

POLICY NOTES



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Can Erdogan Stay at the Helm?

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On June 7, Turkey will hold national parliamentary elections. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has led the country since 2002, will almost certainly win this race. Ironically while an AKP victory is certain, it is difficult to estimate the number of seats the party will win in the Turkish legislature. If the smaller Kurdish nationalist Peoples Democratic Party (HDP) crosses the 10-percent electoral threshold necessary for parliamentary representation, the AKP's majority in the Turkish legislative will be a relatively small margin, if any. Should the HDP fail the threshold, however—currently polls show that party's popularity hovering around 10 percent—the AKP would pick the HDP's seats in the country's Kurdish southeast. This would endow the governing party with a solid majority in the legislature, allowing it to amend the constitution and usher in a presidential system with AKP founder Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the helm.

Whatever the nature of the AKP's lead in the Turkish parliament, the party's forthcoming victory will signal the rise of a dominant-party system in Turkish politics in the mold of African National Congress (ANC) rule in South Africa since 1994. As such, it is important to examine the factors contributing to the AKP's continued electoral strength and the implications of a dominant-party system in Turkey for the future of Turkish foreign policy and U.S.-Turkey ties.

Introduction

Turkey first became a multiparty democracy with free and fair elections in 1950; until recently, the system comprised four main parties: a center-right

party usually in government, a center-left nationalist party usually in the opposition, and two smaller parties, representing the conservative-nationalist and Islamist poles, that often allied with the center-right bloc.

However, with the implosion of the traditional center-right parties in 2001-2, precipitated by an economic meltdown, this configuration has changed, giving way to the rise of the Islamist AKP, which has successfully banded together the Islamist and larger center-right blocs. This new alignment helps explain the AKP's continued electoral strength: the party has won the last three parliamentary elections by increasing margins and in August 2014 secured the

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presidency for Erdogan. As long as the AKP controls the center-right, it will reign in Turkish politics.

Traditional Four-Pillar Party System

CENTER-RIGHT. The largest party in the Turkish political system has traditionally come from the center-right bloc. It has advocated a free-market economy, pro-Western foreign policy, and soft separation of religion and politics compared to its center-left Kemalist rivals.

Between 1950 and 2002, center-right parties ran Turkey almost exclusively. In the 1950s, Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes's Democrat Party (DP) held the majority in the Turkish National Assembly (*Meclis*). Following the 1960 military coup, the DP was dissolved and its top leaders, including Menderes, were executed. Soon after, Suleyman Demirel's Justice Party (AP), a reincarnation of the DP, took charge of the country, ruling Turkey through much of the late 1960s and 1970s. In the aftermath of the 1980 coup, led by Gen. Kenan Evren, the Turkish military closed all political parties, resulting in the splintering of the center-right bloc into two groups: the first led by Demirel, an engineer who spent time in the United States, and the second by Turgut Ozal, a slightly more liberal newcomer and an economist who had spent time at the World Bank. Demirel's True Path Party (DYP) and Ozal's Motherland Party (ANAP) rotated in power throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s, with the two leaders and their political protégés serving as successive prime ministers and presidents, respectively.

Ozal's and Demirel's respective successors, Mesut Yilmaz, a German-trained economist, and Tansu Ciller, a U.S.-trained economist, performed poorly during their tenures in the 1990s, a decade characterized by runaway inflation, successive economic downturns, and massive casualties sustained fighting the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The failures of DYP and ANAP leaders led to the demise of Turkey's traditionally dominant center-right bloc. After losing their charismatic leaders to nonpartisan runs for the presidency—Ozal ran in 1989, Demirel in 1993—the DYP and ANAP imploded in two election cycles. Their trajectory may hold lessons for Erdogan and the AKP's continued political strength. Given that the country's

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CENTER-LEFT. The center-left nationalist bloc has been Turkey's primary opposition power. This group, in line with Kemal Ataturk's legacy, has traditionally stood for strict separation between religion and politics.

