THE RESTRICTIVE IMPACT OF PARTY IDEOLOGY ON PARTY STRATEGY: TURKEY'S RADICAL RIGHT THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT PARTY AFTER JUNE 2015 ELECTIONS

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Abstract

Nationalist Action Party (MHP) embraces nativist ideology; thereby, representing radical-right politics in Turkey. The party's attitudes during the negotiations after the June 2015 parliamentary elections come within the purview of this article. The article reached to the conclusion that the party's ideology acted as a restrictive factor hampering political efforts to form a coalition government. Contrary to the argument that MHP has always been a political party defending established system, this article suggests that the MHP turned into an anti-political establishment party after June 2015 parliamentary elections due to the party's radical right ideology based on a strong belief in nativism.

Keywords: Radical Right, Nationalist Action Party, Party ideology, Party strategy, 2015 Parliamentary Elections in Turkey.

PARTİ İDEOLOJİSİNİN PARTİ STRATEJİSİ ÜZERİNE KISITLAYICI ETKİSİ: HAZİRAN 2015 SEÇİMİ SONRASI TÜRKİYE'NİN RADİKAL SAĞI MİLLİYETÇİ HAREKET PARTİSİ

Öz

Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP), Türkiye'de radikal sağ siyasetin temsilcisidir. Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi'nin politikaları diğer belli başlı Avrupa ülkelerinde bulunan radikal sağ partilerin politikaları ile mukayese edilmiştir. İlaveten, Parti'nin, Haziran 2015 seçimi sonrası koalisyon görüşmeleri sürecinde izlediği siyasi strateji irdelenmiştir. Makale, temelinde "öznelcilik" olan radikal sağ ideolojinin, Parti'yi Haziran 2015 seçimi sonrası koalisyon görüşmeleri sürecinde düzen karşıtı bir parti haline getirdiği sonucuna ulaşmış ve Parti'nin ilgili süreçte takındığı tavrın anlaşılması için bu değişimin dikkate alınması gerektiği sonucuna ulaşmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Radikal Sağ, Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, Parti İdeolojisi, Parti Stratejisi, 2015 Parlamento Seçimleri.

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Introduction

As rational actors, political parties are expected to pursue the aim of increasing their vote shares in successive elections. To meet this goal, they should try to thoroughly understand voters' expectations and develop strategies accordingly.[1] While doing so, however, political parties have to deal with a particular problem, termed here the 'restrictive impact of ideology.' As Marks et al. argue, 'political parties are not empty vessels; [instead], … they are organizations with historically rooted [ideologies or] orientations.'[2] Drawing on this argument, this article suggests that a party's strategies are more likely to succeed as long as they does not conflict with party's ideology. For instance, if a political party that embraces an ideology promoting internationalism strategically opposes European integration to appeal to Eurosceptic voters, this opposition will probably be unconvincing. By contrast, such a strategy would likely work well for a political party that embraces a nationalist ideology emphasizing national sovereignty. While latter party's ideology allows it to pursue the given strategy convincingly, the former party's ideology restricts it from doing so. Any political party that builds itself around an extreme ideology must take into account the limits set by this ideology when planning a strategy. On the right end of the ideological spectrum, typical examples of such parties include those termed 'radical right' or 'populist radical right' in the literature. Studies of radical right voters' in various European countries also conclude that most opt to support particular parties based on ideological proximity.[3] It logically follows that 'radical right' or 'populist radical right' parties should rely on ideology to maintain strong ties with their supporters. Employing the term 'radical right,'[4] this article focuses

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[1] Kaare Strom,, (1990), "A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties", *American Journal of Political Science,* 34 (2), 574.

[2] Gary Marks, Carol Wilson, and Leonard Ray (2002), "National Parties and European Integration", *American Journal of Political Science*, 46 (3), 586.

[3] Marcel Lubbers, Merove Gjisberts, and Peer Scheepers (2002), "Extreme right-voting in Western Europe", *European Journal of Political Research* 41 (3), 371-372; Wouter, Van Der Brug, Meindert Fennema and Jean Tillie (2000), "Anti-immigrant Parties in Europe: Ideological or Protest Vote", *European Journal of Political Research*, 37 (1), 90. In their studies on voting for anti-immigrant parties in West Europe, Van der Brug et al conclude that "voters who wish to influence policy making take into account the strategic consideration that a large party has a better chance than a smaller one to realize its policy goals." This conclusion also implies that voters supporting major parties are less interested in ideologies than are those supporting for minor parties.

[4] While acknowledging that opposition to a multicultural society is a common feature of all radical right parties, Mudde suggests that MHP differs for siding with the state during a clash between the state and the public (see: Cas Mudde, (2007), *Populist Radical Right in Europe,* New York: Cambridge University Press. Therefore, Mudde does not use the term 'populist,' which signifies anti-political establishment rhetoric, in the case of MHP. Nevertheless, MHP has not avoided embracing anti-political establishment rhetoric against the established system. For example, the party voted against the ban on wearing headscarves in public institutions and refused to form a coalition government with established political parties implicitly or explicitly supporting the 'Kurdish Opening Process.' These issues are discussed in detail in the main text later on. In addition, this article does not use the term 'populism' on the grounds that, as argued elsewhere, any political party irrespective of party family can embrace a populist discourse (see: Michael Minkenberg, (2000), 'The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-Modernity' *Government and Opposition*. 35 (2), 173; Kevin Deegan-Krause and Tim Haughton (2009), "Toward a More Useful Conceptualization of Populism: Types and Degrees of Populist Appeals in the Case of Slovakia", *Politics & Policy*, 37 (4), 822.

