

# Elections in the Middle East

What Do They Mean?



Edited by

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# 1999 ELECTIONS IN TURKEY: NATIONALISTS AND GLOBALIZATION

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## **Introduction: Description of the 1999 Election Results**

Although Ottoman Turkey was introduced rather early on to the practices of constitution (1876), election (1877), and political parties (1908) in the modern sense, and although republican Turkey experienced the multi-party system in 1924 and 1930, the real era of multi-party and election processes started after World War II. This era of democracy was momentarily interrupted during the three military interventions of 1960, 1971, and 1980, but nonetheless continued.

The elections in question were held on national and municipal levels on 18 April 1999 and yielded quite surprising results for everyone.

**Predictions before the Elections.** Predictions made before the elections were centered on the following main points:

- DSP (Democratic Left Party, social democrat, nationalist) would be the first party;
- FP (Virtue Party, Islamist) would follow immediately with some losses compared with the previous elections of 1995, from which it had emerged as the first party;
- The center right—ANAP (Motherland Party) and DYP (True Path Party)—would suffer some losses (though not too many) because the voter would inevitably identify them with widespread corruption;
- CHP (People's Republican Party, center left, Kemalist) would, with some difficulty, overcome the national election threshold (a minimum of 10 per cent countrywide);
- MHP (National Action Party, Panturkist, extreme right) would more or less do the same;
- HADEP (People's Democracy Party, Kurdish nationalist) was a question mark. PKK leader Öcalan had been captured and brought

back to Turkey only two months earlier; the family of those killed by the PKK were attacking the Party's branches; Turkish nationalism was at its zenith; and Kurdish nationalism was in disarray;

- The ratio of undecided voters was very high and participation in the elections was not expected to match the last elections (85.2 per cent).

**Election results.** The statistical results obtained by the main parties were as follows:

- DSP: 6,919,670 votes, 22.1 per cent, 136 MPs;
- MHP: 5,606,583 votes, 20 per cent, 129 MPs;
- FP: 4,805,381 votes, 15.3 per cent, 111 MPs;
- ANAP: 4,122,929 votes, 13.2 per cent, 86 MPs;
- DYP: 3,745,417 votes, 12 per cent, 85 MPs;
- CHP: 2,716,094 votes, 8.7 per cent, no MP;
- HADEP: 1,482,196 votes, 4.7 per cent, no MP.

Most of the predictions therefore proved to be wrong:

- The DSP had become the first party but it was only a fraction ahead of the second party, MHP;
- The FP had lost 1.5 million votes and came only third;<sup>1</sup>
- The center right had lost many votes;<sup>2</sup>
- The CHP had been unable to overcome the 10 per cent national threshold;<sup>3</sup>
- The MHP had not only overcome the national threshold but had surprisingly obtained a percentage close to the DSP, making it the second party.
- HADEP had been unable to overcome the national threshold and therefore would have no voice in parliament, but nonetheless it came

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<sup>1</sup> Because a) It had proven after the previous elections that it was totally unprepared for government; b) represented a sharp conflict model vis-a-vis the Armed Forces, the intellectuals, the grand bourgeoisie; c) lacked coherent leadership; d) tried to unite people under Muslim upper identity although Islam is not a common denominator for ethnic groups in Turkey, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Because it was associated (and rightly so) by widespread corruption; and also because it had been too many times in power without success.

<sup>3</sup> Because it had not been able to redefine its former place (Kemalism of the 1930s) in a globalized world; and also because it had no coherent leadership.

- as the first party in the most important provinces of the southeast, an area mainly populated by ethnic Kurds. It also managed to produce several mayors in the municipal elections of the same area.
- The ratio of participation surpassed that of the 1995 elections (87.1 per cent against 85.2 per cent).

### **Analysis of the Results: The Three Turkeys**

From the transposition of the election results to the map of Turkey we reached an important conclusion.<sup>4</sup> The economic and cultural dividing lines of Turkey had now come to reflect in the political field as well, as in each of the three distinct economic/cultural regions three different parties emerged as the first party with more than 30 per cent of the votes.

- The DSP managed to become the leading party in the 'First Turkey,' centered around Izmir and formed mainly by the Marmara region around the Turkish Straits, the Aegean coast line, and the western Black Sea area (the most developed region of Turkey);
- Yozgat and its surroundings in the central Asian plateau formed the 'Second Turkey,' which was claimed by MHP as the first party (this is a much less developed region; in a way "the remotest part of Turkey from the World");
- HADEP became the first party in the "Third Turkey," mainly in southeast Turkey and with its center in Diyarbakir (the least developed region of Turkey).

