

THE REASONS OF ELECTORAL STAGNATION OF THE CHP IN THE LIGHT OF THE 2015 TURKISH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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Abstract

It is the intention in this article to explain the electoral stagnation of the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) in the light of the 2015 parliamentary elections in Turkey. Drawing on theories of voting behavior, the article uncovers the organizational shortcomings within the party and the problem of credibility that have emerged as significant impediments to the party in addressing long-term historical-structural issues, mainly the division of Turkish society between the religious periphery and the secular center. Furthermore, the strong identification between the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) and its partisans have made party-switching difficult, having been achieved, above all, through the provision of economic benefits and public services and the consolidation of party identification through growing polarization and division in Turkish politics. Last but not least, the changes to the political environment between the June 7 and November 1, 2015 elections, pushed stability and security to the top of the agenda, as well as AKP's electoral adjustments in the run-up to the November 1 elections inhibited any possible flow of votes to the CHP.

Keywords: CHP, Voting Behavior, Turkish Politics, Turkish Parliamentary Elections

2015 Türkiye Parlamento Seçimleri Işığında CHP'nin Oylarını Artıramamasının Nedenleri

Öz

Bu makalenin amacı 2015 Türkiye Parlamento Seçimleri ışığında Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi'nin (CHP) oylarında durgunluğun nedenlerini açıklamaktır. Oy verme davranışı teorilerinden yararlanarak makale, parti içindeki örgütsel

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zaafiyeletlerin ve inandırıcılık sorununun partinin uzun dönemli tarihsel-yapısal sorunların üstesinden gelmede – temel olarak Türkiye’de toplumun muhafazakar çevre ve laik merkez arasında bölünmesi - önemli engel olarak ortaya çıktığını ileri sürmektedir. Bunun yanında Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) ve taraftarları arasındaki güçlü özdeşleşme parti değiştirmeyi güçleştirmektedir. Özdeşleşme herşeyden önce ekonomik fayda ve kamu hizmetlerinin sağlanmasıyla ve Türk siyasetindeki artan kutuplaşma ve bölünmeyle gerçekleşmektedir. Son olarak 7 Haziran ve 1 Kasım 2015 tarihleri arasında politik ortamdaki değişiklikler güvenlik ve istikrar meselelerini gündemin tepesine çıkarmış ve AKP’nin 1 Kasım seçimleri öncesinde yaptığı değişiklikler CHP’ye muhtemel oy akışının önüne geçmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: CHP, Oy Verme Davranışı, Türkiye’de Siyaset, Türkiye Parlamento Seçimleri

Introduction

After taking over the chairmanship of the Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) from Deniz Baykal in 2010, Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu sought to turn it into a catch-all party by collecting votes from a broader range of the electorate. Under Kılıçdaroğlu, the CHP has undergone a significant process of renewal in terms of leadership, ideology and organization, although it would appear that his efforts to increase the party’s votes since he assumed the party chairmanship have been in vain. Following the 1. November 1 elections, voices of the opposition within the party have been raised once again, calling for a general meeting during which elections would be held for the selection of a new chairman.

A central contention of the article is that in its efforts to expand its electoral base, the CHP was unable to overcome its long-term historical-structural issues due to mainly to organizational shortcomings within the party and problems of credibility. The paper maintains further that regarding the short-term factors, the changing political context between the June 7 and November 1 elections, which helped prioritize stability and security, as well as the policy adjustments and measures put in place by the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) in an

apparent response to the June 7 election results kept the CHP from expanding its electoral support. The paper argues further that the recent polarization and deepening of ideological, ethnic and religious divides in Turkish politics, as well as the economic largesse and the boost in public services provided by the AKP helped consolidate party identification, in particular for the AKP, making cross-overs between parties difficult.

