The Kurds' Relationship with Turks in Turkish Kurdistan: A Historical and Socio-Political Analysis (Pre-2010)

I. Introduction

A. Defining the Kurds and the Contested Geography of Kurdistan

The Kurds are an ethnic and linguistic group whose traditional homeland, often referred to as Kurdistan ("Land of the Kurds"), spans a mountainous and plateau region across the Taurus Mountains of southeastern Anatolia (present-day Turkey), the Zagros Mountains of western Iran, northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, and parts of Armenia.[1] Historically, this extensive area has been the primary area of Kurdish settlement for millennia, though the ethnic origins of the Kurdish people remain a subject of scholarly discussion.[1] Despite this long historical presence, Kurdistan has never achieved sustained political unity as an independent state.[1]

Within this broader geographical context, "Turkish Kurdistan," or "Northern Kurdistan" (Kurdish: *Bakurê Kurdistanê*), refers to the southeastern portion of Turkey where Kurds constitute the predominant ethnic group.[2] Estimates from organizations like the Kurdish Institute of Paris suggest that around 20 million Kurds reside in Turkey, the majority concentrated in this southeastern region.[2] The term "Turkish Kurdistan" is frequently employed within Kurdish nationalist discourse, rendering it a controversial and politically charged term among proponents of Turkish nationalism, who often prefer terms like "Southeastern Anatolia" to describe the region.[2]

The geographical boundaries of Turkish Kurdistan have been delineated by various historical and scholarly sources. According to the British officer Trotter in 1878 and later detailed by the Encyclopaedia of Islam, the region traditionally encompassed at least 17 provinces in present-day Turkey. These include, in the northeast, Erzincan, Erzurum, and Kars; in the central parts, Malatya, Tunceli, Elazığ, Bingöl, Muş, and Ağrı (formerly Karaköse); and further south and east, Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Siirt, Bitlis, Van, Şanlıurfa, Mardin, and Hakkari (formerly Çölamerik).[2] However, it is consistently emphasized that the precise frontiers of Kurdistan are often imprecise and have varied over time, making exact territorial delimitations challenging.[2] This region forms the southeastern edge of Anatolia, situated in Upper Mesopotamia, and is characterized by high mountain ranges, arid plateaus, and an extreme continental climate.[2] Historically, the local economy was dominated by nomadic pastoralism, particularly sheep and goat herding, supplemented by small-scale agriculture.[1]

The very act of defining "Kurdistan" and its constituent parts, especially within the context of existing nation-states like Turkey, is inherently political. While Kurdistan is geographically identifiable as a traditional area of Kurdish settlement, its historical lack of overarching

political unity [1] and the Turkish state's consistent reluctance to officially recognize the term "Kurdistan" for its own territory [2] underscore a foundational tension in the Kurd-Turk relationship. This tension revolves around a nation largely without a state, whose historical homeland is divided among several countries, and whose very toponymy is a subject of ongoing contestation. The struggle, therefore, extends beyond civic rights to encompass the recognition of a distinct territorial, cultural, and national identity, which the Turkish state has historically resisted, viewing such recognition as a potential threat to its unitary structure and territorial integrity. This fundamental disagreement over nomenclature and territorial identity forms a primary and persistent layer of the complex and often fraught relationship between Kurds and Turks.

B. Overview of the Historical Trajectory: From Coexistence to Conflict and Contestation

The relationship between Kurdish populations and various Turkic groups, culminating in their interactions within the modern Turkish state, is a long and complex narrative stretching over centuries. It encompasses periods of strategic alliances and significant Kurdish autonomy, particularly during the Seljuk and early Ottoman eras.[3] These were often followed by phases of increasing centralization by imperial powers, which sought to curtail local autonomies.[6]
The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 marked a dramatic shift, ushering in an era characterized by the denial of Kurdish identity, systematic assimilation policies aimed at creating a homogenous Turkish nation [2], and the violent suppression of Kurdish uprisings.[11]
This period of intense state pressure and Kurdish resistance eventually led to a protracted armed conflict, primarily between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), from the late 1970s/early 1980s onwards.[20] Interspersed within this history have been intermittent attempts at dialogue, political openings, and reforms, particularly in the later decades leading up to 2010.[12]
The historical trajectory of Kurd-Turk relations is thus not a simple linear progression but is marked by cyclical patterns. Periods of relative autonomy and pragmatic cooperation, often driven by mutual strategic interests, have frequently given way to intense conflict. This conflict has typically been fueled by the centralizing ambitions of the state, whether Ottoman or Republican, and the rise of competing Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms. This recurring pattern suggests that the "Kurdish question" in Turkey is not a static issue with a single origin but a dynamic and multifaceted problem that has been continually reshaped by broader political, ideological, and socio-economic currents throughout history. The persistence of this underlying tension, despite various attempts at resolution or suppression, points to deep structural issues concerning identity, rights, and governance.

C. Scope and Objectives of the Report

This report undertakes a historical and socio-political analysis of the relationship between Kurds and Turks specifically within the context of Turkish Kurdistan. The chronological scope extends from the early interactions during the Seljuk period through the Ottoman era and culminates at the end of 2009, thereby excluding developments from 2010 onwards.

The primary aim is to provide an expert-level synthesis of the political, socio-economic, and cultural dimensions of this relationship. Drawing upon a range of historical and contemporary sources, the report seeks to illuminate the complexities, continuities, and significant ruptures that have characterized Kurd-Turk interactions. It will examine periods of alliance and autonomy, the impact of imperial and republican state policies, the evolution of Kurdish identity and political consciousness, the causes and consequences of conflict, and the nature of attempts at political resolution and social accommodation.
The objective is to offer a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the historical roots and pre-2010 manifestations of one of the most enduring and critical ethno-national issues in the Middle East.

Table 1: Chronology of Key Events in Kurdish-Turkish Relations in Turkey (Pre-2010)

Date	Event	Significance for Kurdish-Turkish Relations
1071	Battle of Manzikert	Kurds, allied with Seljuks, play a role; marks significant Turkic entry into Anatolia.[4]
c. 1150	Seljuk Sultan Sanjar names a province "Kurdistan"	First official administrative use of the term for a unified Kurdish region.[3]
1514	Battle of Chaldiran	Kurdish emirates, led by Idris Bitlisi, ally with Ottomans against Safavids, leading to Ottoman control over Eastern Anatolia and a period of Kurdish autonomy.[3]
1527	Ottoman tax register mentions "Vilayet-i Kurdistan"	Indicates administrative recognition of autonomous Kurdish emirates.[2]
1639	Treaty of Zuhab	Divides historical Kurdistan between Ottoman and Safavid Empires.[7]
Early-Mid 19th Century	Mahmud II's reforms and Tanzimat Period	Ottoman centralization policies begin to erode Kurdish autonomy, leading to rebellions (e.g., Bedir Khan Beg, 1847).[6]
1846-1867	Kurdistan Eyalet established	Attempt at direct Ottoman administration over Kurdish areas.[6]
Late 19th Century	Abdul Hamid II's reign / Hamidiye Cavalry	Pan-Islamist policies; formation of Kurdish tribal cavalry, used for border

		defense and internal control, sometimes exacerbating inter-communal tensions.[4]
1908	Young Turk Revolution	Rise of Turkish nationalism, increased centralization, suppression of non-Turkish identities, sparking early Kurdish nationalist responses.[4]
1920	Treaty of Sèvres	Proposed an autonomous Kurdistan, but never ratified.[4]
1923	Treaty of Lausanne / Establishment of Turkish Republic	Redefined Turkey's borders, made no provision for Kurdish autonomy or rights, dividing Kurdish-inhabited lands; start of systematic denial of Kurdish identity.[4]
1924	New Turkish Constitution / Abolition of Caliphate	Denied Kurdish autonomy; policies of Turkification and suppression of Kurdish language and culture begin.[10]
1925	Sheikh Said Rebellion	Major Kurdish nationalist and Islamist uprising against the secular Turkish state; brutally suppressed.[11]
1927-1930	Ararat Rebellion	Kurdish nationalist uprising; suppressed, leading to Zilan Massacre (1930).[11]
1934	Resettlement Law	Aimed at demographic engineering and assimilation of non-Turkish populations.[11]
1937-1938	Dersim Rebellion/Massacre	Alevi Kurdish uprising suppressed with extensive military force and mass killings/deportations.[11]
1950-1960	Menderes Era (Democratic Party)	Period of limited liberalization, relaxation of some assimilationist policies, co-optation of traditional Kurdish elites.[19]
1960	Military Coup	State Planning Organization's "Eastern Report" (1961)

		proposed ethnic mixing; 1961 Constitution granted wider civil liberties.[11]
1969	Formation of Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları (DDKO)	Revolutionary Cultural Eastern Hearths, a key Kurdish student and intellectual organization.[19]
1970	Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP) recognizes existence of Kurds	Significant acknowledgment by a legal Turkish leftist party.[19]
1971	Military Memorandum	Crackdown on leftist and Kurdish movements; DDKO and TİP banned.[19]
1978	Establishment of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)	Marks the beginning of a new phase of armed Kurdish nationalism.[21]
1980	Military Coup	Intensified repression of all political opposition, including Kurdish groups; widespread torture and imprisonment.[11]
1984	PKK launches armed insurgency	Beginning of a decades-long armed conflict in southeastern Turkey.[11]
1985	Establishment of Village Guard System	State-armed local militias to fight PKK; highly controversial.[11]
1987	State of Emergency (OHAL) declared in Southeast	Imposed extensive restrictions and granted broad powers to security forces, leading to widespread human rights violations.[12]
1990	People's Labor Party (HEP) formed	First major legal pro-Kurdish political party; precursor to a series of parties subsequently banned.[12]
1990s	Height of PKK insurgency and state counter-insurgency	Massive forced displacement, village destructions, extrajudicial killings, and disappearances.[11]
1991	Turgut Özal lifts ban on Kurdish language	Significant cultural concession, but limited practical impact initially.[23]
1993	Democracy Party (DEP)	Continuation of suppression of

	banned; MPs imprisoned	legal Kurdish political representation.[12]
1999	Capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan	Major turning point in the conflict; PKK declares unilateral ceasefire.[23]
Early 2000s	EU accession process prompts reforms	Limited reforms regarding Kurdish language rights (e.g., broadcasting, private courses).[12]
2003	People's Democracy Party (HADEP) banned	Continued pattern of party closures.[12]
2004	PKK ends ceasefire, insurgency resumes	Renewed phase of conflict.[23]
2009	"Kurdish Opening" / "Democratic Initiative" announced by AKP government; DTP banned	Government initiative for a political solution; simultaneously, the main pro-Kurdish party (DTP) is banned by Constitutional Court.[12]

II. Foundations of the Relationship: Seljuk and Ottoman Eras

The historical relationship between Kurds and various Turkic polities, particularly the Seljuks and later the Ottomans, laid a complex foundation for their interactions in the modern era. These early periods were characterized by strategic alliances, varying degrees of Kurdish autonomy, and the initial administrative conceptualization of "Kurdistan" as a distinct region.

A. Kurdish-Seljuk Interactions: Alliances and the Emergence of "Kurdistan" as a Region

The advent of the Seljuk Turks into the Middle East in the 11th century marked one of the earliest significant interactions between Turkic groups and the established Kurdish populations of the region. These relations commenced as Alp Arslan, the Seljuk sultan, sought to traverse Kurdish-inhabited territories to facilitate his military campaigns aimed at conquering Anatolia from the Byzantine Empire.[4] By this time, the Kurds were already substantially Islamized, predominantly adhering to Sunni Islam, and their territories formed a crucial buffer zone between the wider Muslim Middle East and the Christian realms of Anatolia and the South Caucasus.[4]

Recognizing the strategic importance of the Kurds, Alp Arslan actively cultivated alliances with powerful Kurdish principalities and tribes in preparation for the pivotal Battle of Manzikert in 1071.[4] Kurdish forces are reported to have played a "vital role" in this battle, which was a

decisive Seljuk victory over the Byzantines and is considered as significant for Kurdish history as it was for Turkish history, as it opened Anatolia to Turkic settlement.[4] This early cooperation was based on mutual interests: the Seljuks required safe passage and military support for their expansionist ambitions, while Kurdish leaders likely sought stability, recognition, and a share in the spoils of war.

A particularly noteworthy development during the Seljuk period was the formal administrative recognition of a region named "Kurdistan." Around 1150, under the reign of Sultan Ahmad Sanjar, the Seljuks consolidated various Kurdish principalities they had annexed into a large province explicitly designated as "Kurdistan".[4] This Seljuk province encompassed significant historical centers such as Ecbatana (modern Hamadan), Sinjar, Shahrazur, Dinavar, and Kermanshah.[4] This marked the first instance of "Kurdistan" being officially used as an administrative term for a unified region predominantly inhabited by Kurds.[3] While this administrative unification was under Seljuk suzerainty and involved the annexation of previously autonomous entities, it nonetheless provided a degree of formal recognition to Kurdish territory and, implicitly, to a collective Kurdish presence. This Seljuk precedent of defining a "Kurdistan" would resonate through later historical periods, even as the political realities shifted. The transition from strategic alliance to administrative incorporation under the Seljuks also foreshadowed the recurring theme of balancing Kurdish autonomy with central state control, a dynamic that would profoundly shape subsequent Ottoman and, later, Turkish Republican policies towards the Kurds.

