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Journal of Democracy, Volume 27, Number 2, April 2016, pp. 141-154 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0021>

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TURKEY'S TWO ELECTIONS: THE AKP COMES BACK

Ziya Öniş

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Even by the dramatic standards of Turkish politics, 2015 was a remarkable year. Against the backdrop of continuing regional turmoil, Turkey held not just one but two national elections. Taking place less than six months apart, they pointed in starkly different directions. During the first (held on June 7), the long-ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) of premier-turned-president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan—in office since 2002—seemed badly shaken as it lost its parliamentary majority and struggled to form a government. During the second vote, held on November 1 after the failure of government-formation efforts had led to a hung parliament, the AKP made a stunning comeback, recouping its majority and with it the ability to claim that Turkish voters had once again confirmed its primacy, just as they had in 2007 and 2011.

Even after decades of multiparty political competition, Turkey remains far from being a consolidated liberal democracy and might be best described as a hybrid regime.¹ Its hybrid status, moreover, appears less than stable. There is potential for movement in a liberal-democratic direction, but also for degeneration toward competitive authoritarianism.

The prospect of hybrid regimes turning more authoritarian is an ominous possibility as democracy stagnates worldwide and the West and its liberal-democratic model slip into relative decline.² The EU's transformative impact is not what it used to be, given Europe's deep economic and identity crises. The declining appeal of Western-style liberal democracy has left a vacuum that nationalist-populist leaders such as Russia's Vladimir Putin, Hungary's Viktor Orbán, India's Narendra Modi, and Turkey's Erdoğan are filling. In an era of intense geopolitical competition, the authoritarian Moscow-Beijing axis has become an alternative reference point for many leaders in the global South.

Among the basic ideas behind this trend is the notion that capitalist development does not require liberal democracy. Instead, the thinking goes, such development may be achieved in a minimally democratic environment based on competitive elections and a narrowly construed majoritarianism that pushes aside such principles as respect for the rule of law, safeguards for minority rights, and reverence for civil liberties. It is against this background that we should evaluate the AKP's performance during its third term (the one ushered in by its 2011 win at the polls) as a prelude to assessing 2015's twin elections.

Center-right parties have dominated Turkey's political scene since the country became a parliamentary democracy in 1950. Yet the AKP, a party with a strong religious-conservative heritage under the charismatic leadership of Erdoğan, has proved to be more durable than any previous center-right party, winning three straight general elections from 2002 through 2011, while upping its vote share each time. Governmental fatigue, a common characteristic of Western democracies, simply did not occur in the case of the AKP. Indeed, the party reached the peak of its power in 2011, when it received almost 50 percent of the total vote. After the June 2015 setback, it returned to its winning ways in November and replicated its 2011 success.

We can divide the years of AKP command from 2002 through 2015 into three phases. The first, from late 2002 to 2007, looks in retrospect like a kind of golden age. This was a period of significant progress in the economy, the democratic order, and foreign policy, all under the strong influence of the EU accession process. Rapid growth raised living standards for the middle and poorer classes, powerfully bolstering the AKP's electoral appeal.³ The AKP continued democratizing reforms that had begun under the previous coalition government. The military's political role was reduced, the heavy hand of Kemalist secularism was lightened (giving more space to religious-conservative segments in this predominantly Sunni Muslim society), and Kurdish ethnic identity received clearer recognition. Indeed, the AKP under Erdoğan began a "Kurdish peace process" in order to end the long-running and at times quite bloody conflict between the Turkish state and the large Kurdish minority.⁴ In the foreign-policy realm, Turkey avowed a desire for "zero problems" with its neighbors and sought to play a mediating role in matters such as the situation of the Turkmen ethnic minority in Iraq and the international diplomatic controversy over the Iranian nuclear program.

The second phase, which spanned the 2007 and 2011 elections, was a time of transition. The AKP consolidated its power, marginalizing such key actors of the old secularist order as the military and the judiciary. Economic and political reforms slowed, and dealings with the EU lapsed into stasis.

