

Measuring Social Perception of the July 15 Coup Attempt

NEBİ MİŞ*

ABSTRACT¹ *This study aims to measure the social perception created by the impact of the July 15 coup attempt. The social picture that emerged during and after July 15 deserves greater sociological attention. A total of 250 people were martyred in this upheaval, making it the bloodiest coup attempt in the history of coups in Turkey. Social resistance to the perpetrators transformed into “democracy watch” countrywide which lasted 27 days. As part of the study, interviews were conducted with 176 people who participated in the democracy watch in 9 cities and 12 squares. Hence, the codes of social consciousness developed about the coup attempt and the perpetrators, amongst others, are captured by how the society perceives the coup attempt.*

Introduction

Following the advent of democratic politics (in 1946) and in the current Republican era of Turkey, the military intervened in politics five times – roughly once every ten years (1960, 1971, 1980, 1997, and 2007). Considering the level of political and economic development and the degree of democratization efforts in Turkey, the struggle against the pro-coup mentality and structures have made a late start in Turkey when compared to countries with a similar geo-politic profile.

The showdown with and the fight against the system of military tutelage began immediately after the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power. Although instruments of tutelage were eliminated considerably, the pro-junta affiliated with FETÖ (the Fetullah Gülen Terror Organization), the disciples of which have been permeating into the military over 40 years, made a bloody coup attempt on July 15, 2016. The coup was orchestrated by a group, the junta structure and the organization ideology of which differ from those of

* Sakarya
University,
Turkey

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the military coups in the past in that it was planned as an armed revolt. In order to achieve their aims, the perpetrators were willing to use terrifying methods such as helicopters and tanks with heavy weapons and F-16s dropping bombs to kill civilians. In addition, the pro-junta not only bombed some strategic institutions of the state, such as the Grand National Assembly of Tur-

key (TBMM), the Presidential Complex, the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) compounds and security buildings, but also tried to assassinate President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan using specially trained teams. The plotters behind the coup attempt, executed outside of the military chain of command, are part of a structure based on a sect of Muslims who follow a particular understanding of Islam dictated to them by their leader Fetullah Gülen. In this respect, the motivation, the planning, the implementation, and the aim of the attempted coup differ from those of previous *coup d'états* as the culprits had allegiances to an external organization.

During the junta's coup attempt, first President Erdoğan and then the chairmen of both the ruling and the opposition parties called on the people to resist. Consequently the coup failed because of the popular resistance and the determination of the political parties, the media and NGOs against the coup plotters. Regrettably, a total of 250 people were martyred and 2,195 were wounded in this insurgence - the bloodiest attempt in Turkey's history of coups. On the night of July 15, the society showed an exemplary resistance to the coup, and in the following days the resistance turned into "democracy watch." Thousands of people poured into the streets and the squares every night to express their rejection of the perpetrators and the democracy watch lasted 27 days, until August 10, 2016.

The civilian initiative that emerged on the night of July 15 stayed on guard for democracy watch in hundreds of squares across Turkey. The revelation of views and perceptions of the civilian initiative on the attempted coup is of importance. Without doubt, the emerging social picture, during and after July 15, deserves careful sociological attention beyond civilian-military relations. In this context, new definitions and conceptualizations are needed. For this research, a total of 176 individuals in 9 cities and 12 squares were interviewed between July 18 and August 10, 2016, for a sound assessment, together with the support of primary data directly collected in the field on the social uprising against the coup. The main theme and focus of the research was to capture the social consciousness that thwarted the coup attempt.



People of Gaziantep protesting FETÖ and the coup attempt, at the democracy watch.

AA PHOTO / ENSAR ÖZDEMİR

Undoubtedly, the democracy watch became the most concrete reflection of this social consciousness. Based on the interviews with the participants of the democracy watch, the study aims to analyze the social consciousness that rose against the coup attempt and how people perceived the events of that night.

Method, Frame, and Constraints of the Field Research

The research was conducted in the cities of Ankara, İstanbul, İzmir, Diyarbakır, Trabzon, Adana, Van, Sakarya, and Eskişehir which are considered to be representative of the whole country. The sample cities were chosen both because they experienced the most violence committed by the putschists during the coup attempt on the night of July 15 because their residents took to the streets in larger numbers than other cities and also for the purpose of geographical representation.

The method of qualitative data gathering was used in the research. Therefore, direct and observable data were collected postulating that the relation between the collected data and their social context would be displayed clearly.²

Interviews were conducted with a total of 175 individuals from different age groups. However, the age group of over 18 was particularly concentrated on since the content of the research was weighed more by political issues. Yet, the age group of 15-18 - although limited in number - was also interviewed

struggle of the ruling power in the post-coup attempt period,” “the attitude of the opposition parties in the face of the coup attempt,” “FETÖ’s role in the coup attempt,” “the view on FETÖ prior to the coup attempt,” “the view on TAF and security forces,” “comparison with the past *coup d’états*,” “in the period of the post-coup attempt, the fight against FETÖ and other elements involved,” and “what would have happened if the attempt had been successful.”

Some of the participants hesitated to be interviewed because of the on-going discussions over the danger of a possible renewed coup attempt and the trauma they were suffering from was quite fresh to them. Women, in particular, seemed to approach the request for an interview with reservations, but men seemed more comfortable. Another constraint was that although a balanced distribution of participant profiles were intended for the sake of social diversification, individuals who would satisfy a well-balanced distribution in terms of political views could not be reached easily. The reason was that generally conservative and nationalist identity groups were attending the democracy watch. To compensate for this imbalance, as many individuals as possible were interviewed at the Tak-sim rally of the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP). Since other opposition leaders also attended the Yenikapı Democracy Meeting in İstanbul, interviews were conducted with more people with the thought that they were the voters of the opposition parties. On the other hand, interviews were made with people at the cafés and streets other than those who joined democracy watch in the eastern and southeastern provinces of Van and Diyarbakır.



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Motivation for Resistance to the July 15 Coup Attempt

The failure of the July 15 coup attempt was the result of strong and hard popular resistance to the putschists. Thus, the question “What was the main motivation behind the emergence of such resistance?” is critical. Many people were confused initially with the low altitude flights of F-16 fighter jets over the capital of Ankara being the first sign that something unusual was taking place. People in İstanbul, considered the possibility of a terror attack when the entrances to the Bosphorus Bridge [newly renamed as the July 15 Democracy Martyrs Bridge] were closed by the pro-coup soldiers. Many others were concerned that the country was under attack by foreign forces, but only a few

people realised that it was a *coup d'état*. In fact, the views of the participants confirm this initial confusion and disbelief.

A cab driver in Kızılay, Ankara, who witnessed the coup attempt from the first moment said:

“Flights started at 8.30 pm. Then, I said, there is something wrong here. If it were a day of celebration, these would be airplanes for show or parade, there is something fishy here (...) I thought that our soldiers were going to strike some places again, but it never occurred to me that it would be a coup. I saw the Kenan Evren coup d'état (of 1980), I have lived through three coups. I am 82-years-old, but have never seen such a coup.” (ANK-21)

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driven mainly by rage, fear, enthusiasm, self-reliance and anxiety. Later in the night, people were relatively relaxed and as they succeeded in the struggle against the pro-coup soldiers, so they gained more self-confidence.

About three quarters of the interviewees took to the streets on the night of July 15 to react against the attempted coup. Among the most commonly mentioned concepts by the participants for why they took

Undoubtedly the majority of the participants who came out on to the streets following Erdoğan's call are religious conservatives. However, it should be noted that, although limited in number, there were left-wing participants out there, too

to the streets were “homeland, country, nation and freedom,” “the feeling of unity-solidarity,” “to protect the elected government” and “to protect Erdoğan.” The findings reveal that four major criteria played a key role for people to take to the streets on that night:

a) Love of country and nation, b) Erdoğan's invitation on Facetime to the People to take to the streets, c) *Salâ* prayer announced from the mosques [during the Ottoman period, *salâ* prayers were called to announce difficult times during wars] and d) Reaction against the coup communique read out on TRT, the anti-coup stance and collective/social memory of the coups.

Later on that night, more people poured into the streets after it became certain that this was a coup attempt, so they were highly motivated and the thought of resisting the coup sank in heavily.