on Turkey's Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi,* or MHP), which has not been a subject of the comparative studies on political parties.[5] After comparing the MHP's policies to those of its counterparts in various European countries, the article discusses the restrictive impact of ideology on the MHP in pursuing strategies related to the various coalition alternatives considered after the June 2015 parliamentary elections. This discussion aims to stimulate a scholarly debate on the post-election attitudes of radical right parties during coalition government negotiations, another topic that has been largely ignored in the literature. The article concludes that the party's ideology has forced the MHP to maintain an uncompromising opposition to the 'Kurdish Opening' process, the saliency of which has substantially increased in the Turkish politics. As the only parliamentary party strictly opposing the process, consistent with its ideology, the party could not act in concert with the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi*, or HDP), the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, or CHP) or the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, or AKP) during the inter-party negotiations for a collation government.

The article has been divided into two parts. The first part reminds the reader of the main features of radical right parties and explains the extent to which the MHP's policies are similar to those of other radical right parties in various European countries. The second part presents the coalition alternatives in which the MHP could have played certain roles during the period concerned in this study, followed by a discussion of how the party's ideology restricted the party in performing these roles. The article ends with the concluding remarks.

A Review Of Literature On Radical Right Ideology

The core of radical right ideology is a form of nationalism that centers on the principle of nativism. Mudde defines nativism as the belief that 'the states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (the nation), [because] nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous state.'[6] Arguing that politics should only serve the needs of those native to a state, radical right parties develop an antagonistic approach towards any group of people whose cultural background is different from that of those considered native and towards any ideas that are considered to be pernicious to the national culture and national sovereignty. Party

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[5] The Nationalist Action Party has been the subject of individual studies of Turkish politics. These studies also argue that the MHP is an ultra-nationalist party pursuing ethnic nationalism (see: Sultan Tepe (2000), "A Kemalist-Islamist Movement? The nationalist action party" *Turkish Studies,* 1 (2), 62-63; Alev Çinar and Burak Arikan (2002), "The Nationalist Action Party: Representing the State, the Nation or the Nationalists", *Turkish Studies*, 3 (1), 36;, Ziya Öniş (2003), "Globalization, Democratization and the Far Right: Turkey's Nationalist Action Party in Critical Perspective", *Democratization*, 10 (1), 31; Ali Çarkoğlu, (2008), "Ideology of Economic Pragmatism?: Profiling Turkish Voters in 2007", *Turkish Studies*, 9 (2): 332; Ersin Kalaycioğlu, (2014), "Local Elections and the Turkish Voter: Looking for the Determinants of Party Choice", *South European Society and Politics*, 19 (4): 584.What is missing in these studies is a comparison of MHP's policies with those of its counterparts across Europe.

[6] Cas Mudde, 2007, 19.

programs such as that titled 'Our People First' and party names such as 'One Nation' are evidence of this approach.[7] Contemporary radical right parties may seem reminiscent of racist parties in the inter-war years; however, the former represent a new party family for a couple of reasons. First, they can be described as 'culturist' - but not 'racists' – in that while they accept that no culture is superior to another, they argue that each culture should develop independently, because cultural interaction hinders a culture in maintaining its purity.[8] Second, they do not entirely reject the idea of democracy, though following the first reason they considered electoral democracy is preferable to liberal democracy.[9]

Opposition to multiculturalism is the most distinctive feature of radical right ideology. Within radical right circles, both post-material issues[10] promoted by new left political parties, whose emergence in West European countries starting in the late 1960s has been described as a 'silent revolution,' and liberal policies allowing the inflow of immigrants for work and family re-unification as well as asylum seekers have been regarded with suspicion on the grounds that these decay the native culture built around traditional ways of life.[11] For example, both the National Front in France, which has been regarded as a prototype of contemporary radical right parties, and *Republikaner* in Germany argue that restrictive laws on immigration *must* be enacted, as immigrants would otherwise continue to increase the crime rate.[12] In fact, the electoral successes achieved by radical right parties in West Europe in the mid-1980s were described as a 'silent counter revolution.'[13] Even though the immigrant population has been increasing in Central and East European countries, particularly due to the Syrian crisis, immigration is not a highly salient political

[7] 'Our People First' was the heading of the Freedom Party's program issued in 1997 in Austria (see: Terri Givens, (2005), *Voting Radical Right in Western Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 36. 'One Nation,' founded under the leadership of Pauline Hanson in 1997 has persisted as the main radical right party in Australia (see: Pippa, Norris, (2005) *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market* (New York Cambridge University Press, 68.

[8] Cas Mudde (1995), "Right-wing extremism analyzed: A comparative analysis of the ideologies of three alleged right wing extremist parties NPD, NDP, CP'86", *European Journal of Political Research* 27 (2): 211.

[9] Michael, Minkenberg, 2000, 174; Cas Mudde, 2007, 156-157;, Alina, M. Pippidi, (2007), "EU Accession is No End of History", *Journal of Democracy*, 18 (4), 11. Electoral democracy differs from liberal democracy in that in the former, human and minority rights breaches are hardly exceptions, though its method of holding elections is largely acceptable (see: David, Collier and Steven Levitsky (1997) "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Politics", *World Politics*, 49 (3), 439-441.

