Divide and Conquer:
Voting Patterns and Erdoğan’s Campaign Strategy
Ahead of Turkey’s Snap Election

For more than two months after the June 7 election, Turkey remained in a sort of political deadlock. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan might have lost its outright majority in parliament, but it was still the largest party and charged with trying to form a coalition government. Each of the three other parties in parliament, however, campaigned explicitly against the AKP’s central objective: changing the constitution to create a strong presidential, rather than parliamentary, system. Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that the coalition formation process was unusually drawn out and failed to yield any workable government.¹

Now that the August 23 deadline to form a coalition has passed, Turkey has no choice but to head to the polls again. Will another round of voting lead to a significantly different result? Is there any path back to power for Erdoğan and the AKP? Although exit polls after the June 2015 vote suggest that voters would stick by their original choices in an early election, a closer examination of the vote outcome suggests there is a path back to power for Erdoğan and the AKP—a potentially dangerous path but one that they seem to have discovered and are fully committed to following.
Three distinct dynamics in Turkey’s 2015 general election outcome:

1. The AKP’s vote share shrank substantially in heavily Kurdish areas in the southeast and urban provinces with sizable Kurdish populations; these votes were transferred almost unanimously to the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP). This trend can be largely attributed to the AKP’s perceived disingenuous commitment to Kurdish reconciliation.

2. Nationalist conservative voters also abandoned the AKP, mainly in the Anatolian and Black Sea region, voting for the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) instead. That stemmed, at least partly, from concern that the AKP made too many concessions in the peace process with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

3. The major opposition party, the Republican Peoples’ Party (CHP), also lost some votes in the 2015 polls, with voters switching to the HDP in left-leaning coastal provinces. Some CHP “tactical voters” likely supported the HDP in an effort to weaken the AKP’s parliamentary majority, as seats gained by unrepresented parties are subsequently allocated to larger parties.

Constituency breakdown suggests the AKP can win back votes and a path back to power:

1. Former-AKP Kurdish voters will be hard to win back, as the HDP—the first Kurdish party to officially run as a party—now enjoys broad support in Turkey’s Kurdish-majority areas, including major cities. While polls suggest the HDP will lose some support, mostly from CHP tactical voters or liberal Turks who view it as being too close to the PKK, the HDP is unlikely to fall below the 10 percent threshold. Though Turkey’s Kurds are not monolithic — comprised of, among other groups, religious Kurds who previously voted AKP and might not share the PKK’s objectives, and Kurds sympathetic to the PKK who view HDP as being too conciliatory to the Turkish government — left with few other options, all are likely to rally around the HDP. As such, Turkey’s snap election could see even higher Kurdish turnout and the party could lose only a small margin of seats. With the HDP likely to stay above the threshold, this will reduce the amount of seats allocated to the AKP.

2. The CHP and AKP—staunchly opposing parties—had no overlapping constituency and therefore lost very few votes to each other. While an AKP-CHP coalition did not materialize, ostensibly pursuing it was either an AKP delaying tactic or an attempt to bolster the CHP’s relevance in order to dissuade future tactical voting for the HDP and thereby weaken it.

3. The AKP’s most viable and pragmatic option is to pursue, unrepentantly, nationalist voters who switched to the MHP ahead of the snap election.

What has transpired since the election suggests that Erdoğan, determined to maintain power, is adopting precisely this strategy, gambling that a divisive, crisis-driven nationalist strategy will win back enough votes from the MHP in the snap election:

- Although negotiations have patently failed, the AKP has maintained the façade of coalition-building, particularly with its staunch rival, the CHP. This move could be seen as a delaying tactic in order to maintain its image of being committed to the post-election process and perhaps to burnish the reputation of the CHP in an effort to reduce the number of tactical CHP voters selecting the HDP, and push the party below the 10 percent threshold.
Erdoğan and the AKP have begun to pursue nationalist voters who switched to the MHP. In addition to joining the U.S.-led coalition against the extremist group ISIS, Turkey’s AKP has begun airstrikes against the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK)—with whom it had been conducting peace talks for the last two years—and launched a smear campaign against the HDP linking it to the PKK. As MHP voters are strongly opposed to a Kurdish peace process, the resulting sense of crisis and danger to the Turkish state appeals to nationalist voters, allowing Erdoğan to cast himself as the strong leader the country needs at this critical moment.

