

# The CHP in the June and November 2015 Elections: An Evaluation on Political Impasse

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*ABSTRACT* The electoral will reflected at the ballot box on November 1 confirmed the hegemony of the AK Party in Turkey's party system and raised numerous questions about the future of its opposition parties. Having attempted an ideological and organizational restructuring, following the election of Kılıçdaroğlu as the chairman, the CHP did not garner enough "voting power" to meet its expectations at the ballot box on November 1, just as it failed to do so for the June 7 elections. CHP's inability to increase its votes by even half a point with respect to the June 7 elections indicates that the party is facing a significant deadlock and has been unable to increase its votes. CHP's election results reflect political stalemate despite the efforts of its leader in the last two elections and his statements, which appear to respond to the concerns and demands of the voters. This paper shall focus on the political impasse the CHP faced during the November 1, 2015 elections and the reasons for its continued weak electoral performance.

## The CHP from the June 7 to November 1 Elections

**H**aving considerably resolved its internal problems following the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Convention, the CHP had two remaining tasks to complete for the June 7 elections. The first was to designate the parliamentary candidates and the second was to appear before the electorate with an electoral declaration comprising of assertive pledges to attract more voters.<sup>1</sup> The CHP accomplished more than what was expected. By carrying out an internal election prior to the national elections, the CHP took an important step towards becoming a modern social-democratic party and adopting the principle of institutionalizing intra-party democracy. Abiding by the preferences of party members in these internal elections, the party administration placed the candidates who obtained the most votes at the top positions of the parliamentary candidate lists. Overall, the CHP may have achieved the highest degree of transparency in relation to the other parties' internal processes for the June 7 elections. This was because Kılıçdaroğlu paved the way for designating almost two thirds of parliamentary candidates, including himself, through the inter-

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## The CHP combined an economic and social policy message to propose to the voters a mixture of populism with economic growth

designate former DYP (*Doğru Yol Partisi/True Path Party*) members as candidates, especially in the east and southeast, in order to draw votes away from the AK Party in those regions.<sup>2</sup> The internal elections along with the effort to increase the number of women candidates in major cities created the potential for a new atmosphere in the party. Moreover, the CHP rejected to extend candidatures to the right wing of the party, as “right wing” candidates were often supported in the previous elections. This time around, they were either excluded from the lists or were placed in less important positions. The CHP list aimed to prevent the loss of social-democrat and youth votes to the HDP in key areas. In this sense, one of the features of the list was that it was based on not embarking on an adventure but “preserving its votes,” according to those who consider that the CHP was not focused on making a major leap but on “preserving its votes.”<sup>3</sup> The critics of the CHP’s new internal elections claimed that the representative mechanisms were reduced to “representation of elites.” We have to draw attention to the fact that certain professional groups failed to find a place or managed to find a very small place in the candidate list of the CHP: workers (trade unionists were excluded from the list or were placed in positions without any possibility for election), farmers and villagers, craftsmen, etc. These constituencies all failed to find any place in this system.<sup>4</sup>

However, although certain socio-economic groups were excluded, the CHP ran on a platform of “CHP for Everyone,” a message given by Kılıçdaroğlu to mean that the institutional identity of the party has not been hijacked by any ideological identity. And the CHP should be a “catch-all party.” The CHP intended to reposition itself with an image of a “mosaic party” that had projects for the post-modern times by including candidates from an array of political and ethnic standpoints, such as candidates of center-right wing origin, certain nationalist figures, representatives of the Roman and Armenian community, especially in major cities. This is what the CHP meant by “CHP for Everyone” and a “catch-all party.”<sup>5</sup> During the process of designating candidates, CHP leaders wanted the party to have an image of “beyond right and left, but right in the center,” based on its political actors. This was focused on winning in politics and would comply with the spirit of the time. The most modest reading of this slogan indicates that the CHP planned to extend its influence beyond the traditional right or left divide, and to pursue the centrist voters supporting the AK Party.<sup>6</sup>

nal elections. This process revived the party’s grassroots; further, it laid the grounds so that the base of other parties would place pressure on their party leadership. This could have a positive outcome and become more prevalent for future elections. Another tactic was to

