



MARCH  
2025

# Adıyaman, the “Ownerless City”: Story of a Political Emancipation

Giulia FOURNIER

4<sup>ifri</sup>  
since  
1979

The French Institute of International Relations (Ifri) is a research center and a forum for debate on major international political and economic issues. Headed by Thierry de Montbrial since its founding in 1979, Ifri is a non-governmental, non-profit foundation according to the decree of November 16, 2022. As an independent think tank, Ifri sets its own research agenda, publishing its findings regularly for a global audience.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach, Ifri brings together political and economic decision-makers, researchers and internationally renowned experts to animate its debate and research activities.

The opinions expressed in this text are the responsibility of the author alone.

ISBN: 979-10-373-1083-5

© All rights reserved, Ifri, 2025

Cover: Adiyaman, Turkey – January 2023: Adiyaman Clock Tower  
© yilmazharmanci/Shutterstock.com

**How to quote this publication:**

Giulia Fournier, “Adiyaman, the ‘Ownerless City’: Story of a Political Emancipation”, *Ifri Studies*, Ifri, March 2025.

**Ifri**

27 rue de la Procession 75740 Paris Cedex 15 – FRANCE

Tel. : +33 (0)1 40 61 60 00 – Fax : +33 (0)1 40 61 60 60

Email: [accueil@ifri.org](mailto:accueil@ifri.org)

**Website:** [ifri.org](http://ifri.org)

# Author

Graduated from the master's program "Integration and Transformations in the Mediterranean and the Middle East" at the Grenoble Institute of Political Studies, **Giulia Fournier** is now a doctoral student at Cerdap2 (Center for Studies and Research on Diplomacy, Public Administration, and Politics) affiliated with the Grenoble IEP. Her thesis work focuses on minority issues, particularly Kurdish, between Turkey and Syria.

# Executive summary

Over the past two years, the city of Adıyaman has made headlines for two major reasons: first, its devastation by the earthquake of February 6, 2023, which struck between Turkey and Syria, and second, its significant political shift following the municipal elections of March 31, 2024. The election of a candidate from the Republican People's Party (CHP) is unprecedented after 47 years of conservative dominance and 20 years of governance by the Justice and Development Party (AKP). This shift can be partially explained by a protest vote against a central government perceived as neglectful in the aftermath of the earthquake.

The election of this new mayor, in the context of intense political competition at the local level in Turkey and under challenging post-disaster conditions, represents both a challenge for the new municipal leadership and a source of hope for the population. After the traumatic experience of the earthquake, residents aspire to see their city rebuilt and opened to the world. Tourism, arguably the greatest hope for this transformation, is expected to play a key role in this process. The province of Adıyaman possesses an invaluable cultural and historical heritage, shaped by its position at the crossroads of civilizations, religions, and cultures. This rich legacy has the potential to drive economic recovery and foster greater international engagement.

# Résumé

La ville d'Adiyaman a fait les grands titres ces deux dernières années en raison d'une part de sa dévastation par le séisme du 6 février 2023 entre la Turquie et la Syrie et d'autre part de son tournant politique partisan après le scrutin municipal du 31 mars 2024. Si l'élection d'un candidat du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP) est inédite après 47 ans de domination conservatrice et vingt ans de gouvernance par le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) sur la ville, elle s'explique partiellement par l'utilisation d'un vote-sanction à l'égard d'un État central négligeant au moment du tremblement de terre.

L'élection de ce maire, dans un contexte partisan très compétitif au niveau local en Turquie ainsi que dans des conditions dégradées après la catastrophe, constitue tant un défi pour les nouvelles figures municipales qu'un grand espoir pour la population qui souhaite, après l'épisode traumatique du séisme, voir sa ville se reconstruire et s'ouvrir sur le monde. Le tourisme, probablement le plus grand espoir énoncé, devrait contribuer à cette ouverture dans la mesure où la province d'Adiyaman dispose d'une richesse patrimoniale inestimable en raison de son histoire à la croisée entre les peuples, les religions et les cultures.

# Table of contents

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ADIYAMAN, "CITY OF PEACE AND HAPPINESS": THE IDEAL OF THE PEACEFUL MARGIN .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Adiyaman's official narrative .....	9
Historic minorities, excluded from history .....	11
<b>THE "ADIYAMAN MODEL": LOYALTY AND DEPENDENCE.....</b>	<b>14</b>
A province created by the Democrat Party in 1954: Political strategy and the promise of economic development .....	15
Adiyaman's economic disappointments .....	17
A conservative <i>metroköy</i> .....	21
<b>THE BREAKDOWN OF THE "ADIYAMAN MODEL" .....</b>	<b>25</b>
The earthquake and the breakdown of the "Adiyaman model" .....	25
The CHP takes control of Adiyaman: A "social" and "productive" roadmap .....	29
Opening up Adiyaman: " <i>Tarım, tekstil, turizm</i> " .....	31
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>35</b>

# Introduction

Adıyaman, a city of two hundred thousand people in Southeastern Anatolia (*Güneydoğu Anadolu*),<sup>1</sup> has made headlines in Turkey several times since the devastating earthquake of February 6, 2023. The disaster destroyed much of its center, killing several thousand.<sup>2</sup> But it was above all the political consequences of the *deprem* that put Adıyaman in the spotlight in 2024. The city had long been viewed as a marginal, conservative region, and since 2004 had been a stronghold of the Justice and Development Party (AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*). In the municipal election of March 31, 2024, however, it elected Abdurrahman Tutdere of the Republican People's Party (CHP, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) as its mayor.<sup>3</sup> This was a major and unexpected victory for the CHP in its return to local politics—particularly in rural areas, where the AKP often wins a majority—and represented a direct response to the breakdown of the system of reciprocity between the AKP state and marginal regions loyal to it. The state's culpable neglect after the earthquake revealed longstanding dysfunction, and highlighted how isolated and marginalized both the city and province of Adıyaman had become in recent decades.

We will examine Adıyaman's position as a marginal city, but a politically useful one for the Turkish state, embodying the ideal of the peaceful, loyalist, republican fringe region—a legacy that has, counterintuitively, enabled the AKP to succeed at the local level since 2004.<sup>4</sup> March 31, 2024, marked a turning point in the city's political trajectory, reflecting a movement away from the role of neglected loyalist city and an attempt to reconnect with national and international dynamics.

Beyond the party-political disruption that followed the earthquake, Adıyaman is of interest to researchers who study minority issues in Turkey. The region's ethnic and religious make-up is distinctive: throughout its history it has been a crossroads, with many diverse ethnicities and faiths intersecting, coexisting, and competing, sometimes coming close to disappearing altogether. We will return to this history, which has largely been forgotten in present-day Adıyaman. The city's current reputation

---

1. "Tematik Haritalar - Coğrafi İstatistik Portalı," *Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu* (TÜİK), available at: <https://cip.tuik.gov.tr>.

2. Estimates of the number of people who died in the earthquake range from the official figure of 11,000 to local estimates of 80,000 given by residents in May 2024.

3. The last municipal election took place on March 31, 2024. Although the AKP won as expected, the CHP claimed back several major cities nationwide, as well as smaller towns in Anatolia and on the Black Sea, becoming the leading party at the municipal level, with 37.77% of the national vote compared with 35.49% for the AKP.

4. The city was governed by AKP candidates for twenty years, from 2004 to 2024.

is based instead on three essential features: its Kurdishness, the prominence of religious brotherhoods, and a brief outbreak of radical Islamism. The city’s Kurdish identity provides a fascinating point of entry, for unlike other majority cities in Southeastern Anatolia, Adiyaman is not characterized by Kurdish militancy hostile to the Turkish state.<sup>5</sup> The presence of the *tarikât* (religious brotherhoods) fuels rumors: there are large numbers of Alevis, although a precise number is hard to come by, and it is similarly difficult to assess the real influence on local society and politics of the *Menzil*, a Sufi brotherhood of the *Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya* order named after a nearby town.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Adiyaman received media attention in 2015 when the Islamic State in Syria set up a recruiting network in the city.<sup>7</sup> Physical and symbolic manifestations of religious, ethnic, and partisan affiliations reveal power relationships and points of stability that explain both Adiyaman’s marginality and its silent integration into the vertical, centralized system of classic Turkish republicanism.

---

5. Gilles Dorronsoro writes that, in the case of Turkey’s Kurds, “the link between identity/identities and political behavior is anything but automatic” (p. 9). We might intuitively expect a marginalized population to directly oppose the state, but the case of Adiyaman shows that this instinct is often unjustified, and makes it difficult to perceive the range of political behaviors underlying Kurdish identity, or even multiple Kurdish identities. See G. Dorronsoro, “Introduction générale: la gouvernamentalité kurde,” in G. Dorronsoro (ed.), *Le Gouvernement des Kurdes: Gouvernement partisan et ordres sociaux alternatifs*, Paris: Karthala, 2023, pp. 7–28.

6. One interview subject described Adiyaman as one of Islam’s holy places because of the Menzil’s real or imagined importance to the city. Interview by the author, October 2024, Adiyaman.

7. The author raised the subject during an interview. While it is true that some young people in Adiyaman were recruited by the Islamic State, the interview subject claimed that the group was no larger than five. Interview by the author, October 2024, Adiyaman. See also M. Jégo, “À Adiyaman, vivier de l’État islamique en Turquie,” *Le Monde*, October 21, 2015, available at: [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr).



# Adıyaman, “city of peace and happiness”: The ideal of the peaceful margin

The city of Adıyaman is “a gateway to Southeastern Anatolia and the Middle East.”<sup>8</sup> It is a marginal region, ethnically, religiously, and linguistically, with a diverse history revealed through its main heritage sites. Its history—officially controlled and at the same time incomplete—is that of a buffer zone lying at the intersection of great empires: the Hittites, the Seleucids, Commagene, the Eastern Roman Empire, the Umayyads, the Abbasids, the Hamdanids, the Byzantine Empire, the Seljuks, the Beylik of Dulkadir, the Mongols, and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>9</sup> Modern-day Adıyaman is inhabited by Kurds and Turks, Alevis and Sunnis, and some Syriacs and Armenians, who are quick to state their identities and whose peaceful coexistence is reflected in a slogan one encounters frequently in the city,<sup>10</sup> and which has a dedicated monument: the City of Peace and Happiness (*Huzur ve Barış Şehri*).

In reality, Adıyaman’s history remains centrally managed and only sparsely detailed outside Turkey’s grand national narrative. Interwoven in this national story are fragments of minority and community histories. But their limited presence in the discourse of the city’s most prominent figures perhaps reflects how incomplete they are. The society of the past is an occasional background presence, not least in the physical traces that remain, but the historical substance of minority lives comes up only rarely or indirectly in conversation during field visits.<sup>11</sup> Because we lack access to oral histories in the private sphere, we cannot firmly describe the failure to integrate minority histories into the present social narrative as collective amnesia. Still, this failure seems to have facilitated the famously peaceful coexistence between Adıyaman’s communities, the identities of which have blurred together.

---

8. Quote from an interview with the mayor of Adıyaman, Abdurrahman Tutdere, by the author, May 2024, Adıyaman.

9. For a chronology of the city’s successive rulers, see the Adıyaman prefecture website. “Adıyaman Tarihi,” “Adıyaman Kronolojisi,” T.C. Adıyaman Valiliği, available at: [www.Adıyaman.gov.tr](http://www.Adıyaman.gov.tr).

