



## July 2007 Turkish Elections: Winners and Fault Lines

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**O**n July 22, 2007, Turkey faces early parliamentary elections. The polls were called after the political debacle in April and May when the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) moved to legislatively elect AKP member and foreign minister Abdullah Gul to the presidency. At that time, rallies by millions of people, intervention by the Constitutional Court, and a military declaration blocked the AKP from achieving its goal. When the parliament failed to elect a president, as stipulated in the Turkish constitution, it dissolved itself so that a fresh parliament could be formed to elect the president. Since then, Turkish politics have been in limbo.

For starters, outgoing president Ahmet Necdet Sezer continues to act as president. The parliament to be elected on July 22 will have only thirty days to elect a new president by a two-thirds majority, which, depending on the election results, may not be possible. If no president is elected, dissolution of the parliament and new elections are required. Even if the parliament formed after July 22 elects a new president, a recent AKP constitutional amendment stipulates that the president be elected through direct popular vote. The Constitutional Court has sent this amendment—a popular proposition in any democracy—to a referendum on October 21, when it is likely to pass.

This development promises great political uncertainty: Turkey will be electing its president while both changing the way it elects a president and holding general elections for a new government. Accordingly,

Turkey faces at least three ballots in four months: early elections on July 22, a referendum on October 21, and presidential elections after that. Moreover, a fourth election may be required for a new parliament if the one elected on July 22 is unable to elect a new president within the thirty-day deadline. Will Turkey's turmoil come to an end on July 22? Who will win in the elections, and will the country find political stability then?

At the moment, predicting the election results based on Turkish opinion polls is an arduous task. The polls suggest widely differing outcomes. For instance, some surveys say that the ruling AKP, a party with an Islamist pedigree, might win over 40 percent of the vote, while others put the AKP vote at about 25 percent, on par with the opposition left-nationalist Republican People's Party (CHP).<sup>1</sup> One way of avoiding the uncertainty of the broader polls would be to conduct a detailed analysis of the likely election results across Turkey's regions, aggregating those findings to estimate the overall outcome. This methodology should also provide hints about the likely government in Turkey after July 22 as well as the postelection political environment.

1. Some election scenarios can be viewed at "Seçim Senaryoları" (Election scenarios), *Sabah* (Istanbul), July 19, 2007 (available online at [onwww.sabah.com.tr/2007/06/19/haber,CF8993616B7D457FAFD0C9AE6C2039B6.html](http://onwww.sabah.com.tr/2007/06/19/haber,CF8993616B7D457FAFD0C9AE6C2039B6.html)); Ertuğ Yaşar, "İlk Seçim Senaryoları" (First election scenarios), in the Turkish business newspaper *Referans* (Istanbul), May 9, 2007 (available online at [www.referansgazetesi.com/haber.aspx?HBR\\_KOD=67305&YZR\\_KOD=86&ForArsiv=1](http://www.referansgazetesi.com/haber.aspx?HBR_KOD=67305&YZR_KOD=86&ForArsiv=1)); and "Patronların Anketinden Çıkan Seçim Sonuçları" (Election results from the bosses' poll), *Milliyet* (Istanbul), June 19, 2007 (available online at [www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/06/19/son/soneko13.asp](http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/06/19/son/soneko13.asp)).

## Electoral Thresholds for a New AKP Government

In the outgoing Turkish parliament, only the AKP and the CHP are represented. The CHP is the only opposition party in the parliament because a 10 percent minimum electoral threshold barred the other fragmented secular parties from parliament following the November 2002 elections. What is more, the threshold allocated the seats that would have gone to the smaller parties mostly to the AKP, giving the party a legislative supermajority after having actually won only one-third of the seats. This picture might change on July 22.

