



National Security Program

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Shadows and Doubts

The Turkish Local Elections of March 30, 2014

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BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER



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Executive Summary

The Turkish local elections on March 30, 2014, were the most controversial in recent history, triggering an unprecedented number of accusations of irregularities and vote-rigging. For the first time, there were violent clashes between the police and demonstrators as supporters of opposition parties took to the streets to protest the results.

The overall victor in the elections is not in doubt. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won 45.54 percent of the popular vote in metropolitan areas, which includes more than 75 percent of the Turkish population, and 45.43 percent in the elections for provincial assemblies in the rest of the country. The controversies—and the doubts—are in the details, particularly in districts that were expected to be close contests between the AKP and candidates from the main opposition parties, the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP).

In some districts—most strikingly in the election for metropolitan municipal mayor in Ankara—ballot-box tallies missing the legally required stamps and signatures were included in the final calculations of the vote. Perhaps more disturbing were the statistical anomalies, such as abnormally high clusters of invalid votes in districts that had been expected to be close contests and that were eventually won by AKP candidates. The same phenomenon was not repeated in districts that were strongholds of the AKP or one of the opposition parties and where the result was regarded as a foregone conclusion.

Such anomalies have inevitably fueled suspicions of the organized manipulation of results in what were regarded as marginal districts. While the hope is that there is an alternative explanation, the failure of electoral authorities to conduct an investigation has inevitably reinforced doubts about the validity of some of the results.

The March 2014 local elections took place in the shadow of serious concerns about Erdoğan's increasing authoritarianism. As a result, the unresolved questions about the local elections are likely to intensify the doubts about the possible result of the presidential elections in August 2014. Erdoğan has strongly suggested that he will run as a candidate and, if successful, attempt to introduce a presidential or semi-presidential system in which even more political power is concentrated in his own hands.

It is important for Turkey's stability, for the strength of its democracy, for its standing in the region, and for its continued good relations with the United States that the upcoming presidential, and later parliamentary, elections be free from the doubts that plague the just-concluded local contests. It was the fear that their voices are not being heard that brought people to Turkey's streets during last year's Gezi Park protests. If they become convinced that their votes will also not be counted, their incentive to remain within the political

process will diminish. Moreover, the August election will be the first of its type in Turkey—a direct popular election of the president—and the rules governing it appear far from clear.

For all of these reasons, we strongly recommend that the Turkish government allow international monitors to observe the presidential election—just as they have all of the recent elections for national offices. This move would help dispel any doubts remaining after the March vote, bolster Turks’ confidence in the electoral system, and make clear the AKP’s commitment to democracy.

Democracy, Elections, and the AKP

In 1993, one year before he first came to national prominence by successfully running for mayor of Istanbul as a candidate for the Islamist Welfare Party (RP), Erdoğan was famously quoted as describing democracy as “a vehicle which you ride as far as you want to go and then get off.”¹

Both the RP and its successor, the Virtue Party, were closed down by the Turkish Constitutional Court for allegedly seeking to erode the principle of secularism enshrined in the country’s constitution. In 1999, Erdoğan himself served four months in jail for allegedly inciting religious hatred. In August 2001, when he founded the AKP, Erdoğan sought to distance himself from the Islamism of his youth, insisting that he had changed and was now committed to secular, pluralistic democracy. Skeptics were unconvinced, arguing that Erdoğan was merely dissimulating in an attempt to avoid antagonizing the fiercely secularist Turkish military, which had ousted four elected governments in the previous 42 years.

Nevertheless, in November 2002, with Turkey still reeling from the worst economic recession in living memory, the AKP won a majority in parliament, taking 34.28 percent of the popular vote. During its first term, the AKP focused on stabilizing the economy and accelerating Turkey’s application for EU accession, legislating a battery of apparently liberalizing reforms. The skeptics appeared to have been proven wrong.

At the time, the president was elected by parliament.² In April 2007, the AKP announced that it was preparing to use its parliamentary majority to appoint the then-Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül to the presidency. Fearful that the appointment would give the AKP a stranglehold on the apparatus of state, the military issued a public statement implicitly threatening to stage a coup. Erdoğan responded by calling an early general election for July 2007, which the AKP won by a landslide (see Table 1 below). In August 2007, Gül was appointed president. The military did nothing. In March 2008, hard-line secularists in the judiciary applied to the Constitutional Court for the AKP’s closure on the grounds that it was committed to eroding secularism. In July 2008, the court upheld the application but failed to ban the AKP, opting instead to impose a monetary fine.

Confident that he no longer needed to fear the military or the judiciary, Erdoğan became increasingly authoritarian, suppressing rather than nurturing political pluralism and intensifying restrictions on freedom of expression. He was assisted by the followers of the exiled Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen, commonly known as the Gülen Movement.

Although they were rivals within the broader Islamic movement, when the AKP was founded, Erdoğan and the Gülen Movement formed an alliance of convenience. Through this

alliance, Erdoğan tamed the Turkish military and purged the government and state institutions of rivals. Erdoğan also mounted a campaign against freedom of expression, exerting pressure on media owners and editors. Instead of uniting to resist government pressure, the media splintered and succumbed. Hundreds of journalists were fired and self-censorship became widespread.

As the AKP grew in strength and confidence, the line between party and state started to blur. The civil service became dominated by AKP supporters, and state resources were frequently used for party business. The AKP gradually built the largest, most sophisticated, and best-funded party network in the country, dispersing grassroots activists to the low-income core of the AKP's support, rewarding businesses with links to AKP leadership, and gaining control of media outlets. In the run-up to the March 2009 local elections, state and party officials collaborated in distributing huge volumes of aid—ranging from coal to dishwashers—to low-income groups in what were expected to be closely contested districts. However, the election occurred during a sharp economic downturn. Consequently, the aid appears to have reduced the AKP's losses rather than boosted its vote (see Table 1 below).

Yet there were few reported incidences of electoral irregularities. A series of power cuts during the counting of the votes for the March 2009 fueled suspicions of skullduggery among the AKP's opponents. But there was no proof that the outages had been used to manipulate the results. Indeed, any irregularities that did occur during the AKP's first decade in power appear to have been small-scale and localized. There was no evidence of systematic or nationwide vote-rigging. Instead, the AKP focused on shaping the preferences of the electorate before they went to the ballot box by trying to control the information on which they based their choices.

In the run-up to the June 2011 general election, the AKP was keen to ensure that the MHP failed to overcome the 10 percent threshold for representation in parliament. This would result in the seats being divided among a smaller number of parties and would improve the AKP's chances of securing the two-thirds majority necessary to be able to realize its hopes of promulgating a new constitution.³

Starting on April 27, 2011—two days after the deadline for parties' candidate lists—secretly recorded sex tapes involving leading members of the MHP began appearing on the Internet. Over the next month, a total of six videos were posted online with a warning that four more would follow. Nine members of the MHP's 17-member National Executive Committee were forced to resign. The videos had been recorded over a period of several months using devices apparently hidden in overhead lighting appliances in private homes and hotel rooms. The recordings had clearly been preceded by extensive surveillance, suggesting considerable resources of personnel and professional expertise. The AKP's opponents blamed the members of the Gülen Movement, who now dominated the intelligence-gathering department of the police. This was denied by the government. But no attempt was made to identify or apprehend those responsible.⁴ Erdoğan also targeted the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), releasing a recording of a private conversation in which party members discussed whether to tell their supporters in districts where the

party was not fielding a candidate to vote for the MHP—in order to ensure that the MHP crossed the 10 percent threshold and thus reduced the AKP’s majority. While it’s illegal under Turkish law to record a private conversation without a permit from a judge, no action was taken against Erdoğan. When the elections were held on June 12, 2011, the AKP increased its share of the popular vote to 49.83 percent.