B. The Ottoman Centuries

The Ottoman Empire, which rose to prominence after the Seljuks, inherited and further developed a complex relationship with the Kurdish populations inhabiting its eastern frontiers. For a significant portion of Ottoman rule, this relationship was characterized by strategic alliances and the granting of considerable semi-autonomy to Kurdish emirates, a system that eventually gave way to increasing centralization and conflict.

1. Strategic Alliances and Semi-Autonomy: The Era of Kurdish Emirates

The Ottomans established significant and formalized contact with Kurdish leaders in the early 16th century, primarily driven by the geopolitical rivalry with the Safavid Empire of Persia.[6] The predominantly Sunni Kurdish chieftains found common cause with the Sunni Ottomans against the Shi'a Safavids. Under the astute guidance of Idris Bitlisi, a prominent Kurdish scholar and statesman, a crucial alliance was forged between Kurdish emirs and the Ottoman Sultan Selim I.[3]

This alliance proved pivotal in the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, where Kurdish forces provided essential support to the Ottomans, contributing significantly to their victory over Shah Ismail al-Safavi.[3] This victory was instrumental in securing Ottoman control over Eastern Anatolia, including the strategic city of Diyarbakır.[4] In recognition of their loyalty and military contributions, Sultan Selim I, and subsequent Ottoman rulers, granted the Kurdish emirates a special status. This included exemptions from certain taxes, military service obligations when deemed necessary, and, most importantly, a considerable degree of semi-autonomy.[4] This

autonomous system, ruled by hereditary Kurdish tribal leaders and emirs, persisted for several centuries, from 1514 until the centralizing reforms of the mid-19th century.[1] Notable Kurdish principalities during this era included Bohtān, Hakari, Bahdinan, Soran, and Baban in areas that would become part of Turkey, and Mukri and Ardelan in Persia.[1]

However, this autonomy was not absolute, nor was Kurdish political unity a consistent feature. The Kurdish principalities were often internally divided and engaged in rivalries with one another.[7] Furthermore, the 1639 Treaty of Zuhab, which demarcated the border between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, effectively bisected the historical region of Kurdistan, placing different Kurdish communities under the suzerainty of rival empires.[7] The Ottoman-Kurdish relationship during these centuries was, therefore, largely a pragmatic and strategic compact. The autonomy granted to Kurdish emirs was less an acknowledgment of inherent Kurdish rights and more a calculated measure to ensure the security of a volatile imperial frontier and the loyalty of powerful Kurdish groups against the Safavid threat. This system allowed Kurdish elites to wield considerable local power, but their ultimate allegiance lay with the Ottoman Sultan, creating a complex hierarchy of vassalage. The long duration of this semi-autonomous status, however, cultivated a historical precedent and a strong expectation of self-governance among Kurdish communities, the subsequent dismantling of which would become a major source of grievance and conflict.

2. Administrative Structures and the Question of the Millet System for Kurds

The administration of Kurdish-inhabited regions within the Ottoman Empire was characterized by a differentiated and flexible approach, rather than a uniform system. Several distinct administrative structures coexisted, reflecting the varying degrees of power and geopolitical significance of different Kurdish entities.[2]

At the apex of autonomy were the Kurdish *hükümets* (governments). These entities, such as Cezire, Egil, Genç, Palu, and Hazo as listed by the 17th-century Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi, enjoyed a high degree of self-rule. They were generally exempt from paying taxes to the central treasury and were not required to provide troops for Ottoman military campaigns. The Ottoman Porte typically refrained from interfering in their internal affairs, including matters of succession.[2]

Below the *hükümets* in terms of autonomy were the Kurdish *sancaks* (districts), also known as *Ekrad Beyliği* (Kurdish Lordship). These were governed by hereditary Kurdish rulers (beys) who, unlike the heads of *hükümets*, had defined military obligations and tax responsibilities to the Ottoman state.[2] Examples of such *sancaks* in the Diyarbekir Eyalet included Sagman, Kulp, Mihraniye, Tercil, Atak, Pertek, Çapakçur, and Çermik.[2]

Alongside these Kurdish-administered units were classical Ottoman *sancaks*, which were directly controlled by officials appointed by and responsible to the central Ottoman authorities in Istanbul.[5] This tripartite system demonstrates the Ottomans' pragmatic approach to governing their vast and diverse eastern territories.

Evidence of this administrative recognition dates back to the early 16th century. An Ottoman tax register (*defter*) from 1527 mentions an area designated as "Vilayet-i Kurdistan" (Province of Kurdistan). This province reportedly included seven major and eleven minor Kurdish

emirates, which the document refers to as *eyalet* (state), a term indicative of the substantial autonomy they enjoyed.[2] Further formalizing this relationship, Sultan Suleiman I issued an imperial decree (*Ferman*) around 1533, which outlined the rules of inheritance and succession among the Kurdistan beys, granting hereditary succession to those Kurdish emirates loyal to the Ottoman Empire and confirming their autonomy within the imperial framework.[2] The degree of this autonomy often varied based on the geopolitical significance of a particular emirate; weaker Kurdish tribes were sometimes compelled to join stronger confederations or become part of standard Ottoman *sancaks*, while powerful and less accessible tribes, especially those near the Persian frontier, maintained a higher degree of self-rule.[2]

The question of whether the Kurds were incorporated into the Ottoman *millet* system is complex. The *millet* system, in its classic formulation, primarily applied to non-Muslim religious minorities (e.g., Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Jewish), granting them autonomous powers in self-regulation, including their own religious leaders, laws pertaining to personal status (marriage, divorce, inheritance), and educational institutions.[79] While some sources suggest that Kurds, as a large and formidable group, enjoyed fiscal, judicial, and administrative autonomy and applied their customary laws [8], it's important to note that the term "millet system" was not commonly used by the Ottomans themselves before the 19th century, and its application was often flexible, loose, and hybrid.[79]

Given that the vast majority of Kurds were Sunni Muslims, like the Ottoman ruling class, their status differed from that of the non-Muslim *millets*. Their autonomy was less about religious self-governance and more akin to the special arrangements the Ottomans made with other powerful frontier communities and tribal confederations, such as in Bosnia or certain Turco-Mongol lands in Anatolia.[5] These arrangements were often designed to leverage existing tribal influence, ensure border defense, and maintain stability in strategically vital but geographically remote regions. The Ottoman state often yielded to the pressure of powerful local families in these areas, granting them hereditary prebends and significant local control in exchange for loyalty and military service.[5] Thus, the Kurdish administrative status within the Ottoman Empire was a unique blend of recognized autonomy and vassalage, shaped more by geopolitical pragmatism and the balance of power than by the religious criteria that defined the non-Muslim *millets*. This nuanced system, while allowing for considerable Kurdish self-rule for centuries, also contained inherent vulnerabilities, as the level of autonomy was contingent upon the strength of the central state and its strategic priorities.

3. Socio-Economic and Political Fabric of Ottoman Kurdistan

The socio-economic landscape of Ottoman Kurdistan was predominantly shaped by its traditional tribal structures and a pastoral economy. The principal unit in Kurdish society was the tribe, typically led by a sheikh (religious leader) or an aga (tribal chieftain), whose authority was generally firm and respected.[1] This tribal identification and the leadership of sheikhs and agas remained influential, albeit to a lesser degree, even as urbanization began to occur.[1]

The traditional Kurdish way of life was largely nomadic or semi-nomadic, revolving around the herding of sheep and goats across the Mesopotamian plains and the mountainous highlands

of Turkey and Iran.[1] Agriculture was practiced, but often on a marginal scale, secondary to pastoralism.[1] In some border areas, such as the Iraq-Turkey frontier, cross-border smuggling, particularly of goods like petroleum in later periods, also constituted a significant source of income for local communities.[2]

Politically, the Kurdish principalities within the Ottoman Empire were often viewed by the Porte as buffer zones or protectorates. Their role was not only to secure the eastern frontiers against the rival Safavid Empire but also to maintain order among other, sometimes "disobedient," Turcoman and Kurdish tribes within the region.[5] The relationship between these Kurdish emirates and the Ottoman central government was multifaceted and dynamic, characterized neither by absolute, unwavering loyalty to the Sultan nor by constant, unified rebellion.[28] Instead, it was a complex interplay of cooperation, negotiation, and periodic conflict.

Kurdish beys and emirs frequently made strategic decisions based on their own political interests and the prevailing power dynamics, sometimes shifting allegiances between the Ottomans and the Safavids when it suited their advantage.[28] For example, historical accounts mention figures like Rüstem Bey of the Çemişgezek Principality initially supporting Shah Ismail I of Persia, only for his son Pir Hüseyin Bey to later align with the Ottomans. Similarly, Emir Şeref of Bidlis switched allegiance to Shah Tahmasb during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, and Şeref Han, the famed author of the *Şerefname* (a comprehensive history of Kurdish dynasties), himself moved from Safavid to Ottoman service.[28]

The degree of autonomy enjoyed by the Kurdish principalities was not static; it fluctuated depending on the intricate balance of power involving the Ottoman central state, the authority of provincial governors, and the influence of the local ruling families within each province.[5] When the central Ottoman state was strong and assertive, it could impose greater control and limit the autonomy of the emirates. Conversely, during periods of Ottoman weakness or preoccupation with other fronts, Kurdish emirs could expand their power and act with greater independence. This delicate and often shifting balance defined the political fabric of Ottoman Kurdistan for centuries, creating a legacy of regional power centers accustomed to a significant measure of self-rule.

4. The Shift Towards Centralization: Tanzimat Reforms and Early Kurdish Resistance

While the early centuries of Ottoman rule were characterized by a relatively decentralized system that accommodated Kurdish semi-autonomy, the 19th century witnessed a significant shift towards centralization, which profoundly impacted Ottoman-Kurdish relations. By the mid-17th century, there were already indications that the autonomy of some Kurdish emirates was diminishing.[2] However, during periods of Ottoman decline, such as the late 18th and early 19th centuries, these principalities often regained practical independence.[2]

The decisive turning point came in the mid-1800s, marking a deterioration in the relationship.[6] Sultan Mahmud II (reigned 1808-1839) initiated a series of reforms aimed at modernizing and centralizing the Ottoman state. These reforms directly challenged the long-standing autonomous status of the Kurdish emirates and sought to interfere with the traditional Kurdish

tribal system, leading to early instances of Kurdish resistance against direct Ottoman imposition.[6]

The Tanzimat reforms, a more comprehensive period of modernization and reorganization that began in 1839 and lasted until 1876, further intensified these centralization efforts.[6] The Ottoman state aimed to establish a "new order" in the provinces, which included measures such as using military force for "remediation" and "repudiation" of local powers, demanding allegiance documents from tribal chiefs, exiling uncooperative leaders, and conducting censuses for more efficient tax collection.[28] These policies directly threatened the power and privileges of the Kurdish emirs and tribal leaders.

In response to these pressures, several Kurdish rebellions erupted. Notable among these was the uprising led by Bedir Khan Beg of Bohtan in 1847, a former Ottoman ally who rebelled to restore his emirate's autonomy and resist the increasing demands for centralization.[6] The defeat of the Ottoman Empire by the Egyptian army in Nizip (1839) had weakened the state's prestige in Kurdistan, contributing to widespread rebellions by other Kurdish mirs like Babanzade Abdurrahman Pasha and Mir Muhammed Pasha of Soran.[28] The Bedirhan Bey rebellion, often referred to as the "trouble of Kurdistan," required significant state mobilization to suppress.[28] Following the defeat of Bedir Khan Beg, the Ottoman government established the Kurdistan Eyalet (Province of Kurdistan) in 1846, which lasted until 1867, as an attempt to bring Kurdish territories under more direct administrative control.[6]

The Ottoman state's policies towards rebellious Kurdish tribes during this period often included punitive measures such as "banishment," "discipline," and "deportation".[9] The forced displacement of Kurdish clans from their traditional areas of residence, which had begun in the late 18th century, continued and intensified throughout the 19th century, with clans being moved from regions like Marash to Raqqa, for example.[9]

A temporary shift in relations occurred during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909). His adoption of Pan-Islamist policies, emphasizing Muslim unity under the Caliphate, led to a period of improved relations with some Kurdish groups.[4] A key outcome of this policy was the formation of the Hamidiye Alayları (Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments) in the late 19th century. These regiments, composed primarily of Kurdish tribal horsemen, were established to protect the empire's eastern borders against the Russian threat, counter Armenian revolutionary activities, accelerate the Islamization of certain areas, and, ostensibly, to prevent Kurdish nationalist movements by integrating powerful tribes into the state's security apparatus.[6] However, the Hamidiye Cavalry also became notorious for engaging in internal violence, extortions, and inter-tribal conflicts, often acting with impunity.[28]

The 19th century, therefore, represents a critical juncture where Ottoman modernization and centralization efforts directly collided with the established traditions of Kurdish autonomy. This clash fundamentally altered the power dynamics, leading to the first significant wave of organized Kurdish resistance against direct Ottoman rule. The state's response—a combination of co-optation (as seen with the Hamidiye) and forceful repression (as seen in the suppression of emirates and deportations)—established patterns of state-Kurdish interaction that would have lasting repercussions into the 20th century.

