RETHINK
INSTITUTE WASHINGTON DC

RESURGENCE OF THE KURDISH CONFLICT IN TURKEY: HOW KURDS VIEW IT

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY

The ongoing conflict in Syria and the Kurdish struggle in the northern part of the country have triggered increased participation of Kurdish youth in the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The Turkish government, initially, did not perceive this as a domestic threat because of the ongoing peace process. However, with the latest resurgence of conflict in southeast Turkey, this has become a serious concern for the Turkish government.

Kurds in Rojova (northern Syria) plan to declare an autonomous region with the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is supported by the PKK. This plan conflicts with Turkey's policy of protecting the territorial integrity of Syria. Moreover, recent domestic political developments in Turkey have put an end to the peace talks. In June 2015, the armed conflict resumed and the PKK branch for urban youth, the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H), began to entrench and barricade in the Kurdish towns in southeastern Turkey. This strategy portrayed as "the people's self-defense" by Kurdish nationalists drew to a heavy response by Turkish security forces and within six months, the conflict cost the lives of more than 100 security forces, around 100 civilians, and more than 800 PKK members. More than 250,000 people have been forced to migrate or leave their homes. Curfew has been imposed on the cities and because of ongoing clashes and boycotts of the PKK, the socioeconomic life of the region has come to a halt.

This study aims to investigate how Kurdish perceptions have changed since June 2015 in the face of the entrenchment-barricade strategy and the Turkish government's response with military operations and the curfews. It includes detailed interviews with opinion leaders in the cities of Hakkari, Şırnak, Mardin, Diyarbakır, and Şanlıurfa.

INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the Kurdish issue has been at the forefront of nation-building efforts, security concerns, and issues of socioeconomic development in Turkey.

The Kurdish issue started to be visible after the centralization policies of the Ottoman Empire in the 1800s. It gained an ethno political character with the nation-building efforts of the Committee of Union and Progress in the early 1900s. The declaration of the Republic in 1923, and the abolition of the caliphate caused Kurds to rebel against the state. Koçgiri (1921), Seyh Said (1925), Ağrı (1926-1930), Oramar (1930) and Dersim (1937) were among the significant rebellions in the newly established republic. Between 1940 and 1970 there were no known rebellions. However, it is known that there was discontent among Kurds due to restrictions on Kurdish identity. Rise in gang activity in the 1970s was met with military operations, which took the discontent of Kurds a step further.

After the 1950s, socialism in the Middle East became a popular common ground for youth, and the situation was the same for Kurdish youth (Bozarslan, 2015). Divisions within the Turkish left and the suppression of the '70s led Kurds to form their own group. The establishment of the PKK and the start of armed conflict in the '80s put Kurds in a troubled situation. The state tried to solve this issue with security/militaristic approach, occasionally taking a more peaceful stance. It would be fair to say that peace processes have been exceptions. Leaders such as Suleyman Demirel in the 1970s, Turgut Özal in the 1980s, Tansu Çiller in the 1990s and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the 2000s stated that the Kurdish issue can be resolved peacefully and took some steps to do so. But those attempts never succeeded. On the other hand, the PKK's stance, i.e. adopting an armed rather than political approach, demanding a socialist system rather than the basic rights of Kurds, employing an imposing philosophy of war and peace in order to get Kurdish support, and creating an environment that does not allow democracy, has not been conducive to peace[1]. Therefore, in every wave of conflict, the state and the PKK kept fighting in order to strengthen their hand for the next peace talk. Consequently, in the last 40 years, thousands of people have died or been disabled, families have been torn apart, and hundreds of villages and towns have been emptied or burned[2].

It is important to focus on some of the basic points mentioned by every expert on the Kurdish issue. First, the issues regarding Kurds, non-Muslims and Alevis began with the idea of a nation-state and can be overcome by revising these policies. As the state constructs an identity based on Sunni-Hanefi Turkishness, the rights of "others" are usually neglected, or they are victimized for endless "openings"[3]. Second, the state has failed to understand the ethno-political aspects of the Kurdish issue. They prefer to focus on different aspects instead. Mesut Yeğen summarizes these in five points: (1) regional underdevelopment; (2) local governments' manipulation of people; (3) meddling of

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[1] See (Marcus, 2007; McDowall, 2005; Çiçek, 2015) on the PKK's conceptual and actual structure.

[2] See (Erder, 2007; Kalkınma Merkezi, 2010; MAZLUMDER, 2004; TBMM, 1997; TESEV, 2006; Yükseker, 2008/a; Yükseker, 2008/b; Erkan & Bağlı, 2005; Göç-Der, 2001; HÜNEE, 2006; Kaya, 2009; Keser, 2011/a) about these migrations.

[3] See (Lewis, 1969; Karpat, 2004; Mardin, 2007) on Turkey's process on becoming a nation-state. See (Gözaydın, 2009; Kaplan, 2009; Çağlayan, 2014) on the subject of how institutions work in this process.

foreign powers; (4) lawlessness; and (5) religious conservatism. This rhetoric is used in different forms in order to divert Turkish public opinion on other things whenever the Kurdish debate is heated (Yeğen, 2003).

It is clear that the state's founding paradigm is insufficient to resolve the Kurdish issue. For this reason, in the past, the left wing and the Islamists had espoused the idea that "only we can solve this issue." However, the Turkish left has become nationalized, and the leading party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), prioritizes Kemalist approaches. The Islamist AKP approached the cultural needs of Kurds positively for a long time and started the peace process. However, following the Kobani incident, it has switched to security-based policies.

In order to understand the current perception of Kurdish nationalists, it is important to understand the role of using force and the historical and philosophical basis of autonomy. Entrenchments, barricades and establishing autonomous units did not happen overnight. First, the Kurdish nationalist movement and its leader, Öcalan, aim to achieve Kurdish socialist revolution by force. As is well-known, the PKK follows a Marxist philosophy and a "Strategy of the Role of Force." The PKK's force approach and the approaches of similar organizations are based on Engel's perspectives. It is possible to theoretically describe "force" in two ways. The retrogressive or colonial force a state asserts on its own people by economic, political, or militaristic means can be defined as the social order the state achieves. The local repression the state imposes on its own people becomes a sort of autocracy or dictatorship; if repression is applied internationally, it results in colonialist-imperialist policies. With regard to force, Marx argues that counter-force is the only way to deal with imperialist-colonialist states and the class that owns the finance-capital or infrastructure (Öcalan, 1982).

Öcalan addresses force theory from two perspectives. He criticizes the state's repression of Kurds. He specifically perceives Ottoman settlements in the region as external force, and in the organization's literature, this is perceived as internal force after the Ottoman conquest. In the Republic era, Kurds experienced repression and violence and, on top of that, the Kurdish region has economically become an internal colony. According to Ocalan, political force has always been applied by economic force in state policies. This brings up the question "What could have opposed the force-based policies carried out by the state for decades?" Especially prior to the 90s, this was one of the major questions for which Öcalan was trying find answers. Since the state was suppressing people by force-based policies, he believed the similar force were supposed to be used against the state. Thus, Öcalan proposed the application of Engel's "force of revolutionists" or "counter-force" approach (Öcalan, 1982). In the 1980s, for those who were keen on socialist theories, force theory was supposed to be applied in order to nullify the state's own forceful policies.

As the PKK was applying the concept of revolutionary force, it began to be seen as a social engineering policy. A rural-based war strategy was the primary approach, and rural people encountered the role of force. The organization specifically needed a popular dynamic in order to put this force into practice. As the people lacked such action-based practice, and felt a different and stronger type of force from the state, Öcalan inclined to channel people toward his organizational dynamic for the role of force and believed that this would make a real revolutionary force possible. Consequently, between 1984 and 1990, the PKK not only fought against the police and military forces but also consolidated

Kurds using force and violence. Until 1987 and 1988, Kurds were disturbed by this pressure and began to understand that the role of force is not one-sided. In other words, people were repressed by both the organization and the state. As a consequence, people slowly started to be channeled toward the organization and in 1990, during their fourth convention, the organization seriously considered the role-of-force approach. They discussed how the force approach toward the people negatively influenced the organization.

After the 1990s, Kurdish nationalists started to apply the role-of-force strategy on local level. This approach was mostly used against those who spread propaganda against them and village guards (*korucu*). The role of force was localized, and whoever represented the state was targeted revolutionary force mentality. In this process, despite a change in the organization's strategy, the state's approach remained unchanged in the region, thus pushing people gradually toward the organization. The PKK began to lose its Marxist rhetoric in the early 1990s and revised its Marxist-Leninist strategies in accordance with time and situations. In 1999, after Öcalan was captured, the organization carried out the role-of-force approach with a more sophisticated rhetoric. In this new era the main approach was based on "self-defense." Öcalan portrayed self-defense as basic right that is suppressed by the state and said that Kurds have to protect their right to defend themselves. For him, self-defense is nonnegotiable and every part society should be organized from this perspective (Öcalan, 1982). The role of force was a philosophy used to manipulate people with the idea of "self-defense" that lies at the heart of repression rather than as a method to be accepted without question.

The role of force is a concept from the Cold War era. However, the PKK still continues a sophisticated force policy in the region in order to maintain control, physically and psychologically. Moreover, the role of force should not be considered merely as a unidimensional concept. Althusser stated that the state and powerful elites use two tools: repression and ideology (Althusser, 2010). In 2005 Öcalan repeated in a Kurdish Communities Union (KCK) convention that they aim to destroy the current government-state based social systems in the Middle East[4]. On the one hand, the organization positions its own repression tools against the state's repression tools. On the other hand, it tries to build its own ideological tools with educational and cultural centers (AÖSBA, 2014). Although it is stated in the convention that the KCK is not a state structure, the establishment of autonomous units and the strategies mentioned strengthen the idea of a parallel state in the region. Öcalan states that a democratic confederation will be established in the region without violence and force[5]. However, he also stated that if there is any threat against people, freedoms, and the rule of law, there will be self-defense. As was discussed by high officials in the last congress of the Democratic Society Congress (DTK) in December 2015, the Kurdish nationalist movement will eventually demand autonomy in order to "self-govern" its own areas. These areas are streets, neighborhoods, districts and cities that they have declared autonomous based on the people's democratic rights. This congress considered entrenchments and barricades and

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[4] See (rojbas3.wordpress.com/kck-sozlesmesi/, 2015) for the entire text.
[5] During his interviews with political as well as Kurdish nationalist opinion leaders Çiçek noticed that autonomous units mentioned in KCK are evaluated in different systems such as federation, autonomy or strengthening of local governments. In sum, the organization does not have a concrete model on this (Çiçek, 2015).

Kurdish people's reactions against military, judicial and political operations as a "right and justified" ways to declare autonomy by using democratic rights. Military operations of the state that aim to ensure "public order" are viewed as "heavy assaults"[6].

The role of force, autonomy and self-defense strategies are pieces of a whole. It was possible to understand this fact during the interviews in Diyarbakır Suriçi in November 2015 with armed members of the YDG-H. The members stated that the entrenchments and barricades were done with the help of the people, and that there was no reaction from them. The YDG-H members believe that entrenchments and barricades will soon be visible in socioeconomically well-off parts of the cities, and that despite people's reactions independence of the Kurdish people depends on these strategies. As seen here, the role of force is still a visible strategy. Although on the discourse level the people's democratic choice was highlighted in both the KCK convention and the latest DTK congress, the YDG-H members stated that people do not know what is in their best interest and may be acting emotionally and short-sighted when they do not support entrenchments.

The PKK's strategy of dragging the war into cities resumed the armed conflict. The prospects for peace have been getting weaker as the previously rural conflict is dragged into urban settings after June 2015, becoming more violent, and causing the deaths of combatants and non-combatants, as well as because of the rhetoric of politicians who focus on their target group. In the process, the state has tried to remove the entrenchments with military operations. However, civilian deaths, curfews, and damage to the historical and cultural heritage have created a major concern among people.

