

Teim



TEIM Election Watch Analysis

ELECTORAL REPORT:

TURKEY/Local elections

29 March 2009

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Background to the elections:

The 29 March 2009 local elections took place almost two years after the July 2007 general elections. In July 2008, the governing party, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), accused of undermining the republic's secular principles, faced a judicial ban from politics. The Constitutional Court rejected the petition to ban the party, but ordered the AKP to bear in mind the seriousness of the trial and imposed a financial sanction. For the AKP, the local elections were, in part, a way of endorsing its popularity and hence they hoped to repeat the results of the 2007 general elections, in which they garnered almost 47% of the vote – or even surpass this percentage. However, the world economic crisis, which has also affected Turkey, seemed to have had an effect on the government's popularity. Two polls that appeared prior to the elections gave different possible results. Konda Research and Consultancy estimated that the AKP would win 47.9% of the vote on a national level for the provincial assemblies and 44.6% of the vote for the mayoral posts. A&G Research, on the other hand, indicated that the percentage of votes that the AKP could win for the mayoral posts would fall to 39.1%. Konda estimated that if general elections were held, the AKP would win 51.8% of the vote, while A&G found different results, which would give the AKP 42.5% of the vote instead of the 46.6% they received in the 2007 general elections.

The campaign was the object of significant media attention. The main party leaders took on key roles in the political meetings. The economy was one of the most discussed questions in the campaign, which decidedly emphasised the rising unemployment rate, the high cost of living and the economic crisis. However, as Professor Fuat Keyman noted, the topics in the debates at local level were muddled by a party battle at national level where the AKP was seeking to repeat its victory as the predominant party, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) wanted to shore up its 20% of the vote and consolidate itself as the main opposition party, the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) wanted to position itself as a key party that could become the alternative to the AKP and the Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, DTP) aspired to be the main actor on the Kurdish question. Furthermore, it was possible that the local elections would serve to provide oxygen to parties with little national scope at this time, such as the DP¹, the DSP and the SP, which had broken away from an earlier banned party (the Virtue Party) under accusations that it was using religion for political purposes. Although it is true that the national and local level discourses tend to mix more in the big cities, the particular local characteristics are also important for understanding the results. Although the AKP started off as the front runner, it was not certain that the party would maintain its popularity despite the economic crisis and political polarisation, and whether the powerful inertia of its earlier election victories would continue, or if the AKP would see its popularity reduced significantly to the benefit of the opposition parties.

Quantitative indices of democracy:

Turkey was classified in the following democratic performance rankings just before these elections:

¹ DP: Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*), DSP: Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Partisi*) and SP: Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*).

Measurement	Name and year of report or database	Institution	Index	Points, ranking and classification
Political rights and freedom	Freedom House Report 2009	Freedom House (FH)	PR: political rights CL: civil liberties	PR: 3, CL: 3 (Scale of 1, free to 7, not free) Classification: partly free
Degree of democracy in earlier elections	Polyarchy 2.0 2004	Peace Research Institute of Oslo and Tatu Vanhanen	ID: Synthetic democracy index, Part: participation, Comp: competition	ID: 33.1, max. 49 Part: 47.3, max. 70 Comp: 70, max. 70 (Democracy minimum: ID: 5, Part: 10, Comp: 30) Classification: democratic
Consolidation of authoritarian and democratic institutions	Polity IV 2007	Center for International Development and Conflict Management, Univ. of Maryland	Democracy: consolidation of democratic institutions Autocracy: authoritarian consolidation Polity: synthesis of both	Democracy: 8 Autocracy: 1 Polity: 7 (Scale of +10, very democratic to -10, very authoritarian) Classification: democratic
Perception of corruption	Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2008	Transparency International (TI)	TICPI: corruption perceptions index	TCPI: 4.6 points out of 10. (Scale of 1, very corrupt to 10, not at all corrupt) Rank: 58 out of 180 countries
Management of political and economic change	Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2008	Bertelsmann Foundation	MI: Management Index, quality of transformation management	MI: 6.33 points out of 10, Rank: 24 out of 125 countries Classification: successful management with weaknesses
Democracy, including press status and corruption	World Democracy Audit Oct. 2008	World Audit	World Democracy Rank: political freedom (FH) + press and corruption (TI)	World Democracy Ranking: 57 out of 150 countries, division 3 out of 4

