

## **Abstract**

This thesis discusses the group polarization observed among Kurds residing throughout Turkey and the factors that contribute to the division within the ethnic group. Factors researched include ethnic mobilization, area of residency, political parties and influence of a radical insurgency group. It utilizes a case study approach of Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party, as well as, Ireland and the Irish Republican Party. Findings include polarization influenced by all factors discussed; however, the factors cannot be concluded as solely responsible for the polarization observed among Kurds. Each factor combines with previous research to produce the divisions experienced within ethnic minority groups.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1: Literature Review.....	7
Chapter 2: Theoretical Approach.....	13
Chapter 3: Research Design.....	17
Chapter 4: Case Study.....	22
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	30
Conclusion.....	37

## List of Figures

Figure 1-Kurdish Political Party Splits.....22

Figure 2-PKK Recruitment Patterns.....27

## Introduction

After the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the Republic of Turkey under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, ethnic Kurds and Turkish nationalizing policies found themselves in a conflict over ethnicity rights and nationhood (Yildiz 2012). Ethnic Kurds experienced large scale oppressive assimilation policies instituted by the Turkish state and have become the largest ethnic group without a nation or representative government. The twentieth century witnessed the rise of aggressive insurgencies, who utilized violent methods against their state governments in response to their forced assimilation and in attempts to achieve an independent nation. Despite their shared background of oppression and common ethnicity, ethnic Kurds reside in different areas of Turkey and hold diverse opinions on Kurdish issues.

This thesis studies ethnic Kurdish issues and the polarization observed among the ethnic group. Issues that previous scholars associate with Kurds and insurgencies are discussed within the context of factors creating divisions among the ethnicity. First, previously presented literature on the topic is explored and expanded upon. Former research includes subjects such as the historical relationship between the Turkish State, ethnic Kurds and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) Furthermore, research regarding ethnic mobilization and the influence of a radical insurgency group within the framework of the Irish Republican Party is consulted to provide greater depth to the subject.

This thesis focuses specifically on factions observed among ethnic Kurds in southeastern and western Turkey and describes factors contributing to the division phenomenon with an ethnic or political group. It argues that area of residency, political

parties, influence of a radical insurgency group and ethnic mobilization contribute to the factions observed among Kurds in the Republic of Turkey.

With the rise of the Islamic State and conflicts regarding Kurds in the Middle East, understanding group polarization and factions is a critical topic to consider when discussing international relations and the role of insurgencies. The United States currently supports the Democratic Union Party, which is considered the sister organization of the PKK in Syria. This support for the PYD in Syria is a point of contention between US and Turkish relations. Furthermore, at the risk of harming relations with Turkey, many countries have discussed arming and supporting the Kurds in the fight against the self-proclaimed Islamic State.

Before drafting policies regarding the Islamic State or relations with Turkey, it is vitally important to comprehend the internal dynamics of the Turkish Republic and its Kurdish conflict. Additionally, recognizing the divisions among ethnic Kurds concerning methodology, tactics and insurgency are important factors for the United States to fully recognize before arming factions of ethnic Kurds. Previous research demonstrates that Kurds residing in Diyarbakir and southeastern Turkey are more prone to supporting the PKK, whereas, Kurds in the west are generally more likely to condemn PKK actions (Mousseau 2012).

It is fundamental to comprehend Kurdish ethnic mobilization patterns when forming military strategies against the self-proclaimed Islamic State for many crucial reasons. If the international community wrongly assumes that all ethnic Kurds support Kurdish independence, arms factions of an ethnicity that is not prone to insurgency or

aggressive tactics, and then promises assistance in the creation of an independent nation, the expected outcomes will not occur.

Considering the importance of this topic and its relevance to the international community, it is essential to validate and more fully comprehend this issue. To determine this theory's validity, a case study of the PKK and the Turkish state is presented, along with a case study of the Irish Republican Party. Various researchers' field work is examined and utilized to better interpret the polarizing factors observed among Kurds residing in Turkey.

## Chapter One: Literature Review

### Ethnic and Group Polarization

Numerous authors and researchers have contributed to theories regarding ethnic polarization over the years. A widespread majority of them argue that ethnic and group polarization is caused by an authoritative or nationalistic government oppressing the minority faction through harsh policies and delegitimizing their identity claims. A great deal of research about polarization is dedicated to the Turkish government's attitude toward Kurds; however, less is dedicated to Kurdish attitudes about their own minority and group goals (Gunes 2007, Laitin 1995, Crowther 1997 and Dixon 2010). Although the influence of a nationalistic government contributes to group division, previous research overlooks factions and divisions within the ethnic group that are created by the minority group. By expanding upon their research, this thesis presents an alternative explanation for Kurdish ethnic polarization; Kurdish attitudes towards their ethnicity are diverse, thus, divisions exist among their ethnicity.

Geoffrey Evans and Ariana Need study ethnic polarization among minority groups and examine factors such as "insecurity; perceived threat; social differences and social distance" (Need and Evans 2002). They find that 'social distance' accounts for the majority of cultural division observed among ethnic minority groups. Social distance includes intermarrying, social interactions and area of residency, which are themes observed among Kurdish ethnic groups in east and west Turkey. This thesis builds upon their research throughout the case study, discussion and literature review and

demonstrates the effect social differences (residency, social interactions and intermarrying) has upon group polarization.