[10] Support for protest activities, feminist movements, abortion and same-sex marriages are examples of post-material issues.

[11] Ronald Inglehart (1971) "The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-industrial Societies", *American Political Science Review*, 65 (4), 991-1017.

[12] Jens Rydgren, (2005), "Is extreme right-wing populism contagious? Explaining the emergence of a new party family", *European Journal of Political Research*, 44 (3), 413-437; Terri Givens, ibid, 29 and 37.

[13] Piero Ignazi (1992), "The silent counter revolution", *European Journal of Political Research*, 22 (1), 6; Ronald Inglehart and Scott, Flanagan, (1987), "Value Change in Industrial Societies", *The American Political Science Review*, 81 (4), 1306.

issue. Instead, the current motive for radical right parties in these countries centers around the ethnic hatred of historically rooted minority groups.[14] Political parties supported predominantly by minority groups in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia are treated as a 'fifth column.' Radical right parties in these countries argue that the political activities of such parties must be banned. Furthermore, radical right parties oppose the use of minority groups' languages in state media and as an instruction medium in universities[15] Also, radical right parties in Central and East European countries blame increases in crime rates on Roma people and often make derogatory remarks about this group. For example, the Slovak National Party describes the Roma as a 'pollutant,' and its slogan for the 1998 parliamentary election was that 'Let's vote for a Slovakia without parasites'[16] The Greater Romania Party has adopted a similar approached towards Roma, proposing policies aimed at deporting Roma people to working camps.[17]

Remaining skeptical about European integration, either from a soft form or hard standpoint, is common to radical right parties across Europe.[18] This commonality is not unexpected, given the nativism that guides the parties in formulating foreign policies championing the notion of national sovereignty.[19] Europeanization, as a top-down process involving the EU's impact on individual member and candidate states, is perceived negatively.[20] At the EU level, Europeanization perceived as economic,

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[14] Wouter Van Der Brug and Meindert Fennema (2009), "The Support Base of Radical Right Parties in the Enlarged European Union" *Journal of European Integration*, 31 (5), 590.

[15] Ataka (2005), **"**20 tochki na partiya Ataka" www.ataka.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=51 (23 January 2016);

Sharon L Wolchik (1997), "Democratization and political participation in Slovakia", Dawisha, Karen and Bruce Parrott (Eds.) *The Consolidation of Democracy in East Central Europe* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 230; Gabriel Andreescu, (2005), "Romania" Mudde, Cas (Ed.), *Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe* London: Routledge, 187); Cas Mudde, 2007, 149.

[16] Thomas Szayna (1997), "The Extreme rights political movements in post-communist Central Europe" Merkl, Peter and Leonard Weinberg (Eds.) *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties* (London: Frank Cass), 126, 120 and 130; Peter Vermeersch (2006), *The Romani movement: minority politics and ethnic mobilization in contemporary Central Europe* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books), 98; Cas MUDDE, 2007, 98-99.

[17] Gabriel Andreescu, 2005, 188.

[18] Simon Usherwood and Nick Startin (2013), "Euroscepticism as a persistent phenomenon", *Journal of Common Market Studies,* 51 (1), 5.

[19] Taggart and Szczerbiak develop a conceptualization of Euroscepticism, classifying party-based opposition to European integration by degree of opposition. On the one hand, hard Euroscepticism 'implies outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration and opposition to one's country joining or remaining a member of the EU.' On the other hand, soft Euroscepticism involves 'contingent and qualified opposition to European integration.' Some radical right parties can be considered soft Eurosceptic for supporting integration in principle, yet; employ 'rhetoric of defending or standing up for the national interests.' (see: Aleks Szczerbiak, and Paul Taggart (2004), "The Politics of European Referendum Outcomes and Turnout", *West European Politics*, 27 (4), 557-583.

[20] Robert Ladrech, (1994), "Europeanization of Domestic Politics Institutions: The Case of France", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 32 (1), 69; Claudia Major, (2005), "Europeanization and Foreign and Security Policy – Undermining and Rescuing the Nation State", *Politics*, 25 (3), 176.

political and cultural integration among European states is bluntly rejected as well.[21] The United Kingdom's Independence Party and the National Front in France are examples of hard Eurosceptic radical right parties that have called for their countries' withdrawal from the European Union.[22] The League of Polish Families, now defunct, was another hard-Eurosceptic party for urging their supporters to vote against the membership in the 2003 EU accession referendum. The party took a negative position on Polish membership in the EU primarily on the grounds that the EU socio-cultural policies allowing same-sex relationships, abortion, euthanasia, and human cloning are incompatible with the Catholic tradition that is regarded as an inseparable part of the Polish nation.[23]

Studies on party politics have arrived at a broad consensus that socio-economic policies are of secondary importance to radical right parties.[24] Broadly speaking, such parties in affluent European countries (e.g. North European countries) disapprove of welfare state expansion through tax increases, while the opposite is true in less economically developed countries.[25] Nevertheless, we cannot conclude that the socioeconomic policies of radical right parties can be predicted by considering the economic conditions in their countries. In their book *Radical Right in West Europe: A Comparative Analysis*, Kitschelt divide radical right parties into four classifications based on socio-economic policies.[26] Similarly, Pirro concludes that the radical right in Slovakia pursues right-wing economic policies, thereby diverging from radical right parties in Bulgaria and Hungary, which generally opt for left-leaning socio-economic policies.[27] However, radical right parties strongly concur with each other in their disapproval of economic

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[21] Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (2008), "A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Consensus to Constraining Dissensus", *British Journal of Political Science*, 39 (1), 17; Milada A. Vachudova and Liesbet Hooghe (2009), "Post-communist politics in a magnetic field: How Transition and EU Accession structure party competition on European integration", *Comparative European Politics*, 7 (2), 188; Dimitri Almeida (2010), "Europeanized Eurosceptics: Radical Right Parties and European Integration", *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 11 (3), 239.

