

TURKEY'S 2011 ELECTIONS: AN EMERGING DOMINANT PARTY SYSTEM?

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This article analyzes Turkey's June 12, 2011, general elections, focusing on the three parties and the predominantly pro-Kurdish independents. Although the incumbent Justice and Development Party won by a sizeable majority, it gained fewer seats in comparison to its 2002 and 2007 electoral performances. The Republican People's Party maintained its position as the main opposition party, with noticeable increases in its voting shares both regionally and locally. The pro-nationalist Nationalist Action Party was the only party to lose seats in parliament. Last, the Kurdish independents increased both their parliamentary representation and their share of electoral spoils. Though the government maintained an overall parliamentary majority, its desire to enact constitutional changes and/or implement a presidential system will be constrained and dependent on support from the remaining parties in parliament.

INTRODUCTION

On June 12, 2011, Turkey's governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) won an anticipated third term in office for 2011-2015. The party, which first came to power in November 2002, has won three consecutive landslide elections. Under the leadership of Tayyip Erdogan, the AKP won a surprising near 50 percent (approximately 21.4 million votes) of the popular vote and 327 seats (out of 550) in the country's unicameral Grand National Assembly. The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), under the chairmanship of Kemal Kilicdaroglu, came in second with approximately 26 percent of the vote (11.1 million votes), giving them 135 seats in parliament. The CHP was followed by the pro-nationalist Nationalist Action Party (MHP), which gained 53 seats, with 13 percent of the vote. The pro-Kurdish nationalist Peace and Democracy Party, which ran its candidates as independents, obtained 35 seats.

Voter turnout was high, with approximately 83 percent of eligible voters showing up at the polls. The new parliament is composed of many novice parliamentarians, with 349 out of 550 deputies being first-timers. In addition, a higher proportion of female candidates have gained seats, increasing from 45 in 2007 to 78 in 2011.

The result achieved by the AKP is unique in Turkey's multiparty political history. Only the Democrat Party between 1950 and 1960 had managed to gain three consecutive terms in office. However, in the case of the AKP, the party has increased its share of the popular vote in each national electoral race (the Democrat Party's share of the vote fell between the second and third term in office). The CHP's renewed leadership also managed to improve the party's electoral performance, with significant rises in its vote share and the number of seats in parliament. Yet even such a result was not enough to end the party's long opposition spell, nor did it meet the rising expectations of CHP voters after Kilicdaroglu became the chairman of the party.

On the other hand, the MHP has emerged from the election as the only party that saw both the size of its parliamentary bloc and its vote share diminish. This result may further push the MHP into turmoil and a

period of soul-searching to develop a more effective political agenda. After the governing AKP, the other clear winner of the 2011 general elections was the pro-Kurdish BDP, which managed to increase both its share of the popular vote and the number of its seats in parliament. The BDP arguably ran its best-coordinated and most effective campaign since the Kurdish nationalist movement founded its first legal political party in 1990. Having almost doubled its parliamentary bloc and outperformed candidates from the ruling AKP in some key southeastern provinces, it could emerge as a key player pushing for minority rights and democratization in the next parliamentary term.

This article analyzes of the 2011 national election results. First, it accounts for the results achieved by the four parties entering parliament with an in-depth analysis of their electoral performance. Second, it discusses what one can expect from a third AKP term in office as well as what the political agenda of the opposition parties between 2011 and 2015 will be.

Party	Valid Votes (mil.)	%	Seats	Swing from 2007 %
AKP	21.4	49.9	327	3.3
CHP	11.1	25.9	135	5
MHP	5.5	12.9	53	-1.2
Independents	2.8	6.65	35	1.4

**THE
JUSTICE
AND
DEVELOPMENT
PARTY
(AKP)**

Table 1: Overall results of political parties and independents entering the Turkish national assembly.

Turkey Table 1

The
results

can be interpreted as an outright victory for the governing Justice and Development Party. The AKP formed a new government having received a vote of confidence in parliament and approval from President Abdullah Gul. This represents a third consecutive electoral victory for the AKP (2002, 2007, 2011), a feat that has only been achieved once before in Turkey's multiparty period (by the Democrat Party during the 1950s). What is unique about the AKP victory is that the AKP party has increased its share of the popular vote from one election to the next. At a personal level, this represents the sixth consecutive electoral victory for Erdogan in 17 years.

During its third term in office, several headline policy initiatives are expected from the AKP: Erdogan has already signaled his intention of going forward with the promulgation of a new constitution to replace the military commissioned 1982 constitution, which has been heavily amended over the course of the last decade. Between 2011-2015, there is the possibility of the AKP testing the ground to see if a presidential or semi-presidential system can replace the existing parliamentary system.

Furthermore, the "Kurdish Opening," an AKP policy initiative to resolve the Kurdish problem can be expected to gain momentum, particularly on account of the 35 pro-Kurdish elected members of parliament. During the delivery of his victory speech on June 12, 2011, Erdogan stressed that the AKP was happy and proud to have been given another clear mandate to govern, but this would be tempered by

humility and cooperation. Erdogan noted that they were not the government of 50 percent of the people, but of all 74 million Turkish citizens. He outlined that the AKP would do everything to draft a new constitution by building the broadest and most widespread consensus. In other words, in the event a new constitution is created, the AKP does not want this to be “the AKP’s” constitution. Having said this, any constitutional changes during this parliamentary term are likely to trigger protracted and heated debates. The AKP is unlikely to be able to pass any constitutional amendments with ease, as it will need the support of other political parties in parliament (see below).