The elections analysed in this profile produced the following electoral democracy quantitative results:

Degree of democracy in these elections	Measurement of democracy in these elections according to the 2009 Polyarchy 2.0 index, calculated by TEIM Election Watch	ID: 34.9, max. 49 Part: 57.1 ² max. 70 Comp: 61.2 ³ max. 70 (Democracy minimum: ID: 5, Part: 10, Comp: 30)	Classification of the elections: democratic
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Definition of the political system and parties:

Local elections are held every five years and do not usually coincide with national elections. Voting is compulsory and those who do not exercise this right are fined a small sum.

²Participation was calculated out of a population of 71,517,100 (source: *Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu*, 31 December 2008) and a participation of 40,836,785 voters.

³Competition was calculated using the percentage of seats for the parties in the elections to the provincial assemblies.

The municipal councils and provincial assemblies are all elected according to a proportional electoral system, with an election threshold of 10%. The mayors are elected using a pluralist system in which whomever wins the most votes – even if they do not obtain a majority – wins the post of mayor. The same occurs with the post of *mukhtar* (a neighbourhood or village head), who is elected along with a group of people who will assist him or her in their job (a list of names appears on a separate paper that is added to the ballot for *mukhtar*, who in no case is affiliated with any political party).

At this time, Turkey has a multi-party system and one predominant party in power, the AKP, which won a majority of the seats in the Assembly in two consecutive general elections, in 2002 and 2007. Currently, the AKP has 338 seats in the Assembly, the CHP 97, the MHP 69, the DTP 21, the DSP 13, the ÖDP⁴ 1 and the independents 5. The AKP has managed to occupy the centre-right position, displacing the traditional parties that had filled this space. The CHP and the DSP are usually included in the centre-left, although many critics believe that there is no real social-democratic force in Turkey. Representation by the DSP at this time is low and the CHP has been branded as a secular, nationalist party but not a social-democratic one. The DTP is a pro-Kurdish party located on the left of the political spectrum and the MHP is an ultra-nationalist Turkish party on the extreme right of the political spectrum, although it is not currently an anti-system party. The ÖDP, in turn, is the product of the fusion of several leftist groups and its electoral impact is limited.

Impact of the electoral process and size of the constituency on the elections:

The electoral process used for the elections to the municipal councils and provincial assemblies is proportional representation with a voting threshold of 10% and closed lists for the parties. For the provincial assemblies, each of the 81 administrative provinces forms a constituency, while for the mayors and municipal councils, the constituency is the corresponding municipality. In the so-called metropolitan municipalities, the district forms its own constituency (for the election of its local authority); however, the mayor of the metropolitan city is elected within the limits of the metropolitan municipality as a single constituency. The *mukhtar* assumes the most important administrative role in towns and villages, as well as in city neighbourhoods.

Both the *mukhtars* and the mayors are elected through a plurality voting system. In local politics, this system places special importance on the personality of the candidates for mayor and their relationship with the citizens. In fact, it is not unusual for the mayor to belong to a party different to the party with the largest number of seats in the provincial assemblies and municipal councils.

The proportional representation electoral system tends to favour the parties with the most votes since it is based on the D'Hondt formula, which minimises representation of the smallest parties. The provincial assemblies have a large average size (for example, 50 members in the Trabzon provincial assembly), a factor which does not distort the proportional representation of the parties.

⁴ÖDP: Freedom and Solidarity Party (*Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi*).