“As we saw on TV that the Bosphorus Bridge was blocked, we thought it was not a terrorist incident. We left home in Bahçelievler, marched to the Kocasinan Police Station, but the area was calm, then upon the incoming news hastily moved over to the Atatürk International Airport. We came face-to-face with tanks. What was done to [the late Prime Minister Adnan] Menderes and [the late President Turgut] Özal are well known. So, we stood by Reis [(The Chief, Erdoğan’s nickname)]. I witnessed the outburst of popular resistance. All segments of the society were there.” (SRC-01, M, 26)

“The feeling of being victimized, anxiety for the future, bitter memories of the 1980 military coup d’état, and the anti-coup stance... Way before these incidents took place, I and my spouse talked and promised each other to resist together in case of a coup. During the coup attempt, we took to the streets with no hesitation before Erdoğan’s call.” (KSK-01, M, 56)

“I came here at the cost of my life. So, this is not about parties, this is about me. As soon as I heard the news, I left the house around 22.00 p.m., I did not hear Erdoğan’s call. I learned about the coup from the news. I heard that my brother was heading to the square, so did I, after I heard the news from my friends; I grabbed my flag and went out.” (TRB-01, F, 29)

“I took to the street around 24.00 p.m. I simply say, it was for ‘love of country.’ Please, do stress this especially.” (ANK-02, F, 31)

Some of the participants who took to the streets on the first night said that they were out with the motivation of the anti-coup stance because imprints of political and social collapses caused by the past coups are still fresh in the collective memory, so much so that another coup could not be tolerated. A 50-year-old female participant said the following on the matter:

“I am the granddaughter of a man who was a [Democrat Party] DP supporter. He was the DP Province Chair in İzmir. He told me that Menderes had said, ‘I trust my people,’ but his people could not do anything [to protect him]. I remember the tortures he went through. I remember my grandfather, so I hit the street. My 16-year-old daughter said ‘don’t go,’ but I said to her that I am going out because I do not want to regret it in the future. I was anxious, but I left (home) right away upon hearing the President’s speech.” (ANK-12, F, 50)

Although a considerably important segment of the society hit the streets and the squares on the night of the coup attempt, some of the interviewees said that they remained at home. Two main factors that kept them at home were “fear” and “confusion.” However, they joined the democracy watch in the following days as the phenomenon became more evident. A 20-year-old woman in İstanbul, who described herself as a CHP supporter, explained the reason for not going out to the streets on the first night:

*“We didn’t take to the streets on that night, but out in the streets there were our friends who are not pro-government and there were our friends who are pro-government. I do have many pro and anti-government friends, but this has nothing to do with parties or politics. People were out for their country and their flag.”
(TKS-01)*

In brief, it was found that motivations vary amongst the people who were in the streets on the night of the coup. However, almost all of the participants were driven by the love of country; they had an urge to protect democracy and resisted the attempted coup. One of the most critical

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reasons for those who acted to fight against the coup is that the memories of the past coups are still fresh in the collective memory. The majority of them were 40 plus years old; therefore, presumably they experienced, the September 12, 1980 military *coup d’état*.

Some of the participants, on the other hand, were motivated by knowledge of the previous coups which they had received from the older generations in their families. A great many participants said that they went out after seeing President Erdoğan inviting people to the streets on a live TV broadcast using his video phone call to the anchorwoman of CNN Turk. Undoubtedly the majority of the participants

who came out on to the streets following Erdoğan’s call are religious conservatives. However, it should be noted that, although limited in number, there were left-wing participants out there, too. Finally, the call to *salâ* announced from the minarets of mosques were another important reason for people heading to the streets.

A group of participants confirmed that they remained inside on the first night because of fear, anxiety, or uncertainty. However, a significant number also explained that they were not in a situation to go out onto the streets. People vacationing at various holiday destinations while the coup attempt took place were not out because nobody was on the streets and there was not any abnormality or activity in their location.

Social Perception of the Perpetrators of the Coup Attempt

Another critical question posed to the participants during the interviews was: who is, or are, the perpetrator(s) behind the attempted coup? The answers reflect that almost all of the interviewees, with no hesitation, see FETÖ as the perpetrator of the coup. Again, a great majority of the participants believe that

external powers assisted FETÖ in the coup attempt and that it is difficult to plot a coup without assistance from outside.

The participants who regard FETÖ as the perpetrator of the coup attempt have different views on FETÖ's role in the venture. Those who believe that FETÖ is the principal culprit justified their belief with the knowledge that FETÖ has structured itself within the state for almost half a century.

An interviewee from Sakarya emphasizing that the coup was certainly plotted by the FETÖ members nested in the military, said, *"I believe FETÖ, as an organization brooded in the military for many years, is the mastermind of these incidents."* (SAK-09, M, 25)

A 26-year-old man from İzmir stressed that FETÖ not only infiltrated TAF but also all state institutions, and that education facilities owned by FETÖ played a key role in this process over time. He said, *"Gülen selected students to educate them both for TAF and official institutions. He was able to execute the coup attempt in this way, and still continues to educate students."* (İZM-04)

A 33-year-old female computer engineer did not believe that FETÖ had such power, until the night of July 15. She said, *"We had our suspicions before the coup, but after the coup, I definitely believe FETÖ did it."* The interviewee only believed that they had the power to do this after the event.

FETÖ is the main contractor of the coup plot, according to some of the participants, but it is possible that FETÖ had the assistance of different actors. A 62-year-old retired interviewee from the district of Saraçhane in İstanbul, believing that FETÖ was the leading actor but was helped by other actors, said, *"Certainly, there are other actors involved. [But] The pro-FETÖ played the leading role, others provided logistic support, I think. The parallels³ undertook the operations."*

It is significant that more than half of the participants consider that external powers played an active role in planning or organizing the coup attempt. There were others who said that although foreign power centers were not evident, they likely provided support indirectly. According to a substantial number of participants, the indicators of the involvement of foreign powers are that: Gülen lives in the U.S., the language used about the coup in the foreign press and the attitude of other countries towards Turkey. Arguments that external powers backed the coup attempt in Turkey are associated with the geographical position of Turkey, and it was suggested that such powers were disturbed by Turkey's newly active foreign policy and strong economic growth.

According to more than half of the participants, external powers were behind the coup plot, the U.S. took the lead, and the European countries followed

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close behind. A limited number of the interviewees considered that Israel, Russia and Iran might have been involved in the attempted coup. The number one reason for believing in the U.S. involvement is that FETÖ's leader Fetullah Gülen resides in the U.S., so he is safeguarded by the U.S., according to the interviewees.

For a 58-year-old retired man in Van, the fact that Gülen lives in the U.S. is proof enough that the U.S. is one of the actors behind the coup attempt. The same participant thinks external power centers back the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), as well. He says:

“Until the 15th of July, I thought it was an exaggeration when it was said ‘FETÖ is a terror organization.’ I don’t believe in conspiracy theories. I used to believe in them when I was young, but now [Fetullah Gülen’s] residing in the U.S. tells me that the U.S. is behind this. That also confirms how accurate the remarks of our President are. He says, ‘the lowest [level of the group] is engaged in religious practices, the middle is in business and the top is in treason.’ I thought it was an exaggeration. They don’t have the power for such a treachery, but definitely there is the influence of external powers. As with the PKK, which claims to be a Kurdish movement, foreign powers are 90 percent active here too.” (VAN-09)

Some participants accusing the U.S. of being behind the coup attempt justify their claim by the fact that that the tanker aircrafts, which fueled the fighter jets that bombed people on the night of the coup, took off from the İncirlik U.S. Base in Adana, in South East Turkey the same night. According to many participants tanker aircrafts at the İncirlik Base, could not have taken off without the U.S. knowing about it. For a 26-year-old man in Saraçhane, İstanbul, FETÖ was the Turkey-leg of the coup and the U.S. was the external-leg of it. He said:

“Most likely, the U.S. was behind the coup attempt. It is a ring of the chain. FETÖ is the kernel. They acted together with the traitors inside Turkey. The U.S. overtly provided support from the İncirlik base.” (SRC-05)

Another claim involving the U.S. voiced by the participants is that Washington backed the coup via NATO and its military-wing. The participants emphasized that the above argument caused a rift in the Turkish military between “the pro-NATO and the others;” FETÖ worked upon this division and benefited from it during the coup attempt.

