

Environmental Politics and the 2013-2014 Protests in Turkey

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Abstract

In this paper, I examined the causes of the 2013 Gezi Park protests against the Justice and Development (AKP) led government, as well as the more recent protests in late 2013 and in February of 2014. While factors for the various protests have included the shift in the AKP's influence over the political space in Turkey, concerns of rising authoritarianism, allegations of corruption, along with more recent controls over the internet and the judiciary, I argue that environmental issues played a large role in the initial protests, and continue to be a primary factor for the protests in late 2014. Therefore, such issues should not be minimized when understanding citizen frustrations in Turkey. While many argue that the initial protests were underlining concerns about increased government control, the protests themselves resulted namely because of the AKP plans to build on Gezi Park. Significant evidence exists to suggest that the environmental concerns extend much deeper than the government's actions in Istanbul. The Turkish government, in its attempt toward rapid economic growth, has a history of controversial environmental projects that have resulted in citizen protests throughout Turkey. In addition, leaders of the AKP are also making Islamic arguments for this activity. Nonetheless, the Gezi Park protests were mere extensions of frustrations resulting from government over-reach in various affairs that include economic development in the form of hydroelectric power plants at the expense of the environment and citizen concerns for their surroundings. Furthermore, I argue that because of their plans to build more hydroelectric power plants, citizen tensions (and protests) will continue in the future.

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Introduction

On May 27th, 2013, individuals in Istanbul congregated on Taksim Square to protest government plans to build replica barracks from the days of the Ottoman Empire that would also serve as a shopping center. The initial protests began because of the government's plans to build over Gezi Park, one of the major parks in Istanbul. Citizens were upset that the government would willingly take out the park in favor of a new construction project. Furthermore, many were also frustrated that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was leading such plans without serious consideration or input from how they, the citizens, actually felt about the new development project (New York Times, 2013).

On May 30th, police responded to those who were congregated in the square with violence in attempts to remove the protesters. Reports of tear gas, police violence, as well as "burning of tents" occurred, with further threats of additional violence by the state leader (Amnesty International, 2013) against what they argued were 'violent' protests, although it became quickly evident that the government's claims about responding to "violence" was unsubstantiated, as "even solitary figures, standing alone and silent in Taksim Square were detained for participating in what became known as the "standing man" protests" (Amnesty International, 2013: 6). Furthermore, the government under Erdogan also seemed to label those who were "banging pots" as potential criminals (Amnesty International, 2013). And even those businesses that were willing to shelter the protesters were not spared from government attention.¹ However, what began as a protest against a park development quickly evolved to become a political movement against the state (BBC, 2013). In fact, the initial protests that were concentrated on Gezi Park in Istanbul quickly spread, with protests taking place throughout Turkey.

There have been multiple reasons and explanations for the protests. Many have been upset with Erdogan's attempt to build his control over Turkish society, whether it is through the suppression of the journalistic voice, because of an increase in Islamic laws in Turkish

¹ Amnesty International (2013) has written an extensive report on the protests entitled: "Gezi Park Protests: Brutal Denial of the Right to Free Assembly in Turkey."

society.² Burga (2013) argues that a host of factors led individuals to protest the government. He explains that *“What brought the demonstrators from different walks of life together was their reaction to an economic strategy where growth led to environmental degradation, to a limited understanding of politics identifying democracy solely with the ballot box whilst remaining oblivious to people’s concerns and demands, to the polarizing discourse of political authorities and to the way economic and political interests have become intertwined within the networks formed around the ruling party. People were also united by the resentments caused by the politically engineered rise of religious conservatism that marginalized those whose lifestyles were not deemed to be in conformity with the government authorities’ understanding of the principles of Sunni Islam”*.

Opposition parties have said as much, suggesting a strong disconnect between citizen feelings and government actions. Luis Ayala, The Secretary-General of the Socialist International party stated that, “the situation in Istanbul reflects the distance between what people see and consider fundamental and the opposite agendas of the government. There has been a deficit between priorities of citizens and government. We believe strongly that there’s a big deficit of democracy when a government is moving in an agenda that goes in the opposition direction of what citizens believe are the fundamentals” (Hayatsever, 2013).

