



# What's Happening with the HDP?

## Tracking Legislators in Turkey's Liberal, Pro-Kurdish Party

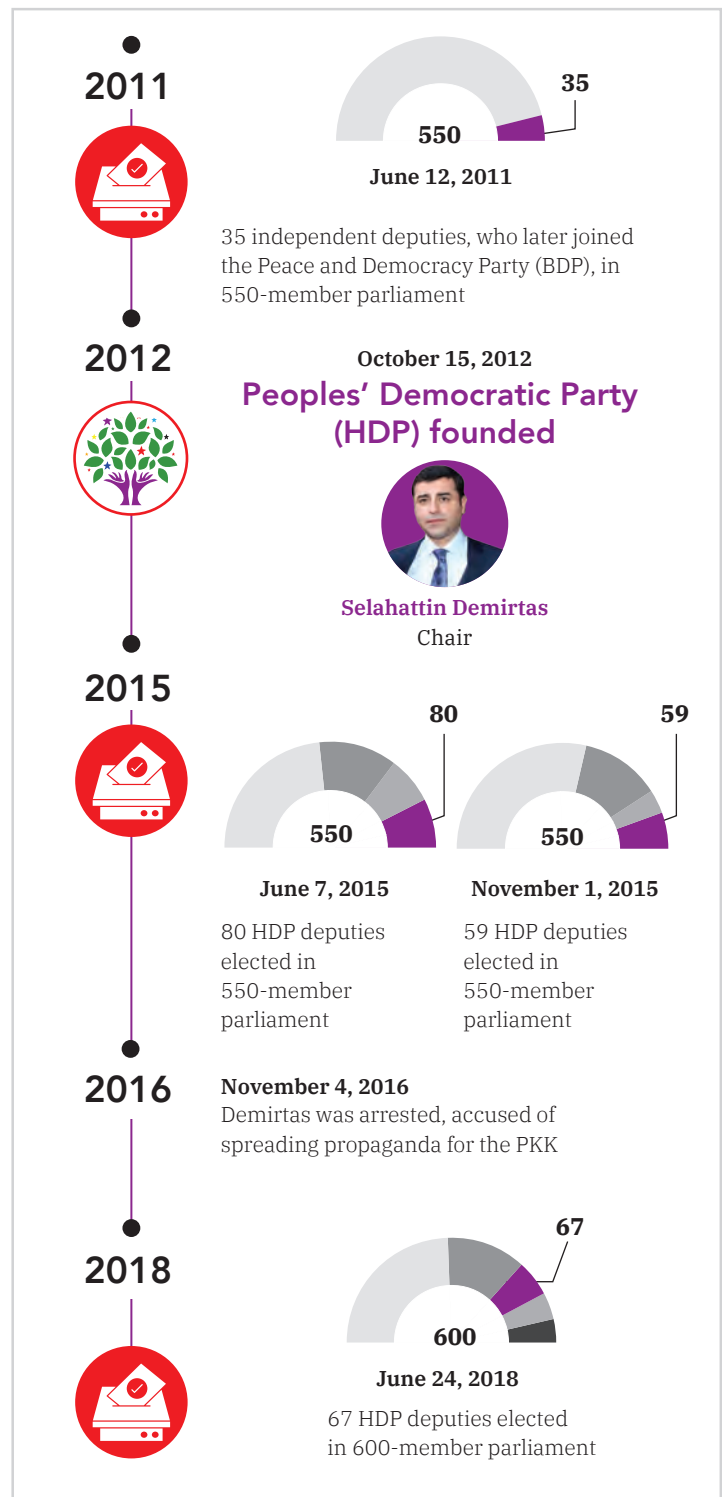
Soner Cagaptay, Umut Can Fidan, and Nibras Khudaida  
August 2021

The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) is a liberal, pro-Kurdish bloc with roots stretching back to the Kurdish nationalist movement in the 1980s. The HDP's predecessor—the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP)—was shut down by Turkey's constitutional court in 2014 for alleged links to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is designated as a terrorist entity by Turkey, the United States, and other states. The HDP was established in 2012, before the official closure of the BDP, with Selahattin Demirtas as its chair. Prior to his leadership, Kurdish nationalist parties in Turkey had received around 5–7 percent of the vote nationally, consistently failing to clear the 10 percent threshold necessary to enter parliament.

