



RESEARCH NOTES

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Revealing Trends in Turkey's Presidential Election

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On August 10, former Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won the country's presidential election with 51.79 percent of the vote, comfortably surpassing his own Justice and Development Party's (AKP's) 43.32 percent tally in the March 30 nationwide local polls. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the joint candidate for the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and Nationalist Action Party (MHP), received 38.44 percent, underperforming the bloc's efforts in March, when it received 43.22 percent. The smaller Kurdish nationalist People's Democracy Party (HDP) received 9.76 percent, far exceeding the 6.5 percent it garnered, along with its sister Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), in March; the HDP has since absorbed the BDP.¹

Erdoğan's August victory reflects his success in building a coalition of the right, which has dominated Turkish politics for decades. This effort included peeling votes from the MHP and also securing the support of small far-right movements, including the Felicity Party (SP) and Great Union Party (BBP). Despite Erdoğan's electoral majority in August, recent election tallies reveal that support for the new president and his AKP may have plateaued: in the 2011 parliamentary election, the party received 21.4 million votes; in the March nationwide local elections, it took

19.4 million votes; and on August 10, Erdoğan collected 21 million votes.

There is another reason the AKP will not have the luxury of remaining complacent. Turkey's next parliamentary elections are scheduled for June 2015, and the question remains whether the party can win again, without Erdoğan at the helm. No doubt, a triumph will rely on using Erdoğan's August tactic of appealing to the country's right-wing voters to muster a winning plurality, or even majority. In the event of the latter, the party would have two-thirds parliamentary representation, allowing it to amend the Turkish constitution, including possibly changing the country's government from a parliamentary to a presidential system, headed by Erdoğan.

As for the CHP/MHP, its recent dip can be attributed to (1) certain MHP voters backing Erdoğan over Ihsanoglu and (2) votes lost by CHP to HDP candidate Selahattin Demirtaş. This suggests the persistence of the traditional Turkish left-right divide—hence the seemingly unlikely voter shifts from the opposition to the government; in other words, from one right-wing party, the MHP, to another, the AKP. Indeed, these voter migrations within the right have implications for the leftist CHP's chances of ultimately seizing power from the AKP.

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Further, analysis of the HDP suggests the party made large gains by promoting a decidedly liberal message in place of its erstwhile exclusive emphasis on Kurdish nationalism. This speaks well for the future of liberal thought in Turkish politics. Still, the HDP itself remains a small party, and having violent Kurdish nationalists among its ranks could prevent it from winning broader support. A stronger challenge to Erdogan could come from the left if the HDP and CHP united around a committedly liberal platform.

Erdogan was sworn in as president on August 28. Although Article 101 of the Turkish constitution stipulates that the president cannot have a party affiliation, it is an open secret that Erdogan will seek to control the AKP from the presidential palace by appointing a prime minister and party head who will report to him.²

In the near term, all indications point to Erdogan's continued quest for widespread influence. Studying his election tactics will help shed light on his party's future prospects as well as those of his opponents.

Left vs. Right in Turkey

Excluding thirty-three months under the premiership of Bulent Ecevit (January to November 1974, June to July 1977, and January 1978 to November 1979) and discounting left-right coalition governments, the political right has held power since Turkey became a multiparty democracy in 1950. Typically, parties on the right receive 50–60 percent of the vote, with leftist parties gaining 30–40 percent. A leftist party crossed the 40 percent threshold only in 1973 and 1977, when the CHP, under Ecevit's charismatic leadership, successfully challenged right-wing dominance in the country. In many other years, by comparison, such as the 1999 and 2002 elections, the collective right-wing tally has crossed 60 percent; in the latter case, it ballooned to 69 percent.

In the Turkish political context, the AKP and MHP are similarly conservative and nationalist movements, with the AKP having an Islamist pedigree and the MHP being more nationalist. On the left, the CHP and HDP have more visible political differences. The CHP has a Turkish nationalist stance, while the HDP is strongly identified with Kurd-

ish nationalism. While both parties stand for strict separation of religion and government, only the CHP makes this issue a key part of its election platform.

Given the ideological proximity between the two right-wing parties, voters on the right have traditionally shifted their allegiance between the MHP and the AKP—and, before the AKP was established in 2002, between the AKP's predecessors, the Refah (Welfare) Party and Fazilet (Virtue) Party. Voters on the left have been less inclined to switch from one party to another due to the more pronounced differences between the CHP and HDP and its predecessors, including the BDP.

