THE MARCH 31
LOCAL ELECTIONS IN TURKEY

NEBİ MİŞ • HAZAL DURAN

SETA | ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The analysis explains the March 2019 local election's significance to Turkish politics and concentrates on the ways in which the visions of various political parties for local government have changed over the years.

On March 31, 2019, Turkey will hold local elections in 30 metropolitan districts, 51 provinces, 922 counties, 32,105 neighborhoods, and 18,306 villages. This local election will be the fifteenth electoral contest since the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power 17 years ago. Yet there will be a range of new dynamics at play, as Turkey's political arena undergoes major changes. The April 2017 constitutional referendum facilitated the country's transition from the parliamentary system of government to a type of presidentialism known as the "Presidency System of Government." The country's political arena has been reshaped under the new system. On June 24, 2018, Turkey held a national election for the first time under presidentialism. Parliamentary and presidential elections took place on the same day and various political parties contested races by forming electoral alliances among themselves. Those alliances made a significant impact on the election results.

A large number of political parties will participate in the March 2019 local election as part of broader electoral alliances. As a matter of fact, those electoral alliances have deepened since last year's national election, with each alliance endorsing a joint mayoral candidate in many provinces. In some cases, they even jointly nominated a group of candidates for the city council. As such, Turkey will discover for the first time how electoral alliances will influence voter behavior in local races.

This analysis explains the March 2019 local election's significance to Turkish politics and concentrates on the ways in which the visions of various political parties for local government have changed over the years. Accordingly, the analysis primarily discusses the upcoming election's key dynamics. It proceeds to analyze the March 2019 election's significance for each major political party's internal agenda and future projections. Moreover, this analysis offers a detailed account of how each political party's vision for local government has changed over the years and how their respective visions have been tailored for the 2019 local election campaign. Finally, it identifies a number of issues that will possibly set the post-election political agenda in Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

The June 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections, which took place shortly before the 2019 local election, represented a turning point in Turkey's political history for two reasons. First, those elections were a critical threshold for the transformation of the country's political system since the transition to presidentialism had already been accepted by the April 16, 2017 constitutional referendum. Moreover, various political parties could form electoral alliances for the first time under the new rules, which set apart the June 2018 elections from previous electoral contests.

Ahead of the June 2018 elections, Turkey's leading political parties formed two major alliances. The AK Party and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) formally joined forces, with the implicit support of the Grand Union Party (BBP), to contest the election as part of the People's Alliance - whose stated purpose was to protect Turkey's interests at home and abroad with an emphasis on native and national values. Its opponent, the Nation Alliance, brought the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Good Party, and the Felicity Party (SP) together on the basis of opposition to the AK Party and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In the end, President Erdoğan and the AK Party claimed their fourteenth consecutive victory, including parliamentary and presidential elections, and constitutional referendums. Having received 52.59 percent of the popular vote, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became Turkey's first president under the new system of government. The People's Alliance, which the AK Party and the MHP had formed jointly, attained parliamentary majority with 53.66 percent. The AK Party claimed 295 parliamentary seats with 42.56 percent of the vote and the People's Alliance, together with the MHP's 49 parliamentarians, managed to control a total of 344 seats.[1]

Turkey's formal transition to the presidential system after the June 2018 elections raised a number of questions about the potential impact of the new rules and the introduction of electoral alliances in the first local election under the new system. In this regard, each political party assessed how joining an electoral alliance might help or hurt them. In the end, they decided to join forces in what they considered key districts. Whereas the AK Party and the MHP jointly endorsed candidates in 51 provinces and many counties, the CHP and the Good Party adopted the same strategy in 50 provinces. The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), in turn, supported the CHP-Good Party alliance by not contesting the election in 11 provinces.

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1. For analyses of the June 2018 election results, see Ali Çarkoğlu and Kerem Yıldırım, "Change and Continuity in Turkey's June 2018 Elections", *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 20, No: 4 (2018); Nebi Miş, "Yeni Siyasal Sistemin İlk Seçimleri ve Sonuçlarının Karşılaştırmalı Analizi" [A Comparative Analysis of the First Election under the New Political System and Its Outcome], *Muhafazakar Düşünce*, No: 54, (2018).