“I think the U.S. and NATO provided a good deal of support. Tanker aircraft took off from İncirlik to re-fuel F-16s in the air. To me, that’s the U.S. and NATO involvement.” (ANK-18)

According to a 29-year-old female artisan in İzmir, the argument that the U.S. was behind the coup attempt was reinforced by a frequently circulated claim in social media that “Gülen and the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan were exchanged:”

“The extradition of [Abdullah Öcalan] to us and the sending off of Gülen to the U.S. coincided in time. I think there is nothing more to say. The U.S. is using Gülen; in fact, has used and dumped everyone in the Middle East anyway. It will eliminate Gülen, too, once they are through with him.” (İZM-13)

The attitude⁴ of the international media – both before and after the coup attempt – was also frequently referred to by the participants. For a group of interviewees, this is indicative of the support of the Western public opinion and governments to the coup. Some others believed that defamatory articles on Turkey and the AK Party government published by the Western media were a tactic to prepare the Western public opinion for a coup. A 25-year-old female graduate student in describing herself as ‘a pro-Peoples’ Democracy Party (HDP) with leftist inclinations’ shared her views as follows:

“I think the U.S. and Europe have a finger in the pie. I mean, although I am an AK Party opponent, I was angry at the discourses of Western newspapers such as that there is a dictatorship in Turkey. Actually, I couldn’t get it. Why? I mean, Turkey cannot be their only problem after all. But it dawned upon me that these were to accustom the West and its public opinion to the coup. I mean, for instance, they were to say that ‘look, Turkey is an authoritarian country anyway, so a coup cannot be bad.’ Turkey is an EU candidate and a NATO member after all. They were supposed to disapprove the coup, but still would agree with it and say, ‘it was an authoritarian country anyway.’” (ANK-14)

One of the arguments for the influence of external powers in the coup, suggested by the interviewees, is ever changing international balances and the claim of Turkey’s turning into a target for the international powers due to the latest developments in the Middle East. According to them, Turkey was trying to make a critical leap forward to meet her 2023 goals, but was being blocked. Turkey will overcome some of the existing problems after 2023. Therefore, anti-Turkey groups are trying to maintain the obstacles facing the country and to this end, they are trying to stop Turkey.

In this context, a 22-year-old female participant in İzmir said:



On July 21, 2016 people celebrate the victory of democracy during a rally at the Bosphorus bridge.

AFP PHOTO / METİN ARABACI

“The U.S. nurtures [FETÖ] and doesn’t want Turkey to grow. The Treaty of Lausanne will expire in 2023 and Turkey will be free of constraints. Right now, Turkey cannot use her real power. So, they want to finish up Turkey by 2023. The U.S. is also the reason for the years -long PKK [terror].” (İZM-07)

Factors Causing the Failure of the Coup Attempt

Until the changes made after the year 2000 in the context of fighting the tutelage and settling the scores with the culture of coups, conditions that enabled coups determined the boundaries of political and social spheres.⁵ The first factor that has allowed military interventions in politics is the suspension of the Constitution after each coup; thus, providing sustainability of states of emergency. The second factor is that the juntas behind the coups were under the protection of the (self-made) Constitution, so they were immune from standing trial at the outset. The third factor is that criticism of both coup plotters and the implementations carried out in the ensuing periods were banned by legal and institutional guarantees endowed after coups. The fourth factor is that some political parties and politicians co-operated with and facilitated exercises, activities and discourses of military coup plotters for their own circumstantial and pragmatic reasons. The fifth and the last factor is that much of the media and many intellectuals subscribed to narratives empowering the military’s dominance over the political sphere, therefore legitimizing the cycle of mistrust that always followed military coups.⁶

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In contrast, the policies of the AK Party period substantially impeded the mechanisms of tutelage that the military had traditionally used on politicians, and reconstructed the collective memory.⁷ In this respect, one of the most critical reasons behind the failure of the coup attempt on July 15 is the negative perception and attitudes emanating from the collective memory towards coups. Each military coup since the 1960s has directly and negatively affected different segments of society and that has paved the way for social unity against coups.

During the AK Party period, politics was forced to make a complete change, and the social consciousness that has built up at every level of the society against military tutelages necessitated all political parties to stand together against the coup attempt on July 15. The levels of popular consciousness and collective memory against coups is illustrated with the similarity of views expressed between a 70-year-old participant in Ankara and a 29-year-old AK Party supporter interviewed at the Yenikapı Democracy and Martyrs Meeting in İstanbul:

“We know these because we have developed awareness through our experiences during the Menderes period and because of our President’s call for the People to take to the streets. That’s why the coup attempt turned into a failure. We have learned how to defend our rights thanks to our President, his standing up straight reassured us, instilled confidence in us.” (YNKP-06, M, 29)

On the other hand, the media’s transformation and pluralism, and the development of the IT sector made everything difficult for the pro-coup planners. In addition, the transformation and the diversification of bureaucracy, and the increasing influence of different social segments over public domain deprived the perpetrators from their traditional support mechanisms.⁸ Undoubtedly, the strengthening middle class and the conservatives’ increasing self-confidence with the onset of the AK Party periods have given birth to masses willing to stand up and fight against tanks in the public squares. It is important to recognize that the AK Party has been quite successful in dealing with political crises - most notably with the April 27 military e-memorandum and the December 17-25 coup attempt by the FETÖ/Parallel State Structure

The remarks of the participants who took to the streets, either supporters or opponents of Erdoğan, reveal that his speech instilled self-confidence in the society from the moment that the incident was certainly a coup attempt

are among other factors that repelled the attack. The political will's impact on the prevention of the coup was also critical and that should be discussed in detail separately.

The 52-year-old housewife living in Adana, who has experienced previous coups, said the following to explain the abovementioned factors which effectively prevented the success of the coup:

"I believe people have changed. They got out right away. Because we are a country which paid a heavy price for not taking to the streets [in the past]... I think, people of this country are getting mature enough to express themselves... I voted, expressed my thoughts. How dare you to send my will to the garbage bin? How dare you?... The perpetrators deserve a one big slap in the face, but only people can do this." (ADN-09, F, 52)

Erdoğan's Influence over Social Mobilization and the Prevention of the Coup

President Erdoğan's political leadership played a tremendous role in averting the coup attempt by FETÖ. Up to now Turkish society, the political establishment and leadership have gone through a myriad of tests.

Erdoğan's success in dealing with the many crises during his political career has given birth to a political learning process for all. People took to the streets and showed their resistance to the attempted coup and putschists, and remained in the streets for democracy watch. If analyzed through Erdoğan's leadership, we see two dimensions of the issue:

The first is Erdoğan's inviting people to the streets, airports and squares after the news about the coup attempt on July 15 spread reapidly. People poured into the streets to start the resistance following Erdoğan's call; therefore, they

(PDY, in Turkish); these experiences were vital for fending off the July 15 coup attempt. The rationale is that the political actors have gained in competence and strength in each and every crisis.

On the other hand, the timing of the coup attempt, the failure to conduct the operation under the chain of command, and the balancing power of the security establishment

gained a psychological advantage over the coup plotters. Such a critical move also nurtured popular self-reliance among the anti-coup groups and caused the putschists to lose confidence.

Erdoğan's determination, unflinching stance, and arrival at Atatürk International Airport boosted up the popular self-confidence. Importantly with the tactical moves, such as *salâ* prayers and calls for prayers (*azans*) at mosques all night long, people perceived the issue as a struggle for liberation. Some of the participants having different political stances at different squares said:

"In my opinion, people love Erdoğan dearly. I mean, they love him to death, we have seen this. So, if Erdoğan were captured by the coup plotters, more people would have come out and never gone back home. They would have died if necessary but surely would have reacted to the coup." (ANK-16, F, 33)

"I think, the one and only reason is that our leader and President called for us to take to the streets. Because, people were ready to die. Everyone was pouring out onto the streets, but no one thought that they would be killed. Everyone is saying, we had so many coups, but none of the past putschists opened fire on their own fellow citizens. No one ever thought that the coup plotters might open fire on people. People were out for their country. Of course, the biggest motivation was our President's call." (YNKP-07, F, 48)

The remarks of the participants who took to the streets, either supporters or opponents of Erdoğan, reveal that his speech instilled self-confidence in the society from the moment (it was understood) that the incident was certainly a coup attempt. The majority of people poured into the streets upon Erdoğan's speech. Again, remarks of some participants reveal that these people did not simply go out to protest but also entered potential conflict areas to fight against the perpetrators of the coup.

A 52-year-old artisan in Adana, who describes himself as an AK Party supporter, said the following on President Erdoğan's speech:

"When President Erdoğan spoke, I realized that the coup had failed. So, I rushed into the streets and then figured out that they cannot pull it off anymore."

A 47-year-old *Saadet* Party supporter, retired from the military, who joined democracy watch at the Taksim Square in İstanbul, said the following on political leadership and trust: *"The political leadership prevented mistrust. Only Erdoğan's leadership could have saved us." (TKS-03)*

A 38-year-old female visual arts teacher and a CHP supporter who joined the CHP rally at Taksim emphasized that Erdoğan's leadership and the bond he

has with the society played a vital role in the prevention of the coup. Besides, she said that she felt closer to Erdoğan in this period.

