

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Defeating the 10 Percent: the HDP's rise and fall in the 2015 Turkish general elections

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The June 2015 Turkish general elections marked a historical win for the Kurdish political party, the HDP (*People's Democratic Party*). For the first time in Turkish democratic history, a Kurdish political party, without a party alliance, managed to pass the parliamentary threshold of 10 percent with 13.1 percent of Turkey's vote. In doing so, the HDP gained a place in parliament to represent Kurdish voices in a country that historically oppressed Kurdish people. However, just five months later, in November 2015 the HDP barely passed the threshold with 10.7 percent of the vote. This thesis explored how the HDP lost their parliamentary advantage in five months and what events occurred during those five months that affected the Turkish vote for the HDP. By using three methods, a content analysis on a human rights court case by Selahattin Demirtaş, the co-leader of the HDP, and a content analysis on media articles published about the HDP, and brief historical analysis of the events that occurred during the election period, this thesis found that the AKP's (*Justice and Development Party*) ethnic association between the HDP and PKK, a Kurdish "terrorist" group, affected the HDP vote negatively. This thesis argued that the ending of the PKK peace agreements in July 2015, which began fighting between the PKK and Turkish state in Southeastern Turkey, a region where a majority of Kurds reside, afflicted the region with increased militarization and violence that affected the HDP vote negatively in the November 2015 elections. These findings revealed a larger trend of the targeting of Kurdish political parties in Turkey and restrictions on the democratic processes conducted by the Turkish government.

Defeating the 10 Percent: the HDP's rise and fall in the 2015 Turkish general elections

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Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Title Page	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents	4
Chapter 1: The HDP's Rise and Fall in the 2015 Turkish General Elections	6
Introduction	6
The Question of Kurds in Turkey	8
Expressing Identity through Political Parties	10
The 2015 Elections	11
The HDP and PKK Relationship	14
Conclusion	16
Chapter 2: Methodology	17
Introduction	7
Concepts and Definition	23
Populations	24
Content Analysis for Media	24
Readership and Bias of <i>Sondakika</i> and <i>Sözcü</i>	26
Content Analysis for Court Case	27
Data	29
Conclusion	29
Chapter 3: Court Case Analysis	31
Introduction	31
Hypothesis	32
Results	33
Creating Ethnic Association: PKK Peace Agreements	33
Creating Ethnic Association: Parliamentary Immunity Removal and Pre-trial Detention	38
Creating Ethnic Association: Associating Demirtaş with Violence	43
Tensions between Demirtaş and AKP	46
Confirmation of AKP's Narrative of Demirtaş as a Terrorist	51
Conclusion	52
Chapter 4: Media Analysis	52
Introduction	52
Methodology	54
Media Analysis of <i>Sözcü</i> and <i>Sondakika</i>	55
Limitations	56
First Theme: HDP Condemning the PKK	56

Second Theme: HDP and PKK are connected: Directly and Implicitly	61
Conclusion	76
Chapter 5: A Brief Layout of the Events in the 2015 Turkish General Election Period	78
Introduction	78
Kobani 2014 The Precursor of the 2015 Elections	79
Election Campaign Rhetoric	82
The end of the PKK Peace Agreements	84
Other Factors: Media Censorship	95
Conclusion and Future Directions	98
Appendix A: Table for Codes	101
Appendix B: Raw Data from Court Case Analysis	104
Appendix C: Table for Media Analysis Articles	120
Citations	124
Citations for Media Analysis	131

Chapter 1: The HDP's Rise and Fall in the 2015 Turkish General Elections

Introduction

Historically, the Kurds have been oppressed by the Turkish state through state-sanctioned cultural violence. This oppression derived from the dynamics of multiple identities and how it conflicted with the emergence of a nationalist movement to form the new state of Turkey. I began the introduction to this thesis by stating an overview of my research question, my argument, and the importance of this project. Then, I shifted by going in-depth with important components of background that aid with understanding the dynamics behind my research question. This began by briefly explaining the origins of this oppression and the question of the Kurds in Turkey. The Kurdish question or otherwise phrased as the question of the Kurds, is a phrase used in academic literature and in political speeches. It is not a question on the existence of the Kurds, although at times policies did try to limit the existence of the Kurds and their expression of culture, but rather a question of the identity dynamics of the Kurdish people in Turkey and their individual mission for human rights. After explaining the origins of the tension between the Kurdish people and the Turkish state, I gave background on two avenues in which the Kurds express their voice and concerns, through a militant group and political parties. After this, I explained a history-making election for the Kurdish people. The struggle for the rights of Kurds in Turkey had been uncertain throughout the years, but the shocking Kurdish electoral win of the Kurdish party HDP in the June 2015 elections gave hope for improvement. However, a series of factors along with the complex relationship of three actors, the AKP, HDP, and PKK, caused this win to be short-lived and the HDP lost their parliamentary seats in November 2015.

My research focused on these elections because this historic win of the HDP ended between the months of June 2015 and November 2015 (five months), cut short by several factors that influenced this voting change. In this research, I aimed to understand what the factors were that caused the HDP to lose its parliamentary representation in the 2015 elections. Specifically, I asked why did the HDP (People's Democratic Party), a Kurdish political party, lose parliamentary representation in national Turkish politics during the 2015 general election period?

Through this question, I looked at the narratives being told about the HDP in the Turkish voter public sphere that caused the decline of votes. I looked into three actors: the PKK (a Kurdish militant political group), HDP (specifically through the leader of the party at the time, Selahattin Demirtaş), and the Turkish state. The importance of my research question was evident through the current-day effects of the 2015 election. Selahattin Demirtaş, the co-leader of the HDP, was arrested in 2016 because of an alleged HDP association with the PKK (Shaheen, 2016). The HDP is currently facing shutdown by the Turkish government because of its association with the PKK, a declared Kurdish "terrorist" group by the Turkish state (Buyuk, 2020). The main trends of the Turkish state were evident in the court documents I coded, associating Kurdish political parties and members with the PKK to shut them down. The Kurds are constantly facing battles against their human rights. Between the Turkish state's back and forth on the "Kurdish question" (Ergil, 2000), there have been countless human rights violations of the Kurds and Kurdish politicians. The June 2015 election was a unique opportunity for the Kurds to exercise their political voice, however, it was lost. Analyzing this question added to the current literature about the HDP and PKK relationship through Turkish society and the tactics and reasonings as to why a minority ethnic party lost representation (based on the use of ethnic

association and historical stereotypical narratives). By focusing specifically on Selahattin Demirtaş, I added a unique angle of the targeting of the HDP by the AKP through their co-leader and spokesperson in my methodology.

Through my research, the Turkish state weaponized the ethnic association between the PKK and the HDP to remove their political opponents such as Selahattin Demirtaş. I argued that this ethnic association was created by speeches that targeted or used language that associated the HDP with terrorism and the media association of terrorism with the Kurds and HDP that culminated alongside the dissolution of the PKK peace agreements, which was referred to as a Kurdish terrorist group frequently. The halting of the PKK peace agreements was detrimental for the HDP's political support after June 2015 despite the HDP being actively against the PKK in the media. The localized fighting of the PKK versus the Turkish state residing in the Southeastern part of Turkey (where most Kurds and HDP voters live) along with these political speeches and media articles dissuaded previous HDP voters from supporting the HDP in November 2015. My arguments were supported by court-based documents of evidence that revealed the Turkish state through a legal avenue criminalized the HDP with the PKK and through a social avenue through media reports from two of Turkey's highly frequented online news this association of the HDP and PKK was continued.

The Question of the Kurds in Turkey

The Kurdish question emerged before the creation of Turkey as a state. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the British, Soviets, Italians, and French divided up the previous Ottoman Empire land. At that time of international politics, there was a campaign for self-determination, where a nation declared its own statehood, which was highly encouraged (Radpey, 2020). These ideals of self-determination came into play with the Kurds during the

creation of Turkey through the Treaty of Sèvres (Radpey, 2020). Under Article 64 of the Treaty, “within one year of the coming into force of the Treaty, Kurds would attain independence from Turkey by popular majority if desired” (Radpey, 2020). With this treaty, the Kurds would have been able to have their own state, however, this treaty failed to be enforced by the Allies. The Kemalists, followers of Kemal Atatürk, the founding leader of Turkey, did not follow the Treaty of Sèvres, so the treaty was renegotiated at Lausanne. On July 24, 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne recognized “Turkey” as an independent state, and the previous potential self-determination of the Kurds was removed (Radpey, 2020).

Since the creation of Turkey under Atatürk’s direction, the Turkish republic enforced policies of Turkification, which were strategies to create a new national identity after the fall of the Ottoman Empire (Demir, 2017). This “Turkish nation-building project” aimed to westernize, centralize, secularize, and homogenize Turkey so that it could become like a “pure, strong, ‘civilized’ modern European state” (Demir, 2017 p. 271). However, because Turkification revolved around being Turkish, any minority or non-Turk would have to become Turks, meaning that they would be forced to assimilate. This ideology was enforced through policies such as only allowing Turkish last names or the ban of the language of Kurmanji, which was attributed to a cultural genocide of the Kurds in Turkey (Fernandes, 2012).

Because the national identity of Turkey as a state was built from Turkification, the Kurdish identity was forced to become Turkish. These policies still have a long-lasting impact on the treatment of Kurds in Turkey and their human rights. Because of this loss of culture and representation of their identity in national politics, the Kurds began to advocate for themselves and their rights. Since Kurmanji was banned until 1980, along with fights between Kurdish resistance groups since the 1970s, the anti-Kurdish cultural policies were only stopped less than

60 years ago. Much of the conflict from these policies attributed to increased tensions about the Kurdish ethnicity and population in Turkish society happened recently and is still in the collective memory of Turkey. Before the 1970s, there were racist mob attacks against the Kurds, but specifically after the foundation of the political militant Kurdish group the PKK (Kurdistan's Worker Party, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*), these racist attacks increased significantly (Yarkin, 2022). Since the Turkish state's war with the PKK, beginning in the 1990s officially (but the PKK was formed in the 1970s), "multiple community-level racist mob attacks against the Kurds erupted in various places" (Yarkin, 2022). These attacks emerged from the association that being Kurdish meant being part of the PKK and became prevalent again in 2015 when the Turkish state was fighting against the PKK. According to the Rawest Research Center, the Yaşama Dair Vakıf (YADA Foundation), and the Kurdish Studies Center, in 2020, 70 percent of Kurdish youths in Turkey encountered discrimination in their daily lives (SCF, 2020). The discrimination against Kurds in Turkey continues and their fight for human rights becomes even more ambiguous with a lack of uncertainty from the government to address them and an inability to express their concerns through legal avenues (Ergil, 2000). Unable to gain autonomy through the land, the Kurds, who make up 18 percent of the population in Turkey (Gunter, 2021), have tried to express their political voice through the creation of Kurdish political parties and other avenues.

Expressing Identity through Political Parties

Turkey has a system of party-list proportional representation, voters vote under a party rather than an individual (this was before the changes of the constitution in 2016). Under this system, minority parties that cannot gain enough votes to stand alone are forced to be in an electoral alliance with other parties to reach the 10 percent threshold for parliamentary

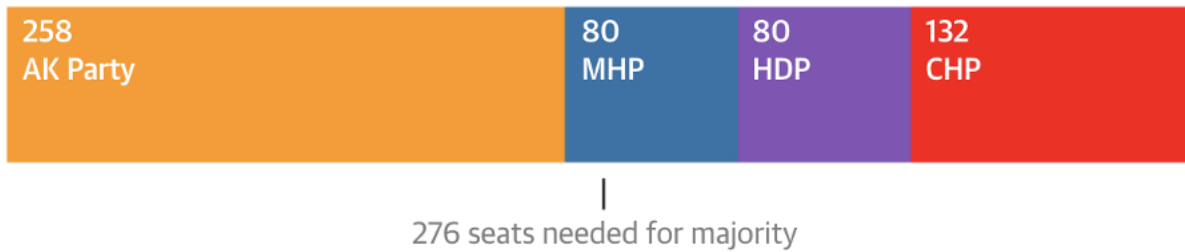
representation (Carnegie Europe, 2015). For the Kurds, the first pro-Kurdish party wasn't created until 1990 and was called the People's Labor Party (*Halkin Emek Partisi* HEP). By the 1991 elections, they gained 22 seats in the Turkish Grand Assembly through their electoral alliance with SHP (another Turkish political party). However, by July 1993, the HEP was banned. After this ban in May 1993, the Freedom, and Democracy Party (OZDEP) was created but then banned in November of that same year ("History of Kurdish politics...", 2020). This trend of creating a new Kurdish party and afterwards it being banned occurred throughout the years. Since 1990, 23 Kurdish political parties have been closed by the Turkish government, citing reasons for terrorism and ethnic separatism (Buyuk, 2020).

The 2015 Elections

On June 7th, 2015, the HDP was the first Kurdish political party to reach the 10 percent threshold without an electoral alliance. During this parliamentary election, the HDP, the People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*), managed to receive 13.1 percent of the votes (Grigoriadis, 2016). However, this win changed the dynamics in Turkish politics. It was historic for the Kurds, and during this election, the incumbent Justice, and Development Party (AKP), the majority party of the Turkish government, had lost their parliamentary majority for the first time since 2002 (Grigoriadis, 2016). It was said that the HDP's new presence in parliament was one of the "major reasons for the failure of the incumbent Justice and Development Party (AKP) to win a parliamentary majority" (Grigoriadis, 2016). This change in power between the parties was new to the Turkish parliament and allowed the possibility of changes to the government by other parties beyond the agenda of the AKP. The parliament after the June 2015 elections was composed of four parties: the AKP, the HDP, the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party), and the CHP (Republican People's Party). The AKP had

258 seats, the HDP and the MHP tied with 80, and the CHP with 132 with 278 seats needed for the majority. Since the AKP was no longer in power, it was up to the opposition parties in the Turkish parliament to make a coalition government either with or in place of the AKP. The coalition government could be formed in four different ways (see Figure 1 below) (Anadolu Agency).

Parliamentary breakdown after the election on 7 June



Possible coalitions

$$\text{AK Party} + \text{MHP} = 338$$

If the ruling AK party could recruit the nationalists of MHP, they would have a majority. The MHP has not been enthusiastic about the idea

$$\text{AK Party} + \text{CHP} = 390$$

A grand coalition between AK and the main opposition party seems unlikely

$$\text{AK Party} + \text{HDP} = 338$$

A coalition between AK and the inclusive pro-Kurdish HDP would have the numbers. The two parties disagree strongly on electoral reform

$$\text{CHP} + \text{MHP} + \text{HDP} = 292$$

Without the AK, the opposition parties would need to form a tripartite alliance. This is unlikely because neither the CHP or the HDP are likely to want to work with the rightwing nationalists of the MHP

The AKP was the minority government and had to talk with other parties to create a coalition (Kaya, 2015). However, because of conflicts among parties, the CHP and AKP having deep rivalries, other parties unlike to partner with the HDP, and the MHP wanted a diminished role of Erdoğan (which the AKP did not agree with since Erdoğan is the leader of their party), coalition talks were unsuccessful (Associated Press in Ankara, 2015). The deadline for coalition talks was on August 23, 2015 and by that time no coalition was formed (Arango, 2015). With no

coalition formed, the President of Turkey (Erdoğan) could call for elections (Arango, 2015). On August 24th, Erdoğan called for a snap election in November, which is an election “declared by the incumbent substantially before the statutory date in order to improve its chance of re-election” (Daoust & Péloquin -Skulski, 2020).

Compared to the June election, the snap elections in November had the AKP gaining seats from 258 to 317 and the majority of parliament back with 49.5 percent of the vote. For the CHP they gained two additional seats, with a total of 134 seats, and had 25.32 percent in parliament. For the MHP, they lost seats from 80 deputies (seats) to 40 deputies with only 11.9 percent in parliament. The HDP lost its 13.1 percent majority and barely passed the threshold with 10.76 percent. In June the HDP had 80 deputy seats but only five months later had 59 deputies. This stark decrease in seats, and a renewal of the AKP’s majority, was a blow to Kurdish politics in Turkey. The HDP no longer had the power in parliament to go against the majority party, the AKP. Because the HDP was a political opponent of the AKP and no longer had as many deputies they became the smallest party in parliament and continued to face targeting. The two co-leaders of the HDP were arrested in 2016 while they were still serving as elected officials and several HDP party members were placed in jail. This targeting of HDP members has detrimental effects on Kurdish politics in Turkey since the HDP is the only Kurdish political party in Turkey right now. During the five months between the 2015 elections, several significant events happened that caused this decrease in HDP deputies. A significant event that occurred during these months was the halting of the PKK, a Kurdish political militant group, peace agreements. The renewed war between the Turkish state and PKK began again after 30 years of fighting and peace talks. The casus belli of the peace agreement occurred a month after the June elections when there was an assassination of two police officers in

Ceylanpinar (Savran, 2020). Soon after, the conflict between the AKP and PKK occurred during the five months in the election period and large amounts of anti-Kurdish rhetoric increased (O'Connor & Başer, 2018).

The HDP and PKK Relationship

The PKK was founded in 1974 by Abdullah Öcalan with Marxist-Leninist roots and the militant political organization sought to create an independent Kurdish state in Turkey (Bruno, 2007). The peace process talks prompted by the AKP between the AKP and PKK from 2009 to 2015 in Turkey had failed (Savran, 2020). Literature has shown that the continued denial of Kurdish identity by the Turkish state is an underlying reason why the conflict between the PKK and Turkish state has failed (Savran 2020; Dayton 2013; Gunter 2022). The PKK and the disruption and cyclic renewal of the peace talks prompted scholars in the literature to question which parties were responsible for this and for what reasons. In the current literature, there have been several studies that outline the Turkish state's trend to try to shut down Kurdish political parties and the AKP's use of ethnic association to gain votes.

Many scholars believe that the AKP associated the HDP with the PKK to gain back lost seats from the June 2015 election (Koontz, 2021; Özpek, 2019; Grigordias, 2016). Two fundamental narratives in the Turkish public of what caused the 2013 to 2015 PKK peace resolution to be broken in Turkish society was the main anti-Erdoğan narrative, that it was Erdoğan who used the breaking of the peace conflict to gain more votes, and the second narrative that it was the PKK who started the breaking of the peace process (Necif, 2015). Most scholars agreed with the anti-Erdoğan narrative, but also acknowledged "triggers" that could have provoked the PKK to break the peace agreement. In the current literature, however, there is a gap of a detailed analysis and explanation of the events that occurred between the June and

November elections that led to altered election results in a span of 5 months. Necef briefly addressed the different political parties' perspective and general media perspective of what had taken place, but did not have enough evidence to support these claims beyond just media sources.

O'Connor and Başer's research on communal violence and ethnic polarization addressed the 2015 election events that happened through newspaper sources and the electoral violence that the "impact of state led anti-Kurdish discourse...that aggravated dormant tensions." This literature was the more detailed and in-depth discussion on this topic with media evidence, however, the methodology and its focus solely on the media differed from my research. Although the same election and trends will be analyzed and their use of newspapers, their focus was solely on mentions of "violence directed against HDP members or party offices and ordinary Kurds, if the inter-ethnic nature of the clashes was reported" (O'Connor & Başer, 2018 p.6). My work focused on media mentions of the HDP and PKK connection and how ethnic association of the HDP and PKK developed throughout media reports and the position of the Turkish state (the AKP) regarding this terrorist connection with the HDP (and how it was used to imprison its leaders). Additionally, I did not just use media sources in my methodology but also focused on Selahattin Demirtaş, which not many in the literature have done, and the court case of Demirtaş and his imprisonment based on events that happened in the 2015 election. This evidence allows me to be certain that these events did take place, since they are in a court document and vouched by both the Turkish state, Demirtaş, and the European Court of Human Rights, and gained access to the Turkish state's sentencings, reasonings and evidence that believed incriminated Demirtaş.

In the current literature, there were several studies that outlined the Turkish state's trend to try to shut down Kurdish political parties. However, the question of terrorism and the Kurdish parties became more convoluted. In the past, most of the parties were shut down because of terrorism and ethnic separatism (Buyuk, 2020). But the integrity of this connection had been questioned by scholars.

Additionally, the PKK's relationship with the HDP, as a form of two different avenues for Kurdish human rights (political/legal and militant), was analyzed and questioned by scholars. Academically, some scholars believe that the Kurdish parties and the PKK were not structurally together, but they will always have a relationship because of the same supporter base (O'Connor 2017; Kaya 2018). However, in other literature, the HDP was viewed as a PKK legal political front. Yegen explicitly outlined that the HDP represented the PKK's new goals of the party, a focus on national legal politics. By detailing all periods of the PKK's agenda and various changes in goals based on Ocalan and negotiations with Turkey, Yegen emphasized that the PKK and the legal political front of the PKK, that the HDP represented, are shaped by each other and are more likely to be kept together. Yegen's view of the HDP in correlation with the PKK's goals brought forth the perspective that the HDP could be used by the PKK to advance their new goals, but the HDP will then be consistently associated with the PKK. Yegen does not provide explicit evidence for this association and reasoning other than the history of the PKK and the traditional goals and views that the PKK has (2015).

In the Turkish public's view, the relationship between the HDP and PKK varies depending on the viewer. Many Turkish civilians viewed the HDP as a political wing of the PKK (Grigoriadis, 2016). Others, such as HDP supporters, view the two to have no relation.

Conclusion

My research aimed to understand the narratives of the HDP portrayed to the Turkish public, specifically through ethnic association with the PKK. Because of the later imprisonment of many HDP members by the Turkish government for terroristic activity, by focusing on the connection with the PKK to discredit them, one can better understand this complex relationship and how it was portrayed in the media and by the government to the Turkish public. With an additional analysis of the cumulative events that happened during the five months that include speeches from the HDP that “antagonize” the AKP, and speeches discussed internally in parliament, I mapped out the events that the Turkish public had read about, was impacted by, and provoked the decrease of parliamentary seats.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Introduction

In this section, I reviewed my methodology and how the specific methods chosen effectively answered my research question. I first gave a more general summary of my content analysis research method, where all my choices and variables will be explained later in the chapter, and explained why I chose the specific methods I did. I gave a brief overview of the gap in the literature and how my research fit into the current literature. Afterwards, I reviewed the types of methods and sources I used (the media articles and court cases) and gave more insight to their limitations and how they answered my research question. I provided definitions for codes and terms I used, populations in my research, a more in-depth view of the content analysis method, and provided information on the type of data I collected.

My research method consisted of conducting content analyses and utilizing these content analyses to examine the events that took place during the election of June 2015 and November 2015. To appropriately understand the political environment and public perception of the HDP, I

conducted a content analysis on two actors: Selahattin Demirtaş representing the HDP and *Sözcü* and *Sondakika* news outlets representing the Turkish media perspective. After conducting these two content analyses, I had a large amount of data about how the HDP was labeled, or associated with certain connotations (negative or positive), by the AKP and the media to the Turkish voter public. Through these labels, I hypothesized there were references to the HDP with terrorism and the PKK. Specifically, I believed that these references were done by ethnic association and using language that implicitly associated the HDP in relation with the PKK. I also hypothesized that the PKK and HDP fighting, after the ending of the peace agreements, occurred in the Southeastern region of Turkey, where mostly Kurds reside (of which many are HDP supporters), and prompted increased militarization in these regions negatively affected HDP votes for the November 2015 elections. In the literature currently, there is a gap how, specifically, the HDP was labeled with the PKK through speeches, the government's statements, and the media.