Our analysis of voting patterns in Turkey’s 2015 general election, coupled with recent polling, suggests that this strategy could very well prove successful: the AKP appears poised to regain its parliamentary majority, albeit by a very small margin.

Table 1. Predicted 2015 Snap Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>2015 Election Vote Share</th>
<th>Predicted Snap Election Vote Gain/Loss</th>
<th>2015 Election Seat Share</th>
<th>Predicted Snap Election Seat Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>40.87%</td>
<td>+4-5%</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>~283-289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>24.95%</td>
<td>+1-2%</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>~137-143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHP</td>
<td>16.29%</td>
<td>-3-4%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>~60-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDP</td>
<td>13.12%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>~74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Seats to Secure Parliamentary Majority = 276

**Party Platforms and Voter Base**

**The Justice and Development Party (AKP)**

The AKP has enjoyed widespread support and a loyal voter base since coming to power in 2002. As a right-wing Islamist party, the AKP’s constituency comes largely from devout Muslims located in rural Anatolia. Advocating for an improved economy and a continued Kurdish peace process, the party also gained support from Turkey’s business community, the pragmatic middle class, and some Kurdish voters. Recently, however, Erdoğan and the AKP have aimed to establish a stronger presidency, which critics view as a way of cementing their grip on power.
The Republican Peoples’ Party (CHP)

The CHP is the oldest political party in the country and represents the left-wing social democrats and Kemalist Turks—those who support the secular and nationalist policies of Mustafa Kemal, the founder of modern Turkey. The party’s regional strongholds are concentrated in the left-leaning western and coastal provinces. The CHP’s platform stands in stark contrast to that of the Islamist AKP and espouses strengthening the parliamentary system and imposing limits on the powers of the presidency.

The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)

The MHP is considered to be the most right-wing, radical party in Turkey, advocating for highly nationalistic policies with deference to Turkey’s Muslim identity. Along with a steady commitment to traditional Turkish values and improving the economy, the MHP is particularly focused on resuming military operations against the designated terrorist organization, the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), in the country’s southeast. Much of the party’s voter base is located in the southernmost coastal regions of Anatolia, which tend to be conservative.

The Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP)

The HDP stems from a line of Kurdish interest parties including the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Unsurprisingly, the HDP drew much of its support from the heavily Kurdish regions in the southeast of Turkey in 2015. Unlike its predecessors, however, the HDP established itself as a party of national significance, appealing not only to Kurds but also to liberals, religious minorities, and women. The party’s primary goals are: continuing the Kurdish peace process, advancing women’s and minority rights, restructuring as an egalitarian economy, and promoting secularism.

2011 vs. 2015 Election Results

Compared with Turkey’s 2011 parliamentary election, 2015 yielded significant gains for the most ideologically extreme parties: the HDP and the MHP. Although Turkey’s four parties are quite ideologically disparate, identifying which regions and constituencies lost the largest amount of AKP votes informs how the post-election process will evolve and where Erdoğan and the AKP will attempt to align themselves ahead of the snap election.

Table 2. Turkey’s Parliamentary Elections: 2011 and 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>49.83%</td>
<td>40.87%</td>
<td>-8.96%</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>25.98%</td>
<td>24.95%</td>
<td>-1.03%</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>MHP</td>
<td>13.01%</td>
<td>16.29%</td>
<td>+3.28%</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>+27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDP/</td>
<td>~6.6%</td>
<td>13.12%</td>
<td>~+6.52%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>+45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Number of Seats to Secure Parliamentary Majority = 276)
Leaving the AKP: Quantifying Party Losses

While still earning the most votes out of any party, the AKP was the biggest loser in the 2015 election, seeing lower support in every Turkish province—the equivalent of 85 voting districts—compared to 2011. The AKP’s biggest losses were experienced across most of the country, including central Anatolia and the Black Sea region, major cities, and the Kurdish southeast, where voters left the party in droves. The smallest losses came from places where the AKP had little clout to begin with or, conversely, enjoyed deep-rooted support due to effective grassroots efforts.