[22] Pippa Norris, 2005, 72; Simon Usherwood and Nick Startin, 2013, 5.

[23] Dorota Dakowska (2010), "Whither Euroscepticism? The Uses of European Integration by Polish Conservative and Radical Right Parties", *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 11 (3), 260; Inka Slodkowska and Magdalena Dolbakowska (2006), *Wybory 2005: partie i ich programy* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiow Politycznych Akademii Nauk).

[24] Michael Minkenberg, 2000, 173; Cas Mudde, 2007, 117; Herbert Kitschelt, (2007), "Growth and Persistence of the Radical Right in Postindustrial Democracies: Advances and Challenges in Comparative Research" *West European Politics*, 30 (5), 1178.

[25] Pippa Norris, 2005, 61, 66 and 70; Terri Givens, 2005, 23; Radoslaw Markowski (2002) "Disillusionment with democracy and populism in Poland", *Europe and the Crisis of Democracy: Elections in Europe: 1990-2002* (Paris: Notre Europe), 28; Cas Mudde, 2007, 133; Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, 2008, 18; Andrea L. Pirro (2015), *The Populist Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge), 63.

[26] Herbert Kitschelt (1995), *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 22 and 23.

[27] Andrea L. Pirro, 2015, 93.

globalization and foreign investments.[28] In spite of this similarity, Kitschelt argues elsewhere, a party family solely including radical right parties should not be described based on criteria to socio-economic policy.[29] Instead, the criteria should be established on the basis of socio-cultural and foreign policies, where radical right parties find greater commonality. Multiple cases in which parties gained higher electoral support by heavily emphasizing socio-cultural policies give credibility to this argument.[30] In sum, radical right parties occupy a position somewhere close to the right-wing pole on a continuum of programmatic alternatives for designing socio-cultural policies, stressing the protection of a mono-cultural society and the importance of enjoining people to live in accordance with tradition.[31]

The results of the 2010 Chapel Hill expert surveys, which estimated party positioning on socio-economic issues, socio-cultural issues and European integration separately, also confirm that radical right parties find greater commonality in terms of socio-cultural policies and policies related to European integration, while diverging with respect to socio-economic policies.[32] As table 1 shows, on a scale ranging from 1 (libertarian) to 10 (authoritarian), a great majority of radical right parties fall somewhere between 8 and 10. In addition, falling between 1 (strongly opposed) and 4 (neutral), radical right parties are either soft Eurosceptic or hard Eurosceptic in their attitudes towards the European integration. Nevertheless, in terms of socio-economic policies, on a scale ranging from 1 (left) to 10 (right), radical right parties fall anywhere from 2.1 to 8.2.

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[28] Pippa Norris, 2005, 68 and 70; Andrea L. Pirro, 2015, 76.

[29] Herbert Kitschelt, 2007, 1178.

[30] Wouter Van Der Brug and Meindert Fennema, (2003), ''Protest or mainstream? How the European anti-immigrant parties developed into two separate groups'', *European Journal of Political Research*, 42 (1), 70-71; Pippa Norris, 2005, 66,67; Terri Givens, 2005, 24.

[31] Piero, Ignazi, 1992, 24; Cas Mudde, 2007, 23.

[32] Ryan Bakker et al. (2015), ''Measuring Party Positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File: 1999-2010'', *Party Politics*, 21 (1), 148.

Table 1
The 2010 Chapel Hill Expert Survey on Party Positions

Party Name	Socio-cultural policies*	European Integration**	Socio-economic policies*
Vlaams Blok (Vlaams Belang)	9.6	2.6	7.9
Danish People's Party	9.4	2.4	5.4
Front National	9.5	1.2	6.5
UK Independence Party	7.6	1	8.2
British National Party	9.5	1.2	6.3
Freedom Party	8.7	1.9	5
Sweden Democrats	8.25	1.6	5.5
National Union Attack	9.3	2.5	2.6
The Movement for Better Hungary	9.4	2.3	3.1
League of Polish Families	9.5	1.7	3.5
Greater Romania Party	9.4	3.7	2.1
Slovak National Party	9.2	2.9	4.3
Slovene National Party	8.5	3	6
Nationalist Action Party	9.4	2	5.4

* Party positioning on socio-cultural policies and socio-economic policies is measured on a scale ranging from 10 (libertarian / left) to 10 (authoritarian / right).
** Party positioning on European integration is measured on a scale ranging from opposing European integration (1) to supporting European integration (7). On this scale, the score of 4 represents the neuter position.