10. One of our interview subjects was very fond of the slogan, claiming the city was unaffected by intercommunal conflicts. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adıyaman.

11. Étienne Copeaux recalls the bewilderment of some of his Turkish interviewees when confronting apparently non-Turkish monuments like churches which are ignored by national narratives. É. Copeaux, *Espaces et temps de la nation turque*, Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1997, available at: <https://books-openedition-org.fr>.

## Adıyaman’s official narrative

The Ottomans conquered Adıyaman in 1516 under Selim I, and it subsequently remained under undisputed Ottoman control. It bore the name of Hısnımansur until 1928. The region was part of Kahramanmaraş between 1563 and 1849, when it became part of Diyarbakır. In 1859 it was attached to Malatya, and then in 1883 to Harput, before once again becoming part of Malatya between 1923 and 1954. Until that point, it was treated as an outlying part of these larger neighboring cities.

During the birth of the Republic, the literature on Hısnımansur treated it as a remote region used by Atatürk’s Anatolian liberation troops.<sup>12</sup> Following the Armistice of Mudros on October 30, 1918, the Ottoman Empire was dismembered by the Treaty of Sèvres on August 10, 1920. This led to a period of chronic instability in southern Anatolia: French troops were stationed along the entire Turkish-Syrian border and had control of Cilicia, while Greek troops occupied the area around Smyrna (İzmir), the British controlled Mesopotamia, and the Italians occupied Antalya and the Dodecanese. The larger cities around Hısnımansur were occupied, with the British taking control of Gaziantep in December 1918. They were succeeded by the French, who remained until December 1921.<sup>13</sup> During this period, Hısnımansur offered shelter to Kemalist troops led chiefly by Hacı Bedir Ağa, a wealthy Kurdish landowner from Koluk (Kâhta).<sup>14</sup> Under his command, around 1,700 men from Hısnımansur, Samsat, and Kâhta took part in the fighting at Gaziantep.<sup>15</sup> A friend of Atatürk and İsmet İnönü,<sup>16</sup> Hacı Bedir Ağa went on to serve three terms in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) as deputy for Malatya, despite being illiterate.<sup>17</sup> His family background illustrates the fractures running through rural Anatolia in the 1920s. Some of his family—including his brother Zeynel Ağa and his son-in-law Şükrü Ağa—took part in the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925,<sup>18</sup> the first

12. H. Doğan, “Milli Mücadelede Adıyaman ve Çevresi,” *Gaziantep Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Niğde Üniversitesi, 2012, pp. 555–585, available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr>.

13. M. Can, “Antep’in İşgali ve Kurtuluşu,” in *Milli Mücadele’nin Yerel Tarihi 1918–1923*, Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi, available at: [www.tuba.gov.tr](http://www.tuba.gov.tr).

14. Hacı Bedir Ağa was a prominent Kurdish landowner from Kâhta and head of the Zürevkan branch of the Kurdish Rişvan tribe. He remains famous for defending neighboring towns from Western powers, notably Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, and Kahramanmaraş, with a small group of devoted troops. See M. Gündüz, “Hacı Bedir Ağa’nın Milli Mücadeledeki Rolü ve Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi’ndeki Faaliyetleri,” *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, Vol. 35, No. 100, November 2019, p. 415–448, available at: <https://atamdergi.gov.tr>; H. Doğan, “Milli Mücadelede Adıyaman ve Çevresi,” op. cit.

15. M. Gündüz, “Hacı Bedir Ağa’nın Milli Mücadeledeki Rolü ve Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi’ndeki Faaliyetleri,” op. cit.

16. İsmet İnönü, a key figure in the transition to the Republic, became its second President after the death of Atatürk. He was president until 1950, by which time the Turkish political scene was dominated by the Democrat Party (DP).

17. M. Gündüz, “Hacı Bedir Ağa’nın Milli Mücadeledeki Rolü ve Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi’ndeki Faaliyetleri,” op. cit.

18. Ibid.

large-scale Kurdish revolt,<sup>19</sup> which heavily influenced the nascent Kemalist state’s policies towards Anatolia. Simultaneously, Hısnımansur is presented in official narratives as a city that resisted Kurdish and Armenian separatism in the 1920s,<sup>20</sup> demonstrating its early loyalty to the Republic. Hacı Bedir Ağa in particular emerges as a historic figure, firmly opposing Kurdish independence as Turkey’s southeast took shape.<sup>21</sup>

Atatürk’s reconquest and stabilization of Anatolia led to the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923. The Turkish Constitution of 1924 confirmed the jurisdictional link between Hısnımansur and Malatya: the city became a district of Malatya province, as did Akçadağ and Kâhta. The district of Besni had been attached to Gaziantep Province in 1926 for the sake of geographical coherence but was reallocated to Malatya in 1933, against the wishes of the population.<sup>22</sup> In 1927, there were 265 villages (*köyler*, singular *köy*) in the district of Hısnımansur. Following an official policy of Turkifying toponyms, its name was changed from Hısnımansur<sup>23</sup> to Adıyaman<sup>24</sup> on December 28, 1928.<sup>25</sup> Kerem Öktem estimates that 68% of toponyms in the province—generally of Armenian, Kurdish or Arabic origin—were changed in this period.<sup>26</sup>

The simplification of Adıyaman’s history, presenting it a city wholly caught up in its support for Atatürk’s national campaign, is characteristic of the sacralization of Anatolia in Kemalist historiography.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the practice of Turkifying toponyms shows how traces of minority heritage have been left out of the Turkish national narrative. The lack of written resources, and the concealment of expressions of minority identity in public spaces,

19. The Sheik Said rebellion (1925) is seen as the first major Kurdish revolt in the history of the Turkish Republic. It was a direct reaction by the *tarikats* (generally Sufi brotherhoods) to the process of secularization which began with the abolition of the caliphate in 1924. It ended with the execution of its leader on June 29, 1925.

20. S. Vakkas Toprak, “1835 tarihli nüfus sayımına göre XIX. yüzyılın ilk yarısında Hısnımansur (Adıyaman),” *Adıyaman Üniversitesi Yayınları*, 2018.

21. The Treaty of Sèvres (1920), which broke apart the Ottoman Empire, contained provisions for an independent Kurdish state consisting of the Kurdish regions of southeast Turkey. These were undermined by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which gave the eastern territories of present-day Turkey to the new republic (with the exception of Hatay, which became Turkish in 1936).

22 S. Vakkas Toprak, “1835 tarihli nüfus sayımına göre XIX,” op. cit.

23. There are many theories about the origin of the name Hısnımansur, none of them definitive. It may come from the Arabic “Hisn el-Mansur” (Mansur’s castle), after the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mansur (714–775). See R. Arslan, “XIX Yüzyılda Adıyaman’da Sosyo-Ekonomik Yapı,” *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, no. 26, April 2010, available at: <https://scholar.google.fr>.

24. The name “Adıyaman” existed before the city was officially renamed, and is mentioned in the writings of William Francis Ainsworth, a British surgeon, traveler, geographer, and author who visited the region in 1838–1839. While the Ottoman authorities used “Hısnımansur,” “Adıyaman” was already in use locally. Some sources claim that “Adıyaman” refers to a local legend of the “Yedi Yaman” (Seven Tough Men), a brotherhood of seven men who rebelled against their pagan father in Commagene times.

25. S. Vakkas Toprak, “1835 tarihli nüfus sayımına göre XIX,” op. cit.

26. K. Öktem, “The Nation’s Imprint: Demographic Engineering and the Change of Toponyms in Republican Turkey,” *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, No. 7, 2008, available at: <https://journals-openedition-org.fr>.

27. É. Copeaux, “Chapitre VIII: Sous la Turquie, l’Anatolie,” in *Espaces et temps de la nation turque*, Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1997, available at: <https://books-openedition-org.fr>.

mean that the work of tracing minority stories in Adıyaman which offer alternatives to the grand national narrative is still ongoing.

## Historic minorities, excluded from history

Behind this administered history lie minority histories whose physical traces represent modern-day Adıyaman’s main heritage sites. Commagene, a Hellenistic kingdom founded in 163 B.C. with Samosata (modern-day Samsat) as its capital, is often included in the broader history of Adıyaman, and the *Hierotheriesion*—a tomb and temple on Mount Nemrut (*Nemrut Dağı*)<sup>28</sup> to Antiochos I of Commagene—is one of the province’s most economically important historic sites. The necropolis of Perrhe is another key Commagene site, like Samosata, but was submerged during the construction of Lake Atatürk. Commagene was Christianized during the Roman conquests of 64 BC, but the historiography of Adıyaman does not directly address these Christian aspects of its past. The region was Islamized in the seventh century, but retains traces of earlier cultures and religions. Much like the rest of Southeastern Anatolia (*Güneydoğu Anadolu Bölgesi*), Adıyaman province is an area of minority communities, inhabited in the past and present by Kurds, Alevis, and Christians, particularly Syriacs and Armenians, whose histories can be traced to varying degrees.

In the nineteenth century, the city of Hınımınsur had four non-Muslim schools, all Christian: the Armenian church (*Ermeni Kilisesi*) had 72 pupils, the Protestant church (*Köprülü Protestan*) had 20, the Catholic church (*Paşapınarı Katolik*) had 18, and the Syriac church (*Süryani Kilisesi*) had 15.<sup>29</sup> Before 1914, 5,202 Armenians lived in the 21 Armenian localities within the *kaza* of Hınımınsur.<sup>30</sup> In 1915, the city became a transit area for deported Armenians,<sup>31</sup> with the men being executed and the remainder moved outside the city center. The eradication or flight<sup>32</sup> of most of the Armenian community during and after 1915 has left its mark on the city’s demographics, although a few Armenian and Orthodox Christian families remain. They usually worship alongside Syriac families, with 150 families attending the Mor Petrus and Mor Pavlus Syriac church. The church was renovated between 2010 and 2011,<sup>33</sup> a sign of the AKP’s openness towards

28. The Hierotheriesion is a tomb and temple to Antiochos I (69–34 BC). See the UNESCO page on Nemrut Dağı, available at: <https://whc.unesco.org>.

29. R. Arslan, “XIX Yüzyılda Adıyaman’da Sosyo-Ekonomik Yapı,” Dumlupınar Üniversitesi, *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, No. 26, April 2010, available at: <https://scholar.google.fr>.

30. “7. Déportations et massacres dans le vilayet de Harpout/Mamuret ul-Aziz,” in R. H. Kévorkian, *Le Génocide des Arméniens*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 2006, pp. 469–532, available at: [www.shs.cairn.info](http://www.shs.cairn.info).

31. Ibid.

32. Missak Manouchian fled the small town of Adıyaman for France at the age of 16 after his family was killed in the Armenian genocide.