For example, much of the literature referenced an association of the HDP with the PKK done by the AKP so the AKP could gain more votes (Necif, 2015). However, the evidence used in these papers did not cite specific examples or use data from media sources and court cases (Özpek, 2019 & Grigoriadis, 2016). Rather they came to these more general conclusions by discussing narratives in Turkey about why the PKK peace agreements ended. These narratives are the AKP weaponizing ethnic association to incriminate the HDP or the alternative narrative that the PKK is the reason why the peace agreements fell. There hasn't been a direct in-depth explanation focused on the interaction between all three actors and the portrayal of the HDP in the media through these interactions. This is important to understand because of these public spheres, the central arena for societal communication, being presented to the voters of Turkey

who were the ones that did not vote for the HDP in the November elections (compared to voting for them in the June elections) (Oxford Bibliographies, 2018). The AKP created this negative portrayal of the HDP for political reasons while drawing on Turkey's discriminatory history against the Kurds. This point was emphasized throughout the literature (Özpek 2019 & Grigoriadis 2016). However, the literature generalized these themes rather than going in-depth with specific evidence or reasoning.

Other literature in the field (O'Connor, 2017) (Yegen, 2015) (Kaya, 2018) diverged on the following: 1) is the HDP a political legal front of the PKK, 2) evidence in favor of it being a political legal front. For the latter second point, this evidence given was based on media references and meetings between members, but this evidence was debunked as illegitimate by the European Court of Human Rights. Some of the evidence of meetings were based on meetings that were approved by the state, or attendance in general Kurdish conferences rather than a specific PKK conference. But this evidence was painted as confirmation of the HDP having a membership with the PKK. This evidence became even more questionable when one considered the HDP's continued denial of PKK involvement and efforts to stop PKK violence. Dr. Zeynep Kaya analyzed the different ties and dynamics between the HDP and PKK and stated that the HDP is not a political legal front (Kaya & Whiting, 2018). Whether the HDP is affiliated with the PKK, the literature analyzed it through a political theory approach. My research analyzed it through the perspective of Turkish society, what the everyday voters in Turkey consumed on the election news, and everyday media (e.g. online news outlets). I focused on what types of portrayals the Turkish voters receive of the ethnic associations and alleged connections between the HDP and PKK, that was based on a different methodology and evidence source of court cases and media articles, rather than the typical method in the literature

to find evidence officially connecting the HDP and PKK. By highlighting the types of narratives spread to the Turkish voters, whether they were true or not, showcased more of the influence of these narratives on election results and the overall political climate during the June 2015 and November 2015 elections.

For my research, I decided to analyze the specific labels and rhetoric around the HDP to give a better perspective as to why the HDP lost votes. These labels were created by the AKP through official court documents, the media portrayal, and the influence of the violence created after the dissolution of the PKK peace agreement that impacted the elections (since the AKP is the majority ruling party legislatively). By conducting my research with these sources of evidence, it added a unique approach to analyzing this complex election period. Compared to previous literature, this methodology encompassed more types of evidence, rather than just a summary or media collection, and its results strengthened and added to the literature. By understanding the political climate of Turkey in the 2015 election period, the type of campaigns used, and the quotes from politicians, it created an in-depth perspective of the events that occurred during the election period rather than previous literature discussing a more general layout of events. Through this methodology, it laid out connections and links which revealed an overall trend of the Turkish state and media associating the HDP with the PKK in order to discredit and delegitimize their party to appeal less to the Turkish public. The PKK already had an incredibly negative view and was associated with a large amount of violence in Turkey. It was because of this negative portrayal of the PKK and the history of the Turkish state (AKP) shutting down Kurdish political parties that it was crucial to understand how a minority political party in Turkey had lost parliamentary representation.

To analyze the Turkish society's perspective of the HDP, I decided to focus on media articles and the court case of Selahattin Demirtaş. The media articles are what the Turkish public read every day and consume. The court case was a unique piece of evidence because the case itself occurred three years after the elections, so the case cited the evidence during the election 2015 results that was used against the HDP to persecute them and imprison them. The court case had a third-party perspective, the European Court of Human Rights, that added insight into the validity of the arguments of the Turkish government to imprison the HDP which removed potential bias from Turkish government-led sources. It provided the logical reasoning that the Turkish government used to imprison Demirtaş including the specific quotes that they believed showed Demirtaş as a terrorist (most of these quotes occur in the public sphere through speeches). When choosing which articles to analyze from *Sondakika* and *Sözcü* for the media news journal perspective, I selected articles that mention specifically the HDP and PKK in the same article and analyze in what connotations and references they portray both parties.

I did these specific methods to encompass the reasons why the HDP lost its parliamentary representation and the tensions between the three actors in a legal and social framework. I did a relational concept analysis, which “develops the conceptual analysis further by examining the relationships among concepts in a text” (“Content Analysis”). Through a relational concept analysis, I was able to find keywords used in the court documents and themes shared between the different sentencings of pre-trial detention, charges of terrorism, and potential human rights violations that the AKP conducted toward Selahattin Demirtaş, co-leader of the HDP. After my first round of reading, I created a code that I used throughout all the documents by researching court documents and identifying keywords I saw throughout the documents (see Appendix A for a table of the codes). My content analysis turned into a

discourse analysis because I used a more textual analysis than an analytical analysis. Therefore, by content analysis, I examined the discourse and compared them within my court case analysis, and in my media analysis analyzed the discourse in the articles themselves not comparing the two outlets to each other.

Ideally, I would have preferred to analyze each major event that occurred during the election period, such as terrorist attacks by the PKK after the halting of the peace agreement, campaign speeches from Selahattin Demirtaş and Erdoğan, and local interviews, to map out a cumulative history of all the events that occurred during the June and November 2015 elections. However, time was a major limitation in this project since I only had a year. Therefore, I decided to condense my work and combine the results from my two analyses with a general brief overview of the major terrorist events or electoral events, classified as important through the literature, that happened between June and November 2015. Another major limitation was the type of evidence I used cannot directly state a connection (without a doubt) or confirm whether those affected the Turkish public or ensured that by reading one of the articles it influenced the public. However, I did showcase all the influences that played into the daily media consumption and news in the Turkish public that could affect their vote and results of the election. So rather than a direct linkage, I showed correlation, since I didn't have the evidence to declare there being a direct connection of the trends since I cannot consider all the potential factors that can influence each Turkish voter.

Concepts and Definitions

In this research, I referred to the AKP, Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), as the Turkish government when discussing the time of 2002 to 2015. The AKP had a parliamentary majority since 2002 before losing it in the June 2015 elections when

the HDP received 13.1 percent of the vote (Grigoriadis, 2016). Because of this majority and the president being part of the AKP, this party had complete control of the Turkish government. If I referred to the Turkish government before 2002 or a government where AKP does not have a parliamentary majority, I specified it as the Turkish state. This would occur in periods before 2002.

I referred to the general Turkish public perception as Turkish society. During the events between June 2015 and November 2015, there were several events that could factor into the change of HDP votership in 4 months. One major factor was the halthing of the PKK peace agreements and its aftereffect of a heightened AKP campaign on terrorism (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey”). Through this campaign, the emphasis of the PKK as a Kurdish group, shown in literature by consistent view of the PKK being a major part of the Kurdish question (Gunter, 2022) rather than just the Kurdish people, which helped create an association between Kurdish groups and terrorism (since the PKK is labeled as a terrorist group in Turkey). The PKK’s history as a Kurdish terrorist group that had disputes with the government since 2009 (Savran, 2022) and the Kurdish identity of the HDP in the media factored into votes. Especially since the presence of the PKK between the four months had grown with violent terrorist attacks occurring in those months (Grigoriadis, 2016). To understand why the HDP lost their parliamentary seats, I analyzed how Turkish voters perceived and interacted with the HDP.

Populations

Because the HDP is a large political party, I chose to focus on a specific member of the HDP for my research. Selahattin Demirtaş was the co-leader of the HDP and spokesperson for the HDP between 2014 to 2018. Much of the rhetoric about the HDP by Erdoğan or the AKP in media statements were referencing specifically the co-leaders of the political party. Selahattin

Demirtaş was one of two co-leaders of the HDP, and while both got arrested, Selahattin Demirtaş filed a court case against Turkey for human rights violation surrounding his prolonged pre-trial detention and 2016 prison sentences. This human rights court case by the European Court of Human Rights made evidence and information public that would not have been accessible through classified Turkish court documents. This court case had been translated by a professional translator, therefore rendering potential loss of translation through an online translator. By making my population Selahattin Demirtaş for my content analysis on lost parliamentary representation, I began to understand the motivations behind arresting Selahattin Demirtaş, specifically his actions between June and November 2015 that caused the AKP to charge him. An essential component to answering my research question was to understand why the AKP charged him with terrorism and what evidence they used to do so. The AKP's reasons, in the court document, were used as evidence for understanding what caused the HDP to lose their votes and how Turkish society viewed Selahattin Demirtaş and the HDP.

Content Analysis for Media

When deciding how to conduct a content analysis from the media perspective, I looked at research from Oxford's Reuters Institute of Journalism. On Jan 1, 2015, 88 percent of the Turkish population used online media, including social media, as their news source (see figure 1 from Reuters article). TV came as the second majority news source with 77 percent of the Turkish population (Newman, 2022). For online media outlets, *Sondakika.com* had 30 percent of the Turkish population, CNN Türk online had 30 percent of the Turkish population, and *Sözcü* had 27 percent of the Turkish population using the news outlets (Newman, 2022)(see figure 2 from Reuters article). For TV, FOX TV had 54 percent of the Turkish population, CNN Türk had 33 percent of the Turkish population and *Sözcü* had 32 percent of the Turkish

population (Newman, 2022). *Sözcü* is seen as an independent outlet that is still critical of the government despite increasing media censorship problems in Turkey.

However, CNN Türk was bought by a pro-government business group which may lead to their coverage no longer being unbiased (O'Donohue, Hoffman & Makovsky, 2020). To have a culminating view of media sources that the public perceived, I decided to analyze *Sözcü* and *Sondakika* since they have a strong online presence with the Turkish public. I conducted content analysis and a discourse analysis around 5-10 articles each written by *Sözcü* and *Sondakika* about the HDP between the June 2015 and November 2015 elections. These are articles that simply mentioned HDP and PKK in the June to November election period. A major limitation to this collection of news articles was the lack of archived Turkish articles on the internet from June to November 2015. This limitation influenced my decision to choose *Sondakika* over CNN Türk since I could not find enough CNN Türk articles and inhibited the number of articles I wanted to conduct a content analysis on. My main criteria for selecting which articles to analyze were ones that discussed the HDP and PKK because of the limited amount of archived articles on Turkish websites I had a limited selection. Then I used an internet translator, and for areas that were evidently incorrect through translation or important connotations, I asked a native Turkish speaker to translate it.

Weekly reach – online

ONLINE

Turkey

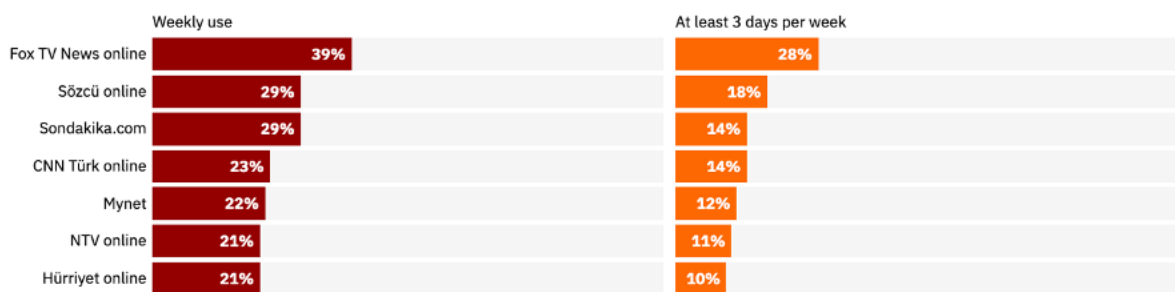


Figure 1 from Reuters (Newman, 2022)

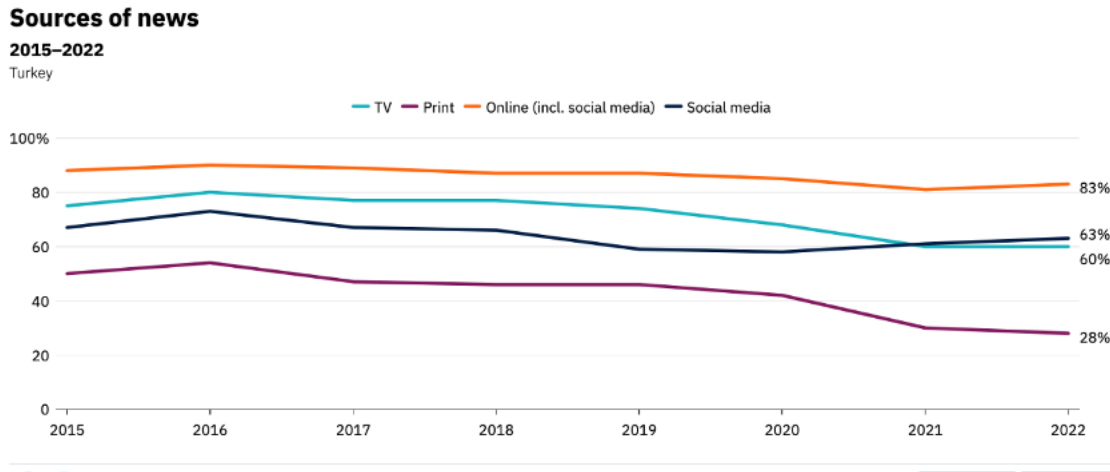


Figure 2 from Reuters (Newman, 2022)

Readership and Bias of Söndakika and Sözcü

Based on Freedom House, the conditions for media freedom in Turkey deteriorated after 2014 where new laws expanded the Turkish state’s power to block websites and increase surveillance (2015). Journalists continued to face legal obstacles since courts restricted reporting on topics like corruption and national security issues. They used laws such as anti-terrorism laws to limit journalists and media outlets (Freedom House, 2015).

Based on this journalist backdrop, *Sözcü* is one of the most popular printed and online news outlets in Turkey (Yanatma, 2020). *Sözcü* is an outlet that is critical of the AKP and is considered by the Turkish public to provide “accurate and reliable news,” “strong viewpoints/opinions” and help the audience “understand complex issues” (Yanatma, 2020). Although this report was created in 2017, the results of *Sözcü* being one of the most used online media outlets still held true based on the 2015 (Newman, 2022). *Sözcü*’s readership is 49 percent people who self-identify on the left and only a tiny number who identify on the right (3 percent)

(Yanatma, 2020). Therefore, the audience they appeal to is mostly those who identify on the left.

Sondakika, or known as *Sondakika.com*, is an online news source that does daily short news clips and articles. *Sondakika.com*, as of 2021, was the most used online news source. According to their principles they do not directly or indirectly comment on any news “we only present the event that has occurred” (Ferhat Boratav, personal communication, April 22, 2023). Since *Sondakika* doesn’t have any comment or opinion writers it is difficult to ascribe a political identity to them. However, these supposed impartiality to their articles conflicted with the findings in Chapter 4.

Content Analysis for Court Case

One of my arguments for my research was the association of the HDP with the PKK and terrorism decreased the HDP’s votes in the November 2015 election. To understand why this association was created, I used official government evidence and statements on Selahattin Demirtaş being part of a terrorist organization. Since the government has immense influential political power, the removal of Demirtaş’s parliamentary immunity and charges of terrorism and inciting violence did affect the perception of the HDP. However, since these charges occurred after the November 2015 election, I analyzed the evidence listed in the case against Selahattin Demirtaş before November 2015 and his charges after 2015. I conducted a content analysis on Selahattin Demirtaş’s 2020 European Court of Human Rights Case against the state of Turkey. Because I did not have access to the original Turkish court rulings and documents against Selahattin Demirtaş, I decided to use the European Court of Human Rights case that is open to the public.

An advantage to this court case was I knew that there is no government bias since it is from outside Turkey. This case included Selahattin Demirtaş's statements, the Turkish states' statements, and the third-party statements on Demirtaş's prolonged pre-trial detention, removal of parliamentary immunity, and human rights violations against Demirtaş (throughout the court case). This case included evidence used against Demirtaş by the Turkish state and a summary of rulings and appeals of Demirtaş's domestic Turkish cases done in the Diyarbakir, Ankara, and Istanbul courts. The information in this document was not available to the Turkish public during the election period, but this court case was used as a resource to receive specifically condensed quotes and speeches that address terrorism and the HDP. All the charges against Demirtaş included terrorism, and so many of the violations around his jailing focused on his association with terrorism. Therefore, this evidence and culmination of speeches that otherwise would have been harder to locate were in this court document and were primary sources from both parties. This court case was translated, however, by a professional translator, so it can be considered a reputable translation. The court had access to all the proper documents that include the prosecution (the Turkish state) against Demirtaş and the evidence they cited for it. The European Court of Human Rights reviewed the information given by both parties and stated whether certain procedures done by the Turkish government were just or biased. It was a neutral third party that was viewing specifically human rights violations from the Turkish government towards Demirtaş, so the information included was very related to Turkish politics and human rights violations within politics.

Data

I collected my data by reading through the court document to understand what the document included. Then, in my second round, I created codes for each actor, AKP, HDP, PKK,

violence, and applicant (see table in Appendix A for all codes). Then in my third coding round, I created codes that reflected the relationship between certain codes, such as HDP and violence, PKK and the applicant, applicant and violence, and AKP and violence. Then in my fourth round, I ruled out which sections of the document I would not use in consideration of my data, such as the legal framework sections and the sections that included the applicant's rebuttal. Afterward, I collected key phrases from my codes as well as annotations of specific sections that highlighted prominent evidence.

The sources I used and their geographical context are important to consider. Two of my sources are Turkish news outlets, where they can face prohibitive laws, potential penalties and restrictions from the government. Therefore, I was not measuring the validity or reputability with their articles but rather I am looking at how the HDP is being portrayed to Turkish society, not their content. Because of these two online outlets being very commonly used, they gave a reflection of the type of media the Turkish public consumes. Specifically with the readership of *Sözcü*, which was left leaning, there are intersections in ideology between left leaning readers and the left leaning HDP party. The other source was outside of Turkey backed by the reputable European Court of Human Rights and is not accessible to the Turkish public during the time of the 2015 elections.

Conclusion

The politics of the HDP and AKP in the June to November 2015 elections were incredibly complex. The history of systemic human rights violations of the Kurds along with a history of terrorism and violence in Turkey already complicated the HDP as a political party, not to mention the political competition between the AKP and HDP and the conflict between the AKP and PKK. This pivotal election period in Turkish history created ripples in Turkish politics

that are seen today. The arrest of several important HDP politicians and the current potential shutdown of the HDP by the Turkish government endangers the only political representation the Kurds have. The Turkish government is continuing its trend of trying to shut down Kurdish political parties and a larger trend of the oppression of Kurdish rights. This research method of the two content analyses and then comparing them relationally answered the larger question of how the HDP lost its parliamentary immunity in a matter of a few months.

In this chapter, I discussed how the two content analyses analyzing the perspective of the media and Selahattin Demirtaş as the HDP encompassed the events that took place that contributed to the loss of parliamentary immunity. These content analyses were conducted after several rounds of coding based on set terms and definitions.

Chapter 3: Court Case Analysis

Introduction

For my section on my content analysis on the Selahattin Demirtaş European Court of Human Rights case, I began with a general overview of the hypothesis and reiterated the dynamics of Turkish politics at the time with the actors of the AKP (majority Turkish party led by Erdoğan) and HDP (Kurdish minority party led by Demirtaş). I addressed my reasoning as to why the AKP could be targeting the HDP and then went into discussing the results of my analysis. This content analysis was both a quantitative analysis by analyzing and counting the number of codes, but also, was a discourse analysis by reviewing the reasons and discourse among the AKP, filed here as the Turkish government, and the HDP, filed here as applicant or Selahattin Demirtaş. Through my analysis, five distinctive themes stood out: ethnic association with the PKK through the peace agreements, ethnic association with the PKK through parliamentary immunity removal, creating ethnic association by associating Demirtaş with

violence, tensions brewed between AKP and Demirtaş and lastly, confirmation of the AKP's narrative to make Demirtaş appear as a terrorist.

I discussed my first theme of ethnic associations with the PKK and how they manifested in the court case by beginning with the events that occurred in Kobani. By discussing Kobani and setting a backdrop to the political tension in the 2015 elections, the discussion of the PKK and the HDP was easier to understand by knowing these previous tensions. Then I analyzed the reasons why parliamentary immunity (immunity given to politicians to prevent them from going to jail based on what that said in parliament) was removed. Understanding the sentences of Demirtaş, even though it was a year later, confirmed sentiments of the AKP that continued to prosecute and connect the HDP to terrorism. Lastly, I ended with tensions between the AKP and Demirtaş found in the court case to explain and analyze the discourse that occurred between the two through the public sphere of the media and giving speeches. These discourses occurred in the public sphere where the Turkish public actively perceived and viewed these tensions, which may have led to a change in voting behavior.

Hypothesis

I hypothesized that the Turkish state (AKP) was weaponizing ethnic association with the Kurdish terrorist group, PKK, to remove their political opponent, Selahattin Demirtaş. Specifically, because of the major shift in politics when the HDP gained 13.12 percent of the vote in the June 2015 elections, the AKP lost the parliamentary majority for the first time since 2002 (Grigoriadis, 2016). This historic win was huge for Kurdish politics because of the high percentage to enter the Turkish parliament (10 percent). Previously all Kurdish parties had to build a coalition to reach this threshold. But the HDP was the first Kurdish political party to

pass the threshold without the aid of another party. With the AKP's majority gone, the HDP's new growing leadership and newfound ability to make a new government to rule parliament (as part of a coalition with other parties) could serve as a motive for the AKP to try to remove this Kurdish figure from the political scene. If the HDP lost votes, the AKP could regain the majority.

After the June 2015 elections, there was a period of political turmoil. Since the AKP was no longer the majority ruling party, the Turkish parliament's minority groups needed to create a coalition to gain control of the government. One of these parties was the HDP. However, because of political disputes among minority parties, no coalition was formed. The AKP during this time kept calling for repeat elections, since they could not make up a majority government as well (they also failed at coalition talks). Without a coalition government, an early election was set for November 1, 2015, labeled a "repeat" election by the government. The results of this election were a loss of 21 HDP seats (10.76 percent) and the gain of 59 AKP seats again (gained 9 percent back) (Kirisci, 2015).

Because of these tensions, and the ongoing PKK fighting after the peace agreements, there were increased accusations about terrorism in the government ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey"). Specifically, Erdoğan made comments stating that Demirtaş himself was a terrorist. During the time, the only terrorist group conflict was with the PKK, so when the government accused the HDP of terrorism, there was only one group it could have been. The one indisputable connection about both the PKK and the HDP is that they were Kurdish. The resulting violence that occurred from the ending of the PKK peace agreement polarized the previous HDP voters and led them to vote for different parties. For my research, this creation of ethnic association was found throughout the court case.