Turkey's Radical Right: The Nationalist Action Party

The Nationalist Action Party (MHP) was founded in 1965 as the Republican Peasants' Nation Party. A party congress gathered in 1969 adopted the name Nationalist Action Party. As seen in table 1, the 2010 Chapel Hill expert survey shows that MHP not only follows authoritarian socio-cultural policies, but also is a hard Eurosceptic party. The MHP promotes a nationalism built around Turkish culture, traditions and faith.[33] They regard Islam and nationalism as the nexus of the Turkish identity. In the early 1970s, the founding leader of the party, Alpaslan Türkeş, stated that 'we refuse a nationalism that denies Islam and we refuse an Islam that ignores the nation.'[34] The party repudiated

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[33] Milliyetci Hareket Partisi (2011) **"Seçim Beyannamesi"**
http://mhp.org.tr/usr_img/_mhp2007/kitaplar/MHP_2011_SecimBeyannamesi.pdf (11 January 2016).
[34] Ali Erken, (2014), "Ideological Construction of the Politics of Nationalism in Turkey: The Milliyetci Hareket Partisi (MHP), 1965-1980", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 20 (2), 208. Nevertheless, the prime emphasis has been on nationalism, making the MHP different from those parties considered to represent political Islam in Turkey (see: Ziya Önıs, 2003, 43; Gamze, Avci (2011), "The Nationalist Movement Party's Euroscepticism: Party Ideology Meets Strategy", *South*

the ban on wearing the headscarf in universities and public institutions - an enduring problem between Muslim people and secular state institutions since the 1970s- and voted for lifting the ban in 2008 The party argues that individuals should grow up with Islamic values; to this end, the party promised to eliminate the age restriction on Quran courses, taught in mosques during summer holidays. In line with this commitment, not only does the party favor the continuation of the compulsory religious education classes in primary and secondary schools, it also disapproves of alternative ways of life (e.g. living together without marriage), while approving a traditional family structure, considered the guardian of national values and social integrity[35] The party favors strict punishments including the death penalty, which was removed from the Turkish Penalty Code entirely in 2004.[36] The MHP is a hard Eurosceptic party in its opposition to EU membership, arguing that the EU's approaches to the Cyprus Question and the Kurdish Issue conflict with Turkey's national interests.[37]Instead, the MHP suggests that Turkey should strengthen relations with the Turkic Republics of Caucasia and Central Asia in order to make the country a global actor. The MHP's slogan for the 1973 parliamentary election was 'long live to our world domination.'[38] The party believes that this would also elevate the Turkish language to the list of widely spoken languages worldwide.[39] As a corollary of its skepticism about international politics, the MHP disapproves of foreign investments, lest these foreign actors' ventures threaten national security. Instead, the party favors an economic model that primarily relies on native employers and employees.[40]

As a member of the radical right party family, the MHP objects to the extension of minority rights on the grounds of protecting the national security. This reasoning guides the party in opposing the re-opening of *Halki Seminary*, the Greek Orthodox School that closed in 1971.[41] In response to the increasing saliency of the 'Kurdish Opening'[42] process,

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European Society and Politics, 16 (3), 438. At the time, the Constitutional Court cancelled this legislation; however, the ban was subsequently lifted. The MHP's opposition to the ban casts doubt on the argument that the party always takes the state's side when there is a conflict between the state and the public (see: Filiz Baskan, (2006), "Globalization and Nationalism: The Nationalist Action Party of Turkey", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 12 (1), 91.

[35] MHP, 2015, 135-136 and 150. A detailed information on this issue can also be found at http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=238&nid=19789 (24 January 2016).

[36] The death penalty in Turkey was partly abolished in 2001, when the MHP was part of a three-party coalition government. Although the MHP voted against this legislation, it passed with the support of members of parliaments from other coalition partners and opposition parties.

[37] Gamze Avci, 2011, 443, Bulent Aras and Gokhan Bacik, 2000, 57.

[38] Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (1973), *1973 Secim Beyannamesi*, (Ankara), 28.

[39] MHP, 2011, 1-2.

[40] MHP, ibid, 65, 85-86.

[41] Gamze, Avci, 2011, 442. For remarks on this issue given by the deputy chairman of the party, Semih Yalçın, please see:http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/mhp-criticizes-efforts-over-halki-seminary.aspx?pageID=238&nID=25303&NewsCatID=338 (17 January 2016)

[42] The central aim of the process, initially called the 'Democratic Initiative,' was originally to consolidate the democratic regime in Turkey by acting as a catalyst for addressing the problems of minority populations in Turkey. However, discussions regarding the initiative have been confined exclusively to the 'Kurdish issue,' and debates about the efficacy of the 'Kurdish Opening' revolve

the party has acted almost as a single-issue party, differentiating itself from existing parliamentary parties through its objection to the process. While assessing the process as a dreadful ordeal, the MHP claims that the extension of minority rights (in relation to the Kurdish issue) is tantamount to accepting the presence of terrorism in Turkey. One might argue that the MHP has taken a negative position on the 'Kurdish Opening' due to its fierce opposition to terrorism, rather than its opposition to the extension of minority rights. Yet, it should be noted that not every one with a Kurdish ethnic background supports the PKK. For example, about a half voted for the Motherland Party or the True Path Party during the 1980s and 1990s, and many have voted for the currently ruling Justice and Development Party since 2002. Thus, even if the MHP opposes the extension of minority rights in part due to its approval of the PKK, it is also true that the MHP ignores the demands coming from those Kurdish voters, who do not support the People's Democratic Party. The leader of the MHP, Devlet Bahçeli, went so far as to argue that his party would fight for 50 years, if necessary, to undo any concession that would be made to PKK, which have fought against the Turkish state for more than 25 years.[43] In line with its objection to the process, the MHP disapproves of adopting the Kurdish language as a medium of instructions.[44] The party criticized the incumbents for signing a declaration with representatives from the pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HDP) in 2015 likening declaration to the Treaty of Sèvres signed between the Allied Powers and the Ottoman Empire in 1920 that confirmed the partition of the latter.[45] Due to its opposition to minority rights, the MHP favors an electoral democracy in spite of its commitment to consolidate the democratic regime in the country The party strongly disagrees with re-conceptualizing Turkish citizenship in the Constitution in manner that would embrace various ethnic identities.[46]

Radical right parties have generally been minor parties in terms of their vote shares and number of parliamentary seats. In other words, they have been substantially far away from securing outright parliamentary majorities.[47] As a member of the radical right family of parties, the MHP is not an exception in this regard.