Yet despite some concerns about the growing power of Erdogan and the AKP, particularly following the constitutional referendum of 2010, along with worries by secularists in Turkey that the AKP is pushing more Islamic law into the state, the AKP still maintains a great deal of support throughout the country. In particular, the party’s strong ties to the business elite suggests a major power block all too willing to continue their support of the government. Such attitudes can be found throughout Turkey. For example, in an interview with the Irish Times, Mahmut Hichyilmaz, the President of the Chamber of Commerce for the city of Kayseri, said that “[t]he AKP is seen as a saviour here in Kayseri” (Fitzgerald, 2013). The city has 1.6 billion dollars of yearly exports. In addition, the government has additional plans to expand business development and infrastructure in the city (Fitzgerald, 2013).

And it is this reference to the growing economy since the AKP has been in office that seems to provide them with a broad range of support throughout Turkey. With a yearly growth rate of 5-7 percent since the AKP came to power in 2002, many in Turkey are quite happy with the economic direction of the country, and credit the AKP for such economic

² Erdogan however defined the situation quite differently, labeling the protesters as “terrorists” (BBC, 2013). But while this was the case, others in the government such as Deputy Bulent Arinc was much more critical of the police action (BBC, 2013). To further support this point, many human rights organizations have found that the police clearly committed numerous rights violations.

success. In fact, one of the biggest successes of the AKP's economic policies has been the rise of the middle class; in 1995, the middle class was at 25 percent of the population. The figure today is at 59 percent (Fitzgerald, 2013). Along with this, a recent Pew Research Report earlier that year found that Erdogan was well liked throughout much of the country. Overall, 62 percent of those surveyed had a positive response towards Erdogan, compared to 34 percent who did not. In 2012, the percent support for Erdogan was at 59 percent. Thus, it seems from this that the majority of citizens are pleased with Erdogan. It would be inaccurate to suggest that these protests in Turkey mirrored the events in Tunisia or Egypt. Despite some who are clearly not happy with the government, Erdogan has broad support in the country. Where his numbers are lowest however is in the city of Istanbul, where 46 percent of those surveyed had a positive response towards him, with 54 percent having an unfavorable position of the Prime Minister (Pew Research Center, 2013). Furthermore, Pew, when examining the relationship between respondents' attitudes and religiosity, found that *"only 36% of Muslims in Turkey who pray infrequently (hardly ever or only during religious holidays) have a favorable view of the Islamist-oriented PM. Meanwhile, three-fourths of Turkish Muslims who pray five times a day have a positive view of him"* (Poushter, 2013).³

But regardless of their high reputation for building Turkey's economy, many who became involved in the protests have cited a "creeping authoritarianism" by the Justice and Development Party (Fitzgerald, 2013), which I believe can easily be viewed in regards to their economic policies at the expense of environmental problems. And even though the AKP still has significant support, the environmental criticisms of the government should not easily be dismissed. I argue that because of the continued economic approaches of the government, and the direct effect that the government's actions are having on citizens and their environments, the protests and criticisms of the government will not disappear.

Environmental Politics and the Protests in Turkey

The protests in the Middle East and North African began in 2010-2011 with Tunisia, and then followed in Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Morocco, Bahrain, and Syria, among other states. During this time, however, Turkey was spared from mass protests. However, shortly after the early 2011 protests in the Middle East, in May, the AKP was also the target of citizen unrest. Looking at the recent situation in Turkey, one has to wonder what factors caused citizens to

³ And while one could argue that this measure of prayer does not entirely reflect overall attitudes of religiosity, I believe at minimum it offers a glimpse of how differences based on religious practice may account for the varied levels of support for Erdogan.

protest the Turkish government, particularly when months before, while much of the region was in political transition, Turkey remained rather stable.

In order to understand the reasons for the increased tension between citizens in Turkey and the government, one must understand the relationship between the Turkish citizens and the AKP dominated government's attitude and actions regarding economic development. Despite the popularity of the AKP, as well as the continued democratic transition of Turkey, the government has embarked upon an extensive development plan that sharply contrasts various citizen rights throughout Turkey. In an interview with Heinrich Böll Stiftung (2013), Cengiz Çandar was asked whether the protests were at least partially due to the different development activities that have occurred by the government throughout Turkey, to which he replied, *"Of course there is. However, this alone is insufficient to explain the dimensions the Gezi Park protests have reached. In any case, the reactions to hydroelectric power plants, thermal power plants, and dams and so forth, have been evident in the massive reaction triggered by Gezi Park because these projects have consolidated the frustrations of a people who are dealing with a government that does not take in account their voice in matters concerning their lives. Thus, environmental awareness has an indirect share in all of these protests."*

As mentioned earlier, the May protests were initiated by citizens due to government building plans in Gezi Park in Istanbul. However, these protests in 2013 were not the first under the AKP government's rule. There is a history of smaller, localized environmentally-focused protests against the state in the past decade, when the government itself began what has been called "urban transformation" (Guardian, 2013). While anti-nuclear protests existed as early as the 1970s, and anti-gold mine protests beginning in 1990s until the present day, there has been significant organization around protesting the hydro-electric power plants beginning in 2004 until today (Baykan, 2013).