“For the first time, I felt closer to Erdoğan. I can even say that I am beginning to like him. On that day, during the live broadcast, I was just waiting for a step to claim that he is ‘our president.’ I’ve decided that he is alone right now just like [the founder of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal] Atatürk. That’s why, I will never leave him alone.” (TKS-10)

In the past, intellectuals decided whether or not a coup was legitimate as some political parties advocated the legitimacy of coups and media explained this legitimacy to the society. Civilian bureaucratic entities, the judicial bureaucracy in particular, were cooperating with military juntas and accommodating post-coup periods in favor of juntas; therefore, normalizing military coups and then narrowing the sphere of politics. In such an environment, the society was silenced and masses were deprived of self-confidence in order to prevent them raising their voice against military coups.⁹

Political parties of the present stood against the July 15 coup attempt with “no ifs or buts.” Owing to the pluralism in the media in the last decade, the takeover of the state did not support the coup attempt. For instance, in the initial stage of the attempt, the Constitutional Court issued a communique claiming to support the democracy¹⁰ and local city council administrations used their heavy equipment against the coup plotters.

Erdoğan’s political leadership, which he also exhibited in the course of the April 27 e-memorandum, is directly related to the failure of the coup attempt on July 15, 2016. The e-memorandum [issued by the Chief of Staff on April 27, 2007] was adamantly reacted to and destined to fail; that became a breaking point as far as Turkey’s history of coups is considered. When the process is interpreted together with other challenges the AK Party has faced, it is seen that the AK Party has gained “political learning” experience to overcome this and similar crises, and its independence has grown stronger through gaining new experience with every crisis.

After the December 17-25, 2013 coup attempt, Erdoğan has begun to see the fight against FETÖ as a matter of life-and-death for the future of the country and the state. President Erdoğan, himself, clearly explained the PDY to the people, the danger of the Gülenist Organization, i.e. FETÖ, and Gülen’s deviant understanding of religion. Owing to Erdoğan, broader segments of the society believes that Turkey must actively fight against FETÖ. Although the opposition parties did not support him and even some of his fellow partisans did not understand how big the danger was, Erdoğan continued the fight alone. The eviction of, at least, some of the leading FETÖ cadres - par-

ticularly in the Judiciary and the Security Department - played a vital role in forestalling the coup attempt.

In addition, Erdoğan reduced the support provided to FETÖ by campaigning against the cohorts of the group in the media. He has taken a series of preventive measures to cut off its economic resources, and that has weakened FETÖ. It has become evident that if such preventive measures had not been taken, the consequences of the coup attempt would have caused much deeper crises.¹¹

Many segments of Turkish society have come to the opinion that the threatening face of FETÖ has been exposed after December 17-25, 2013. A substantial number of the participants agreed that only Erdoğan has the capacity to fight against this organization but they also believe that most of the time Erdoğan is working alone in this fight.

In other respects, some of the participants criticized Erdoğan saying that AK Party supported this organization prior to December 17-25, 2013. However, they acknowledged that the group possibly deceived Erdoğan, too.

A 28-year-old participant in Adana said: *“In fact, when our President said, ‘we will get into their den,’ we have known all these since then. We already knew these anyway.”*

A 38-year-old female designer in Eskişehir said on the issue: *President named them the Parallel State, he had evidence in hand. But, let me tell you this: They were together at first. Since they were together, then it means, they deceived him, too.”*

Perception about Turkish Armed Forces after July 15

A significant majority of the participants made a distinction between FETÖ affiliated putschists embedded in (Turkish Armed Forces) TAF and the TAF, itself. They generally embrace and have a positive attitude about the rest of the TAF. In most of the interviews, the participants pointed out that FETÖ has infiltrated TAF, this is a problem; however, TAF should be considered separately from the FETÖ members nested in TAF. When taking into account the ages of interviewees, who said that their opinion about TAF did not change in a



A significant majority of the participants made a distinction between FETÖ affiliated putschists embedded in (Turkish Armed Forces) TAF and the TAF, itself. They generally embrace and have a positive attitude about the rest of the TAF

negative way, it can be seen that there is no significant difference between the different age groups.

“I will go on to my military service duty in August. I don’t know what I will go through. I definitely stand by TAF. I never react against TAF. Those who opened fire on people were of course FETÖ members.” (TRB-08, M, 25)

“There were henchmen, they were soldiers deceived by FETÖ. They were ready to hit the country rock bottom for sixpenny, but couldn’t succeed. My opinion about TAF did not change just because of (some) FETÖ members.” (VAN-10, M, 19)

All of the participants, over a range of different political ideologies and identities, believe in the existence of the FETÖ structure and perceive it as a major threat to Turkey

The interviewees generally made positive remarks about the TAF high command who vowed for commitment to the civilian will. The high command of the military played a key role on the night of, and after, the coup attempt, adopting a position in favor of the civilian will and acting together with the President.

The overall attitude of the TAF’s high command helped their positive image in the public eye. It may be seen in the following statements:

“After the President, TAF announced, ‘we do not stand by the coup.’ Our attitude towards TAF did not change. Soldiers of the Turkish Nation are our soldiers, the perpetrators were FETÖ members.” (ADN-02, M, 22)

An interesting differentiation is observed between the leftist youth and the leftist voters who lived through the 1980 military *coup d’état*. In this context, the July 15 coup attempt did not seem to have caused any negative impact on a young CHP voters’ tendency to “embrace the military” and they make a distinction between the TAF and FETÖ. Some of the older leftist participants, on the other hand, said they do not trust TAF since the pre-1980 times. Their justification is based on the view of anti-militarism.

“I don’t trust the military now and did not trust them before 1980 either.” (TKS-08, F, 60)

“I am not surprised by the events. I don’t think any army in the world has any use. I trust no armies.” (TKS-01, M, 36)

Remarkably, in some of the interviews, TAF was sternly criticized with reference to the bad memories of the February 28, 1997 post-modern coup. In this regard, two different identity groups voiced similar criticisms. It is seen

that the hanging of Menderes (in 1960) and the ill-treatment of conservatives during the February 28 post-modern coup have created a lack of trust towards TAF in this group, some of whom said:

“TAF seems modern on the surface but its mentality is extremely nationalist and officers seeing the military as the utmost powerful group still weigh in favour of the military. I always did, and will even from now on, think that TAF would pose a threat.” (ANK-08, M, 29)

In general, positive views prevail about TAF and it is referred to as the society’s “apple of the eye.” Emotional and religious descriptions of the military, such as “the Prophet’s Hearth” are often visited; and that is not a sporadic tendency unique to only one province or region. Similar approaches are observed in different cities:

“The change is this: Those traitors in the military must be definitely purged. You will have to make background checks very well. My view has never changed, the military is the Prophet’s Hearth. You will put the military in order. You will abolish Kuleli [Military High School] and Harp Okulu [Military Academy]; you will become civilianized. You will train university graduates for one or two years, just like you do with policemen. They are mentally poisoned at Kuleli, at Harp Okulu. They are all raised with a mindset for taking-over control.” (ADN-06, M, 60)

Perceptions about FETÖ

To witness attitude changes, the participants were asked whether their views had changed on FETÖ before and after the coup attempt. All of the participants, over a range of different political ideologies and identities, believe in the existence of the FETÖ structure and perceive it as a major threat to Turkey. However, three different groups of interviewees have emerged in regards to acquiring knowledge about FETÖ. The first category is those participants whose views on FETÖ have always been negative from the beginning. In the second category, are the participants who approached (the group) with optimism, but their views have changed after the Gezi Park Protests and the December 17-25 coup attempt by FETÖ. In the third category, the interviewees did not have a clear picture about FETÖ until July 15, 2016.

