

Centre-Periphery Conflict and Ideological Distance in Turkey

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Abstract: *This article integrates ideology into a game-theoretical model of centre-periphery bargains. Ideological differences between national and sub-national elites constitute a major obstacle for the accommodation of autonomy claims. While reforms bringing about decentralization are often analysed systematically as well as through case studies, cases where, despite claims to autonomy, decentralization does not occur have been largely neglected by scholars of territorial politics. Turkey is such a ‘negative case’. We argue that ideological distance prevents national parties from accommodating peripheral authority claims. We test our expectation with a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative analysis of party positions with in-depth qualitative analysis of party documents showing how the different ideological positions of national and Kurdish parties affect decentralization demand and national response in Turkey between 1987 and 2015. Our findings support the theoretical expectations, but also point to additional inferences. Whereas asymmetric authority demands have been widely ignored, symmetric local autonomy has become an important issue in territorial politics.*

1 Introduction

The partisan representatives of Kurdish citizens in Turkey have long striven for more autonomy. Their claims have a strong identity component rooted in cultural differences and precedents of autonomy in neighbouring countries. Economic power has partially shifted from the western industrial areas of Turkey to the central ‘Anatolian Tiger’ provinces (Tok 2008; World Bank 2015, 96); the areas of dense Kurdish population remain poor on average, but still provide about 6 per cent of Turkey’s GDP between 1987 and 2015 (TUIK 2015).¹ This is slightly more than the ratio of the Scottish GDP to the overall GDP of the United Kingdom. Kurds in Turkey constitute around 52% of the overall Kurdish population in the Greater Middle East and they are estimated to form between 14 and 22% of the Turkish population.² Adding to the economic and demographic importance as well as to the territorial size of the Kurdish populated areas, Kurdish autonomy claims challenge the centralist and nationalist attitudes of many Turkish elites. Territorial integrity and cultural unity are of particular concern for conservative political actors in Ankara. Hence, the centre in Turkey depends on the Kurdish areas in economic as well as symbolic terms.

¹ We consider here only provinces with Kurdish population majorities and aggregate the share of the GDP at current prices.

² Estimates of the Kurdish population are contested. However, the regions with Kurdish majorities have much higher birth rates leading to a growing share of the Kurdish population over time (Izady 2015).

Autonomy for the Kurdish region, secession as well as irredentist mobilization are preferred options for the Kurdish majorities in eastern Turkey. This underpins the credibility of the autonomy demands. Thus, this case fulfils all conditions referred to in the introduction of this special issue. This should lead us to expect that the centre at some point concedes to the Kurdish demands (Siroky et al. 2016). Admittedly, in many other cases regions with comparable minority mobilization and economic and symbolic capacities received asymmetric authority and thereby a recognition of their specific identity. In the Turkish case, however, there is no single instance in recent decades where the government signalled its willingness to accommodate Kurdish autonomy demand.

Existing theories of national partisan preferences towards minority accommodation fail to predict the unresolved “Kurdish question”. We argue that the main factor preventing movement towards a more decentralized Turkish state is the ideological distance between neo-liberal and culturally conservative national governments in Ankara and the Marxist and culturally pluralist mobilization of Kurdish political actors. Hence, we add the role of ideological distance between partisan actors to the analysis of centre–periphery conflicts and integrate ideology into a game-theoretical model. Since many case studies, as well as systematic evidence, point to a positive relationship between ideological proximity and transfers of authority to the periphery, we complement the causal symmetry with a ‘negative case’ – one where against the expectations of other theoretical approaches authority transfers fail to occur.³

We critically discuss existing approaches to explaining asymmetric decentralization and conceptually develop our argument that ideological distance is a so far ignored but very important factor. We integrate this factor into a game-theoretical model of centre–periphery conflict. Given significant ideological distance between national and peripheral political actors, we expect conflict to be the outcome instead of exit (secession), loyalty (status quo) or concessions towards asymmetric arrangements. Next we test this argument with a mixed-methods approach to Turkish party competition. Quantitatively, we use party manifesto-based preference mappings to illustrate the constellation of actors on economic, cultural and territorial dimensions. Important veto players, such as the Constitutional Court (CC), the National Security Council (NSC) and the president are taken into consideration. Qualitatively, using party documents and legislative proposals, we trace the development of party preferences, their framing and also attempts to implement territorial reforms between 1987 and 2015.

The analysis largely confirms our quantitative findings. National parties most of the time ignore Kurdish claims to autonomy. Decentralization at the local level became a major issue for the national parties. However, the discourse about local authority was entirely decoupled from Kurdish autonomy demands and evolved as part of the populist and peripheral mobilization strategy of Islamic parties. Accordingly, the framing and meaning of local authority is very different for central and peripheral parties. Kurdish parties frame local and regional authority as part of radical democracy, striving for effective political decentralization of sub-national entities. The national government parties

³ A negative case is a case which lacks the outcome of interest. Additionally, informative negative cases are characterized by the possibility principle. This principle states that relevant negative cases are those where the outcome has a real chance of occurring (Mahoney and Goertz 2004, 654). In our case the realistic possibility of authority accommodation is given through the presence and powerful mobilization of the Kurdish minority as well through the fact that a number of existing theories (incl. Siroky et al. 2016) would predict authority transfers to Kurdish dominated regions.

overwhelmingly frame local authority in terms of effective public service provision and mainly refer to administrative decentralization. These differences reflect the ideological differences on the other dimensions. Neo-liberal, nationalist and Islamic ideologies prevail on the national level and contrast sharply with the culturally pluralist and market-sceptic mobilization of Kurdish parties.

2 Decentralization Claims and National Responses: The Role of Ideological Differences

Asymmetric claims for territorially based authority always come with an identity component. Ethnicity, due to its malleability, underlies many claims to political self-determination (Chandra 2012; Anderson & Costa 2016). In multinational states the mobilization of national minorities results in claims to political self-determination or co-decision rights on a territorial basis (Keating 2001). The claimants usually envisage an institutionalized asymmetric authority which underlines their distinctiveness (Stepan 2001). These recognized differences are mirrored in *de jure* asymmetric authority arrangements (McGarry 2005), which differ from *de facto* political differences in federated or decentralized states. Hence asymmetrically distributed authority is a political answer to identity claims (Hooghe et al. 2015). It is, however, just one plausible answer to sub-national demand, with other responses ranging from symmetric federalism and consociational arrangements to ignorance, suppression, military conflict and secession.

In order to explain this variation in the willingness of national actors to accommodate authority claims, scholars turn to national actors' preferences on the territorial dimension (De Winter et al. 2006; Massetti and Schakel 2016). But these revealed preferences do not show very systematic patterns. Moreover, they are only weakly related to an overall left–right dimension of political conflict or to economic and cultural sub-dimensions (Toubeau and Wagner 2015; Swenden and Maddens 2009). Several concepts are proposed to make sense of the erratic nature of signalled preferences on territoriality by national mainstream parties. The electoral vulnerability concept starts from the assumption that national parties are willing to decentralize in order to prevent losses in a particular sub-state at national elections (Meguid 2009; Alonso 2012). The congruence concept argues that if the same party governs on several territorial levels at the same time, this facilitates authority shifts due to internal party pressure (Elias and Tronconi 2011, 518–20; Petersohn et al. 2015, 629). The authority insulation concept argues that shifts of authority occur in order to empower national actors on a sub-national level if they expect to gain stable majorities in these areas (O'Neill 2005). This argument implies the perceived stability of electoral support of the political party over time and at different levels. Authority is insulated in areas which are electoral strongholds, irrespective of their electoral or economic importance (O'Neill 2003).

