

## Media Representation of 'Diyarbakır Mothers': A Cross-Newspaper Comparison and Analysis

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**Abstract:** In today's world, the media plays a powerful role in shaping perspectives on social issues. The portrayal of the 'Diyarbakır Mothers' in the media highlights a critical area of research on the media's influence on social perception. This study examines how four different newspapers (Yeni Şafak, Sözcü, Sabah and Cumhuriyet) represent the 'Diyarbakır Mothers' and explores the media's impact on shaping social perception. To achieve this, the language used by these newspapers, their headline choices, and their news content are examined through discourse analysis, aiming to uncover the media's stance on this issue. By employing this method, the linguistic choices and narrative strategies within the news articles are assessed to understand how they shape the public perception of this topic. By analyzing the language, headline choices, and content of these news articles, the study aims to reveal the media's stance on this issue. This analysis offers valuable insights into the political orientations of these newspapers, their influence on social perceptions, and the strategies they use to engage their audiences. Ultimately, this study helps us understand the diversity in how the 'Diyarbakır Mothers' are portrayed in the media and prompts us to question the role of media in shaping social issues.

**Keywords:** Media Representation, Diyarbakır Mothers, Newspaper Analysis, Social Perception, Social Issues.

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## Introduction

The idea that media is one of the most powerful tools capable of influencing all levels of society is widely accepted. Mass communication tools have been used for many years to shape societal behavior by creating social awareness. As an element of social reality and due to the impact it creates in the formation of this reality, the representation of social institutions and phenomena in the media has become a significant area of research. For these reasons, which will be discussed in more detail later in this study, this research focuses on the media representation of the 'Diyarbakır Mothers.' We can begin by explaining what we mean by this term.

The term 'Diyarbakır Mothers' refers to mothers who hold vigils with the aim of rescuing their children from the PKK based on the claim that their children were abducted to be recruited by the organization.<sup>1</sup>

The term 'abducted' is used because even if the children consented, it is believed that this consent was obtained through deception. Additionally, given their age at the time, they are considered minors, and according to international conventions and all relevant legal documents, no child under the age of 18 can be conscripted into armed groups under any circumstances.

The first protest by mothers whose children were abducted to join the PKK began on May 19, 2014, in front of the Municipality of Diyarbakır. During the 84-day protest, the families were forced to leave the front of the municipality, leading them to continue their protest on the sidewalk across from the building (AA News Agency, 2014). The mothers chose the municipality building as the site of their protest because they believed that the political party controlling the municipality was complicit in the abduction of their children. This protest was notable as it marked the first time Kurdish mothers publicly raised their voices against the PKK. Through their actions, the mothers accused the HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) of facilitating the recruitment of members for the PKK.<sup>2</sup> The sit-in, which began in May, ended in September, influenced by the positive atmosphere of the 'solution process.' The 'Vigil for Children' protests, which are the focus of this study, began on August 22, 2019.

On this date, Hacire Akar, who had already lost one son in the mountains and had her second son abducted by the PKK, went to the HDP provincial office in Diyarbakır and began a sit-in protest. Hacire Akar declared, "I am here for my child. The HDP abducted my son. My son entered the HDP building and never came out. I want my son back. If he isn't on the ground, they will bring him down from the sky. I'm not leaving this building until my son is returned." She remained outside the building for two days, and at the end of those two days, her son, Mehmet Akar, was handed over to the police (AA News Agency, 2019). Hacire Akar's protest inspired other mothers, leading to the beginning of the 'Evlat Nöbeti' (Vigil for Children) protest, which has continued for nearly five years. During this time, the Diyarbakır Mothers have been frequently featured in the news. Their protests, as well as visits by politicians and artists, have been reported, and the anniversaries of the protest have been covered. Most notably, the reunions between mothers and their children have been widely publicized. This article focuses on how the Diyarbakır Mothers were represented in the media during this period. To analyze this, the newspapers *Sabah*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Cumhuriyet* and *Sözcü* were selected. *Sabah* and *Yeni Şafak* are

known for supporting the government's policies, while *Cumhuriyet* and *S  zc  * are known for supporting the opposition. *Yeni   afak* is recognized as a publication with Islamist tendency, while *Sabah* is known for its close ties to the government. *Cumhuriyet* was chosen for its Kemalist left-wing stance, and *S  zc  * for its Kemalist nationalist opposition stance. In this way, publications close to the government and those aligned with the opposition were differentiated from each other.

The reason for choosing the media representation of the Diyarbakır Mothers as the subject of this article is that, despite the high visibility of their protests in the media, to date, no analysis has been conducted on this topic. A review of the literature revealed no studies specifically examining news coverage of the Diyarbakır Mothers. In fact, when academic publications were reviewed, it became evident that the concepts of the Diyarbakır Mothers or the Vigil for Children have not been sufficiently addressed, not only in terms of their media representation but also in other contexts, with few exceptions in the academic literature. Another reason for focusing on the media representation of the Diyarbakır Mothers in this study is my background as a journalist, which has allowed me to visit these mothers on numerous occasions and develop an informed perspective on their portrayal in the media over time.

The article is structured as follows. First, the background of the Diyarbakır Mothers' Vigil for Children protest is presented followed by the methodology and approach used in the study. Hereafter, the findings from the analysis of news articles in *Cumhuriyet*, *S  zc  *, *Sabah* and *Yeni   afak* newspapers are discussed. Finally, the conclusion and evaluation parts are delivered.

Following assumptions guide this study: The Diyarbakır Mothers' Vigil for Children, which began on August 22, 2019, has continued to the present day, making it a long-term protest. The frequency of media coverage for such sustained protests has been influenced by various developments over time and has held the potential to trigger political and sociological changes. It is assumed that the Vigil for Children, being the first civilian protest against the PKK in T  rkiye, has received extensive media attention. One of the key objectives of this study is to determine whether the protest has been represented in a way that reflects its unique significance. Conversely, another assumption is that the prolonged duration of the protest may lead to a decrease in media attention over time.

Additionally, it is assumed that the protest has received greater visibility in media outlets aligned with the government, where a more supportive tone has been employed. Conversely, it is presumed that the protest has been covered less frequently in opposition media outlets, with a more neutral tone, and that, at times,

some critical coverage may have been given. Moreover, the absence of police intervention—since the protests do not target the government or the constitutional order—is expected to decrease the visibility of the protests in the media. As a result, it is anticipated that the selected content, as well as the rhetoric, syntax, and terminology used in the media representations, may reflect the ideological stances of the respective newspapers. The primary assumption of this study is to determine whether there is a significant difference in the frequency and manner in which the protests are reported between government-aligned and opposition media outlets. Additionally, the discourse analysis of the media representation of the Diyarbakır Mothers' protests aims to reflect the sociological significance of the movement.