Out of the 81 provincial districts, the AKP came in first in 71 provinces (see Figure/Map 2.). Regionally, for the first time, the AKP received the highest share of the vote in *all* of the country’s seven regions. The AKP won in nearly all of Turkey’s “greater municipalities” (designated as the largest and most populated cities), including Istanbul and Ankara. These are critical electoral districts, as they have the lion’s share of seats in parliament. Most noteworthy is the increase in the party’s vote share in the Aegean region. The AKP increased its share of the vote from 37 percent to 42.5 percent. Furthermore, although the AKP came in second behind the CHP in Izmir, it succeeded in significantly closing the gap in terms of the number of parliamentarians (Whilst the CHP gained 13 seats, the AKP gained 11). This success can be attributed to the particular attention paid by the party to the region, achieved largely by fielding credible candidates, outlining new projects, and intense campaigning.

To the dismay of the CHP, the AKP won the province of Antalya, a CHP stronghold and the home city of the former CHP Chairman Deniz Baykal (who was reelected). The only provinces in which the AKP did not gain seats were Tunceli, Hakkari and Igdir. The AKP was weakest in the southeastern provinces. In this region, the BDP increased its share of the vote by 70 percent in comparison to 2007, clearly increasing the visibility of Kurdish politicians and the Kurdish problem. The resolution of this issue is likely to be of central importance in this parliamentary term.

Most interestingly, 58 percent of the AKP’s parliamentarians were elected for the first time, while 138 out of the party’s 326 members were reelected. In addition, this is likely to be the last time that many of the AKP top brass will be elected (73 members in total). The party’s bylaws state that a party member can only stand and be a member of parliament three times. Unless this rule is altered, names such as Bulent Arinc, Cemil Cicek, Ali Babacan, Mehmet Ali Sahin, and Tayyip Erdogan cannot stand as candidates. Erdogan has already confirmed numerous times that he will not stand again. This is most likely because he intends to run for president.

Still, the AKP actually gained fewer seats in comparison to 2007. Two reasons can be cited: first, the increase in the number of seats gained by the BDP in southeastern provinces, which the AKP traditionally reaped. Second, based on a 2010 census count, the Higher Electoral Council reduced the number of seats held by many provinces (which were redistributed to provinces with increased population), on account of falling population in these areas. The AKP was able to gain fewer seats in such provinces overall (down from 341 to 327).

Despite an increase in the AKP’s percentage of votes, the number of seats received by the party in parliament was at its lowest since 2002. This is critical as the government lacks the minimum number of votes in the national assembly to invoke constitutional amendments. Simply put, the consent of two-thirds of parliamentarians (367) is necessary for a unilateral amendment of the constitution. This not being met, a three-fifths to two-thirds majority (330-367) is enough to submit proposed constitutional amendments to a national referendum (This was the method utilized by the AKP when it proposed 27 amendments to the

1982 constitution in 2010). The AKP presently has 327 seats, which will allow the government to pass any parliamentary legislation comfortably, but it will have to collaborate and rely on the support of other parties in parliament should it want to invoke any constitutional changes. Specifically, any move by the AKP to draft a new constitution or replace Turkey's parliamentary system of government with a presidential or semi-presidential system will necessitate the cooperation of other parties in parliament. The two parties most likely to cooperate with the AKP are the main opposition party, CHP, and the pro-Kurdish BDP. The pro-nationalist MHP is very unlikely to go along with any AKP initiatives in relation to liberal oriented constitutional changes, as these are likely to cross many if not all of the MHP's red lines.

Drafting a new constitution may be easier said than done. The CHP has indicated that it is willing to collaborate and is not totally opposed to the idea of a new constitution. However, Kilicdaroglu will be interested in not compromising on his own red lines. The CHP will not entertain the idea of a presidential or semi-presidential system, as they are aware that this will play into the AKP and Erdogan's hands (based on the belief that Erdogan would be elected president). The CHP also has preconditions for negotiations such as reducing the electoral barrier to five percent, taking steps to make the judicial branch more independent from the executive, and the removal of compulsory religious education from the national curriculum. These will prove to be difficult areas of compromise for the AKP.

If the AKP pushes ahead with drafting a new constitution, a reenactment of a parliamentary 'Settlement Commission' could take effect to help resolve disputes. This was an idea put forward by the AKP in 2007, but the CHP did not participate in this initiative. Another possibility revolves around the idea that the AKP may choose to collaborate exclusively or heavily with the pro-Kurdish BDP, in place of the CHP. This would mean that Erdogan would have to give further ground to the demands of the BDP in drafting a new constitution such as granting political autonomy or the guarantee of education in mother tongue (Kurdish) written into the constitution itself.

Still, it is unclear as to whether the BDP would then entertain the idea of enacting a presidential system. Furthermore, exclusive reliance on part of the AKP on the BDP to draft a new constitution would drastically fall short of Erdogan's promise to engage in consensus driven politics. It can be surmised that while the road to drafting a new constitution will be rocky, the possibility of enacting any type of presidential system in the next four years will be extremely difficult to achieve.

The final big question the new parliament will have to address quickly relates to the length of Abdullah Gul's term of office. The national assembly will have to determine whether he will serve one seven-year term expiring in 2014, or be up for reelection in 2012 as the new provisions provide. It would be fair to conclude that the answer to this question will largely be determined by Erdogan's own sentiments about implementing a presidential system and whether he intends to run for the position.

