



## Turkey's 2014 Political Transition *From Erdogan to Erdogan?*

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**I**N 2014, TURKEY WILL HOLD two key nationwide elections: one on March 30 for local government and city officials and a second one for president, to conclude by August 28 (see Appendix 1 for details). The governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has held power since 2002, has lasted longer than any government since the country became a multiparty democracy in 1950. For the AKP, the two 2014 elections offer an opportunity to strengthen its hand in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 2015. Yet the elections of 2014 also pose multiple challenges for Turkey's governing party and its leadership, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has ruled Turkey longer than any of the country's other democratically elected prime ministers.

The local elections, while not affecting the national government directly, can be considered a quasi-referendum on the governing party's leadership. These local elections also include a big prize in the mayoralty of Istanbul, a global city that accounts for 30 percent of Turkey's \$1.3 trillion economy. In addition, leadership of Istanbul has been a bellwether for national leadership. Indeed, the AKP's rise to national prominence began in 1994 when Erdogan was elected mayor of Istanbul, which had previously been run by the AKP's predecessor, the Welfare Party (RP), defunct since 1999. A victory in the March polls in Istanbul could thus foretell continued national dominance for the AKP.

The presidential polls are especially important, in part because they mark the first time Turks will elect their president directly, following the terms of a 2007 constitutional amendment. Previously, Turkish presidents were elected by parliament. The elections likewise pose complicated choices for Erdogan, including how he will continue to share power with President Abdullah Gul, who officially resigned from his position in the AKP in 2007—following Article 101 of the Turkish constitution, preventing the country's president from having a

political affiliation—but who remains a respected figure in the AKP.

Another possible quandary for Erdogan can be found in the 2015 parliamentary election, which includes the vote for prime minister. Article 132 of the AKP's charter bans members from holding the same elected office for more than three terms,<sup>1</sup> and the prime minister has

1. AK Parti, "Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi Parti Tuzugu, 2013," <http://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/tu%CC%88zu%CC%88k-2013-1.pdf>.

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already served three terms in his current position. Will Erdogan therefore run for the presidency in 2014 to comply with AKP rules, even as this would entail relinquishing both his party membership and some influence within the party? And if Erdogan does decide to run for president, will Gul yield to this decision—and possibly run to become prime minister himself? Most important, should Gul ascend to the prime ministry, would a President Erdogan, known for his strong leadership style, defer to Gul as prime minister, the country's true head of government?

Yet another key question, should Erdogan become president, is whether the AKP—a grand coalition of business interests, center-right conservatives, and Islamists<sup>2</sup>—could stay together after losing its strong, charismatic leader. Fearing that his party might implode, as did other grand right-wing coalitions, such as the Motherland Party (ANAP) and True Path Party (DYP) in the 1990s, might Erdogan opt to amend Article 101 of the Turkish constitution? Needless to say, such an amendment would require two-thirds majority approval in the parliament, votes Erdogan does not presently have. In addition, Erdogan would need Gul's blessing, as well as the support of different constituencies, such as the influential Gulen movement and Kurdish nationalists.

The option also exists for Erdogan to seek to do away with Article 132 of the AKP charter, thus paving the way for him to remain prime minister for another term. Such a step would hurt Erdogan's image as a leader loyal to his word—and the idea for AKP term limits was Erdogan's in the first place. Yet this path may be the least complicated for Erdogan, given the complexities presented by the others.

Whichever path Erdogan chooses, he must sustain the country's economic prosperity if he wishes to score victories for his party in the 2014 elections. Since 2002, unprecedented economic growth has propelled the AKP to three successive election victories by increasing voter margins.

Yet the challenges faced by Turkey's leadership transcend mere internal politics. To the south, Syria's civil war presents various threats, such as that of violent radicalization among the county's small Alawite community,

which mostly lives in the southernmost Hatay province and tends to sympathize with Syria's Bashar al-Assad regime. Other threats include jihadist infiltration from Syria and Turkey's potential inability to deal with further inflows from Syria.<sup>3</sup> Should Ankara get pulled into the Syrian conflict or find itself exposed to further instability emanating from Syria, Turkey's image as a stable nation could be upset, undermining its economic growth.

Given that Turkey's economic growth over the past decade—at about 5 percent annually, with more than \$40 billion invested annually in the Istanbul stock market—has been driven largely by foreign capital, Erdogan knows he must uphold strong investor confidence in Turkey. This confidence is bolstered by the perception of Turkey as an island of stability in a tumultuous region. Should this stability continue, the virtuous cycle of economic growth and AKP victories could well continue into the next elections. Yet if Turkey's stability is shaken by events in Syria, the country could slide into the ranks of neighborhood “problem states,” breaking Erdogan's recipe for political and economic success.

These complex and multifaceted scenarios lay the grounds for a study of Turkey's forthcoming elections, and its political dynamics, including those within the ruling AKP.

### Erdogan and the AKP: Past Lessons

In 2011, the AKP became the first party in Turkish history to win three consecutive elections with a higher percentage of the vote in each race. With this victory, Erdogan also eclipsed Adnan Menderes, who ran the country from 1950 to 1960, as the longest serving democratically elected prime minister in Turkish history. The AKP's continued success may well rely on whether the party follows these lessons from Turkey's recent past.

#### BUILD A BROAD RIGHT-WING COALITION

The AKP's success has thus far been based on its greatest strength: its appeal to a broad segment of the political right in Turkey. Its platform has resonated with the center-right and right-wing constituencies that were once the province of Turkey's major establishment parties,

2. Emre Erdogan, “Erdogan's Longest Year,” analysis (German Marshall Fund of the United States, October 3, 2013), [http://www.gmfus.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files\\_mf/1380811736Erdogan\\_LongestYear\\_Sep13.pdf](http://www.gmfus.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files_mf/1380811736Erdogan_LongestYear_Sep13.pdf).