At the same time, traditionally speaking, Turkish voters have shied away from crossing the hard wall between left and right. The CHP and MHP's placement of a joint candidate for this presidential election, therefore, can be considered an unconventional strategy, aimed at bringing together left- and right-leaning voters behind the same candidate. With his centrist political pedigree, Ihsanoglu, a secular scholar from a conservative family, appealed to many MHP and CHP voters. But he appears to have ultimately failed to attract the full support of these parties' bases. Erdogan took advantage of weaknesses in this strategy to peel votes away from the MHP, and away from Ihsanoglu.

How Erdogan Built His Right-Wing Majority

On August 10, three candidates competed in Turkey's presidential vote. Although the candidates technically ran on their names, not on party lists, Erdogan was effectively the AKP candidate, Ihsanoglu ran for the CHP/MHP, and Demirtas ran for the HDP. In this study, the March 30 election results were used to gauge party popularity; when correlated with the August 10 results, this allowed for an estimate of party/candidate choices in the latter contest.

On March 30, the four main Turkish parties collectively received 91.18 percent of the vote. Other than these four parties, only the Islamist SP and BBP and the leftist HDP received more than 1 percent, reaching 2.77 percent, 1.58 percent, and

1.97 percent, respectively. The remaining balance went to sixteen minor parties. This analysis will consider voter shifts among the four main parties and also the direction of the SP and BBP votes, accounting for more than 97.5 percent of the Turkish electorate as of the March election, to explain Erdogan's winning August 10 majority.

Whereas Erdogan received 21 million votes in the presidential poll, 1.6 million more than his party's March tally, the collective CHP/MHP count dropped from 19.4 million in March³ to Ihsanoglu's 15.5 million in August. Demirtas, for his part, received 3.9 million votes in August, compared to his party's 2.9 million in March, when it ran alongside the BDP.

Voter turnout on August 10—excluding overseas Turks, who were allowed to vote for the first time in Sunday's polls in their country of residence—was 77.05 percent (or 40.5 million voters), 12.25 percent lower than in March (when 44.9 million ballots were cast).

The fall in overall votes might be proposed as an explanation for the CHP/MHP drop-off, but analysis by province quickly dispels this notion. Indeed, voter turnout dropped not just in provinces where the CHP and MHP dominate, such as Osmaniye (by 14.3 percent) and Tunceli (by 16.7 percent), but also in strongly pro-AKP provinces such as Malatya (by 15.2 percent) and Kirikkale (by 14.5 percent)—all greater than the national decrease of 12.25 percent (see map, p. 4).

Given these dynamics, voter shifts since March may offer a better explanation than turnout for Erdogan's continuing strength displayed August 10. While losing some total votes because of the overall low turnout, he still maintained, and even slightly increased, his popularity by peeling votes from other parties, a feat not equaled by the CHP/MHP.

SP Votes for Erdogan: A Right-Wing Kurdish Consolidation

Traditionally speaking, the SP—and its predecessor, the Refah Party (RP)—is considered a far right-wing Islamist party. Like the MHP and the AKP, whose voters can shift from one to the other, the SP and the

RP too have witnessed voter migration to the AKP or MHP and back in recent decades.

On August 10, Erdogan likely received an overwhelming majority of the 1,243,045 votes cast for the SP in the March election. Getting these SP votes was an easy task. Even without the official endorsement of party leaders, Erdogan's RP roots likely helped him win support from these voters.

Although the SP does not figure largely in the national picture, or dominate in any of Turkey's eighty-one provinces, the party has a strong presence in some of the country's 957 subprovincial districts, mostly in the Zaza Kurdish areas of the southeast electoral region (see map, p. 4). Turkey's Zaza Kurds live predominantly in mixed Alevi-Sunni areas and tilt more toward right-wing and Islamist parties than do Kurmanji Kurds, who live mainly in exclusively Sunni areas.

Analyzing SP, AKP, and other parties' votes in districts where the SP performed well helps demonstrate the flow of SP votes to Erdogan on August 10. For instance, in March in Bingol's Genc district, the AKP received 52.99 percent of the vote and the SP received 25.81 percent. Also earning significant votes in this district were the leftist BDP (11.24 percent) and the Free Cause Party (HUDA-PAR),⁴ a Kurdish Islamist movement that earned 7.51 percent. On August 10, Erdogan received 82.9 percent in Genc, closely mirroring the AKP/SP/HUDA-PAR tally (86.31 percent) in March. Meanwhile, Demirtas earned 14.95 percent, exceeding the March leftist tally.