## **Methodology**

This study focuses on the media representation of the Diyarbakır Mothers' Vigil for Children protests. The method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) was employed to explore how the protests were portrayed in four different newspapers. This section will discuss why critical discourse analysis was chosen as the methodology and how it was applied. Discourse analysis is a widely used method in media and communication studies, shaped by the works of post-structuralist and post-modern thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Chantal Mouffe, and Ernesto Laclau. Foucault, in particular, emphasizes the relationship between power and discourse, arguing that power is not only exercised by the state or institutions and that discourse is not merely textual. According to Foucault, no relationship is more universal than that between power and discourse (Foucault, 1999). In studies examining the interplay of discourse and power across all levels of society, emphasis is placed on the role of discourse in shaping culture and society, its historical context, its ideological functions, and its connection to power. Within this framework, critical discourse analysis enables the examination of news texts as cultural and political artifacts.

Teun A. van Dijk's work, as one of the leading scholars in critical discourse analysis, is particularly noteworthy. Van Dijk approaches discourse analysis on two levels: macro structure and micro structure. At the macro level, the thematic and schematic elements of discourse are examined. The thematic structure focuses on the main topic and theme of the news text, while the schematic structure analyzes the organization of discourse, such as how sections like the headline, introduction, body, and conclusion are structured. In this study, the thematic framing of the Diyarbakır Mothers' actions and the schematic structuring of the news reports will be analyzed. At the micro level, linguistic, syntactic (sentence structure), semantic (meaning), and rhetorical (persuasive elements) aspects of discourse are

examined. This involves a detailed analysis of the language used in news texts, including the purpose behind word choices, the emphasis on specific words, and how sentences are constructed using active or passive structures. According to Van Dijk's model, discourse analysis comprehensively evaluates the content, rhetoric, semantics, and narrative of the news text. Critical discourse analysis focuses on multiple layers, from word choices to sentence construction, from the linguistic structure of headlines and subheadings to the arrangement of words within the text. Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis method allows for the examination of the text within its socio-economic, ideological, cultural, and political contexts, making it a frequently preferred approach in media studies. The primary level of analysis in this study will be how the discourse of the Diyarbakır Mothers is presented in the news and how this presentation reflects the newspaper's ideological and social context. In this framework, both macro and micro elements such as whether the mothers' statements were included or how they were presented, the length of the news reports, the quality of the visuals used, the linguistic structure of headlines and subheadings, the emphasis on quotations and emotional tones, the use of active or passive sentence structures, and whether the agents were obscured, have been analyzed in detail (Devran, 2010).

To further elaborate on the reasons for adopting the critical discourse analysis approach in this study, it is important to highlight the following: Teun A. van Dijk, in his analysis of news as a form of discourse, connects discourse with ideology, arguing that the conceptual structure that emerges is embedded within a cultural, political, and ideological historical context (Van Dijk, 2003: 19). Van Dijk also identifies journalists, writers, academics, and artists as "symbolic elites" within society. These "symbolic elites" have the privilege of producing and shaping discourse in ways that influence and articulate social structures. In the context of this study, journalists and writers—symbolic elites—exercise their power by making decisions about the style of discourse, the headlines, the choice of words, what gets quoted, and how sentences are structured. Through these decisions, they exert influence over society and thus become subjects of sociological analysis.

Critical discourse analysis is often employed in contexts where discourse is shaped by power structures. When applied to media, it is generally assumed that the creators of discourse are those in power—such as the state, government, or related forces and actors. As Foucault argues, the relationship between power and discourse is unavoidable. However, in today's society, it is clear that there are power centers beyond state authority, and these can sometimes challenge state authorities, even exerting considerable influence over the media. These non-state power groups, using the communication tools available today, can also effectively

engage in discourse production. In this study, critical discourse analysis will be applied with the understanding that discourse is not exclusively produced from the perspective of the state or government. It will also take into account that the Diyarbakır Mothers, as well as the political actors and organizations they protest against, possess their own tools for discourse production.

The HDP and PKK, which are the targets of the Diyarbakır Mothers' protest, also have the capacity and tools to produce their own discourse. However, this study does not focus on them. Instead, it examines whether the discourse of the protest and its targeted actors is being reproduced in pro-government and opposition media outlets. The media outlets were chosen based on their social and ideological contexts. Rather than selecting publications that directly serve as mouthpieces for the political party and organization targeted by the protest, the study focused on opposition outlets that, due to their opposition to the government, are sometimes perceived as supporting the HDP.

The table below provides an analysis of the news coverage on the Diyarbakır mothers across several Turkish newspapers, including *Anadolu Ajansı* (AA), *Sabah*, *Sözcü*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Milliyet*, *Hürriyet*, and *Diyarbakır Söz*. It compares the number of articles, publication dates, headlines, and the use of visual elements such as photos or videos.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1***Content and Visual Analysis of Diyarbakır Mothers News Coverage in Selected Turkish Newspapers*

<i>Newspaper Name</i>	<i>How Many News Items Analyzed</i>	<i>Publication Date of News</i>	<i>News Website</i>	<i>News Headlines</i>	<i>Photo/Video Content</i>	<i>Number of Photos</i>
<i>AA Haber Ajansı</i>	3	2014, 2019	aa.com.tr	“Seslerini duyurmak için oturma eylemi başlattılar” “Teröre lanet” “Evlat nöbeti devam ediyor”	Photo, Video	2 Photos, 1 Video
<i>Sabah</i>	6	2019, 2021, 2023	sabah.com.tr	“Hacire anneden HDP’ye lanet” “Oğlunun dağa kaçırıldığını söyleyen annenin HDP’deki eylemi sürüyor” “Meral Akşener’den HDP ve PKK’ya tek laf etmeden Diyarbakır annelerine sözde destek” “Evlat nöbetindeki babadan HDP’li vekile sert tepki: Zafer işaretini çok seviyorsa Kandil’e gitsin” “Başkan Erdoğan’dan Diyarbakır annelerine destek ziyareti” “Evlat nöbetindeki babadan HDP’ye lanet”	Photo, Video	4 Photos, 2 Video
<i>Sözcü</i>	5	2019, 2021, 2022	sozcu.com.tr	“Kayıp oğul ortaya çıktı” “Akşener destek verdi” “Zafer işareti yapan HDP’li vekile soruşturma”	Photo	3 Photos
<i>Yeni Şafak</i>	5	2019, 2021, 2022, 2023	yenisafak.com.tr	“HDP oğlumu çaldı” “Kılıçdaroğlu, Diyarbakır anneleri ile otelde görüşmek istedi: Bize kumpas kurdu” “Evlat nöbetindeki ailelerden kaçan HDP’li Katircioğlu zafer işareti yapıp kıskırttı” “Evlat nöbetindeki ailelerden kendilerini ziyaret etmeyen Akşener’e tepki: Masanın altından çekindi” “Diyarbakır anneleri, Erdoğan’ın desteğinden memnun: Güç verdi”	Photo, Video	4 Photos, 1 Video
<i>Milliyet</i>	1	2019	milliyet.com.tr	“HDP önündeki eylemde 10. gün: 8 yıl sonra gördü, hemen oraya koştu”	Photo	2 Photos
<i>Hürriyet</i>	1	2014	hurriyet.com.tr	“Aileler BDP’yi bastı, PKK açıklama yaptı”	Photo	2 Photos
<i>Diyarbakır Söz</i>	1	2021	diyarbakirsoz.com	“HDP binayı boşalttı”	Photo	1 Photos