And in 2008, DISK, a Labor union, planned to hold a May 1st protest in Taksim Square. Choosing Taksim Square was important because it challenged the government's assigned protest areas. However, the government disapproved of this, and fired pepper gas to disperse the crowd (Bugra, 2013). In addition, Aysa Bugra (2013) speaking of this event, states that: *"On that day, I was a witness to the police throwing pepper gas into the building itself where the DISK has its headquarters and later talked to people who had seen the emergency ward of a hospital, where injured demonstrators were taken, also gassed by police"*.

However, it must be noted that these labor protests were not limited to 2008; May protests have occurred in recent years as well. However, citizens have also protested other government activity, and specifically, environmental actions by the state.

For example, a group in Bergama protested a gold mining operation that was using cyanide (Burga, 2013). This protest movement, “the largest scale and longest running ecological resistance movement modern Turkey has ever seen” (Çoban, 2004: 438). In fact, Paker (2013) explains the importance of this movement by pointing out that various organizations and officials, along with the citizens of the town came together against government actions in a context which “public opinion in Turkey considers environmental issues to be of secondary importance”, thus illustrating the success of such a movement. In fact, this case illustrates citizen action against a growing government indifference towards environmental issues. As mentioned, this conflict between the people at Bergama and the government is not new; the state has had begun the process for using the gold mine in the town in the 1990s. One of the first actions towards the gold mine were to bring in a company (Eurogold) to test the land. However, while they were carrying out this work, chemicals entered the water supply, which led to children becoming sick (Abacioglu, 1997: 1, in Çoban, 2004). Because of what occurred, many of the citizens became skeptical of the project. Such feelings seemed to intensify when the citizens came to the understanding that this new project would disrupt their livelihoods, since “tons of cyanide would be used to leach the gold and silver from the ore, tons of heavy metals would be left behind, and the dust arising from the crushing and grinding would contaminate the air and land” (Çoban, 2004: 442), as the region is reliant on agriculture and farming, without overall regional yearly production values said to be 42 million US dollars (Taskin, 1997: 67, in Çoban, 2004: 443). And in fact, scholars point out that indeed the mining site is in close proximity to a number of villages. For example, Ovacik is a mere 60 meters from the site (Çoban, 2004).

Citizens, upset at the government’s plans to continue with the site, often met together to discuss the ecological impact that this mine would have on their communities. Some even protested by putting their concerns and wants onto a stone tablet, which they displayed in the center of town, which referenced the importance of the environment compared to gold (Çoban, 2004). Furthermore, they continued to meet amongst one another, discussing ways to challenge the government’s actions. In 1996, they began sit-ins and marches, as the Eurogold Company began cutting 2500 olive trees. Many even obstructed the path for the company to

bring in shipments of cyanide, with 36 of those who were believed to be the leaders of the actions were arrested (Çoban, 2004: 445).

And despite the different protests, along with court rulings that seemed to suggest that the actions were unconstitutional, the government continued to try to find ways to allow the project to move forward. For example, in 2000, the Ministry of Energy put out a report requesting that conditions improve so that the mine can become functional. Interestingly, a primary argument by the government was that by not allowing the mine, this would serve long-term damage to Turkey's economy, since it would hinder future foreign direct investment (Çoban, 2004:448). As a result of the paper and the ministry's expectations, many other "ministries issued permits for a 'one-year' trial, production' and thereby the corporation commenced gold extraction", despite continued protests and further attempts to involve the courts in stopping government action (Çoban, 2004:448). In fact, citizens took their pleas to the European Court of Human Rights, where in 2004, "the court found that the state of Turkey had indeed violated the activists' procedural rights and awarded EUR 3000 each to the 315 individuals taking part in the lawsuit. However, the ECHR refused to back the activists in their calls to order Turkey to shut down the mine" (Environmental Justice Organisations, Liabilities and Trade (EJOLT), 2013: 5). However, currently the mine is still operating, despite ongoing tension locally, as well as nationally with many who continue to see the Turkish government continue to focus on new mining locations (EJOLT, 2013).