The concepts of vulnerability, congruence and insulation build on different causal mechanisms and lead to different expectations with regard to territorial reform. The electoral vulnerability argument argues that authority is transferred to sub-national levels with the aim of securing national majorities (Alonso 2012). In contrast, congruence and insulation refer to an empowerment of the same party on another territorial level. Others argue that the bargaining power of regional minorities can lead to national actors' willingness to accommodate irrespective of their genuine preferences. Once mobilization for autonomy is given and exit seems a viable option, the bargaining power of minorities

depends on the economic and/or symbolic dependency of the centre on that particular periphery (Siroky et al. 2016). However, cases where accommodation fails to appear for important regions with viable exit-options cast the explanatory power of all the accounts mentioned so far into doubt. We claim that Turkey is such a case. The south-eastern provinces are electorally, economically and symbolically an important part of the Turkish nation and the signalled request for authority is highly credible, but the claims to autonomy have so far led to hostile reactions.

We argue that national government parties may be willing to shift authority to those regions where ideologically proximate parties govern.⁴ Our theory of ideological authority insulation (Röth & Kaiser 2016) claims that asymmetric authority shift is a likely outcome if two factors come together: credible minority mobilization and stable ideological proximity between national and regional political elites.

The calculus of ideological insulation builds on two causal bases. One argument relates to increased control by replacing or side-lining elites. Additionally, authority shifts may lead to establishing new institutions and new positions which can be staffed with allies. Thereby, asymmetric decentralization serves to mobilize support and to consolidate control by replacing or side-lining the sub-national elites of ideological opponents (Boone 2003, 356; Aalen and Muriaas 2015).

Our argument can be made explicit by formulating it in a game-theoretical way. The empowerment of ideological allies on the sub-national level alters the structure of costs and benefits for national parties as well for minorities. A shift towards more authority for ideological allies on the sub-national level creates veto players for competing parties on the national level who may enter government in future. Thus, for the party which shifts authority to sub-national levels, empowering ideological allies may achieve considerable long-term gains. The reform may be seen as a means to solve a prisoner's dilemma by institutionalizing authority differences in a short-term equilibrium (Zuber 2011).

Asymmetric authority claims are articulated because minorities have strong reservations about the location of authority in the centre (Zuber 2011). From the regional-minority perspective, the risks of being governed centrally should decrease with ideological proximity, reducing the willingness to secede and moderate the claims towards authority. Asymmetric arrangements attempt to alter the risk calculations of the minorities and keep them in the state (Young 1994). Consequently, ideological similarity drives minority challengers as well as national actors to consent. In contrast, ideological distance increases the incentives for confrontation symmetrically.

Accounting for ideological differences solves the puzzling fact that the same national elites follow different strategies towards different regions in the same country. In Zuber's illustrative case, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan succeeded in their autonomy claims, gaining far-reaching asymmetric authority from the Russian government; while Chechnya failed to receive any specific recognition (Zuber 2011, 557–64). Such differences can be observed in other countries as well. In some cases no institutional recognition of self-determination is achieved at all, even though national minorities are mobilized to a

⁴ For earlier arguments in this direction – which, however, have so far not been systematically developed on the conceptual level and tested empirically – see Garman et al. 2001; Maddens and Libbrecht 2009; Toubeau and Massetti 2013; Toubeau and Wagner 2015. In contrast to the niche-party literature (Meguid 2005; Wagner 2012), we assume that claimants to more regional authority do have an ideological stance. Since these parties offer their population the option of a new state or autonomously governed territory, by definition they provide their potential voters with a broader vision of society beyond mere claims of authority.

considerable degree. As we argue, the pay-offs in an asymmetric decentralization game are tremendously altered when ideological distance between national and minority elites is factored in (see Table 1).

The incentive to decentralize under ideological proximity (Outcome B) is even higher than in the model suggested by Zuber (Outcome A). Empowering ideological allies brings long-term gains because national elites basically install a power base by the replacement or consolidation of regional elites. Under the assumption of ideological proximity asymmetric arrangements are likely to occur. It is actually not even a prisoner's dilemma any more, but the dominant strategy, because both actors benefit most from the asymmetry outcome (NE: $AA > SQ > VC > S$, RE: $AA > S > SQ > VC$). In contrast, the empowerment of ideologically distant actors comes with considerable long-term costs. These costs of establishing a power base for political opponents and of possibly dealing with spill-over effects to other territorial entities in the longer term make accommodation under ideological distance very unlikely and reduce the willingness of national actors to accommodate authority demands (Outcome C). Ideologically distant regional elites prefer secession or asymmetry over being dominated by national ideological opponents (status quo), but national elites neither accept the separation of territory because secession is a major symbol of weakness nor accommodate towards the asymmetry option as this is also very costly in political terms. Therefore violent confrontation turns out to be the likely outcome under the assumption of considerable ideological distance (NE: $SQ > VC > AA > S$; RE: $S > AA > VC > SQ$).

3 A Quantitative Assessment of the Turkish Actor Constellation

Quantitative evidence supports the ideological similarity argument with regard to both programmatic signals (Toubeau and Wagner 2015) and the implementation of asymmetric decentralization reforms (Röth & Kaiser 2016). In addition, many case and area studies substantiate this relationship for positive cases: that is, cases where decentralization reforms occur. What remains under-researched are those cases where reform demands are denied. As a population comprises positive and negative cases (Mahoney and Goertz 2004), the absence of asymmetric decentralization despite regional demand is also of

Table 1: Confrontation Game with Ideological Constraints

NE / RE	Cooperation	Defection
Cooperation	<i>Asymmetric Arrangement (AA)</i>	<i>Secession (S)</i>
	Outcome A: 3/3	Outcome A: 1/4
	Outcome B: 4/4	Outcome B: 1/3
	Outcome C: 2/3	Outcome C: 1/4
Defection	<i>Status Quo (SQ)</i>	<i>Violent Confrontation (VC)</i>
	Outcome A: 4/1	Outcome A: 2/2
	Outcome B: 3/2	Outcome B: 2/1
	Outcome C: 4/1	Outcome C: 3/2

Note: Outcome A is borrowed from Zuber (2011), leaving ideological concerns aside. Outcome B captures the relationship between national elites and ideologically proximate regional elites. Outcome C depicts the case of ideologically distant elites. NE = National Elites; RE = Regional Elites.

theoretical interest. A causal relationship is only well established if it is met by positive and negative cases alike (Walker and Cohen 1985).