5. The Impact of the Young Turk Revolution and Rising Turkish Nationalism

The vast majority of Kurds had maintained a degree of loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, often rooted in religious allegiance to the Sultan-Caliph, until the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.[4] This event marked another pivotal moment, as the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), commonly known as the Young Turks, seized power and began to implement policies based on a more assertive Turkish nationalism and further centralization.[4]

The Young Turks' emphasis on Turkish ethnic identity and their efforts to create a more homogenous state directly challenged the multi-ethnic fabric of the Ottoman Empire and the particularisms of groups like the Kurds. They closed down various Ottoman associations and non-Turkish schools, signaling a move away from the more inclusive (though hierarchical) Ottoman system.[29] These policies sparked some of the first modern Kurdish nationalist revolts, although these early uprisings were generally small, poorly coordinated, and lacked widespread support within Kurdistan itself.[4]

The CUP government also pursued policies of social engineering. For instance, Talaat Pasha, a leading Young Turk figure, articulated policies aimed at preventing Kurdish refugees or displaced populations from continuing their traditional tribal life and maintaining their distinct nationality. This was to be achieved by separating chieftains from the common people during deportations and by forcefully sedentarizing nomadic Kurdish groups.[6] These actions were clear attempts to break down traditional Kurdish social structures and accelerate assimilation.

Interestingly, the rise of Turkish nationalism also had an indirect effect on the nascent Kurdish intelligentsia. Some Kurds, particularly those residing in Istanbul and exposed to these new ideological currents, were inspired by Turkish nationalism to begin formulating their own distinct Kurdish nationalism.[4] However, these early expressions of modern Kurdish nationalism found little immediate resonance in the more traditional and tribally organized society of Kurdistan proper.[4] Nuri Dersimi, a Kurdish intellectual of the period, later claimed that the intensified propagation of Turkish nationalism, especially after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), contributed to growing anti-Turkish sentiments among Kurds in Istanbul.[4]

The Young Turk era thus fundamentally altered the ideological underpinnings of the Ottoman state, shifting it from a multi-ethnic imperial framework towards a more exclusionary, Turkish-centric one. This ideological shift directly threatened Kurdish identity and the remnants of their autonomy, fostering the initial stirrings of modern Kurdish nationalism as a reactive force. The CUP's policies of centralization, Turkification, and social engineering laid a significant part of the groundwork for the more systematic and pervasive assimilation policies that would be implemented by the subsequent Turkish Republic. This period represents the embryonic stage of the modern Kurd-Turk conflict, increasingly defined by competing nationalisms rather than the older dynamics of imperial center-periphery relations.

III. The Turkish Republic: Nation-Building, Denial, and Early Kurdish Rebellions (1923 - 1940s)

The establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 marked a watershed moment in the

history of Kurdish-Turkish relations. The transition from a multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire to a Turkish nation-state led to a fundamental redefinition of the status and identity of Kurds within the new political entity, setting the stage for decades of tension, conflict, and systematic state policies aimed at assimilation and denial.

A. The Post-Ottoman Order: Unfulfilled Promises and the Erasure of Kurdish Identity

In the aftermath of World War I and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the Allied powers initially envisioned a different future for the Kurdish-inhabited regions. The Treaty of Sèvres, signed in 1920, included provisions that suggested the possibility of an autonomous, and potentially independent, Kurdish state in eastern Anatolia.[4] This prospect, however, was short-lived.

The Turkish National Movement, led by Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk), vehemently rejected the Treaty of Sèvres and launched the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922) to secure the territorial integrity of a new Turkish state.[4] During this critical period, many Kurdish tribes and leaders allied themselves with the Turkish nationalists.[4] This support was often garnered through promises from the Kemalist leadership of a future Turkish-Kurdish federated state, or at least significant autonomy for Kurdish-majority regions.[4] For some Kurds, the fight was also framed as a defense of the Caliphate against foreign Christian powers.[4] Indeed, Mustafa Kemal himself, in the early stages of the national struggle, acknowledged the Kurds as a distinct nation and indicated that provinces where Kurds lived would be granted autonomy.[11]

However, these promises and acknowledgments were largely abandoned following the victory of the Turkish National Movement. The Treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923, superseded the Treaty of Sèvres and formally recognized the independence and borders of the Republic of Turkey.[4] Crucially, the Treaty of Lausanne made no mention of Kurdish autonomy or a Kurdish state, effectively dividing the Kurdish-inhabited territories of the former Ottoman Empire among Turkey, Iraq (under British mandate), and Syria (under French mandate).[20]

Once the Republic was established, the Kemalist government embarked on a radical nation-building project centered on a singular Turkish identity. The earlier promises made to the Kurds were disregarded.[4] The new Turkish Constitution of 1924 explicitly denied Kurdish autonomy and laid the legal foundation for the suppression of Kurdish identity.[11] This was followed by a systematic campaign to erase visible manifestations of Kurdishness: Kurdish place names were changed to Turkish ones, the public use of the Kurdish language was outlawed, and the very words "Kurds" and "Kurdistan" were expunged from dictionaries, history books, and official discourse.[2] This abrupt reversal from wartime alliance and promises of partnership to post-war denial and suppression created a profound sense of betrayal among many Kurds and became a foundational grievance for the development of modern Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. The erasure was not merely symbolic; it was a deliberate policy aimed at constructing a homogenous Turkish nation by assimilating or marginalizing all non-Turkish identities.

B. Kemalist Ideology and the "Kurdish Question"

The ideological framework of the newly established Turkish Republic, Kemalism, was central to shaping the state's approach to its Kurdish population. A core tenet of Kemalism was the creation of a unified, homogenous Turkish nation-state, seen as essential for preserving the territorial integrity of the new republic and preventing the kind of internal fissures and foreign exploitation that had led to the demise of the Ottoman Empire.[16] To achieve this, the Kemalist leadership declared all Muslim citizens within Turkey's borders to be Turks, thereby denying, in principle, the existence of distinct ethnic minorities among the Muslim population and, consequently, any basis for external powers to intervene on their behalf.[16]

Within this paradigm, ethnic diversity, particularly from a large and geographically concentrated group like the Kurds, was perceived as a direct threat to national unity and state security.[14] Consequently, the Kurds, despite their significant numbers and distinct linguistic and cultural heritage, were officially decreed to be Turks.[14] This policy manifested in the infamous "Mountain Turk" thesis, which posited that Kurds were originally Turks from Central Asia who had migrated to the mountainous regions of Anatolia and, over time, had forgotten their true Turkish language and customs.[2] This narrative aimed to legitimize the denial of a separate Kurdish ethnicity and justify assimilationist policies.

From the perspective of the Turkish state, the "Kurdish Question" was thus not primarily understood as an issue of minority rights or cultural recognition. Instead, it was framed largely as a problem of separatism, backwardness, and susceptibility to foreign manipulation.[16] Official discourse often attributed Kurdish unrest to socio-economic underdevelopment, the influence of "reactionary" tribal and religious elites, or the machinations of external enemies seeking to destabilize Turkey, rather than to legitimate grievances stemming from the denial of ethnic identity and rights.[16] While Kemalist nationalism was often presented as a form of modern civic nationalism, based on shared citizenship, its practical application, particularly towards the Kurds, involved significant ethnic and assimilationist elements.[80] The problem, as perceived by many Kurds and later analysts, stemmed from the failure of Kemalist nationalism and the Turkish state to provide democratic cultural rights and an equal citizenship status that acknowledged and respected Kurdish identity.[80] This fundamental ideological clash, wherein the state's foundational principles required the negation of Kurdish particularity, made genuine dialogue or the recognition of Kurdish aspirations nearly impossible within the framework of the early Turkish Republic, thereby institutionalizing a relationship of dominance and resistance.

1. Systematic Assimilation: The "Mountain Turk" Thesis and Turkification Policies

The official denial of a distinct Kurdish ethnicity was systematically enforced through the "Mountain Turk" thesis. This theory, actively promoted by the state, classified Kurds as being of Turanian (Turkic) origin, asserting they had migrated from Central Asia thousands of years ago and were merely Turks who had lost their original language and culture due to their mountainous environment.[2] This narrative provided the ideological justification for a comprehensive set of Turkification policies aimed at erasing Kurdish identity and assimilating

the Kurdish population into the Turkish national mainstream.
A key legal instrument for these policies was the 1934 Resettlement Law (İskan Kanunu). This law was designed to facilitate demographic engineering by dispersing populations with non-Turkish cultures away from their traditional areas of concentration and settling individuals deemed loyal to, or willing to adhere to, Turkish culture in formerly non-Turkish (primarily Kurdish-majority) regions.[11] The explicit aim, as articulated by proponents of the law, was to "create a country speaking with one language, thinking in the same way and sharing the same sentiment".[17] The Dersim region, with its predominantly Alevi Kurdish (Zaza-speaking) population, became one of the first and most tragic test cases for this resettlement policy.[11]
Forced assimilation programs were multifaceted and aggressively pursued. They included the outright ban of the Kurdish language in public and often in private, the forced relocation of Kurdish communities to non-Kurdish areas in western and central Anatolia, and the settlement of Turkish-speaking migrants (often from the Balkans) in Kurdish regions to alter the demographic balance.[12]
Education was another critical tool for assimilation. Children of Kurdish intellectuals were sometimes brought to Istanbul and placed in special boarding schools with the explicit aim of assimilating them into Turkish culture.[78] In regions like Dersim, a more systematic approach was taken, with Kurdish boys and girls being forcibly sent to boarding schools outside their home region to be "Turkified." The curriculum in these schools focused exclusively on Turkish language and culture, and there were even plans to encourage intermarriage among these Turkified Kurdish youth upon graduation.[31] The Elazig Girls' Institute, for example, was established with the specific mission of transforming Kurdish girls into "Turkish women".[31]
These assimilationist practices were not passive or accidental; they constituted an active, state-driven project involving legal frameworks, demographic manipulation, and educational indoctrination, all aimed at the cultural and linguistic absorption of the Kurdish population.

2. Suppression of Kurdish Language, Culture, and Heritage

A cornerstone of the Turkification policy was the comprehensive suppression of the Kurdish language and all forms of Kurdish cultural expression. Following the establishment of the Republic, a 1924 mandate explicitly forbade the operation of Kurdish schools, organizations, and publications.[10] The very terms "Kurd" and "Kurdistan" were systematically erased from official discourse, dictionaries, and historical narratives.[2]
The Turkish Constitution of 1924 effectively prohibited the use of the Kurdish language in public places.[11] This was further reinforced by legislation and state campaigns. By 1930, publishing in any language other than Turkish was officially prohibited, famously promoted under the slogan "Citizen, Speak Turkish!" (*Vatandaş, Türkçe Konuş!*), which pressured all non-Turkish speakers to use Turkish in public life.[13]
This linguistic suppression extended to all aspects of cultural heritage. Traditional Kurdish dress, folklore, music, and even the giving of Kurdish names to children were forbidden or strongly discouraged.[12] The rich oral tradition of the Kurds, which had been the primary means of cultural transmission for centuries, was driven underground.[73] The development of a

modern Kurdish press and literature within Turkey was effectively stifled for decades; one source notes that only about a dozen literary works in Kurdish were produced in Turkey during a significant span of the 20th century due to these restrictions.[10] This systematic assault on language and culture was intended to sever Kurds from their heritage, break intergenerational cultural continuity, and enforce a singular Turkish national identity. The long-term impact on Kurdish cultural development within Turkey was profound, leading to what some scholars have termed "linguicide" and cultural loss.[73]

C. Kurdish Uprisings (Sheikh Said, Ararat, Dersim) and Violent State Repression

The aggressive assimilationist policies and the denial of ethnic identity by the nascent Turkish Republic inevitably provoked resistance from various Kurdish communities. The period from the 1920s to the late 1930s witnessed a series of significant Kurdish uprisings, which were met with overwhelming and often brutal state force. These rebellions, though ultimately suppressed, became defining moments in modern Kurdish history and cemented a legacy of conflict. Key uprisings included the Koçgiri Rebellion (1920, pre-dating the Republic but indicative of early tensions), the Beytüşşebab Rebellion (1924), the Sheikh Said Rebellion (1925), the Ararat Rebellion (1927–1930), and the Dersim Rebellion (1937–1938).[11]