At the moment, three parties—the AKP, the CHP, and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), a right-nationalist party—seem likely to cross the threshold to enter parliament. The populist-nationalist Young Party (GP) and perhaps the center-right True Path Party (DYP)—now renamed the Democrat Party (DP)—each hold a slim chance of scaling the threshold and entering parliament as well. The Kurdish-nationalist Democratic Society Party (DTP), which is unlikely to surpass the threshold, is running independent candidates and might gain about two dozen seats in the 550-seat parliament. (In the Turkish election system, independent candidates do not have to cross the national threshold to enter parliament as long as they win in their respective provinces.)

What are the chances that the AKP will gain a legislative majority to form a government after July 22? Statistically speaking, in a four-party parliament (with AKP, CHP, MHP, and DTP represented), the AKP could gain a legislative majority if it receives 35 to 37 percent of the votes. In a five-party parliament (with AKP, CHP, MHP, DTP, and GP or DP represented), the AKP would need at least 36 to 38 percent of the votes to gain a majority of the seats.<sup>2</sup>

## Turkish Regions in the Elections: Issues and Winners

Will the AKP cross the crucial 35 to 38 percent threshold, and how many parties will enter parliament

on July 22? The answers to both these questions can be predicted from a detailed regional analysis of the likely election results. For the sake of this analysis, Turkey can be seen as composed of six regions.

### *Anatolian Heartland*

This region is in the country's interior, extending from Sivas and Kayseri in the east to Kutahya and Isparta in the west, with two panhandles jutting north to the Black Sea, the first along the Sakarya River valley (Sakarya, Duzce, and Bolu provinces) and the second along the Yesilirmak River valley (Samsun and Tokat provinces). Sending 113 deputies to parliament, this rural area with twenty-one provinces and 7,544,330 voters is essentially a conservative-nationalist heartland. This political trend dominates even in the area's large cities, such as Konya and Kayseri. The region votes for conservative parties, as it did for the Islamist Welfare Party (RP) in 1995. At the same time, however, the area has strong nationalist reflexes and shies away from Islamist parties that confront the much-respected military. Hence, after the 1997 showdown between the RP and the military, in the 1999 elections, this region moved en masse from the RP to the MHP.<sup>3</sup> In 2002, when the AKP was formed by cadres who suggested a clean break with the RP, the heartland shifted to the AKP, enticed by the party's conservatism.

Will the Anatolian heartland stay with the AKP on July 22? Today, continuing terrorist attacks by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) combined with the AKP's resulting inability to deliver security against the PKK are eroding the AKP's popularity in this region. At another time, the AKP would have already lost votes en masse to the MHP in the Anatolian heartland. Currently, however, the AKP's politically savvy message—that the party's attempt to elect Foreign Minister Gul to the presidency in April–May 2006 was blocked by secular Turks and their institutions “because Gul is religious,” and that such “injustice can be undone”<sup>4</sup> by supporting the AKP—is hitting very close to home among the rural heartland's

2. An interactive screening in Turkish of how votes correspond to the seats in parliament is available online at *Ari* movement's website ([www.bilincliyo.com](http://www.bilincliyo.com)).

3. Results for all the previous general elections in Turkey are available online in Turkish ([www.belgenet.net](http://www.belgenet.net)).

4. Author interviews with Turkish politicians, Istanbul (June 12, 2007) and Ankara (June 19, 2007).



conservative voters. Accordingly, the AKP's rhetoric on "electing a religious president" (a conservative emphasis) seems to be dampening the negative effect of the PKK problem (a nationalist issue) on the party's popularity in this conservative-nationalist area.

What is more, the AKP has been generous in handing out subsidies to farmers in this predominantly rural area and the rest of the country. The Turkish daily *Zaman* reported on June 3 that in 2006, the AKP distributed US\$4 billion in subsidies to farmers,<sup>5</sup> an amount that translates to US\$974 per family—no small figure in rural Turkey, where average annual family income stands at US\$1,915, according to the Turkish National Statistical Institute (TUIK).<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the AKP can be expected to emerge strongly in the Anatolian heartland. The MHP will likely follow behind. The CHP, which has a power base among rural Alevi voters in this area, could be the third party.<sup>7</sup> The DP and GP will trail behind as the fourth and the fifth parties.