Although it is undeniable that qualifications, identities, and abilities of candidates are among the factors that lead to voting for one party or another, what makes political parties reputable for their voters is the harmonization of their ideology, program, and actors. To understand how a party is perceived, statements and speeches made during the election campaign are the most important sources for analysis at hand during the June 7 election process. By examining the election campaign statements and speeches, we can better understand what kind of future the CHP imagines for Turkey and what kind of means and methods it intends to implement to see its vision become a reality. Among the slogans formulated for the June 7 election campaign, the most stressed one is “*We Clap, We Clap Nationally; Vote and They Shall Go.*” How the CHP would build a different version of Turkey after the elections if it were to win was based on a strategy with four bases as expressed by Kılıçdaroğlu. The first basis is centered on the slogan, “*Participatory Republic, Accountability of the State, Transparency.*” The second one is “*A Turkey with a Competitive Power in the World.*” The third one is founded on a “*Social State*” emphasis and the fourth basis would be a “*Sustainable Restructured State.*” The most important issue that drew attention in these slogan-like statements was the CHP’s claim to present itself to the voters this time as a “*Social-Democrat Party with Projects.*”

Each slogan represents a strategy and corollary projects that put emphasis on economic policy over the political. The goal was to appeal to voters based on economic needs and life style improvement. The CHP combined an economic and social policy message to propose to the voters a mixture of populism with economic growth. But the CHP went further than purely political sound bites and expressed how the programs would be implemented through concrete projects with the goal of a more “*livable Turkey,*” as expressed by Kılıçdaroğlu. Hence this was the main thrust of the campaign slogans brandished by the CHP. Moreover, there was a need to emphasize the political current of social democracy that underpins CHP’s movement and serves as a defining identity for its slogans and statements.<sup>7</sup> The CHP also wanted to connect with the voters through the optimistic message of hope and it expressed this through its slogan: “*Major Transformation Aims for a Promising Future.*”

The CHP focuses on seven basic topics in its political, economic, social and cultural framework. These are “*Freedom, Rule of Law and Democracy,*” “*Inclusive Economy Generating Jobs,*” “*Solidarity and Social Justice,*” “*Quality Public Services for Citizens,*” “*Urban and Environmental Rights,*” “*Citizenry- and Value-Based Foreign Policy,*” and “*Information Society.*” Under each topic first the problem is defined and then a pledge is made on what should be done and how. Each theme is materialized through the proposal of concrete projects. The difference for the CHP, this time, was that it placed the economy before politics through the creation of projects with a social content. It becomes easier to understand the logic of CHP’s strategy based on economic factors, as

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they are determinant in the party choice of voters in Turkey.<sup>8</sup> The construction of an “alternative Turkey” presented by Kılıçdaroğlu, as a strategy with four bases, is meant to attract voters. The four bases are meant to indicate an evolution of what Turkey will become under the leadership of the CHP, such that first a *participatory republic*, *accountability of the state*, and *transparency* will emerge that will allow for an improved “Social State.” The contrast that the CHP is making with the traditional left in Turkey is that it also wants to focus on the economic issues of growth, development, and production. Hence, the economy is seen as job generating and inclusive.

However, the social component is considered as paramount to this alternative Turkey prospect since the CHP advocates that social welfare can only be achieved with human-oriented development. But it goes back full circle to the need for a growing economy that is based on the advancement of information and technology. The role attributed to the state is to support economic development.<sup>9</sup> The emphasis by the party that stable and inclusive growth can only be achieved through a strong social state stands out in these campaign slogans. Although campaign statements and government policies advocating for a market oriented-liberal economy promote growth models, economic growth can be limited to certain economic sectors and not be inclusive. On the other side of the political-economic spectrum, campaign claims that promote a social state,<sup>10</sup> bolstered by projects, correspond to CHP’s position of constructing a social state based on production sharing. While the stagnate vision of the social-democrat tradition in Turkey had difficulty in understanding how production is vital for better distribution, this time the CHP stresses achieving production to be able to ensure fair and “proper distribution.” This new perception is a reflection of CHP’s novel approach to the political economy in Turkey.

During the fast pace run toward June 7, the CHP was almost fully focused on the economy and prioritized social-oriented solutions in its election campaign. Part of the AK Party’s success is that it reached out to Turkish society through the economy. Since the day it took office, it had succeeded in maintaining the support of the poor and the deprived. This has forced the CHP to shake off its ideological obsessions and reduce the distance between itself and the people. CHP’s attempt to transform itself is partly due to the AK Party, more than the ideological conditionings of the past.<sup>11</sup> With CHP’s campaign pledges of a more social state, which will serve as the basis for social justice, it was able to reach out more effectively to the poor, as expressed by the party’s Istanbul deputy candidate Mehmet Bekaroğlu. Moreover, the CHP reduced its polemics with its political competitors but instead focused on the economy



After the unofficial results of the November 1<sup>st</sup> elections, journalists wait at the emptied CHP headquarter for Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of CHP.