The **Sheikh Said Rebellion** in 1925 was a major revolt with both Kurdish nationalist and Islamist dimensions.[11] Led by Sheikh Said, a prominent Naqshbandi Sufi leader, and supported by the Kurdish independence organization Azadî, the uprising was largely fueled by opposition to the Kemalist government's secularizing reforms, particularly the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, as well as aspirations for Kurdish autonomy or independence.[20] The rebellion, predominantly involving Zaza-speaking Kurds but also gaining some support from Kurmanji-speaking Kurdish tribes, spread across several southeastern provinces.[32] The Turkish state responded with a massive military campaign, including the use of aerial bombardment against rebel areas.[32] The rebellion was swiftly crushed, and Sheikh Said, along with 36 of his followers, was captured and executed in Diyarbakır.[20]

The **Ararat Rebellion** (1927-1930) was another significant Kurdish nationalist uprising, organized by the Xoybûn (Independence) league, a nationalist organization founded by Kurdish intellectuals and tribal leaders, some of whom were in exile.[20] The rebels proclaimed an independent Republic of Ararat in the mountainous region near Mount Ararat.[31] This rebellion also faced a harsh military response from the Turkish state. During this period, the Zilan Massacre occurred in 1930, where Turkish forces reportedly killed a large number of Kurdish civilians in the Zilan Valley, with estimates of the dead ranging from 5,000 to 47,000.[11]

The **Dersim Rebellion** (1937-1938), centered in the predominantly Alevi Kurdish (Zaza-speaking) region of Dersim (later renamed Tunceli), was a response to the state's intensified centralization and Turkification policies, including the 1934 Resettlement Law which targeted the region.[11] The state's campaign to suppress the Dersim resistance was exceptionally brutal, involving large-scale military operations, aerial bombings (in which Sabiha Gökçen, Atatürk's adoptive daughter and one of the world's first female combat pilots,

participated [8]), mass killings of civilians, and forced deportations. Casualty estimates vary widely, with figures ranging from 10,000-15,000 [11] to as high as 40,000-70,000 killed.[12] Thousands more were exiled from the region. The events in Dersim have been described by some contemporary observers, such as the British consul at Trebizond, as being comparable in their brutality to the Armenian Genocide.[20]

The Turkish state's response to these and other, smaller uprisings was consistently characterized by overwhelming military force, massacres of civilians, mass deportations, and the imposition of martial law and emergency rule in the eastern provinces, which in some areas lasted until 1939 or even 1946.[12] Some sources estimate that between 1925 and 1939, as many as 1.5 million Kurds were deported or massacred as part of these pacification campaigns.[10] While these rebellions were often localized, sometimes driven by specific tribal or religious grievances alongside broader nationalist sentiments, and lacked full integration or coordination among different Kurdish actors [33], they collectively demonstrated a profound rejection of the Turkish Republic's assimilationist project. The state's violent suppression of these uprisings created deep collective trauma, sowed enduring mistrust, and fueled a cycle of resistance and repression that would define Kurdish-Turkish relations for much of the 20th century. The memory of these events became a cornerstone of modern Kurdish political consciousness and a rallying point for future generations of activists and insurgents.

Table 2: Major Kurdish Rebellions in the Early Turkish Republic (1920-1938)

Rebellion Name	Dates	Key Leaders/Groups	Primary Causes/Aims	Key State Repressive Measures	Outcome/Impact
Koçgiri Rebellion	1920-1921	Alişan Bey, Alişer Bey, Nuri Dersimi; Alevi Kurds	Resistance to Kemalist centralization, demands for autonomy.	Military campaigns, suppression. Some talk of limited autonomy in Grand National Assembly afterward, but nullified by Lausanne Treaty.[20]	Rebellion suppressed; foreshadowed future conflicts over autonomy and identity.
Sheikh Said Rebellion	1925	Sheikh Said, Azadî organization	Opposition to secularization (abolition of Caliphate), Kurdish nationalist aspirations,	Large-scale military operations, aerial bombardment, martial law, Independence	Rebellion crushed; intensified state repression and assimilation policies; Sheikh

			religious grievances.	Tribunals, execution of leaders.[11]	Said and many followers executed.
Ararat Rebellion	1927-1930	Ihsan Nuri Pasha, Xoybûn organization	Kurdish nationalist demand for an independent state (Republic of Ararat).	Sustained military campaigns, Zilan Massacre (1930) involving mass killing of civilians.[11]	Rebellion suppressed; Republic of Ararat dismantled; further consolidation of Turkish state control.
Dersim Rebellion	1937-1938	Seyid Riza; Alevi Kurdish (Zaza) tribes	Resistance to Turkification policies, state centralization (1934 Resettlement Law), and military presence.	Massive military operations, aerial bombardment (by figures like Sabiha Gökçen), mass killings, mass deportations.[11]	Rebellion brutally suppressed; tens of thousands killed and exiled; region pacified and renamed Tunceli; deep trauma for Alevi Kurds.

D. The Legal and Social Status of Kurds in the Nascent Republic

The legal framework established by the Turkish Republic in its early years played a crucial role in institutionalizing the denial of Kurdish identity and shaping the social status of Kurds. A key aspect of this was the interpretation and application of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). Unlike non-Muslim minorities such as Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, who were granted certain minority rights (primarily concerning language, religion, and education) under the treaty, Kurds, being predominantly Muslim, were not accorded similar status.[80] Instead, the official position was that Kurds were "principal elements" or "first-class citizens" of the Republic, undifferentiated from Turks, and therefore expected to assimilate into the new Turkish national identity.[80]

This non-recognition as a distinct minority with specific rights had profound consequences. It meant that Kurds lacked any legal basis to demand collective cultural or political rights. The 1924 Constitution, along with a series of subsequent laws and decrees, effectively criminalized the expression of Kurdish identity.[11] As discussed previously, laws prohibited the use of the Kurdish language in public, banned Kurdish organizations and publications, and even outlawed Kurdish names and traditional dress.

Furthermore, specific legislation targeted the socio-economic standing of Kurds. A law was

passed that enabled the expropriation of Kurdish landowners, with their land often being redistributed to Turkish-speaking settlers or loyalists.[11] This not only aimed to alter the demographic composition of Kurdish-majority regions but also weakened the traditional Kurdish social structure and economic base.

To enforce these policies and maintain control, special administrative measures were implemented in the Kurdish-majority southeastern provinces. From 1927 until 1952, these regions were governed by General Inspectorates, which ruled through emergency decrees and martial law.[11] These Inspectorates had wide-ranging powers, effectively creating a state of exception where normal legal protections were often suspended. Compounding this, southeastern Turkey was designated a forbidden zone for foreigners until 1965, limiting external observation and reporting on the situation in the region.[11]

In practice, therefore, despite the official rhetoric of Kurds being "first-class citizens," the legal and administrative framework of the early Turkish Republic created a system of profound inequality and vulnerability. By denying their distinct ethnic identity, criminalizing their cultural expression, and subjecting them to discriminatory laws and special administrative regimes, the state effectively relegated Kurds to a subordinate status within the new nation. This created an environment where asserting Kurdishness was equated with separatism or treason, laying the groundwork for decades of social and political marginalization.

E. Early International Dimensions and Perceptions

The international context following World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire played a significant role in shaping the fate of the Kurdish people, generally to their detriment. The initial post-war settlement, the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), did contain articles (62-64) that provided for the possibility of local autonomy for the Kurdish areas of eastern Anatolia, with a potential path to independence if the Kurdish population demonstrated such a desire and the League of Nations Council consented.[4] This offered a brief glimmer of hope for Kurdish aspirations for self-determination.

However, the Treaty of Sèvres was never ratified, largely due to the successful resistance of the Turkish National Movement led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.[10] The subsequent Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which established the modern Republic of Turkey, made no provisions for a Kurdish state or autonomy.[4] Instead, the Kurdish-inhabited territories of the former Ottoman Empire were divided among Turkey, Iraq (under British Mandate), Syria (under French Mandate), and Iran, making Kurds a significant ethnic minority in each of these newly configured states.[29] This division, often referred to by Kurds as the "great betrayal," became a central element of modern Kurdish political grievance.

The interests of the Great Powers, particularly Britain and France, were paramount in shaping the post-Ottoman Middle East. British policy, for instance, was significantly influenced by strategic considerations, including control over the oil-rich region of Mosul, which had a substantial Kurdish population and was contested between Turkey and British-mandated Iraq. A British spokesman candidly stated in November 1919, "Even though we don't trust the Kurds, it is our interests to use them".[32] Similarly, British Prime Minister Lloyd George remarked at the San Remo Conference in May 1920 that "the Kurds cannot survive without a large state behind

them," implying a need for external patronage or control rather than full independence.[32] These statements reveal a pragmatic, interest-driven approach by external powers, where Kurdish aspirations were often subordinated to larger geopolitical calculations.

The suppression of Kurdish identity and political activity within Turkey led to the early internationalization of Kurdish nationalism. Kurdish nationalist organizations, such as Xoybûn (founded in 1927), were established by intellectuals and tribal leaders in exile, often in territories under French Mandate like Lebanon and Syria.[31] Xoybûn played a key role in organizing the Ararat Rebellion. This diaspora activism became a recurring feature of the Kurdish national movement, as repression at home forced political and cultural activities to seek refuge and support abroad. Overall, the international political climate of the 1920s and 1930s proved largely unfavorable to Kurdish aspirations for statehood or significant autonomy, as the consolidation of new nation-states in the Middle East, backed by colonial powers, prioritized territorial integrity and stability over the principle of self-determination for groups like the Kurds.

IV. Navigating State Policies and Emerging Consciousness (1950s - 1970s)

The period from the 1950s to the late 1970s in Turkey was marked by significant political and social transformations, including multi-party politics, military coups, and socio-economic changes. For the Kurdish population, these decades brought fluctuating state policies, ranging from limited liberalization to renewed assimilation efforts, and witnessed a crucial reawakening of Kurdish political and cultural consciousness, laying the groundwork for more organized and radical movements in the subsequent era.

A. State Policies in Flux:

The Turkish state's approach to its Kurdish population during this period was not monolithic, shifting in response to domestic political changes, internal security concerns, and evolving socio-economic conditions in the Kurdish-majority regions.

1. The Menderes Period (1950-1960): Limited Liberalization and Strategic Co-optation

The election of the Democrat Party (DP) under Adnan Menderes in 1950 ushered in Turkey's first genuine multi-party era and brought a noticeable, albeit limited, shift in policies towards the Kurds.[19] The overtly repressive assimilationist measures of the single-party era were somewhat relaxed. For instance, most of the ubiquitous village police posts, which had been symbols of state control in Kurdish rural areas, were abolished.[19] The General Inspectorates, which had governed the Kurdish provinces under emergency-like conditions, were officially closed in 1952, signaling a move away from direct martial rule in the region.[11]

However, this liberalization was accompanied by a strategy of co-optation. The Menderes government sought to maintain control and secure political support in the Kurdish regions by cultivating alliances with traditional Kurdish elites – tribal leaders (agas), religious figures

(sheikhs), and large landowners.[19] These elites, in turn, used their influence within the DP's party system to deliver votes in exchange for patronage, resources, and a degree of local influence, thereby reinforcing their own positions both locally and with the central government.[19] This approach represented a tactical shift from direct coercion to indirect control, aiming to integrate Kurdish society into the national political system through its traditional leadership structures rather than through forced assimilation alone.

Despite this relaxation, the limits of state tolerance for independent Kurdish expression remained clear. The "49ers incident" in 1958-1959, which saw the arrest and prosecution of 49 Kurdish intellectuals and students (some sources say 50) on charges of separatism and communism, served as a stark reminder.[37] These arrests followed the publication of a Kurdish-language newspaper, *İleri Yurt*, in Diyarbakır and protests organized by Kurdish students in Istanbul and Ankara.[37] The state's reaction demonstrated that any assertion of distinct Kurdish political or cultural identity beyond the channels sanctioned or controlled by the co-opted elites would continue to be viewed with suspicion and met with repression, particularly in light of the concurrent resurgence of Kurdish nationalism in neighboring Iraq under Mullah Mustafa Barzani.[37] The Menderes era, therefore, represented a complex phase of limited opening combined with strategic containment, rather than a fundamental change in the state's ultimate goal of integrating the Kurdish population into a Turkish national framework.