### Coastal Turkey

This largely urban area includes most of the country's littoral provinces along the Mediterranean and the Aegean seas (from Icel [Mersin] in the south to Edirne in the north), Thrace, and the Caucasus provinces (Ardahan and Artvin, which have strongly secular Georgian and Turkish populations) in the northeast. Sending eighty-three deputies to parliament, this region of eleven provinces and 7,194,361 voters is Turkey's secular heartland. Coastal Turkey, including metropolitan Izmir, favored the CHP in the 2002 elections and is likely to do so again in large numbers. Nevertheless, rising concerns over the PKK issue may give the MHP, which has not historically

had a strong showing in coastal Turkey, a moderately good outcome at the polls this time. A third party likely to perform well here is the GP, which seems to be appealing to the population whose roots are in the Balkans and Central Europe. A majority of the millions of Turkish and Muslim immigrants persecuted in and expelled from the Balkans and Central Europe over the past centuries live in coastal Turkey where the GP, whose leader is of Bosnian origin, had its strongest overall regional performance in the 2002 elections. This region is the AKP's weakest base area across Turkey. Overall, after the CHP, the AKP, the MHP, and the GP will compete for second place in this region, and the DP will come just behind.

### Varos

The lower-middle-class districts of the large industrial-service-economy cities, which are known as the *varos*, can be considered "fortress AKP" in the elections. In the 1980s and 1990s, Turkish cities went through a population boom caused by immigrants from the Anatolian heartland and southeastern Turkey flooding these urban areas for work. Today, these immigrants and their *varos* neighborhoods constitute a plurality, in some cases a majority, of the population in large cities. For the purposes of this analysis, four of Turkey's five largest cities (Istanbul, Ankara, Adana, and Bursa) as well as Kocaeli (Izmit) and Yalova, two industrial provinces in the Istanbul conurbation, with 13,784,396 voters and 140 parliamentary deputies, can be considered as a bloc in the upcoming elections.

What unites these cities is not that they have large *varos* populations, but that they are controlled by the AKP; therefore, CHP-controlled Izmir, Turkey's third-largest city, is excluded from the bloc. The AKP's control of the municipal governments has been crucial to the party's electoral success and will continue on July 22. The AKP's predecessor, RP, took control of these cities in 1994 and ruled them until the April 2003 local elections, when the AKP took the baton. The RP and the AKP, built on the RP networks, developed elaborate grassroots machinery in these six areas, creating databases and reaching out to individual *varos* inhabitants. This machinery now brings strong support for the AKP in the *varos*.

5. The full version of this news report is in "Sıkıntılara Rağmen Tarımda Gelir İkiye Katlandı" (Despite difficulties, agricultural income has doubled), *Zaman* (Istanbul), June 3, 2007. Available online ([www.zaman.com.tr/webapp-tr/haber.do?haberno=559048](http://www.zaman.com.tr/webapp-tr/haber.do?haberno=559048)).
6. "880 bin aile ayda 190 YTL ile Geçiniyor" (880 thousand families survive on 190 YTL monthly salary), citing TUIK figures, *Milliyet* (Istanbul), December 26, 2006. Available online ([www.milliyet.com.tr/2006/12/26/ekonomi/eko01.html](http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2006/12/26/ekonomi/eko01.html)).
7. For more on the Alevis and their support for the CHP, see Soner Cagaptay, "Secularism and Foreign Policy in Turkey: New Elections, Troubling Trends," *Policy Focus* no. 67 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2007). Available online ([www.washingtoninstitute.org/print.php?template=C04&CID=268](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/print.php?template=C04&CID=268)).

