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Perceived Human Rights in Van Merkez, Eastern Turkey

ABSTRACT

The Kurdish population in Turkey and its human rights situation have been a major issue in Turkey's foreign and domestic politics. There is a need for large-scale empirical evidence on perceptions of human rights or how people judge their own life situation and obstacles to greater empowerment and freedom of choice in the predominantly Kurdish eastern part of Turkey. Providing such empirical input, this study offers insight into the perceived human rights of people living in Van Merkez, an area that has been shaped by the Kurdish conflict. The data are part of the EUMAGINE project on human rights and migration-related perceptions, and consist of survey questions about human rights conditions among a representative sample of 500 respondents aged 18–39. The results show that the differences in perceptions between Kurds and Turks are partially explained by the life satisfaction, perceptions of corruption and safety of respondents. The largest part is explained by the perception of language discrimination by the government.

Introduction

One of the growing topics in Near and Middle Eastern Studies is the position of ethnic minority groups in society and how states cope with forms of internal diversity within their borders. In line with this development, the study of Kurds has boomed in the last two decades. This academic attention to Kurdish populations has mainly been incited by the scope and impact of recent conflicts (notably the civil wars fought in Turkey, Syria and Iraq) and has profited from the transnational turn in the humanities and social sciences. While scholars are increasingly working on cultural aspects of Kurdish populations (on literature or cinema, for instance), many of the studies dealing with Kurds do so from international relations and political science perspectives, focusing on issues of security, terrorism, paramilitary organizations and conflict resolution.

Kurdish studies is a vast area of research that covers populations living in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran, the former Soviet Union and the Kurdish diaspora (mainly in Western Europe) as well as different linguistic and religious groups. The Kurds in Turkey have so far received most attention: Kurds constitute about one-fifth of the country's population, although there are no reliable statistics on the matter.¹ Moreover, the 'Kurdish issue' has been high on the agenda of Turkey's domestic politics (as it is related to issues of citizenship, national identity, cultural policies and social divisions) as well as its foreign politics (for instance in the context of the on-going civil war in Syria and Turkish relations with the Kurdistan region in Iraq). This Kurdish conflict in Turkey is multi-layered, historically complex and finds its roots in the demise of the Ottoman Empire. It is essentially an armed conflict between the Republic of Turkey and Kurdish insurgent movements (notably the PKK, Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, Kurdistan Workers' Party) that demand autonomy, separation or greater political and cultural rights. The conflict escalated in particular between 1984 and 1999, and again since 2004. While some steps towards solving the conflict were taken after 2013 in the so-called 'Çözüm süreci', or 'Solution Process', violence has again escalated widely since 2015. Partly due to the spillover effect of the Syrian civil war, the peace process has effectively ended. Human rights issues recur throughout different stages of this conflict.

Kurdish organizations, transnational networks and human rights advocacy groups have increasingly put human rights for Kurdish populations on the agenda, using the opportunities offered by supranational institutions such as the European Parliament, European Commission, European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights² as well as transnational political networking.³ Moreover, Kurds and their rights have become a key issue in the context of the ongoing negotiations for Turkey's European Union membership bid.⁴ In one of its latest progress reports on the Turkey-EU accession negotiations, released in October 2014, the European Commission devoted a substantial part to the condition of fundamental rights and the enforcement of human rights. Along with persistent issues such as the fight against impunity, the reform of the prison system and freedom of expression, the report also focuses on cultural rights, particularly with regard to Kurdish culture and language. The Commission casts recent legislative changes in Turkey in a positive light—changes that have enabled some forms of education and cultural expression in languages of minorities, such as the permission of non-Turkish letters X, Q and W, the introduction of elective Kurdish language courses in

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some public schools as well as in a handful of university departments in south-eastern Turkey.⁵

In its most recent report, the European Commission remained concerned about the state of cultural rights, although a number of positive developments were noted.⁶

Language is one of the most important aspects with regard to Turkish Kurds and human rights. In the field of linguistic human rights, the case of Kurdish languages and dialects in Turkey has been studied as a key example of linguistic discrimination and oppression.