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[6] See (imctv.com.tr, 2015) for the concluding text of the Congress text.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this work is to examine how the Kurdish population in certain cities perceive terrorism and violence: How do people criticize or support the organization believed to be taking action on their behalf and the state that carries out operations to protect them? The study is based on interviews. Based on our previous research in the region, it is concluded that data collected through surveys are not trustworthy. Particularly during times of armed conflict, the majority of people do not want to express their views to individuals they do not know. Therefore, we decided to conduct interviews with people with whom we had earlier connections.

Interviews took place in Hakkari, Silopi, Cizre, Idil, Sanliurfa, Mardin, and Diyarbakir. These cities were selected because they are experiencing heavy armed conflict. Compared to the other cities, Sanliurfa is subject to less terrorism and violence. However, it was included due to its significance for two districts, Suruc and Ceylanpinar, which have experienced, respectively, a suicide bombing and the massacre of two police officers, as well as its location close to the armed conflict zone in Syria. There were 38 participants and each interview lasted one to two hours. Those individuals were chosen for being opinion leaders who had also been reached for other studies. However, believing that reaching out to the opinion leaders of ideological, religious and political groups would not represent overall public opinion, we also conducted interviews with ordinary citizens. Based on data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) and other studies, we aimed for a certain average of age, gender, ethnicity, and ideological-religious identity. Interview questions were sent out to participants by mail or electronically, and 136 people returned them. The fieldwork took place in November and December 2015.

During the interviews, we asked a number of questions: How did the peace process end and how did we reach this level of violence? What do you think of the PKK entrenchment and barricade policies? As war is dragged into urban area, how does it affect the establishment of autonomous units? When does the state/government think the entrenchments and barricades were created? How do the imposed curfews influence people? What do people think of the actions of the YDG-H after the June 7 elections? Also, in order to understand the expectations of the Kurdish people, four more questions were asked: If operations and curfews continue longer, how will the people be affected? Can the peace process be resumed? If yes, how? Are you concerned about the future because of the violence experienced right now? Are you concerned that we are going back to the 90s?

The answers provided to these questions were categorized and evaluated by the principles of qualitative analysis. Questions were titled and separated into groups, and tables were created for visual purposes. When the question "What ended the peace process?" was categorized, there were six prominent points that were put into a table. For each question, the percentages were calculated depending on the number of participants. In each section, notes from some study participants were given directly in order to reflect their "voice." Grammatical and punctuation mistakes were corrected without changing the meaning. Participants were not limited in terms of the length of their answers, so they were able to state all the points they found important. While transcripts of the interviews were observed, since all subjects were taken into consideration, some questions had more answers than the number of participants. Therefore, the percentages were not calculated. It is important to point out that

methodological distinctions do not always reflect the ideas of participants. However, these distinctions are important in order to convert raw information into qualitative information. We tried to give voice to every thought and tried to grasp an overall picture of Kurdish public opinion.

Demographics

Age groups were determined based on the latest TUIK data, which show that the average age in Turkey is 30.1 years. However, average ages in the cities where the research took place are as follows: 21.7 years in Diyarbakır, 18.9 in Şanlıurfa, 20.7 in Mardin, 18.5 in Şırnak, and 21.2 in Hakkari. Thus, the average age for this region is younger than the national average.
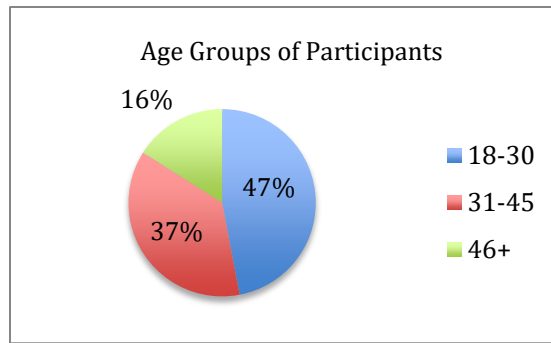

This work was not a survey, so we did not collect detailed demographic data. Moreover, increasing violence in the region raises suspicion among people about any research or surveys of this sort. Our participants were asked about their age, gender, ethnicity, and religious and political ideologies. 47% of were 18 to 30 years old, 37% were 31 to 45 years old, and 16% were 46 years old or older. These age ranges were selected because of personal experiences of recent history. Between 1990 and 1993, these cities experienced a wave of violence and terrorism; millions of persons were forced to migrate, and almost the same number experienced permanent psychological, physical and economic harm. Considering that individuals older than 45 have better knowledge of the region, they were evaluated in a different group. The age group of 18 to 30 years is made up of individuals who experienced the heavy armed conflict of the 1990s, forced migrations and social changes. They are especially important, as they grew up in socioeconomically underdeveloped regions that are experiencing entrenchments and heavy armed conflict today, and they are especially significant in Kurdish studies. These individuals are traumatized and are usually referred as "purgatory youth" or "Generation Z" or "millenials". They adopt neither modernity nor tradition, and therefore show strong protest characteristics[7]. Poverty and underdevelopment, as well as a penchant for revenge and the vendettas of their predecessors play a crucial role. Our second group is 31 to 45 years old. They are believed to remember the 90s, but unlike the younger group, they were raised in a relatively healthier sociocultural atmosphere.

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[7] See (Yanmış, 2015; Gürcan, 2015) for related research.

The gender distribution of participants was 82% men to 18% women (Table 2). The low number of women is a shortcoming of the study. Middle-aged and older women have fewer advantages in terms of being part of social and economic life, and they are mostly dependent on their spouses, which influences participation rate. The timing of the interviews coincided with ongoing conflict and tension, so many women did not want to participate, or even if they did, their responses were not relevant to this study, so they had to be eliminated.

Gender Distribution of Participants

18%

83%

■ Male
■ Female
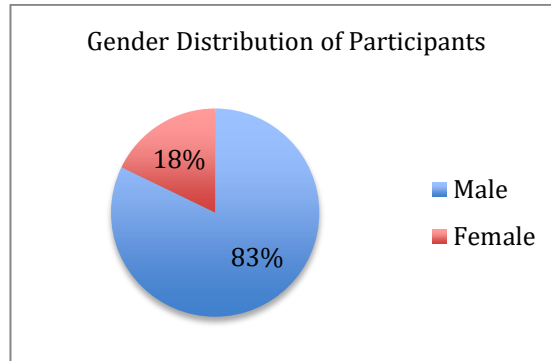
When participants were asked to identify themselves ethnically, 73% identified as Kurdish, 8% as Armenian, Assyrian, Arab and others, 7% as Zaza, and the remaining 12% did not provide an ethnic identification (Table 3). It was not asked whether Zazas and Syrians were Kurdish. The way individuals identified themselves was taken into consideration. Other studies conducted in this region also show a similar ethnic distribution. The percentage of Armenians, Syrians and Arabs was a bit high.

Ethnic Distribution of Participants

12%
8%
7%
73%

■ Kurdish

■ Zaza

■ Armenian,
Arab,
Assyrian
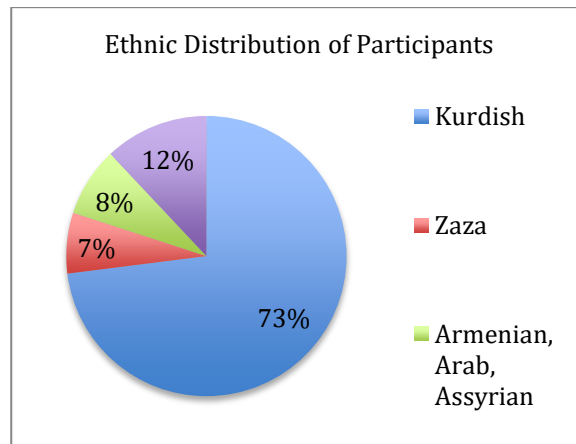
Another important demographic feature of participants was their religions and ideologies: 60% identified themselves as Muslim, 12% as Social-Democrat Muslim, 7% as Socialist, 5% as Humanist, 4% as Socialist Muslim, 4% as Liberal and 8% chose not to answer (Table 4). Other studies conducted in this region also show a similar distribution. In some other studies, the percentage of Muslims was a bit higher.

Religious & Ideological Distribution of Participants

No Answer
8%

Liberal
4%

Humanist
5%

Socialist
7%

Muslim
64%

Social
Democrat
Muslim
14%
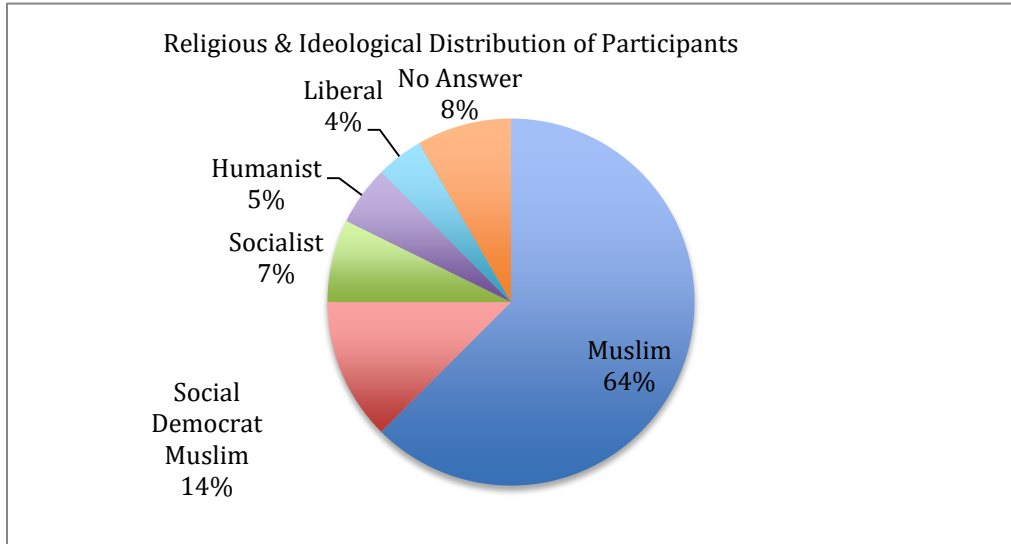
FINDINGS

1. What Ended the Peace Process?

The Kurdish issue entered a new peace process in 1994 with Turkey's EU Customs Union talks with the European Union and in 1999 with the negotiations for full membership in the EU after many years of heavy armed conflict, terrorism, violence and migrations. During this process, relations with the EU were met with hope for all the oppressed groups that were considered to be "others."

After 2002, the AKP wanted to resolve the Kurdish issue peacefully. As the attitude of the new government was coupled with the EU membership process, Kurds were satisfied with those efforts. During this time, Kurdish language classes were allowed, the first Kurdish TV station (TRT 6) began operating, local governments were strengthened, Kurdology majors became available at universities, and the peace process was officially stated. However, the October 6-8 protests of 2014 vis-à-vis Kobani assault, the massacre in June 2015 by a suicide bomber of some young people in Şanlıurfa/Suruç who had convened to go to Kobani in June 2015, and the massacre of two police officers in Ceylanpinar triggered a new period of armed conflict. Participants were asked what or who ended the peace process. The following six answer categories were identified (Table 1)[8]:

Table 1. What ended the peace process?		Count	Percentage
1	Attitude of the state and government	78	57.8
2	Failure and insincerity of the parties	39	28.6
3	The PKK's distrust of process and politics	24	17.6
4	Inability of the PKK and HDP to manage post-June 7 election period	19	13.9
5	Defense of Kobani and "Kobani's falling" catchphrase	17	12.5
6	Foreign developments and "foreign powers"	10	7.3

An interesting point about Kurdish public opinion is that the majority did not believe that the Suruç bombing or the death of two police officers in Ceylanpınar are why the peace process ended. Only four participants believed these were the real reasons.