THE PEACE AND DEMOCRACY PARTY (BDP)

It can be argued that the BDP is the "happiest" party to come out of the elections, as it surpassed its own expectations. The AKP has, despite its numerical success, reasons to be somewhat upset, as it lacks the parliamentary seats to initiate constitutional changes.^[1] Similarly, the CHP has not achieved its set target

of 30 percent of the vote, and the MHP has seen a drop in its share of the vote (see CHP and MHP sections below). The Kurdish movement on the other hand has performed well on account of electoral strategy and recent past experiences. In December 2009, the Constitutional Court shut down the BDP's predecessor, the Democratic Society Party, based on charges of supporting terrorism. Having regrouped as the BDP, Kurdish politics in Turkey has once again proven its resilience as a broad social movement that is solely beyond the confines of a political party.

Until the 2007 general elections, Kurdish parties had found it difficult to gain parliamentary representation on account of the existence of the ten percent national electoral barrier, which they consistently failed to surpass. The ten percent barrier, however, does not apply to parliamentary candidates standing as independents. In both 2007 and 2011, rather than standing as the DTP/BDP, Kurdish parties fielded their candidates as independents. This required careful campaigning on their part, informing voters in the country's predominantly southeastern provinces which "independent" candidate they should be voting for. It is difficult for voters to identify independents as they do not running under an easily identifiable party banner on the ballot paper. Despite these obstacles, the Kurdish movement has increased its representation in parliament from approximately 20 seats in 2007 to 35 in 2011.

The Kurdish problem has gained further mainstream parliamentary attention and has influenced the government's policy formulation, which has come to be known as the Kurdish Opening. Over the course of the new parliamentary term, the BDP can be expected to continue to project increased demands upon the Turkish state. Specific demands are expected to focus on the constitutional guarantee of education in mother tongue, increased demands for regional autonomy, a push for a general amnesty for members of the separatist PKK terrorist organization, and possible negotiation over the status of its imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan.

Still, the BDP's fortunes have not fared well since the election. The BDP's prominent parliamentarian Hatip Dicle was banned from taking his seat in parliament by the Higher Electoral Council, based on his criminal conviction for sponsoring terrorism on behalf of the PKK. Following this denial, the BDP declared on June 20, 2011 that unless he was allowed to take his seat in parliament, the BDP would "not recognize the Turkish parliament" and BDP parliamentarians would not take their seats and oath of office.[2] Dicle's seat was subsequently awarded to the AKP, which raised the government's seat number to 327 and the BDP down to 35.[3] Two CHP members of parliament were similarly denied their seats in connection with ongoing criminal investigations.

At the time of writing, the BDP has not taken its place in parliament and is unlikely to do so until the end of the parliamentary recess at the earliest (October 2011). During the 2011-2015 term, the BDP will likely continue to be challenged with presenting itself as an accepted and legitimate political agent. This is mainly related to the view that the Kurdish political movement consistently fails to distance itself from the PKK's activities. Further skirmishes and conflict with the Turkish Armed Forces by the PKK and the resulting deaths of Turkish military personnel will make it harder for the AKP to continue with the Kurdish Opening process and will likely incite anger among the Turkish public toward Kurds in general.

THE REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S PARTY (CHP)

The Republican People's Party entered the 2011 elections under a new leader. Its long-standing chairman

Deniz Baykal had resigned in May 2010 after a sex tape was released on the internet implicating Baykal. [4] Following this unexpected turn of events, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the party's popular mayoral candidate for Istanbul in the 2009 local elections, was elected as the new chairman of the party by an almost unanimous vote. A career bureaucrat by profession, Kilicdaroglu entered politics just before the 2002 general elections as a candidate for the CHP. He has not been involved with the deep factional politics that has long characterized the party and rather stood for drastic changes within the CHP, both at the organizational and policy level. [5] Upon assuming office, Kilicdaroglu shuffled the Central Executive Council to appoint his trusted colleagues and replaced the old guards—"Baykal's Politburo"—in the Party Council with younger and more progressive members. Under his guidance, the CHP tried to portray a reformist image against the AKP government and recruited new candidates for the 2011 general elections.

The center-left CHP ranked second in the 2011 general elections by receiving 25.94 percent of the votes and gaining 135 seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. As shown in Table 1, this constitutes a steady increase in the level of support for the party since the 2007 general elections. The CHP elites interpreted the results with some disappointment, however, as the ruling party had won an impressive third consecutive term with an increased vote share while their party was still relegated to the ranks of the opposition. The CHP (see Table 2) received the bulk of its support from the more developed Aegean (35.77 percent), Marmara (30.98 percent), and Mediterranean (29.02 percent) regions, where most of the urbanized population is concentrated. On the other hand, its vote share experienced a fall in the conservative Black Sea region (22.73 percent) as well as Central Anatolia (22.30 percent) and reached a nadir in the Eastern (9.81 percent) and Southeastern (8.71 percent) regions. For his first election as chairman of the party, Kilicdaroglu ran a very successful campaign, which energized the CHP base more so than any other election in recent memory. Unlike Deniz Baykal, who preferred TV appearances over campaign stops, Kilicdaroglu kept his pledge to visit every province at least once, including those in the Kurdish-populated region. [6]

The biggest departure from the Baykal era, however, occurred at the policy level, as Kilicdaroglu left his mark by moving away from the party's rigid secularist positions. The new CHP administration instead formulated a populist platform, largely aimed to incorporate the socioeconomic groups excluded from the AKP's neo-liberal agenda (farmers, unemployed workers, retirees, and state employees) into an electoral coalition. Accordingly, the CHP elites criticized the government for creating economic growth that did not lower the unemployment rate and turned urban poverty into a major campaign issue. [7] In order to counter the AKP government's perceived strategy of selectively distributing state resources in exchange for political support, the CHP's election agenda included targeted messages such as lower gasoline prices for farmers, more jobs, higher retirement wages, and reduction of sub-contracted labor. Its most important campaign item was the "family insurance" initiative, a program that would offer poor households cash support to match their monthly income if it is below a certain level. [8]