## Findings and Levels of Analysis

As previously mentioned, this study focuses on four selected newspapers: *Sabah*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Sözcü* and *Cumhuriyet*. *Sabah* and *Yeni Şafak* were chosen because they are considered pro-government and are assumed to have frequently and extensively covered the Diyarbakır Mothers' protests. *Cumhuriyet* and *Sözcü* were selected due to their opposition to the government, as they are believed to have given less coverage to the protests and to have downplayed the organizations and political parties targeted by the protest in their reporting. The assumptions underlying this study were discussed in greater detail in the introduction, so this section will primarily focus on explaining the levels of analysis.

The research utilized news articles available in both physical and digital formats. Some articles appeared in both print and online versions, while others were only digitally accessible. Since the goal of the study is to use critical discourse analysis to identify the discursive, ideological, and social contexts of the texts, it was important to examine how the same news was reported in different newspapers. To achieve this, the digital archives of Anadolu Agency (AA) and Doğan News Agency (DHA) were used. The articles were reviewed, and five key articles were selected for detailed analysis.

Specific criteria were established for selecting the news articles to be included in the study. One key criterion was that the selected articles must have been covered in all four newspapers. Hacire Akar's visit to the HDP Provincial Headquarters was included due to its significance as the event that initiated the protests. Additionally, visits from political figures across different parties were incorporated, as these were expected to reveal differences in how the newspapers produced ideological and social discourse. The main criterion for selecting the news articles was their presence in all four newspapers, based on their newsworthiness. If certain articles were absent from one or more of the newspapers, this omission was also analyzed as an additional level of analysis.

Another level of analysis focused on whether the Diyarbakır Mothers' statements were included in the news articles, and if so, how they were presented. This aspect is crucial because many of the mothers explicitly stated that their children were abducted by the HDP and handed over to the PKK. Analyzing which newspapers reported these statements and how they were framed offers insights into the ideological and social contexts of the respective media outlets.

The study examined several factors, including whether the articles received extensive coverage, whether they included photographs or were brief (single news



items), the choice of words in headlines and subheadings, whether photos of the mothers with their children were used, whether direct quotes were included, whether the purpose of the protest was clearly articulated, whether political messages were conveyed, whether the text included emotional elements, and whether passive syntax was employed to obscure the identities of the perpetrators (Devran, 2010, p. 36). Without engaging in a debate about the legitimacy of power, the study treated the HDP and PKK as power centers, similar to the government, police, and public authorities, in terms of their capacity to produce discourse. This consideration forms the basis for adopting the critical discourse analysis method.

The study explored how the Diyarbakır Mothers' Vigil for Children protests were represented in the selected newspapers, specifically investigating whether the newspapers' editorial choices reproduced their own ideologies through the news articles. To do this, Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis framework was applied to the news texts. In the conclusion, the study sought to understand how the ideological and social narratives were constructed based on how these newspapers handled the related news coverage.

### **Background of the Vigil for Children Protests**

This section provides an overview of the Diyarbakır Mothers' Vigil for Children protests, focusing on how the movement began, its objectives, the reasons cited by the families, and the current state of the protests. The analysis in this study centers on news articles about the protests that began in 2019. However, these were not the first protests by Kurdish mothers against the HDP and PKK. The initial protest occurred in May 2014, when the families of two 15-year-old high school students initiated the movement (AA News Agency, 2014).<sup>4</sup> The families claimed that their children had been abducted by the PKK and stormed the provincial headquarters of the BDP, the predecessor of the HDP. In response, the PKK issued a statement through its affiliated news outlets, asserting that the children had not been abducted but had voluntarily joined the organization.<sup>5</sup> The PKK further alleged that the state, unable to prevent these joinings, had coerced the mothers into protesting as part of a psychological warfare tactic (Hürriyet, 2014).

The protest initiated by two families quickly expanded. Nearly 100 families continued the protest, first in front of the Municipality of Diyarbakır and, after intervention by municipal officers, in tents they set up on the median across from the building. This marked the first protest by mothers against the PKK and HDP. Until then, the most well-known mother-centered protest was the 'Saturday Mothers' whose target was the state, as they claimed their children had been disappeared after being taken into custody by state forces.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the

Diyarbakır Mothers' Vigil for Children targeted the PKK and the HDP, whom they accused of abducting their children and handing them over to the PKK. This initial protest ended on September 7, 2014, after 84 days, partly due to the positive atmosphere created by the ongoing peace process. During the period between May and September, some families were reunited with their children, marking the first time that Kurdish mothers had raised their voices against the PKK. Between 2014 and 2019, the peace process ended, and Türkiye experienced a period of frequent terrorist incidents. As the peace process concluded, a wave of intense terrorist attacks—partly responsible for its collapse—occurred, leading to heightened public backlash against the terrorist organization. In response, large-scale 'Curse Terror, Invite Brotherhood' rallies were held in several cities, including Bingöl, Elâzığ, Ağrı, Tunceli, Van, Hakkâri, Muş, Bitlis, and Batman (AA News Agency, 2019).