Turkey serves as a negative case, because a long history of Kurdish autonomy demands has not so far led to concessions by Turkish governments. Our argument leads us to expect that this is due to ideological distance between the political parties concerned. We trace the ideological constellations of Kurdish parties and the major Turkish national parties from 1987 to 2015. Primary documents, such as party manifestos are coded and quantitatively assessed to map the preferences of actors on three dimensions: economic, cultural and territorial. The economic dimension captures the degree to which political actors advocate social coordination via markets and acceptance of market outcomes (Röth 2016). On the cultural dimension, we use the acceptance of cultural heterogeneity versus the advocacy of cultural homogeneity as conceptual extreme points. The stance on this dimension is reflected by more concrete issue positions towards political participation, multiculturalism, protection of minorities and nationalism. Both economic and cultural positions are measured by using fine-grained issue positions and their salencies from the CMP/MARPOR dataset (Volkens et al. 2015) according to the procedure proposed by Röth (2016). Many important programmes and policy statements in Turkey are not available from the CMP dataset. In these cases we coded the documents ourselves using the CMP coding scheme.⁵ We converted the issue positions and salience measures into comparable positions.⁶

Since national governing parties change and Kurdish parties run through a ‘circle of formation–closure–formation’ (Watts 2010, 69), the quantitative assessment also gives an overview of the evolution of the complex Turkish party system (see Figure 1). The different Kurdish parties (written in italics) adopt very interventionist positions on the economic dimension. In only two cases (1991 and 2004), have they contested elections with more moderate centre-left positions, motivated by coalition requirements. Between 1987 and 1991 the Kurdish MPs were part of the SHP before they founded the HEP.⁷ In 2002 the DEHAP also followed a coalition strategy with the SHP and both parties converged on economic positions.

Culturally, the Kurdish parties’ pluralist vision of Turkey sets them at an ever increasing distance from the AKP and MHP. The AKP stresses the values of Islam as a unifying cultural umbrella, whereas the MHP highlights Turkish nationalism. The CHP, as a centre-left party, held relatively monistic views until the late 2000s, when they started to move towards more cultural pluralism. With regard to the territorial dimension, the Kurdish parties have a tradition of formulating detailed claims to strengthen regional and local authority. Successive Turkish governments have perceived these claims as challenging the constitutionally protected unity of the Turkish state, often leading to Kurdish parties being banned.⁸

The Turkish mainstream parties, despite their differences, have mainly adhered to centre and centre-right economic ideologies since the 1980s. Only the SHP in the early 1990s, and the CHP since 2002, have held economically centre-left positions and been able to pass the

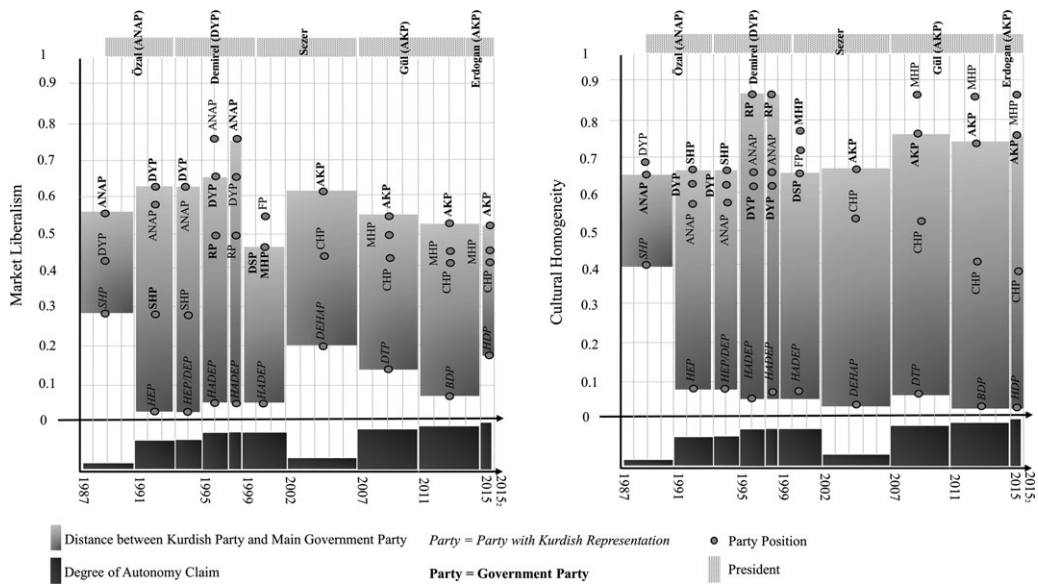
⁵ See Table B in the Online Appendix for an overview of the documents used.

⁶ Issue emphases are converted to party positions by using the approach of Röth (2016). For the selection, confirmation, weighting and aggregating of items via generalized structural equation modelling, see the Online Appendix. For the different sources of programmatic documents, see Table F in the Online Appendix.

⁷ For party names in English and Turkish, see Table A in the Online Appendix.

⁸ A related reason for banning Kurdish parties is their alleged relationship to terrorist activities.

Figure 1: The Party Constellation in Turkey between 1987 and 2015



Note: Party positions on the two dimensions are measured with CMP/Marpur data using the procedure of Röth (2016). See Online Appendix for a detailed description of the measurement. The degree of autonomy claims refers to the institutional depth and political scope of demanded authority in the manifestos of Kurdish parties. All manifestos of the Kurdish parties have been coded by the authors (see Online Appendix Table F). The top line lists the different presidents.

10 per cent electoral threshold. Our overview also indicates that until the early 2000s Turkish cabinets were short-lived and the party of the president and the leading cabinet party rarely corresponded. Only since 2002 with the successive majorities of the AKP has the Turkish system become more stable. The corresponding reduction of veto powers opened up a window of opportunity for constitutional change. Overall we observe the largest ideological differences between national governments and Kurdish parties in the 1990s. In the early 2000s these differences decreased, but began to rise again when the AKP put more emphasis on Islam as the unifying cultural umbrella for Turkey and started to lose votes in the Kurdish regions.

A detailed account of decentralization preferences is not captured in the CMP/MARPOR data. The degree of autonomy claims is based on our detailed coding of programmatic proposals of the Kurdish parties (lower part of Figure 1). We explain these preferences in more detail in the qualitative part. What is already visible in the quantitative overview, is the correspondence of ideological distance and the intensity of the autonomy claims.

4 Territorial Authority in the Turkish Context

The history of territorial politics in Turkey helps us understand the specific discourse about local and regional authority. A system of democratic local government was gradually built up in modern Turkey, especially following the establishment of the Republic and the municipal legislation of 1930. The principle of the election of the mayor

by the municipal assembly was then adopted for the first time (Harris 1948, 17–18). Later it became possible for mayors to be appointed by the minister of the interior or the prefect, although election by the local council is the norm (Harris 1948, 192). Special Provincial Administrations received their budgets from central government, but had limited executive competencies. Provincial assemblies were directly elected, but could not exercise legislative authority autonomously, because decisions were subject to the approval of the governor. Thus local governments were designed as the ‘local administrations’ of central government (Göymen 2004, 31; Bayraktar and Massicard 2012, 11). This ‘tutelage system’ engenders constant political conflict,⁹ because advocates of political decentralization consider only its abolition can enable effective local authority. Local authorities were empowered at the municipality level, if at all, rather than at intermediate levels, which were politically neutralized (Bayraktar and Massicard 2012, 19).

In the 1980s, Regional Development Administrations (RDADs) were established for the development of the south-eastern Anatolia areas. Although having some competences with regard to local and regional issues, they were never intended to evolve as entities of regional authority. In 2006 a new law was introduced which established 26 RDAGs according to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics in the European Union (NUTS).

Actors trying to change the territorial structure of Turkey are confronted with a political system equipped with various veto players. With a constitutional change in 2007, the political system may be described as semi-presidential. Since then, the president has been directly elected (Özbudun 2011, 75), with the first election held in 2014. Although the president is not authorized, before or since 2007, to act alone in executive matters, he is a major veto player able to delay or prevent policy change. The effective head of the executive branch, the Council of Ministers, is the prime minister. The president and the Council of Ministers are legally supervised by the Constitutional Court.¹⁰ Since 1961 Turkey has employed a proportional representation system using the D’Hondt method. Proportional representation is not very rewarding to regionally concentrated minorities; moreover, since 1983 a 10 per cent electoral threshold (nationwide) has further excluded small and minority parties.