3. For more on the impact of the Syrian crisis on Turkey, see Soner Cagaptay, *The Impact of Syria's Refugees on Southern Turkey*, Policy Focus 130 (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute, October 2013), [http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus130\\_Cagaptay\\_web.pdf](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus130_Cagaptay_web.pdf).

before they imploded during the 2001 economic crisis. In fact, Turkey's AKP is best described as a grand coalition ranging from Islamists to center-right adherents, with a conservative center-right making up the party's backbone. In January 2004, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan elaborated on the party's orientation by explaining its support for "conservative democracy"<sup>4</sup>: "While attaching importance to religion as a social value, we do not think it right to conduct politics through religion [or] to attempt to transform government ideologically by using religion."<sup>5</sup>

This stance was unsurprising in that it insulated the party from the legal challenges that had shuttered its predecessors. The AKP did, in fact, face charges of alleged antisecular activities that could have led to its closure in 2008 (although, ultimately, the AKP survived the court battle). But, more important, Erdogan's branding the party a "conservative democratic" movement also reflects his adept reading of the Turkish electorate.

In certain important respects, Prime Minister Erdogan is an astute pupil of former Turkish prime minister and president Turgut Ozal. Since its election victory in 2002, the AKP has pursued a market-friendly economic policy, as did Ozal in the 1980s when he was the country's prime minister. At the same time, though, unlike Ozal's laissez-passer style on social issues, the AKP has promoted a conservative lifestyle that serves to highlight the party's antielitist hue. With this platform, the AKP has presided over a grand coalition that spans the spectrum of conservative subgroupings—from business-minded fiscal conservatives to pious rural voters. The influential Gulen movement, dedicated to the teachings of the Sufi-inspired Fethullah Gulen, is just one such group in the AKP coalition. This has allowed the AKP to inherit the domains of the former center-right Motherland Party (ANAP) of Turgut Ozal and the True Path Party (DYP) of Suleyman Demirel, another former Turkish prime-minister-cum-president.

#### STRONG LEADER PRESERVES THE COALITION

Keeping a lid on entropy is an unending task for a party that harbors such diverse political currents. The AKP manages these pressures in the same fashion as the ANAP and DYP once did under Ozal and Demirel,

respectively—by rallying around a charismatic and strong-handed leader.

For its part, Ozal's ANAP was actually a grab bag of different movements, some on the center-right, some mildly leftist, others verging toward traditionalism, alongside some that hewed to ultranationalist principles. Ozal's task was to keep this jumble nominally unified, while still reaching out to as broad a swath of the right as possible. In 1986, for example, Turkey had nine right-of-center parties, but only Ozal's ANAP and Demirel's DYP had a chance of surpassing 10 percent of the vote, the threshold required by the 1982 constitution to win seats in the parliament.<sup>6</sup>

For the AKP, Erdogan is the only leader capable of this task. The "Erdogan factor" can hardly be overstated. Fastening together the shifting currents within the party requires a leader of extraordinary presence, and the AKP elites understand that none among them matches Erdogan in this regard.

#### COALITION IMPLODES IF STRONG LEADER LEAVES

Turkey's past experience with AKP-like grand right-wing coalitions with charismatic leaders, such as the ANAP and the DYP in the 1990s, shows that such politically dominant coalitions implode in as little as two election cycles once the charismatic leader goes. Indeed, both Ozal and Demirel left their parties to take over the coveted but much less powerful position of president—Ozal in 1989 and Demirel in 1993—only to see their once mighty political machines wither away due to lack of charismatic and feared leadership on top.

When Ozal left his party to assume the presidency in 1989, the centrifugal forces within the party immediately intensified. With no charismatic leader available to fill Ozal's shoes, the successive party leaders—Yildirim Akbulut and Mesut Yilmaz—were helpless as the party splintered into its constituent strands over two election cycles. Demirel's departure from the DYP to serve as president had a similarly traumatic effect: under his successor, Tansu Ciller,<sup>7</sup> the DYP imploded in two election cycles as well.

4. William Hale, "Christian Democracy and the AKP: Parallels and Contrasts," *Turkish Studies* 6, no. 2 (2005).

5. *Ibid.*

6. Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), 195.

7. Umit Cizre, "Tansu Ciller: Lusting for Power and Undermining Democracy," *Political Leaders and Democracy in Turkey*, ed. Metin Heper and Sabri Sayari (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002), 199–213.

Accordingly, even AKP members who bemoan Erdogan's growing authoritarianism are compelled by a simple electoral logic: An Erdogan-led AKP stays together to win elections, and everyone is rewarded. Conversely, challenges to Erdogan would cascade into multiple fractures, resulting in a scrabble of weak parties and guaranteed disaster for the entire coalition. As this befell the ANAP and DYP when Ozal and Demirel departed for their respective presidencies, the AKP leaders can be expected to do whatever it takes to avoid such a fate, even if it means clinging to Erdogan as the party leader. But the office of the presidency, as it is currently defined, is not compatible with this goal.

The AKP's ability to unify disparate currents has been a cornerstone of its success; it is an accomplishment that depends greatly on the persona of Erdogan. Turkish political parties, especially those on the winning right—the left has ruled Turkey for only one year excluding left-right coalition governments since Turkey became a multiparty democracy in 1950—have been rigidly hierarchical organizations driven by strong personalities. What is more, as this discussion has shown, these right-wing parties seldom survive the demise of their founding leader.

The Turkish leader may well be looking to his predecessors for lessons, including Ozal and Demirel and what happened to their parties after they abandoned the helm of the ANAP and DYP to take over the presidency. And Erdogan may conclude that he might be better served to not follow the Ozal-Demirel path of prime ministry to presidency.