This center-left constituency is now represented in the Meclis by the Republican People's Party (CHP), founded by Ataturk in 1923. The CHP ruled Turkey as a single party between 1923 and 1950, when the DP pushed it from power. In the early 1970s, the CHP's leftist tendencies surged under Bulent Ecevit, a poet and journalist who spent time as a journalist in Winston-Salem, NC, in the 1950s, and who would eventually serve as the Turkish prime minister. The party adopted a strong nationalist foreign policy and statist economic doctrine, blending Kemalism, social democracy, and socialism. For thirty-three months in the 1970s, the center-left nationalists ruled Turkey under Ecevit. During this period, workers' movements gained traction in Turkish society, echoing the high point of European socialism. Ecevit again led the country between 1999 and 2002 in a coalition government.

CONSERVATIVE-NATIONALIST. This smaller political group has advocated a separation of religion and

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politics, while not embracing free markets. Alparslan Turkes, a Cyprus-born former army colonel, and his Nationalist Action Party (MHP), established in 1969, have led this movement. The party served as a minor coalition partner in the 1970s with Demirel, and then in 1999 with Ecevit. The MHP promoted a pro-Western foreign policy during the Cold War to defend the country against Turkey's longtime enemy Russia. Since the end of the Cold War, the MHP has adopted a nationalist foreign policy that strongly opposes not only the PKK but often also Kurdish national identity.

ISLAMIST. Similar to conservative-nationalists, Islamists have traditionally been one of the two smaller players in the Turkish political system. This movement has long promoted an anti-Western foreign policy, saying that instead of folding under the West, Turkey should become a standalone Muslim power, drawing strength from its Ottoman antecedents. On the political side, traditionally speaking, the Islamists have strongly advocated for Sunni Islam to play a larger role in politics and education. In the economic sphere, again traditionally speaking, Islamists have supported a “third way” policy, which they have described as “neither socialist nor capitalist.”

This faction served primarily as a minor coalition partner to Demirel in the 1970s under the German-educated engineer Necmettin Erbakan. In June 1996, Erbakan's Islamist Welfare Party (RP) entered a brief coalition government with the center-right DYP, led by Turkey's first woman prime minister, Tansu Ciller, but it was eventually ousted from power following

public rallies backed by the military in June 1997. This set of events was later dubbed a “soft coup.”

End of the Old System, Rise of the AKP

Similar to those of many European countries, the Turkish constitution grants the country's top court the power to shut down political parties if they violate the country's charter.¹ The Turkish Constitutional Court has banned Islamist parties on a number of occasions, including Erbakan's National Order Party (MNP), in 1971, and its subsequent reincarnation, the National Salvation Party (MSP), in 1981. More recently, the courts banned the RP, a reembodyment of the MSP, in 1998. The judges also shut down the RP's subsequent reincarnation, the Fazilet (Virtue) Party (FP), in 2001. The RP's leaders brought their case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which upheld the decision of the Turkish judges in August 2001.

Thereafter, Erbakan, the leader of the Islamist bloc, decided to reorganize the movement and form the Felicity Party (SP). Erdogan, a rising Islamist figure who gained national prominence in the 1990s for successfully running Istanbul as mayor, broke away from Erbakan to set up the AKP. Three important figures joined Erdogan's newly founded AKP, one of them Abdullah Gul, an economist from conservative central Turkey who spent time in the United Kingdom as a graduate student and then worked for the Islamic Development Bank in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Two prominent bureaucrats, Abdulkadir Aksu, a center-right figure of Kurdish origin from the Ministry of Interior, and Abdullatif Sener, of Circassian origin from the Ministry of Finance, also played key roles in forming the AKP.

This quartet of leaders, in which Erdogan enjoyed primacy, actually promoted the AKP as a non-Islamist movement. To prove its non-Islamist credentials, the new party embraced Turkey's European Union accession process and supported pivoting to the United States. Erdogan visited Washington in January 2002 ahead of Turkey's November elections to underscore

1. Bans against political parties are unheard of in the United States, but many European democracies, such as Spain and Germany, allow their supreme courts to ban parties deemed to be violating their respective constitutions.

the AKP's new pro-Western foreign policy. Economically, the party embraced a strong free market agenda and tasked Ali Babacan, a U.S.-trained economist and Fulbright alumni, to draft its manifesto. The AKP also indicated it would respect the separation of religion and politics, suggesting a move away from Erbakan and the RP's antiseccularist line.

