

Analyzing Party Positions and Electoral Dynamics in Turkey

Türkiye’de Partilerin Konumları ve Seçim Dinamiklerinin Analizi

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Abstract

This article examines the June and November 2015 general elections in Turkey – the final elections before Turkey’s transition into a presidential system – focusing on the political environment leading up to the elections, the coalition deals and potential coalition scenarios between the two elections and the aftermath of the November elections. The analysis is two-fold: first section looks into the background of electoral politics in Turkey and how policy dimensions of parties changed or stabilized over the years, covering the concepts of coalition potential, party adaptability and survival. The second section looks into electoral geography in Turkey, changes in voting patterns, strategic voting and the discrepancies in numbers in 2015.

Keywords: Turkish Politics, Elections, Coalitions, Party Positions, Party Politics, AKP.

Öz

Bu çalışma Türkiye’de başkanlık sistemine geçilmeden önceki son seçimler olan Haziran ve Kasım 2015 genel seçimlerini, seçimler öncesindeki siyasi sürece, iki seçim arasındaki dönemde yapılmıő olan koalisyon görüşmelerine, olası koalisyon senaryolarına, ve seçimler sonrasındaki gelişmelere bakarak, incelemektedir. Bu analiz iki bölüme ayrılmaktadır. İlk bölüm Türkiye’de seçimlerin arka planını incelemekte; koalisyon potansiyeli, partilerin adaptasyonu ve partilerin kalıcılığı gibi kavramlar üzerinden, politika alanlarına göre parti konumlarının yıllar içerisinde ne kadar deęişip deęişmediğini analiz etmektedir. İkinci kısım ise Türkiye’deki seçim coğrafyasını ele alarak 2015’teki oy verme eğilimlerini, stratejik oyları ve seçim sonuçlarındaki uyumsuzlukları tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türk siyaseti, Seçimler, Koalisyonlar, Party Konumları, Parti Siyaseti, AKP.

Introduction

A referendum in April 2017 has changed the Turkish political system from a parliamentary one to a presidential one. Perhaps, this was one of the most drastic changes to the system since the foundation of the republic or the military coup of 1980. The last parliamentary election before this transition was to take place in June 2015, but due to a hung government and unsuccessful attempts at forming a government, the election was repeated in November of the same year. These

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particular elections are important for several reasons. Firstly, there were major discrepancies in results between the two, even though the timeframe between elections were not far apart. These discrepancies were not analyzed fully. Secondly, changes in party positions and the non-cooperative behavior of leaders had a major role in hindering the emergence of a coalition and need to be examined. Thirdly, coupled with the decline in quality of democracy and the unstable environment during the period, the legitimacy of these elections became questionable. And finally, because these elections were the last elections before the transition to a presidential system and that they initiated the process towards changing the system, they have to be regarded as critical elections rather than normal ones.

This paper will analyze these points by looking at the road that led to the election, the in-between period from June to November where coalition deals took place, the aftermath of the elections and their impact. The first section will look into the background and characteristics of Turkish elections in the recent decades. The second section will analyze party positions in Turkey by comparing changes over the years in party policy dimensions and discuss coalition potentials among parties in the aftermath of the June election where a single-party government was no longer possible. The final section will examine strategic voting patterns, the shifts in votes between the June and November elections, electoral strongholds and geography of parties, and draw attention to the peculiarities in election results.

Background

While the 2002 general election in Turkey hit a peak in terms of electoral volatility and displayed considerable realignment of voter preferences, it also showcased a natural merging of the center. In this sense, the 2002 election was a unique and crucial election. The center was artificially split due to the military intervention of 1980 when most leaders and politicians were banned from political activity and major parties of the center were shut down. The gap they left behind was filled by new parties when the military finally stepped down in 1983 and elections resumed. However, when the banned politicians returned to politics with an amnesty law in 1987 they decided to lead their own parties instead of joining the existing major parties of the center. As a result, the center-left and center-right were represented by two parties on each side with a total of four major parties splitting the votes. This occurrence weakened the center substantially and aided parties with more radical rhetoric to gain grounds in the electoral arena (see Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009). It also caused confusion among the electorate as now there were more parties representing similar agendas on the center (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009).

The victory of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP) in 2002 not only put an end to the fluctuant coalition era of the late 1990s but also created a massive erosion of the existing parties from the political scene. The results were remarkable as the AKP was relatively a new party¹, established just a year before. Meanwhile, almost all pre-existing major

1 The AKP was a new party but it was building upon the existing organization of preceding pro-Islamist parties unlike, for instance, Genç Party in 2002. The case of party continuities is a common occurrence in Turkish politics when

parties lost representation in the Turkish parliament failing to pass the ten percent threshold. From 1987 until 2002, Turkey had five general elections and each of those had produced a different winner or a frontrunner. This shows the unstable nature of party politics and the dissatisfaction of voters with governments overall. Politics in the 1990s did not prove to be very efficient due to lack of cooperation among parties. Moreover, with an increasing number of parties in the political arena, party system suffered due to fragmentation. An era of weak governmental performance, centralized and authoritarian party structures, economic recession, high inflation, stagnation, clientelistic networks, allegations of corruption, scandals, party closures, non-cooperative coalitions, personal rivalries among leaders, high levels of volatility, and low levels of transparency marked the 1990s (Sayarı & Esmer, 2002). Therefore, one question was whether the success of the AKP related to protest behavior and it was the result of the economic crisis that preceded the election or not. Contradictory to the protest hypothesis, the AKP managed to stabilize its support and won sweeping victories in the next two elections (2007 and 2011) but the clientelistic nature of politics, personal rivalries and excessive party centralization still remained. A crucial example of party centralization can be seen in candidacy appointments through party headquarters instead of carrying out primary elections (see Ecevit & Kocapinar, 2018). Just as people started to believe that the governmental dominance of the AKP could not be challenged came the June 2015 election.

