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TOWARD KURDISH DISTINCTIVENESS IN ELECTORAL POLITICS: THE 1977 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN DİYARBAKIR

This article examines processes of ethnic and regional differentiation through a study of the 1977 local elections in Turkey's Kurdish-majority provinces. An analysis of electoral data shows a high level of support there for independent candidates, a result sharply at odds with voting in the rest of the country that indicates a new correlation between ethnicity and political behavior. We argue that independents benefitted from mainstream political parties' inability to mobilize voters in the southeast because of the declining power of local notables, the emergence of new social movements, and alternative frames that the parties were unable to integrate. This context allowed social and political outsiders to build social coalitions outside the mainstream parties, as we demonstrate through a case study of the election of independent candidate Mehdi Zana, a working-class Kurdish activist who won the 1977 Diyarbakır mayoral race.