Methodologically, the paper scrutinizes the actions of the party and makes a content analysis of the speeches of party chairman Kılıçdaroğlu, as depicted in the media in the run-up to the 2015 elections, analyzing also the CHP election manifestos in order to demonstrate how the changes in the CHP continued under Kılıçdaroğlu. The focus of the content analysis are the campaigns preceding the June 7 and November 1 elections, while a further analysis is made of the 2015 parliamentary elections with particular focus on the performance of the CHP. The intention in this regard is to show the continued electoral “ghettoization” of the party, in that support for the party was confined to certain groups and regions of the country. A major question raised in the study is why has the CHP still suffered from electoral stagnation, despite the considerable efforts of Kılıçdaroğlu to overhaul the leadership, ideology and organization of the party? The article draws on some established theories of voting behavior to address this question, including rational choice theory (economic and political short-term factors), sociological theory (historical and sociological long-term factors, such as socio-economic status and religion) and psychosocial theory (an individual’s identification with a political party).

The article is divided into theoretical and empirical parts. Following a brief introduction, theories of voting behavior and studies dealing with the issue in Turkey are discussed; while the empirical part of the study begins with an introduction to the efforts of Kılıçdaroğlu to transform the party. The following section draws focus onto the electoral campaigns of the CHP during the 7. June June 7 and 1. November November 1 elections, with particular focus on Kılıçdaroğlu’s efforts to put the party in a

competitive position against the ruling AKP. The following section evaluates the results of both the June 7 and November 1 elections, with particular focus on the performance of the CHP. In the next section, the factors that contributed to the failure of the CHP to increase its votes are highlighted, after which the paper is concluded with a summary of the findings of the study.

Theories on Voting Behavior

There are three dominant theories related to voting behavior: the sociological model, known as the School of Columbia, which identifies social factors as the main reason behind the behavior of the electorate; the psychosocial model, referred to as the School of Michigan, which suggests that it is, above all, party identification that drives voters to vote for a certain party; and finally, rational choice theory, dubbed also the Model of Economic Voting, which assumes that individuals vote on the basis of their personal interests.

The sociological model clarified that it was the social group to which a person belonged that determined primarily an individual's voting behavior (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). In this regard, historical and sociological long-term factors such as socio-economic status, religion and area of residence played a more important role in electoral choice than, say, an individual's exposure to the media during the election campaign. The sociological model maintains that voting behavior is shaped mainly by social cleavages (Berelson et al., 1954). In their seminal study, Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan pointed out that the main determinants of party support in Western Europe were social identities. (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). According to Lipset and Rokkan, social divisions such as class differences of employees-employers, regional cleavages of center-periphery and sectarian cleavages over religion and state that emerged much earlier in European states played a strong role in shaping voting behaviour. The importance of these traditional cleavages lies in the fact they are a reflection of major ideological divides in party system. Social class reflected the basic divide between the left advocating a

powerful role for the state particularly through egalitarian welfare measures and the right favoring a more limited role for government. The religious fission mirrored liberal and conservative moral debates. Division between core and periphery reflected the extent, to which the nation-state should be centralized.

Although social factors can be helpful in explaining the long-term stability of voting behavior, they cannot answer why variations exist in the behaviors of voters in different elections. Similarly, social factors cannot explain why individuals who are part of the same social group vote differently. These limitations to the sociological model have led to the emergence of a new voting model, being the psychosocial model of voting behavior.

Psychosocial theory attempts to overcome these difficulties by using the concept of partisanship, aiming to connect the effects of long-term historical and sociological factors in sociological theory with short-term social and political factors in each election (Campbell et al., 1960). The concept of partisanship, referring to a psychological association and a stable and lasting connection with a political party, although this may not necessarily turn into a tangible relationship through registration or consistent votes for the party, lies at the heart of this theory. Even if individuals vote for another political party for any number of reasons, such as economic crisis or a poor election campaign, they vote for their original party in the next elections (Norris, 1998). This model of voting behavior encourages the adoption of an explanatory model known as a funnel of causality, whereby distal factors such as historical and socio-economic features, membership groups, norms and attitudes influence partisanship, and this, in turn, steers decisions on proximal factors such as candidates, issues, election campaigns, the political and economic situation, and government action, with a final influence on electoral behavior. The fact that this school of voting behavior cannot explain why some voters associate with a political party but vote for another party, or decide not to vote in an election at all, has led to the formation of another theory on voting behavior: the rational choice model.