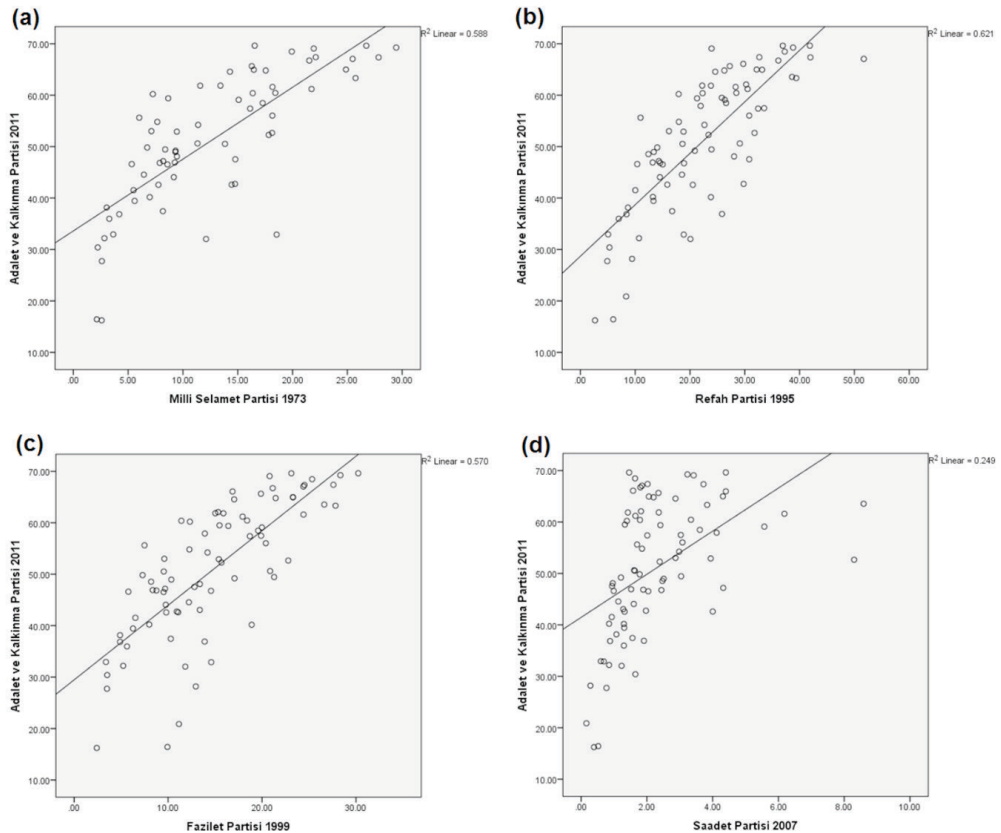
Several questions were raised in relation to the AKP and the Turkish party system following the 2002 election. One was whether the AKP could be considered a new party or not at the time. This question also relates to the ideological nature of the AKP, as its moderate discourse was met with suspicions among secular circles. The second one was whether the Turkish party system finally started to stabilize and started converging into what resembles a two-party system. The third one was about the level of representation in the parliament. And the final one was whether the AKP would be able to repeat its success in the following elections or would the volatile nature of electoral politics continue.

The first question relates to the concept of successor parties, which is a common feature of Turkish politics. Since the transition to multi-party politics in 1950, many parties were shut down due to military interventions or decisions by the constitutional court. As a result succeeding parties emerged with new names but they built upon the organizational and electoral base of the preceding parties. That was the case for the AKP as well in 2002, and because it had ties to pro-Islamist parties of the 1970s and the 1990s, it came into conflict with the secular establishment at times. Kumbaracıbaşı's (2016) findings support the argument that the AKP had managed to build upon the electoral strongholds of such parties. Figure 1 shows comparisons with four pro-Islamist parties (which succeeded each other and had similar ideology and agendas) that the AKP shows positive correlations with. The measurements were carried out by looking at district-level data and identifying where each party surpassed or fell below its national average. Their results were

a party is closed or banned and another replaces it almost immediately. This also fits in with the party adaptation discourse where parties seek ways and try to be flexible in order to survive in the political environment (Katz & Mair, 1994).

then compared in linear regression charts to see if the electoral strongholds of a party coincided with another to pinpoint continuities of electoral support in the party system. 2011 was taken as the base year for comparison because it was the election where the AKP received its highest share of votes, and it was the election that came before the 2015 elections. Previous research shows that, apart from several occasions where the AKP correlated with the ultra-nationalist party (Nationalist Action Party – *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* – MHP) and once with a center-right party (Motherland Party – *Anavatan Partisi* – ANAP) the AKP did not display any continuity with center parties in general (Kumbaracıbaşı, 2016). And the ones that showed correlations were never high as those of pro-Islamist parties. The AKP, however, strongly emphasized that the party was completely separated from its pro-Islamist roots and rhetoric, and that it converged into a moderate party of the center-right with liberal-conservative policy initiatives. Even so, the party came under criticism due to its socio-conservative proposals – especially those that relate to the education system – and it clashed on several occasions with the president and other parties. In 2007, when the AKP's candidate was elected president, the party became more autonomous and dominant *vis-à-vis* its environment.

Figure 1. Continuities in Electoral Support for Pro-Islamic Parties



The second debate relates to the nature of the Turkish party system. At first glance, the party system seemed to be converging into a “two-party model” in Sartori’s (1976) terms where two parties started to dominate the political competition by gaining the majority of the seats in the parliament. However, after successive electoral victories of the AKP and the Turkish model not displaying any alternating balance of power between the two major parties, now the system is regarded as a “predominant” or a “hegemonic” party system (Sartori, 1976) where one party continuously wins the elections while others remain in opposition (see also Sayarı, 2007). The only challenge to the AKP’s electoral dominance came in the June 2015 election. A coalition deal among opposition parties at the time would have dethroned the party. When this failed to materialize, the AKP managed to win the November election and reclaimed its dominance. But this shows that the Turkish party system is far from stabilization and parties are organizationally vulnerable in relation to their electoral geography (Siegfried, 1949; Goguel, 1951; Prescott, 1959; Agnew, 1996). Organizational vulnerability is visible when electoral results are analyzed. It seems that most Turkish parties fail to spread beyond their core electoral strongholds (districts where they surpass their national vote percentage) from one election to the other. Outside these strongholds and putting core supporters aside, parties may face floating votes and major shifts in voter preferences at any time. Such factors contribute to high levels of volatility and even though, there has been a decline in volatility in last decades it is still considered to be high in comparison to mature democracies. Patterns of organizational vulnerability can also be seen in the internal candidate selection methods. Most parties in Turkey do not carry out primary elections and parliamentary candidates are appointed directly by party headquarters or leaders, indicating high levels of centralization, internal dependency and weak intra-party democracy are common traits in Turkish politics. Thus, all these factors remain a hindrance to institutionalization of parties (Panebianco, 1988).

Table 1. Party Fragmentation and Electoral Volatility(1987-2015).

Election Year	Total Number of Parties	Parties below 4% Vote	Number of New Parties	Volatility
1987	7	2	6	38.7
1991	6	1	1	17.3
1995	12	5	7	22.5
1999	20	13	10	22.3
2002	18	11	8	43.6
2007	14	10	4	18.8
2011	15	12	7	11.6
June 2015	20	16	11	12.3
November 2015	16	12	1	9.6

The third point related to the level of representation in the parliament. The 10 percent national electoral threshold introduced after the military intervention in 1980, which was intended to curtail fragmentation and keep radical/splinter parties out of the parliament, tends to create artificial majorities in the parliament similar to those of plurality electoral systems. Interestingly, it did not manage to stop the increase in the number of parties after 1980 as the party system became more fragmented (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2007). It did not stop coalition governments

from occurring either. Table 1 shows fragmentation and volatility levels in Turkey, which remain high in comparison to institutionalized systems. Moreover, the fragmented nature of party politics did not disappear, even though the AKP dominated the environment. A major reason for fragmentation is over-centralization of parties and personal rivalries. In Hirschmann's terms (1970) exit levels are high from parties because members cannot make their voices heard, so they choose exit and establish new parties or join others. This is also visible in the constant shifts in the seat distribution among MPs within a given parliamentary term. Party switching seems to rise during periods of uncertainty and electoral instability (Heller & Mershon, 2005; Canon & Sousa, 1992) and has been a common characteristic of Turkish politics. Factional splits were mainly dominated by policy-related factors while individual switches were related to electoral concerns (Kemahlioğlu & Sayarı, 2017: 202). The existence of multiple parties located on similar ideological positions also facilitated the frequent occurrence of factional moves (Kemahlioğlu & Sayarı, 2017: 204). Party switching can also be an indicator of protest toward leadership or hierarchical structure of parties. Despite these problems, the AKP managed to win successive elections. Research shows that party identification, ideological voting and to some extent economic voting have the greatest impact on shaping of electoral choices in Turkey (Esmer, 2002; Kalaycıoğlu, 2008; Kalaycıoğlu, 2010).