Further analysis of the results yielded an even more accentuated division:

The DSP came first in 27 provinces, the MHP in 30 provinces, and HADEP in 11 provinces. In the HADEP-first (more than 30 per cent) provinces, DSP and MHP were at the bottom (less than 10 per cent). For example, in nine provinces out of 13 where DSP obtained less than five per cent, HADEP came first. A similar observation was true for MHP. On the

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<sup>4</sup> The following analysis is mainly taken from Faruk Alpkaya, "Seçim Sonuçları Üzerine Bazı gözlemler ve Öngörüler" (Some Observations and Predictions on Electoral Results), *Birikim*, no. 122 (June 1999), pp.42-46.

other hand, in provinces where DSP or MHP came first (more than 30 per cent), HADEP was at the bottom (less than 10 per cent).

This scheme could not be linked to factors that would normally come to mind: 1) Although these three regions represented three levels of economic development in Turkey (the first region being the most developed, the third the least), statistical results showed that the rationale behind this division was far from being economic; 2) Before the election these three parties had not formulated distinct and different views about socio-economic concepts such as internal debt, social security, privatization, etc; 3) Nor was there enough evidence explaining the votes obtained by DSP and MHP by the presence of Kurdish 'ghettos.'

**Common denominator: nationalism.** If there were to be found a common denominator for these three parties, it was nationalism: Turkish nationalism for DSP and MHP, and Kurdish nationalism for HADEP.

At this point the following question can be asked: Why two parties instead of one for Turkish nationalism? The answer lies with the famous distinction between the 'French type' (territorial) and the 'German type' (blood) nationalisms. The DSP with its emphasis on 'equality between all Turkish citizens' and also on the denial of ethnic differences represented the first type. The MHP, on the other hand, was the direct descendant of Pan-Turkism and of Pan-Touranism, with a very strong emphasis on the denial of the existence of different ethnic groups in Turkey and also on Turkish ethnic origin.

The differences between the demographic structures of their respective strongholds also strongly underlined this analysis:

The 12 provinces where DSP obtained more than 30 per cent were areas where Muslim immigrants from the Balkans and the Caucasus were settled. In the 19th century these immigrants of different ethnic origin (Pomaks, Bosnians, Circassians, Georgians, Abhaz, Albanians, etc.) were driven from their homelands—mainly for being Muslims—and became Turkicised by natural assimilation, only following the well known proverb in Turkish: "The visitor complies with the rules of the landlord."<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, the

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<sup>5</sup> Explained in more scholarly terms, the concept of territory is very closely linked with ethnic identity; immigrants, in contradistinction with the autochthonous

11 provinces where MHP obtained over 30 per cent were populated by autochthonous Turks (settled there since the 11th century); this population was ethnically homogenous (except for one province) and this homogeneity was obtained by driving out those who were different, the Greeks and the Armenians, at the beginning of the 20th Century. "Love it [Turkey] or Leave it" had been the most important slogan of MHP since the advent of Kurdish nationalism in the late 1980s.

**Dialectics of the election: nationalism and globalization.** Now the main question remains to be asked: Since the phenomenon of Turkish nationalism is very old, why did it not cause such an eruption in earlier elections? The answer is twofold: 1) Because then globalization<sup>6</sup> was not so influential; 2) Because under the 1995 conjuncture globalization had worked for RP, the Islamist party predecessor of FP.

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populations, voluntarily leave their own identity and adopt a new one in where they settle, and they even usually become "more royalist than the king". (Compare: Jews (emigrated at end of 15<sup>th</sup> Century) to Greek Orthodox, Armenians, and Kurds of Anatolia).

<sup>6</sup> Globalization is a much-discussed concept and needs further evaluation. It can best be defined as the *expansion of the Western system, carrying with it both its infrastructure (capitalism) and superstructure (rationalism, secularism, human and minority rights, democracy, etc.)*.

Globalization today (1990s) is actually the third. There has been two previous waves, both corresponding to the needs of capitalism then: 1) Globalization of 1490s: Geographical discoveries necessitated by the trade policies of the Mercantilist period that ended up what we call "Colonialism"; and 2) Globalization of 1890s: Western expansion required by the needs of the Industrial Revolution's monopoly stage (cheap flow of raw materials, new markets, new territories to increase the marginal productivity of the capital, new lands for the excess population, etc.); in short, what we call "Imperialism". The first globalization was naturally weak; the second was much stronger and paved the way for the third which is actually its continuation after a break of some 50 years, break mainly due to Soviet Union and its ideology.

This third globalization is created by three successive and complementing developments that took place during the last thirty years: 1) The advent of multinational companies in the 1970s, 2) Revolutionary developments in Communications in the 1980s, and 3) The fall of the Soviet system in the 1990s.