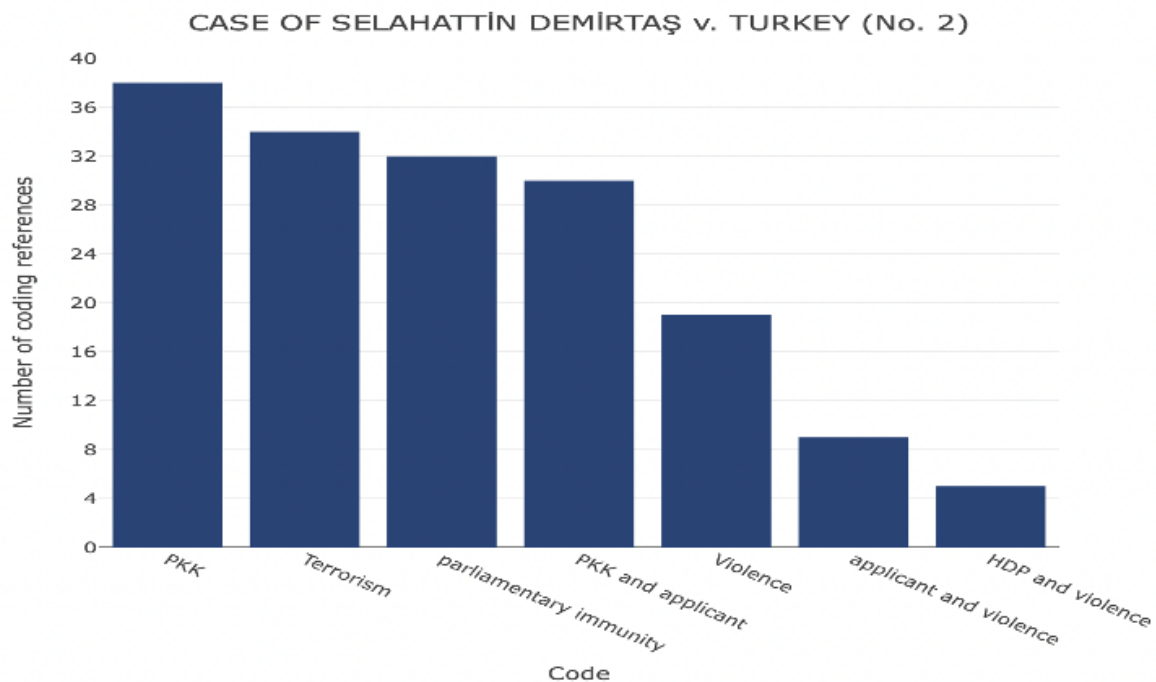
Results

Creating ethnic association: PKK peace agreements

The first round of coding for this document, I coded for individual actors. For example, the PKK was mentioned around 38 times, terrorism followed up with 34 mentions, parliamentary immunity 32 times and PKK and applicant (Demirtaş) 30 times (see Figure 1 below). I did not code for an individual code of “applicant” since this was a court case filed by Demirtaş, applicant is used a tremendous amount (more than any other word) and could skew the results, but I did code for codes with applicant in relation to another individual code (such as “applicant and violence”).

The importance of the PKK and applicant, 30 times, being mentioned together showcased that, except for only 8 times, when the PKK was mentioned, it was in direct reference to the applicant. An important factor to consider with this result is the argument that the HDP was connected to the PKK was the main argument laid by the Turkish government’s lawyers (AKP lawyers) to prosecute Demirtaş. Therefore, I coded for applicant and violence,

Figure 1: Case of Selahattin Demirtaş b. Turkey (No.2)



which did not include terrorism, to differentiate between the association of the applicant with the PKK and the applicant with other charges that did not include the PKK terrorism specifically. I selected specific quotes that showed this portrayal of the applicant and the PKK being affiliated through speeches and the AKP during the time of the 2015 elections.

The PKK peace agreements were crucial to the Kurdish question since the government associated the Kurdish question, at times, as the question of the relationship with the PKK. The first reference to the peace agreements with Demirtaş, in the court case, was the 2014 protests in Kobani. Despite Kobani 2014 happening before the elections, it had a pivotal impact on the political environment of Turkey and strained relationships between political parties, emphasized later in the 2015 elections. In September and October 2014, members of Daesh (an armed terrorist organization) attacked the Syrian town of Kobani along the border of Turkey (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.4). After the clashes between the Daesh and YPG (People’s Protection Units), the Turkish government opened the border to an influx of thousands of refugees. But, at the same time, they closed the border that allowed people to enter the Kobani region. The protests that emerged from the attack in Kobani centered around Kurdish voices because the YPG is an affiliate of the PKK and Kobani is near the southeast region of Turkey, a region of Turkish Kurdistan. Citizens who wanted to fight against Daesh held demonstrations in Turkey. Ethnic Kurds were angry at the government for not helping Kobani fight against ISIL/Daesh (Al Jazeera, 2021).

A few days later, on October 5th, a tweet “was posted on a Twitter account controlled by one of the PKK leaders” that said they “call upon all the young people, women and everyone from 7 to 70 to stand up for Kobani, to protect our honor and dignity and to occupy the metropolitan areas” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.4). This idea of boycotting

spread among southeastern Turkey with calls from the HDP to protest the “AKP government’s embargo over Kobani” and KCK (Kurdistan Communities Union, viewed as the “urban wing” of the PKK) (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.4). The demonstrations became violent and curfews were imposed in several towns (by the mayors and national government). This violence occurred between October 6-8th caused the death of fifty people and injured 772.

Because of the HDP’s calls against the government during these protests, the government believed that this proved some allegiance to the PKK¹. They argued in the court case that these tweets proved as evidence for this allegiance. This was the first mention of the HDP in accordance with the PKK. This being the precursor of the 2015 elections greatly added to ongoing political tensions with the HDP and AKP.

The tweets from the HDP, the state (AKP) believed, encouraged violence in Kobani. In rebuttal to the claims of his tweets inciting violence, quoted above, Demirtaş specifically outlined that “there was no violence anywhere” and they “did not tell anyone to resort to violence” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.4). However, Demirtaş stated that “people were not satisfied with the pursuit of the peace process, which was not leading to any conclusion, and they were in a bad mood” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.4). This statement revealed that the reason why the violence happened, according to Demirtaş, was because civilians were upset with the pursuit of the peace process which led to boycotting the similar lack of government involvement in Kobani. The peace process was between the PKK and the government, meaning the party that was partially responsible for the lack of change in the peace process was the AKP. The AKP continued to cite these Kobani tweets as evidence for

¹ This belief proved true in 2020 when the government said that “pro-Kurdish politicians were attempting to incite civil war and were taking orders from the PKK, arguing the party is inextricably linked to the PKK” (“Turkish prosecutors indict...”)

violence because of the similarity of the HDP and PKK stating to boycott the AKP in their tweets, which for the AKP, linked Demirtaş with the PKK, despite Demirtaş stating that he did not incite violence and rather it reflected the citizens against the government.

The next reference with the PKK and Demirtaş was the AKP citing as evidence (to justify later arresting Demirtaş on counts of terrorism) how Demirtaş was involved with the beginning of the 2012 peace process and made several visits to the prison that held the PKK's leader Abdullah Öcalan ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.8). This evidence however did prove a precedent of Demirtaş being involved with the PKK only when it is to aid with the peace process, rather than the AKP insinuating other connections. The government later in the court case cited other evidence for their connection, however, the evidence provided did not hold up as credible enough according to the European Court of Human Rights. Rather, the only true connection of the HDP and PKK meeting and collaborating in person was through professional visits for the peace process help.

This collaboration between the AKP and HDP created a ten-point reconciliation declaration with the PKK to aid the peace process called the "Dolmabahçe consensus." On February 28th, 2015, the Prime minister stated that the consensus meant "that significant steps were being taken towards halting terrorist activities in Turkey" ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.8). This statement and interaction demonstrated that the HDP had been taking steps to stop violence, along with working with the government (AKP). This evidence demonstrated that they were not affiliated with the PKK despite continuous insistence by the AKP that they are.

Despite the AKP and HDP collaboration on the Dolmabahçe consensus, shortly after, Erdoğan said that "it was out of the question that the government would reach an agreement

with a terrorist organization” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.8). This complete reversal in actions with aiding the peace process within the same political party reflected an overall instability surrounding the Kurdish question and peace process within the AKP government.

The peace process in Turkey had been going on since 2009 and the people of Turkey experienced continuous fighting from both sides in the periods of no peace process. Therefore, the peace process affected not just the AKP and PKK, but Turkish and Kurdish civilians as well. Hence, it was a large national issue that has developed with and part of the Kurdish question in Turkey. A few weeks before the June 7 elections, the Deputy Prime Minister stated “that if the HDP exceeds the 10 percent threshold the AKP government loses power and there will be no solution process” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.8). First, this statement was reflective of the turbulence of the peace process. Despite the prime minister of Turkey writing this consensus, the president of Turkey went against the consensus, refusing to make peace. Second, this statement showcased the AKP’s power to rebrand and re approach their views on the peace process. By threatening the voters to not vote for the HDP if they want the peace process to work, the government utilized the peace process to gain votes. Third, this statement could suggest two varied meanings between the relations with the HDP and the peace process. The connection between the HDP and PKK could mean that by voting for the HDP, a citizen would be directly endangering the peace process. Or it could be viewed as the peace process simply being a strategy to stop votes for opposing parties and does not have any correlation with the HDP and PKK being related. Either way, it showed that the AKP is weaponizing the PKK peace process to halt votes for the HDP. This, again, showcased how the HDP and PKK are linked and in correlation with electoral politics before the election happened. Especially since

this statement came from the Deputy Prime Minister, there was a certain amount of authority and legitimacy involved that could impact voting behavior. Fourth, this statement showed the duality of the AKP with halting the Dolmabahçe consensus and then utilizing the peace process to gain votes. The AKP's priority was not aiding the process but rather using the process to aid their elections.

Ethnic Association with the PKK: Parliamentary Immunity Removal and Pre-Trial Detention

Since this court case was based on Demirtaş' human rights violations while imprisoned, much of the content referred to his parliamentary immunity removal and pre-trial detention after the 2015 elections. However, despite these events happening after the election, the statements from the government used to imprison him do reveal why Demirtaş was incarcerated and charged. Most of these charges were based on terrorism and evidence cited happened before or during the 2015 election. Understanding these charges and the evidence used to imprison Demirtaş, the Turkish state revealed how they already had been collecting evidence and discussing the HDP linked to the PKK prior to the 2015 elections (when the HDP became an equal competitor in politics). This added more evidence to the Turkish state's trend of shutting down Kurdish political parties for reasons such as terrorism. These charges determined that the AKP and Turkish state viewed and framed Demirtaş as a terrorist legally and imprisoned him while he was still serving his political term.

Parliamentary immunity is protected government immunity for Turkish politicians so they can express themselves and speak freely in parliament. The AKP and other Turkish parties ruled to remove Demirtaş' parliamentary immunity based on terrorism charges, meaning that the government could prosecute and imprison Demirtaş afterwards.

A pivotal finding in the court case about parliamentary immunity was when Erdoğan made a statement to the press on January 2nd, 2016 stating that Selahattin Demirtaş conducted crimes against the constitution and that the “ process that will start with the lifting of [parliamentary] immunity will also have a positive impact on the atmosphere in our country in terms of combating terrorism” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.11). Despite this statement occurring after the November 2015 elections, it did directly correlate Selahattin Demirtaş with terrorism and his removal of the parliamentary immunity, and by removing that immunity meant decreasing terrorism. This statement confirmed that the reason Demirtaş had his immunity removed was because the AKP believed he was associated with terrorism. 376 out of 550 deputies voted to approve a bill to amend the constitution to strip away immunity from prosecution (“Turkish parliament votes to lift...”, 2016). The removal of parliamentary immunity because of Demirtaş’ alleged association with a terrorist group is confirmed again in the explanation behind the constitutional amendment.

The reasons stated by the government for removing Selahattin Demirtaş’ parliamentary immunity laid in their explanation of the constitutional amendment. To remove the rights of parliamentary immunity, the government had to pass a constitutional amendment that allowed them to remove certain members of the HDP’s parliamentary immunity. In the justification of the amendment, the government stated that

“Turkey is waging the strongest and most intensive campaign against terrorism in its history, certain members of parliament, whether before or after their election, have made speeches voicing moral support for terrorism, have provided de facto support and assistance to terrorism and terrorists [and] have called for violence; [these actions] have aroused public indignation... The Turkish public are of the view that members of

parliament who support terrorism and the terrorist[s] and call for violence are abusing their [parliamentary] immunity” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.14).

This quote directly declared that charges of terrorism, specifically calls to violence that may support terrorists are the reason why Selahattin Demirtaş lost his parliamentary immunity. It was these charges and allegations that were viewed as terrorism that led to his parliamentary immunity being removed.

To break down how the government removed Demirtaş immunity (since it was the AKP’s statements discussed earlier and not all of parliament’s consensus) was because of investigation reports, “the vast majority concerning terrorism-related offenses” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey p.15), drawn up during his terms as a member of parliament. Then the prosecutors of these investigations applied to the National Assembly to have Demirtaş’ parliamentary immunity removed (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey p.15). Afterwards, the constitutional amendment was created to officially lift the parliamentary immunity of Selahattin Demirtaş. Despite the court case not including the specific documents of evidence that outlined why his parliamentary immunity was removed, I can reasonably conclude based on brief summaries of his various sentences written by Turkish prosecutors that these charges were based on terroristic activity that the reasons stated for his parliamentary were mostly based on his terrorism-related charges (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey p.15). The procedure of how his immunity was removed with the created amendment for stopping terrorism in parliament was used against other HDP members. This parliamentary immunity process further connected Demirtaş with terrorism with evidence of acts that occurred before 2016 that prompted the process of the immunity removal.

The government, at the time when they first put him in detention, did not prosecute Demirtaş officially on any charges but continued to keep him detained in pre-trial detention after his initial arrest. To clarify, they would keep him in pre-trial detention and then after his detention time “ran out” they would extend it by bringing up another criminal charge to keep him in jail. This detention in pre-trial detention and the Turkish government's consistent extension of his pre-trial detention tied into his charges toward jail. They justified his pre-trial detention with what he was charged with, hence when the government discussed reasons for keeping him in pre-trial detention, they also inherently discussed the reasons why he was sentenced to jail. These charges later placed him into jail when the government found him guilty. Because of the similarity of the charges and how the parliamentary immunity charges were used as evidence for his prison sentence, in my analysis, I grouped the prison charges and parliamentary immunity reasons together.

The evidence that the government gave for pre-trial detention were six political speeches made by the applicant, his participation in a public assembly that the government believed was tied to a terrorist organization, and a tweet by the HDP calling for demonstrations against the attack by Daesh in Kobani in October 2014 (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey p.86”). Additional evidence was his political speech in September 2015 where he had “defended self-governance”, described the terrorist acts allegedly committed by PKK members as a legitimate ‘war of self-defense’ and as acts of ‘resistance’, and criticized the operations by the security forces by describing them as ‘massacres’.” The government also added that in a political speech, Demirtaş had praised the leader of the PKK and called for people to take to the streets in protest in November 2012 (to see more details on evidence please reference Appendix B on the Charges against Demirtaş section). Other charges they had were the commission of

offenses on behalf of a terrorist organization without being a member of it, giving propaganda to help terrorist organizations, conducting, and participating in unlawful meetings, and praising crime and criminals (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey p.16). Some of these charges were faulty because the Turkish government had two charges for him that contradicted each other, one where he was part of a terrorist organization and one where he was not a member of it but was doing favors for them. Both charges were listed under two different courts in the same case of 2016 and 2017. These conflicting charges can be explained, however, by the way, that the government would layer on charges after certain periods to continue Demirtaş’ extension for pre-trial detention, hence explaining the initial charge of being a member and the later charges of not being a member. Despite the European Court of Human Rights reviewing the evidence given to prosecute Demirtaş, they concluded that most of these charges were based on statements against the AKP government and were not applicable to prosecute Demirtaş. However, neither the court case nor this research is looking into the veritability of these claims, rather looking at the continuous targeting and associating of Demirtaş as a terrorist that led up to his arrest in 2016.

These pieces of evidence showcased that the government did label Demirtaş as a terrorist and used his previous speeches he had said in a public sphere, either to the media or to parliament, as evidence of terroristic activity. Therefore, by analyzing these speeches said in the public sphere, one can understand how they were viewed and portrayed by the government as terrorism during the 2015 election period and that the Turkish public perceived Demirtaş’ “terroristic” statements before the November 2015 election.

Creating ethnic association: Associating Demirtaş with Violence

There were nine references for the code “applicant and violence.” In Figure 2 below, half of the mentions of violence in the court case were in reference to the applicant, Demirtaş, and violence. Most cases when the PKK was discussed it was in relation to the applicant, shown by almost similar numbers of codes for PKK and PKK and applicant. Perhaps, the applicant did not commit direct violence beyond charges of terrorism, which would explain the smaller number of codes for applicant and violence, but when violence was mentioned it was in reference to an event with terrorism and the PKK.

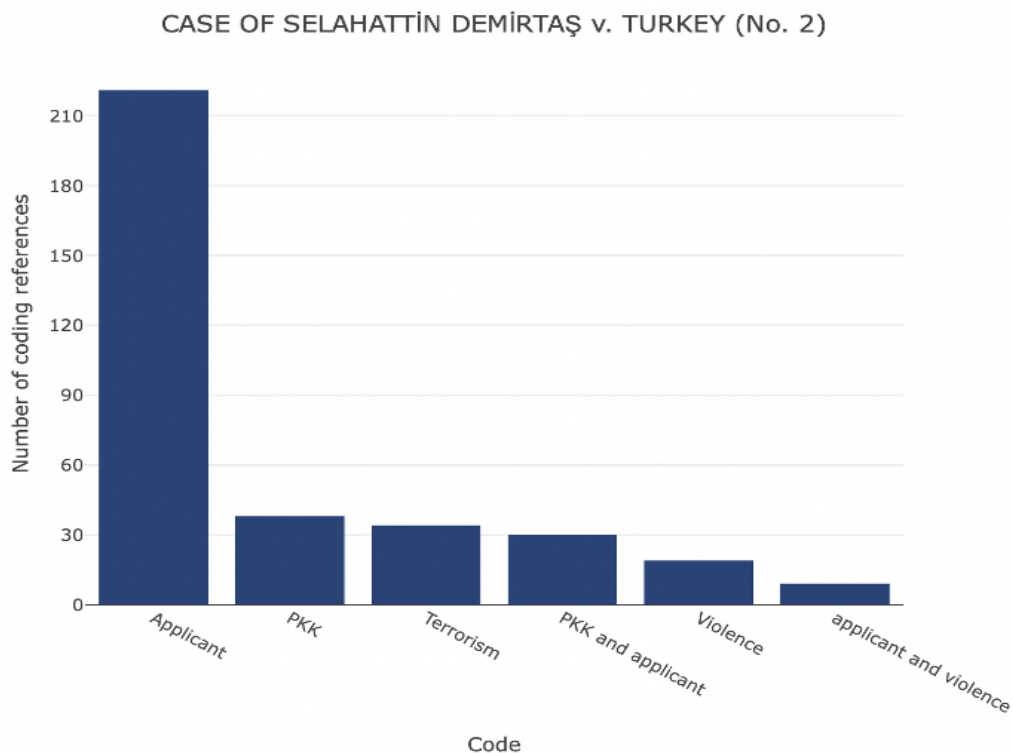


Figure 2: Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey (No.2)

In two statements made on 7 and 9 October 2014, during Kobani, Demirtaş emphasized that he was opposed to the use of violence during the demonstrations. He stated that his party was prepared to cooperate with the government but that the latter first needed to identify the agitators behind the violence (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey p.6). Demirtaş defended himself against AKP's claims of violence and inciting the crowds. The Kobani situation, again, was an attack against the government and during Kobani it was not just the HDP tweeting about it but the PKK and KCK. It was harder to just pinpoint one organization for inciting the violence when there were many tweets being sent about the situation in Kobani.

Other notable Demirtaş and violence codes referred to the pre-trial detention and arrest of Demirtaş. All his charges were based on terrorism and inciting violence through a terrorist organization (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey p.20). However, Demirtaş’ detention period continued for several years after his initial arrest. In 2019, the President of Turkey (Erdoğan) stated that

“If you are looking for a killer in this country, there is no need to search for the address. They have even infiltrated Parliament. This nation does not and will not forget those who called people out into the streets and then killed our fifty-three children in Diyarbakir. We are following this matter and we will follow it through to the end (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey p.32).”

Both the pre-trial detention and statement given by the president occurred after the 2015 election period, however, these statements, from the court case, can be used to understand the political climate of Turkey and the tensions that happened, before Demirtaş’ initial arrest, that

motivated his arrest. Because of the legitimacy of the president as a government position and the president being part of the AKP, these statements did showcase the point of view of the prosecutors' side. By using such strong rhetoric as "killer" and "infiltrated" in reference to what had happened where this quote was made after Demirtaş was placed back into pre-trial detention, there is a labeling of him as violent to the Turkish public.

The AKP, which is the ruling party of the government, prosecuted Demirtaş' tweets from the HDP account about Kobani as inciting violence. But the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) viewed that these calls remained within the limits of political speech, "in so far as they cannot be construed as a call for violence" ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.93). Much of the evidence that the AKP prosecuted Demirtaş on had been disregarded by third parties that claimed that the evidence given did not support the claim that he was part of a terrorist organization or enticing violence.

In the court document, the ECHR first laid out the applicant's side of the case, then the prosecutors of Turkey side of the case, and then their opinion on the case. So, in this review of the evidence, one quote from the ECHR review was that his case "was part of a broader pattern of repression against various groups expressing criticism of official policy in Turkey. [ECHR] submitted that many HDP members of parliament had faced judicial proceedings and pre-trial detention on terrorism-related charges on account of their legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression" ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.68). The ECHR had concluded their remarks that because of "excessively" opening cases by Turkish prosecutors, the AKP, against the HDP and the constitutional amendment for lifting parliamentary immunity explicitly focused on prosecuting parliamentary members that support terrorism (which were deemed many HDP members), there was an alternative mission. They believed that "this

situation gave the impression that the criminal proceedings against the members of parliament had from the outset been tainted by serious irregularities and had been aimed at silencing them as parliamentarians” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.68). The continued pre-trial detention and allegations of terrorism was more because of the threat that Demirtaş imposed onto the AKP rather than actual terrorism. Despite there being little validity to the charges, the AKP continued to disseminate this narrative of the HDP and PKK being affiliated to the Turkish public, despite there being other motives (mainly the AKP using this association to gain a political advantage).

Tensions between Demirtaş and the AKP

Before the elections of 2015, there were building tensions between the head leader of the HDP and the AKP. Kobani was a huge stressor for this tension before the election. The calls to action of the HDP and directly calling out the embargo that prevented citizens from entering Kobani as the fault of the AKP brought the HDP and Demirtaş to the forefront of the AKP’s attention.

The previous calls from Erdoğan to make sure the AKP gained votes (in the section *Creating ethnic association: PKK peace agreements*) otherwise the peace process would be halted and continued. On March 7, 2015, the President of Turkey stated, “Give me 400 members of parliament and everything will be settled peacefully” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.113). In the court document, Demirtaş directly commented on this statement in court. He believed that his initial and “continued pre-trial detention on account of the political views he had expressed as a member of parliament and co-chair of Turkey’s second largest opposition party had ultimately been aimed at punishing and silencing him” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.113). He stated that the “real reason” for his detention was

because of his criticism of policies that were encouraged and pursued by the government and president. His viewpoints did appear to be quite legitimate because after the President's June 2015 statement, Demirtaş responded with, in the media, on March 18th, "Dear Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, we will not make you President, we will not make you President, we will not make you President" ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.113).

This quote and continued conversations that the HDP and AKP had through speeches indirectly, showcased motives and tensions for the AKP to prosecute Demirtaş. This speech of Demirtaş in particular had "quickly gone viral and had influenced the overall political climate in the run-up to the June 2015 elections, becoming a key HDP slogan and positioning the party and himself in direct opposition to the President" ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.113). These speeches emphasized that the HDP would never align with the President and directly challenged the president throughout the campaign leading up to the HDP winning 13 percent of the vote. This is notably important because of the correlation between opposition speeches and "crackdown" against members of the HDP.