The AKP provides jobs and contracts for the *varos* population through the municipal governments. It also doles out free goods, school supplies, and coal for heating in these neighborhoods through city governments. In June, for example, in the Tuzla borough of Istanbul, a mostly *varos* neighborhood, residents were given a ton of free coal per family, well ahead of the winter but in time for the elections.<sup>8</sup> Such clientelist mechanisms provide a social safety network as well as a means of upward mobility and extra income. Tuzla residents who use gas for heating said they would sell their coal to people in their countryside hometowns for cash. Thus these mechanisms have created a loyal base for the AKP in the *varos*, with the exception of the Alevis who vote for the CHP and other secular parties. Lately, the PKK issue seems to be eroding part of the AKP base in the *varos*, moving some voters to the GP, the only party other than the AKP whose leader seems capable of projecting a strong political appeal in the *varos*. Nevertheless, overall support for the AKP seems steadfast in the *varos*.

In fact, as long as the AKP controls the local governments of Istanbul and the other aforementioned cities, it is unlikely to lose the elections there. The AKP's control over the *varos* is a self-feeding political tool. The election debate in the *varos* is not over secularism or even politics, but rather about monetary dispensation—over which the AKP has full control. Hence, the CHP, which has weak networks in the *varos*, will likely do well only in the middle- and upper-middle-class neighborhoods of these cities. In this regard, recent political mobilization over secularism in these neighborhoods, as demonstrated in mass rallies attended by millions of middle-class Turks, especially women, will add to the party's already strong support base in those areas.

Meanwhile, given the fragmented nature of the center-right parties and the recent failure of the center-right DYP and Motherland Party (ANAP) to unite, the center-right vote in the large cities is up for grabs. Recognizing this fact, the AKP has appointed center-right candidates to appeal to these middle-class voters. The CHP and MHP have followed

suit. Hence, the center-right votes will likely be split among the AKP, the CHP, and the MHP.

Overall, a strong AKP will be followed by the CHP in this region, while the MHP and the GP, both also attracting voters angry about the PKK issue, will likely emerge closely behind the CHP as the third and fourth parties.

### *Middle Turkey*

This region comprises the country's mixed-economy (agricultural-industrial) provinces along the Black Sea and in western Anatolia (an area extending from Balıkesir in the north to Denizli in the south and Eskisehir in the east). In addition, the region includes the Amanos mountain provinces (Gaziantep, Kilis, Hatay, and Osmaniye) with similar economic conditions. The region also contains the Caucasus provinces of Kars and Iğdir, whose Azeri populations, though largely poor and rural as in the Anatolian heartland, shy away from the AKP. This region has twenty-two provinces, 8,235,508 voters, and 110 parliamentary deputies.

Given its economic mix, the region is neither predominantly urban, like coastal Turkey, nor rural conservative, like the Anatolian heartland. Hence, this area can be seen as Turkey's most level playing field in the elections between the AKP, the CHP, the MHP, and even the DP, which has traditionally strong appeal among rural voters in western Anatolia. The AKP will benefit from its appeal among conservative rural voters, as in the Anatolian heartland, and among lower-middle-class urban voters, as in the *varos*. The PKK security issue will win votes for the MHP here, and the debate over secularism will bring middle-class, as well as Alevi, voters to the CHP. The DP, following suit, will likely do better in this area than in any other region of the country. The GP will likely follow the DP.

### *Southeast*

This area in predominantly Kurdish southeastern Turkey consists of twelve provinces and 2,696,324 voters; it has fifty-four deputies in parliament. Dominated by Sunni Kurds, of whom many maintain tribal affinities, the rural region votes almost exclusively either

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8. Author interviews with Turkish citizens, Istanbul, June 13, 2007.

Kurdish nationalist or Islamist. Since the 1990s, the region's political oats have been spread between Kurdish nationalist parties, running in this election as the Democratic Society Party (DTP), and Islamist parties from the RP to the new AKP. In the countryside, such voting usually follows the directives of tribal leaders, in accordance with agreements between those leaders and the political parties.<sup>9</sup> The DTP and the AKP will split almost all the votes in this area, while other parties that have localized support, such as the DP, will trail behind in a distant third position. The DTP will likely win around 90 percent, and perhaps all, of its parliamentary seats from this region.