Similarly, in Sanliurfa's Eyyubiye district in the March election, the spread among right-wing parties was as follows: AKP, 55.32 percent; SP, 22.80 percent; and HUDA-PAR, 0.71 percent. On the left, the BDP received 17.32 percent. On August 10, Erdogan received 78.5 percent in Eyyubiye, almost mirroring the AKP/SP/HUDA-PAR tally in March (78.73 percent), while Demirtas remained close to the HDP/BDP's March performance, getting 16.93 percent. This result once again suggests the migration of many SP supporters to Erdogan in August, together with votes from HUDA-PAR (103,213 in the March elections⁵) and a right-wing consolidation of Kurdish votes against the HDP.



MHP Supporters for Erdogan: Right-Wing Voter Consolidation

In addition to securing the support of Kurdish voters from the SP and other smaller Islamist parties, Erdogan won over some MHP-supporting Turkish voters by exploiting the left-right divide. A study by the Turkish polling firm IPSOS⁶ confirms this assessment, finding that 27 percent of interviewees who voted for the MHP in March backed Erdogan on August 10. This equates to some 2,136,108 MHP voters who picked Erdogan and not their party’s candidate. Some question remains as to who exactly these voters are.

Anti-Alevi rhetoric. In peeling voters away from the CHP/MHP coalition, Erdogan was helped by the perception that Ihsanoglu was a closer representative of the CHP than of the MHP. Indeed, the CHP campaigned harder for Ihsanoglu than did the MHP. This imbalance broadened Erdogan’s appeal for conservative MHP voters.

Erdogan employed polarizing right-wing rhetoric in this effort, including language targeting the country’s Alevis, a liberal Muslim bloc that represents some 10–15 percent of the Turkish population. This strategy seems to have worked especially well in more than two dozen provinces in the Anatolian

heartland and Euphrates valley regions—mainly rural areas with conservative urban hubs, such as in Kayseri, Malatya, Konya, and Erzurum. Many of these provinces, especially those in the Euphrates valley region, are also home to large populations of Alevis. The Alevis are staunchly secular and vote for the CHP in overwhelming numbers, while the majority Sunni (both Turkish and Kurdish) population in these regions votes for the AKP and MHP, and for the SP and BBP in some deeply conservative provinces, such as Elazığ, Sivas, and Konya.

In these regions before the August vote, Erdogan sought to alienate the MHP base from Ihsanoglu by frequently invoking his own Sunni origins in contrast to the Alevi identity of opposition CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu, even though Kilicdaroglu was not running for office. In an August 2 speech in Istanbul, Erdogan provocatively called out Kilicdaroglu: “You are an Alevi, come out and say it.”⁷ On August 8, he echoed this message in Ankara: “You are an Alevi. Don’t dread it! Say it! And I am a Sunni; I can say I am a Sunni without a hesitation.”⁸

As a result of this strategy, the MHP base moved away from Ihsanoglu and toward Erdogan in these regions. Not surprisingly, the drop in CHP/MHP votes from March to August, plus migrating SP votes, is closely mirrored in a vote pickup by the AKP. In Adiyaman, a mixed Alevi-Sunni province in the Euphrates valley region, for instance, Erdogan earned 14.55 percent more votes in August than did the AKP in March. The CHP/MHP, meanwhile, lost 8.46 percent support over this period. Add to this latter figure the 5.84 percent SP tally for March in Adiyaman, and the total is exactly 14.3 percent. This figure suggests a near unanimous poaching by Erdogan of SP votes and MHP defectors in Adiyaman. A similar dynamic played out in other Euphrates valley region provinces from the March to August votes,⁹ as illustrated in table 1.

Left vs. right rhetoric. In the Anatolian heartland, Erdogan employed the same strategy to similar effect. In Sivas province, for example, home to a significant Alevi population, Erdogan seems to have added BBP voters to his coalition as well. While this far-right Islamist party—with 709,029 voters

nationally in March—officially backed Ihsanoglu, its members in Sivas apparently threw their lot behind Erdogan. The party’s strength in Sivas is attested to by its 19.55 percent support in the March vote, compared to 1.58 percent nationally.¹⁰ Meanwhile, in March the AKP received 52.25 percent and the SP received 2.40 percent. The AKP/SP/BBP total was therefore 74.2 percent. By comparison, Erdogan garnered 69.99 percent in August, showing the success of his appeal to the right-wing bloc.

