

The Republican People's Party and the 2014 Local Elections in Turkey

MUSTAFA ALTUNOĞLU*

ABSTRACT Ahead of the 2014 local elections, the main opposition, the Republican People's Party (CHP), developed an aggressive outreach campaign to add new voters to its ranks as the disappearance of its former rivals, the Democratic Left Party (DSP), left the CHP with a monopoly over the Left and the Gülen Movement broke with the ruling AK Party just months before the elections. The election results, however, reaffirmed that the main opposition party remained largely unpopular outside major metropolitan areas, including Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. On election day, the CHP received less than 5 percent in most of the Southeast and Eastern Anatolia, as its efforts to associate with democracy and freedom proved futile against the backdrop of controversial alliances with extra-parliamentary forces.

Introduction

In Turkey, each election cycle tends to receive special attention as elections typically spark both great excitement and tensions. For months at a time, elections dominate all public debate about the country's politics while politicians, candidates and party organizations compete to impress voters. Once election results start flowing in, winners passionately embrace their success while losers face disappointment.

The special attention that elections receive may be attributed to the various persistent shortcomings of the Turkish political system's democratic credentials. In regular modern democracies, elections represent an indispensable part of the political system while the Constitution safeguards individual rights and liberties from the majority's demands and expectations. In Turkey, however, government institutions tasked with protecting the Constitution and, by extension, individual rights and liberties (i.e. checks-and-balances) traditionally served another set of priorities – the protection of the state and its various

* Anadolu University

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institutions against a counter-revolution. In a sense, such government institutions represented safety switches that would deter and prevent elected actors from challenging the state and its red lines.

Various memorable confrontations between elected governments and the establishment in the Republic's history, including the 1960 military coup, the 'postmodern' coup of 1997 and the 2007 'e-coup', reflected the aforementioned sense of protecting the state and the constitutional order against challenges and constituted the cornerstone of Turkey's infamous guardianship regime. This self-proclaimed role of the establishment historically justified a broad range of interventions in the political process as a necessary and, in some cases, mandatory act. The execution of ousted Prime Minister Adnan Menderes in 1961, for instance, represented one of the most extreme measures that the elites took over past decades. A series of controversial rulings by the Constitutional Court, coupled with various incidents where elected governments were forced to resign, would fit into the same category. While the Republic's history could offer numerous other examples of the sort, the point is that the establishment has traditionally chosen to serve and protect the state as opposed to the people, and turned a blind eye to elections and civilian politics at their own convenience.

Against the backdrop of repeated transgressions against electoral processes and civilian politics in Turkish history, both ordinary citizens and politicians attributed a special importance to the ballot box. For the general population, elections served as the only instrument within their means to influence the country's affairs. Similarly, the ballot box has traditionally offered a channel for the masses to stand against the aforementioned defamation of their representatives. In response, politicians often found that they could only rely on popular support in their pursuit of power and influence within the political system.¹ It is therefore that elections, local or national, remain of critical importance to this day.

Turkey's democratic shortcomings would also account for the widespread treatment of various local elections in past years, as well as in March 2014, as a national affair. Since 1960, local elections typically had repercussions beyond the limits of local races and therefore assumed the role of a referendum or a vote of confidence for successive governments. Simply speaking, local elections in Turkey either served as a nationwide opinion poll during the lead-up to national elections or represented a vote of confidence for the ruling party/coalition government in the aftermath of national elections.²

In March 2014, two factors were influential over the local elections' treatment by voters and commentators as a matter of national politics. First and foremost, local issues rapidly lost their relevance to voters as political tensions,

which became visible during the Gezi Park protests and grew more intense after the government was hit with corruption allegations on December 17, 2013, peaked right before election day. Secondly, the upcoming presidential race in August 2014 and subsequent parliamentary elections in 2015 further reduced the influence of local races and candidates over voter behavior. In light of these elements, it is possible to argue that all political parties deliberately brought national issues to the forefront of their campaigns in an attempt to test their strength prior to two key national elections over the next 18 months.

While almost all political commentators in Turkey made the case that the March 30 elections had to do more with national matters than local politics, it is worth noting that such a claim seems to discredit the various components of electoral behavior by exclusively relying on overarching national debates. In other words, assessments of the local elections without due attention to local concerns, policy issues and candidates would inevitably fall short of presenting an accurate and complete portrayal of the election results.³

Contextualizing the March 30 Local Elections

The outcome of the 2014 local elections reaffirmed the simple fact that the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), which won all elections since its establishment in 2001, remains considerably more popular than its competitors. With the exception of a handful of electoral districts, the ruling party either won or finished second in local races across the nation, while support for opposition parties was concentrated in only certain parts of the country.

Election results in Turkey and elsewhere tend to reflect their political, economic and sociological context which in turn carries traces of historic trends. In this sense, the specific context of the 2014 local elections represented a mix of structural elements (i.e., Turkish political culture including the country's historic quest for secularization and national unity), last summer's urban revolts and tensions between the AK Party government and the Fethullah Gülen Movement which became public in late 2013.