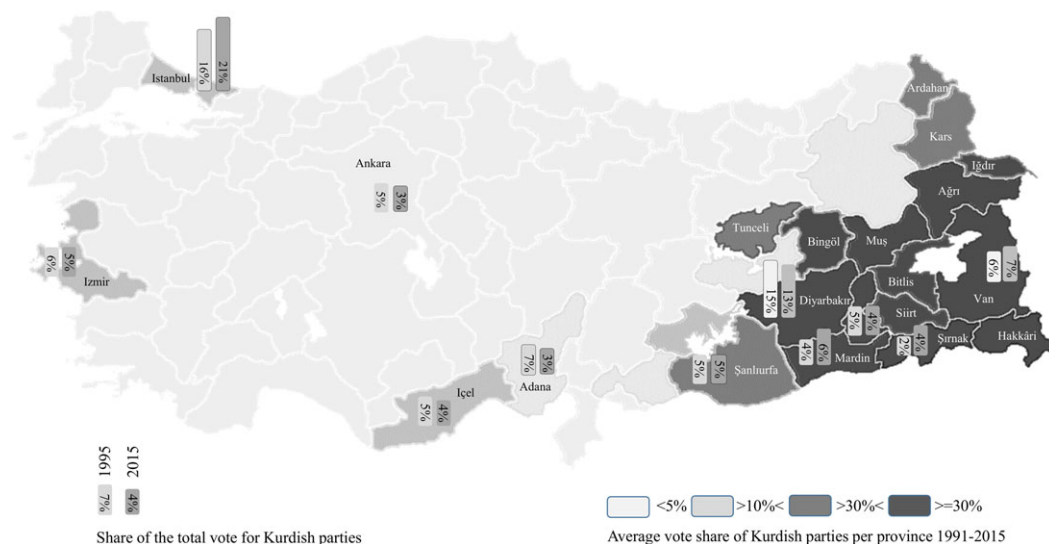
The territorial concentration of Kurdish voters provides the basis for autonomy claims. However, a considerable number of Kurdish voters are located in the metropolitan cities of Istanbul, Izmir and Mersin. In 1995 around 40 per cent of HADEP voters were located outside the south-eastern provinces, and this share has changed little subsequently. In 2015 around 38 per cent of HDP voters came from the western and metropolitan provinces of Turkey (see Figure 2). Overall, without these voters none of the Kurdish parties would be able to pass the 10 per cent electoral threshold.

The provinces with strong Kurdish population shares are electorally relevant for the national mainstream parties as well. The Islamic parties as well as centre-left parties usually receive between 30 and 40 percent of their national votes from these regions. From the electoral vulnerability perspective, the accommodation of Kurdish regions would be straightforward, because this would probably tip the balance towards the accommodating

⁹ For a more precise description of the tutelage system and its reform under the Erdogan cabinets, see Coşkun and Uzun 2005, 161; Tortop et al. 2006, 129–30.

¹⁰ Before the first Erdogan cabinet, the National Security Council (NSC), representing the military class of Turkey, was also an important veto player. Its ‘recommendations’ were binding acts with ‘priority consideration’ (Özbudun 2011, 82). However, in 2004 its influence was diminished to advisory functions (Keyder 2004).

Figure 2: Territorial Voter Distribution of Kurdish Parties



Note: The share of the total vote for Kurdish parties is calculated by dividing the sum of regional votes by the absolute number of national votes for the respective party (in this case the HADEP in 1995 and the HDP in 2015). The average percentages of votes are calculated as the mean of the vote share for Kurdish parties within the specific province between 1991 and 2015 (national parliamentary elections).

national party in national elections. But the vulnerability as well as the congruence argument fails to work in the Turkish context even though the electoral setup is much closer to the theoretical expectations than in countries for which these theories were developed.¹¹ Despite the electoral relevance of the Kurdish provinces for the national mainstream parties, stable majorities in these areas are not very likely. In 2015, the Kurdish party (HDP) dominated most of them, having for example majorities of up to 85 percent of the vote in provinces like Sirnak. Compared to other autonomous regions, asymmetric decentralization in Turkey would sooner or later empower the minority parties and the Kurdish parties are ideologically very distant to the national governments in Turkey (see Figure 1).

5 A Qualitative Analysis of Party Preferences and the Framing of Territorial Tensions

Our quantitative overview of the Turkish party system has visualized the enormous ideological differences between national and Kurdish parties (see upper part of Figure 1) as well as the changing intensity of Kurdish autonomy claims (see lower part of Figure 1). These findings are confirmed by our qualitative analysis of primary documents relating to economic and cultural positions. What remains hidden in the quantitative analysis are the substantive claims on the territorial dimension. Hence we pursue a comparative analysis of

¹¹ For example, Scotland never provided more than 10 percent of the vote for Labour or the Conservatives after the Second World War.

Kurdish demands and the response of specific national parties. Additionally, we highlight the framing of territorial proposals by Kurdish as well as the national parties. The framing is of genuine concern here, because our argument rests on the assumption that whether autonomy claims are embedded in Marxist rhetoric or in terms of efficient public goods provision makes a difference.

Kurdish Autonomy Claims 1987 - 2015

The timeline of Kurdish autonomy demands (see lower part of Figure 1) highlights that with two exceptions the intensity in which regional autonomy is claimed has always been very high and is still increasing. The exceptions are periods when Kurdish political representatives were part of broader alliances and territorial issues were accordingly toned down.

Before 1990, only the Kurdish representatives within the SHP were considered to partially represent Kurdish claims in the Turkish parliament and their influence on the territorial agenda of the SHP was limited. Autonomy claims were not part of the government agenda at that time. In 1990 Kurdish parliamentarians split off from the SHP to found the HEP. Although the HEP was banned three years later, all pro-Kurdish parties have followed in its footsteps and ‘the circle of formation–closure–formation’ ensured a consistent representation of the Kurdish people by different partisan movements afterwards (Watts 2010, 69). None of the succeeding parties fundamentally revised the agenda of the HEP. Furthermore, the leading individuals were mainly the same, despite juridical interventions such as imprisonment and political restrictions (Watts 2010, 70). Kurdish partisan representation is on an abstract level, therefore, characterized by programmatic and personal continuity. Claims to social justice, human rights, interventionist and redistributive demands reflect the Kurdish left-wing economic discourse of the 1990s, mirroring the Marxist origin of the Kurdish movements (Watts 2010). A simple categorization as ‘ethnic party’ would be misleading and does not reflect the relations of the HEP and its successors to the Turkish left (Watts 2010, 73).

In 1990 the HEP issued its first policy statement as an independent party. In contrast to the SHP, its statements bear a strong anti-capitalistic appeal (HEP 1990, 1ff, 10).¹² They also criticize the post-1982 constitutional and legal regulations, in particular passages related to ‘the Kurdish question’ (HEP 1990, 17ff.). The HEP formulates precise demands for decentralization, primarily transfer of competencies such as education and the abolishment of the tutelage system (HEP 1990, 24–5, 55, 59). However, these claims are embedded in a broader critique of the Turkish centralist culture (HEP 1990, 9). The ‘Kurdish question’ is framed as a democratic deficit, a lack of cultural pluralism and of minority protection (HEP 1990, 17–19; Schüler 1998, 95–102).