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around two main topics: whether it would introduce legislations to improve minority rights, and whether it could eliminate the terrorism that has been carried out by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkaren Kurdistani, PKK*) within Turkish borders since the mid 1980s. Although almost six years have passed, the process has progressed feebly.

[43] Radikal (2 August 2009) "Biz 50 yıl dağa çıkarız"
http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/devlet-bahceli-biz-50-yil-daga-cikariz-947751/ (17 January 2016).

[44] Ziya Önis, 2003, 45.

[45] Hürriyet Daily News (3 March 2015) "MHP likens government's joint statement with HDP to treaty that ended Ottoman Empire" http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/mhp-likens-governments-joint-statement-with-hdp-to-treaty-that-ended-ottoman-empire.aspx?pageID=238&nID=79146&NewsCatID=338 (18 January 2016)

[46] MHP, 2011: 10, 36, and 44-45.

[47] Maurice Duverger (1954), *Political Parties: Their organization and activity in the modern state* (London: Methuen), 283.

Table 2
Radical Right in Last Three Parliamentary Elections

Party Name	1st election	2nd Election	3rd Election*
Vlaams Blok	12 % / 17 (150)	7.8 % / 12 (150)	3.7 % / 3 (150)
Danish People's Party	13,9 % / 25 (179)	12.3 % / 22 (179)	21.1 % / 37 (179)
Front National	11.3 % / 0 (577)	4.3 % / 0 (577)	13.6 % / 2 (577)
UK Independence Party	2.2 % / 0 (650)	3.1 % / 0 (650)	12.6 % / 1 (650)
Freedom Party	11 % / 21 (183)	17.5 % / 34 (183)	20.5 % / 40 (183)
Sweden Democrats	2.9 % / 0 (349)	5.7 % / 20 (349)	12.9 % / 49 (349
National Union Attack	9.4 % / 38 (240)	7.3 % / 23 (240)	4.5 % / 11 (240)
The Movement for Better Hungary	2.2 % / 0 (386)	16.7 % / 47 (386)	20.3 % / 23 (199)
League of Polish Families	7.9 % / 38 (460)	8 % / 34 (460)	1.3 % / 0 (460)
Greater Romania Party	19.5 % / 84 (345)	13. % / 48 (332)	3.2 % / 0 (334
Slovak National Party	11.7 % / 20 (150)	5.1 % / 9 (150)	4.6 % / 0 (150)
Slovene National Party	6.3 % / 6 (90)	5.4 % / 5 (90)	1.8 % / 0
Nationalist Action Party	13 % / 53 (550)	16.3 % / 80 (550)	11.9 % / 40 (550)

* Third election refers to most recent parliamentary elections. Because LPR has been defunct the 3rd election refers to the 2007 Polish parliamentary election. Likewise, the 3rd election in Slovenia is the one held in 2011.
Source: The data on election results were collected from http://www.parties-and-elections.eu (accessed 21 February 2016).

The MHP achieved its greatest electoral support in the 1999 parliamentary elections. At the time, the party won the 18.0 per cent of the votes and secured 130 (out of 550) parliamentary seats. Its second best result came in the June 2015 parliamentary elections, in which the party gained 16.9 per cent of the votes and 80 parliamentary seats (out of 550). The MHP failed to exceed the electoral threshold at the country level (10 per cent) in the 1987, 1995, and 2002 parliamentary elections. Just once, in the 1991 parliamentary elections, the party formed an electoral alliance (with the Welfare Party); this bloc won 16.9 per cent of the votes, providing the MHP with 18 seats (out of 450). In the most recent parliamentary elections, held in November 2015, the MHP's vote share decreased significantly (from 16.8 per cent to 11.9 per cent), and its number of parliamentary seats literally halved (from 80 to 40). Importantly, this failure marked the first time that the party reserved fewer seats than the pro-Kurdish HDP. On the one hand, for some radical right parties, remaining in opposition is preferable to taking office where their anti-

political establishment image could weaken in the minds of voters. This occurred, for instance, in the case of the Freedom Party in Austria until 2003.[48] On the other hand, some radical right parties, such as the League of Polish Families and the Slovak National Party, have willingly become part of coalition governments. Until the June 2015 parliamentary elections, the MHP fell into the second group, participating in coalition governments in the late 1970s and late 1990s. Nevertheless, due to the increasing prominence of the 'Kurdish Opening' process in Turkish politics, a process supported to varying degrees by all other parliamentary parties, the restrictive impact of ideology forced the MHP to employ anti-political establishment rhetoric after the June 2015 parliamentary elections.

