June 12, 2015

Reflections on Turkey’s Parliamentary Elections of 2015

Muqtedar Khan, University of Delaware

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/muqtedar_khan/64/
Reflections on Turkey’s Parliamentary Elections 2015

Dr. Muqtedar Khan

This article was first published by Turkey agenda June 12, 2015.

If you are an Islamist first (the Turkish version of Islamist1) and then a Turk then the outcome of Turkey’s latest Parliamentary elections should worry you. But if you are a Turkish first and then an Islamist, secularist, etcetera then you should rejoice2.

Democracy Stronger, AKP Weaker

The most important revelation that comes out from this election is that Turkish democracy is in good health and the allegations that the authoritarian predilections of President Erdogan may have undermined it have been negated. The significant loss of seats and percentage of vote by the incumbent party is in itself a testimony to the freeness of the elections. The accusations of political corruption on a grand scale will be difficult to substantiate. It is clear that AKP did not use its position of power to subvert the elections to gain the critical 330 seats necessary to realize President Erdogan’s vision for a new Turkey. This result speaks well of Turkey’s democracy and of AKP’s political integrity.
The second most obvious conclusion one can draw from the current election outcome is that the only real change has been the shift away from AKP of about 8-9% of the vote. While MHP has gained seats (27), its share of votes has increased by only 3% and CHP remains where it was. HDP is the biggest winner finally gaining a pro-Kurdish party direct representation in the parliament. It is not clear, at least to me, whether the votes HDP got is pro-Kurdish or anti-AKP/Erdogan.

The chart below summarizes party position and percentage of vote garnered by parties in the past four elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>AKP</th>
<th>CHP</th>
<th>MHP</th>
<th>HDP</th>
<th>Independents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>258 (41%)</td>
<td>132 (25%)</td>
<td>80 (16%)</td>
<td>80 (13%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>327 (50%)</td>
<td>135 (26%)</td>
<td>53 (13%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>341 (47%)</td>
<td>112 (21%)</td>
<td>71 (14%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>363 (34%)</td>
<td>178 (19%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Questions for AKP**

By my estimate, looking at how many votes AKP got in 2011 and now, nearly 3 million AKP voters defected. It is possible that two million of them voted for MHP. Who did the rest vote for? This election does pose several serious questions to AKP. This was the first time that Prime Minister Ahmed Davutoğlu was leading his party in the elections, and even though they won the most votes and seats, they failed to win a majority since 2002. Does this raise, in the mind of AKP supporters and party functionaries questions about his ability to lead AKP?³

To be frank, even though Ahmed Davutoğlu was the leader, the presence of President Erdogan in the election season was as usual domineering and he must bear primary responsibility or at least share it with Davutoğlu for AKP’s less than stellar performance.

The stakes for AKP were unusually high in this election. Not only where they campaigning on their past record of good governance, but they were also advancing a new vision of Turkish identity, Turkish foreign policy and Turkish governmental structure. They were not seeking to win just a majority, they wanted 330 seats in the parliament so that they could rewrite the constitution and shift the country to a Presidential form of democracy. Clearly the majority of the voters are not enthused by this vision or the prospect of the return of President Erdogan to the head of the government with more powers than he ever wielded before.

Does this mean that the new vision is so unappealing that it overrides the record of good governance?

Turks have spoken loudly and so have more than 15% of AKP supporters. Until this election AKP supporters use to brag that they got progressively greater share of the vote with each election – 34% in 2002, 47% in 2007 and nearly 50% in 2011. But now suddenly the picture is not that positive as it appears that AKP has lost seats in every election 363 in 2002, 341 in 2007, 327 in 2011 and 258 in 2015.

Will AKP listen to them or will the usual “foreign conspiracies” and “the evil West” rhetoric preclude serious self-critical thinking?

We can expect the next elections to be ahead of schedule, perhaps even as early as 2017. But I
am sure AKP’s think tank knows that a snap election after a less than successful coalition government could hurt all parties in power equally and may not necessarily benefit AKP.

**Coalition Politics is not Good**

This election also returns Turkey to coalition politics. From 1999-2002 Turkey experienced the challenges that coalition politics impose on democracies that use the Westminster model -- where the Prime Minister is the executive head, the legislative head and the leader of the biggest party in the Parliament. India until recently and the current Israel are good examples of the potential policy incoherence that coalition politics can generate. Turkey’s past experience with coalition politics resulted in a drastic weakness in economy.

If there are significant ideological and vision differences between coalition partners, making effective, consistent and long-term policies are impossible in coalition scenarios. This was apparent to the Turkish voters in 2002, who essentially voted out everyone who was in Parliament and gave birth to the era of AKP. Even though AKP won only 34% of the vote they won 363 seats in the Parliament, essentially cashing-in on disgust with coalition-politics in Turkey at that time.

It is important that Turkish politicians exercise prudence at this critical moment in Turkey’s history. The regional environment is fraught with danger and insecurity. The chaos in the Middle East is at Turkey’s doorstep. Turkey’s relations with the West too are not at its best. This is not a good time to allow internal squabbles to become so serious that they fragment the polity and derail the economic gains made in the past decade.

This is not the time for policy entrepreneurs to advance narrow interests, rather this is the time for all parties to rise above their differences and consolidate the gains made by Turkish democracy.

Dr. Muqtedar Khan is Associate Professor at the University of Delaware. His website is [www.ijtihad.org](http://www.ijtihad.org).

**END NOTES**

1 Khan, MA Muqtedar, ed. *Debating Moderate Islam: The Geopolitics of Islam and the*


