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## BEING THERE: THE 2013 ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS IN ISTANBUL, TURKEY

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### Abstract

By happenstance, we found ourselves in Istanbul, Turkey in early June 2013 only days after a mass anti-government protest developed in and around Gezi Park. In addition to informal discussions and interviews with academics and others, we visited the protest site and traveled throughout Istanbul to directly experience the atmosphere and events. We also conducted two studies of Turks' participation in, and views of, the protests. This paper recounts the events in Istanbul that summer and reviews our own, and other, social science research on the protests and the protestors. We focus on who the protestors were and why they protested, as opposed to the less engaged actions of visiting the protests or following them in the media.

### Keywords

Turkey; protest; collective action; anti-government; empowerment; anger

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In early June 2013, the four of us based in the United States traveled to Turkey to visit Bahçeşehir University and begin a research project on Turkish identity. As one of our group is originally from Istanbul and another had studied there for some time, the project was designed to benefit from the language skills and local expertise we brought with us, as well as the many contacts and colleagues in Istanbul we planned to consult. Political scientist Ayşe Betül Çelik, who works on inter-group relations within Turkey, especially those regarding the Kurdish issue, is an Istanbul-based member of the team who also added disciplinary breadth to the social and political psychology expertise in our team.

Our research plans were altered by the development of mass protests in Istanbul, just days before our arrival. As we first gathered together on the hotel terrace overlooking Istanbul from the Beşiktaş neighborhood (see Figure 1), it became clear that the city was in upheaval below us. That night we heard what sounded like explosions (most likely water cannons and the firing of tear gas canisters) as well as waves of marchers chanting slogans and singing songs. The night sky would occasionally fill with a white, acid, smoke. More tear gas. It was worrying at times. But, nowhere near as frightening as it must have been on the ground below. In those first few nights and days it was unclear what was happening and what could happen. We wondered whether we were in the midst of a revolution, like those seen not long before in 2011's so called Arab Spring in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, etc., and in the anti-austerity 15-M movement of Los Indignados (The Outraged) in Spain or the anti-austerity movement in Greece (for a comparison of these events, see Tugal, 2013). Our wonder at possible revolution was no doubt influenced by the fact that the world is in an age of protest, as demonstrations, marches, petitions and the like, become more and more common across the world (for reviews, see Snow, Della Porta, Klandermans, & McAdam, 2013; Walder, 2009).

As it turned out, our two weeks in Istanbul coincided with mass protests in the city, and eventually across the country, that would garner international attention. Apparently, much of the Western media portrayed Istanbul as experiencing a violent and dangerous revolution, an Arab Spring of its own. This led many of those who knew we were in Istanbul to worry about our safety. The truth is that we traveled to Gezi Park and Taksim Square and all across the city to see what was happening with our own eyes, and to participate in the vibrant everyday life that continued in the city throughout the protests. Of course, the protests were on most people's minds; the academics, administrators and other people we met could talk about little else. But, most people did not stop living their lives. Most people went to work or school, shopped and cooked, had tea and coffee with friends. For those couple of weeks in June 2013, Gezi Park became a part of everyday life for many Istanbulites, and for us. Thus, we had the great fortune to begin research on a protest at the very time and place where it began. Being there informed the questions we asked and how we asked them as it allowed us to better ground our theoretical concepts in the lived reality of the protests. For instance, we tailored our questions regarding forms of involvement with the protest to include some of the particular activities that we witnessed (e.g., the banging of pots and pans at nine each night). Being there also enabled us to better understand the texture and the gravity of the answers we received from protestors and non-protestors alike. Thus, we could better understand what it meant -- socially and psychologically -- when people told us that they felt empowered as part of the Taksim collective. For us, the anti-government protests in Istanbul in early June 2013 had their own look, taste, and smell. And, no, this was not just the tear gas, although that was surely a part of it.

In contrast to media representations of Gezi Park and countless other protests across the world, mass collective action did not erupt spontaneously at the end of May 2013 simply because a few environmentalists camped out to block bulldozers. Individual Istanbulites as

Figure 1: The view over Istanbul from our hotel terrace in the Beşiktaş neighborhood.