Results:

These elections elected 16 metropolitan mayors, 65 municipal mayors (provincial capitals), 143 mayors from metropolitan districts, 749 mayors from regional municipalities, 1,974 town mayors, 69,112 members of municipal councils, of whom 34,556 will fill the post directly, with the other 34,556 acting as substitutes, 6,568 members of provincial assemblies, of whom 3,284 will fill their posts directly with the rest serving as substitutes, 34,305 town *mukhtars*, 18,460 city district *mukhtars*, and between those designated directly and their substitutes, 277,736 candidates elected to the town councils of elders and 147,680 members of the councils of elders in the urban districts.

In the elections for the provincial assemblies, of the 19 parties that ran (apart from the independents), those who obtained the highest percentage of the vote were as follows:

Results of the elections to the provincial assemblies

Party	Votes won	% votes	Difference from 2007 legislative elections	Difference from 2004 local elections
Justice and Development Party (AKP)	15,490,799	38.78%	-7.8%	- 2.89%
Republican People's Party (CHP)	9,237,494	23.12%	+2.24%	+4.89%
Nationalist Action Party (MHP)	6,408,399	16.04%	+1.77%	+5.59%
Democratic Society Party (DTP)	2,269,482	5.68%	--	--
Felicity Party (SP)	2,061,434	5.16%	+2.82%	+1.14%
Democrat Party (DP)	1,488,134	3.73%	-1.69%	-6.24%
Democratic Left Party (DSP)	1,111,594	2.78%	--	+0.66%
Great Union Party (BBP)	894,145	2.24%	--	+1.08%
Independents	156,091	0.39	-4.85%	-0.34%

Source: NTV. <http://secim2009.ntvmsnbc.com/default.htm>

Mayoral posts won by the parties in the municipal elections

Party	Votes won	% votes	Main mayoral posts	% mayoral posts
AKP	19,073,953	40.0	492	50.6%
CHP	13,413,030	28.2	183	18.8%
MHP	7,002,686	14.7	139	14.3%
DTP	2,406,249	5.1	58	5.9%
SP	2,267,235	4.8	23	2.3%
DSP	1,161,790	2.4	12	1.2%
DP	1,066,937	2.2	40	4.1%
BBP	463,741	1	4	0.41%
INDEPENDENTS	232,706	0.5	16	1.6%
ANAP Motherland Party	217,642	0.5	4	0.41%

Source: Radikal. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/secim2009/secim.aspx>

Qualitative analysis of the elections:

Participation:

The election census produced 48,033,247 voters, of whom 40,836,785 exercised their right to vote in the elections to the provincial assemblies, with a total of 39,946,932 valid votes, 889,853 invalid votes and an abstention rate of around 15%.⁵

The high official participation reveals the importance bestowed upon the local elections by the electorate. The sensation as an observer is that this official participation rate is credible and corresponds to what was observed.

Competition:

19 political parties participated in these elections, although not all of them ran candidates in all of the regions of the country. Independent candidates also competed. The party with the highest proportion of the vote in the elections to the provincial assemblies, the AKP, won approximately 38.78% of the vote at national level. Although the ADP asserted its predominance, the competition was very intense in certain places.

Transparency:

The parties, media and governmental representatives all considered the elections valid and international observers were allowed to be present. The newspapers, however, presented some anomalies the day after the election. On election night in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Antalya, Çanakkale, Isparta and Kütahya, the Supreme Election Council's computer system temporarily froze when it came time to make the data public. In some places where the electricity was cut off, CHP sympathisers headed to the polling locations to control the vote count.

A Catalanian delegation of election observers in Turkey⁶ alluded in their report to a 'formal correction', as well as to the presence of 'certain logistical irregularities' and 'latent pressure' in the campaign, especially experienced by the pro-Kurdish DTP party, in the eastern and southeast regions of Turkey, where there is a majority Kurdish population. The delegation noted that the DTP candidacies were the object of 'intense physical and psychological coercion'. The logistical irregularities included the high military and paramilitary militia presence, which contributed to creating a strained election environment. The clash between the PKK and the Turkish army continues to take its toll when it comes to being able to normalise the situation in the region. Apart from this conflict, the Interior Ministry justified the deployment of troops in order to guarantee the safety of the elections, especially in the rural areas – elections for *mukhtar* in these areas are usually the most eventful. In fact, seven people were killed with more wounded as a result of armed confrontations.