The AKP's rise to power came on the heels of the country's worst economic crisis in modern history, in 2000–2001. At the time, Turkey was run by a coalition government led by Ecevit, who chaired a splinter group from the center-left, the Democratic Left Party (DSP), with the MHP and ANAP also serving in the coalition. This crisis left these three parties and Ecevit, the left's charismatic leader, stigmatized—and they were grounded by the economic collapse.

More important, the crisis left the ANAP and DYP deeply stigmatized, as these center-right parties were blamed for a legacy of economic mismanagement and widespread corruption stretching into their almost decade long rule in the 1990s. In the ensuing financial meltdown of 2000–2001, the country's economy shrank by almost 10 percent and unemployment jumped to nearly 20 percent. In the eyes of the Turkish electorate, the crisis represented the failure of not only the DYP and ANAP but also Ecevit and the MHP. In a near perfect storm, all traditional pillars and leaders of Turkish party politics, excepting the Islamists and Erdogan, were publicly discredited.

As such, the AKP's surge in popularity resulted from its freshness as a party, untainted by the cataclysmic 2000–2001 crisis. Although the CHP was not then in government, its reputation too was tarnished in the 1990s by various party-affiliated mayors who became embroiled in corruption and mismanagement dustups, such as the embezzlement of funds, uncollected garbage, and chronic water shortages in Istanbul. The AKP branded itself as the unscathed, uncorrupted, and “clean” party—the word *ak* means “abstract” white in Turkish.

Erdogan's charismatic personality boosted the AKP's popularity further. As the center-right parties imploded, their voters flocked to the AKP, with Erdogan receiving nearly double the votes of the RP in

November 2002. Whereas the RP had received a winning 21.4 percent in the 1995 elections, the AKP got 34.3 percent in 2002. Other casualties of the AKP's rise included the DYP, whose haul fell from 19.2 percent in 1995 to 9.5 percent in 2002, and the ANAP, which dropped from 19.6 percent to 5.1 percent. Turkey's dominant center-right parties have since dwindled even further, with their base regathering almost entirely under the AKP. In the 2007 elections, the DYP, renamed the Democrat Party after its glorious predecessor, received 5.4 percent; by 2011, its tally fell to a meager 0.65 percent.

New Four-Pillar Turkish Party System

Erdogan has won three successive elections since 2002 using this formula: in the absence of a center-right party, Turkey's center-right voters have gravitated to the right and, namely, to the AKP. In 2007, for example, the AKP's votes increased to 46.6 percent, and in 2011, to 49.8 percent. The AKP now represents the dominant pillar of Turkish politics. CHP, the second pillar, has maintained support at 19.4 to 26 percent between 2002 and 2011, and MHP, the third pillar, has a share in the popular vote that ranges between 8.4 and 14.3 percent. After the center-right pole imploded, with its voters folding under the AKP, Kurdish nationalists have entered Turkish politics as its new, fourth pillar in the 2000s, maintaining support at 5 to 7 percent.

For its part, the CHP has failed to make inroads against the AKP, especially in view of the right-leaning tendencies of Turkish voters. In 2010, the CHP sought to reinvigorate itself, electing a new leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, a bureaucrat of ethnic Kurdish and Alevi origin. The party has also attempted to flash more liberal and free-market credentials, including more women and civil rights activists in its leadership and a number of businesspeople on its electoral lists.

Despite these gestures, the CHP has seen only a slow increase in its popularity since 2002, when the party received 19.4 percent of the vote. In 2007, that mark had risen to 20.9 percent, and in 2011, it rose to 26 percent.