Table 1. The AKP’s electoral performance 2002–2011

TYPE OF ELECTION	ELECTORATE	VALID VOTES	AKP VOTE	AKP (%)
2002 Parliamentary	41,333,105	31,398,452	10,762,131	34.28
2004 Local*	43,552,931	32,268,496	13,447,287	41.67
2007 Parliamentary	42,799,303	35,049,691	16,327,291	46.58
2009 Local*	48,049,446	39,988,763	15,353,553	38.39
2011 Parliamentary	52,806,322	42,941,763	21,399,082	49.83

* *Elections for provincial assemblies*

In the wake of this electoral victory, Erdoğan’s self-confidence swelled to the point of hubris. Policymaking became increasingly deinstitutionalized. Virtually all decisions were now taken by Erdoğan himself in consultation with a small circle of sycophantic advisors. Although he avoided saying so explicitly in public, Erdoğan made it clear that he intended to formalize what was already the de facto concentration of power in his own hands by introducing a presidential system and having himself elected to the presidency when Gül completed his term in office in August 2014.

In addition, starting in 2008 and particularly after his election victory in June 2011, Erdoğan sought to reshape Turkish society according to his conservative religious beliefs. His rhetoric started to take on a sectarian Sunni Islamic hue as he attacked not only secularists and members of non-Islamic faiths but also Turkey’s heterodox Alevi community. The result was an increasingly polarized society. The divisions—and the hatred with which he was now regarded by his opponents—were exacerbated by the contrast with the inclusive, pluralistic rhetoric Erdoğan had used during the early years of the AKP. It was not just that the skeptics had eventually been proved right. There was a sense of betrayal, of having been deceived. For his opponents, nothing Erdoğan now said or did could be trusted.

The distrust and growing sense of desperation finally erupted in summer 2013 in what became known as the Gezi Park protests. Instead of trying to defuse the protests and healing the deepening divisions in Turkish society, Erdoğan sought to exploit them and deepen, rather than broaden, his core support. He accused the protestors of being part of a vast international conspiracy, agents of foreign powers who were jealous of Turkey’s rise to greatness under his leadership. Erdoğan’s accusations were absurd. But they were widely believed by his supporters.

While the protests petered out, the underlying resentment and distrust that triggered them did not. Nor did Erdoğan tone down the abrasive rhetoric he had used when the protests were at their height. Previously, Erdoğan had reserved his most excoriating rhetoric for the leading members of the opposition parties. Starting during the Gezi Park protests, he has increasingly targeted all of those who do not support him, portraying himself and his supporters as engaged in a “War of National Liberation” against external and internal enemies—and effectively pitting one section of Turkish society against another.

The 2014 Local Elections

From 2012 and into 2013, the alliance between Erdoğan and the Gülen Movement came under increasing strain. Erdoğan's growing authoritarianism and presidential ambitions had alarmed the Gülen Movement, which feared that—once he believed he had sufficient power—Erdoğan would no longer feel he needed their support. On December 17, 2013, pro-Gülen public prosecutors in Istanbul launched a judicial investigation into corruption and the fixing of state contracts, reaching into the highest levels of the AKP government. Erdoğan hit back by initiating a purge of suspected Gülen sympathizers from the police and judiciary. Thousands of police officers and more than 450 members of the judiciary were removed from their posts, including the prosecutors who had launched the corruption probes. The Gülen Movement responded by making public dozens of covert audio recordings—mostly telephone intercepts—of Erdoğan and his close associates allegedly discussing taking bribes, manipulating court proceedings, and fixing state contracts. The release of a new recording was first announced on Twitter and then posted to YouTube. Although there are doubts about the authenticity of some of the recordings, most are accepted to be genuine.

Erdoğan had been hoping that a convincing victory in the local elections on March 30, 2014, would create the momentum for his bid for the presidency in August 2014.⁵ He was also aware that a small group of prominent members of the AKP were uneasy with his growing authoritarianism and socially divisive policies, although they were reluctant to move against Erdoğan while he appeared strong. Erdoğan thus needed a resounding triumph on March 30, 2014, both to further his presidential ambitions and to quell dissent within his own party.

The audio recordings' release was designed to try to damage Erdoğan and the AKP in the local elections. However, as with the sex tapes against the MHP in 2011, the volume of recordings released within a short period in the run-up to an election made it clear that they were part of a politically motivated campaign. As a result, they merely reinforced existing political preferences and social divisions, and helped Erdoğan turn the local elections into a referendum on his record in national government.

However, in addition to shaking the AKP, the Gezi Park protests eased the climate of fear that had previously gripped the Turkish media. The process accelerated in late 2013 as the collapse of the alliance between Erdoğan and the Gülen Movement opened up spaces for journalists to become more outspoken. On March 11, 2014, a 15-year-old boy called Berkin Elvan died following nine months in a coma after being hit on the head by a police tear-gas canister when he went out to buy bread for his family during the Gezi Park protests. Elvan's death triggered an outpouring of national grief. Virtually every public figure issued a statement of condolence to the boy's family. The one exception was Erdoğan, who publicly accused Elvan of being a "terrorist" and led an election rally of AKP supporters in booing the child's mother.

The reaction was first shock and then fury as even previously intimidated journalists forgot their fears and angrily denounced Erdoğan's callousness. So many journalists spoke out that it was impossible to silence them all. Throughout the rest of the local election campaign, journalists were noticeably more prepared to speak out against Erdoğan. But the media is as divided as Turkish society. Most of the AKP's voters watch television and—if they read them at all—read newspapers that support Erdoğan.

Late on the evening of March 20, 2014, amid persistent rumors that something devastating to Erdoğan was going to be posted on the Internet on March 25, the Turkish authorities—almost certainly acting on instructions from Erdoğan himself—outlawed all access to Twitter from inside Turkey. On March 27, 2014, an audio recording was posted on YouTube apparently showing Hakan Fidan, head of the National Intelligence Organization, discussing staging a false flag attack in Syria to create a pretext for a Turkish military intervention in the country. Within hours, access to YouTube was also blocked.⁶

Local Elections in Turkey

Local elections are held once every five years. Geographically and electorally, Turkey is divided into 81 provinces. The provinces are further divided into districts. Each province has a provincial capital, which usually gives its name to the province. Cities with a population of more than 750,000 are classed as metropolitan areas. Voters elect different tiers of local government depending on where they live. In metropolitan areas, voters elect a metropolitan municipal mayor and district mayors and councils. In towns and cities in provinces that are not classed as metropolitan areas, they elect a provincial assembly and district mayors and councils.⁷

All elections in Turkey are overseen by the Supreme Electoral Board (YSK), which is based in Ankara and headed by a committee composed of high-ranking members of the judiciary chosen from within their own ranks by the Supreme Court of Appeals and the Council of State. This committee has seven members and four reserve members who oversee the activities of the YSK at provincial and district level. The committee is currently chaired by Sadi Güven, who was appointed in January 2013.