Party representation and debate during the election:

Local elections allow for a different kind of proximity than general elections. In areas like Trabzon, the parties carried out a door-to-door campaign. Local problems had their impact on the different programmes, although national questions had more impact in the press. The leaders of the national parties threw

⁵ Find more information in the Turkish newspaper Milliyet, available at: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2009/03/30/Secim2009.html?ver=24>

⁶Read more about this mission at: <http://eleccionsmunicipalsturquia.wordpress.com/>

themselves into a campaign with a strong political content. Many analysts noted how little the national leaders, who were prominent in the campaign, debated specific proposals for managing and alleviating the consequences of the economic crisis and proposing solutions to local questions.

These elections were notably marked by questions of national politics: the Ergenekon case, the endorsement referendum sought by the AKP after its confrontation with the judges, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's reaction in Davos, which significantly increased his popularity, the Kurdish question, for which the AKP has been sharply criticised for being too apprehensive with the reforms for some and going too far for others, the economic crisis, and the fight by other parties to maintain and increase their authority at a national level, among others.

One analyst emphasised the fact that the leaders significantly personalised the campaign, giving them an aura of theatricality, instead of facing real, specific questions like the economic crisis and how to improve the democratic management of local administrations. Also notable is the larger amount of resources available to the most important parties and especially the AKP, to carry out their campaigns.

Openness:

The elections were open to an important degree. Several polls appeared beforehand, the results of which, although they heralded the predominance of the AKP, were inconclusive. The poll that most closely predicted the results was presented by A&G. This pollster stated that the percentage of votes that the AKP could win for the mayoral posts would fall to 39.1%. In fact, the AKP's loss of votes, although not excessive, was a disappointment for the party.

Significance:

Local elections have become more important in Turkey since the 1970s. Turkey is a highly centralised country, but with the growth in the big cities, local politics is taking the form of a special platform for developing the popularity of the parties on a national level and connecting to voters more directly. For politicians, being a leading figure in the large metropolises can offer a prominent role that is not easy to find inside the parties, which are largely dependent on their leaders. Since the end of the 1980s and during the 90s, local questions have occupied a more clearly-defined space in the campaigns and specific projects for local development have taken form. Increasingly often, greater professionalisation can be detected in political life at this level. Furthermore, small parties that have little representation on the parliamentary level demonstrate their existence with these elections, which offer them visibility and a presence. For the most powerful parties, moreover, they serve to provide more pluralism in the ranks and to show new faces, which can balance the party heads' stale leadership.

Consequences and impact on the political system:

The elections confirmed the predominance of the AKP in the party system. It positioned itself as the political force with the most votes and for now, without any clear alternative among its most important competitors, the CHP and the MHP. In the provincial assemblies, the AKP won 39% across the country, while the CHP won nearly 23% and the MHP, 16%. The AKP lost about 3% of its support with respect to the 2004 local elections. Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan

assessed the results on election night, accepting the need to take note of the vote and work in a different direction.

As Ali Çarkoğlu noted,⁷ the influence of the regional factor was more important for the CHP, DTP and MHP, while the AKP was able to maintain a significant presence in all the regions. As a direct consequence, one important weakness can be seen in the party system. For example, in the east and southeast, only the AKP and DTP have a notable presence. The latter has re-evaluated its electoral weight in the eastern part of the country, with a majority Kurdish population, trying to claim a key role as the interlocutor on the Kurdish question, where the identity factor seems to have played a key role in these elections, as opposed to other policies based more on administration. It also won 58 mayoral posts.