The CHP elites also criticized the AKP government for violating civil liberties (especially in the infamous Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases), [9] suggesting that Turkey was on its way to becoming a civilian autocracy. In sharp contrast with the AKP's majoritarian measures, Kilicdaroglu tried to demonstrate his willingness to compromise on some controversial issues, ranging from his support for lifting the ban on

veiled students at university campuses to his pledge for granting enhanced powers to local governments. Due to criticism coming from the party ranks, however, he retracted some of his remarks, which ultimately damaged his credibility among some voters and was exploited by the AKP.

As indicated in Table 2, the CHP increased its vote share in all regions across the country—albeit marginally in the Southeastern and Eastern Anatolia. The CHP's electoral rise was modest but widespread across the country. Its vote share increased in all but 15 provinces, out of which 11 are located in Kurdish-populated areas. In 20 provinces, which are mostly in the Central Anatolian and inner parts of the Black Sea regions, the vote increase was only marginal (less than three percentage points), and overall support for the party remained low.

On the other hand, the party seems to have done relatively well (raising its vote share by between 3 to 10 percentage points) in 38 provinces and achieved tremendous success in 9 other provinces— among them Tunceli, Kilicdaroglu's hometown, with a historical high of 56 percent of the votes (a 39.63 percent increase). As shown in Figure 3, the CHP's electoral support was concentrated in five provincial clusters: (1) the Thrace region; (2) major urban centers; (3) the Aegean and the Mediterranean coastlines; (4) the two Alevi axes along Erzincan, Tunceli, Malatya, Tokat, Corum, and Amasya; and (5) small pockets of social democratic zones along the Black Sea coastline. In total, these five groups contain all the provinces in which the CHP received more than 15 percent of the vote.

Several observations should be noted here. First, the CHP has done extremely well in the Aegean coastline and the Thracian provinces, which have disproportionally large farmer and retired communities, and possess local economies that primarily depend on agricultural exports (e.g., 15.85 percent increase in Edirne, 13.8 percent in Canakkale, 13.75 percent in Aydin, 12.56 percent in Kirlareli, 11.36 percent in Mugla, 10.14 percent in Tekirdag, 9.5 percent in Balikesir, and 9.47 percent in Manisa). Six out of nine provinces, where the CHP achieved an electoral increase over ten percent, are indeed located in these two regions. While the party also did well here in the past elections, its impressive gains at the ballot box nonetheless suggest that Kilicdaroglu's targeted messages to farmers (cheap gasoline, higher agricultural subsidies, etc.) and retirees (legislation to ensure them a greater share of the national wealth) were well received. Marginalized by the 2001 economic crisis and structural reforms that followed, these two groups provided the electoral base of the Youth Party (*Genç Partisi*) in the 2002 and 2007 general elections^[10] and seem to have now turned to Kilicdaroglu's CHP.

Second, the party managed to increase its vote share significantly in major urban centers across the country. It made gains in 14 of the 16 most populous provinces (except for Sanliurfa and Van) and obtained major increases in its electoral support in some of the most developed parts of the country (e.g., 10.15 percent increase in Eskisehir, 8.35 percent in Izmir, 7.98 percent in Adana, 6.7 percent in Mersin, and 6.56 percent in Bursa). However, even a causal inspection of the results reveals that most of the vote increase came from the middle-class and affluent districts—Sisli, Kadikoy, Bakirkoy, and Besiktas of Istanbul; Cankaya of Ankara; and Konak and Karsiyaka of Izmir, etc.—rather than the poorer sections of these cities.^[11] Its weak party organization and the insufficient services provided by its local governments may partly account for this failure.

Kilicdaroglu's CHP may have also benefited from the selection of good candidates, thanks to the reintroduction of intra-party primaries held in 29 provinces.^[12] Its vote went up in 27 of these provinces, including some in which the party has historically done rather poorly (e.g., a 9.47 percent increase in Manisa, 9.25 percent in Denizli, 7.34 percent in Usak, 7.16 percent in Kirsehir, 5.39 percent in Bolu). Last,

the “Kilicdaroglu factor” substantially increased votes for the CHP in the Alevi-populated provinces, thanks to above normal turnout. While the CHP has historically been the party closest to the Alevi voters, leaders of the Alevi community were increasingly critical of the party for what they considered to be its lukewarm support for the Alevi political agenda and discrimination of their candidates.[13] Following the election of Kemal Kilicdaroglu as chairman of the party and the nomination of several high-profile Alevi candidates (Ilhan Cihaner, Sabahat Akkiraz, Huseyin Aygun), however, the Alevi voters seem to have given the party another chance.

THE NATIONALIST ACTION PARTY (MHP)

The pro-nationalist MHP entered the 2011 campaign with deep divisions inside the party arising from some members’ dissatisfaction with Devlet Bahceli’s weak leadership and centrist policies. The party also became the epicenter of the most dramatic development of the 2011 general elections, after a cyber group openly threatened to put online sex tapes of ten high-level party officials that resulted in their resignation a few weeks before the end of the campaign.[14] Voters were therefore more exposed to the internal bickering and scandals of the party than its electoral platform and policies. At the end of this rough campaign, the MHP secured 13 percent of the votes and, as expected, ranked third after the ruling AKP and the main opposition CHP. These results allowed the party to enter the Grand National Assembly with a reduced parliamentary bloc of 53 seats, down from 71 in the previous term.