Rational choice theory places emphasis on proximal factors rather than distal ones. In other words, it is based on an evaluation of economic and political short-term factors in each election. Just as customers seek to obtain maximum utility in the market, electors seek to maximize their electoral gains in a political system. According to this model of voting behavior, voters and political parties act on the basis of their own interests (Downs, 1957), and voters tend to reward the ruling parties/politicians who brought benefit to them, and punish those who did not. Voters compare political parties and choose the one that best meets his/her needs and desires. If they decide that a party that they had voted for did not fulfill their expectations, they can easily change their vote in the next elections. (Lance and Salisbury, 1987: 1-30)

Voting Behavior in Turkey

Studies of voting behavior in Turkey have revealed several determining factors influencing the voters' decisions at the ballot box, including political ideology, party identification and economic factors. This section provides a review of literature on voting behavior in Turkey.

Political ideology, which is determined primarily by the way the voter locates her/himself on the left-right divide, is source of voting behavior in Turkey. The ideological stances of the voters seemed to have been the most important determinant of party preferences during the 1990s. (Kalaycıoğlu, 1994; Kalaycıoğlu, 1999; Esmer 2002) Religiosity affects closely political ideology, in that more pious voters are inclined to define themselves as right-wing, while the more secular ones tend to define themselves as left-wing (Çarkoğlu, 2005). The division of Turkish society along the secular-religious line comes to such a point that some scholars describe it as *kulturkampf* in order to emphasize the depth of the divide (Kalaycıoğlu, 2010). Reflecting this ideological divide between the pro-Islamist elements at the periphery as opposed to the secularist center, a similar framework is used the center-periphery (Mardin, 1973). Along with religiosity, Kurdish-Turkish

ethnic identities contribute to defining voters' ideological positions (Çarkoğlu, 2007; Çarkoğlu and Hinich, 2006; Kalaycıoğlu 2010).

A second driver of voting behavior in Turkey is party identification (Kalaycıoğlu, 2008; Kalaycıoğlu, 2010) (psychological attachment to a political party), which is influenced not only through political socialization in the family, but also by such factors as ethnicity, religiosity, and in some cases, the perception of the management of the economy. Recurrent coups in Turkish politics have disrupted the party system several times in the past, leading to the emergence of new political parties, and the resulting lack of party institutionalization has reduced the importance of parties and the identification of voters with a party. This assigned party leaders with a greater role in determining the voters' party preferences (Kalaycıoğlu, 2013). The findings of a study focusing on the 2007 parliamentary elections demonstrated that "party identification seemed to play a major role in voter preferences for the AKP", which seemed in turn to depend mainly on how the AKP managed the economy. This is because the absence of socialization through the family, given the relatively recent arrival of the party onto the Turkish political landscape and absence of a significant challenge from the left, rendered the economic performance of the AKP more important for party identification (Kalaycıoğlu, 2010: 43; Kalaycıoğlu 2008: 309). Given that politics has become much more partisan and ideological in recent years, the number of people who identify with a political party has seen a dramatic rise (Kalaycıoğlu, 2014).

Another significant driver of voting behavior in Turkey is a retrospective or prospective assessment of the ruling party(ies)'s management of the economy (Başlevent et al., 2005; Çarkoğlu 2008; Başlevent and Kirmanoğlu, 2016). Analyzing 21 elections in the 1950-1995 period, Çarkoğlu identified a close connection between higher unemployment and inflation rates and lower electoral support for the ruling party/ies on the one hand, and higher economic growth and higher voter support on the other (Çarkoğlu, 1997). Akarca and Tansel revealed a correlation between the economic growth rate in the year before the election

and inflation rates and the share of the vote won by the ruling party/ies (Akarca and Tansel, 2006). They concluded that, “Turkish voters seem to hold only the major party in a coalition government responsible for economic growth, but all parties in power for inflation.” (Akarca and Tansel, 2006: 96). During the AKP era in the 2000s, the role of the economy in voting behavior seems to have increased, given the collapse of the center-right parties at the end of the 1990s due to their failure to tackle the economic woes (Çarkoğlu, 2008).