33. This Syriac church, built in 1701, is linked to Metropolitan Mor Grigoriyos Melki Ürek, one of Turkey’s four metropolitans. See O. Pehlül, “Séismes en Türkiye: L’église syriaque d’Adıyaman fortement endommagée,” Anadolu Ajansı, February 28, 2023, available at: [www.aa.com.tr](http://www.aa.com.tr).

non-Muslim communities after it took office in 2002. While this gesture reassured Christian communities of their freedom to meet and worship, it also blurred their identities, denying the Armenian community a symbolic existence and confirming the Syrians as the main symbolic reference for Christianity in the region.<sup>34</sup>

Such blurring, when the history of these communities is incomplete, helps explain a distinctive feature of contemporary Adiyaman, one that is viewed very positively: the apparent absence of any instrumentalization of community, ethnic or religious affiliations for political ends. The example of the Alevis illustrates this. The city is home to a large Alevi community, which some sources estimate at 30% of the population,<sup>35</sup> as well as two *cemevi*. Nonetheless, the Unity Party (*Birlik Partisi*, BP), a left-wing party focused on Alevi rights, failed to gain a foothold either in the city or at the national level. Adiyaman was one of 29 provinces (of a total of 67) where the BP put forward candidates in the 1969 parliamentary elections, winning only 0.7% of the vote. The failure of identity-based politics in the region echoes Adiyaman’s religious flexibility. Those who attend *cemevi* emphasize the flexibility and social porosity of Alevi and Sunni communities: it is easy to convert, and intermarriage between the two groups is common.<sup>36</sup>

Present-day Adiyaman is also a predominantly Kurdish city, with some residents claiming that 80% of the population is Kurdish, a figure that cannot be verified.<sup>37</sup> References to Kurdishness are commonplace: Kurdish words (*kurmandji*) are used frequently in conversation, and people readily describe themselves as Kurds. But this identity is not associated with political opposition to the Turkish state, and pro-Kurdish militancy, prominent in other parts of south-eastern Anatolia, is apparently less prevalent in Adiyaman.<sup>38</sup> As an example, while the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK) was a sporadic presence in Adiyaman in the 1990s, it failed to gain a strong or lasting foothold.<sup>39</sup> While there are pro-Kurdish parties in the region, they do not pursue antagonistic, revolutionary programs and do not attract many voters. The Peoples’ Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP) did well at the national level in the June 2015 legislative election, and won 22.6% of the vote in Adiyaman, which was likely won over by its popular leader, Selahattin Demirtaş.<sup>40</sup> With this

34. Many of the surviving Armenians in the province chose to convert to Sunni Islam, but a large number returned to Christianity in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in a period of relatively good relations between the state and Christian communities. See L. Ritter and M. Sivalsian, “Les restes de l’épée: les arméniens cachés et islamisés de Turquie,” Marseille: Thaddée, 2012.

35. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adiyaman.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid. Since Turkey does not keep ethnic statistics, this number is simply a statement asserting the respondent’s identity. The important thing to note is that such identity claims are separate from any particular political position.

38. See footnote 6.

39. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adiyaman.

40. The result was low when compared to the party’s scores in the rest of the region for the 2015 legislative election: the HDP obtained 77.7% of the vote in Diyarbakır, 72.1% in Mardin, and 38.1% in Şanlıurfa.

exception, successive Kurdish parties have failed to find significant support in the city. The DEM, a direct successor to the HDP, is very much a minority in Adiyaman. It generally adopts a progressive left-wing agenda during elections, focusing especially on purchasing power, without engaging in earnest with those issues of identity which are heavily exploited in elections in other eastern provinces of Southeastern Anatolia. As one interview subject joked, “round here they [the Turkish state] have managed to invent the right-wing Kurd.”<sup>41</sup>

Adiyaman’s historical ambivalence—the coexistence of historical narratives, their compartmentalization, and the lack of mutual understanding—hinders public expressions of minority identity. While the history department at Adiyaman University studies these historical issues, minority or otherwise, in their local context, they remain a marginal topic for scholars. As a result, these multiple histories have not been instrumentalized or used as the basis for present-day political goals. Belonging to a community has become a marker of tradition, a form of social intimacy, rather than a source of political commitment. This peaceful coexistence between communities has been favorable to conservative parties, ensuring Adiyaman’s political loyalty particularly after it became provincial capital in 1954.

---

41. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adiyaman.



# The “Adıyaman model”: Loyalty and dependence

When the *Demokrat Parti* (DP) created Adıyaman province in 1954, a process that was highly politicized, hopes were high for local economic development. While the state initiated a number of initiatives to boost activity at the provincial level from the 1950s to the 1980s, they were never very successful.<sup>42</sup> The launch of the Southeastern Anatolia Project (*Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi*, GAP) in 1977 promised to inject new energy into the province’s economy and to improve the socio-economic conditions of its population. Once again, however, the economic development its neighbors enjoyed bypassed Adıyaman. The impact of the anti-PKK security measures put in place in 1991 has weighed on Southeastern Anatolia, making it unattractive to investors and tourists alike. Unlike its neighbors, Adıyaman has not recovered from this period of instability and isolation, instead becoming a *metroköy*<sup>43</sup> (city-village). The AKP took control of the local government in 2004, having campaigned on a platform of local development (*yerel kalkınma*), but it too failed to open up the city. This has led to the “Adıyaman model,” where both the city and province form a peaceful, conservative region on the nation’s margins, loyal to the state and economically dependent on it.

---

42. Economic activity in the Adıyaman region in the nineteenth century was mainly focused on agriculture and livestock breeding. The consumers for these products were primarily local, and trade was largely contained within the empire. “XIX. Yüzyılda Adıyaman’da buğday (...), arpa, pamuk, pirinç, mercimek, nohut, bakla, küşne, darı (...), soğan, sarımsak, fasulye, patates gibi tarım ürünleri yetiştirilmiştir. (...) bir belgede Adıyaman ve çevresinde çok miktarda bağ ve bahçenin olduğu kaydedilmektedir. Bu bağ ve bahçelerde kayısı, dut, elma, armut, erik, kızılçık, şeftali, kavun, karpuz ve nar yetiştirildiği bilinmektedir.” [Agricultural products like wheat (...), barley, cotton, rice, lentils, chickpeas, broad beans, *küşne*, millet (...), onions, garlic, beans, and potatoes were all cultivated in Adıyaman in the nineteenth century. (...) One document states that Adıyaman and the surrounding area had a large number of vineyards and gardens. We know that apricots, blackberries, apples, pears, plums, cranberries, peaches, melons, watermelons and pomegranates were grown in these vineyards and gardens.] Tobacco (*tütün*) was also produced in the region. It was taxed by the Ottoman authorities, provided them with substantial income. See R. Arslan, “XIX Yüzyılda Adıyaman’da Sosyo-Ekonomik Yapı,” *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 26, April 2010, available at: <https://scholar.google.fr>.

43. The word was used by a subject during an interview, October 2024, Adıyaman.

## A province created by the Democrat Party in 1954: Political strategy and the promise of economic development

The city of Adıyaman was split off from Malatya and promoted to provincial capital by Law no. 6418 of December 1, 1954.<sup>44</sup> This separation—defended in the Grand National Assembly by deputies of the Democrat Party<sup>45</sup>—was initially justified on the basis of geographical, economic, social, and cultural coherence.<sup>46</sup> The Anti-Taurus Mountains run through the region, and connections between Adıyaman and its surrounding villages on the one hand, and Malatya on the other, are hampered by the rugged terrain and mount climate, particularly in winter.<sup>47</sup> These geographical and climate conditions had long been a stumbling block to economic development, and Nanuk Gedik, Minister of the Interior to Adnan Menderes between 1954 and 1960, argued that splitting Adıyaman off from Malatya would promote growth.<sup>48</sup> Simultaneously, by elevating Adıyaman to provincial capital, the state and local populations would be able to collaborate more easily on the region’s economic and social development.<sup>49</sup> Thanks to the promise of economic development, the decision to divide the two cities won widespread local support<sup>50</sup>: “*Ayrıca vilayet olacak Adıyaman’da ‘işsiz ve monoton hayat’ bitecektir, ‘kültürsüz Adıyaman’ kültüre, ‘yolsuz Adıyaman’ yola, ‘dertli Adıyaman’ şifaya kavuşacaktır*” (Furthermore, “monotonous and jobless existence” will come to an end in Adıyaman, “uncultivated Adıyaman” will have culture, “roadless Adıyaman” will have roads, and “troubled Adıyaman” will be healed).<sup>51</sup> When Besni objected to being made part of the new province of Adıyaman for administrative and jurisdictional purposes, the DP government and deputies promise to build a road between the two cities,<sup>52</sup> simultaneously ensuring improved connectivity for Adıyaman.<sup>53</sup>

44. Archive videos from the General Directorate of Press, Publications, and Tourism (*Basın—Yayın—Turizm Genel Müdürlüğü*) are available online, offering a visual retrospective of the commemorations of December 1, 1954. See “Adıyaman İl Oluşu 1954” [The formation of the province of Adıyaman, 1954], Besni Yenibakış Gazetesi, YouTube, available at: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

45. The Democrat Party (DP) is a right-wing conservative party founded in 1946. With its victory in the 1950 legislative election, it became the first party in the Republic’s history to win an election against the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP). The creation of the DP and its victory in the parliamentary elections of 1950 marked the beginning of a multi-party system in Turkey.

46. A. Gülen, “Demokrat Parti Döneminde Adıyaman Vilayetine Kuruluşuna Dair Bir Tartışma,” *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, Vol. 104, 2021, pp. 357–382, available at: [www.dergipark.org.tr](http://www.dergipark.org.tr).

47. S. Vakkas Toprak, “1835 tarihli nüfus sayımına göre XIX,” op. cit.

48. Ibid.

49. A. Gülen, “Demokrat Parti Döneminde Adıyaman Vilayetine Kuruluşuna Dair Bir Tartışma,” op. cit.

50. M. Gündüz, “Adıyaman Kazasının Vilayet Olması ve Bu Süreçte Yaşanan Gelişmeler,” *Kent Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol. 10, No. 28, 2019, pp. 1230–1254, available at: [www.dergipark.org.tr](http://www.dergipark.org.tr).

51. A. Gülen, “Demokrat Parti Döneminde Adıyaman Vilayetine Kuruluşuna Dair Bir Tartışma,” op. cit.

52. Ibid.

53. S. Vakkas Toprak, “1835 tarihli nüfus sayımına göre XIX,” op. cit.



The decision to separate Adıyaman and Malatya also reflects a political strategy that anchored the DP at the local level, enabling the party to monopolize Turkish politics for a decade.<sup>54</sup> During the campaign for the parliamentary elections on May 2, 1954, Refik Koraltan, a DP member and president of the TBMM, gave a speech in Adıyaman in which he promised to make the city a provincial capital.<sup>55</sup> Prior to this, Koraltan is understood to have hinted that, if Adıyaman voted for the DP, it would become a province in its own right as a reward: “*Eğer seçimlerde bütün Adıyamanlılar reylerini DP[']ye verir ve Halk partisine bir rey dahi vermezlerse seçimlerden sonra Adıyaman[']ın vilayet olması mukadderdir*” (If the Adıyamanlı vote for the DP in the elections and don’t give a single vote to the Republican People’s Party, Adıyaman is destined to become a province after the elections).<sup>56</sup> Uniting Malatya and Adıyaman as a single administrative unit had always been favorable to the CHP, which has a loyal base in Malatya, and has disadvantaged the DP’s supporters in Adıyaman. With the division of the two cities and the creation of Adıyaman province, this pro-DP vote became a force in parliamentary elections. In the contest which took place<sup>57</sup> after the two cities were divided, on October 27, 1957,<sup>58</sup> the DP won all five seats in Adıyaman province, while the CHP won all nine seats in Malatya.<sup>59</sup> Support by the DP government and deputies for splitting Adıyaman off from Malatya might have been a reward to Adıyaman for its loyalty, but it was also part of a political strategy to optimize the electoral map in the party’s favor. The elevation of Adıyaman to provincial capital was part of the DP’s strategy to entrench loyalty in marginal regions, in exchange for promises of economic prosperity at the provincial level.