The MHP has made only small gains compared to the AKP. In 2002, the MHP received 8.4 percent

of the vote, climbing to 14.3 percent in 2007, and dropping slightly to 13 percent in 2011. The party has entered the last five elections under its current chair, Devlet Bahçeli, who joined that party's youth wing in the late 1960s. The MHP has been unable to appeal to middle-class voters, lacking the AKP's pro-free market outlook. The party also fails to reach to women voters: currently only 5.8 percent of the MHP legislators in Ankara are women, compared to 14.4 percent of the AKP legislators, 13.6 percent of the CHP legislators, and 31 percent of the Kurdish nationalist members of the Meclis.

KURDISH BLOC. Since the traditional center-right in Turkey has been folded under the AKP, a new fourth pillar of Turkish politics has emerged, led by Kurdish nationalist parties. In recent decades, Kurdish nationalist parties have frequently changed their names and leaders to evade sanctions by the country's Constitutional Court and to reflect election alliances with Turkey's far left. One such alliance took place before the 2014 presidential elections, when the Kurdish nationalist Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) changed its name to the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) to encompass smaller leftist parties under a larger umbrella. Such alliances notwithstanding, the Kurdish nationalist bloc is the smallest in the current four-party system; in the most recent 2011 general elections, the BDP, running independent candidates, received 6.6 percent of the vote.

While 13 to 15 percent of the Turkish population is estimated to be of Kurdish origin, only a third to half of this population appears to vote for Kurdish nationalist parties. The AKP has captured the majority of the Kurdish vote in metropolitan areas in western Turkey, where nearly half of Turkey's Kurds live. The party is also strong among the relatively more conservative Zaza-speaking community in eastern Turkey. Even among the more nationalist Kurmanji-speaking Kurds in the southeast, the AKP competes with Kurdish nationalist parties.

Another movement that enjoys relative popularity among Kurds in conservative areas of eastern Turkey is the Free Cause Party (HUDA-PAR). Although negligible nationally—having earned a mere 0.2 percent in the most recent election—the party is important to watch, given its links to the historically

violent Kurdish Hezbollah and plans to run independent candidates on June 7, some of whom could get elected into the Turkish legislature—which would be a first for Kurdish Islamists.²

Breaking down HUDA-PAR's tally more closely, the party garnered just 2.5 percent support in 2014 local elections—the first nationwide elections in which the party participated—in the eleven predominantly Kurdish southeastern provinces, compared with 50.2 percent for the secular nationalist BDP. However, in a number of mostly contiguous southeastern districts,³ HUDA-PAR far exceeded its national and regional averages. For instance, along the Anti-Taurus Mountains, in Diyarbakir's Ergani and Cermik districts and Bingol's Genc and Solhan districts, the party received 9.2 percent, 8.8 percent, 8.6 percent, and 7.1 percent, respectively. Similarly, along the northern rim of the Mardin Massif in the Cinar district (Diyarbakir province) and the Mazidagi district (Mardin province), the party received 14.9 and 8.9 percent, respectively. In a third microregion, along the Batman River, HUDA-PAR also performed well, receiving 7.4 percent in the Besiri district, 7 percent in the Kozluk district, and 7 percent in the Batman district (all in Batman province). Outside these three microregions, the political wing of the Kurdish Hezbollah did exceedingly well in the mayoral race in the Korkut district (Mus province), where its candidate earned 40.1 percent against the AKP winner's 53.6 percent. As suggested before, HUDA-PAR's independent candidates in Diyarbakir, Batman, and Bingol among the southeastern Turkish provinces could be elected into the parliament on June 7 as independents.

RUMP ISLAMIST BLOC. Another noteworthy smaller party is the hardline rump Islamist SP, which garnered 1.27 percent of the national tally in 2011. The SP has relatively strong support in a number of Turkish microregions, most notably along the eastern Black Sea coast in Trabzon's Of, Sürmene, Dernekpazarı, and

2. For more on Kurdish Hezbollah, see Rusen Cakir, *The Reemergence of Hizballah in Turkey*, Policy Focus 74 (Washington DC: Washington Institute, 2007), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus74initial.pdf>.