#### THE SIREN SONG OF THE TURKISH PRESIDENCY

Even knowing the risks, the Turkish prime minister may still be tempted to run for the presidency. This is because Turkey's next head of state to occupy the seat of its modern founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, will also be its first popularly elected president since Turkey became a multiparty democracy. Turkey's 1982 constitution has made specific adjustments to the country's parliamentary democratic model, assigning the president certain powers, including the prerogative to appoint judges to the high courts.<sup>8</sup> Of course, except in very narrow cases, the president cannot make

policy without the collaboration of the prime minister; the Turkish presidency, in its current conception, is still very far from the American presidency, with its foreign policy and enforcement powers. Nevertheless, the Turkish president does have a set of enumerated powers that elevate him above the status of a simple figurehead, or a ceremonial head of state, as is the case in other parliamentary democracies, such as Italy and Germany. These powers include returning bills to parliament for review; subjecting constitutional amendments to a veto, which could only be overruled with a two-thirds parliamentary majority; sending proposed constitutional amendments to referendum; bringing bills and ordinances to the Constitutional Court for annulment; and drafting the agenda and convening the meetings of the National Security Council.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, although the prime minister is the head of government and chief executive under the Turkish system, the post of the presidency holds symbolic as well as real power.

For Erdogan, the presidency is a top prize for another reason as well. Since 2002, he has dramatically transformed Turkey, eliminating some key aspects of Ataturk's legacy, such as the firewall between religion, government, and education. If Erdogan were elected president, he would not only fill Ataturk's seat, but do so through a popular vote. This suggests that the presidency could have immense symbolic significance for Erdogan.

#### Possible Scenarios for the 2014–2015 Election Season

The upcoming Turkish elections could see a number of story lines, possibly involving changes to the national constitution as well as to AKP party rules. A sampling of possibilities is outlined here.

##### ERDOGAN RUNS FOR A PARTISAN PRESIDENCY AFTER A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The forthcoming polls present AKP leader and Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan with multiple choices. Given that the AKP's internal statute forbids party officials from holding the same elected office for more than three terms and that Erdogan has already served as prime minister for three terms, one way for

8. *Turkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı*, "Gorev ve Yetkiler," [http://www.tccb.gov.tr/sayfa/cumhurbaşkanlığı/gorev\\_yetki/](http://www.tccb.gov.tr/sayfa/cumhurbaşkanlığı/gorev_yetki/).

9. Metin Heper and Menderes Cinar, "Parliamentary Government with a Strong President: The post-1989 Turkish Experience," *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 3 (1996).

Erdogan to stay at the helm of Turkish politics would be to run for president. However, Article 101 of the Turkish constitution stipulates that the president cannot belong to a political party, a clause intended to provide for a nonpartisan president who can act as a grand arbiter among the various parties in the parliament.

Becoming a strong president would allow Erdogan to steer the country toward his vision for Turkey's long-term transformation, which after a decade under AKP rule is still under way. Just as Atatürk molded Turkey in his rigidly secular and Western image, Erdogan would remake Turkey to match his image of rigid social conservatism and Islamic identity. Indeed, it is telling that the AKP platform focuses on goals to be achieved by 2023, the centennial of the Turkish republic. The AKP does not plan on leaving the limelight any time soon.

This is Erdogan's dilemma: if he becomes president but leaves the AKP, there may not be much left of the AKP, his main power tool to govern, in the coming years. Accordingly, the Turkish leader would want to eliminate the "nonpartisan" nature of the presidency before becoming president. This would require an amendment to the constitution. The first of two ways in which such an amendment could be achieved is with straightforward approval by 367 of the 550 seats in the legislature. The second method requires fewer votes (330) but then requires that the amendment be put to a popular vote. Because the AKP has only 320 seats in the Turkish parliament, Erdogan would need at least three additional votes from non-AKP members as well as approval by a popular referendum, and as many as forty votes with no referendum, in order to eliminate Article 101.

While the AKP leader faces stiff political criticism from the country's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), Erdogan is likely to look for support from smaller parties in the legislature should he seek to pass a constitutional amendment: the Kurdish nationalist Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and its ally, the People's Democracy Party (HDP), which together have thirty seats, and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), which has fifty-two seats. Indeed, the BDP and MHP have opposing views on the Kurdish issue, one of Turkey's most pressing domestic problems, and therefore Erdogan's potential decision for the presidency would also require a binary choice between satisfying the demands of Kurdish nationalism and doing the opposite.

Going with either party could be tricky for Erdogan and would require that he make political concessions. In this regard, Erdogan could get the support of the BDP through granting more cultural rights to the Kurds, a step that would also appease the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Still, his conciliatory stance toward Kurdish nationalism to win BDP support would haunt him at the ballot box. In response to the necessary step of bringing the Article 101 amendment to a referendum, an alienated and nationalist MHP base would vote against the measure. These constituents would be joined by the AKP's nationalist base, the CHP, and independents unhappy at Erdogan's crackdown on demonstrators in Istanbul's Gezi Park in a protest vote against the amendment, in which case Erdogan could lose.

If, on the other hand, Erdogan decided to seek the MHP's support, he would need to be tough on the Kurdish issue in order to appease the MHP's nationalist leadership and base. This could draw the wrath of Kurdish nationalists, even leading to PKK violence, a development that would harm Erdogan's vote-grabbing strongman image in the presidential polls.

#### THE STATUS QUO: ERDOGAN RUNS FOR A NONPARTISAN PRESIDENCY

Should stringent domestic constraints and partisan deadlock prevent any major institutional reforms, the presidency would remain nonpartisan. This means Erdogan would have to leave the AKP were he to run for the presidential post, a move that could jeopardize the party's future, given the need for a forceful and charismatic leader to keep the AKP united and disciplined—with Erdogan alone, among the AKP's top leaders, likely to play this part. In such a scenario, it would be highly unlikely for the opposition parties to field an appealing candidate, and the prime minister could manage to succeed in becoming the country's next president. In this role, he could attempt, while formally not a party member, to exercise behind-the-scenes control over what now is his creation.