Table 3. Summary of AKP Losses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNCTIONAL REGIONS</th>
<th>REGISTERED VOTER POPULATION (%)</th>
<th>SHARE OF NATIONAL AKP LOSS (%) i</th>
<th>AKP SEAT SHARE LOSS (%) ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outlier Provinces</td>
<td>10.76</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Anatolia and the Black Sea Region</td>
<td>22.89</td>
<td>27.75</td>
<td>28.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Western and Southern Coasts</td>
<td>13.63</td>
<td>11.09</td>
<td>10.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Provinces</td>
<td>41.77</td>
<td>37.95</td>
<td>24.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish Majority Provinces</td>
<td>10.95</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>34.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.95</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Does not total to 100 due to rounding

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i To calculate the share of the AKP’s overall vote gain or loss by functional region, we divided the number of votes for the AKP by total votes in the region for 2015. We subtracted this number from the same calculation for 2011 and multiplied by 100. This percentage was then divided by the total percentage of the AKP loss and multiplied by 100 to determine the share of the AKP vote loss for that region compared with the party’s national loss.

ii To calculate the AKP’s change in seats by functional region, we divided the AKP’s total number of seats in the region by total available seats in the region for 2015. We subtracted this number from the same calculation for 2011 and multiplied by 100. This percentage was then divided by the total percentage of the AKP seat loss and multiplied by 100.
• **Outlier Provinces:** AKP, CHP, and BDP/HDP strongholds that did not see a significant transfer of votes (less than 5 percent).

These outlier provinces were analyzed separately in order not to skew the data.

• **Anatolia and the Black Sea Region:** Rural, conservative provinces in the Anatolian countryside and Black Sea region.

• **The Western and Southern Coasts:** Left-leaning coastal provinces in the west and south of the country, and overall CHP strongholds.

• **Urban Provinces:** Turkey’s largest cities with a mixed Turkish-Kurdish population.

• **Kurdish Majority Provinces:** Largely Kurdish or significant Kurdish minority provinces in the country’s southeast.

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We analyzed party vote shares, broken down by functional regions, and how they shifted from Turkey’s 2011 parliamentary election to the 2015 election. The AKP, CHP, and MPH all ran as parties in 2011 and 2015. For the HDP, however, 2015 was the first time it ran as a party. In this case, we used the sum of vote shares for the BDP—a Kurdish-led sister party of the HDP—whose members ran as independents in the 2011 election.

To identify which regions and demographics saw a significant transfer of votes from one party to another and where, specifically, the AKP lost votes, we conducted graphical comparisons on the change in vote share, comparing all four parties based on functional region. Functional regions were divided into four categories in order not to skew the data: the first consists of outlier provinces that saw less than 5 percent of AKP vote loss. These outlier provinces are comprised of the AKP, CHP, and BDP/HDP strongholds. The other three groupings consist of demographically similar provinces located in Anatolia and the Black Sea region, the western and southern coasts, urban provinces, and Kurdish-majority provinces.

To determine the likelihood that voters switched support from one party to another, for each functional region, we graphed regression lines measuring all four parties against each other. For the purposes of analysis, graphs that bared weak or insignificant correlations were not included in this brief.
These 35 provinces are overwhelmingly rural and sparsely populated. Though geographically varied, they have long supported Islamist candidates and are more or less homogenously Turkish. Considered to be fairly flexible, Turkish conservatives tend to prioritize economic issues over social ones. Drawing from similar constituencies, the MHP’s gains, which catapulted the party to an overall 16 percent vote share, drew from disaffected AKP voters. This region, which makes up 42 percent of the country’s voting districts, accounted for about 28 percent of the AKP’s total vote reduction and roughly 29 percent of lost seats, as shown in Table 3. This hurt the AKP significantly.