TABLE 1. ELECTORAL ALLIANCES AMONG POLITICAL PARTIES BY PROVINCE		
The People's Alliance	The Nation Alliance	HDP
Provinces Where the MHP Will Support the AK Party	Provinces Where the Good Party Will Support the CHP	Provinces Where the HDP Will not Contest in Favor of the Nation Alliance
Ağrı, Ankara, Antalya, Ardahan, Artvin, Aydın, Balıkesir, Bilecik, Bitlis, Bolu, Burdur, Bursa, Çanakkale, Denizli, Diyarbakır, Eskişehir, Erzurum, Gaziantep, Giresun, Hakkari, Hatay, Istanbul, Izmir, Kahramanmaraş, Kocaeli, Konya, Malatya, Mardin, Muğla, Muş, Ordu, Rize, Sakarya, Samsun, Siirt, Sinop, Şanlıurfa, Şırnak, Tekirdağ, Trabzon, Van, Yalova	Adana, Ankara, Antalya Artvin, Aydın, Bartın Bilecik, Bolu, Burdur Bursa, Çanakkale, Edirne, Erzincan, Eskişehir, Giresun, Hatay, Istanbul, Izmir, Kahramanmaraş, Kastamonu, Kırklareli, Kırşehir, Malatya, Muğla, Sinop, Tekirdağ, Tunceli, Yalova, Zonguldak	Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana, Mersin, Hatay, Aydın, Antalya, Bursa, Gaziantep, Adıyaman
Provinces Where the AK Party Will Support the MHP	Provinces Where the CHP Will Support the Good Party	
Adana, Iğdır, Kars, Kırklareli, Manisa, Mersin, Osmaniye	Afyonkarahisar, Aksaray, Balıkesir, Denizli, Düzce Elazığ, Gaziantep, Isparta, Kayseri, Kırıkkale, Kilis, Kocaeli, Konya, Manisa, Nevşehir, Osmaniye, Sakarya, Samsun, Tokat, Trabzon, Yozgat	

The 2019 local election campaign was distinguished from earlier campaigns due to localized alliances and comprehensive changes to their campaign strategies. Under the AK Party's leadership, the People's Alliance pledged to run an "eco-friendly campaign" by refraining from noise and visual pollution. In this context, the alliance largely stopped hanging banners on the streets, using plastic and paper campaign material, and driving vehicles around districts. Other political parties largely followed suit.

The March 2019 election was also distinguished from previous races by the emphasis on digital campaigns at the expense of traditional campaign methods. Technological advancements and developments in the area of digital communication had an impact on the relationship between society and politics, and changed voters' expectations from major

political parties.[2] Consequently, all political parties attempted to reach out to the electorate through social media campaigns and by launching their own digital platforms. Moreover, they developed digital platforms to facilitate rapid and effective communication among their members and the campaign staff.

LEADING DYNAMICS OF THE MARCH 2019 LOCAL ELECTIONS

From late 2018 onwards, the main item on the agenda of Turkey's political parties was how electoral alliances would be shaped. The AK Party and the MHP were first to announce publicly that they were interested in joining forces for the local election. Spokespeople

2. Nebi Miş, "Dijital Seçim Kampanyası, Ama Nasıl?" [A Digital Election Campaign, But How?], *Türkiye,* 18 December 2018.

for both movements reiterated their commitment to "native and domestic values," which formed the basis of the partnership after the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. Several developments, however, drove a wedge between the two parties around the same time. First, the MHP introduced an amnesty bill - one of the party's campaign promises - in the Turkish Parliament. The AK Party's reluctance to support the bill had a negative impact on its relationship with the MHP. This disagreement was followed by a dispute over the Council of State's ruling to repeal the 2013 abolition of the pledge of allegiance. On October 23, 2018, the AK Party and the MHP announced that they would not join forces in the local election - although they added that they would continue to work together in all other areas. Several weeks later, however, they resumed negotiations for an electoral alliance.

> Alliance negotiations between the AK Party and the MHP took place in a positive atmosphere and ended in a short time.

Against the backdrop of the AK Party's difficulties with the MHP, talks between the representatives of the CHP, the Good Party, the HDP, and the Felicity Party ensued. First, CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu held talks with the leaders of the Good Party, the HDP, and the Felicity Party individually. The media reported that those political parties saw the disagreement between the AK Party and MHP as an opportunity and, therefore, resolved to form an alliance on the basis of shared principles. Around the same

time, the CHP and the Good Party had allegedly agreed to jointly endorse candidates in some provinces and the HDP was going to support their alliance.[3] That allegation, combined with the earlier decision by the AK Party and the MHP to contest the election alone, indicated that the post-coup attempt war on terrorism at home and abroad, and the presidential system's progress could be in jeopardy.[4] Therefore, the AK Party and the MHP decided to join forces once again in the March 2019 local election.