The third phase, which began after the June 2011 election, saw the virtuous cycle of the first phase go into reverse. The annual rate of eco-

monic growth, which had reached a high of almost 7 percent in 2009, slowed to a crawl. Politically, serious democratic backsliding was evident.⁵ Democratic setbacks were particularly visible when it came to the rule of law: Judicial autonomy became virtually a thing of the past, media freedoms were restricted, and the security state began to grow. The police replaced the military as the newly dominant arm of the security state, with the excessive use of force on display most visibly during the antigovernment Gezi Park protests of May and June 2013.⁶ Efforts to highlight corruption allegations against the government were met with fierce repression. Completing the picture of a shift toward authoritarianism based on a narrow majoritarian understanding of democracy was the proposed constitutional change that would replace Turkey's parliamentary order with a presidential system headed by an extraordinarily powerful chief executive similar to Russia's. The danger that parliament and other democratic institutions could be marginalized was (and is) obvious. Finally, in the foreign-policy realm, Turkey's extensive involvements in Egypt and Syria undermined its international image and led to growing problems with neighbors, including Russia.⁷

All this made the June 2015 election critical—or at least it seemed to be so. Voters could give the AKP a two-thirds supermajority in the 550-seat unicameral parliament, opening the way for strong presidentialism and a growing authoritarian turn. Or they might back opposition parties strongly enough to block the shift to presidentialism. By scaling the AKP back from a near 50 percent majority to a 41 percent plurality in parliament, the June voting did open a window of opportunity. But efforts to form a coalition government were effectively prevented by the uncompromising attitudes of key political actors, especially President Erdoğan himself. An extraordinary chain of events then led to a fresh snap election in November, and with it a stunning reversal: Erdoğan and the AKP saw their dominance restored, gaining back all the ground they had lost.

Looking back on the year, we can see how it highlighted the vitality of *both* democratic *and* authoritarian forces in Turkey. On balance, however, the November voting's outcome gives little ground for hope that the authoritarian turn can soon be reversed, with the only consolation being that the path to hyperpresidentialism via constitutional change seems to have been blocked, at least for the moment.

An Election of Surprises and Paradoxes

The June 2015 election was full of surprises that showed how vibrant democratic forces in Turkey remain. Turnout was very high. At 86 percent, it exceeded the 70 percent that the previous year's presidential election had drawn and made for an even starker contrast with the low electoral turnouts in Europe. Clearly, voters cared about the outcome of

the election and wanted to voice their concerns about the direction of political change.

Parliament reemerged as the main arena of political contention. The voters had made it the most representative national legislature in Turkish history. Three parties other than the AKP managed to pass the notoriously high 10 percent threshold and diverse segments of society—religious conservatives, secular Kemalists, nationalists, and Kurds—thus found themselves included in significant numbers. Voters rejected the notion of a monolithic Turkey dominated by a single party under a powerful leader.

Perhaps the election's biggest surprise was the rise of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), a pro-Kurdish formation led by Selahattin Demirtaş, who had already started to make his mark as a 2014 presidential candidate. In early 2015, the HDP broadened its appeal beyond Kurdish issues and presented itself as a nationwide party of the left. For the HDP, just running as a party was a big gamble. Earlier Kurdish parties had always seen themselves stuck at 5 or 6 percent of the vote, and therefore had run their candidates as independents. If the HDP failed to pass 10 percent, the AKP with its Kurdish-outreach program would be the big beneficiary, perhaps picking up enough seats in heavily Kurdish districts to put the shift to hyperpresidentialism over the top. Indeed, up until the last minute there were fears that the HDP would fall just short, finishing somewhere slightly above 9 percent and hence failing to win a single seat.

When the June tallies came in, however, the HDP had reached 12.6 percent. Driving its success had been two things. First, it had wooed conservative Kurds who normally voted for the AKP but who had lost faith in the government's "Kurdish peace process." To many Kurdish citizens, Erdoğan and the AKP seemed insincere about seeking Turkish-Kurdish reconciliation. These skeptics could point to Ankara's October 2014 refusal to help Kurdish forces fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) for control of Kobane, a Syrian city with a large ethnic-Kurdish population near the Turkish border. Noted too was Turkey's insistence on classifying Syria's Democratic Union Party (PYD)—the key group representing Syrian Kurds—as a terrorist organization no better than ISIS. The swing to the HDP of Kurdish votes in eastern and southeastern Turkey did more than anything else to take a bite out of the AKP and end its majority.