**Change in AKP Vote Share vs. Change in MHP Vote Share in Rural Anatolia and the Black Sea Region**

In rural Anatolia and the Black Sea region, the graphical comparison showed a fairly strong negative correlation, meaning it is likely that the AKP losses translated into the MHP’s gains here (see Appendix A1). According to our calculations, almost 50 percent of the MHP’s total vote gain came from these provinces. This trend is not surprising, as the AKP and the MHP draw from a similar conservative, right-wing constituency.
The Western and Southern Coasts:

Composed of left-wing voters who have typically supported the CHP, these provinces drew lower-than-average support for the AKP in 2011 and continued this trend in 2015. Comprising just 11 percent of the AKP’s vote share in 2011, the AKP’s overall numbers were less affected by voter dissatisfaction in these coastal provinces and accounted for only 10 percent of lost seats in 2015, according to Table 3. Despite this, the region still saw a transfer of votes from the AKP to the MHP, particularly in the southern Anatolian provinces, which is indicative of widespread disaffection with the AKP in this year’s election, likely due to the AKP’s poor economic record and contentious peace talks with the PKK.

Change in AKP Vote Share vs. Change in MHP Vote Share in the Western and Southern Coasts

Even in the predominantly CHP-controlled coastal provinces, conservative voters exist, albeit in small numbers. True to national trends, the graphical comparison showed a negative correlation between the loss in AKP votes and gains in MHP votes, meaning that, more than likely, the loss in AKP votes in the region translated into MHP gains (see Appendix A2).

Figure 2. AKP and MHP Vote Share by Year

Figure 2 shows an overall upswing in vote share for both the MHP and the AKP since 2002. However, as the previous graphs suggest, the AKP saw a substantial loss in 2015 while the MHP continued to make steady gains. This further supports the conclusion that disaffected conservatives switched to the MHP and accounted for much of the AKP’s losses in the 2015 election.
**Transfer of Votes from the AKP to the HDP**

**Kurdish Majority Provinces:**

Overall, provinces where the AKP lost more than 15 percent of the vote came from southern and eastern Turkey and contain Kurdish majorities or sizable Kurdish minorities. While Turkey’s heavily Kurdish areas are known to have backed BDP candidates in 2011, the AKP previously enjoyed moderate support in the region due to its stated commitment to the Kurdish peace process. Losing votes in these provinces, however, hurt the AKP’s poll outcomes substantially. Though representing only 11 percent of the country’s voters, Table 3 shows they made up about 34 percent of lost seats for the AKP.

**Change in AKP Vote Share vs. Change in BDP/HDP Vote Share in Kurdish Majority Provinces**

The HDP, exceeding expectations and surpassing the 10 percent threshold for parliamentary representation, gained support from disaffected AKP voters and previously unaffiliated liberals. The graphical comparison shows a very strong negative correlation in terms of loss of AKP votes and gains for the BDP/HDP (see Appendix A3). Grassroots campaigning, a broad-reaching party platform, and running as a cohesive party for the first time likely accounted for the roughly 7 percent spike in BDP/HDP support compared with 2011.

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* Provinces highlighted in light yellow denote areas that did not see a significant transfer of votes as they were already BDP/HDP strongholds and were not factored into the analysis in this section.
Urban Provinces:

Fast-growing and more politically diverse than the rest of the country, these provinces constitute the urban cores and suburban peripheries of Turkey’s four largest cities: Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and Bursa. These losses hurt the AKP due to the sheer numbers of voters who defected to the HDP. Making up 42 percent of the country’s votes, urban centers contributed to 38 percent of the AKP seats lost in 2015, according to Table 3.

Change in AKP Vote Share vs. Change in BDP/HDP Vote Share in Urban Provinces

While the correlation is not as strong compared with the Kurdish southeast, the trend showed that urban provinces also experienced a shift in support from the AKP to the HDP (see Appendix A4). Istanbul, Ankara, and other cities with sizable Kurdish populations contributed to HDP gains as well as to significant AKP losses.
Transfer of Votes from the CHP to the HDP

The AKP was not the only party to lose votes in the 2015 election. Secondary-party competition also occurred in certain regions, most significantly between the CHP and the HDP, in which the HDP picked up lost CHP votes.