Another issue that came up during this period related to the method of electoral alliances in local elections. The February 2018 regulation on electoral alliances allowed political parties to formally work together in parliamentary elections alone. Under those rules, political parties could contest parliamentary elections together, whereas candidates and parties had to work individually in local elections.[5] In other words, there were limited options available to political parties that wanted to form alliances in local elections. Candidates endorsed by multiple parties could enter the race as independents or on the ticket of any party to the electoral alliance. That requirement caused occasional problems in negotiations among the political parties.

Alliance negotiations between the CHP and the Good Party, for example, repeatedly came to a standstill due to conflicts of inter-

3. "CHP ile İyi Parti Uzlaştı" [CHP and the Good Party Reach an Agreement], *Yenişafak*, December 12, 2018.

4. Burhanettin Duran, "İttifaklarda Son Durum" [The Latest on Electoral Alliances], *Sabah*, November 23, 2018.

5. "Seçimlerin Temel Hükümleri ve Seçmen Kütükleri Hakkında Kanun ile Bazı Kanunlarda Değişiklik Yapılmasına İlişkin Kanun" [The Law on Amendments to the Law on the Fundamental Rules of Elections and Voter Registries and Some Other Laws], *Resmi Gazete*, March 16, 2018.

ests between the two movements. Both sides claimed to be more likely to win local races in key provinces including Ankara, Adana, Anlalya, and Mersin. As a matter of fact, Bülent Tezcan, who represented the CHP in the negotiations, was allegedly sacked after failing to manage the fallout from the inconclusive talks. Although the two parties announced that their negotiations continued without interruption and on the basis of shared principles, lengthy talks were needed before they shook hands on a deal.

By contrast, alliance negotiations between the AK Party and the MHP took place in a positive atmosphere and ended in a short time. The two parties initially announced that they had reached an agreement on a strategy for the metropolitan municipalities. They proceeded to broaden the scope of their partnership and decided to work together in additional provinces and counties. The scope of the CHP's alliance with the Good Party, on the contrary, did not become clear until they submitted their candidate lists to the Supreme Electoral Board on the final day.

Local elections in Turkey have traditionally been not just a means to shape local governments but also an opportunity to restore the public's confidence in national politics.[6] In this sense, it became clear that the March 2019 local election would reflect on Turkish politics in general when the question of national survival became a key issue in the campaign. Spokespeople for the AK Party and the MHP repeatedly highlighted that the election was vital to Turkey's survival. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan warned that the

local election would have an impact on the dynamics of national politics: "The most recent developments in our region mean that March 31 will be much more than just a municipal election. The election has become a question of survival for our country and an election about national survival."[7] MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli echoed the same sentiment in his response to critics of the national survival discourse: "Those who question the relationship between the March 31 local election and the question of national survival suffer not only from ill intentions but also problematic national identity. The People's Alliance must succeed on March 31 to ensure that the debate on [presidentialism] does not resurface."[8]

For the AK Party and the MHP, the election evolved into a question of national survival for three reasons. Primarily, the CHP-Good Party-HDP bloc openly challenged the legitimacy of the presidential system - as they had done the year before. In the lead-up to the June 2018 elections, all three movements had called for the parliamentary system's restoration and pledged to take the necessary steps in that direction without delay if they won the election. As a matter of fact, they attempted to issue a joint statement on that question. Those parties' approach and rationale regarding the presidential system motivated the AK Party and the MHP that the March 2019 local election represented a critical threshold for the survival of the new political system. After all, consolidating the presidential system was vital to the lasting institutionalization necessary

6. F. Michael Wuthrich, *National Elections in Turkey: People, Politics, and the Party System*, (Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY: 2015).

7. "Erdoğan: 31 Mart Seçimleri Bir Beka Meselesi" [Erdoğan: The March 31 Election Is a Matter of National Survival], *Türkiye*, January 28, 2019.

8. "Devlet Bahçeli'den Flaş Sözler: 31 Mart Tarihi Bir Eşiktir" [A Surprise Statement by Devlet Bahçeli: March 31 is a Historic Threshold], *Hürriyet*, February 26, 2019.

for Turkey to reach its future goals.[9] That the CHP-Good Party-HDP bloc would openly question the validity of the presidential system if they were to win local races in key metropolitan districts, such as Istanbul and Ankara, turned the March 2019 campaign into much more than just mere local elections.