Table 2. Election Results and Turnout (1987-2015)

Election Year	Vote Percentages of Major Parties	Turnout
1987	ANAP (36.3) SHP (24.7) DYP (19.1) DSP (8.5) RP (7.2)	93.3%
1991	DYP (27.0) ANAP (24.0) SHP (20.8) RP (16.9) DSP (10.7)	83.94%
1995	RP (21.3) ANAP (19.6) DYP (19.1) DSP (14.6) CHP (10.7) MHP (8.1)	85.50%
1999	DSP (22.1) MHP (17.9) FP (15.4) ANAP (13.2) DYP (12.0) CHP (8.7)	87.09%
2002	AKP (34.2) CHP (19.3) DYP (9.5) MHP (8.3) GP (7.2) DEHAP (6.2) ANAP (5.1) SP (2.4) DSP (1.2)	79.14%
2007	AKP (46.5) CHP (20.8) MHP (14.2) Ind.'s* (5.2)	84.25%
2011	AKP (49.8) CHP (25.9) MHP (13.0) Ind.'s* (6.5)	83.16%

* Kurdish party candidates ran for elections independently.

Party	7 June 2015 Election			1 November 2015 Election		
	Seats	Vote %	Vote #	Seats	Vote %	Vote #
AKP	258	40.87	18,867,411	317	49.50	23,681,926
CHP	132	24.95	11,518,139	134	25.32	12,111,812
MHP	80	16.29	7,520,006	40	11.90	5,694,136
HDP	80	13.12	6,058,489	59	10.76	5,148,085

Table 3. Analysis of the 2002 General Election

	1999	2002
AKP	<i>Did not exist</i>	34.28
CHP	8.71*	19.87
DYP	12.01	9.54*
MHP	17.98	8.36*
GP	<i>Did not exist</i>	7.25*
DEHAP	4.75* (<i>was called HADEP</i>)	6.22*
ANAP	13.22	5.13*
SP	15.41 (<i>was called FP</i>)	2.49*
DSP	22.19	1.22*

* Below the electoral threshold.

	Numbers	Percentages in relation to Total Registered Voters	Percentages in relation to Votes Cast
Total Registered Voters	41,407,027	100	-
Votes Cast	32,768,161	79.1	100
Valid Votes	31,528,783	76.1	96.2
People that did not vote - abstentions	8,638,866	20.8	-
Invalid Votes	1,239,378	2.99	3.7
AKP Vote	10,808,229	26.1	32.9
CHP Vote	6,113,352	14.7	18.6
AKP + CHP	16,921,581	40.8	51.6
Votes under the 10% Threshold	14,607,202	35.2	44.5
Total votes not represented in the TGNA + Abstentions + Invalid votes	24,485,446	59.1	-

Table 2 shows the vote percentages received by parties since the 1987 general election until 2011. What is immediately realized is the constant shifts in votes causing high levels of volatility and the low levels of votes parties (even the winners) received. In comparison to established democracies the Turkish elections remain highly volatile and uncertainties remain. A data set developed by Emanuele (2015) analyzed electoral volatility rates among 20 countries in Western Europe between 1945 and 2015. The average volatility during that time period for the mentioned countries is 10.29. This was certainly not the case for Turkey. The shift in voter preferences between 1999 and 2002 marked the highest volatility. Since that election had drastic effects, and was a turning point for the AKP, a more comprehensive examination of it shows the over – and under-representative characteristics of the Turkish electoral system and the effects of the electoral threshold in detail (Table 3). The AKP received 363 seats that amount to 66 percent of the total seats in the parliament, with only 34.28 percent of the national vote creating an over-representation of almost 32 percent. Meanwhile, the second party – the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – CHP) got 19.87 percent of the national vote and received 178 seats (32.3 percent of total seats and an over-representation of 12.5 percent). The combined vote share of the first two parties was 53.67 percent. The remaining parties failed to pass the 10 percent threshold. If, for instance, the threshold was five percent, there would have been seven parties gaining representation in the parliament. The votes that failed to surpass the threshold were approximately 14.6 million while the votes of the two parties that were represented in the

parliament were around 16.9 million. When abstentions, invalid votes and votes below threshold are taken into account the total was around 24.4 million votes (59.1 percent) out of 41.4 million. Such disproportionality in results were not unique to the 2002 election.

The final question was about the future of the AKP at the time. Some believed that the unstable environment was the main catalyst for the rise of the AKP in 2002 – an aspect that would repeat itself in the November 2015 election. Following the 2002 election, it became evident that the coalition era was coming to an end and the split in the center was healing as the CHP gathered the center-left votes while the AKP managed to capture the central-right as well as the pro-Islamist votes under its roof. It also became obvious with the following elections that the party system was transforming into a predominant party system led by the AKP (Sayarı, 2007). As AKP increased its dominance over the political environment and influential veto actors the June 2015 election challenged the party's strength heavily. After winning three straight electoral victories the June election results came as a surprise to the AKP.

Comparing Party Positions

With a fourth party (People's Democratic Party – *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* – HDP) passing the threshold by receiving around 13 percent and gaining representation in the parliament in June 2015, it became clear that no party would be able to secure a majority for a single-party government; creating the first hung parliament since 1999 and opening up grounds for coalition deals. Table 2 shows the results of the two elections in 2015. The June results show that the AKP's vote dropped by nine percent since 2011 and that coupled with the MHP and HDP vote surge produced the defeat of the AKP at the polls. With these results, its seat share in the parliament fell down to 258 out of 550, not enough for a majority. Meanwhile, a Kurdish party managed for the first time to surpass the threshold. It is likely that a considerable amount of its votes were from voters who voted strategically in order to damage the AKP's dominance, because traditionally support for Kurdish parties remained around 5 to 6 percent when the past vote shares are taken into account. The rapid boost in its electoral base up to 13 percent seems to be a strategic move by the voters to make sure a fourth party could gain representation in the parliament. Apart from the strategic elements, the charisma of the HDP leader Demirtaş in constructing strong links with its supporters also seem to have played a role in this boost. Despite ideological differences it appeared that opposition parties could come together to work out a deal that could potentially curtail the dominance of the AKP. However, months of discussions ended in a deadlock and the president decided to call for a snap election at the end of the 45 day period that was spelled out in the constitution. This was mainly due to the MHP's decision to remain out of the coalition deals, while the AKP was stalling the discussions with the CHP in a strategic move to ensure the snap election, and the president was campaigning against the idea of coalition government. The premise was that a party government by the AKP would be the only solution to the ongoing conflict and violent environment in Turkey (see Kalaycıoğlu, 2016). It should also be noted that after the AKP failing in coalition deals and not managing to form a government, the president