The second protest by mothers demanding the return of their children from the HDP and PKK, which is the focus of this study, began in this atmosphere. On August 22, 2019, Hacire Akar went to the HDP Diyarbakır Provincial Headquarters, declaring that the HDP had abducted her son and that she would not leave without him. Frequently referred to in news reports as 'Mother Hacire,' Hacire Akar had previously lost another son who had joined the PKK in the mountains. Believing that her second son, Mehmet Akar, had also been abducted by the PKK, she went to the HDP headquarters. She began her protest by stating, "I am here for my child. The HDP abducted my son. He entered the HDP building and never came out. I want my son back. If he isn't on the ground, they will bring him down from the sky. I'm not leaving this building until my son is returned." (AA News Agency, 2019). On the second day of her protest, her son Mehmet Akar was handed over to the authorities. The protest initiated by Hacire Akar has continued for five years.

Hacire Akar inspired other mothers, leading to a significant increase in the number of participants in the Vigil for Children, similar to what occurred in 2014. The choice of the Diyarbakır HDP Provincial Headquarters as the protest site carries symbolic significance, as it reflects the mothers' belief that the HDP handed their children over to the PKK. The HDP headquarters, already a politically charged location, became a focal point of the perceived connection between the HDP and PKK through this protest. Similarly, in 2014, mothers had stormed the BDP Diyarbakır Provincial Headquarters to express their anger. The HDP, uncomfortable with this association, eventually vacated the building under the pretext of renovations (Diyarbakır Söz, 2021). Although the families occasionally held protests in other locations, this site retained its symbolic importance for their cause.

Violent organizations cannot sustain themselves solely through strong ideologies; they must recruit new generations to survive. For terrorist organizations and extremist groups, securing the participation of young people is vital. Reports indicate that around 3,000 children are in PKK camps, with some as young as 8-9 years old receiving weapons training (Öztürk, 2019, pp. 8-9).<sup>7</sup> These organizations depend on civilian networks to recruit members, which is why it is significant that families are demanding their children back from the HDP Provincial Headquarters. According to the families, HDP-affiliated municipalities have "deceived" or "forcibly" recruited their children into the organization through activities such as picnics (Milliyet, 2019).<sup>8</sup> The PKK's ability to maintain the socialization achieved through the politicization of Kurdish identity hinges on recruiting new generations. The Syrian civil war has provided an opportunity for this. Even Kurds who do not support the PKK have reported that young people and children have been taken to the mountains, given certain training, and then sent to fight in Syria, either through HDP-affiliated municipal cultural and arts centers or directly.<sup>9</sup>

It is also alleged that the organization has trained abducted youths in Syria. Some families have claimed that their children were taken to Syria to join the YPG, while others reported that the last news they received placed their children in Syria. Reports from the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria indicate that the YPG has recruited boys and girls as young as 12 years old into the organization. These allegations are significant as they underscore the organic relationship between the PKK and YPG. These protests have been frequently covered in the Turkish press. However, it is noteworthy that these events have received little to no coverage in international media outlets that closely follow developments in Türkiye. Although this aspect is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to consider whether international media have reported on the Diyarbakır Mothers' protests. For instance, major international news agencies with extensive networks in Türkiye, such as Reuters, AFP, and AP, did not cover the protests (Atlas, 2020, pp. 190-192). In BBC and DW reports, young Kurdish women fighters joining the fight against ISIS are often portrayed as 'freedom fighters', ignoring the fact that many of them are under 18 and therefore underage (BBC, 2014). While the Syrian civil war has served as a tool for the PKK-YPG to legitimize themselves, the reality of children being conscripted into armed conflict has been overlooked, despite international conventions. Although the Diyarbakır Mothers' protests, which began in 2019, have received no coverage in Western media, they have been extensively covered in Turkish media. However, there are notable differences in how and how frequently these protests have been reported by various media outlets in Türkiye. This observation forms the basis of this study.

There are numerous international agreements and legal documents, such as the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1949 Geneva Conventions, and the 2007 Paris Principles, which explicitly state that children cannot be recruited or used in armed conflict (Kekevi & Kılıçoğlu, 2016, p. 483).<sup>10</sup> These documents clearly emphasize that children should not be used even in support roles behind the front lines (Sümer, 2018, p. 12). Despite this, the UN Security Council has acknowledged that the PKK uses child soldiers, and on October 5, 2013, the PKK signed the "Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict," proposed by the Geneva Call, a civil society organization. The YPG also signed this commitment. However, the number of children recruited by the PKK and YPG has not decreased; instead, it has increased. According to the "Who Are These in the Mountains?" study by the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Türkiye (TEPAV), 42% of the PKK's recruits are under the age of 18, and 9% are under the age of 15 (Özcan & Gürkaynak, 2012). Aytekin Yılmaz, who served 10 years in prison for supporting the PKK, claims that Kurdish families are forced to give at least one child to the PKK. Those who refuse have their children forcibly taken to the mountains. This has been the case since the 1990s. Yılmaz attributes the delay in families' reactions against the PKK and its affiliated political parties to the distance between the state and the Kurds during the 1980s and 1990s (Yılmaz, 2019, pp. 10-11). This situation has made families hesitant to report their missing or abducted children to the authorities (Alptekin et al., 2022, p. 71).

## **Representation of the Vigil for Children Protests in the Media: Findings**

In this section, a discourse analysis is conducted on the representation of the Diyarbakır Mothers' Vigil for Children protests in the media, focusing on news articles from *Sabah*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Cumhuriyet* and *Sözcü* newspapers. The analyzed articles were selected from the archives of Anadolu Agency (AA) and Doğan News Agency (DHA), with attention given to how these articles were covered in the four newspapers. AA and DHA were chosen as primary sources because they reported nearly every development related to the protests comprehensively, and most other newspapers frequently relied on these agencies for their coverage. This approach allowed for an examination of how the same news was presented differently across various newspapers.

To this end, the digital archives of AA and DHA were utilized. As mentioned in the methodology section, the selection of news articles was based on their prominence and whether they were deemed significant enough to be covered by all newspapers.

The study examined how the same news was reported across different newspapers, focusing on how the discourse surrounding the Diyarbakır Mothers varied between selected outlets. The analysis primarily looked at how the visits of political figures to the Diyarbakır Mothers were reported, with particular focus on the visits by President Erdoğan, Meral Akşener, and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. Additionally, the coverage of the HDP Member of Parliament, Erol Katırcıoğlu, making a victory sign in front of the Diyarbakır Mothers was analyzed. Lastly, reports on Hacire Akar's visit to the HDP Provincial Headquarters—considered the starting point of the Vigil for Children protests—were included to reflect the significance of the protests.