### **Kurdish Polarization**

*Modernization and Nationalism.* Many scholars depict ethnic Kurds as a unified ethnic group through their common heritage, ethnicity, identity and history of oppression from their respective governments (Acker, Yildiz 2012, Gunduz-Hosgor and Smits 2002). While these scholars acknowledge divisions among ethnic Kurds, such as being divided across four different countries and speaking different languages, they assert that Kurds are a cohesive people group based on their shared backgrounds and identity. Those who discuss polarization within Kurds do so within in the context of modernization theories and intermarrying (Gunduz-Hosgor and Smits 2002, Dixon 2010). Jeffrey Dixon argues that modernization is a crucial factor for understanding anti-Kurdish sentiment. Turkish culture is widely based upon Kemalism, which encourages adopting western lifestyles and manners to better align with the west and enhance the Turkish nation. Because Kurds are often labeled “traditional,” Dixon argues that Kurds are viewed as “a threat to the unitary framework of Turkey,” as well as “Turkey’s modernization and integration to the West” (Dixon 2010).

*Political Parties and Polarization.* What influence does a political party have on ethnic polarization? Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Turkey experienced the creation of multiple pro-Kurdish political parties that divided into factions over the years and utilized different tactics to achieve their goals. Güneş Murat Tezcür, in his research for *Nationalities Papers*, discusses the evolution of pro-Kurdish political parties and their



different strategies. These strategies included many ideas, such as “electoral participation, publishing magazines, associational and union activism, and street demonstrations” (Tezcur 2015). Two groups that arose during this time were the Kurdistan Workers Party and the Workers Vanguard Party of Kurdistan.

These parties were unique from the other pro-Kurdish groups in that they emphasized violence and maintained an active armed division of the organization. Differences in methods among these political groups inhibited pro-Kurdish organizations from reaching consensus between their groups. Many Kurdish parties expressed contempt towards the Kurdistan Workers’ Party for their armed methods and for “taking unnecessary risks when the conditions were not ripe for revolution” (Tezcur 2015). This thesis extends upon Gunes research and argues that radical insurgency groups, such as the PKK and the Workers Vanguard Party of Kurdistan are explanatory factors for polarization observed among ethnic Kurds in Turkey.

### **Ethnic Mobility and Opportunities**

Ethnic identity and insurgency are often linked together throughout international relations scholars’ research. For example, in their research for *American Political Science Review*, James Fearon and David Laitin discuss the relationship between ethnicity, civil war, and ethnic mobility. Ethnic mobility is defined within the context of civil war and a group’s wiliness to join or support an insurgency. Contrary to conventional scholarly opinion, Fearon and Laitin argue that differing ethnic identities within a culture are not the sole reason for a country to resort to civil war. Furthermore, they contend that data

does not support the assumption that countries with the most ethnic and identity diversity are most likely to experience civil war.

While ethnic differences can create divisions within a country, Fearon and Laitin find that countries “that favor insurgency” are more likely to experience civil war or ethnic mobility (Tezcur 2015). Countries with weak central governments are more likely to experience an insurgent uprising than a country that hosts a strong government that is economically and militarily secure. More specifically, insurgencies are more likely to occur in a country that presents better opportunities for the insurgency, such as rough terrain or external support.

Rough terrain presents a more strategic battlefield for insurgent groups utilizing guerilla warfare, as mountains and forests generate confusion among the state military and present the insurgent group with advantages. A group that boasts advantages in terrain is more likely to recruit supporters and fighters if they are able to convince their recruits of positive outcomes. Ethnic mobilization simply on the basis of ethnic and identity differences is unlikely. Virtually every country in existence has ethnic and identity differences due to the fact that humans exist; however not every country has experienced group mobilization due to identity differences.

Instead, groups are more likely to mobilize when they are presented with advantageous opportunities, a clear vision and unified grievances. Eastern Turkey is characterized by rough and mountainous terrain, which presents an obvious advantage for ethnic mobilization among Kurdish groups in eastern Turkey. In contrast to western Turkey, villages through eastern Turkey have experienced greater amounts of

government oppression throughout the 1980s and 1990s and are benefitted by rough and mountainous surroundings.

### **Radical insurgencies' influence on ethnic mobilization**

What factors cause an ordinary person to risk their livelihoods and join a radical insurgency group? Gunes Murat Tezcur, in his research for *American Political Science Review*, seeks to answer why ordinary people take extraordinary risks in joining an armed rebellion, such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party. He discusses two leading perspectives: (1) Those seeking to obtain security are more likely to rebel if the insurgency groups promises safety and security to the recruit and their family, (2) those who are strongly connected to social networks that encourage cohesion among their ethnicity or identity are more likely to rebel if the insurgency group appeals to their belief system (Tezcur 2015).

After reviewing the biographical information of over eight thousand Kurdish militants, Tezcur concludes that those living in more developed districts were less likely to join the PKK, whereas those residing in poor villages are more likely to join an insurgency that offers material benefits and social status. Individuals who have faced significant conflicts and reside in rural areas were more likely to join the PKK, especially in the 1990s when relations between the Turkish state and the PKK were tense. Furthermore, those who favor Kurdish political parties and candidates were more likely to support or join the PKK and those whose families support the PKK were linked with a higher chance of joining the insurgency.

Tezcur makes it clear that the decision to join an insurgency is the result of many factors interlinked and working together. He found recruitment peaked during the 1990's when "counterinsurgency policies had little regard for human rights" (Tezcur 2015).