As shown in Table 1, it lost a small portion of its votes when compared to the two previous election results. The party continues to draw the bulk of its support from the conservative-nationalist parts of the Mediterranean (20.03 percent), Aegean (14.70 percent), Central Anatolian (15.34 percent), and the Black Sea (13.19 percent) regions, while remaining below its national average in the Marmara region (11.34 percent) as well as in the Kurdish-populated Eastern Anatolia (8.09 percent) and Southeast Anatolia (4.16 percent). Its failure to draw considerable support among ethnic Kurdish voters may not be surprising but support for the party has evenly diminished in all regions across the country except for Central and Eastern Anatolia.

The 2011 election carried great importance for the MHP, which has been sidelined as a consequence of growing polarization between the governing AKP and the main opposition CHP. The Islamist media’s coordinated attacks on the party, together with the scandal involving its most senior officials, almost turned the 2011 general elections into a primal battle for the MHP. Bahceli and his entourage were aware of Erdogan’s efforts to attract nationalist voters and push the MHP out of parliament, which would, in effect, grant the AKP a supermajority in the Grand National Assembly. In response, Bahceli possibly ran his most energetic campaign to date, visiting 57 cities—an unprecedentedly high number for Bahceli—on the campaign trail and holding several campaign rallies a day.[15]

During the campaign, the MHP elites focused on four main themes to challenge the ruling AKP: (1) its failure to eliminate the threat of Kurdish separation and PKK terror; (2) the corruption scandals of leading AKP politicians; (3) persistence of relatively high unemployment rates and growing income gaps between socioeconomic groups; (4) Erdogan’s allegedly growing authoritarian tendencies. In his campaign speeches, Bahceli repeatedly suggested that if the MHP were to come to power, he would send several politicians from the AKP ranks to the High Court (*Yuce Divan*) and accuse Erdogan of dividing the country with his Kurdish Opening.

Consequently, the MHP portrayed the election as a “decision moment” (*karar anı*) for the Turkish people on the country’s future, hoping to attract the support of conservative voters disillusioned with the AKP government. In sharp contrast with the CHP, its electoral platform was visibly weak on socioeconomic policies and instead relied on conservative-nationalist sensitivities of the Turkish electorate. Its most “substantial” campaign proposal, *Hilal Card*, was vague and the party elites even failed to explain how they would finance such a program.

Based on the overall vote distribution, it would appear that the MHP’s electoral strategy has failed to achieve much success. When compared with the 2007 general elections, the MHP’s vote share decreased in a record number of 48 provinces, including some major urban centers such as Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana, Mersin, and Eskisehir, not to mention Osmaniye, Bahceli’s hometown. In four of these provinces, namely Bartın, Canakkale, Mersin, and Aydın, the decline was over five percent. Its vote increased, albeit marginally, in only 33 provinces, most of which are located in the underdeveloped parts of the Central Anatolia and the Black Sea region. Only in the sparsely-populated Elazığ, Iğdır, Kastamonu, Düzce and Bilecik, the party managed to raise its vote share by more than five percent, but it was more the local issues (or candidates) than any general trend that were behind this success.

An in-depth analysis of the results of the 2011 general elections also suggests the emergence of a palpable bifurcation in the support base of the party between what one could call the “traditional-nationalist” and the “neo-nationalist” constituencies. Historically, the MHP has drawn most of its support from pious and nationalist voters within the Anatolian heartland, who tend to be of the Sunni sect and have an anti-leftist orientation.^[16] The MHP still generates high levels of support in this region but has lost some of its votes to the AKP, which could offer voters tangible policies (cheap housing, free distribution of coal, paved roads, and free basic health services, etc.).

Similarly, the ruling party also managed to retain its vote majority in provinces that have achieved rapid economic growth over the past decade.^[17] This precluded the MHP’s chances for an electoral breakthrough in booming towns such as Kayseri (18 percent), Konya (13 percent), Malatya (8 percent), Gaziantep (9 percent), and Erzurum (13 percent). Due to both the strong appeal of the ruling AKP and the enthusiasm Kilicdaroglu has generated among voters, the party now ranks third in some of its former strongholds like Corum (11 percent), Tokat (16 percent), Sivas (10 percent), Niğde (19 percent), and Kırşehir (22 percent).

Partly balancing this electoral decline, the MHP has recently begun to attract more support from the economically-developed coastal provinces, where it historically did poorly.^[18] The party now draws some of its greatest support from the highly urbanized Adana (20 percent), Mersin (23 percent), and Antalya (21 percent) provinces. It also reached above its national average in Muğla (16 percent), Aydın (18 percent), and Canakkale (15 percent). These are all provinces that have become the main sites of Turkish-Kurdish clashes and sporadic urban riots, due to rapid Kurdish migration since the 1990s.

Hence, the MHP has successfully recruited the rising “neo-nationalist” groups over the past decade to such an extent that it now displays several characteristics similar to the populist, far-right parties in Europe.^[19] In what could be considered a healthy development within Turkish politics, however, support for the MHP—though still significant—decreased in most of the aforementioned provinces. This may come as a surprise, since the AKP government’s Kurdish Opening has generated significant resistance and outward opposition among nationalist voters. As both the AKP and the CHP increased their vote shares in

these areas, it is almost impossible to tell which party reaped the lost MHP votes until further research is conducted.