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and its impact on the welfare of Turkish society.<sup>12</sup> With this new approach, the CHP made itself a viable party for the voters.<sup>13</sup> By doing so, the CHP began to move beyond identity and ideological politics and economic policy choice issues, such as production, development, and distribution.<sup>14</sup> Essentially, this is how the CHP attempted to distinguish itself during the June 7 elections while still claiming that it has a social-democrat conception of the world.<sup>15</sup> The goal was to displace ideological-political issues, focusing on economic issues/problems by making concrete pledges through the packages of concrete policy projects it presented to its left constituencies, which consisted of the poor, students, the unemployed, the pensioners, credit debtors, subcontractor workers, minimum wage employees, farmers and teachers,<sup>16</sup> and in this sense, for the first time it was oriented towards touching upon the real concerns of the voters.

The fact that the November 1 elections were held in less than half a year after the June 7 elections, forced the political parties to speed up their game and address the issues facing Turkish voters. The CHP made strategic changes in its parliamentary candidate list for November 1 to gain seats in a few provinces, but did not make any large-scale changes. The CHP prepared for the November 1 elections with the same ambitious statements and speeches of uniting ideology and politics with the economic dimension. Also it laid out its political vision of politics and expressed at the outset the importance of the institutionalization of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law to reach the goal of economic development and a more advanced information society. In its aim

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of advancing democracy in Turkey, the CHP repeated the importance of the rule of law through the effective supervision of the executive by the legislative, and underlined the essential importance of a system of checks and balances in a democracy, which is only possible through political pluralism and institutional autonomy. Defining its inherent politics as “Politics of Rights and Freedoms,” the CHP advanced that this shall empower citizens and secure freedoms. According to CHP, this is the only way to resist political, religious, ethnic, and cultural

“domination” over the citizens. Expressing its “understanding of social citizenship” by adding concepts of socio-economic justice to democratic citizenship, the CHP promises fair minimum wage, the right to social security, health and education, and family insurance.

Presenting secularism as a political mechanism reinforcing democracy and not having been used as a tool for negative campaigning,<sup>17</sup> the CHP promises that with democracy the secular state will treat all faiths and individual preferences with equity. Moreover, the Directorate of Religious Affairs shall be restructured to be more pluralistic and inclusive. The pledges range from abolition of compulsory religion classes to providing legal status to *Cemevis*.

The CHP dealt in its statements with one of the most fundamental problems facing Turkey: the Kurdish issue. For the longest time, the Kurdish question was framed as “exclusionist citizenship” and until recent elections -in speeches and slogans- it was described as the “southeastern issue,” rather than the “Kurdish issue.” However, the CHP now emphasizes that the solution to the problem would be possible if Turkey achieved “Full Democracy” and “Equal Citizenship.” Constructing its perspective on the Kurdish issue by starting from a human rights definition, the CHP hones its analysis and sees the issue as part of the lack of democracy and underlines that it can only be solved by strengthening democracy, freedom, and the rule of law. Also, the social-economic dimension is not overlooked. The CHP does not reduce this issue to the purely political realm, and sees it in the context of the struggle against unemployment, poverty, and the necessity of greater social and economic development.<sup>18</sup> The CHP believes that the issue should be considered in an integrated manner with peace, democracy, and socio-economic aspects, through mechanisms established through legislation (such as the Social Consensus Commis-

sion) and other institutional structures such as the Common Wisdom Delegation, which could reach out to the society. Concrete suggestions for solutions to the problem range from realizing decentralization in the administrative system to ensuring that citizens not speaking Turkish as their mother tongue fully benefit from public services, and by having transparency and rule of law systematically applied.

The CHP, through its electoral slogans, has expressed the values it is trying to prioritize for Turkey's future. They cover themes of human rights such as *freedom of assembly and demonstration*, freedom of expression, *free and pluralist media*<sup>19</sup>, civil society, and institutional democracy by establishing a path towards a "*Republic of Rights and Freedoms*."<sup>20</sup> Further, the CHP has expressed the view that these values can be enshrined and legislated by drafting a truly liberal constitution. This newly designed national constitution would be based on democracy, rule of law,<sup>21</sup> social justice, respect for human rights, and would embrace all of the Turkish society. CHP's ultimate goal as expressed in its slogans and campaign messages is a new "social democratic civilization" in Turkey. The construction of this civilization shall bring about a parliamentary system<sup>22</sup> that is pro-active<sup>23</sup>; passing laws and drafts following honest and real debates on the legislation and involving the public while putting an end to the practice of bag bills. The executive will be supervised and its power limited within the context of this new "Republic of Rights and Freedoms," whereby there would be a diversification of investigatory commissions as well as strengthening of the financial and auditory functions of the Parliament.