However, the protests at Bergama were far from the only citizens' environmental mobilizations against the state. For example, others have protested Hydroelectric Power Plants that have either been built or planned in Turkey that has been seen as threatening the environment. Many farmers feel that the new power plants will affect their livelihood. For example, in 2010, citizens in the Cide district of Istanbul protested a government backed plan to build a hydroelectric power plant in Loç Valley. In fact, the government has been working to build over 1000 dams for the area; the area is viewed as a prime location because of the mountain ranges and valleys that are quite conducive for such a project (VOA, 2011). However, similar to many of the other similar hydroelectric power plan initiatives, this case have received wide attention, with even celebrities such as Pelin Batu visiting the city to show support for those affected by the plans (Hürriyet Daily News, 2010). Reports suggest that the building will have numerous environmental effects in the region (as there is a large amount of wildlife in the region (VOA, 2011) that will ultimately be negatively affected by

this development⁴. Speaking to Voice of America, Dicle Tuba Kilic, a member of the Doga Dernegi movement (a group that has protested the government plans to build these various hydroelectric power plants), talked about how the government was circumventing court decisions that were not in their favor, by saying that the state "...opened all the legal way to make construction easily. And more than 1,700 hydroelectric power plant dams are planned. And if they finalize all of them, this will affect all the wetland ecosystem of Turkey and our local cultures living in deep valleys or on top of the mountains because they are now forced to migrate from their villages," said Kilic. "They will destroy archeological sites because they have opened them to make construction without any environmental impact assessment and social impact assessment. You don't have to do anything" (VOA, 2011).

But despite the numerous environmental concerns, the government under Erdogan has shown no intention of stopping this project. Despite the outrage, projects like this one are an all too common occurrence in Turkey.

In fact, the Turkish government under the AKP plans to build several power plants in the next decade. In fact, "[t]housands of dam and hydropower schemes are being built on almost all of the main rivers in a pharonic push to make Turkey a world economic power by the centenary of the republic in 2023" (Gibbons & Moore, 2011). However, from an environmental standpoint, "[i]t is Erdogan's declaration that Turkey's rivers must no longer 'run in vain' and 100% of its hydroelectric potential be harnessed...that has environmentalists most worried. They claim that the rush for hydropower is likely to be even more damaging to Turkey's delicate ecological balance, where desertification and depopulation are already problems" (Gibbons & Moore, 2011). Furthermore, many citizens have been removed from their villages by corporations who have been given the go-ahead to build the power-plants by the state. According to the Turkish Water Assembly, they believe that as many as two million persons may be moved or have to leave because of these projects (in Gibbons & Moore, 2011). Moreover, even specific water protections given to the communities have not always been followed. As Erensu (2011) explains: "*Legally speaking, the companies, who actually own the part of the river that they are investing for 50 years, have to leave no less than 30% of the water untouched. This portion is called can suyu (life water) and supposed to be enough for human livelihoods to persist and the ecosystem to continue. In actuality, however, the plants do not follow the 30% can suyu rule, which is not seriously monitored by the government agencies*".

⁴ It should be noted that the location for a number of dams would be on what is natural reserves areas (VOA, 2011).

Thus, there is a high criticism against the AKP for their neglect of human rights in the name of economic development with these projects. In one case, although the court ordered the halting of a hydro-power plant construction near Senoz Valley, the government seemed to ignore the ruling, allowing the work to go along as planned. This has hurt citizens in the region who have had their land expropriated, only to have it returned, and then taken again (Gibbons & Moore, 2011), as well as the continued effects that the cutting of the forest in the region has had in terms of soil erosion on the environment (Gibbons & Moore, 2011).

Yet these are not the only hydroelectric power plants that are being protested. For example, citizens and the government have squared off in the tourist area of Antalya, where the government has revived plans for a hydroelectric power plant in the region. Similar to the previous cases discussed, here the courts also expressed concern about the environmental effects of such plans. But, “although an administrative court blocked the continuation of the construction of the HES projects in Antalya’s Alakir valley, the projects have not been abandoned but are being prepared for the next stages of construction”, as government officials are making the argument that the previous environmental reports issued are not required (Today’s Zaman, 2012). Despite the years of fighting this project, and the initial court decision in 2011 (Today’s Zaman, 2012), it seems that government officials are set on having this project carried forward, yet another example of government disinterest in citizen thoughts on these different projects.