In the Republic's history, secularization represented an effort by the ruling elites to transform both state and society with reference to the Enlightenment ethos, which seeks to eliminate the influence of religion and traditional culture



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over everyday life and reshape routine practices according to Western standards. National unity, in this context, refers to the elites' reliance on nationalist ideology to create a *homogeneous* nation. In Zygmunt Bauman's words, the 'gardening' state seeks to eliminate and uproot all forms of diversity.⁴ Just like secularization, the quest for national unity entailed repeated interventions by the state in everyday life. Against the backdrop of these practices, both the AK Party and the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) represent social forces that are fundamentally opposed to such interventionism.

Starting with the initial attempts (such as the Progressive Republican Party of the mid-1920s) to establish a multi-party democracy in Turkey, the above-mentioned circumstances contributed to the emergence of all the CHP's political opponents as the center of attention for the general population. As the Republic's founding party refrained from revising its role as the representative of the establishment seeking to dominate social and political life in the country, the majority of the population instead sided with a series of center-right parties, including the Democratic Party of the 1950s, the Justice Party of the 1960s and 1970s, and the AK Party. The most recent election results reaffirmed that similar sentiments maintain their influence over Turkish society today.

Moreover, the Gezi Park protests and recent tensions between the Gülen Movement and the AK Party emerged as centerpieces of the political context of the local elections as both conflicts created the expectation that the opposition front would become more active. While last summer's urban revolts portrayed the AK Party as an ever-authoritarian political movement seeking greater influence over individuals' lifestyles, the Gülen Movement launched an attack against the government on December 17, 2013 in the form of corruption charges and leaked sound recordings. Meanwhile, the movement announced prior to the elections that its members would support the AK Party's leading challengers in local races across the nation and sought to motivate the opposition front. The election results, however, made it clear that the opposition failed to meet its objectives. In light of the above, this study seeks to analyze the outcome of the 2014 local elections with reference to the main opposition, the CHP.

The CHP's Advantages and Disadvantages in the Lead-Up to the Local Elections

Ever since Turkey became a multi-party democracy in the 1940s, the CHP has experienced several losses against its competitors and therefore became nearly a constant part of parliamentary opposition. Despite various initiatives that the party developed to perform better in elections, such attempts proved futile



to a large extent. The fact that ideological and organizational changes failed to deliver expected results represents another interesting phenomenon.⁵ Despite discouraging results, however, experimenting with alternative political platforms has made the CHP considerably more flexible over the past decades – a source of the party’s resilience and ability to maintain its importance within Turkey’s political system over a prolonged period of time.⁶

The 2009 local elections, where the CHP finished second with 23 percent of the vote, represented one of the most notable examples of the party’s flexibility on a number of issues. Prior to the elections, the main opposition party admitted burqa-wearing women as members and promoted Qur'an instruction while shifting the focus of its campaign away from rigid secularism.⁷ Furthermore, the party nominated right-wing politicians in the 2009 local elections and the parliamentary elections two years later in an attempt to reach out to new voter blocs. The fact that the CHP continued this policy after Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu’s rise to power within the party in May 2010 arguably represented an advantage prior to the 2014 local elections, when party lists featured

Supporters of Turkey’s main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) wave Turkish and party flags during an election rally.

EPA / Sedat Suna

right-wing conservatives – including former members of the AK Party and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) members – in Ankara, Bursa and Hatay as well as in certain conservative-leaning districts within the Istanbul metropolitan area.

Prior to the local elections, another major advantage for the CHP was its dominance over the Left as former rivals, including the Democratic Left Party (DSP), rapidly lost their appeal following the death of Bülent Ecevit, a legendary figure for many left-leaning voters. The lack of viable alternatives within the Left, therefore, effectively eliminated the risk of schism which represented a significant challenge in past years.

Thirdly, the CHP had a clear advantage over other opposition parties to reap the benefits of a widespread search for a new kind of politics which began with the Gezi Park protests last year. Assuming that the urban revolts generated a political movement above and beyond its individual components,

greater participation in local government, more emphasis on environmental protection and reactions against police brutality constituted the cornerstones of a new opposition platform. In this sense, the events deepened traditional fault-lines of Turkish politics, while alliances and hostilities within the country's political landscape experienced rapid change.⁸ In this regard, the Gezi Park protests caused the liberals and certain parts of the Left, who were already experiencing some problems with the government, to break their ties with the ruling AK Party. As such, intellectuals, journalists and academics of national and international repute publicly declared prior to the elections that they would support the main opposition party on March 30.⁹

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Moreover, another key advantage for the CHP was the party's position within the broader conflict between the AK Party and the Gülen Movement: The main opposition leadership established a close working relationship with the Gülenists – and, of course, vice versa – in the aftermath of the December 17 operations and remained loyal to this instrumental and strategic alliance with no significant reactions from the voter base. The CHP's closer ties to the Gülen Movement, which reflected both parties' mutual dislike of the AK Party, without a doubt made the party a stronger contender on March 30.