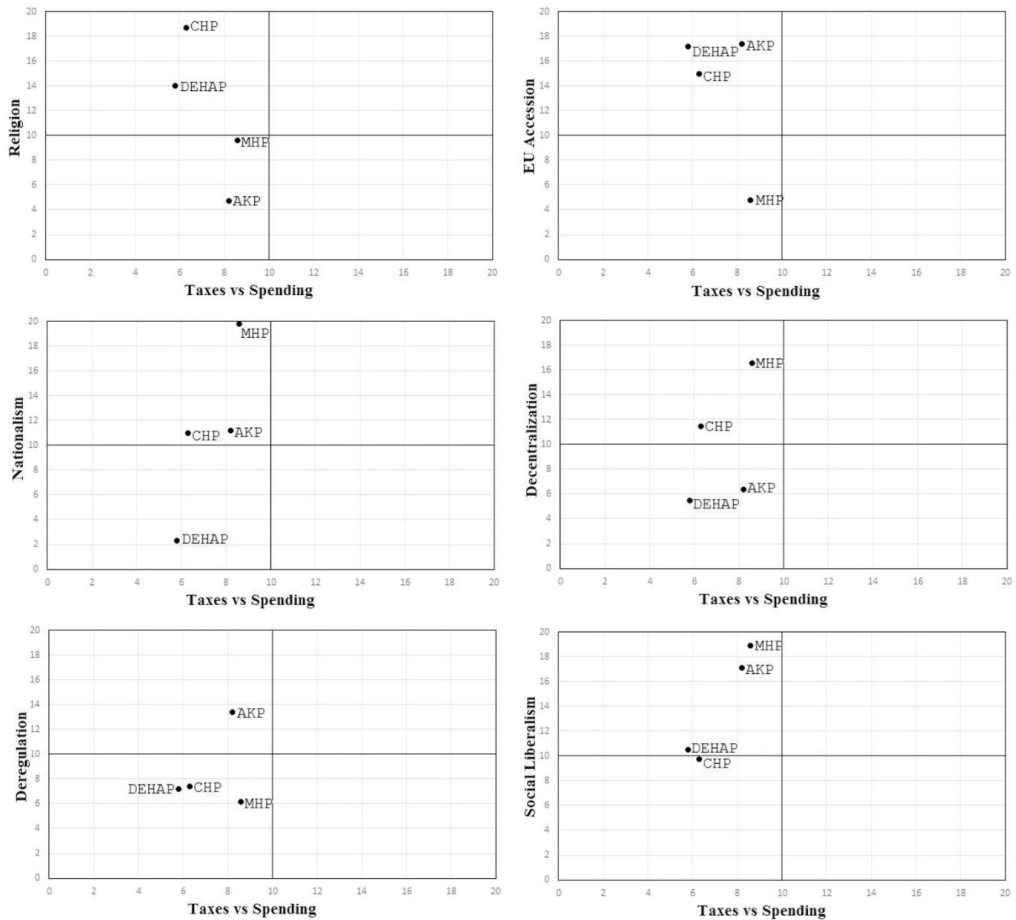
chose to call for a snap election instead of letting the CHP as the second biggest party to go onto coalition deals in order to try and form a government.

Two important questions can be raised regarding the 2015 elections. Firstly, were parties so distant in their policy initiatives that no coalition agreement could be reached, or was there another reason for the failure of the coalition deals? Secondly, how did the AKP manage to increase its votes by nine percent in such a short time from June to November? In order to answer the first question, party positions on certain policy areas need to be examined. The second question will be investigated in the following section.

To identify the political stance of parties, a number of spatial maps showing party positions based on key policy areas were drawn. The data was gathered from an expert survey that was carried out for the purpose of this study in 2016. The survey included seven questions relating to seven policy dimensions in Turkey and out of 62 experts that were contacted, 36 had taken the survey.

The points in the diagrams represent parties' mean positions scored by 36 academic experts on the Turkish party system. The policy dimensions and the questions that were selected in the survey matched those that were used in an earlier study by Benoit and Laver (conducted in 2003 and published in 2006). This way not only policy positions of parties could be determined, but it becomes possible to construct time-based inferences on whether parties moved or remained consistent in their policy initiatives throughout the years (2003-2016). On the other hand, there were several problems being encountered during the surveys. As Benoit and Laver indicated back then, Turkey had the least amount of participation compared to all the other states they analyzed. In the 2016 survey, the same trend persisted, where the number of participants remained low due to lack of response. However, the gathered data still manages to capture party positions and provides information on how parties moved along certain dimensions over time. Another problem is that, surely, coalition potential among parties cannot be funneled down to debates on policy areas only. But, nevertheless, it can serve as a tool that provides the starting point for the analysis of deliberative platforms among parties. Lastly, it should be noted that, considering the political turmoil that Turkey witnessed during those years, it would not be misleading to claim that the results of the survey relating to the pre-June 2015 elections could have been biased – at least to a certain extent. However, during the surveys, the questions asked did not specify a retrospective timeframe, but rather indicated that the respondents should consider the parties at that particular point in time.

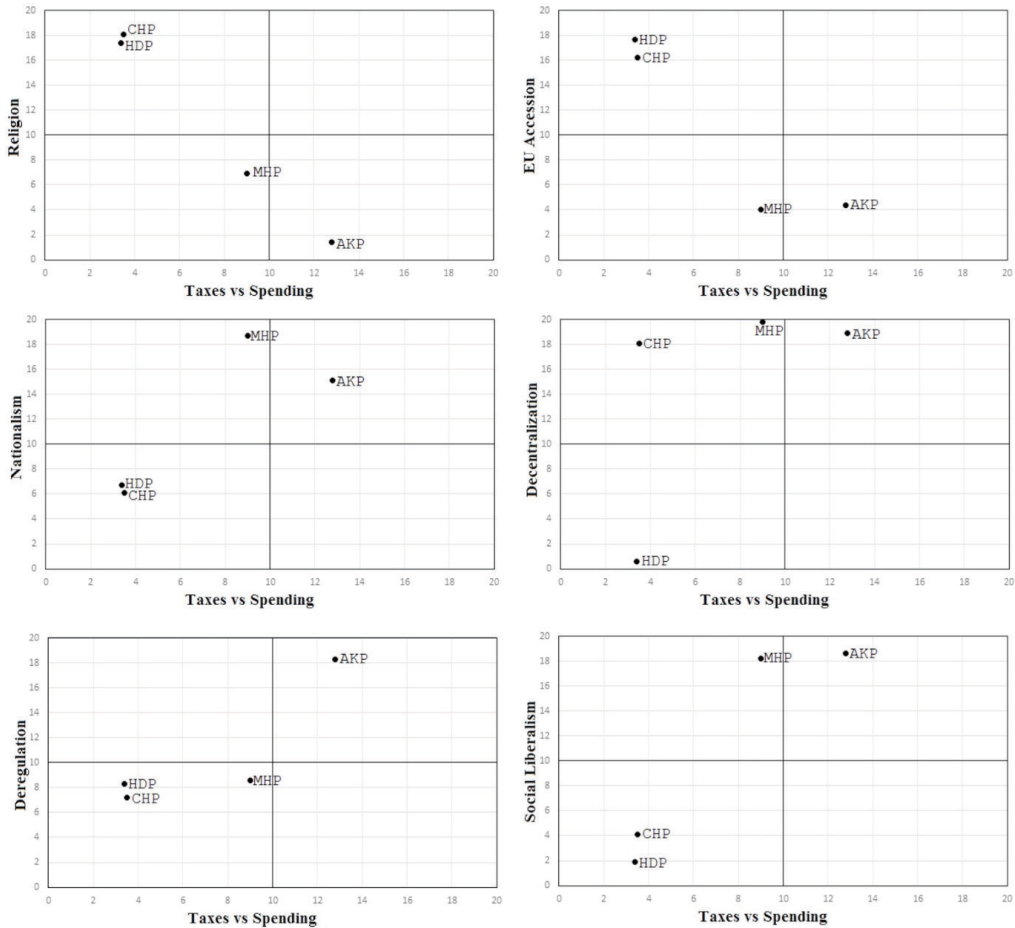
Figure 2. Party Positions (2003)



The first set of diagrams (Figure 2) were created using a raw data set collected by Benoit and Laver in 2003 (published in 2006) just one year after the AKP's rise to power. It indicates the position of political parties based on a number of salient dimensions. The ratings range from 0 to 20 and are widely accepted as a solid "point estimate" of the parties' ideological positions. In the graphs, the parties' estimated positions on the traditional socio-economic left-right dimension are combined with further relevant dimensions. Left-wing ideology corresponds to zero (0) supporting tax adjustments depending on income and high public expenditure; while right-wing stance is twenty (20) indicating support for cutting taxes and reducing public spending, or transferring public expenses to the private sector. Since economic dimension is a key indicator of a party's ideological position, all spatial maps utilize this dimension on their x-axes. It should be noted that even though there were more parties present in 2003 and 2016 in the political arena, only those that correspond to the parties that gained representation in parliament in 2015 were added to these diagrams, for the sake of comparison. It should also be noted that the DEHAP was the predecessor of the HDP.

