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TALHA KÖSE and HÜSEYİN ALPTEKİN

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2015 was the year of elections in Turkey with two parliamentary elections and months-long election campaigns that dominated the political agenda of the country. The parliamentary elections of June 7 brought an end to the AK Party's 12-year long era of parliamentary majority and single-party government in Turkey. Nevertheless, the endeavors to form a coalition government could not be concluded successfully and another election appeared on the horizon. The country was ruled by an AK Party-led interim government and the elections were repeated five months later on November 1. While close in time, the two elections were quite distant with regard to the political contexts in which they were carried out, and in their respective results. The November elections witnessed a comeback for the AK Party, which increased its votes by over 9 points with the addition of five million new votes in the ballot box.

Voter turnout rates were very high in both elections. The HDP's efforts to surpass the ten percent national threshold and transform itself from being a regional party into a political party with a broader national agenda was an important dynamic of the June 7 elections. The HDP was indeed successful in overcoming the ten percent threshold in the June elections. The collapse of the *Çözüm Süreci* (Kurdish Peace Process) in July strained Turkey's political environment as the various potential coalition partners struggled to come to agreement. The main puzzle for the November 1 elections was whether the AK Party would be able to regain its position to form a single-party government, and in fact it did succeed in winning the majority of the seats in the Turkish parliament by a wide margin in the November elections. The HDP and the MHP were thus the main losers of the November elections.

This issue of *Insight Turkey* is prepared in order to understand the elections of 2015 on a comparative basis. For this purpose, this issue, first, includes

some articles that elaborate on these two elections comparatively from a general point of view encompassing all the related parties and important issues by integrating them into a single analytical framework. The issue also includes articles that examine the two elections of 2015 along a number of dimensions, from identity to the economic dimension, and from an analysis of diaspora votes to econometric and disaggregate analyses of the elections. Finally, the issue at hand also includes articles and commentaries that discuss the major political parties individually with great detail in terms of their respective electoral campaigns and electoral performances. In this respect, the four major parties that could pass the national electoral threshold and which gained seats in the parliament, namely the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), and the People's Democratic Party (HDP) are discussed in respective articles.

Ali Akarca, in his article "Putting Turkey's June and November 2015 Election Outcomes in Perspective," examines the long-term, short-term, and specific determinants of elections in Turkey with a focus on the June and November general elections. He concludes his article by stating that the electorate is currently consolidated into four camps more firmly than ever with the conservative-right gaining its roughly 50 percent vote base back in the November elections.

Ali Çarkoğlu and Kerem Yıldırım, in their article "Election Storm in Turkey: What Do the Results of the June and November 2015 Elections Tell Us?" examine the reasons behind the changes in the effective political parties' votes in the June and November general elections. They shed light on the reasons behind the AK Party's loss of votes in June and its comeback in the November elections. They also examine the policy dynamics of the elections and conclude that the role of what they call 'political and economic performance politics' is overridden in times of security crises, as happened in Turkey between the June and November elections.

After these two general analyses, the issue looks at certain, specific dimensions of the elections. Talha Köse, in his article "Identity Dynamics of the June and November 2015 Elections of Turkey: Kurds, Alevis and Conservative Nationalists," argues that "identity politics" was a major dynamic in shaping the results of both the June 7 and November 1 general elections. According to Köse, the Turkish electorate was fragmented into four main identity lines: Turkish and

Kurdish nationalists, secular left and conservative/Islamist. Köse argues that the November 1 elections pushed forward a new agenda in which the issues of security and economic stability were prioritized. The article elaborates how the political preferences of Kurds, Alevis and conservative Turks and Kurds changed during the election process.

Hüseyin Alptekin deals with the economic dimension of the elections in his article, "The Economic Context of Turkey's June and November 2015 Elections: The Role of Economic Indicators, Promises, and Expectations in the Electoral Results." Alptekin argues that the economic context of these elections differed to a great extent in a number of ways. Most importantly while the economy did not present a good picture before the June elections, growth and current account deficit figures improved before the November elections and the AK Party could effectively take credit for this improvement in its campaign. Alptekin concludes that these differences between the June and November elections could better help us conceptualize the different trajectories and results of the June and November elections.

