Identity Dynamics of the June and November 2015 Elections of Turkey: Kurds, Alevis and Conservative Nationalists

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ABSTRACT *Identity politics was one of the major dynamics in shaping the results of both the June 7 and November 1, 2015 general elections in Turkey. The parties that were affiliated with Kurdish and Turkish ethno-nationalism, the HDP and the MHP, increased their votes significantly in the June 7 elections. The AK Party was able to pull some of those votes back in November elections. The HDP tried to transform itself from being a regional or ethnic Kurdish party into a national party relevant to all of Turkey. The PKK's goal of becoming an influential regional actor in the Middle East hindered the HDP's goal, thus leading to a decline of HDP votes in November elections. CHP remained as the favorite party of Alevi voters by a wide margin despite some challenge from HDP.*

Most analysts of Turkish politics agree that "identity politics" was a major dynamic in shaping the results of both the June 7 and November 1, 2015 general elections in Turkey. The political stalemate in the aftermath of the June 7 elections was also attributed to the significant impact of the identity politics on the outcome.[1] Economy, public policy issues and Turkey's turbulent foreign policy, as well as debates on switching to a presidential system from a parliamentary one, were important themes discussed in the pre-election campaign. Identity related positions of the competing parties played a significant role in shaping the preferences of the electorate. The electorate is fragmented into four main identity lines in Turkey: Turkish and Kurdish nationalists, secular left and conservative/Islamist. In the November elections the deadlock, attributed to the use of identity politics, was surpassed[2] yet the legacy of this ideology seems set to be a major issue in the coming years. This study examines the effect identity politics had on the June and November 2015 general elections in Turkey.

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The November 1, 2015 elections did not fix the identity related fragmentation yet it pushed forward a new agenda in which the issues of security and economic stability were prioritized

While the parties that are predominantly affiliated with Turkish and Kurdish nationalism increased their votes,[3] support for center right and center left parties declined in the June elections leading to a hung parliament.[4] Parties adjusted their campaign strategies accordingly for the November elections however the results were not in line with those from June.[5] The main concern of the November elections was whether the AK Party could achieve a majority in the parliament and so be able to form a single party government. The second issue was whether the political polarization on the axis of pro and anti AK Party government, that have continued since the Gezi Protests of 2014 and which further escalated after the June elections, would be abated after the November elections.

With regard to the first problem AK Party managed to overcome its challenge and regained the parliamentary majority with 317 MPs. It is still early to make definitive judgments about the cessation of political polarization but especially in the electoral domain the Turkish electorate decided to increase its support for the two larger parties. Smaller and more ideologically motivated parties were the main losers of the November elections.

The AK Party struggled to transform the overall campaign strategy that was focused on macro issues such as switching into a presidential system and macro economic stability into a campaign that was mostly focused on issues of economic re-distribution, economic stability, youth employment and security.[6] The other parties did not make substantial changes in their campaign strategies between the two elections and the Turkish electorate responded against the centrifugal tendencies of ethnic polarization and increased their support to AK Party. In total two major parties –AK Party and CHP– received three quarters of the votes, whereas MHP and HDP lost in total 6,8 points (4,39 from MHP and 2,36 from HDP) from their vote shares, which corresponds to a quarter of their total votes in comparison to June elections. The rise and the decline of votes to nationalist parties –both Turkish and Kurdish– within such a short period of time needs to be considered as the two sides of the same coin rather than two independent trends.

Fragmentation and polarization along the lines of identity was one of the reasons behind the failure to establish a coalition government after the June 7 elections. If this had not been the case, it would have been easier for the party leaders to negotiate and find a middle ground for their policy differences.[7] The November 1, 2015 elections did not fix the identity related fragmentation yet

it pushed forward a new agenda in which the issues of security and economic stability were prioritized. It is therefore crucial to understand the prevailing identity dynamics of the Turkish electoral landscape.

Identity Dynamics of the June 7 and November 1 Elections

In terms of shaping the June election there were three major questions related to identity politics which continued to be important in November. The first question was whether the HDP would be able to transform itself from being a regional or ethnic Kurdish party into a national party relevant to all of Turkey. The second question was whether the Alevi votes would continue to be concentrated with the CHP, or the process of gradual shift towards HDP[8] would lead to diversification of Alevi voter preferences. The third question was about the distribution of conservative votes. How the AK Party and the MHP would position themselves in their competition over conservative right wing voters in the central, northern and western parts of the country was an important issue. Similarly whether the AK Party would regain the support of conservative Kurdish voters in the east and southeast of Turkey from the HDP was also a crucial concern in both elections. These last two questions were even more important for determining the results of the November elections for the AK Party when it regained its majority in the Turkish Parliament mainly due to its success in convincing conservative Turkish nationalists. The AK Party was even more successful in regaining the support of the conservative Kurdish voters, managing to increase its vote percentages substantively in some cities in the east and southeast of the country. AK Party increased its votes by more than ten points in Iğdır (20 percent), Şanlıurfa (18 percent), Bingöl (18 percent), Erzurum (16 percent), Elazığ (14 percent), Bitlis (13 percent), Ağrı (11 percent), Batman (10 percent) and Muş (9 percent). It also took the place of HDP as the leading party in the November elections in the eastern border cities of Kars and Ardahan.

The efforts of the HDP to appeal to the entire Turkish electorate, which they call "*Türkiyelileşmek*" and the diversification of Alevi political representation, is expected to affect the policies of other parties in the coming years. This transformation continues to put pressure on the governing AK Party, which has been having difficulty in attracting voters from the younger generation[9] and is facing serious challenges, especially in its policies related to the Kurds.[10] The main opposition party CHP's voter base is stuck between 23 to 28 percent and its image of being a party supported by older, affluent, urban and secular Turks, living in Turkey's coastal areas, has put a serious pressure for change on the party.[11] CHP's slightly fluctuating but structurally stagnant voter base is a problem for the party leadership with its total vote percentages in the last three parliamentary general elections only reaching 25.9 percent (2011), 25 percent (June 2015) and 25.3 percent (November 2015).

HDP's Dilemma: *"Türkiyelileşmek"*[12] or "Middle Easternization"

HDP struggled to appeal to the entire Turkish electorate via a language of strategic opposition to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan starting with the August 2014 presidential election campaign. Their campaign was based on a blend of Kurdish ethno-nationalism in the eastern and south-eastern regions of Turkey and an antagonism towards the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the rest of Turkey. Its campaign was successful insofar as it overcame the challenge of a 10 percent national threshold in the June and November elections, yet this does not necessarily mean that the party reached its objective of "*Türkiyelileşmek*".

The PKK's strategic priority shifted towards becoming an influential regional actor in the Middle East within the power vacuum that emerged with the weakening of the Assad Regime in Syria. The HDP's claim of "*Türkiyelişleşmek*" was overshadowed by the re-ignition of PKK violence in July 2015 with the leaders of the party unable to distance themselves from the PKK's attacks. The HDP's co-chairpersons, Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, instead declared their support for the *Demokratik Toplum Kongresi* (Democratic Civil Congress) DTK's quest for "democratic autonomy" (*demokratik özerklik*) and "self-government" (*öz yönetim*) on December 27, 2015.[13] The claim that HDP is pursuing a policy of "*Türkiyelileşmek*" is further challenged by the ongoing clashes between the PKK and the Turkish security forces.