Looking at Figure 2, it can be realized that the AKP combined a relatively centrist, liberal position on economic policies with more conservative social and traditional Islamic values. There is a noticeable movement in every party's policy positions from 2003 to 2016 and especially that of the AKP (Figure 3). Deviations in positions are even more evident when actual behavior or rhetoric of parties are taken into account. Strikingly, on the first dimension (taxes versus spending) parties seem to be quite close in 2003 on the economical left-right axis, while a movement to the left of the spectrum in the HDP and the CHP; and a movement to the right among the MHP and the AKP can be seen by 2016.

Figure 3. Party Positions (2016)



The DEHAP/HDP scored 5.8 on the scale in 2003 and 3.4 in 2016 and perceived as the most left-wing party while the AKP scored 8.2 in 2003 but the number had risen to 12.8 in 2016, being the right-most (Table 4). Despite those numbers none of the parties are in extremes and they are all relatively centrist (see also Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009). However, the second dimension

(religion versus secularism) strikes a different chord and clearly reveals the level of polarization between parties. Here, lower values represent a party's commitment to supporting traditions and conserving religious principles in day-to-day politics, while higher values signify a strong emphasis on secular values. The CHP is seen as a very secular party, whereas the experts rated the AKP as an extremely religious party. The position has not changed much for the CHP as it moved down from 18.7 to 18.1 perhaps as an attempt to catch votes from the center-right voters; but the AKP's movement dropped from 4.7 to 1.4. In strategic terms, the AKP combined a 'middle-of-the-road' approach to economic policy with a clear profile on the religious-secular dimension as its distinctive 'selling point' as one of the most important components of the AKP's program lies in religion (Kumbaracıbaşı, 2009: 169) and its socio-conservative rhetoric has increased over the years.

The next dimension corresponds to Turkey's potential membership to the EU (higher values indicate pro-accession and vice versa). It is visible that, apart from the AKP, parties remained consistent in this dimension (Table 4). However, the steep drop in the AKP's perceptions on the EU integration is apparent (from 17.4 to 4.4). This is also recognizable in the discourse of party members and leaders, a change that gradually occurred since 2005 with the stagnation in discussions and later exacerbated by the refugee crises and the Syrian war. It also coincided with the AKP government's turn towards the Middle East and Asia in its economic and political deals following 2007-2008. This move can be interpreted as a catch-all or an electoral-professional party – in Panebianco's (1988) terms – attribute for the AKP that also displays its adaptability to the political environment or the expectations of its supporters.

Table 4. Party Positions and Shifts (2003-2016)

Policy Dimension	2003				2016			
	AKP	CHP	MHP	DEHAP	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP
Religion	4.7	18.7	9.6	14.0	1.4	18.1	6.9	17.4
EU Accession	17.4	15.0	4.8	17.2	4.4	16.2	4.0	17.7
Nationalism	11.2	11.0	19.8	2.3	15.1	6.1	18.7	6.7
Decentralization	6.4	11.5	16.6	5.5	18.9	18.1	19.8	0.6
Deregulation	13.4	7.4	6.2	7.2	18.3	7.2	8.6	8.3
Taxes vs. Spending	8.2	6.3	8.6	5.8	12.8	3.5	9.0	3.4
Social Liberalism	17.1	9.8	18.9	10.5	18.6	4.1	18.2	1.9

Policy Dimension	AKP	CHP	MHP	DEHAP/HDP
Religion	-3.3	-0.6	-2.7	+3.4
EU Accession	-13.0	+1.2	-0.8	+0.5
Nationalism	+3.9	-4.9	-1.1	+4.4
Decentralization	+12.5	+6.6	+3.2	-4.9
Deregulation	+4.9	-0.2	+2.4	+1.1
Taxes vs. Spending	+4.6	-2.8	+0.4	-2.4
Social Liberalism	+1.5	-5.7	-0.7	-8.6

On the nationalism or national identity scale (supporting civic nationalism and multiculturalism=0 versus supporting radical nationalism based on ethnicity=20), the MHP and the DEHAP were classified by experts as extreme parties, the former being ultra-nationalist and the latter being

the least nationalist party – at least in terms of Turkish nationalism. It should be noted, however, that the DEHAP/HDP have promoted Kurdish nationalism strongly throughout their existence. The other parties were placed somewhere at the middle. Table 4 shows that 13 years later the MHP remains at a similar spot (with a change of – 1.1), the HDP moves towards the center (with a change of +4.4), while the CHP is lowered on the scale with a change of – 4.9. Finally, the AKP became more nationalist in its discourse by moving up on the scale with a change of +3.9 nearing the MHP and moving away from its middle-of-the-road stance. This move by the AKP mainly coincides with the strengthening of the HDP. As the HDP strengthened its electoral base and its bargaining power, the AKP drifted away from the Kurdish negotiations and assumed an increasingly nationalist position against the HDP. So, the AKP shifted gradually away from being a party that tried to incorporate the representation of Kurds in its discourse, displaying catch-all intentions. Moreover, the AKP had always relied on the effectiveness of the ten percent threshold that cemented them the power of a single-party government in the parliament. This way, the Kurds would turn towards the AKP knowing that their own parties were not likely to pass the threshold. The sudden strategic move of a broader electorate turning towards the HDP, as seen in the June 2015 election, allowed them to surpass this threshold. Since then the clashes in the Southeastern regions of Turkey intensified and the AKP's discourse on Kurdish negotiations was completely abandoned.

The decentralization dimension (support for decentralized state structure=0 versus support for unitary state structure=20) seems to coincide with the nationalism dimension. The AKP, CHP and MHP have increased their scores while the HDP score has declined drastically. But the most dramatic change in this dimension relates to the AKP (+12.5) moving from decentralized policy initiatives to a centralized unitary drive that is close to the MHP. On the deregulation dimension the changes were not substantial, though the AKP again scores the highest point moving towards the right (free market principles and transferring the burden of the state to private enterprises). The final dimension relates to social liberalism. The AKP and the MHP remained on the far end (towards conservatism on issues such as family values, cultural norms, women's rights, and abortion) with little change. Meanwhile, the CHP and the HDP were perceived as parties seeking enhanced freedoms and liberties at social and individual levels.