News articles from the digital archives of AA and DHA were reviewed to determine their presence in either the print or digital editions of the four newspapers under study. The absence of an article was recorded as data. For published articles, discourse analysis focused on the size of the coverage, language used in the headlines and text, whether the perpetrators were obscured, the inclusion of the mothers' statements, the mention of the protest's purpose and target, the presence of photos of the mothers and their children, and any political messaging.

### **Analysis of the Protest's Purpose and Targets**

The analysis began by examining how Hacire Akar's sit-in protest in front of the HDP Diyarbakır Provincial Headquarters—initiated after she claimed that HDP members had handed her son over to the PKK—was reported. This news story was covered by all four newspapers. However, *Cumhuriyet* focused more on the return of Akar's son rather than the start of her protest. The headline read, "Her Son Returned, the Protest Ended," with no mention of the PKK or terrorist organization in the subheading. The omission of the protest's purpose suggests an attempt to downplay the responsibility of the PKK and HDP. (Sözcü, 2019)

In the article (Sözcü, 2019) the sentence "On the third day of the protest, Mehmet Akar went to the police station, stating that he 'was not missing.' While his statement was being taken, Hacire Akar left the HDP provincial headquarters to see her son" uses the phrase "was not missing" in quotation marks, subtly undermining the claim that her son was abducted by the HDP and taken to the mountains by the PKK. The article does include a photo of Hacire Akar sitting in front of the HDP Diyarbakır Provincial Headquarters, but the HDP sign is not visible in the image.

In *Cumhuriyet*, articles about Hacire Akar make a deliberate effort to avoid establishing a connection between the HDP and PKK, especially in the headlines and subheadings. The accusatory statements made by Akar and her family against the HDP are presented in quotation marks, without additional commentary.

Similarly, *Sözcü* newspaper did not report on Hacire Akar's protest when it began but only after her son was handed over to the authorities. On the first day of the protest, Hacire Akar went to the HDP Provincial Headquarters, declaring, "I am here for my child. The HDP abducted my son. He entered the HDP building and never came out. I want my son back. If he isn't on the ground, they will bring him down from the sky. I'm not leaving this building until my son is returned." (Yeni Şafak, 2019). She then shattered the glass doors of the building, an incident that received extensive coverage in the Turkish media. However, in both newspapers, the intensity, target, and reasons for Akar's protest were buried within the details following the news of her son's return to the authorities (AA News Agency, 2019).

In *Sözcü's* headline, "Missing Son Found, Protest Ends with 'Incident,'" and the subheading, "She Ended the Protest on the Third Day After Her Son Was Found," it is clear that the newspaper aimed to emphasize the notion that "they were reunited and the issue was resolved," rather than highlighting the purpose and claims of the protest (Sözcü, 2019). The use of the term "missing" instead of "abducted" further depersonalizes the act, omitting the perpetrator. *Sözcü* also reported on the altercation between Hacire Akar and HDP members, featuring both a photo of Akar sitting and one of the scuffle. The photos were close-ups, with none showing the HDP sign in the background.

When examining how the same story was covered in *Yeni Şafak* and *Sabah* newspapers, several key differences emerge. Both newspapers not only reported on Hacire Akar's initial protest but also covered related developments, such as the president's phone call to Akar, her nomination for the Nobel Prize, and interviews with her. The headlines in these newspapers directly addressed the purpose and cause of the protest by using phrases like "HDP stole my son," clearly identifying the perpetrator (Yeni Şafak, 2019). Unlike *Sözcü* and *Cumhuriyet*, *Yeni Şafak* provided extensive coverage of Hacire Akar's statements, thereby emphasizing the connection between the HDP and PKK.

In the article, statements from Hacire Akar such as, "I came here for my child. The HDP stole my son. He entered this building and never came out. I want my son back. Whether they find him on the ground or bring him from the sky, they need to return my son. If they don't, I will stay here. They drugged him, took away his senses (...) They talk about human rights. Where are these human rights? How can they take young men, just 20 days away from their wedding? This is the third time they've done this. They took two before, and this is the third. Every year, they take one. I raise them, and as soon as they turn 16 or 17, they take them away (...) They called him, I took his phone, and they called him. They said, 'Come to the provincial

headquarters.' Isn't this the provincial headquarters? He came here yesterday morning," (Yeni Şafak, 2019) are highlighted to underscore the accusations against the HDP, the emotional toll on the mother, the severity of the situation, and the claim that the HDP facilitated the PKK's actions. Notably, the article emphasizes Akar's statement that her other children were also abducted by the PKK. The report is further supported by comments from human rights organization representatives, stressing that the HDP, as a political party, is violating human rights by aiding a terrorist organization.

Among the media outlets, *Sabah* newspaper provided the most extensive coverage of Hacire Akar's protest. The headlines frequently featured terms like "HDP," "rebellion," "curse," "mountain," and "terror." The emphasis and choice of words in both the headline and subheadline, or "spot," are particularly significant from a discourse analysis perspective. This suggests that *Sabah* focused on the reasons and targets of the protest, framing its reports to directly target the PKK and HDP, much like the protestors themselves. For example, in an article titled "Hacire Mother's Curse on HDP," it was highlighted that Hacire Akar expressed her anger in Kurdish, saying, "May their home be destroyed, may their door be sealed shut. They left me without children." (Sabah, 2023). This report not only featured a mother's curse against the HDP but also emphasized that she spoke in Kurdish—a detail other newspapers did not highlight. This emphasis suggests an attempt to convey that the HDP and PKK should not be associated with Kurdish identity. In another article titled "Sit-in Protest by Hacire Akar, Mother Rebelling Against HDP," the terms "rebellion," "mother," and "HDP" are used in the headline, making it clear from the outset that the newspaper's coverage was supportive of the mothers' protest (Sabah, 2019).

Unlike other newspapers, *Sabah* provided extensive coverage of what Hacire Akar did before arriving at the HDP Provincial Headquarters. The article states;

"She did not return home after leaving on Wednesday. The family, while examining the cellphone left at home by her sons who work in construction, discovered messages urging participation in protests following the removal of the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Mayor and the appointment of a trustee. It was determined that Akar had last spoken with an employee at the HDP Provincial Headquarters. Following this, Hacire Akar filed a complaint against the HDP members and went to the party's provincial office in the Selahaddin Eyyubi neighborhood. She broke the glass door with a hammer and declared that she would not leave until her son, Mehmet Akar—whom



she claimed had been abducted by the HDP and taken to the mountains—was returned, beginning her sit-in protest.” (DHA, 2019).