The problem with this scenario could be the relationship between Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul, who is widely seen as the second best option to lead the AKP after Erdogan and the likely prime minister should Erdogan become president. Here, the dynamic between a President Erdogan and a Prime Minister Gul would need to be recalibrated.

During Gul's tenure as president (2007–present), an executive shared between the president and prime minister has not been a cause for contention. Before Gul assumed the presidency, he had been Erdogan's associate for decades, and the pair's shared background in AKP politics softened the previous opposition between state and partisan interests under the Gul presidency.

Should Erdogan become president, his drive to control the party could be thwarted by the nonpartisan character of his office, and dissident factions within the AKP could use this opportunity to push for more intra-party pluralism. The risk of open conflict and fragmentation would grow. In order to overcome this prospect, the leadership would have to fine-tune the current *modus vivendi* between Erdogan and Gul. What is more, Gul is unlikely to accept a subordinate role akin to Dmitry Medvedev's relationship to Putin in Russia. Ideally, the AKP would want to create a cohabitation system that would allow the two leaders to operate harmoniously without colliding on matters of executive power.

#### THE AKP CHARTER IS CHANGED, AND ERDOGAN STAYS AS AKP CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER

The three-term limit imposed by the AKP on all its members of parliament means that Erdogan cannot run for prime minister in 2015 without amending the party statute. Should his presidential ambitions fail, and should Gul insist on running for the presidency, Erdogan might want to abolish Article 132 of the AKP's statute. This would mean that he could give up the presidential run and let Gul run for reelection on the AKP ticket in summer 2014. The presidential option for Erdogan thus gone, the party would then clamor for Erdogan to keep his seat as party leader and prime minister. Party grandees remark that the internal three-term limit was well intentioned when it was written but failed to keep pace with the party's fantastic success. The party could then revise the statute, and Erdogan could be permitted to lead the AKP in the 2015 general election. If Erdogan wanted this outcome, there is no doubt it would happen.

The damage in this scenario would largely be to Erdogan's and the AKP's image. Awkwardly holding on to the prime minister post is unappealing to Erdogan, compared to what could be framed as a promotion to the presidency. True, this path might prove least cumbersome for Erdogan in technical terms, given that it would not require any constitutional amendment. But it

would also erode two key aspects of Erdogan's successful vote-getting image: the first, that of a leader loyal to his word, and the second, that of a leader in office to serve his country, and not for power.

#### THE AKP PASSES ITS 'PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM' PROPOSAL IN THE PARLIAMENT

Erdogan has not flinched from expressing his dissatisfaction with the presidency as it is currently defined, but he has been less open about the office's major defect, in his perception: its nonpartisan character. In 2001, a public spat between President Ahmet Sezer and Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit triggered a panic that plunged Turkey's economy into disarray.<sup>10</sup> With Erdogan's rise to power, President Sezer exercised his veto powers to block AKP appointments and reforms.<sup>11</sup> Erdogan has echoed concerns that the current structure could prove problematic if different personalities fill the offices in the future, noting, "Today, we are in harmony with the presidency, but how can we be sure that the old problems won't arise in the future?"<sup>12</sup>

In the aftermath of the summer 2013 Gezi protests, when more than 2.5 million liberal Turks demonstrated in seventy-eight cities against Erdogan's style of governance, this scenario could pose a challenge. Should Erdogan declare his intent to amend the constitution to create a strong presidential system, bringing all three branches of government under his rule, new Gezi-style mass demonstrations could be sparked, throwing Turkey into political instability. Yet as he did during the Gezi protests, Erdogan could exploit new pro-liberal demonstrations to rally the broad political right, casting the protestors as a danger to the lifestyle of Turkey's majority right-wing voters. This, coupled with other factors, could help Erdogan rally the right to vote for a constitutional amendment creating a U.S.-style presidential system in Turkey.

#### Enter the Local Elections

The local election results in March could help steer Erdogan's political choices during the rest of the year. A clear mandate in local elections would be touted as a

10. "Turkey in Turmoil," *Economist*, February 27, 2001, <http://www.economist.com/node/517837>.
11. Carol Migdalovitz, *Turkey's 2007 Elections: Crisis of Identity and Power* (Congressional Research Service, 2007).
12. "Erdogan: 'Baskanlik Turk Sistemi Olsun,'" *CNN Turk*, November 11, 2012, <http://www4.cnnturk.com/2012/turkiye/11/11/erdogan.baskanlik.turk.sistemi.olsun/684086.0/>.

public endorsement of the AKP's agenda. On the other hand, disappointing results would dictate pursuing a more cautious approach. AKP strategists are already working feverishly to deliver a resounding AKP victory that would maximize the party's ability to advance.

To amass votes, Erdogan is trumpeting an array of highly visible, prestigious megaprojects. An example is a rail tunnel under the Bosphorus, the first of its kind, connecting Europe and Asia, and Istanbul's disparate halves, as well as cutting the commute time between the city's two parts for 15 million Istanbul residents from hours to less than five minutes.

#### KEY TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS WILL BOOST THE AKP'S POPULARITY

The inauguration of the tunnel and other key projects is timed to coincide with the local elections, as well as presidential elections in 2014 and general elections in 2015 (see Appendix 2 for a list of major infrastructure projects to be opened in 2014–2015). Construction has begun on a new bridge to cross the Bosphorus in Istanbul, and the AKP is vastly expanding the city's metro system in the coming years.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the high-speed rail line that links the central Anatolian cities of Ankara, Konya, and Eskisehir is being expanded to connect the northwestern Turkish cities of Bursa, Izmit, Adapazari, as well as Istanbul, a project that has produced ample photo opportunities for the prime minister. High-speed rail will endow Erdogan with major public relations gains in the forthcoming polls: more than a third of the country's population will live within an hour's commute of high-speed rail lines once the new routes open in 2014–2015. This pattern is to be repeated with a host of other urban transportation projects that will be proposed in politically significant locales, such as Izmir, Kayseri, and Gaziantep.