In the June elections, AK Party lost their majority in the parliament predominantly because they lost the support of Kurds to HDP and Turkish nationalists to MHP.[14] The support for AK Party from the Kurds declined not only in the east and southeast of Turkey but also in the big urban conurbations of İstanbul, İzmir and Adana. The peace process or "Solution Process" played a pivotal role in this transformation which was used by HDP and some unofficial networks related to the PKK to consolidate their position as the legitimate representative of Kurds in Turkey. Conversely nationalist Turks were disturbed by the ongoing peace process with the PKK thus switching their allegiances to the MHP.

Until its collapse, with the re-ignition of PKK attacks in July 2015,[15] the Kurdish peace process (*çözüm süreci*) was a promising story that had the potential to re-structure Turkish politics entirely. Peace processes are often complicated and fragile processes and parties learn a lot from their previous experiences, especially mistakes and successes.[16] Elections are, by their nature, not the best time for ongoing peace processes, because social and political polarization better serves the interests of political leaders trying to consolidate their votes. The peace process however has not been ruined, but it was stalled during the election campaign. Unfortunately in the immediate aftermath of the first election (in late July) a fresh wave of violence broke-out, signifying the end of the peace process. Three important developments: increasing expectations of the Kurd-

ish Nationalist Movement;[17] PYD's *de facto* autonomy in the North of Syria; and Demirtaş and HDP's efforts to demonize President Erdoğan, also jeopardized the peace process. On the other hand the governing AK Party slowed down the peace process during the election campaign period in response to

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criticisms from the conservative Turkish nationalist voters and to the concerns of its traditional supporters. The AK Party Government's foreign policy during the Syrian Civil War, especially its criticism of, and lack of support for, the PYD led to the disenchantment of a section of the Kurdish population in Turkey. Principally, the Turkish Government's unwillingness to intervene directly in the fight between the YPG fighters (armed faction of PYD) and ISIL, in the northern Syrian city of Kobani boosted the criticisms of Kurds in Turkey against the AK Party. These developments heightened the expectations of Kurdish political actors, providing "ammunition" which was actively used in HDP's election campaign, and constituted a blow for the peace process.

The PKK and the HDP started to perceive the AK Party government and Erdoğan as a weakened negotiation partner after the "Gezi Protests" and "December 17-25 Processes" where the AK Party clashed with Gülen movement.[18] This proved to be a misjudgment in such a fragile process. While the PKK's founder and the imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan seemed to negotiate a broader agreement with the AK Party Government on behalf of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement, other actors within the Movement appeared to interpret the fluctuations in the AK Party government's power as new opportunities for them to strengthen their position at the bargaining table. Their interests in the peace process did not completely overlap with their position within the new Middle East power configuration, which is emerging after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War. The leaders' criticisms of and allegations against the AK Party and Erdoğan following the June elections resonated with PKK's new position and increased self-confidence. For example in his interview to BBC Cemil Bayık, a leading figure of the PKK, accused Erdoğan of being behind the ISIL massacres and trying to stop Kurdish advances.[19] Another leading figure of the PKK, Duran Kalkan accused President Erdoğan of ruining the peace process.[20]

The "Gezi Protests" constituted an important challenge for the governing AK Party by mobilizing the identity related fault lines of Turkey. Secular vs. conservative/Islamist; pro vs. anti AK Party and to a certain extend Alevi vs. Sunni identity related cleavages of Turkey were mobilized along the "Gezi Protests." These protests started two months after the initiation of the Kurdish Peace Process;[21] therefore the Kurdish Nationalist Movement was reluctant to join

The young supporters of the HDP celebrating the results of June 7th elections.

AA PHOTO / ERHAN ELALDI

the protests. The left wing section of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement, especially, was critical about the PKK and HDP's decision not to get directly involved in the Gezi Protests. The AK Party government faced serious challenges during the Gezi Protest and the December 17-25 processes, yet Erdoğan and the AK Party government maintained their powerful position. There was a disagreement among the leaders of the Kurdish Movement whether to benefit from the alleged weaknesses of the governing party or to continue the peace process. Regardless of their position they increased their expectations of the peace process. This transformation encouraged the PKK to initiate Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H),[22] an armed militia for urban uprising, to reignite the violent campaign and declare autonomy in some towns in the southeast of Turkey.

A second important development, that raised the expectations of the Kurdish Movement, is the ongoing civil war in Syria. The Democratic Unity Party (PYD) –a PKK affiliate organization in northern Syria– and its armed branch the People's Protection Units (YPG) gained some political advantages and established its control in the Afrin, Jazira, and Kobani cantons in the North of Syria. Despite HDP's criticisms of Turkey with regard to the Kobani siege starting in September 2014, the PYD was unable to defend Kobani against ISIL without external support including that of Turkey. The PYD could only stop the humanitarian crisis with the help of *Peshmerga* forces of the Iraqi KRG,[23] who passed to Kobani through Turkey. In addition, the injured Kurdish fighters during the siege were treated in Turkish hospitals and thousands of civilian Kurds running from the siege took shelter in Turkey.

ISIL's attacks on Kobani raised the ethno-nationalist consciousness of Kurds in Turkey and both the PKK and the HDP used the Kobani struggle for their domestic mobilization purposes. Increasing tensions related to Kobani and allegations against the Turkish government of supporting ISIL ended up with the events of October 6-8[24] in Turkey that led to the death of more than 50 Turkish citizens. The PYD's struggle against the ISIL also contributed to its legitimacy in the international arena, particularly for the younger generation of Kurds; the PYD's control of Syria is like an epic victory. The partial auton-

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omy in the north of Syria raises their hopes and expectations for a future independent united Kurdistan resulting from the ongoing process.

Syria's PYD generated international support and military aid because of their resistance to ISIL and successfully turned its struggle against the "rogue state" into an international PR campaign. The movement's photos, especially those of female fighters were promoted in prominent international news sources.[25] International military aid to the PYD also increased the capabilities of the PKK and strengthened its position *vis-à-vis* the Turkish security forces. The discourses and ideology of ethno-nationalist resistance against the "Islamist" ISIL, was also projected against the AK Party. The PKK manipulated the antagonism of younger generation Kurds and directed their anger from the Islamist ISIL in Syria and Iraq to the conservative AK Party in Turkey. In response the governing party failed to grasp the sensitivities of Kurdish ethno-nationalism.