1.1. Attitude of the State and the Government

Participants mostly questioned the overall attitude of the government and the state as to why the peace process ended. The reason that the peace process ended was explained as "the denial of Dolmabahçe reconciliation," "the government's insistence on a

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[8] Participants touched upon more than one subject when asked open-ended questions. The provided percentages are separately calculated within their own categories. Thus, they amount to more than 100 percent.

presidential system," and "the AKP's failure in the June 7 elections and reaching out to nationalist votes to regain its power." Most of the participants believed that presidential ambitions and the AKP's short-term goal of winning in the elections were not met with enough support. That is why the AKP needed the votes of nationalists, and this deranged the ongoing peace process. Participants stated that the November 1 victory of the AKP was evidence for this idea.

> The AKP's strategy of using Turkish nationalism to regain power after the June 7 elections ended the peace *process (Şivan, 31)*.

> Considering Erdoğan's statement, "Give us 400 deputies and this will result in peace," and then the failure to get 400 deputies in the Parliament, it is not surprising that the AKP ended the peace process and started a war. Erdoğan's ambition of being Turkey's sole leader ended the peace process *(Çetin, 20)*

Participants also found the government and the state guilty because they were reluctant to make the necessary arrangements, since expectations were high during the process. The government's failure to provide the right to education in native language and strengthen the local governments, and Kurds' expectations of being constitutionally equal to Turks, consumed Kurds' hopes for peace. Similarly, many participants stated that despite the government officials' rhetoric on granting the rights of Kurds, they were reluctant to take such action. According to these participants, peace activists among Kurds were shocked by the Roboski and Kobani incidents and statements like "There exists no Kurdish problem, Kurds have some problems." These incidents and this sort of rhetoric caused Kurds to lose their hope for peace.

> The peace process benefited the AKP in the beginnings; however, it began to benefit the HDP more than the AKP, which led the AKP to distance itself from the peace process. Just like every other move, the AKP approached this issue as a strategy to increase its votes. (Seyhmus, 27).

Participants who thought the government was responsible for the failure of the peace process highlighted the nation-state ideology and stated that the government did not want to grant Kurds their rights and used the PKK as an excuse.

> Considering the issue merely as a problem of the PKK or the YDG-H is being subjective. The problem is the state's problem, the state's monist ideology is the problem, the monist ideology that focuses on the Kurdish issue makes the problem bigger. It is not the PKK that resists; it is the people. We suffer because "our existence is not gifted to the Turkish existence." As we suffer, those who live pleasantly are unaware of the reality of the Middle East. One has to be part of the people to understand it (Aslan, 25).

Another reason the process ended was the success of the Kurdish HDP in the June 7 elections. Participants who believed this stated that many Turkish nationalists in urban areas were disturbed because the HDP got more support than the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), and AKP supporters were also not happy with this. On June 8, Deputy Prime Minister Yalcin Akdoğan said "From now on they can only make a movie out the peace process," which is a clear sign of disruption in the situation.

> I believe these operations are carried in order to punish people for the HDP victory in the elections. If the HDP had not passed the threshold, the process would continue in an imaginary world. People would be deceived until the next elections (Ersin, 32).

1.2. Failure and Insincerity of the Parties

Participants believed that the second reason the peace process failed was insincerity and distrust between the parties. Participants believed that politicians used this process for their own interests, and when they realized it did not serve their purposes, they brought it to an end. The PKK being the only group representing Kurds, inability to establish a monitoring committee, lack of transparency of the process, and lack of a legal basis were perceived as a failure of both parties. Also, as referenced during peace talks, which was also demanded by Öcalan, the organization's reluctance to take PKK weapons abroad, the government's building of new police stations in the region, and strengthening military forces in the region were all signs of distrust between the parties.

> The so-called "peace process" was not actually a peace process, but rather a period of recovery. The government has always been busy securing wins in elections. Once an election was won, they moved to the next one. If it was a real peace process, there would be an agenda. This process only prevented deaths and helped the economy recover. The fact that the government/state has been building new police stations in strategic regions via the Housing Development Administration (TOKİ) and taking every action with security concerns shows that the government's approach to the Kurdish issue has not changed over years. On the PKK side, the party was aware of everything. They gained some legitimacy in the process, as well as time to recover. During this period, the PKK extended their shelters in the mountains, stored food, and garnered support, and gained social acceptance by its courts and by resolving conflicts. Therefore the PKK gained society's sympathy. Since the PKK never trusted the sincerity of the process, they took steps accordingly. The fact that the PKK sent some of its members to Northern Iraq as a mere formality and let the majority of members stay in Turkey is the most significant evidence. In sum, this process was nothing but an era of regrouping for both parties (Sidar, 33).

> The process ended when the insincerity of the state and the organization was revealed. Within the last three years the state took slow steps to please Kurds and the people of the region. Yes, some steps were taken, but mostly promises were given but always postponed. People were tired of this. The state had a great chance to reconcile with people but they lost this opportunity and let the PKK take over. The HDP stated that they changed their policies, they are for peace and represent everyone, which increased their number of votes. The PKK recovered its financial situation and reemerged while our country was busy with other problems. That's when we understood that there was no peace process. There was just a break. A break for recovery (Rojda, 22).

Another reason peace was not achieved is that both parties did not want to share the role of "hero" that ended the century-old conflict. According to participants, this made the process personalized and political, which ran the risk of ending the process arbitrarily due to the party's interests.

A few participants believed that "failing to understand the other party" was the reason for failure. They stated that the parties came to the table without understanding the other party's demands and whether they could fulfill those requests. For that reason they failed. It should be kept in mind that peace is possible with a "win-win" approach. According to the participants, the state's rhetoric was in favor of granting rights to Kurds, but they were reluctant to do so due to electoral concerns. The Kurdish side considered

the armed organization as a guarantee in case they could not come to an agreement with the state. These two approaches made the process unsuccessful. During face-to-face interviews, this paradox was put this way: "The state always wants Kurds to disarm and stay away from terrorism and the organization talks about the rights of Kurds rather than the dream of a socialist Kurdistan." The perceptions of the participants reflected the intractability of these approaches.

1.3. The PKK's Distrust of Process and Politics

The PKK's distrust of policies and the peace process was considered to be another reason for failure. Participants believed that the organization did not have faith in building peace through democracy, and this is the reason for the ongoing armed conflict. Those who stated this idea actually implied that there were differences between the organization and the HDP. However, from the Kurdish nationalist perspective, the organization is the major component and the HDP should follow the organization.

Participants believed that Kurdish nationalists did not trust democratic process and peace talks, since they were in favor of resuming a new wave of armed conflict after they had the most significant victory in the June 7 elections. Moreover, some participants stated that a group among the PKK that favors war ended the peace process after the HDP victory. We can list some notes that reflect that the PKK did not trust political resolution and wanted to manage the process by itself.

> I believe there are a few reasons for the failure of peace process. First, conditions have changed since the organization reluctantly agreed to negotiate, and with new gains the promises were not kept, even though there was a risk of failure for the process. As the organization knew, the process would not continue this way, they started a new war after preparing for it during the process. Second, it is not correct that the reason the process is ended is because of the Suruç bombing and the denial of Dolmabahçe reconciliation by the president. Those may just have caused the war to start earlier (Azad, 41).

> The PKK's insincerity ended the process. They wanted to continue the war strategy, which is the reason for their existence and sovereignty. However, the government's wrong policies during the elections were a chance for the PKK to increase its legitimacy among people (Welat, 25).

> Support the HDP had during June 7 elections caused a panic in the PKK because they thought their power and influence would decrease. That is why they increased the level of violence and cut the path toward legal politics (Ibrahim, 38).

1.4. Inability of the PKK and the HDP to Manage the Post-June 7 Election Period

It was believed that the inability of the PKK and the HDP to manage peace talks after the June 7 elections was another reason for their failure. Many participants who were in favor of the party's rhetoric in their election manifesto found what Demirtaş said about Erdoğan –"We will not let you become the president"- strategically wrong. Instead of being a "win-win" approach that would benefit Kurds, this slogan by Demirtaş and his

party made everything worse. Some participants believed that the reason for this slogan was the alliance the HDP formed with radical left parties. Conservative HDP supporters were disturbed by this alliance. A businessman who supported the HDP expressed his disturbance this way:

> Why do Figen (Yüksekdağ) and Önder (Sırrı Süreyya) give speeches in Van and Amed, using the Kurdish youth? Who are they? What have they done for Kurds? They should go to Adana or Istanbul and make propaganda among Turkish youth. All they want is to have a communist state and they are using Kurdish youth for this purpose (Özgür, 38).

People who believed the Kurdish nationalist movement ended the process were Kurds who had "deep distrust" towards that group. According to them, the nationalists will not agree to negotiate unless they have a socialist Kurdish state that they themselves will govern. Participants who thought this way believed that the actions of the YDG-H were the results of the PKK's incorrect strategies and that is how the process failed. According to them, the organization was responsible for the Suruç and Ankara bombings.

> The existence of the PKK and the HDP is the only obstacle to peace. If anyone believes they are sincere about peace, they should listen to their leaders on the incidents in Kobani, Suruç, Amed and Ankara. Incorrect policies of the PKK and the HDP ended peace (İzzet, 22).

Some participants commented that the HDP "went berserk" after they passed the threshold in the elections. These participants were usually the ones who were distant from the Kurdish nationalist movement and middle-aged. There were a few participants who believed the organization became more spoiled, carefree and vicious once they began to negotiate with the government as well as after passing the threshold during the elections. They also believed that the PKK did not make its real intentions obvious during the peace talks and they used this time to serve their own interest, which was to have more space for self-government and establishing a socialist Kurdish state. In sum, the perception was that the organization was not satisfied with what they gained with the process and abused it.

1.5. Defense of Kobani and "Kobani's Falling" catchphrase

The tension between ISIS and the PYD in Kobani created a sense of national urgency among Kurds. Some participants believed the reason the peace process ended was related to this tension. They believed the state and the government-supported groups are fighting against Kurds in order to prevent the establishment of an autonomous region in Northern Syria.

At this time young people from the region left to fight in Syria and died there. In both Kobani-Şengal's Kurdish media as well as globally Kobani was a priority that created sensitivity among Kurds. Therefore the "Kobani is falling" has become a catchphrase. While the AKP circles thought that this slogan was used to incite political chaos, Kurdish nationalists believed it was used to express joy at the government level. Some participants believed that this, as well as another catchphrase "There exists no Kurdish problem," decreased the level of hope for peace.

> I believe the process was harmed by "Kobani is falling" catchphrase. Then came the incidents in Şengal, rumors about supporting ISIS, "There exists no Kurdish problem" sayings. They all ripped Kurds apart from the AKP. The hope of coexisting, which was at its highest in 2013 Newroz, started to fade away, and the attacks against the Kurds in summer of 2015 finished everything. The PKK also had no hope for peace after the incidents in Syria, because Turkey carried out a covert war to prevent an autonomous Kurdish region in Syria. Kurds were upset to see that Turkey - the country that refused to stay silent for the Turkmens in Iraq and Syria - had this sort of attitude toward a Muslim people with whom they share a history of 1,000 years (Nuri, 44).

> A group within the PKK did not want peace. Moreover, by granting small benefits to Kurds, the state raised expectations. The public was shocked about this. The Roboski incident, and statements like "Kobani is falling" and "There is no Kurdish problem" created resentment (Sultan, 28).

1.6. Foreign Developments and "Foreign Powers"

Finally, some participants believed the process ended because of the activities of foreign powers. Those who believed that foreign powers ended the process stated that Russia, Iran, Iraq and Assad forced the PKK to fight in order to prevent any Turkish intervention to Syria. These were people keen on the PKK ideology who were working professionally on the Kurdish issue. According to them, the state should not have fallen for this trap and should have ended its operations and restarted the peace process.

> New power relations emerged with the Syrian civil war that influenced the peace process. I have a feeling today's situation benefits Iran, Assad and Russia most. Second, with the influence of some marginal groups, Demirtaş's June 7 election campaign was "We will let you become the president," which increased the level of tension between the government and the organization (Melik, 24).