This narrative carries stronger rhetorical elements compared to other newspapers. Additionally, unlike other outlets, *Sabah* included a photo of Hacire Akar where the HDP Provincial Headquarters sign is clearly visible.

### **The Construction of Power and Opposition Discourses as an Analysis Level**

As mentioned earlier, the discourse analysis of news articles linking the Diyarbakır Mothers with political figures is particularly insightful. This analysis, therefore, focuses on articles involving President Erdoğan, then-İYİ Party leader Meral Akşener, and then-CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. In *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, the article titled “Akşener Supports Mothers Protesting in Diyarbakır” highlights Akşener’s criticisms of the ruling party, emphasizing accusations of insincerity (Cumhuriyet, 2019). The article not only underscores Akşener’s support for the mothers but also suggests that the Diyarbakır Mothers are being exploited by the ruling party. Akşener’s following statement;

“The mothers whose children were abducted by the terrorist organization are holding vigil in front of a party building in Diyarbakır with tears and longing... It’s not just these mothers who are crying, but the entire nation. The anguish is shared by 82 million people. As a mother and a politician who has served as the Interior Minister of the Republic of Türkiye, I warn you: the solution to these mothers’ cries does not lie at the door of a political party, but at the door of the state. If the mothers of this country must seek relief for a pain that the state should resolve at the door of a political party, then the ruling party and its media must reflect and answer this question: In a country governed with competence, would a mother look to a party or to the state for the future of her child?” (Cumhuriyet, 2019)

shifts the focus from the Diyarbakır Mothers’ demands to criticisms of the ruling party. The article extensively covers Akşener’s statements, with subheadings like “The government should pursue those causing pain to our nation instead of taking revenge for the election” and “Mothers are saying ‘Give us back our children.’” This editorial choice portrays the government as ineffective against the PKK and suggests that the ruling party is not genuinely concerned about the mothers’ plight.



*Sözcü* newspaper published the same story with similar emphasis but in a shorter version. The headline, “Akşener Supports Mothers in Diyarbakır!” carries the same positive tone. In the subheadline and within the article, Akşener’s statements, “The solution to these mothers’ cries is not at the door of a political party but at the door of the state” and “This is a failure of governance” are highlighted (Sözcü, 2019). In both articles, Akşener’s remark, “As a politician who has served as the Interior Minister of the Republic of Türkiye, I warn you,” is included to reinforce her criticism of the ruling party. A significant portion of her speech is quoted directly in the article, while the editorial comment adds that “Akşener emphasized that the state’s duty is not to exploit this desperation for propaganda but to fulfill its legal responsibilities and reunite the mothers with their children.” (Sözcü, 2019)

In *Yeni Şafak* and *Sabah* newspapers, Meral Akşener’s statement regarding the Diyarbakır Mothers was reported with phrases like “So-called support,” “Didn’t utter a word against the PKK and HDP...,” and “Hesitant under the table.” *Sabah* published the story under the headline, “Meral Akşener’s So-called Support for Diyarbakır Mothers Without a Word Against HDP and PKK,” with the subheadline, “IP Chairwoman Akşener has remained silent for days in the face of the grieving mothers’ cries” (Sabah, 2019). The editorial comment, “It is noteworthy that Akşener did not mention the PKK or its political extension, the HDP, even once in her statement, instead suggesting that ‘The solution to these mothers’ cries is not at the door of a political party but at the door of the state,’ thereby targeting the state rather than the HDP,” indicates how the newspaper framed Akşener’s statement as support for the HDP and PKK rather than for the Diyarbakır Mothers. Additionally, the term “support” was given a negative connotation by prefacing it with “so-called.”

*Yeni Şafak* did not report on Akşener’s statements directly, neither positively nor negatively. Instead, it focused on the families’ reactions to her failure to visit them. The headline, “Reaction from Families on Vigil to Akşener Who Didn’t Visit: Afraid of the Table,” references the political alliance known as the “Six-Party Table.” The phrase “Afraid of the Table” suggests that the HDP is the hidden partner in this alliance and that Akşener avoided visiting the Diyarbakır families because of it (Yeni Şafak, 2023). The article included a photo of Meral Akşener superimposed over an image of the mothers on vigil, with the caption, “Akşener did not visit the families on vigil during her trip to Diyarbakır.” Photo captions, much like headlines and subheadings, are crucial in understanding how a story is framed and the message it intends to convey. In the subheading, the article notes that the families expressed disappointment that Akşener, despite being in Diyarbakır, did not visit them. One mother is quoted saying, “As a mother, she ignored the families who have

been fighting for their children here for months. She didn't visit because she was afraid of the table." Another mother's statement in the article reads, "Ms. Akşener often speaks about being a mother and claims she understands women's struggles better than anyone. Aren't we women? Aren't we mothers? Why, like the HDP, has she ignored our voices for four years? If she had come, we would have told her what we've been through. She shouldn't call herself a mother." (Yeni Şafak, 2023). This criticism of Meral Akşener targets both her role as a mother and her alleged ties to the HDP.

Another news story analyzed in this study involves HDP MP Erol Katırcıoğlu making a victory sign as he left the HDP Provincial Headquarters, directed at the Diyarbakır Mothers. While *Sabah* and *Yeni Şafak* reported the incident with headlines like "Reaction to HDP MP" and "Provoked with Victory Sign," *Sözcü* emphasized the investigation rather than the act itself with the headline, "Investigation Launched Against MP Who Made Victory Sign." *Cumhuriyet* did not cover the incident at all.

*Sabah's* headline read, "Father on Vigil Harshly Reacts to HDP MP: If He Loves the Victory Sign So Much, He Should Go to Kandil" (Sabah, 2021). By directly quoting the words of the Diyarbakır families in the headline, the newspaper amplified the impact of the statement, while the phrase "He Should Go to Kandil" underscored the connection between the HDP and PKK. The article included a photo of Erol Katırcıoğlu making the victory sign and reported that the families on vigil asked the MPs leaving the HDP headquarters, "Where is our child?" It also noted that the MPs did not respond and that Katırcıoğlu made the victory sign in response, prompting a grieving father to say, "What can you expect from an MP who flees from his own Kurdish people and cannot even address them?" (Sabah, 2021). The subheadline, "They Didn't Listen to the Families on Vigil," was used to emphasize this point. The article also mentioned that an investigation had been launched against Katırcıoğlu.