Because the DTP is running independent candidates in the southeast to circumvent the national threshold, with more than fifty independent candidate names on the ballots in some provinces, this region might become a postelection hot spot for balloting recounts, causing a significant delay in the final results of the elections. Typically, the night of the Turkish elections, most major media can call the winner, and final results are declared in the days immediately after the elections by the High Election Commission, an independent monitoring body. In this election, a delay of the final results in the southeast could throw off the tight countrywide schedule, i.e., voting for parliament on July 22, then electing a new president in the parliament thirty days after the legislature is formed, then holding a referendum on October 22 for direct presidential elections.

### *Euphrates River Valley*

This mostly rural region with some industrial base includes provinces along the Euphrates River belt from Erzurum in the north to Malatya and Sanliurfa in the south. This mixed Sunni-Alevi and Turkish-Kurdish region contains nine provinces whose 3,061,644 voters elect fifty legislative seats. Since the 1980s, the majority Sunnis in this region have been voting in overwhelming numbers for Islamist and conservative parties in what seems like a response to the Alevis, who identify with secularism and the CHP.

9. Author interviews with Turkish citizens in Mardin (Turkey), June 15 and 16, 2007.

This issue being the main political fault line in the region, support for Kurdish nationalism and the DTP is marginal despite the presence of many Kurds in the region. The Euphrates valley is where the AKP will have its strongest performance in the country on July 22, exceeding 50 percent of the vote in some provinces. The CHP will follow with about half as many votes. Because the Euphrates valley envelops the southeast region where the PKK has inflicted many casualties, the MHP could benefit from an anti-PKK backlash here, coming close to the CHP's performance. The DTP and DP will likely emerge as distant fourth and fifth parties in this area.

### *Strategies and Wild Cards*

Given the preceding analysis, the AKP currently seems poised to emerge on July 22 as the first party in a four-party (or, less likely, five-party) parliament.<sup>10</sup> Whether the AKP can form a government by itself then largely depends on whether the party retains 35 to 38 percent support of the electorate in the polls. This development, in turn, depends on several factors that could add to or subtract from the AKP's popularity before the elections.

### *Cross-Border Operation into Northern Iraq*

The biggest wild card of the elections is what, if anything, Turkey will do with respect to the PKK presence in and attacks from northern Iraq. In this regard, the AKP wants to enter the elections from a position of strength, by suggesting that the option of a cross-border operation into Iraq is on the table. Yet, by switching the onus of initiating such an operation to the military—on July 5, Foreign Minister Gul said that an operation would take place if the military requested it<sup>11</sup>—the AKP is also deferring to the military the issue's political responsibility and likely political fallouts in Iraq, including fallouts for the U.S.-

10. An even less likely scenario, though an ideal one for the AKP, is a three-party parliament (with AKP, CHP, and DTP) in which the AKP would have a supermajority, as is the case in the current parliament.

11. For the full report in Turkish, see "Asker İsterse Kuzey Irak'a Yarın Gireriz" (If the army wants, we will enter northern Iraq tomorrow), CNNTurk.com, July 5, 2007. Available online ([www.cnnturk.com/TURKIYE/haber\\_detay.asp?PID=318&haberID=372066](http://www.cnnturk.com/TURKIYE/haber_detay.asp?PID=318&haberID=372066)).

Turkish relationship. The Turkish military, in turn, has suggested that an operation into northern Iraq would be possible only after government authorization by means of a parliamentary motion, a technical necessity under the Turkish constitution.<sup>12</sup> With this equilibrium in place, further PKK violence coupled with little AKP action against the PKK is likely to hurt the party's popularity.

### Coalition with the DTP

Another factor that may influence the polls is the AKP's policy on a likely postelection coalition with the DTP. On June 16, AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in Agri—a city where the DTP has a strong base—that he would not object to a postelection coalition with the DTP.<sup>13</sup> The AKP may indeed need support from other parties to muster a parliamentary majority and form a government after the elections. An actual coalition with the DTP, however, is unlikely. Most Turks consider the DTP to be related to the PKK in the same way Sinn Fein is related to the IRA. Almost confirming such an assessment, on July 9, prominent DTP member and Diyarbakir mayor Osman Baydemir characterized the PKK as “armed Kurdish opposition.”<sup>14</sup> The AKP can be expected to shy away from a coalition with the DTP because such a move might be detrimental, if not suicidal. Hence, rather than suggesting a postelection coalition, Erdogan's statement should be seen as a preelection political move to reach out to the Kurdish voters, and not necessarily to those in pro-DTP Agri but to those in the *varos* of Istanbul and other large cities.