The third development that raised the political expectations of the HDP was the Party's co-chairperson Selahattin Demirtaş's[26] effective campaign in the presidential elections of 2014. Demirtaş got close to 4 million votes, which constitutes 9.78 percent of the votes cast, with an "anti-Erdoğan" discourse that enabled him to attract a considerable number of young voters in the metropolitan cities.[27] This boosted his confidence and Demirtaş decided to continue his discourses of "Erdoğan antagonism"[28] and "demonizing Erdoğan" after the elections rather than emphasizing a new political discourse. Demirtaş's motto was "We will not allow you to become President" (*Seni başkan yaptırmayacağız*). This campaign also generated significant support for HDP.

The Kurdish nationalist movement and the HDP are facing a dilemma. The ongoing civil war in Syria and the PYD's struggle and success against ISIL helped to transform the PKK and the PYD into major actors in the Middle East predicament. The PYD, and in turn, the PKK gained some legitimacy in the international arena with PKK demonizing Islamist actors in the region while presenting the AK Party government as their sponsors.[29] While the political representative, the HDP, was trying to become Turkey's party (*Türkiyelileşmek*), the PKK was trying to become an important force in Middle East politics. By abandoning the peace process because of its Pan-Kurdist regional agenda, the PKK once again demonstrated that it is the dominant actor in the Kurdish

The contest over the Alevi votes with the increasingly powerful HDP was a real challenge for the CHP in the June and November elections

Movement. This choice jeopardized the HDP's political strategy of "*Türkiyelileşmek.*"

The results of the June and November elections demonstrated that the HDP is likely to be an important and stable actor in Turkish politics in the coming years. Both domestic and international contexts were influential in the HDP's electoral results, which are considered as a success despite the slight decline in November. The HDP's co-president Selahattin Demirtaş capitalized on Gezi Protests and the rising opposition to Erdoğan. On the other hand, the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Iraq and the Kurdish resistance to ISIL in these countries strengthened the legitimacy of Kurdish actors in the Middle East. HDP's efforts to transform itself from an ethnic party into a "national" party were relatively successful until the ignition of the PKK attacks in July 2015. Overall the language of identity politics helped to boost the electoral performance of the HDP but the PKK attacks stood as an important obstacle to this performance. It is difficult to separate the HDP completely from the PKK, but it seems that the PKK's objectives and the regional ambitions constitute significant obstacles to the progression of the HDP as an autonomous political actor.

CHP and HDP's Struggle over Alevi Voters

Alevis are one of Turkey's most politically active ethno-religious communities.[30] They are highly organized in civil society associations, foundations, labor unions and vocational organizations.[31] For decades Alevis continued to support predominantly the CHP and other left wing parties in the political domain.[32] In the last couple of years the HDP and the right wing MHP have tried to attract the support of Alevi voters, despite the MHP's ominous legacy with Alevis. The contest over the Alevi votes with the increasingly powerful HDP was a real challenge for the CHP in the June and November elections. In June HDP managed to gain votes from some of the districts that were predominantly Alevi populated and traditionally strongholds of the CHP, however it appears that some of those votes returned to the CHP in the November elections. The CHP increased its votes by more than 6 percent in only 19 districts of Turkey.[33] Five of these districts were from Tunceli where the wide majority of the population is Alevi[34] and in Hatay-Samandağı, also a majority Alevi populated district, the CHP increased its votes by 12.4 percent.[35]

Especially for the young Alevi voters and Kurdish Alevis, the HDP as a secular, left wing party stands as a strong alternative to the CHP. HDP nominated prominent Alevi figures in many cities.[36] If the diversification of Alevi votes

continue there may be some splits within the CHP. Diversification of Alevi votes will continue to be a challenge for the CHP in the coming years. The slippage of votes of Alevis, especially the Kurdish Alevis, from the CHP to HDP may have a long lasting impact in Turkish politics.[37]

The Alevi vote has rarely been a major issue shaping the outcome of the parliamentary elections in the last three decades, though it is often a significant topic for debate in most political parties during their campaigns. This is mainly because the hegemonic actor in Alevi politics has been the CHP and its predecessor the *Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti* (SHP) after 1980's. There were some other minor left and extreme left parties including *Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi*/Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), *Türkiye Komünist Partisi*/The Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), *İşçi Partisi*/Workers' Party (İP), *Sosyalist Demokrasi Partisi*/Socialist Democracy Party (SDP) that especially attracted the young Alevi voters.

CHP strengthened its hegemonic position in Alevi politics especially after Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, known for his Kurdish Alevi background, was elected as the leader of the CHP. Kılıçdaroğlu managed to consolidate the Alevi votes and created sympathy in Alevi citizens at the grassroots level. For many Alevis he is a heroic figure[38], whereas other Alevi political actors and organizations, who criticized the CHP line, felt marginalized during this consolidation.[39] Although Alevis were also the victims of the top-down Kemalist nation building process, they embraced the secularist principles of Kemalism.[40] In the 1960's and 1970's they scattered their votes to left wing parties such as *Türkiye İşçi Partisi*/Workers Party of Turkey (TİP), Bülent Eecevit's CHP (1972-1980) and the first Alevi Party the *Türkiye Birlik Partisi*/Unity Party of Turkey (TBP). CHP's ideological move to the left of the center position during Bülent Ecevit's leadership was also another incentive for Alevis to endorse the party. After the 1980 coup, Alevis predominantly supported the *Sosyal Demokrat Parti*/Social Democrat Party (SODEP), SHP and the CHP.

Kılıçdaroğlu made some successful moves to transform the CHP from being the party of a Kemalist establishment to the party of secular Turks. With the recent exclusion of "*ulusalcı*" or "secular nationalist" factions of the CHP establishment, new groups gained ground in the CHP including younger generation secular, liberal left actors. There is potentially more room for Alevi identity politics within the CHP, in comparison to the earlier era, an effective move for the CHP which is competing for the votes of a new generation of secular urban groups. The majority of Alevi's are critical of the Turkish government's Syria policy.[41] While leaders of many Alevi associations were publicly supportive of the Kurdish peace process[42] there are some skeptical views, especially at the grassroots of the Alevi community, about the process. Some Kurdish-Alevis even believe that the process may turn into an alliance between Turkish and Kurdish Sunnis.[43]
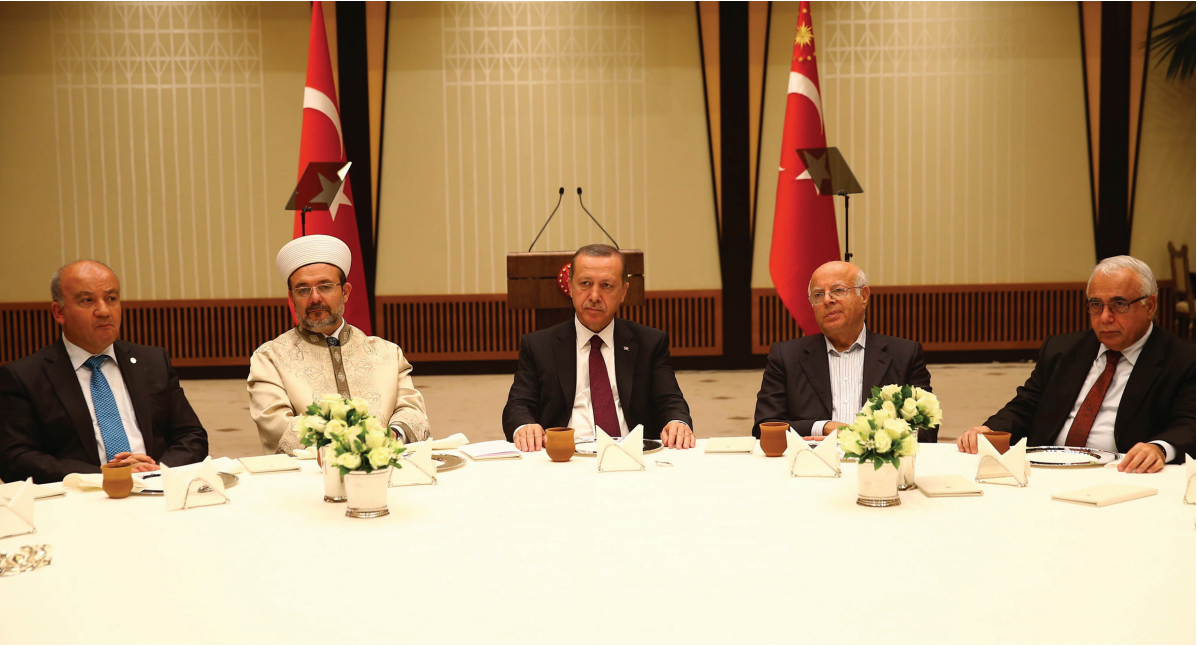
President of
Turkey, Recep
Tayyip Erdoğan,
hosts a dinner
to celebrate
the occasion
of Muharrem
(Muharrem
Aşı) in Mabeyin
Mansion with
leading Alevi
figures.
AA PHOTO /
YASİN BÜLBÜL