⁷ Turkey's policy towards Kurdish language and its users, especially in relation to the 'Turkification' strategies of Kemalist nationalists, has been referred to as 'linguicide' or linguistic genocide by some.⁸ This fits into a broader legacy of denial and oppression of cultural rights that dates back to the Kemalist origins of the Turkish republic, also affecting cultural domains such as press and media⁹ and education.¹⁰ As signalled above, cultural and linguistic reforms are a vital aspect of the most recent democratic process, even though violence has again erupted.

While most research on Kurds and human rights in Turkey focuses on reviews of policies, legislation and judiciary¹¹ or paradigmatic aspects related to human rights and the sociology of globalization,¹² there is little empirical research on how citizens actually experience or perceive human rights and their life situation. Gaining insight into experiences of aspects of life related to human rights, however, is a basic requirement if we are to better understand the actions that result from them, such as forms of cultural and political resistance, support for specific organizations, or migration. Within temporary scholarship, the attention towards transnational human rights focuses primarily on the institutional aspects and the appeal to institutional mechanisms by individuals. The role of perceptions on human rights and the link with migration motivation remains understudied thus far.¹³ While scholars have engaged in promoting a greater understanding of the universal value of human rights principles, less effort has been given to examining how these rights become relevant to individuals and communities.

¹⁴ The dynamics of human rights perceptions on the local level and how they are interpreted or given meaning in different (non-Western) cultural contexts remains neglected.¹⁵

Although a few studies have explored the topic, these mainly concerned specific groups such as students in the context of human rights education,¹⁶ Kurdish youths¹⁷ or Kurdish families with members in the PKK.¹⁸ There are few recent studies addressing human rights perceptions from a broader perspective, including a wider range of social and demographic variables. Such a study seems particularly necessary for populations in eastern Turkey, where human rights issues have been most pressing. In order to fill this void and to give some empirical input into the field of human rights research in Turkey, our study looks at perceptions of human rights-related issues and how these intersect with various demographic variables.

The paper is structured as follows. We first discuss the definition of human rights used in the study, arguing for a broad definition of human rights perceptions, and then consider the hypotheses that were derived from the literature. Next we provide a detailed discussion of the data and methods that were used: a statistically analysed survey among 500 respondents in Van Merkez in eastern Turkey. We examine the results of the study, showing that there are significant differences in human rights perceptions between Turkish- and Kurdish-speaking respondents. In the conclusion, we focus on the possible meaning of these findings in the context of ongoing developments in the Kurdish-Turkish peace process and the perception of human rights among ethnic minorities.

Perceived human rights: theoretical background

While the idea of human rights as a moral principle dates back centuries, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is regarded as the milestone for the contemporary notion of universal human rights. Since the second half of the twentieth century, human rights have provided a global language for moral universality and political claims and counter-claims.¹⁹

The global language of human rights reveals some complexities in contemporary Turkey.

As .ayır and Bağlı argue, Turkey is characterized by two opposing movements. On the one hand, there is a severe lack of inclusion and social equality of minority groups and a history of violence inflicted on parts of the population.²⁰ This is related to the state's position and the 'national developmentalism' that are traditionally very strong.²¹ On the other hand, as a candidate for membership in the EU, Turkey has implemented key reforms to align with a series of international human rights agreements and to improve and protect human rights standards.²² Still, recent reports draw a rather grim picture of the human rights conditions in the country.²³

However, the vast bulk of literature on human rights deals with legislation, and much less with how citizens actually perceive and experience their human rights situation. More specifically, much research on human rights focuses on what human rights mean from a legal and political perspective and refers to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). This type of literature tends to look from a legal and political perspective on what ought to be in the realm of human rights.