> In 2012 the Arab Spring began and Turkey started the peace process in order to protect itself. The organization agreed to come to the table hoping "maybe this time it will work" and ostensibly sent some of the armed groups to Iraqi Kurdistan. Because Öcalan always says "Be careful when you are dealing with the state, watch yourselves." That's what the organization did. Then things changed in Syria and Turkey failed to be on the same side with Salih Müslim. They supported groups that were fighting against the Kurds in Kobani - the Muslim people with whom they have shared a history for a thousand years. This has shocked Kurds. The "Kobani is falling" catchphrase came on top of that, and Kurds lost hope for peace. Demirtaş's slogan of "We will not let you become the president" was the breaking point for Erdoğan (Ali, 56).

A participant stated that the PKK believed that foreign powers are supportive of them (Mesut, 55), which caused the failure of the process. Some considered these foreign powers to be European countries, whereas some believed that neighboring countries supported the organization and they did not want peace between Turks and Kurds.

2. Entrenchments as a Way to Autonomy

Entrenchments and barricades created by YDG-H members in southeastern cities after armed conflict restarted in June 2015 was one of the major focuses of this study. In the interviews, participants expressed their thoughts on four main points (Table 2):

	Table 1. What do you think of entrenchments as a way to autonomy?	Count	Percentage
1	Entrenchments and barricades strategy is wrong	92	67.6
2	Autonomy cannot be achieved this way	81	59.5
3	Entrenchments are result of intractability of politics and need for self-defense	32	23.5
4	Entrenchments are planned action by the PKK; they may succeed	15	11

2.1. The Entrenchments and Barricades Strategy is Wrong

Participants mostly believed that establishing autonomous units by forming entrenchments and barricades in urban areas was wrong. This could lead to an endless cycle of conflict between the PKK and security forces. It did not make sense that the PKK dragged its war strategies into urban areas after an election victory and that the organization was more concerned about the interests of other countries that wanted to trouble Turkey rather than fighting for the rights of Kurds. Some participants believed the organization wanted to repeat their achievements in Şengal and Kobani in Turkey. That is why they are applying this strategy right now. According to participants, another point that misled the organization was the demonstrations held in southeast Turkey in October 6-8, 2014 in support of Kobani. They stated that the organization considered gains in Syria and mass participation in the October 6-8 demonstration as signs of a possible urban revolt; however, people did not support this move.

> We cannot have a state within a state. If they were to declare autonomy, then they could have been in favor of the presidential system. It means there is a conflict of interests. The operations and curfews are horrible. People are hurt the most. People are hungry, unemployed and poor. This is not how you fight for your rights. If you want to fight for your rights, go to Hatay and entrench over there, you will see what will happen (Fatma, 43)!

> In the Southeast many cities and districts are like Syria. In cities, houses, workplaces, the roads are all ruined. There are entrenchments on the roads and an armed conflict is continuing on both sides of the entrenchments. This entrenchment policy hurts the people of the region the most. This brings more tears, suffering, deportation and exile rather than freedom. It looks hard to achieve autonomy by bringing the war into urban areas, because neither the government nor the locals know what autonomy really means. Right now people are just watching what is going on in fear and it is very likely that they will choose sides depending on who gets more powerful. It is not enough to form entrenchments in order to declare autonomy; the support of people is what matters most (Fuat, 27).

2.2. Autonomy Cannot Be Achieved with This Strategy

As cities turned into battlefields with the actions of the YDG-H, the situation gets more worrisome with regard to hopes for another peace process. Another period of violence means death, deportation, economic crisis and psychosocial losses for Kurds. Many participants expressed that this situation is not appropriate for establishing self-governing units, which means autonomy.

Some of the participants did not know the meaning of "autonomy." Interviews with YDG-H members and observation of the organization's documents and public releases show that no clear pattern exists. During the fieldwork, most of the participants mentioned this situation often and stated that they did not want a form of governance that they did not know anything about. Participants also criticized the organization for having the self-governing units force their own agenda on people. In order to apply self-government, people should accept it and Turkish people should be convinced of the idea. We cannot say "I did it and it is done," that does not represent general Kurdish public opinion. Similar statements can be seen on another participant's statement.

> Autonomy is considered to be a "factual status" universally. I mean it means that the central government gives away most of the authority to the local government constitutionally. For that reason, autonomy cannot by its nature be declared; it can only be obtained via an agreement. Therefore, if autonomy is required, democratic channels should be used. It is easier to apply democracy in our country today compared to the past (Melik, 24).

> The PKK started a process thinking people would be supportive just like in the Kobani incidents. Right now the organization is stuck inside its own entrenchments and has taken lots of losses. Therefore, autonomy is not possible this way. And it is not logical. It is not parallel to the will of people. It is not realistic. It is not possible for the organization to win a war when people pay the cost instead of them (Azad, 41).

2.3. Entrenchments Are Result of Political Deadlocks and Need for Self-Defense

Statements of the organization and the DTK show that people are entrenched in order to protect themselves from attacks by security forces. Although this rhetoric of the organization is not completely correct, there is some truth to it. Ten participants supported this idea. Participants who identified themselves as socialist, PKK or HDP supporters from different age groups and genders stated that these entrenchments are troublesome for people, but the state's attitude caused this situation. Some of these participants expressed their thoughts, whereas some only said, "There is no other way, the state keeps making excuses for not resolving this."

> Those who formed the entrenchments are the people who are trying to protect themselves from bullets and bombs. It is not just the PKK that enters civilian districts with armored cars, massacres people and kills children for leaving their houses (Zülküf, 24).

> Entrenchment policy aims for self-protection from the government and police forces for people living in the region. I believe it aims to prevent extrajudicial punishment and torture (Şerif, 23).

> Many actions of the YDG-H that seem not to be accepted are precautions that aim to protect people. At this point the YDG-H's actions can be considered as a step toward bringing the autonomy theory into practice. These actions aim to protect people from state terrorism and make the idea of autonomy common among people. From this perspective I believe the YDG-H's actions are appropriate and necessary for the self-defense of a suppressed people (Barış, 23).

2.4. Entrenchments are Planned Actions by the PKK and They May Succeed

A group of participants, regardless of whether they supported the organization, stated that the entrenchment policy should not be underestimated. They believed that despite lack of public support for their actions, the organization has been successful in many ways. A participant who had a past with Revolutionary Democratic Cultural Association (DDKD) has followed the PKK since the day it was established and opposes violence, and stated that the organization got stronger by always forming strategies calculating the state's "wrong moves" and blaming "uncontrollable," "agents" and "dark forces" for its own mistakes. This participant and others who were on the same page pointed out that if the state keeps fighting with the organization in urban areas the people may side with the PKK over time. Participants stated that it is not easy to end urban wars, and some statements by government officials, such as "we will clean all terror-related things in those districts house by house" are provocative.

> I think the entrenchment policy should not be underestimated. The PKK is not naive enough to think they will win an urban war against the state. However: (1) They started to convey the idea that the PKK is winning. For them, burning cities and destroying buildings is just a step toward victory; (2) By dragging the war to cities, the PKK nullfied the state's war experience that was gained in the mountains. The PKK created a space of war in the state's blind spot (Nuri, 44).

By dragging the war to urban areas, the organization knew that security forces would commit human rights abuses. That way they had another channel for making the Kurdish issue a global concern.

> No, autonomy cannot be achieved by forming entrenchments. The PKK also knows that. But I believe they are trying this in order to grab attention. I am sure they knew that this would be the state's attitude, but I do not think they knew the people would think this way. As a consequence of the state's violent actions, people reacted by embracing the cause. I think we are on an irreversible path. I believe autonomous units will be established, not directly but indirectly, due to the state's attitude. Moreover, I believe in the future they will be established by the state itself (Seyhmus, 27).

> It's partially possible. Entrenchments were dug in narrow alleys such as Bağlar and Sur in Diyarbakır. Even during normal times it is hard for a car to enter these neighborhoods, and during war it is impossible for police and military forces to enter and retake these neighborhoods from the PKK. However, it is necessary to deliver military equipment and capture those who have been involved in this

war. We do not want anyone being killed with bullets of police or soldiers. Just capturing. If those regions are not cleaned as soon as possible, we are afraid that these harsh state policies will continue, war will affect a larger area, autonomous units will be established and even worse scenarios will take place (Rojda, 22).

3. The Position of the State and the Government About the YDG-H's Arm Buildup and Entrenchment Campaign

After conflict began in June, the public was asking about how and when the entrenchments and barricades were built and arms were brought into the region. On this subject, participants mainly focused on three points (Table 3):

	Table 3. What do you think of the policy of the state and government during the time when entrenchments were dug and arm buildup took place?	Count	Percentage
1	The state should not have let this happen, it was a mistake	69	50.7
2	The state knew allowed this in order to drag the PKK into war	29	21.3
3	The state/government did not want to hurt the peace process	12	8.8

3.1. The State Should Not Have Let It Happen, It Was a Mistake

Most of the participants believed the state made a mistake by not taking precautions while the PKK entrenched and stored arms.

High-level government officials stated that during the peace process they knew about all the actions of the PKK but they did not do anything for the sake of the process. Some officials stated that this situation was under the control of the governors and the government did not provide them a directive to target those actions and therefore put the blame on bureaucracy. Those who said that the government made a mistake explained the situation differently. Some mentioned negligence, whereas others said that the government was relaxed on this matter because they believed they would control Ocalan and Kandil and would deal with any type of upheaval. Another explanation is that the government abstained from carrying out operations prior to elections to suppress the perception that there is a terrorism problem. Moreover, there were participants who criticized the state for letting the PKK - an enemy of 40 years - to drag their war into the cities.

> I am not sure if the state is paying for being naive, or as is being said, it is the governors' fault for not taking any action in order not to damage the peace process. I think they both do not make sense. I am sure this information reached the government via MIT [the National Intelligence Organization]. In this situation either the government was expecting this or assumed they would keep the organization at the table by forcing the Öcalan faction. No matter what the reason is, we are facing a big problem (Azad, 41).

> The PKK has been hiding weapons since the beginning of the peace process, not just now. They moved from the mountains into the cities. The state is responsible

for this. While the PKK was carrying all those weapons and bombs into the cities, where were the police and soldiers? We do not know if they said "We are in a peace process, let's not see what is going on and live happily." For instance, everybody knows that the Sur district is the PKK's ammunition storehouse. The government could have controlled this region without attracting too much attention. How did the PKK get stronger? Why did they let it happen? The state should ask these questions itself. The PKK is now uncontrollable and they have extraordinary support from every occupation: teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc. The state should improve its rhetoric and attitude and seek ways to establish order without harming and by embracing everyone. If neither side gives up on this attitude, this war could go on for years. The PKK was in the mountains and at the borders in the past. Right now they are right here. It shows how they got into the inner parts from the border within three years (Rojda, 22).

"The state took part in crime by staying silent and letting the PKK be armed" (Mehmet, 34), and there were other participants who agreed. On this matter, a participant who identified himself as religious and Zaza stated that he cannot forgive the state for making this mistake after experiencing the October 6-8 incidents.

> The state allowed the PKK to gain strength by not taking necessary precautions. As was seen in the October 6-8 incidents, they allowed the region into the hands of the PKK. It is not something you can just say "We trusted them, what can we do" (Welat, 25).

According to some participants, the state underestimated this organization in the beginning and believed they would be able to control the PKK with police and military power. However, after realizing this mistake, it was hard for the state to win against the PKK.

> When the PKK stored arms, laid mines and formed the latest entrenchments, the government was aware of everything. However, instead of paying attention, they spent all their energy on elections, the presidential system, and the parallel state that they declared was terrorists, and silencing opponents. They also believed that they would finish the PKK's actions via technological means. It does not matter if there is a presidential system, there is no change in actions. Entrenchments started to be formed right after the process was over. However the state/government did not intervene (Sidar, 33).