The CHP: Trials of Transformation

Under Kılıçdaroğlu, the CHP aimed to repeat the success of Bülent Ecevit, the party leader in the 1973 and 1977 parliamentary elections when the CHP emerged victorious, garnering the plurality of the votes with 33.3 percent and 41.4 percent respectively.

Deniz Baykal emerged as a dominant figure within the CHP in the first half of the 1990s. Under Baykal, the CHP displayed an inclination to side with the bureaucratic and military elite in state-society conflicts, with the primary aim of protecting the successes of the Kemalist revolution. Rather than putting forward credible policies to overcome the daily problems of the citizenry, it employed an ideological rhetoric, the result of which was that the CHP was unable to adapt to the rapid transformation being witnessed in Turkish politics and society at the time. This meant that the party could rely on only a narrow segment of the electorate for support, in direct contrast to its desire to expand its share of the vote. The CHP’s failure to address the real problems being faced by the public weakened its ties with the electorate, with the result being that the party came to be controlled by a small group of party members with absolute loyalty to the party leadership. This state of affairs turned the party into “an inward-looking organization absorbed in internal bickering with little influence in national politics and unimpressive electoral achievements” (Turan, 2006: 571).

In May 2010, a sex scandal compelled CHP chairman Baykal to resign, paving the way for the election of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu as the new party leader. To address the criticism that the CHP under Baykal was doomed to remain in opposition, and was unable to garner support from a broader array of voters, Kılıçdaroğlu strove to change the ideology, cadre and institutional composition of the party. Having assumed the chairmanship, he expressed his intention to turn the CHP into a party embracing everyone. In this context, Kılıçdaroğlu sought to put forward alternative policies to those being implemented by the AKP government, targeting in particular low-income voters rather than clinging onto policies that prioritized the safeguarding of the Kemalist nation-state model, as had been the case during the Baykal era. The CHP under Kılıçdaroğlu used a more inclusive language with respect to the headscarf and Kurdish issues in order to mend fences with the Kurdish and conservative segments of society, while at the same time taking steps to appease the core supporters of the party. In line with this change in the party's ideology, Kılıçdaroğlu tried to make the party organization more dynamic by replacing some of the more prominent Kemalist figures in the party leadership with figures with more social democratic leanings. Another approach by Kılıçdaroğlu to energize the party organization was to install a system of primary elections in the party for the determination of candidates. The procedure for registering as a member of the party was eased, and the party by-laws, party program and election manifesto were all revised. Despite these significant changes, the CHP failed to overcome its problem of electoral stagnation.

CHP's Electoral Campaigns in the 2015 Parliamentary Elections

In the June 7, 2015 elections, abandoning ideological rhetoric, Kılıçdaroğlu instead used rhetoric similar to the previous elections, offering concrete proposals that are not hard to understand by the public. Basically, the CHP's election campaign targeted the disadvantaged groups, underlining alleged shortcomings in democracy.

Aiming to fend off criticisms that it was doomed to remain in opposition, the CHP sought to demonstrate to the electorate that its credentials were strong and convincing enough to rule Turkey. Accordingly, the CHP tried to match the AKP in particular in the field of the economy, an area, in which the AKP was believed to be the strongest. Concentrating on the economy and de-emphasizing ideological and political issues in the election campaign could also help the CHP garner votes from the right-wing electorate, and in this regard, emphasis was on social policies targeting the middle- and low-income segments of society.

With respect to democracy, which it saw as an indispensable part of sustained economic growth, the CHP promised to restore the democracy, rule of law and individual freedoms it claimed had been lost under the AKP, such as freedom of thought and freedom of press. Instead of the presidential system, championed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the CHP advocated a strengthened parliamentary system in which the president had limited executive and legislative powers.

Moreover, the CHP under Kılıçdaroğlu expanded the practice of primaries to select parliamentary candidates. The party held primaries in 55 electoral districts in 41 of the 81 provinces, and Kılıçdaroğlu entered the primary process in Izmir in order to set an example for the other candidates. The CHP stood out in the June 7 elections as the only party that had selected a significant number of parliamentary candidates in this way.