Some Anatolian heartland provinces lack significant Alevi populations, which required Erdogan to use tactics other than anti-Alevi rhetoric to peel away MHP voters. One such tactic was to identify Ihsanoglu with elitism and CHP leftism. On August 3, at an Istanbul rally, Erdogan said, “They have appointed a ‘mon cher’ [a French term appropriated into Turkish and implying effete, educated snobbery] as a candidate. So what if he knows three languages? Are we looking for a translator, or someone to run the country?” On August 1, at a Kahramanmaraş rally, Erdogan showed a video clip in which Ihsanoglu faltered when trying to sing the Turkish national anthem. He then added, “My fellows from the MHP won’t be voting for this imported ‘mon cher’ who doesn’t know the lyrics of the national anthem.”¹¹

In identifying Ihsanoglu with the left, Erdogan was helped by the MHP’s less than full-scale campaigning for Ihsanoglu, as well as his being branded as a leftist. At the August 1 Kahramanmaraş rally, Erdogan said,

Under this coalition there is the MHP, there is the Socialist Workers’ Party and Revolutionary People’s Party [referring to the minor socialist and communist parties in the pro-Ihsanoglu coalition together with the MHP]. The MHP secretary-general is walking along with them. What happened to your nationalism and your view against communism? Seriously, are there any communists left in this world? The MHP is tagging behind them.¹²

Ironically, such rhetoric urged MHP voters to associate Ihsanoglu, a pious Muslim and a 2004 Erdogan appointee to head the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, with the left and even the far left. MHP

voters were thereby spurred to bolt from the coalition and back Erdogan. As in the Euphrates valley region, AKP/Erdogan gains in the Anatolian heartland region from March to August closely matched CHP/MHP coalition losses. Table 2 outlines examples.

Erdogan's tactic of playing on conservatives' fears of backing either an Alevi party or a leftist-elitist candidate seems to have worked in the Anatolian heartland and Euphrates valley regions. The Turkish leader received more than 70 percent of the vote in eleven provinces in these regions—namely, Konya, Aksaray, Duzce, Cankiri, Kahramanmaras, Malatya, Elazig, Trabzon, Gumushane, Bayburt, and Rize—far exceeding his national tally. Indeed, a majority of the nearly 2.2 million MHP voters who picked Erdogan on August 10 live in these two regions.

CHP Losses in the Metropolitan and Coastal Provinces to the HDP

Alongside its losses in the Anatolian heartland and Euphrates valley regions, the CHP/MHP coalition lost votes in Turkey's metropolitan electoral region, encompassing both Ankara and Istanbul. Once again, the comparison is against the combined parties' tally in March. In Ankara, for instance, Ihsanoglu earned 45.22 percent of the vote in August, compared against a 49.34 percent tally for the CHP/MHP in March.

Unlike in the Anatolian heartland and Euphrates valley regions, however, the AKP did not significantly

increase its votes in the metropolitan region, suggesting that coalition losses cannot be ascribed to voter shifts from the MHP to the AKP. Rather, certain leftist CHP voters in the region seem to have abandoned their party to vote for another leftist candidate, the HDP's Demirtas. This represents a first in the country's political history of voter migration from a "Turkish nationalist" party to a "Kurdish nationalist" one. This happened because Demirtas significantly played down Kurdish nationalism, focusing instead on liberal freedoms, thereby attracting liberal middle-class voters from the CHP. In embracing liberalism, for instance, Demirtas made women's and labor rights and recognition of the country's ethnic and linguistic diversity a key part of his election platform. In his August 3 rally in Istanbul's Kadikoy district, a bastion of secular and liberal CHP voters, he said—referring to Turks, Kurds, Armenians, Sunnis, and Alevis—"We...and all those who are oppressed, workers, women, and the poor, believe that if we stand together, no dictator will be powerful enough to stand before us."¹³

Demirtas's liberal rhetoric worked especially well in middle- and upper-middle-class districts of Istanbul and Ankara, where the increase from HDP/BDP votes in March to Demirtas votes in August almost perfectly equals the total drop in CHP/MHP coalition votes. With his pro-working-class rhetoric, Demirtas also likely gained most of the 363,488 votes cast in March for small leftist parties such as the social

TABLE 1. Electoral shifts between March and August 2014 elections: Euphrates valley.