These projects will serve as monuments to the AKP's achievements and as constant reminders that the party has made a palpable impact on the daily lives of Turks. And Erdogan is especially adept at using these projects to associate his party with a can-do optimism that vaunts Turkey as a rising power with a success story that Turks can be proud of.

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13. "Istanbula Yeni Metro Hatti," *Sabah*, July 23, 2013, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/Ekonomi/2013/07/23/istanbula-yeni-metro-hatti>.

#### ISTANBUL IS A BELLWETHER

Istanbul is a global city home to almost 20 percent of the Turkish population and holding around 30 percent of the country's wealth. The leadership of Istanbul has been a bellwether for national leadership. Indeed, the AKP's rise to national prominence began in 1994 when Erdogan was elected mayor of Istanbul, which had previously been run by the Welfare Party (RP), defunct since 1999. A victory in the March polls in Istanbul could thus foretell continued national dominance for the AKP.

Interestingly, while the CHP is not competitive against the AKP in nationwide elections, it stands a chance in the Istanbul mayor's race. In the most recent parliamentary elections, in June 2011, the AKP received almost 50 percent of the vote to the CHP's 26 percent. Yet in the 2009 local elections, the CHP received 37 percent of the vote to the AKP's 44 percent in Istanbul. This is where the recent controversy between Erdogan and the Gulen movement comes in. The Gulenists are unlikely to vote en masse for a liberal candidate. But simply by not voting, the movement could tilt the election to the CHP, which has a viable populist candidate in Mustafa Sarigul. Should the CHP win the upcoming mayoral race, along with holding on to Izmir, Turkey's third largest city and a secular bastion—which it has held since 2002—it would constitute a major psychological victory for Turkey's main opposition party, even if it suffers losses elsewhere in the country. At the same time, should the AKP defeat the CHP in Istanbul, this would consolidate the AKP's grip over the Turkish electorate as the "party of the future." And should the AKP score a resounding victory across the country, as well as win Istanbul and Izmir, this would mark the effective end of the CHP—although in the aftermath of the Gezi protests, which galvanized Izmir's secular and liberal voters against the AKP, this last scenario appears more remote.

#### CROSSING 50 PERCENT CONSTITUTES VICTORY FOR ERDOGAN

A strong AKP showing in local elections will also be viewed, on a personal level, as a vote of confidence in the Turkish prime minister. Should the AKP exceed its most recent general performance of 50 percent nationwide support, this will be seen as a victory for Erdogan. The Turkish leader would then feel confident to declare his

candidacy for the presidential elections of summer 2014, should he choose to pursue this path. And if his party breaks the psychological 50 percent threshold, Erdogan could reembrace his agenda of switching Turkey's parliamentary democracy to a presidential system, moving not only to become the next Turkish president but also to endow himself with full executive powers.

Meanwhile, should the AKP drop much under 50 percent in the local elections, it will be seen as a public "vote of no confidence" in Erdogan. Such an outcome could lead Erdogan to agree to swap positions with Gul, with Gul taking over the helm of the AKP and running to become the country's prime minister in the 2015 parliamentary elections. In this scenario, Erdogan would assume the secondary executive position of the presidency under Turkey's parliamentary democratic system. A caretaker prime minister would run the country between 2014 and 2015, since Gul is not a member of the Turkish parliament and the Turkish constitution stipulates that the prime minister must be a member of the national legislature.

### Factors Likely to Shape the Outcome of the 2014 Elections

A number of issues, both domestic and international, could influence the direction of the 2014 local and presidential vote in Turkey. Some of the most prominent issues are discussed as follows.

#### THE GEZI PROTEST CHALLENGE AND MAINTAINING A BROAD CENTER-RIGHT COALITION

Since coming to power in 2002, the AKP has implemented sound economic policies that have facilitated the growth of Turkey's economy and its membership in the G-20. And unlike many other emerging-market growth stories, Turkish growth has actually reduced economic inequality and transformed the country into a majority middle-class society for the first time in its history. Yet the recent protests show that the ruling AKP has, perhaps, become a victim of its own success.

Indeed, the middle class that the AKP helped create is committed to individual freedoms, and its members were central to the demonstrations that spread throughout the country in spring 2013. The movement, touched off by a heavy-handed government response to demonstrators seeking to protect a green space in central Istanbul, ultimately grew in scope to target the prime minister's domineering political style.

All this suggests that modernization theory—the idea that economic development leads to more democracy—is being validated in Turkey. Indeed, as countries foster a greater middle class, they tend to become irrevocably diverse, developing the bedrock for democratic governance, including consensual politics and respect for individual and minority rights.

The developments in Turkey do not constitute an extension of the Arab Spring. Turkey did not experience a proverbial political winter. The country is and remains a democracy.

Nor do the protests suggest a weakening of the AKP. By most measures, about 50 percent of Turks continue to support the party. In summer 2013, for example, Erdogan organized a number of rallies with his own supporters to counter the Gezi protests. The numbers at these rallies were comparable to those at the anti-government marches across Istanbul.

Nor are the demonstrations yet another manifestation of the secularist-Islamist cleavage that has defined many of Turkey's political battles in recent years. Although most of the protestors are secular, their rallies are not about secularism per se but rather about the quality of Turkish democracy and a demand for liberal values.