Through the analysis of CHP's political platform expressed by its slogans, statements, and precise measures, we can clearly understand that CHP's ideal of "Turkey First" is a holistic vision of the future. The CHP also described its idea that Turkey should be "*A State in Daylight*" and the system should be seen as "*Politics for Citizens*." Although the CHP did re-orient much of its electoral discourse towards making economic pledges for both the June 7 and November 1 elections, it had not really changed ideologically. The CHP remains a party based on pragmatist populist politics, but it is trying to progressively change to meet the needs of the time.<sup>24</sup>

## **Ballot Box Performance of the CHP on June 7 and November 1**

It is obvious that the ballot box performance of the CHP in both elections was lower than the party's expectations. Hence, as the vote rate barely reached 25 percent (24.9 percent) on June 7, it cannot be interpreted as a success. Losing votes in 53 provinces, the loss of the CHP was -36 in Tunceli, -7.7 in Kilis and -7.6 in Ardahan. Nevertheless, it was neither correct to draw a pessimist future for the CHP based on the results.<sup>25</sup> Its votes increased between 5.9 and

## The CHP did not lose its voting base to other parties, but hasn't been able to gain new votes from other parties

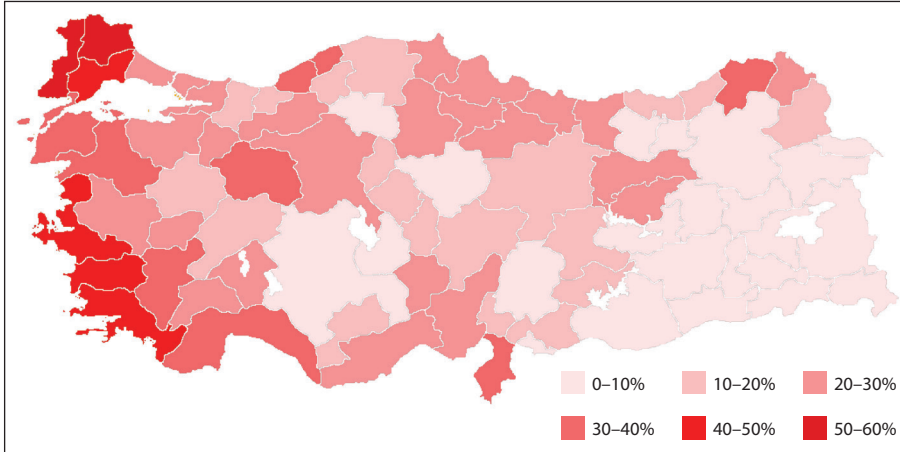
0.1 points in 27 provinces. The highest increase was achieved in Ordu (5.9), Bolu (4.4) and Bilecik (3.9). However, in these elections, the CHP again failed to move its social base, which is mainly centered in Thrace and the Aegean region, from the coastal provinces towards the central, eastern, and southeastern Anatolia. The CHP received vote rates between 25.6 percent and 53.5 percent in the 29 provinces where it managed to receive above its national average. The four provinces where it receives the highest vote rates were Edirne (53.5 percent), Kırklareli (50 percent), Tekirdağ (45.7 percent), and İzmir (44.7 percent).