PROVINCE	CHP/MHP LOSSES	SP VOTES MARCH	COLS 1+2	ERDOGAN/AKP AUG TOTAL
ADYAMAN	8.46	5.84	14.30	+14.55
ELAZIG	8.56	6.85	15.41	+16.99
ERZINCAN	9.14	2.75	11.89	+12.18
ERZURUM	9.72	5.60	15.32	+15.12
GAZIANTEP	5.13	3.13	8.26	+8.09
KAHRAMANMARAS	13.54	2.20	15.74	+15.08
MALATYA	3.24	7.36	10.60	+9.33

TABLE 2. Electoral shifts between March and August 2014 elections: Anatolian heartland.

PROVINCE	CHP/MHP LOSSES	SP Votes March	COLS 1+2	Erdogan/AKP Aug Total
BAYBURT	12.20	9.08	21.28	+23.17
CORUM	6.99	2.10	9.09	+10.64
DUZCE	9.09	5.04	14.13	+15.51
KARAMAN	8.61	4.54	13.15	+13.11
KIRSEHIR	10.48	3.35	13.83	+13.39
NEVSEHIR	9.98	2.43	12.41	+13.34
SAKARYA	9.31	4.64	13.95	+14.13

democrat Democratic Left Party (DSP) and far leftist parties such as the Turkish Communist Party (TKP), Freedom and Solidarity Party (ODP), and others.

Thus, for the first time, the “Kurdish nationalist” party received significant votes in Turkey’s large cities, in some cases increasing its share by five to six times compared to the BDP/HDP’s performance in March. For instance, in middle- and upper-middle-class districts of Istanbul, such as Kadikoy, Bakirkoy, and Besiktas, known as “CHP fortresses,” defections from the CHP/MHP and Ihsanoglu, along with far-leftist support, account for Demirtas’s gains. This assumption is also true for Ankara’s Cankaya district, another middle- and upper-middle-class area known for its vast CHP support. In Kadikoy, Demirtas received 6 percent on August 10, a substantial gain over the BDP/HDP’s 1.77 percent in March—plus 0.63 percent for the small leftist parties, for a total of 2.4 percent. Add in the 3.47 percent drop-off in CHP/MHP support from March to August, and one reaches 5.87 percent, almost equal to Demirtas’s 6.0 percent.

The same formula helps explain the results in Istanbul’s Bakirkoy and Besiktas districts and Ankara’s Cankaya district.

Bakirkoy: HDP/BDP votes in March (2.12 percent) + small leftist party votes in March (0.19 percent) + CHP/MHP losses March–August (3.46 percent) = 5.77 percent. Compare to Demirtas’s August tally of 6.67 percent.

Besiktas: HDP/BDP votes in March (1.54 percent) + small leftist party votes in March (1.38 percent) + CHP/MHP losses March–August (3.82 percent) = 6.74 percent. Compare to Demirtas’s August tally of 6.65 percent.

Cankaya: HDP/BDP votes in March (1.49 percent) + small leftist party votes in March (1.41 percent) + CHP/MHP losses March–August (2.8 percent) = 5.70 percent. Compare to Demirtas’s August tally of 4.96 percent.

Note that even in these districts, Demirtas earned less than 10 percent of the vote. Still, considering that

such big-city districts are among the most heavily populated in all Turkey, these gains are meaningful in the broader Turkish political context. For instance, Kadikoy has 398,813 voters, more than the entire province of Hakkari, a Kurdish nationalist bastion in the southeast, with 150,238 voters.

And the raw numbers are impressive. In Ankara, Demirtas increased his party’s votes by 2.41 percentage points from March to August (1.06 percent to 3.47 percent); in Istanbul, he increased his party’s votes by 4.9 percentage points (5 percent to 9.09 percent). These 289,531 voters in total likely supported the CHP in March; some were probably absentee voters and supporters of small leftist parties. The national increase for the HDP/BDP from March to August was 47.65 percent.

Additional, if smaller, gains for Demirtas came in the coastal region provinces, another area with a traditionally strong CHP base. From the HDP/BDP tally in March, Demirtas added 89,086 votes in Izmir; 28,675 in Antalya; 20,974 in Aydin; 12,511 in Tekirdag; and 12,235 in Mugla.