Finally, political commentators frequently argued that the main opposition party could benefit from the ruling AK Party's 12 consecutive years in power. Adding the Gezi Park revolts and the December 17 operations to the mix, they

argued that large chunks of AK Party supporters could part ways with the government in the local elections. Such a possibility no doubt represented a major advantage for the CHP.

Even though the CHP enjoyed such advantages ahead of the March 30 local elections, it also suffered from a number of disadvantages associated with the party's long history as well as recent performances, which collectively prevented the main opposition from reaching out to broader audiences. In this sense, the leading problem with the party's image has been its perception by the general population as *the party of the state*, which reflects at least two real-life phenomena. First, the CHP's membership remains largely representative of an elite class which has been around since the party's establishment in the 1920s.¹⁰ As such, the legacy of Westernized elites who sought to promote a secularist lifestyle and viewed the masses as people in need of enlightenment remains arguably quite alive within the party organization and prevails among the general population.¹¹ In light of this, the party continues to face serious challenges in its attempt to synchronize with Turkish society.

Another source of the popular imagination of the CHP as a party of the state is that the overwhelming majority continues to believe that, given the choice, the party would opt for close relations with the state rather than the masses. In this sense, the party is expected to discredit elected governments, identify them as a threat against either the constitutional order or the Republican revolution, and cooperate with the *veto players* within the political system in order to eliminate perceived threats.¹² In other words, a significant part of Turkish society continues to associate the CHP with military coups, even though the party leadership repeatedly dismissed such accusations. Therefore, people remain unconvinced that the main opposition party would resist extra-parliamentary attempts to discredit and derail the political process.

At this point, one could make the (partially correct) point that, in light of the erosion of veto players' influence under successive AK Party governments, it would be meaningless to claim that the CHP maintains its ties to such groups.¹³ The CHP leadership's impromptu alliance with the Gülen Movement, however, was met with little resistance from its ranks – with the notable exception of Birgül Ayman Güler, MP¹⁴ – who failed to warn optimists that the party remained vulnerable to shaking the occasional ‘invisible hand’ that seeks to defame the political powerholders.¹⁵ Although the party's cooperation with the Gülen Movement could be justified under the pretext of an aggressive outreach strategy, this move indeed reflected a motivation to adopt means of questionable legitimacy in order to wear down political opponents. Although CHP supporters may not have reacted against their party's alliance with Fethullah Gülen's followers, this move alone turned out to be one of the major obstacles to the party's success on election day.

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Another factor that worked against the CHP's outreach efforts during the lead-up to the local elections was its commitment to "negative politics." Presenting itself as a social democratic party, the CHP's continued efforts to protect Republican icons and the perceived interests of the state effectively resulted in second thoughts about the nature and extent of change within the party.¹⁶ Such doubts, in turn, prevented the CHP from developing meaningful and popular policies – useful tools for a political party trying to persuade the masses that it, too, could solve the country's pressing issues. Had this not been the case, the CHP would have been able to mobilize opposition groups in order to take credible steps to overcome

crisis situations. The party's failure to translate popular discontent into policy, however, has resulted in ever-increasing political tensions while fueling doubts among the AK Party's opponents regarding the main opposition's capabilities.

Another repercussion of the CHP's insistence on "negative politics" relates to the party's vocal criticism of identity politics, especially religious and ethnically motivated movements, since the Baykal era, even though Republicans themselves seek to represent, almost exclusively, a social group with limited influence.¹⁷ The party's failure to instead try and build a broader social coalition to protect individual identity groups from each other as well as the state continues to reflect poorly on its prospects for change.

Furthermore, the CHP's fragmented central and local organizations proved costly in the 2014 local elections. The current composition of CHP supporters, which mainly consist of (1) Kemalist hardliners, (2) reformists and (3) former right-wingers, presents the following challenges to the party's success:

- i) Such fragmentation leads to contradictory and unclear positions within the party. For instance, the CHP's position regarding the Kurdish peace process remains open to interpretation as the party fails to present concrete proposals regarding this crucial matter. More specifically, the leadership and party elites tend to make public statements that contradict one another.¹⁸
- ii) Disagreements within and between the central committee and local organizations appear to have led Chairman Kılıçdaroğlu away from his initial emphasis on reformist policies and, by extension, resulted in a reproduction of negative perceptions about the party.
- iii) Chairman Kılıçdaroğlu, as his actions during his party's efforts to finalize its list of mayoral nominees over the past months would suggest, has a tendency to prioritize power consolidation over intra-party democracy, which runs the risk of creating dissent within the lower ranks of the party organization.

In light of the above, the CHP's fragmented membership and administration has worked to its disadvantage in the 2014 local elections.

Campaigns and Candidates

The CHP's local election campaign employed two main mottos with an emphasis on *unity*: "CHP: Turkey's Uniting Force" and "In Wealth, in Unity, in Liberty." The term accurately reflected the main opposition party's overall direction since the election of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu as chairman in May 2010. Throughout his tenure, the main opposition leader argued that his party would not discriminate against ethnic or religious communities and instead reach out to all social groups. Acknowledging Turkey's ethnic and religious diversity and voicing support for cultural rights, Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu's discourse fueled hope that the CHP could finally bridge the gap between its policies and vast chunks of Turkish society. Furthermore, the CHP leadership made frequent references to wealth, in addition to democracy and liberty, as an indication of the party's interest in economic development.