3.2. The State Allowed This in Order to Drag the PKK into a War

Participants who could not explain the state's permissive attitude toward the PKK and who were supportive of the PKK said that the state did this in order to drag the PKK into war. There are two explanations here: Firstly, the state did not want to grant Kurds their rights because of mental and political obstacles. As the situation turned grave, they created an environment of conflict and said "They were getting ready for a war while we were negotiating." Those who thought this way considered building of new police stations and fortifying old ones, and passing the new security bill as a sign of war preparation. Second, after the June 7 elections the government aimed to start a war in order to win the votes nationalists in Western cities, which would hurt the HDP's overall votes and drag the PKK into a new war.

> The state built new police stations on the borders and brought military equipment. That is why the process ended insincerely. The state needed an excuse to end the process and dragged the PKK into this (Şerif, 23).

3.3. The Government Did Not Want to Hurt the Peace Process

It is known that the president and prime minister knew about developments in the region but did not take action for the sake of the peace process.

> The government did not want to sabotage the process. That is why they did not do anything to them. The municipalities should not have allowed entrenchments (Ahmet, 70).

Some of the participants stated that the government/state and the organization came to an agreement on autonomy and this ongoing war is a "planned war." They said that it is impossible that the government did not to know about the actions of the organization, given all their experience and intelligence, as well as the warnings of people, and they believed that this is a step toward autonomy.

> My observation is that the state does not intervene while they form barricades. They intervene once the barricades were formed. That is why I have doubts that there is something going on between the two sides. Maybe these entrenchments are part of a previously planned project that leads to autonomy (Melik, 24)!

4. Curfews and Security Operations

As the conflict expanded into urban areas, the state started to impose curfews in many towns and created secured districts in rural areas. This continued for more than a month and negatively affected socioeconomic life. Between August 16, 2015 and January 8, 2016, Hakkari, Şırnak, Mardin, and Diyarbakır being the major ones, 58 curfews were imposed in 7 cities and 19 towns. According to 2014 population data, around 1.3 million people were affected (TIHV, 2015). Participants had two main views on curfews and security operations as seen in Table 4.

	Table 4. How do you view curfews and clashes?	Count	Percentage
1	Both terrorism and operations harm civilians	120	88.2
2	Operations and curfews should continue until entrenchments and PKK presence in cities are removed	16	11.7

4.1. Both Terrorism and Operations Harm Civilians

Most of the participants stated that the ongoing long-term curfews and operations should come to an end and the parties should restart a dialogue. Participants mostly stated that "innocent, poor people are harmed most." Participants talked about the following issues: (a) Incidents taking place in cities will not end easily as Ankara assumes,

they must find a way for peace. "Peace cannot be achieved with violence"; (b) The state's way of fighting with SAT, JÖH, PÖH, and JİTEM (military special forces) along with tanks and heavy war equipment is perceived as a weakness of the state; and (c) In the 90s towns and villages were burnt with the excuse of war, right now they do the same to cities. "You cannot get a different result by making the same mistake."

> I believe with these policies the state is punishing the Eastern part of Turkey for not voting for them and rewarding the enemies of Kurds who voted for the AKP (Seyhmus, 27).

> Those who have an alternative move to other places. Those who do not have anywhere to go are stuck between clashes. Psychology of children, fathers that cannot take bread home… we are in a war (Pervin, 24).

> The region's people and merchants are affected most. The parties should resolve this issue by negotiation, not with violence. Without considering what people need, police fire at whatever they object they see, and I am not sure if I can trust such police. A mentally retarded woman named Songül was found shot in Sur. How can she be related to the organization? Curfews should end and government officials should be interested in the needs of people (Imran, 24).

"Peace cannot be achieved with violence" reflects the ideas of participants who criticized state operations. They expressed their disturbance about how the state operates heavy-handedly in cities by declaring "terrorists are in cities". Participants said that what is going on in their cities is like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel tries to justify the state's actions by claiming the existence of terrorists in urban areas, and the participants stated that Turkey should not fall into the same mistake. They also stated that despite the organization's mistakes, the rights of innocent people should be observed and a peaceful resolution should be sought.

> The state cannot have a vendetta against its own people. This sort of hatred and sense of revenge has never been experienced throughout the Republic's history. Actually this is a sign that the state is weak in the region. Having an operation with 10,000 security forces in a town is nothing but weakness. I think this is a war crime. Tanks were used as a sign of power during coup times, but right now they are used against a major component of this country: Kurds (Ridvan, 29).

> It is traumatic to see that the state declares those with whom it shook hands last year to be terrorists. I am thinking this is what is to be expected from the state. Peace cannot be achieved with violence or a sense of revenge (Naz, 27).

Those who criticized the operations usually highlighted problems between the state and citizens and tried to find deeper meanings. The state centralizes itself and makes citizens secondary and does not care about their welfare. Some participants stated that state security justifies any sort of human rights violations. If they are Kurds, it is more likely to happen.

> In this country the security of the lower and middle classes is not important for the government. If they are Kurdish it is even worse. There was a cartoon about this. It was drawn after a statement from the prime minister: " There are no civilian losses, all the dead are Kurds." Actually this is a reflection of all governments and the state's official ideology. Curfews imposed on some cities and the ongoing armed conflict have great negative impact on people. Although

> curfews and operations aim to clean the PKK and the YDG-H from the region, people are most affected. In sum, the state may be trying to help people but indeed hurting them more. Violence brings more violence. What matters is the state's research about what causes people to join the PKK and trying to find ways to establish permanent resolutions (Sidar, 33).

Participants stated that if operations continue, violence will be normalized and the state will make this region like Palestine. Again, a 90s-style "war on terror" that demolishes cities in order to get rid of the PKK will draw more recruits for the organization. Children face the conflict at its worst: They cannot go to school, they are involved in incidents, and they have nowhere else to go. Participants mentioned these points. Some participants from Diyarbakır Suriçi said their children wake up in the middle of the night saying "boom, boom".

> Why does not the state think about the Kurds in that part of the country? If these incidents were to take place in the west, even other countries would intervene. If the west experiences a water shutdown for two hours it is announced on TV. Here people are hungry, they have no hope and no one talks about this. I think the PKK is wrong, they should not have done it among their own people. Kurds suffer at the end of the day under state tyranny (Pelda, 22).

4.2. Curfews and Operations Should Continue until Entrenchments and the PKK Presence in Cities are Removed

Very few participants believed the operations should continue until entrenchments are closed and the PKK is out of the cities. They stated that terrorism and violence harm civilians, but a state should not allow such things to happen. Here is an example: "The state should do whatever it takes to protect its people and the country's unity (Ahmet, 43)." Participants also said that the operations and curfews should come to an end.

> Operations should continue and the state should not let the PKK oppress people. Once the PKK and its affiliates in cities are weakened, the peace process should resume (Mehmet, 34).

> I think curfews are necessary for our security. Violence usually comes from the PKK. They use rockets and bombs. When our soldiers use weapons, they first fire in order to warn, not directly at people (Çiğdem, 49).

5. YDG-H's Actions after June 2015

For around two years, people of this region have been aware of the YDG-H's existence. During its formation period, the PKK sometimes praised the organization and sometimes stated that they are affiliated with them. However, we should keep in mind that it is impossible for such an organization to be formed without the knowledge of the PKK, and also the organization had a close relationship with the PKK after the June 7 elections.

When the youth organization was first established, armed conflicts took place in regions with high poverty levels with drug dealers, sex workers, dirty money and mafia

structures [9]. This organization was created by youths in order to protect their neighborhoods and had no connection with mountain-based organizations. We realized that our participants in Diyarbakır Suriçi were from neighboring cities. When the conflict started, the common belief was that this organization formed to be supported by the PKK. When asked about this organization, our participants talked about two major points:

Table 5. How do you view YDG-H's actions since June 2015	Count	Percentage
1 They disadvantage Kurds most, including the PKK and HDP	85	62.5
2 They protect people in the face of political deadlock	44	32.3

5.1. They Disadvantage Kurds Most, Including the PKK and HDP

Participants believed the actions of the YDG-H are harmful and dangerous for Kurds. They believed this organization grew larger by including drug addicts, tramps, and uncontrollable youths, which is problematic for both the organization and the people. Therefore, many of them stated "The YDG-H harms Kurdish people" and "These types of approaches distance Kurds from the HDP." A participant said, "I believe the actions of the PKK destroy the hopes the HDP created" (Mehmet, 34). Another participant also said:

> This is banditry. Burning schools and cars, damaging construction vehicles that serve the region, sabotaging tourism and investments, and most importantly, leaving children orphaned, show that YDG-H members are thugs (Mesut, 55).

> Oppressing people, making them abide in fear, killing those who disagree, preventing any help for people, blaming the state for any kind of crime or death. These actions by the YDG-H are like the state's policies in the 90s (Azad, 41).

Participants stated that the organization would only gain hatred by victimizing innocent people and dragging the war into cities. Peace should be sought democratically, and this new development that coincides with the HDP's historic victory brings up the question of whether it benefits Kurds, Turks or Turkey's neighboring countries.

> It is not clear who benefited by the YDG-H actions after June 7. Why? In the June 7 elections the HDP won a victory by getting 13% of the votes. If there is a political success, then why did the armed conflict restart? If the conflict had not restarted and the peace process had continued, wouldn't the HDP increase its votes above 13%? I am thinking, if everything is going well for them, then why did they start an armed conflict. There are question marks on who benefits from this conflict. I do not think anyone can find a logical answer to this. I am not supportive of any action that materially and morally affects people negatively (Fuat, 27).

> If an individual, a young person, or a kid is poor and lacks education, violence becomes his occupation, his hobby. I think the YDG-H is the most dangerous threat to Turkey right now, because these people have nothing to lose. In my opinion, as long as the youths of the east are not given opportunities that will

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[9] If checked online, it will be seen that news about the YDG-H in 2014 and 2015 mostly took place in local and national media. Some of them have been subject to legal inquiries.

> ameliorate their financial situation, the YDG-H will increase in number day by day and being part of this organization will be their full-time job (Rojda, 22).

Participants stated that the organization is usually stronger in poor neighborhoods among young people who cannot hold on to life. A participant who took an active role in the party and the organization said that the members of this organization first attracted public attention via operations on drugs, thievery and usury, and also added that at that time he considered the YDG-H to be a morally good organization. However, mafia groups started to control this organization and the members of the organization started to disturb people over time, which made him change his mind about the organization.

It is known that in places that have a dominant culture of poverty, illegal actions become a part of daily routine. In such places a powerful protest culture and possible dislike of the government exist, and security forces and religious leaders can become dominant (Lewis, 1961). As entrenchments are formed in poor neighborhoods, it is not hard for the organization to find members. According to participants, more people may join the organization if operations continue.

5.2. They Protect the People in the Face of Political Deadlock

Despite their reservations with regard to the YDG-H's actions, a significant number of participants stated that political deadlock helped the organization justify their actions. Some said that they logically found the existence of this sort of organization necessary, but they have made mistakes in implementation and their mistakes harm the Kurdish movement. Some believed that the organization protects Kurdish people from the "attacks of the state."

The HDP and the DTK stated that they consider the YDG-H and entrenchments as a means of self-defense (IMC 2015). Therefore, even though the HDP received around 70% of the votes in the observed region (once Şanlıurfa is excluded, the rate goes above 80%), it is obvious that the YDG-H and entrenchments are not supported by people. A few participants who were actively involved in the DTK and are still significant opinion leaders stated that despite reflecting the opposite in the media, the organization's leaders are not supportive of the YDG-H's actions and entrenchment policy.

> I do not think the PKK's YDG-H move harms the HDP. Today people are furious at the PKK, but if we have elections tomorrow the results would not change. Because some people live in rich districts that are far away from the troubled neighborhoods and are unaware of what people are going through. Moreover, the PKK created its own "epistemic community" and shares information with people within its own ideology with its own media tools. It combines news and information with its own ideology. Therefore, for those who follow their media channels, entrenchments are a matter of rights and justice (Nuri, 44).