Based on the analyses and values above, potential coalition deals between parties can be seen in Table 5. The table shows the AKP and the MHP fit closest in their policy outlook and worldview (the historical examples of vote shifts between the pro-Islamist parties and the MHP confirm this), while the CHP and the HDP are close on the opposite end. On the scales of religion, EU accession, nationalism, taxes-spending and social liberalism the AKP and the MHP scored close. So, at first glance, strategic alliances seem to be possible among parties at least around minimum winning sets. There were two problems, however. Firstly, the leader of the MHP stated after the election that his party was not going to participate in any coalition deals and that they did not agree with the other parties. They also mentioned that they were supporting a re-election. This was mainly due to personal rivalries with other party leaders and the extreme ideological incompatibility of the MHP and the HDP. And the frictions between the AKP and the MHP (who

are in theory more compatible) could be explained by the ongoing clashes between the leaders at the time, especially relating to the 17-25 December corruption scandal that took place in 2013. An AKP-HDP coalition was unthinkable at the time as well, mainly due to the broadening of the support base of the HDP at the time as mentioned earlier, fueling new rivalries between the two parties. The second problem related to the fact that in any coalition scenario that did not include the AKP, remaining parties had to create a tripartite coalition in order to meet the numbers to reach a majority which could end the dominance of the AKP. From the start, there was reluctance among the opposition, especially involving the MHP. The other option was a two-party coalition involving the AKP, which would still increase the checks on the government. Since the MHP excluded itself from coalition deals and the tri-partite option was not happening, the AKP and the CHP started discussions. However, the discussions took too long and the constitutional timeframe was over, hence, a snap election was decided by the caretaker government. The discussions could have been strategically stalled on purpose by the AKP to ensure a new election where they could try gaining back their dominance. A final option was a minority government between the CHP and the HDP that would require the support of the MHP from outside, which did not occur either. When the MHP and the CHP refused to take part in the caretaker government, repeat elections were held under the AKP government's full control of the executive (Kalaycıoğlu, 2016: 35).

Table 5. Coalition Potential among Parties in 2015

Policy Dimensions		
Religion	AKP-MHP	CHP-HDP
EU Accession	AKP-MHP	CHP-HDP
Nationalism	AKP-MHP	CHP-HDP
Decentralization	AKP-MHP-CHP	HDP
Deregulation	AKP	CHP-MHP-HDP
Taxes vs. Spending	AKP-MHP	CHP-HDP
Social Liberalism	AKP-MHP	CHP-HDP

A general belief in democratic theory states that deliberation is a crucial component that can create harmonious environments where different parties can reach collective decisions. In developing democracies where reaching such decisions is harder, this deliberative element becomes even more important since it can bring some consensus among various groups. This prevents a single party from taking control of institutions or converging into authoritative and hierarchical organizations dominating the political arena. On the flip side, constructing consensus can be more difficult in comparison to mature democracies because there could be high levels of polarization that create case-specific sensitivities and affect the democratic process negatively. Such sensitivities can curtail cooperative action. Access to information is another vital part of modern democracies. In the Turkish scenario, the electorate was under-informed and party preferences were unclear. In an unpredictable environment reaching coalition agreements can become much harder since the parties do not know the expectations or pre-conditions of other actors. And finally, the president,

the AKP and the MHP emerged as the non-compromising actors in coalition deals that caused the failure of discussions overall (Kalaycıoğlu, 2016: 34).

The 2015 Elections

An important element of the period between June and November elections was the increasingly unstable political situation in the country and escalating violence (see Çarkoğlu & Yıldırım, 2015; Kemahlıoğlu, 2015; Bardakçı, 2016). There were assassinations, bombings, social conflicts and the economy was stagnating. The AKP tried taking advantage of the unstable environment by constructing a rhetoric warning the electorate that if a party government did not emerge in the aftermath of the repeat election, the instability could intensify. As the repeat election neared, many people, scholars, and researchers predicted that the results would not be too different than those of June. However, bafflingly, the AKP managed to raise its vote share by nine percent (around five million) in a matter of months, while the MHP and HDP lost around three million combined. It seemed that the voters acted strategically to prevent the same coalition deadlock from reoccurring. But, could strategic voting tendencies be enough to explain this sudden rise in the AKP votes?

In the November election, the AKP raised its vote by approximately 4.8 million votes and the CHP by 593 thousand since June. The MHP and HDP lost votes on the other hand. Turnout rose by approximately 690 thousand and valid votes rose by 646 thousand. A hypothetical analysis of the movement of votes still leaves questions: if one was to assume that every single vote (100 percent) that parties lost had moved to the AKP as gains, and if the rise in turnout, the rises in valid votes and registered voters (including overseas numbers) were to be added to that sum, all in favor of the AKP, the results still do not match the AKP's total of 4.8 million votes. This is the biggest puzzle that surfaced on the analyses of the two elections. Table 6 displays these changes in the number of votes: the totals calculated include only the loss of parties and the increases in valid votes and turnout. Table 6 also displays turnout, valid votes and overseas results. Another point is about the percentage of invalid votes per year. November 2015 election produced a new low in the number of invalid votes compared to previous elections. This can be seen in Table 7 where invalid votes per year since the 1983 election are shown. Around 670,000 new valid votes emerged in November as the share of invalid votes shrank drastically since June.

Table 6. Comparison of June and November 2015 Elections

Changes in vote shares (June to November)	
AKP Vote: +4,814,515*	Overseas AKP Vote: +202,868*
CHP Vote: +593,673*	Overseas CHP Vote: +31,479*
MHP Vote: -1,825,870	Overseas MHP Vote: -4,784
HDP Vote: -910,404	Overseas HDP Vote: +22,527*
Valid Votes: +646,760	Overseas Valid Vote: +242,247
Turnout: +690,036	Overseas Turnout: +243,494
Total Change: 4,073,070	Overseas Total Change: 490,525

* Not included in totals.

	7 June 2015 Election		1 November 2015 Election	
Valid Votes	46,163,243	97.09 %	47,840,231	98.56 %
Invalid / Blank Votes	1,344,224	2.91 %	697,464	1.44 %
Votes Cast (Turnout)	47,507,467	83.92 %	48,537,695	85.23 %
Abstentions	9,101,350	16.08 %	8,411,314	14.77 %
Registered Voters	56,608,817		56,949,009	

Party	7 June 2015 Election		1 November 2015 Election	
	Vote %	Vote #	Vote %	Vote #
AKP	49.9	519,664	56.2	722,532
CHP	17.2	179,458	16.4	210,937
MHP	9.3	96,451	7.1	91,667
HDP	20.3	211,355	18.2	233,882
	7 June 2015 Election		1 November 2015 Election	
Valid Votes	1,041,470		1,284,964	
Votes Cast (Turnout)	1,056,078 (36.8%)		1,298,325 (44.8%)	
Registered Voters	2,866,979		2,899,069	

Table 7. Valid / Invalid votes per year**Table 7 - Valid / Invalid votes per year**

Year	2015 Nov	2015 June	2011	2007	2002
Votes Cast	48,537,695	47,507,467	43,914,948	36,056,293	32,768,161
Invalid Votes	697,464	1,344,224	973,185	1,006,602	1,239,378
Invalid Votes %	1.43	2.82	2.21	2.79	3.78
Year	1999	1995	1991	1987	1983
Votes Cast	32,656,070	29,101,469	25,157,089	24,603,541	18,238,362
Invalid Votes	1,471,574	974,476	740,423	631,912	886,852
Invalid Votes %	4.50	3.34	2.94	2.56	4.86