The YSK is responsible not only for ensuring compliance with electoral rules and regulations but also the assessment of any accusations of irregularities. Appeals and protests can be made to the YSK's district and provincial representatives. Ultimately, the YSK has the power to annul an election result and order a rerun.

In theory, the YSK is an autonomous body. However, the Turkish judicial system has always been highly politicized. Direct orders by the political authorities are rare. It is more common for judicial decisions on issues with political repercussions to be ostensibly independent but shaped by a desire to ensure that they comply with the stated or assumed wishes of the preeminent force in Turkish politics. During the era of military tutelage, it was unusual for decisions to contradict the stated or assumed wishes of the Turkish military. Similarly, before the informal alliance collapsed, it was uncommon—though not completely unknown—

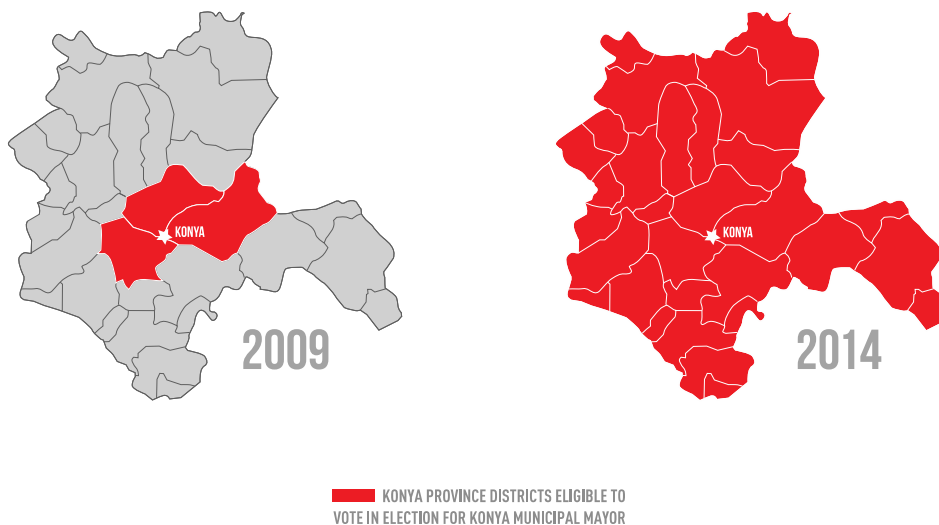
for decisions to be taken that contradicted the stated or assumed wishes of Erdoğan and the Gülen Movement.

Erdoğan currently has a near monopoly of political power in Turkey. As a result, whenever they object to one of the YSK's decisions, Erdoğan's opponents invariably accuse it of making the decision under direct or indirect government influence.

The 2012 Local Election Reforms

In December 2012, the AKP introduced changes to both the number and the boundaries of metropolitan areas.⁸ At the local elections on March 29, 2009, there had been 16 metropolitan areas. Following the reforms of December 2012, this number was increased to 30. Previously, the metropolitan area of a large provincial capital had covered only part of the area of the province. The new law made the boundaries of metropolitan areas coterminous with the provincial boundary. Consequently, in provinces that contained a large city, the entire province became a metropolitan area. This meant that the rural population of such provinces became eligible to vote in metropolitan elections. Although there were exceptions,⁹ this change mostly benefited the AKP, which has traditionally been strong in rural areas.

Map 1: Example of Consequence of Electoral Law Change on Municipal Jurisdictions (Konya Province)



Before the reforms of December 2012, the entire electorate voted for members of provincial assemblies, which meant that these elections provided the clearest indication of the nationwide support for the different political parties. However, since the reforms, provinces that are classed as metropolitan areas no longer have provincial assemblies. As a result, there is no tier of local government for which all of the electorate votes.

After the reforms of December 2012, the proportion of the Turkish population living in metropolitan areas increased from 45 percent to more than 75 percent. Consequently, the metropolitan municipal elections now probably provide the best indication of parties' nationwide support. But the expansion of the number and size of metropolitan areas makes it difficult to compare the results on March 30, 2014, with previous local elections.

Six Elections In One

On March 30, 2014, Turkish voters participated in a total of six elections for two different tiers of local government:

- Provincial assemblies, municipal councils, municipal mayoral positions, and metropolitan municipal mayor positions;
- *Muhtar* or "village/neighborhood headperson" and village/neighborhood committees.

Candidates for the position of *muhtar* are not allowed to declare any political party affiliation. In practice, *muhtars* are considerably more influential in villages than in urban neighborhoods, where they tend to function more as registrars than administrators.

On March 30, 2014, a total of 26 political parties fielded candidates for the provincial assemblies, councils, and mayoral positions. There were 194,310 polling stations. Additional polling stations were established in prisons.

The elections for which electors cast their votes varied according to the area where they lived, namely:

- Village and hamlets
 - Provincial assemblies
 - Muhtars* and village/neighborhood committees
- Urban areas in provinces not classed as metropolitan areas
 - Provincial assemblies
 - Municipal mayors and councils
 - Muhtars* and village/neighborhood committees
- Provinces classed as metropolitan areas
 - Mayor of the metropolitan municipality
 - Municipal mayors and councils
 - Muhtars* and village/neighborhood committees

Voting Procedures and Regulations

Before the election, everyone on the electoral roll received a voting notification document that included details of the polling station at which they were registered to vote. Voting

hours on March 30, 2014, were 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. in eastern Anatolia and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in western Anatolia.

Voting at each polling station is overseen by a board of election. In urban areas, the board is composed of at least five members, two of whom—including the board chair—are civil servants appointed by the YSK. The other members are nominated by the parties that received the highest shares of the vote at the most recent parliamentary elections. In addition, political parties can nominate observers to the polling stations. These designated observers have the right to appeal election results and ask for a recount. Private citizens can also be present as observers in polling stations, but they have no right to contest the results.

When they arrive at the polling station, voters have to show a photo ID and a document confirming their Turkish citizenship number. Most voters use their official identity cards, which include both.

In the March 30, 2014, local elections, the names of the candidates for *muhtar* and the village/neighborhood committees were written on the same ballot paper. As a result, there were five different ballot papers, each a different color.

Voters were required to confirm their identities to a member of the election board, who would give them two or three ballot papers—depending on the classification of the area where they lived—and the same number of differently colored envelopes, one for each ballot paper. The election officials also gave them a stamp with the word “evet,” Turkish for “yes,” on it and instructed them to go into the polling booth to mark their ballot papers and put them in the appropriate envelopes. When the voters had marked their ballot papers and put them in the relevant envelopes, they gave the envelopes to the election officials, who put them in transparent, plastic ballot boxes.

In Turkish elections, after the polls close, the votes are counted by the election officials in the presence of observers designated by the political parties. The results are checked and entered in an official tally of the votes in each ballot box, copies of which are signed and stamped by the election officials and given to representatives of the political parties at the polling station. The ballot papers and envelopes are placed in a sealed container and sent, together with a stamped and signed copy of the results, to the District Election Office.