Despite Kılıçdaroğlu's efforts to transform the CHP, for the first time in the last decade the CHP has encountered a serious rival in Alevi politics. With the entrance of the HDP to the Turkish political scene, the CHP was unable to maintain its policy of consolidating Alevi votes without significant risks or costs. Alevi votes were often taken for granted by the CHP because of a lack of an alternative party which would attract the Alevi votes and pass the 10 percent national threshold to get seats in the parliament.

In order to pass the 10 percent threshold and increase its voter base the HDP tried to incorporate all the marginalized identity groups in Turkey. Some of those groups had been recognized and acknowledged with the AK Party's reform policies toward religious minorities.[44] However some others felt further marginalized with the AK Party policies and political discourse such as Kurdish Alevis, LGBT and some Islamists[45] who are more critical of Erdoğan and the AK Party's political style. The HDP needs to keep the votes of Alevis, especially in western parts of Turkey, therefore it nominated some important names from Alevi civil society organizations and the community and met with some leading figures of Alevi community in Turkey. The HDP also made promises related to Alevi requests such as the abolishing of the mandatory religious education, abolishing of the *Diyanet* (Directorate of Religious Affairs) and the official recognition of *cemevis* as places of worship,[46] resulting in a competition between the CHP and the HDP for the same pool of voters. These major Alevi demands as stated before became the pre-election promises of

both parties. It is clear that there will be more actors competing for the Alevi voter and this will keep the main agenda items of Alevi identity politics in political debates for future elections.

According to the estimates in the June 7 elections 29 Alevi MP's were elected amongst a total of 132 MPs of the CHP[47] and there was no major change in the CHP candidate

The MHP benefited from the right wing voters' worries about the Kurdish Peace Process but their leader Devlet Bahçeli's non-cooperative attitude during the coalition talks was one of the reasons behind the decline of the party's support

list in November election. While the HDP had 8 Alevi MP's in June 7 elections amongst 81 of their total MPs, the number decreased to 3 out of 59 MPs with the November results.[48] Turgut Öker and Ali Kenanoğlu, well-known figures within the Alevi community in Turkey and Europe, were amongst the candidates who were not re-elected from the HDP list in the November elections. The competition over Alevi votes may help diversification of Alevi politics. In the future it may not be as easy for the CHP to consolidate the Alevi votes, however Kılıçdaroğlu is still a popular politician within the Alevi community.

For the HDP it is still not clear whether the party will be successful in keeping this heterogeneous coalition together pragmatically in order to maintain its position in Turkish politics. The Kurdish Nationalist Movement's efforts to approach Islamist actors[49] with the "suggestion" of the PKK's founder and imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan, may distance Alevis from the HDP. The PKK's continuous presence as the hegemonic actor in the Kurdish movement also may deter some Alevis from supporting the HDP. Overall the younger generation of Alevis considers the HDP as a more dynamic and attractive political party, yet the majority of Alevi citizens continue to support their traditional party the CHP. As the HDP leans towards the left it may attract more Alevi support, however when it swings towards Kurdish ethno-nationalism and acts closer to the PKK, it may lose the support of the Turkish Alevis. This delicate balance will most likely determine the distribution of Alevi votes between the CHP and the HDP in the coming years. The AK Party seems unlikely to be an alternative choice to Alevi voters in the foreseeable future.

The New Nationalist Mainstream in Conservative Politics

How the conservative right wing voters would respond to the "Kurdish peace process" was critical in the competition between the AK Party and the MHP in the June elections. The rivalry between these two parties intensified after the re-ignition of the PKK attacks to Turkish security forces in July 2015.

The AK Party's efforts to maintain its appeal to young, more educated, urban voters and women will continue to be a dynamic of the upcoming elections

The overall political posture of the Turkish right is getting more nationalistic. As a consequence skepticism towards the peace process and the ensuing spiral of violence. In the November elections, the AK Party re-gained the majority of the right wing conservative votes that they previously lost to the MHP.[50] This in itself demonstrates the trend of becoming more nationalist among the conservative right wing electorate.

Conservative right wing voters constitute the backbone of Turkish politics.[51] The conjectural effects of the "Kurdish peace process" and recent spree of political violence, has seemingly left these voters confused. The MHP benefited from the right wing voters' worries about the Kurdish Peace Process but their leader Devlet Bahçeli's non-cooperative attitude during the coalition talks was one of the reasons behind the decline of the party's support. Overall the distribution of the right wing conservative voters along the political spectrum and the role of political conjecture in this distribution was another enigma of the elections. Unlike the first two conundrums, the third puzzle may not have any institutional trace in Turkish politics because the social bases of both parties are quite similar especially in the central, western and northern parts of Turkey. It also seems that none of the existing small right wing parties are likely to surpass the 10 percent national threshold in the coming years. For the MHP, differentiating itself from the AK Party and being able to attract new supporters at the same time is the most important challenge.