Coming to the party's November 1 election campaign, the CHP blamed President Erdoğan for the failure of the coalition talks, claiming that he was reluctant to share power with the opposition parties (Milliyet, 2015a). The CHP also maintained that by allowing the continued chaos originating from the clashes between PKK fighters and Turkish security forces, as well as ISIS attacks, to overwhelm the country after the June 7 elections, the AKP was hoping to convince the electorate of the importance of a single-party AKP government in dealing with issues of security (Milliyet, 2015a).

An important emphasis of the CHP election campaign was the Kurdish issue. Highlighting the state of terrorism in the country, CHP chairman Kılıçdaroğlu pointed out that the AKP had been unable to bring an end to the Kurdish issue during its term in office, and argued that the terrorist attacks could be brought to an end and the Kurdish issue could be resolved peacefully through negotiations in Parliament if the CHP came to power (Çevikcan, 2015).

2015 Parliamentary Election Results

The AKP kept the status of being the largest party in Turkey after the June 7, 2015 elections even though its votes decreased by nine percent from 49.8 percent on June 12, 2011 to 40.9 percent on June 7, 2015. This meant that the number of seats won by the AKP decreased from 327 on June 12, 2011 to 258 on June 7, 2015. In contrast, the Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi*, HDP) managed to double its votes from 6.6 percent in the June 12 elections to 13.1 percent in the June 7 elections. The CHP saw a slight decline in support from 26 percent in the June 12 general elections to 24.9 percent in the June 7 elections. As a result, the number of CHP seats dropped from 135 in the June 12 elections to 132 in the June 7 elections. The MHP saw its votes increase from 13 percent in the June 12 elections to 16.3 percent in the June 7 elections. As a result, the number of deputies increased from 53 on June 12, 2011 to 80 on June 7, 2015.

The collapse of the coalition talks following the June 7 elections paved the way for snap elections, which were scheduled for November 1, 2015. The AKP won a landslide victory in the November 1, 2015 elections. It saw its votes increase from 40.9 in the June 7 elections to 49.5 percent on November 1. Its deputies also rose from 258 to 317 between the two elections. The CHP saw its votes increase slightly from 24.9 in the June 7 elections to 25.3 in the November 1 elections. The number of deputies rose slightly from 132 to 134. The MHP votes decreased significantly from 16.3 percent in the June 7 elections to 11.9 percent on November 1. This corresponded to a decrease in the number of seats from 80 to 40.

The HDP, on the other hand, saw its votes decrease from 13.1 percent in the June 7 elections to 10.8 percent on November 1 and its deputies declined from 80 to 59.

The CHP's voter base did not change in the November 1 elections, with again the bulk of its votes coming from the Aegean, Marmara and Mediterranean regions. Here, the party was able to draw votes from a select number of areas, inhabited mainly by the educated, middle, upper-middle urban populations of the larger cities and the cities in the coastal areas and Thrace. While the CHP's votes remained below its national average in Central Anatolia and the Black Sea region, its poor performance did not alter in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia (Yeni Şafak, 2015a). In the November 1 elections, the CHP came in first in six provinces along the Aegean coast and Thrace – Kırklareli, Edirne, Tekirdağ, İzmir, Aydın and Muğla – but was unable to win a single seat in 35 provinces out of 81, primarily those in the Southeastern and Eastern Anatolia, the Black Sea and Central Anatolia. Furthermore, the CHP was unable to make inroads into the conservative lower income electoral districts located on the periphery of Turkey's larger cities, which have become secure areas for the AKP after inheriting the organizational networks established by the Islamist parties of the 1990s. To illustrate this observation, we can take Istanbul as an example. While in the November 1 elections, the CHP received below its national average from slum electoral districts of Istanbul, such as Sultanbeyli, Esenler, Gaziosmanpaşa, Sultangazi, Zeytinburnu and Bağcılar, the AKP managed to surpass its nationwide average in these areas (Yeni Şafak, 2015b). Votes for the CHP in Istanbul, to a large extent, came from large inner urban-populated districts such as Kadıköy, Beşiktaş, Şişli and Bakırköy.