Although the CHP's media campaign prior to the March 30 elections relied on the aforementioned mottos, Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu often turned to other issues on the campaign trail. The December 17 operation, for example, left an unmistakable mark on the main opposition party's campaign events and resulted in additional emphasis on corruption allegations. For Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu, constant references to corruption served as a shortcut to discrediting Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his AK Party.

Another important aspect of the CHP campaign was the total lack of negative comments about the Gülen Movement. In this sense, Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu's public addresses, which typically featured the most recently leaked phone call between government officials, failed to acknowledge the Gülenist hegemony over the country's bureaucracy – a decision that fueled speculation about a deal between the CHP and Gülen's followers despite objections from the main opposition party. Meanwhile, the Gülen Movement offered considerable support to the CHP campaign as Gülenist media outlets provided disproportionate coverage of Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu and other senior members of the CHP. Briefly put, corruption allegations against the AK Party government represented the cornerstone of the CHP campaign, which assumed that talking about corruption, as opposed to concrete proposals and projects, would be enough to discredit the ruling party.

The main reason that the CHP received unusual attention during the lead-up to the March 30 local elections, however, was a set of hand-picked candidates in key districts. The main opposition party nominated Mustafa Sarıgül, the

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were the CHP's star candidates, the party leadership opted for politicians from outside the Left in an attempt to claim new territories. While Lütfü Savaş, who had recently resigned from the AK Party, sought re-election in Hatay under the CHP banner, a series of right-wing politicians in conservative-leaning Bursa, Balıkesir and Kayseri emerged as the main opposition's candidates for local government.

Opting for right-wing candidates over partisan figures in certain districts, the CHP also parted ways with incumbents in certain secularist strongholds including Tekirdağ, Edirne and Kırklareli. Similarly, incumbents failed to secure nomination in some parts of İstanbul and İzmir as the Kılıçdaroğlu administration signalled that they would favor their allies over others in an attempt to consolidate the leadership's control over the party's affairs. Nonetheless, incumbent mayors of Aydın, Antalya, Eskişehir and İzmir Metro found an opportunity to seek re-election in their districts.

Two points deserve particular attention with regard to the main opposition party's choice of mayoral candidates. Primarily, it was noteworthy that Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu made a clear effort to include right-wing politicians among his party's ranks as part of an outreach strategy to win over members of social groups with weak ties to the CHP. Moreover, the 2014 local elections made it clear that the CHP chairman intends to consolidate his power within the party organization. Against the backdrop of such calculated moves, the hype around Sarıgül and Yavaş helped the opposition campaign gain considerable momentum and gave hope to many long-term supporters that victory in either İstanbul or Ankara would deal a serious blow to the ruling AK Party.

What Happened on March 30?

On March 30, the CHP entered the race against the backdrop of aforementioned advantaged and disadvantages. Keeping Chairman Kılıçdaroğlu's post-election statements in mind, the party failed to meet expectations, including reaching the 30-percent mark and ending the AK Party's dominance in İstanbul and Ankara, on election day.¹⁹ Seeking to reclaim either city (or both), the CHP

three-term mayor of İstanbul's financial district, and Mansur Yavaş, a popular Ankara-based politician who recently left the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), in the country's largest metropolitan areas which have been dominated by the AK Party over the past decade. In addition to Sarıgül and Yavaş, who

ended up losing to the AK Party in both metropolitan districts. As such, the main opposition party failed to implement its game plan with regard to its cumulative share of the votes and the local races in İstanbul and Ankara.

In the 2014 local elections, the CHP won a total of 13 provinces, six of which (i.e., Aydın, Tekirdağ, Muğla, Eskişehir, Hatay and İzmir) were metropolitan municipalities with 750,000+ residents.²⁰ Furthermore, the party claimed two provinces (i.e., Hatay and Burdur) which were previously governed by AK Party politicians. In contrast, former CHP municipalities Antalya and Artvin went to the AK Party while Mersin, another CHP municipality, witnessed an MHP victory. Moreover, the main opposition party lost Ordu, where the incumbent had switched from the DSP to the CHP after winning the 2009 local elections. As such, the CHP won three new districts, while losing four formerly Republican municipalities to its opponents.