*Yeni Şafak* took a critical stance in its headline, "HDP's Katırcıoğlu Provokes Families on Vigil with 'Victory Sign' After Avoiding Them," emphasizing the words 'avoiding,' 'victory sign,' and 'provokes' (Yeni Şafak, 2021). The article stated, "HDP members continue to provoke the families who have been holding a vigil in front of the HDP Diyarbakır Provincial Headquarters for 507 days, demanding the return of their children abducted by the PKK. As he left the building, HDP's Katırcıoğlu ignored the families' question, 'Where is our child?' and instead made a 'victory sign,' escalating the tension." The language clearly emphasizes that the MP's actions were the cause of the tension.

*Sözcü* newspaper, under the headline "Investigation Launched Against HDP MP," presented the news with more straightforward language (Sözcü, 2021). The article described the reason for the Vigil for Children protest by stating, "In Diyarbakır, 192 families continue their protest on the 507th day in front of the HDP provincial building, demanding the return of their children abducted by the PKK." Additional details, such as "Intense security measures were taken" and "An investigation has been launched by the Diyarbakır Chief Public Prosecutor's Office against HDP Istanbul MP Erol Katırcıoğlu, who made a victory sign," were reported without further commentary.

Another article well-suited for critical discourse analysis involves then-CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's interaction with the Diyarbakır Mothers. Pro-government media outlets focused on headlines such as "Kılıçdaroğlu didn't visit the families, summoned them instead, and the families' reactions," while opposition media framed it as "Kılıçdaroğlu's visit to the Diyarbakır Mothers" (Cumhuriyet, 2022).

*Cumhuriyet* published a headline stating, "Kılıçdaroğlu Met with the 'Diyarbakır Mothers,'" emphasizing in the article that Kılıçdaroğlu listened to the demands and expectations of the mothers (Cumhuriyet, 2022). The term 'Diyarbakır Mothers' was placed in quotation marks. The newspaper also released a separate article detailing Kılıçdaroğlu's visit to Diyarbakır. The meeting with the Diyarbakır Mothers was reported separately from the news about his visit to Diyarbakır. This suggests that public concerns about Kılıçdaroğlu not visiting the Diyarbakır Mothers were acknowledged, and there was an effort to address these concerns.

*Sözcü* reported the same event with the headline, "Kılıçdaroğlu Met with Families Holding a Vigil for Their Children" (Sözcü, 2022). While *Cumhuriyet* used quotation marks around the term 'Diyarbakır Mothers,' *Sözcü* did not use quotation marks for the phrase 'vigil for their children.' By choosing the warmer phrase 'vigil for their children,' *Sözcü* sets itself apart from *Cumhuriyet*. Although both newspapers aimed to strengthen the opposition narrative through the Diyarbakır Mothers, *Sözcü* provided a more comprehensive coverage of the mothers' actions, giving greater emphasis to the aims and objectives of their protest.

*Yeni Şafak* ran the headline "Kılıçdaroğlu Wanted to Meet the Diyarbakır Mothers at a Hotel: 'He Set a Trap for Us'," presenting the story in a way that emphasizes Kılıçdaroğlu's failure to visit the Diyarbakır Mothers and highlights the families' strong reactions to the proposed hotel meeting (Yeni Şafak, 2022). The phrase "he set a trap for us," quoted from one of the families, indicates that the article is designed to create a critical narrative against Kılıçdaroğlu. The report includes a quote from the Diyarbakır Mothers: "The place where you should meet us is not a

hotel but in front of the HDP Diyarbakır provincial office, because our children were abducted from there." The families accused Kılıçdaroğlu of setting a trap and directed harsh criticism towards him. This not only questions Kılıçdaroğlu's sincerity but also implies that he is avoiding confrontation with the HDP. The same story was published in the print edition the following day under the headline, "Not at the Hotel, Come to the HDP's Front." No related report was found in Sabah newspaper.

President Erdoğan's statements, visits, and remarks about the Diyarbakır Mothers have been widely reported across various media outlets. In this study, his direct visit to the families in Diyarbakır was taken as an example, focusing on how his 2021 visit was covered by four different newspapers. *Cumhuriyet* ran the headline, "Erdoğan Visited the Diyarbakır Mothers: We Will Pursue This to the End" (*Cumhuriyet Gazetesi*, 2021). In the subheading, the phrase "AKP's President Tayyip Erdoğan" was used, emphasizing his role as the leader of the AK Party rather than his position as the highest representative of the state. Although Erdoğan's strong statements linking the PKK and HDP were included in the article, these remarks were placed in quotation marks, which can be interpreted as the newspaper distancing itself editorially from the President's comments. The report was also accompanied by photographs of the President alongside the families.

*Sözcü* covered President Erdoğan's visit to the Diyarbakır Mothers within a broader article titled "Erdoğan's Statement on the Peace Process," addressing it under a subheading (*Sözcü*, 2021). Instead of focusing on Erdoğan's meeting with the mothers holding a vigil for their children, *Sözcü* emphasized the messages he delivered during the visit, linking them to the "peace process." The subheadings also highlighted this theme with phrases like "What we told you in 2005, we still stand by today" and "We talked about peace, we talked about resolution." These editorial choices suggest that *Sözcü* intended to create the impression that the AK Party and Erdoğan might be considering a return to the peace process.

In contrast, *Yeni Şafak* and *Sabah* newspapers covered the same event much more extensively. Both newspapers gave special attention to Erdoğan's visit to the Diyarbakır Mothers, featuring numerous photographs from his meeting with them. *Yeni Şafak* enriched its coverage with exclusive interviews with the mothers, publishing the story in its weekend supplement under the headline "Diyarbakır Mothers Grateful for Erdoğan's Support: He Gave Us Strength" (*Yeni Şafak*, 2021). The article highlighted the mothers' words about the president, with quotes like "Our President sheltered us and stood by us. We will not give up our struggle until

we get our children back," "He listened to each of us individually," and "He gave us hope."

*Sabah* similarly highlighted the portion of Erdoğan's visit to Diyarbakır that involved the Diyarbakır Mothers. In an article titled "President Erdoğan's Support Visit to the 'Diyarbakır Mothers'," it was noted that Erdoğan was "welcomed with great affection and applause by the families," and that he stated, "We have never given up on this, and we never will" (Sabah, 2021).

## Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the media representations of the 'Diyarbakır Mothers' and to reveal how newspapers with different political and ideological stances approached this social event. The findings clearly demonstrate the media's powerful role in shaping public perception. Through the use of critical discourse analysis, this research highlights how the media frames social events according to their ideological positions and how they influence their readers' perceptions. Indeed, the ideological stances and political preferences of media outlets are decisive in their coverage of social events. In our study, we focused on the actions of the Diyarbakır Mothers to illustrate this differentiation. *Yeni Şafak* and *Sabah* newspapers, in their extensive coverage, presented a narrative that supported the protests, aimed to enhance the social legitimacy of the movement, and aligned with the government's policies. In contrast, *Sözcü* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers provided more limited coverage of the protests, focusing on how the events were perceived by the opposition. The reports on the actions of Hacire Akar particularly exemplify this distinction. We found that *Yeni Şafak* and *Sabah* strongly emphasized the pain experienced by the mothers and the allegations that the HDP acted as an intermediary for the PKK. This narrative reflects the pro-government newspapers' efforts to shape public perception in line with government policies. *Sözcü* and *Cumhuriyet* did not construct an explicitly pro-HDP or anti-government narrative; however, their coverage was selective and downplayed key aspects of the protests.

In other words, instead of emphasizing the purpose, claims, and goals of the protests, these newspapers offered more limited coverage, providing their readers with a different perspective. For instance, while *Cumhuriyet* reported on Hacire Akar's actions, it also downplayed the reasons behind the protests and the connection between the HDP and PKK, demonstrating how opposition newspapers frame social events. This analysis shows how the framing of social events by opposition media can shape reader perception.

Another finding that underscores the ideological differences among the newspapers under review is particularly evident in the coverage of politicians visiting the 'Vigil for Children' protests. Pro-government newspapers highlighted President Erdoğan's visits to the mothers or his statements about them, often accompanied by warm images, while emphasizing the opposition leaders' perceived indifference to the Diyarbakır Mothers. In contrast, opposition newspapers focused on the visits of opposition leaders, reporting their accusations that the government was exploiting the mothers for political gain.

In conclusion, this study highlights how media representations influence public perception and shows how different ideological stances lead to diverse portrayals of the same event, revealing the manipulative impact of editorial policies on public opinion.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This footnote provides general background information on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as referenced in this article. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is an armed organization established in 1978 under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan, with the objective of establishing self-governance in regions encompassing southeastern Türkiye, northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, and northwestern Iran. The PKK has been designated as a terrorist organization by Türkiye, the European Union, NATO, the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, and several other international entities. Initially founded on Marxist-Leninist principles, the organization transitioned towards the ideology of democratic confederalism after 2005. Following the apprehension of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, the PKK has operated under alternative names, including the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK) and the People's Congress (Kongra-Gel).

<sup>2</sup> Although the political party in question has since changed its name, it will continue to be referred to as the HDP in this study, as that was its name when the protest began.

<sup>3</sup> In the methodology section, the data is presented in tabular form to facilitate comparison. Newspaper names and headlines are kept in their original language, while all other content is translated into English. This approach preserves the authenticity of the sources while ensuring the information is accessible to a wider academic audience.

<sup>4</sup> In 2014, I had the opportunity to meet with the protesting mothers and spoke with the then-Minister of Interior, Beşir Atalay, during his visit to them. The BDP-led municipal administration, with the assistance of municipal officers and cleaning vehicles, had attempted to force the mothers to leave the area in front of the municipality. Consequently, the mothers continued their sit-in protest on the median across from the building. In addition to the mothers whose sons had been abducted by the PKK, there was another group of mothers who had set up a tent in a city park. A group of female journalists,

including myself, went to visit these mothers as well. We asked them why they were not sitting with the other mothers. While the mothers across from the municipality were accusing the PKK of abducting their children, the mothers in the park were using language that blamed the state instead. An elderly woman, wearing a white headscarf, referred to the "Fascist Turkish State" and said, "The fascist state killed one of my sons, imprisoned another, and my third son is in the mountains. How can my heart endure this?" (Diyarbakır, June 6, 2014). Such statements were striking, highlighting how different the perspectives of mothers with sons in the mountains could be.

<sup>5</sup> The PKK's statement on the matter reads as follows: "The Turkish psychological warfare department, unable to prevent these joinings, is using certain families to slow down and obscure the participation of Kurdish youth. To this end, they are misleading some families and using them as part of their scheme under the guise of 'families of abducted children.' We want to make it clear that everyone who joins the ranks of the PKK guerrilla forces does so voluntarily. It is impossible for us to keep anyone in our ranks who is not a willing participant. Therefore, no one has been abducted; everyone who has joined has done so willingly and of their own free will." (Hürriyet, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> The Saturday Mothers are known for their sit-in protests in front of Galatasaray High School on İstiklal Street, initiated by the relatives of those who went missing under suspicious circumstances following the 1980 military coup, as well as those allegedly disappeared while in custody during the 1990s.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the use of child soldiers by terrorist organizations, see reports titled "Child Soldiers in ISIS, PKK, Boko Haram" by Human Rights Without Frontiers International and "Under Kurdish Rule: Abuses in PYD-run Enclaves of Syria" by Human Rights Watch. (See "Child Soldiers in ISIS, PKK, Boko Haram," Human Rights without Frontiers International, <https://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Child-soldiers-in-ISIS-PKK-Boko-Haram%E2%80%A6.pdf>, accessed October 16, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> "My son was first taken to a picnic and then to the mountains. In Şırnak, where they took my son under the pretext of a picnic, he was first brought to the HDP Provincial Headquarters, then to a safe house, and from there to the mountains. The children of families with connections in the HDP were returned." (AA News Agency, 2019b).

<sup>9</sup> For my doctoral thesis titled "Kurdish Nationalism in the Context of Secularization and Religiosity," I conducted focus group studies in Diyarbakır, interviewing around 30 individuals in groups of 15, aged 20-35. At the time of the interviews, the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality was under government-appointed trusteeship. I met with the group that was distanced from the PKK in one of the municipality's facilities. The interviewees mentioned that this location had previously been used to persuade Kurdish youth to join the PKK, with the belief that going to the mountains—especially for young girls—was equated with freedom, and that these ideas were instilled through activities held in thesees. (See Kökçe, H. (2020). *Sekülerleşme ve Dindarlık Bağlamında Kürt Milliyetçiliği*. [Unpublished PhD thesis, Marmara University].

<sup>10</sup> Numerous international agreements and legal documents, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Paris Principles, and the Geneva Conventions, assert that individuals under the age of 18 must be recognized as children and cannot, under any circumstances, be recruited into military service. These documents also stipulate that children are prohibited from being employed, not only in conflict zones but also in support roles behind the front lines.

## **Article Information Form**

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