### The Presidential Election

A third issue intricately tied to the parliamentary elections is the presidential election. As mentioned before,

after failing to elect Gul as president in the parliament, the AKP passed a constitutional amendment in May to change the current system and elect the president through a direct popular vote. Then, however, President Sezer vetoed this amendment and, on June 18, referred it to the Constitutional Court, as is required by the Turkish constitution.<sup>15</sup>

The AKP has since used the presidential election issue to bolster its support in the conservative Anatolian heartland and also to enter the elections from a position of strength. Numerous times, AKP leaders have said that Gul's candidacy, which was shot down in May, continues until the presidential election issue is resolved. By insisting that Gul's candidacy continues and discussing the botched presidential election as a “case of injustice,” the AKP portrays itself as the underdog, a position most Turks find politically attractive. This stance has so far boosted the party's popularity.

On July 5, the Turkish Constitutional Court overturned President Sezer's earlier veto of the AKP's amendment.<sup>16</sup> The court also decided to take the amendment to the previously mentioned referendum on October 21. The new political picture allowing direct presidential elections should steal some of the AKP's thunder on the presidential election issue. Nevertheless, the party seems intent on maintaining its rhetorical position as the underdog in this regard. As soon as the court called for a referendum, Gul suggested that the 120-day waiting period, a cooling-off period stipulated by the Turkish constitution on all referenda, be decreased to 45 days<sup>17</sup> so that the presidential election could be held at the same time as the parliamentary elections. The more the presidential election debate is entwined with the parliamentary elections, the more the AKP wins. As long as the

12. See, for example, CNNTurk report on Chief of Staff Gen. Yaşar Büyükanıt's speech. Ercüment Alhan, “Hükümete Yazılı Talep Veremem” (I cannot make a written request to the government), CNNTurk.com, May 31, 2007. Available online ([www.cnnurk.com/TURKIYE/haber\\_detay.asp?PID=318&haberID=355262](http://www.cnnurk.com/TURKIYE/haber_detay.asp?PID=318&haberID=355262)).

13. For the full report, see “Erdogan'dan DTP ile Koalisyon Açık Kapı” (Open door to coalition with DTP by Erdogan), *Milliyet* (Istanbul), June 17, 2007. Available online ([www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/06/17/siyaset/siy01.html](http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/06/17/siyaset/siy01.html)).

14. “PKK Propaganda by Mayors from DTP,” *Sabah* (Istanbul), July 10, 2007. Available online (<http://english.sabah.com.tr/D1D38E74947D4E27A30D8EFA6BB0F1B7.html>).

15. For the relevant report, see “Sezer'den Referandum Süresini Kısaltan Yasaya Veto” (Sezer vetoes the law that shortens the period of referendum), *Sabah* (Istanbul), June 16, 2007. Available online ([www.sabah.com.tr/2007/06/18/haber,3E80F3447D0B45EBA22385DFC2B90E2B.html](http://www.sabah.com.tr/2007/06/18/haber,3E80F3447D0B45EBA22385DFC2B90E2B.html)).

16. More information is available in “Anayasa Mahkemesi Sezer ve CHP'nin İstemini Reddetti” (Constitutional Court rejects Sezer and CHP's request), *Milliyet* (Istanbul), July 5, 2007. Available online ([www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/07/05/son/sonsiy26.asp](http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/07/05/son/sonsiy26.asp)).

17. For the full report, see “Mahkemenin Sürpriz Kararı, Köşk İçin Ekim'de Referandum Var” (Surprise decision from the court calls for referendum for the presidency), *Zaman* (Istanbul), July 6, 2007. Available online ([www.zaman.com.tr/webapp-tr/haber.do?haberno=560587](http://www.zaman.com.tr/webapp-tr/haber.do?haberno=560587)).