These demonstrations present a new dynamic in Turkish politics. Members of the protest movement have discovered that they have strength in numbers and can sustain their demonstrations, largely thanks to social media technologies. Indeed, the protests represent Turkey's first massive, grassroots political movement. In the past, grassroots movements never reached a massive scale. By comparison, Turkey has witnessed several large anti-government protests, such as the rallies of 2007. But these demonstrations were organized in a top-down fashion and were linked to the military.

This new form of grassroots and liberal opposition politics could complicate Prime Minister Erdogan's political agenda. Should he, for instance, decide to proceed with transforming the country's parliamentary democracy into a presidential system, he may face a highly effective backlash. Meanwhile, President Gul has already positioned himself as a nonpartisan figure, supporting the protestors' right to assemble and stating: "Democracy is not just winning elections."

For his part, Erdogan has used the Gezi protests to bolster his base, as implied in his facilitation of

counterprotests. Erdogan also dismissed the protestors' legitimacy, although he eventually did agree to meet with some of their representatives.

Since summer, the government has deployed its considerable resources to reshape the narrative regarding the Gezi protests. One tactic has been to depict the protest movement as a conspiracy of radicals looking to destabilize Turkey and secular elitists (the conservatives' longtime *bête noire*) looking to orchestrate a coup d'état fashioned after the military's move against Prime Minister Menderes in 1960. By portraying the Gezi protestors as degenerates, Erdogan may hope that Turkey's mainline conservative voters will recoil from the movement, which in reality has comprised largely young professional men and especially women—hardly the motley bunch Erdogan describes.

Success in the upcoming elections will require the AKP to produce a compelling alternative account of the Gezi incident. The party has been working to revise the narrative in order to cast itself as a democratic protagonist striving to preserve stability and conservative values in the face of radical forces working to undermine national prosperity and standing. The defining question will be the extent to which this account resonates with the conservative public.

And right-leaning voters constitute more than 60 percent of the electorate, explaining why Erdogan has responded to the Gezi protests by labeling the demonstrators hoodlums and liberals. The opposition's distinctive secular, liberal, and leftist hue makes this strategy possible, since the right-leaning bloc—which ranges from center-right factions to Islamists—will not make common cause with this camp. To be sure, some conservatives have grown uneasy with Erdogan's personality, but he is likely to prevail if he sticks to his message—namely, “You may not like my style, but would you really prefer the leftists and liberals?” Rallying conservatives behind the AKP's banner will be even easier given the proliferation of images showing far-left vandalism and violence in Taksim Square during the Gezi protests.

#### MANAGING THE SYRIA CONFLICT'S SPILLOVER

Before the Arab Spring, Ankara advertised its rapprochement with Syria as a centerpiece of its debut as a leader with influence and control in the region.

Syria's implosion has turned this pronouncement on its head. Unsurprisingly, boasts of regional leadership have featured less prominently in AKP discourse of late, but the real political danger will arise if the conflict begins to feed a perception that the AKP has lost control and can no longer safeguard stability and security within Turkey's borders. Jihadist infiltration from Syria and skirmishes that spill into Turkey are matters of particular concern in this regard. Moreover, the AKP's intentions of getting involved militarily in Syria are opposed by many, both in the parliament and the electorate, especially within groups such as the 500,000-strong Alawite community and the Alevis, who constitute around 15 percent of Turkey's population. While different from Arabic-speaking Syrian Alawites,<sup>14</sup> the Alevis share with Alawites secular attitudes and suspicions of Sunni Islamic activism. Like the Alawites, the Alevis staunchly oppose the AKP's policies, including its stance on Syria, and overwhelmingly support the opposition CHP. Given these shared political affinities, if Hatay Alawites rallied more forcefully against the government's Syria policy, the CHP and the Turkish Alevis would almost certainly follow, leading to massive, and unfortunate, unrest across the country.

#### CURBING THE KURDISH PROBLEM

In late 2012, Ankara began negotiating with Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK. These talks quickly produced a ceasefire announcement. With this breakthrough, the AKP neutralized a major electoral risk, PKK violence. Erdogan must continue the process in order to keep PKK operations in remission. However, he needs to prolong the process so as to avoid granting highly visible concessions to the Kurds, which might inflame his nationalist base and damage performance at the ballot box.

Meanwhile, tying together peace talks with the Kurds and efforts to simultaneously appease the Gezi protestors even as it condemns them, the AKP has unveiled a package of reforms to expand civil liberties

14. For an article elaborating on the differences between Alawites and Alevis, see Soner Cagaptay, “Are Syrian Alawites and Turkish Alevis the Same?” *CNN Global Public Square*, April 17, 2012, <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/04/17/are-syrian-alawites-and-turkish-alevis-the-same/>.

in Turkey. In fact, prior to Gezi the AKP had already passed two watershed reform bills in July 2012 and April 2013. These measures included court reform in the wake of the controversial Ergenekon trials, and further expansion of the freedom of expression by allowing political activists to display emblems of groups designated by the Turkish government as terrorists, a move with obvious implications for activists who support the PKK.<sup>15</sup> In this regard, a reform package announced in September 2013 allowing the teaching of Kurdish in private schools and more use of Kurdish by public officials and in courts represents an AKP step to maintain and further build its base among the Kurds. So is Erdogan's promise to drop the country's 10 percent threshold in parliamentary elections to 5 percent, hence allowing the Kurdish nationalist BDP, which usually receives 5 to 6 percent of the popular vote, to enter the legislature—currently, the BDP has a parliamentary “club” composed of party members who run as independents and then unite under the BDP flag once in the legislature.

Another factor in the mix is Turkey's relations with the Iraqi Kurds and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Turkey seeks KRG president Masoud Barzani's support in its outreach to the PKK, as well as for mutually beneficial oil and eventually gas deals. But Ankara must look over its shoulder at the Turkish population, Baghdad, Washington, and even Tehran if its enthusiasm for an ever more autonomous KRG is not carefully calibrated.