Figure 1

well as environmental, neighborhood, and professional organizations had been opposing the redevelopment of the park for years as part of an effort called Gezi Parkı Dayanışması (Solidarity with Gezi Park; see David & Toktamış, 2015; Hürriyet Daily News, 2013). The opposition to turning Gezi Park into a shopping mall and/or historical monument was based on a desire to preserve green space and to exert local control against what was seen as authoritarian rule by city and state (David & Toktamış, 2015; KONDA, 2014). Although the busy hub of Taksim Square, which is adjacent to Gezi Park, had not been the site of regular protest marches for some time, its history was revived in a series of large-scale marches and smaller-scale protests every Saturday organized by Gezi Parkı Dayanışması in 2012 and the first half of 2013 (David & Toktamış, 2015). These protests occurred within the broader context of growing opposition to the ruling conservative AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – Justice and Development Party) party's policies in Istanbul and nationally (Çelik, Bilali, & Iqbal, 2016; Kalaycıoğlu, 2012).

In the first years of AKP governance, starting in 2002, Turkey's democratic standards, economy, and regional influence in the Middle East increased. However, in recent years the AKP government has been characterized as increasingly authoritarian and conservative (Taşpınar, 2014). For example, there were growing concerns about the government's polarizing views of religious (vs. secular) schooling, women's rights, and increasing restrictions on the freedom of expression and on alcohol (see Çelik et al., 2016). These policies have amplified the divide between AKP supporters and detractors, a divide that reflects longstanding tensions between the

conservative religious and the liberal secular segments of the Turkish population (Kalaycıoğlu, 2012). In the context of the Gezi Park protests, many protestors and supporters that we spoke to framed Gezi Park and Taksim Square as a stand for secular values in the face of growing government authority. This was echoed in formal surveys of protestors, which we discuss in more detail below.

Those first fifty or so protestors who gathered in Gezi Park on the night of 27th May 2013 likely had no idea what would follow across Istanbul, across Turkey, and across the world. As workers made repeated attempts to demolish walls and uproot trees in the park, Gezi Parkı Dayanışması used social media and personal contacts to mobilise others to help “occupy” the park to prevent its demolition (David & Toktamış, 2015; *Hürriyet Daily News*, 2013). By the night of 30th May, the growing number of protestors had been joined by several members of the opposition in parliament. Ayşe Betül Çelik was in Gezi Park that night to witness the growing momentum firsthand. Things turned violent on 31st May, as a dawn raid by police tried to forcibly remove the protestors (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2013). News of the attack, and images of the police’s use of force, spread quickly. This led to greater numbers descending on Gezi Park and spilling into Taksim Square. The police withdrew the next day and increasing numbers of people “occupied” Gezi Park and turned it and parts of the adjacent Taksim Square into the “Taksim Commune” (see Bilgiç & Kafkaslı, 2013; KONDA, 2014). Burnt out buses and other large objects were used as barricades across access streets (see Figure 2). A library, infirmary, and meeting spaces were set up in tents, and food, water, and sanitation facilities were organized (see Figure 2). In this way, the June 2013 anti-government protests in Istanbul resembled the earlier mobilizations in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, Los Indignados in Spain and the anti-austerity movement in Greece (see Tugal, 2013).

By the time we arrived in early June, Gezi Park was teeming with occupiers, with many different social and political groups flying their flags and inviting passersby to learn about them and their various causes (see Figure 2 and 3). LGBTI and feminist groups were there; Kurdish groups and political parties were there; socialist, communist, anarchist, and anti-capitalist Muslim groups were there; as were many unions and labor organizations (see David & Toktamış, 2015). Also there were people visibly identified with the main opposition party Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP or Republican People's Party). Given Turkey’s often fractious politics, it was impressive to see such diversity co-existing in one small area (see Figure 3). And, there were clear signs of a shared frustration with the ruling government and concern for social and political freedom (KONDA, 2014; Bilgiç & Kafkaslı, 2013). However, it was also clear that many different political groups and social agendas were being advanced at Gezi Park, and in Taksim Square more generally (see Figure 3).

On the 15th of June, the police finally forced the last of the protestors out of Gezi Park and Taksim Square. Smaller marches and protests continued nonetheless across Istanbul and throughout Turkey (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2013). Indeed, between 31st May and 20th June, there were protests in 67 other cities in Turkey. According to the numbers provided by the Ministry of Interior, 1,730 people were detained in 235 protests around the country (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2013). The Turkish Doctors’ Union (TTTB) claimed that 4,177 people had been injured during the protests (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2013), 6 people had died, and 11 lost their eyes (TTTB 2013). This was a major social and political event.