While the government continued to lose support from Kurdish supporters throughout the 1990's, the PKK gained recruits from their ability to appeal to identities, strongly held beliefs, a desire for security and poor villagers.

## Chapter Two: Theoretical Approach

Previous research on Kurds and the Turkish state generally depict Kurds as a victimized minority group that is unified through a common culture, heritage, and language. They emphasize the assimilation and oppression Kurds faced under the nationalizing policies of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and the unique identity Kurds bring to a society. While these researchers make it clear that Kurds have a unified history and heritage, this thesis argues that Kurds are polarized within their group. Their discussion depicts polarization as the result of modernization and past transgressions from the Turkish state. This thesis presents an alternative hypothesis about polarization and contends that radical insurgency groups and area of residency play a crucial role in dividing Kurdish society, specifically in Turkey.

Researchers address polarity among Kurds; however, they discuss it within the context of modernization by the Turkish state (Dixon and Ergin 2010) and social distance, such as intermarrying between Turks and Kurds (Gunduz- Hosgor and Smits 2002). Modernization and intermarrying are portrayed as influencing factors for anti-Kurdish beliefs in Turkey, as well as polarizing aspects among Kurds. While these elements are definitely factors of division among ethnic groups, this paper will present additional factor that creates polarization throughout Turkish Kurds: the influence of a radical insurgency group, social distance among ethnic Kurds, political parties and ethnic mobilization.

For the arguments to be logically compatible with the thesis statement, radical and aggressive tactics must be shown to be a divisive element in nation building and insurgency groups. Anti-Kurdish sentiment and counter-insurgent sentiment must be

demonstrated as an outcome of the radical tactics employed by the PKK. It must explain Kurdish phenomenon observed in Turkey, such as the HDP being labeled as a pro-PKK political party, despite their attempts to achieve their goals in a democratic manner. Moreover, a radical group's influence and area of residency further explain the situation observed in Turkey. A logically sound hypothesis must distinguish between the levels of support observed among Kurds residing in eastern and western Turkey. Finally, for these topics to actually create polarization, they must influence the divisions observed, all other factors aside.

### **Thesis Statement**

Internal factors among the Kurds in Turkey create polarization among ethnic Kurds and explain the lack of an independent Kurdistan. During the discussion and research design, the following three hypotheses further explain the thesis statement and guide the presented research.

### **Hypotheses and Expected outcomes**

(1) Polarization exists among Kurds in Turkey; (2) Social distance, specifically area of residency contributes to the polarity observed among Kurds in Turkey, (3) A radical insurgency group, such as the PKK contributes to the polarity observed among Kurds in Turkey.

The conclusion establishes and discusses further viewpoints on ethnic polarization within Turkey. Additionally, previous research is expanded upon and utilized to examine phenomenon observed among ethnic Kurds. Finally, the previously mentioned factors

contribute to polarization (social distance, ethnic mobilization, political parties and radical insurgency groups) and demonstrate key elements of Kurdish divisions.

### **Measurement of Polarization**

Four factors that create polarization and are prevalent within Turkey today include: (1) ethnic mobilization, (2) divisions among pro-Kurdish political parties, (3) social distance, specifically area of residency and (4) influence of a radical insurgency group.

### **Ethnic Mobilization**

Ethnic Mobilization refers to an individuals' willingness to take action about an issue relating to his or her identity or ethnicity. It takes many forms and can be as radical as a Kurd's support and recruitment into the PKK or as minimal as supporting a political party that advocates for Kurdish representation. What determines individuals' levels of support for his/ her identity group and the tactics he/ she is willing to support to achieve his or her goals? Polarization is caused by diverse degrees of ethnic mobilization among ethnic Kurds and explains the phenomenon observed among the Kurdish ethnic group.

### **Divisions among pro-Kurdish political and advocacy groups**

Polarization among Kurds in Turkey exists and is created by (1) a divide between radical insurgency and political groups and their demands on the Turkish state, (2) area of residency, specifically among eastern and western dwelling Kurds. For example, rural dwelling Kurds, specifically in southeastern Turkey demonstrate radical views on topics

regarding an independent Kurdistan and are more likely to engage in violent measures to attain their goals. In contrast to this, urban dwelling Kurds, specifically in modernized Istanbul, will support democratic measures to attain their goals or completely dissociate with their ethnicity. These factors explain why an independent Kurdistan ceases to exist: Kurds within Turkey are not unified, thus a unified country, Kurdistan, is not present.



### Chapter Three: Research Design

This thesis utilized a comparison case study method between radical Kurdish insurgency groups in Turkey and the Irish Republican Party in Ireland. Since both insurgency groups employ radical tactics to achieve their means, these factions were researched, compared, and contrasted to demonstrate their impact on the people groups they claim to represent. The Kurdistan Workers' Party justifies their aggressive methods because of Turkey's past history of oppressing ethnic Kurds and their desire to obtain an independent Kurdistan. Likewise, the Irish Republican Party (IRA) contends that Ireland should be an independent republic and utilizes violent methods to achieve their end goals.

Many scholars affirm that the use of violence hinders the unification of the groups they claim to represent and instead, divide the group over methods and end goals. Kerim Yildiz argues that "The halting of violence can prove to be a game changer and as other well-established principles of peace processes demonstrate can be the crucial element in moving things forward" (Yildiz 2012). While some ethnic Kurds side with the PKK and condone the use of violence, others agree with Yildiz that ending the violence is a crucial component of the peace process between Turkey and Kurds. This conflict of opinions among Kurds is discussed in greater depth as an important factor creating polarization among Kurds in Turkey.