This government sentiment seems to be rather consistent throughout the different regions where the projects are taking place, and is attempting to making the construction of these plants much easier. For example, in 2013, speaking about the building of plants, Veysel Eroğlu, the minister of Forest and Water Affairs was quoted as saying that “we don’t want the (hydroelectric power plant) investments to be delayed even a day” (Hurriyet Daily News, 2013). Again, while officials have at times recognized the debate that some of the locals for the plants have caused, they continue to say that the ultimate objective for these projects is to build Turkey’s energy, all the while aiding in the support of the private sector (Hurriyet Daily News, 2013).

However, the hydroelectric power plants are not the only concern that Turkish citizens have. The AKP has also prepared for the building of three nuclear plants. This is concerning to many, particularly with “Turkey being one of the most seismically active nations on earth” (Gibbons & Moore, 2011). And in Ankara, protesters have voiced their concern over a dam being build on the Tigris after a major flooding incident (Gibbons & Moore, 2011), while

others are concerned about population evacuations in South-east Turkey, where there is a 4 billion dollar Beyhan dam project in development (Gibbons & Moore, 2011).

And thus, the tensions in Takism square in relation to Gezi Park must be understood in a larger environmental context. The government under the AKP has for decades carried out a policy of economic and infrastructure expansion, quite clearly at the expense of environmental concerns. Thus, Gezi park is just one recent example of the government continuing to press forward in its aims to grow Turkey's economy and infrastructure, all the while seeming to pay little concern to how citizens feel about these projects.

Erensu (2011) argues that the anti-hydroelectric power plant movement operates at both the rural and urban communities, where the rural movement is often comprised of those directly affected by a protected in their community, where the urban activists, while also protesting local plants, also have a role networking amongst the spectrum of ant-hydroelectric power plant activists (8). Yet, when looking at why the Turkish government (and some supporters) are not giving attention to the voices of those affected by these state decisions, Bugra (2013) argues that this dismissal of environmental concerns is due to the significant attention the government has given to economic development. Looking at the rise of the AKP's power and popularity, it would be difficult to suggest that the role of the AKP in a rising economy has not at least given them a rising popularity due to a belief that the AKP's policies have led to this increased development. The AKP itself often mentions the successful growth under its watch. However, this has not been without a cost. Bugra (2013) explains the AKP's position regarding the environment in contrast with an expectation to increase the economy: "Under the AKP rule, although the average rate of economic growth has not ben as high as those observed in the emerging economies of countries such as China, Brazil or India, it nevertheless achieved a respectable rate. However, this went along with an increasing current account deficit, much larger than the overwhelming majority of developed and developing economies. Hence, the economy became heavily dependent on the inflow of foreign capital. Capital flow, in its turn, depended on positive expectations about economic growth, which were largely led by infrastructure development and the vitality of the construction sector where a huge public agency (TOKI) has come to dominate the use of real estate and financial credit. This meant that environmental concerns had to be subordinated to the requirements of economic profit".

This attention to "neo-liberal" economic policies in the past decade, and even before the AKP came to power helps in understanding the objectives of the state, and in turn the ties

that they have to a number of these companies who are carrying out the development work, as in the case of the government and Eurogold in Bergama. In the case of the gold mine in Bergama, citizens saw the state as being linked with the corporation, putting profits ahead of citizen concerns (Çoban, 2004). The perception of a strong state-corporation relationship was only further supported when in 2004, after a Turkish court ruled that the actions were against the constitution's support for life and the environment, "[t]he government authorities did not implement the ruling" (Çoban, 2004: 447), in which the villagers responded to with more protests.

Erdogan, Islam and the Environment

Along with the economic growth—that has been why the government has continued to push for construction—at the expense of environmental protections, there is also the issue of how Erdogan is framing the power plants, namely, in the context of Islam. In fact, Erdogan has in fact used religious language in the discussion of the hydropower plants. In a 2010 speech, arguing for the benefits of these power plants, Erdogan said: “What we are attempting here is to meet our energy needs through new, local, renewable energy resources, such as wind and hydro. We are, with the help of entrepreneurial spirit, converting the blessings of God into energy, into production. How could this ever be against environment? SHPs don't eat up the water or evaporate it, or take it to somewhere else. SHPs pay maximum attention to sustainability of natural life” (*Hurriyet Daily*, August 11, 2010 (find article to cite), in Erensu, 2011).