3. Turkey has 81 provinces divided into 965 districts for election and administrative purposes.

Arakli districts, where it received 11.5 percent, 7.1 percent, 6.9 percent, and 6.6 percent of the vote, respectively. In the nearby Ardesen district in Rize province, the SP received 5 percent of the vote, and in the Black Sea hinterland Bayburt province, the party received 4.7 percent, its best result in any Turkish province overall. Despite losing a majority of its voters to the AKP, the SP continues to maintain some support in cities along the mountains of the eastern Black Sea littoral. Other microregions with relative SP strength include Sakarya River delta towns, populated by conservative Circassians and Abkhazes, as well as the conservative Konya and Elazig provinces in central Turkey and along the Euphrates Valley, respectively.

The SP is entering the June 7 elections in an alliance with the Great Union Party (BBP), a similarly conservative Islamist movement, which received 0.75 percent of the vote in the 2011 elections. The BBP has a stronger Turkish nationalist outlook than does the SP, but like the SP, it has some localized support. The party polls well among the Circassians and northern Caucasus diaspora populations in Kayseri and Sivas, two provinces in the upper Kizilirmak Basin in conservative central Turkey. While the SP-BBP coalition is unlikely to cross the 10 percent electoral threshold necessary for parliamentary representation, any votes going to this bloc will reflect a loss for the AKP.

Current Identities of the Four Main Turkish Parties

AKP. As Turkey's dominant political party, the AKP is led by a dominant political figure, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Other key AKP figures have exited the party in recent years, including Abdullah Gul, who left in 2007 to become Turkish president. Although he maintained informal contacts with the party, Gul fell out with Erdogan in 2014 toward the end of his term, in part because Erdogan did not want him to run for president again. Since then, Gul has adopted a quiet public profile and has not returned to the AKP. The other two members of the original AKP quartet, Sener and Aksu, have also fallen out of the party's leadership. Aksu maintains a low profile as a member of parliament, and Sener openly broke ranks with Erdogan and abandoned the AKP in 2008.

Because the country's constitution mandates that the president not have any partisan affiliation, Erdogan formally broke ties with the AKP in summer 2014 to run for president. But Erdogan effectively remains at the AKP's helm, continuing to lead the party via new prime minister and AKP chair Ahmet Davutoglu, the former foreign minister and architect of Turkey's Middle East policy since 2005. Today's AKP can best be described as a diverse coalition of the right, composed of center-right, conservative, urban lower-middle class, nationalist, Islamist, and conservative Kurdish voters united by Erdogan's personal charisma and political dominance. The AKP is the only party with strong popular support in all Turkish regions.

AKP FOREIGN POLICY. In international politics, true to its Islamist and center-right constituency, the AKP has blended the doctrines of these two movements. Initially, the party pursued strong ties with the West, initiating accession talks with the EU in 2005 and mending fences with Washington after the failure of a 2003 Turkish parliamentary vote to help the United States in the Iraq war. Gradually, however, Islamist foreign policy *weltanschauung* started to inform Turkey's international politics. Similar to Erbakan's MNP, MSP, and RP, the Islamists have long suggested that instead of folding under the West, Turkey should become a standalone Muslim power, drawing strength from its Ottoman roots. In this regard, 2007 was a turning point. Winning its second general election that year, the AKP increased its support to 46.6 percent from 34.3 percent in 2002. This development boosted the party's confidence, and Turkey's foreign policy pivoted away from its traditional Western orientation.

Subsequently, Erbakan's vision started to shape Erdogan's foreign policy. Ankara built good ties with its Muslim neighbors, sometimes at the expense of traditional relations with the United States and Europe. As Turkey turned its attention to the Middle East, the country's EU accession process suffered, and talks came to a halt by 2010–2011. Moreover, Turkey's ties with Israel unraveled as Ankara built intimate relations with Hamas, and Turkish efforts to help mediate nuclear talks between Washington and Tehran backfired in 2010, hurting U.S.-Turkey ties.

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In Syria too, Turkey has tried to assert itself as a Muslim power. Ankara has sought to shape the outcome of the uprising and subsequent war, allowing fighters to cross into Syria to fight the Bashar al-Assad regime nearly unchecked. Some of the fighters traveling to Syria under Ankara's watchful eye have since joined the ranks of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), also known as the Islamic State, which now represents a grave threat to Ankara across Turkey's 786-mile-long border with Iraq and Syria.