The Western and Southern Coasts:

Change in CHP Vote Share vs. Change in BDP/HDP Vote Share in the Western and Southern Coasts

In the graphical comparison, the modest correlation between the CHP vote loss and the BDP/HDP vote gain in the CHP-dominated western and southern coasts suggests that the CHP vote loss translated into some HDP gains (see Appendix A5), especially because there was no significant transfer of votes from the CHP to the AKP or from the CHP to the MHP. This trend supports the “tactical voter” theory, which posits that the CHP voters in these left-leaning provinces strategically switched to the similarly liberal HDP to boost them past the 10 percent threshold in an effort to weaken the AKP’s majority.
AKP Voter Retention

Outlier Provinces:

The AKP was successful at voter retention in these 11 provinces because they were either AKP strongholds or enjoyed little support to begin with. Combined, these provinces accounted for roughly 5 percent of the AKP’s losses nationally and resulted in no lost parliamentary seats. Ultimately, there was no significant transfer of votes from any party in this particular group of provinces and, therefore, little room for analysis in comparison to the other functional regions.

Analyzing HDP vs. BDP Success

Before breaking down the HDP vote, it is important to note that barriers to analysis exist when analyzing the HDP’s performance in 2015 relative to the performance of independent BDP candidates in 2011. Official election data, therefore, does not delineate whether or not votes cast for independent candidates were for Kurdish representatives or others, preventing a clear-cut analysis. Further, demographic data on Kurdish populations is not released by the Turkish government. To accommodate for this, all votes cast for independent candidates in 2011 have been consolidated in a manner similar to that of other analyses.7

Coupled with the fact that it was the first pro-Kurdish group to run as a party, the HDP’s election success is largely attributed to courting a broad coalition of liberal and urban voters. By emphasizing a platform of inclusion and human rights, the HDP expanded from an ethnic-based party to a national party, receiving support from feminists, LGBT activists, secular youth, Istanbul elites, ecologically oriented voters, and Armenian religious minorities who had previously lacked a party representing their interests. Additionally, some of the party’s gains came from young, first-time voters, many of whom became politically active during the 2013 anti-government
demonstrations at Gezi Park. The HDP received the second-largest share of voters under the age of 25 after the AKP, 13 percent of which came from first-time voters.8

Turkey’s cities most accounted for the significant majority of Turkish HDP voters, as urban centers tend to contain more liberal populations. In addition to these Turkish voters, Kurdish ethnic enclaves contributed to the HDP’s above-median performance in Istanbul, Izmir, and Adana. Both demographics may have been convinced to vote for the HDP after its 2014 presidential candidate, Selahattin Demirtaş, came in third, demonstrating the HDP’s viability as a party.

**Figure 3.** Change in the BDP to HDP Regional Vote Share Distribution, 2011–2015

Figure 3 shows how vote shares between BDP-affiliated independents and the HDP changed from 2011 to 2015. The HDP not only had more votes cast overall compared with the BDP, but also expanded support in major cities, which contain sizable populations and seat shares in parliament. These factors likely boosted the HDP’s success in 2015.

**Implications for Post-Election Strategy**

The AKP’s prospects might have looked dim the day after the June election. In losing almost 20 percent of its vote share from 2011, it was denied a fourth-consecutive single-party government. And the prospects for somehow reversing the situation seemed bleak. With each of the three other parties that made it into parliament running on a platform that specifically and vigorously rejected one of the AKP’s central objectives—changing the constitution to create a super-presidential system—the chances of a coalition government that would allow the AKP to continue advancing its agenda seemed minimal. Similarly, with post-election polling showing that voters were determined to stick by their original preferences in the case of a snap election, it did not seem that pushing for another vote would yield a better result for the AKP. Yet, a closer examination of the result suggests there is a path back to power for Erdoğan and the AKP.

Turkey’s June 2015 general election result was driven by two dynamics. First, and most importantly, the abandonment of the AKP by two
different groups of voters to two different parties largely over the same issue. While select provinces remained resolute in their support for the AKP, the party’s most damaging losses came from Kurdish voters leaving in droves in the southeast and urban provinces as well as nationalist voters departing in the Anatolian and Black Sea region. The MHP and the HDP experienced sizable gains, receiving support from disaffected nationalist and Kurdish AKP voters, respectively. Both groups of voters were concerned with the Kurdish peace process, but for different reasons.