If the HDP can stick to its decidedly liberal platform, it will likely continue enjoying success among Turkish liberals and increase its vote tallies. If it continues evolving, it could even become a national liberal force, appealing to Kurds and non-Kurds alike. A positive development for the HDP in this regard, as pointed out in an August 19 article by Emre Kizilkaya,¹⁴ is that of the three candidates, Demirtas appears to have attracted the most March abstentions, evidently showing his ability to inspire those disaffected with politics.

One challenge awaiting the HDP is the presence of Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leaders in its ranks. Turkey and the PKK have been in peace talks since 2012, relieving Turkey of PKK-related violence. At the same time, closer Turkish-Kurdish cooperation in Iraq—including with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the PKK—against the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), recently renamed the Islamic State (IS), could help alter the PKK’s violent image. This image has hitherto rendered the party a pariah in Turkish poli-

tics. No doubt, PKK violence could easily tarnish the HDP's image, eroding its newfound liberal support base.

For its part, the CHP's challenge is to keep its liberal voters and use a liberal opening similar to that pursued by Demirtas to build its base. The success of Demirtas's unabashedly liberal campaign has shown that a liberal constituency exists in Turkey and that this group is seeking a voice. The CHP, a mix of traditional leftists and liberals, can build its base as a coalition of the liberal left if it adopts an unabashedly liberal stance, similar to that of Demirtas prior to the August 10 elections.

Single Leader Dominance

Party dominance constituted another notable feature, alongside the left-right divide, of the August vote. Dominance is defined as more than 75 percent of the vote in a province and more than 90 percent in a district. By any measure, these are unusual accomplishments in a multiparty democracy. Erdogan and Demirtas, political veterans, appear to have experienced such dominance more than Ihsanoglu, who entered politics only two months before the August 10 polls to lead the CHP/MHP coalition.

Erdogan experienced dominance in three provinces: Gumushane (75.10 percent), Bayburt (80.2 percent), and his home province of Rize (80.57 percent), along the Black Sea. Gumushane and Bayburt, located near Rize, are part of the Anatolian heartland region and longtime AKP bastions. Erdogan came close to the 75 percent threshold in two other Anatolian heartland provinces in conservative central Turkey, Konya (74.62 percent) and Aksaray (74 percent).

At the district level, Erdogan gained more than 75 percent in 245 Turkish districts—or more than a quarter of all the country's districts—mainly in the Anatolian heartland region. What is more, Erdogan surpassed 90 percent in seven districts. Four of these are along the eastern Black Sea coast, a region that includes Erdogan's hometown, Rize. Erdogan passed 90 percent in Ikizdere and Guneyosu, both in Rize; nearby Hayrat, in Trabzon province; and Camoluk, in Giresun province. Erdogan also passed 90 percent in Pazaryolu, in Erzurum. Although techni-

cally in the Euphrates valley region, Pazaryolu actually lies adjacent to Rize's Ikizdere district. All this suggests a strong personal power base for Erdogan in the eastern Black Sea region. Outside this region, Erdogan passed the 90 percent mark only Sincik—an isolated SP/BBP bastion in the Anti-Taurus range—in Adiyaman province, in the Euphrates river valley region; and Harran, along the Syrian border in Sanliurfa province in the southeast region. In the latter, Erdogan received 92.42 percent of the vote. Harran's population is overwhelmingly Sunni Arab, a unique case among the Turkish districts. This suggests strong support for Erdogan's Syria policy among the country's Sunni Arab community, a stark contrast with the Alawite Arabs in Hatay who oppose Ankara's Syria policy and support the CHP with similar fervor.

Demirtas, as expected, enjoyed dominance in mainly Kurdish-populated provinces in the southeastern electoral region. In Hakkari and Sirnak, two provinces along Turkey's border with Iraq and Iran, he gained 81.59 percent and 83.18 percent, respectively. At the local level, Demirtas secured 75 percent support in twenty-four districts in the southeastern region. In the following four districts, he received more than 90 percent support: Diyarbakir's Lice district (94.92 percent), a PKK bastion along the Anti-Taurus range, as well as Hakkari's Yuksekova district (91.89 percent), Sirnak's Silopi district (90.15 percent), and Van's Basakale district (94.89 percent). Further underscoring his strength in the Sirnak-Hakkari-southern Van area, he received 89.36 percent in the Cizre district and 89.34 percent in the Uludere district, both in Sirnak; 82.72 percent in the Ozalp district and 82.40 in the Saray district, both in southern Van; and 81.12 percent in the Cukurca district, in Hakkari.

