

The November 2002 Elections and Turkey's New Political Era

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On November 3, 2002, the Turks went to the polls to elect their new government. The elections ushered in a major realignment of the Turkish political landscape, bringing the Justice and Development Party (AKP)--a party with an Islamist pedigree--to power. The AKP received 34.2 percent of the vote, winning 363 of the 550 seats in the Turkish parliament. Of the eighteen parties running in the elections, the social democrat Republican People's Party (CHP) was the only other party to win parliamentary representation, garnering 19.4 percent of the vote and 178 seats (the remaining 9 seats went to independent candidates). On the other hand, the major parties that ran the country in the 1990s, the center-left Democratic Left Party (DSP) of outgoing Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), and former President Turgut Ozal's centrist Motherland Party (ANAP) failed to pass the ten percent threshold needed to enter the parliament. Islamist opposition Felicity (previously Welfare) Party (SP), and former Prime Minister Tansu Ciller's center-right True Path Party (DYP) were also unsuccessful in winning representation in the parliament. How can we explain this realignment of the Turkish political landscape? What does AKP's success mean for the future of Turkish politics?... ❖

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