According to Meyersson (2015), turnout was a crucial factor since several provinces showed significant changes in turnout compared to June: several Kurdish provinces had substantial reductions in turnout, likely a result of the ongoing conflict in the region. The digit tests² conducted by Meyersson (2015) point out irregularities in November election showing 'evidence that would

2 The idea behind digit tests rests on people effectively being unable to randomize numbers, and so demonstrating that an empirical distribution is not of the relevant benchmark distribution is taken as a sign that something is wrong (although there is some criticism against digit tests ability to discover election fraud) (Meyersson, 2015). Meyersson studied the last digit distribution in vote counts for all four parties including 174,678 ballot boxes for November election and 174,220 boxes for June.

be consistent with widespread voting manipulation but not a proof of it, both in terms of the change in the distribution of last as well as adjacent digits. Something that stands out particularly strong is the degree to which MHP's vote counts appear to have been adversely affected. The MHP had the largest loss of vote share (4.4 percent). But the AKP and HDP vote counts also show evidence consistent with some form of tampering. The CHP vote count, on the other hand, shows predominantly little change across the different tests.' Findings of Meyersson indicate that while digit tests for the CHP seem to be coherent when two elections are compared; the MHP, HDP and the AKP results display inconsistencies. These results certainly leave questions and room for further research on the 2015 elections (see Kalaycıoğlu, 2017).

Shifts of votes between parties and electoral strongholds also need to be investigated. Figure 4a analyzes the aggregate level vote distribution of the AKP (November) and the MHP (June) to see if there was a shift in votes from the MHP to the AKP. The "r-square" shows that both parties received votes from similar areas but the positive correlation is not profound, contradicting expectations. It is clear that both parties have similar electoral strongholds.

Therefore, it can be said that there was a shift of votes from the MHP to the AKP, but nothing substantial. Figure 4b utilizes the same provincial comparison with the HDP. Since, the HDP mainly receives strong support from specifically the Southeast regions it becomes harder to make inferences. Therefore, a secondary graph (4c) including only 15 Southeastern districts is created. The strikingly high negative correlation suggests that the AKP did not do well in regions where the HDP did well in terms of electoral strongholds. Figures 4d and 4e display no noticeable shifts between the AKP and CHP, or the CHP and HDP, while the HDP support in the Southeastern regions remained consistent. Meyersson (2015) also mentions the importance of the change in votes in this region that favored the AKP. In his analyses he found out that the overall votes in the region creates an abrupt cut-off unlike in any other district or any previous election. This peculiar non-linearity exhibits a statistically significant jump for the AKP last digit vote distribution in November election.

Figure 4. Comparison of Party Support in 2015 Elections

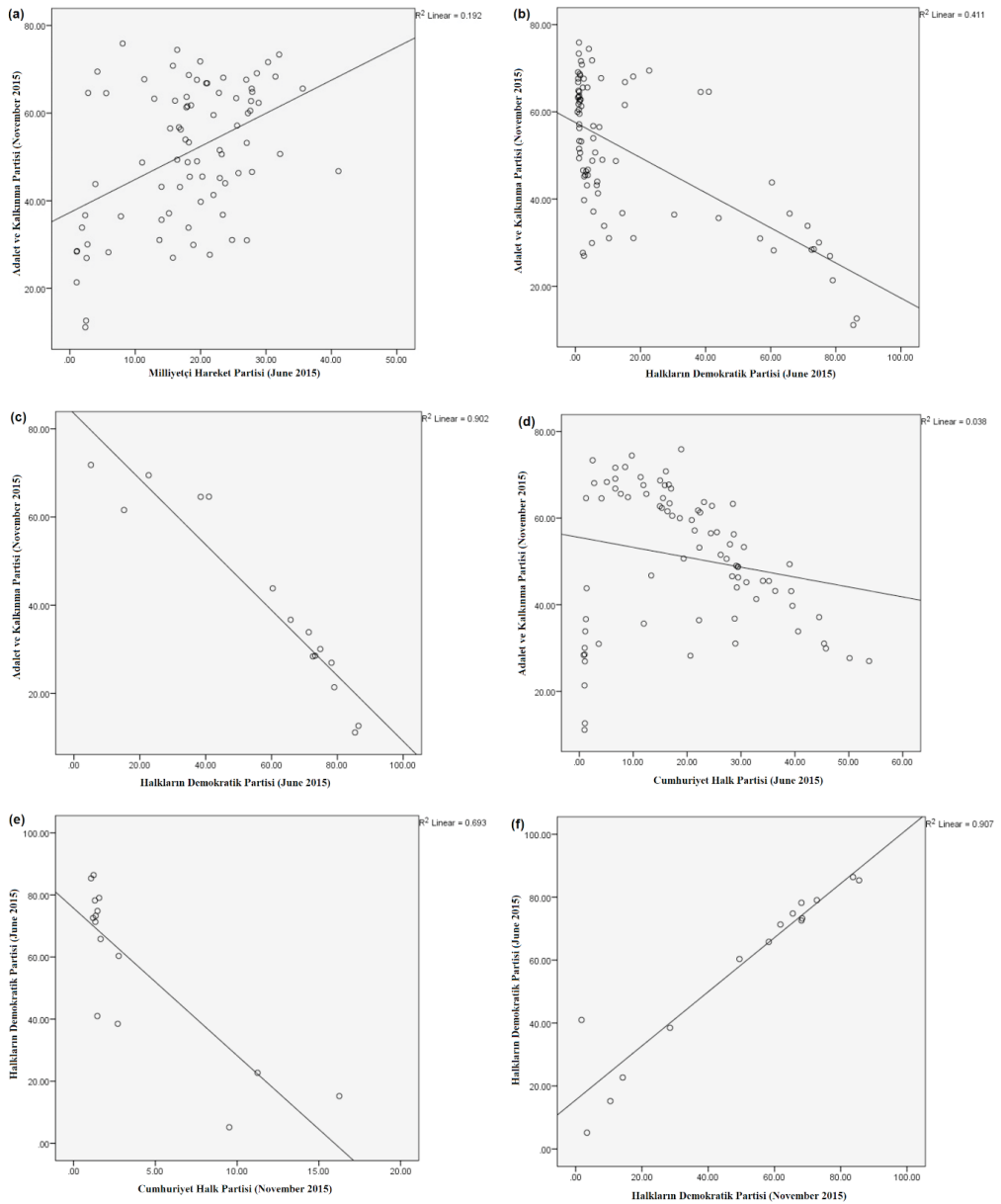


Table 8 shows the vote percentages of parties and changes in votes between the two elections. It is clear that there is a substantial rise in the AKP votes in the regions but these percentages may not be pointing towards a shift of votes from the HDP to the AKP but instead a decline in the HDP vote due to low turnout. In other cases there might have been instances where the poor and the pious might be shifting from the HDP to the AKP. When the overall results are analyzed

nationwide, it is clear that the HDP was the main winner of the June election, while the MHP was the main loser of the November election (see Kalaycıoğlu, 2017; Sayarı, 2016).