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In this study, we adopt a social scientific perspective on human rights and investigate perceived human rights or how people judge their own life situation and obstacles to a greater 'freedom of choice and empowerment'.²⁴ In this type of research on perceived human rights conditions, researchers study which elements (such as gender, socioeconomic background) have an effect on people's positive or negative perception of their life situation with regard to their human rights (including social, economic, political and civil rights).²⁵ A range of studies has explored these perceived perceptions of human rights. For example, Carlson and Lifthaug analysed human rights practices and people's perceptions of human rights conditions in 55 countries.²⁶ The authors specifically mention that two countries, China and Turkey, were not included in the study because of the sensitivity of human rights questions in surveys. While most cross-national studies that measure the public perceptions of human rights focus on issues such as universalism versus particularism or the relation between perceptions and actual human rights oppressions,²⁷ we are more interested in understanding the variables that affect human rights perceptions. Some studies have been conducted along those lines. The study by Anderson et al., for instance, indicates that not all people in countries that systematically violate human rights develop more negative perceptions about their country's human rights situation. More specifically, they found that people with a higher level of education were less likely to say that there was respect for human rights if they lived in a country where political and civil rights were frequently violated.²⁸ In a similar vein, a study among adolescents in 27 countries found a significant relation between education and perceptions of human rights.²⁹ Moreover, several studies have found significant gender differences in terms of engagements with human rights concepts and perceptions, showing that females are more sensitive to these issues.³⁰ Authors such as Carlson and Lifthaug as well as Matsuda et al. have also argued that perceptions on human rights are influenced by individual-level factors such as gender.³¹

Perceived human rights: hypotheses

Based on the discussed literature, we wish to formulate four hypotheses on human rights perceptions. In this study, we focus on people living in Van Merkez, eastern Turkey. Firstly, since our study is conducted in a region that is predominantly inhabited by Kurds, who have the status of being an ethnic minority that claims to be not fully recognized as citizens in Turkey, we expect different perceptions of human rights in Turkey between people with and without a Kurdish background (hypothesis 1). Secondly, following the content of the claims that Kurdish minority movements make, we assume that the negative perceptions of human rights in Turkey in this region refer mainly to their negative perceptions of language and cultural policies towards the Kurdish population (hypothesis 2). Thirdly, as indicated in the above-mentioned studies conducted among adolescents, we hypothesize that people with a higher level of education have more negative perceptions of human rights in Turkey than those with lower levels of education (hypothesis 3). Finally, in line with the studies indicating a gender difference in perceived human rights conditions and the reports on the continuing problems with women's rights in Turkey, we hypothesize that the female respondents in our study have more negative perceptions of human rights in Turkey than men (hypothesis 4).

People form their perceptions and gain information about human rights from a range of different local, national and international sources,³² implying that these perceptions, aspirations and decisions are socially and culturally embedded. For this reason, we will operationalize the perceptions on human rights as socially and culturally constructed, influenced—among other things—by various discourses on major social issues related to their regions and the world outside. We propose to use a definition of human rights that focuses on one's capability to act in such a way as to take control of one's life and realize one's fundamental purposes. This concept focuses on the agency of individuals and groups to change their life circumstances and to escape from disadvantaged positions. Therefore we opt for a broad definition of human rights that comprises concepts of negative as well as positive freedom.

Methodology

Van Merkez

This study was set in Van Merkez, being one location within a multi-sited research project on migration-related perceptions of adults in Morocco, Senegal, Ukraine and Turkey.³³ Different research areas in Turkey were selected for their specific human rights context, including Van Merkez.³⁴ Van Merkez ('Van Central') is a sub-province of Van in eastern Turkey. The area is made up of two towns, 92 villages and 23 mezras (a few houses built close to each other). The population of Van Merkez is approximately 450,000, and is concentrated in the urban areas.³⁵ The main economic activities in Van Merkez are industry, agriculture and livestock. During the latest local elections in March 2014, BDP (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, Peace and Democracy Party) was the largest party in the province of Van. The party is a pro-Kurdish party that recently dissolved into another leftist, pro-Kurdish party, HDP

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(Halkların Demokratik Partisi, Peoples' Democratic Party). Van, particularly Van Merkez, has functioned as a conduit for international migration due to its location near the Iranian border but also for internal migration for people from the surrounding areas looking to migrate elsewhere in Turkey. Furthermore, many Kurdish political activists have emigrated from Van to other parts of Turkey or to Europe (most of whom never returned). The area has a legacy of violence and conflict because of the clashes between the Turkish state and the PKK, which have affected it economically, socially and politically.