The point worth paying attention to here is that the first group, those who have always had negative thoughts on FETÖ, is less in number compared to the other two groups. Most of them justified their negative thoughts on FETÖ because of its deviant religious teachings and discrepancies in the organization’s religious approach. Some decided to stay away from the organi-

zation based on their personal experiences with FETÖ. Some have negative views on religious groups in general, believing that religious practices and devotion to Allah are subjective matters and must remain private. Some others with negative impressions about FETÖ shared their views in the following way:

“[My views on them] had been negative anyway. They were religiously problematic. It was a selfish, unreliable/untrustworthy and introvert structure. That kept me away from them.” (KSK-01, M, 56)

“I am of the opinion that Fetullah Gülen exploited Islam and used sincere Muslims for his own advantages, for this purpose... If these people have a brain and if their minds are not for rent, there is a clear-cut political picture showing what is what in reality.” (ADN-05,M, 26)

Many of the participants believe FETÖ has always been a misguided movement since its structuring began in the 1970s; and their opinion is based on their personal experiences with FETÖ. For instance, it was a turning point for a 46-year-old female when the Religious High School she attended in Isparta was closed during the 1980 military coup and ceded to a Gülen foundation:

“I have never been naïve about the Gülen group. I studied at Isparta Religious High School. My school was located on a vast piece of land. The ownership of our school was transferred to the Akyazılı Foundation during the September 12 military operation. The foundation belonged to Gülen. So, the title deed was consigned to them. Then, they built two schools in the school yard. We objected. It was explained to Gülen, but he did not accept, and two schools were built. They left us without a school.” (ANK-20, F, 46)

“I have always had my reservations towards Fetullah. He was always cynical and self-interested. I have never sympathized with him. They have never assured us.” (ANK-07, F, 45)

A great majority of the participants fall into the second category. They had positive views on the Gülen movement prior to the Gezi Park Protests and the December 17-25 coup attempt, but then totally changed their minds against the organization recognizing the presence of the more sinister FETÖ:

“I even attended their prep schools and read his works. I changed my mind after December 17[, 2013].” (KSK-06, M, 33)

“These people are like a huge flock. This dishonorable [Fetullah Gülen] went to the U.S., before that he was our master --- I am from Erzurum --- we used to listen to him, and have respect for him.” (İZM-15, M, 61)

The participants may be considered in two categories: Conservative-right liners who did not see the Gülen organization as a terror group until the coup attempt and those who recognized the presence of FETÖ before July 15 but have had their opinions hardened by information released about the organization since the event.

Collective Memory on Coups and the Reaction to the July 15 Coup Attempt

The July 15 coup attempt differs from the previous military coups in Turkey. The events of July 15 were committed by actors nourished by a system of Messianic belief rather than from a shared ideological background. The perpetrators of the July 15 attempt, in contrast to the previous coups, failed to present an ideological framework for the coup to gain popular support.

Again, differing from the coup plotters of the past, the perpetrators of the July 15 attempt used heavy weaponry and terror methods, thereby causing the deaths of many people and the injury of many more. Despite such differences, people compare the July 15 coup attempt with the coups in the past, particularly those aged 40 and above. In general, all of the participants who were interviewed about the July 15 attempted coup stated that the attempt was not similar to any other coup or coup attempts, and that none of the coups or the coup attempts in the past were as brutal as the July 15 endeavour.

One of the most critical matters stressed by the interviewees during the comparison between the July 15 coup attempt and the previous coups is the state of affairs in the country. The participants particularly emphasized that no climate of conflict existed to justify the events of July 15 in Turkey. The hanging of the late Prime Minister and the Democratic Party leader Menderes as a result of a military coup in 1960 has helped the formation of a strong enough sense of reaction in the collective memory against the implications of coups. In the period post-1960, each military coup affected different identity groups and that gave birth to the sense of a common reaction in the collective memory against coups.¹²

In Ankara, a 62-year-old veteran [of the 1974 Peace Operation in Cyprus] made the following comparison:

Compared to the past, democratic politics has gained ground and the military has lost its influence over politics in the new political atmosphere. Popular awareness has increased and people's reaction to events has changed

“Because the 1980 coup was committed at midnight, nobody could hear about it, nobody knew. There was only one TV channel back then. It [the coup] happened suddenly. People couldn’t take to the streets, people were weary. But now, people have self-confidence. We experienced the 1980 coup, the environment in Turkey was very bad (then). But now, there is no such thing.” (ANK-09, M, 62)

A 56-year-old AK Party voter, interviewed at the CHP rally in Taksim, said people were convinced of the need for a coup due to the environment of conflict in the period of the 1980 coup:

“They prepared the people for the 1980 coup. Conflicts between leftists and rightists were used to create a ground to commit the coup. Before our eyes, they [leftists and rightists] were killing men out there in front of our windows. So, they convinced people very well. We got up in the morning of the September 12 coup and heard the Chief of Staff speaking on the radio. People were really pleased. Nobody died nor got wounded. Today, there were no such grounds [for a coup]. The economy may not be great, but there is no reason to commit a coup. How dare you to attempt a coup, what kind of power did you rely on... People were very well convinced for the 1980 coup.” (TKS-03 M, 56)

Without doubt, one of the most important reasons for the failure of the July 15 attempted coup is that civilian politics has gained strength in Turkey. Compared to the past, democratic politics has gained ground and the military has lost its influence over politics in the new political atmosphere. Popular awareness has increased and people’s reaction to events has changed. A 47-year-old male industrialist in Van stresses the point as follows:

“Turkey was not developed this much when the 1980 coup took place. The private sector was not that well developed. People did not believe so much in civilian politics back then. In this connection, the AK Party government was a reform government. Thus, compared to the past governments, the AK Party government has concentrated on civilian-democratic reforms rather than having tutelary inclinations. Instead of hoping for help from the military, this time, civilian-democratic politics has been worked on. In the past people with an instinct to seek protection turned to the military.” (VAN-2, M, 47)

According to a 41-year-old female participant, saying that she was a 5-year-old child when the 1980 coup was committed, skirmishes had become part of daily life back then, but today, there is no environment of conflict. For this reason, she furiously reacted to the coup attempt:

“I was stuck, as a kid, in a conflict environment two months before the 1980 coup. I was five years old. Skirmishes were part of our daily lives. Now, there is no such situation. The attempt was stifled in a short time anyway. This made us very



President Erdoğan greets the people at the Yenikapı rally after he delivered his speech.

AA PHOTO / KAYHAN ÖZER

proud: People did not want the coup. Only a small group said, ‘what a pity, they couldn’t do it.’ That is the most dramatic difference between now and the 1980. There was a café house in the 1980s, prosecutors often went there. Right across the café house, leftists were sitting outside a pharmacy. An old woman, a passerby, asked them, ‘My child, I will pass through you. If you are planning to fight, let me know; so that I will not get stuck in between.’ (ANK-23, F, 41)

A Glance at the Opposition Parties’ Attitudes on the July 15 Coup Attempt

As far as the past coups in Turkey are concerned, examples of cooperation were seen between the military and political actors. It should be noted, without doubt, that such cooperation is critical to provide a ground of legitimacy to coups. The July 15 coup attempt, however, took place in a different setting. Political actors did not collaborate with the coup plotters; to the contrary, they issued statements for a united stand with the elected government and rejected the attempt.

On the course of the July 15 attempted coup, chairmen of the MHP and CHP, Devlet Bahçeli and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, respectively, called Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and said the upheaval was unacceptable and that they stood together with the elected government.¹³ The pro-Kurdish HDP, too, announced on social media that they sided with the civilian politics.¹⁴

Settling the account with the coup attempt on the 15th of July 2016 will satisfy the social conscience and gratify the sense of justice; it will also fulfill two basic functions that will guarantee the sustainability of democracy

Regarding the attitudes of the opposition parties on the night of the attempted coup, the participants largely shared three basic views. The first view is that the attitude and joint-stance of the opposition parties - both during and after the coup attempt - and their stance in a special parliamentary session [during the bombing] were praiseworthy.

A 25-year-old male masters student in Sakarya said this picture of unity contributed to the people's motivation, adding:

“Bahçeli's initial reaction helped [MHP] idealists to take to the streets and provided a moral boost to everyone. In this sense, his reaction was crucially important and should be praised. I couldn't hear how Kılıçdaroğlu reacted at first. I learned about it later. But, it was too crucial, too. On that day, I couldn't hear about the HDP's reaction either. But later on, I saw how they reacted. It was critical to exhibit such an accord right from the start.” (SAK-09)

Some of the participants expressed that although the united stand of the government with the opposition parties was critically important, it was more important to turn it into cooperation; and the cooperation of the parties on the first night, in particular, had quite an effect on the failure of the coup attempt. A 32-year old male participant in Trabzon said:

“It's questionable whether they did enough, but they did what they had to do. They couldn't bring the people out but supported the people. There were other parties, too, I saw them. They were less in number and statistically, the number may vary, but they were there.” (TRB-08)

Apparently, regarding sincerity, the participants in general have reservations about other opposition parties except the MHP. The majority of the participants believe that CHP and HDP supported the government because they had to and that they will withdraw their backing in the days to come. A 25-year-old male in Ankara justified his claim in the following way:

“I was expecting a move from CHP. I thought CHP would watch the course of events first and then adopt a stance accordingly, which they did do for a while. As the course of events took a turn in favor of the AK Party, only then CHP adopted a position. CHP's stance reduced the polarization among parties. But if the coup attempt were successful, CHP would have sided with the coup plotters. CHP pro-

vided support when the AK Party stood powerful. As for the HDP, [the chairman] Selahattin Demirtaş was in Diyarbakır and did not participate in the joint statement of the parties; that indicates that he did nothing.” (ANK-01, M, 25)