Although he did not achieve dominance in any province, Ihsanoglu made his strongest showing in Kizilirmaci (67.95 percent), a Thracian province in the pro-CHP coastal electoral region, suggesting a strong and persistent anti-AKP trend in the country's provinces populated by Balkan immigrants. The CHP/MHP candidate did, meanwhile, break 75 percent in various districts in the metropolitan electoral region, such as Istanbul's Besiktas district (75.57 percent) and Izmir's Karsiyaka district (76.61 percent). The MHP

traditionally has a weak base in these districts. In the March elections, the party received only 3.04 percent of the vote in Besiktas and 6.49 percent in Karsiyaka. Hence, Ihsanoglu's strong showing in these two districts with a total of 402,057 voters testifies to the CHP's continuing strength in middle-class districts of large cities despite its previously mentioned losses to Demirtas.

Ihsanoglu's biggest gains were, however, outside metropolitan Turkey, in the Hatay province bordering Syria. This province, which has a large community of Alawites, who are traditionally pro-CHP and take strong issue with Ankara's pro-rebel policy in Syria, has been swinging left in recent elections. This is especially the trend in Defne and Samandag, Hatay's two Alawite-majority districts, where the left, including the CHP and smaller leftist parties, received 95.62 percent and 92.95 percent of the March vote, respectively. Ihsanoglu seems to have consolidated the leftist votes in these districts, receiving 90.36 percent in Samandag and 91.9 percent in Defne.

Conclusion

Turkey will hold parliamentary elections in June 2015, and a challenge awaits the AKP and Erdogan. Can the party win again? To do so, the AKP would need to follow Erdogan's tactic in the August elections of appealing to the right and far right, although without Erdogan in charge. Having been elected president, the Turkish leader was sworn in on August 28. At this point, Erdogan needs to take a nonpartisan position, as noted earlier and stipulated by Article 101 of the Turkish constitution. Further lessons from the latest vote are as follows:

Erdogan is in charge. At least part of the AKP's electoral success can be ascribed to Erdogan's personal political skills and his image as an anti-leftist, anti-elitist, conservative strongman. Yet even if the AKP's next leader and the country's caretaker prime minister, an Erdogan appointee, will be actual executor of the party's platform, Erdogan will want to remain the AKP's chief strategist.

As president of all Turks? At the same time, having become president, Erdogan now faces another

challenge: he has risen to power by demonizing the country's left, liberals, Gulenists, Armenians, and Alevis, suggesting that these sectors will not fully regard "President Erdogan" as the country's leader. He will thus need to regain his stature among such groups if he is to rise above the partisan fray as president, representing all citizens, as dictated by Article 101.

Or as president of the right? These challenges will be significant for Erdogan and the AKP's new leader alike, in part because the party and Erdogan's support seems to have plateaued over the last three national elections, with 21.4 million votes in the 2011 parliamentary election, 19.4 million votes in the March local elections, and 21 million votes in August's presidential contest. One option for Erdogan, given these trends, may be to remain "president of the right," becoming further polarized and hoping to peel more votes from the MHP, SP, BBP, and other far right and Islamist parties to build further AKP and personal majorities.

Is it takeoff time for liberals? On August 10, the collective CHP/MHP tally dropped, not only because some MHP voters abandoned Ihsanoglu for Erdogan but also because some CHP voters picked Demirtas over Ihsanoglu. The challenge for the CHP is this: can the party take a decidedly liberal attitude in politics, recapturing voters fleeing to the HDP and building on the liberal momentum in Turkish politics? Only this path will allow the CHP to grow. Yet the party must simultaneously contend with the reality that the Turkish electorate lies on the right and that unseating the AKP will be an uphill battle.

The HDP gained by promoting a core liberal message in place of its previously exclusive emphasis on Kurdish nationalism. Although it remains a small party, the HDP's further embrace of liberalism will certainly help it grow. At the same time, increased Turkish-Kurdish cooperation in Iraq against ISIS, and also potentially in Syria, where the PKK is strong, will help improve the latter's image in Turkey. This will allow the HDP to make further gains among Turkish liberals who were hitherto repelled by the HDP's (and BDP's) close ties to the PKK.

In the longer term, the adoption of liberal thought by the HDP and CHP could build the Turkish left,

making it a more powerful contender to the AKP. As a coalition committed to a liberal platform, the HDP and CHP together could pose a formidable challenge to Erdogan and the AKP.