It would be a mistake, however, to associate the HDP's success solely with a swing by religious-conservative Kurdish voters. Many Turks who would normally have voted for the left-of-center Republican People's Party (CHP) decided to vote for the HDP instead because Demirtaş also strongly appealed to left-wing sentiment and because they feared that his party's falling short of the threshold would harm democracy's prospects in Turkey. For once, ironically, the exceptionally high "barrage"—a fea-

FIGURE—VOTE SHARES OF TURKEY'S MAJOR PARTIES

ture set up by an early-1980s military regime anxious to keep extremist splinter parties out of future parliaments—worked for rather than against a predominantly Kurdish party. In fact, the HDP and Demirtaş found themselves at center stage, the voice of the massive Gezi Park movement in the realm of party politics. It is estimated that around 2 percent of the electorate, especially in key urban areas, shifted from the CHP to the HDP and contributed to the latter's success.⁸

The Nationalist Action Party (MHP), the traditional standard-bearer of Turkish nationalism, also did well in June, picking up 28 new seats for a total of 80. Both the MHP and the HDP—for widely differing reasons—criticized the Kurdish peace process, and this helped both parties to cut into the AKP vote. The MHP did especially well in many conservative, AKP-dominated cities in the central and eastern parts of the country. The MHP was a place to go for Turkish nationalists in the broad AKP coalition who were finding themselves unhappy with the Kurdish peace process, but it also drew voters who found themselves affected by the slowing of the economy as well as receptive to charges that the AKP had become corrupt and authoritarian.

The June election suggested that Erdoğan's leadership, so crucial to the AKP's rise and dominance, might be turning into a liability for his party. Erdoğan's election to the presidency in August 2014 seemed to have worked to the AKP's disadvantage, suggesting that he might have overestimated his 52 percent mandate in a low-turnout, weakly contested election in which he had always been the prohibitive favorite.

The first year of Erdoğan's presidency was marked by growing authoritarianism. Erdoğan named his longtime foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu

to take over as premier (the AKP parliamentary majority unanimously elevated him to the post), but it was the president himself who called and chaired cabinet meetings. The custom and spirit of the constitution had always cast the president as a neutral figure, an “honest broker” above the realm of partisanship. Not content to claim more power under the old constitution, Erdoğan made changing it the focus of his first year as president. In other steps outside traditional constitutional boundaries, he actively campaigned for AKP parliamentary candidates and built a new thousand-room presidential palace. The price for all these moves was a certain amount of voter backlash.

Finally, the June balloting also saw the largest opposition party, the CHP, remain stuck at its 25 percent vote share (with a slight rise in its seat total from 125 to 132). While the CHP would have done better had it not lost some voters to the HDP, a glance at the electoral map shows that the secular, social-democratic, Western-oriented CHP is a party of the Aegean coast, of the small part of Turkey that lies geographically within Europe, and of a few big cities (including Istanbul and Ankara). Its strategy has been to downplay “identity” issues concerning secularism and republican values in order to focus on economic appeals, but that has not helped it much. Turkish voters, it seems, have “bounded identities.”⁹⁹ This means that in regions dominated by Islamic conservatives, the MHP benefits from discontent with the AKP, while in Kurdish districts the HDP is the alternative to the AKP. The CHP is left out. In a country that tends to prefer one mix or another of nationalism and religious conservatism, the market for secularist social democracy is limited.

Coalition Politics versus Authoritarianism?

Even after its June setback, the AKP continued to be the dominant force in Turkish politics. Its base remained formidable: Large slices of society had done well economically under AKP rule, and Islamic conservatives—long treated with suspicion by the Kemalist establishment—had enjoyed an enhancement of their rights, freedoms, and status. Still, there was reason to hope that the structural pressures produced by the June result would make the AKP more pliable and readier to turn away from an authoritarian course.