Furthermore, the Irish Republican Party's violent methods are discussed within the context of polarization, radical insurgency groups and ethnic mobilization. Combined together, the case studies of the IRA and the PKK answer a question: does a radical and violent insurgency group contribute to polarization and division among the faction they

claim to represent? If so, the PKK and the IRA are internal dividing aspects within their factions.

### **Polarization Measurement Variables**

Before continuing, it is important to establish the boundaries and definitions ethnic polarization. The following definition of ethnic polarization provides clarity regarding polarization patterns among ethnic Kurds: “the difference between the positions taken by members of the ethnic majority and members of ethnic minorities on issues concerning minority rights” (Need 2002). This definition is employed to better understand the use of polarization throughout this thesis and positions taken by members the Kurdish ethnic minority on issues concerning Kurdish minority rights within Turkey. The following variables are further utilized to examine the claim that polarization exists among Turkish Kurds.

*Social Distance.* Social distance refers to a divide among ethnicities and can refer to intermarriage or modernization or any factors that effectively divide an ethnic group. However, this thesis discusses social distance within the context of separatist group recruitment and area of residency of ethnic Kurds. Scholars contend that, generally speaking, ethnic Kurds living in eastern Turkey are more likely to support or join the PKK, whereas Kurds who have moved to western Turkey, specifically Istanbul, are more likely to advocate against the PKK. In short, does location determine a person’s willingness to support a radical insurgency group and does location divide ethnic Kurds within Turkey?

While eastern or western residencies are not inherently “polarizing” within a nation state or political group, eastern residencies in Turkey are generally more conducive to PKK support, whereas western residencies are more favorable to Turkish nationalism and disassociation with the PKK. South eastern Turkey has historically been more susceptible to PKK recruitment and support due to the opportunities that are available and present, which are not as readily accessible in the west. This thesis argues that residency not only effects polarization among Kurds, but also, ethnic mobilization.

*Ethnic Mobilization.* According to James Fearon and David Laitin, location and area of residency determines an individual’s willingness to support a radical insurgency group. This thesis expands upon their work and argues that area of residency determines the degree of mobilization an ethnic group will experience (Laitin 2003). What influences and encourages an ethnic Kurd to participate in pro-Kurdish activities and to what extent will he/she support Kurdish nationalism? Fearon and Laitin argue that opportunity and residency play a crucial role in determining an individual’s willingness to participate in an armed insurgency group. This thesis utilizes their research to observe the effect area of residency plays on individual and ethnic mobilization (Laitin 2003). Moreover, degrees of ethnic mobilization is observed among ethnic Kurds and the Irish Republican Party and used to help understand polarization among ethnic groups.

*Influence of a Radical Insurgency Group.* The impact a radical insurgency group has on ethnic groups and political organizations is discussed within the context of PKK and IRA recruitment patterns. Studying recruitment patterns among insurgencies groups depicts their ability to appeal to their audience and demonstrate the level of polarization they bring to an organization or ethnic group. The PKK creates polarization because of its

ability to appeal to specific factions within the Kurdish ethnicity. These specific factions are discussed in greater detail throughout the case study and the discussion.

Furthermore, the influence of a radical insurgency group is discussed within the context of southeast Turkey, conflicts throughout the 1990s and research by Gunes Murat Tezcur. This area of Turkey witnessed a higher level of PKK recruitment throughout the 1990s due to the insurgency's ability to leverage specific elements of the conflict within the Kurdish ethnicity. However, this increase in recruitment was experienced mainly in areas with large scale conflict between the PKK and the Turkish government. This large scale recruitment and involvement of fighters in the southeast is indicative of the polarizing effect of the PKK (Tezcur 2016).

The analytic approach used to examine the Irish and Turkish case studies includes a most similar and congruent method research design based on typical themes found within insurgent and ethnic groups. Essentially, the IRA and PKK will be compared and contrasted to discover if they offer similar themes between the two groups that can be applied to polarization among ethnic Kurds within Turkey. Since this thesis examines what divides the Kurds within Turkey, it is important to research groups that claim to represent the ethnic group. The PKK claims representation of ethnic Kurds, which is why Turkey is an important case study for this paper. Comparing the violent methods of the PKK to the IRA's aggressive means strengthens principles drawn from the Kurdish insurgency group.

*Political Parties.* Political parties and organizations are additional variables employed to explain the trends among Kurdish ethnicities. The Democratic Peoples' Party (HDP) is widely associated with ethnic Kurds and is known for their alignment

with pro-Kurdish issues. They advocate for equality and representation of Kurdish culture; however, the HDP is often associated with anti-Turkish and PKK forces. This element is discussed throughout the case study and conclusion as a contributing factor to polarization.