Election officials enter the results from each ballot box in a centralized computer database, which pre-selected media outlets are able to access. Consequently, instead of waiting for all of the votes in an electoral district to be counted, the announcement of election results is a cumulative process with the tallies in each electoral district being continually updated as the results from more ballot boxes are added. The process, which can be followed on the Internet or on national television, usually starts within a few hours of the polls closing and continues deep into the night. However, the data is provisional. The official results are announced by the YSK after it has evaluated any appeals or protests and taken into account any reruns. Under Turkish law, this process can take up to three months.

The Results of the 2014 Local Elections

The provisional results of the March 30, 2014, local elections broadly align with the opinion polls in the run-up to the election and suggest that the AKP suffered, at most, minor damage from the barrage of allegations of corruption over the previous four months. Significantly, the revelations ceased as soon as the local elections were held.

Table 2. Results of the Elections for Metropolitan Municipal Mayor

PARTY	OVERALL VOTE (%)	METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITIES WON
AKP	45.54	18
CHP	31.04	6
MHP	13.65	3
BDP	3.09	3*

* Includes Mardin where the pro-BDP Ahmet Türk ran as an independent.

Table 3. Results of the Elections for Municipal Mayor in Non-Metropolitan Provinces

PARTY	OVERALL VOTE (%)*	PROVINCIAL CAPITALS WON (NON-METROPOLITAN)*
AKP	43.13	31
CHP	26.45	6
MHP	17.76	5
BDP	4.18	7

* Does not include the provincial capitals of Ağrı and Yalova, where the YSK has ordered reruns.

The AKP won 45.54 percent of the vote in the elections for metropolitan municipal mayors and 43.13 percent of the vote in the elections for municipal mayors in non-metropolitan provinces. It won 16 of Turkey's 30 metropolitan municipalities, including Istanbul and Ankara, and 31 of the 51 provincial capitals in non-metropolitan areas.

The CHP was second with 31.04 percent of the vote in the elections for metropolitan municipal mayors and 26.45 percent of the vote in the elections for municipal mayors in non-metropolitan provinces. It won six metropolitan municipalities, including its traditional stronghold of Izmir, and six provincial capitals. The MHP was third with 13.65 percent of the vote in the elections for metropolitan municipal mayors and 17.76 percent of the vote in the

elections for municipal mayors in non-metropolitan provinces. It won three metropolitan municipalities and five provincial capitals. In two of the non-metropolitan provincial capitals, Ağrı and Yalova, the YSK ordered a rerun for June 1, 2014.

The results were broadly in line with the findings of opinion polls conducted in the months leading up to March 30, 2014 (see Table 4 below).

Table 4. Opinion polls in the run-up to the local elections (%)

DATE MADE PUBLIC	SOURCE	AKP	CHP	MHP
03-10-14	ANAR	46.9	30.1	14.3
03-11-14	Optimar	44.8	29.3	14.2
03-16-14	ORC	45.7	28.3	16
03-16-14	Pollmark	49.4	28.3	13.2
03-19-14	Andy-AR	40.77	31.22	17.27
03-19-14	A&G	43-45	26-27	14-16
03-23-14	Konda	46	27	15
03-30-14	Local Election	45.54	31.04	13.65

Note: Figures are as made public by the companies conducting the poll.

In terms of the geographical distribution of votes (see Map 1 and Map 2 below), the AKP strengthened its hold over most of Anatolia and the large metropolises—such as Istanbul and Ankara—whose populations are predominantly composed of first and second generations of migrants from the countryside. The CHP remained strongest in the west of the country, particularly along the Aegean coast. But it suffered setbacks along the Mediterranean coast, including losing control of its previous stronghold of Antalya, where it lost to the AKP by a margin of 36.40 percent to 34.61 percent.

narrowly defeating the AKP. Yet, after a recount, the AKP was declared the victor, which triggered several days of street protests by BDP supporters. On April 6, 2014, the YSK ordered a rerun for June 1, 2014.

In the previous local elections in March 2004, the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) —which was outlawed by the Turkish Constitutional Court on December 11, 2009— had been the leading party in eight provinces. The Constitutional Court also banned Ahmet Türk, a former chair of the DTP, from membership of a political party for a period of five years. Although he had the backing of the BDP, when he stood for mayor of the Mardin Metropolitan Municipality in March 2014, Türk had to do so as an independent. He defeated the Mehmet Vejdi Kahraman of the AKP by 52.19 percent to 37.39 percent.

Unlike in parliamentary elections, there is no national threshold in local elections. Parliamentary seats are only distributed among parties that win more than 10 percent of the national vote, with the result that some electors vote for one of the larger parties so as not to “waste” their vote. This is not a concern in local elections. As a result, it is difficult to extrapolate a party’s prospects in parliamentary elections from its performance in local elections. The local election reforms of December 2012, which abolished provincial assemblies in metropolitan areas, also make it difficult to compare the results of the 2014 local elections with the previous local elections in March 2009.

Nevertheless, the 2014 local election results suggest that there has been little change in the balance of power among the three main parties (see Table 5 below). The AKP’s relatively poor performance in the local elections of March 2009 is probably largely attributable to a sharp contraction in the Turkish economy as a result of a combination of indigenous factors and the repercussions of the global financial crisis.

The results of the 2014 local elections also suggest a continued consolidation of support for the AKP and CHP at the expense of minor parties. The process is also a symptom of the increasing polarization of Turkish society as Erdoğan seeks to tighten his grip on power by actively exacerbating social divisions.

Table 5. The three main parties in local and general elections 2007–2014 (%)

	2007 GENERAL ELECTION	2009 LOCAL ELECTION*	2011 GENERAL ELECTION	2014 LOCAL ELECTION**
AKP	46.58	38.39	49.83	45.54
CHP	20.88	23.08	25.98	31.04
MHP	14.27	15.97	13.01	13.65
AKP+ CHP	67.46	61.47	75.81	76.58

* Votes for provincial assemblies.

** Elections for metropolitan municipal mayor.

This electoral consolidation can be seen more clearly when the votes for the parties in local and general elections are treated separately (see Tables 6 and 7 below).

Table 6. The Three Main Parties in Local Elections 2004–2014 (%)

	2004*	2009*	2014**
AKP	41.67	38.39	45.54
CHP	18.23	23.08	31.04
MHP	10.45	15.97	13.65
AKP+CHP	59.00	61.47	76.58

* Votes for provincial assemblies.

** Elections for metropolitan municipal mayor.

Table 7. The Three Main Parties in General Elections 2002–2011 (%)

	2002	2007	2011
AKP	34.28	46.58	49.83
CHP	19.38	20.88	25.98
MHP	9.64	14.27	13.01
AKP+CHP	53.66	67.46	75.81

Differences in their respective policy agendas continue to preclude a nationwide alliance between the CHP and the MHP. However, in the 2014 local elections, concerns about Erdoğan’s growing authoritarianism resulted in some tacit cooperation for the first time—both at the local party level and in terms of tactical voting by supporters of the two parties.