After June, the AKP found itself facing checks and balances that had scarcely existed before. There was a chance for the party to distance itself from Erdoğan and to keep his powers in line with the existing constitutional framework of semipresidentialism. During the first year of Erdoğan’s presidency, there were clear signs of disagreement between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu on key issues such as how to deal with serious corruption charges leveled against former AKP ministers. Yet Davutoğlu and the rest of the party leadership, even though occasionally

prodded by senior party figures including former president Abdullah Gül, had been unable or unwilling to act.¹⁰ That opportunity for revitalizing the AKP through self-examination had been lost. In June 2015, however, the need for a coalition partner to form a new government handed AKP leaders fresh leverage that they could have used to achieve distance from the presidential office while pointing themselves and their party in a more democracy-friendly direction.

With pressures for pluralism building, the AKP might have chosen to go “back to the future” via a reprisal of its post-2002 emphasis on economic and democratic reforms. To regain its majority, it could have sought to regain the Kurdish votes that it had lost. Did this not suggest the wisdom of taking major and credible steps in the direction of democratization and support for the Kurdish peace process?

Despite the promise of those June days, however, other and less happy scenarios could not be ruled out. Uncertainties were everywhere. Would Erdoğan be willing to step back and abandon his hyperpresidentialist ambitions? Or would he resolve to retain power, and if so, what might he do to achieve that end? Would Davutoğlu and the rest of the party elite have the nerve to distance themselves from Erdoğan? What might possible coalition partners ask of the AKP in sensitive areas such as presidential powers and corruption allegations? No one could take for granted that a smooth reversal of the authoritarian turn was in the offing.

Turkey’s experience with coalition politics has not been a happy one. From the late 1970s through the 1990s, multiparty governments in Ankara were beset by instability and crises (including military coups). The last government before the AKP came to power was a coalition that ran things under Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit from 1999 to 2002. It launched major reforms, but these had become possible only after a massive February 2001 economic and financial crisis that Ecevit had failed to prevent. The November 2002 elections swept aside all the parties in Ecevit’s government and handed the AKP the supremacy that it has enjoyed ever since. Coalition failures in the past, however, do not necessarily have to mean coalition failures in the future. If key political players show prudence, restraint, and a willingness to compromise, coalitions can work. Conversely, failure and instability are always possible outcomes as well. June 2015 should have taught the AKP that its majority is not guaranteed. What voters have given, they can always take away. Leadership is key.

In mid-2015, the incentives facing all key party leaders favored coalition-building. Even the AKP, while retaining a plurality in parliament, had seemingly poor prospects of regaining a majority in an early election. The CHP, stuck at about a quarter of the total popular vote and with a base skewing heavily Aegean-coastal and urban, could only hope to make an impact via membership in a ruling coalition. An AKP-CHP coalition seemed as if it would enjoy the broadest reach (the AKP

is very strong in the wide Turkish heartland of the Anatolian Plateau) and would offer the best chance of a constructive approach to the Kurdish peace process. The CHP, a party associated with the tradition of the Turkish Republic's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, is not without its Turkish-nationalist elements, but its liberal tendencies under present leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu make it a better candidate than the hardcore-nationalist MHP for working with the Kurds. Indeed, leading up to the June vote, Kılıçdaroğlu had avowed his desire to continue the Kurdish peace process, albeit in a more transparent and accountable manner.

The MHP, meanwhile, had to ask itself whether it wanted to "go mainstream" or stay a single-issue protest party that might profit from the occasional voter backlash against larger parties, but would otherwise remain on the fringe. Under current leader Devlet Bahçeli, the latter option seems to have the upper hand. The MHP's key distinguishing feature is its wholesale opposition to the Kurdish demands for rights and autonomy that underlie the peace process. An AKP-MHP coalition appeared more "natural" than an AKP-CHP juncture, but the implications for the Kurdish peace process would have been dire. The opportunity was there for the MHP's leadership to redefine the party—and broaden its reach—as a more "normal" center-right formation with firm but less hard-edged nationalism as part of its repertoire but not necessarily its overriding issue. Had that opportunity been seized, it could have proven to be one of the most positive unintended consequences of the June election. But a willingness to develop new issue agendas and, above all, to be more conciliatory on Kurdish matters was absolutely crucial. Such a new-model MHP would have found itself well-positioned to rival the AKP for votes throughout the heartland, where conservative citizens with their bounded identities are likely to see the MHP as the only alternative to the AKP.