The European Court of Human Rights had found that 93 investigation reports were drawn up for Demirtaş by the prosecuting authorities. The vast "majority concerning terrorism-related offenses." ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.15). 45 of the reports were created between 2007 and 2014, in a time frame of 7 years. However, in 2015 and 2016, a total of 48 reports about Demirtaş were submitted to the National Assembly ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.15). These reports were conducted in the span of a year. The increase of reports made against Demirtaş during 2015, when the HDP gained power in the elections, revealed targeting by the government towards Demirtaş when the HDP became a political opponent that could affect the AKP's rule. This increased targeting could have

stemmed from the events and speeches that Demirtaş continued to say that would go against the government and because of the HDP's growing power that directly opposes the AKP. Especially since the June 2015 elections were the first time, since the AKP's majority of parliamentary power since 2002, that the AKP was no longer the majority in parliament. The events that happened during 2015 could have also affected the increase in investigations, especially the ending of the peace process in July 2015.

On July 20, 2015, a month after the first general election where the HDP exceeded the 10 percent threshold, terrorist attacks began. In Suruç, just 15 miles away from Kobani, 34 people died in an attack apparently carried out by Daesh. On July 22, 2015, two police officers were murdered in their homes in Ceylanpinar, allegedly by PKK members ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.9). These two murders were the *casus belli* of the PKK peace agreements ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.9). However, the perpetrators of the murders have yet to be identified. The timing of the events of Suruç, where it is geographically located close to Kobani and near the year anniversary of Kobani (October 2014), most likely stirred up sentiments around PKK terrorism and government inability, specifically the AKP, to prevent the conflict.

The day after Ceylanpinar, the PKK urged people to arm themselves and call for a proclamation of a political system of self-governance. On July 28th, 2015, Erdoğan gave a statement to the press saying that "I do not approve of dissolving political parties. But I say that the leaders of the HDP must pay the price. Personally, and individually" in reference to acts of terrorism ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.9). This statement came before prosecuting Demirtaş and occurred after the June elections, this environment of fighting between the state and PKK along with the president of Turkey placing blame on the HDP for

terrorism continued to add to the complex political environment. Despite there being no evidence that the HDP was part of the PKK, Erdoğan continuously associated the two together to the media and in turn to the Turkish voters. Compared to his statements weeks before the June 2015 election, where he stated that if the AKP did not gain enough votes the peace process would be halted, there were contrasting views on who was responsible for the failing of the peace process. Erdoğan, head leader of the AKP, placed a target on the HDP to the media by emphasizing that they must pay a price, implicitly associating the HDP with terrorism, and in turn the PKK.

On the same day, Demirtaş gave a speech at a meeting of the HDP's parliamentary group that the HDP will not view the murder of anyone as normal (not the PKK, not the army or the police). This was in reference to Ceylanpınar police killings. That those "people must not pay the price, but the HDP will be ready to pay the price," specifically for those that fight against them, in reference to the AKP, and are hostile. That together they will be defeated "by resistance and that a free future of Turkey will triumph" ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.9). This rhetoric of paying the price was in both Erdoğan and Demirtaş' speeches. Erdoğan called out the HDP needing to pay the price and Demirtaş deflected this by paying the price for the HDP from Erdoğan, rather he framed it as how the politicians will pay any price, empowered by the votes of their people, to bring peace to Turkey. Demirtaş tried to remove this association of the HDP with violence or terrorism and rather focused on a politician's constitutional duties and why he served in parliament in the first place. Perhaps this reference back to the ethic of being a politician was in a way legitimizing himself and distancing himself from terrorist claims. Especially since Erdoğan's speech came first in the day and Demirtaş' seemed to appear more as a response to Erdoğan's speech, it showed the conversation these two parties had about each

other but to the media and not each other directly. This similar rhetoric and how both speeches were given on the same day display a tense conversation between the AKP and HDP against the backdrop of all the terrorist attacks.

In August 2015, the violence escalated. 19 different towns in Turkey declared self-governance, the vast majority of them in the southeastern region, where many Kurdish people reside. Between August 10 and 19th members of the YDG-H, regarded as the PKK's youth wing, dug trenches and put-up barricades ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.9). According to the security forces they declared that the YDG-H had brought a large number of weapons and explosives ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.9). In response, local governors imposed curfews to clear the explosives that the YDG-H allegedly planted. The tension increased when eight soldiers were killed by the PKK on August 19 ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.9). The violence continued when more police officers and soldiers were killed by the PKK in September. More curfews were put up as the situation became graver in Sur. During this time, Demirtaş gave a statement to the press saying

"Our people want self-governance, their own assemblies, and municipalities where responsibility lies with elected officials rather than appointees. Our people have the power to resist pressure and massacre policies everywhere. We have the power to protect ourselves against any attack. We will show that we are not despairing; we will resist together; we will achieve salvation without forgetting our motherland and history and by defending our rights" ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.10).

This quote from the leader of the HDP, a Kurdish politician, declaring that people want more voice in the government system and to go against the current system of appointees was critiquing the government. Especially considering the terrorist attacks and barricades built

around Turkey, people were unhappy and were declaring themselves to be independent. One could argue that the HDP is merely representing upset citizens' voices. Using rhetoric such as "our people," Demirtaş aimed to unite the Turkish citizens who were unhappy with the government. However, this direct critique on the government, especially in a region where there are many Kurds, and during the time where the PKK and state were fighting, the government, and the AKP, responded to this through force and action to stop this. A similar statement expressing the same sentiments by Demirtaş continued to place him as a potential threat to the AKP, since he placed himself against the AKP.

Confirmation of AKP's narrative of Demirtaş as a terrorist

Throughout the election period, and especially during the end of the PKK peace agreements, Demirtaş had been associated with the PKK, despite him never referring to or supporting the PKK himself. After the PKK peace agreements ended and speeches by the president who "had, for example, said on 28 July 2015 that 'the leaders of that party [the HDP] must pay the price,'" there was an increase in the number and pace of the criminal investigations in respect of" Demirtaş ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.121). Demirtaş actively outspoken against the AKP with electoral slogans of "we will not make you president" and, afterwards, gained 13 percent of the vote in the June 2015 elections. Because of this, along with the Kobani tweets, there was increased targeting by the AKP to imprison Demirtaş and to do so portrayed him as part of the PKK. For the number of times that the PKK was mentioned, there were close to the same amount of references to the PKK and the applicant (Demirtaş) (see Figure 1). This showed that when the PKK was brought up in the court case, most times they were labeled with Demirtaş or as Demirtaş being part of the PKK. This showed the continued ethnic association of Demirtaş and the PKK. Demirtaş had proven to not support the PKK

through his speeches that stated he was not part of the PKK and in his arguments in his court case with the ECHR but continued to be associated with them because of their shared Kurdish identity.

Conclusion

Echoing the past trend of shutting down Kurdish political parties for terrorism, the AKP did the same to the HDP through the prosecution of one of their two co-leaders, Demirtaş². From this European Court of Human Rights case, it was found that the AKP had begun building a case for prosecution for the HDP before the 2015 elections, when the HDP became a prominent political opponent. The AKP, before the June 2015 elections, had viewed tweets by the HDP on Kobani as evidence for terroristic affiliations. The AKP told the Turkish public that if the public did not guarantee votes to them the peace process would stop. They utilized the peace process as a tool to gain more votes before the election, and then after the June 2015 elections, blamed the halting of the peace process on the HDP and continued a public targeting of the HDP with the PKK through speeches. This targeting was done on purpose to build up a case against the HDP through the same speeches and tweets used as evidence in the 2016 parliamentary immunity removal of Demirtaş and later jail sentencing of Demirtaş. Although the ECHR viewed little validity to the violence charges towards Demirtaş, the ECHR's position was not made known to the Turkish public during the 2015 election period. So, the Turkish public was actively receiving and perceiving this targeting of the HDP, done through ethnic association of the HDP and PKK, by the AKP, a Turkish party that had been in power since 2002 and had legitimate authority and power to not be contested with. The Turkish public only had access to these public statements by the AKP and therefore only took in the narrative of the

² (the other co-leader Yüksekdağ was also imprisoned after the 2015 elections)

AKP associating the HDP with the PKK during a tumultuous and violent period of fighting with the PKK. This was crucial to understand because it could have largely affected the HDP vote decline from the June 2015 elections to the November 2015 elections.

Chapter 4: Media Analysis

Introduction

For this chapter, I aimed to present and understand the results of my media analysis by going into the trends that emerged from the data and its larger application to the presentation of the HDP to the Turkish public through the media. I began my media analysis chapter by going more in depth with the specific coding, articles, and news outlets used. Then I delved into my two major themes that my data fell into: the HDP condemning the PKK or the HDP linked with the PKK directly or indirectly. By splitting my results up into these two major themes, it was easier to view the different methods used for articles that condemn the PKK and HDP connection by using direct quotes from the HDP versus articles that directly stated a connection or implied one through tools such as wording and layout of information. After discussing the different articles separately and going in depth with the different techniques used, I summarized my main findings between the two different news outlets. I decided to not organize and present my data between the two news outlets, so it was easier to view the different outlets discussing and using similar tools. Lastly, I ended with my limitations for this media analysis.

Methodology

The two outlets I used for my content and discourse analysis were *Sözcü* online and *Sondakika.com* because these outlets were the second and third most used online outlet in 2015 in Turkey (Newman, 2022). The other most used online outlet in 2015 was FOX TV News online however a major limitation that prevented me from using FOX TV News was the lack of

archived 2015 articles. By using the code of “HDP and PKK”, I found 17 articles in total between the two outlets that mentioned both parties. I then began to analyze and code the use of language, connotation, relevance of the article and provide context to the article and its place in Turkish politics. I coded these articles with a first-round coding, which meant analyzing the terms used to describe the HDP, then coded a second round to see the terms used to describe both the HDP and PKK together. Because of the limited access to 2015 archive articles, my data pool was smaller than I had anticipated, but nonetheless still useful. I grouped my findings through the themes found in the articles during the second round of coding. One concern is there was no author credit on these articles, unless it is an opinion piece, because it is just credited as the outlet news team. However, that is quite normal in Turkish daily news since it is a team of people producing numerous articles a day. However, it makes it harder to pinpoint authors that have individual bias. *Sözcü*'s reader base is more left leaning and the outlet itself is more anti-government. There are little statistics on *Sondakika*'s reader base, but *Sondakika* exclusively uses no author credits and short impartial daily news articles. Although I was comparing two different media outlets, I was not looking at the validity of the articles but rather how the outlets portray the HDP to the Turkish public. Even though the readership base is different, both outlets spread news about the HDP to the public, and from my results, both still depicted the HDP negatively (despite readership or political affiliations of the news outlet).

Media Analysis of Sözcü and Sondakika

Under *Sözcü*, 12 articles were found highlighting the HDP and PKK in the same article between the months of June 2015 to November 2015. I searched for the article through Google's filter feature of having a time for the results (in the left-hand corner of the search bar). Through these dates I put June 7th, 2015, to November 1st, 2015 and searched for results with this “Sözcü

PKK AND HDP” and “*Sondakika* PKK AND HDP.” I made sure that the articles were from the original websites, so *Sözcü’s* website and *Sondakika.com*, and not a secondary source (all articles and their links are in Appendix). Afterwards, I read all the articles that came up from *Sözcü’s* filter results that included relevant information (meaning it is pertaining to politics or a retelling of events that include the HDP and PKK). I then used google translator to translate the article to English. If there was irregular formatting or words that did not make sense, I would ask a native Turkish speaker to assist with the translation and specific connotations of words to make sure it was not lost in translation. Because most of these articles were short, it was easier to verify that the translation was correct. My findings consisted of themes of terrorism associated with the PKK and HDP emerged in two distinct ways: either the HDP condemned the PKK in a direct statement and wanted to promote peace with them or the newspapers referred to terrorism when mentioning the HDP.

Limitations

The data collected for this article were archive articles that had “the HDP and PKK” code. I inputted the code when searching through the newspapers that were written from June 2015 to November 2015. There were three major limitations to this data collection. First, on the newspaper's websites, the archive database would not display articles from 2015. Therefore, I had to use google and adjust the search to only include articles written from June 7, 2015, to November 2015. I would search, for example, the news outlet, my code “the HDP AND PKK,” and make sure the dates were correct. Therefore, the number of articles I had were limited. Second is the translation of the articles. These articles were translated via a google translator. In important parts of the article where the word usage and connotation were ambiguous because of the translation, I referred to my own language skills in Turkish, and

sometimes someone who was born in Turkey to make sure the meaning and connotations were correct in the article. Third, *Sözcü* was ranked third in online weekly reach in 2015 in Turkey. *Sondakika* was second and Fox TV News was first, but there were little to no archived 2015 FOX TV News articles despite using filters on the website and searching through articles by just looking up PKK or HDP in 2015 (Newman, 2022).

First Theme: HDP Condemning the PKK

Out of the 17 articles reviewed, four of them explicitly focused on the relationship between the PKK and HDP. The reasoning for this was based on the context of the article, where the HDP was actively trying to create peace and HDP statements that directly condemned the PKK.

For *Sözcü* articles, the first one that did not emphasize a connection between the HDP and PKK was written on July 14, 2015, titled “Demirtaş called on the PKK to lay down arms.” The article was just quotes from an interview that Demirtaş’ gave, therefore *Sözcü* did not paraphrase his words (which gives an opportunity for bias).

In this statement, there was an overall emphasis on the need for a different approach to solving the PKK peace agreement. When asked about the failure of the peace agreements, Demirtaş said if it were up to him, he would “call day and night” to fix the problem, but it wasn’t up to just calling. Based on the failure of the Dolmabahçe agreements, a ten-point reconciliation agreement lead by the Prime Minister of Turkey and aided by the HDP (Demirtaş), Demirtaş continued to advocate for a way to reconcile with the PKK after the peace agreements had failed in February. His statement he would “call day and night” meant he would be calling the parties involved in the peace agreement relentlessly. This statement reflected his resilience in trying to aid with peace and stop the tensions between the PKK and

the Turkish government. This statement was just five days before the Ceylanpinar PKK killing of two Turkish police officers which resulted in the breaking of the peace process. After these killings, violence between the Turkish state and PKK occurred and rhetoric of terrorism increased (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş ...”). In this statement, Demirtaş explicitly “called” to the PKK to lay down arms. The choice of the word “call”, where throughout his quote he used “call”, promoted a sense of urgency and imploring the PKK to stop.

Later in the article, Demirtaş stated that “I'm speaking from the heart, with faith, not as a joke. But my call is not the solution.” The use of pathos, such as emotional words like “heart” and “faith,” in this statement demonstrated that Demirtaş was truly trying to call the PKK to stop arms. The word “call” implied that it was not his “call” or not in his power to determine the fate of the peace process. He confirmed this by ending his statement with “it is not in my power to fix the situation” and then stated that it “must be on the terms of the leader of the PKK, Öcalan ”. He then said, “that was what the Dolmabahçe agreement was for.” This statement referred to the AKP Deputy Prime Minister and Erdoğan who immediately halted the Dolmabahçe consensus after it was made, a consensus that was prompted by the AKP to ask the HDP for help with coming to a compromise with the PKK before the peace process ended in July 2015. This statement could be read as Demirtaş expressing his disapproval for halting measures that wanted to continue the peace process. This statement also could reflect the larger sentiment in Turkish society with growing anger about the lack of progress made in the peace process that was reflected in the Kobani protests from Chapter 3. This article showed, from direct statements from Demirtaş, that the HDP wanted to aid with the peace process with the PKK, using references to when he tried to help end the conflict with the PKK through the Dolmabahçe agreement , which confirmed the HDP’s stance on wanting peace.

The next *Sözcü* article was written on September 4, 2015, titled “HDP will make a call to PKK.” In this article, after Demirtaş’ statements that the PKK must lay down arms, the HDP executives, with approval from government MPs, “will contact the PKK to declare a ceasefire”.

Demirtaş and HDP were portrayed as the delegation that would be the third party between the Turkish government and PKK. The article used words such as “HDP executives took action,” meaning that the HDP was taking a more active role to aid with the PKK conflict that began again after two months. The HDP was revealing to the Turkish public that they were taking initiative to make change, compared to the AKP which was instigating and continuing the conflict. However, unlike the previous article, this was to reinstate the peace process again after it had been broken in July. Meaning that at the time of publication of this article, the HDP as a political party was prioritizing stopping terrorist activity from the PKK. The HDP in this relationship with the PKK and AKP served like a mediator. Although a mediator is impartial, the HDP believing that they have the power to make monumental change within a 20 plus year conflict between the AKP and PKK could be interpreted, if the reader was biased, as a connection between the HDP and PKK. Specifically, one could have viewed it as why and what would the HDP have in common with the PKK that the PKK would listen to them...perhaps a connection or an ethnic connection. However, this article does not imply that narrative at all, so it would be unlikely that it would hold an influential difference in the portrayal of the HDP and PKK connection (within this article). Another alternative interpretation of this article is it could be a positive view of the HDP taking action to stop conflict, whereas the Turkish government is taking more of a defensive role with attacking the PKK rather than focusing on peace. This interpretation is more likely considering the history

of the Dolmabahçe consensus which was a successful agreed upon consensus between the PKK and AKP, aided by the HDP, but was halted right after by the AKP.

Another *Sözcü* article written on October 9, 2015, titled “What did Selahattin Demirtaş say about the ceasefire?” included direct quotes from Selahattin Demirtaş, like the previous article in July 2015. *Sözcü* included direct quotes from Demirtaş and asked rebuttal questions to Demirtaş, which he then refuted.

First, Demirtaş emphasized the importance of the peace process. Saying “the will for a solution must re-emerge urgently and quickly,” Demirtaş appeared to be a supporter of quickly resuming peace talks with the PKK and the government to stop the violence happening in Turkey. Second, when Demirtaş was asked his stance about the prime minister saying that HDP pursued a policy of terror after June 8, he responded with “let me not say anything about the prime minister for “he is the biggest supporter of terrorism, he is the one who feeds ISIS .” In this quote, he decided to not address that he was not pursuing terror, but rather implied that the prime minister is conducting conspicuous activities behind the Turkish public’s back and supporting ISIS, an Islamic terrorist organization. Perhaps he did not directly refute this as a strategy to make it appear as though the prime minister’s claims were not based in any verity so there was no point in addressing it. In doing so, he redirects the claim of terrorism to draw a critique on the prime minister. The narrative of the HDP pursuing a policy of terror, stated on June 8th in this article by the AKP, came after the June 7th elections where the HDP got 13 percent of the vote. This timing of this statement, only one day after the election, questioned this narrative of terroristic activity because it conflicted with the HDP’s campaign manifesto of more socialist policies that aided the community, not terroristic activity (see “Decision to confiscate HDP election manifesto” p.69 of Chapter 4). The article later stated that “6 million

voters who voted for the HDP "expect peace" from the party, and in this context, the HDP's will for peace should be directly transferred to the PKK." Therefore, Demirtaş' call to peace is provoked by the demands of his voters and the needs of promoting peace. This implied that to some Turkish voters the HDP symbolized a campaign of peace, meaning the portrayal of the HDP before June 7th was a positive connotation. This goes directly against the prime minister's statements that the HDP was running a campaign of terror. This article overall associated Demirtaş with a positive view where he advocated for peace and ignored claims of terrorism while advocating for his constituents' want of peace. This article did show, however, the AKP continued to try to associate Demirtaş with terrorism.

The only *Sondakika* article that had a positive view of the HDP was written on September 1, 2015, titled "Peace Day Statement from Diyarbakir: The Deaths cannot be endured." This article was centered on a statement from the HDP and DBP (Democratic Regions Party) which stated that there needed to be an emphasis on peace with the PKK and that the violence must stop.

In the HDP's statement "it was emphasized that there was no longer any tolerance for the deaths of the people." The deaths meant the police officer killings, civilian killings, and PKK soldier killings from the halting of the peace agreement occurring in mostly Southeastern Turkey. The use of "any " death inferred a neutral position about the fighting (usually police officer deaths were done by the PKK and PKK soldier killings were done by the AKP) and emphasized the need for peace. Especially since this article was written in September, in every month since the June 2015 election, the HDP had a statement on stopping violence, seen in the articles just discussed. The article had the header called "peace is more valuable than anything." This header is a quote from the statement and reiterated to the reader that the

HDP's priority is peace by formatting the quote as a header, which has a bigger font and draws the reader's attention. This format emphasized the quote and captured the essence of this article: a call for peace. This article had a positive view of the HDP with its direct quotes on the need for peace and the stopping of the deaths that are caused by the PKK.

Overall, these four articles had a positive portrayal of the HDP because much of it was direct statements from Demirtaş. Demirtaş did not support the PKK directly in statements and the lack of personal annotations and analysis to the articles, done by the news outlet, made a more neutral reporting of Demirtaş' statements and adhere to principles of *Sondakika's* impartiality, unlike the articles in the upcoming section. However, these articles, with their quotes, did portray that the HDP did advocate to the Turkish public many times that they were not involved with the PKK and rather had wanted to promote peace.

Second Theme: HDP and PKK are connected: Directly and Implicitly

Out of the 17 articles, 13 had some mention of the PKK and HDP being connected. These articles framed evidence to imply relationships among the PKK and HDP, such as out of context quotes and headers, and headlines that portray the HDP as part of the PKK. Other ways used specific words with connotations that delegitimize the HDP's claims to not be related to the PKK.

For *Sözcü* articles, one was written on July 19, 2015, titled "It is normal to have relations with PKK and HDP?" This article focused on the statements of Salih Müslim, a co-chair of the PYD, a Kurdish Democratic Union Party of Syria. ("It is normal to have..." 2015). Salih Müslim was introduced as the co-chair of "the PKK's Syrian branch PYD."

Directly referring to the PYD as part of the PKK, Salih was introduced as being affiliated with the PKK, yet this information contradicted with Salih's own words later in the

article, “those who associate us with the PKK have another purpose...that it is not right to terrorize the PYD.” This quote meant that “those,” referring to someone, wanted to associate the PYD with the PKK and Samil viewed that as negative, using the word “terrorize,” perhaps because this delegitimized their party. He did not want to be associated with the PKK and suggested how there was another purpose for “those ” who tried to associate the PYD with the PKK. Through this, he implied that he is not part of the PKK. The vague term of “those” and later he used “people” could refer to a trend of the media and politicians wanting to create an association with the PKK, since this statement for the media, so his audience was the media. The words “another purpose” conveyed that by associating one with the PKK the media or “those people” are trying to do something with malintent. Perhaps the associating delegitimized the organization to relate to a terrorist group. Again, this is what happened to the HDP repeatedly by the state quoting them as terrorists.

This article’s ordering and sentence structure showcased information in a negative connotation for the HDP. By stating as the first introduction of Salih as “co-chair of the PKK’s PYD branch,” it already associated him with the PKK (his statements denying the connection came later in the article). Then the first header (in a large font) was a quote of “we have a relationship with the HDP.” Although Salih denied PKK relations, the article portrayed him as being related to the PKK, then directly after this introduction the simplified quote emphasizing the relationship with the HDP made it seem as though the PYD and HDP are connected, and they have a relationship. Based on the article associating the PYD with the PKK and then Salih stated that he had a relationship with the HDP implicated and associated the HDP with the PKK. However, the quote after this header revealed that the header was simplified without context that altered the meaning of it.