## Chapter Four: Case Study - Turkey

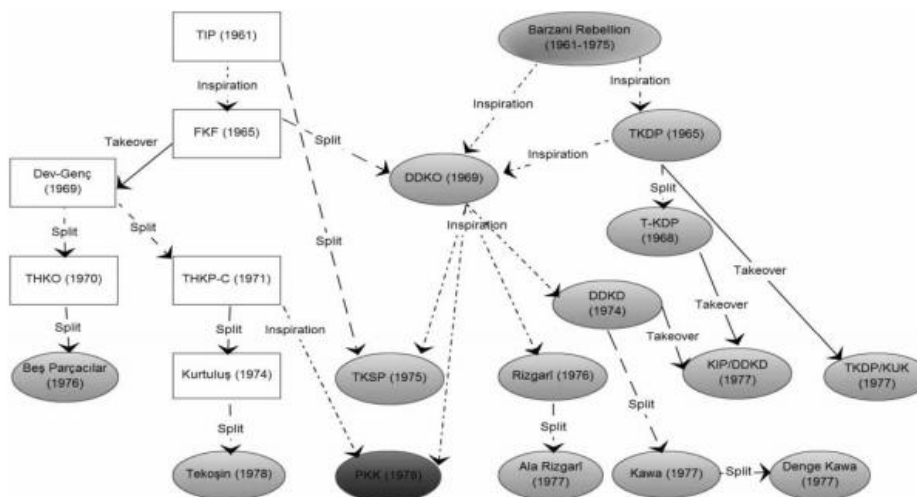
Comprised of roughly thirty million people, Kurds make up the largest ethnic minority in the world who do not have an independent nation to claim as their own. This fact presses the question: why does an ethnic group this large not have its own nation state? Spread across four culturally and linguistically distinct countries, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, the Kurds face divisions within their ethnic group. Throughout the years, the Kurds have uniformly faced persecution from their different home countries; however, the severity has varied across countries and between political leaders. Persecution against Kurds has ranged from Mustafa Kemal's creation of the Turkish Republic to the violent repression by Saddam Hussein in Iraq. This study focuses specifically on the Kurds in Turkey and what contributes to polarization observed among the ethnic group.

Roughly fifteen million ethnic Kurds reside in Turkey, making it home to nearly half of the Kurdish ethnic minority. The Kurds have a long history of suppression from the Turkish government, specifically under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and his creation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Similar to many leaders of the modern world, Ataturk believed modernization and secularization was the best way to achieve a strong, industrial and modern nation state. He strove to attain these goals through the reduction of Islam, attention to the rights of women, and the assimilation of Turkish residents. Examples of his new policies include the promotion of Turkish as the official language and compulsory education for children. These policies had very specific meanings for the Kurds; as a result, instructing and speaking Kurdish was outlawed and Kurdish schools were no longer considered legitimate (Tezcur 2015).

## Kurdish Political Parties

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the rise of Kurdish nationalism as a reaction to Turkish nationalism and oppression. In fact, many scholars contend that this denial of Kurdish identity and discrimination of the minority group, widely contributed to the radicalization among Kurdish nationalist groups ( Mesut 1996, Yalcin 2012, Bozarslan 2008). Despite holding similar goals of independence, equality and political representation, multiple political parties associated with ethnic Kurds were created throughout this time (See Table 1).

**Figure 1. Kurdish Political Party Splits.**



*Source:* Gunes Murat Tezcur. Violence and nationalist mobilization: the onset of the Kurdish insurgency in Turkey. *Nationalities Papers*. 2015. 253.

As depicted by the graph of pro-Kurdish political parties, these political and advocacy groups split into smaller groups and continually argued over techniques and methods for achieving their goals (See figure 1).

Tezcur discusses Kurdish insurgency and argues that: “their ideological differences concerned issues such as the rift between the Soviet Union and China, the support for the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq, the nature of class alliances, and the goal and method of struggle” (Tezcur 2015). Ideological and methodology differences led to divisions, group competition and violence within Kurdish political and activist groups.

An example of factions among Kurdish political parties includes the TKSP (Türkiye Kürdistanı Sosyalist Partisi), which was founded in 1975 and attracted professionals and students, due to their non aggressive methods. While they won municipal elections in Diyarbakir in southeastern Turkey, they failed to unify and mobilize the entirety of the Kurdish population. Another political group that advocated for Kurdish rights and independence was the T-KDP that argued that “liberation of Kurdish people would be achieved by armed struggle” (Tezcur 2015). Their ideology conflicted with the TKSP, in that the T-KDP believed an independent Kurdistan would be attained through violence and armed fighting with the Turkish state. However, the T-KDP never utilized guerrilla or armed warfare and failed to make “deep inroads among the peasantry who made up the overwhelming majority of Kurdish society” (Tezcur 2015).

While ethnic Kurds have a similar history within Turkey, today there is great division among the minority group, evidenced by the differences between the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), the People’s Democratic Party (HDP) and ethnic Kurds. Despite



sharing Kurdish heritage, they are divided by methodology and ideology. The Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) is listed as a terrorist organization by both the Turkish government and the United States. Using violent and terrorist like measures to achieve their goal, an independent Kurdistan, the PKK has been involved in intermittent conflict with the Turkish government since the early 1980s.

### **PKK Background**

Founded in 1974 with Marxist-Leninist roots, the Kurdistan Workers Party sought to unify Kurds in Turkey through forming an independent nation that would combine parts of south-east Turkey and northern Iraq for their new homeland (Bruno 2007). Originally, the PKK sought to amalgamate Kurds through the creation of a unified nation; however, today the group's objective is "more in line with winning some level of autonomy" and civil rights within Turkey (Bruno 2007). They exercise harsh and radical tactics to achieve their objectives and are an incredibly controversial topic, especially in Turkey.