Finally, the case of the HDP deserves special emphasis. That party's rise was the real surprise of June 2015. Its difficulty was that, more than any of its competitors, its success depended on effective coalition-building, but it was clearly the least likely formal coalition partner for the AKP. The HDP had put together an effective *voter* coalition linking left-of-center Kurds who normally voted for other ethnic-Kurdish parties; center-right or conservative and religious Kurds who had been voting for the AKP but had become disillusioned by its handling of the peace process; and left-of-center ethnic Turks who had come to fear for their country's democratic future and valued the HDP as the new progressive face of Turkish politics.

The durability of this unlikely coalition depended on a number of tenuous conditions. The HDP would have had to find a way to use its formidable 80-seat bloc in the new parliament (up from 29 seats just four years before) to satisfy religious-conservative Kurds regarding the peace agenda while also satisfying left-of-center Turks who had backed the HDP as a nationwide progressive party (and not just an ethnoregion-

al Kurdish formation). The HDP would have had to put forth concrete positions on the economy, democratization, and gender inequality that could draw more voters, while totally rejecting violence and military action and committing itself to staying within the bounds of peaceful civilian politics. The HDP leaders would have had to walk a tightrope, but the possible payoff was a bigger electoral coalition and the ability to make a significant contribution to the democratization of a Turkish political scene deeply shadowed by authoritarianism.

The economy's troubles stretching back to 2011—slow growth, high inflation, and ominous corporate-debt levels—should also have encouraged coalition-building. The best thing for Turkey's economy would have been a strong and credible government, one able to implement fiscal and monetary discipline and boost investor confidence in the short term, while taking steps to promote growth and productivity in the longer term. All parties had reason to fear the extreme uncertainty that economic instability and collapse would produce. The democratization agenda hinged on the economy as well, since hard times would surely mean the downgrading if not abandonment of projects such as the Kurdish peace process. Moreover, something like the reverse also applied. Democracy-friendly measures to stem the authoritarian tide and restore judicial autonomy and the rule of law would also help economic performance by promoting transparency, stable expectations, and the like.

The Politics of Fear

Yet despite all the incentives that seemed to line up in favor coalition-building, liberal hopes for a new era of cross-party cooperation leading to better governance were cruelly dashed soon after the June election. Erdoğan used all the power at his disposal to delay coalition talks and the formation of a new government. It quickly became obvious that he would try to force an early election, with plans to make it a vehicle for the AKP's comeback and the revitalization of his own presidential ambitions in the context of a new constitution. He developed a clever and aggressive strategy aimed at wrenching nationalist votes back from the MHP. Bahçeli, that party's leader, facilitated this process by flintily refusing to join any coalition. Kılıçdaroğlu, the CHP leader, displayed some openness to the idea of an AKP-CHP coalition, and there is reason to think that Prime Minister Davutoğlu felt willing to work with him. Yet the AKP under Erdoğan was reluctant to share power with the CHP, with which it had significant ideological differences on key matters of secularism and religion. Had Davutoğlu not been under such strong pressure from Erdoğan, could a coalition government have formed in mid-2015? Regrettably, we will never know.

Regional geopolitical developments also favored the AKP and Erdoğan. Under pressure from the United States and other Western al-

lies, Erdoğan and the AKP government agreed to play an active role in the coalition against ISIS. They used this, however, as an occasion to attack the PKK as part of the all-around campaign against terror groups. The PKK, meanwhile, played into the AKP's hands by unwisely assuming that major powers would back a renewed push for an independent Kurdish state as a reward for Kurdish help against ISIS. By late July 2015, the ceasefire had collapsed and the PKK had resumed violent struggle. The spiking violence in the heavily Kurdish east and southeast was reminiscent of the deadly fighting between ethnic-Kurdish guerrillas and Turkish security forces that had swept those areas in the 1990s.