The HEP was dissolved by the Constitutional Court in 1993. It was succeeded by the DEP. That too was banned by the Constitutional Court, in June 1994, for threatening the integrity of Turkey and succeeded by the HADEP. The HADEP era was the most violent in the conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurdish movements. The south-eastern provinces had been governed under a state of emergency since 1987 and the conflict caused approximately 30.000 casualties during the 1990s (SIPRI 2010, 67, 74).

In 1994 the HADEP largely retained the programmatic orientation of the HEP. They presented themselves as the party of the exploited, blaming authoritarian and centralist

¹² Party documents are listed in the Online Appendix (Table F).

governance by the Turkish elites (HADEP 1994, 5). A solution was presented: more decentralized and ‘federal’ institutions,¹³ including regional parliaments and increasing competencies for local governments (HADEP 1994, 10). The HADEP identified obstructive elements of the constitution and demanded the abolition of the tutelage system and the 10 per cent electoral threshold (HADEP 1994, 10, 9). Again, the military conflict was framed as a democratization problem, by highlighting minority rights and blaming cultural assimilation (HADEP 1994, 8, 6). However, the HADEP extended their cultural pluralist position beyond the claim of regional self-determination to a general plea for a multicultural Turkey (HADEP 1994, 11–12). The party was banned in March 2003.

When Kurdish parliamentarians were part of the SHP, autonomy claims were rarely voiced. This changed when the HEP identified major obstacles to Kurdish political self-determination: the tutelage system and centralized education. Consequently, they demanded the first be abolished and the second decentralized. In the HADEP period ideological differences increased, mainly on the cultural dimension. The framing of political self-determination focused on minority rights and multiculturalism. The HEP’s autonomy claims were not only pursued but also intensified. The demand to, *de facto*, federalize Turkey led to the dissolution of HADEP by the Constitutional Court.

In 1997 the DEHAP was founded, renewing official Kurdish representation after the banning of the HADEP. The DEHAP shifted attention to the role of Turkish citizenship and demanded further democratization and more rights for cultural and ethnic minorities in general (DEHAP 2003, 17). Economically, the DEHAP programme of 2003 broke with the anti-capitalist appeal of its predecessors, envisaging coalition with more moderate left-wing groups. In 2004 the DEHAP and the SHP set up a joint list for the local elections (Watts 2010, 71). Symbolic of this shift, the small-business sector was now presented as a major addressee of DEHAP policy proposals (DEHAP 2003, 41). The stance of the Kurdish parties had always been based on cultural pluralism, but this was now significantly strengthened, in particular with regard to gender equality (DEHAP 2003, 54, 77) and LGBT rights (DEHAP 2003, 66). The economic moderation of the DEHAP was accompanied by very few and only modest claims on the territorial dimension.

The DEHAP merged with the DTH to form the DTP in 2005. While sharpening its culturally pluralist profile, economically the DTP returned to anti-capitalist views (DTP 2005, 7). It criticized the neo-liberal politics of retrenchment and proposed interventionist measures (DTP 2005, 54–5, 56–7, 59ff.). It attacked the Turkish system as highly centralist, in contrast to its proposed network of civil society groups, labelled ‘democratic confederalism’ (DTP 2005, 7).¹⁴ Thus the moderate claims of the DEHAP in the early 2000s were replaced with more interventionist positions, while proposals to empower regions resembled the idea of federalism, although the DTP never used the word.

In 2009 the closure–formation–closure circle was activated again: the DTP was banned by the Constitutional Court for threatening the indivisible unity of the Turkish state and succeeded by the BDP. The BDP signalled programmatic continuity with its general policy statements in 2009 and its manifesto in 2011. This time, the economic model set against the ‘centralized and capitalist Turkish system’ was called ‘participatory economy’. Its

¹³ The term federalism is never used in Turkish discourse, probably because such a claim would violate the Turkish constitution. Often, the claims of Kurdish actors simply describe a federal system in other words; we therefore use this term although it is not literally mentioned.

¹⁴ The pillar of this political order is participatory democracy based on local authority, with reference to ecology and feminism (Yarkin 2015).

demands – a maximum 35-hour working week, suspension of privatizations and the reconstruction of the Turkish agricultural sector – indicated a left-wing economic agenda (BDP 2011).

With its reference to the ‘democratic autonomy’ model, the BDP also invented a new label for its territorial ambitions. The model entails dividing the country into 20 to 25 autonomous regions, structured by their socio-economic capacities (BDP 2011).¹⁵ The major planks of the policy are administrative regional structures and constitutionally guaranteed self-rule authority with elected regional parliaments. The central state would retain residual powers, such as foreign affairs, external security and finance. The BDP demanded shared competencies in internal security and justice. The regional legislative actors envisaged would have the competence to determine other official languages besides Turkish. Regional schools should explicitly ensure the provision of teaching in additional and region-specific languages. Regional parliaments would have the right to raise taxes. At the same time, additional population- and development-based transfers from the central government, comparable to a fiscal equalization scheme, would take place. In effect, the BDP proposed a federal system for Turkey, with significant and effective regional self-rule alongside shared rule.

Despite the strong decentralization claims of the BDP, the party was not banned, mainly because a 2010 constitutional amendment had raised the threshold for doing so. However, thousands of party members were arrested (Satana 2012, 184). Consequently, the BDP did not contest the next national election. It ran parallel to the HDP in the 2014 municipal elections, mostly in the Kurdish-dominated south-east, while the HDP contested elections in the rest of the country. The HDP was founded in 2012 out of numerous left-wing movements, in order to pass the 10 per cent electoral threshold and ensure Kurdish partisan representation nationally.

The HDP programme for the June 2015 election borrowed several aspects from the preceding BDP and DTP platforms but included some new features. The participatory elements are framed in terms of individual sovereignty, this time labelled ‘radical democracy’ (HDP 2015a, 3). Its central concept is ‘democratic autonomy’, proposed for the entire country, but with a specific focus on decentralized new regions and regional parliaments (HDP 2015, 1, 11). The HDP explicitly mentions the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ECLS). As an initiative of the Council of Europe, the ECLS has sought since 1985 to establish municipal political, financial and administrative self-government. Turkey signed the Charter in 1992, but with reservations to certain paragraphs and articles.¹⁶ The HDP seeks to abolish these reservations to increase the autonomy of the municipalities (11).

What was called the ‘participatory economy’ in the BDP programme is replaced with a new label. Under the heading of ‘confidence economy’,¹⁷ the HDP continues the narrative of a participatory and socially embedded economy. Production is to be based on values such as egalitarianism, participation, ecology and gender equality (HDP 2015b, 16ff).

¹⁵ The following examples of BDP proposals are quoted from the 2011 manifesto, which is unpaginated.

¹⁶ Some reservations are caused by discrepancies in the 1982 Turkish Constitution. Reservations are articulated towards articles 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. Some scholars argue that with the reform of the local level in the mid-2000s the ECLS was implemented *de facto* (Sadioğlu and Ömürgönülşen 2014; Sobaci 2015, 9). However, the degree of fiscal autonomy and national interference in local governance remain under debate.

¹⁷ In the November 2015 election the HDP changed the term again, to ‘confident life economy’ (HDP 2015b, 16ff.).