The following findings were remarkable when we analyzed the June 7 votes of the party according to voting groups. The provinces with vote rates in the 0-5 percent range are all in the eastern and southeastern Anatolia region, except for Gümüşhane (4.6 percent) and Bayburt (2.5 percent). This result indicates that the CHP has a very serious growth problem in these regions. There are seven provinces where the CHP reached vote rates in the range 5-9.9 percent and these are mostly in central Anatolian provinces (such as Çankırı, Aksaray, Yozgat, and Konya). There are six provinces where vote rates were in the range of 10-15 percent (Adıyaman, Kütahya, Kars, Kayseri, Osmaniye, and Sivas). The average of CHP in these provinces varied between 11.4-14.4 percent. There are 13 provinces where CHP received 15-19.9 percent of the vote. These provinces are mostly located in the central Aegean, central Anatolian, Marmara and Black Sea regions. The CHP votes are in the range of 20- 25 percent in 10 provinces. For example, in this voting group, it received the lowest vote with 20.2 percent in Tunceli and the highest with 24.5 percent in Bolu. The CHP obtained votes higher than its national average during the June 7 elections in 29 provinces, which is worth noting. Among these 14 provinces where it managed to receive between 25-29.9 percent of the vote, the lowest rate was in Erzincan (25.6 percent) and the highest was in Bilecik (29.5 percent). In the next group, with votes in the range 30-34.9 percent, we observe that the CHP managed to receive votes in this range in five provinces (31 percent in Bartın, 31.4 percent in Artvin, 32.6 percent in Antalya, 33.9 percent in Balıkesir, and 34.9 percent in Denizli). The provinces where it received votes in the range of 35-39.9 percent were Hatay (36.3 percent), Zonguldak (38.9 percent), Eskişehir (39.1 percent), and Çanakkale (39.3 percent). While reaching a voting rate in the range of 40-44.9 percent only in Aydın and İzmir, there are four provinces where the CHP received above 45 percent: Muğla (45.6 percent), Tekirdağ (45.7 percent), Kırklareli (50 percent), and Edirne (53.5 percent). These regions seem to be CHP strongholds. Given the electoral geography that is depicted above, although the CHP has a deeply-rooted and loyal electorate in terms of maintaining its social base, the CHP has not been able to bolster its



numbers. In other words, the CHP did not lose its voting base to other parties, but hasn't been able to gain new votes from other parties.<sup>26</sup>

CHP Electoral Map for June 7 General Elections

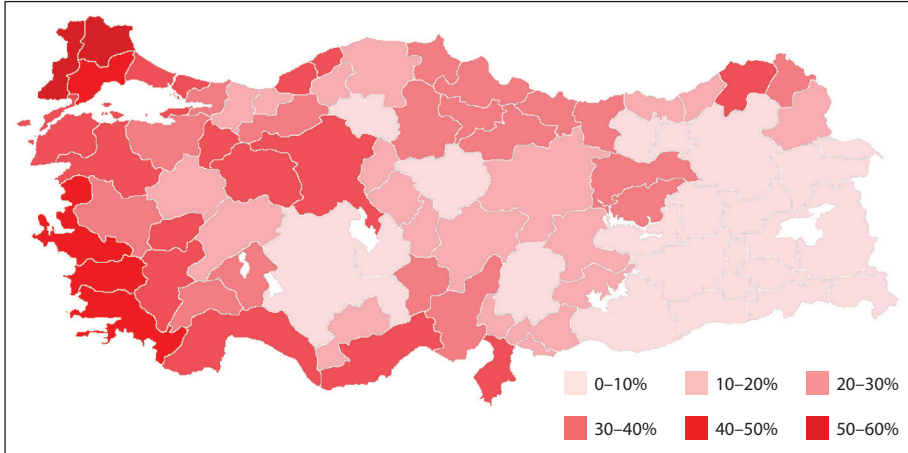


Resource: <http://www.yenisafak.com/diger/2015-secim-haritasi---7-haziran-secim-2015-2158453>.

The CHP faced a similar situation of political deadlock during the November 1 elections.<sup>27</sup> In 28 provinces, it received vote rates above its national average and the highest votes were in Edirne (57 percent), Kırklareli (55.7 percent), Muğla (48.4 percent), İzmir (46.5 percent), and Tekirdağ (45.7 percent). It is noteworthy that it was below national average in 53 provinces. The five provinces where it received the lowest votes were Şırnak (1.1 percent), Ağrı (1.3 percent), Batman (1.2 percent), Hakkari (1.2 percent), and Muş (1.3 percent) respectively. All these provinces are located in the southeastern Anatolia. Considering the vote increase of the CHP in terms of voting groups and provinces, it increased its votes by a maximum of approximately 7 points. One province stands out in this example of an increase in voting points: Tunceli (7.3 percent). Votes for the CHP increased in 41 provinces and decreased in 40 provinces with respect to the June 7 elections. There were 33 provinces where it managed to increase its votes by more than the national vote increase (0.4 percent). The five provinces where the highest increase achieved were Ardahan (6.4 percent), Kırklareli (4.5 percent), Kilis (4.5 percent), and Artvin (3.8 percent) respectively. The provinces with the highest range of votes lost were Ordu (4.2 percent), Rize (-4 percent), Bolu (-3.1 percent), Zonguldak (-3.1 percent), and Samsun (-2.7 percent).