The third basic view pertaining to the opposition parties is that supporters of the opposition parties think their parties were insufficient. A 25-year-old female HDP supporter in Ankara criticized her party in the following way:

“HDP is my party. I mean, in the last two elections I voted for it even though I had my doubts. But I think although the HDP stood against the coup attempt, it should have called for us to take to the streets as they invite everyone out even for a minor incident. It should have organized a meeting of its own. We usually see AK Party and MHP supporters in the demonstrations. I wish more people like me joined [the demonstrations]. So, I am feeling kind of strange.” (ANK-14, F, 25)

A 58-year-old retired teacher in Van commented on the HDP’s attitude throughout the process:

“Unfortunately, I, as an easterner, definitely protest against HDP. They were about to side with the coup. The remark of ‘I am against the coup, I am against Erdoğan’ is rather... This is what happens if we, the Kurds, surrender our destiny into the hands of a few people. I, as a Kurd, don’t think that HDP under the leadership of Erturğrul Kürkçü and Figen Yüksekdağ has the capacity to defend the rights of anyone, let alone the Kurds. I know very well for whom they worked in the past.” (VAN-9, M, 58)

A 40-year-old HDP supporter female, again in Ankara, criticized her party:

“HDP was too late and the statements of Selahattin Demirtaş were highly inadequate. He should’ve gone out to the squares on the first day of the coup attempt. [HDP co-chair] Figen Yüksekdağ said, ‘there are no women at the squares.’ It was a horrible remark. I do criticize HDP in this process. Still, they tried to fix it later on. That’s nice. I gave CHP credit for their stance. Kılıçdaroğlu’s speech at the general committee meeting was good. The coup plotters expected CHP voters to take to the streets. But the CHP clearly stood stronger against it, so did the MHP. That’s the only subject that the four parties agreed on in a long time. I see this as an advantage gained in the process.” (ANK-22, F, 40)

Settling the Account with the Coup Plotters and their Accomplices

Settling the account with the coup attempt on the 15th of July 2016 will satisfy the social conscience and gratify the sense of justice; it will also fulfill two basic functions that will guarantee the sustainability of democracy. In this respect,

the State's reaction to FETÖ after the coup attempt is the consequence of the State's struggle for existence. Preventing FETÖ terrorists' infiltrating the State components through similar moves from now on requires a policy of refinement. This process is necessary for a soundly functioning democratic rule of law.

Turkey will settle the score with the July 15 coup attempt through two fundamental channels. One of them is a political showdown based on preventive measures taken by the political will. The second is a legal showdown based on reactions of the judicial system with all of its rules and institutions as a whole.¹⁵ In this context, the participants shared their opinions, in a broad spectrum of thoughts, about prospective measures and policies for refining the processes.

The strongest opinion crystallized as the outcome of all the interviews is that the political establishment should immediately launch the prosecution process and discharge civil servants affiliated with the FETÖ. The participants specifically emphasized that the entrance exams system should be revised so as to prevent FETÖ's penetration into the State. A 36-year-old PhD student in Adana said:

“First of all, we should thoroughly revise our exam system from top to bottom. These guys select 12-13 year-old children as fresh seeds, these children who have yet seen nothing by then are taken into their [digestive] system, before they open their eyes, they inject into them anyway... whatever they need to ... Think about this, you become an army general, a police chief, a department head, a judge, a prosecutor, and yet you do literally and strictly follow everything this guy says (orders).” (ADN-04, M, 36)

While phrasing the removal of FETÖ members and their partners in the coup attempt from public and state institutions, many participants used the words of “cleaning,” “extermination,” and “eradication.” For some of the interviewees, eliminating FETÖ members from public institutions will not be adequate by itself. For the same reason, in order to not face similar problems in the future, religious groups should be prevented from becoming organized in public institutions. A 33-year-old male faculty member in Kısıklı, İstanbul, said:

“We realized the danger very late. These are cynical, cowardly, lying hypocrites. Now, strict policies must be adopted. Their properties must be confiscated. Furthermore, none of the other religious groups should be provided with such a broad sphere of influence. The sense of justice should not be harmed.” (KSK-06, M, 33)

A great number of the participants also agreed on the consolidation of the structure of the Intelligence. A 61-year-old female retired worker in İzmir shared her opinion as follows:

“I am a citizen. I don’t, and cannot, have my own news and intelligence. All right then, how come the State couldn’t prevent this? How come the State couldn’t have the intelligence information on this? The State should have its ears wide open to fight [with FETÖ].” (İZM-10, F, 61)

According to some of the interviewees, regulations are needed, as well, for the military institutions and schools. However, some emphasized that any prospective measures should not wear TAF out and cause security weaknesses. They think more control mechanisms over military schools are needed. In addition, a 34-year-old educator in Sakarya stressed that social understanding on military members should also change:

“Discrimination among people should be prevented from now on. Everyone should agree on a minimum education curriculum based on law and get rid of this coup mentality breeding community. For instance, we should adopt a mindset to highlight particular issues, such as democracy, law and human rights instead of praising the military and soldiers and of constantly blessing old victories.” (SAK-01, M, 34)

In addition to all these issues, the interviewees expect the political establishment to work meticulously on the State of Emergency, but in the meantime, not to overlook international connections (of the attempt) as part of the process. The extradition of Fetullah Gülen, in particular, should be fully concentrated on; to this end, more effective talks should be conducted with the U.S.

The violations committed by FETÖ by embarking on the July 15 endeavour have two dimensions, one of which is about the attempted destruction of the constitutional order and the other is human rights violations regarding the deaths and injuries sustained that night. For this reason it would be useful if the prospective system, used to settle the account with the coup attempt, takes as reference the norms that emphasize universal human rights laws and principles, as well as the perspective framed by national laws. Another practical benefit of that would be to form an international public opinion against the coup plotters.¹⁶

As a component of the political showdown, the process of determining and purging the cohorts of the coup attempt should be followed by the preparation of the infrastructure to facilitate the legal showdown. Thus, elements who were purged already, and those who are in the process of being purged, will be pun-

If the coup were successful, the future of Turkey after the coup would have been evaluated through a disintegrated Middle East under the influence of external forces

ished upon completion of the on-going legal processes; whereby, they will be rendered to account. The normative and institutional framework of the punishments will be determined by the rules of the criminal law and the principles of the universal human rights laws which will be enforced on the perpetrators of the July 15 coup who have already violated human rights.

As for their opinion on how the prosecution process for FETÖ members should be conducted, a 50-year-old artisan male participant in Diyarbakır said the legal process should be conducted very attentively, and each institution should be held liable to accountability.

“The prosecution process of these guys must not be diluted as in the Balyoz-Ergenekon [cases]. Mistakes made by the courts and judges must not be pardoned. The suspects of Ergenekon and Balyoz must never be assigned to the seats emptied by the FETÖ terrorists in the military and the judiciary. They will have no mercy for us.” (DYB-6, M, 50)

It should not be forgotten that the impact of the coup attempt was fresh [in people’s minds] and the issue of capital punishment had made the agenda while the interviews were being conducted. Hence, most of the answers to the question about the prosecution process consisted of the participants’ opinions on capital punishment. The majority of the interviewees suggested “capital punishment” as an answer when they were asked “How should the score be settled with the coup plotters?” This is an indication of how intensely people feel about the coup plotters and perpetrators.

Opinions on capital punishment may be evaluated under three categories: in favor of capital punishment, against capital punishment and undecided. It has been observed, throughout the interviews, that people who took to the streets on the night of the attempt were still affected by the incidents and their personal experiences with some of the participants overtly and strongly demanding capital punishment for their relatives or close ones who were harmed in the course of the attempt. A reason for why the participants suggested capital punishment could be that any military revolt against the State and the Nation is directly considered as treason and deception. According to two interviewees, capital punishment would be a deterrent; they had the following to say:

“All must be hanged. You are a soldier, the State meets all of your needs. What’s the matter with you, how dare you attempt a coup?” (İZM-02, M, 54)

“Discharge from the military is a sufficiently heavy punishment for a soldier. The capital punishment may be [re-enacted] for crimes such as treason and rape. Deterrence must exist.” (KSK-01, M, 56)

However a significant portion of the participants who were in favor of capital punishment were also concerned that real offenders must be carefully distinguished from others and “the baby should not be thrown out with the bathwater.” The same interviewees underlined the necessity of a fair trial. According to them, the “rank and file” of FETÖ should be meticulously separated from their leaders in the military who willingly and knowingly committed the crime. The participants’ expectation of the government to conduct a fair trial and legal process is a critical point. Some of the views on the matter are as follows:

“Perpetrators who plotted the coup and opened fire on people, and the bombers must be subject to the heaviest of punishments, heavier than lifetime imprisonment. Capital punishment would be suitable for them but I don’t know if this is legally possible, if not, government representatives should take the pulse of the nation accordingly. Someone who provides even the scant amount of support to the Gülen organization may be punished according to counter-terrorism laws, but if an ordinary man sympathizes with the Gülen organization, he should be subject to minor punishments and partially deprived of personal benefits. Repentance laws should be carefully put into force; otherwise, everyone will regret.” (ANK-08, M, 29)

“My heart’s desire is capital punishment! But, may be, some wrong verdicts may be rendered; so, if the punishment is lifetime imprisonment, there would still be a chance to reverse a wrong decision [if any].” (SRC-02, M, 48)

A large number of participants believe some prerequisites must be met in order to support capital punishment. At this point, some of the interviewees came to the fore and demanded capital punishment for the PKK’s imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan and rapists if the capital punishment is re-enacted. Another group of interviewees wish the re-enactment of capital punishment to be implemented only once and solely for the perpetrators of the July 15 coup attempt, yet some others demand capital punishment on condition of no extrajudicial execution.