For those first few weeks of June, the police’s use force, against protestors in and around Taksim square and in other hot spots in Istanbul, continued. We witnessed first-hand the use of batons, tear gas, and water cannons against protestors, supporters, and onlookers (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2013). Many arrests were made. In response, protestors equipped themselves with glasses,

Figure 2: Taksim commune.



Figure 2



goggles and masks in an effort to limit the sting of the ubiquitous tear gas. Many of those who lived or worked along the routes to Taksim Square made milk, lemon, and yogurt available to those who needed to soothe tear gassed eyes and skin. In some cases, residences and businesses took people in, to help them avoid the police or the crush of the crowd. Employees of Bahçeşehir University, our hosts, told us that on one evening a university building was opened to allow protestors some respite.

Along with this instrumental support, many Istanbulites offered social support to the protests. For weeks, people far and close to Taksim Square stood outside at 9 o'clock every night banging on pots and pans or whatever was close to hand, engaging in a cacophony of sonic protest. On some nights the collective din of the banging was so loud, it drowned out every other sound for ten or fifteen minutes. However, many neighborhoods were quiet (KONDA, 2014). Indeed, a large portion of society saw the protests as misguided and inappropriate (KONDA, 2014). When the then Prime Minister (later President) Erdoğan labeled the protests as a pre-planned civilian coup, this view was furthered. Most people who harboured such suspicions of the protests were supporters of the ruling AKP party and many participated in counter-rallies in support of Erdoğan (David & Toktamış, 2015). Erdoğan continued along this line, referring to the protestors as *çapulcu* (looters) and characterized them as immature, violent, and seditious (The Independent, 2013). A representative national survey from July 2013 found that 54% of Turks agreed with the government's characterization of the protests, as part of a plot against Turkey in which protestors were influenced by external forces (KONDA, 2014). Thus, as with many political issues (see Çelik et al., 2016), Turkey was starkly divided about the 2013 anti-government protests.

Many protestors embraced the intended insult and came to refer to themselves as *çapulcu*. Making it more active, they also turned the word into a verb as protestors described their regular individual trek or collective march to gather at Taksim Square and Gezi Park each evening as *çapullu*. Each evening, we witnessed people from across Istanbul making their way by foot or ferry to the main roads leading to Taksim Square (see Figure 3). Much of this traffic proceeded down a main commercial street called İstiklal. Social, political, neighborhood and other groups often marched together to Taksim, sometimes singing, chanting, or waving flags and banners.

### **Who Protested?**

It is important to know who the protestors were and what they wanted. Luckily, researchers at Bilgi University in Istanbul had about 3,800 protestors and supporters complete online surveys in a 20 hour period from the evening of June 3rd (Bilgiç & Kafkaslı, 2013). They invited supporters of the protests to link to the survey via their personal Facebook and Twitter accounts. Interested parties then themselves invited their contacts to participate creating an online snowball sample. Seventy-three percent of the sample was from Istanbul and 76% reported participating in the protests by taking to the streets. Amazingly, 54% had never participated in a mass action before. Protestors tended to be young adults, with 64% being under 30. Although many political parties and other organizations were present in Gezi Park and Taksim Square, most of the protestors described themselves as “conservative”<sup>1</sup> (75%) and secular (65%) “freedom seekers” (81%) who did not feel close to any political party (70%) or were “apolitical” (55%). What had started

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1 The participants did not have to define what conservatism meant to them. In the Turkish context, conservatism is usually associated with a traditional lifestyle that adheres to the rules of an Islamic life. According to Hakan Yılmaz (2008), social conservatism (conserving the religious regulatory mechanisms in the areas of sexuality, gender relations, and family values) is more central to conservatism in Turkey than political conservatism.

Figure 3: Banners in Gezi Park and Taksim Square, protestors on the daily march down İstiklal street.



Figure 3

as a protest against the changes to Gezi Park became a protest against the Prime Minister's authoritarian behavior (92%). Indeed, less than 8% of protestors identified as voting for the Prime Minister's ruling AKP. In addition, over 90% of protestors cited the disproportionate use of force by the police and the infringement of democratic rights as the reasons for their action.