In the metropolitan municipal election in Ankara, Mansur Yavaş ran as the CHP candidate against the incumbent Melih Gökçek of the AKP. Yavaş was a former member of the MHP and had even stood as the MHP’s mayoral candidate in 2009, taking 27.37 percent of the vote. In 2009, he had finished third behind Gökçek, who won 38.53 percent, and Murat Karayalçın of the CHP, who won 31.30 percent. In Adana, on Turkey’s eastern Mediterranean coast, Hüseyin Sözlü, who had been elected as the CHP mayor of the local district of Ceyhan in 2009, stood as the MHP candidate for metropolitan mayor in March 2014.

In each case, Yavaş’s and Sözlü’s former party ran a relatively low-key campaign and avoided excessive criticism of either the candidate or his new party. In both Ankara and Adana, there were significant differences between the votes for the CHP and MHP candidates for the district councils and the two parties’ candidates for metropolitan municipal mayor, which would appear to suggest tactical voting. For example, the MHP’s candidates for district mayors in Ankara received a total of 525,409 votes (16.60 percent of the total cast), while Mevlüt Karakaya, the party’s candidate for metropolitan municipal mayor, received 245,628 votes (7.78 percent of the total cast).

Such tactical voting can also be seen in other provinces. But it appears to be almost exclusively by opponents of the AKP, not its supporters. Nor was it always successful. Sözlü won in Adana, taking 33.51 percent to 31.88 percent for Abdullah Torun of the AKP. However, in Ankara, Yavaş was narrowly—and highly controversially¹⁰—defeated by Gökçek by a margin of 44.80 percent to 43.78 percent.

Allegations of Irregularities

Suspicious about possible irregularities in the 2014 local elections began to be expressed long in advance of the actual polls. They started with the local election reforms of December 2012, which critics of the AKP claimed were designed to tilt the electoral balance of power toward the government by making rural voters eligible to vote in mayoral elections in metropolitan municipalities. There is little doubt that this was one of the AKP's main motivations. But making a metropolitan municipality's borders coterminous with those of a province is not inherently undemocratic. Even if it was applied without taking into consideration the specific characteristics of individual provinces—in some, the majority of the population already lived in urban areas, in others the population was overwhelming rural—it was at least consistent. Indeed, the previous system—whereby a metropolitan municipality's boundaries were determined by drawing a circle on a map based on the location of the governor's office, with the radius varying according to the population of the city concerned—had hardly been satisfactory, either.

In some areas, the reforms were even to the AKP's electoral detriment. For example, approximately 80 percent of the population of the province of Mardin live in rural areas, where the BDP has traditionally been very strong. In March 2009, the AKP candidate had won the mayoral election in Mardin with 45.04 percent of the vote. In March 2014, after the entire province had been made a metropolitan municipality, the pro-BDP candidate Ahmet Türk was elected mayor with 52.19 percent of the vote to 37.39 percent for the Mehmet Vejdi Kahraman of the AKP.

Similarly, in mid-March 2014, reports appeared in the Turkish media that the YSK was planning to print nearly three times as many ballot papers for the 2014 local elections as it had for the 2011 general election. The news triggered a furor. Critics of the AKP claimed that the number of ballot papers was itself proof that the government was planning widespread fraud on March 30, 2014. In fact, in the 2011 general election, voters had only needed one ballot paper. When they went to the polling stations for the 2014 local election, most voters required three ballot papers.

More problematic—and prophetic—were concerns about a repeat of the power cuts that had plagued many polling stations across the country during the counting process in the 2009 local elections. On March 25, 2014, Energy Minister Taner Yıldız announced that he had been in contact with the electricity distribution companies and had been assured that they had taken preventative measures.

But such reassurances did little to reduce the distrust with which Erdoğan and the AKP were regarded by their critics. On polling day, many were actively looking for evidence of irregularities and expecting to find it.

Claims of Irregularities during the Voting Process

Although they had primarily targeted Erdoğan, the Gezi Park protests were also an implicit indictment of the inability of the opposition parties to curb the prime minister's increasingly intrusive attempts to reshape Turkish society according to his own conservative Sunni Muslim beliefs. The majority of protestors were members of a previously largely apolitical generation in their teens and twenties who had taken to the streets more out of desperation than hope. The protestors were always too diverse to coalesce into a political party. But the senses of empowerment and solidarity that the protests engendered have fueled an upsurge in civil activism and social engagement. Although the protests forced the AKP to abandon its plans to build a shopping mall in Gezi Park, they have arguably been more influential in changing the environment in which government policies are implemented rather than reshaping the policies themselves.

In the run-up to the 2014 local elections, a number of volunteer networks were formed in cities such as Istanbul and Ankara to encourage people to vote and to monitor the polling stations on Election Day. Most of the volunteers were young people who had participated in—or been inspired by—the Gezi Park protests. An Istanbul network called *Oy ve Ötesi*—which translates as “Vote and Beyond” or, perhaps more idiomatically, “Ultra Vote”—mobilized nearly 20,000 volunteers in Istanbul. In Ankara, a similar network called *Ankara Oyları*, or “Ankara Votes,” deployed 3,000 volunteers and 200 vehicles to monitor the election in the capital. In addition to the observers from the political parties, these volunteer networks provided live updates on the Internet during the voting and counting processes. As a result, in the large cities where the volunteers were concentrated, the 2014 local elections were the mostly closely observed in Turkish history. Reports of irregularities began as soon as the polling stations opened and continued throughout the day.

A large proportion of the irregularities that occurred during the voting process appear to have been the result of ignorance, incompetence, and sloppiness rather than a calculated attempt to affect the result of the election. Networks such as *Oy ve Ötesi* and *Ankara Oyları* provided training for their members.¹¹ These volunteers in the polling stations frequently complained that the election officials on duty in the polling stations were unaware of the election rules and legally required procedures. There were numerous reports of voters being poorly informed about how to stamp the ballot papers and put them in envelopes. Photographs were posted on the Internet showing ballot papers without an envelope in the transparent ballot boxes. Particularly in conservative low-income districts, there were repeated reports of election officials allowing husbands to accompany their wives into the voting booth after the husband claimed that his wife was incapable of stamping the ballot paper on her own.

There were also a number of violent incidents, although these were mostly related to elections for *muhtar* rather than the assemblies, councils, and mayoral positions. In total, nine people are believed to have been killed and more than a dozen wounded in clashes in rural areas between the families and supporters of rival candidates for the post of *muhtar*.

In urban areas, most of the reports of politically motivated irregularities involved claims of political party officials—mostly members of the AKP¹²—attempting to intimidate voters and election officials. But none of the reported cases was accompanied by conclusive proof that this had resulted in anything that could materially affect the outcome of the election. More disturbing were the reports of irregularities during the counting process, particularly in areas where an AKP candidate was involved in what was expected to be a very close result.

Claims of Irregularities during the Counting Process

During the counting process, there were 44 reports of power cuts in polling stations in 21 provinces across the country. Election observers posted photographs on the Internet showing election officials counting votes by flashlight and candlelight. Many of the outages occurred in districts where an overburdened local infrastructure means that power cuts are relatively frequent. Others took place in areas of eastern Anatolia that were hit by a fierce storm on the evening of March 30, 2014. However, the fact that many occurred after Energy Minister Yıldız's assurance on March 25, 2014, that measures had been taken to avoid a repeat of the outages during the counting of the March 2009 local elections merely intensified the suspicions of skulduggery. These doubts were hardly allayed by the fact that, in several districts, opposition parties had a lengthening lead before the outages, only for the process to go into reverse and for them to be first caught and then overtaken by the AKP when counting resumed.