Table 1: Electoral Districts, CHP win (2014 Local Elections)²¹

	District	Points (%)	Runner-up, (%)	Margin (%)
1	Aydın	43.7	AK Party, 29.05	+14.65
2	Burdur	44.4	AK Party, 35.1	+9.3
3	Çanakkale	54.4	AK Party, 35.9	+18.5
4	Edirne	36.9	AK Party, 30	+6.9
5	Eskişehir	44.8	AK Party, 39.1	+5.7
6	Giresun	46.3	AK Party, 39.1	+7.2
7	Hatay	40.9	AK Party, 40.4	+0.5
8	İzmir	49.6	AK Party, 36	+13.6
9	Kırklareli	37.9	AK Party, 29.4	+8.5
10	Muğla	49.1	AK Party, 29.1	+20
11	Sinop	54.2	AK Party, 37.4	+16.8
12	Tekirdağ	45.8	AK Party, 37.2	+8.6
13	Zonguldak	39.9	AK Party, 38.6	+1.3

In all districts that the CHP won on March 30, the party's primary opponent was the AK Party. In Hatay and Zonguldak, the main opposition party won municipal races by a small margin while dealing major blows to the AK Party in Muğla (20%), Çanakkale (18.5%), Sinop (16.8%), Aydın (14.5%), İzmir (13.6%), Burdur (9.3%), Tekirdağ (8.6%), Kırklareli (8.5%), Giresun (7.2%), Edirne (6.9%) and Eskişehir (5.7%).

Table II presents another key data set about the 2014 local elections. As seen above, the CHP finished second in 18 provinces while losing to the AK Party by a particularly small margin in Ankara, Antalya and Ardahan. Similarly, the party trailed the MHP in Kars and Mersin. In Malatya, Adiyaman and Ga-

Table 2: Electoral districts where the CHP finished second (2014 Local Elections)

	District	CHP (%)	Winner (%)	Margin (%)
1	Adiyaman	21.8	AK Party, 56.5	-34.7
2	Ankara	43.8	AK Party, 44.6	-0.8
3	Antalya	35.3	AK Party, 35.8	-0.5
4	Ardahan	33.7	AK Party, 34.2	-0.5
5	Artvin	36.9	AK Party, 46.3	-9.4
6	Bolu	37.7	AK Party, 49.6	-11.9
7	Bursa	28.7	AK Party, 49.5	-20.8
8	Çorum	34.4	AK Party, 50.7	-16.3
9	Denizli	38.8	AK Party, 45.3	-6.5
10	Gaziantep	21.7	AK Party, 54.1	-32.4
11	İstanbul	40.1	AK Party, 47.9	-6.8
12	Kars	25.1	MHP, 28.3	-3.2
13	Kocaeli	26.2	AK Party, 50.6	-24.4
14	Malatya	16.7	AK Party, 62.9	-46.2
15	Mersin	28.2	32.1 (MHP)	3.9
16	Ordu	34.2	54.4 (AK Parti)	20.2
17	Trabzon	24.4	58.4 (AK Parti)	24
18	Tunceli	30.8	42.5 (BDP)	7.7

ziantep, however, there was a considerable gap between the winners and the runner-ups. Finally, the party's notable defeats included Artvin (9.4%), Bolu (11.9%), Bursa (20.8%), Çorum (16.3%), Denizli (6.5%), İstanbul (6.8%), Kocaeli (24.4%), Ordu (20.2%), Trabzon (24%) and Tunceli (7.7%).

Table III provides a list of electoral districts where the CHP performed the worst. In a total of 37 districts, the main opposition party received less than 10 percent of the vote. Among these, Afyonkarahisar (5.35%), Aksaray (6.51%), Isparta (9.9%), Kahramanmaraş (6.12%), Kastamonu (7.18%), Kayseri (8.75%), Konya (5.7%), Osmaniye (9.91%), Sakarya (8.89%) and Tokat (5.28%) marked areas where the CHP's popular support exceeded the 5-percent mark. Meanwhile, the party received less than one percent of the votes in Ağrı, Batman, Bayburt, Bingöl, Bitlis, İğdır, Mardin, Siirt, Şanlıurfa and Van as well as less than two percent in Çankırı, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, Hakkari, Kütahya, Muş, Nevşehir, Şırnak and Yozgat. The numbers clearly point out that the main opposition party suffers from extremely low support in the Southeast as well as a number of Central Anatolian cities, including Yozgat, Çankırı, Nevşehir and Kırşehir. Finally, the CHP proved largely unsuccessful outside the Aegean coastline in Western Anatolia.

Table 3: Electoral districts with the worst CHP performance in the 2014 local elections

	District	Percentage Points
1	Afyonkarahisar	5.35
2	Ağrı	0.77
3	Aksaray	6.51
4	Batman	0.73
5	Bayburt	0.88
6	Bingöl	0.61
7	Bitlis	0.89
8	Çankırı	1.32
9	Diyarbakır	1.30
10	Düzce	3.96
11	Elazığ	7.02
12	Erzurum	1.57
13	Gümüşhane	3.56
14	Hakkari	1.42
15	Iğdır	0.74
16	Isparta	9.9
17	Kahramanmaraş	6.12
18	Karabük	2.61
19	Kastamonu	7.18
20	Kayseri	8.75
21	Kırıkkale	2.86
22	Kilis	3.02
23	Konya	5.7
24	Kütahya	1.61
25	Mardin	0.88
26	Muş	1.2
27	Nevşehir	1.81
28	Osmaniye	9.91
29	Rize	4.90
30	Sakarya	8.99
31	Siirt	0.55
32	Sivas	4.84
33	Şanlıurfa	0.82
34	Şırnak	1.53
35	Tokat	5.28
36	Van	0.72
37	Yozgat	1.52