Adıyaman province was subsequently enlarged as a series of districts were grafted onto it: Gölbaşı in 1958, Samsat in 1960, Tut in 1990, and Sincik in 1991. Today it has eight districts (*ilçeler*, singular *ilçe*).<sup>60</sup>

The province is characterized by its loyalism, but also by its dependence on the state for economic development. While there were prominent attempts at centralized economic planning to encourage provincial development in the second half of the twentieth century, they stumbled in the face of successive failures and persistent isolation.

54. The DP led Turkey from 1950 to 1960. It was overthrown on May 27, 1960, by a military coup planned by Cemal Gürsel and other army officers. In the wake of the coup, a number of political figures from the DP were tried in military tribunals, including Adnan Menderes, who was executed on the island of İmralı on September 17, 1961.

55. A. Gülen, “Demokrat Parti Döneminde Adıyaman Vilayetine Kuruluşuna Dair Bir Tartışma,” op. cit.

56. Ibid.

57. Legislative elections results, 1946–1957: in 1946, the CHP won all 12 seats for Malatya Province; in 1950, it won all 11 seats; in 1954, it won all 12 seats; in 1957, it won all 9 seats, while the DP won all 5 seats in Adıyaman province.

58. For election results, see the online newspaper Yeni Şafak: [www.yenisafak.com](http://www.yenisafak.com). There are some inaccuracies, particularly regarding the exact dates of the polls. For these, see the website of the Higher Electoral Council (Yüksek Seçim Kurulu, YSK): [www.ysk.gov.tr](http://www.ysk.gov.tr).

59. S. Vakkas Toprak, “1835 tarihli nüfus sayımına göre XIX,” op. cit.

60. “Adıyaman Tarihi,” T.C. Adıyaman Valiliği, available at: [www.Adıyaman.gov.tr](http://www.Adıyaman.gov.tr).

## Adiyaman’s economic disappointments

### *Adiyaman and Turkey’s planned economy*

The promises of economic development the DP made in the 1950s did not turn Adiyaman into a major economic hub during the second half of the twentieth century. Until the 1980s, Turkey’s economy was planned. Monopolistic state-owned enterprises like Sümerbank played a predominant role, with subsidiaries dedicated to economic development in low-growth regions. Manufacturing came to Adiyaman in 1967 with the establishment by Sümerbank of a cotton ginning and spinning plant (*pamuk*), the Sümerbank Adiyaman Pamuklu Dokuma Sanayii Müessesesi.<sup>61</sup> By 1985, this employed 779 workers and 52 civil servants.<sup>62</sup> A cement plant and a milk factory opened in the 1970s.<sup>63</sup> However, industrial activity in Adiyaman remained very modest, with agriculture still the main source of income for the population. Monoculture tobacco production (*tütün*) took on a significant role in the local economy in the 1970s. Crops were purchased in part by Tekel,<sup>64</sup> a semi-public monopoly in the tobacco and alcoholic beverages sector, and in part resold informally. At the time, tobacco offered many families financial independence.<sup>65</sup>

### *Adiyaman and the GAP*

The GAP, launched in 1977, bolstered longstanding promises of regional prosperity. The master plan was published in 1989, setting as its goal a 7.7% increase in GRP (gross regional product, *Gayrisafi Bölgesel Hasıla’nın*) per capita each year.<sup>66</sup> Adiyaman featured twice: in the “Adiyaman-Kâhta” project to create 77,824 hectares of irrigable land, and in the “Adiyaman-Göksu-Araban” project to create 71,598 hectares of irrigable land.<sup>67</sup> Several dozen villages in the province were flooded during construction of the Atatürk Dam on the Euphrates,<sup>68</sup> permanently displacing

---

61. M. Bakırcı, “Adiyaman’da İmalat Sanayinin Gelişimi ve Yapısı,” *Türk Coğrafya Dergisi*, No. 59, pp. 45–58, available at: [www.dergipark.org.tr](http://www.dergipark.org.tr).

62. Y. Koç, “Sümerbank nasıl yaratıldı ve yok edildi?,” *Aydınlık Gazetesi*, November 16, 2020, available at: [www.yildirimkoc.com.tr](http://www.yildirimkoc.com.tr).

63 M. Bakırcı, “Adiyaman’da İmalat Sanayinin Gelişimi ve Yapısı,” op. cit.

64. E. Kayaalp, “Farmers as Dispossessed Citizens: The Remaking of the Tobacco Market in Adiyaman,” *Ethnologie française*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 2014, pp. 207–214, available at: [www.shs.cairn.info](http://www.shs.cairn.info).

65. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adiyaman.

66. “GAP Master Planı (1989),” GAP Bölge Kalkınma İdaresi Başkanlığı, T.C. Sanayi ve Teknoloji Bakanlığı, available at: [www.gap.gov.tr](http://www.gap.gov.tr).

67. D. Bischoff and J.-F. Pérouse, “I. Le projet du GAP: ambitions et réalisations,” “La question des barrages et du GAP dans le Sud-Est anatolien,” Institut français d’études anatoliennes, 2003, available at: [www.books-openedition.org](http://www.books-openedition.org).

68. Construction began in 1983.

around 50,000 people to make way for the work.<sup>69</sup> The *Adıyamanlı* saw this “gift” of 250 villages as a genuine sacrifice at the local level, one that still comes up regularly today.<sup>70</sup>

In reality, benefits from the GAP have been minimal for Adıyaman province. The water resources made available by the GAP are not equally accessible: Şanlıurfa, another city intended to benefit from the project because of its proximity to Atatürk Dam, has the financial means to exploit these resources, while Adıyaman does not. The economic disparities between the two cities mean their water pumping infrastructure has developed at different rates, as has their access to the electrical resources needed for pumping. Adıyaman, which is located high up on the vast reservoir, has never had the means to fully benefit from the water resources offered by the Atatürk Dam.<sup>71</sup> When the GAP was launched, the resale of land—much of it held by the state but farmed by local non-owner farmers—to large landowners considerably altered the structure of agriculture in the province.<sup>72</sup> Non-owner farmers who lost their land turned to alternative ways to earn a living, starting with seasonal work.<sup>73</sup> The phenomenon has become more acute since the 2000s, prompting 150,000 people each year to move from Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Adıyaman, and Siirt to the intensively farmed Çukurova plain.<sup>74</sup> Some settle there, while others continue to migrate seasonally.<sup>75</sup> The people of Adıyaman complain about the uneven impact of the GAP, particularly in contrast to Şanlıurfa, which has become an important economic hub by virtue of its efficient water management systems and good infrastructure.<sup>76</sup> This sense of injustice extends to other major cities which have clearly been picked out for economic development by the GAP, like Gaziantep, Diyarbakır, and Mardin. As an example, while Adıyaman and Mardin had similar provincial GDPs in 2005 (2,364,280,000 lira for Adıyaman and 2,807,350,000 lira for Mardin), their growth trajectories are very different. In 2023, Adıyaman had a provincial GDP of 95,617,180,000 lira, compared to 149,513,566,000 lira for Mardin. The sacrifice of villages during construction of the Atatürk Dam is seen as a loss of productive land, at substantial cost to the province’s economy, rather than a step towards prosperity.<sup>77</sup>

---

69. D. Bischoff and J.-F. Pérouse, “III. Des impacts socio-économiques discutés,” “La question des barrages et du GAP dans le Sud-Est anatolien,” Institut français d’études anatoliennes, 2003, available at: [www.books-openedition.org](http://www.books-openedition.org).

70. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

71. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adıyaman. See the account of irrigation problems on p. 71 of the “Adıyaman Tarımsal Master Planı,” published in 2004: TARIM VE KÖYİŞLERİ BAKANLIĞI, Adıyaman TARIM İL MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ, “Adıyaman Tarımsal Master Planı,” December 2004, available at: [www.tarimorman.gov.tr](http://www.tarimorman.gov.tr).

72. D. Bischoff and J.-F. Pérouse, “III. Des impacts socio-économiques discutés,” op. cit.

73. Ibid.

74. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adıyaman.

75. D. Bischoff and J.-F. Pérouse, “III. Des impacts socio-économiques discutés,” op. cit.

76. Ibid.

77. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

## ***Agriculture in Adiyaman***

Despite a wealth of cultivated agricultural land, and its relative competitiveness in cereal and other crops during the 2000s, Adiyaman’s agricultural sector is underdeveloped in comparison with neighboring provinces. It had 248,936 hectares under cultivation in 2005, which had fallen to 173,966 by 2023. Gaziantep had 215,012 hectares in 2005, down to 127,513 in 2023.<sup>78</sup> But while both provinces have seen a similar trend in area cultivated, Gaziantep’s crop production grew significantly between 2005 and 2023 (613,326 tonnes in 2005, up to 1,105,434 tonnes in 2023), whereas it stagnated in Adiyaman (607,155 tonnes in 2005, up to 686,919 tonnes in 2023). Adiyaman’s inability to use the dam’s water has disadvantaged it on national and global markets. The province is the leading almond producer in Turkey<sup>79</sup>—surprisingly, given the substantial amount of water required. The districts of Kâhta, Besni, and Gölbaşı produce a large proportion of the crop, but this is a fairly recent development,<sup>80</sup> reflecting both a recomposition of the sector and province-internal disparities between districts in terms of water access. At the start of 2025, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is offering up to 50% funding for individual irrigation systems for small-scale producers,<sup>81</sup> demonstrating once again that disparities in water access are shared by small- and large-scale agricultural producers alike. The problems facing almond production are similar to those affecting cotton. Furthermore, traditional local crops like buckwheat and flax have been abandoned as uncompetitive.<sup>82</sup> Tobacco production, one of the province’s historic assets—there remains much local pride in being one of the first tobacco-producing cities in Turkey—was severely restricted in 2002 by Tobacco Law no. 4733. By privatizing Tekel, which had held a monopoly on the tobacco sector, and opening up the sector to competition, the law imposed a contract-based farming system, marginalizing small growers who were now unable to attract contracts, and consolidating the position of the biggest firms, who were the only ones capable of meeting the demand of multinationals.<sup>83</sup> Small growers continue to sell their produce locally, in small quantities and generally informally, and there are numerous bulk tobacco stores in the city’s shopping streets.<sup>84</sup>

78. All data is taken from the online platform of TÜİK (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu), “e-hizmetler,” “il göstergeleri,” available at: <https://biruni.tuik.gov.tr>.

79. O. Pehlul, ““Badem diyarı” Adiyaman’da üretim yükselişte,” Anadolu Ajansı, November 15, 2024, available at: [www.aa.com.tr](http://www.aa.com.tr).