Analytical procedures

In order to test our hypotheses, we use data from the EUMAGINE project. As mentioned before, in this contribution we focus on one area in Turkey where Kurdish-speaking people are living: Van Merkez. In this section, we outline the quantitative data collection of the EUMAGINE project in this research area.³⁶

The research population was delimited to the population between 18 and 39 years old. We aimed to draw a representative sample of 500 respondents aged 18–39 within the research area (500 respondents in total). We used a stratified cluster sample with random walks. The research area was first stratified according to a rural–urban dimension and sub-counties. Interviews were distributed according to the size of the strata. More specifically, 50 batches of 10 interviews were distributed according to the relative size of strata.³⁷ A list of clusters (neighbourhoods, villages) was made for each stratum. After deciding on the number of clusters in each stratum, batches of 10 interviews were sampled in fixed intervals. A random walk was executed to select households. Within selected households (defined as 'all persons who live under the same roof, normally eat together and have communal arrangements concerning subsistence and other necessities of life') respondents were randomly chosen. The selected respondents were questioned face-to-face in the first half of 2011 with structured paper and pencil questionnaires.³⁸ Interviewers had both Turkish and Kurdish versions of the questionnaire. The Kurdish translation was modified to be as close as possible to the Kurdish dialect of Van Merkez. The selection of respondents in the research areas continued until 500 interviews were completed.³⁹ In order to perform statistical analysis, the data had to be weighted to account for differences in the selection probability of respondents.⁴⁰ We analysed the data using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Firstly, we used bivariate correlation analysis to search for associations between the variables. Secondly, linear regression with standardized coefficients was used to model the dependent variable. The outcome and the non-dichotomous independent variables were standardized.

Variables

Five questions in our survey measured the perception of human rights in their own country. People were asked whether the life of men and women, schools, health care and governmental poverty reduction in their own country was very bad (4), bad (3), neither good nor bad (2), good (1) or very good (0). We thus defined human rights in a broad sense. The Cronbach alpha or the internal consistency of this scale was 0.71. The combined questions (averaged) constituted the outcome variable. The final scale goes from a positive to a negative perception.

Independent variables

To model the dependent variable, we used the following characteristics of respondents: age, marital status, having children, gender, years of education, mother language, life satisfaction, perception of corruption, perception of safety, perception of job opportunities and perception of the respect given by the Turkish government to the different languages that people speak (see also Table 1 for a univariate description of all the variables). Age is a continuous variable measuring the age of respondents. We standardized the variable for the whole sample. The variable marital status is coded 1 when respondents were unmarried, divorced, widowed or separated and coded 0 when respondents were married/monogamous, married/polygamous or living with partner/not married. The variable children is a dichotomous variable measuring whether respondents have at least one child (coded as 0). The variable years of education is coded as 0 (no education, only Koranic school, only basic literacy or national language), 1 (pre-school), primary school—old system (1–5), primary school (2–9), lower secondary school—old system (6–8), higher vocational school (9–11), upper secondary school—old system (10–12), upper secondary school—old system (10–13), university or polytechnic (14–17) to doctorate (18). We also asked the respondents which language they spoke at home with their parents at the age of seven. This question indicates the mother language of the respondents. This variable has two values: Turkish (0) and Kurdish (Kurmanci) (1).

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the respondents living in Van Merkez (*N*, minimum, maximum, mean or percentage and standard deviation).