2. The 1960 Coup: The State Planning Organization's "Eastern Report" and Assimilationist Strategies

The military coup of May 27, 1960, which overthrew the Menderes government, had contradictory consequences for the Kurdish population. On one hand, the junta initiated some repressive measures: hundreds of Kurdish Alevi notables were detained in a camp in Sivas, and 55 individuals, mostly affiliated with the deposed Democrat Party and including several Kurdish Members of Parliament, were deported to western provinces.[35] There were also attempts by the military leadership to revive some of the more direct assimilationist policies of the pre-1950 period.[19]

A significant development in this vein was the establishment of the State Planning Organization (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, DPT) under the Prime Ministry. The DPT was tasked, among other things, with addressing the issues of Kurdish separatism and the socio-economic underdevelopment of the eastern provinces.[11] In 1961, the DPT produced a report titled "The principles of the state's development plan for the east and southeast," commonly known as the "Eastern Report" (*Doğu Raporu*). This report proposed strategies to defuse Kurdish separatism, notably by encouraging ethnic mixing through state-sponsored migration both to and from the southeastern region.[11] Such demographic engineering policies were reminiscent of earlier strategies pursued by the Committee of Union and Progress during the late Ottoman Empire and the Resettlement Law of 1934.[11] The report was criticized by some contemporary figures, including Bülent Ecevit, then Minister of Labor, who had partial Kurdish ancestry.[11]

Paradoxically, while the state apparatus continued to devise assimilationist strategies, the

1960 coup also led to the promulgation of a new constitution in 1961. This constitution was, in many respects, more liberal than its predecessors, granting wider civil liberties, including greater freedom of the press and the right to form associations and trade unions.[19] This unintended opening of political and civic space would prove crucial for the subsequent reawakening of Kurdish political and cultural expression in the decade that followed. The period after the 1960 coup thus highlighted a persistent duality in Turkish state policy: a continued underlying commitment to national homogeneity and assimilation, coexisting with, and at times inadvertently facilitating, periods of limited political and cultural pluralism. The southeastern region, however, remained a forbidden area for foreigners until 1965, indicating ongoing security concerns and state control.[11]

3. The 1971 Military Memorandum: Impact on Kurdish and Leftist Movements

The decade of relative political ferment and activism that followed the 1960 coup was abruptly curtailed by the military intervention of March 12, 1971, often referred to as the "coup by memorandum." This intervention occurred amidst a backdrop of escalating domestic strife, including widespread student radicalism, labor unrest, and political violence from both the far-left and far-right.[42] The military command issued a memorandum demanding the formation of a "strong and credible government" to neutralize the "anarchical situation" and implement reforms, effectively forcing the resignation of Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel's government.[42]

While the intervention was not a direct seizure of power in the manner of the 1960 coup, the military exerted significant influence over subsequent "above-party" governments. The stated aim was to restore "law and order," but in practice, this translated into a broad crackdown on leftist movements and any groups perceived as supporting Kurdish separatism.[36] The Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP), which had taken a stance on the Kurdish issue, was subjected to prosecution for allegedly carrying out communist propaganda and supporting Kurdish separatism.[42] Numerous youth organizations, such as Dev-Genç (Federation of the Revolutionary Youth of Turkey), which had been active in student protests, were targeted and eventually banned.[42]

Martial law was declared in eleven provinces, including major urban centers and key Kurdish-majority regions in the southeast.[42] This led to the proscription of many leftist publications, the prohibition of union meetings and strikes, and widespread arrests.[42] Kurdish cultural and political organizations that had emerged in the 1960s, most notably the Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları (DDKO), were banned, and many of their members and activists were imprisoned.[19]

The 1971 military intervention and the subsequent period of repression had a profound impact, thoroughly demoralizing and disrupting both the Turkish left and the newly re-emerging Kurdish movement.[36] However, as had occurred after previous crackdowns, the experience of imprisonment often served as a crucible for political education, radicalization, and the forging of new networks among activists.[19] While public political life was paralyzed, political formation, particularly for groups like the nascent "Kurdistan Revolutionaries" (the precursor to the PKK),

shifted to more clandestine settings, such as private apartments and student dormitories.[36] The 1971 intervention thus significantly curtailed the political and cultural openings of the 1960s, driving much of the Kurdish movement underground and contributing to a trajectory of increasing radicalization among some factions.

B. The Reawakening of Kurdish Political and Cultural Expression:

Despite the fluctuating and often repressive state policies, the period from the 1960s through the 1970s witnessed a significant resurgence of Kurdish political and cultural consciousness. This "Kurdish national revival" [37] was fueled by socio-economic changes, increased educational opportunities, and the limited political space afforded by the 1961 Constitution.

1. The Role of Kurdish Intellectuals and Student Movements (e.g., DDKO)

A key driver of this reawakening was a new generation of educated Kurds. Improved access to education, even if primarily in Turkish, and increased labor migration from the underdeveloped eastern provinces to urban centers in western Turkey, exposed many young Kurds to new ideas and political currents.[19] This led to the emergence of a broadly based Kurdish national movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[19]

Kurdish intellectuals, primarily students and professionals based in major cities like Istanbul and Ankara, began forming cultural clubs and associations in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[19] These early initiatives often focused on Kurdish folklore, history, and the socio-economic problems of the eastern regions. The growing political consciousness was evidenced by mass student demonstrations that took place in several Kurdish-majority cities in the summer of 1967, with significant turnouts in towns like Silvan and the major southeastern city of Diyarbakır.[19]

A pivotal organization in this period was the Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları (DDKO - Revolutionary Cultural Eastern Hearths), formed in 1969 primarily by Kurdish university students in Ankara and Istanbul.[39] The DDKO initially operated within a leftist framework, organizing seminars on Marxism and socialism, but increasingly became a forum for discussing the specific "Kurdish question".[39] They also engaged in cultural activities, such as performing short theater plays in the Kurdish language, a significant act of cultural assertion given the prevailing restrictions.[39] The DDKO received support from elements within the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP) and managed to establish branches in several cities, including in the southeast.[39]

The DDKO represented the left wing of the emerging Kurdish movement. To maintain a degree of legality, its publications and public statements often focused on the economic underdevelopment of the eastern provinces, the oppression of villagers by feudal landlords, and the brutal behavior of Turkish army units in Kurdish areas, typically avoiding overt references to "Kurdistan" or explicit Kurdish separatism.[19] Nevertheless, the formation of the DDKO in 1969 is widely seen as marking the beginning of a more distinct Kurdish nationalist left, increasingly diverging from its Turkish Marxist counterparts.[19] Kurdish student movements during the 1960s and 1970s were diverse, encompassing a range of ideological positions, from

those advocating for democratic reforms within universities to those espousing broader anti-imperialist and socialist struggles.[82]
The 1971 military memorandum led to the banning of the DDKO and a general crackdown on such activism.[19] However, the seeds of political consciousness had been sown. The period between the 1971 and 1980 military coups, though repressive, saw the clandestine emergence of more radical groups, including the "Kurdistan Revolutionaries," the direct precursor to the PKK. Political organization and ideological development during these years often took place in private spaces, such as student apartments and houses, rather than public forums.[36] This period of intellectual ferment and student activism, therefore, was crucial in shaping a new generation of Kurdish leaders and laying the ideological foundations for the more assertive and, in some cases, militant Kurdish movements of the following decades.

2. The Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP) and its Engagement with the Kurdish Issue

The Workers' Party of Turkey (Türkiye İşçi Partisi – TİP), established in 1961, became an important, albeit complex, arena for the articulation of Kurdish grievances within a legal political framework during the 1960s. As a socialist party, TİP attracted many Kurdish intellectuals and activists who saw an alignment between the struggle for workers' rights and the fight against regional underdevelopment and social injustice in the Kurdish-majority eastern provinces.[19]
When TİP first entered the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1965 with fifteen deputies, four of whom were Kurdish, its initial approach to the Kurdish issue was largely framed in socio-economic terms, focusing on the severe underdevelopment and poverty of the eastern regions.[37] This perspective was, to some extent, in line with the prevailing Kemalist view that the "Eastern problem" was primarily one of backwardness rather than distinct ethnic identity.[19] However, the presence and activism of Kurdish members within TİP gradually pushed the party towards a more explicit recognition of the ethnic dimension of the Kurdish question.[19] These Kurdish cadres argued that the issue was not merely about economic inequality but also involved national or ethnic inequality and systematic cultural oppression. This internal debate and advocacy culminated in a landmark resolution at TİP's 4th Party Congress in October 1970. The congress officially recognized the existence of the Kurdish people as a distinct ethnic group and denounced the national oppression to which they were subjected.[19] For a legal Turkish political party at that time, this was a radical and courageous stance, marking a significant moment in the public discourse on the Kurdish issue in Turkey.[41]
TİP's engagement with the Kurdish question was not limited to internal party debates. The party organized mass rallies in Kurdish-majority cities, which garnered considerable support from ordinary Kurds and were pivotal in mobilizing Kurdish political consciousness on a wider scale.[37] These rallies often focused on issues of regional inequality and democratic rights, providing a platform for Kurdish voices to be heard within the existing political system.
Despite these developments, the relationship between the broader Kurdish movement and TİP was not without its tensions. By the late 1960s, a split began to emerge, driven by the increasing radicalization and desire for greater autonomy within the Kurdish movement itself.[41] Many Kurdish activists grew disillusioned with what they perceived as the Turkish left's

reluctance to fully embrace Kurdish national demands, including the right to self-determination. They felt that Turkish leftist parties, including TİP at times, prioritized class struggle over national liberation or viewed Kurdish national aspirations as untimely, potentially divisive, or even reactionary.[19] This disillusionment led many Kurds to leave Turkish leftist organizations and seek or form separate, more explicitly Kurdish nationalist groups.
The Workers' Party of Turkey was banned following the 1971 military memorandum, bringing an end to this particular chapter of legal political engagement with the Kurdish issue.[19] Nevertheless, TİP's period of activity in the 1960s played a crucial role in raising awareness, providing an early legal platform for Kurdish political expression, and contributing to the development of a modern Kurdish political consciousness. Its ultimate inability to fully satisfy the growing national aspirations of many Kurdish activists, coupled with state repression, highlighted the limitations of working solely within the Turkish leftist framework and pushed segments of the Kurdish movement towards more independent and nationalist trajectories.

3. Underground and Overt Cultural Preservation: Language, Music, and Folklore

Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, despite periods of intense state suppression and official bans on the public use of the Kurdish language and expressions of Kurdish culture, concerted efforts were made to preserve and promote Kurdish heritage. These activities took place both overtly, during periods of relative liberalization, and covertly, when state control was tighter.
In the more open atmosphere of the 1960s, following the promulgation of the 1961 Constitution, a few journals began to appear in Turkey that were devoted to the history, folklore, and socio-economic problems of the eastern provinces—a common euphemism for Kurdistan.[19] Although these publications were often short-lived and frequently banned by the authorities, they represented an important step in bringing Kurdish issues into public, albeit limited, discourse. During this time, some classic works of Kurdish literature, such as Ehmedê Xanî's epic *Mem û Zîn* and Şerefhan Bidlisi's historical work *Şerefname*, were also published in Turkey, often in Turkish translation or in limited Kurdish editions, contributing to a growing awareness of a distinct Kurdish literary heritage.[19]
Cultural organizations played a vital role. The Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları (DDKO), for instance, organized cultural events that included short theater plays performed in the Kurdish language, a significant act of cultural assertion.[39] These activities, while often framed within a leftist political context, served to keep the language alive in public performance and foster a sense of shared cultural identity among Kurdish youth and intellectuals. The DDKO, as the first legal Kurdish organization established in 1969 by intellectuals in Ankara, also published materials focusing on economic problems and oppression in the Kurdish regions, contributing to the documentation of Kurdish experiences.[19]
The Kurdish diaspora also became increasingly important for cultural preservation and development, especially from the 1970s onwards. With severe restrictions on Kurdish cultural production within Turkey, Kurdish writers, poets, and musicians in exile, particularly in European countries like Sweden, found greater freedom to publish and perform. Sweden, for example, became a significant center for the publication of books in the Kurmanji dialect of

Kurdish.[73] These diaspora efforts helped to maintain and develop modern Kurdish literature and provided a vital link for Kurds within Turkey to their evolving cultural heritage.
In Istanbul, cultural centers that would later become prominent, such as the Mesopotamia Cultural Center (Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi - MKM), which was formally established in 1991, had their roots in the activism and cultural consciousness that emerged during this earlier period. These centers, and others like Arzela Cultural Center and Med Culture-Art Association, would go on to offer classes in Kurdish music, theater, and film, and compile collections of Kurdish songs, often retranslating and reclaiming works that had been archived under Turkish names.[83] They actively promoted traditional Kurdish musical forms like *Dengbêjî* (the art of the traditional bards or story-singers) and *Govend* (traditional circle dances), recontextualizing them for urban Kurdish populations and reinforcing their significance as markers of Kurdish identity.[83]
These efforts at cultural preservation were intrinsically linked to the broader Kurdish political struggle. In an environment where Kurdish identity was officially denied and its expressions criminalized, the very act of speaking, writing, singing, or performing in Kurdish became a form of resistance. This cultural activism was not merely about nostalgia; it was about asserting a distinct identity, reclaiming a suppressed history, and fostering a sense of collective belonging in the face of state policies aimed at assimilation. These underground and overt cultural activities laid crucial groundwork for the more widespread Kurdish literary and artistic revival that would occur in later decades, particularly after the partial lifting of language bans in the 1990s.

V. The Era of Armed Conflict: The PKK Insurgency and State Response (1978 - 2009)

The late 1970s marked a significant turning point in Kurdish-Turkish relations with the establishment of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê - PKK). The PKK's emergence and subsequent armed insurgency initiated a decades-long conflict that profoundly reshaped the political landscape of Turkey, the socio-economic conditions in the Kurdish-majority southeast, and the nature of Kurdish identity and aspirations. This era, extending up to 2009, was characterized by intense violence, widespread human rights violations by both sides, and intermittent, often fraught, attempts at political resolution.