The first development enlarged the marketplace to embrace the whole globe now (hence, "globalization"). The second development made it possible to conquer the minds of people instead of their country (and that made it very difficult to challenge the conquest this time). The third practically gives the West monopolistic control over international developments, political as well as economic.

This transformation of national capitalism into international capitalism (popularly labeled as globalization) had been the main reason behind the sharpening of Turkish nationalism through two channels:

Directly, it created a reaction a) by destroying the already precarious distribution of income;<sup>7</sup> and b) by imposing from outside international values that Turkish internal dynamics are yet unable to produce (minority rights, etc.) or values that a conservative-nationalist population cannot easily tolerate (for example, erotic movies on TV).

Indirectly it strengthened Kurdish nationalism, which, by using terror as principal means, provoked Turkish nationalist behavior.

### **Continuity and Change in the Aftermath:**

#### **Interaction between Nationalists and Globalization**

The left and the right wing nationalists (as one may call the DSP and MHP respectively) won the election by using a discourse against globalization ('national policy,' 'national identity,' and protection of national interests against outside), and against PKK (Kurdish) terror.

Once in power, the DSP did not display much change. On the other hand, MHP changed in some ways:

1) It had managed to obtain incomparably more votes than its members strove to keep by acting like a mass party: The leadership asked its rank-and-file to stop eating garlic in daytime, wearing white socks with a black suit, growing a Mongol-like moustache (the ends downward; a symbol of the MHP), carrying prayer beads or displaying pistols in public, and, secretly of course, to stop throwing out of the window leftist students who mistakenly entered MHP quarters while trying to escape riot police. These were the changes imposed upon MHP as a result of its being a member of the coalition government.

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<sup>7</sup> The destruction caused by globalization had then favored RP because, using a religious jargon, it proposed almost leftist but ambiguous solutions (such as "The Just Order") for lower classes, and also because it was "untried" at the time. But once in power RP proved to do nothing but repeat its religious jargon. On the other hand, as has already been stated, Öcalan was captured and the public opinion was very much excited about a solution to end the Kurdish question. Therefore in 1999 nationalism, not religion, what considered the ideology *par excellence*, if not the solution for, for painful moments.



2) More importantly, the MHP in no way spoke or acted against, and smoothly sided with, the 'rising values' of the well known recipes of globalization traditionally imposed through IMF: devaluation, high interest rates and consumer prices, worker layoffs, heavier indirect taxes, and especially privatization. It did not even protest the selling of public land on the internet, with the sole purpose of paying the interest on the public loans.

Under the nationalist government, Turkey continued its economic policy based on an ever-increasing foreign and domestic public debt. In February 2001 a financial crisis erupted because seven billion dollars left the country in one week, seemingly as a result of friction between the president and the prime minister.<sup>8</sup> Turkey then went in search of 25 billion dollars, i.e., close to one fourth of all the foreign debt accumulated during the 75 years of the Republic.

In some other areas MHP did not change its 'nationalist' behavior:

1) It went on to curse the Armenian Republic and to refuse entry to a rescue team it sent after the August 1999 earthquake disaster, to try to do the same to the Greek rescue team, to declare (in a speech by the minister for public health) that Turkey had "no wounded patients to be treated by the US medical assistance team", etc;

2) It refused to abolish capital punishment in view of the possible execution of Öcalan;

3) More importantly, the MHP displayed very strong opposition to the acceptance by Turkey of human rights requirements stated in the 'Document of Participation in the EU' in accordance with the Copenhagen Criteria. Important items that should have been included in the 'National Program' as a procedural result of the document, such as broadcasting and education in the mother tongue, were categorically rejected by the MHP, which called them "Owl's cries" (the owl being considered an ill omen in Turkey), while the EU was accused of being PKK's mouthpiece.

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<sup>8</sup> The real cause of the crisis was not political, but economic: The wheel of economy was in no way fueled by production. It was based on placing money in banks with high interest rates ("to live on money that makes money"); and on heavy borrowing from abroad. In the mean time, this foreign borrowing was used to buy back the state banks that were privatized previously, after they were "emptied" by their new owners either to give unrecoverable credits to their holding companies or to buy villas on the Bosphorus or for transfer to Swiss banks.

## Conclusion

The 1999 elections in Turkey were strongly influenced by opposition to Kurdish nationalism and to the process of globalization. Once in power, the nationalists on the right quickly and completely adapted themselves to the infrastructural demands of globalization but resolutely resisted its superstructural requirements. The left wing nationalists, on the other hand, stuck to the former only.

As for HADEP, it started to show important signs of desiring to become a mass party.

Nevertheless, as the observation about the Turkish nationalist parties rather concerns a relatively short period of experience, barely two years, I would emphasize that the possibility of the superstructural requirements of globalization one day being accepted by the nationalists should not be completely ruled out.