Thus, Erdogan seems to be arguing that it is beneficial to take the resources bestowed by God and to be put to use. However, Erdogan and the AKP are not the only ones that reference God and Islam within the framework of the environment. For example, Bülent Duru (2013) has argued that Islam does indeed support issues related to the protection of the environment, as “one can notice that Islam emphasizes the value of all living beings as part of its essence, encourages a modest way of life, [and] attaches special importance to natural values” (5).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that while increased government controls over public space, as well as concerns about an increase corruption have led to citizen protests in 2013, and while the initial Gezi Park protests were primarily environmental in nature, the concerns

about the neglect of the environment and in turn the livelihood of citizens at the expense of economic development is much more pronounced than the protests in May and June of 2013. As written in the Guardian (2013), *“when the people protested against the building of hydroelectric and coal power plants there was no media attention, nor did it constitute a popular movement. Yet the seeds of today’s resistance were planted in Bergama, Hopa, Munzur, Gerze, and Amasra”*.

Furthermore, these concerns do not seem to be going away. In fact, Hurriyet Daily News (2014) reported that on February 13th, 2014, police fired tear gas on environmental protesters. The protesters were upset at what “the opening ceremony of a dam and hydroelectric power plant (HES) fair in Istanbul”. They were critical of the government’s continued plans for the power plants and the effects that they have on the environment (Hurriyet Daily News, 2014). According to reports, some of the protesters tried to make their way into the Congressional building.

The discontent between the protesters and government becomes more evident when examining more recent statements by government officials. For example, at this congress, Veysel Eroğlu, the minister of Forestry and Waterworks was quoted as saying “it’s impossible to understand those who oppose the HES. Across the world, countries including the U.S. and Canada have used their hydroelectric power potentials of up to 95 percent. Turkey, meanwhile, was using 18 percent [of its potential] in 2003” (Hurriyet Daily News, 2014). He went on to say that “the HES are the insurance of electricity in Turkey. It’s not the right to oppose them” (Hurriyet Daily News, 2014).

The reason that this is not a temporary issue that many citizens who historically have not been involved in environmental causes are directly effected, and thus, are devoting their lives to ensuring that their communities, their businesses, and their communities are not destroyed by the policies of the state. In fact, this is exactly why I argue that the protests due to environmental concerns will continue to be an issue for the state. The events in Turkey are not limited to a core set of environmental activity. While such groups are important in the movement, and have been making progress on environmental issues in the country for years, what is happening is that ordinary citizens who historically have had little ties to the environmentalists are becoming directly affected by the government’s development plans, which is leading them to devote their time and efforts to the various causes in their respective communities. As Baykan (2013) points out that while many are involved in environmental organizations, “there are also citizens who become “environmentalists” after finding out that a

thermal power plant, gold mine or HES is to be erected in their backyards, fields or nearby their rivers They are different from the above groupings in the sense that their struggle usually has a single focus and they do not fit well into the general environmentalist perception...” (11).

Looking at the HES case in Gerze, for example, “people from the Yaykil village of Gerze joined the struggle because their livelihoods would be under threat” (11). He goes on to explain that different types of protesters had different angles for their dismay at the state. For example, “...in Gerze, the way the town dwellers approach the issue is different from that of the villagers. Those who live in the town, with different livelihoods from the villagers, mainly emphasize the impacts of the power plant on the health an embrace the region, this way, they try to maintain the left-wing politics tradition prior to 1980 on the one hand and express their demand for democracy via a discourse that is against the construction of a project unwelcomed by the local people” (11).

This last point is important, because government actions are leading individuals who usually would not be as active on environmental issues to become involved due to this challenge to their existence and economic revenue source. Couple this with a strong rising environmental movement, as long as the government continues on their plan of economic development at the expense of local communities and the environment as a whole, this, coupled with rising controls of the internet and political space, the animosity by citizens will not dissipate, but rather, will only escalate in the state. While the actions as a whole may not immediately spark an uprising immediately, just one of the specific violations may be enough to lead to mass anti-government protests. As long as the AKP and the state continue to disregard the livelihood and communities of their citizens, this will continue to be an underlying (and sometimes open) issue for the government.

It must be remembered that economic development does not need to come at the cost of the environment; the two are not mutually exclusive. The state can work with the environmentalists and local citizens to protect the rivers, farming lands, and other lands, all the while building infrastructure and continued economic expansions.

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