On June 7, out of the 29 provinces where the CHP received higher than its national average vote, 9 were in Marmara, 6 in the Aegean, 2 in central Anatolia, 5 in the Mediterranean, 6 in the Black Sea, 1 in the eastern Anatolian region, while on November 1, out of the 28 provinces where it received higher than

### CHP Electoral Map for November 1 General Elections



its national average vote, 9 were in Marmara, 6 in the Aegean, 2 in the central Asian, 4 in the Mediterranean, 4 in the Black Sea, and 3 in the eastern Anatolian regions. The top 10 provinces where the CHP garners its highest votes did not change for the CHP in both elections. These provinces were Edirne, Kırklareli, Muğla, İzmir, Tekirdağ, Aydın, Çanakkale, Eskişehir, Zonguldak, and Hatay. However, Burdur and Amasya, where it received above its average vote rates for the June 7 elections, dropped below the average. In Ardahan and Tunceli, where it received less than the average in the same election, it increased for the November 1 elections and was above the average. In certain provinces, the CHP managed to increase its votes very slightly with respect to the June 7 elections and these increases were in the range of 0.03 (Antalya) -7.32 point (Tunceli).

Overall, the CHP suffered a loss of votes in 40 provinces, between -0.01 (Gümüşhane) and -4.22 (Ordu). The common features of the provinces with the highest CHP votes are that they were center-right strongholds during the 1990s, they have socially dominant secular life styles, and they have strong agricultural bases. With the exhaustion of the center-right in the early 2000s, the CHP became a focal point among certain groups of voters. The tightly knit relations that the CHP established with voters in Thrace and in the Coastal Aegean regions for a quarter century seems to have continued during the November 1 elections. However, the CHP was unable to increase its electoral strength in the other regions of Turkey, in particular in Anatolia and even in the Black Sea region. Any high voter strength in certain provinces (Tunceli 27.9 percent, Hatay 35.6 percent, Tokat 22 percent) of central and eastern Anatolia is likely to be due to Alevi turnout or sporadic CHP performance. The better CHP performance than the national average in the electoral districts of Bursa, Çanakkale, Manisa and Uşak is related to the identification that western oriented, secular

segments of Turkish society of the traditional center right electors have with the CHP. Moreover, the CHP has managed to increase its votes by nearly 1 point in major cities, such as Istanbul, Adana, Ankara, and İzmir, while it is even stronger in the wealthier and more westernized

## **One of the obstacles the CHP faces is the image that the party is introverted and refuses to extend a hand to certain sections of the society**

districts of the same cities (66.5 percent in Karşıyaka, İzmir; 55.9 percent in Çankaya, Ankara; 62.9 percent in Beşiktaş, Istanbul). What is thought provoking is that the CHP, once again, failed to perform well in the poorer neighborhoods and electoral districts during the November 1 elections. Ankara's Pursaklar (9.3 percent) and Istanbul's Sultanbeyli (7.8 percent) are illustrative of this issue. Importantly, the very weak performance of CHP in Turkey's southeast in these elections reflect that Kurds have fully abandoned the CHP during the 2000s. The CHP, even as a social-democrat party, was unable to reach even a 2 percent threshold in heavily Kurdish populated provinces, such as Şırnak, Batman, Muş, and Van. Kurdish voters are definitely a missing voting group among the CHP electorate. In sum, the CHP has not been able to reach out and gather votes from among the Kurdish population, moderate conservatives, and the poor. If the CHP cannot effectively obtain votes from these important segments of the Turkish electorate, it will not be able to win elections.<sup>28</sup> What is even more alarming is that the CHP could not even increase its votes by a mere 1 point in the past elections where 8 out of 100 voters changed their party choice with respect to the June 7 elections. The swing vote was important, as it was 12 percent in eastern Anatolia, 10 percent in central Anatolia, 11 percent in the southeast, and 10 percent in the Black Sea. In the end, if the CHP cannot attract voters that would not normally vote for it, it is in a political impasse.

### **Can a Party that Fails to Win National Elections Accede to Power and Government?**

Certain political analysts are not surprised the CHP is in an electoral *cull de sac*. Hence, according to Kalaycıoğlu, this is because very few voters are ideologically aligned with the CHP's positions and the left in Turkey is paralyzed. He points out, "The ratio of people who regard themselves on the left are around 15 percent to 20 percent, while the ratio of people who consider themselves as having the same positions as the CHP is even lower, around 8 percent to 12 percent of voters. The CHP received 25 percent of votes. People look down at this 25 percent, as it seems to be two or three times what the CHP should normally receive. The CHP achieves this increase by receiving votes from people more from the center, from liberals, or more moderates etc."<sup>29</sup> Sencer Ayata, one of the party administrators expressed the opinion that



The leader of CHP, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, during a speech in İzmir's electoral campaign.