A. The Genesis of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK): Ideology, Objectives, and Early Activities

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was formally established on November 27, 1978, in the village of Fis, near Lice in Diyarbakır province, by a group of Kurdish students and activists led by Abdullah Öcalan.[21] The group's origins can be traced to an earlier formation in the early 1970s known as the "Kurdistan Revolutionaries" (Apocular), which coalesced around Öcalan in Ankara.[23]
Ideology: The PKK's initial ideology was a fusion of revolutionary socialism, Marxism-Leninism, and fervent Kurdish nationalism.[19] It viewed the Kurdish situation through

an anti-colonial lens, defining Turkish rule over Kurdish territories as a form of colonial occupation. The party aimed to mobilize the Kurdish peasantry, whom it saw as the main revolutionary class in the predominantly rural Kurdish regions, and considered itself the vanguard and sole legitimate representative of the Kurdish liberation struggle.[38]

Initial Objectives: The primary and explicit objective of the PKK at its inception was the establishment of an independent, unified, and socialist Kurdish state, encompassing Kurdish-inhabited territories in southeastern Turkey (Northern Kurdistan), as well as parts of Iran (Eastern Kurdistan), Iraq (Southern Kurdistan), and Syria (Western Kurdistan).[23] This demand for an independent state was a direct response to decades of Turkish state policies characterized by the denial of Kurdish identity, forced assimilation, and the violent suppression of Kurdish political and cultural rights.[22]

Early Activities (pre-1984): In the years leading up to the official launch of its armed struggle, the PKK engaged in ideological dissemination, propaganda, recruitment, and the establishment of regional committees and student organizations.19 Its activists sought to raise political consciousness among Kurdish workers, peasants, and students regarding their national rights and the perceived oppression by the Turkish state.23 This period was also marked by violent clashes with rival Turkish leftist and rightist groups, as well as with some traditional Kurdish landowners and tribal leaders who were seen as collaborators with the state or obstacles to the PKK's revolutionary agenda.23

The military coup in Turkey on September 12, 1980, led to an intensified crackdown on all political organizations, including the PKK. Many PKK cadres were arrested and imprisoned, while a significant portion of its leadership and militants, including Abdullah Öcalan, withdrew to Syria and Lebanon.23 In these neighboring countries, the PKK established training camps, often with the support of Palestinian militant organizations and the Syrian government, and prepared for a protracted guerrilla war.23 The PKK's Second Party Congress, held in Daraa, Syria, in August 1982, formally decided to return to Turkish Kurdistan and initiate an armed struggle for an independent Kurdish state.23

Shift in Objectives (1990s-2000s): Over the course of its long conflict with the Turkish state, and particularly following significant military setbacks and changing geopolitical dynamics, the PKK's stated objectives underwent a notable evolution. Around 1995, the organization ostensibly began to shift its primary demand from outright independence to calls for greater political and cultural rights, democratic autonomy, or a federal solution for Kurds within the existing borders of Turkey.[47] This moderation became more pronounced after the capture of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. From prison, Öcalan advocated for a new ideological paradigm known as "democratic confederalism," which emphasized grassroots democracy, ecological sustainability, and gender equality, and envisioned self-administration at local levels rather than a traditional nation-state solution.[44]

The PKK's emergence represented a critical juncture, transforming the Kurdish struggle from primarily political and cultural forms of resistance into a large-scale, organized armed insurgency. Its initial uncompromising Marxist-Leninist ideology and demand for an independent state marked a radical departure from earlier Kurdish movements in Turkey. The subsequent shifts in its strategic aims, whether driven by pragmatic adaptation to

circumstances or genuine ideological evolution, added further layers of complexity to the ongoing conflict and the search for a political solution. This ideological flexibility, or pragmatism, became a key characteristic of the PKK's protracted engagement with the Turkish state.

B. The Escalation of Conflict (1984-2009):

The period from 1984 to 2009 was dominated by the armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state, which escalated in intensity and scope, leading to profound human, social, and economic consequences, particularly in southeastern Turkey.

1. Dynamics of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency Strategies

The PKK officially launched its armed insurgency on August 15, 1984, with coordinated attacks on Turkish gendarmerie posts in the towns of Eruh (Siirt province) and Şemdinli (Hakkari province).[21] This marked the beginning of a protracted guerrilla war that would last for decades.

PKK Tactics: The PKK employed classic guerrilla warfare tactics, primarily targeting Turkish military personnel, police forces, and other state officials and installations in the largely Kurdish-populated southeastern provinces.[23] The group also sought to undermine traditional Kurdish authority structures by attacking individuals and tribes deemed "collaborationists" with the Turkish state.[23] Their arsenal and methods included ambushes, raids on military outposts, the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), car bombs, landmines, small arms, mortars, and, in some instances, kidnappings and suicide bombings.[23] Schools and teachers were also targeted, as the PKK viewed the Turkish education system as an instrument of assimilation.[38]

Turkish State Counter-Insurgency Strategies: The Turkish state responded with a multi-pronged counter-insurgency strategy that involved massive military deployments, legislative measures, and attempts to co-opt segments of the Kurdish population. Key elements included:

- **Large-scale Military Operations:** The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) conducted extensive military operations throughout southeastern Turkey, involving tens of thousands, and at times hundreds of thousands, of troops.[21]
- **Establishment of the Village Guard System (*Koruculuk*):** In 1985, the state created the Village Guard system, arming and paying local Kurdish villagers and tribes to fight against the PKK.[11] This was intended to deny the PKK local support and provide intelligence, but it also led to significant inter-Kurdish conflict and human rights abuses.
- **State of Emergency (OHAL):** A State of Emergency was declared in several southeastern provinces in 1987 and remained in effect in various forms until 2002.[12] OHAL rule granted extraordinary powers to security forces and regional governors, leading to the suspension of many civil liberties.
- **"Scorched Earth" Tactics:** Particularly during the peak of the conflict in the early to mid-1990s, Turkish security forces engaged in widespread forced displacement of civilian populations and the systematic destruction of thousands of Kurdish villages and

hamlets.[11] This was aimed at denying the PKK logistical support, shelter, and recruits from the rural population.

- **Cross-Border Operations:** The PKK established bases in the mountainous regions of Northern Iraq (Iraqi Kurdistan), particularly after the 1991 Gulf War created a semi-autonomous Kurdish zone there.[21] The Turkish military conducted numerous large-scale cross-border air and ground incursions into Northern Iraq to target these PKK camps.[23] Syria also provided sanctuary and support to the PKK and Öcalan until 1998, when Turkish military pressure forced Damascus to expel him.[45]

The conflict reached its zenith in the mid-1990s, characterized by intense fighting, high casualty rates, and widespread human rights violations.[45] The state's counter-insurgency strategies, while aimed at militarily defeating the PKK, often had devastating consequences for the Kurdish civilian population. The policy of village evacuations and destructions, in particular, led to the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands (some estimates reach millions) of Kurds, fundamentally altering the demographic and socio-economic landscape of southeastern Turkey and further alienating large segments of the Kurdish population from the state. This created a vicious cycle of violence, where state repression often fueled popular resentment and, in some cases, recruitment into the PKK.

2. The State of Emergency (OHAL) in Southeastern Turkey: Governance and Civilian Life (1987-2002, relevant pre-2010 impact)

The State of Emergency (Olağanüstü Hal, OHAL) regime, declared in 1987 and progressively expanded to cover many provinces in southeastern Turkey, became a defining feature of governance and daily life in the region for over a decade, officially ending in 2002.[45] While OHAL was lifted before the 2010 cut-off of this report, its profound impact on civilian life, human rights, and the collective memory of the Kurdish population shaped the context of Kurdish-Turkish relations leading up to 2010.

Under OHAL, the normal rule of law was often suspended or significantly curtailed. Regional governors appointed under the emergency legislation were granted extensive powers, including the authority to impose curfews, ban public gatherings and demonstrations, censor or close down media outlets, and order the evacuation of villages or entire areas.[55] Security forces—including the military, gendarmerie, police special operations units, and village guards—operated with considerably broadened authority and often with impunity.[55]

For the civilian population in the OHAL region, daily life was characterized by pervasive insecurity, fear, and severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms.[12] Military operations, checkpoints, arbitrary searches, and a heavy security presence became commonplace. Movement was often restricted, and economic activities, particularly agriculture and pastoralism (the mainstays of the rural economy), were severely disrupted by security measures, grazing bans, and the destruction of rural infrastructure.[57]

The OHAL period witnessed a dramatic escalation in human rights violations. Mass arrests, often without due process, were frequent. Torture and ill-treatment of detainees in police stations, gendarmerie posts, and prisons became systematic, as documented by numerous national and international human rights organizations.[13] Enforced disappearances and

extrajudicial killings of suspected PKK sympathizers, political activists, journalists, and ordinary civilians became tragically common, creating a climate of terror.[13] Kurdish-language media and cultural expression faced intense pressure, with publications being confiscated and journalists targeted.[60]

The policy of forced village evacuations and destruction reached its peak during the OHAL years, particularly in the early to mid-1990s.[55] This strategy, aimed at cutting off PKK support, led to the displacement of vast numbers of rural Kurds, who were forced to abandon their homes, lands, and livelihoods, often with little or no assistance from the state. Many migrated to overcrowded urban centers within the southeast, like Diyarbakır, or to cities in western Turkey, facing severe economic hardship and social dislocation.

The State of Emergency regime thus created a state of exception in the Kurdish-majority provinces, effectively militarizing governance and leading to systematic human rights violations with a pervasive lack of accountability for perpetrators within the security forces. This period profoundly shaped the collective memory and political consciousness of Kurds in the region, deepening grievances against the state, eroding trust in state institutions, and contributing to the cycle of violence and radicalization. The legacy of OHAL, including unresolved disappearances, uncompensated losses from displacement, and the trauma of state violence, continued to cast a long shadow over Kurdish-Turkish relations well into the 2000s.

3. The Village Guard System (*Koruculuk*): Establishment, Role, and Controversies

The Village Guard system (Geçici Köy Koruculuğu - GKK, or "Temporary Village Guards") was officially established by the Turkish state in 1985 through an amendment to a 1924 law.[11] Its stated purpose was to create a local militia force, primarily composed of Kurdish villagers, to protect their communities against attacks and reprisals from the PKK and to assist the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) in counter-insurgency operations.[53] The rationale was that these local forces, with their knowledge of the terrain and local languages (Kurdish dialects), would be valuable assets in combating the PKK insurgency.[53]

Recruitment into the village guard system was ostensibly voluntary, with members receiving salaries, weapons, and training from the TAF.[53] The number of village guards grew rapidly, from around 8,000 in 1985 to an estimated 58,000-60,000 by the mid-1990s and early 2000s, covering numerous provinces in the southeast.[11] The system was also a means for the state to distinguish between "loyal" and "disloyal" Kurdish tribes and communities, often rewarding cooperating tribes with material benefits, weapons, and a degree of local power, while coercing or punishing those who refused to participate.[53]

The impact of the village guard system on the Kurdish conflict and Kurdish society was deeply divisive and controversial:

- **Inter-Kurdish Conflict:** It effectively pitted Kurd against Kurd, creating deep fissures within and between communities.[54] The PKK viewed village guards as "traitors" and "collaborators" and frequently targeted them and their families in brutal attacks.[23] This led to a cycle of revenge and counter-revenge, further brutalizing the conflict.
- **Forced Recruitment and Village Destruction:** While recruitment was officially

voluntary, numerous reports from human rights organizations and villagers indicated that communities often faced immense pressure to form village guard units. Refusal could lead to severe repercussions, including the forced evacuation and destruction of their villages by security forces.[53] Villagers were caught in an impossible dilemma: join the guards and risk PKK attacks, or refuse and face state retribution.

- **Human Rights Abuses and Impunity:** The village guard system became notorious for widespread human rights abuses. Armed and often operating with little oversight, village guards were implicated in numerous cases of murder, rape, torture, extortion, illegal land occupation, and drug trafficking.[53] They frequently acted with impunity, protected by their association with the state's counter-insurgency efforts. Reports by Human Rights Watch and parliamentary commissions in Turkey confirmed the involvement of village guards in a range of criminal activities and abuses.[53]
- **Empowerment of Certain Tribes/Individuals:** The system often empowered certain tribal leaders or individuals who were willing to collaborate with the state, sometimes regardless of their past criminal records or standing within the community. This further disrupted traditional social hierarchies and created new local power brokers whose authority derived from state backing and weaponry.

The village guard system, therefore, while intended as a counter-insurgency tool, had profoundly negative consequences. It exacerbated violence, contributed to the forced displacement of civilians, fostered a climate of lawlessness and impunity in many areas, and deepened divisions within Kurdish society. Its legacy continued to be a contentious issue in the region long after the peak of the conflict in the 1990s.