The AK Party's efforts to maintain its appeal to young, more educated, urban voters and women will continue to be a dynamic of the upcoming elections. A big leadership challenge facing the AK Party chairman Ahmet Davutoğlu in the coming years is to attract the support of younger generations and to appeal to a larger audience without alienating the loyal support base of the AK Party. The polls demonstrate that younger generations are more likely to vote for the MHP and the HDP.[52] This last problem seemed to be more important for the AK Party's quest to maintain its role as a single governing party thus the election promises of the party in the November elections focused towards the expectations of young voters.[53] To consolidate the support of both conservative Turkish and Kurdish nationalists at the same time is a grave challenge for the AK Party therefore it seems that they will continue to focus on this competition in the upcoming years. The discourse of "National Unity and Brotherhood" seems to be the AK Party's answer to this challenge, yet for the moment it is not a convincing alternative on either front.

One of the dramatic stories of the last decade for right wing politics in Turkey is the evaporation of the smaller parties. Many of those parties were earlier incorporated into the AK Party[54] or they shrank to a negligible significance. Turkey's ten percent national threshold for parliamentary elections was an important catalyst in this rapid transformation. The total vote percentages of small right wing parties declined from 27 percent in 1999 to 1.48 percent in November 2015 (Figure 1). Table 1 demonstrates this decline more clearly on the bases of parties. *Anavatan Partisi* (ANAP, Motherland Party),[55] the party which was established by the former prime minister and president the late Turgut Özal, declined and disappeared from Turkish politics dramatically in the last two decades of Turkish politics. ANAP was united with *Doğru Yol Partisi* (DYP, True Path Party) and the two changed their name to the *Demokrat Parti* (DP) in 2007, but this change could not prevent their steep decline. *Halkın Sesi Partisi* (*HAS Parti*, People's Voice Party) was established with the leadership of Numan Kurtulmuş on November 1, 2010. The *HAS Parti* closed itself down in September 2012 after its founding leader decided to join the AK Party.

Table1: The Change of Small Parts' Vote Percentages Over the Years

Years	SP	BBP	ANAP	DP	DYP*	BTP	HAS Parti	Total
1999		1,5	13,2	0,3	12			27
2002	2,49	1,02	5,13		9,54	0,48		18,66
2007	2,34			5,42		0,52		8,28
2011	1,27	0,75		0,65	0,15		0,77	3,59
2015-June	2,06 (electoral coalition)			0,16	0,06	0,21		2,49
2015-November	0,68	0,53		0,14	0,03	0,1		1,48

* On May 27 2007 *Doğru Yol Partisi* (DYP) united with *Anavatan Partisi* (ANAP) and changed their name as DP. Next day another party with the same name DYP was established by Çetin Özaçıkgöz.

Decline of the Small Right Wing Parties (1999-2015)

Figure 1: Total Vote Percentages of Small Right Wing Parties
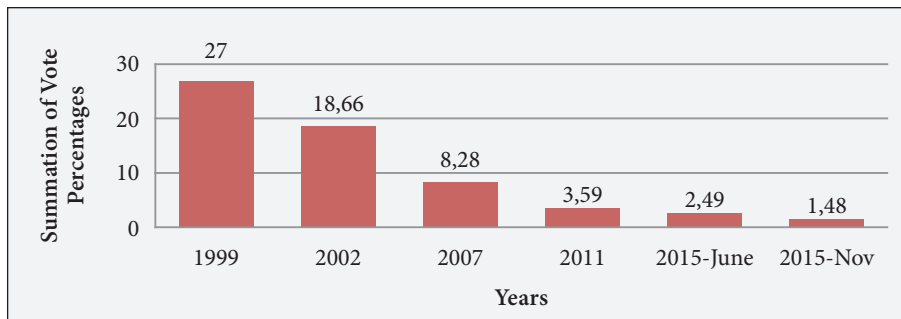
Primary actors in this competition are the AK Party and the MHP but smaller parties gained some significance before the November elections. AK Party was

Identity related fault lines in Turkey had been re-activated during the campaign processes of both June and November 2015 General Elections

struggling to regain its parliamentary majority and small shifts from these parties to the AK Party could have significant impact. AK Party elites especially considered a pre-election coalition with the *Saadet Partisi* (Felicity Party)[56] but these efforts and negotiations failed.[57]

Both the AK Party and the MHP may be more willing to form electoral coalitions with smaller right wing parties in the future. The AK Party especially may need to form a coalition with one or more of those parties to form a single party government. In the November elections the AK Party was able to get the parliamentary majority without such a coalition, but in the future they may need to consider such an option. Concerns related to overcoming the 10 percent national threshold in order to be represented in the parliament may push the MHP to form such a pre-election coalition in the future. In case of a coalition option, the MHP may also consider a pre-election coalition in order to be a stronger candidate as a coalition partner. The most likely pre-election partner for the MHP is the smaller Turkish nationalist party the BBP.

Due to the right wing voters' criticism of the peace process with the PKK, nationalist discourses turned out to be more visible in right wing politics. Competition between the AK Party and the MHP may further push the Turkish right to the ultranationalist direction. This move does not help the AK Party in the long run because the AK Party is competing for the conservative religious Kurds as well as the right wing Turkish nationalists. This delicate balance cannot be maintained for the AK Party if Turkish politics gets more polarized along nationalist lines.

Figure 2: Small Partys' Vote Percentage Changes Over the Years
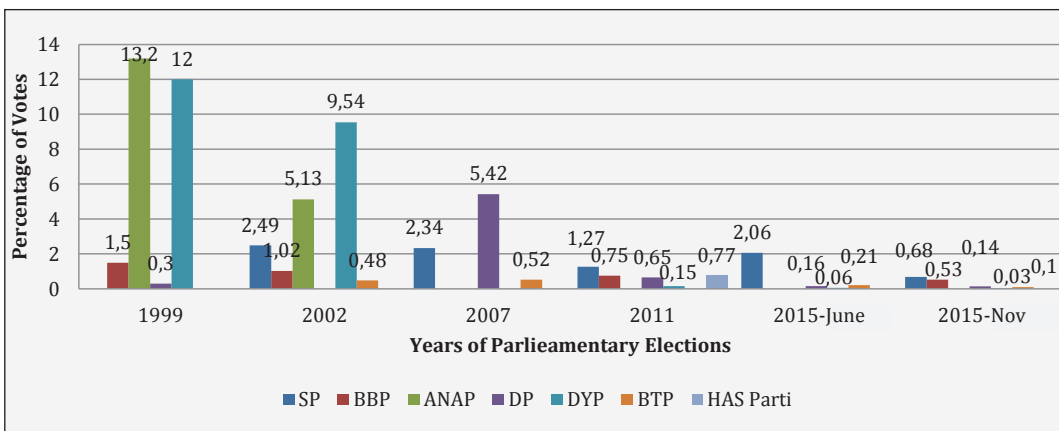
Conclusion

The HDP and the Kurdish Nationalist Movement's dilemma between "*Türkiyelileşmek*" and "Middle Easternization"; the competition between CHP and the HDP over the Alevi votes and the AK Party's competition with the HDP over conservative Kurdish voters and MHP over right wing conservative voters were the three identity related puzzles that affected the results of the June and November elections. Identity related fault lines in Turkey had been re-activated during the campaign processes of both June and November 2015 General Elections. Turkey experienced a turbulent political environment within the interim period between the June and November elections which alerted the Turkish electorate. Within such a context AK Party was successful to steer the dynamic of the November election away from identity politics to issues of security and a policy of economic and social promises. The other parties more or less maintained campaign strategies for the November elections that were similar to their strategies for the June elections. AK Party's risky move to change its campaign strategy in the November elections helped the party to attain its objective of reaching a single party government.

