

Amid local elections, curfews returned Turkey's Kurdish districts

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Turkey's local elections will be held on March 31, 2019, throughout the 81 provinces of the country. A new curfew has been announced in 37 villages and hamlets in Lice and Hani districts of Diyarbakir, the war-ravaged de-facto capital of Turkish Kurdistan, on the grounds of military operations amid the local elections. The curfew will remain in place until further notice.

Following the 2015 parliamentary elections, the Turkish-Kurdish conflict flared up once again, and a curfew was declared in Turkey's mainly Kurdish south-east.

Following his visit to Turkey on April 14, 2016, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils MuiÅ¼nieks, reported that "round-the-clock, open-ended and increasingly long curfews declared in entire neighbourhoods or cities in South-Eastern Turkey" have been the defining feature of counterinsurgency operations since July 2015. In response to the renewed conflict in Kurdish areas in the wake of the June 2015 election, Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AKP government launched a

massive campaign of curfews in city centres. The duration of the curfews ranged from several days to several weeks with the longest one in the Cizre district of Sirnak, lasting nine months, the first 79 days of which civilians were confined 24 hours a day.

Curfews were population control measures. They targeted civilians by suspending individual rights and freedoms and resulted in hundreds of deaths, displaced thousands, and destroyed whole towns. Regarding its effect on civilian populations, this episode of Turkish counterinsurgency remains unprecedented in the long history of the Kurdish conflict. Human rights organisations report that curfews affected more than one million residents and led to the displacement of an estimated 100,000 civilians. Turkey Human Rights Organization (TIHV) estimates that 321 civilians died, mostly because of lack of access to emergency care and by fire from armoured vehicles. Use of heavy weaponry in populated settings led to the destruction of city centres. In Sirnak alone, 9 of 12 neighbourhoods were wiped out leading to the demolition of an estimated 7,000 buildings.

Curfews were adopted as part of a counterinsurgency campaign that targeted areas where the pro-Kurdish leftist alliance, Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) has a significant following.

Districts that received curfews were in which HDP at least 50 percent of the valid vote. Accordingly, all districts where curfews were announced in urban areas emerged as HDP strongholds in the June election.