C. The Human Cost:

The decades-long armed conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK, particularly from the mid-1980s through the 1990s, exacted a devastating human toll. Both Turkish security forces and the PKK were responsible for widespread human rights violations, leading to immense suffering for the civilian population, predominantly Kurds, in southeastern Turkey. The socio-economic fabric of the region was also severely damaged.

1. Human Rights Violations by Turkish Security Forces (Forced Displacement, Torture, Extrajudicial Killings, Village Destruction)

The Turkish state's counter-insurgency campaign against the PKK was characterized by widespread and systematic human rights violations, extensively documented by national and international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.[12] These abuses were often carried out under the umbrella of the State of Emergency (OHAL) and involved various branches of the security apparatus.

- **Forced Displacement and Village Destruction:** One of the most devastating tactics employed by Turkish security forces was the forced evacuation and destruction of thousands of Kurdish villages and hamlets, particularly between 1991 and 1995.[11] Official Turkish government figures cited around 378,335 displaced persons from over 3,000 settlements [11], while human rights organizations and other estimates suggested the

number of displaced could be as high as 2 to 4 million.[13] This policy aimed to deprive the PKK of logistical support, shelter, and recruits from the rural population by creating "free-fire zones".[57] Security forces would surround villages, burn homes, crops, and livestock, and forcibly expel inhabitants, often with extreme violence and humiliation.[11]

- **Torture and Ill-Treatment:** Torture was reported as endemic and systematic in police stations, gendarmerie posts, and prisons throughout Turkey, but particularly in the southeast.[12] Detainees, including suspected PKK members, sympathizers, political activists, journalists, and ordinary civilians, were subjected to severe beatings, electric shocks, *falaka* (beating the soles of the feet), sexual assault, mock executions, and prolonged suspension in painful positions.[67] Amnesty International reported over 400 deaths in custody due to torture between 1980 and 1996.[67]
- **Extrajudicial Executions and Enforced Disappearances:** The 1990s saw a significant rise in extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, particularly in the Kurdish regions.[11] Individuals, often after being detained by security forces, would "disappear," their fate and whereabouts unknown to their families. Many were later found dead, or their bodies were never recovered. Human rights defenders, Kurdish politicians, and journalists covering the conflict were frequently targeted.[67] The Human Rights Association (IHD) documented thousands of such cases.[48] Mass graves containing victims of these killings were later uncovered in some areas.[13]

These actions by Turkish security forces were often justified by the state under the rubric of national security and the fight against terrorism. However, the scale and systematic nature of the abuses, as documented by numerous independent sources, indicated a deliberate strategy that went far beyond legitimate security operations and often constituted grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. This created a pervasive climate of fear and impunity in the southeast, deeply traumatizing the civilian population and further fueling the conflict. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) later condemned Turkey in thousands of cases related to these violations.[11]

2. Human Rights Abuses by the PKK, including Attacks on Civilians

While the Kurdish population suffered extensively from state actions, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) also committed serious human rights abuses and violations of humanitarian law during the conflict.[20] These actions complicated the narrative of the conflict and inflicted suffering on civilians, including Kurds.

The PKK targeted individuals it deemed "collaborators" or "traitors" to the Kurdish cause. This often included village guards and their families, state employees (such as teachers and civil servants), members of rival Kurdish political groups, and Kurds who did not support the PKK's ideology or methods.[23] These attacks frequently involved summary executions, abductions, and massacres of civilians.[23] Human Rights Watch documented numerous PKK raids on villages where village guards, their families (including women and children), and other civilians were killed.[23] For example, the Pınarcık village massacre in 1987 resulted in the deaths of over 30 people, mostly women and children.[23]

The PKK also attacked state institutions, including schools, which it viewed as instruments of Turkish assimilation policy, sometimes resulting in the killing of teachers.[23] The organization employed tactics such as bombings in urban areas, which sometimes caused civilian casualties, and suicide attacks.[23] Furthermore, the PKK was accused of forcibly recruiting individuals, including minors (child soldiers), into its ranks.[23] Amnesty International reported instances of the PKK torturing and killing Kurdish peasants and its own dissenting members.[23] The organization was also widely reported to be involved in drug trafficking to finance its activities.[23]

These actions by the PKK drew international condemnation and alienated segments of the Kurdish population. They also provided the Turkish state with justifications for its own repressive measures, often blurring the lines between combatants and civilians in its rhetoric and operations. The PKK's violence against other Kurds contributed to internal divisions and hindered efforts to build a unified Kurdish political front.

3. Socio-Economic Devastation in the Southeast

The armed conflict had a catastrophic socio-economic impact on southeastern Turkey, a region already grappling with underdevelopment and poverty. The war exacerbated existing inequalities and created new layers of hardship for the local population.

The direct financial cost of the conflict to the Turkish state was enormous, estimated to be between $300 billion and $450 billion, primarily in military expenditures.[23] These resources could have otherwise been invested in regional development. The conflict also had a significant negative impact on tourism, not only in the southeast but also in other parts of Turkey, due to security concerns.[23]

For the inhabitants of the southeast, the consequences were far more direct and devastating. The policy of forced village evacuations and destruction led to the loss of homes, agricultural lands, livestock, and traditional livelihoods for hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people.[56] Displaced populations, mostly rural Kurds, were often forced to migrate to overcrowded urban slums in cities like Diyarbakır, Van, and Mersin, or to major metropolitan areas in western Turkey such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Adana, where they faced unemployment, inadequate housing, and social marginalization.[11]

The conflict zones were often subjected to food embargoes and severe restrictions on movement, further crippling local economies.[12] Agricultural production plummeted due to insecurity, displacement, and the destruction of infrastructure and resources. The Southeastern Anatolia Project (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi - GAP), a massive state-led irrigation and development project initiated in the 1970s and expanded in subsequent decades, aimed to transform the region's economy through large dams and irrigation schemes.[106] However, its implementation was often slow, and its benefits to the local Kurdish population were frequently debated and undermined by the ongoing conflict, security measures, and displacement.[61] While GAP did lead to increased cotton production in some areas, its broader goals of socio-economic upliftment for the region's inhabitants were severely hampered by the war.

The pervasive "environment of insecurity," encompassing both material deprivation and

non-material threats to identity and safety, as described in analyses of 1993 TDHS data, was intensified by the conflict.[101] This environment of poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunity, combined with political grievances, created fertile ground for social unrest and provided a continuous source of recruitment for armed groups like the PKK. The socio-economic devastation thus became both a consequence and a contributing factor to the perpetuation of the conflict.

4. Civilian Experiences and Testimonies

The human cost of the conflict is most poignantly captured in the experiences and testimonies of ordinary civilians who lived through this period. While official reports and statistics provide a macro-level view, personal narratives offer crucial insights into the daily realities of fear, loss, displacement, and resilience in southeastern Turkey.

Oral histories and sociological studies, though sometimes limited by access and the sensitive nature of the topic, have documented the profound impact of the conflict on Kurdish civilians. For instance, studies on healthcare access reveal long-standing issues of language-related oppression, where non-Turkish-speaking Kurds faced significant barriers in communicating with medical staff, often leading to misdiagnosis, inadequate treatment, or avoidance of state healthcare services altogether.[107] These experiences were not merely logistical; they were often perceived as part of a broader system of discrimination and denial of cultural rights.

Life under the State of Emergency (OHAL) was particularly harsh. Civilian testimonies describe a life punctuated by curfews, military checkpoints, arbitrary searches, constant surveillance, and the ever-present threat of violence from security forces or the PKK.[12] The suspension of normal legal protections meant that civilians had little recourse against abuses of power. The psychological trauma resulting from witnessing violence, losing family members, being forcibly displaced, and living under constant fear was immense and often intergenerational.[13]

Memoirs from individuals involved in the Kurdish movement, such as that of Sakine Cansız, a co-founder of the PKK, provide accounts of the early days of the movement, the motivations of its members, and the brutal conditions within Turkish prisons, particularly the infamous Diyarbakır Military Prison.[111] This prison became a symbol of state torture and repression during the 1980s and 1990s, and the experiences of those incarcerated there played a significant role in radicalizing many Kurds and strengthening their resolve to resist.[13]

The forced displacement of rural populations had a particularly devastating impact on family structures, community ties, and cultural practices. Villages that had existed for centuries were wiped off the map, and their inhabitants were scattered, often losing their social networks and traditional means of livelihood.[57] The transition from rural to urban life was fraught with challenges, including economic hardship, discrimination, and the difficulty of preserving cultural traditions in a new and often hostile environment.

These civilian experiences, documented through various channels including human rights reports, academic research, and personal testimonies, are essential for understanding the deep social and psychological scars left by the conflict. They highlight the

Works cited

1. Kurdistan | History, Religion, Map, & Facts | Britannica, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/place/Kurdistan
2. Turkish Kurdistan - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkish_Kurdistan
3. The Kurds (1)- Issue 27 - حبر أبيض, accessed June 5, 2025, https://whiteink.info/issue-27/?lang=en
4. Kurdish–Turkish relations - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdish%E2%80%93Turkish_relations
5. The Formation of Ottoman Kurdistan: Social, Economic and Political ..., accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/political-economy-of-the-kurds-of-turkey/formation-of-ottoman-kurdistan-social-economic-and-political-developments-in-ottoman-kurdistan-before-the-nineteenth-century-15141800/382C2DF544D0CFEBB91CA2C0C0D3FD83
6. Ottoman Kurds - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Kurds
7. Kurdish emirates - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdish_emirates
8. What was the condition of the Kurds during the Turkish Ottoman rule? - Quora, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.quora.com/What-was-the-condition-of-the-Kurds-during-the-Turkish-Ottoman-rule
9. A history of hostility and bloodshed The most famous Kurdish ..., accessed June 5, 2025, https://whiteink.info/a-history-of-hostility-and-bloodshed-the-most-famous-kurdish-emirates-which-fought-back-the-ottoman-occupation/?lang=en
10. Kurdish Repression in Turkey | Cultural Survival, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/kurdish-repression-turkey
11. Kurds in Turkey - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurds_in_Turkey
12. Human rights of Kurdish people in Turkey - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_of_Kurdish_people_in_Turkey
13. The Survival of Kurdish Identity in Turkey - Human Rights Foundation, accessed June 5, 2025, https://hrf.org/latest/the-survival-of-kurdish-identity-in-turkey/
14. Prohibitions Against the Use of Kurdish and Languages Other than Turkish - Human Rights Watch, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/turkey/turkey993-08.htm
15. The Kurdish Issue in Turkey - Columbia International Affairs Online, accessed June 5, 2025, https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/iai/iai_99gam01.html
16. Turkey's Kurdish Question: Irresistible Force and Immovable Object - Executive Services Directorate, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Other/15