Regulations for external voting were brought into force in May 2012 by law and external voting was first practiced in the 2014 Presidential Elections. Migrants from Turkey all over the world were enabled to cast votes abroad. In this context, Zeynep Şahin, in her article "External Voting: Mapping Motivations of Emigrants and Concerns of Host Countries," drawing from original fieldwork investigation in Germany, finds that citizens' motivation for voting abroad was largely dictated by the symbolic dimension of citizenship, and desire to formally participate in Turkish politics.

Hatem Ete, Mustafa Altunoglu and Galip Dalay, in their article "Turkey under the AK Party Rule: From Dominant Party Politics to the Dominant Party System?" clarify the conceptual and empirical ambiguity on the question of whether the AK Party is a dominant party and Turkey has a dominant party system. By analyzing the electoral performance of the AK Party, its solid social base, duration in power, and its victory in ruling the country free of any military tutelage, the authors' answer to both questions is yes.

Yusuf Can Gökmen and Tanju Tosun in their article "The CHP in the June and November 2015 Elections: An Evaluation on Political Deadlock" shed light on the electoral performance and party politics of the CHP in the context of

the June and November elections. The authors, first, discuss the ideological and organizational restructuring of the CHP during Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership and then conclude that despite such an ambitious transformation, the party is unable to reach greater masses at the ballot box.

Şükrü Balcı and Onur Bekiroğlu in their article "The MHP in the June and November 2015 Elections: Political Communication, Discourse and Strategies" focus on the MHP's electoral campaign strategy relying on their content analysis of the party's electoral statements and TV advertisement in the national TV channels. The authors conclude that the MHP did not only target the incumbent AK Party by pursuing a negative strategy in its election campaign but also sent positive messages to the electorate by portraying itself as the most promising solution to the security crisis of the country.

Besides the valuable articles mentioned above, this issue also hosts a number of significant commentaries, some focusing on the June and November elections in Turkey and some focusing on other significant questions such as the rise of Islamophobia, escalating violence, and the ongoing refugee crisis in the close neighborhood of Turkey

Vahap Coşkun in his detailed commentary "HDP Torn Between Violence and Politics" examines the HDP's experience of the June and November elections. After outlining the reasons for the tremendous rise in the party's votes in the June elections and then the decline in the November elections, Coşkun argues that we should not underestimate HDP's electoral victory in June despite the following decline in November. He concludes that what the party needs to do now is a critical self-evaluation not to repeat its mistakes of being unable to fulfill people's expectations to take initiative to stop the conflict between the state security forces and the PKK after the June elections.

Amongst the contributors to the commentaries, İbrahim Uslu examines the AK Party's comeback in the November elections and lists the overlooked reasons behind this electoral victory. Uslu lists the temporary uncertainty stemming from the change in the leadership and overall lists of the AK Party, little bit too much self-esteem and lack of motivation in the party ranks, and increasing political polarization in the country as the primary causes of the AK Party's loss of significant portion of votes in the June elections. Accordingly, the party came up with new strategies to deal with each of these problems and this

change, coupled with the opposition parties' shortcomings, enabled the party to hit a historic comeback in November.

Other commentaries in this issue take a broader look at contemporary issues in the region and deal with Islamophobia and political violence in particular. In this respect, the following three commentaries can be seen in a dialogue with each other. Omar Ashour neatly classifies the Middle Eastern countries with respect to civilian-military relations in respective state traditions and draws his conclusions on the problem of political violence in the region from this conceptualization and categorization. Farid Hafez deals with the question of the current refugee crisis and rising Islamophobia in Europe. Hafez's approach is a simple humanitarian one that unveils the political and economic calculations and the Islamophobic discourse surrounding the refugee problem and takes the question back to its genuine humanitarian context. Aristotle Kallis takes the very same problem of Islamophobia in Europe and strongly argues that this is no longer a problem of the far-right movements alone but also has become a popular approach, not sufficiently negated by mainstream political forces, which has penetrated to people's everyday lives.

The current issue, hence, examines the June and November elections comparatively, not only by comparing the two elections but also comparing the four major political parties in these elections along different dimensions from the identity realm to the economy. We hope that this issue will be a major source for future researchers in understanding 2015, the year of elections, in Turkish political history. ■