The MHP may have increased its electoral importance among a nationalist electorate that is dissatisfied with the AKP's approach to the Kurdish question, while the CHP seems to have more sway among people with a higher economic level in the richest and most industrialised areas. The rise of the MHP has been more homogenous around the country, a rise which, moreover, can be seen as having benefited from the economic erosion that the current financial crisis may bring in its wake.⁸

The other small parties, for their part, managed to shore up their visibility at the municipal level, with limited electoral support, decreasing in some cases and very moderately growing in others. The DP, as in 2004, won a provincial capital, Yalova. However, it went from having 89 regional municipalities in 2004 to 39 in 2009. Despite the death of its leader Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu in a helicopter accident before the election, the BDP did not lose its pull in Sivas, and won a provincial capital and three regional mayoral posts. In 2004, the DSP won one metropolitan city, 2 provincial capitals and 5 regional municipalities. This time, it held Eskisehir and Ordu, but lost Bartın. However, it increased its regional mayoral posts to 23. The SP won 4.8% of the vote on a national level and 23 mayoral posts, almost doubling its 2004 numbers.

Conclusions:

Local elections in Turkey attract considerable attention and interest. They have taken on their own personality since the 1980s and the campaigns have defined truly local questions. For politicians, moreover, local administration has become an important trampoline to refine their careers and increase their popularity. This time, however, national questions surrounded the March 2009 local elections, contributing to an atmosphere like that of the general elections, with the main party leaders dominating the front pages in the press. Questions like the economic crisis, the Prime Minister's reaction at the Davos conference and the inflammatory party politics played an important role, although at a local level, voters did not overlook specifically local issues. For instance, it is not unusual to find a mayor from one camp in a provincial capital where the provincial assembly is dominated by another party. Clearly, therefore, the voters differentiated between the candidates and the parties, depending on different factors. The AKP has consolidated itself as the predominant party in the system, but its percentage of the vote decreased. A haughty and less inclusive attitude, along with the economic crisis, seems to have eroded its popularity. The Prime

⁷ Ali ÇARKOĞLU. "Turkey's local elections: winners and losers". *Insight Turkey*. Vol. 11/2. pp. 1-18.

⁸ *Idem*.

Minister himself announced on election night that he was paying attention to the voters' message and there may be changes in the Council of Ministers, to establish another direction. The CHP and MHP increased their percentage of the vote with respect to the 2004 local elections, respectively winning 23.1% and 16.1% of the vote (in the provincial assemblies). However, these two parties combined only equal the percentage of votes won by the AKP, which gives some idea of how far they still are from the AKP.

The small parties that do not surpass the 10% threshold in the general elections find an important gold mine of electoral strength and visibility in the local elections. This was the case with the DTP (a pro-Kurdish party that is usually on the left of the political spectrum), which won significant electoral victories in some of the most important cities in eastern Turkey and has confirmed its importance as a political force in the region, where the Kurdish question is key. Other parties, such as the DSP and the SP, very moderately increased their victories on a local level with respect to 2004, with 2.8% and 5.2% respectively (of the percentage of votes for the provincial assemblies). On the centre-right spectrum, the AKP remains secure in the face of the DP's electoral fall, while on the centre-left, the CHP is consolidated against the DSP – which has still not regained the electoral weight of its earlier years when Ecevit headed the party – but continues to position itself as an alternative to the AKP. The ultranationalist MHP, in turn, continues to increase its electoral weight. In any case, although the local elections point to certain trends on a national level, it is important to remember that they have their own, specific dynamic.

Reference to two other Internet analyses of this election:

Çarkoğlu, Ali: "Turkey's Local Elections of 2009: Winners and Losers", en *Insight Turkey* Vol. 11 / No. 2 / 2009, pp. 1-18, available at:
http://www.insightturkey.com/Insight_Turkey_2009_2_Ali_Carkoglu.pdf

Sekercioglu, Eser: "Turkey's March 2009 Elections: Loss without Defeat, Gain without Victory", en *MERIA Journal* Volume 13, No. 2 - June 2009, available at:
<http://www.gloria-center.org/meria/2009/06/sekericioglu.html>