CONCLUSIONS

In the words of Erdogan, the AKP perceives the 2011-2015 parliamentary term as its “senior term” (*ustalik donemi*) in office. The party’s bylaws state that no party member can serve as party chairman for more than three consecutive terms, and Erdogan has indicated on numerous occasions that this will be the last time he will be a member of parliament. This does not alter the prediction, however, that the AKP during its third term will attempt to implement a series of constitutional changes to facilitate the transition from a parliamentary system to some sort of presidential system. Given his popularity among masses across the country, it seems inconceivable that Erdogan will withdraw from the field of professional politics by 2015. If successful changes were to be implemented, this would allow Erdogan to stand for such a position in 2014, when President Gul’s seven-year term is likely to expire. This said, at the time of writing, and based on present constitutional provisions, the AKP does not possess the requisite number of seats to carry out any constitutional changes. This will require the support of opposition parties in parliament, which at present appear to be uncertain at best.

Given the AKP’s strengthened electoral position at the 2011 elections, a basic conclusion that can be surmised is that Turkey is headed towards a dominant party model. The incumbency of the government since 2002 suggests that state institutions and the bureaucracy are increasingly becoming extensions of the will of the executive. However, it still is not apparent to what degree the AKP’s success is the success of Erdogan’s persona, as opposed to the grassroots appeal of the party. Certainly, the party performance in local government is known to be popular among voters across the country. Furthermore, the AKP’s relatively stable macro-economic policies have ensured record levels of economic growth over the last nine years, favoring small, medium, and big businesses.

Still, the question remains open for further research regarding the extent to which the AKP’s success is largely based on Erdogan’s personally. In any case, the resolution of critical political impasses will require the AKP to collaborate with opposition parties. This is true with regards to the creation of a new constitution (the top item on the AKP’s electoral manifesto), further implementation of the Kurdish Opening, and any transition to a presidential system. This is a reality Erdogan conceded when delivering his victory speech on June 12, 2011, by stating that the AKP was the party of not just the people who voted for it, but the party of 74 million.

With all of these considerations in mind, it seems difficult to envision any major compromises beyond the above-mentioned political problems. Reaching a compromise with opposition parties in parliament may be an insurmountable challenge, particularly because the creation of a new constitution, the transition to a presidential system, and the Kurdish Opening will come up against the demands and red lines of the CHP, MHP, and BDP. None of these parties are likely to support a presidential system knowing full well that Erdogan would be elected to office. From this perspective, while the AKP will have significantly less obstacles to passing new legislation during its third term, the same cannot be said of its ability to invoke systemic changes as represented by constitutional amendments and/or the creation of a new constitution.

There is no doubt that the AKP and Erdogan are happy with the results of the election. Still, they did not gain at least 331 seats in parliament, which would have allowed the government to attempt bolder changes.

Limitations, albeit from a different perspective, can also be identified in the case of the BDP. Having mastered an effective strategy to elect the maximum number of candidates, the Kurdish cause has never been so highly represented in the national assembly. Assuming that all 29 members of the BDP take their parliamentary oaths, this is sure to give the Kurdish movement a greater voice in national politics than ever before. Still, increased pressure is likely to bear down upon the party to transform itself into a “legitimate” political entity, implying that the political movement must completely distance itself from the separatist PKK. Recent attacks by the remnants of the PKK on the Turkish military and the ensuing loss of life on the part of military servicemen will not make Turkish public opinion more sympathetic to the Kurdish cause. Instead, it will weaken the government’s resolve and ability to roll out further measures associated with the Kurdish Opening as well as increase political pressure upon the government to conduct further military operations.

Furthermore, the Kurdish movement as represented by the BDP in parliament will feel pressure to portray a more “united front,” with respect to realizing its goals. Members within and outside of the BDP are currently too divided on what constitutes a desired settlement of the Kurdish problem. The recent declaration of the “autonomy of Diyarbakir,” as read out by certain members of the BDP, was not met with unanimous enthusiasm by all prominent members of the BDP. While, some members believed that calls for autonomy were premature, some members totally distanced themselves from the idea. This is indicative of the fact that the Kurdish movement in Turkey’s parliamentary scene is in a continued state of development. The critical point to watch for is whether the BDP and the AKP will be able to develop a consensual political relationship. The BDP’s calls for “autonomy” and “general amnesty” for PKK members and/or for Abdullah Ocalan will likely hamper the resolution of the Kurdish problem. Any lasting solution to Turkey’s longest and most protracted ethnic problem in the 2011-2015 term will require the cooperation and compromise of both the AKP and the BDP.

Although Kilicdaroglu’s CHP demonstrated an ability to attract new voters, the party still fell short of its self-declared threshold for success—30 percent of the vote. Many reasons account for this result, but the bottom line is that the renewed CHP was not endorsed by a majority of voters as a credible governmental alternative to the ruling party. In particular, it experienced great difficulty in reaching out to voters in conservative Central Anatolia and the Black Sea regions (especially its inner parts) as well as the Kurdish-populated Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, where the party’s vote remains well below its national average. Neither Kilicdaroglu’s populist rhetoric nor his strategy of running a national campaign proved enough to achieve a breakthrough with nationalist Kurdish and religious voters, the two groups that were repressed during the Kemalist single-party period.[20]

After a hard-fought campaign, Kilicdaroglu has thus found himself in a weakened position vis-à-vis both the AKP government and critics inside the party, who have tried to cast the results of the 2011 general elections as a negative vote on Kilicdaroglu himself. Not surprisingly, some analysts have already begun to question Kilicdaroglu’s ability to push for further reforms within the party. His meteoric rise has so far precluded him from having the time to lay the groundwork for structural changes within the party. Yet he now has an opportunity until the next party convention, scheduled for May 2012, to assemble a strong team (several deputy chairmen may lose their seats) and push the CHP in a reformist direction.