Identity politics will mostly likely play an important role in shaping the future of Turkish politics in the coming years and continue to be the primary dynamic unless Turkey faces an interstate war or a major economic crisis. Ongoing ethnic and sectarian conflicts within the Middle East and Turkey's broader neighborhood may further aggravate identity related polarization in Turkey. One adverse effect of the increasing importance of identity politics is that this may continue to escalate the social and political polarization in Turkey thus preventing negotiations on more substantive issues and preparation of a democratic and more inclusive constitution. ●

Endnotes

1. Etyen Mahçupyan, "Kimlik Siyaseti ve AKP," *Akşam*, (June 26, 2015), retrieved from http://www.aksam.com.tr/yazarlar/kimlik-siyaseti-ve-akp/haber-416968; Talha Köse, "Kimlik Siyasetinin Açmazları," *Sabah*, (June 20, 2015), retrieved from http://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/perspektif/talhakose/2015/06/20/kimlik-siyasetinin-acmazlari; Bekir Ağırdır, "Seçmen Bütünleme Sınavında ne Yapacak?," *T24.com.tr*, (September 3, 2015), retrieved from http://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/bekir-agirdir/secmen-butunleme-sinavinda-ne-yapacak,12653.

2. "Kimlik Siyaseti Kaybetti," *Al Jazeera Turk*, (November 2,2015), retrieved from http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/kimlik-siyaseti-kaybetti; Bülent Aydemir, "Kimlik Siyaseti Değil Hizmet Siyaseti Kazandı," *Gazete Habertürk*, (November 2, 2015), retrieved from http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1147737-kimlik-siyaseti-degil-hizmet-siyaseti-kazandi; Orhan Miroğlu, "Kimlik Siyasetinin Sonu," *Star*, (November 11, 2015), retrieved from http://haber.star.com.tr/yazar/kimlik-siyasetinin-sonu/yazi-1068900; Talha Köse, "Kimlik Siyasetinden İnşa Siyasetine," *Star Açık Görüş,* (November 14, 2015), retrieved from http://haber.star.com.tr/acikgorus/kimlik-siyasetinden--insa-siyasetine/haber-1069698.

3. MHP got more than 7,5 million votes which makes 16.29 percent of the total votes, whereas HDP got slightly more than 6 million votes which makes 13.12 percent of total votes in June 7, 2015 elections (Source T.C. Yüksek Seçim Kurulu 7 Haziran 2015 Milletvekili Genel Seçimi Kesin Sonuçları).

4. AK Party got more than 18 million votes which makes 40.87 percent of total votes, whereas CHP got around 11, 5 million votes which makes 24.95 percent of total votes.

5. In November 1 repeat elections AK Party and CHP increased their votes. The AK Party increased its percentage of votes to 49.49 percent and CHP increased to 25.33 percent. On the other hand MHP's vote percentage plummeted from 16.29 percent to 11.9 percent and HDP also experienced a significant loss from 13.12 percent to 10.76 percent.

6. Hüseyin Alptekin, "The Economic Context of June and November 2015 General Elections of Turkey: The Role of Economic Indicators, Promises, and Expectations in the Electoral Results," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2015).

7. "Baykal: Kimlik Siyaseti Nedeni ile Olmuyor," *Al Jazeera Turk*, (June 12, 2015), retrieved from http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/baykal-kimlik-siyaseti-sebebiyle-olmuyor.

8. Selahattin Demirtaş's 2014 presidential campaign generated sympathy among the young Alevis, especially among the Kurdish Alevis.

9. Public opinion research company KONDA's report for June 2015 elections is a useful source for estimating the detailed outcomes of the June 7 2015 general elections. KONDA's public opinion research estimated the results of June 2015 elections with less than 1 percent deviation from actual results; therefore we will resort to the KONDA report for some details of the election results. According to KONDA's estimation AK Party got just 21 percent of the votes of young voters (ages between 18-28). This is almost half of the overall average of AK Party's votes. Whereas MHP, HDP and CHP's percentage support of young voters are 33 percent, 32 percent and 24 percent respectively. (*KONDA 7 Haziran Sandık ve Seçmen Analiz Raporu*, 18 Haziran 2015, İstanbul).

10. According to KONDA Survey Results of June 2015 elections AK Party got 20 percent of the votes of Kurdish electorate, whereas HDP got 59 percent (9 percent was indecisive according to survey). According to 2014 local elections AK Party got the 42 percent of Kurdish votes. BDP (32 percent) and HDP (7 percent) combined got 39 percent of the Kurdish votes in 2014 local elections. BDP dissolved itself in the summer of 2014 and the movement decided to go under HDP name in 2015 elections. There is a remarkable decline in AK Party's support from Kurdish voters (*KONDA 7 Haziran Sandık ve Seçmen Analiz Raporu*, 18 Haziran 2015, İstanbul).

11. According to KONDA report 36 percent of voters whose average monthly income is more than 3000 TL votes for the CHP. The CHP also gets the support of 36 percent of voters whose level of education is college (excluding 9 percent undecided electorate) KONDA 7 Haziran Sandık ve Seçmen Analiz Raporu, (18 June 2015, İstanbul).

12. The policy of "*Türkiyelileşmek*" was a deliberate effort of Kurdish Ethno-nationalist Movement in Turkey to reach entire Turkish electorate. Establishment of HDP as a leftist umbrella party that would campaign for the elections all over the Turkey was an important pillar of this policy. With the HDP, the political wing of the Movement tried to transform itself from a region based ethno-nationalist movement into political party that would appeal to entire Turkish society. This policy became possible with the ceasefire that was declared in the spring of 2013 and under the conditions of the peace process or the "*çözüm süreci*". Selahattin Demirtaş's candidacy in the presidential race of 2014 was successfully instrumentalized for this goal.

13. "DTK Sonuç Bildirgesi Açıklandı," *imctv.com*, (December 27, 2015), retrieved from http://www.imctv.com.tr/dtk-kongresinin-sonuc-bildirgesi-aciklandi-tam-metni/

14. This estimation is based on public opinion company KONDA's analysis, "7 Haziran Sandık ve Seçmen Analizi," *KONDA*, (June 18, 2015).

15. PKK re-initiated its attacks against Turkish security forces by killing two police officers in the Ceylanpınar district of Şanlıurfa in July 22, 2015. This attack is considered by Turkish government as the event that ended the peace process. "Ceylanpınar'da İki Polis Şehit," (July 23, 2015), retrieved from http://www.milliyet.com.tr/ceylanpinar-da-2-polis-sehit-gundem-2091335/.