Salih had referred that the PYD had relationships with the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, a political party in Iraqi Kurdistan), PKK and HDP and PJAK(Kurdistan Free Life Party, a Kurdish political party in Iran). He stated that these relations “are very normal.” All of these parties he listed are Kurdish groups in the Middle East, therefore it would make sense that there would be some sort of relationship. However, in the context of the article where Salih is affiliated with the PKK, it continued to associate the HDP with the PKK because the HDP had a relationship with the PYD confirmed by Salih (which had a relationship with the PKK). Although there was the shared identity of being Kurdish political parties, based on the negative history of the PKK in Turkey, instead of a reader associating the connections because of their identity, rather it would be a connection through terrorism. Although Salih stated that it was “normal to have relations,” the article reframed his statement in the title to ask the Turkish public, “Is it normal to have relations with PKK and HDP?” This quote posed as a question seemed to challenge his statement and by using the word placement “**with PKK and HDP**” made it seem as though the HDP and PKK are related (as opposed to “with PKK and with HDP” which separated them as different entities). Through the framing and out of context quote, this article associated Salih with the PKK, despite Salih saying not to associate him with the PKK. Additionally, *Sözcü* associated Salih with the PKK and then discussed how he had relations with the HDP directly after that association. The context to the actual association, of how it was many parties that the PYD had relations with and not exclusively the PKK and HDP, was later in the article. This layout of presenting information intrinsically associated the HDP having relations with the PKK like PYD.

The next *Sözcü* article was written by Saygin Ozturk on July 24th, 2015 titled “You cannot afford to shut down the HDP because...” This article discussed the AKP’s pressure and plans for closing parties as an attempt to crackdown on terrorism.

In the discussion of opposing parties fearing that Turkey will become a “party graveyard” and the AKP trying to shut down the HDP, Oztürk stated that “the HDP’s relationship with the PKK is not new.” This sentence structure and almost rebuttal-like comment of Oztürk justified the attempts of the AKP to close the HDP on the grounds of terrorism. Although he initially tried to dismiss fears of the Turkish government shutting down opposition parties, when it came to the HDP, shortly after dismissing fears, he stated the HDP had a relationship with the PKK, meaning the HDP is associated with terrorism. This association was confirmed in the next sentence when he stated that the Turkish government called upon the court to “take action against the HDP.” The arrangement of these sentences and the association of the HDP with the PKK confirmed that there was this pressure to shut down the HDP, only over one month after the June elections. July 24th was the day the Ceylanpinar incidents ended (started on July 22nd, 2015). This meant the conflict with the PKK had just started. These statements showed the Turkish government beginning to push an anti-terrorist agenda and associated the HDP with it. In the article, Oztürk implied that there has been a “known history” with the HDP and PKK, despite Demirtaş saying a month beforehand that they are not a part of the PKK (articles from the positive association of the HDP section above).

Furthermore, the article stated that “if the HDP has a relationship with a terrorist organization, one end of it will touch the government.” Meaning that the article continuously implied a relationship with the HDP and PKK but did not directly state this connection instead

they used words such as “known history” and the Turkish government is taking down opposing parties for terrorism reasons and there has been this action directed towards the HDP. These two sentences in context with one another imply an association. But, because they cannot directly confirm it (perhaps for the HDP consistently denying it), they used the word “if” and stated that “if” they were related the HDP’s “relationship” with the PKK would end up touching and corrupting the government. This sentence provoked fear for the potential of corruption and depicted the HDP having a relationship with the PKK.

However, in contrast, Oztürk continued with references to the HDP deputies knowingly going to a PKK terrorist camp in Iraq, with the government’s knowledge. Although Oztürk mentioned it was with the government’s permission (which subjectively meant it was not a legitimate piece of evidence of the HDP and PKK relationship), the way it was laid out directly after these previous statements of the HDP trying to be shut down by the government, made it appear as if it were valid evidence that could confirm the HDP and PKK relationship. After connecting the PKK and HDP being associated together, in July 2015 (around a month and a half after the June elections), Oztürk ended with an encouragement to continue an investigation into the HDP. This article being a month after the June 2015 elections revealed a beginning trend in the media to implicitly associate the HDP and PKK and as the conflict continued with the PKK, these associations became more direct.

Another *Sözcü* article that implicitly associated the PKK and HDP was written on August 5, 2015, titled “Selahattin Demirtaş will meet with the PKK!” This article had direct statements from Demirtaş claiming that the HDP never supported violence, terrorism, or racism. The way the article was laid out implicitly altered the meanings to Demirtaş’ statements.

The opening sentence stated, “it has been learned that Selahattin Demirtaş will meet with PKK executives in Brussels.” Afterward, it gave Demirtaş’ statements condemning the PKK, but directly after those statements, there was a little note that declared Demirtaş had “later denied these words” and “moved to Belgium with a sudden decision” to meet with PKK executives in Brussels. The article, later, described the trip being decided “urgently.” The tone of “it has been learned” adds an investigative voice to the statement, perhaps implying that this information was kept secret. Then despite Demirtaş condemning the PKK, the sentence framed “later denied these words” discredits all Demirtaş’ previous statements, implying a falseness to his word. The portrayal of the trip as “sudden” and “urgent,” painted the trip as a rash and impulsive decision, perhaps opening the question to the reasons why Demirtaş decided to go and who encouraged Demirtaş to attend. Overall, this article painted a negative portrayal of Demirtaş’ statements and denial of a link with the PKK.

This negative portrayal of the HDP with specific words and the order of sentences seemed to delegitimize Demirtaş’ statements. This continued in another *Sözcü* article written on August 5, 2015, titled “Stunning PKK statements from Selahattin.” This article restated quotes from an interview Demirtaş did with another magazine, *Financial Times*, in the first paragraph. But, after this summary of his quotes, where he did not support the PKK, it reminded the reader that the day after the President’s message, “let the parliamentarians who support terrorism be arrested,” Demirtaş was targeted to have his immunity lifted. Just in the introduction of the article, using certain sentence orders it delegitimized Demirtaş statements against the PKK and implicitly associated Demirtaş with the PKK since he was being targeted to have his immunity removed (which means he supports terrorism). The article posed the order of sentences to make the Demirtaş and terrorism have a connection. This directly

influenced the reader to have a negative connotation of Demirtaş. Demirtaş statements in the *Financial Times* called the PKK tactics as “dirty.” Demirtaş emphasized that he “had never supported violence, terrorism or racism,” showcasing that he again did not support the violent tactics of the PKK. However, later in the article, *Sözcü* stated that HDP deputies were in communication with PKK leaders, which implied a connection with the two parties.

Considering that some of the Turkish public believed that the HDP was a political front of the PKK, the “communication with PKK leaders” strengthened this belief. This article ended with Demirtaş denying that HDP was the political forefront or political cover posing as a legal avenue for the PKK to participate in Turkish politics. Therefore, this article emphasized mixed portrayals of the HDP and PKK relationship. When articles used direct quotes from Demirtaş that were not altered or reframed, it was most likely going to be a positive portrayal, the HDP is against the PKK’s actions and was not associated with the PKK. However, in some cases, like in this article, *Sözcü* and *Sondakika* positioned the sentences in a certain order and added their analysis of Demirtaş’ statements to try to delegitimize Demirtaş’ claims. This article used Demirtaş’ direct quotes from *Financial Times* without additional analysis but equipped a different method of rearranging sentences to imply a connection with the PKK implicitly.

This implicit association is seen in another *Sözcü* article written on September 7, 2015, titled “HDP Deputy caught while bringing food to PKK.” However, this article used another tactic to associate the PKK and HDP, by focusing on smaller events with HDP and PKK members together.

The first sentence of this article was about eight people detained in the vehicle that went to the PKK, and one of the individuals detained was a HDP deputy. The next sentence was “while Turkey was crying for its martyrs in Dağlıca, the devastating news came from

Kars.” Dağlıca refers to a PKK terrorist attack on August 14th where 3 soldiers died from PKK placed explosives on the highway (Daily Sabbah, 2015). The article utilized words that had a large emotional appeal to the readers. By setting up the article with reminding the reader about the PKK attack and calling the ones who died “martyrs” and how Turkey was “crying,” the article utilized pathos to make the reader view the news of the HDP official in the PKK van to be upsetting. This reference to a devastating PKK attack and then having stated a HDP deputy was found in a vehicle delivering food to the PKK, aid to the PKK, implied a direct connection between the HDP party (even though it is a lesser-known official). Using words such as “helping” after the devastating news that had happened, this tactic could sway the reader to not only associate the HDP and PKK but have an emotional reaction, perhaps of anger towards aiding a terrorist group that had just killed people. This article connected the HDP and PKK by highlighting a HDP deputy was found aiding the PKK, which meant a direct connection, and framed it in the scope of a previous PKK terrorist attack to show both the HDP and PKK were helping each other and attempting to emotionally sway viewers.

Another *Sözcü* article that had a negative portrayal of the HDP and no direct quotes either was written on September 19, 2015, titled “1 arrest in attack on HDP building!” A march that was condemning terrorism in Turkey was held the night before.

“During the march held in Ankara at the same time, a group of unidentified people attacked HDP Headquarters.” This quote and a few other sentences were the entire article, but the first two sentences showcased how even in smaller reported events there was still a rewording of an incident to implicate the HDP with terrorism. Because the march was about condemning terrorism and these people from the march attacked the HDP, it referred to the attack on the HDP being because the HDP was associated with terrorism. Even though this

was about an arrest of someone who wrongfully attacked a HDP building, the article implicitly associated the HDP with terrorism through a citizen attacking the building because of that association. However, based on the reader's bias, it could be interpreted as just the people who attacked the building thought the HDP was associated with terrorism rather than people who attacked the building because the HDP was associated with terrorism.

A similar article about an attack on a HDP building was written on September 22, 2015, titled "HDP building was set on fire this time in Semdinli." This article had three components to it.

First, it emphasized that a region of Turkey (Hakkari) previously known as safe (little to no terrorist activity), had a terrorist attack. Perhaps, this sentence was to sway the readers to be concerned about the violence spreading in a region that had never had issues before. This could heighten the fear and urgency of Turkish readers about the growing number of terrorist attacks. A narrative already portrayed in the media a lot and used to associate the HDP with the PKK. The second component stated that an HDP building was set on fire by a group that was angry at the PKK for cutting off the road. Despite it being the actions of individuals and the *Sözcü* reporting on it, these individuals associated the HDP with the PKK. They believed that to punish the PKK, because they could not attack them directly, they would attack the HDP. This means that these individuals thought that the PKK and HDP connected, and that the PKK would be affected if the HDP was damaged. The third component was the subsection titled "they are angry at the PKK, and they burn the HDP building." This statement showed that these people associated the HDP and PKK, but the way it was laid out could also be a reference to the newspaper believing that it did not make sense why they would burn an HDP

building to get back at the PKK. Alternatively, it could reveal the newspaper reinforcing the connection. This would be up to the interpretation and internal biases of the reader.

A *Sözcü* article on HDP policies, with no direct quotes (so interpreted by *Sözcü*), was written on October 19, 2015, titled “Decision to confiscate HDP election manifesto.” The news outlet wrote that the HDP’s election manifesto, previously displayed to the public during election campaigns, was labeled as a “radical change” in Turkish society.

In the manifesto, the HDP advocated for a women’s ministry (aiming to make half of the parliament as women), free kindergartens in the mother tongue of the neighborhood (for benefit of mothers and children), free water and electricity, free public transportation and 250 TL a month for property-less tenants, increase the unemployment fund, protect parks, stopping forests renting, and all agricultural workers covered by labor law and social security (*Sözcü* “HDP’s Election Manifesto”). The Ağrı Criminal Court of Peace decided to confiscate the brochures of the manifesto because of the emphasis on “self-management” in the manifesto . Although the manifesto did not state much about self-management, the Ağrı Criminal Court of Peace decided to persecute them in that regard, revealing continued censorship of HDP policies based on counts of the court that were not supported by evidence. The court stated that they were in favor of all people living with their own will and differences which were “suppressed” by the HDP. Perhaps this was a strategy for the Court to stop the HDP from disseminating this “radical” rhetoric and labeled this intervention as the benefit for the Turkish people. The HDP was painted in the article as against direct democracy and as an opponent to democracy using the word “suppressed.” This was, again, to delegitimize the HDP’s agenda and arguments. Although in this article there was no reference to the PKK directly with the HDP, there was an active suppression of the HDP’s political campaigns and more socialist

policies. The court had not given any explicit reason to stop the manifesto that pertained to the content in the manifesto. This suppression of the HDP's political agenda continued to display the trend of the government overshadowing the HDP by labeling their thoughts and policies as against the ideals of Turkey. Another factor to note was the article continued to use the word "ourselves" when referring to the AKP's opinion on the HDP. This could be considered a biased source since they are writing from the side of the AKP.

However, it was not just *Sözcü* that would implicitly or directly tie the HDP to the PKK in their articles, the third most used, viewed, online news source in Turkey, *Sondakika* did as well (Newman, 2022).

Sondakika wrote on August 1, 2015, an article titled "The Mausoleum constructed in Tunceli for the lifeless killed in Paris has been opened." This article reported on the funeral for PKK member Sakine Cansiz.

At the opening of the mausoleum was HDP co-chair Yüksekdağ. The article later quoted the HDP co-chair speaking at the opening about the murder of Sakine and how the female "comrades" were killed right at the "threshold" of the peace process. This article with its use of words such as "comrades," and supporting statements from the HDP did emphasize a connection between the PKK and HDP since comradeship implicates a relationship stronger than just strangers. Especially considering that the first person who was listed for attending the opening was the HDP co-chair then the Diyarbakir mayor, even though the HDP co-chair's statement were reported after Diyarbakir's mayor's statements later on in the article (which would not make sense if they were to list the participants at the funeral by the chronological order of their statements listed later in the article). By the HDP co-leader being the first person mentioned at the funeral of a PKK member showcased a relationship between

the HDP and PKK, especially since it's attending the mausoleum of the PKK member. It could be implied that this specific ordering of people at the funeral, with the HDP first and more noticeable, was to implicitly apply a connection. This ordering however did not follow the ordering of the quotes and sources listed later in the article. This framing of the quotes and the list of attendees could implicitly associate a potential relationship between the HDP and PKK.

Another *Sondakika* article was written on August 8, 2015, also included a relationship between the HDP and the graves of PKK members, titled "HDP members of Beytüşşebap keep watch in the PKK Cemetery on Mount Kato." HDP members keep watch at a PKK cemetery by setting up a tent and standing to guard.

The reason as to why the members were keeping watch at the cemetery was because of the AKP's use of special security zones to block off areas to prevent public access, including the cemetery. A statement given by the HDP district president stated that they did not agree with the AKP's use of special security zones to block off areas. The president stated that if these threats of the AKP blocking off areas continued, they would stand guard with their people and party leadership. At the cemetery, the HDP members were willingly displaying their relationship with the PKK. Because these were general HDP members (not as well known), and not leadership, how did *Sondakika* know that these members were part of the HDP. Although there was the statement of the HDP president, a well-known figure, at the end of the article, whose statement did make it seem a HDP political stance to willingly stand guard at a PKK cemetery. The district president was not at the cemetery giving the statement, rather the statement was added after, the subject of the article, information about the HDP members at the cemetery. One could ask how the news outlet knew these were HDP members or whether it was credible that these specific people standing were HDP members. Perhaps the

order of the sentence, with the HDP district president's statement and then the statement of HDP members guarding the prison appeared to prove, implicitly, that the people guarding were HDP members. Additionally given that the beginning of the article was quite repetitive about the HDP members standing guard at a PKK cemetery, this repetitiveness along with the HDP's president statement, who was not at the cemetery but rather commented on it, meant to emphasize the connection between the HDP and PKK.

Sondakika had longer articles about the HDP that analyzed the relationship between the HDP and PKK related parties. One was written on August 9, 2015, titled "Power Struggle between HDP, Qandil, and Irdi." This article pointed out the different conflicts of interest with the HDP and PKK.

First, it stated that the latest PKK attacks were because the PKK, referencing the PKK as Qandil (the area where the PKK headquarters are located), didn't want the HDP to become independent from the PKK, especially after the HDP June 2015 win ("PKK is turning Shingal..."). It had also stated that previous statements from the HDP about winning with votes "entrusted to them" on the June 7th elections seemed false, "did not hold true," to the KCK. The KCK is part of the PKK and the Kurdish Communities Union ("KCK urges..."). The KCK claimed that the HDP won votes because of their principles and not because people "entrusted them". This interaction with the KCK and the previous statement by the Qandil represented the dynamic between Kurdish parties in Turkey. Because there is only one Kurdish political party in Turkey, the HDP, the PKK wanted control over the HDP, mainly because they wanted control over any Kurdish related organization in Turkey. The PKK feared other powerful Kurdish parties that did not align with their values, which meant that these other parties could challenge the PKK's authority and take the Kurdish human rights movement in a

different direction (Yegen, 2015). Demirtaş responded to both statements from the PKK and KCK by agreeing with both and said if the vote was entrusted it was because “we value and understand it but not that they passed the threshold because of trust.” These beginning statements revealed the conflict between the HDP and PKK by stating that the PKK did not want to lose control of the HDP. Demirtaş’ response could be interpreted in two ways. The first was that the PKK did not control the HDP at all. The second is that the HDP at a prior time was once in the control of the PKK, proving their connection.

In the article, the HDP also said that they were not the “interlocutor” for laying down arms but rather Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, was the one who should. This statement was a reference to the ending of the peace process and how it was not the HDP who could stop it but rather the leader of the PKK that had the power. This statement was met with disagreement from the AKP, which stated that “unless their brother shuts them down” the PKK would not stop. This usage of the word “brother,” in reference to the HDP, emphasized a connection between the HDP and PKK, a deep relationship. Especially considering that the brother was referenced to efforts of the HDP trying to reinstate the peace process, this “brother” connection could be deep enough to reinstate the PKK peace process.

Later, Akgün (an AKP leader) stated that he thought that there was room for the HDP to maneuver and expand “to the extent that it acts independently of Qandil (PKK).” This statement again was said under the assumption that the HDP and PKK were once together and were just now facing conflicts of interest. This article, in a more complex manner, showcased the tensions between Kurdish parties and their different goals to Kurdish human rights. Especially with remarks from the AKP, who placed the responsibility of the peace process on the PKK’s part and in turn their “brother” the HDP who could also stop the peace process. But

this information was contradictory especially since the HDP had been staying since February 2015 after the failure of the Dolmabahçe consensus that it was not up to them to stop the conflict.

Another *Sondakika* article that analyzed the power dynamic between Kurdish parties in Turkey was written on September 9, 2015, titled “With Analysis Graphics - The Triangle That Ends Conflict: ‘Hdp-Pkk-Kck’.” This article discussed many of the similar quotes from the *Sondakika* article titled “Power Struggle between HDP, Qandil, and Irdi” however certain information was given that solidified the alleged HDP and PKK connection in this article.

The article said “PKK organized armed attacks on the security forces, Selahattin Demirtaş' brother was among them (Nurettin Demirtaş).” This statement showed a direct familial connection between the HDP and PKK by Demirtaş' brother being in the PKK. Demirtaş responded to this by saying that his brother was not in the PKK but in the resistance army against DAESH. However, to delegitimize Demirtaş' response, the article used words such as “determined that” when revealing Demirtaş' brother was found to be in the PKK and part of the attack. The ending of the article stated that “after Demirtaş' words, 16 soldiers were killed in Dağlıca and then 13 police officers in Iğdır.” By placing this statement directly after Demirtaş' rebuttal to these familial PKK allegations, it evoked a sense of pathos from the audience since there were people killed because of a PKK attack. The use of “after Demirtaş's words” then giving the number of soldiers killed, despite Demirtaş's having nothing to do with the attack, implied that he had something to do with it. Or, at the least, his words were not true about his “PKK” brother and now the PKK was inciting more violence. Despite there being direct quotes from Demirtaş, this article misconstrued them and delegitimized Demirtaş' statements.

The familial connections between HDP members and the PKK were reiterated in another *Sondakika* article written on October 22, 2015, titled “PKK Female Terrorist Died in Clash Buried in Derik.” This short article stated that the HDP deputies were at the funeral of a PKK terrorist.

Then the article ended with, “HDP Diyarbakir Provincial Co-Chair Omer Önen’s cousin was also in the PKK” and provided evidence that he took part in a short film about the lives of PKK members. Again, the media outlets were trying to connect HDP members with the PKK to further associate them with terrorism. Despite this article being about a funeral for a PKK member, the news outlet managed to bring up familial connections between the HDP and the PKK, despite there being no need to bring up that HDP members had attended a funeral of a PKK terrorist.

Conclusion

The *Sondakika* articles, despite having direct quotes from HDP members stating otherwise, would frame a PKK and HDP connection by the ordering of sentences and information included before or after a direct quote. The *Sözcü* articles, when using direct quotes, tended to be a more positive view of the HDP, reaffirming the quotes instead of rebutting against them. In *Sondakika's* articles, they would discuss familial heritage to the PKK or already assume that there was a connection between the HDP and PKK, one article even stated that the relationship was changing from a dependent relationship to an independent one. The Turkish media, in both *Sözcü* and *Sondakika*, would use tactics such as reordering sentences to delegitimize Demirtaş’ statement or imply a connection between the HDP and PKK, focusing on smaller events that had HDP and PKK members together as evidence of their connection, and used words with negative connotations to associate the HDP

with terrorism. Overall, there was an overall trend that either the HDP condemned their relationship with the PKK with direct quotes or a relationship was either implied or assumed already in the articles.

Similar rhetoric about the HDP and PKK occurred in the speeches from the AKP in the court case, but with a more direct association. Before the June elections, Erdoğan would call the HDP terrorists and weaponize the PKK peace agreements to try to ensure votes for the AKP (by threatening the peace). After the June elections, the AKP would tell the Turkish public of terrorists being in parliament, referring to the HDP, emphasized a need to remove this terrorism through shutting down political parties, and use vocabulary from previous HDP statements about terrorist attacks that occurred in a negative context to indoctrinate the HDP with the PKK. Both the media and the AKP, in the court case, would delegitimize the consistent HDP statements of wanting peace and not being part of the PKK with specific language and negative connotations. Both the media and the speeches were conducted in this public sphere with the intent, based on the audience of the Turkish public, to disseminate this ethnic association of the HDP and PKK.

Chapter 5: A Brief Layout of the Events in the 2015 Turkish General Election Period

Introduction

In this chapter, I explained the major general events that occurred during the 2015 elections that could have affected the HDP's election results. Because of the various actors, party dynamics, terrorist activity, and citizen protesting that occurred in the public sphere between June 2015 and November 2015, this chapter aimed to dissect and lay out all these components in a chronological order that may have been harder to understand otherwise. This chapter incorporated these major events, determined from previous literature as influential, with

findings from the court case and media analysis and compared these with previous literature on this subject. By comparing the various discourse on the events in 2015, laying out the general context, and incorporating data from chapter 3 and 4, I came to a new argument: the violence in Southeastern Turkey, a region where majority of Kurdish people reside, along with increased militarization from the AKP in the region dissuaded voters to vote for the HDP in the November 2015 elections.

I began this chapter by explaining the events that happened in Kobani, which was an important precursor to the election since Kobani had highlighted and began many of the tensions between the AKP and HDP that we see later in the elections. After a focus on Kobani, I have a section on election campaign rhetoric leading up to the June 2015 elections. This section's aim was to showcase the HDP and AKP's party's agenda and the utilization of campaign rhetoric to place a target on the AKP, but at the same time, had the AKP place a target on the HDP. After this, I went into the ending of the peace agreements, which was the first major event since the June 2015 elections and dramatically affected and shaped the results of the November election. I continued this section going over other major events and discussed influential factors such as media censorship. In this chapter, I did not attempt to do a complete historical analysis of the events that happened between June and November 2015, but rather place the results from my analyses into the general context of events happening in Turkish society to better focus on the connections displayed to the Turkish public during this important time. This will help digest the complex events that happened during the elections and show the different power struggles between the HDP, PKK and AKP.