While a leadership contest is not on the horizon, thanks to Kilicdaroglu's popularity among party members, the CHP may experience an intra-party crisis revolving around the role of Kemalism. Orthodox Kemalists, who are unhappy with the efforts of Kilicdaroglu and his entourage to reinterpret Kemalism in a populist fashion, have mostly kept quiet. However, it is not clear how long these divisions can stay beneath the surface.

These intra-party struggles will take place during a very busy parliamentary term in which a new Turkish constitution may be written. Already faced with some intra-party opposition, Kilicdaroglu does not have much choice but to rally his base by taking an aggressive stand against the AKP. This initial resolve during the "parliamentary oath" crisis may be the first clear sign that the CHP elites will follow a determined course against the ruling party to oppose its systemic policy initiatives. Accordingly, the prospect of the two parties joining forces to write a new constitution seems highly unlikely at this point. What is still a bit unclear is to what extent the CHP will succeed in forging an inclusive opposition bloc that can voice the grievances of a diversified electorate that did not vote for the AKP. If Kilicdaroglu accomplishes this goal, Turkey will finally get the vibrant and democratic opposition it has lacked for some time.

The next parliamentary term also holds more risks than opportunities for the pro-nationalist MHP. For the moment, the party elites have the consolation of mostly preserving their vote share, despite being shaken up by sex scandals and intra-party divisions. If anything, Bahceli's MHP showed that it could withstand the onslaught of the AKP political machine, not to mention the attacks of the Islamist media, and still muster enough votes to surpass the ten percent electoral barrier. It should therefore be clear that the MHP will continue to be a major actor in Turkish politics in the near future. However, support for the party remains thinly scattered across Turkey. Its failure to increase votes in its former strongholds in Central Anatolia and the Black Sea region, where nationalism is still a potent force, should be an automatic concern for a party that found electoral life in the 1990s by making the Turkish-Kurdish cleavage salient.

Most conservative voters tend to make their electoral choices based on economic performance, as there exists a great deal of similarity on many ideological issues among the right-wing parties of the periphery. [21] While the MHP's electoral strength remained stable but low in the Anatolian heartland, many lower-income and middle class voters (Turkey's version of the "silent majority") flocked to the AKP—a "catch-all" party that offers both tangible economic benefits and a credible conservative-nationalist agenda. This trend is arguably the biggest reason the MHP has been out of power since 2002.

The MHP's main electoral base seems to have shifted to the more developed, coastal provinces in which voters are increasingly opposed to the Kurdish migration to their cities. Even in these areas, however, the party faces tough competition for votes from both the AKP and the CHP and ultimately depends on a rise in PKK-related terror to thrive electorally. The MHP may have already reached the end of its electoral reach, given that its ultra-nationalist ideology hurts its chances with Kurdish, educated, and highly religious voters. Provided that the attacks of the separatist PKK do not substantially rise and the economic climate remains positive, it will most likely stay within this electoral bandwidth.

Based on the election results, it would appear that the MHP resembles a "generational" party receiving disproportionately high levels of support from young, unemployed, and male voters but fails to instill in them strong partisan loyalties. In the long run, the party's biggest challenge would be to establish stronger partisan ties with its highly volatile and regionally diverse base. This partly depends on the MHP's ability to supplant its nationalist ideology with a new economic agenda that can appeal both to the urban poor and

to the economic-minded, conservative voters in provincial areas. For this, Bahçeli may need to follow a policy of brinkmanship in the upcoming parliamentary term by catering to the traditional-nationalist voters but without completely alienating the CHP (lest it lose more secular-minded nationalist voters in coastal provinces).

Under such a scenario, the MHP is expected to endorse some of AKP's conservative propositions in the coming parliamentary term, while also pushing the government to stand firmly against the minority demands of the Kurdish-nationalist BDP. Given their ideological proximity and similar constituencies, the ruling party would hesitate to make too many liberal concessions for fear of losing some voters to its nationalist rival. Hence, Bahçeli's MHP could play a critical role in shaping the essence of the new constitution in a conservative-nationalist fashion.

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[1] See "Why Couldn't We Get More Votes?" NTVMSNBC, June 16, 2011, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25223645/>.

[2] "If You Don't Let Us Be, We Will Not Enter Parliament," NTVMSNBC, June 20, 2011, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25224838/>.

[3] "Victim Mother to Take Dicle's Seat," NTVMSNBC, June 22, 2011, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25225510/>.

[4] Deniz Baykal has kept his parliamentarian post and was reelected in the 2011 general elections to represent Antalya in parliament. The details concerning the release of the tape have remained a mystery.

[5] For a detailed journalistic account of what occurred among the CHP's top circles from the time of Baykal's resignation until Kilicdaroglu's election, see Sukru Kucuksahin, *Kemal'in Gelisi – 15 Gunluk Frtna* (Istanbul: Dogan Kitap, 2010).

[6] Yusuf Sahici, "Quadrupled Baykal," *Gazeteport*, June 11, 2011, http://www.gazeteport.com.tr/haber/37002/baykali_katladi, (accessed July 17, 2011).

[8] For a concise summary of the CHP's campaign platform, see Oktay Eksi, *Turkiye'ye Sozum Var – Kemal Kilicdaroglu* (Istanbul: Literatur Yayincilik, 2011).