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean or percentage	Std. Deviation
<i>Total sample</i>					
Age	498	19	39	27.08	6.24
Unmarried	500	0	1	42%	/
No children	500	0	1	50%	/
Male	500	0	1	39%	/
Years of education	500	0	18	7.38	4.92
Kurdish (Kurmanji as mother language)	499	0	1	78%	/
Life satisfaction	500	0	4	1.94	1.29
Perception of human rights in their own country	496	0.20	3.80	2.08	0.74
Perception of job opportunities in their own country	495	0	4	3.04	0.92
Perception of corruption in their own country	492	0	4	0.94	0.88
Perception of the Turkish government's respect for the different languages spoken in Turkey	495	0	4	2.68	1.22
Perception of safety in their own country	496	0	4	2.63	1.01
<i>Only respondents with Kurdish as their mother language in Van Merkez</i>					
Age	388	19	39	26.97	6.18
Unmarried	389	0	1	42%	/
No children	389	0	1	50%	/
Male	389	0	1	44%	/
Years of education	389	0	17	6.62	4.85
Life satisfaction	389	0	4	1.75	1.28
Perception of human rights in their own country	386	0.20	3.80	2.18	0.73
Perception of job opportunities in their own country	384	0	4	3.04	0.93
Perception of corruption in their own country	383	0	4	0.90	0.85
Perception of the Turkish government's respect for the different languages spoken in Turkey	386	0	4	2.90	1.13
Perception of safety in their own country	386	0	4	2.64	1.00
<i>Only respondents with Turkish as their mother language in Van Merkez</i>					
Age	110	19	39	27.40	6.41
Unmarried	110	0	1	41%	/
No children	110	0	1	47%	/
Male	110	0	1	21%	/
Years of education	110	0	18	10.08	4.15
Life satisfaction	110	0	4	2.63	1.06
Perception of human rights in their own country	108	0.40	3.40	1.74	0.67
Perception of job opportunities in their own country	110	1	4	3.03	0.87
Perception of corruption in their own country	108	0	4	1.07	0.99
Perception of the Turkish government's respect for the different languages spoken in Turkey	108	0	4	1.93	1.22
Perception of safety in their own country	110	0	4	2.60	1.03

Source: weighted data; individual questionnaire—stum20121001.

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We also measured a number of perceptions on the respondent's life situation in their country: on life satisfaction, job opportunities, corruption and language discrimination. The variable life satisfaction is measured with the question: 'all things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?' It is coded from very dissatisfied (0), rather dissatisfied (1), neither dissatisfied or satisfied (2), rather satisfied (3) and very satisfied (4). The perception of job opportunities in their own country was measured with a statement whether or not according to the respondent 'it is easy to find a good job in this country'. The perception of corruption was measured by the question whether 'there is a lot of corruption in Turkey'. The perception of safety in Turkey was measured by the question whether 'in Turkey, it is dangerous to walk down the street at night' (coded from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Lastly, we have a variable on the perception of the respect given by the Turkish government to the different languages that people speak in Turkey. This variable was measured by the question whether 'the government in Turkey respects the different languages that the people in Turkey speak'. With the exception of the perception of safety, all perceptions are coded as strongly agree (0), agree (1), neither agree nor disagree (2), disagree (3) to strongly disagree (4).

Results

Bivariate analysis

In the following analyses, we use bivariate Pearson correlations or mean square contingency (Phi) coefficients (for binary variables) (see Table 2).⁴¹ These statistics summarize the bivariate relations between the variables.

We notice that an increasingly negative perception of human rights in their own country is significantly related to having both Kurdish (in this region: Kurmanci) as a mother language and lower life satisfaction. Furthermore, we see that people in our sample who speak Kurmanci in Van Merkez tend to be less well educated, male, have lower life satisfaction and have a less positive perception of the government's respect for languages. We also notice that other characteristics of respondents including age, marital status, having children or not, years of education and gender are not significantly related in a bivariate way to the perception of human rights in one's own country.

A negative perception of human rights in their own country is bivariately related to other perceptions. When respondents have a negative perception of job opportunities and when they think that there is a lot of corruption, they also tend to have a negative perception of the human rights in their own country. The strongest relation of the perception of human rights in one's own country with another variable in our analysis exists with the perception of the Turkish government's respect for the different languages that people speak. When people agree that there is a lack of respect for languages on the part of the government, they tend to agree that human rights are bad in their country.