Table 1: General Election Results, June 12, 2011 – June 7, 2015 –November 1, 2015

	Vote share (percent)								
	Vote share (percent)			Change (percent)			Seats		
	June 12, 2011	June 7, 2015	November 1, 2015	Change June 12, 2011 – June 7, 2015 (percent)	Change, June 12, 2011 – November 1, 2015 (percent)	Change, June 7, 2015 – November 1, 2015 (percent)	June 12, 2011	June 7, 2015	November 1, 2015
AKP	49.8	40.9	49.5	-8.9	-0.3	8.6	327	258	317
CHP	26.0	24.9	25.3	-1.1	-0.7	0.4	135	132	134
MHP	13.0	16.3	11.9	3.3	-1.1	-4.4	53	80	40
HDP*	6.6	13.1	10.8	6.5	4.2	-2.3	35	80	59
Other parties	4.6	4.8	2.5	0.2	-2.1	-2.3	0	0	0

Source: The Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey and N.N. 2015. Seçimler. NTV, (20. 11. 2015).

* In the June 12, 2011 general elections, Kurdish candidates from the HDP ran as independents and 35 were elected to the parliament.

How to explain the entrenched stagnation in CHP votes?

There are few who would disagree that the CHP has undergone a significant ideological, leadership renewal under Kılıçdaroğlu, who has further expanded the party’s social-democratic rhetoric, addressing the concerns of socioeconomic segments of the society that tend to be overlooked under the AKP’s neo-liberal policies, and who used a more tolerant language towards the Kurds and pious in the parliamentary elections of 2015. However, the CHP has still been unable to attract the level of votes aspired to under Kılıçdaroğlu. This section explains the perpetual stagnation in the votes garnered by the CHP during the

2015 parliamentary elections on the basis of the sociological, psychosocial and rational-choice models of voting behavior.

First, based upon rational-choice theory, which takes into consideration the impact of economic and political short-term factors on voter preferences in each election, it could be suggested that the conjuncture between the two elections in 2015 worked in favor of the AKP at the expense of the opposition parties, including the CHP. Indeed, the CHP had weathered the coalition talks following the June 7 elections well, standing out as the only party that was able to talk to the other parties. It was the first party to announce clearly its conditions for establishing a coalition with the other parties. During the coalition talks with the AKP, it projected an image that it genuinely wanted to be part of a coalition government, and took a conciliatory approach to this end. The CHP's positive attitude was rewarded by the electorate in the opinion polls held during this period, which indicated an upsurge in support for the CHP of up to 2.5 percent. Nevertheless, despite the CHP's positive attitude during the coalition talks, coalition negotiations have also demonstrated to the electorate of difficulty of forming and sustaining a coalition government. This, in turn, might have affected the attitude of the stability-seeking electorate negatively and led them to support in the November 1 elections the strongest political party, the AKP, which had the highest chances of forming a single-party government rather than the other less powerful parties such as the CHP. Moreover, the atmosphere following the collapse of the coalition talks proved to work in favor of the AKP.

The start of the conflict between the PKK and state security forces led many nationalist voters to vote for the AKP instead of the MHP. The securitization of the Kurdish issue also weakened the CHP rhetoric during the election campaign, pledging its intention to settle the Kurdish conflict through peaceful means if elected into power.

Another short-term factor that contributed to the success of the AKP in the November 1 elections to the detriment of all

opposition parties was the AKP's quick response to the June 7 election results. In order to return to office as a single-party government in the November 1 elections, the AKP took a number of steps. The AKP expanded the package of economic pledges to the electorate. Moreover, the AKP changed its parliamentary candidate list by 40.