Although the MHP, like every other party, campaigned on its opposition to Erdoğan and his plans for a presidential system, this was not the central concern of those who defected to the party. Those who went with the MHP saw Erdoğan and the AKP as having engaged in dangerous negotiations with terrorists — negotiations that could threaten the sovereignty and identity of Turkey. These voters came from parts of Turkey that had historically supported the MHP but began shifting toward the AKP once it appeared on the political scene in 2002, approving of its push for a bigger space for religion in the public sphere and its strong economic performance. With many of those conservative goals achieved and the economy stuttering, the original reasons these voters had for voting AKP vanished and they returned to their nationalist roots, punishing the AKP for its dalliance with the Kurds. This single-issue orientation made this bloc of voters — more than 3 percent of the national vote — fungible and potentially still up for grabs.

For Kurdish voters, on the other hand, the AKP’s sin was not taking the peace process far enough. Moreover, with a Kurdish party not only contesting the elections as a party but also appearing to have very good chances of surpassing the electoral threshold, there seemed to be no good reason to vote for the AKP. Even if the AKP was serious about making peace with the PKK, it would have to work with the HDP to make the political changes required to bring the conflict to an end. So, in the best case, migrating votes from the AKP to the HDP would not affect the outcome of the negotiations. Voting HDP was not only a chance at a historic accomplishment — putting a Kurdish party in parliament — but also a chance to exert political pressure on the AKP to take the peace process seriously.

This would seemingly make Kurdish voters a potential swing electorate that, like the MHP bloc, could go back to the AKP under the right circumstances. The way the election played out, however, all but precludes that from happening. First, Erdoğan not only ran a largely nationalist campaign — proclaiming, for example, that Turkey had no “Kurdish problem” — which further convinced Kurds the peace opening was only a political ploy, but he appeared to take personal umbrage at the performance of the HDP. Had the HDP not crossed the threshold and entered parliament, it is likely the AKP would have retained its majority. Erdoğan then focused his ire on the HDP and its leader, Selahattin Demirtaş, making a possible coalition or courtship of HDP voters more difficult.

Further rendering an AKP-HDP partnership unlikely was the HDP’s own electoral strategy. Demirtaş called for civil and political rights not just for Kurds but also for all those underrepresented in the Turkish political system. Regardless of whether this was a pragmatic decision by the party to attract a wider electorate in an effort to surpass the threshold or a principled stand, the logic of this position drove the HDP to an inexorable conclusion: achieving greater liberties for their electorate at the cost of supporting Erdoğan’s quest for greater control over the rest of society was no longer a coherent or defensible position. When Demirtaş declared that he could not agree to Erdoğan’s desired presidential system, he further alienated Erdoğan and locked the HDP into perhaps the most inflexible position of the three opposition parties.

The second, though much less prominent, dynamic in the election was that the CHP lost roughly 1 percent of its vote share due to tactical voters who strategically switched to the HDP in order to push it over the 10 percent electoral threshold and weaken the AKP’s majority. These voters are the most fungible of all the swing blocs — their votes were purely pragmatic. And while they never did and
never would support the AKP, rendering their votes insignificant in the next election would benefit the AKP, as seats won for parties without parliamentary representation are reallocated to larger parties. Because tactical CHP voters indirectly impacted the AKP’s seat allocation in parliament by pushing the HDP’s final tally so high, getting them to return to the CHP would bring the HDP’s vote share much closer to the threshold.

These two dynamics suggest that, whatever the AKP’s previous intentions toward the Kurds might have been, the HDP proved to be the biggest, and most immovable, obstacle to regaining power. Erdoğan might have once schemed that a tactical alliance with the Kurds would give him the sweeping executive powers he desired; now the only path to that dream leads squarely away from them. Based on a close read of the June election results, the AKP’s best strategy would be to embrace the nationalist cause to court swing voters that defected to the MHP, while seeking to weaken the HDP by driving tactical voters back to the CHP. Such a divisive strategy would not necessarily be new for the AKP, which has long adopted polarizing rhetoric that has riven the country, but it would expose it to a greater threat of instability and violence than any tack the party has taken thus far.