80. Ibid.

81. T. C. Tarım ve Orman Bakanlığı, Adiyaman İl Tarım ve Orman Müdürlüğü, “% 50 Hibe Destekli Bireysel Sulama Sistemlerinin Desteklenmesi İçin Başvurular Başladı,” T. C. Tarım ve Orman Bakanlığı, Adiyaman İl Tarım ve Orman Müdürlüğü, March 3, 2025, available at: <https://Adiyaman.tarimorman.gov.tr>.

82. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adiyaman.

83. E. Kayaalp, “Farmers as Dispossessed Citizens: The Remaking of the Tobacco Market in Adiyaman,” *Ethnologie française*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 2014, pp. 207–214, available at: [www.shs.cairn.info](http://www.shs.cairn.info).

84. Vendors run the risk of being fined for selling tobacco informally, but the substantial profits encourage them to continue. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adiyaman.

## ***Industry and manufacturing in Adıyaman***

Some industry developed in Adıyaman during the 1990s, particularly manufacturing. Agriculture is dominant, but while farming in the province has been mechanized, as in the rest of Turkey,<sup>85</sup> agro-industry—particularly the production of agricultural machinery—plays only a modest role in local industry. In 1986, the province had ten companies producing agricultural machinery,<sup>86</sup> compared with just two now.<sup>87</sup> According to figures from the prefecture, the production of machinery and equipment makes up just 0.7% of local industry.<sup>88</sup> A broader “organized industrial zone” (*Adıyaman Organize Sanayi Bölgesi*) was set up in 1991<sup>89</sup> and a number of companies established: in 1994, there were 28 industrial firms, including 11 in the textile sector, employing 3,192 people<sup>90</sup>; in 1998, there were 91 industrial firms active in Adıyaman, including 54 in the textile sector.<sup>91</sup> In 2001, the textile industry accounted for 42% of Adıyaman’s industrial activity and employed 5,124 people.<sup>92</sup> Textiles represent one of the most promising sectors in terms of job and wealth creation. But the city’s industrial development still lags behind its neighbors. Similarly, the province is rich in oil, accounting for 20% of Turkey’s national crude oil production,<sup>93</sup> but it has benefited very little from this—not even in terms of employment, as most of the province’s oil sector workforce comes from outside the country.<sup>94</sup>

## ***Adıyaman’s first tourism projects***

In the 1990s, there was great hope for developing the city and province through tourism. The GAP included a tourism component which aimed to make the province more attractive to visitors, focusing especially on the Nemrut Dağ site.<sup>95</sup> The city was included in both the “Anakültür Kocahisar, Kâhta, Adıyaman, Acırlı (Mardin-Midyat) Environmental Arrangements”<sup>96</sup>

85. Z. Özdemir, “Türkiye’de Traktör Endüstrisinin İktisadi Analizi,” doctoral thesis, University of Istanbul, Institute of Social Sciences, Economics Department, Istanbul, 1990, available at: <https://nek.istanbul.edu.tr>.

86. Ibid.

87. “Tarım ve ormancılık makinelerinin imalatı,” *Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği*, available at: <https://sanayi.tobb.org.tr>.

88. “Adıyaman Ekonomisi,” T.C. Adıyaman Valiliği, available at: [www.Adıyaman.gov.tr](http://www.Adıyaman.gov.tr).

89. “Tarım,” T.C. Adıyaman İl Özel İdaresi, available at: [www.Adıyamanozelidare.gov.tr](http://www.Adıyamanozelidare.gov.tr).

90. M. Bakırcı, “Adıyaman’da İmalat Sanayinin Gelişimi ve Yapısı,” *Türk Coğrafya Dergisi*, no. 59, pp. 45–58, available at: [www.dergipark.org.tr](http://www.dergipark.org.tr).

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid.

93. “Adıyaman Ekonomisi,” op. cit.

94. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

95. D. Bischoff and J.-F. Pérouse, “III. Des impacts socio-économiques discutés,” op. cit.

96. D. Bischoff and J.-F. Pérouse, “I. Le projet du GAP: ambitions et réalisations,” “La question des barrages et du GAP dans le Sud-Est anatolien,” Institut français d’études anatoliennes, 2003, available at: [www.books-openedition.org](http://www.books-openedition.org).

and the “Adıyaman-Nemrut Centered Subregion Development Plan.”<sup>97</sup> Pursuing this GAP-driven approach, Adıyaman’s city council launched a project in 2002 to redevelop a historic district in partnership with İstanbul Technical University (*İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi*).<sup>98</sup> A local interview subject points out that, in the 1990s, the city’s tourism potential rivaled that of Cappadocia.<sup>99</sup> But the effects of tourism-led development were felt only briefly. The city’s tourist sector was described to us as dynamic in the 1990s, with numerous Turkish visitors, some foreign visitors, and alcohol sold widely.<sup>100</sup> But there was no development strategy targeting a particular attractive feature, such as hot-air ballooning in Cappadocia in 2005.<sup>101</sup> Finally, anti-PKK security measures—put in place despite the group’s minimal presence in Adıyaman<sup>102</sup>—have undermined the region’s appeal for tourists.

The GAP has caused a trend towards monopoly in local agriculture, benefiting state-affiliated economic actors from outside the province. It has also increased climate change-related water stress. These effects have hampered the economic development of both the city and province. Industry has fallen behind, making it clear that economic efforts to develop the region have failed. Adıyaman has developed in isolation, a “*metroköy*” which has seen a slight growth in population<sup>103</sup> but no benefits from the widespread economic dynamism enjoyed by other peripheral mid-sized cities in Anatolia, like Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep, and more recently Diyarbakır and Mardin.

## A conservative *metroköy*

Adıyaman has been described as a “closed box.”<sup>104</sup> The failure of economic revitalization means that it has preserved a stable socio-cultural identity as a

97. D. Bischoff and J.-F. Pérouse, “III. Des impacts socio-économiques discutés,” op. cit.

98. Ibid.

99. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

100. Interviews with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman. Many of those the author spoke to used the same period in the 1990s to depict Adıyaman as an open and dynamic city. The reference to alcohol sales did not arise from a direct question on our part, but was made spontaneously by interview subjects when describing this era.

101. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

102. The PKK was founded in 1978. It began armed action against the Turkish state in 1984. Tensions between Turkey and the PKK reached a peak in 1993–1995. With the imprisonment of its founder, Abdullah Öcalan, in 1999, the group’s activities have diminished considerably, but never stopped entirely.

103. Clashes between the PKK and the Turkish army in the 1990s were concentrated primarily in rural areas, leading to a significant rural exodus. While Adıyaman felt the effects of this, population growth remained very low—even declining slightly in the early 2000s—due to economic migration to large urban centers in the west. Provincial population by year: 1985: 430,728 inhabitants; 1990: 513,131 inhabitants; 1995: no data; 2000: 623,811 inhabitants; 2007: 582,762 inhabitants; 2010: 590,935 inhabitants; 2015: 602,774 inhabitants; 2022: 635,169 inhabitants; 2023: 604,978 inhabitants; 2024: 611,037 inhabitants. For data from 1985 to 2000, see the archives of TÜİK, available at: <https://biruni.tuik.gov.tr>. For other periods, see the results of TÜİK’s address-based population registration, available at: <https://biruni.tuik.gov.tr>.

104. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adıyaman.



conservative, traditionalist village—what an interlocutor called a *metroköy*. This relative closure has benefited conservative political groups. Since 1954, the population has shown a steady preference for conservative—and occasionally Islamist—parties. The only exception was a candidate from the populist Socialist Democracy Party (*Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Partisi*, SHP) who was elected mayor in 1989 in special circumstances.<sup>105</sup> Three Islamist parties were dominant in the 1990s: the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP),<sup>106</sup> the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*, FP), and the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*, SP).<sup>107</sup> Moving from one party to another as each of these was dissolved in turn, Abdulkadir Kırmızı maintained his position at the head of the municipality of Adıyaman from 1994 to 2004. The city’s conservatism is also reflected in its loyalism: in municipal elections it generally votes for the parties at the head of the government.

**Table 1: List of mayors of the city of Adıyaman since 1954**

Municipal election year	SURNAME, First name	Political party
1954	BİLGİN Fuat	Democrat Party ( <i>Demokrat Parti</i> , DP)
1963	BİLGİNER Mahmut	New Turkey Party ( <i>Yeni Türkiye Partisi</i> , YTP)
1965	HARIKÇI Mithat	Justice Party ( <i>Adalet Partisi</i> , AP)
1974	KOCATÜRK Mustafa	National Salvation Party ( <i>Millî Selâmet Partisi</i> , MSP)
1984	ERDEM Mehmet	Nationalist Democracy Party ( <i>Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi</i> , MDP)
1989	GÜRSOY Şevket	Social Democratic Populist Party ( <i>Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Partisi</i> , SHP)
1994	KIRMIZI Abdulkadir	Welfare Party ( <i>Refah Partisi</i> , RP)
1998		Virtue Party ( <i>Fazilet Partisi</i> , FP)
2001		Felicity Party ( <i>Saadet Partisi</i> , SP)
2004	BÜYÜKASLAN Muhammed Necip	Justice and Development Party ( <i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i> , AKP) (37.9% of the vote in 2004, 49.71% in 2009)
2014	KUTLU Fehmi Hüsrev	Justice and Development Party ( <i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i> , AKP) (56.41%)
2019	KILINÇ Süleyman	Justice and Development Party ( <i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i> , AKP) (53.22%)
2024	TUTDERE Abdurrahman	Republican People’s Party ( <i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i> , CHP)

105. The conditions for the SHP’s victory were distinctive, as the conservative vote was split between three right-wing candidates.

106. The Refah Partisi was founded by Necmettin Erbakan, the father of Turkish Islamism.

107. The Fazilet Partisi is the direct offshoot of the Refah Partisi following its dissolution in 1998. Two parties were created after the dissolution of the Fazilet Partisi in 2001, the Saadet Partisi and the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi.

The AKP’s success in local elections—starting in 2004 and continuing uninterrupted until 2024—is a continuation of the electoral behavior that favored Islamist parties in the 1990s. After the Turkish Constitutional Court dissolved the FP in 2001 for infringing secularism, its members formed two offshoot parties: the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*, SP) and the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP). Starting in 2002, the AKP took as its main target rural Anatolia, which had been neglected by Turkey’s main center-right political parties, making promises of “local development” (*yerel kalkınma*).<sup>108</sup> The AKP’s focus on the local level is characteristic of the stance of Islamist parties in the 1990s, which at the time were politically marginalized and relied on local government to gain political power. Many figures in these parties began their careers at the local level.<sup>109</sup> The AKP largely achieved its goals, winning 40.12% of the vote in the 2004 local elections, and winning back 1,952 municipalities and 12 metropolitan municipalities.<sup>110</sup> Its versatility enabled it to capture both loyal followers of earlier Islamist parties and more moderate conservative voters. As the table above shows, Adıyaman elected three AKP mayors between 2004 and 2024.