Second, with respect to the psychosocial model of voting behavior referring to one's identification with a political party that may change depending on such short-term factors as election campaigns, candidates and the policies pursued by the parties, it could be said that the CHP faced a series of difficulties that made it difficult for it to increase its share of the vote. As stated elsewhere in the text, the AKP enjoys a higher level of party identification, which seems to depend to a significant extent on its successful management of the economy. The AKP has been an unconventional actor in Turkish politics, achieving unprecedented electoral hegemony, and making it extremely difficult for not only the CHP, but also all other opposition parties to make inroads into its electoral base. While the AKP was able to establish a loyal bloc of voters through the provision of public services and resource distribution, the other parties were able to attract votes based for the most part only on their ideological standpoints (Ciddi ve Esen, 2014: 433). As a result, despite the significant economic, political and foreign policy mistakes made by the AKP, the party succeeded in keeping its votes above 40 percent and came in first in the June 7 elections. By contrast, closer to home, the CHP continued to be plagued by credibility problems during the 2015 parliamentary elections. The CHP could not project an image to the electorate that it could rule the country better than the AKP if voted into power. Besides, as the analysis of the November 1 election results revealed (Milliyet, 2015b), adjustments made by the AKP following the June 7 elections succeeded in attracting AKP partisans who deserted the party in the June 7 elections back into the party fold.

Another issue, which contributed to strong party identification is the recent political polarization in the country in which political parties are able to consolidate the support, making

crossovers to other parties uncommon. A recent public opinion poll found that people who would under no circumstances vote for the CHP, AKP, the Peace and Democracy Party (*Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP)¹ and the MHP were 40, 40.5, 77.7 and 21 percent respectively (Akyürek and Koydemir, 2014: 60). The effects of political polarization are further magnified by the growing divides in Turkey on the basis of ethnicity, sect and religion with the result that conservative or Kurdish voters would find it difficult to vote for the CHP, and vice versa. In other words, the increasing polarization and deepening of divides have contributed to a strong party identification, making the work of the CHP to make inroads into the conservative electoral base of the AKP all the more difficult. A recent study revealed that the AKP enjoyed the highest level of voter identification, with 39.1 percent, which was way above the second-placed CHP figure of 14.9 percent (Kalaycıođlu, 2014: 593).

Third, concerning the sociological model of voting behavior that is based on such historical and sociological long-term factors as socio-economic status, religion and area of residence, it could be maintained that the CHP had failed to attract the pious segment of the electorate who had traditionally remained distant from the party and the Kurds, or those who had given up supporting the party some time ago due to the strict Kemalist policies pursued by previous administrations. Reflecting on the sociological model of voting behavior, the center-periphery framework of the Turkish context informed closely the electoral support behind the CHP. As shown in the earlier analysis of the election results, votes for the CHP in the November 1 elections were confined largely to the coastal areas and the larger cities, inhabited mainly by the educated, middle- and upper-middle class urban populations who are known for their secular values, and the party was unable to penetrate the conservative districts of Central Anatolia, the Black Sea region, the Kurdish districts in Southeastern and Eastern Anatolia, and in the main cities and poor working-class conservative neighborhoods of larger cities.

¹ A Kurdish-based party that preceded the HDP.

Organizational problems within the CHP could be highlighted as a contributing factor in the party's failed efforts to boost its tally in electoral areas that had hitherto not voted for the CHP. A field study analyzing organizational problems in the CHP revealed three major problems faced by the party as an organization (Emre, 2015a). The most important of these concerns the detachment of the CHP from civil society and economic life. The retired and old play a disproportional role in the CHP organization, and the party has only a limited connection with civil society at large, including trade unions and professional organizations. Secondly, the party membership has little in common with the people who vote for the party, since the predominance of small groups in the party keeps it from reaching out to the new voters. The third issue faced by the party is the fact that the political platforms and mechanisms through which the members can support the party are limited only to participation in election campaigns, in that the party refrains from engaging other kinds of political participation mechanisms for its members, such as protests or demonstrations.