Table 8. Vote Percentages in the Southeast Regions and Shifts

	AKP June	HDP June	MHP June	CHP June	AKP Nov	HDP Nov	MHP Nov	CHP Nov
<u>Ağrı</u>	16.6	76.9	2.7	1.3	27.8	66.7	1.6	1.7
<u>Adıyaman</u>	58.0	22.6	4.3	11.4	69.1	14.3	3.0	11.3
<u>Batman</u>	18.8	71.3	1.2	1.1	29.1	66.8	0.8	1.6
<u>Bingöl</u>	46.9	40.5	2.9	1.6	64.3	29.1	1.9	1.8
<u>Bitlis</u>	31.3	59.4	4.0	1.6	44.1	48.6	2.0	3.1
<u>Diyarbakır</u>	14.8	77.7	1.2	1.3	22.3	71.3	0.8	1.9
<u>Gaziantep</u>	47.0	15.3	17.7	16.3	61.5	10.6	9.5	16.2
<u>Hakkari</u>	9.7	84.8	2.6	1.3	13.7	81.9	1.5	1.6
<u>İğdır</u>	11.7	55.9	26.7	3.9	31.7	51.7	12.5	2.1
<u>Mardin</u>	19.9	72.1	1.2	1.3	29.2	67.0	0.9	1.7
<u>Mus</u>	24.8	70.1	2.0	1.4	34.4	60.6	1.4	1.7
<u>Sanlıurfa</u>	46.8	38.1	5.6	4.3	64.3	28.1	2.8	3.0
<u>Siirt</u>	28.7	64.7	2.5	1.5	37.2	57.2	1.6	2.0
<u>Sırtak</u>	21.8	83.8	2.5	1.3	12.3	83.7	1.4	1.4
<u>Van</u>	20.1	73.6	2.8	1.3	30.7	64.2	1.3	1.8

	Change for AKP	Change for HDP	Change for MHP	Change for CHP
<u>Ağrı</u>	+11.2	-10.2	-1.1	+0.4
<u>Adıyaman</u>	+11.1	-8.3	-1.3	-0.1
<u>Batman</u>	+10.3	-4.5	-0.4	+0.5
<u>Bingöl</u>	+17.4	-11.4	-1.0	+0.2
<u>Bitlis</u>	+12.8	-10.8	-2.0	+1.5
<u>Diyarbakır</u>	+7.5	-6.4	-0.4	+0.6
<u>Gaziantep</u>	+14.5	-4.7	-8.2	-0.1
<u>Hakkari</u>	+4.0	-2.9	-1.1	+0.3
<u>İğdır</u>	+20.0	-4.2	-14.2	-1.8
<u>Mardin</u>	+9.3	-5.1	-0.3	+0.4
<u>Mus</u>	+9.6	-9.5	-0.6	+0.3
<u>Sanlıurfa</u>	+17.5	-10.0	-2.8	-1.3
<u>Siirt</u>	+8.5	-7.5	-0.9	+0.5
<u>Sırtak</u>	-9.5	-0.1	-1.1	+0.1
<u>Van</u>	+10.6	-9.4	-1.5	+0.5

Conclusion

Looking back at several years before the 2015 elections and the years that followed, several points need to be discussed. Firstly, the political environment was in turmoil. Starting with the Gezi protests and other mass demonstrations, the December 2013 corruption scandal, the erupting political violence and conflict (bombings, assassinations and an attempted coup claimed around 800 lives between June 2015 and January 2017), and the war in the Middle East point towards a profoundly unstable political condition for Turkey and indicate deep divisions or problems within the society. The results of these conditions can be seen in a variety of global democracy indices where Turkey's scores have declined over the last five years (especially those that relate to functioning of democracy, freedom of the press, freedom of expression, internet freedoms, legal environment, civil liberties and political rights). Table 9 shows the democracy score of Turkey in different indices around that time. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) index show a rising trend

in the quality of democracy between 1983 and 2003 in Turkey, based on factors such as electoral conduct, freedoms, deliberation, participation and equality. After 2003, the trend has reversed and quality of democracy has been on the decline under the AKP rule and fallen under the world average since 2013.

Table 9. Turkey's Democracy Rankings in 2015 (at the time of elections)

Index	Score	Additional Notes
Freedom House: Freedom Score (2016)	53/100	Described as "not free" on the freedom of press category.
Democracy Barometer: Quality of Democracy (2014)	66/71	
Transparency International: Corruption Perceptions (2016)	75/142	Turkey has fallen nine places since 2015.
Transparency International: Judicial Independence (2012)	88/142	
World Justice Project: Rule of Law (2015)	80/102	
UN Worldwide Governance Indicators: Rule of Law (2014)	84/208	
Global Democracy Ranking (2015)	69/103	Turkey has fallen seven places since 2010.
World Press Freedom Index	151/180	
Economic Intelligence Unit: Democracy Index (2015)	97/167	Turkey has fallen nine places since 2012.

Secondly, non-cooperative nature of parties and party leaders (as seen during the coalition deals in 2015) create an unpredictable environment polarizing the society. Thirdly, irregularities in electoral analyses (even though if there was no tampering or fraud in the first place) leave questions and suspicions regarding the legitimacy and objectivity of election results. Moreover, the 2017 April referendum produced very close results with 51.4 percent of the electorate voted for "yes" and 48.6 percent for "no" indicating the split in society. The 'yes' camp was mainly supported by the AKP and the MHP, while the CHP and the HDP remained on the "no" side. The constitutional amendment package covered 18 articles of the constitution and it was ambiguous to the general public as constitutional changes require high levels of expertise on the subject. Added to this was the number of articles that were being proposed at once, which also included a proposal on overhauling the parliamentary system to be replaced by a presidential one. The striking part of the results is two-fold. Firstly, there has been a sharp decline in the AKP votes, especially when the results are considered to be in allegiance with the MHP. Secondly, the allegations of manipulation especially relating to the Southeastern provinces mimic the November 2015 election. There were many suspicions relating to the legitimacy of the referendum, mainly because the Supreme Electoral Council announced non-stamped ballots would not be considered invalid right after the voting process had begun, something that contradicted the Council's standard regulations. Opposition parties rejected to this procedure claiming that there were approximately 1.5 million non-stamped ballots. Since, the "yes" votes were incrementally high in the Southeast where the AKP traditionally did not do well, it added to the speculations. Interestingly, the AKP may have gained as much as 450,000 votes in the Southeast compared to November 2015, corresponding

to roughly 10% of votes of the entire region and since turnout was significantly lower this time around by some 150,000 (Meyersson, 2017).

This paper tried to investigate several dimensions of the June and November 2015 elections in Turkey. The first part tried to construct a brief summary of earlier elections with an emphasis on continuities in the pro-Islamist vote, electoral volatility and party system characteristics. The second part focused on party positions around the 2015 elections, coalition deals in the aftermath of the June election and the changes in party positions, rhetoric and policies over time with the help of expert surveys. The findings indicate catch-all and electoral-professional elements in the AKP behavior at the central-right and right wing of the political spectrum. It seems that the AKP is a party that is highly flexible in most policy dimensions (apart from the socio-conservative axis) adapting to the daily conjecture to be able to survive. The changes in the EU accession deals and Kurdish negotiations are striking examples of that. This section also tried to investigate potential coalition scenarios and why coalition deals failed.

The final section by looking into the results of the two elections, showed that there was an unusual rise in the vote share of the AKP in a matter of months and a steep decline in invalid votes. However, it is unclear where the AKP received all its votes in November since the numbers seem not to amount to the total rise in AKP votes. Several other studies also mentioned irregularities and peculiarities in the November election (Meyersson, 2015 & 2017) especially relating to the Southeastern regions. It is likely that tactical voting elements have played an important role in both elections, but the changes in vote shares of parties need further investigation.

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