Throughout the 1980s, Turkey witnessed the rise of the PKK's aggressive methods in the form of car bombings, kidnappings, assaults against police and diplomats and raiding villages that were not compliant with their demands. After the capture and imprisoning of their leader, Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK began to assert themselves as a political instead of an armed resistance movement. Cengiz Gunes stipulates that the PKK were responsible for "devastating the regional economy...costing the lives of 35,000 people and displacing between 2 and 3 million Kurds" (Gunes 2007). In 1999, there was hope that the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish would begin to resolve and the

violence would end. A ceasefire was formed between the two parties, talks were initiated and the PKK sought to rebrand their group as a passive political organization. In 2004, after only five years of peace, the ceasefire failed “due to failed efforts to reinvent” (Bruno 2007) and the PKK reverted back to their violent methods.

Despite the hopes of a successful peace agreement between Turkey and the PKK, scholars contend that it was destined to fail due to the amount of support the PKK received from factions of ethnic Kurds. Özlem Kayhan Pusane in his research for Middle Eastern Studies argues that Turkey’s failure to win Kurdish support throughout the 1980s and 1990s enabled the PKK to recruit larger numbers of Kurdish fighters and supporters.

Kurds living in the southeast of Turkey witnessed the coercive tactics utilized by the Turkish government to counter the PKK’s insurgency and observed their loved ones enduring torment and cruelty at the hands of Turkish security forces. Pusane believes that “these kinds of experiences, and especially the security forces’ involvement in human rights violations, contributed to an increase in popular support for the PKK” (Pusane 2015). While the PKK does not represent the beliefs of the entire Kurdish population within Turkey, many Kurds in the southeast became radicalized during this period of contention between the two parties.

Relations between Turkey and the PKK were renewed in 2013, when another ceasefire was crafted between them; however, this was short-lived. In July 2015, the ceasefire that many thought would lead to a truce and a period of recognition and equality for Kurds, failed due to escalating violence between the state and the PKK (Pusane 2015). Today there continues to be devastating strife and contention, as evidenced

through the repeated car bombings, kidnappings and violent attacks against the public and government throughout Turkey.

### **The Peoples' Democratic Party**

Various political experts contend that this renewed conflict between the PKK and Turkish state negatively affects pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey. An example of this is the People's Democratic Party (HDP), which is widely associated as the Kurdish political party. Advocating for change through democratic and peaceful methods, the People's Democratic Party, advocates for minorities, transparent politics and women's rights. Although most pro-Kurdish political parties seek "a pragmatic solution to the conflict between the PKK and the state through the institution of a new framework for democracy in Turkey," they are often viewed by the public as supportive of the PKK and their radical methods (Kafanov 2015).

### **Ireland and the Irish Republican Party**

Another example of a nation state that has experienced conflict from a radical insurgency group is Ireland and the Irish Republican Party (IRA). It has been described as "an insurgency that successfully challenged British rule in the whole of Ireland in the early years of the twentieth century" (Gregory 2010). Beginning during the early 1900s in Northern Ireland, the IRA fought for Irish independence from Great Britain by using radical tactics, such as bombings and assassinations against political leaders. While the IRA faced multiple divisions and splits within its organization throughout the years, an independent Irish free state was produced in 1921 in exchange for six Northern provinces

to remain under the control of Great Britain (Gregory 2010). This created a further divide among Irish independent fighters, as some accepted the deal and others opposed the British control of Northern Ireland.

Tensions between the British and the Irish Republican Army members began to rise in the late 1960s when Irish Catholics, who felt discriminated against by the British and English Protestants began to clash. During this time the IRA faced tensions and divisions among its members. Some supported the “Dublin-based ‘officials,’ who advocated a united socialist Ireland by peaceful means” and other supported the “Belfast-based ‘provisionals,’ who vowed to use violence as a catalyst for unification” (Gregory 2010). Ultimately, these differences divided the IRA into two groups and likewise, divided Irish independence supporters.

Initially, the Belfast-based “provisionals” bloc of the IRA collected little support due to their advocacy of guerilla warfare tactics. However, in 1972, the British killed fourteen Irish protesters in a catholic rally and presented the PIRA (Provisionals Irish Republican Army) with a rallying cry. PIRA support significantly increased and violent conflict between the British and IRA drastically amplified. Despite the radical ideological differences between Great Britain and the IRA, they formed a peace agreement in the 1990s, known as the Good Friday Agreement. The IRA made apologies for the lives that were lost and through their violent struggle against the British government. In 2005, the IRA officially “ended its armed campaign to reunify Ireland” and “no longer describes itself as an armed force” (Gregory 2010). Although the IRA is no longer a violent organization, they still support Irish independence and oppose British influence in Northern Ireland.

Radical Irish independence violence did not completely stop in 2005 with the IRA's promise to end armed force. Break off groups of the IRA, such as the Real IRA and Continuity IRA continue to fight for Irish independence using aggressive tactics and terrorist like methods. Furthermore, both Great Britain and the United States have labeled these groups as terrorist organizations.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

The Turkish state and ethnic Kurds, as well as the Irish Republican Army, provide an excellent example for examining factors regarding radical insurgency groups and polarization. This discussion verifies claims made in the theoretical approach and further examine themes observed in the case study to provide evidence for the effect of radical separatist groups on their factions. Factors discussed here include: social divides, such as eastern residency versus western residency, ethnic mobilization, pro- Kurdish political parties and the Kurdistan Workers' Party. Furthermore, previous research that was mentioned throughout the literature review are examined and compared with observations taken from the case studies. These themes include modernization and intermarriage among Kurds and Turks.