From June 6th-8th, the firm KONDA surveyed 4,411 of those physically present in Gezi Park (KONDA, 2014). As in the Bilgi University survey, the KONDA survey showed the majority of protestors to be under 30 and either senior university students or educated professionals who were employed. Thus, those in Gezi Park tended to be more highly educated than Turks as a whole. In contrast to some characterizations of the Arab Spring, and political participation in general, women and men were present in Gezi in equal numbers. Also consistent with the Bilgi University survey, those in Gezi Park tended to report no formal political or other affiliation (79%). This is actually consistent with the wider trend in Turkey as a whole where only about 15% of the county reports being affiliated with a political party (KONDA, 2014). For 44% of respondents, Gezi Park was their first involvement in protest and most (87%) believed that their human rights were being violated.

According to KONDA (2014), only 13% of those surveyed in Gezi reported being at the protest site for the first time. Thus, consistent with our observations, most in Gezi Park reported coming everyday (36%) or at least several different times (20%). Almost a third of those surveyed said that they had been in Gezi Park over a week ("since the trees were removed"). The most common reason given for participating was "seeing police brutality" (49%) followed by the removal of the trees (19%) and the statements of the Prime Minister (14%).

There were some important differences between the two large-scale surveys of protestors discussed above, with the online survey by Bilgi University producing more extreme and consensual views. Nevertheless, both surveys give a fairly consistent view of educated young adults who went to Gezi Park and Taksim Square to protest against the ruling party's perceived moves against democracy and secular freedom. In our own studies in Turkey, we were particularly interested in how people protested and why they protested. Thus, likely as a result of the preponderance of psychologists on our team, we focused more on these psychological questions. Nevertheless, we aimed to ground this psychological approach in the particular social and political reality of Turk's views of their ruling government and their society. Unlike the large-scale surveys, we were most interested in how the protests were experienced and what values, beliefs, and feelings appeared to motivate people to actively and directly protest by going to the Park or Square, or to perform the less engaged actions of visiting the central protest sites in Istanbul, or just following news of the protests across various media.

### **How and Why Protest?**

After assembling in Istanbul days after the protests began, we developed local academic and activist contacts who helped us disseminate two online studies to participants in Turkey in July 2013, weeks after the protests had ended (for details, see Cidam, Stewart, Leach, Bilali, & Çelik, 2016). E-mail lists, mass emailing of contacts, and Facebook posts were the main means by which potential respondents were recruited. Given that many of our contacts were academics, our samples tended to be university educated. However, in this and in most other ways, our sample was quite similar to the large sample surveyed by KONDA at Gezi Park as well as the online survey conducted in early June by the Bilgi University researchers. Our first, early July 2013, study included 359 participants throughout Turkey (with about 70% from Istanbul) whereas our second, late July study, had 327 participants, with about 64% from Istanbul. Both



studies included roughly equal numbers of women and men.

## How?

Our first study focused on different degrees of engagement with the anti-government protests and the violence experienced by those involved in the most engaged form of protest in Gezi Park and Taksim square. We did not focus solely on those directly involved in protest, because people can prefer the less engaged, and less risky, action of simply visiting a protest or following it in the news (for reviews, see Klandermans, 1997; Snow et al., 2013). Less engaged forms of protest are likely to be experienced very differently and thus may be explained differently. It was obvious to us from our time in Istanbul that Istanbulites, and Turks more generally, had very different levels of interest and involvement in the protests and thus we thought it important not to focus narrowly on those who went to Gezi and Taksim to protest.

We assessed the highly engaged action of actual participation in the protests by summing five different actions: participating in a protest march, camping at the Gezi protest site, chanting slogans, pots and pans protests, or sharing information about the details of the protest on social media. Our choice to assess these particular actions was guided by our first-hand observation of protests in Istanbul as well as our consultations with academics and others informed about the most prevalent forms of protest in Istanbul at that time. We also assessed the moderately engaged action of visiting the protest site and the least engaged action of simply following the protests from social media, television, internet, and newspaper. Befitting its social and political importance at the time, over 80% of the participants followed the protests through at least two sources. As we might expect, simply following the protests was unrelated to visiting or to participating directly. Thus, following the protests was unrelated to the experience of violence or collective empowerment. Two-thirds of participants visited the protest site and 88% participated in at least one of the most engaged direct actions of protest. Sixty-eight percent participated in three to five of the direct protest actions that we asked about. Thus, our sample tended to be directly engaged in the protests.