16. According to Timothy Sisk "Political elites in societies divided along ethnic, sectarian or religious lines may have incentives to "play the ethnic card" in electoral processes in order to cause fear among the population and to manipulate support for more extreme positions."(Timothy Sisk, "Elections in the

Wake of War: Turning Points for Peace?" in *Legitimacy and Peace Processes: From Coercion to Consent*, ACCORD, No. 25, (2014), pp. 31-34. United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC), report also demonstrates that elections may not be the sources of the divisions, but they may trigger or ignite more deeply rooted social, economic and political tensions just like Kenya, Haiti and Cote d'Ivoire (p. 9) (The Role of Elections in Peace Processes: When and How They Advance Stability or Exacerbate Conflicts, UNSSC, Turin, 2011).

17. I specifically prefer to define the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in contemporary Turkey as the movement that started with the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan in 1980's. Thus İmralı (Abdullah Öcalan), PKK (Kandil), KCK, HDP, DBP, YDG-H and other civil society organizations and armed factions that are related to this movement is considered as the elements of "Kurdish Nationalist Movement."

18. Gülen Movement (GM) defines itself as a religious oriented transnational civil society network that is mainly involved in education activities. Judges affiliated with the GM filed a corruption probe against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's family on December 17 and 25, 2013 with the aim of toppling AK Party Government. Gülen Movement has been accused of infiltrating the state institutions and bureaucracy aiming to create a parallel structure within the Turkish State.

19. "PKK Leader: Turkey is Protecting IS by Attacking Kurds," *BBC*, (August 10, 2015), retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33818282.

20. "PKK'lı Duran Kalkan'dan iki Bomba Açıklama," (June 16, 2015), retrieved from http://www.haberler.com/pkk-li-duran-kalkan-yasa-anayasa-degismeden-hdp-7420153-haberi/.

21. March 21, 2013 (Newruz day) was accepted as the official initiation of the Peace Process. Abdullah Öcalan's letter praising the peaceful and democratic resolution of Kurdish Issue was read to public during the Newruz celebrations in Diyarbakır.

22. Metin Gürcan, "PKK Looks to the Future with Creation of Youth Militia", *Al Monitor*, (August 31, 2015), retrieved from http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/08/turkey-kurds-pkk-armed-young-militias.html#.

23. Turkish government allowed *Peshmerga* forces of KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) of Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government to pass through Turkey's territories to fight against ISIS ("Turkey allows Iraqi Kurds across border to fight ISIL in Kobani," *The Telegraph*, retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11195529/Turkey-allows-Iraqi-Kurds-across-borders-to-fight-Isil-in-Kobane-in-pictures.html.)

24. ISIL besieged the Northern Syrian city of Kobani, which is a Kurdish populated city of Syria on the border of Turkey. HDP co-chairman Selahattin Demirtaş called Kurdish people to streets to protest both ISIL and AK Party government's inaction with regard to the siege of Kobani. More than 50 Kurds, closer to Islamic Groups such as HÜDA PAR were massacred and some public buildings were set to fire by protestors. The events of October 6-8 stalled yet not stopped the peace process. However the events created a trust gap between the AK Party government and the supporters of HDP and sympathizers of PKK (Vahap Coşkun, "The Kurdish Peace Process: Oct 6-8 Events and Beyond," *Dicle* Üniversitesi *Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 20, No. 32 (2015), pp. 1-12; Ali Dağlar, "6-7 Ekim'in Acı Bilançosu: 50 Ölü," *Hürriyet*, (November 06, 2014), retrieved from http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/6-7-ekim-in-aci-bilancosu-50-olu-27525777.

25. David Ignatius of Washington Post; Kate West of Middle East Eye, are just few examples of the journalists or bloggers who try to promote secular PKK or PYD fight against "Islamists" in the Middle East and advising their governments to support their allies. Kate West, "The Female Guerilla Fighter of the PKK," (July 31, 2015), retrieved from http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/female-guerrilla-fighters-pkk-2044198184; In David Ignatius' article "White House Dithering Paralyzes U.S.'s Best Ally for Fighting the Islamic State" the editor also chooses to use the photo of a female YPG (People's Protection Units) fighter, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/white-house-dithering-paralyzes-uss-best-ally-for-fighting-the-islamic-state/2015/09/22/ba8fe4be-6151-11e5-8e9e-dce8a2a2a679_story.html.

26. Demirtaş's popularity boosted after his successful campaign in presidential elections on behalf of his party. Demirtaş especially appealed to younger generation voters. Vahap Coşkun argued that Demirtaş won the support of some Kurdish voters that previously voted for AK Party. Especially the Kurds in the Western parts of Turkey voted for Demirtaş without the limitation of 10-percent threshold (Vahap Coşkun, "What Demirtaş Achieved in the Presidential Election," *Daily Sabah*, (August 20, 2014).

27. Selahattin Demirtaş increased the votes of the HDP and the BDP together almost 1 million in the presidential race in comparison to local elections that were held in March 30, 2014. In metropolitan cities like Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir Demirtaş almost doubled HDP's votes. Demirtaş got 236.435 additional supporters in Istanbul. This increase was 99.302 in İzmir and 67.219 in Ankara. Vote percentages in increases were 4.84 percent to 9,09 percent in Istanbul; 3,37 percent to 7,98 percent in İzmir and 0,87 percent to 3,46 percent in Ankara; Hatem Ete, "Demirtaş Kimden Oy Aldı?," *Akşam*, (August 21, 2014).

28. "Seni Başkan Yaptırmayacağız" (We will not let you become the president) was the motto of HDP's campaign in June 7, 2015, general elections. This campaign was successful and attracted some votes outside of the traditional support base of BDP/HDP especially in cities in the Western parts of Turkey.

29. In his interview with the German newspaper Die Zeit Cemil Bayık, one of the leaders of PKK, argued that "President Erdoğan is the Caliph of the ISIS." "Bayık: İŞİD'in Halifesi Erdoğan," *Deutsche Welle Türkçe*, (December 17, 2014), retrieved from http://www.dw.com/tr/bayık-işidin-halifesi-erdoğan/a-18136987 /.

30. There are major debates about how to define Alevi identity and Alevi community in Turkey. Academically I prefer to define Alevis as an ethno-religious community. Talha Köse, "Ideological or Religious? Contending Visions on the Future of Alevi Identity," *Identities,* Vol. 19, No. 5 (2012), pp. 576-596.

31. Elise Massicard, *The Alevis in Turkey and Europe: identity and managing territorial diversity*, Routledge, 2012.

32. There are several studies on the relationship between Turkish left parties and the Alevi community: Harold Schüler, *Türkiye'de Sosyal Demokrasi: Particilik, Hemşehrilik, Alevilik*, 2ⁿᵈ ed. (Istanbul: İletişim, 2002); Ali Çarkoğlu, "Political Preferences of the Turkish Electorate: Reflections of an Alevi-Sunni Cleavage," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2005), pp. 273-292; Ali Çarkoğlu, "The Nature of Left-Right Ideological Self-placement in the Turkish Context," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2007), pp. 253-271.