### **Ethnic Mobilization**

What influences a group's willingness to mobilize and support organizations relating to their ethnicity or belief system? Fearon and Laitin describe ethnic mobilization and insurgency recruitment through the perspective of opportunities that encourage individuals to support or join an armed insurgency. They find that factors which favor insurgency are more likely to initiate an armed rebellion, instead of cultural grievances. They discuss their findings in American Political Science Review:

The conditions that favor insurgency-in particular, state weakness marked by poverty, a large population, and instability- are better predictors of which countries are at risk for civil war than are indicators of ethnic and religious diversity or measures of grievances such as economic inequality,

lack of democracy or civil liberties, or state discrimination against minority religions or languages” (Laitin 2003).

Additional conditions that favor insurgency and ethnic mobilization includes mountains and contiguous territory, similar to the territory that is found in south eastern Turkey. Fearon and Laitin find that:

Mountainous terrain is significantly related to higher rates of civil war. A country that is about half “mountainous” (ninetieth percentile)...has an estimated 13.2% change of civil war over the course of a decade. A similar country that is not mountainous at all (tenth percentile) has a 6.5% risk (Laitin 2003).

As noted throughout the case study south eastern Turkey is significantly more rural, mountainous and rugged than western Turkey. Additionally, southeastern Turkey is associated with higher recruiting patterns of PKK supporters, especially throughout the 1990s (Pusane 2015). According to Fearon and Laitin’s research, it appears logical to conclude that ethnic mobilization is influenced by factors favoring insurgency, such as mountainous territory and rough terrain. However, this finding points to another factor affecting Kurdish polarization today: area of residency.

### **Residency and Kurdish Identity**

Divide in Kurdish support for the PKK is widely based on residency. South-eastern Turkey, specifically the city of Diyarbakir is considered the source of Kurdish nationalism and PKK support. Kurds have historically resided in southeast Turkey, and many living in this area during the 1990s were recruited by the PKK or supported their

methods and motives. This area is characterized by rough terrain and mountainous landscape that create factors that favor insurgency. As demonstrated in the case study, this area is largely associated with PKK recruitment, which suggests area of residency being a driving factor among Kurds residing in eastern Turkey versus western Turkey (Laitin 2003). Furthermore, research by Laitin, Fearon and Tezcur suggest a connection between opportunities favoring insurgency such as rough terrain and increased patterns of ethnic mobility. In short, eastern Turkey has witnessed higher patterns of ethnic mobilization within the PKK, whereas western Turkey has experienced lower amounts of recruitment. This paper argues that this is evidence of the polarization among Kurds in Turkey.

### **Influence of a Radical Insurgency**

As mentioned in the case studies of Ireland and Turkey, radical insurgencies exist in both countries and have experienced many divisions. In the Turkish case study, pro-Kurdish nationalism activities, such as the PKK are viewed as inherently at odds with Turkish nationalism. Although the PKK is generally viewed negatively within Turkish communities, what effect does the PKK have upon Kurdish communities? Does it further divide a group or assist in establishing a group identity?

This thesis began the project by theorizing that a radical insurgency group further divides and polarizes a group, especially ethnic groups. The hypothesis suggested that, other factors aside, radical insurgency inherently divides ethnic and political groups because of their guerilla warfare and aggressive tactics against the government and civilians who oppose them. It follows that the divide observed among Kurds within



Turkey would continue to exist, even if the PKK were the sole remaining factor. This question is researched through Gunes Murat Tezcur's study of recruiting patterns by the PKK throughout Turkey (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2. PKK Recruitment Patterns and Findings**

Hypotheses	Empirical Evidence	
	District Level	Individual Level
Individuals are likely to join an ethnic insurgency when they		
H. 1: seek material benefits and social status	More developed districts have a lower recruitment ratio; districts experiencing development have their recruitment ratio decrease in the pre-1999 period.	Poor villagers join the insurgency in pursuit of benefits especially in the pre-1999 period. Among individuals with similar characteristics, educational achievement decreases the likelihood of recruitment.
H. 2: seek security	Higher levels of clashes and population declines across districts lead to higher recruitment; recruitments increases in districts experiencing population decline over time and with high levels of previous recruitment.	Individuals from rural areas characterized by heavy clashes and families persecuted by security forces join the insurgency especially in the 1990s.
H. 3: live in strong and tight-knit ethnic communities.	No evidence found.	
H. 4: maintain their cultural distinctiveness vis-à-vis the national identity.	No evidence found.	
H. 5: develop radicalized ethnic identities due to political violence.	Higher levels of clashes and population declines across districts lead to higher recruitment; recruitments increases in districts experiencing population decline over time and with high levels of previous recruitment.	Individuals whose relatives are victimized by state violence develop moral outrage and seek revenge.
H. 6: are embedded in dense social networks close to the insurgents.	Higher electoral support for Kurdish parties/candidates across districts are associated with higher recruitment; recruitments increases in districts with high levels of previous recruitment.	Familial and social loyalties induce individuals follow their relatives and friends and join the insurgency.
H. 7: have high levels of political efficacy and develop existential threat perceptions about their ethnic identity.		Educated individuals with political efficacy develop collective threat perceptions and join the insurgency especially since 1999.

*Source:* Gunes Murat Tezcur. Ordinary People Extraordinary Risks: Participation in an armed rebellion. *American Political Science Review*. May 2016. 247.