As mentioned above, those who attended the anti-government protests in Istanbul saw the use of force by police against the occupiers and protestors as a main reason for being there. At the same time, the reality of police violence must have made it clear to potential and actual protestors that they could face police violence themselves. This is likely to have affected individual's willingness to engage in such direct action (see Alnabulsi & Drury, 2014; Klandermans, 1997; Reicher, 1984). Protestors may be especially concerned about the threat to their physical safety posed by the police, who may cause harm by crowd control techniques such as the use of batons, tear gas, or water cannons ((Klandermans, 1997; Kritzer, 1977; Stott & Reicher, 1998), all of which were used in Istanbul in June 2013 (Bilgiç & Kafkaslı, 2013; Hürriyet 2013; KONDA, 2014). Indeed, in our study, both visiting and participating in the protest were moderately correlated with experiencing police violence. This is the reality of a good deal of protest in the real-world, and it is often absent from the more controlled and socially removed studies of protest that predominate in behavioral science and in some social science. As we mentioned above, one response to this was for those engaged in direct protest to equip themselves with social and material tools to withstand the police violence which they had good reason to expect.

Recent work shows that real-world collective protests are a socially-shared experience of solidarity with like-minded others (Páez, Rimé, Basabe, Włodarczyk, & Zumeta, 2015) which is often felt to be empowering (Drury & Reicher, 2009). Indeed, co-acting together in a protest, or other group activities, is a basis for psychologically investing oneself in the group (Jans, Leach,

Garcia, & Postmes, 2015). People who merely follow a protest in the news, or who observe a protest without taking part, seem unlikely to experience the collective empowerment that is tied to active participation in the collective action of protest. Thus, based on recent research on empowerment and solidarity and on our firsthand observation of local forms of collective empowerment in Istanbul, we assessed the sense of collective empowerment by asking participants if they had experienced being supported and applauded by passersby, by a feeling of solidarity with other protestors, and by being encouraged to participate in protests by family or friends. Seventy-seven percent of the sample experienced at least two of these things. Visiting the protests was moderately linked to a sense of collective empowerment, whereas the more engaged actions of protesting were highly linked. Part of this link was tied to the experience of police violence that was partly embedded in protest. Thus, participants appeared to be empowered by police violence, rather than dissuaded or demoralized by it (see also Reicher, 1984). This is what might be considered an ironic, or unexpected, effect of the government's uncivil use of police violence to thwart the protestor's attempts to contribute to civil society.

### **Why?**

Over the years, many different psychological constructs have been examined as explanations of protest, including relative deprivation, group identity, perceived grievance, and perceived resources and risks (for reviews, see Duncan, 1999; Klandermans, 1997; Snow et al., 2013; Walder, 2009). For instance, van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears's (2008) social identity model of collective action argues that group identity, feeling bad about perceived injustice and a sense of group efficacy are fairly independent, medium-sized, explanations of protest. This was supported by their meta-analysis of 182 samples which totaled over 10,000 participants. Importantly, however, few of these studies examined real-world behavior or people's values, beliefs, emotions and intentions in the context of a close and immediate instance of sustained collective protest. Thus, the aim of our later July study was to use a psychological model to explain individuals' direct protest participation as well as the less engaged practices of visiting the protests or following news of them. Building on the recent dynamic dual pathway model (van Zomeren, Leach, and Spears, 2012), we examined whether political ideology and the social psychological constructs in the model – identification as a protestor, perceived social support, anger at the government, perceived efficacy of the protestors – similarly predicted more and less engaged action.

**Political Orientation.** Protests are often partisan affairs and thus associated with the political left or right, or some more specific political ideology such as anti-austerity, anarchy, or fascist (see Walder, 2009). Thus, political orientation or ideology is often a powerful explanation of who participates in protests and how (for reviews, see Klandermans, 1997; Snow et al., 2013). In a complicated political landscape like Turkey, with many different political parties and other civic organizations, self-placement on the left-right continuum seemed the best way to capture the likely importance of political orientation. Many psychological studies of protest fail to account for political orientation or ideology. This may be misleading as in the present study, left political orientation was a moderate-sized explanation of participation in protest. As such, it was the single biggest direct explanation of who protested. Left political orientation was also important as an indirect explanation of protest, as those on the left identified more strongly as protestors, perceived more social support from Turks, and perceived greater efficacy and felt greater anger. Thus, all of the social psychological constructs that explained protest were tied to Left political orientation. Political orientation also helped explained visiting the protests and following news of it.