Another reason behind the national survival debate was Turkey's fight against terrorist organizations, including FETÖ and the PKK, and the country's active foreign policy at the regional and international levels. In the wake of the July 2016 coup attempt, which FETÖ orchestrated, the AK Party's cooperation with the MHP played a crucial role in the domestic and international fight against that group. Again, during the same period, the MHP offered its unconditional support to the AK Party government's counterterrorism operations against PKK targets in Northern Syria. As such, the leaders of both parties stressed repeatedly that the partnership between the AK Party and the MHP was vital to the continuation of the fight against terrorist organizations. The HDP's references to a united force against the People's Alliance added another dimension to the national survival debate between the two blocs, even though the party refrained from formally joining the Nation Alliance. In 2015, when the PKK unilaterally ended the ceasefire and resumed violence, HDP-controlled municipalities had followed suit by declaring autonomy and financing PKK operations. Moreover, the HDP supported the YPG presence in Northern Syria, which made the local election race between the People's Alliance and the Nation Alliance crucial to Turkey's fight against terrorism.

The final dimension of the "national survival" question related to efforts to undermine the Turkish economy through manipulations, which was what happened after the June 2018 elections. After last year's election, the Turkish Lira's rapid depreciation against the U.S. Dollar and the steady increase in the inflation rate were considered as consequences of foreign manipulations against the Turkish economy.[10] Consequently, the CHP, the Good Party, and the HDP frequently claimed on the campaign trail that Turkey was going to suffer an economic meltdown after the March 2019 local election. As a matter of fact, spokespeople for those movements described the launch of direct sale points, known as *tanzim* stores, which enabled citizens to purchase fruits and vegetable for more reasonable prices, as a reflection of the alleged economic crisis.

WHAT THE MARCH 2019 ELECTION MEANS TO POLITICAL PARTIES

The March 31 municipal election is critically important to the AK Party and the MHP. In the July 2016 coup attempt's wake, the cooperation between the two political parties operated on several levels. First of all, the MHP offered its unconditional support to the AK Party government when it came to the dismissal of FETÖ and PKK operatives from public institutions under the State of Emergency, and domestic and cross-border military operations against terrorist groups. Among other things,

9. Burhanettin Duran, "31 Mart Sadece Yerel Seçim mi?" [Is March 31 Just a Municipal Election?], *Kriter*, No: 33, (March 2019).

10. "AK Parti Genel Başkan Yardımcısı Cevdet Yılmaz: "Ekonomik Saldırı 15 Temmuz'un Devamı" [AK Party Deputy Chairman Cevdet Yılmaz: The Economic Assault Is a Continuation of July 15], *Kriter*, No: 28, (October 2018).

the MHP's support resulted in the Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch Operations against PKK/YPG militants in northern Syria. In other words, the MHP's political support to the AK Party government played an important role in the latter's efforts to improve domestic and border security.

Therefore, both political parties maintained that the March 2019 municipal election would have an impact on the course of Turkey's counterterrorism efforts. Continued cooperation between the AK Party and the MHP, both sides believed, was key to domestic political stability and, by extension, cross-border military operations against terrorist groups. They posited that the Nation Alliance could jeopardize Turkey's ongoing fight against the PKK and FETÖ because that alliance's participants lacked a coherent strategy to combat those organizations effectively.

The AK Party and the MHP saw their cooperation in the March 2019 municipal election as a crucial step towards ensuring domestic stability until the 2023 presidential election and addressing structural problems. Their partnership, which was born out of the July 2016 coup attempt, played a crucial role in ending a long-standing crisis of Turkey's political system (with the April 2017 constitutional referendum) and in implementing the new system after the June 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections.[11] By the same token, both movements maintain that their continued partnership is key to ensuring the compatibility of Turkey's state apparatus with the new political system after the March 2019 municipal election.

The March 2019 election will be the third campaign for the People's Alliance (including the 2017 constitutional referendum). This motivates the CHP-Good Party-HDP bloc to do everything in its power to reduce the number of municipalities controlled by the AK Party or the MHP, and to win as many new districts as possible. Therefore, those three parties built their platform around sheer opposition to the People's Alliance rather than a certain ideology or set of values. Their eagerness to end the control over metropolitan districts, notably Ankara and Istanbul, of the AK Party and MHP made it possible for the CHP, the Good Party, and the HDP to ignore their vast ideological differences. In other words, the opposition bloc, which failed to defeat the People's Alliance in the presidential and parliamentary elections last year, seek to reverse the trend by winning the local election.[12]