Multivariate analyses

In this section, we report analyses to check whether the bivariate relations hold in a multivariate context. We use linear regression with standardized coefficients to model the perception of human rights in their own country. ⁴² The outcome and the non-dichotomous

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Table 2. Bivariate Pearson correlations or mean square contingency (Phi) coefficients (for binary variables).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age											
2. Unmarried	-0.584										
3. No children	-0.594	0.830									
4. Male	0.023	0.178	0.178								
5. Years of education	-0.199	0.317	0.340	0.233							
6. Kurdish (Kumancias mother language)	-0.024	0.001	0.021	0.211	-0.288						
7. Life satisfaction	-0.028	0.063	0.037	-0.083	0.166	-0.284					
8. Perception of human rights in their own country	0.028	-0.049	-0.044	0.042	0.024	0.231	-0.370				
9. Perception of job opportunities in their own country	0.046	-0.041	-0.019	0.165	0.020	-0.002	-0.075	0.100			
10. Perception of corruption in their own country	-0.047	0.004	-0.016	-0.121	-0.159	-0.056	0.097	-0.313	-0.145		
11. Perception of the Turkish government's respect for the different languages spoken in Turkey	0.027	0.011	0.032	0.072	0.006	0.337	-0.212	0.447	0.095	-0.296	
12. Perception of safety in their own country	-0.087	0.029	0.004	-0.062	0.012	0.010	-0.071	0.219	0.147	-0.122	0.088

Source: weighed data; individual questionnaire—stun20121001; listwise $n = 480$; Bold means $p < .05$.

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Table 3. Linear regression of the perception of human rights in their own country of respondents in Van Merkez.

	Coefficients			
	Model 1 (n: 493)	Model 2 (n: 493)	Model 3 (n: 481)	Model 4 (n: 480)
Age	0.014	0.018	0.014	−0.009
Unmarried	−0.049	0.015	−0.002	−0.010
No children	−0.100	−0.137	−0.125	−0.149
Male	−0.089	−0.135	−0.127	−0.079
Years of education	0.125**	0.160***	0.126***	0.097**
Kurdish (Kurmanci as mother language)	0.701***	0.496***	0.430***	0.184*
Life satisfaction		−0.348***	−0.306***	−0.273***
Perception of job opportunities in their own country			0.026	0.009
Perception of corruption in their own country			−0.240***	−0.163***
Perception of safety in their own country			0.159***	0.147***
Perception of the Turkish government's respect for the different languages spoken in Turkey				0.307***
Intercept (unstandardized coefficient)	−0.444***	−0.278***	−0.239***	−0.051
R square	0.072	0.182	0.273	0.344

*** $p < 0.01$;

** $p < 0.05$;

* $p < 0.10$; weighted data; Individual questionnaire—stum20121001.

independent variables were standardized. We report four models (see Table 3). In model 1, we only include the demographic variables (age, gender, years of education, marital status, having children and mother language). In model 2, we enter the life satisfaction of the respondents. In model 3, we enter the perceptions of political aspects (such as corruption) but also on safety and job opportunities. In the last model, we enter the perception of the respect by the Turkish government for the different languages that people speak.

We see a confirmation of the results in the bivariate analysis. We notice that background characteristics such as age, marital status, having children and gender have no significant relation with the perception of human rights in their own country. This means that we do not find evidence for hypothesis 4.

In contrast with the bivariate analysis, the years of education of respondents in Van Merkez has a significant relation with the dependent variable. Respondents who have more years of education are more negative regarding human rights in their own country (in all models). This gives evidence for hypothesis 3. However, this is in contrast with the bivariate analysis where we showed that years of education is not significantly related to a negative perception of human rights in one's own country. Only after controlling for the effect of age, marital status, having children or not and mother language does the effect of years of education on the perception of human rights in one's own country become significant. In models 1–4, we see that having Kurmanci as a mother language is negatively related to a positive perception of human rights in their own country. This effect reduces when we gradually enter life satisfaction (model 2), perception of corruption, job opportunities, safety (model 3) and perception of language discrimination (model 4). We notice that the effect of having Kurdish as a mother language reduces the most when we include the perception of language discrimination. The effect reduces from 0.430 to 0.184 and borders on being insignificant in the last model. These results confirm hypotheses 1 and 2.