The weakness of the link between the party organization and its members can be illustrated by the low membership rate and the low proportion of membership fees in the overall revenue of the party. As of 2013, membership fees made up a meagre 0.42 percent of the overall total party budget (Emre, 2015a). As of December 2014, party membership stood at 1.1 million, and the CHP received 11.5 million votes in the June 7, 2015 elections (Taşkın, 2015). This means that the CHP could organize only 9.5 percent of its membership base. In contrast, the AKP, which received 18,867,000 votes in the June 7, 2015 elections, had at the time around 10 million members, meaning that the AKP was able to organize 53 percent of its members. In short, the AKP was five times as successful as the CHP in organizing its members. This was particularly the case when it came to the share of women and youth members in the CHP. As of December 2014, women made up only 30 percent of the overall membership of the CHP, and only 12 percent of the members were below 30 years old (Taşkın, 2015). This is in a country where half of the voters are aged 30 or above, meaning that the CHP can be considered a party of men of middle-

age or older. The lack of active party members and organizational defects was also significant, in the sense that despite the ideological renewal, the CHP party organization was unable to play the role of intermediary in communicating the party's new rhetoric and policies to its potential supporters. Furthermore, although the CHP under Kılıçdaroğlu abandoned its traditionally strict Kemalist line, the local party organizations were still dominated by a narrow understanding of Kemalism (Tosun, 2015). This projected an exclusive image of the party among the potential voters that the CHP had been striving to attract.

Regarding the sociological model of voting behavior, the historical-structural background of Turkish politics is another reason why, in the short-term, the CHP was unable to increase its votes. Peripheral countries like Turkey have not been conducive to the development of social democratic parties due to difficulties with economic development and participatory democracy (Emre, 2015b). Within this process, right/conservative parties have flourished at the expense of left/social democratic parties, and as a result, Turkish politics has for some time harbored a 35/65 percent traditional left/right divide in terms of political support. In other words, the right-wing bias of Turkish politics creates huge cultural and ideological obstacles for the parties on the left of the spectrum. It should be kept in mind that in the multi-party era, the CHP has never been able to raise its voter support above 40 percent except in the 1957 and 1977 elections. Ever since the victory of the Social Democratic People's Party (*Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti*, SHP) in the 1989 local elections, the CHP has never been able to claim victory in any election in the last few decades. In this regard, nobody can reasonably expect the CHP to improve its status in the ballot box in leaps and bounds in the short term. In other words, voters are unlikely to give up their ideological affiliations in the short term.

Conclusion

Since taking over the leadership of the party, Kılıçdaroğlu has put considerable effort into transforming the CHP into a party that

can garner votes from a diverse array of the electorate by making changes in the leadership, organization and ideology of the party, but as with previous elections, on November 1, the CHP under Kılıçdaroğlu was unable to penetrate the electoral districts that had not voted for the party in previous elections. This can be thought of as a problem of electoral ghettoization, in that the CHP's voter base is made up of specific niche segments of society, being the educated, middle/upper-middle urban population in the main cities, along the coastal areas and Thrace. It gained few votes from the Kurds in Eastern/ Southeastern Anatolia, nor from the large cities and conservative-nationalist electorate in the Black Sea and Central Anatolia regions, and was unable to make inroads into the AKP's strongholds in the peripheral poor urban districts of the country's larger cities. In short, the CHP could not turn itself into a party that represents Turkey as a whole.

Drawing on theories of voting behavior, the article suggests that the CHP's inability to expand its electoral base may be linked to a series of factors. The study demonstrated that the CHP was unable to surmount the traditional center-periphery cleavage in Turkish politics that divides Turkish society between the "peripheral" rural, religious and conservative segments of society and the "central" bureaucratic secular and economically better off. This is mainly because of shortcomings within the CHP, which has continued to suffer from problems of credibility among the wider electorate and has been plagued with organizational shortfalls that include the weakness of the link between the party organization and civil society. Furthermore, it would be difficult for any opposition party to defeat the AKP, which has established a strong bond with the electorate through the provision of public services and resource distribution. Rising polarization and a sharpening of divides on the basis of ideology, ethnicity and religion have contributed further to strong party identification, decreasing the likelihood of party-switching among the supporters. Finally, the conjunctural economic and political factors that dominated between the June 7 and November 1 elections that prioritized security and stability, and the AKP's policy adjustments in the run-up to the November 1 elections were able to reverse the positive

perception of the CHP among the electorate following the June 7 elections, impairing its electoral fortunes.

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