AKP casts itself as the underdog party “fighting for the will of the people,” projecting an image of a “small, feisty boxer nobody wants to see lose,” this portrayal will boost the party’s popularity.

### Turkey after July 22

Barring any unforeseen changes, the AKP will likely emerge as the first party on July 22. If the preceding factors help it, the AKP could even win a parliamentary majority, although a slimmer one than the supermajority it now enjoys. Should the preceding factors take votes away from the AKP, an alternative outcome would be a CHP-MHP coalition. Instead of bringing political stability, however, such developments would likely usher in new political tensions.

### Exit the Center-Right

Despite recent international press coverage citing the AKP’s probusiness policies as evidence it is a “liberal party,”<sup>18</sup> the Turks’ perception of what is liberal—a weak political tradition in Turkey—what is right, and what is left is detached from this conclusion. Most Turks judge politicians and political parties based on the pedigree of these leaders and parties in the country’s early democratic experience of the 1950s and the 1960s.

In this regard, the Turks perceive four major political trends: the left, represented by the CHP, a party founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; the center-right, rooted in the Democrat Party of the 1950s; nationalism, anchored in the MHP of the 1960s; and Islamism, rooted in the 1960s Milli Görüş (National Outlook) movement and the RP. On July 22, the AKP might consolidate a good part of the center-right, effectively swallowing this political current. Such a development would embolden the AKP. It would also open the way for the AKP to be seen, especially by the leftists and the nationalists, as “*Milli Görüş* on steroids,” in other words, “Islamists that have co-opted the center-right.” This perception would boost an already emerging political fault line between Turkey’s Islamists and the nationalist-leftists. If the DP

does not enter the parliament on July 22, the disappearance of the center-right could be the biggest challenge of the Turkish political landscape.

### Macro vs. Micro Turkey

As in judging the AKP’s political credentials, evaluating the AKP’s performance since 2002 gives two different pictures, one from the outside and one from the inside, as well as a political fault line. On the one hand, the Turkish economy has grown in leaps and bounds over the past years, and Turkey has become a choice investment market. These developments have created a rather promising macro picture of the country, mostly seen from outside. On the other hand, a different, micro picture of the country, seen from within, also exists. The fact that millions of middle-class Turks, especially women, took part in the anti-AKP demonstrations in the spring implies that at a micro level, a new AKP government would be seen as an unwelcome development by middle-class Turks. In this regard, lifestyle issues, such as the debate over *turban* (a specific women’s head cover that emerged in Turkey in the mid-1980s and is considered a political symbol by the courts, which ban it for public employees and on college campuses) will play a big role after July 22 in mobilizing micro Turkey against the macro picture and thus against the AKP.

### The “Presidential Problem”

The previously mentioned fault lines are emerging within the background of a 550-seat parliament in which, under the system in place until the October referendum, 367 votes are needed to elect a president. Moreover, the legislature has thirty days to elect a new president after the elections, or it will be dissolved. In that case, likely political instability awaits Turkey in all three postelection scenarios:

- In the best-case scenario, even if everything goes normally after July 22, multiple polls and the uncertainty over the presidential elections (Turkey would be electing its president while at the same time changing the way it elects presidents) would likely usher in postelection political instability on par with the April–May period.

18. See, for example, Owen Matthews, “The Prince of Deference: How Will Turkey’s Next Leader Impact Iraq?” *Newsweek*, April 25, 2007. Available online ([www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18317348/site/newsweek/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18317348/site/newsweek/)).

- In the case of a four- or five-party parliament, no party will be able to muster 367 seats by itself to elect a president. If the AKP and the other parties cannot avoid the emergent fault lines and elect a president, the parliament will be dissolved, opening the way for new parliamentary elections, which would coincide with the referendum on direct presidential elections. At that point, Turkey would be electing its president, changing the way it elects a president, and holding general elections almost all at the same time. This complicated political soup would effectively throw the country into a polarized political chaos.
- Finally, in the less likely case of a three-party parliament with only the AKP, CHP, and DTP represented—a not-impossible outcome—the AKP would have enough seats to elect the president by

itself. This development, however, would activate the fault lines previously discussed, ushering in a postelection political maelstrom.