Even where the power stayed on, there were numerous reports of irregularities and inconsistencies during the counting process, triggering often heated disputes between the representatives of the political parties—mainly representatives of the opposition parties—and the election officials. A large proportion of the inconsistencies can probably be explained by human error, not least as the result of exhaustion. Many of the election officials arrived at the polling stations several hours before voting started. Protests and appeals not only raised tensions but lengthened the counting process. Some of the counts were not concluded until the early hours of March 31. By that time, many election officials had been without sleep for nearly 22 hours.

However, there were also a small number of claims of election officials refusing to allow representatives of opposition parties and independent observers to be present during the counting of the votes. Most of these claims were related to polling stations in large cities in western Turkey. The situation in the villages and towns in Anatolia—which were much less closely observed—remains unclear.

On March 31, 2014, photographs appeared on the Internet from locations around Anatolia apparently showing marked ballot papers that had been burned and dumped in the garbage. The number of votes appears to have been relatively small. Nor is it clear whether they were attempts to manipulate the election result or to cover up a human error—such as an election official forgetting to send some of the counted ballot papers to the YSK and then

trying to destroy the evidence. Nevertheless, if only to allay suspicions, such incidents needed to be thoroughly investigated. This was not done.

In most election districts, the voting preferences of the population are already well known. In previous elections, they have voted overwhelming for one party or another. In these areas, the results of the local elections could be predicted with a high degree of accuracy even before the polls opened. Consequently, rigging the result would not only have required fraud on a massive scale but would have been obvious. More critical in terms of the possibility of deliberate manipulation is what happened in what were expected to be tightly contested districts. It is perhaps inevitable that allegations of irregularities are going to be more numerous in a contest where one candidate has narrowly defeated another. The Turkish local elections of March 2014 are no exception. However, there were numerous instances in which election regulations were breached. In addition, some of the claims of irregularities in tightly contested districts are difficult to dismiss as mere chance or the product of human error. Most disturbingly, statistical analysis of the local election results suggests a pattern, with clusters of anomalies in districts where AKP candidates were expected to be involved in a close contest.¹³

There was a particularly striking concentration of anomalies and claims of irregularities in the election for metropolitan municipal mayor in Ankara, where the AKP's Melih Gökçek was running for a fifth consecutive term in office. Opinion polls in the run-up to the election suggested that it was going to be an extremely tight race, with some giving Mansur Yavaş, the CHP candidate, a narrow lead.

Gökçek has long been a highly controversial figure, not least within the AKP. Privately, leading members of the AKP accuse him of turning the metropolitan municipality into a personal fiefdom and putting his own interests before those of the party. There were discussions about deselection of him as the AKP's candidate in the 2014 local elections. But there were concerns that he might then stand as an independent.

For reasons that have yet to be explained, the vote-counting in Ankara took considerably longer than in other large cities such as Istanbul and Izmir. But this also meant that the count was closely followed, with national television channels updating their graphics as the results from each ballot box were entered into the YSK's computerized system. Initially, Gökçek had what appeared to be a healthy lead over Yavaş, although—again for reasons that have yet to be explained—the results of the vote in neighborhoods that were known to be CHP strongholds were taking longer than those from AKP strongholds.

As the results from CHP began to come in, Gökçek's lead rapidly started to shrink. With most of the remaining results due to come from CHP rather than AKP strongholds, it looked as if Gökçek was going to be defeated. Suddenly, the results stopped coming. For a period of one hour, there was no new data. When the results started coming again, Gökçek's lead began to increase once more. Curiously, when the YSK computer showed that 11,927 of the 12,235 ballot boxes in Ankara had been counted and entered in the system, Gökçek was leading Yavaş by 1,378,365 votes to 1,370,210. When the computer populated the results

from 11,928 ballot boxes had been entered in the system, the cumulative total for Gökçek had increased to 1,380,543, while Yavaş's votes had fallen to 1,368,505. In other words, when the tally from another ballot box was added to the total, Yavaş somehow lost 1,705 votes. The anomaly has never been explained. Gökçek was eventually declared the victor with 1,415,973 votes (44.85 percent) to 1,383,786 votes (43.83 percent) for Yavaş.

As the results from the different ballot boxes were being announced, CHP representatives started to complain that the totals being entered into the YSK computer did not match the results they had been given by the election officials in the polling stations. More anomalies soon emerged. At 254 polling stations in Ankara, the turnout was registered as more than 100 percent—a statistical impossibility as only people who were registered at a specific polling station were allowed to vote there.

In addition, an examination of the official tallies of the votes in the ballot boxes from the polling stations in Ankara showed that more than one-fifth lacked the required stamps and signatures confirming that they are an accurate record of the count (see Table 8 below). Turkish law states that tallies without stamps and signatures from the election officials at the polling stations cannot be included in the calculations of the final result. But they were.

Table 8. Ankara Ballot Boxes

BALLOT-BOX TALLIES	BALLOT BOXES	VOTES	SHARE OF VOTES (%)
Stamped	9,327	2,443,106	77.4
Unstamped	2,908	713,556	22.6
Total	12,235	3,156,662	100

Although Turkish law says they should still have been excluded from the final count, it is theoretically possible that the large number of unstamped ballot box tallies was the product of sloppiness and human error. However, a comparative analysis of the breakdown of votes on the stamped and unstamped ballot-box tallies reveals a striking disparity between them (see Table 9 below). When the unstamped ballot-box tallies are analyzed on their own, Gökçek has 48.87 percent to 38.37 percent for Yavaş. However, on the stamped ballot-box tallies, Yavaş is ahead of Gökçek by 45.46 percent to 43.71 percent.

Table 9. Breakdown of Ankara Vote By Stamped/Unstamped Ballot Boxes

BALLOT-BOX TALLIES	GÖKÇEK	SHARE (%)	YAVAŞ	SHARE (%)	TOTAL VALID VOTES
Stamped	1,067,808	43.71	1,110,532	45.46	2,443,106
Unstamped	348,730	48.87	273,820	38.37	713,556
Total	1,416,538	44.87	1,384,352	43.85	3,156,662

The CHP has accused the AKP of using its political influence—both through the municipality and at the governmental level—to delay the vote count in Ankara and submit doctored, and unstamped, ballot-box tallies. The discrepancy between the data on the stamped and unstamped ballot-box tallies would appear to support this claim. In the seemingly improbable event of there being an alternative explanation, the law is clear: unstamped ballot-box tallies are invalid. Nevertheless, the YSK rejected all of the CHP’s appeals, refusing even to investigate the allegations and statistical anomalies. In the days following the election, police used tear gas and water cannons to break up demonstrations by CHP supporters protesting the YSK’s decision. On April 21, 2014, Yavaş submitted an application to the Turkish Constitutional Court for the result of the Ankara mayoral elections to be overturned.

However, analysis of the results from other closely contested areas suggests that there are reasons to be concerned about the results in numerous other districts across the country. Statistical analysis of other AKP victories reveals not only anomalies but a nationwide pattern. The correlation appears too close to be coincidence and, if true, is suggestive of centralized coordination. No such patterns emerge in statistical analysis of victories by the opposition parties.