It appears that those participants who are against capital punishment have reached their decision from a range of different motives which can be grouped into four categories: those who think capital punishment is not sufficient or not humane, those who are of the opinion that the coup plotters should be prosecuted by the existing judicial system, those who reject capital punishment for



With the rise of the middle class in Turkey, conservatives have a stronger self-confidence in the public sphere. Thus, the very same conservative masses played a leading role in the prevention of the coup on July 15

The findings reveal that four major criteria played a key role for people to take to the streets on the night of July 15: a) Love of country and nation, b) Erdoğan's invitation, c) Salâ prayer announced from the mosques and d) Reaction against the coup communique read out on TRT, the anti-coup stance and collective/social memory of the coups

is the easiest way (out for them). The same interviewees preferred the perpetrators of the coup to remain alive but "suffer." A 52-year-old male artisan in Adana had the following to say:

"People say 'capital punishment,' but I think it is better if they are locked in and suffer. If they are hanged, they will die at once and will be free. But if they are not hanged, they will die slowly every day. Their salaries will be cut, properties will be confiscated. They will experience the pain behind bars. If you hang them, they will be free. Let them remain in prison for life and live in pain; to me, this is worse than a thousand capital punishments." (ADN-03, M, 52)

The Future of Turkey Had the Coup Attempt Been Successful

After the coup attempt, the question of what would have happened if the coup were successful has been frequently visited. A generally accepted opinion by experts on the matter is that if the coup were successful, it would have been a disaster for Turkey. Turkey would have experienced an internal conflict and a danger of division; and would have turned into a country where many people would have died in clashes or flocked out of the country.

Some commentators have stated that if the coup were successful, FETÖ leader Fetullah Gülen would have returned to Turkey and established a bureaucratic dictatorship in accordance with his own deviant understanding of religion. According to another comment, FETÖ elements, under the newly established regime, would have formed an authoritarian-modernist regime in a separate

religious concerns, and those who believe capital punishment negatively affects Turkey's EU membership bid. A substantial number of the interviewees who spoke against capital punishment were undecided at the beginning of the interviews, but they eventually decided against it. This confirms that people have not yet had enough time to assess criminal prosecution procedures and the consequences of reintroducing capital punishment.

The participants not satisfied with capital punishment said the criminals will not pay any price after being hanged, so capital punishment

part of Turkey so as to appear acceptable to the West but maintained their own understanding of ruling in the rest of the country.¹⁷

Like the experts, the participants who were interviewed as part of the research often stressed that if the coup had been successful; Turkey would have been like Syria, faced the danger of a civil war and division and become a colony of external powers. In this context, some participants expressed the following opinions:

“Not my life but the life of the T.C. [abbreviation of the Republic of Turkey, in Turkish] would have come to an end. T.C. would have been divided, disintegrated. Our people, future of our children, future of you, and our professions, we (all) would have turned back 40 years; all these investments, all this prosperity... I am 47 years old. We experienced poverty. I went to Egypt, traveled every part of the country, five years later the coup took place. [Abdel Fattah al-] Sisi came to power; they are 50 years back right now. We are witnessing with our own eyes what we would have experienced. We, as the nation, know this. We would not have been secure even in our own homes. Who would have been where, perhaps a civil war would have taken place just like in Syria.” (YNKP-08, F, 47)

“If the coup had been successful, we would have been another Syria.” (DYB-03, F, 40)

“We would have no private life if the coup were successful because a civil war would have started. If the coup were successful, it would not be similar to the 1980 coup; to the opposite, the situation would be like Syria, like Aleppo. This is how I imagine right now.” (YNKP-02, M, 43)

A 29-year-old male participant at the Yenikapı, İstanbul (meeting), said Gülen would have returned from U.S. to Turkey and led a Syria-like country:

“We would’ve been worse than Syria. For the moment, we have 250 martyrs. That means, [if the coup were successful] thousands would’ve been dying every day, people would’ve been armed, taken to the streets every day, and would have stood up against soldiers. Soldiers again would have shot people. Of course, Fetullah Gülen would’ve come back to Turkey, I guess.” (YNKP-06)

Some of the participants, drawing attention to their belief that Turkey would have turned into another Syria if the coup had been successful, said nobody would have defended Turkey, and therefore, the situation in the country would have been worse than Syria. Some opinions are as follows:

“If the coup were successful, it would’ve been worse than Syria. Since I believe that it would not (be successful), I even cannot imagine it. There was a place to which Syria(ns) could turn to, but we would have no place to go.” (VAN-09, M, 58)

A group of the participants said if the coup were successful, Turkey would have entered an endless civil war between the pro-coup and the anti-coup, been divided in the end, and would have never pulled herself up again. A 36-year-old male journalist in Van explained the possibility of division as:

“For instance, you wouldn’t have been here today. Perhaps, the junta would’ve killed 20,000 of our people. If the coup were successful, politicians and everyone who is involved in politics would’ve been sent to prison or hanged; the economy would’ve collapsed, freedoms would’ve been ended. Those who intend to divide Turkey would divide it here. Perhaps, the east of the country would’ve been occupied; we would’ve been like Syria.” (VAN-01)

In conclusion, the participants especially emphasized that if the coup had been successful; Turkey would have turned into another Syria, and faced the danger of civil war and division. The interviewees also stressed that the FETÖ structure would have established a bureaucratic oppressive regime in the framework of its own deviant understanding of religion and would have not bestowed the right of expression to others.

On the other side, through the alliance of FETÖ-external powers, Turkey would have been under the complete influence and direction of the West. In this sense, if the coup were successful, the future of Turkey after the coup would have been evaluated through a disintegrated Middle East under the influence of external forces. According to this view, the participants most often referred to a new situation that would have arisen in Turkey similar to those in Iraq and Syria.

In Lieu of Conclusion: Outstanding Findings in the Field Research

The research aimed to measure social perceptions about the coup attempt on 15 July 2016, and was based on the method of semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews conducted with a total of 176 participants (96 males and 80 females) in 9 provinces of Turkey. A substantial portion of the participants said that they took to the streets on the night of July 15th. A group of the remaining participants joined democracy watch in the following days although they had not taken to the streets on the first night.

Those who were out there in the streets justified their actions primarily by love of country and nation and reacted to the reading out of a coup communique on TRT, President Erdoğan’s call for people to take to the streets and the *salâ* (call to gather) from the mosques. Again, a group of the participants who were in the streets on the night of the coup attempt underlined the effect of TV and social media. However, all of the participants emphasized, in particular,

that they were especially motivated by Erdoğan's inviting people to the streets and remained in the streets through out the first night.

When people were asked about their motivations to take to the streets following the coup attempt, "the love of country," "the future of the country and nation," and "the national unity and togetherness" seemed to be their main motives which were similarly expressed by all identity groups and political positions. However, as the interviews progressed, the participants broke down the abovementioned motivating factors and they often included "to stand by Erdoğan," "the future of their children," and "to stand by the elected."

Most of those who joined the democracy watch said that they were out from the first day (on). Their main motivation for the democracy watch - similar to that of the night of the July 15th - was "to protect the country and the state, and to claim the homeland." However, the interviewees added that participating in the democracy watch also meant "to express gratitude" to the July 15th martyrs."

In the research, three different categories of the interviewees formed depending on their comments about their perception on the leading actor of the coup attempt, FETÖ. The first group had negative views on FETÖ all along. The views of the second group had changed in a negative way after the Gezi Park Protests and the December 17-25 activities by FETÖ in 2013. The members of the third group weren't convinced until after the July 15 coup attempt that FETÖ is a very dangerous organization.