Demirtas expanded the party's base by appealing to liberal and ethnic non-Kurdish voters—specifically, by running a list with balanced gender representation and candidates from Turkey's religious and ethnic minorities. This helped more than double the HDP's tally in the June 2015 parliamentary elections, in which the party exceeded 13 percent of the popular vote. Although its support dropped to nearly 11 percent in the repeat November 2015 parliamentary elections, pushed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP), the HDP nevertheless managed to enter parliament with fifty-nine seats, registering as the legislature's third largest political party.

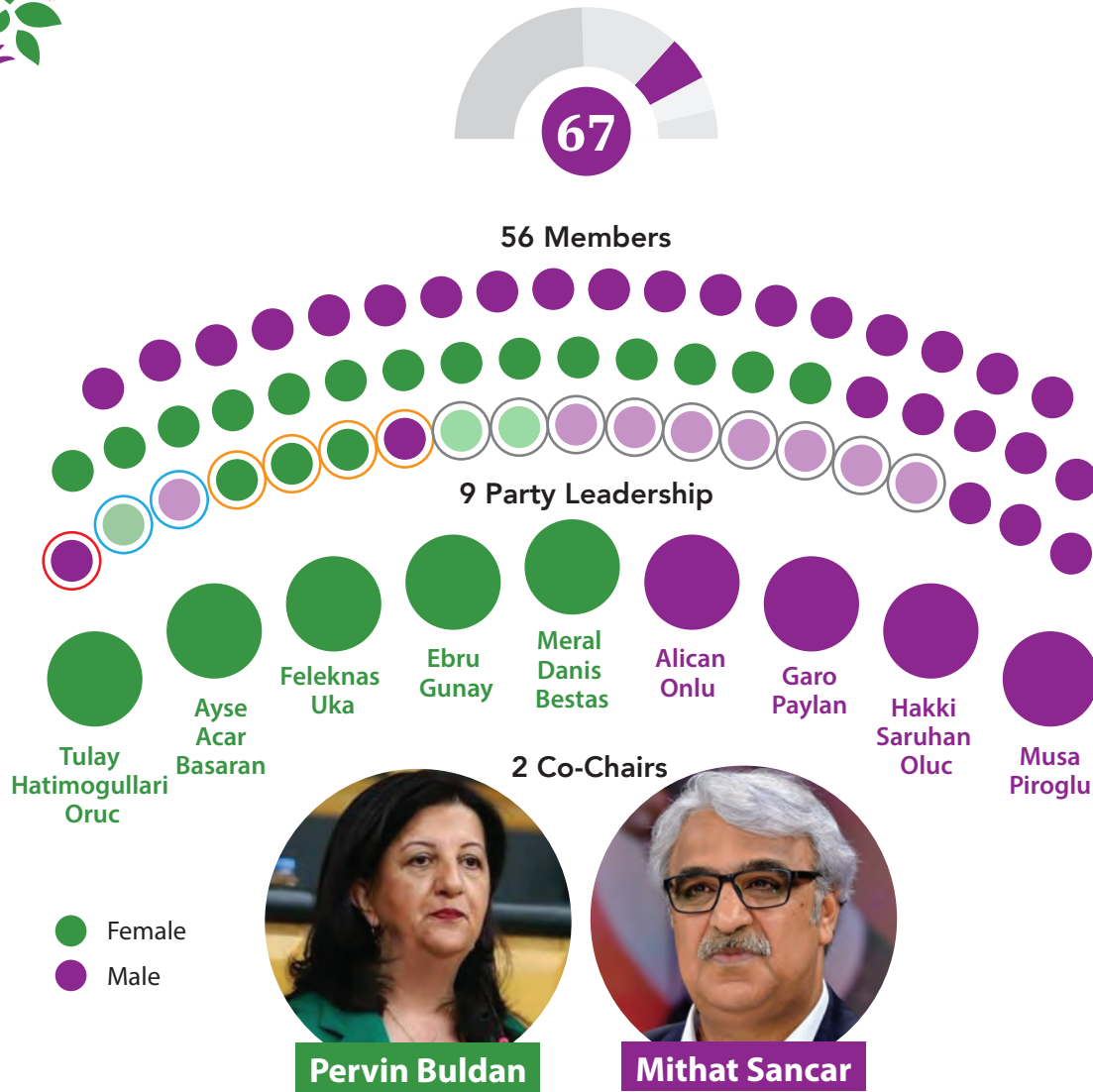
Demirtas—also a central figure in the failed effort to block then prime minister Erdogan from becoming an executive-style president—was subsequently arrested in 2016 on charges of “spreading propaganda for the PKK.” In the most recent elections, held in 2018, the HDP again received nearly 11 percent of the vote, gaining sixty-seven seats in the six hundred-member legislature and remaining the third largest political party. Since then, the HDP has borne the brunt of Erdogan's anti-opposition crackdown, with a significant number of legislators either arrested, losing parliamentary immunity, or under investigation by the authorities. The following chart summarizes the current legal and political status of HDP deputies in the Turkish parliament.