33. Ali Çarkoğlu and Kerem Yıldırım, "Election Storm in Turkey: What do the Results of June and November 2015 Elections Tell Us?," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2015).

34. In Tunceli the shift seems to be from HDP to CHP because AK Party underperformed in this city. Ali Çarkoğlu and Kerem Yıldırım. "Election Storm in Turkey: What do the Results of June and November 2015 Elections Tell Us?," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2015).

35. In Hatay Samandağ, previously (in June elections) independent candidate Refik Eryılmaz was nominated by CHP in November elections. This may also be an important reason behind CHP's vote increase.

36. Among those candidates especially three of the HDP's Alevi candidates have strong publicity among Alevi community and beyond. Müslüm Doğan previously served as the president of the Pir Sultan Abdal Association, Turgut Öker was the former president of The Confederation of European Alevi Bektashi Unions (AABK) and Ali Kenanoğlu was the president of Hubyar Sultan Alevi Derneği

37. Some journalists and field researchers argue that there is confusion among Alevi voters between CHP and HDP but especially the younger Alevis feel closer to HDP. "Ankara'da Alevilerin Oy Tercihi Belli: Yaşlılar CHP'ye, Gençler HDP'ye," *Taraf*, (19 May, 2015), retrieved from http://www.taraf.com.tr/ankarada-alevilerin-oy-tercihi-belli-yaslilar-chpye-gencler-hdpye/; Sinan Onuş, "1 Kasım: Alevi Seçmenler CHP-HDP Arasında Denge Gözetiyor," *BBC Türkçe* retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/10/151028_1_kasim_alevi_secmen.

38. This observation is based on the author's field interviews with Alevi citizens in various occasions within the frame of research project in between "Kurdish Alevis and the Peace Process" (December 2013 and April 2014). Findings of the research were published as "Kürt Alevileri ve Çözüm Süreci," *Süreç Araştırma Merkezi Rapor*, (May 2014).

39. "Kürt Alevileri ve Çözüm Süreci," *Süreç Araştırma Merkezi Rapor*, (May, 2014).

40. Talha Köse, "Between Nationalism, Modernism and Secularism: The Ambivalent Place of 'Alevi Identities'," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2013), pp. 590-607; for a more critical approach to relationship of Alevis with Kemalizm see Hamit Bozarslan, "Alevism and the Myths of Research: The Need for a New Research Agenda," in White, Paul Joseph, and Joost Jongerden, eds. *Turkey's Alevi Enigma: A Comprehensive Overview*, (Brill, 2003), pp. 3-17.

41. The author's personal contacts and interviews with prominent Alevi community leaders and Alevi citizens in the last 3 years.

42. "Büyük Alevi Kurultayı 'Çözüm Süreci' Başlığı ile Toplandı,"*Yeni* Şafak, (May 12, 2013), retrieved from http://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/buyuk-alevi-kurultayi-cozum-sureci-basligi-ile-toplandi-521195.

43. "Kürt Alevileri ve Çözüm Süreci", *Süreç Araştırma Merkezi Rapor*, (May, 2014).

44. For a detailed official account of democratization initiative of AK Party Government, *Sessiz Devrim: Türkiye'nin Demokratik Değişim ve Dönüşüm Envanteri 2002-2014*, 4th ed, T.C. Başbakanlık Kamu Düzeni ve Güvenliği Müsteşarlığı, (Ankara, 2014).

45. For example a group that calls themselves as "anti-capitalist Muslims."

46. "İşte HDP'nin Seçim Vaatleri," *Milliyet*, (April 21, 2015), retrieved from http://www.milliyet.com.tr/hdp-nin-secim-beyannamesi/siyaset/detay/2047485/default.htm.

47. İsmail Saçlı, "CHP Alevi Partisi mi?," *Yurt Gazetesi*, (September 01, 2015), retrieved from http://www.yurtgazetesi.com.tr/gundem/chp-alevi-partisi-mi-h95207.html.

48. Three Alevi MPs (Müslüm Doğan, Alican Önlü and Mahmut Toğrul) are elected from HDP in November elections. While high profile Alevi candidates of HDP former president of The Confederation of European Alevi Behtashi Unions (AABK) Turgut Öker and President of Hubyar Sultan Alevi Association Ali Kenanoğlu and 3 other Alevi MP's that were elected in June elections in HDP list were not re-elected in the November elections. This change demonstrates an important decline in the overall representation of Alevi MPs in HDP.

49. The effort of congregating the "Democratic Islamic Congress" (*Demokratik İslam Kongresi*) twice in the last two years can be considered as such a move. The first meeting of "Democratic Islamic Congress" was organized in Diyarbakır in May 2014, while the second "Democratic Islamic Congress" met in İstanbul in December 2015. "Diyarbakır'da Demoratik İslam Kongresi," *BBC Türkçe*, (May 10, 2014), retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/05/140510_kongre_diyarbakir; "Demokratik İslam Kongresi Toplantısı," *haberler.com*, (December 18, 2015), retrieved from http://www.haberler.com/demokratik-islam-kongresi-toplantisi-7982079-haberi/.

50. As demonstrated in Çarkoğlu and Yıldırım's analysis (Table 1 and Figure 3), the AK Pary gained most votes in İstanbul, Iğdır, Bayburt, Gümüşhane, Trabzon, Sivas, Kayseri, Karabük, Kütahya and Afyon. It is most likely that in many of these cities the vote shifts are from MHP to AK Party. See Ali Çarkoğlu and Kerem Yıldırım, "The Election Storm in Turkey: What do the Results of June and November 2015 Election Tell Us?, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2015).

51. Ali Akarca, "Putting June and November 2015 Elections Outcomes in Perspective," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2015).

52. *KONDA 7 Haziran Sandık ve Seçmen Analiz Raporu*, (June 18, 2015), pp. 61-62.

53. Credit opportunities for young entrepreneurs, new and improved education opportunities and regulations that would encourage the employment of youth employment were some of the election promises of the AK Party for November elections. "AK Party'nin Seçim Beyannamesi Açıklandı," *Milliyet*, (October 4, 2015), retrieved from http://www.milliyet.com.tr/ak-parti-nin-secim-vaatleri/siyaset/detay/2126729/default.htm.

54. Former leaders of *HAS Party* (Numan Kurtulmuş) and Democrat Party (Süleyman Soylu), together with most of the governing elites of these parties, joined to AK Party.

55. In 1999 elections, *Anavatan Partisi* (ANAP) was not a minor party (a party which was unable to surpass the 10 percent national threshold). ANAP got the 13,22 percent of the votes and gained 86 chairs in the parliament.

56. *Saadet Partisi* is the successor of *Refah Partisi*, the party from which founders of AK Party such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç splitted in 2001.

57. "Saadet Partisi AK Party İttifakı İçin Kararını Verdi," *Sabah*, (September 16, 2015), retrieved from http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2015/09/16/saadet-partisi-ak-parti-ittifaki-icin-kararini-verdi.

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