In the 2014 local elections, there were an abnormally high number of invalid votes, reversing a trend in which they had been steadily declining as a proportion of the total (see Table 10 below).

Table 10. Total Votes and Invalid Votes in Elections (2002–2014)

	TOTAL VOTES CAST	INVALID VOTES (%)
2002 Parliamentary	32,661,123	3.87
2004 Local*	33,211,457	2.84
2007 Parliamentary	36,056,293	2.79
2009 Local*	40,932,260	2.31
2011 Parliamentary	43,914,948	2.22
2014 Local**	36,440,968	4.19

* Elections for provincial assemblies.

** Vote in elections for metropolitan municipal mayor.

However, rather than rising uniformly, statistical analysis of the individual results from each district revealed distinct clusters, with much higher rates of invalid votes in some areas than in others. There was no evidence of any correlation between these clusters and socioeconomic factors, such as levels of education or income. But there did appear to be a direct correlation between high levels of votes classed as invalid and an AKP victory in what had been expected to be a tightly contested district. In known AKP strongholds, the proportion of invalid votes was relatively low. But the rate rose steeply in districts that were expected to be tightly contested but that the AKP eventually won by a narrow margin.

The most obvious explanation for this phenomenon—and one that is espoused by the AKP's opponents—is that, in areas where there was a likely benefit from a minor manipulation of the vote, the election was rigged by classifying votes for opposition candidates as invalid. In districts that were known AKP strongholds, there was no need to interfere in the voting process. In areas that were known to be opposition strongholds, it would have been too obvious.

It may be that there is another explanation, although it is difficult to think of one that would account for such an anomaly. But, at the very least, it raises serious doubts that need to be addressed—if only to maintain the AKP's opponents' faith in the efficacy of the election process. But nothing has been done.

In total, there were more than 1,400 allegations of irregularities in the local elections, the overwhelmingly majority of them made by opposition parties against results in which AKP candidates were victorious. But the YSK ordered only two reruns in provincial capitals, both of them in response to appeals by the AKP against narrow losses to opposition parties: in Yalova, where the AKP had been defeated by the CHP, and in Ağrı, where the AKP had lost to the pro-Kurdish BDP. In each case, the YSK ordered a rerun for June 1, 2014.

The rerun elections on June 1 played out much the same as they did on March 30, seeing the AKP once again come in second to opposition parties in Ağrı and Yalova.¹⁴ In Ağrı, BDP candidate Sırrı Sakık won with 23,460 votes, ahead of AKP candidate Hasan Aydın, who received 20,609 votes. In Yalova, CHP candidate Vefa Salman won by a narrow margin, earning only 228 more votes than AKP candidate Yakup Kocal. With so few votes separating the two candidates, AK Party Vice President Abdülhamit Gül declared the AKP's intent to further contest the Yalova results, on the grounds that 800-900 votes were disputed, enough to cast doubt on the election's results.

Electoral-Monitoring and the Upcoming Elections

Turkey has a history of inviting international observers to its parliamentary elections. Turkey first invited international observers from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to monitor the 1983 post-coup elections, but elections were not monitored again after 1983 until 2002.¹⁵

Turkey is a signatory of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) 1990 Copenhagen document, which states: "The participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place. They therefore invite observers from any other OSCE participating States and any appropriate private institutions and organizations who may wish to do so to observe the course of their national election proceedings, to the extent permitted by law. They will also endeavour to facilitate similar access for election proceedings held below the national level."¹⁶ Furthermore, at the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit, Turkey and the other participating states specifically committed themselves to "invite observers to our elections from other participating States, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and appropriate institutions and organizations that wish to observe our election proceedings. We agree to follow up promptly the ODIHR's election assessment and recommendations."¹⁷

After signing these agreements, Turkey began to more regularly invite international observers from PACE and the OSCE, with international delegations overseeing the 2002, 2007, and 2011 parliamentary elections.

In September 2002, the Turkish Foreign Ministry invited ODIHR to observe the November 3 parliamentary elections. While it is generally the OSCE's practice to send a larger team composed of long-term observers who are later joined by short-term observers, timing constraints forced the OSCE to only send a small, short-term mission of five members.

The OSCE was able to send a full team to observe the 2007 parliamentary elections, deploying a Needs Assessment Mission in late May 2007 prior to the July 22 elections and a 15-member team for the elections themselves. Likewise, in 2011, the OSCE was invited to observe the elections on April 6, conducted a Needs Assessment Mission from March 30 to April 1, and deployed an Election Assessment Mission from May 23 to June 18 for the June 12 elections. PACE also sent observers for the 2007 and 2011 elections.

Overall, observers' findings were positive, noting that elections in Turkey are "held under election laws that establish a framework for democratic elections in line with international standards. Significant constitutional and legal reforms instituted over the past two years

have further improved the overall legal framework under which the elections were carried out.”¹⁸ The OSCE/ODIHR praised Turkey’s electoral process as “characterized by pluralism and a high level of public confidence underscored by the transparent, professional and efficient performance of the election administration.”¹⁹

However, observers have consistently found faults with Turkey’s laws governing electoral observation, with both PACE and the OSCE recommending that “in order to remove any possible uncertainty the authorities should amend the legal framework for elections to provide explicitly for access to all stages of the election process by international observers and for domestic non partisan observer groups.”

Electoral-Monitoring and the Local Elections

Prior to the March 30 local elections, 18 European MPs sent a letter to EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton urging her to request an invitation from Turkey for election observers. Dutch liberal MP Marietje Schaake, who authored the letter, said that electoral observation was necessary due to the “atmosphere of mistrust, conspiracy, deep polarization and sometimes aggression,” in Turkey following the corruption allegations and the government’s response.²⁰ The CHP and HDP also called for election observation, warning that they were concerned about potential fraud in the elections.

While Erdoğan stated, “We welcome international election observers in our country and the Foreign Ministry is ready to assist them in every possible way,” prior to the elections, Turkey did not issue invitations to international institutions to monitor the local elections.²¹

Electoral Changes: The Presidential Election

The upcoming presidential contest will be the first of its kind in Turkey: a direct, popular election.

Prior to 2007, Turkey’s president was elected by secret ballot among the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) to serve a seven-year term.²² To be elected, a candidate required a two-thirds majority (367 votes) in either the first or second rounds. However, if the first two rounds did not yield a clear winner, the winning threshold was dropped to a simple majority (276 votes). If in the third round there was still no clear winner, the two candidates with the most votes would proceed to a runoff election, where the winner would be selected by simple majority. If there was no winner, the Constitution stated that a snap general election must be called to overcome the parliamentary deadlock.

In April 2007, the system failed to elect a president to succeed Ahmet Necdet Sezer.²³ In the first round of voting, AKP candidate Gül did not obtain two-thirds of the vote, with only 361 members of the TGNA present for voting and the rest boycotting. Before a second round could be held, the main opposition, the CHP, filed a petition in Turkey’s Constitutional Court seeking the invalidation of the first round of votes on the ground that, if two-thirds of the vote was necessary to elect the president, two-thirds of the parliament should also be

required to be present. The Constitutional Court ruled in favor of the CHP, decreeing that the first round of voting should be repeated.²⁴ However, with the opposition continuing to boycott, voting could not be held. In response, Erdoğan called for an early general election, under the constitutional requirement that a snap general election be held if parliament failed to elect a president.

