

## **The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and popular support: counterterrorism towards an insurgency nature**

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The PKK has been a prolonged problem in Turkey, and various measures have been adopted to diminish and end the violence. In addition to the impacts on violence, these policies have also had an impact on public opinion and ethnic awareness of Kurds in Turkey. This article analyzes these policies and their effects on electoral support for the PKK by examining the vote shares of the pro-PKK political parties in national and local elections. It concludes that Turkey has conceptualized the issue solely as a problem of terrorism, but the goal, strategy, organization, and format of violence used by the PKK reflect the nature of an insurgency. Therefore, it is argued that Turkey, by ignoring the insurgency features, has disregarded the legitimate parts of the cause and related popular support, and thus has responded mostly with deterrent measures apart from the reforms of recent years. Results have shown that policies of deterrence culminated in a steady level of support for the PKK indicating that low level of legitimacy – as they were perceived by the people – of the policies resulted in viable popular and political support for the PKK. Despite the recent accommodative reforms, the existence of pro-PKK parties rallying electoral support in the political arena provided sustained level activities in the conventional politics in Turkey's municipal and national political system, in which they pursue pro-PKK agendas, such as 'Autonomy' and 'Confederation' as well as activities to increase the distinction in identity around the ethnic consciousness for more popular support. Yet, no clear pattern is identified between violence level and popular support in the macro-scale.

**Keywords:** PKK; popular support; counterterrorism; insurgency; political violence; Turkey

### **Introduction**

Turkey, in its recent history, has faced a high volume of political violence from different parts of the political spectrum. Terrorism has placed an enormous cost on the Turkish Republic, both economically and socially. For the last three decades, terror incidents have been dominated disproportionately by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Since its foundation, the PKK conflict has caused approximately 35,000 fatalities, around 4800 of which were civilians and 5850

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