Implications for U.S. Policy

The election results mean that Erdogan, Turkey's most powerful politician, has managed to build a winning coalition using the right-left split in his country's politics. Nevertheless, Erdogan's apparent plateau in support suggests he will use any opportunity to bring more right-wing voters under his fold as the AKP prepares for the 2015 parliamentary elections.

At this stage, every right-wing voter counts for Erdogan. This suggests the continuation of a populist right-wing tinge to Turkish politics, with the AKP

leadership adopting nationalist and Islam-laden rhetoric to appeal to fringe voters. Yet Turkey's leaders need U.S. assistance against emerging Middle East threats such as ISIS. More important, Turkey's economic success is the product of its stability in an unstable region. The record-breaking amounts of foreign direct investment into the country have reached \$50 billion annually, fueling Turkey's growth and Erdogan's electoral wins. As the ISIS threat to Turkey intensifies, international investments will dry up, threatening the AKP's success in the 2015 parliamentary elections. The Turkish leadership will, therefore, walk a tightrope between cooperation with Washington in the Middle East and nationalist and Islamist political rhetoric aimed at U.S. leadership in the region.

Notes

1. The March 30, 2014, local election results have been retrieved from <http://www.haberturk.com/secim/secim2014/yerel-secim?source=aa>. The August 10, 2014, presidential election results have been retrieved from <http://www.ysk.gov.tr> and <http://www.haberturk.com/secim/secim2014/cumhurbaskanligi-secimi/>.
2. Soner Cagaptay, "Will President Erdogan Run Turkey?" *PolicyWatch* 2302 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 11, 2014), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/will-president-erdogan-run-turkey>.
3. This tally equaled the AKP's at that time, explaining the CHP/MHP plan to join forces to challenge Erdogan in the presidential polls.
4. "HUDA-PAR'i Kim Kurdu?" (Who Founded HUDA-PAR?), *Milliyet*, January 31, 2014, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/huda-par-ne-anlama-geliyor-huda/gundem/detay/1829964/default.htm>.
5. While this figure represents just 0.23 percent of total valid votes, and HUDA-PAR is a minor party nationally, it did relatively well, reaching nearly 10 percent, in some Kurdish districts in the southeast. See Soner Cagaptay, *Turkey's Presidential Prospects: Assessing Recent Trends*, Research Note 18 (Washington DC: Washington Institute, 2014), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkeys-presidential-prospects-assessing-recent-trends>.
6. "Cumhurbaskanligi Secimlerinde Oy Tercihlerinde Neler Etkili Oldu?" (What Factors Affected Voter Behavior in the Presidential Elections?), IPSOS, August 10, 2014, <http://www.ipsos.com.tr/node/1003>.
7. "Kilicdaroglu Sen Alevi Olabilirsin" (Kilicdaroglu, You Are an Alevi), *Cumhuriyet*, August 2, 2014, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/video/video/101273/Erdogan__Kilicdaroglu__sen_Alevi_olabilirsin....html.
8. "Erdogan: Kilicdaroglu Alevi Oldugunu Soyleyemiyor" (Erdogan: Kilicdaroglu Can't Say He Is an Alevi), *Bugun*, August 8, 2014, <http://www.bugun.com.tr/son-dakika/erdogan-kilicdaroglu-alevi--haberi/1216711>.
9. The lone exception is Tunceli, the only Alevi-majority province in Turkey. Also a Kurdish-majority province, Tunceli supported Demirtas with 52 percent while Erdogan managed only 14.6 percent.
10. Kayseri, which is near Sivas, is the only province with a comparably prominent BBP presence.

11. “Basbakan Erdogan’in Kahramanmaras Mitingi Konusmasi” (Prime Minister Erdogan’s Kahramanmaras Rally), *Beyaz Gazete*, August 1, 2014, <http://www.beyazgazete.com/haber/2014/8/1/basbakan-erdogan-in-kahramanmaras-mitingi-konusmasi-2320789.html>.
12. Ibid.
13. “Demirtas Istanbul Mitingi’nde Konustu” (Demirtas Spoke at Istanbul Rally), *SelahattinDemirtas.net*, August 2, 2014, <http://www.selahattindemirtas.net/haberler/view/80>.
14. Emre Kizilkaya, “Explained: Turkey’s Presidential Election Results in a Nutshell,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 18, 2014, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/explained-turkeys-presidential-election-results-in-a-nutshell.aspx?pageID=238&nID=70588&tNewsCatID=338>.