As the AKP monopolized state apparatuses and resources,<sup>111</sup> the loyalty which Adıyaman had shown to the state since 1954 was transformed into loyalty to the AKP state. Because of the AKP’s direct links with the Islamist parties of the 1990s, it already had an electoral and activist base in these peripheral and/or rural areas. The AKP’s ability to appropriation clientelist systems depends on maintaining a foothold in Adıyaman’s influential spheres, and particularly the city’s Islamic bourgeoisie. The social control exercised by influential families<sup>112</sup> and *tarikatarlar*<sup>113</sup> in Adıyaman is a mechanism for pacifying society, countering efforts to instrumentalize identities, and maintaining a *status quo* that benefits AKP leaders. Adıyaman is a generally conservative city, and votes accordingly, and is consequently unaffected or only very slightly affected by identity- and/or community-based political conflicts.<sup>114</sup> While traditional ethnic, religious, and/or

108. J.-F. Pérouse and S. Débarre, “Dire et faire le territoire en Turquie: entre idéologie unitariste et obsession de la rente,” *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, No. 23, 2016, available at: [www.journals-openedition.org/fr](http://www.journals-openedition.org/fr).

109. U. Bayraktar and E. Massicard, “La décentralisation en Turquie,” Agence française de développement, *Focales*, pp. 104, available at: <https://shs.hal.science>.

110. The status of metropolitan municipality (*büyükşehir belediyesi*) was created in 1982 (law No. 3030), and was first applied to Turkey’s three largest cities, Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir, in 1984. The law added a second level of governance to cities, which now consist of both the metropolitan municipality (*büyükşehir belediyesi*) and district municipalities (*ilçe belediyesi*), each with their own powers. Beyond their new powers, metropolitan municipalities have financial advantages, as they can collect 3% of taxes levied in the region they cover. To obtain this status, a district must have a population above 750,000, and a metropolitan area encompassing at least three district municipalities. See U. Bayraktar and E. Massicard, “La décentralisation en Turquie,” op. cit.

111. G. Dorronsoro and B. Gourisse, “Une clé de lecture du politique en Turquie: les rapports État-Partis,” *Politix*, Vol. 27, No. 107, 2014, pp. 195–218, available at: [www.shs.cairn.info](http://www.shs.cairn.info).

112. While interview subjects vaguely described the influence of the five main families in Adıyaman, little is known precisely about them. As a result, their actual influence is difficult to measure.

113. *Tarikatarlar* (singular *tarikatar*) are religious brotherhoods.

114. Interviews with the author, May and October 2024, Adıyaman.



linguistic identities—Kurdish, Alevi, Turkish, Sunni, and to a lesser extent Christian—find expression in everyday life, they apparently do not translate into political ambitions. Pro-Kurdish and left-wing activists see the local branch of the DEM (*Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi*) as moderate, unlike its counterparts in Diyarbakır and Şırnak.<sup>115</sup> Adıyaman forms the margin of a “second southeast,” with its geographical outline based on its more moderate and conservative electoral behavior, in contrast with its neighbors.

The city’s loyalty to the dominant party, its dependence on state subsidies, and the role of AKP local authorities as intermediaries in a reciprocal relationship between state and city, all suggest the existence of an “Adıyaman model.” This model reflects the region’s distinctive political character, which combines conservative partisan preferences with the depoliticization of identity issues. The city’s political trajectory is entirely its own, standing in contrast to that of its nearby neighbors: it is distinct from both the Kurdish fringe regions in the east, like Diyarbakır, Mardin, and Batman, and the economically successful western regions like Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa. Adıyaman and its province form an enclave which is to a large extent closed to the outside world, but which mostly does not share its neighbors’ hostility to the state. This *metroköy* model is based on an isolation which perpetuates conservatism and discourages anti-state movements. At the same time, such persistent closure has created economic dependence on the state. As a result, Adıyaman’s loyalty to the Turkish state has remained constant over the long term, developing over the last two decades into loyalty to the AKP state. But the region’s unbroken loyalty to the AKP state between 2004 and 2024 was shattered abruptly with the earthquake that struck southern Turkey and northern Syria on February 6, 2023.

---

115. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

# The breakdown of the “Adıyaman model”

Adıyaman has been loyal to the Turkish state for many years, particularly since the AKP came to power, but the earthquake of February 6, 2023 disrupted this pattern. The disaster highlighted the Turkish state’s neglect of the region, triggering a change in the population’s electoral behavior. After 47 years of domination by conservatives, the city elected Abdurrahman Tutdere of the CHP as mayor in the municipal elections of March 31, 2024. This was a protest against the AKP state, but also confirmed the political credit that Tutdere enjoys. The early days of his term have opened up new prospects, particularly for the economy.

## The earthquake and the breakdown of the “Adıyaman model”

### ***The earthquake of February 6, 2023 in Adıyaman***

On February 6, 2023, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake hit Southeastern Anatolia. Hatay, Kahramanmaraş (the epicenter), and Adıyaman were particularly badly affected. Almost 65% of buildings in Adıyaman’s downtown (*merkez*) were destroyed.<sup>116</sup> The state put the death toll at 11,000, but many locals are skeptical of this figure, with some putting number closer to 80,000.<sup>117</sup> Some sources estimate the number of displaced people at 72,000.<sup>118</sup> The scale of the disaster was vast, affecting eleven provinces, and posed an enormous challenge for the Turkish state. It struggled to provide relief across the board, but its efforts were particularly poor in Adıyaman.

Accounts of the disaster all emphasize that it took the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (*Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı*, AFAD), a branch of the Ministry of the Interior, three to four days to send relief supplies to Adıyaman. Many of those we spoke to pointed out that the city’s airport was used as a hub for aid to other affected areas in the south-east, as the roads were impassable, but that Adıyaman itself was initially neglected. Recognizing that these delays were putting survivors at risk, locals organized emergency aid networks. In Besni, for example, medical teams at the state hospital (*Besni Devlet Hastanesi*) set up a consultation area, providing

---

116. Data from an interview with the mayor, May 2024, Adıyaman.

117. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adıyaman.

118. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adıyaman.

emergency care and medicine in the days after the disaster. In downtown Adıyaman, the Confederation of Public Service Workers’ Unions (*Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*) set up its own aid coordination center and deployed field teams to establish temporary clinics and meal distribution centers. These local networks were mainly supported by essential goods donated by civil society groups, particularly those based in Istanbul. Family and friendship relations cultivated by the *Adıyamanlı* (based on networks of *hemşehirlilik*<sup>119</sup>) enabled external volunteers to work in the field, to understand what was needed, and to identify priority areas. The first professional rescuers on the scene were foreign teams, from Poland and Holland, who provided assistance in Besni.<sup>120</sup> In addition, the Turkish-Armenian border was opened for the first time in 35 years, allowing the Armenian Ministry of the Interior to dispatch search and rescue teams which arrived in the center of Adıyaman on February 8.<sup>121</sup> AFAD teams arrived in the affected areas of the province 3 to 4 days after the disaster. Many residents reported discrimination when emergency aid was handed out, with AFAD teams reportedly distributing less to villages predominantly inhabited by ethnic, religious, and/or linguistic minorities, including Bağlıca, a Kurdish Alevi village badly affected by the quake.

The lack of emergency relief in the days after the earthquake made clear that the system of reciprocity between the state and Adıyaman had broken down, shattering the region’s trust in the government. Awareness of this rupture reached the top of the state very quickly, prompting Recep Tayyip Erdoğan himself to travel to Adıyaman on February 27, 2023, to make a public apology, accompanied by Devlet Bahçeli, his political ally and chairman of the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisinin*, MHP). While making amends, Erdoğan tried to justify the perceived failures: “Unfortunately, due to the destruction caused by the earthquake, poor weather conditions, and damaged infrastructure, we were unable to carry out the activities we had planned in Adıyaman [*Adıyaman’da arzu ettiğimiz etkinlikte çalışma yürütemedik*] during the first few days. Please accept our apologies.”<sup>122</sup>

119. A Turkish word meaning “from the same town.”

120. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

121. B. Kahyaoğlu, “Ermenistan’dan gelen ekip Adıyaman’da arama kurtarma çalışmalarına katılıyor,” Anadolu Ajansı, February 11, 2023, available at: [www.aa.com.tr](http://www.aa.com.tr).

122. “Başkan Erdoğan Adıyamanlılara Seslendi: Kimse Mağdur Edilmeyecek,” AKP İstanbul, available at: <https://akpartiistanbul.com>.

## ***The consequences of the earthquake in Adıyaman***

The disaster disturbed the city’s relative socio-economic stability. In October 2024, Tutdere said that since the start of his term started<sup>123</sup> he had met with nearly 30,000 people who came to his office to complain about persistent problems of homelessness or low-quality housing, unemployment, and poverty.

Material destruction was extensive, with at least 65% of buildings destroyed during the earthquake and in its aftermath.<sup>124</sup> Almost all the victims were initially rehoused in container camps, which have now developed public service infrastructure like schools and clinics, and have been integrated into public transport routes (*dolmuş* and buses). Until the Social Housing Development Administration (*Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı*, TOKİ)<sup>125</sup> has completed its reconstruction plan, there are few alternatives to this temporary solution, which is on track to become permanent. According to the most recent figures, given in January 2025 by Osman Varol, the prefect of Adıyaman province (*Adıyaman Valiliği*), “38,436 homes, including 8,449 in rural areas and 29,987 in urban areas,” have already been completed by Emlak Konut,<sup>126</sup> a property developer half-owned by TOKİ. TOKİ offers interest-free loans ranging from two to twenty years, payable in monthly or annual installments. The Social Housing Administration offered similar loans in Van, which suffered a massive earthquake on October 23, 2011, creating complex financial situations for some families that still persist more than a decade later.<sup>127</sup> Meanwhile, some families in Van still live in prefabricated homes.<sup>128</sup> It is entirely unclear, then, whether the container camps will continue to exist in the long term. Moreover, rents for the few properties in Adıyaman that were not destroyed have risen sharply, making them inaccessible for most: a typical monthly rent of 2,500 Turkish lira before the earthquake has risen to between 8,000 and 12,000 Turkish lira in May 2024.<sup>129</sup>

The local economy has seen rising prices, leading to a decline in purchasing power. The earthquake has also had a major impact on the job market. According to TÜİK, the labor force participation rate fell from 51.8%

---

123. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

124. Interview with Abdurrahman Tutdere, May 2024, Adıyaman.

125. TOKİ is a public company founded in 1984 under the direction of the Ministry of the Environment and Urban Planning, with responsibility for building and managing Turkey’s social housing stock. It was first created to combat informal settlements like *gecekondu*. Its political and financial capabilities have grown considerably in recent years.

126. S. Burak Utucu, “6 Şubat depremlerinin üzerinden 2 yıl geçti: Adıyaman’da yeniden inşa ne durumda?,” *EuroNews*, February 5, 2025, available at: <https://tr.euronews.com>.

127. “12 yıl önce depremle sarsılan Van’da son durum: Hepsi yalan, anne kurban,” *Yeşil Gazete*, May 9, 2023, available at: <https://yesilgazete.org>.

128. Ibid.

129. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adıyaman.

in 2022 to 44.9% in 2023.<sup>130</sup> While these figures should be treated with caution, they partially illustrate a decline in activity in the province after the earthquake. According to the mayor’s office, 70,000 people left the city in the wake of the disaster,<sup>131</sup> many of them skilled or middle-class workers. This loss may damage the city’s prospects, and particularly its ability to rebuild and to develop its economy.