At the same time, Ankara has failed to unseat Assad, who is unlikely to forgive Turkey for trying to oust him through various proxies. As a result, Ankara has found its hopes for regional preeminence quashed in Syria. The country also appears to be losing the regional competition for hegemony against an Iranian regime that has provided Assad with a lifeline. Turkey's influence in Syria today is limited to some Sunni rebel groups in the country's north.⁴ Recognizing its shortcomings, Turkey has only recently signaled a change in tactics by beginning to work with Washington on the U.S. program, launched in May 2015, to train moderate rebels.

Turkey has also pivoted toward the Kurds in recognition of the challenges it faces. In Iraq, Ankara has built good ties with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which effectively shares an economic commonwealth with Turkey.⁵ Ankara wants

to repeat this strategy in Syria by turning the Syrian Kurds and their Democratic Union Party (PYD) into a Turkish ally and potential proxy. The PYD is closely allied with the PKK, and if the peace talks between the Turkish government and the PKK proceed, the Syrian Kurds will become aligned with Ankara. Less likely, however, is that the Syrian Kurds would agree to act as a Turkish proxy against Assad. For most of the Syrian war, the PYD, far from being a regime antagonist, has had a cozy nonaggression and support pact with Damascus.⁶

Even with the dual challenges of an unrelenting Assad regime and brutal ISIS presence across its borders in Syria and Iraq, the AKP's foreign policy continues to envision Turkey as a standalone regional power, working with or breaking with the West as necessary. True to its center-right and Islamist antecedents, the AKP will blend the foreign policy doctrines of these two blocs as it sees fit.

CHP. The CHP has strong appeal among urban middle- and upper middle-class voters. Regionally, substantial party support can be found in Thrace and along the Aegean and Mediterranean seacoasts, owing to its popularity among Turks of Balkan-immigrant background; these areas likewise have a dominant tourism sector and comparative openness to the outside world. The CHP also has very strong backing from the Alevis, who profess a distinctly Turkish and liberal understanding of Islam and constitute around 10 to 15 percent of the population. Along with its middle- and upper middle-class appeal, the CHP reflects a coalition of leftists, liberals, secularists (Kemalists), social democrats, educated women, and—as noted—coastal Turks, Alevis, and Balkan immigrants. In the forthcoming elections, the CHP is thus fielding lists with prominent Alevi figures and liberals, as well as numerous female candidates. Women head the CHP

4. Likewise, Iran enjoys predominance in Baghdad, limiting Turkish influence to the Sunni Arabs and Kurds in the northern parts of the country.

5. For figures on booming trade and tourism between Turkey and the KRG, see <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkey-and-the-krg-signs-of-booming-economic-ties-infographic>.

6. In summer 2012, when Assad pulled his forces out of Syria's Kurdish areas to focus on fighting the rebels, the PYD filled the void. Since then, where regime-controlled areas abutted PYD regions, Assad forces and the PYD have helped each other logistically. At times, however, in the nonbinary Syrian theater, Assad and PYD forces have clashed, most recently in Hasaka in January 2015. Late in the next month, regime forces and PYD militias conducted an offensive that led to the capture of Tel Hamis, a town south of Hasaka held by ISIS.

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lists in fourteen of the eighty-five election districts, and, more symbolically, a Turkish Armenian woman, Selina Dogan, heads the CHP list for Istanbul's second district. Yet, ironically in the short term, the CHP's growth could be stifled by perceptions of its leftism, given that the left has failed to emerge as a majority movement in Turkish politics, excepting the few years under Ecevit in the 1970s.

MHP. A nationalist movement with a traditionally strong appeal in conservative central Turkey, the MHP has lately lost ground to the AKP in the region, but has simultaneously made inroads among some ethnic Turkish and Turkmen voters in the Aegean and Mediterranean hinterlands. To grow further, the party must increase its appeal among women as well as urban middle-class voters. In the lists for the June 7 elections, women constitute 18 percent of the AKP and CHP candidates, and 48 percent of the HDP candidates (discussed next), but only 9 percent of the MHP lists. Moreover, the MHP has a scant presence in the Kurdish southeast and will likely fail to gain parliamentary representation in nearly a dozen of its provinces.