The March 2019 election turned into a fight for survival in the eyes of the CHP-Good Party-HDP bloc because intraparty crises affecting the CHP and the Good Party would deepen if they suffer yet another defeat in this election. As a matter of fact, the CHP and the Good Party leaders faced immense pressure from their respective bases and certain intraparty opposition groups as they engaged in alliance negotiations. For example, many CHP heavyweights, including Deniz Baykal, Hurşit Güneş, and Ilhan Cihaner warned that working with the Good Party would weaken the CHP in municipal races.[13] The CHP leadership ignored those

11. Fahrettin Altun, "Laying the Cornerstone for a New Turkey: The June 24 Elections", *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 20, No: 3, (2018).

12. Abdulkadir Selvi, "CHP-İYİ Parti ittifakı nereye gidiyor?" [The Future of the CHP-Good Party Alliance], *Hürriyet*, December 12, 2018.

13. Hazal Duran, "CHP Nereye Koşuyor?" [CHP: Quo Vadis?], *Sabah Perspektif*, February 2, 2019.

critics and moved on with partnership talks. Yet, the eventual agreement crippled both movements in some provinces. Even after the scope of the partnership became clear, the debate within both movements became more and more heated. Consequently, sitting mayors and party officials serving at various levels of the CHP and the Good Party ended up submitting their resignations. As such, there is plenty of unhappiness and dissatisfaction among loyal supporters and intraparty opposition groups, even though the the CHP and the Good Party concluded a partnership agreement. An additional dimension of that crisis related to power struggles among various intraparty groups over the selection of endorsed candidates on the local level.[14]

> ## The AK Party and the MHP maintained that the March 2019 municipal election would have an impact on the course of Turkey's counterterrorism efforts.

In light of the abovementioned issues, both the CHP and the Good Party leadership will possibly encounter intraparty opposition groups after the March 2019 municipal election. Both movements suffered from a serious crisis of leadership after a poor performance in the June 2018 elections, as certain groups within those parties held their leaders responsible for the failure. Therefore, a much stronger intraparty opposition movement could emerge especially among the CHP ranks after the March 2019 municipal election. After last year's presidential and parliamentary elections, a large number of CHP delegates signed a petition to demand leadership change and an emergency congress. Those opponents eventually suspended their campaign to avoid further damage to the party before the municipal election. For those reasons, a poor performance by the CHP and the Good Party in March 2019 could revive the intraparty opposition challenging the CHP's current leadership.

For the Good Party, in turn, the municipal election represents a key factor for the future. The nationalist contingent within the movement was unhappy with the leadership's decision to join forces with the CHP and the Felicity Party in the June 2018 parliamentary elections. Their disapproval fueled a heated post-election debate among the Good Party ranks, as deepening polarization resulted in Chairwoman Meral Akşener announcing her resignation. Her decision to step down led to the resignation of additional heavyweights including Yusuf Halaçoğlu, Özcan Yeniçeri, and Nevzat Bor. Although Akşener proceeded to reverse her decision and returned to the party's leadership, the wave of resignation continued in the lead-up to the March 2019 municipal election as well. Those resignations decreased the number of parliamentary seats that the Good Party controlled from 44 to 39. Bearing in mind those developments, the Good Party leadership's election strategy will likely come under criticism – depending on the election results.[15]

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14. Burhanettin Duran, "Kılıçdaroğlu'nun Manevraları ve CHP'nin Serencamı" [Kılıçdaroğlu's Maneuvers and CHP's Situation], *Sabah*, February 12, 2019.

15. Nebi Miş, "2019'da Siyaseti Ne Bekliyor?" [What Lies Ahead for Politics in 2019?], *Türkiye*, January 3, 2019.

VISIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT: FROM PAST TO PRESENT

The Justice and Development Party (AK Party)

Although the AK Party was established in 2001 and therefore did not formally become part of local government for another three years, the 1994 municipal election was key to understanding the movement's vision for local government. March 27, 1994 was a historic day in Turkey's political history. On that day, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who would proceed to shape the country's future, won the mayoral race in Istanbul. The future president's victory in Istanbul resulted in much more than the municipality of Turkey's largest city changing hands.[16] At the same time, the 1994 election ushered in a new era, during which Turkish politics and the idea of local government underwent major changes. During his tenure as the mayor of Istanbul, Erdoğan developed a political style and legacy that became driving forces behind the AK Party's establishment. Two of those factors were particularly important: Erdoğan's unique style of political communication on the campaign trail, and his approach to local government in office and the notion of project-centered local government.