In the early parliamentary elections, held in July, the AKP gained 46.5 percent of the vote and 341 seats in parliament, but it failed to secure the two-thirds majority necessary to push their presidential candidate through despite opposition boycotts.²⁵ Following the election, the newly constituted parliament convened to elect Sezer's successor. Gül was re-nominated by the AKP, going against candidates from the Democratic Left Party and the MHP, who decided not to boycott the elections, and was elected in the third round, when the requirement dropped from a two-thirds majority to a simple majority.²⁶

In the interim, prior to Gül's successful election, the parliament passed constitutional amendments in May that provided for the direct election of the president, shorted the presidential term from seven to five years, and allowed the president to serve for a second term. President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, who retained his position, sent the legislation back to parliament, which passed the changes yet again. Sezer, unable to veto the bill a second time, submitted the bill for referendum, held on October 21, 2007, where 68.95 percent voted in favor.²⁷ The amendments entered into force but not in time to change the 2007 presidential process, meaning that Turkey's president will be elected by popular vote for the first time in August 2014.

Recommendation for Election-Monitoring

Despite Turkey's promise and the presence of international observers in its last three national elections, *Today's Zaman* columnist Cengiz Aktar charges that "Turkish governments have never liked foreign election observers, and they have done everything to prevent it, as governmental permission is necessary for a team of observers to come in."²⁸

With historic elections about to take place—both the first popular presidential and parliamentary elections—against a backdrop of tension and political uncertainty, we recommend that the Turkish government invite international observers to assess the fairness and security of the vote. In light of the fraud claims arising from the March 30 elections, such an invitation would not only honor Turkey's OSCE commitments, but it would reassure the opposition and Turkish citizens that the Turkish government means to conduct free and fair elections.

Turkey's presidential elections are slated for August 10. Time is ticking down for the Turkish Foreign Ministry to issue an invitation to the OSCE, to allow the organization to have sufficient time to organize a delegation and deploy a Needs Assessment Mission prior to the elections.

Conclusion: Shadows and Doubts

Although there has recently been an easing in the climate of fear that had come to characterize the Turkish media, the change has not occurred as a result of the Erdoğan government becoming more willing to tolerate criticism. Instead, it has occurred as a result of a sense of desperation at Erdoğan's growing authoritarianism.

Since the Gezi Park protests that swept Turkey in 2013, Erdoğan has increasingly sought to bolster his grip on power not only by attacking opposition parties and politicians but by pitting one section of society against another. The consequence has been a further deepening in the already dangerous divisions in Turkish society. More worryingly, by encouraging his supporters to believe that they are engaged in a "War of National Liberation" against not only foreign powers but also their fellow citizens, Erdoğan has created a situation where he needs continued societal tension. As a result, Erdoğan's increasing authoritarianism has cast a shadow across not only the political arena but also Turkish society. It was in this shadow that the local elections of March 30, 2014, were held.

Although Erdoğan previously sought to restrict and reshape the information on which the electorate based its choices, the processes of voting and then counting the votes had generally been regarded as free and fair. The contrast between Erdoğan's rhetoric when he was seeking power and what he has done since he has been able to exercise power had already meant that he was regarded with distrust by a large section of the population. Since the March 30, 2014, local elections, those doubts have now extended to the electoral process itself.

Most of the irregularities reported during the voting at the polling stations were probably the product of carelessness and ignorance. But there are serious concerns about what happened during the counting process. There is no reason to question the validity of the AKP's overall victory. Opinion polls are unanimous in showing that Erdoğan and the AKP remain considerably more popular than any of their rivals. The questions concern what happened in key districts where the AKP was expecting a tight contest. The patterns of clusters of statistical anomalies in the votes from these marginal districts—and the patent illegalities, such as the inclusion of unstamped ballot-box tallies in the calculations of the final result, in Ankara—raise very disturbing questions, because they are suggestive of centralized planning rather than the actions of a few rogue individuals. The hope is that there is an alternative explanation. But, in order to quell any doubts and restore faith in the ballot box, these questions need to be addressed and answers provided. This has not been done.

The doubts raised by the local elections would be dangerous in any society. The dangers are particularly acute in Turkey, where there is already much distrust of the prime minister and where society is so deeply divided.

Restoring faith in the ballot box has been given a greater urgency by the impending presidential election, the first round of which is due to be held on August 10, 2014. There are grave concerns that, if he becomes president, Erdoğan will become even more authoritarian. If there are also doubts about the election itself, the opposition to Erdoğan is likely to move away from the ballot box and onto the streets.

The AKP has yet to win the support of the majority of the Turkish electorate. Yet Erdoğan's main challenge is not the breadth but the depth of the opposition to him. No political party leader in recent Turkish history has been able to command such a level of devotion from his supporters, but neither has any Turkish politician been so hated. If Erdoğan's opponents feel that they can no longer trust the results of elections, the consequences for political and social stability could be dire.

Endnotes

- ¹ Metin Sever and Cem Dizdar (eds.), *2. Cumhuriyet Tartışmaları*, (Ankara: Başak Yayınları, 1993).
- ² In October 2007, the constitution was amended, and appointment by parliament was replaced by a popular vote.
- ³ Its failure to secure the 367 seats needed means that it is unclear what this new constitution would have contained.
- ⁴ The campaign ultimately backfired, as the number and timing of the tapes made it clear that they were part of a politically motivated campaign. The MHP won 13.01 percent in the general election on June 12, 2011.
- ⁵ The first round of voting will be held on August 10, 2014. If no candidate receives more than half of the vote, there will be a runoff on August 24, 2014, between the two candidates who received the most votes in the first round.
- ⁶ Access to Twitter was restored once the elections were over. The ban on YouTube has not been lifted.
- ⁷ This is addressed in greater detail in the section titled "Six Elections In One."
- ⁸ Law No. 6360 of November 12, 2012, published in the *Official Gazette* of December 6, 2012.
- ⁹ In the southeastern province of Mardin, where more than 80 percent of the electorate lives outside the provincial capital, in the March 2014 election the inclusion of rural votes resulted in the AKP losing control of the municipality to a candidate affiliated with the pro-Kurdish BDP.
- ¹⁰ This is examined in greater detail in the following section on alleged irregularities.
- ¹¹ A copy of the booklet (in Turkish) made available to volunteers from Oy ve Ötesi can be found at: https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B_UpQQoMTTVtZHpS2DVUVXhMQ1k/edit?pli=1.
- ¹² The main exception was in the southeast, where AKP representatives accused BDP officials of intimidation.
- ¹³ A preliminary statistical analysis of the data can be found at <http://erikmeyersson.com/blog/>.
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- ¹⁵ Cengiz Aktar, "Election Monitoring is Needed," *Today's Zaman*, March 19, 2014.
- ¹⁶ Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, *Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE*, June 29, 1990.
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- ¹⁸ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Republic of Turkey Parliamentary Elections 3 November 2002: OSCE/ODIHR Assessment Report*, December 4, 2002, 1.
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- ²⁴ "Turkey's Presidency Vote Annulled," *BBC*, May 1, 2007.
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- ²⁸ Cengiz Aktar, "Election Monitoring is Needed," *Today's Zaman*, March 19, 2014.