He finds that in areas of high PKK recruitments, there are higher levels of radicalized ethnic identities, due to political violence between the state and the insurgency group (See Table two). Individuals who have faced political violence and

oppression from their government have greater incentive to support an insurgency that claims to represent their social and cultural grievances. Furthermore, radical and violent tactics are justified by the harsh measures that the Turkish government utilized throughout the 1990s (Tezcur 2016).

As the case study demonstrates, the 1990s was full of conflict and violence between the PKK and the Turkish state. In southeast Turkey, when the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state was particularly severe, the PKK experienced an increase in recruitment. Tezcur finds: “individuals from rural areas characterized by heavy clashes and families persecuted by security forces joined the insurgency, especially in the 1990s” (Tezcur 2016).

Ozlem Pusane researches reasoning behind the formulation and failing of the ceasefire between the PKK and Turkish state and concludes that the success of the PKK and failing of the ceasefire after 2004 is largely due to support from Kurds in southeast Turkey. He proposes that “another major reason behind Turkey’s failure to end the PKK insurgency despite its military victory over the organization was the continuing public support for the PKK among the Kurds” (Pusane 2015). He argues that Kurdish support is a crucial factor for the success of the PKK.

The failing of the ceasefire and the success of the PKK, despite setbacks throughout the 1990s, explain polarization phenomenon observed among Turkish Kurds today. While the PKK utilized aggressive tactics and was responsible for thousands of lives lost or destroyed, many Kurds in south east Turkey continued or began to support this radical group in the 1990’s, which is largely why the PKK currently exist. Pusane’s

reasoning demonstrates that the PKK met social needs while creating a negative image of the Turkish state for ethnic Kurds living in south eastern Turkey.

Kurds constantly witnessed the violent conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK and were exposed to radical and extreme tactics, which led to a new generation of Kurds who supported and fought for the PKK. Furthermore, the Turkish state failed to obtain the support of the PKK, due to what many label as human rights violations. Kurds were forced to leave their communities and homes due to increased conflict in the south eastern regions and many blamed the government for their continued aggression against the PKK. As A. Marcus for Middle East Report writes, “These kinds of experiences, and especially the security forces’ involvement in human rights violations, contributed to an increase in popular support for the PKK”( Bruno 2007).

As the case study and Marcus’s work demonstrate, popular support for the PKK rose in the 1990s; however, not all Kurds supported the harsh techniques and claims for independence by the PKK. Greg Bruno, a researcher for the Council on Foreign Relations, believes that many view “Kurdish nationalism as a threat to its national security and to the modern borders drawn up after World War I” (Bruno 2007). Bruno further asserts that “this fear is particularly acute in Turkey, where about one-fifth of the population—some 12 million people—is Kurdish” (Bruno 2007). This demonstrates that this era in Kurdish and PKK history has contributed to the polarization that is observed among Kurds throughout Turkey today.

### **Limitations and Findings**

Despite a shared heritage and common history, Kurds remained divided within their ethnic group, as demonstrated throughout this case study and discussion. Witnessing

the factors facing ethnic Kurds today, such as residency, ethnic mobility, and support for political/insurgency groups, one can easily come to the conclusion that ethnic Kurds experience polarization and divisions within their faction.

Although each element is a crucial component to ethnic polarization, each element is not sufficient to explain the entirety of ethnic polarization itself. For example, residency is a hindrance to group unification; however, it is only polarizing if a group shares social grievances against its government. Therefore, this study finds that while each element is important to understand for the comprehension of ethnic polarization, each factor cannot be attributed solely to the creation of ethnic divisions.

## Conclusion

Ethnic polarization is an important topic to understand within international relations and foreign policy. Throughout this thesis ethnic polarization was discussed within the context of Turkey's Kurdish problem and the factors that contribute to factions among Kurds. The IRA is an example of radical insurgency groups, political parties and polarization. Previous research has depicted Kurds as a people-group with a common heritage and culture. Policy makers can address additional polarizing factors among ethnic groups: area of residency, radical insurgency groups, political parties and ethnic mobilization. Accomplishments of this thesis include further expansion upon current polarization research as well as providing additional factors to understand when discussing or studying ethnic polarization. While these elements can be further employed to better understand dividing aspects of polarization, one cannot assume that each factor is unilaterally responsible for dividing an ethnic group. Instead, this thesis simply expands upon previous studies and argues that ethnic polarization within Turkey is further created through internal conflicts among ethnic Kurds.

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## Appendix A

### Definitions and Terms

Democratic Peoples' Party (HDP): A political party within Turkey that is associated with Kurdish activism and Kurdish rights.

Ethnic Polarization: The difference in positions taken by members of the ethnic majority and members of ethnic minorities on issues concerning minority rights (Need 2002).

Insurgency: Insurgency is a technology of military conflict characterized by small, lightly armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from rural base areas (Laitin 2003).

Irish Republican Army (IRA): An armed insurgency movement within Northern Ireland that is committed to creating a nation that is separate from Great Britain. They are known for their aggressive and violent methods to achieve an independent nation.

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK): A radical ethnic Kurdish insurgency group that works mainly in Turkey. They are known for their aggressive and violent tactics to obtain an independent Kurdistan. They are labeled as a terrorist by both Turkey and the United States.

Polarization: "Concentration about opposing extremes of groups or interests formerly ranged on a continuum" (Polarization 2016). Within the context of international relations, polarization refers to bipolarity or multipolarity and is used to characterize ethnic fractionalization.