Proposals for a minimum wage, free supply of basic services and ending privatization reflect the HDP's interventionist stance (HDP 2015a, 27ff). Culturally, the 2015 agenda is probably the most liberal in Turkish history. It demands the equal treatment of religions and explicitly mentions discrimination against the Alevi (HDP 2015a, 19; HDP 2015b, 15). It supports multiculturalism and multilingual education (HDP 2015a, 45, HDP 2015b, 15–16). Both women's rights (2015a, 7, 20–2, 40–1; 2015b, 3ff, 23) and LGBT rights (HDP 2015a, 26; HDP 2015b, 29) are highly salient issues.

After the 2015 elections tensions between Kurdish actors and the re-elected AKP government rose again. The HDP supported the 14-point declaration of a Kurdish think-tank (DTK) which explicitly proposed regional self-government (Bianet 2016). In Turkish discourse this represented another shift, using terminology previously banned from the territorial debate. The AKP response was hostile and at the end of 2015 many Kurdish mayors and the HDP chairman were prosecuted (Hurriyet 2016), while many south-eastern cities descended into violent conflict (Human Rights Watch 2015).

In sum, Kurdish claims to political self-determination have always been framed in economic and cultural terms. The labels – confident life economy, participatory economy – change, but they offer the voter a comprehensive approach combining interventionist and locally organized economic structures with multicultural elements and a firm idea of effective political self-determination. Over time, the demands become more precise, continuously trying to shift the boundaries of the Turkish discourse towards accepting the language of federalism. In comparison to other countries, this might be not very radical, but given the background of the Turkish principle of a unitary state and nationalism, it is perceived as a serious threat to the unity of the Turkish nation.

National Neglect of Kurdish Autonomy Claims and Parallel Development of a Discourse on Symmetric Local Autonomy

The main actors on the national level in the late 1980s and early 1990s were the ANAP and the DYP. The ANAP formed the first government after military rule. It had to integrate party members from very heterogeneous backgrounds but converged on economic positions favourable to privatization and marketization, alongside a strong belief in technological progress (Keleş 1992, 10–12). Culturally, the ANAP combined conservative with liberal ideas into a highly original position of cultural 'checks and balances' (Schüler 1998, 38–45). In its manifesto the ANAP dedicated about 3 per cent of emphasis to decentralization issues. Most of the statements emphasize advocacy for increased competencies on the municipality level and are framed in terms of efficient public goods provision (ANAP 1991). The ANAP's behaviour in government is also instructive. In 1984, it nullified an order originating from the military regime in 1983 which would have created regions with directly elected governors equipped with considerable authority and resources. The ANAP perceived the division of territory in the absence of a settlement of the Kurdish question as very risky (Bayraktar and Massicard 2012, 26). On the other hand, they also made several attempts to moderately increase the authority of municipalities and some laws passed the assembly.¹⁸

¹⁸ The most important of these laws is that establishing the metropolitan municipalities (law 3030, 1984). Another important law on 'urban planning' increased autonomy on local debt and the right to establish municipal

The other major national actor struggling with the ANAP for electoral predominance was the DYP. Economically, the DYP held moderate views of a mixed economy (*karma ekonomisi*), but after 1987 adopted market-liberal positions closer to the ANAP (Schüler 1998, 50–1). Culturally, the DYP was a conservative party whose positions closely resemble those of the ANAP. A strong emphasis on nationalism alongside the notion of re-democratization characterizes the stance of the DYP in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Consequently, the DYP does not mention territorial issues in their official statements in the late 1980s.

In 1991 the Turkish prime minister of the DYP–SHP coalition government, Suleyman Demirel, acknowledged the ‘Kurdish reality’ in a speech in Diyarbakir. This speech was seen by some as a turning point from the policy of denial to acknowledgement of the Kurdish problem (Beriker-Atiyas 1997, 452). This seems to be a misinterpretation, as the Kurdish problem remained framed as a terrorism issue (Satana 2011, 172–3). Only two years later, extending cultural rights was seen as a concession to terrorism by Demirel (Beriker-Atiyas 1997, 442).

The centre-right DYP was a market-liberal party, while conservatism, nationalism and law and order issues characterized its cultural agenda (Schüler 1998, 49). Despite the 1991 Demirel speech, it remained silent about Kurdish autonomy claims and decentralization in general. The only statement related to the territorial dimension is a brief passage in favour of a unitary state (DYP 1991). The ANAP dedicated several passages of its party manifesto to specific aspects of decentralization. Although it said nothing in response to specific Kurdish demands, it signalled commitment to strengthening local government, framed in terms of efficient provision of local services and local responsiveness (ANAP 1991, 22, 83–9). The SHP, which had made votes for the HEP possible by introducing a special list, also emphasized its advocacy of local governance and argued for provincial governments and the abolition of the tutelage system to increase political participation (SHP 1991).

The DYP was the pivotal player in Turkish politics at that time. Since it was the defender of the unitary state, there was no serious attempt to change the territorial distribution of authority between 1991 and 1996. The same is true with regard to the attitudes of national parties towards the Kurdish question. Officially, policy proposals on political decentralization largely ignored the Kurdish issue. Much more important than the neglect of Kurdish claims was the intensifying Islamic political tradition, which gave rise to the AKP. The AKP’s predecessors, such as the RP, developed no specific position on decentralization in their early phase. What made local authority important for them was the simple fact of local success. After the local elections in 1994 the RP came into power in most of Turkey’s large cities (Dogan 2007, 81). Many later AKP leaders were recruited and trained as mayors in this period.¹⁹

The success of the RP at the municipality level was reflected in its manifesto for the 1995 national election, which included proposals for more authority and more financial means for the local level (RP 1995, 26–7). It depicted the centralist tradition of Turkey as oppressive and exploitative (RP 1995, 26). Again, these statements were entirely disconnected from Kurdish claims. The Kurdish question was embedded in a more cultural perspective. The RP emphasized Islam as the unifying factor for Turkish and Kurdish citizens. The increasing salience of the local authority debate also changed the

¹⁹ The most prominent example is Tayyip Erdogan, mayor of Istanbul 1994–1998. Overall, the role of local politicians at the national level grew, so that the local level became a launching pad for the decentralization agenda and local government reform in Turkey (Sadioğlu 2012).

agenda of the DYP. In the early 1990s it had defended the unitary state; in 1995 it joined the discourse of strengthening local authority, framed as a quest for efficiency and political participation (DYP 1995, 50–2).

The other two parties with parliamentary representation in 1995 placed more emphasis on decentralization issues. The ANAP made local authority a major topic within their manifesto. More local authority was proposed to increase efficiency, raise participation and provide local entities with genuine authority over specific policy areas (ANAP 1995, 8–15).²⁰ It also proposed reducing tutelage (15). After 1994, several bills to increase local authority were tabled, but none of them was successful. One reason was that governments in this period were rather short-lived. For example, the coalition headed by Mesut Yilmaz (ANAP) proposed a bill which contained the transfer of authority, increased revenues and diminished national supervision of the municipality level, but the government fell before the reform could be completed. The RP supported the bill, but considered it not bold enough (Bayraktar and Massicard 2012, 27).

The national election of 1999 produced a new coalition government. The MHP set up a cabinet with the DSP. Even though the MHP presented itself as the defender of national unity and integrity, it also signalled its willingness to extend local autonomy, advocating relaxing central administrative tutelage and granting more autonomy in the provision of local public services (MHP 1999, 45, 48). The DSP also signalled its moderate commitment to more local autonomy. It framed this both as a matter of efficiency and as a means to more responsiveness (DSP 1999, 100). General support for more fiscal as well as political local autonomy was emphasized (DSP 1999, 75).