#### STEWARDSHIP OF THE ECONOMY

Turkey's economy has tripled in size during the AKP's tenure, and the party's reputation for prudent economic governance goes a long way toward explaining its lasting electoral success. This has helped the AKP in the polls. As noted by analyst Emre Erdogan, “Economic growth in Turkey is one of the most important issues affecting the decisions of the voters. Each one point increase in the per capita real income increases the votes of the governing party by 0.7 percent [*sic*] points when all other factors are static.”<sup>16</sup>

But growing macro-level imbalances and chronic unemployment have continually stalked rosy economic forecasts. The party must forestall any sudden development that could tarnish its claim to capable economic management, particularly as shifts in the global financial landscape apply pressures on Turkey's financing situation. These factors will shape the AKP's ability to maneuver as it advances the interrelated goals of promoting Erdogan's leadership and bolstering party unity. The party's ability to shape the Turkish political system will depend on how deftly the party negotiates these challenges in the coming long election season.

#### Policy Implications for Washington

How Turkey sorts through this upcoming trial by politics is of critical importance not only to Turkey but also to the region and the United States. Despite differences, most recently over the Turks' purchase of a Chinese air-defense system, Turkey is by far the most stable and strongest U.S. partner in the region, with the exception of Israel. A domestically stable and economically healthy Turkey will not so much be a “model” for the region (that dream perhaps never had much substance) as an anchor, with which the United States shares enough interests to undertake common initiatives. A Turkey consumed by political conflict or maximizing the authoritarian and “majoritist” tendencies seen in the reaction to the Gezi protests will weaken this anchor. Furthermore, any real backsliding from a liberal, democratic trajectory by a country so significant in global politics would do immense harm to the century-long American effort to promote liberal universal values.

So what can the United States do? First, heed President Obama's words at the UN General Assembly in September 2013 about the “well-earned humility” Americans have acquired in trying to influence the internal affairs of foreign countries. The worst thing the United States can do is to undercut its relations with Turkey over specific domestic disputes and decisions. Washington can, as an ally, point out publicly and, even better, privately when it thinks decisions will hurt rather than help Turkey, but it must also deal with Turkey as it is, not as the United States wishes it to be. U.S. military relations with Turkey should continue, but the United States

15. Busra Erdal, “Paketlerle Kaldirilan Yasalarin, Gezide Uygulanmasi Isteniyor,” *Zaman*, July 25, 2013, [http://www.zaman.com.tr/gundem\\_paketlerle-kaldirilan-yasalarin-gezide-uygulanmasi-isteniyo\\_r\\_2113635.html](http://www.zaman.com.tr/gundem_paketlerle-kaldirilan-yasalarin-gezide-uygulanmasi-isteniyo_r_2113635.html).

16. Emre Erdogan, “Erdogan's Longest Year,” analysis (German Marshall Fund of the United States, October 3, 2013),

[http://www.gmfus.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files/mf/1380811736Erdogan\\_LongestYear\\_Sep13.pdf](http://www.gmfus.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files/mf/1380811736Erdogan_LongestYear_Sep13.pdf).

needs to explain to Ankara why specific decisions such as the Chinese air-defense purchase make joint cooperation more difficult.

One useful initiative for Washington, if carried out carefully, would be to coach key Turkish officials on the relationship between Turkey's economic success over the last decade-plus and the broader opening to the West. This discussion could cover trade arrangements with Europe as well as Turkey's general reputation as a stable, modern country that encourages free trade and open economic activity, on the one hand, and is governed by rule of law and respects its citizens, on the other. In this regard, scenarios such as the government's overzealous reaction to the Gezi Park protests seriously undercut Turkey's image. This reaction, along with other factors, has already had an impact on the Turkish stock exchange, foreign investments, and the exchange rate between the dollar and the lira. Many Turks, including high-ranking AKP figures, have absorbed this message, but it has not

necessarily penetrated deeply enough within the leadership. In emphasizing the importance of this issue, Washington would do better to show discretion rather than openly attacking the entire political program of the Turkish prime minister.

Along similar lines, the United States should resist the urge to reduce the relationship to a tit-for-tat exchange, or to conflate any specific Turkish political leader or movement with Turkey as a whole. The task of helping Turkey reinforce its security against its dangerous neighbors or the PKK is as much in the U.S. or region's long-term interest as it is in Turkey's. The Turkish people, whatever their political views, are proud of and support their country. They also, as the last fifty years have shown, will bristle at U.S. efforts to "punish" a given Turkish government for decisions Washington thinks are inadvisable. Likewise, Turkish governments have been less apt to trust and work with the United States if they perceive the threat of censure rather than the promise of cooperation.

APPENDIX 1  
Elections in 2014

**LOCAL ELECTIONS**

On March 30, 2014, Turkish citizens who live in the country's 2,890 municipalities will cast their votes for mayor and city council. Voters will also select members for the councils of the country's eighty-one provinces. The campaign for these local elections, held every four years, officially begins January 1, 2014, and public servants seeking office will have had to resign from their existing positions by December 1, 2013.

Local elections determine the administrations at three political levels:

- **Village** A village is led by a village head and council of elders. An urban neighborhood with fewer than two thousand inhabitants also counts as a village.
- **Municipality** A municipality is led by a mayor and municipal council, with the mayor serving as the council's head. Mayors and municipal council members both serve five-year terms, and municipalities must have populations exceeding two thousand. Whereas the mayor is elected based on a plurality vote, the municipal council members are elected based on a system of proportional representation.
- **Province** A province is led by a provincial governor and a general provincial council, with the governor serving as the council's head. As with the city councils, the general provincial council members are elected for five-year terms based on proportional representation, while the governor, a civil servant, is appointed by the central government in Ankara.

**PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

The vote to elect the twelfth president of the republic of Turkey must be completed within sixty days before the current president's terms ends on August 28, 2014. The new president will therefore likely be chosen between late June and late August 2014. The twelfth president will serve a five-year term.

An absolute majority is required for a candidate to win the presidency. Thus, if no candidate receives such a majority in the first round of voting, the two leading vote-getters compete in a second round, to take place the second Sunday after the first round.

Since the next Turkish president will be the first elected directly by Turkish citizens, the country's Supreme Electoral Council, a nonpartisan monitoring entity, is currently reorganizing the entire electoral procedure, including the official start date of the campaign.

## APPENDIX 2 Major Infrastructure Projects

### ***Marmaray Project***

This project is designed to connect the European and Asian sides of Istanbul with an uninterrupted, high-capacity commuter rail system that starts in the Halkali district on the European side and ends in the Gebze district on the Asian side. Marmaray not only connects Istanbul's disparate halves through a sub-sea train line, it also links the city's many subway lines to each other. The first part of the 47.4-mile Marmaray line, a sub-Bosporus tunnel stretching 8.5 miles from the Kazlıcesme district on the European side of Istanbul to the Goztepe district on the Asian side, was opened October 29, 2013. The rest of the project will be completed by 2015.

### ***High-Speed Train (YHT)***

Since 2003, Turkey has been building five high-speed train lines between Ankara and Istanbul. Together with the existing lines, the Ankara–Eskisehir–Istanbul line, to be opened in March 2014, will bring high-speed rail service to a total of more than 20 million Turkish citizens before the local elections of 2014.

### ***Gebze–Izmir Motorway and Izmit Bay Suspension Bridge Project***

This project, valued at 11 billion Turkish lira, will entail a six-lane, 262-mile highway and marks the largest public-private partnership in Turkey to date. The highway will cut travel time between two major Turkish economic centers—Izmir, the country's third largest city, and Istanbul—from 10 to 3.5 hours by means of a two-mile bridge crossing Izmit Bay. The affected area will include a third of Turkey's population and its seven key cities, which contribute to 45 percent of the country's GDP. The project is expected to be complete in 2018, meanwhile creating 10,000 construction jobs. The first stretch of highway, between Gebze and Orhangazi and including the Izmit Bay bridge, will open by 2015.

### ***New Airports***

**Cukurova Regional Airport** is intended to serve Mersin and Adana, two large industrial provinces in southern Turkey with a combined population of 3 million. Construction began in 2013 and is expected to be completed in 2015–2016. This airport will serve international destinations and an estimated 15 million people.

**Yuksekoval Airport** will be the first in Hakkari (population 250,000), deemed Turkey's most remote province. Construction of this airport, aimed at boosting accessibility for area residents, began in 2010 and will be complete in 2014 before the local elections.

**Ordu-Giresun Airport**, an engineering feat owing to its construction on landfill on a rugged coastline, will be complete soon, with flights expected to begin in 2014, maybe before the local elections. The airport will serve the more than one million residents of Ordu and Giresun.

*(continued)*

### ***New Metro Lines and Trams in Cities Controlled by the AKP***

- **Ankara** will add many new metro lines to its existing 14.5-mile system. Of these, the 9.6-mile Batıkent–Sincan, 11.2-mile Kızılay–Cayyolu, and 10.3-mile Kızılay–Torekent lines are expected to be active by the end of February 2014. The 7.2-mile Keçioren–Tandoğan line is expected to be completed in summer 2014.
- **Istanbul** has already added many new lines to its existing metro map, including the 13.5-mile Bağcılar–Basakşehir–Olimpiyatköy line and the 3.6-mile Bağcılar Kirazlı–Otogar extension, both of which were opened in June 2013. The Şişhane–Yenikapı line, connecting the city’s downtown to the historic old city and Marmaray, is expected to be opened in 2014. The almost half-mile Aksaray–Yenikapı line, completing a connection between Atatürk International Airport and downtown, will be opened in 2014. Additionally, the 2.2-mile Şişhane–Halic Metro Gecis Köprüsü–Yenikapı line is expected to be complete in January 2014. Istanbul is expecting its second metro line on the Asian side, a 12.4-mile project covering Üsküdar–Umranıye–Çekmeköy–Sancaktepe, to be opened in 2015. Other targets for completion in 2015 are the 2.8-mile Kartal–Kaynarca line and the 2-mile Levent–Rumeli Hisarüstü shuttle line.
- Also planned for **Istanbul** is a 5-mile air tram line between Zincirlikuyu, Altunizade, and Camlica, to be opened in 2015.
- **Bursa’s** four-mile T1 tram line was opened in October 2013, adding to the city’s existing 19.3-mile metro system, which will be augmented by the 5-mile Kestel line, with the first three of its seven stations expected to be in service in 2014. Future plans for the system include extensions amounting to more than thirty miles.
- **Gaziantep** is completing the İbrahimli–GATEM tram line in January 2014, adding to its existing 9.3-mile system, which travels from the railway station to Akkent.
- **Konya** will add a new tram line to its existing 13-mile system. Construction began in March 2013 and is expected to be completed by early 2015.
- **Kayseri** will see completion of stages two and three of its tram line in 2014, adding to stage one, which covers 10.6 miles.
- **New Metro Lines and Trams in Cities Controlled by the CHP**
- **İzmir’s** 3.1-mile Uçyol–Uçkuyular extension will add to the city’s 10-mile metro system and is expected to be completed in 2014. İzmir’s 50-mile commuter rail system is also extending by 18.6 miles from Cumaovası to Torbalı, a project expected to be completed in 2014.
- **Eskişehir’s** existing 10-mile tram line will be expanded by 13.7 miles, likely reaching twenty new neighborhoods by the end of January 2014.