-F-0983_DOC_04_Turkeys_Kurdish_Question_2007_Final.pdf
17. Assimilation of the Muslim communities in the first decade of the Turkish Republic (1923-1934) - OpenEdition Journals, accessed June 5, 2025, https://journals.openedition.org/ejts/822
18. The Efficacy of Assimilation Politics within Occupied Territories: A Case Study of the Kurd Population within the Middle East - University of Michigan, accessed June 5, 2025, https://lsa.umich.edu/content/dam/polisci-assets/Docs/honors-thesis-archive/Mustafa.%20Zainab.pdf
19. The Kurds in Turkey - MERIP, accessed June 5, 2025, https://merip.org/1984/02/the-kurds-in-turkey/
20. Kurdish–Turkish conflict - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdish%E2%80%93Turkish_conflict
21. Turkey - Kurdish Conflict, Ethnicity, Borders | Britannica, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkey/The-Kurdish-conflict
22. Identity and Conflict: PKK vs. Turkey (1984-Present) - FIU Digital Commons, accessed June 5, 2025, https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=ippcs_studentworks
23. Kurdistan Workers' Party insurgency - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdistan_Workers%27_Party_insurgency
24. 2009–2010 Kurdistan Workers' Party ceasefire - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009%E2%80%932010_Kurdistan_Workers%27_Party_ceasefire
25. Ending a 40-year Kurdish insurgency: a historical turning point for Turkey and Syria, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/commentaries/ending-a-40-year-kurdish-insurgency-a-historical-turning-point-for-turkey-and-syria/
26. Article - Attitudes and policies toward Turgut Ozal issue Kurdish ..., accessed June 5, 2025, https://repository.uobaghdad.edu.iq/articles/jcoeduw-688
27. The Kurdish Issue in Turkey: Limits of European Union Reform - ResearchGate, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232934967_The_Kurdish_Issue_in_Turkey_Limits_of_European_Union_Reform
28. www.ijcv.org, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/download/5952/5541/27538
29. Kurdish nationalism - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdish_nationalism
30. A New Era for the Kurdish Question - RIAC, accessed June 5, 2025, https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/columns/middle-east-policy/a-new-era-for-the-kurdish-question/
31. The Kurdish Dilemma in Turkey | Washington Kurdish Institute, accessed June 5, 2025, https://dckurd.org/2023/01/26/the-kurdish-dilemma-in-turkey-2/
32. Sheikh Said rebellion - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheikh_Said_rebellion
33. Kurdish Rebellions and Conflict Groups in Turkey during the 1920s and 1930s | Request PDF - ResearchGate, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263718909_Kurdish_Rebellions_and_Conflict_Groups_in_Turkey_during_the_1920s_and_1930s
34. Mapping Euro-Kurdistan - MERIP, accessed June 5, 2025, https://merip.org/2008/06/mapping-euro-kurdistan/
35. 1960 Turkish coup d'état - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1960_Turkish_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat
36. A Spatial Perspective on Political Group Formation in Turkey after the 1971 Coup: the Kurdistan Workers' Party of Turkey (PKK) in: Kurdish Studies Archive - Brill, accessed June 5, 2025, https://brill.com/edcollchap-oa/book/9789004506176/BP000008.xml
37. The Kurdish Question in Historical Context (Chapter 3) - Limits of Supranational Justice, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/limits-of-supranational-justice/kurdish-question-in-historical-context/164A689868A5CF29A1B5ACB5EACDE3AA
38. Mad Dreams of Independence - MERIP, accessed June 5, 2025, https://merip.org/1994/07/mad-dreams-of-independence/
39. Revolutionary Cultural Eastern Hearths - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_Cultural_Eastern_Hearths
40. Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları - Netewe, accessed June 5, 2025, https://portal.netewe.com/devrimci-dogu-kultur-ocaklari/
41. Between integration, autonomization and radicalization. Hamit Bozarslan on the Kurdish Movement and the Turkish Left - OpenEdition Journals, accessed June 5, 2025, https://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4663
42. 1971 Turkish military memorandum - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1971_Turkish_military_memorandum
43. Timeline: The Kurds' Long Struggle With Statelessness - Council on Foreign Relations, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.cfr.org/timeline/kurds-long-struggle-statelessness
44. Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) - National Counterterrorism Center | Terrorist Groups, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.dni.gov/nctc/terrorist_groups/pkk.html
45. Turkey (Türkiye), the PKK, and U.S. Involvement: Chronology - Congress.gov, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF11380
46. Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) | Kurdish Militancy, History, Disbanding, & Ideology | Britannica, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kurdistan-Workers-Party
47. Kurdistan Workers' Party - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdistan_Workers%27_Party
48. LibGuides: Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances: Turkey - Gumberg Library, accessed June 5, 2025, https://guides.library.duq.edu/disappearedpersons/Turkey
49. Mass-graves and State Silence in Turkey | Amnesty International USA, accessed June 5, 2025,

https://www.amnestyusa.org/updates/mass-graves-and-state-silence-in-turkey/
50. Torture, extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" - Amnesty International, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/eur440391992en.pdf
51. Full article: Explaining the Severity of the Turkey-PKK Conflict, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17419166.2025.2495550?src=exp-la
52. (PDF) Turkey: Kurdish Question and the Coercive State, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281304713_Turkey_Kurdish_Question_and_the_Coercive_State
53. Village guard system - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Village_guard_system
54. Arming civilians as a counterterror strategy: The case of the village guard system in Turkey, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271625492_Arming_civilians_as_a_counterterror_strategy_The_case_of_the_village_guard_system_in_Turkey
55. Civilian Victimization and the Politics of Information in the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/295688540_Civilian_Victimization_and_the_Politics_of_Information_in_the_Kurdish_Conflict_in_Turkey
56. “Still critical”: Prospects in 2005 for Internally Displaced Kurds in ..., accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/03/06/still-critical/prospects-2005-internally-displaced-kurds-turkey
57. Turkey: "Still critical": Introduction - Human Rights Watch, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/turkey0305/3.htm
58. Unjust, Restrictive, and Inconsistent: The Impact of Turkey's Compensation Law with Respect to Internally Displaced People: Background, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/eca/turkey1206/2.htm
59. EmergencyDecreeLawsReport.pdf - İnsan Hakları Derneği, accessed June 5, 2025, https://ihd.org.tr/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/EmergencyDecreeLawsReport.pdf
60. The legacy of state of emergency rule in Turkey - Mesopotamia Observatory of Justice, accessed June 5, 2025, https://mojust.org/2020/05/27/the-legacy-of-state-of-emergency-rule-in-turkey/
61. The Cultural and Environmental Impact of Large Dams in Southeast Turkey Maggie Ronayne - RiverNet, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.rivernet.org/turquie/pdfetdocs/turkeydams.pdf
62. profile of internal displacement : turkey - ecoi.net, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1412115/ds164_02347tur.pdf
63. Village Evacuation and Reconstruction in Kurdistan (1993-2002) - OpenEdition Journals, accessed June 5, 2025, https://journals.openedition.org/etudesrurales/9241
64. Civilian Victimization and the “Identification Problem” in the Kurdish Conflict in

Turkey - The International Studies Association, accessed June 5, 2025, http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/FLACSO-ISA%20BuenosAires%202014/Archive/d679bf27-ba6e-49e2-aea9-f01cd4cc122e.pdf
65. Kurdish Political Movement in Turkey - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdish_Political_Movement_in_Turkey
66. Ocalan Trial Monitor - Human Rights Watch, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/eca/turkey/kurd.htm
67. TURKEY No security without human rights - Amnesty International, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/eur440931996en.pdf
68. Internally Displaced Persons - IDPs - Turkey: Background - Human Rights Watch, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/eca/turkey/2004/10/2.htm
69. Displaced and Disregarded - Human Rights Watch, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/turkey/Turkey1002-03.htm
70. Turkey: “Still critical” - Human Rights Watch, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/turkey0305/turkey0305.htm
71. Turkey - Human Rights Watch, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Turkey.htm
72. A New Phase in Turkey's Kurdish Conflict: Ocalan's Call and Its Implications, accessed June 5, 2025, https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/a-new-phase-in-turkeys-kurdish-conflict-ocalans-call-and-its-implications/
73. From Dengbêj to Modern Writer: Heritagization of the Kurdish Oral ..., accessed June 5, 2025, https://core-cms.cambridgecore.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/0F3BA0717D881D70DE8923CF6CAE4099/S0021086222000019a.pdf/from_dengbej_to_modern_writer_heritagization_of_the_kurdish_oral_tradition_and_revitalization_of_the_kurdish_language_in_the_works_of_mehmed_uzun_and_mehmet_dicle.pdf
74. Turkey: Hollow Promises for Kurds Displaced by Army | Human Rights Watch, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/news/2005/03/06/turkey-hollow-promises-kurds-displaced-army
75. 2009 Human Rights Report: Turkey - U.S. Department of State, accessed June 5, 2025, https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/eur/136062.htm
76. Democratic Society Party closure case - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Society_Party_closure_case
77. Appendix E – Statement of Reasons – Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) - Parliament of Australia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Completed_Inquiries/pjcis/five_terrorist/report/output/appendixe
78. HUMAN RIGHTS,THE KURDISH ISSUE AND TURKEY – İHD, accessed June 5, 2025, https://ihd.org.tr/en/human-rightsthe-kurdish-issue-and-turkey/
79. The Myth of the Ottoman Millet System: Its Treatment of Kurds ... - Brill, accessed

June 5, 2025, https://brill.com/downloadpdf/journals/ijgr/21/4/article-p497_3.pdf
80. (UPA) – KEMALIST NATIONALISM AND TURKEY'S KURDISH QUESTION: ETHNICIZATION OF THE CIVIC IDENTITY - Uluslararası Politika Akademisi, accessed June 5, 2025, https://politikaakademisi.org/2014/04/28/kemalist-nationalism-and-turkeys-kurdish-question-ethnicization-of-the-civic-identity/
81. History, Culture and Politics of the Kurds: A Short Overview, accessed June 5, 2025, https://kulturnistudia.cz/history-culture-and-politics-of-the-kurds/
82. Full article: Student protests at Boğaziçi University against Turkey's authoritarian regime, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2024.2407394
83. Kurdish Music-Making in Istanbul: Music, Sentiment and Ideology in a Changing Urban Context - Harvard DASH, accessed June 5, 2025, https://dash.harvard.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/54e54300-68eb-4303-973b-d37b0644fc0f/content
84. Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=pjcis/pkk_1/statement%20of%20reasons%20pkk.pdf
85. The Kurdish Genocide - European Parliament, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/d-iq/dv/03_kurdishgenocidesofanfalandhalabja_/03_kurdishgenocidesofanfalandhalabja_en.pdf
86. Introduction : GENOCIDE IN IRAQ: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds (Human Rights Watch Report, 1993), accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal/ANFALINT.htm
87. Turkey and War in Iraq: Avoiding Past Patterns of Violation | Human Rights Watch, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/eca/turkey/turkey_violations.pdf
88. Testimony on Torture Turkey Report - Amnesty International, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/eur440231985en.pdf
89. Turkey: Walls of glass - Amnesty International, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/075/1992/en/
90. Turkey: Security operations in south-east Turkey risk return to widespread human rights violations seen in the 1990s - Amnesty International, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.amnesty.nl/actueel/turkey-security-operations-in-south-east-turkey-risk-return-to-widespread-human-rights-violations-seen-in-the-1990s
91. Turkey No security without human rights - Amnesty International, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/eur440841996en.pdf
92. Turkey - Amnesty International, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/eur441591996en.pdf
93. Security operations in south-east Turkey risk return to widespread human rights violations seen in the 1990s - Amnesty International, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/4366/2016/en/

94. "In light of all the information at its disposal, the [European Committee for the Prevention of Torture] can only conclude - Amnesty International, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/eur440131994en.pdf
95. Reports | Human Rights Watch, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/publications?filter0=728&filter1=108&page=157
96. Human rights in Türkiye - Amnesty International, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/western-central-and-south-eastern-europe/turkiye/report-turkiye/
97. Türkiye | Country Page | World | Human Rights Watch, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/turkey
98. TURKEY'S KURDISH QUESTION - Carnegie Corporation of New York, accessed June 5, 2025, https://media.carnegie.org/filer_public/c5/3f/c53f7ed9-172e-45b0-95a2-88a3d4f19351/ccny_book_1998_turkey.pdf
99. History of Human Rights Association (IHD) - İnsan Hakları Derneği, accessed June 5, 2025, https://ihd.org.tr/en/history-of-human-rights-association-ihd/
100. Human rights in Turkey - Wikipedia, accessed June 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_in_Turkey
101. repository.bilkent.edu.tr, accessed June 5, 2025, https://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/bitstreams/d008bd9a-c4d5-4a49-a1b7-76fa309391ae/download
102. ethnic discrimination in the turkish labor market: evidence from survey and field data - Economic Research Forum (ERF), accessed June 5, 2025, https://erf.org.eg/app/uploads/2018/05/1197_Final.pdf
103. Full article: The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey: The Central Role of Identity Recognition (or Lack Thereof), accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17449057.2023.2275229
104. The Transformation of Ottoman Kurdistan: Underdevelopment in Ottoman Kurdistan in the Age of Centralisation, Westernisation and Crisis (1800–1914) (Chapter 3) - The Political Economy of the Kurds of Turkey, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/political-economy-of-the-kurds-of-turkey/transformation-of-ottoman-kurdistan-underdevelopment-in-ottoman-kurdistan-in-the-age-of-centralisation-westernisation-and-crisis-18001914/33CF5F123B19F6FA5478DC49D0364A2F
105. The changing image of the Kurds in Turkish cities: Middle-class perceptions of Kurdish migrants in İzmir - ResearchGate, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/45098845_The_changing_image_of_the_Kurds_in_Turkish_cities_Middle-class_perceptions_of_Kurdish_migrants_in_Izmir
106. (PDF) Economics and marketing: Effect of the southeastern anatolia project (GAP) on cotton markets of turkey and the world - ResearchGate, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299188666_Economics_and_marketing

_Effect_of_the_southeastern_anatolia_project_GAP_on_cotton_markets_of_turkey_and_the_world
107. How narration could unfold oppression: insights from the ..., accessed June 5, 2025, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12123738/
108. How narration could unfold oppression: insights from the experiences of the Kurds in access to Turkish healthcare services - PubMed, accessed June 5, 2025, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40448141/
109. Oral Testimonies - The Kurdistan Memory Programme, accessed June 5, 2025, https://kurdistanmemoryprogramme.com/oral-testimonies/
110. An exploratory study of Kurdish refugee families, accessed June 5, 2025, https://kurdishstudies.net/menu-script/index.php/KS/article/download/147/137/138
111. Sara - My Whole Life Was a Struggle | Space Studios, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.spacestudios.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/sakine-cansz-sara-my-whole-life-was-a-struggle.pdf
112. THE AFTERLIFE OF SACRIFICE IN THE KURDISH MOVEMENT - Cultural Anthropology, accessed June 5, 2025, https://journal.culanth.org/index.php/ca/article/download/5575/953?inline=1
113. Learning from Civil Society Actors in Turkey: Using Transitional Justice in an Ongoing Conflict - Oxford Academic, accessed June 5, 2025, https://academic.oup.com/ijtj/article/18/2/250/7655897