The FP, predecessor of the RP, referred to its political responsibilities in many municipalities and presented itself as advocate of decentralization (FP 1999, 10–17), framing it in terms of successful management and more efficient public goods provision on the local level. Central government was presented as a major obstacle – too bureaucratic and too restrictive of fiscal resources (FP 1999, 11, 12). The FP was banned by the Constitutional Court in 2001 for violating the secularist base of the Turkish constitution.

Instead of responding to Kurdish claims, national parties in the 1990s developed a separate discourse. In 1991 the SHP, former home of many HEP politicians, had suggested abolishing the tutelage system – a major and ongoing demand of the Kurdish parties. However, in the mid-1990s local authority became a contested issue for almost every national party, regardless of Kurdish claims. Decentralization became an issue in Turkish politics because of the mobilization strategy of Islamic movements and parties. The RP, as the predecessor of the AKP, positioned itself as the ‘outsider’, rallying against the central elites (Bayraktar and Massicard 2012, 27). This local mobilization approach had consequences, as other national parties signalled their willingness to diminish tutelage and to increase administrative autonomy on the local level. It also had policy implications, namely minor reforms of local regulatory competencies. All these proposals and policies were framed in terms of efficiency and totally disconnected from the ‘Kurdish problem’, which was regarded as an issue of terrorism or regional backwardness (Satana 2012, 173).

In the early 2000s the national counterparts of the Kurdish parties were the AKP and the CHP, the only two parties which passed the 10 per cent electoral threshold. The AKP is the successor party of the RP. The first two Erdogan governments (2003–7, 2007–11) made decentralization reform a priority (Yilmaz and Dincer 2003). The 2002 AKP manifesto adopted a very specific stance on decentralization. It proposed changing the

²⁰ These were the regulation of water, environment, agriculture, construction and education (ANAP 1995, 15–16).

tutelage system into a system of legal supervision (AKP 2002). For example, mayors should be dismissed only if courts confirm the necessity (AKP 2002). Increased local authority is mainly regarded as promoting efficiency in public services, but is also framed within principles of participatory and pluralist democracy (AKP 2002). Another element of the manifesto is the demand for the reorganization of metropolitan and non-metropolitan municipalities (AKP 2002).

Since 2002 the AKP has governed alone. Its manifesto statements are mirrored in its government programme, entailing a paradigm shift – strong advocacy of local authority and also the empowerment of provinces. Draft legislation aimed to create ‘a public administration that provides public services in a participatory, transparent, accountable, fair, fast, high-quality, efficient and effective manner’ (Köseçik and Sağbaş 2005, 128). It also intended to restructure the ‘provincial administrations; to transfer competencies and powers of the ministries in the provinces and special provincial administrations’ (Bayraktar and Massicard 2012, 28). The territorial structure of Turkey would have changed significantly. However, various interest groups and political actors sharply criticized the decentralization plans for risking the unity of the state. The proposed laws were watered down, and many of the remaining provisions were vetoed by the president or the Constitutional Court (see Table G in the Online Appendix). The reforms strengthened the municipality level, but primarily metropolitan municipalities.

After its partly successful decentralization attempts, the AKP signalled continued willingness to further empower municipalities. Depicting itself as the one party protecting Turkey from too much centralism, its manifesto focuses on its successful reforms with few proposals for further decentralization (AKP 2007). The main task is identified as reinforcing fiscal capabilities at the local level (AKP 2007). After its re-election, however, the AKP in government drafted further bills to change the structure of the metropolitan municipalities and the revenues of municipalities in general.²¹

The CHP, traditionally the defender of state unity, placed less emphasis on decentralization, but nevertheless made some proposals to increase administrative decentralization (CHP 2002, 19–20) and introduce ‘soft regionalization’ through economic development programmes (CHP 2002, 51).²² In the later part of the decade, it moved towards a more sceptical stance on decentralization.

CHP resistance to the AKP’s decentralization agenda has to be seen against the background of the party’s history. In contrast to AKP constituencies, CHP voters strongly identify with the trinity of Turkish nationalism, secularism and the unitary state. The latter two principles were challenged by the Islamic AKP and hence its decentralization agenda generated strong opposition. President Ahmet Sezer, as well as the majority of the Constitutional Court judges, vetoed several AKP legislative proposals on the grounds of the constitutional principle of ‘unitary administration’. At the same time, the AKP’s decentralization agenda mainly served its own purposes, since the shift of authority to the municipalities essentially empowered its own party members.²³ In the local election of

²¹ In 2008 the Law on Metropolitan District Municipalities (No. 5747) and a law on the regulation of local government revenue (No. 5779) were passed.

²² ‘Soft regionalization’ is a concept from Kuhlmann and Wollmann (2014) and refers to economic empowerment rather than increased self-rule authority. Some authors argue that the AKP later adopted that approach with the formation of development agencies (Sadioğlu and Dede 2011).

²³ However, the reform process was also supported by many local politicians and administrators from other parties (see Sadioğlu and Ömürgönülşen 2014).

2004, the AKP received around 40 per cent of the vote and gained mayors in 1.952 out of 3.499 districts (56%). It also held the mayoralty in 12 out of 16 metropolitan municipalities (75%). Although all local authorities were strengthened, this holds true in particular for the metropolitan municipalities (Bayraktar and Massicard 2012, 46–7).

In the 2011 national election campaign, the AKP turned to a more conservative stance on decentralization. However, it clearly positioned itself as the major advocate of further decentralization and made vague commitments to increasing local responsibilities (AKP 2011). In contrast, the CHP signalled hesitant commitment to decentralization, while stressing the importance of a unitary state (CHP 2011). Additionally, it proposed more administrative competencies to be shared between the centre and the local levels to increase effectiveness (CHP 2011). As usual, the MHP remained silent on these issues (MHP 2011).

In the two electoral campaigns of 2015, the AKP continued to advocate its decentralization agenda, asserting ‘a clear need for a new constitution based on decentralization and democratic checks and balances; and it will provide a democratic base representing different groups and preventing all kinds of tutelage’ (AKP 2015a, 34, 40; AKP 2015b, 33). These statements read as a clear commitment to political decentralization. The AKP additionally promised increased resources for local government, partly based on increasing locally raised revenue (AKP 2015a, 57, 60, 177, 289–99) and signalled its commitment to the ECLS (AKP 2015a, 61, 301; AKP 2015b, 49). There is also a noticeable shift to highlighting democracy as the major rationale of decentralization (AKP 2015a, 66).

Education had not previously fallen within the decentralization agenda of the AKP, but in 2015 the AKP brought forward specific proposals for education. Primary schools were to be under local authority with school-based budget management, universities to have more autonomy and local governments to be represented in the management of technical and vocational schools (AKP 2015a, 81, 83, 86, 89). To improve the capabilities of local governments in the field of culture and arts, existing cultural institutions (libraries, museums, etc.) were to be devolved (AKP 2015a, 126). Finally, the AKP intended to strengthen the Regional Development Agencies (RDAGs; AKP 2015a, 301).