**Possible Outcomes of the Early Election**

The AKP appears to have decided to adopt a divide-and-conquer policy in a drastic attempt to regain its parliamentary majority in early elections. Given the deteriorating security situation along Turkey’s borders, bolstering nationalist rhetoric and undermining the HDP and the Kurds seems to have become the AKP’s path to a second-round electoral victory. By capitalizing on conservatives’ animosity toward the Kurdish issue and the ease of drawing ties between the HDP and the PKK, Erdoğan and the AKP are attempting to court MHP voters after losing a sizable vote share to that party.

Erdoğan hopes that a successful smear campaign against the HDP will also stem its political influence and push the party below the 10 percent threshold. Though certainly controversial, these hard-line stances and accusations of terrorism do appear to have weakened the HDP’s support.

According to an August 5 survey conducted by Turkish polling company SONAR, the AKP is poised to capture 43 percent of the vote in a snap election, regaining a parliamentary majority, while the HDP is expected to retain only about 10 percent of the vote, barely enough to hold seats. Our analysis of Turkey’s 2015 general election outcomes corroborates these preliminary findings and suggests that the AKP’s strategy may well be successful due to two distinct trends that inform how early election results will break down:

1. Nationalist conservative voters abandoned the AKP, mainly in the Anatolian and Black Sea region, instead voting for the MHP, which likely accounted for the party’s 27-seat increase. This stemmed, at least partly, from concern that the AKP made too many concessions in the PKK peace process. In light of Erdoğan’s strategic crackdown on the PKK and campaign against the HDP, the AKP could win back a sizable share of the MHP’s votes. Further, recent polls suggest that a majority of voters would prefer a single-party government to a coalition, which may convince pragmatic conservatives to switch back to the AKP.

2. The AKP’s vote share shrank considerably in the Kurdish southeast and urban centers with large Kurdish populations, where votes transferred almost unanimously to the HDP. The CHP also lost votes to the HDP in left-leaning coastal provinces, likely due to tactical voters. In the snap election, however, we could see a small uptick in CHP support after their positive role in trying to form a coalition and regaining tactical voters who may now see the HDP as being too close to the PKK. While the HDP could lose
some tactical voters, liberals, or first-timers—about 1 percent of its vote share—to the CHP, it is poised to stay above the 10 percent threshold due to strong Kurdish support.

Given these national trends, the table below highlights projected outcomes of the snap election. Based on our predictions, the AKP would regain its parliamentary majority, though with much less momentum:

Table 4. Predicted 2015 Snap Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>AKP</td>
<td>40.87%</td>
<td>+4-5%</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>~283-289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>24.95%</td>
<td>+1-2%</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>~137-143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHP</td>
<td>16.29%</td>
<td>-3-4%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>~60-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDP</td>
<td>13.12%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>~74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Seats to Secure Parliamentary Majority = 276
Endnotes


5 “Turkey’s President Erdoğan Tries to Politically Disarm Kurds,” Bipartisan Policy Center, August 6, 2015. Available at: http://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/turkeys-president-Erdogan-tries-to-politically-disarm-kurds/.


Appendix

A1 Change in AKP Vote Share vs. Change in MHP Vote Share in Rural Anatolia and the Black Sea Region

A2 Change in AKP Vote Share vs. Change in MHP Vote Share in the Western and Southern Coasts

A3 Change in AKP Vote Share vs. Change in BDP/HDP Vote Share in Kurdish Majority Provinces
A4 Change in AKP Vote Share vs. Change in BDP/HDP Vote Share in Urban Provinces

![Graph showing change in AKP vote share vs. change in BDP/HDP vote share in Urban Provinces. The graph includes a scatter plot with a trend line, R^2 = 0.078, and P = 0.8096.]

A5 Change in CHP Vote Share vs. Change in BDP/HDP Vote Share in the Western and Southern Coasts

![Graph showing change in CHP vote share vs. change in BDP/HDP vote share in the Western and Southern Coasts. The graph includes a scatter plot with a trend line, R^2 = 0.3865, and P = 0.0348.]

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