The Restrictive Impact Of Ideology On The MHP's Strategies After The June 2015

No political party won an outright parliamentary majority in Turkey's June 2015 parliamentary elections. Surprisingly, the AKP lost its parliamentary majority for the first time in 13 years. The party's vote share decreased from 49.7 per cent to 40.7 per cent, and its number of its parliamentary seats fell from 327 to 258 (out of 550).[49] The CHP, despite being the main opposition party since 2002, also suffered a disappointing showing (25.7 per cent and 132 seats out of 550) and remained about ten points adrift of its own expectations[50] By contrast, the MHP managed to increase its vote share from 13.0 per cent to 16.8 per cent, reserving 80 parliamentary seats. The MHP welcomed the result as a chance to strength its efficacy within the parliament. As no single party secured a parliamentary majority, post-election debates revolved around the question of whether the opposition parties would challenge the AKP's dominance or whether the AKP would maintain its dominant position through a coalition government.

The election results produced various scenarios regarding possible coalition governments. The CHP insisted on a tri-party coalition including the CHP, MHP and HDP, representing 'the bloc of 60 per cent,' compromising those in the electorate who did not vote for the AKP.[51] Various circles fearing about the AKP's increasing authoritarian tendencies also supported this option, seeing it as a way of undermining the AKP's dominance.[52] Towards this aim, the CHP's leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, even offered the prime ministry to the MHP's leader, despite the fact that the CHP had gained more parliamentary seats.[53] The MHP did not agree to this option, however, sparking widespread criticisms among those opposed to the AKP. Such critics accused the MHP of ignoring the 'bloc of 60 per cent'

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[48] Terri Givens, (2005), 26.
[49] Nordsieck, Wolfram (2016), "Dataset on Parties and Elections in Europe" http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/index.html (11 January 2016).
[50] Hürriyet Daily News (2 March 2015), "Turkey's main opposition CHP aims for 35 percent at elections", http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-main-opposition-chp-aims-for-35-percent-at-elections-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=79089&NewsCatID=338 (16 January 2016).
[51] Raphael Satter and Suzan Fraser (21 June 2015), "Question mark over Erdogan as Turk parties jockey for power" *Associated Press*.
[52] Şahin Alpay (7 June 2015), "What Happens After the Election", *BBC Monitoring European*,
[53] Mehmet Cetıngulec, (2015), "The Most-Likely Coalition Option", *BBC Monitoring European,* (24 June 2015).

and pursuing a strategy benefitting the AKP.[54] Indeed, some argued that the election of the AKP's nominee as speaker of parliament was partly due to the MHP's strategy.[55] This view, however, ignores the restrictive impact of ideology on the MHP's strategies. As a radical right party, the MHP could not have designed a strategy based on cooperation with the pro-Kurdish HDP for the sake of challenging the AKP's dominance. Because such a strategy would be incompatible with the party's ideology, the MHP would be unlikely to convince even its own supporters to back it. In fact, the MHP's counterparts in Bulgaria (ATAKA) indirectly supported the formation of a quasi-technocratic coalition government between the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the pro-Turkish Rights and Freedom Party (DPS) in 2013. ATAKA's decision to support a coalition government including the pro-Turkish DPS explicitly conflicts with the party's ideological stance concerning the minority rights in the country. The ATAKA's failure to secure a single seat in the European Parliament in the 2014 elections and the decline in the party's vote share from 7.3 per cent in 2013 to 4.5 per cent in the 2014 parliamentary election were attributed to this decision.[56] Instead, the MHP's strategy involved refusing to cooperate with any political party advocating the Kurdish Opening process.[57] The policies the party formulated in response to increasing violence due to 'the Kurdish issue' also complied with the party's ideology. For instance, the MHP asked the incumbents to impose martial law in regions where violence frequently occurred. The party also advised banning the HDP on the grounds of its having close relations with the PKK. The MHP voted against the formation of a parliamentary commission to investigate the July 2015 *Suruç* bombing in which 20 supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP lost their lives Even though various circles opposing the AKP claim that the MHP helps the AKP when the latter faces with a difficulty, the two parties did not establish a coalition after the June 2015 parliamentary election. Although AKP and MHP disagreed over certain issues such as Cyprus and EU membership, this option seemed quite viable in that both parties appeal largely to conservative voters.[58] A post election survey also indicated that a large majority of both party's supporters solidly solid supported this option.[59] Nevertheless, negotiations for a coalition government between the AKP and MHP ended in failure, due in part to the

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[54] For example see: Mehmet Yılmaz (2 July 2015), "Will Bahceli's negationist policies work?" *BBC Monitoring European*; Cengiz Candar (3 July 2015), "AKP Speaker for Parliament, On Course for Early Elections", *BBC Monitoring European*.

[55] Murat Yetkın (2 July 2015), "AKP has started healing its wounds", *BBC Monitoring European*. The AKP's nominee, İsmet Yılmaz, was elected in the fourth round where the candidate with highest number of votes is elected irrespective of simple or qualified majority.

[56] Andrea Pirro, 2015, 59-60.

[57] Al-monitor (8 June 2015), "Turkey elections: what's next for Turkey" http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/turkey-elections-what-next-coalitions-akp-chp-hdp.html (21 January 2016).

[58] Taştekin, Fehim (11 June 2015), "This Rudder Cannot Withstamd This Course", *BBC Monitoring European*; Alexander Christie-Miller (9 June 2015), "Grand coalition looks to humiliate Erdogan", *The Times*.