Kobani 2014: The Precursor of the 2015 Elections

The Kobani protests in 2014 marked an important point of conflict between the HDP and AKP. The Kobani protests were in September and October 2014 when the Kurdish Syrian border town of Kobani was attacked by the Daesh, ISIS affiliates. Kobani was defended by the YPG, a PKK affiliated group, and many Kurdish Turkish citizens wanted to fight against the Daesh in support of the Kobani Kurds. However, the AKP, the government at the time, did not allow citizens to enter the region which sparked a series of protests that led to curfews in cities. This was a major protest aimed directly at the Turkish government (I will use the AKP and Turkish government interchangeably since the leadership was AKP). Many Kurdish politicians, including Selahatin Demirtaş, had made statements about the protests. The major three actors here were the PKK, which sent a tweet encouraging “all the young people, women and everyone from 7 to 70 to stand up for Kobani, to protect our honor and dignity and to occupy the metropolitan areas” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.4). The tweets by the HDP account, which was later used to incriminate Demirtaş with terrorist charges, were said to protest the “AKP government’s embargo over Kobani” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.4). From the viewpoint of the AKP, the HDP was inciting violence and encouraging rhetoric against their party. This was seen in the speeches Erdoğan gave on October 11, 2014, in reference to Demirtaş’ speeches about Kobani,

“As well as these terrorists on the street, the cowards who pushed them into the streets and are disguised as politicians hiding behind them, will be asked to account for these incitations. I want you to know that. On one hand, you say ‘Get out on the street!’ On the other hand, you say, ‘We said freedom and peace; we told them to use their democratic rights; we did not tell them to resort to violence’. What kind of political responsibility is this? Is that possible?” (Gerim, 2020).

Erdoğan was clearly implying the HDP since they were the only political party in Turkey that had sent tweets about Kobani. Here in this statement, by saying that certain politicians are terrorists, a year before the 2015 elections, the state was already beginning to associate the HDP with terrorism.

The Kobani events “can be viewed as a severe confrontation between two adversaries, and the discourses allow us to observe the events with respect to the strategy of struggle, the relationship of power, and also the reciprocal relations between them” (Gerim, 2020). The two opposing narratives were one was the AKP was strong enough to overcome the protests and blamed the HDP for inciting violence. The other was the HDP blamed the AKP for denying Kobani help based on it being a Kurdish town. These two narratives evolved for the 2015 election. The relationship of power of two different political agendas trying to delegitimize each other, along with tension from Kurdish oppression, made Kobani an important event for understanding the conflict between the two parties. When the HDP gained 13.1 percent of the vote, and in turn, removed the AKP from majority rule of parliament, these similar tensions from Kobani continued to amplify, but through the election campaigns.

In other literature, Kobani was mentioned when discussing the election results of 2015. Mehmet Necef, an associate professor at University of Southern Denmark, in his paper “Who Started the War Between the Turkish State and the PKK- Erdoğan or the PKK?” analyzed two fundamental narratives of what caused the 2013 to 2015 PKK peace resolution to be broken. For the public narrative of the PKK starting the war (meaning ending the 2015 peace agreements), Necef stated that the PYD, a PKK affiliate, was the “USA’s only organized, trained, and willing local ally in the fight against ISIS,” therefore, the US could ally itself with the PKK and only aid with airstrikes (and the PYD would do the rest), so this was very

favorable for the PKK to establish a Kurdish “corridor” between areas near Iraqi and Turkish borders, expanding PKK Kurdish towns (p.4). Since the US supported the Iraqi defacto Kurdistan, the PKK viewed Rojava, the area in Syria, as a potential new defacto Kurdistan which, to the PKK, was more important and part of their agenda to have a Kurdistan than maintain peace with the AKP. Hence, the PKK tweeted about supporting Kobani from ISIS. Necef’s analysis of this narrative did not correlate with the narrative I found in my research. Rather, Kobani, for my research, was tensions between the AKP’s authority to dictate what regions get aid and the Turkish Kurdish citizen’s wanting aid with a Kurdish town being destroyed. This tension did not seem to be a deliberate political strategy of the PKK, but rather a continued reflection on anything related to the Kurdish identity being suppressed in some manner in Turkey. Such as the AKP not allowing support to Kobani because it is a majority Kurdish town that is being protected by a PKK affiliate and the Turkish government’s stern disapproval for any aid to the PKK. This viewpoint was supported by Francis O’Connor, a researcher from the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, and Bahar Baser, a research fellow at Stockholm University, research titled “Communal Violence and Ethnic Polarisation before and after the 2015 Elections in Turkey: Attacks against the HDP and the Kurdish Population.”

For O’Connor and Baser, the “importance and emotional salience of transnational ties and a shared identity between Kurds in Turkey and Syria has been well documented” (p.4). It was “no surprise” that sympathizers of the Kurdish movement protested in many Kurdish cities in Turkey over the AKP’s closure of the border and lack of aid to the Kurdish community. It appeared as though the AKP supported ISIS and impeded any “pan-Kurdish effort to alleviate the siege of Kobani” (O’Connor & Baser, 2018 p.4) This led to many Kurds doubting the Turkish government’s sincerity to being committed to the peace process. This

same narrative was stated in Selahattin Demirtaş' court case and reflected why Demirtaş had denied his tweets promoted violence rather it was the citizens who had been upset over the Turkish government's insecurity ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.4).

Election Campaign Rhetoric

On the campaign trail for the June 2015 elections, the rhetoric stated in the campaign showcased its importance for each party's agenda and antagonized the AKP. Erdoğan had plans to change the constitution to allow the adoption of a presidential system that would give him more power, and if the AKP won in the 2015 June elections this would be instated. On March 7, 2015, Erdoğan stated, "Give me 400 members of parliament and everything will be settled peacefully" ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.113). The encouragement of citizens to vote for the AKP, so things will be "settled peacefully," displayed the tactics that the AKP used to receive votes. Based on their powerful majority at the time, they had the power to make things harder to "settle." This sentence is a prelude to the dissolution of the peace agreements after the AKP did not receive what they wanted. This speech is quite crucial because it meant that the AKP was willing to delay peace for votes. Burak Özpek, a political science professor from the TOBB University of Economics and Technology, agreed that this statement from Erdoğan meant he created a "causal connection that he established between a presidential system and the peace process" (Özpek, 2019).

Before the June 2015 elections, the HDP's campaign rhetoric became the forefront of their campaign, placing them against the AKP directly. Selahattin Demirtaş made remarks on March 18, 2015, that

"I will in fact express my message in just one sentence: Mr. Recep Tayyip

Erdoğan, you will never be able to be the head of the nation if the HDP exists and if the

HDP people are on this soil... We will not make you the president, we will not make you the president, we will not make you the president” (“We will not make you...” 2015). According to the court case, this speech had “quickly gone viral and had influenced the overall political climate in the run-up to the June 2015 elections, becoming a key HDP slogan and positioning the party and himself in direct opposition to the President” (pg.113).

This direct opposition against the AKP positioned the HDP not only as a rival that challenged the AKP, but positioned their views to the Turkish public as a party that did not tolerate the AKP’s agenda. These two challenging powers through the election campaign mirrored the same tension in Kobani.

O’Connor and Baser agreed that this campaign rhetoric, “We will not make you the president,” made it “obvious that the elections were seen as critical for constitutional change in Turkey” that could fundamentally “restructure Turkey’s political institution” (O’Connor & Baser, 2018 p.11). For them, this meant there was a shift on the AKP’s part in relation to the HDP and the peace process where they embraced a “discourse which explicitly vilified the HDP and the Kurdish population that was sympathetic to the party as terrorist sympathizers” (O’Connor & Baser, 2018 p.11). The AKP purposefully had used ethnic association to delegitimize the HDP party and influence the votes in June 2015. This ethnic association continued after June 2015 and became heightened after the ending of the peace agreements. Other scholars in the literature such as Ioannis Grigoriadis, an assistant professor at Bilkent University, agreed that the HDP’s campaign rhetoric became “one of the defining moments in the election campaign” (2016) (p.5), but [SR10] did not note the AKP’s interpretation of this rhetoric, rather focused on how the HDP campaigned to different voters.

The End of the PKK Peace Agreements

The 2015 PKK peace agreements began in 2013. This peace process was noted as a positive change from its predecessors because it had “turned into a public peace process, which the Kurdish side had long demanded” (Savran, 2020). Therefore, this peace process had prompted debates about the Kurdish question in the public sphere, holding the Turkish government more accountable for the process and allowed the Turkish public to gain insight into the process. However, no real progress was made. But, in early 2015, the AKP and PKK had their first official meeting together at the Dolmabahçe Palace where “they agreed in a public press conference on the 28 February 2015 to elevate the peace process to a more serious negotiation stage” (Savran, 2020). The result was the Dolmabahçe agreement where the HDP was brought in as a third party between the AKP and PKK to help with the peace process to form a more concrete solution. On April 25, 2015, Erdoğan stated that the Dolmabahçe agreement was not an agreement and that “it was out of the question that the government would reach an agreement with a terrorist organization” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.8). Then, following this complete denial of the agreement, that was approved by an AKP leader, the Deputy Prime Minister (AKP) had stated a few weeks before the June 7 elections “that if the HDP exceeds the 10 percent threshold the AKP government loses power and there will be no solution process” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.8). This complete reversal concerning the PKK peace agreement was a major step to the ending of the peace process. O’Connor and Baser viewed this change as a tactical decision on the AKP’s part in response to anti-Erdoğan campaign rhetoric by the HDP (O’Connor & Baser, 2018). By stating that if the HDP gained enough votes to reach parliament then there will be no solution process, the AKP implicitly admitted their power and role in steering the direction of the peace agreement. They

were one of the two parties responsible for the peace agreement, which became contradictory later in their ethnic association of the HDP and PKK because they blamed the violence on the HDP rather than acknowledging that the HDP has no power over choosing or contributing to the violence. Through this statement, the AKP weaponized the peace agreements as a contingency for potential voters who did not want violence with the PKK.

Leading up to the halting of the agreements, “the PKK had lost faith in the Turkish government after the Kobani crisis. They, and millions of Kurds, felt that the Turkish authorities would rather see a monstrous group as IS ruling north of Syria than help protect Kobane and its citizens from IS horror and death” (Savran, 2020). The Kobani protests and the AKP’s lack of intervention prompted a great amount of distrust in the government and its ability to protect its citizens regardless of their ethnic association. This tension was amplified when on July 20, 2015, a Turkish IS bomber killed 32 young left-wing activists that were “going to deliver aid to Kobani” (Savran, 2020). The Suruç bombing, in Suruç, provoked a PKK-loyal group to kill two police officers in Ceylanpinar who were supposedly involved in the bombing as a way to gain revenge (Savran, 2020). This was considered the *casus belli* of the peace agreements by scholars because soon after these killings Turkish jets began bombing PKK targets in Qandil Mountains, the PKK headquarters (Savran, 2020).

Interestingly, an article by *Sözcü* titled “Demirtaş called on the PKK to lay down arms” was published on July 14, 2015, six days before Suruç. This article was a plea from the HDP to aid with the peace process and continue the Dolmabahçe peace agreements (Savran, 2020). This article had a positive association with the HDP because of the HDP’s continued calls of wanting peace with the PKK. Therefore, the perception of the HDP before the dissolution of the peace agreement by the media had been a positive association of a party wanting to have peace and

taking the steps to do so with the Dolmabahce agreement. However, a day before the Suruç bombing on July 19th, 2015, there was another *Sözcü* article titled “It is Normal for HDP and PKK to have relations.” This article presented to the Turkish public an association of the PKK with the HDP and associated Demirtaş with the HDP, despite rebuttals from Demirtaş against this. These two conflicting articles published in the same newspaper and only a few days from each other can be seen as a larger debate among Turkish society of PKK and HDP affiliations. It additionally led to questioning about the integrity of Turkish news outlets (see section titled *Other Factors: Media Censorship*). However, after the Suruç bombing and dissolution of the PKK, there was a more intense association between the HDP and PKK in speeches and in the media.

After the Ceylanpınar murders, on July 28th, 2015, Erdoğan gave a statement to the press saying that “I do not approve of dissolving political parties. But I say that the leaders of the HDP must pay the price. Personally, and individually” in reference to acts of terrorism (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.9). This speech had made an impact on the media’s portrayal of the HDP. The next day *Sözcü* released an article on July 29th, 2015, titled “You cannot afford to shut down the HDP because...” This article confirmed the pressure to shut down the HDP government after only a month after the June elections. Already in the media, there were calls to shut down the HDP and investigate its connection to the PKK based on Erdoğan’s statements. Erdoğan’s speeches and opinions were highlighted in the media whereas, with the HDP, *Sözcü* had tried to implicate them with the PKK despite there being direct quotes from Demirtaş denying this connection in the article. On the same day, Demirtaş gave a speech at a meeting of the HDP’s parliamentary group that the HDP will not view the murder of anyone as normal (not the PKK, not the army or the police), in reference to Ceylanpınar police killings.

That those “people must not pay the price, but the HDP will be ready to pay the price,” specifically for those that fight against them, in reference to the AKP, and are hostile. That together they will be defeated by resistance and that a free future of Turkey will triumph” (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey ” p.9). However, the article did not cite any of Demirtaş’ rebuttals to Erdoğan’s statement. This difference between the treatment of HDP and AKP statements and either confirming their speeches as truth and agreeing with them versus denying their speeches and reinforcing different agendas is reflected to the public. This contrary treatment could have influenced the overall perception of the HDP with the PKK greatly only a month after the June elections.

The HDP were targeted in the public sphere with speeches and media articles, and also with the president’s statement about “pay[ing] the price,” there was an increase in the number and pace of the criminal investigations in respect of” Demirtaş (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.121). These increased investigations meant there was a targeting of the HDP in affiliation with the PKK in parliament as well. This goes against the precedent of the HDP trying to take measures to ensure peace such as the Dolmabahçe consensus and after the ending of the peace agreements making statements against the PKK.

The violence between the PKK and AKP escalated in August 2015. On August 1, 2015, two PKK fighters were killed, and one civilian was wounded in an attack in Çatak. During this time, PKK fighters took 70 hostages for two hours in the Kars-Erzurum-Igdir highway (“Azerbaijani citizens no injured...” 2015). On August 1, 2015, *Sondakika* published an article called “The Mausoleum Constructed in Tunceli for the Lifeless Killed in Paris Has Been Opened.” This article strongly attempted to delegitimize the HDP by stating that the HDP members were attending the funeral of their “brother.” This statement revealed overall similar

rhetoric in Turkish news of utilizing small events to connect the HDP and PKK implicitly. Despite the events being small and relatively insignificant compared to the violence happening in Turkey at the time, because of the media's accessibility to the Turkish public, these negative associations can influence Turkish voters to associate the HDP with the PKK. This was seen again in a *Sondakika* article published on August 8th titled "HDP members of Beytüşşebap keep watch in the PKK Cemetery on Mount Kato." It conducted a similar method where it connected the HDP and PKK by focusing on smaller events, despite all the violence going on, to showcase a connection between the two.

From August 2 to 10th, fighting took place amongst the PKK and AKP with around 20 deaths, most of them Turkish soldiers. *Sözcü* published an article on August 5, 2015, titled "Selahattin Demirtaş will meet with the PKK!" Despite the article using direct quotes from Demirtaş it attempted to implicitly associate Demirtaş with the PKK by using statements such as since he is being targeted to have his immunity removed (which means he supports terrorism). The news continued to feed negative perspectives of Demirtaş while more deaths occurred and fighting escalated throughout the Southeastern region in Turkey. On August 9th, 2015, *Sondakika* published an article called "Power Struggle between HDP, Qandil, and Irdi." In this article, they had rearranged the responsibilities of the three actors, the HDP, PKK and AKP to place more blame onto the PKK and HDP for the war rather than the AKP. This was contrary to the actual role of the HDP having no power to be able to end the peace process or restart it again. In Sur Diyarbakir, between August 10 and 19th members of the YDG-H, regarded as the PKK's youth wing, dug trenches and put-up barricades ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.9). Security forces declared that there were weapons and explosives in the trenches so in response the local governors-imposed curfews to clear the explosives. The

tension continued to increase when 8 soldiers were killed by the PKK on August 19th (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.9). During this time, with the increasing number of attacks, there was an increase in blame towards the HDP and a strengthening of their connection. These attacks towards the HDP in the media and by politicians made an impact on the Turkish public’s opinion. According to O’Connor and Baser, a HDP law commission report “stated that in August, there were 9 assaults on HDP buildings in cities such as Istanbul, Antalya, Burdur and Adana” (2018 p.15). Because the media and AKP continued to spread an association of the PKK and HDP throughout the Turkish public sphere, civilians who viewed the HDP as a terrorist organization attacked HDP buildings as a way to express their frustration with the violence occurring in Turkey, but at a party that had no responsibility for this violence.

This continued into September 2015. On September 1, 2015, *Sondakika* news released an article called “Peace Day Statement from Diyarbakir: The Deaths cannot be endured.” This article has a positive view of the HDP with the HDP emphasizing the need for peace and stopping the deaths caused by the PKK. This positive view of the HDP making calls to stop the violence is reaffirmed by a *Sözcü* article titled “HDP will make a call to the PKK.” While the conflict between the AKP and PKK continued, the HDP stayed true to their original intentions, set by them helping with the Dolmabahce agreement and these calls to action from them to the PKK. However, on September 7th, 2015, *Sözcü* released an article titled “HDP Deputy caught while bringing food to PKK.” This article had connected the PKK and HDP directly by targeting a low ranking HDP official delivering aid to the PKK as a confirmed connection between the larger HDP party and the PKK, despite the aid being for food related purposes, not for more extreme or violent purposes and was not an official with tremendous power. By titling the article as “HDP Deputy caught” and emphasizing the food as aid given to the PKK during

the war between the PKK and AKP potentially could have tried to delegitimize the HDP's statements.

The next day on September 8th, 2015 "the HDP's local branch building and 32 shops were set ablaze by a group of people who were allegedly organizing a march to 'condemn PKK terrorism'" (O'Connor and Baser, 2018). O'Connor and Baser noted the rising rates of attacking HDP buildings between the June and November 2015 elections and agreed that this was the start of a trend of attacks towards the HDP, whether that be attacking their buildings or verbal attacks in speeches and the newspaper. The sentiment of the HDP and PKK connection began to have physical repercussions and damage.

The day after these attacks, *Sondakika* news released "With Analysis Graphics - The Triangle That Ends Conflict: 'Hdp-Pkk-Kck'." This article's main argument was that the PKK and HDP were connected, even citing that Demirtaş' brother was in the PKK. Articles continued to reinforce this connection of the HDP and PKK throughout the month of September. A *Sözcü* article titled "1 arrest in attack on HDP," despite it being an article about a person being arrested for attacks done early in the month, continued to associate the HDP with terrorism. Another article by *Sözcü* on September 22, 2015, titled "HDP building set on fire this time in Semdinli." This article reported on more attacks on the HDP building, the same attacks O'Connor and Baser noted began to grow based on this continued ethnic association with the HDP and PKK. This article again emphasized that people had attacked the building because of a PKK affiliation, but questioned the motives as to why they thought burning down a HDP building would get back at the PKK. Around this time in September there were an increasingly large number of attacks on the HDP buildings. After the violence had escalated in Sur, Diyarbakir had more killings of police officers and soldiers by the PKK. This backdrop of

violence occurring in civilian regions in Diyarbakir, a Southeastern part of Turkey and majority Kurdish inhabitants, civilians attacked HDP buildings and rhetoric in the media about the HDP and PKK being affiliated greatly contributed to the results of the November 2015 elections. The instability of the Turkish government at the time, with no party in majority power in parliament, and the increased investigations towards the HDP in parliament reflected a disruptive and tumultuous period for the Turkish public. This instability could have scared voters, so in wanting to have a more stable Turkey and not support a party that was deemed by the media and AKP to have been creating this instability (through association with the PKK), voters began to switch their votes from the HDP to a different party.

In September, the HDP had made critical speeches that contributed as evidence to Demirtaş' terrorist charges by the AKP. On September 13, 2015, Demirtaş gave the following statement to the press in Lice about the declaration of a curfew in Sur by the Diyarbakır governor's office:

'Our people want self-governance, their own assemblies, and municipalities where responsibility lies with elected officials rather than appointees. Our people have the power to resist pressure and massacre policies everywhere. We have the power to protect ourselves against any attack. We will show that we are not despairing; we will resist together; we will achieve salvation without forgetting our motherland and history and by defending our rights' ("Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey" p.17).

This speech was highly criticized by the AKP. Declarations of self-governance had similar tones of self-governance being declared by the PKK in Suruç back in July 2015. However, the notions of self-governance are not new to the Kurds. Self-governance had been used in many Kurdish political speeches because of the historical fight for Kurdistan, since before the state of Turkey

developed. Southeastern Turkey and Diyarbakir specifically have a large Kurdish population, therefore comments of self-governance and “our people” appealed to the Kurdish voters.

However, this area of Turkey was also where most of the war between the PKK and Turkey was happening. Citizens in these areas had to deal with the effects of the war daily while reading news coverage that showed the continued attacks against the HDP for being affiliated with the PKK. O’Connor and Baser agreed that the HDP as a political party at this time faced many issues and manifested through filings of a series of criminal complaints detailing the extent of the violence to which the HDP was subjected in September 2015 (O’Connor & Baser, 2018 p.15). During this time, there was an increase in attacks on Kurdish citizens in Turkey.

In September 2015, two people spoke in Kurdish to each other at a bus terminal in Trabzon and were attacked by the passengers around them, suffering serious injuries (O’Connor & Baser, 2018 p 18). This sort of environment surrounding the Kurds with the PKK war was disseminated into daily Turkish rhetoric and manifested into hateful actions against the Kurds. This led to a consensus of an ethnic association between the PKK and the Kurds in Turkish society.

In October 2015, the violence had continued. On October 2nd, the Turkish military entered another city in Diyarbakir, Silvan, and sought to destroy all PKK elements within the city. Coming in with tanks, hundreds of troops, and armed weapons they killed many PKK militants (Matthews, 2015). By the Turkish military entering a civilian area in Diyarbakir, the Turkish military was expanding the impact of the war on Diyarbakir citizens, many who voted for the HDP in June, and forcing them to face violence firsthand. This violence continued to be afflicted on Turkish citizens.

On October 4th, 2015, Hacı Birlik was a 24-year-old protester killed by Turkish security forces and his body was tied to a police car and dragged throughout the streets (“According to Sabah ...”, 2015). The responses varied from officials and the media about this attack. Those who supported the state said that the video was fake and photoshopped while newspaper *Sabah* said that it was a “common routine against terrorists'” (“According to Sabah...”, 2015). In this statement, they delegitimize and avoided accountability for the death of a citizen and justified these actions of a protest as a terrorist. Hacı Birlik was the brother-in-law of a former HDP MP Leyla Birlik, meaning that he was most likely a HDP protestor. The Prime Minister of Turkey stated that it was not acceptable that this happened, and he fired the police officers. But the HDP released a statement saying that the officers were never fired (“HDP Hacı Lokman...” 2015). In this rhetoric, there was a normalized acceptance of violence against those who are deemed as “terrorists,” or in this case HDP supporters labeled as such by the AKP and then partially supported by AKP supporters and media with the media retelling the statements of the AKP. The ethnic association of the HDP and PKK continued despite Demirtaş denying these claims. *Sözcü* released an article October 9th, 2015, titled “What did Selahattin Demirtaş say about the ceasefire?” In this article, it was a report of an interview with Demirtaş where he advocated for peace, but the article continued to emphasize the AKP connecting Demirtaş with terrorism. On October 19, 2015, *Sözcü* released an article titled “Decision to confiscate HDP election manifesto.” With the lack of coalition talks happening, a snap election was promised in November. During this time, the HDP campaigned and released a manifesto with all their political agendas to the public. *Sözcü* reported that this manifesto had been taken by the government and was not allowed. This suppression of the HDP’s political agenda continued to

display the trend of the government overshadowing the HDP by labeling the NDP's thoughts and policies as against the ideals of Turkey, especially close to the November elections.