There were participants who tried to explain the organization's entrenchment strategy differently. They stated that the establishment of autonomous units was stated in the KCK contract and other declarations, but it was supposed to be achieved via democratic means, not with violence.

> Entrenchments are a reflection against ongoing violent policies. "Autonomy" is a subject to be discussed theoretically. I think at this point the application of

YDG-H ideas is wrong. Autonomy can be achieved via political negotiation, not with arms. Entrenchments are the most likely outcome of a war that has expanded into urban areas and a peace process that has ended. Because Mr. Öcalan stated previously that "if this process fails and if the Kurdish people are manipulated and stalled, a war will start, which even I cannot end" (Ridvan, 29).

6. Concerns about the Length of Security Operations

Participants predict what might happen if operations continue: (1) Radicalization may increase among youths in the region; (2) Turkish-Kurdish differences may become more visible; (3) People will lose hope and the region will become like Syria and Palestine; (4) The PKK may become more powerful (Table 10).

	Table 6. What will be the effects of lengthened security operations and curfews on Kurds	Count	Percentage
1	The region may become more radicalized	33	24.2
2	The Turkish-Kurdish disintegration may deepen	26	19.1
3	People may lose hope in peace and the region may become like Syria and Palestine	19	13.9
4	The PKK may become more powerful	8	5.8

Some participants expressed other ideas. They believed that this situation will not have an effect on Kurdish society. These participants were the ones who believed that the "operations should continue until entrenchments are closed and the PKK is over". A Kurdish participant who is over 60 years of age and identified himself as religious believed there will be no separation between Turks and Kurds, but that is what the organization wants.

> There will be Kurdish-Turkish separation. This rhetoric makes everything easier for the PKK. This is their perception of it. They expand the idea among foreign countries that the Kurdish people do not want to live together with Turks in order to achieve their desire for autonomy (Veysi, 65).

There were also participants who reacted to entrenchments as well as the state's operations. Those who were trying to be neutral the quote "We are against the PKK entrenchments and the state`s response to the entrenchments with tanks and 20,000 solders" is very descriptive.

6.1. The Region May Become More Radicalized

Participants were concerned that as civilians continue losing their lives because of the state`s operations people will hate the state more every day. Operations may be perceived as positive in the Western parts of Turkey, but among Kurds they create doubt and frustration. Trusting their experiences, some participants stated that if this situation continues in cities, the organization may get an increasing level of support among people,

or at least young people who are already in favor of them may become more radicalized and join the organization`s combatant group. It was a common belief that the imposed curfews convey the idea that "There is a war going on," which triggers violence.

> If this situation continues everything may become worse. If violence continues and civilian deaths continue, the mistakes of security forces continue, the PKK will become stronger in the region. Let`s assume 75% of the population are in favor of the PKK, and people are angry because of the entrenchments, so it drops to 50%. The core of the organization is 10%. If the situation continues, it will become 25%, which will create a big problem for the state. The organization already owns a strong media and an online network, so it can recover its losses easily. But how is the state going to regain the radicalized youth? The state is tricked (Murat, 45).

> Forming entrenchments and the presence of armed individuals behind the entrenchments would obviously force the state take action. So how was the state supposed to solve this with soft power, with dialogue? Of course this was an important option, but unfortunately they did not think of it. By imposing curfews, they created a perfect atmosphere of war. This is an absolute political failure and lack of consideration about what will happen in the future. Since the state made the same historic mistakes, they are confined to failure (Fuat, 27).

> The YDG-H is the team for a possible upheaval. The PKK is aware that the way the YDG-H fights is not professional, but they still keep them close in order to minimize coexistence and deepen polarization. Once someone from the YDG-H is killed, that family loses trust in the state and they become the state`s enemy. Since they do not perceive the state as their state, they will get closer to the PKK. In sum, the YDG-H`s actions are in accordance with those of the PKK, but it is not possible to say that they are professionals (Sidar, 33).

Based on our field research and previous observations, the PKK always calculates when the state will use violence and how they can draw people to their side. According to the participants' answers, it is likely that the marginal wing of the organization will grow if the operations continue. Given the cities in the region have lower average age compared to the rest of the country and the organization has strong channels of communication, the level of marginalization and recruitment for the organization is likely to increase in the face of civilian deaths, provocative rhetoric by politicians, graffiti by security forces, and hostile treatment of deceased members of the organization.

6.2 The Kurdish-Turkish Disintegration May Deepen

There were participants who stated that Turkish-Kurdish disintegration may become deeper if operations continue. They believed that Turks are always silent about the injustices inflicted on Kurds and try to foster unity by merely saying "We are brothers." It is a commonly held thought that the deaths of civilians, soldiers, police officers and PKK/YDG-H members will increase the level of hatred and revenge among people.

A participant who identified himself as a religious Kurd who is supportive of the state, and who supports Kurdish rights passionately, stated that if the process continues with armed conflict, Kurds who are in favor of peace and coexistence with Turks may become marginalized. He believed developments in Rojova created a sense of nationalism among

Kurds and the organization's media uses this, as well as the civilian deaths, to influence youths. People who had no affiliation with the organization in the past started to join the organization, or they became more confused during this time. Participants believed violence in the region will negatively affect other regions of Turkey as well.

> By bringing the war into cities, the PKK had an opportunity to draw their sympathizers into the combatant group. Groups that came from the mountains united with the thugs among YDG-H members. Back in the day, the organization had to convince youths to join wars and train in the mountains for a long time. Right now kids see everything and all they have to do to join the war is go two blocks away. If war continues, youths will get used to violence, violence will be normalized, and more people will join the PKK. This has already been the situation since Kobani. Another threat is that people will lose trust as the state oppresses them more and this process continues. Consequently, youths will consider joining the groups in the mountains. This oppression will bring a Kurdish-Turkish conflict and those who support coexistence will become marginalized (Nuri, 44).

> The state punishes the entire society for a guilty group. This is the reason why Kurds came to the verge of a breaking point from Turkey. If violence continues there may be an irreparable separation between Turks and Kurds. Both the state and the PKK should stop acting this way (Ibrahim, 38).

The bombings in Şanlıurfa/Suruç and Ankara and the following developments increased the level of anxiety among Kurds with regard to verbal and physical attacks. It also created a sense of bitterness for Kurds that among Turks there was no significant reaction to civilian deaths. A young woman (27) said, "I do not want them staying silent while people are dying after saying that we are brothers." Another participant who identified himself religious and takes active role in the Kurdish political movement said:

> I am upset that curfews are imposed and people die in the East and Southeast and their bodies stay on the streets for days. It is sad to see that civilians in the West show no reaction to this. This is a very serious situation. This can even lead to division (Özgür, 38).

6.3. People May Lose Hope In Peace and the Region May Become Like Syria and Palestine

Another concern expressed by participants was that if the armed conflict continues and the number of deaths increases, people will lose hope for peace and the region will become like Syria and Palestine. Those participants were usually the ones who identified themselves "neutral" Kurds and they believed that the state's way of taking the organization out of cities may be catastrophic.

Participants who believed conflict in cities will not end easily shows that the situation in small districts like Sur, Silopi, Cizre has not ameliorated despite all the efforts of security forces for the last two months. The strong belief was that a solution is not possible with heavy military operations, as is mentioned in the statements of officials; "If all the PKK/YDG-H members are killed," there will be a sense of revenge among Kurds and more people will join the organization and this will make the cities a permanent location of war.

The state says that the operations will continue until the region is cleared of all terrorists, but they are mistaken. Let's make a basic calculation. You killed 1,000 PKK members and 200 civilians in Sur, Silopi, Cizre and Nusaybin. Of course, soldiers and police officers are also our children, but I will say something else. The 1,200 people who were killed were all Kurds, and each person had around 50-100 visitors for their funeral. Sometimes it may even have exceeded 200, but let's talk about averages. This makes around 120,000 people. The state says those who fight are Russian, French, uncircumcised. Kurds will not listen to the state, they will look at who is in the coffin. The state has to understand this; every death equals at least 3 to 5 people who will go into the mountains. The organization sees and calculates this, but the state cannot. Now that you have been fighting for the last 3-5 months, let's say you cleared the cities, will you be able to say let's reconcile, dear Kurds. Can you achieve peace over this blood? (Nuri, 44)

Entrenchments are all over the region so we can no longer consider it local. Therefore it will have bigger consequences. If the state increases the level of suppression and violence, the other side will do the same. If this process continues people who lose their lives, homes, properties, and most importantly who lose their country will not trust the state again (Metin, 44).

Violence should come to an end as soon as possible. If not, our country will be worse than Syria. The government should give up on its violent policies because the atmosphere is convenient for foreign powers to separate Kurds and Kurdistan from Turkey (Ibrahim, 38).

Participants over middle age who feared that the violence will bring another wave of violence did not want the state to fall into this vicious cycle. They pointed out that heavy armed conflict that takes place in cities will cause more deaths, which will create a group that wants revenge. They stated that the armed conflict can end if the state restarts negotiations and tries to restore the region.

It is clear that people in the region fear becoming like Syria or Palestine. A young woman stated that the PKK's actions "leave the region solely and a place of war like Syria" (Jiyan, 27). According to participants, the state can prevent this situation by "granting the rights of Kurds" as a response to the organization's "violent" attacks.

6.4. The Organization May Become Stronger

When participants were asked, "What will happen if operations and curfews continue?" they responded that the PKK will benefit from this situation and be stronger in the next peace process.

The PKK is aware that they cannot gain autonomy by entrenchments. However, with entrenchments they aim to deepen polarization among Turks and Kurds and minimize their common values. Moreover, the PKK aims to attract global attention with entrenchments and wants the world to focus on the region where Kurds live and realize human rights abuses. The PKK aims to get stronger for another peace process. By being affiliated with the YDG-H, the PKK aims to train more qualified people for future projects (Sidar, 33).

> Yes, people are furious about the actions of the YDG-H, but they are also furious at the state. The fact that they are furious at the PKK does not mean "I want to get rid of you." They still support the PKK. That is what Turks need to understand (Sultan, 28).

According to participants, the continuing operations, civilian deaths and deaths of organization members may help the PKK spread propaganda over a larger area. Based on our previously conducted research in the region, we can say that deaths cause an increase in people joining the organization and provide a sense of belonging, specifically among close relatives and friends. Therefore the operations are not enough to finish the organization with regard to the number of members. The organization will keep growing with people who suffer from losses and want to get revenge.

7. Going Back to the 1990s?

The resumed armed conflict in the region brings back memories of 90s, which were full of terrorism, violence, and unsolved murders. The 1990s are the symbol of tragedy for Kurds question, so "Are we going back to the 90s?" recently been asked often. We asked our participants this very question and received three main responses:

	Table 7. Are we going back to the 1990s?	Count	Percentage
1	We are moving to that direction	66	48.5
2	Today is worse than the 1990s	38	27.9
3	The 1990s were far worse than today	24	17.6

7.1. We Are Moving in That Direction

Participants who said "We are not yet in 90s, but we are moving in that direction" and "I do not think the situation is worse" also believed that if violence continues the situation will become like the 90s, where we experienced unsolved deaths. Participants frequently stated that bombings, murders and "secrecy" in court decisions increase the level of concern. Deaths create a sense of insensitivity in the community as well as a basis for separation of the people.

> We are definitely about to experience more serious traumas than 90s. People are insensitive toward deaths. We do not even remember how many massacres took place recently. While we are upset about something, new incidents happen. People cannot stay in crowded places, and hesitate to join demonstrations. As an individual who experienced the 90s as a child, I can say what we are going through today is like the 90s. People are getting more distant every day. We are almost happy to hear that someone from the other side has died. This is dangerous and separates people from each other (Fuat, 27).

Participants clearly stated that the situation will get worse than the 90s if armed conflict continues. Operations carried out in urban places, hearing gunfire, and deaths make

people more concerned. It should also be noted that mass media tools increase the level of concern.