HDP. Traditionally Turkey's only "regional" and ethnic party, the HDP has a strong presence in the Kurdish southeast but has lacked support elsewhere in the country. Although the HDP's overarching political goal is Kurdish autonomy, in the 2014 presidential elections, HDP candidate Selahattin Demirtas ran a decidedly liberal campaign, attracting new voters and helping him reach beyond his party's core nationalist Kurdish constituency. Demirtas received 9.7 percent of the vote, versus 6.6 for his party's predecessor, the BDP, in 2011.

However, Kurdish violence in reaction to ISIS's autumn 2014 attack on Kobani, during which

pro-HDP/pro-PKK Kurds fought pro-HUDA-PAR Kurds, has hurt the HDP's liberal appeal in western Turkey. In an effort to boost its liberal brand, the HDP is running a list in western Turkey loaded with liberals, socialists, and women—indeed, the HDP is the only party in which men and women candidates are equally represented. To bolster its claim as the party representing Turkey's ethnic diversity, the HDP has also included a number of Alevis and Armenians, a Syriac, and two Yazidis in its lists.

In southeastern Turkey, the HDP is also fielding nationalist and some Islamist candidates. The goal here is to peel away conservative Kurds who have supported Erdogan but are angry over his reluctance to help the Kurds in Kobani. The comparatively liberal and inclusive list in western Turkey appears to be part of the HDP's strategy to cross the 10 percent threshold for parliamentary participation and become the "Party of Turkey."

Currently, polls show the HDP hovering around that 10 percent. And if the HDP fails to cross it, the AKP will have enough parliamentary seats to amend the country's constitution to create a presidential system. If the HDP does cross the threshold, Erdogan will seek its help to pass his amendment. Either way, the HDP will press for administrative reforms providing increased power to Turkey's eighty-one provinces, which are currently run by governors appointed by Ankara. Such reforms would effectively mean administrative autonomy for the country's dozen Kurdish-majority provinces, a dealmaker for the HDP.

Implications for Washington

The June 7 vote in Turkey has important implications for the United States, especially considering its campaign to train moderate Syrian rebels and to "degrade and destroy" ISIS.

MAJORITARIAN PARTY, SPLIT-SOCIETY SYSTEM. An AKP victory in the June 7 parliamentary elections will mean that by the time it finishes its five-year term, the party will have governed Turkey for eighteen years,

the longest period for a democratically elected party in the country's history. Erdogan's leadership, for its part, will have outlasted that of Ataturk, Turkey's founding president, who led between 1923 and 1938.

More important, a fresh AKP victory will signal the beginning of a dominant-party political system in Turkey, similar to that of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa since 1994, the Kuomintang (KMT) in Taiwan throughout much of the Cold War, and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico from the 1920s to the 1980s. These three parties all came to power following revolutionary developments, garnering strong popular support. Thereafter, they promoted their vision to transform their respective societies, interpreting their persistent popular mandate as cause to rule in a majoritarian fashion. Although they have political differences, the ANC, KMT, and PRI can all be classified as majoritarian dominant parties in postrevolutionary societies.

Likewise, since coming to power in 2002, the AKP has eliminated Kemalist institutions of statecraft, pivoting away from Europe and eliminating the barriers between religion, education, and politics established by Ataturk in the 1920s and 1930s. In December 2014, Turkey's Council of Higher Education, a government-regulated body, issued a policy recommendation suggesting that public school courses on Islam be taught to all students as young as six. Such recommendations reflect the revolutionary instincts of the AKP in the mold of a majoritarian dominant party.