**Consensus Building and the U.S. Role**

Beyond the elections, any winner of the July 22 polls will need to take into account that democracy is the art of consensus building, a feature that has been absent from Turkish politics since the AKP moved to elect Gul as president in April–May 2006. Rather than promising stability, July 22 could be the continuation of a politically tumultuous period that began in April–May 2006. The need for political consensus around a secular democracy is bigger today than ever before, and the U.S. administration should make this concern a focal point of its rhetoric on Turkey to prevent further political instability.

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**The Muslim Scholars Association:  
A Key Actor in Iraq**

By Daniel Fink and Steven Leibowitz

**O**n November 26, 2006, Iraqi investor minister Jamal al-Bakir issued a court warrant for Hareth al-Dhawi, secretary general of the Muslim Scholars Association (MSA). Iraqi news websites reported that al-Dhawi, who is presumed to have close ties to elements in the Sunni Islamic nationalist insurgency, is charged with inciting terrorism and violence. The announcement comes at a time of heightened U.S. pressure on Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki to bolster Iraqi security and reduce the sectarian violence.

The next day, after a barrage of criticism emanating from Iraqi Sunni leaders, the Iraqi government took steps to distance itself from the announcement. Iraqi deputy prime minister Barham Salih said that the warrant came from the judiciary and was thus issued only to investigate alleged criminal activities committed by Hareth. Because of the paper's report, the MSA rejects from Iraqi Sunni communities, the announcement may further alienate Sunni politicians, galvanize the Sunni Islamic-nationalist insurgency, and inflame sectarian tensions.

This paper explores the nature of the Muslim Scholars Association and its origins, evolution, political disposition, and place within the Sunni political, religious, and insurgent landscape. The MSA plays a key role in the Sunni Arab politics of Iraq, defining political positions for the Sunni community on important issues, acting as an informal issue broker and tacit spokesperson for the Sunni Arab insurgents, and mobilizing support for resistance to occupation.

**Background**

The Muslim Scholars Association (Hawth al-Umma al-Madaniyya) is a Sunni religious organization that claims to represent 3,000 mosques and speak on behalf of Iraqi Sunnis. The membership includes those of Arabic and Kurdish backgrounds, as well as the crescent Shiite sect. Although not a formal political party, the MSA takes distinct political positions. It is the largest and most powerful Sunni religious and party political organization in Iraq and has ties with the Iraqi Islamic Party, the main constituent of the Iraqi Accordance Front, and the Waqf, the government's Sunni religious endorsement, which funds Sunni mosques and religious activities throughout Iraq. Additionally, the MSA is believed to have ties to elements in the Sunni Islamic nationalist insurgency<sup>1</sup> and to provide it political support, logistical assistance, and financial resources.

**Inception of MSA**

The MSA arose shortly after the fall of Saddam Hussein in response to a need to fill the power vacuum created with the fall of the regime. Its rise was most publicly with the return to Iraq of Dr. Hareth al-Rubawi, Iraq's most important Sunni scholar,<sup>2</sup> from

1. Edward Wong, "The 'Voice of Sunnis' Gained a Face," Associated Press, June 19, 2006.  
2. Special Representative for Iraq, Stephen D. Rupp, "Iraq's New Leadership: A Guide to the Key Figures," U.S. State Dept., Office of the Special Representative for Iraq, Washington, DC, October 10, 2006. See also, "Iraq's New Leadership: A Guide to the Key Figures," U.S. State Dept., Office of the Special Representative for Iraq, Washington, DC, October 10, 2006. See also, "Iraq's New Leadership: A Guide to the Key Figures," U.S. State Dept., Office of the Special Representative for Iraq, Washington, DC, October 10, 2006.

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