7.2. Today is Worse than the 1990s

Bombings, murders, entrenchments and operations that have been going on since June 2015 have created a sense of concern like "We are reliving the 90s" or "We are moving in that direction" among participants. Some who had these concerns expressed ideas such as: (a) There were no tanks in cities back in those days; (b) I do not know the 90s, but right now it is really bad; (c) The situation is really bad, we are going towards the 90s; (d) Division is more likely to happen; (e) There is no state of emergency but there is a new implementation called a Special Security Zone[10]; (f) In the 90s, even if it was not appreciated, you had the chance of saying you were neutral; (g) We are in a worse situation than the 90s.

> Things we experience right now create a sense of concern that we are going back to the 90s. Imposing the new Special Security Zone instead of a state of emergency is a way of trying to change perceptions because both are the same concept (Mehmet, 22).

> I did not experience the 90s because of my age. But I will always remember the 2010s. In a bitter way (Rojda, 22).

> The world knows about anything at the exact moment, thanks to mass media tools. Kurds also use these tools effectively, including social media. The Kurdish community has gone through political tough times since the 90s, which are impossible for the state to control (Sidar, 33).

> The situation is worse than the 90s. At that time many families stayed neutral between the PKK and Hizbullah even if it was not appreciated. Right now whatever you say you are labeled as either a supporter of the state or the PKK. Back in the day, only the villages were this way. The rise of national consciousness and the fact that war is now dragged into the cities play a role in this. There is no gray area, you have to choose sides (Nuri, 44).

Some participants stated opinions on the murdering of Tahir Elçi. They mostly said that those who wanted armed conflict to continue committed this crime. They thought a strong character who stated the mistakes of both sides clearly would harm their interests, that is why they murdered him. Participants mostly saw the murder implying the state.

> Things that are different and worse than the 90s are being implemented. A conscious, patriotic person like Elçi was killed and this system aims to get rid of people like him while protecting those who are silent. Different from the 90s,

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[10] A State of Emergency was first imposed in Bitlis in 1984 and it became a law in 1987. Until 2002 it was imposed in different forms in the Southeast. Although a more concrete and effective way of decision-making was aimed at, uncontrollable actions also took place. A Special Security Zone was established in 1983 and refers to a zone that civilians are not allowed to enter for state security purposes. Since June 2015, 300 places in 15 cities have been declared special security zones. Areas that are declared Restricted Zones can be reached from the websites of governorates of Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia.)

the state does not accept genocide and attributes every negative action to the PKK or other organizations of the people. I think we have been living the 90s for a long time (Baris, 23).

Armed conflicts that take place in urban areas, imposed curfews and ongoing operations in towns (except Silvan) increase the level of concern. A participant who feared that the operations will last longer said, "I believe a worse time than the 90s is approaching and we will be dragged into a civil war like Syria." Specifically, the fact that in city centers heavy equipment like tanks and helicopters are being used and long curfews support the idea that the situation is worse than 90s.

Another concern mentioned during the interviews was that people living in the western part of country do not react to what is going on in the East. This has people thinking the situation is worse than the 90s.

> We are not concerned that we are going back to the 90s because we are in a worse situation right now. Since it does not affect the whole country, the western media does not cover it. But we are here, we live in it, we see it. A gunshot or a bomb is being heard in our house, not theirs (Mahat, 21).

7.3. The 1990s Were Far Worse Than Today

Participants who said that they did not think the terrorism and violence were worse than in the past expressed it in different ways. Some said the government would not allow such a thing, and the Kurds are more equipped and conscious than in the past. They highlighted that it is possible to publicize violence to the world via technological improvements and the world would not stay silent.

When we asked this question, we made a comparison between those who were older than 45 and experienced the 90s during adulthood and younger people. Those who were middle-aged and older stated that they had a more positive attitude towards the process compared to other age groups, and they did not believe we are going back to the 90s.

Seventeen of 27 participants over 45 years old stated that situation was the same or worse, whereas 10 said, "I do not think we are going back to the 90s." However, among these 10 participants there were some who said the situation would get worse if operations continue and the number of civilian deaths increases.

> Despite similarities with the 90s, I believe the 90s were mostly concerned with the state's attitude. Therefore, I am worried that we are going back to the 90s. However, with the latest attitude, the organization substituted the state's and JİTEM's role in the 90s (Azad, 41).

> Actually, the current situation is similar to the 90s, or maybe it's worse, but it is not exactly 90s. I think people are more conscious. In the 90s villages were being emptied, right now the cities, but I believe people will rule it out, or at least I want to believe it (Seyhmus, 27).

8. Expectations about Restarting the Peace Process

Participants were asked whether the peace process will start again and how it will start.

	Table 8. Will the peace process start again?	Count	Percentage
1	The process may start again	83	61
2	The process will not restart	50	36.7
3	The process can restart only if it is transparent and legal	35	25.7
4	There can be no peace process without the PKK and Ocalan	9	6.6

8.1. *The Process May Start Again*

Participants mostly gave positive responses to whether peace talks would restart. However, it should be noted that when they were asked about how it would restart, they gave different answers: (a) If it benefits the interests of politics; (b) When both sides are tired of fighting; (c) When Kurds are granted their legal rights; (d) When the state ends operations; and (e) When the state or Turks stop considering Kurds and the PKK as the same.

> It will restart. When the state/government feels that the power of the PKK is balanced, wise men will step in (Metin, 44).

> The process has to restart. But if you say let's kill all the PKK members and then try to negotiate, you will lose the people. Because, if you kill 500 people this equals to the sorrow of 25,000 people (Ali, 32).

"Peace is possible between conflicting groups."

> Only if the state/government makes radical changes. If they sincerely grant Kurdish rights and take concrete steps, there may be a positive result. Or else this war will continue like this. Both parties will say peace or war depending on their interests. A permanent resolution is possible if democratic rights of Kurds are granted (Özgür, 38).

> I believe a peace process may restart. If it was done once it may be done again. Of course it will not be easy because trust is damaged. Maybe different parties should try to negotiate now instead of the same parties. It would be better if the process was transparent and held through democratic channels. Yes, peace is more difficult than war, but it should be noted that no one loses in peace and no one wins in war. Thirty years of bloodshed should end. We have to see mutual sincerity (Fuat, 27).

A majority of participants wanted the peace process to restart. However, they had concerns about how a new process would take place. Participants stated that certain conditions should be met for a new process, such as ending operations, rebuilding peace, disarmament of the PKK, and concrete steps toward granting rights to Kurds. Despite the difficulty of these steps, people were still optimistic about peace.

8.2. *The Process Will Not Restart*

Many participants stated that it is not possible to have a new peace process. They said it is not possible to start a peace process under these circumstances, during violence. Others stated that the state's reluctance to grant the rights of Kurds is an obstacle to peace, while the rest believed there would be no peace without ending the PKK.

> Kurdish animosity should be stopped and tyranny against Kurds should be ended for permanent peace. You should have some empathy. Have you ever kept your child's dead body in the freezer in order to protect it from spoiling just because there is a curfew imposed? Have you even been tied to a police car and dragged in the streets? Have your children been bombed while trying to bring home bread (Roboski)? Have you ever been subject to tyranny for speaking your native language at school? If you were in this situation would you still want peace? (Zülküf, 24).

> I do not think the peace process will restart. The current government and system says whoever rises against us we will stamp out, we will enter every single house. Every action brings reaction (Şivan, 31)!

A participant who stated that a new peace process is impossible to start under these circumstances said he had no words left in his mind relating to peace. Another participant said with regards to Tahir Elçi's murder that even the peace messenger was killed, how is it possible to talk about peace. Overall it was observed that peace talks raise expectations and once they are not met they create great disappointment.

8.3. *The Process Can Restart Only If It Is Transparent and Legal*

Some participants stated that a new process would only be possible with a transparent and constitutional base. According to them, the biggest problem with the process that continued for three years was having the PKK as the only party in the negotiations and ignoring the rest of the Kurdish groups, as well as having the talks at the government's political initiative rather than a larger consensus. If this is a problem of the state, it should be handled in Parliament in a legal way and both party's political interests should be protected. These participants mostly supported the state's rhetoric and criticized the PKK passionately, but with regard to entrenchments and peace talks, they believed the state/government did wrong. Some participants also stated that if peace talks restart, it would be more affective to have it under the control of a monitoring committee.

> The majority of Kurds are conservative Muslims. But unfortunately, during 30 years of conflict, state policies pushed these people toward a Marxist ideology like that of the PKK. Unfortunately, the AKP government made the same mistake. The state and the government should learn from past lessons and should not push Kurds toward the HDP and PKK. People should be party to the resolution, or groups like HakPar, HüdaPar should be included in the process. The state should grant all rights- material and moral- back to Kurds and prioritize education in native language. The state should negotiate these rights with the HDP and PKK. Because rights granted after these types of bargains are

attributed to the PKK and HDP, and this pushes people towards them. People should be included in the peace process, not just certain groups (Abdullah, 33).

The process may restart. However, both sides should make sacrifices, and think about what is best for people. Moreover, if the process restarts it should take place in a legal and written framework (Ibrahim, 38).

Considering participants' answers to the question of "What ended the process?" it can be concluded that another process may only begin if both sides "trust each other" and "there is mutual sincerity."

Any peace process, regardless of which country we talk about, lasts long with interruptions, but eventually reaches a resolution. The fact that the armed conflict is now at climax does not mean another peace process is impossible. In order to restart the peace process, arms should be silenced first and secret talks should begin for that. If arms are silenced, there may be negotiation. But more importantly, the state should take Kurds out of the frame of conflict with the PKK. Meaning, they should grant Kurds their rights, promise and take concrete steps towards constitutional regulations and should not leave excuses for another crisis (Azad, 41).

Both parties should trust each other and reconcile in order to have a new peace process. There should be a monitoring committee that would act like a third eye, a referee. Peaceful rhetoric should be used. Policies should be in favor of equality and democracy (Deniz, 38).

8.4. There Can Be No Peace Process without Öcalan and the PKK

Participants who evaluated the peace talks from the Öcalan-PKK axis stated that a new process would not be possible without these actors. Not just marginal participants supportive of the organization thought this way. Some who considered themselves religious and statist also mentioned the same idea.

Peace has to be achieved or there will be a separation between Turks and Kurds. On the other hand, to be realistic, peace cannot be achieved with only the PKK, and it also cannot be achieved without the PKK. We cannot get anywhere by saying "All cities will be cleared of terrorists." If you do that, you cannot have peace on blood and sorrow. You would only hear those who want revenge. Cities should be cleared with peace (Nuri, 44).

The government and the PKK are the sole parties responsible for peace. As long as the government does not negotiate with Öcalan, this situation will continue and our country will be divided (Özgür, 38).

9. Suggestions to End the Conflict

The participants were also asked if they wanted to add anything else. Moreover, when the transcripts were examined, four major subjects became prominent about expectations: 1) Participants did not want officials to use provocative rhetoric and they wanted peace to be achieved as soon as possible; 2) They wanted the organization to give up on its entrenchment strategy; 3) They wanted the security forces to be more controlled and end civilian deaths; and 4) They wanted acceptance of Kurdish identity and granting the right to education in the native language (Table 13).

	Table 8. What are your suggestions to end the conflict?	Count
1	Peace needs to be brokered immediately	38
2	The organization needs to give up its entrenchment strategy	43
3	Officials should avoid inflammatory rhetoric	23
4	The security forces should avoid civilian casualties	22
5	Kurdish identity and the right to education in Kurdish need to be recognized	19

9.1. *Peace Needs to be Brokered Immediately*

Participants expect that the PKK walk out of the cities, the government end the security operations, peace brokered between the parties. The overall perception was that both sides will become more distant from peace as more people die and separation will become more visible. Therefore, participant wanted the peace process to restart. They believed the armed conflict is problematic because of the danger that both parties may become passionate about gaining victory. For that reason, participants wanted the government to end the conflict politically.