Metropolitan Districts: İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir

On March 30, the CHP received 27.8 percent of all votes across the nation. In other words, 12,553,398 voters out of the total 44,875,292 opted for the main opposition party. Meanwhile, the party's performance in metropolitan districts of İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir allows for an interesting comparison with its overall performance: the CHP received 40.1 percent of the vote in İstanbul and 43.8 percent in Ankara. In secularist stronghold İzmir, the party's support peaked at 49.6 percent. These large metropolitan districts, where the main opposition party performed considerably better than elsewhere in the country, constitute 32.41 percent of the total number of voters across the nation and

Table 4: The distribution of votes among the three largest political parties in İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir

	AK Party (Votes / Share)	CHP (Votes / Share)	MHP (Votes / Share)	Total Votes (Valid)
İstanbul	4,180,329 / 47.91%	3,494,174 / 40.05%	349,614 / 4.01%	8,724,840
Ankara	1,411,583 / 44.61%	1,387,139 / 43.83%	248,324 / 7.88%	3,164,555
İzmir	953,043 / 35.86%	1,319,084 / 49.64%	212,178 / 7.98%	2,657,447

48.73 percent of all votes cast for the party. Consequently, the CHP votes in these three districts amount for almost half of the party's total support.

Table 4 also provides a comparative perspective on how the AK Party, the CHP and the MHP performed at the national level. We previously stated that the main opposition party received almost half of its votes from İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir. Meanwhile, the AK Party won 6,554,955 out of 14,546,842 total votes in these districts, which constitutes 31.89 percent of the ruling party's total number of votes. MHP supporters in these areas, however, only amounted to 11.8 percent of its national support. In light of the above numbers, it is possible to claim that the AK Party's performance here resembled its national performance, while the CHP

performed above the national average and the MHP remained consistently below its level of nationwide support.

The CHP fared particularly well in wealthy constituencies of İstanbul and Ankara while largely failing to win over lower-income voters

al districts and achieved a comfortable margin in Bakırköy (68.53%), Beşiktaş (76.35%), Kadıköy (72.44%) and Şişli (61.53%). In contrast, the party reached similar levels of popular support in only two out of 25 districts, namely Yenimahalle (50.86%) and Çankaya (64.78%). Meanwhile, the party won 22 out of a total 30 districts within the İzmir metropolitan area, garnering the highest support in Karşıyaka (70.47%) and Balçova (60.49%) with approximately 50 percent in the remainder of its districts. The above-mentioned data indicates that the CHP performed considerably well among high-income constituents in metropolitan districts.

Election data from Turkey's three largest metropolitan areas indicate the following: The CHP's votes in these areas accounted for almost half of its total number of votes at the national level. As such, the party's performance in the 2014 local elections must be associated with its popularity in the aforementioned districts. Furthermore, we must note that the CHP fared particularly well in wealthy constituencies of İstanbul and Ankara while largely failing to win over lower-income voters – a pattern that emerged across the nation.

Concluding Remarks

Modernity as a grand narrative assumed that two sources of identity would perish over time. The expectation was that secularization, the rise of rationalism and economic welfare would eventually lead to a weakening of the indi-



A photograph of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on a poster and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu while giving his speech at the meeting of the CHP.

AA / Abdülhamid Hoşbaş

vidual's ties to their ethnic and religious background. Ethnicity and religion, in this regard, would gradually lose their significance. In retrospect, we can easily assert that such assumptions proved inaccurate since both ethnic and religious identities arguably play a central role in the ways in which individuals express themselves.

We can associate the emergence of religion and ethnicity as the centerpiece of individual and collective identity with some sort of resistance. In the face of hegemonic power, individuals today counted their sense of worthlessness or irrelevance with reference to these concepts and seek to overcome their prescribed roles in society.²² Therefore, social movements with ethnic and religious concerns enjoy more influence today than in previous decades.

The same goes for Turkey. As the Republic's founding elites embarked on an ambitious project to create a classless and uniform society, they sought to repress, if not entirely eliminate, ethnic and religious diversity. For this purpose, the elites did not refrain from occasionally intervening severely in social life.²³ Such efforts, in turn, generated a strong sense of alienation among a significant

chunk of society. Furthermore, the legacy of elite-led interventions gave rise to a form of resistance among the general population.

Today, the prominence of identity (in the broadest sense of the term) in Turkish politics unmistakably reflects society's experiences since the Republic's establishment. As such, the CHP maintains its traditional role as the *party of the state* and continues to categorically reject all forms of identity politics, which the party regards as an impediment to national unity. At the same time, however, the Republican leadership has sought to incorporate ethnic and religious pluralism into its political platform in recent years. Ignoring the obvious contradiction between the two positions, the party thus seeks to establish ties to alienated social groups.