According to the participants, FETÖ is the leading actor of the July 15 coup attempt. At this point, a great many of them only accused FETÖ, others said "FETÖ acted together with external powers," a few believed that "FETÖ and the U.S. cooperated" in the attempted coup. As to why the coup took place, the interviewees stressed that whoever was behind the venture was aiming to stop Turkey from taking critical steps forward in terms of the international balance of power and trade.

The plotting of the coup by the FETÖ members nested in TAF brought the military face-to-face with the society. However, research reveals that the majority of the people have a positive opinion of TAF. The participants predom-

Arguments that external powers backed the coup attempt in Turkey are associated with the geographical position of Turkey, and it was suggested that such powers were disturbed by Turkey's newly active foreign policy and strong economic growth

inantly distinguish the FETÖ members embedded in the military from the rest of the TAF. Interestingly, however, a small group of the interviewees still does not trust the military.

In terms of its characteristics, participants believe that the July 15 coup attempt differs from military *coup d'états* that Turkey has experienced in the past. One of the main reasons for such perception in the society is that the coup plotters opened fire on people and acted brutally against their own fellow citizens.

As seen through the popular reaction to the coup attempt and the democracy watch, a negative part of the collective memory created by the culture of military coups in Turkey has become one of the key factors that helped people repel the attempted coup on July 15, 2016. For instance, the participants constantly recalled that the late Prime Minister Menderes was hanged after a military coup in 1960, and a similar scenario would have been put into play against President Erdoğan today. That is sufficient to prove the impact of the collective memory on the July 15 coup attempt.

With the rise of the middle class in Turkey, conservatives have a stronger self-confidence in the public sphere. Thus, the very same conservative masses played a leading role in the prevention of the coup on July 15. Since they have become more affluent and moved from the periphery to the center during the period of the AK Party and the Erdoğan government, conservatives believe every single attack on Erdoğan in fact targets them as well. For conservative masses, in this sense, the fate of Erdoğan is the fate of their own future.

One of the critical factors for the success of the past military coups is that they were supported and encouraged by a broad coalition. Today, however, people have started to question the culture of coups owing to media pluralism in the Erdoğan era, the existence of social media, the transformation of bureaucracy, the consolidation of local administrations, and the emergence of a new intellectual class.

Therefore, the harm caused by the coups in Turkey's past political life has a prime position in the collective memory. On the other hand, politics has experienced ample crises during the rule of the AK Party government, successfully passing a range of tests. This has yielded cumulative learning experiences in crisis management and in the nature of reactions that should be shown by the political establishment.

The findings reveal that a significant number of the participants appreciated the opposition's siding with the elected and legitimate government of the Republic of Turkey immediately after the coup attempt. On the other hand, a group of participants commented that other major political parties – except

MHP- took action after the course of events became clear and that they were late to invite their constituents to the streets; therefore, their stance was unconvincing. Nonetheless, the participants appreciated the compromise of the opposition parties to stand united with the governing bloc, and considered this a critical factor in the normalization of the society.

One of the key factors in the failure of the July 15 coup attempt is that in the post-December 17-25 (2013) period, Erdoğan worked to convince the masses about the dangers posed by the FETÖ structure. Moreover, the fight against FETÖ, which was launched after the December 17-25 coup attempt, especially the removal of members of FETÖ from the Police Force, have been successful in cleansing certain areas allowing for a decisive response from the police to the events of July 15. After fending off the attempted coup, the State has embarked upon a political and legal struggle, and a showdown against FETÖ - the leading actor of this venture. A great many participants stressed that FETÖ members must be dismissed – especially from public institutions.

Another dimension of the fight against the July 15 coup attempt are the necessary legal regulations. Almost all of the interviewees agreed on the punishment of the coup actors in the heaviest manner. Most participants advocated the re-enactment of capital punishment at this point however as some point out,, they believe it will not be possible in the existing international climate; therefore, the coup plotters must be punished with lifetime imprisonment.

On the other hand, if the coup attempt on July 15, 2016 had been successful, Turkey would have become another Syria. That was the argument most often verbalized by the participants. Concordantly, a civil war would have taken place in Turkey and the country would have been rapidly divided, according to the interviewees. In addition, foreign powers would have shaped Turkey at their discretion and FETÖ would have helped them. The interviewees emphasized that Fetullah Gülen would have returned from the U.S., the FETÖ structure would have established a bureaucratic dicta regime in Turkey, eliminated all dissidents and hanged many politicians. ■

Endnotes

1. This study, to be published as a book, is based on data collected during field research which we conducted together with Serdar Güleler, İpek Çoşkun, Hazal Duran, Erkut Ayvaz, Serancan Erciyes, and Hüseyin Öztürk. The field research will be published by SETA as a book with the title of *Demokrasi Nöbetleri: Toplumsal Algıda 15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimi* [Democracy Watch: Social Perception of the July 15th Coup Attempt] both in Turkish and English. I extend my gratitude to Serdar Güleler, İpek Çoşkun, Hazal Duran, Erkut Ayvaz, Serancan Erciyes, and Hüseyin Öztürk for their contribution to the field research and the book.

2. For further information on the subject, see. Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, Fourth Edition, (Boston: Ally & Bacon, 2000).

3. After December 17-25, 2013 the Parallel State Structure (PDY) has been identified by the State in the official statements as a national threat and designated as a terror organization under the name of the Fetullah Gülen Terror Organization (FETÖ) (*Fetullahçı Terrör Örgütü*, in Turkish)
4. Kemal İnat, "Batı'daki Darbe Sevicilerin Çarpık Demokrasi Anlayışı!," *Türkiye*, (July 20, 2016).
5. For further reading criticizing military-civilian relations and military tutelage on politics in Turkey, see. Ahmet İnel and Ali Bayramoğlu, *Bir Zümre, Bir Parti: Türkiye'de Ordu*, Fourth Edition, (İstanbul: Birikim Yayınları, 2009); Ümit Cizre Sakalioğlu, "The Anatomy of the Turkish Military's Political Autonomy," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (1997), pp. 151–166; Kemal Karpat, "Military Interventions: Army Civilian Relations in Turkey Before and After 1980," in M. Heper and A. Evin (eds.), *State, Democracy and Military: Turkey in the 1980s*, (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998); Kurtuluş Kayalı, *Ordu ve Siyaset- 27 Mayıs- 12 Mart*, Fourth Edition, (İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2005); Ali Balcı, *Türkiye'de Militarist Devlet Söylemi*, (Ankara: Kadim Yayınları, 2011); Ümit Cizre, "İdeoloji, Menfaat, Bağlam: Türk Ordusu," in Reşat Kasaba (ed.), *Türkiye Tarihi 1839-2010*, (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2011); Ergun Özbudun, *Çağdaş Türk Politikası: Demokratik Pekişmenin Önündeki Engeller*, (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2003), Murat Yeşiltaş, *Türkiye'de Ordu ve Jeopolitik Zihniyet*, (Ankara: Kadim Yayınları, 2016).
6. See Nebi Miş, "Türkiye'de Güvenikleştirme Siyaseti 1923-2000," Unpublished PhD Thesis, Sakarya University Social Sciences Institute, (May 2012).
7. Tanel Demirel, "2000'li Yıllarda Asker ve Siyaset," *SETA Analiz*, No. 18 (February 2010).
8. Ali Balcı, "Darbenin Önlenmesinden En Önemli Engel Milletin Hafızasıydı," *Derin Tarih*, No. 53 (August 2016).
9. Nebi Miş, "Darbenin Önlenmesinde Erdoğan Liderliğinin Rolü," *Kriter*, No. 4 (August 2016), p. 32-33.
10. "FETÖ'nün Darbe Girişimine Tepkiler," *Habertürk*, (July 16, 2016).
11. Nebi Miş, "Millet FETÖ'yü Bitirdi," *Star Açık Görüş*, (July 23, 2016).
12. Şükrü Hanioğlu, "Darbe ve Toplum," *Sabah*, (July 24, 2016).
13. "Devlet Bahçeli Darbe Girişiminin Olduğu Gece Ne Yaptı?," *Hürriyet*, (July 19, 2016).
14. "HDP'den İlk Açıklama," *Milliyet*, (July 16, 2016).
15. Serdar Gülener, "Dünyada Arındırma Politikaları ve Devletin FETÖ'den Arındırılması," *SETA Perspektif*, No. 142, (September 2016).
16. Gülener, "Dünyada Arındırma Politikaları ve Devletin FETÖ'den Arındırılması."
17. Halil Bertkay, "Ya Türkiye'deki Darbe Girişimi Başarıya Ulaştıydı?," *Serbestiyet*, (August 11, 2016).