> I actually do not think there will be peace, but we have no other choice than to hope. If the state brings the military forces of the west to the east and clear the armed PKK members, another peace process may be on the agenda. But, if soldiers and police consider all the people guilty and act accordingly that would be a big problem. We see that peace cannot be achieved with pepper spray, guns, tanks. If necessary the government should ask to restart negotiations with the PKK. At least for the sake of innocent civilians and their tears. We do not want to see war equipment any more, we do not want to hear gunfire or bombs. This is new normal now. We do not want to smell pepper spray, we do not want to see kids throwing rocks. Government officials should use more peaceful rhetoric and embrace the people. The government should give the impression that they are trustworthy (Berivan, 41).

> In Diyarbakır, we have very limited space left. We are tired of the influence of gunfire, gas bombs, violence, and cries in our everyday lives. Those who have not experienced this cannot understand. Neither the state nor people in west know what we and displaced people (around 200,000 people who were forced to leave their homes due to operations) go through. If a Western city

> experienced what Diyarbakır experiences for an entire day, for even one hour, the whole country would rise up. But for us it is normal. We were forced to get used to it. It is normal for us to fear death every second. It is so sad. It consumes us. Even right now, as I am writing this, I am worried about the gunshots I hear from outside. And I do not want to write any more (Rojda, 22).

There were participants who pointed to the history of the Kurdish nationalist movement and stated that they do not want to see wars any more.

> I want peace. My grandfather, my father and I grew up in war. We do not want our kids to experience war. The state should restart what they ended and open ways for dialogue (Nureddin, 30).

> We say Islam, we say we are brothers, we say our police, our soldiers, our guerillas. They are bleeding, we want peace. May God be pleased with everyone who tries to bring peace (Zahir, 45).

Most participants demanded that authorities end rhetoric that escalates tension and conflict. "Clearing each house," "clearing the region from terrorists," "continuing the fight until the last terrorist is killed," "the HDP can only make a movie of the peace process": This kind of discourse disturbed participants. Participants also stated that the HDP's rhetoric about the president, prime minister and other government officials is also a part of the intractability of the problem. A commonly held idea was that mutual hate speeches deepen the tension in an already fragile society.

9.2. The Organization Needs to Give Up Its Entrenchment Strategy

Participants who wanted peace expected the organization to give up on the entrenchment strategy. They stated that entrenchments and barricades harm Kurdish society and make the region like Syria and Palestine, and that the organization "is committing harakiri," and therefore should end this wrong and harmful strategy.

Many participants believed that the organization's actions in cities invite heavy-handed state interventions and bring about much loss of life and property and it does not make sense for the state to offer peace unless the organization leaves the cities. Therefore, it was stated that the organization should end its actions for the sake of peace.

> If they aim for Kurdish rights- identity, language- there is Parliament and democracy. If their aim is to serve foreign powers, then they are betraying Kurds. The organization takes so many steps that cannot be explained that I have difficulty understanding whose rights they protect. Merchants are miserable, poor people are miserable, cities are forlorn and you say that you protect Kurds? Who believes that? If the organization cares about the people they should end this strategy (Neva, 23).

9.3. The Security Forces Should Avoid Civilian Casualties

Some participants said that they were disturbed by the harsh attitude of security forces. Graffitti such as "Be praised if you are a Turk, obey if you are not," "Blood touched the wolf's teeth," "It's JÖH's turn for training," "Teams of Esedullah," "Jackals are gone when the wolves arrive," as well as dragging bodies of the dead people, got the reaction

of Kurds. If the state is after those who commit hate speech and crime, they should be punished and this situation should be communicated to the public clearly and quickly.

> I think the state cannot make a distinction between terrorists and people. Bringing tanks to the entrenched regions harms people the most. We have had enough of the PKK's rockets and now we have to face the state's tanks. Both screwed the city. We are living in a time when it is not hard to frame people who are killed as terrorists. But people know who are civilians (Izzet, 22)

Some participants believed the imposed curfews are misinterpreted. Curfews are imposed to protect people, so it is understood as if security forces have the authority to shoot anyone who goes out. It is not known who among the dead is a civilian or YDG-H member, and it is also not known which gun kills whom. But despite that people blame the state for the deaths. Deaths of babies, children and elderly hurt everyone;

> Imposed curfews are so wrong. In the West, if anyone breaks the curfew they are fined (financially), however the penalty for Kurds is death (Hatice, 22)!

> The state does not care about civilian life. People living in entrenched regions are not paid any attention. Actually the situation got to this point because authorities ignored disturbance of the people. Three- month old babies die, authorities should take action consciously (Neva, 23).

> Actually the responsibility for the current armed conflict lies with the PKK for dragging the war into cities. The attitude of some security personnel, who do not have the same mentality of the new Turkey, shadows the legitimate actions of the state. This sort of attitude forms a basis for PKK propoganda. The government should be more sensitive on this matter (Welat, 25).

9.4. Kurdish Identity and the Right to Education in Kurdish Need to be Recognized

One of the most important issues of the Kurdish problem is education. Kurds believe they are one of the building blocks of this country and consider the right to education in native language as a natural right. Although this was not a topic of this research, some participants stated that this issue would play a significant role in building Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood and peace.

> "Turks and Kurds saved this country from conquest together" is empty discourse if all the rights granted to Turks are not also granted to Kurds. This is not just limited to jobs, food, etc., this is about basic rights and liberties. (1) Every nation has a right to determine its own destiny. (2) Language and identity given to people by the Creator cannot be prohibited by any authority or nation (Şerif, 23).

Another issue Kurds are sensitive about is that, although it was not asked in the interview questions, Turkishness is the only ethnicity mentioned in the Constitution and Kurdishness is ignored. Kurds demand that along with Turkish identity, Kurdish, Arab, Laz, and Circassian identities also be put in the Constitution, which will be a big step toward peace.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study aimed to portray recent developments in Kurdish society that started with the Kobani incident in Syria and became more visible with the June 7 elections. It aimed to understand public opinion on unprecedented entrenchment actions, armed urban conflict and imposed curfews.

As a leftist group, the PKK was established in 1970s as a reaction to oppression of Kurds by the state, sheiks and feudal landowners. As right-wing parties have gained power in most elections, beginning in 80s, the state started to carry out operations in the East and Southeast, violating human rights, using the PKK as an excuse. What should be noted is that the organization claims to be a defender of the Kurdish people while at the same time pushing its own style of suppression on its people. One of the major problems this study aimed to show is that the organization`s entrenchment-barricade strategy embodies the idea of "for the people despite the people."

Four points should be highlighted based on field research data.

First**, the Kurdish people hope for a new peace process as soon as possible.** The majority of participants believed that the entrenchment strategy is wrong and it harms Kurds; on the other hand, operations and curfews should come to an end, too. Imposed curfews and the armed conflict inflict psychological and social damage to people. The armed conflict also damages historical and cultural heritage of cities and causes trauma that cannot be healed, especially for children. The armed conflict, imposed curfews and the organization`s boycotting decisions worsen education and social life every day.

Based on this data, it can be concluded that people consider this issue from only one perspective, for two reasons. First, the state has long considered the Kurdish identity and its sociocultural life as a threat to the nation-state ideology. Therefore, some Kurdish people have "ontological" mistrust against the state. Second, people believe the PKK will only leave cities if the state takes the right political steps. It is challenging to see that our group of participants, who were assumed to support the Kurdish nationalist movement, believed the state could bring peace. Other participants stated that in order to bring an end to the armed conflict they tried to reach out to the organization in July and August 2013 but that did not work out since there was no chance of consultation. At this point, our evaluation is that the ongoing bloodshed will not create an environment for peace, but will rather inflame the desire for revenge. **We recommend that the state and the organization end the armed urban conflict in a peaceful manner, since it causes civilian casualties, and severe economic and cultural losses.** The PKK should realize that the armed conflict started in urban areas will not lead to any success and this situation will harm the Kurdish people and civil policies the most. Both sides should make convincing statements about civilian casualties.

Another issue highlighted during the interviews was the danger of a deepening Turkish-Kurdish disintegration if operations continue and civilian casualties rise. Participants stated that the Turkish public does not know what is going on, mainstream media do not cover it well, and the damage to the historical and social heritage is ignored. This situation may dampen Kurds' desire for coexistence. Specifically, it is believed that in the summer

of 2015, Kurds living in the western cities experienced physical and verbal attacks that damaged the brotherhood of Kurds and Turks. **In order to prevent a division between Turks and Kurds, nonprofit organizations, parties, labor unions should visit the region just as they did during the peace process, evaluate the current situation and play a constructive role in the peace process. Similarly, businessmen, women's organizations, religious leaders, and clan leaders should also work for peace and organize meetings with the media for information-sharing purposes.**

European Union representatives have not visited the region for a long time, although they used to visit and talk about the region`s problems back in the day. This attitude of international organizations creates a sense of mistrust in Kurds, specifically toward the EU. During the interviews, it was stated that the EU and UN consider Turkey as a buffer for preventing a refugee crisis, and therefore turn a blind eye to other developments. **We believe Western countries may get a new wave of refugees if there is a widespread Kurdish-Turkish conflict.** Considering that 8 million Kurds live in the western cities of Turkey, in case of a crisis it is likely that they will turn their faces to West.

Another significant point during the interviews was the opinion that radicalism may increase among Kurdish youth if the armed conflict continues, and that the armed members of the organization cannot be cleared out of the cities. Along with the conflict in Syria/Kobani, more people have joined the PKK and a sense of nationalism has arisen among Kurds. The organization may use social media to recruit more young people who would fight in cities to join. Since political views were not taken into account when organizing the sampling group, it can be said that the organization received both negative and positive reactions. Despite that, the participants drew attention to the possibility that the organization experience an increase the number of radicals among its members who believe war is the only option for resolving the conflict. **In order to prevent radicalism, the Turkish public should be told that what is happening in some districts is in the level a catastrophe.** Civil society organizations should carry out campaigns to support families who have been forced to migrate in order to keep Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood healthy.

A significant number of participants believed that the peace process ended and armed conflict started because of political interests. The government is criticized more harshly, but the leaders of the Kurdish nationalist movement are also criticized. Imposed curfews and operations may decrease people's level of trust in a political resolution. **It can be concluded that a peace process merely carried out by politicians may not be trustworthy.**

The way that participants emphasized failure of peace talks or efforts indicate a need for peace studies in Turkey. As an Irish peace expert said to the researcher of this study, "I am wondering why universities do not have a major related to peace studies in a country that has so many social problems." **In order to contribute to political efforts of peace, universities should establish peace institutes and peace studies majors.**

The century-old Kurdish problem in Turkey occasionally escalates to armed conflict. The conflict restarted in June 2015 after developments that ended three years of peace talks.

The gains of the PYD in Syria and the efforts of the autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Iraq for independence have increased Kurdish expectations from the state. It is possible that Kurds will demand more rights from the Turkish government compared to eight months ago, as their fight against ISIS is acknowledged by the US, EU and Russia. It is not certain whether the AKP will be brave enough to take the ethnopolitical steps to resolve the issue, since they have been in power for the last 14 years and show some political fatigue. Specifically, since Erdogan`s desire for a presidential system is the most important subject, the party is unlikely to take a step that would anger nationalist constituents. What empowers Turkey in this matter is the fact that Russia, Iran, Iraq and Syria did not support the idea of an autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Syria. As the US has recently made similar statements, the Kurds are concerned about this recent development.

In sum, as the Arab Spring turned into a Kurdish Spring in the Middle East, Turkey`s efforts to end the armed conflict with more violence may be a mistake in the long run. The weakening nation-state ideology, the AKP's loss of its reformist touch, Erdogan`s aspirations for a presidential system and his need of nationalist votes lessen hopes for sustainable peace in Turkey in the short run. A lengthened conflict may radicalize Kurdish youth and hinder viable solutions.

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