The March 30 local elections have clearly established that the main opposition party's outreach strategy failed to persuade voters with a sense of alienation. With the notable exceptions of Eskişehir and Burdur, the CHP only managed to win elections exclusively on the Aegean and Mediterranean shoreline and therefore failed to influence voters beyond its traditional social base. Moreover, the party won 2 percent or less of the vote in a number of districts in the country's largely Kurdish Eastern and Southeastern provinces – a sign that the majority of Kurdish voters remain outside the CHP's reach. Similarly, the main opposition failed to bridge the gap with conservative voters. In light of the local election results, it would not be inaccurate to point out that the CHP today remains an outcast to broad sections of society which it alienated over the years.²⁴

Conservatives, one of the two social groups that the state and the CHP long excluded,²⁵ continue to support the AK Party as opposed to the CHP since they regained a sense of equality and pride under the current government.²⁶ The ruling party, moreover, seems to enjoy an advantage over its competitors since its leadership and local organizations reflect the general population.²⁷ Similarly, the BDP receives considerable support in the Southeast as a supporter of Kurdish liberties within the limits of parliamentary politics. As such, the CHP fails to perform well outside metropolitan areas and the coastline.

Perhaps the leading factor imposing clear geographic restrictions on the CHP's popularity has been its failure to reach out to conservative voters and the Kurds. Identity politics alone, however, would fail to account for the party's limited appeal in certain parts of the country, as identity does not necessarily have complete influence over electoral behavior. After all, multiple factors come into play to determine which political party Turkish voters will support. A significant chunk of voters with relatively loose ties to both religion and ethnic identity, for instance, seem to primarily concentrate on public services when opting for one party over another. This group of voters, which CHP cam-

paigner Ateş İlyas Başsoy refers to as “the reasonable people,” tend to support political movements which, they believe, are more likely to address concrete problems they encounter on a regular basis. Meanwhile, the CHP’s insistence on negative campaigning largely fails to present the main opposition as capable of providing much-needed services and thereby win over members of this group.²⁸

From the 2009 local elections onward, the CHP adopted a number of measures to reach out to voters beyond its traditional strongholds across the Aegean and Mediterranean coast. Under Chairman Baykal, who resigned from his post following a sex tape scandal in May 2010, the party admitted several burqa-wearing women into membership, promoted Qur'an instruction through its municipalities and nominating right-wing politicians for public office. Furthermore, Mr. Baykal was particularly careful not to place too much emphasis on secularism in order to make conservatives feel welcome – a policy that continued under new management to little effect.

Surely enough, the disappointing performance of the CHP in the most recent local elections requires lengthy deliberations. Following the elections, news reports indicated that the main opposition party has indeed taken steps to assess its merits and shortcomings, which builds upon its efforts over the past few years to identify and improve how the general population views the CHP. Despite such attempts, it is safe to assert that a significant portion of Turkish society continues to have an overall negative view of the main opposition party. In this sense, transforming conventional wisdom about the CHP remains a significant challenge for the opposition’s leadership.²⁹ Another problem seems to be that the party reproduces some of its unpopular policies either due to the leadership’s decisions or lasting sentiments among CHP supporters despite the leadership’s transformative efforts. A perfect embodiment of the latter phenomenon took place during a campaign event in Manisa, where CHP Chairman Kılıçdaroğlu argued that his party, once in power, will reach out to all social groups without exception and welcome all women, whether or not they choose to wear the religious headscarf, to their ranks. Meanwhile, the audience chanted the secularist anthem, “Turkey is and will remain secular!” Considering that secularism has traditionally represented an exclusive, rather than inclusive,

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force in Turkish politics, it would be unfair and unrealistic to expect life-long conservatives revising their view of the CHP upon encountering manifestations of such secularist sentiments during campaign events.³⁰ If anything, the CHP ended up giving all the more reason for the masses to perceive it as a proponent of extra-parliamentary measures against elected governments. By rallying behind the December 17 operations, an effort by Fethullah Gülen's followers to strongarm the elected government, the main opposition party reinforced its historic image as a supporter of military coups. As such, the affair represented yet another missed opportunity for the CHP to stand with the people. ■