[59] Abdülkadir Selvi (30 June 2015), "What will be AKP's Share of Vote If New Elections Held", *BBC Monitoring European*; Abdülkadir Selvi (17 July 2015), "Behind the Scenes of the Davutoglu-Bahceli Meeting"*, BBC Monitoring European*.

restrictive impact of ideology on the MHP's strategies.[60] In keeping with its ideology, the MHP could have agreed to form a coalition government with the AKP on the condition that the 'Kurdish Opening' process was fully terminated, among other conditions.[61] The AKP could not have accepted this condition however, due to its fear of losing the support of a bulk of the Kurdish electorate.[62] Consequently, the AKP's leader returned his mandate to form a coalition government after failing to do so.[63]

The failure to form a new coalition government within forty-five days of the election for the bureau of the newly elected parliament resulted in the formation of a caretaker government. This government lasted until the snap election on 1 November. The caretaker government was to include ministers that elected from each parliamentary party, along with three ministers outside the parliament whose 'independence' from the parliamentary parties is required constitutionally. However, driven by the restrictive impact of ideology on its strategies, the MHP refused to take place in the caretaker government on the grounds that the government included the pro-Kurdish HDP. As a radical right party, the MHP was fiercely determined not to take part in the caretaker government, even though this decision led to a personality clash within the party, and created the impression that the party was avoiding its responsibility to fulfill this constitutional requirement.[64]

Conclusion

As a radical right party, the MHP is located at the right end of the ideological spectrum making the party ideology-oriented rather than policy-oriented. This requires the party to plan strategies that are fully compatible with its ideology. As the 'Kurdish Opening' process increased considerably in salience, and as all parliamentary parties, except the MHP, supported the process at least to some degree, the MHP turned into an anti-political

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[60] The AKP had a strategic reason not to form a coalition government with the MHP. The AKP was 18 seats short of a parliamentary majority after the June 2015 election. For the AKP, taking its chances to regain a parliamentary majority in a snap election was preferable to forming a coalition government that would constitutionally last for four years.

[61] The MHP also laid down two more conditions, namely that the corruption allegations against four ministers and Erdoğan's family must be investigated, and that the President Erdoğan would not exceed constitutional limits in performing his duties.

[62] Patrick Cockburn (8 June 2015), "Turkey elections: A coalition looks likely: but what kind of coalition and how will affect the war in Syria", *The Independent*;

Raphael Satter and Suzan Fraser (21 June 2015), "Question mark over Erdogan as Turk parties jockey for power" *Associated Press*.

[63] Davutoğlu handed back his mandate to President Erdoğan on the 39th of 45 days. However, Erdoğan did not give the mandate to the main opposition party's leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, on the grounds that he has no viable option to form a coalition government. Instead, Erdoğan waited until 23 August, when the deadline for forming a government was over.

[64] Ahmet Hakan (29 August 2015), "Ten Things About the Tugrul Turkes Incident", *BBC Monitoring European*. Following his acceptance of the offer to be deputy prime minister in the caretaker government, Türkeş was sent to the discipline committee of the MHP to demand his expulsion from the party. In the meantime, Türkeş resigned from the MHP and joined the AKP. In the November election, he was elected as a member of parliament in the constituency of Ankara and continued his position as deputy prime minister in the 64th government formed after the election.

establishment party. This follows from the MHP's embrace of radical right ideology, the core feature of which is opposition to multiculturalism. As an ideology-oriented party, the MHP's opposition to the Kurdish Opening process restricted its available strategies during the post-election negotiations for a coalition government.

On the one hand, the party refused to be part of an 'anti-AKP bloc,' because the bloc included the pro-Kurdish HDP. On the other hand, the party was unwilling to form a coalition government with the AKP due to the latter's support for the 'Kurdish Opening' process. Because no coalition government was formed by the constitutionally set deadline, a caretaker government was formed; yet, despite being invited, MHP refused to participate due to the inclusion of the pro-Kurdish HDP. The party's ideology forced the party to design a strategy aimed at halting the 'Kurdish Opening' process and to follow this strategy during negotiations with different political parties to form a coalition government. Aside from the MHP, all parliamentary parties have supported the process to varying degrees; therefore, the MHP's approach resulted in their refusal to cooperate with other parliamentary parties.

This approach left the electorate with the impression that the MHP did not want to rule the country, adversely affecting the party's popularity. The party's vote share decreased from 16.8 percent to 11.9 percent in the elections held on 1 November 2015, the party's worst electoral showing since the 2007 parliamentary elections. This article cannot measure the extent to which this factor played role in the MHP's declining electoral support, however. Future studies should aim to fill this gap by conducting micro-level analyses on voting behavior in both parliamentary elections held in 2015.

The MHP's substantial loss of electoral support has initiated an intra-party debate about how to stage a comeback. The disagreement concerns not only how the party has been governing, but also ideological differences within the party. The debate is likely to continue until the party congress scheduled for 18 March 2018, although the intra-party opposition is attempting to settle the party's issues earlier through a petition. The opposition has fulfilled the party's 250 delegates signature requirement, but the party's existing leadership has ignored the demand so far. This potential change in the MHP's leadership could cause a realignment of Turkish party system can occur in near future. Alternatively, a new party with a moderate ideology could be formed as a result of possible splits from the MHP. The outcome of these ongoing developments within the MHP and its impact of Turkish politics remain to be seen.

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