The CHP fundamentally revised its hesitant approach towards local authority in its 2015 manifestos, becoming the strongest advocate of decentralization compared to the AKP and MHP (CHP 2015a; CHP 2015b). It proposed to empower local governments in several respects, including autonomy of financial transfers and authority over urban planning (CHP 2015b, 148, 155). Generally, it demanded more financial means for the municipalities and assistance in debt-related issues (CHP 2015b, 162). It further proposed transferring competence to the provincial banks (*İller Bankası*) (CHP 2015b, 162). Like the AKP, the CHP emphasized the necessity to endow educational facilities with more autonomy (CHP 2015b 130, 132). Finally, it called for a restructuring of the RDAGs (CHP 2015b 165).

Even the MHP joined the camp of the decentralization advocates. However, its position in 2015 was much more a stance on efficient service provision, remaining very sceptical towards the transfer of political authority. Its position was reflected by its support for a policy wherein strategic functions remain centralized, while operational functions are decentralized (MHP 2015a, 81).

As in the preceding decade, debates in the 2010s about decentralization and the Kurdish problem remained separated most of the time. It is worth noting, however, that both the AKP and the CHP proposed that a new constitution should include a definition of

citizenship independent of any ethnic or religious identity (AKP 2015a, 37; CHP 2015b, 29). Both parties refer to a democratic solution of the conflict (AKP 2015a, 27; 2015b, 23; CHP, 2015a, 14; 2015b, 20). The CHP even for the first time links the issue of decentralization and the Kurdish problem (CHP 2015a, 43). Even though the CHP's new position on decentralization is a major ideological shift on the territorial dimension towards HDP claims, there is still a considerable distance between them. The core demands of political self-determination and regionally based authority alongside local self-government remain unthinkable for the major national parties. The only references to regions in the AKP and CHP manifestos are in connection with restructuring RDAGs (CHP 2015a, 165; AKP 2015a, 301).

The AKP's accession to national power changed the political constellation significantly. With single-party governments between 2002 and 2016, it stabilized the political system considerably. These majority victories derived from a local mobilization strategy. Using its majority position, the AKP not only established new elites, but also disempowered the military and exchanged parts of the judicial elite. Additionally, two AKP presidents provided government with considerable political leeway. This political room to manoeuvre was used to challenge the secularist base of the Turkish constitution.

The Kurdish parties, in turn, hold very interventionist positions on the economic dimension and increasingly emphasize liberal cultural views which are unique in the Turkish political landscape. The ideological differences between the AKP and the Kurdish parties are therefore considerable. Although both the AKP and the HDP before the 2015 elections signalled very high willingness to decentralize further, in effect they aim at different goals. The AKP frames decentralization mainly as a means to efficient services, advocates privatization and strongly supports metropolitan municipalities, whereas for the HDP local and regional authority is basically a means to political and cultural self-determination. Over time, the CHP has moved to a more liberal position on the cultural dimension and increasingly also holds economically interventionist positions. This growing ideological similarity to the Kurdish parties also translates into accommodating views of local political self-determination. For the first time in the party's history, the manifesto for the June 2015 national election contains no reference to the unity of the state, while the November 2015 manifesto has a special chapter on the 'Kurdish Question'.

The AKP as the most effective agent of decentralization has considerably slowed down its efforts after successfully stabilizing its national electoral performance. In fact, many observers see recent reforms of metropolitan municipalities which led to shifts of competencies to ministries in Ankara as a re-centralization of the Turkish system (Bayraktar 2013; Ömürgönülşen and Sadioğlu, 2014). The earlier decentralization reforms of the AKP followed an electoral insulation rationale. The empowerment of Kurdish municipalities was a side-effect which helped to provide electoral majorities for the AKP in this region. However, this electoral advancement only lasted for a short period. In the local elections of 2009 and 2014 the Kurdish parties increasingly gained majorities. Many of the Kurdish mayors faced legal difficulties in 2015.

The 'Kurdish problem' remains a question of identity recognition for the Kurdish side and an issue of regional development or terrorism for the national side, although Kurdish and national actors achieved convergence over many minor issues of decentralization. The degree of tutelage has been decreased, municipalities have gained much more authority and metropolitan municipalities now have far-reaching competencies. Notwithstanding recent reforms by the AKP government which may be interpreted as re-centralization, in the election campaigns of 2015 the national actors have started talking seriously about the

decentralization of education which would concede a major demand of Kurdish politicians.

Our findings from the qualitative analysis of party documents confirm the evidence from the quantitative overview. The ideological positions of national parties and minority challengers indicate at no point between 1987 and 2015 a constellation where we would expect serious discussion about autonomy shifts to the Kurdish minority. National actors either articulate Kurdish regional authority as a threat to the Turkish unitary state or ignore the Kurdish claims outright. However, the development of the discourse on local authority demonstrates that under specific circumstances decentralization has become acceptable in Turkey. Interestingly, the Islamic parties, by presenting themselves as outsiders of the system, successfully established electoral strongholds on the local level which helped them to consolidate and train their own class of politicians.

6 Conclusion

Why are national governments in some cases willing to transfer authority to national minorities but not in others? This article presents a theory that is more encompassing than previous approaches in that it is able to explain not just cases where asymmetric decentralization occurs but also negative cases where the conditions for reform are given and existing theories would predict authority transfer but nothing happens. Our theory of ideological authority insulation argues that what distinguishes positive from negative outcomes of asymmetric decentralization demands is the ideological proximity between the national government and minority elites. Based on a game-theoretical model we show that taking ideology into account changes the actors' calculations of costs and benefits which should systematically affect the probability that asymmetric authority solutions occur.

We choose the case of Turkey for a test of our theory. In Turkey, the centre is economically and symbolically impelled to maintain the territorial unity of the state and the Kurdish claims are highly credible at the same time. The game-theoretical model in the introduction of this special issue (Siroky et al. 2016) would thus predict a concession of the centre to the Kurdish demands. Our case study points to a constellation where ideological distance outweighs the relevance of credibility and dependency as factors that drive the explanatory model of Siroky et al. (2016). Kurdish minorities have consistently mobilized for regional autonomy but national elites either declared this to be a threat to the unitary state or outright ignored Kurdish claims. In our two-step empirical strategy we first quantitatively analyse Turkish party manifestos for the period of 1987 to 2015 to map their preferences on the economic, cultural and territorial dimension. We complement the CMP/MARPOR dataset where data on parties or on specific documents are missing.

Our findings from this first step confirm that the ideological distance between national governments and Kurdish parties varies over time but is generally very large. In the second step we add detailed information on substantive claims of Turkish parties on the territorial dimension by qualitatively coding party documents. This helps us to identify the intensity with which Kurdish parties claim regional autonomy, the way state-wide parties react and the strategies in which territorial issues are framed. Three findings stand out. (1) The intensity of Kurdish autonomy claims strongly corresponds with the ideological distance between the national governments and Kurdish elites. In the two periods where Kurdish representatives were part of broader alliances, ideological distance, especially on the economic dimension, decreased and the intensity of Kurdish claims for territorial authority transfers declined to a considerable extent. (2) Whereas Kurdish

parties frame decentralization issues in terms of national identity and, increasingly, of radical democracy, state-wide parties see decentralization as instrumental for effective public goods provision. (3) Since the early 2000s a symmetric decentralization discourse has emerged that was inspired by an AKP interest in establishing local strongholds to train their own class of politicians. Since then a national consensus has begun to emerge on the advantages of administrative decentralization. This discourse, however, remains completely separated from the “Kurdish question”.

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