The flaring conflict put Demirtaş and the HDP in a most awkward spot. Their claim to be a nationwide party lacked credibility so long as they could not disassociate themselves from PKK violence. While the peace process had been active and a coalition government had seemed possible, Demirtaş had been a rising star. With strife raging in the southeast and the coalition option closed off, however, he found himself marginalized. To add to the HDP's woes, state institutions suppressed its activities—already hampered by a lack of time and resources—during the run-up to the November 1 snap election.

The politics of fear helped Erdoğan and the AKP. They called for a strong majority government as the surest base for security and stability, and voters responded. Pluralism and freedom of expression had moved down on the list of public concerns. The November balloting brought the AKP a 9-point increase in its vote share, returning it to the 2011 level. (Oddly, pollsters somehow missed the AKP's resurgence, so this result took pundits by surprise.) The big losers of November 2015 were the HDP and the MHP. Both managed to pass the threshold, but dropped from 80 seats apiece to 59 and 40, respectively. The CHP's electoral showing hardly changed from June to November: Kılıçdaroğlu's constructive and conciliatory stance toward both interparty politics and the Kurdish peace process brought no dividends at the polls.

The AKP's aggressive turn to nationalism and the politics of fear brought back the 5 percent of vote share that it had lost to the MHP in June. Perhaps ironically, some of these returning AKP voters were religious-conservative Kurds who calculated that the AKP (which they already found congenial on other issues) was the best bet to restore stability to the conflict-ridden southeast and restart the peace process. The psychological impact of terrorism and disorder cannot be understated. Just weeks before the snap election, on October 10, a pair of suicide bombers probably sent by ISIS killed more than a hundred people outside the main train station in downtown Ankara. The attack, aimed at a peace rally that involved the HDP, was the most devastating terrorist assault in the history of the Turkish Republic. For the average citizen, the originator of terror—whether ISIS or the PKK—seemed irrelevant, even though there were charges that state institutions bore a measure of

responsibility by virtue of having let ISIS terrorists live unobstructed. In this kind of environment, it was easy to paint dissent as a threat to stability and public order.

Selling Stability

Concerns about economic instability were also an integral part of the politics of fear. In a country replete with legions of debt-ridden small businesses and signs of economic unsteadiness, the power vacuum associated with a hung parliament was singularly unwelcome. The delay in coalition talks coupled with not-so-distant memories of crisis-prone coalition governments only heightened such sentiments, making a coherent single-party government seem more urgently needed than ever as a guarantor of economic stability.

The AKP's second campaign of the year was cleverly designed. Unlike in the first one, when Erdoğan had insisted on actively supporting AKP candidates, he appeared to stay in the wings, leaving center stage to Davutoğlu. The issue of shifting to a presidential regime was deemphasized. Instead, economic issues received top billing. Taking a page from the CHP's playbook, the AKP even promised voters a wide range of material benefits. Erdoğan had cunningly realized that stressing the presidential issue earlier in the year had dragged down the AKP's performance. But his step back had been merely tactical: As soon as the November landslide was won, he once again seized the spotlight and began voicing his hyperpresidentialist ambitions with renewed vigor.

Finally, the broader geopolitical context and the changing nature of relations with the United States and the EU had important implications for Turkish domestic politics. Here too, Erdoğan and the AKP were the beneficiaries. In the lead-up to June 7, Western criticism of Turkey's authoritarian turn was growing, with much complaint focusing on violations of human rights and media freedoms. More recently, however, security concerns have moved up on the West's agenda. In official circles at least, Western critiques of Turkey's democratic deficits have accordingly become muted.¹¹ Once Turkey opted to become an active member of the anti-ISIS coalition, joining the U.S.-led air campaign against ISIS in late August, Washington's critical remarks about Turkey's internal politics largely faded away.