*Sources: Anadolu Agency, ANF News, Beyaz Gazete, Bianet, CNN Turk, Dogru Haber, Evrensel, Gazete Duvar, Haberler, Haberturk, HDP website, Halk TV, Human Rights Watch, Independent (Turkce), Medyascope, Milliyet, OneDio, Ozgur Denizli, Ozgur Manset, Rudaw, Secim Haberler, Sozcu, TRT Haber, T24*





# Legal and Political Status of HDP Members



## 1 Arrested, Released, and Reinstated



Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu

## 2 Arrested and Lost Parliamentary Immunity



Leyla Guven  
Musa Farisogullari

## 4 Under Investigation



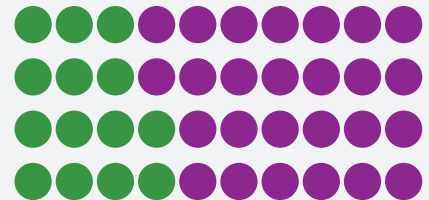
Remziye Tosun  
Ayşe Surucu  
Serpil Kemalbay Pekgozegu  
Berdan Ozturk

## 9 Left HDP for Other Reasons



Saliha Aydeniz  
Bedia Oztokce Ertan  
Tuma Celik  
Ahmet Sik  
Erkan Bas  
Adnan Selcuk Mizrakli  
Mensur Isik  
Ayhan Bilgen  
Baris Atay Mengulluoglu

## 40 Other HDP Members



Filiz Kerestecioglu Demir, Dirayet Tasdemir, Semra Guzel, Dersim Dag, Zuleyha Gulum, Dilsat Canbaz Kaya, Huda Kaya, Pero Dundar, Fatma Kurtulan, Sevin Coskun, Gulustan Kilic Kocyigit, Nuran Imir, Muazzez Orhan, Oya Ersoy, Kemal Pekoz, Abdullah Koc, Kemal Bulbul, Necdet Ipekyuz, Mehmet Rustu Tiryak, Erdal Aydemir, Mahmut Togrul, Hisyar Ozsoy, Imam Tascier, Mahmut Celadet Gaydali, Sait Dede, Habip Eksik, Erol Katircioglu, Ali Kenanoglu, Zeynel Ozen, Murat Cepni, Ridvan Turan, Sidik Tas, Nimetullah Erdogmus, Nusrettin Macin, Omer Ocalan, Huseyin Kacmaz, Hasan Oztugunes, Tayip Temel, Murat Sarisac, Sezai Temelli



# Arrested, Investigated, or Departed— An Inventory of HDP Politicians

## Arrested, Released, and Reinstated



**Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu**

Investigations targeting Gergerlioglu began in 2016, in response to his support for the peace process between the Turkish government and the PKK. In February 2018, before his parliamentary tenure began, he was sentenced to two and a half years in prison for “spreading terrorism propaganda.” Turkey’s top appeals court upheld his sentence in February 2021, and he kept his parliamentary immunity until March 2021. Later on, the Constitutional Court ruled that Gergerlioglu’s rights to “be elected and to engage in political activities” and to “personal liberty and security” had been violated. He was released July 6, 2021, and reinstated in parliament ten days later.

## Arrested and Lost Parliamentary Immunity



**Musa Farisogullari**

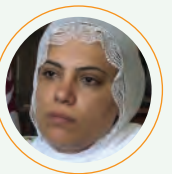
Sentenced to a six-year prison term in September 2019 in a broader case targeting the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK)—an umbrella organization that also includes the PKK—Farisogullari was spared arrest thanks to his parliamentary immunity. In June 2020, however, he was dismissed from parliament together with Leyla Guven, and the two were arrested on June 4, 2020, in Diyarbakir over alleged links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). This time, he received a nine-year sentence.



**Leyla Guven**

With her six-year, three-month prison sentence affirmed by the Turkish Supreme Court in September 2019, Guven—like her HDP colleague Musa Farisogullari—nevertheless avoided arrest because of her parliamentary immunity. As an MP, she supported HDP mayors who were dismissed from their posts. Also in 2019, during the Turkish incursion into northeast Syria, she used the rallying cry “Raise your voice against war in Rojava,” prompting the state to investigate her for “spreading terrorist propaganda” and “potential terrorist connections.” In June 2020, she was dismissed from parliament with Farisogullari and subsequently arrested based on her former conviction. In December of the same year, she was sentenced to over twenty-two years in prison on grounds that she encouraged and participated in demonstrations and allegedly belonged to an illegal organization that supported the PKK.