These violent attacks and media reports of the HDP and PKK affected many citizens in Southeastern Turkey. Because the violence was concentrated in that region, deliberate or not, along with the Turkish military expanding the violence to civilian places (the PKK did not attack civilians, only police officers and soldiers of the state), many previous HDP supporters were first hand impacted by the violence. The International Crisis Group made a visual explainer of attacks based on their regions in Turkey from the war with the PKK (below). Most of the attacks were based only in the Southeastern region of Turkey, with the darker the color the more fatalities. During this time, there was a clear labeling of the HDP, specifically Demirtaş, being affiliated with terrorism. Investigation reports by the parliament against the HDP went up. Before the 2015 elections, there were only 45 reports made between 2007 and 2014 about the HDP in parliament, in a time frame of 7 years. However, in 2015 and 2016, a total of 48 reports about Demirtaş were submitted to the National Assembly (“Case of Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey” p.15). These reports were conducted in the span of a year. The increase of reports made against Demirtaş during 2015, when the HDP gained power in the elections, meant there was a targeting by the government towards Demirtaş when the HDP became a political opponent that could affect the AKP’s rule. O’Connor and Baser agreed with this, believing that the AKP had deliberately and systematically targeted the HDP, and associated them with terrorism, to remove them as a political opponent.

The lead up to the November elections which were characterized by violence and the war with the PKK. During this time, Turkish society felt the instability and unrest and AKP campaigns had continued to emphasize a connection between the HDP and PKK while



continuing investigating against the HDP. More HDP officials were being targeted and questions of arresting and shutting down the HDP circulated in the media and by the government.

Other Factors: Media Censorship

The media portrayal of the HDP played a major role in disseminating the narrative of the HDP and PKK between June and November 2015. However, the rights of the media in Turkey, specifically critical journalism, have deteriorated over time. The Human Rights Watch wrote a 69 page report titled “Silencing Turkey’s Media: The Government’s Deepening Assault on Critical Media.” According to the report, the attack on critical media began increasing after 2014, with a sharp rise after the 2016 failed coup attempt (2016). The Turkish government used their criminal justice system to prosecute and jail journalists on charges of terrorism, insulting public officials or crimes against the state. Therefore, journalism in Turkey during the elections was under attack and the integrity of journalism and access to it faltered. So, the Turkish public’s access to non-governmental approved media was restricted and, in turn, the AKP’s agenda was discussed more in the news than oppositional agendas could have been. Since the media was such an influential factor during elections, the AKP’s limit of the media could have greatly affected how Turkish voters perceived what was occurring in Turkey. The Human Rights Watch had evidence of documented threats and physical attacks on journalists and media organizations and government interference with media independence. The Turkish government employed strategies of taking over private media companies, restricting access to airwaves and closing down television stations. This crackdown on the media targeted pro-Kurdish media and independent journalists and news outlets that were critical of the government such as *Cumhuriyet* news. So, any potential for critical unbiased news was greatly reduced, making

voters consume media that was heavily biased. The lack of Kurdish voices in the media definitely aided with perpetuating false narratives about the HDP and PKK since there weren't news outlets that would actively publish articles against it. Journalists told Human Rights Watch that they had limited access to Southeastern Turkey, a predominantly Kurdish region, during the fighting between the AKP and PKK in July 2015. So, reports on that region, including casualties, could have been skewed and portrayed in a harmful manner that continued to aid the AKP's campaign for anti-terrorism. Many physical attacks occurred to journalists if they were reporting in the Southeastern region or were arrested by the police. This lack of critical media in the Southeast, the region with most of the PKK and AKP fighting, censored potential voices that could have aided with providing a more reliable and non-bias view in a region that already has many stereotypes and ill reporting because of ethnic polarization in Turkey.

Specific attacks that occurred between the 2015 election periods were 3 Vice News journalists arrested on charges of terrorism after covering the unrest in Southeastern Turkey in September 2015 (Yeginsu, 2015). The strategy of charging oppositional forces on accounts of terrorism have been used on many HDP members and was seen in the rhetoric by the AKP during the election period. On September 14th, 2015, an edition of *Nokta* magazine was removed on counts of "insulting the President" and publishing "propaganda for an armed terrorist organization." The edition of the magazine had a photo of Erdoğan taking a selfie in front of a soldier's funeral which referenced the narrative that the AKP resumed the conflict with the PKK to win back votes ("Nokta Toplatildi" 2015). On October 1st, 2015, *Hürriyet* news columnist Ahmet Hakan was attacked by four people outside his home. It was later found that three of four of them were AKP members, with one of them stating that the police had paid them money to carry out the attack with the knowledge of the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) and the

President (“Beating Schedule for Ahmet Hakan...”, 2015). Other allegations about MIT and their involvement in the 2015 elections have been surfacing on social media years past the election. Because government documents are not available to the public, social media like Youtube has been one of the few avenues people can discuss crucial information about crimes the government has committed. Youtubers such as Ahmet Nisen, who reports on these hidden issues in Turkey, have discussed the confessions of MIT officers, employed by the AKP, who posed as the PKK and incited violence. Confessions such as these reveal the potential of misconstrued information on PKK attacks in Turkey during the election and the continued narrative of the AKP using terrorism as an excuse to jail opponents and gain votes.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The June 2015 elections marked a new beginning in Kurdish politics in Turkey. The HDP disrupted the parliament dynamics with its new votes and stopped the implementation of a constitutional system that would have given Erdoğan more power. But this major change came to a halt in the November 2015 elections. The HDP lost their advantage and the AKP regained their votes. This loss happened because of ethnic association of the HDP and PKK circulated by the media and the AKP and the increased militarization and the fighting between the PKK and AKP occurring in Southeastern Turkey, a region where majority of Kurds (therefore HDP supporters) reside. The Turkish public sphere had media articles that highlighted smaller events that involved both the HDP and PKK as evidence for their connection, negative word connotations and sentence structuring that delegitimized HDP’s rebuttals to these claims. The AKP launched more investigations into the HDP in parliament, attempting to remove their position in parliament, and continuously used ethnic association to persuade the Turkish public of a HDP and PKK connection. The Turkish public confronted instability in parliament, terrorist

attacks occurring throughout Turkey that launched an anti-terrorist sentiment, media censorship that did not allow anti-AKP rhetoric to be spread, and in access polls in regions where the majority of Kurds reside because of violence from the PKK and AKP. This led to the drastic change in support in the HDP within five months.

The impact of these events discussed throughout this chapter were seen in the decline of the HDP party after June 2015. After the November elections, the AKP regained their majority and a year later Demirtaş was placed into prison. Many HDP members are currently in pre-trial detention or prison while still representing thousands of constitutions in Turkey. In 2020, the HDP party was facing a potential ban from the government, which is still continuing. If the HDP is banned, the only legal avenue for the Kurds to express their rights will be removed and another Kurdish party will be added to the already 23 banned Kurdish political parties in Turkey. The PKK peace agreements still have not been reinstated and no attempt for resolution has been made. Erdoğan gained his presidential election system and now has more power allocated to him challenging the democratic ideals of Turkey. The war with the PKK determinately affected the HDP's election results and disrupted the potential of a new government without the AKP and a Kurdish party being able to advocate for the Kurds with the power of parliamentary seats.

On a global scale, there continues to be a suppression of an ethnic minority group's right to be represented in a government that has historically oppressed said minority group. Scholars can learn from the 2015 Turkish general elections about political parties, and in Turkey's case the government since the AKP is the majority, utilizing historically racist rhetoric as a way to persuade their country to continue to suppress these minority groups. They can also learn about the power of language and how it is a tool used by politicians to persuade the public to believe

in false narratives. This was also seen in America with Bush's use of language such as "weapons of mass destruction" in association with Iraq to convince the American public there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and justify the Iraq war (there were no weapons of mass destruction) (Foyle, 2004). This is similar to the AKP's agenda to associate the HDP with the PKK despite no actual evidence for this connection.

For future directions of this project, I became interested about the media censorship that occurred in Southeastern Turkey during the 2015 elections. When learning about the complex relationship between the PKK within the Kurdish community (its violent approaches and role with recruiting Kurdish sons within Kurdish family structures), I became more curious about the Kurdish people's view about the PKK and Turkey. I want to understand the differences between the Kurdish human rights struggle as seen by the common Kurdish citizen in Turkey and the influence of government propaganda about the PKK on Kurdish people. I would look more into local narratives and positions of the Kurdish identity in relation to the struggle for Kurdish rights in a country that continuously denies them their rights.

Appendix A: Table for Code

<u>Code</u>	<u>Meaning of Code</u>	<u>Why this code is useful</u>
AKP	AKP involves any statements or references of the AKP political party	Because this case is in the context of Demirtaş' sentencings, any mention of the AKP can help show the interaction of the AKP with the other two actors, the HDP and PKK
AKP and Kobani	Kobani was a series of protests that occurred based off the Turkish government's restrictions from letting Turkish people help Kurdish Syrian citizens in Kobani	Kobani was used several times as a reason why Demirtaş was sentenced to jail and how he incited violence. Coding between AKP involvement in the Kobani conflict showcases their own negligence and involvement in violence in Kobani.
Applicant	Applicant means Selahattin Demirtaş since he is the one who filed the original European Court Case	This code was more of a general almost control like code to compare how many times applicant was used in the case to the code of applicant and PKK

Applicant and violence	Applicant means Selahattin Demirtaş, and violence is violence generally, not specific to terrorism.	Code is useful to differentiate terrorism that applicant was associated with and violence that applicant was associated with since the Turkish government associated it as two different entities
Erdoğan	Erdoğan is the President of Turkey	Important to highlight specifically Erdoğan because of the rhetoric that went back and forth between the applicant mentioning Erdoğan and Erdoğan mentioning the applicant during campaign speeches and later condemning one another in the media.
HDP	HDP is the pro-Kurdish political party that Demirtaş was co-leader of.	References of HDP and the members of HDP being associated with the party and condemned together as a party later in sentencings.
Kobani	Kobani was a series of protests that occurred based off the Turkish government's restrictions from letting Turkish people help Kurdish Syrian citizens in Kobani	Kobani was used against applicant and stated as evidence to applicant's involvement in violence
HDP and Violence	A relational coding of mentions of the HDP political party generally and violence they may have encouraged or incited	HDP's political statements were used as evidence in the court case for encouraging and inciting violence.

Parliamentary Immunity	The protection a parliamentary member of Turkey must not be placed in jail because of political statements	Parliamentary immunity and Demetra's' removal of it is a pivotal part of my research question
PKK and applicant	This is a relational code that showcases the relationship between the charges of terrorism with the applicant	This is the crucial code of my research. When they mention the PKK and applicant they are charging and associating the applicant with terrorism
PKK	PKK is a Kurdish nationalist "terrorist" group in Turkey	The PKK was discussed heavily in the court case, despite it being a seemingly third-party actor. References of the PKK means implicitly references of the HDP and PKK in return since this is the case about the applicant and HDP.
Terrorism	Terrorism is any acts of terrorist activity specifically labelled as terrorism by the government (which in turn is its own specific definition of terrorism)	This code showcases the amount terrorism is referred to in the case and how it could be used as one of the reasons as to why Demirtaş was arrested, and his immunity was removed
Violence	Violence refers to any violent activity or association of violent activity that is not terrorism	There are many instances of violence, not including terrorism, in this case that were used as evidence for why the applicant should be imprisoned

Appendix B: Raw Data from Court Case Analysis

Statements given about parliamentary immunity:

- ““At a time when Turkey is waging the strongest and most intensive campaign against terrorism in its history, certain members of parliament, whether before or after their election, have made speeches voicing moral support for terrorism, have provided de facto support and assistance to terrorism and terrorists [and] have called for violence; [these actions] have aroused public indignation. The Turkish public are of the view that members of parliament who support terrorism and the terrorist[s] and call for violence are abusing their [parliamentary] immunity, and they are urging the Turkish Grand National Assembly to ensure that anyone carrying out such activities can be brought to justice. In the face of such a demand, it is inconceivable that the Assembly should remain silent.”” constitutional amendment on removing parliamentary immunity (pg.14)
- “The suspect Selahattin Demirtaş appeared before [the] magistrate to be questioned in connection with [alleged] offences of public incitement to commit an offence and membership of an armed terrorist organization; the suspect is still a member of parliament but is nevertheless not entitled to parliamentary immunity in relation to the

offences [dating from] before 20 May 2016, on account of the amendment made to the second paragraph of Article 83 of the Constitution by Law no. 6718 of the same date; [as established below,] there is concrete evidence giving rise to a strong suspicion [that the suspect] committed offenses.” Diyarbakir 2nd magistrate court findings (pg.16)

- “In a statement to the press on 2 January 2016, the President of Turkey said the following: ‘The statements by the two co-chairs clearly amount to crimes against the Constitution. They are both currently the subject of proceedings initiated by public prosecutors. These matters deserve to be followed up. Closing down the party should not even be on the agenda. But there may be members of parliament, mayors or other people who have committed offenses. They must pay for it. The investigations initiated by the Diyarbakır and Ankara chief public prosecutors should also be seen against this background. I believe that the process that will start with the lifting of [parliamentary] immunity will also have a positive impact on the atmosphere in our country in terms of combating terrorism.’” (pg.11)

- “We must immediately settle the issue of immunity. Parliament must move forward quickly. [We cannot discuss whether to lift the immunity of just] one or two people. We need to adopt a principle. What is this principle? Those who cause the death of fifty-two people by urging my Kurdish brothers to pour into the streets will show up in Parliament, those who say that the PKK, the PYD [Democratic Union Party] and the YPG are behind them will have clean hands, is that it? If Parliament does not take the necessary action, this nation and history will hold it accountable.” (pg. 13) March 16, 2016, Presidential speech

- “During the applicant’s successive terms as a member of parliament,

- ninety-three investigation reports (fezleke) were drawn up in respect of him by the competent prosecuting authorities, the vast majority concerning terrorism-related offences. The prosecutors applied to the National Assembly to have the applicant's parliamentary immunity lifted. Forty-five of these investigation reports were drawn up between 2007 and 2014. In 2015 and 2016, a total of forty-eight investigation reports were submitted to the National Assembly.” (pg. 15)

- “Following the entry into force of the constitutional amendment
 - concerning the lifting of parliamentary immunity (see paragraph 56 above), the Diyarbakır public prosecutor (“the public prosecutor”) decided to join thirty-one separate criminal investigations in respect of the applicant together as a single case.”

Charges against Demirtaş in original court case

- “a terrorist organisation without being a member of it, investigation no. 2016/24946 on the commission of offences on behalf of a terrorist organisation without being a member of it, investigation no. 2016/35438 on public incitement to hatred and hostility, investigation no. 2016/35211 on organising, conducting and participating in unlawful public meetings and demonstrations, disseminating propaganda in favour of a terrorist organisation and praising crime and criminals, investigation no. 2016/35237 on organising, conducting and participating in unlawful public meetings and demonstrations and disseminating propaganda in favour of a terrorist organisation, investigation no. 2016/35447 on public incitement to hatred and hostility, praising crime and criminals and disseminating propaganda in favour of a terrorist organisation, investigation no. 2016/23921 on disseminating propaganda in favour of a terrorist organisation, investigation no. 2016/23920 on public incitement to hatred and hostility

[and] disseminating propaganda in favour of a terrorist organisation, investigation no. 2016/24617 on public incitement to commit an offence [and] disseminating propaganda in favour of a terrorist organisation, investigation no. 2016/29488 on disseminating propaganda in favour of a terrorist organisation, investigation no. 2016/29489 on disseminating propaganda in favour of a terrorist organisation, investigation no. 2016/24542 on praising crime and criminals, and investigation no. 2016/35454 on organising, conducting and participating in unlawful public meetings and demonstrations [and] disseminating propaganda in favour of a terrorist organisation,” Turkish government Diyarbakir 2nd Magistrate Court to Demirtaş (pg.16)

- “The Constitutional Court observed that there was an indication that an offense had been committed in the case before it. Lastly, having regard to the documents seized during the search of A.D.’s home and the content of the conversations among presumed senior officials of the PKK and between them and the applicant, it found that it had been legitimate to consider that the applicant might have acted in accordance with the instructions of the leaders of an armed terrorist organisation. It therefore held that those factors were sufficient grounds for a strong suspicion that the applicant had committed an offense.” (pg 92)

- “the Constitutional Court had quoted from a speech he had given in 2012, in which he had stated that a sculpture of Abdullah Öcalan would be displayed.” (pg.86)

- “Court had referred to nine specific grounds for reasonable suspicion justifying the applicant’s detention. Six of the grounds had concerned political speeches made by the applicant as an active member of the National Assembly and co-chair of the second largest opposition party in Turkey. The seventh ground was his participation in a lawful

public assembly. The eighth ground was a tweet published by the HDP calling for demonstrations against the attack by Daesh in Kobani. The last ground related to the fact that several criminal investigations were ongoing in respect of the applicant. He maintained that none of those grounds could give rise to a reasonable suspicion that he had committed an offense.” (pg.86) Demirtaş’ perspective of the evidence given by the Turkish government

- “the applicant defended self-governance, described the terrorist acts allegedly committed by PKK members as a legitimate “war of self-defence” and as acts of “resistance”, and criticised the operations by the security forces by describing them as “massacres”. The Government added that the applicant had praised the leader of the PKK and had called on the people to take to the streets. The applicant, for his part, submitted that he had given similar speeches during proceedings of the National Assembly and that the speeches in question were therefore protected by the first paragraph of Article 83 of the Constitution” (pg.74) government’s statement on case
- Specific evidence given by the government for case and parliamentary immunity:
 - “Afterwards, the Diyarbakır public prosecutor asked the Diyarbakır
 - 2nd Magistrate’s Court to place the applicant in pre-trial detention for membership of an armed terrorist organisation (Article 314 § 1 of the Criminal Code) and public incitement to commit an offence (Article 214 § 1 of the Criminal Code).”
 - “The suspect Selahattin Demirtaş appeared before [the] magistrate to be questioned in connection with [alleged] offences of public incitement to commit an offence and membership of an armed terrorist organisation; the suspect is still

a member of parliament but is nevertheless not entitled to parliamentary immunity in relation to the offences [dating from] before 20 May 2016, on account of the amendment made to the second paragraph of Article 83 of the Constitution by Law no. 6718 of the same date; [as established below,] there is concrete evidence giving rise to a strong suspicion [that the suspect] committed offenses:”

- HDP and KCK tweets that are similar were given as evidence, “Gerilla and Militan’. Following that publication, at 10.20 a.m., the central executive board of the Peoples’ Democratic Party, the HDP (including the suspect, who was among the members [present at the meeting] of the executive board on 6 October 2014), posted the following tweet: ‘Urgent call to our people! Urgent call to our people from the HDP central executive board, currently in session! The situation in Kobani is extremely dangerous. We urge our people to join and support those protesting in the streets against Daesh attacks and the AKP government’s embargo over Kobani.’ At 10.51 a.m. the HDP Twitter account confirmed the post. A further tweet was then posted by the same account: ‘We call upon all our people, from 7 to 70, to [go out into] the streets, to [occupy] the streets and to take action against the attempted massacre in Kobani.’ In addition, [the following tweet was published]: ‘From now on, everywhere is Kobani. We call for permanent resistance until the end of the siege and brutal aggression in Kobani.’ Following the publication of those tweets, on 6, 7 and 8 October 2014, during incidents in sixteen towns in Turkey, the offenses ... were committed. It was found that during the commission of the offenses [in question], 50 people

had died, including 12 in Diyarbakır, 678 people had been injured and 1,113 buildings (including hospitals, schools, banks and town halls) had been rendered unfit for use. The [abovementioned] statements by the suspect give rise to suspicion on the basis of concrete indications that he committed, simultaneously with members of the PKK/KCK terrorist organisation, the offence of public incitement to commit an offence.” (pg.17)

- October 9 2014, Selahattin Demirtaş made a statement to the media ““We issued the calls in question [the tweets posted by the HDP Twitter account] because we had found out that Daesh had reached the border at Mürşitpınar’; ‘If no call had been issued, the events could not have been prevented in the region’; ‘People went out into the streets and there was no violence anywhere. We did not tell anyone to resort to violence’; ‘On 7 October 2014 a young man was murdered by the security forces in Varto (Muş)’; ‘In Batman, unidentified civilians opened fire on the demonstrators’; ‘People were not satisfied with [the pursuit of] the peace process, which was not leading to any conclusion; they were in a bad mood’; ‘There should be no acts of violence. There is no need for intervention in demonstrations [held] in support of Kobani ...’” (pg. 17)

- September 13, 2015 Selahattin Demirtaş gave a statement ““about the declaration of a curfew in Sur by the Diyarbakır governor’s office: ‘Our people want self-governance, their own assemblies and municipalities where responsibility lies with elected officials rather than appointees. Our people have the power to resist pressure and

massacre policies everywhere. We have the power to protect ourselves against any attack. We will show that we are not despairing; we will resist together; we will achieve salvation without forgetting our motherland and history and by defending our rights.”
(pg.17)

- December 18, 2015 Selahattin Demirtaş gave a statement to the media on “We will not let cruelty and fascism win any more; this resistance will triumph. Those who try to downplay it by calling it [resistance of] ditches and holes should look back at history. There are tens of millions of heroes and brave people resisting this coup. You are waging a war against the people. The people are resisting and will resist everywhere”

- “On 26, 27 and 28 October 2007 the suspect took part, together with mayors and members of the DTP [Party for a Democratic Society, a left-wing pro-Kurdish political party] in the ‘First General Meeting’ of the DTK (Democratic Society Congress), which was founded and operates in accordance with the Third Part of the KCK Agreement.”

- “On 26 December 2015 the suspect made the [following] statements to the DTK: ‘The barricades and trenches are not the result of the Kurdish people’s desire for self governance; they were put up because the people who made plans for a massacre in Ankara began implementing those plans. What trench, what barricade? We can’t play down the question. The resistance in the trenches and barricades [is driven by the same motive as] the resistance against fascism and massacres: the right to an honorable life. If one day someone refuses to accept this and discuss it and says he will lock up and bring to their knees anyone who thinks in this way ... ‘Oh, they have put up barricades, but that’s not much – what else can they do?’ They criticize us because that’s what people say. If we, the politicians, NGOs, workers’ organizations, women’s organizations, youth

organizations, local authorities, can support self-governance, if we can achieve it step by step, we will solve this historic problem. This resistance will lead to victory. My thanks go to all our friends [, who are not letting us down], who are resisting, who are not crumbling, [and] all our comrades who, despite everything, are remaining by the people's side during this time. Once again, I repeat my promise of loyalty and affection towards our”

- “26 March 2016, in the theater hall at Yenışehir Municipality Building, the suspect

- gave a speech [in which he stated]: ‘Not claiming a corpse is dishonorable; leaving a corpse on the ground is dishonorable. We are looking at [what is happening] with shame; we are truly ashamed. [They are saying:] ‘Oh, you went to [express] your condolences’, ‘no, it was a member of parliament [from your party] who went’, ‘no, the other one went...’. Can there be fifteen million terrorists in a country? If you [accuse] everyone of terrorism, in particular if you [accuse] the Kurds, who are claiming [their] rights and freedoms, [and] if you say you are going to take the necessary action, [this] fifteen-million-strong people will resist against your fascist practices by all available means. [Against this background], resistance becomes legitimate. Otherwise, war is not legitimate, there is no legitimacy [in] war. Resistance is legitimate. The people will be obliged to pay a higher price, our young people will be obliged to pay a higher price [and] we, the politicians, can only look at what is happening with sorrow when our dearest [friends] are murdered before our eyes. Against this background, I trust that the Democratic Society Congress will revive the enthusiasm [from] the time of its creation.’