We also notice that the perception of job opportunities becomes insignificant in a multivariate analysis. It disappears under control of the other variables. The relation in the bivariate analysis between life satisfaction, the perception of corruption and safety in their own country and the dependent variable persist in a multivariate analysis.

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Conclusion

This article offered a view on the perception of human rights of people residing in Van Merkez (eastern Turkey), focusing on the perception of human rights in their country with a stress on the perception of language discrimination, corruption, safety and life satisfaction. In Van Merkez, most people have Kurdish (Kurmanci) as their mother language; only a minority has Turkish as their mother language. This makes this region an interesting context in which to compare both groups. A focus on human rights is important from a theoretical perspective. Human rights has become one of the most powerful concepts in contemporary thinking about social and political change. Moreover, human rights discourses have come to play a central role in discussions about the Kurdish conflict and democratic change in Turkey. To provide a more empirical basis to such discussions, this study has sought to understand the perceived human rights conditions of the population in Van Merkez. We found a relation between the perceptions of human rights in Turkey (on the quality of schools, the life of men and women, governmental poverty reduction and health care) as the outcome variable and years of education, mother language, life satisfaction, perception of corruption/safety/respect for their mother language as independent variables. The relation between having Kurmanci as a mother language and the outcome variable is partially explained by the life satisfaction, perceptions of corruption and safety of respondents. The largest part of this relation, however, is explained by the perception of language discrimination by the government. This not only confirms claims of cultural and linguistic discrimination formulated by human rights activists, but also shows that improvements in the area of cultural and linguistic policy are vital to sustainable democratic reform in Turkey. Furthermore, this article also showed that research should continue to focus on the background characteristics of respondents and its relation with perceptions on human rights. Namely, we found that more highly educated respondents are more negative towards the human rights situation in their own country. We can therefore claim that perceptions of human rights are socio-economically stratified, even with controlling for ethnic differences of perceptions. Further research should delve into this matter more closely.

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Notes

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38. The language used during the interviews was Turkish (73.7%) and Kurdish (Kurmanci: 26.3%) (Ersanilli, op. cit., p. 7); 22% of the respondents have Turkish as their mother language and 78% have Kurdish (Kurmanci) as their mother language (weighted data). Of those with Turkish as mother language, 97.5% were interviewed using the Turkish questionnaire. Of those with Kurmanci as mother language, only 66.9% were interviewed using the Turkish questionnaire. Interviewers indicated that the respondents spoke Turkish well (93%). Fifteen interviewers were employed in Van Merkez. Every interviewer spoke Turkish and Kurdish and roughly 50% of the interviewers were male. Interviewers had an upper secondary degree and higher. There was a pilot study before the actual study was implemented.

39. 607 households in Van Merkez were contacted in order to meet this criterion (Ersanilli, op. cit., p. 19). Respectively 3.62% of the contacted households were assessed as households with no eligible respondents. Of the contacted households, 9.06% refused to cooperate. During the data collection, a terrorist incident happened in a nearby area, which may have influenced the answers of respondents (Ersanilli, op. cit., p. 8).

40. A selection probability weight was calculated for the within-household selection for each stratum. No selection probability weight for the household selection was calculated because there is no up-to-date population data on the number of households with members aged 18–39 in each village/neighbourhood in the research area. In each stratum, a weight was calculated and normalized so that the sum of the weights is 500 for each region. The size of the eventual stratum was divided by the number of people in the stratum eligible for the survey. The result of this calculation was then multiplied by the number of eligible respondents in the household (Ersanilli, op. cit., p. 26).

41. Spearman Rho coefficients are almost similar. We use listwise deletion of missing values because we do not have many missing values. Only 20 of 500 respondents have a missing value on at least one of the variables.

42. There is no evidence for multicollinearity in the regression models (Variance Inflation Factors do not go beyond 3.5). The regression standardized residuals are normally distributed in all regression models. There is no evidence for heteroscedasticity in the regression models (when plotting the regression standardized residuals with the regression standardized predicted values). There was only one case for which the standardized residual went beyond 3 (only in the last model in Table 3).