However, the Turkish case differs from other dominant-party systems in one crucial respect. The movements in South Africa, Mexico, and Taiwan all captured at least 60 percent of the vote, and usually much higher, and namely in the third example they did not always entail free and fair elections.⁷ Such overwhelming dominance is not evident in Turkey, where the voting is generally believed to be free and fair. In the past three parliamentary elections, of 2002, 2007, and 2011, the AKP has garnered a respective 34.3 percent, 46.6 percent, and 49.8 percent of the vote. In the brightest

7. In South Africa, the ANC has regularly captured 60 to 70 percent of the vote since 1994, while in Mexico the PRI consistently took between 70 and 98 percent between 1929 and 1982 and in Taiwan the KMT garnered 60 to 90 percent between 1969 and 1989.

Turkey is a key U.S. partner in the Middle East, especially in the context of the U.S. war against ISIS. Accordingly, the current trend in Turkish politics presents Washington with a unique dilemma. With Turkish society split down the middle, significant tensions will emerge along with the emergence of a dominant-party system. Washington should focus on alleviating these tensions to help promote stability in a key ally.

assessment for the AKP, therefore, the Turkish electorate is split between pro- and anti-AKP supporters.

Given its limited electoral dominance as compared to the ANC, KMT, or PRI, Turkey's AKP might better be seen to resemble another set of dominant parties in "split" societies, including Sweden's Social Democratic Party (SAP) and Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). In Sweden, as the dominant party from 1932 to 1973, the SAP received 30 to 50 percent of the general vote, peaking at 53.8 percent in 1940. Similarly, the LDP maintained around 36 to 50 percent of the vote from 1958 to 1993, reaching its apex of 56 percent in 1963. The SAP and the LDP both ruled through consensus building, taking into account the split nature of their societies. By contrast, the AKP, although operating in a similarly split society, tends to eschew consensus for majoritarian assertion of power.

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Helping alleviate these tensions will mean taking the following steps: (1) stressing to the AKP leadership that its frequent efforts to eliminate or "tame" society's pluralistic elements damages not only human rights and democracy but also the AKP's own chances of remaining a positive force in Turkey's development; (2) engaging broader Turkish society and avoiding conflation of Erdogan and the AKP with the will of

the Turkish majority; and (3) avoiding “punishment” of the AKP or Erdogan for various policies, slights, and other deviations from “good ally” behavior. With this last tendency, the United States would risk isolating not just AKP supporters but larger segments of the Turkish populace as well.

TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY. Tactically, Washington must realize that in the context of current threats to Turkey, the country will likely acquiesce to U.S. leadership in the Middle East should Washington demonstrate such initiative. For example, when the United States decided to airdrop weapons to the PYD militants defending Kobani against ISIS in October 2014, Ankara originally objected vehemently to this policy of effectively arming the PKK. However, once President Obama informed President Erdogan that the United States would go forward with this move regardless of Turkish views, Ankara grudgingly gave in. Thus, should Washington launch new initiatives in Syria and the rest of the Middle East with unyielding resolve, Turkey will likely follow, although with consternation.

Regarding a resurgent Russia, even strong U.S. leadership and resolve against Moscow may not suffice to bring Ankara on board. Turkey imports half of its energy needs from Russia and, given Turkey’s status as

a G-20 economy, it needs Russia to grow. At the same time, Turkish elites of various persuasions, including those outside the AKP, have a deeply internalized fear of the Russians, who between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries defeated the Turks in at least seventeen wars, with the Turks winless over the period.

Thus, Turkey will be, at best, a neutral ally to the United States against Russia, fulfilling its minimal treaty obligations while continuing to cultivate close commercial ties with Moscow. At the same time, Ankara will keep lines of communication open with the Kremlin to assist the Crimean Tatars, who constitute around 13 percent of the population in the Russian-occupied peninsula, should they come in harm’s way.

As for Turkey’s EU prospects, the situation looks bleak. The country’s membership process is closely linked to convergence with the EU in areas of foreign policy and liberal democracy. Given the deterioration of human rights and liberties in Turkey since 2007—following the party’s near-majority victory and spotlighted harshly in spring 2013 by the government crackdown against protestors in Istanbul’s Gezi Park—a breakthrough in its EU accession process under the dominant AKP seems highly unlikely.

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