## Under Investigation



**Remziye Tosun**

In March 2020, the chief public prosecutor in Diyarbakir began investigating Tosun for allegedly “inciting the public to enmity and hatred.” In September 2020, she was sentenced to ten years in prison for “membership in a terrorist organization,” although she remains free pending an appeal. If the upper court upholds her conviction, her case will go before parliament, which will then vote on whether to lift her immunity.



**Serpil Kemalbay Pekgozegu**

On February 13, 2018, Kemalbay was arrested following the HDP party congress in Ankara, at which banners of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan were displayed, an illegal offense in Turkey. She was released a week later, but still faces charges of “spreading terrorist propaganda” and is prohibited from leaving the country.



**Ayşe Surucu**

In October 2016, Surucu was detained briefly over an investigation linking her to terrorist propaganda associated with a radio show appearance. She was released soon after on the condition that she not travel outside the country. In March 2019, Surucu was sentenced to more than twenty months in prison for participating in a protest then outlawed by Sanliurfa’s governor, a conviction her lawyer said she would appeal. Attempts to remove her parliamentary immunity failed in April 2020 and March 2021.



**Berdan Ozturk**

In 2016, an investigation was launched against Ozturk for his participation in a funeral for five PKK members; he was acquitted in May 2018. Since 2019, Ozturk has been under investigation for a statement he made concerning that year’s Turkish incursion into northeast Syria.



# Arrested, Investigated, or Departed— An Inventory of HDP Politicians

## Left HDP for Other Reasons

- **Tuma Celik**  
Celik resigned from the HDP on July 18, 2020, immediately following allegations that he sexually assaulted a woman during his campaign. Two days later, he was discharged from the party by its disciplinary board. In October 2020, his parliamentary immunity was lifted, subjecting him to a possible twelve-year prison sentence, but a lack of evidence prompted his acquittal in April 2021.
- **Ahmet Sik**  
Citing deep “structural” problems in the HDP, and charging that the party had joined the establishment and abandoned its democratic ideals, Sik handed in his resignation in April 2020; it became official the following month. Soon afterward, he joined the Workers’ Party of Turkey (TIP), a pro-leftist faction.
- **Erkan Bas**  
In 2018, Bas—along with his colleague Baris Atay Mengulluoglu—resigned from the HDP and joined the TIP.
- **Baris Atay Mengulluoglu**  
Along with Erkan Bas, he resigned from the HDP in 2018 and joined the TIP.
- **Adnan Selcuk Mizrakli**  
Elected to parliament in 2018, Mizrakli stepped down to become mayor of Diyarbakir in April 2019, but was deposed and detained on October 21, 2019, for allegedly belonging to a terrorist organization. A month after facing a second trial hearing in February 2020, he was sentenced to nine years, four months in prison for “membership in a terrorist organization.” He is one of twenty-three Turkish mayors currently in detention on charges of PKK ties.
- **Mensur Isik**  
Isik was suspended for two years by the HDP’s disciplinary committee over his alleged beating of his spouse.
- **Ayhan Bilgen**  
Elected to parliament in 2018, Bilgen stepped down to become mayor of Kars in April 2019. On September 25, 2020, he was detained together with several prominent HDP politicians over his involvement in the 2014 protests to support the Kurdish population of Kobane, Syria. In October 2020, he was transferred from detention to Ankara’s Sincan Prison. That same month, in a trial at which numerous journalists and others from the periodical *Ozgur Gundem* were accused of having PKK ties, Bilgen was found not guilty of terrorism-related charges, and in June 2021 he was released following a hearing related to the Kobane charges, but barred from international travel.
- **Saliha Aydeniz**  
In November 2019, Aydeniz resigned from the HDP and became co-chair of the similarly pro-Kurdish Democratic Regions Party (DBP).
- **Bedia Ozgokce Ertan**  
Elected to parliament in 2018, Ertan stepped down to become mayor of Van in April 2019, but along with others was dismissed from her position by the Interior Ministry in August 2019. That October, a judge accepted an indictment for Ertan, and said she would be prosecuted for belonging to “an armed terror organization.” Facing a prison term of thirty years, she currently lives in exile in Greece.