AA PHOTO / MAHMUT SERDAR ALAKUŞ

although CHP increased its votes from 20 percent to 25 percent during the last five years, it has leveled out. According to Ayata, “The traditional two third against one third left-right division in Turkey has only once moved in favor of the left with 42 percent for Ecevit. The CHP and the HDP are parties with very different political stances. However, considering in terms of emphasis of left identity, their vote totals seems to be 38 percent. This is a high ratio compared to the past, however it is insufficient. The results indicate that the processes of enlightenment and modernization have advanced considerably in Turkey. [...] Abandoning addressing citizens with a socio-economic language would be a mistake... We should be a party that further supports labor. I do not believe that the CHP has the opportunity to expand its electoral base through a conservative discourse.”<sup>30</sup> Ali Çarkoğlu considers that the dilemma of the CHP is staying on the left wing by affecting voters with centrist tendency controlled by the AK Party. According to him, the AK Party managed to gain a clear advantage on behalf of the volatile voters of the MHP and the HDP, by framing this dilemma as a security problem in its campaign for the November 1 elections.<sup>31</sup> According to those who do not consider the failure on November 1 as a loss, the CHP has managed to maintain its electorate from March 30 to November 1 to a certain extent. In this context, advocates of the CHP expect it to develop a political strategy that can extend beyond its traditional base. The groups among Turkish society where it can gain votes, other than its grassroots base, and extend its electorate, are the Kurds, socialists, and the strong centrist electorate with a secular orientation. If the CHP could attract more Kurdish and

**Although the CHP attempted to connect with electors through social and economic policies in the June 7 campaign, it did not reach a focused face-to-face communication-level and never went beyond limited superficial television coverage and local meetings**

left-wing voters through real social-democratic policies, this could increase its votes and would strengthen the legitimacy of the party on the left. But this may disenchant the center right. However, if the CHP attempts to expand and convince centrist voters by moving more toward the center, it would be a better bet and it should be able to keep its electoral strength above the 25 percent level in the long run.<sup>32</sup>

Although the CHP has attempted to restructure its ideological message, it has not been able to appeal important segments of voters: lower to middle class Turks, moderate religious, and conservative or nationalist electors; nor has it been able to reach certain geographic areas of Turkey and ethnic minorities in those regions. Part of the CHP's lack luster performance falls back upon the shoulders of its leaders and senior administration. Attempts to be proactive during election campaigns fall short if CHP is unable to penetrate and convey a message that these social groups can profoundly relate to and feel a connection with CHP's ideology and political platform. This is largely related to a perception and image of the party still held by many voters. To come out of this political impasse, the CHP must transform its political image. One of the obstacles the CHP faces is the image that the party is introverted and refuses to extend a hand to certain sections of the society. This introversion becomes a negative image that the CHP cannot ignore if it wants success at the ballot box. Further, the CHP local organizations or grassroots organizers, which are the main mechanisms to connect the public (i.e., potential voters) with the party has been unable to overcome anachronistic ideological references or representations of the CHP. It should be sculpting a vibrant image of the CHP as a party for Turkey's future. Under Kılıçdaroğlu and his senior leadership's, the CHP has been able to distance itself from the hardline Kemalist line, without compromising Atatürk's legacy, but a certain ideological hegemony of the past still leaves a strong imprint on the organization. This generates an exclusionist party image rather than an inclusive one for a majority of Turkish society, which makes it very difficult to win an election. There is a disconnect between local organization's hardline exclusionist homogenous ideology that is based on the notion of "*Our Union*" rather than being concerned with the fate of the

CHP as a political stake holder in Turkey's political future. This has led to the "political impasse or deadlock" described above, where the CHP just does not seem to understand that most Turkish voters do not have the same terms of references anymore, putting the CHP out of the running. The efforts to bring the party together with the society is limited to electoral periods, and the only concern other than the elections has been reduced to emerging victoriously from intra-party power struggles.