**Social Psychological Constructs.** The social psychological constructs specified in van Zomeren et al.'s (2012) dynamic dual pathway model added explanatory power. Together, all of these constructs explained 30% of reported protest participation. In contrast, the social psychological constructs were a much poorer explanation of simply visiting the protests or following them in the media. As to be expected, identification as a protestor did not explain visiting the protest site or following the protests in the news.

As the dynamic dual pathway model expects, those who participated in the direct action of protest tended to identify more strongly as protestors, to be angrier at the government, and to perceive the protestors as having more efficacy. Those participants who perceived Turks as more supportive of the protests, also felt angrier at the government and perceived the protestors as having more efficacy. Thus, as the model expects, perceived social support explained protesting indirectly through perceived efficacy and anger. In short, the social psychological dynamic dual pathway model worked well as an explanation of individual's recent marching, chanting, and other highly engaged actions at the Gezi Park and Taksim Square protests in June.

## Conclusion

Despite the recent growth of social psychological research on "collective action," very few studies have examined people engaged in genuinely collective real-world protest. The majority of research instead focuses on individuals' socially isolated, low-stakes, indirect and thus less engaged personal actions, such as signing a petition in a university lab or expressing a willingness to write a letter of complaint (for a review, see van Zomeren et al., 2008). However, protest in the real world can be very different. Unlike the university lab, actual protests are often policed and thus pose a risk of arrest or the violence of the police baton, tear gas, or water cannon (Klandermans, 1997; Stott & Reicher, 1998). The Istanbul anti-government protests provided us a rare opportunity to observe an ongoing protest firsthand and to use this experience to tailor an examination of a more abstract social psychological model to the specific circumstances in Istanbul. It was reassuring to see a model, previously utilised in the context of less enduring and physically threatening situations, work so well to explain involvement in direct participation of sustained and physically dangerous protest. We believe that participants' responses to our questions about their beliefs, emotions and identity, were more meaningful in the context of their real and recent involvement in actions, which certainly were more meaningful to us by being there.

The "Taksim Commune" and the two weeks of regular, large-scale, protests in Istanbul in June of 2013 were a novel and notable expression of civil society in contemporary Turkey. The Gezi protests were unique in Turkey's history, in that they brought together highly diverse groups, including groups that were traditionally hostile to one another (Budak & Watts, 2015). Indeed, the tolerance of diversity displayed in the Gezi protests became so characteristic of the protest, that it is now referred to as the "Gezi Spirit." This spirit continued for some time after the protests, as public forums emerged around Istanbul that brought together many different social groups to discuss political issues. These forums though, fell in number as time passed. The police use of force -- and the physical injuries and arrests that resulted -- seem to represent what the editors of this special issue refer to as "uncivil times." These uncivil times in Turkey led, for a time, to the civility of the "Gezi Spirit" and to its progeny of public forums.

Given the gravity of the events, and Turkey's more general geopolitical importance, there is good reason to wonder what longer-term effects the June 2013 anti-government protests had in Turkey or beyond. According to Amnesty International (2013), very few police officers have

been investigated or charged in cases where use of lethal or injurious force was documented. In contrast, Amnesty International argues that thousands of protestors were detained and charged without sufficient cause. The organization also expressed concern that the courts are prosecuting suspected organizers of peaceful protest for committing violence or terrorist organizing. The Amnesty International documents numerous examples of government criticism, intimidation, and even prosecution of businesses, medical professionals, lawyers, social media commentators, and others seen as aiding or supporting protestors.

Considering its increased authoritarianism, restrictions, and crack down on criticism, the fear that the government's formal and informal responses to the protests would have a chilling effect on future protest, and perhaps also civil society more generally, turned out to be true. There are now few public protests. And few activists, academics, journalists who dare criticize the government openly. To protest or to criticize risks formal and informal sanction, as clearly demonstrated by the ongoing dismissal and arrests of academics who signed a petition critical of the government in the wake of the bomb attack in Ankara in October 2015. Ultimately, it appears that the enthusiasm and hope for greater freedom expressed in Istanbul and throughout Turkey was a short-lived coming together of diverse voices that have now gone their separate ways (Özen, 2015). In fact, the protests appear to have sharpened the historical divide in Turkish society between the secular and the religious. Now, Gezi and Taksim has become yet another symbol of the fault lines in the society, around which there is increasing polarization and conflict.

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