Finally, beyond the death and material destruction,<sup>132</sup> the earthquake had devastating psycho-social effects. A rise in suicides<sup>133</sup> and antidepressant use<sup>134</sup> in the areas affected by the earthquake shows that the trauma is still very present. The director of the local branch of the Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen (*Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği*, Müsiad) and the chief physician at Adıyaman hospital have set up a mental health support service, going some way towards lifting the taboo on these long-term psychological after-effects.<sup>135</sup>

The aftermath of the earthquake did not result in any substantial change in the May 2023 presidential election, with Erdoğan winning Adıyaman province with 66.2% of the vote, but we can speculate that this was a vote for safety during a crisis, as voters tried to guarantee the state’s active participation in reconstruction efforts in the months immediately following the disaster. In this respect, there is generally high confidence in rebuilding projects by the state and TOKİ.<sup>136</sup> Legal proceedings have been launched against officials alleged to have approved unsafe construction projects in areas affected by the earthquake, but these cases have little apparent chance of success.<sup>137</sup> Loyalty to the AKP state has deteriorated, not least because of its inability to maintain the role of “service party” following the earthquake. The AKP’s failure has had a negative impact on Adıyaman’s loyalty to the state. With its loyalism in question and party allegiances weakening, a window of opportunity opened at the municipal level for Tutdere and the CHP. Tutdere’s personality and his local campaigning allowed him to position himself as a credible alternative to the AKP, which had enjoyed the city’s loyalty for twenty years, until its neglectfulness threw its dominance into question.

130. « Tematik Haritalar—Coğrafi İstatistik Portalı,» Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK), available at: <https://cip.tuik.gov.tr/>.

131. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adıyaman.

132. According to official figures, Adıyaman had the highest crude death rate among Turkish cities in 2023 (18.0 per thousand). “Ölüm ve Ölüm Nedeni İstatistikleri, 2023,” Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK), June 14, 2024, available at: <https://data.tuik.gov.tr>.

133. In October 2024, thirty to forty people killed themselves each month. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

134. “En Turquie, la prise d’antidépresseurs en hausse chez les rescapés du séisme de 2023,” *Courrier international*, September 26, 2024, available at: [www.courrierinternational.com](http://www.courrierinternational.com).

135. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

136. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adıyaman.

137. “Türkiye: Stonewalling on Charges for Officials in Earthquake Deaths,” Human Rights Watch, March 27, 2024, available at: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org).

## The CHP takes control of Adiyaman: A “social” and “productive” roadmap

The 2024 municipal elections marked a local comeback for the main opposition party to the AKP.<sup>138</sup> The CHP retained control of İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Adana, and Mersin, recovered control of Bursa and Antalya, and won a number of smaller towns on the Black Sea and in eastern Anatolia. These victories were particularly surprising, as these regions had provided a major reservoir of votes for the AKP. With these local successes, the CHP is rebuilding its municipal network and reshaping its electoral capacities. While the results in Adiyaman must be understood in the distinctive context of the post-earthquake crisis, as a vote to punish the AKP,<sup>139</sup> Tutdere’s success also reflected his clear popularity and his success as a deputy. Having been elected twice (2019 and 2023) as the only CHP deputy from Adiyaman province, Tutdere enjoys a good reputation among the local population, not least because of his defense of tobacco growers’ interests in the TBMM.<sup>140</sup> His distinctive position is also due to his reputation among certain voters who identify as conservatives and as natural AKP supporters.

While reconstruction is high on the agenda, the new mayor also wants to focus on building a “social municipality.”<sup>141</sup> To reinforce his image as a dynamic mayor who listens to his fellow citizens, Tutdere claims to have met 30,000 people in his office between March and October 2024. As mentioned, the main topics at these meetings are lack or low quality of housing, unemployment, and poverty. While housing is managed by TOKİ,<sup>142,143</sup> the town hall is investing in other areas, still with the aim of becoming a “social municipality.” Certain urban management issues have become more complex since the earthquake. With support from the French Development Agency (*Agence française de développement*), the municipality is working on access to water and sanitation, which are major challenges during the

138. N. Bourcier, “Élections municipales en Turquie: la large victoire de l’opposition constitue un désaveu cinglant pour le camp d’Erdogan,” *Le Monde*, April 1, 2024, available at: [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr).

139. “Adiyaman: 47 yıl sonra CHP nasıl kazandı?,” BBC News Türkçe, YouTube, available at: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

140. “ABDURRAHMAN TUTDERE: ‘BU TOPRAKLARDA ÜRETİLEN BİR TÜTÜN NASIL KAÇAK OLUR?’” Anka Haber Ajansı, available at: [ankahaber.net](http://ankahaber.net).

141. A word used by Aburrahman Tutdere, mayor of Adiyaman, during an interview with the author, October 2024, Adiyaman.

142. “Adiyaman’ın yeni yerleşim yeri belli oldu,” TRT Haber, available at: [www.trthaber.com](http://www.trthaber.com).

143. Law no. 3030 of 1982 and its successive revisions give metropolitan municipalities powers over urban planning and development (see footnote 105). As a result, district municipalities within a metropolitan municipality have no input into urban planning or development. Medium-sized cities that are not metropolitan or district municipalities do have responsibility for local urban planning. However, the Ministry of the Environment and Town Planning and TOKİ have the power to take control from local authorities, considerably broadening the state’s ability to intervene in town planning, particularly following natural disasters. As a result, these two bodies, one public and the other para-public, are responsible for most construction projects in Adiyaman. See B. Açimuz, “Le droit de l’urbanisme en Turquie,” *Droit de l’Aménagement, de l’Urbanisme et de l’Habitat* 2013, GRIDAUH, pp. 559–570, available at: [shs-cairn-info.fr](http://shs-cairn-info.fr).



summer months.<sup>144</sup> The destruction caused by the earthquake, and the new construction projects that followed it, have made pollution worse. International projects are on the rise, providing the town council a way to form relations with other bodies and to attract international funding. The city is working with the Bulgarian town of Montana on a European project to share best practices and train municipal staff in climate issues, and in July 2024 launched a project with Solidar Suisse, an NGO, to address housing and psychosocial needs in disaster zones. For its part, the German Development Agency (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*) is providing assistance for a “technical support project to strengthen urban services infrastructure in cities affected by the earthquake.”<sup>145</sup> Several of these initiatives target vulnerable groups, like a training center to help women and young people enter or re-enter working life (*Meslek edindirme kursları—Kadın ve Gençlik Merkezi*). The authorities are treating socio-cultural development as part of the city’s post-traumatic recovery. The council has opened a tea room for retirees, a rest area for women, and a childcare center next to Democracy Park, in the center of the city. A social café, “Fortuna” (*Fortuna Sosyal Tesisleri*),<sup>146</sup> has been set up in the center of Eğriçay Park. Tutdere used the opening ceremony on October 3, 2024, to reaffirm his commitment to rebuilding Adiyaman, both materially and in terms of its social fabric.<sup>147</sup>

But action by the local authority has been undermined by a drastic cut in finances. In Turkey, municipalities are heavily dependent on the central government for funding to ensure the continuity of public services.<sup>148</sup> The new mayor’s political allegiances may explain the drop in funding, but falling incomes from local taxes following post-earthquake exemption measures also play a role, as property taxes had previously been one of the municipality’s most important resources.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, local authorities and other public bodies face considerable difficulties in planning and implementing their roadmaps. While these problems are partly the result of the earthquake, they derive too from the complexities of political cooperation between the different levels of public authority. The CHP’s rise to power has upset the AKP’s local system of power, as the AKP-led local authority has

144. Interviews with the author, October 2024, Adiyaman.

145. “Depremden Etkilenen Belediyelerin Kentsel Hizmet Altyapısını Güçlendirmek İçin Teknik Destek Projesi.” A list of the municipality’s current international projects is available on its website. Adiyaman Belediyesi, “Güncel,” “Devam Eden Projeler,” Adiyaman Belediyesi, available at: [www.Adiyaman.bel.tr](http://www.Adiyaman.bel.tr).

146. The name is by no means random. “Fortuna” is the name of one of the five gods pictured in the reliefs at the top of Nemrut Dağ.

147. “Adiyaman Yeni Mekanına Kavuştu: İlk Limonatalar Başkanımız Tutdere’den,” Adiyaman Belediyesi, October 3, 2024, available at: [www.Adiyaman.bel.tr](http://www.Adiyaman.bel.tr).

148. On the history of decentralization and state control of local authorities, both administrative and financial, see U. Bayraktar and E. Massicard, “La décentralisation en Turquie,” Agence française de développement, *Focales*, p. 104, available at: <https://shs.hal.science>.

149. Interview with the author, May 2024, Adiyaman.

historically acted as an intermediary for state action at the local level.<sup>150</sup> The fragmentation of public authority resulting from a disconnect between a decentralized municipal authority and a devolved prefectural authority has led to friction and gaps in planning. Government action has been hindered by tacit competition between the mayor’s office and the prefecture, which have different party affiliations. Such partisan dysfunction has a negative effect on the city’s prospects for growth. For example, although there is consensus on the need to develop Adiyaman’s tourist industry, workers in the sector describe how difficult it has been, over the course of several years, for representatives of the city, the prefecture, and the Ministry of Tourism to develop a joint plan.<sup>151</sup>

## Opening up Adiyaman: “*Tarım, tekstil, turizm*”<sup>152</sup>

While the after-effects of the earthquake are still hindering Adiyaman’s development, Tutdere’s victory seems to promise a new period of growth. Reconstruction efforts go beyond infrastructure, aiming to build up the province’s economic dynamism. The city is relying on three key economic sectors to achieve this: agriculture (*tarım*), textiles (*tekstil*), and tourism (*turizm*).<sup>153</sup>

Adiyaman province’s economy remains predominantly agricultural, although comparison with Gaziantep reveals a significant productivity gap even in this sector. We will use data from 2022 to control for the consequences of the earthquake on Adiyaman’s economy. The total exports of the two provinces are barely comparable: Gaziantep exported \$10,172,779,000 worth of goods in 2022, while Adiyaman exported only \$82,968,000. Furthermore, as we saw earlier, Adiyaman province had a total area of 174,336 hectares of cultivated farmland in 2022, compared with 127,726 hectares in Gaziantep,<sup>154</sup> and produced 585,109 tonnes of crops in 2022, compared to Gaziantep’s 957,105 tonnes.<sup>155</sup> There is also a vast productivity gap in small livestock farming: there were 333,505 animals on farms in Adiyaman in 2022, compared to 851,390 in Gaziantep, with the numbers standing at 301,297 and 845,036, respectively, in 2023. The difference is less stark for cattle: there were 100,618 cattle on farms in

150. Discussing Kurdish activists gaining control of local authorities in Southeastern Anatolia, B. Gourisse and G. Dorronsoro point out that the municipal level has always been a route to power for parties marginalized on the national stage: “The municipal level provides a counterweight to the process of monopolization that the AKP has overseen since 2002.” See G. Dorronsoro and B. Gourisse, “Une clé du politique en Turquie: les rapports État-Partis,” *Politix*, Vol. 27, No. 107, 2014, pp. 195–218, available at: [www.shs.cairn.info](http://www.shs.cairn.info).

151. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adiyaman.

152. “Agriculture, textiles, tourism.” From an interview with the author, October 2024, Adiyaman.

153. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adiyaman.

154. All data from the online platform of TÜİK. “e-hizmetler,” “il göstergeleri,” Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK), available at: <https://biruni.tuik.gov.tr>.

155. Ibid.



Adıyaman in 2022, compared to 197,073 in Gaziantep, with the numbers standing at 107,175 and 200,952, respectively, in 2023.<sup>156</sup> Tutdere’s office is committed to encouraging agriculture and livestock, in particular by supporting the construction of a slaughterhouse and a livestock market. A tender has also been launched for the construction of a new flour mill.<sup>157</sup>

Textiles still represent one possible development sector for industry in the province. The number of textile mills rose from 41 in 2001 to 92 in 2011.<sup>158</sup> In 2022, before the earthquake, there were 265 textile mills in Adıyaman, employing 22,000 people<sup>159</sup> and mainly producing clothes for large multinational ready-to-wear firms. Post-disaster recovery has been rocky, not least because of low competitiveness, with manufacturers finding it difficult to get their firms back on their feet without state aid.<sup>160</sup> The province still faces numerous barriers to participating in national and global trade circuits. The construction sector also generates jobs, but at least at first glance does not offer any sustainable prospects for growth, as reconstruction projects will last a maximum of five years—or perhaps less, as it has been announced that the entire population will be rehoused within two years.<sup>161</sup> As an extension of the AKP state, TOKİ’s presence in the medium term establishes a form of political surveillance concealed within a parapublic institution. Nor is the sector particularly profitable for local actors, as many of the construction companies come from outside the region and bring in their own workers.<sup>162</sup> The way public contracts are awarded in Turkey’s construction sector reveals the power of state clientelist networks, and it is not uncommon for companies from outside the province to be chosen to carry out building projects using their own workforce.

In these conditions, tourism represents perhaps the greatest hope for economic growth in Adıyaman, as the city possesses a rich cultural and historical heritage, not least with Nemrut Dağ. But investment in the sector has so far been minimal.<sup>163</sup> Other towns in the south-east have demonstrated dynamism and inventiveness in putting themselves on the tourist map. Gaziantep has bet heavily on its gastronomic history, investing in places which promote it.<sup>164</sup> In addition to gastronomic tourism, based especially on its famous pistachios (*fıstık*), Gaziantep has built museums to improve its heritage sites, particularly

---

156. Ibid.

157. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

158. M. Bakırcı, “Adıyaman’da İmalat Sanayinin Gelişimi ve Yapısı,” *Türk Coğrafya Dergisi*, No. 59, pp. 45–58, available at: [www.dergipark.org.tr](http://www.dergipark.org.tr).

159. İ. Gün, “Adıyaman’da tekstil sektöründe çarklar dönmeye başladı,” *Anadolu Ajansı*, April 29, 2023, available at: [www.aa.com.tr](http://www.aa.com.tr).

160. “Adıyaman’ın Ekonomisi Yerinde Dönüşümle Ayakta Kalıyor, Üretim Gün Geçtikçe Değersiz Hale Geliyor,” *Adıyaman Gazeteciler Cemiyeti*, November 11, 2024, available at: [cemiyet.org](http://cemiyet.org).

161. Ibid.

162. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

163. Many locals compare Adıyaman to Gaziantep in terms of tourism. The way in which Gaziantep has developed its tourist sector is seen as a model of success. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

164. Interviews with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

the ancient site of Zeugma.<sup>165</sup> The growth of (mainly Turkish) tourism in Mardin has been driven by advertising and supported by heritage conservation policies involving the local community.<sup>166</sup> In 2021, 732,979 tourists visited Gaziantep<sup>167</sup> and 201,339 visited Mardin.<sup>168</sup> By contrast, Adıyaman saw only 111,833.<sup>169</sup> The Mount Nemrut site—accessible both through Adıyaman and Malatya—saw around 60,000 tourists in 2007, 250,000 in 2022, 60,000 in 2023 in the wake of the earthquake, and 100,000 in 2024.<sup>170</sup> In general, around 90% of tourists were Turkish, and around 10% came from abroad.<sup>171</sup> The goal now is to match or exceed the figures for 2022. Physical improvements to heritage sites have become a priority for the authorities. The prefecture’s Cultural Office (*Adıyaman İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü*) wants to set up welcome points at nine different heritage sites: Kızılın bridge, Besni old town, Turuş cemetery, the Palanlı caves, the village of Taşgedik, the Karakuş burial mound, the Severan Bridge, the castle at Kâhta, and the ancient site at Arsameia.<sup>172</sup> At the same time, archaeological excavations have restarted at several sites, including the ruins of Pirin, the ancient Commagene city of Perrhe. A chamber tomb and a female relief dating from the Roman period were recently discovered in the neighboring district of Gölbaşı.<sup>173</sup> Efforts to promote the region’s heritage have been supported by efforts at historicization. A number of books have been published,<sup>174</sup> but it remains impossible to link up every piece of the area’s history, aspects of which remain hidden. Above all, revitalizing tourism in the province requires building the infrastructure for visitors to arrive and stay. Adıyaman’s attractiveness to tourists has been severely affected by the earthquake and the slow pace of rebuilding. There are only a few reliable or functional hotels left, and tour operators in south-east Turkey currently either skip the city or only schedule brief stopovers.<sup>175</sup> A real plan, one that accounts for the different dimensions of the tourist economy, has yet to be drawn up.

While Adıyaman’s appeal to tourists is not yet secure, the city’s gradual opening up can be seen in the attention it now receives from the outside world. Many natives of the province returned after the earthquake to help rebuild, and some report a renewed sense of belonging in the wake of the

165. The Zeugma Mosaic Museum opened in Gaziantep in 2011.

166. Interviews with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

167. These figures reflect the number of people who stayed in tourist accommodation certified by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2021. See “Üst Menü—Turizm—Turizm İstatistikleri—KONAKLAMA İSTATİSTİKLERİ—İşletme (Bakanlık) Belgeli Tesi Konaklama İstatistikleri—Önceki Dönemlere Ait İstatistikler,” “2021 Yılı Turizm İşletme Belgeli Konaklama İstatistikleri İl-İlçe Tablosu,” T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, available at: <https://yigm.ktb.gov.tr>.

168. Ibid.

169. Ibid.

170. Interview with the museum director by the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

171. Ibid.

172. Interview with the museum director by the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

173. “Adıyaman’da Roma dönemine ait oda mezar bulundu,” Haber Türk, October 18, 2024, available at: [www.haberturk.com](http://www.haberturk.com).

174. In addition to academic works, Seydi Vakkas Toprak has written on the province’s history and Mehmet Öncü on its food. According to the Director of Tourism and Culture of Adıyaman Prefecture, this kind of historiographical work has been carried out since the 1980s.

175. Generally GAP-funded tourism, including tours of the dams.

disaster.<sup>176</sup> Above all, the city has attracted increasing national media coverage. Several political leaders have visited since the earthquake. Ekrem İmamoğlu, mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality of İstanbul (*İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi*), came as president of the Union of Municipalities of Turkey (*Türkiye Belediyeler Birliği*) for the organization’s board meeting in Adıyaman on August 28, 2024. Murat Kurum, who became Minister of Urbanization and Environment (*T.C. Çevre, Şehircilik ve İklim Değişikliği Bakanlığı*) in July 2024, and who was İmamoğlu’s erstwhile rival for mayor of İstanbul, visited on October 4–5 to tour TOKİ’s new buildings. Finally, Mansur Yavaş, mayor of Ankara, visited on October 5 as president of the Union of Historical Towns of Turkey (*Tarihi Kentler Birliği*). Politicians also visited for a tribute to victims of the earthquake on February 6, 2025, including Ali Yerkaya, Minister of the Interior, Mahmut Demirtaş, Director General of Security, Ahmet Aydın, Deputy Minister of Labor, Özgür Özel, President of the CHP, Mehmet Varol, Governor of Adıyaman, and Cemil Tugay, Mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality of İzmir.<sup>177</sup> As part of the commemoration, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Murat Kurum appeared together in Adıyaman for a conference entitled “*Bir Oluruz*” (We Are One).<sup>178</sup> The city’s gradual emergence from isolation is partly based on the new mayor’s networks in the CHP, which offers links with the towns and cities the party won in the last local elections.<sup>179</sup> Adıyaman reflects a drive by the CHP to reclaim the local level—that is, to consolidate an alternative power base in local governments, and to link them together in order to change the balance of domination between Turkey’s center and its peripheries. And while the presence of political figures from a variety of parties offers a hint that future elections will be increasingly competitive, it is clearly a sign of renewed engagement, and perhaps marks the end of the region’s political isolation.

---

176. Interview with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

177. M. Ferit Binzet, “6 Şubat’ın ikinci yıldönümünde Adıyaman: Saat 04:17’de anma töreni düzenlendi,” Medyascope, February 6, 2025, available at: <https://medyascope.tv>.

178. “Adıyaman’DA DEPREM ŞEHİTLERİ ANILDI,” T.C. Çevre, Şehircilik ve İklim Değişikliği Bakanlığı, February 6, 2025, available at: <https://csb.gov.tr>.

179. One of Tutdere’s closest advisors, who had worked previously for the municipality of İzmir, was instrumental in linking the political networks of the two cities.

## Conclusion

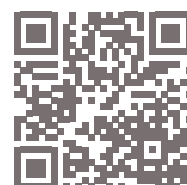
Adıyaman is a marginal, conservative Turkish city, whose loyalty and dependence on the state has remained constant over the long term. Its loyalty is based above all on peaceful inter-community relations and a social conservatism fostered by its isolation. The city and province have developed an “Adıyaman model,” where a peaceful conservative fringe region is loyal to and economically dependent on the state. Although the city’s elevation to provincial capital in 1954 was intended to open it up and, above all, to encourage economic development, it has remained isolated, lagging behind neighboring provinces that have seized on development opportunities for Turkey’s mid-sized cities. Adıyaman developed on a closed model that allowed conservative political tendencies to dominate its politics, with the AKP controlling municipal affairs between 2004 and 2024. But the 2023 earthquake seemed to have reawakened the long-neglected inhabitants of this “*sahipsiz şehir*” (ownerless city),<sup>180</sup> who were overlooked even at the moment of the disaster. While Adıyaman did not directly punish the AKP or Erdoğan himself in the 2023 elections, the local elections on March 31, 2024 marked a remarkable rupture point, as the city broke with 47 years of conservative domination and with the “Adıyaman model” of loyalty and dependence on the state. The promise of development, so long delayed, is emerging as a positive psychological resource for the *Adıyamanlı*: “Hope was born in the ruins of the earthquake.”<sup>181</sup>

---

180. Several of our interview subjects used the expression “*sahipsiz şehir*,” highlighting a widespread sense of abandonment among the population. Interviews with the author, October 2024, Adıyaman.

181. Quote from an interview with Abdurrahman Tutdere, May 2024, Adıyaman.





27 rue de la Procession 75740 Paris cedex 15 – France

[Ifri.org](http://Ifri.org)