In analyzing the June 7 elections, the CHP leadership seemed to convey through its slogans and statements effective ideas and messages to the voters. There is no doubt that the process of Kılıçdaroğlu's election as chairman evolved into a new leadership. Kılıçdaroğlu has been a strong leader, who is trying to reproduce the image of a populist leader by using references to the fair distribution discourse of Ecevit during the 1970s. Also, Kılıçdaroğlu comes across as "peace loving" embracing the masses through a vision of pluralists-democratic politics. However, it would not be an exaggeration to remark that local party organizations have not kept pace with his more pro-active and modern performance. Although compared to the former CHP, where the CHP linked organizations spent their energy in the past to compete for intra-party power, the organizations today are focusing more on winning the elections. The most fundamental organizational problem is the insufficient grasp of understanding "*occupation-oriented politics*," which is settled at the grassroots levels and in the alleyways of power. The local organizations have not been able to transmit and translate the demands of the street to the senior management. Despite the laudable intentions of the CHP's leadership, this inability to explain the new party ideology and policies to the street are among the fundamental barriers against creating a bridge between CHP and Turkish society as well as the voters. Thus, solely election-oriented efforts are inadequate, especially in major cities. CHP's inability to connect was the main reason for its failures at the polls for both elections in 2015.

Although the CHP attempted to connect with electors through social and economic policies in the June 7 campaign, it did not reach a focused face-to-face communication-level and never went beyond limited superficial television coverage and local meetings. Therefore, the CHP did not rid itself of the negative perception that it is "an unreliable party that is unaware of performance," which is still deep-rooted in the minds of Turkish society. Unfortunately, there is an image of the party and its members that it is "distant to our values" in the sociology of values and identities of the majority of Turkish people of the middle and lower middle classes. This has been perpetuated for several generations. This is the central reason why many voters feel alienated from it.

The CHP can still overcome this perception but it needs to modernize and transform its *modus operandi*. The method by which it can break down the

cultural barrier will require the CHP to get down to business and be ready to go door to door at the grass roots level, rather than starting all over and wasting time on a search for a new leader, program, and ideology. The CHP has “written its story” under the leadership of Kılıçdaroğlu but it has to find a way for Turkish voters to hear it and feel connected. The CHP must read this to the public and have the public read into it and “buy into it.”<sup>33</sup> Historical prejudices among the public against the CHP is a major obstacle against its growth. Failure of local party organizations to carry out proactive partisanship and their failure to touch voters will continue to be CHP’s downfall. The CHP is still seen throughout most of Turkey as the elitist party of the single-party era that is far from the average Turkish person’s traditional values. To increase the voter ratio and for the CHP to eventually move from being an opposition party to a viable political alternative goes through the “discovery of the street.” However, this is no longer sufficient for leftist parties in Turkey today. The CHP cannot just come out during election periods; it has to be present in the lives of voters all the time. It has to become part of their daily lives. One of the most basic features of the CHP under Kılıçdaroğlu, was its transformation into a party that aimed to accede to power. Kılıçdaroğlu demonstrated this through his personal performance during the June 7 and November 1 elections, which included the new ideas and statements expressed during the election campaigns and the constructive attitude during coalition talks. However, the analysis above outlined how CHP’s image remains the biggest obstacle to overcome the way it has been characterized as an “urban legend,” which needs to be transformed into a positive image.<sup>34</sup> ■

## Endnotes

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19. According to the statements of the CHP, the media should be freed from the tutelage of politics and become a much more pluralistic and free medium. Concretely, TRT should cease being the acting instrument of the political power. Another important aspect that the CHP emphasizes regarding the media freedom is job security for media employees if they express views counter to the governing political establishment. The executive should end placing pressure on the media and social media should be liberated from any censure or closures.
20. In the electoral slogans of the CHP is argued that in order to create a more honest and participatory form of politics, political ethics laws should be enacted. Further, citizens should be afforded greater protection against unlawful measures of state powers and against arbitrary state authority practices, thus ending arbitrary treatment by the police force. In particular, the judiciary as well as legal civil society should see the dignity of the law and the independence of lawyers upheld.
21. Conforming to the CHP's views, a truly independent judiciary through judicial reform and respect of the rule of law should be constructed. For example, the method for the election of members of senior judicial bodies should be democratic and non-partisan, the practice of anonymous witnesses should be ended, the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors should be restructured, and most importantly independence of judges and prosecutors should be ensured according to the CHP's vision.
22. Accordingly, the CHP believes that Turkey should return to a classic democratic parliamentary system, with the President being a neutral Head of the State. For example, the President's authority to appoint senior bureaucratic and judiciary authorities would be restricted in this vision.
23. One of the main goals of the CHP is the modification of the electoral system so that parties would be more democratically representative of Turkish society, thus the 10 percent national threshold for political parties would be abolished and so would be the ban on civil servants' affiliation with political parties. Party financing would have to be transparent, creating accountable politics that shall foster fair competition among parties.
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