“

- “On 11 January 2017 the public prosecutor filed a bill of indictment

- with the Diyarbakır Assize Court in respect of the applicant, running to 501 pages (not including the appendices). He charged the applicant with forming or leading an armed terrorist organisation (Article 314 § 1 of the Criminal Code), disseminating propaganda in favour of a terrorist organisation (fifteen counts – section 7(2) of the Prevention of Terrorism Act), public incitement to commit an offence (Article 214 § 1 of the Criminal Code), praising crime and criminals (four counts – Article 215 § 1 of the Criminal Code), public incitement to hatred and hostility (two counts – Article 216 § 1 of the Criminal Code), incitement to disobey the law (Article 217 § 1 of the Criminal Code), organising and participating in unlawful meetings and demonstrations (three counts – section 28(1) of the Meetings and Demonstrations Act (Law no. 2911)), and not complying with orders by the security forces for the dispersal of an unlawful demonstration (section 32(1) of Law no. 2911). The public prosecutor sought a sentence of between forty-three and 142 years’ imprisonment for the applicant.” additional charges brought against applicant (pg. 21)

- Evidence given for the above charges:

1. “(i) In a speech given in the BDP offices in Batman on 27 October 2012, the applicant had disseminated propaganda in favour of the PKK terrorist organisation by urging people to close their shops and not to send their children to school as a protest aimed at securing the release of the PKK leader. (ii) On 13 November 2012 two demonstrations had been held in Nusaybin and Kızıltepe in protest against the conditions of the PKK leader’s detention, and the applicant had made the following comments in Kızıltepe: “They said you couldn’t put up the poster of Öcalan. Those who said it ... Let me speak

clearly. We are going to put up a sculpture of President Apo. The Kurdish people have now risen up. With their leader, their party, their elected representatives, their children, their young and old, they are one of the greatest peoples of the Middle East.” (pg.21)

2. “In a speech he had given in the BDP offices in Diyarbakır on 21 April 2013, the applicant had stated the following: “The Kurdish movement used to see the war as a legitimate war of self-defense. Nowadays, if you have enough experience to resist [and] prevail using non-violent methods, it is not morally [and] politically right to use weapons. Today, those who criticize us also say that the Kurdish people would not exist, at least in Turkish Kurdistan, without the PKK movement. You could not speak of the existence of Kurds in Turkish Kurdistan. Without the coup in 1984 [the year of the first PKK attacks], without the guerrillas, no one today could speak of the existence of the Kurdish people; the Kurds had no other choice. At the time of the initial resistance in Şemdinli [and] Erüh [the first terrorist attacks by the PKK, carried out in the Şemdinli district in Hakkari and the Erüh district in Siirt on 15 August 1984], no one was aware of what was happening but the resistance has today created [the] reality of the [Kurdish] people. We have gained our identity.” (pg.22)
3. “Following the proclamations of self-governance and the operations conducted by the security forces, the applicant had stated on several occasions that the operations in question were massacres carried out by the national authorities and had described certain acts attributed to members of the PKK as acts of resistance” (pg.22)
4. “The applicant had actively worked to set up the DTK organization, founded according to the public prosecutor in order to raise public awareness of the PKK’s views, and had given speeches at meetings organized by the DTK.”

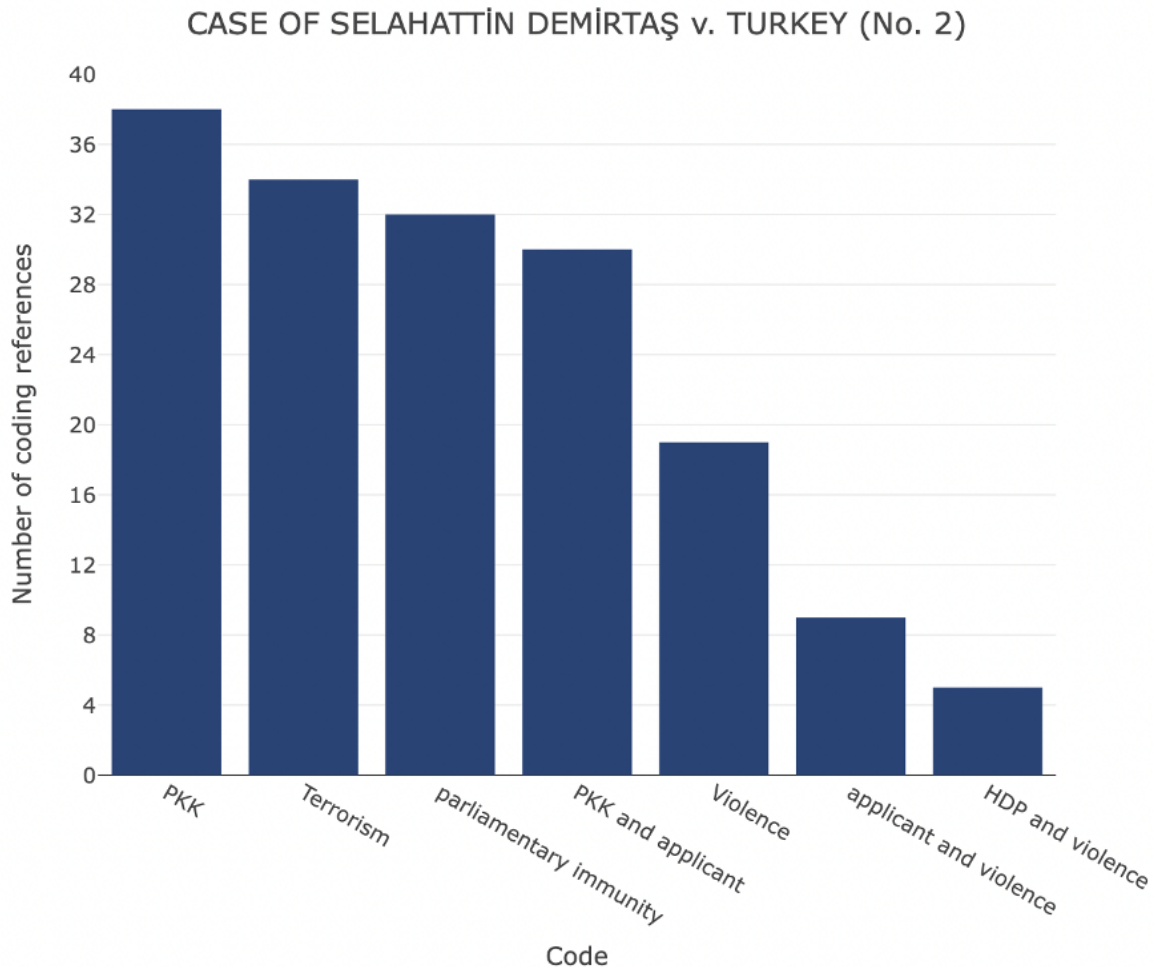
5. “The applicant was in charge of the political wing of the KCK, an illegal organization; in that connection, the public prosecutor presented evidence including the following:
1. two documents, entitled “documento” and “ikram ark”, discovered on a hard drive seized from the home of a certain A.D., who at the time had been the mayor of Sur, a district of Diyarbakır, and had been sentenced in 2017 to eighteen years’ imprisonment for leading a terrorist organisation; according to those documents, S.O., the presumed KCK leader in Turkey, had given instructions to several people, including the applicant, to visit the relatives of İ.E., who had been mistakenly murdered by the PKK;” (pg.23)
 2. “the records of intercepted telephone conversations between S.O. and K.Y., who was co-chair of the Democratic Regions Party (a left-wing pro-Kurdish political party) and had subsequently been sentenced to twentyone years’ imprisonment for leading a terrorist organisation, and between K.Y. and the applicant. According to those records, S.O. had given instructions to several people, including the applicant, to take part in certain meetings abroad, including in Strasbourg.” (pg.23)
 3. “had incited the acts of violence that had taken place between 6 and 8 October 2014. “ (pg.24)

Figures from coding:

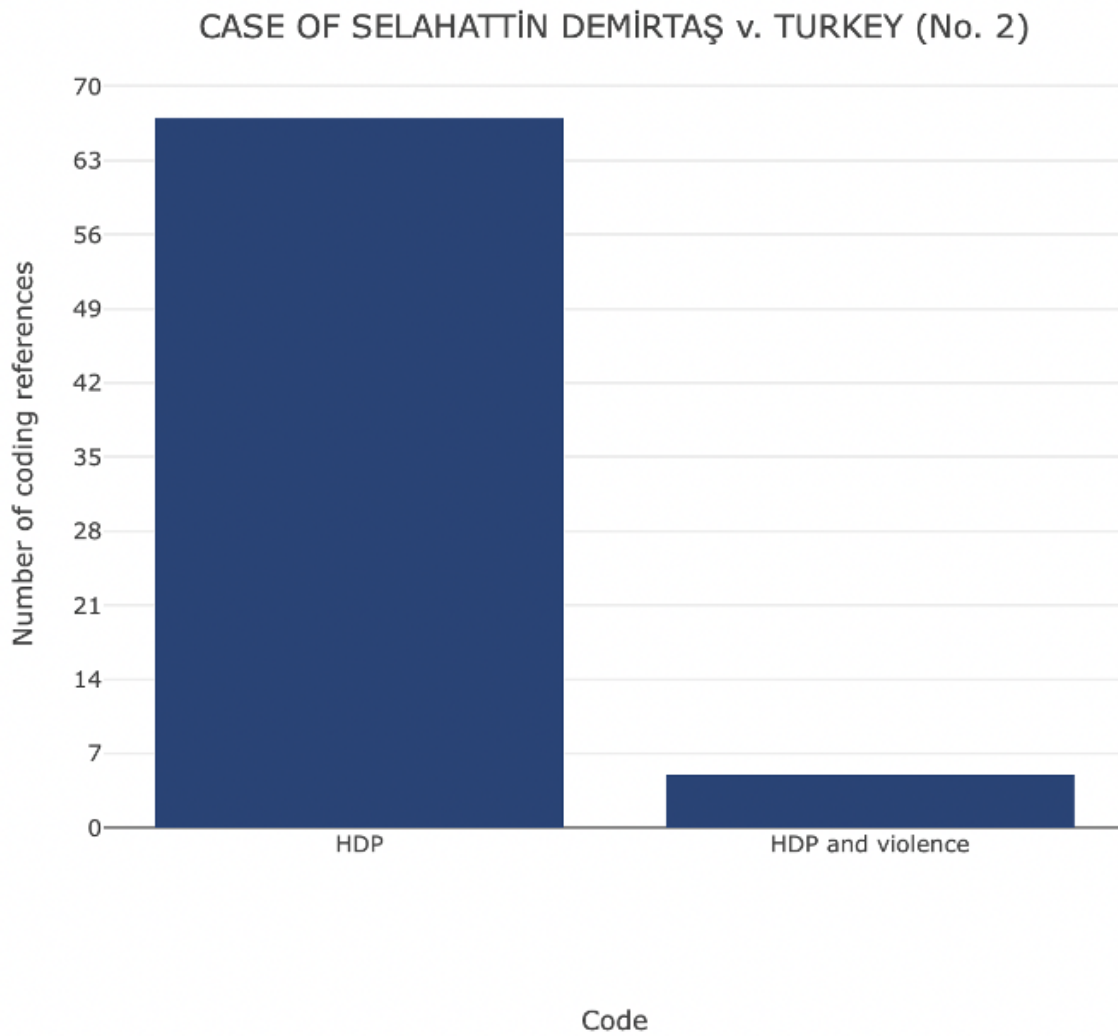
- Graph A: Showcases all of my different codes compared to one another.
- Graph B: The mention of the HDP overall generally was far more than mentions of the HDP tied to violence. Therefore, there are references to the HDP tied to violence partially but most of the references about the HDP are not associated with violence.

- Graph C: This graph shows that most times when terrorism is mentioned it is in direct association with the PKK. Compared to the difference between the HDP and references of HDP and violence in Graph B, Graph C shows that references of PKK and applicant and PKK have a much narrower margin of difference. Therefore, most of the time the PKK is mentioned in this document is in reference to the applicant’s association with the PKK. There is a greater margin of difference between violence and the applicant and violence.

- Graph D: This graph shows how much each actor was referred to in the document.

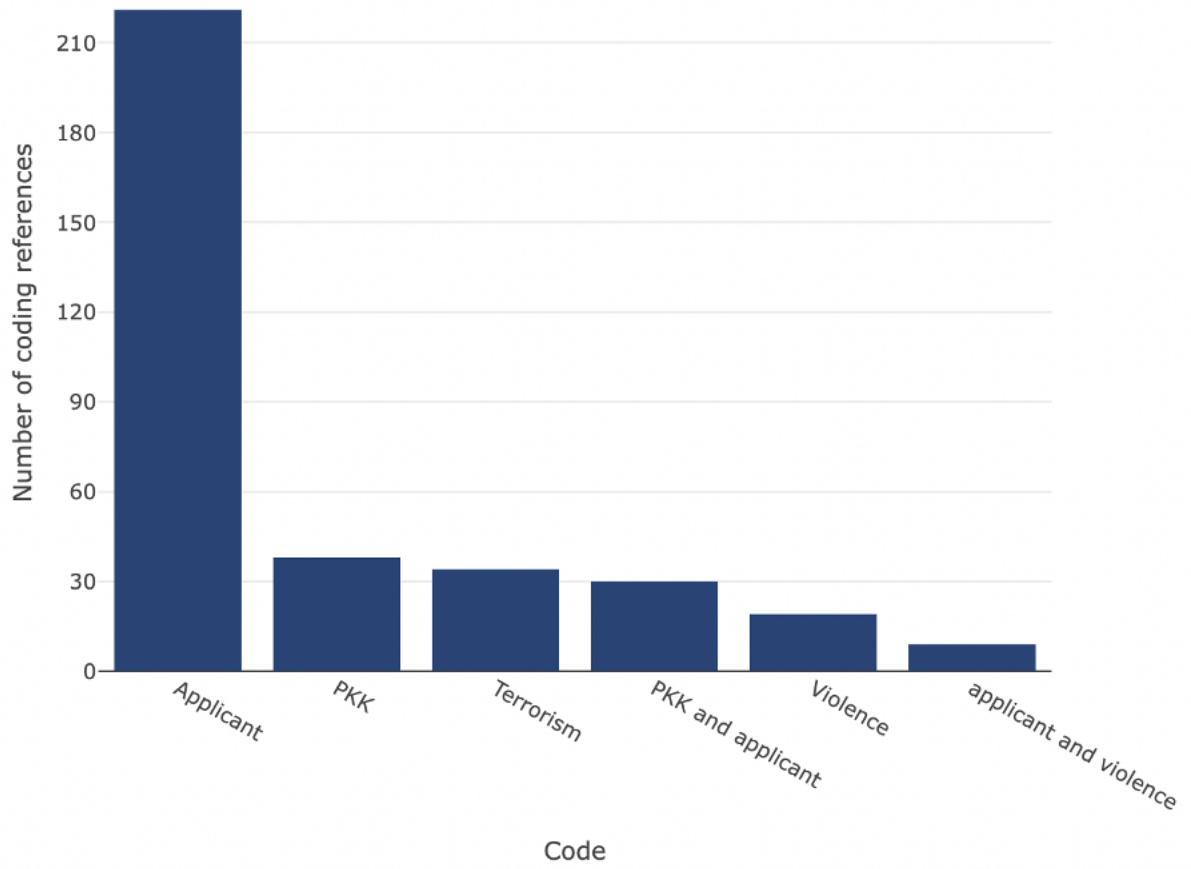


Top graph is graph A, bottom graph is graph B



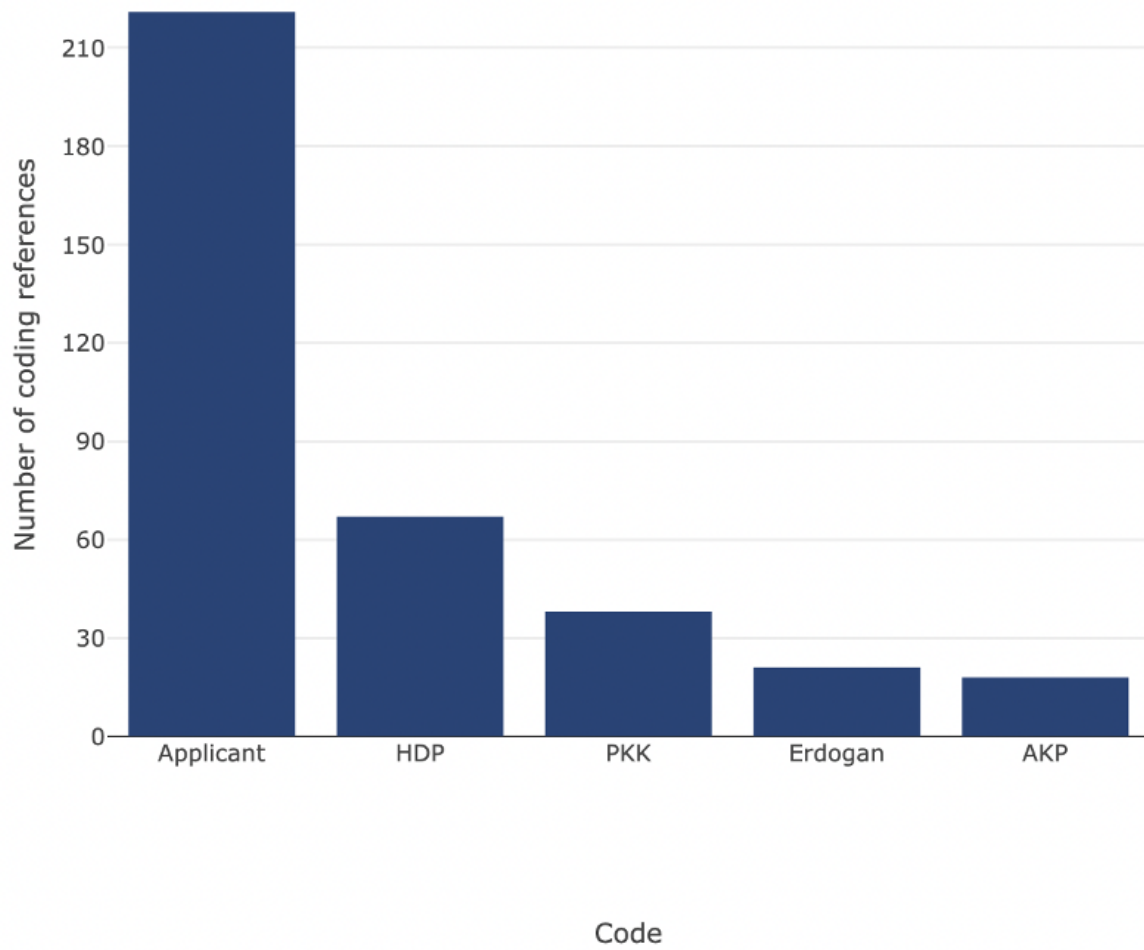
Graph C below

CASE OF SELAHATTİN DEMİRTAŞ v. TURKEY (No. 2)



Graph D below

CASE OF SELAHATTİN DEMİRTAŞ v. TURKEY (No. 2)



Appendix C: Table for Media Analysis Articles

Name of Media	Date of Article	Code Words	Title of Article	Link
Sözcü	July 19, 2015	HDP and PKK	“It is Normal to have relations with PKK and HDP”	https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/dunya/pkk-ve-hdp-ile-iliskilerim-izin-olmasi-nor-maldir-887809/
Sözcü	September 4, 2015	HDP and PKK	“HDP will make call to PKK”	https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/gundem/hdp-pkkyag-cagri-yapacak-927652/
Sözcü	October 19, 2015	HDP and seizing	“Decision to confiscate HDP election manifesto”	https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/gundem/hdp-secim-beyannamesi-ne-toplatma-karari-963666/ For context: https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/gundem/hdpnin-secim-bildirgesi-809958/
Sözcü	September 19, 2015	HDP and Terrorism	“1 arrest in attack on HDP building!”	https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/gunun-icinden/hdp-binasina-saldirida-1-tutuklama-931793/

Sözcü	September 7, 2015	HDP and PKK	“HDP Deputy caught while bringing food to PKK”	https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/gundem/hdpli-v-ekil-pkkya-erzak-gotururken-yakalandi-929877/
Sözcü	September 22, 2015	HDP and PKK	“HDP building was set on fire this time in Semdinli”	https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/gundem/hdp-bin-asi-bu-kez-semdinlide-kundaklandi-941492/
Sözcü	July 29, 2015	HDP and PKK and AKP	“You cannot afford to shut down HDP Because...”	https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/yazarlar/saygi-ozturk/hdpyi-kapatmaya-gucunuz-yetmez-cunku-895836/
Sözcü	August 5, 2015	Demirtaş and PKK	“Selahattin Demirtaş will meet with the PKK!”	https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/gundem/selahattin-demirtas-pkk-ile-gorusecek-901610/
Sözcü	August 5, 2015	Demirtaş and PKK	“Stunning PKK statements from Selahattin Demirtaş	https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/gundem/selahattin-demirtastan-arpici-pkk-aciklamalari-901380/
Sözcü	October 09, 2015	Demirtaş and PKK	“What did Selahattin	https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/

			Demirtaş say about the ceasefire?"	gundem/selahattin-demirtas-ates-kes-icin-ne-dedi-955291/
Sözcü	July 14, 2015	Demirtaş and PKK and HDP	“Demirtaş called on the PKK to lay down arms!”	https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/gundem/demirtas-pkkyasilah-birakma-cagrisi-yapti-884849/
Sondakika	October 22, 2015		HDP and PKK	https://www.sondakika.com/haber/haber-catismada-olen-pkk-li-kadin-terorist-derik-te-7804995/
Sondakika	September 1, 2015	Peace Day Statement from Diyarbakir: the Deaths cannot be endured	HDP and PKK	https://www.sondakika.com/haber/haber-diyarbakir-dan-baris-gunu-aciklamasi-olumlere-7651299/ https://www.sondakika.com/haber/haber-diyarbakir-dan-baris-gunu-aciklamasi-olumlere-7651248/
Sondaikika	August 8, 2015	HDP members of Beytüşşebap keep watch in the PKK Cemetery on Mount Kato	HDP and PKK	https://www.sondakika.com/haber/haber-beytussebap-hdp-liler-kato-dagi-ndaki-pkk-7581376/

Sondakika	August 9, 2015	Power Struggle between, HDP and Irdi	PKK and HDP	https://www.sondakika.com/haber/haber-grafikli-hdp-kandil-imrali-guc-mucadelesi-7583085/
Sondakikia	AUGust 1, 2015	The Mausoleum Constructed in Tunceli for the Lifeless Killed In Paris Has Been Opened	Use of threatening words against akp by hdp	https://www.sondakika.com/haber/haber-paris-te-oldurulen-sakine-cansiz-icin-tunceli-de-7562701/ https://www.sondakika.com/haber/haber-tunceli-paris-te-oldurulen-pkk-li-sakine-cansiz-7562740/
Sondakika	September 9, 2015	With Analysis Graphics - The Triangle That Ends Conflict: "Hdp-Pkk-Kck"		https://www.sondakika.com/haber/haber-analiz-grafikli-catismasizliga-son-veren-ucgen-hdp-7674259/

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