Europe, for its part, is now overwhelmingly concerned with the masses of Syrian and other refugees and migrants who are flowing over its borders, often from Turkish territory, and is willing, at least for the time being, to shelve worries about Turkey's democratic credentials. German chancellor Angela Merkel's state visit to Turkey shortly before the November election clearly strengthened Erdoğan's position and lent further credibility to his highly assertive and nationalist foreign policy in the eyes of ordinary voters. It was also striking

that the European Commission's annual progress report on Turkey's EU candidacy was held back until after the election in order not to jeopardize security cooperation.¹²

Between Hope and Anxiety

Turkey's twin elections of 2015 hold lessons for students of comparative democratization. In June, the vitality of Turkish democratic processes was on display: A long-ruling party, rocked by several years of protests and scandals, took a pounding. In November, however, the persistence of authoritarian pressures and the ability of incumbents to play on fear were highlighted. In the midst of instability and violence, Turkish voters signaled their desire for stability and order. As a result, the monopoly that Erdoğan and the AKP enjoy at the center of the Turkish political system seems once again assured.

The next parliamentary elections are due to be held no later than 25 October 2019. Erdoğan will be up for reelection the same year (under current rules he can serve up to two five-year terms). Although we are not likely to see a formal shift to a presidential system in the interim, the makings of a *de facto* presidential system already exist. As president, Erdoğan exerts considerable power over both his party and the political system as a whole. Half the electorate votes loyally for the AKP—a share unlikely to shrink barring a major catastrophe or economic crisis. Religious-conservative voters in much of the country have made gains in terms of cultural and political rights as well as economic well-being, and they are unlikely to drop their support for the AKP. Erdoğan knows how to capitalize on the fears of many of them, arguing that any compromise with opposition groups will soon lead to unjust impositions on the majority. His references to the fate of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 (toppled by an army coup) and of Turkish premier Adnan Menderes a half-century ago (overthrown by a junior-officers' putsch in 1960 and hanged in 1961) have been effective in arousing worries that minority forces can strip a majority of power.¹³

And what of the half of the electorate that does not vote for the AKP? This half remains firmly dissatisfied with the existing state of Turkish democracy, finding it crippled by a majoritarian spirit that limits democracy to rule by the many while taking too little notice of the need for a classically *liberal* democracy that also guards the rights of the few (including the individual). Although the AKP has been reelected on the promise of order and stability, there is no guarantee that durable peace and stability can be generated amid continuing polarization and violence. What we are more likely to observe is a kind of quasi-stability in which a politics of force and fear dominate while the rule of law is often forgotten. Restrictions on speech and the media are expanding while various segments of the opposition are being repressed, all in the name

of order and stability. Clearly, this is not a healthy environment for the further deepening and consolidation of liberal democracy.

That environment, moreover, is no longer likely to be changed much from the outside. As this century began, the external context—particu-

The AKP is likely to remain the hegemonic force in Turkish politics, so whether its more liberal and centrist elements will be able to reassert themselves and contest for power within the party will be crucial in coming years.

larly in the form of the EU accession process and its requirements—looked favorable for democracy. Now, while Ankara's dealings with European capitals and Washington will remain important, we should not assume that these dealings will create pressures for democratic change in the Turkish domestic realm. On the contrary, if Turkish democracy is to be revitalized, that revitalization will have to come from within. The will and ability of civil society to mobilize itself, and of the existing political parties to renew themselves and their respective leaderships, will tell the tale. It cannot be safely predicted that these parties will do so, but it

can be safely predicted that unless they do so, they will never emerge as serious contenders for office.¹⁴

Of critical importance as well will be the AKP and its own internal politics. It is likely to remain the hegemonic force in Turkish politics, so whether its more liberal and centrist elements will be able to reassert themselves and contest for power within the party will be crucial in coming years. After the roaring comeback of November 2015, dissident voices are (as one would expect) faint. Yet as Erdoğan's need to sideline Davutoğlu over the possibility of coalition talks suggests, new forms of contestation and topics of debate may yet emerge inside the party, with positive repercussions for Turkey's democratic future. The AKP is likely soon to feel the need (for reasons of stability, if nothing else) to revive the Kurdish peace process. Perhaps that step, impelled more by realism than idealism but impelled nonetheless, will help to renew some much-needed democratic momentum in Turkey.