Endnotes

1. Nonetheless, we must take into account that civilian actors with ties to tutelary actors within the bureaucracy seeking to dictate government policy have been active in Turkish politics.
2. Hüseyin Yayman, «Yerel Seçim mi, Genel Seçim mi?», *Türkiye Günülgü*, No. 97 (2009), p. 77-78.
3. See Ali Çarkoğlu, "Turkey's Local Elections of 2009: Winners and Losers", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2009), p. 2.
4. According to Bauman, the modern nation-state associates diversity with chaos, disorder and ambiguity. Diversity, which represents the primitive, the malignant and the irrational, must be uprooted through gardening. (see Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernlik ve Müphemlik* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayıncılık, 2003), p. 34).
5. Regarding such efforts, see Simten Coşar ve Aylin Özman, "Representation Problems of Social Democracy in Turkey", *Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Spring, 2008), pp. 233-252; Mahmut Övür, "12 Eylül'den 12 Haziran'a Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP)", *Seta Analiz*, No. 40 (2011); Hatem Ete and Doğan Eşkinat, Siyaset Arayışından Arayış Siyasetine Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (2010-2013), *Seta Analiz*, No. 65 (2013).
6. For an account of the CHP's survival with reference to adaptability and flexibility, see Bünyamin Bezci, "Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi' Devleti Kur'an Partisi", Turgay Uzun (ed.), İttihat ve Terakki'den Günümüze Siyasal Partiler (Ankara: Orion Yayıncılık, 2010), p. 127.
7. The CHP's "Qur'an instruction initiative" began with a statement by then-Kocaeli mayor Sefa Sirmen, who argued that Republican municipalities should offer complementary Qur'an lessons to residents – an idea that gained momentum among Republican mayors in various districts. The "burqa initiative" also emerged around the same time as then-Chairman Deniz Baykal admitted burqa-wearing women into party membership with a public ceremony aimed at impressing conservative voters.
8. See Hatem Ete ve Coşkun Taştan, *Kurgu ile Gerçeklik Arasında Gezi Eylemleri* (Ankara: Seta Yayıncılık, 2013); Hatem Ete, "Gezi'nin Siyasal Mirası", *Sabah*, Eylül 21, 2013.
9. A number of public figures including Perihan Mağden, Hasan Cemal, Şahin Alpay and Cengiz Çandar fall within this category.
10. This elite class consisted of the military, civilian bureaucrats and intellectuals. For a more detailed discussion, see Sina Akşin, "CHP'nin Siyasal, Toplumsal ve Ideolojik Kökenleri", *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi Cilt 8* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 1983), p. 2037.
11. See M. Asım Karaömeroğlu, "Tek Parti Döneminde Halkçılık", Ahmet İnsel (ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce (Cilt 2: Kemalizm)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 2009), p. 285.
12. I borrow the term 'veto players' from Sinan Ciddi and Berk Esen. See "CHP'de Değişimin Kırmızı Çizgileri Yok", *Milliyet*, Ocak 21, 2013.
13. See Hasan Bülent Kahraman, "CHP'li Dostlarımıza Anlatmadıklarımız", *Sabah*, Ocak 16, 2013.
14. For Ayman-Güler's critique, see http://baguler.blogspot.com.tr/2014_02_01_archive.html.

- 15.** See Tuncay Önder, "CHP Siyasetin Neresinde", *Sabah*, Mart 8, 2014.
- 16.** See Tanıl Bora and Ümit Kivanç, "Yeni Atatürkçülük", *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncıları, 1996), p. 780.
- 17.** Deniz Baykal's address to CHP parliamentarians on January 27, 2004 represented the quintessential embodiment of his critique of identity politics. For Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's rejection of ethnically motivated politics, see "Kimseyi İkinci Sınıf Yurttaş Görmeziz", *Milliyet*, Ocak 25, 2013.
- 18.** See Mustafa Altunoğlu, *Geçmişin Yüküyle Yenilik Arayışı CHP'de Lider, Tavan, Taban Analizi* (Ankara: Seta Yayıncıları, 2014).
- 19.** For one such statement, see <http://www.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303532704579476613607927916.html>.
- 20.** The Yalova election was excluded from this list due to the Election Authority's decision to declare the election results in this district null and void.
- 21.** All statistical data in this text reflects unofficial election results. See <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yerel-secim-2014/> and <http://secim.ntv.com.tr/2014-yerel-secimleri/canli-sonuc> for more detail.
- 22.** See Manuel Castelss, *Enformasyon Çağı: Ekonomi, Toplum ve Kültür Cilt İki (Kimliğin Gücü)* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayıncıları, 2006), p. 18.
- 23.** See Eric Jan Zurcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncıları, 2010).
- 24.** For the origin of this phrase, see Manuel Castells, *Enformasyon Çağı: Ekonomi, Toplum ve Kültür Cilt İki (Kimliğin Gücü)* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayıncıları, 2006), p. 16.
- 25.** For an example of such alienation, see Binnaz Toprak, "CHP ve Seçimler", *Birgün*, Nisan 23, 2014.
- 26.** For Binnaz Toprak's assessment of election results, see <http://www.haberturk.com/polemik/haber/940925-erdogan-halkin-adami>.
- 27.** See Nur Vergin, "Siyaset ile Sosyolojinin Buluştuğu Nokta", *Türkiye Günlüğü*, No. 76 (2004), p. 7.
- 28.** See Ateş İlyas Başsoy, *AKP Neden Kazanır? CHP Neden Kaybeder* (İstanbul: Pegasus Yayıncıları, 2011).
- 29.** For a similar argument, see Nuri Bilgin, "Psiko-Sosyolojik Açıdan Seçim Sonuçlarına Bir Bakış", *Türkiye Günlüğü*, No. 97 (2009), p. 11.
- 30.** For a detailed analysis of the CHP's voter base, see Ali Bayramoğlu, "Seçim Sonuçlarının Dip Akıntıları", *Birikim*, No. 180 (Nisan, 2004), p. 38.



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