[9] At the time of writing, both investigations remain highly controversial and divisive among the Turkish public opinion. One side has argued in favor of the two trials, seeing them as a great opportunity to put an end to the covert operations conducted by the state security apparatus or the military to topple civilian

governments. The opposing side, however, claims that both cases mostly depend on faulty or fabricated evidence and that the legal and civil rights violations made by the prosecutors will come to haunt Turkish democracy. While some of the allegations regarding these cases are extremely serious and need to be prosecuted, there are growing signs that suggest both cases have become politicized and rather counter-productive. See Dani Rodrik and Pinar Dogan, *Balyoz: Bir Darbe Kurgusunun Belgeleri ve Gerçekleri* (Istanbul: Destek Yayinlari, 2010); Dani Rodrik and Pinar Dogan, "Turkey's Other Dirty War," *The New Republic*, May, 24, 2010, <http://www.tnr.com/article/world/75123/turkey%E2%80%99s-other-dirty-war>; Gareth H. Jenkins, *Between Fact and Fantasy: Turkey's Ergenekon Investigation*, August 2009, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/0908Ergenekon.pdf>.

[10] Bahadır Turk, *Sirket ve Parti* (Istanbul: Iletisim, 2008).

[11] This indeed reflects an electoral trend that has been in the making for quite some time. See Ali Carkoglu, "Ideology or Economic Pragmatism?: Profiling Turkish Voters in 2007," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer 2008), pp. 330-31; Sinan Ciddi, "The Republican People's Party and the 2007 General Elections: Politics of Perpetual Decline?" *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Fall 2008), pp. 446-47; Eser Sekercioglu, "Turkey's March 2009 Elections: Loss Without Defeat, Gain Without Victory," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (June 2009), <http://www.gloria-center.org/meria/2009/06/sekericioglu.html>. Following the electoral disappearance of their parties, the secular middle and upper-middle class voters of the center-right Motherland Party (ANAP) and the True Path Party (DYP) have increasingly turned to the centrist CHP in defense of their lifestyles. Despite attaining much success with other constituencies since the early 2000s, the AKP has consistently failed to make inroads into the more cosmopolitan segments of the urban population.

[12] "Primary Celebration at CHP," *Radikal*, April, 4, 2011, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1045054&CategoryID=78>; Meral Tamer, "The Primary Elections Benefited Women at the CHP; Kilicdaroglu Is Happy to Have Been Wrong," *Milliyet*, April, 5, 2011,

<http://ekonomi.milliyet.com.tr/chp-de-on-secimler-kadinlara-yaradi-kilicdaroglu-yanilmaktan-memnun/ekonomor>

[13] Tahire Erman and Emrah Goker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Winter 2000); Harold Schuler, "Secularism and Ethnicity: Alevi and Social Democrats in Search of Alliance," in Stefanos Yerasimos, Gunter Seufert, and Karin Vorhoff (eds.), *Civil Society in the Grip of Nationalism: Studies on Political Culture in Contemporary Turkey* (Istanbul: Ergon, 2000).

[15] "Bahceli Campaigned in 57 Cities," *Milliyet*, June 10, 2011, <http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/bahceli-tam-57-il-gezdi/siyaset/siyasetdetay/10.06.2011/1400880/default.htm>.

[16] Burak Arikan, "The Programme of the Nationalist Action Party: An Iron Hand in a Velvet Glove," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (October 1998); Jacob Landau, "The Nationalist Action Party in Turkey," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (October 1982), pp. 587-606.

[17] William Hale and Ergun Ozbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey: The Case of the AKP* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 99-118; Fuat Keyman and Berrin Koyuncu Lorasdagı, *Kentler:*

Anadolu'nun Donusumu, Turkiye'nin Gelecegi (Istanbul: Dogan Kitap, 2010).

[18] This political trend was as much a consequence of the MHP's move towards a centrist position in the political arena as the electoral disappearance of the center-right parties since the mid-1990s. For an account of the MHP's evolution, see Arikan, "The Programme of the Nationalist Action Party"; Alev Cinar and Burak Arikan, "The Nationalist Action Party: Representing the State, the Nation or the Nationalists?" *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 2002). For an ethnographic study that convincingly demonstrates how the MHP gradually stole the center-right True Path Party's (DYP) vote, see Sibel Ozbudun, "The Reproduction of Clientelism in Regressing Rural Turkey or Why I Became a 'Erect Ear'," *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Spring 2005), pp. 241-72.

[19] The rise of neo-nationalism in the Turkish context has been in the making for some time and is not only restricted to the MHP voters. For a more detailed discussion of this trend and its diverse ideological components, see Tim Jacoby, Tanil Bora, "Nationalist Discourses in Turkey," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 102, No. 2-3 (Spring/Summer 2003), pp. 433-451; Tim Jacoby, "Fascism, Civility and the Crisis of the Turkish State," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (May 2011), pp. 905-24; Cenk Saracoglu, *Sehir, Orta Snf ve Kurtleri Inkardan "Taniyarak Dislama"ya*, (Istanbul: Iletisim, 2011).

[20] Omer Taspinar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey: Kemalist Identity in Transition* (London: Routledge, 2004). See also Mesut Yegen, *Devlet Soyleminde Kurt Sorunu* (Istanbul: Iletisim, 1999).

[21] Ali Carkoglu, "A New Electoral Victory for the 'Pro-Islamists' or the 'New Centre-Right'? The Justice and Development Party Phenomenon in the July 2007 Parliamentary Elections in Turkey," *South European Society & Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (December 2007), p. 518; Ali Carkoglu and Melvin Hinich, "A Spatial Analysis of Turkish Party Preferences," *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2006).