NOTES

1. On hybrid regimes, see Larry Diamond, "Elections Without Democracy: Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 21–35. On competitive authoritarianism, see Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). The concept of "defective democracy" is also relevant in this context. See, Wolfgang Merkel, "Embedded and Defective Democracies," *Democratization* 11 (December 2004): 33–58. Also relevant is Matthijs Bogaards, "How to Classify Hybrid Regimes? Defective Democracy and Electoral Authoritarianism," *Democratization* 16 (April 2009): 399–423.

2. Larry Diamond, "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession," *Journal of Democracy* 26 (January 2015): 141–55.

3. Ziya Öniş, "The Triumph of Conservative Globalism: The Political Economy of the AKP Era," *Turkish Studies* 13, no. 2 (2012): 135–52.

4. The AKP launched the Kurdish peace process with much fanfare after the 2007 election. The declared aim was to end permanently the decades-long conflict—a very bloody one at times—between the Turkish armed forces and the separatists of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK). Ankara launched reforms meant to improve the rights and freedoms of Turkey's Kurdish citizens, with the ultimate aim of convincing the PKK to lay down its arms. See F. Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey's New Kurdish Opening," *Survival* 55, no. 5 (2013): 133–46.

5. For detailed assessments, see, Ziya Öniş, "Sharing Power: Turkey's Democratization Challenge in the Age of the AKP Hegemony," *Insight Turkey* 15 (Spring 2013): 103–122 and "Monopolising the Centre: The AKP and the Uncertain Path of Turkish Democracy," *International Spectator* 50 (June 2015): 22–41.

6. For background, see İlder Turan, *Turkey's Difficult Journey to Democracy: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). On the decline of the rule of law, see Ergun Özbudun, "Turkey's Judiciary and the Drift Towards Competitive Authoritarianism," *International Spectator* 50 (June 2015): 42–55. For a vivid account of the Gezi Park protests, see Erdem Yörük and Murat Yüksel, "Class and Politics in Gezi Protests," *New Left Review* 89 (September–October 2014): 103–23.

7. Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Arab Revolutions: Boundaries of Regional Power Influence in a Turbulent Middle East," *Mediterranean Politics* 19 (July 2014): 203–19.

8. Ironically, the Kurds were largely absent from the Gezi protests. They were still hopeful about and strongly committed to the peace process at that time, and anxious to avoid any confrontation with the government.

9. For an elaboration of the concept of "bounded communities" and "bounded interests" and its relevance for understanding the dynamics of Turkish politics, see Ziya Öniş, "Monopolising the Centre."

10. The most outspoken such AKP figure was former parliament speaker and deputy premier Bülent Arınç. Ali Babacan, the widely respected former economy minister, stressed the importance of the rule of law and warned that its absence was harming Turkey's economic performance. Former president Gül, a founder of the AKP, became marginalized after leaving office in August 2014. None of their sporadically voiced criticisms succeeded in creating an environment for self-reflection by Erdoğan and the AKP in the weeks before the election.

11. Nate Schenkkan and David J. Kramer, "The US, the EU and Turkey: Now What?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 14 (Summer 2015): 55–62.

12. See "Turkey Criticised over Media Freedoms and Judicial Independence in EU Report," *Guardian*, 10 November 2015, www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/10/turkey-criticised-over-media-freedoms-and-judicial-independence-in-eu-report.

13. See Claire Berlinski, "How Turkey's Leaders Are Exploiting Egypt's Coup," *U.S. News and World Report*, 9 July 2013, www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2013/07/09/egyptian-overthrow-of-morsi-helps-turkey-erdogan.

14. A highlight of both June and November was the work of the nonpartisan civic group Oy ve Ötesi (Vote and Beyond) in training and mobilizing tens of thousands of volunteers to monitor the ballot boxes for the sake of a fair vote. Such activities highlight the potential that Turkey's grassroots have to exert pressures favoring democracy.