As Erdoğan ran for office, mainstream media outlets, which opposed him at the time, urged residents to oppose him by saying that the mayoral race was about selecting not just the next mayor of a megapolis with 10 million residents but also the most influential Turkish politician after the prime minister. Knowing that political parties that won mayoral elections in Istanbul had historically played a prominent role in national politics, the mainstream media and other allies of the establishment cared deeply about the 1994 mayoral race.

At the time, Erdoğan managed to overcome the resistance against himself and his party by adopting a new communication strategy. His unique brand of political communication, which helped him to win the 1994 election, remained intact after the AK Party's establishment. As a mayoral candidate, Erdoğan's first step was to reach out to the recently urbanized middle and working classes - a demographic that no other party had penetrated ever before.[17] He communicated in person with various social groups, including low-income residents who had recently moved to the city, and implemented an unprecedented campaign strategy. Erdoğan distinguished himself from the rest of the mayoral candidates by walking into people's homes, telling them about his plans, and promising to deliver public services.[18] At the same time, he communicated with largely ignored parts of Turkish society by focusing on not just districts promising political support but also social groups that did not share his own worldview.

Ahead of the 1994 municipal election, Erdoğan built a strong organization with extensive knowledge of local governments. He launched training programs to make his team better equipped to deliver key public services including physical infrastructure, environ-

16. Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey: 2002), p. 22.

17. Metin Heper, "Islam, Conservatism, and Democracy in Turkey: Comparing Turgut Özal and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan", *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 15, No: 2 (2013), pp. 141-156.

18. "Tayyip Erdoğan'ın 75 Bin Kişilik Seçim Ordusu" [Erdoğan's Election Team Consisting of 75 Thousand People], *Milliyet*, February 15, 1994.

mental protection, water management, and transportation as well as to familiarize them with the relevant body of law. That Erdoğan's party formed special boards and teams to keep track of each individual polling station amounted to a new kind of effort. Steps by the Women's Branch, which played an active role in Erdoğan's mayoral campaign and proceeded to be an important part of the AK Party's organization, gave him a special advantage. Female volunteers were key to conveying Erdoğan's messages to every single household. To be clear, Erdoğan's decision to involve women more deeply in his mayoral campaign was crucial to women playing a more prominent role in Turkish politics. On the campaign trail, women became part of discussions on urban and national problems and successfully carved out a political space for themselves to defend their rights and voice their demands.

Once in office, Erdoğan implemented his vision for local government and project-centered administration, which the AK Party adopted with improvements in the following years. After taking over as mayor, the future president shared Istanbul's problems, along with his plan and projects to address those issues, with the public. Erdoğan encountered similar problems - this time, at the national level - when his AK Party came to power in 2002. He proceeded to build on his experience as mayor to implement the AK Party's action- and public service-centered political strategy.

To accomplish his goals as mayor of Istanbul, Erdoğan desperately needed a group of senior executives who would be responsible for solving problems. At the time, he turned to experts and academics for help on key issues, like infrastructure and transportation, that re-

quired a certain level of proficiency. Erdoğan placed special emphasis on all employees of the metropolitan municipality and county-level local governments learned about urban planning, regional planning, infrastructure engineering, the history of local government, aesthetics, history of art, and environmental protection. The group of people that worked for Istanbul's various municipalities at the time proceeded to take responsibility for the nation's government after the 2002 general election.

Erdoğan's goal was to replace the top-down approach to local government - which meant that the municipality would act unilaterally and residents were expected to be grateful for whatever public services they received - with a new system, under which the local administration would be required to meet public demands. To implement that plan, he launched White Desk (*Beyaz Masa* in Turkish), a hotline that residents could use to voice their demands or provide feedback on existing services. By taking that step, Erdoğan promoted communication between the municipality and local residents through new channels. He also commissioned opinion polls in various districts every week to identify pressing problems, popular demands, and expectations, and the level of happiness among voters - which made it possible for the solution-oriented approach to local government to work.

Since the 1980s, developed nations around the world have been trying to reform public administration. Their reform programs promoted small government, the reduction of red tape, activity, and efficiency. Governments and public institutions adopted a new approach, whereby they focused on output (rather than input and the administrative pro-

cess), flexible organization, offering services based on popular demands and expectations, and small-scale, horizontally organized public institutions. In doing so, they relied on market-like structures to manage and provide public services. They also took private sector practices, such as human resources management, strategic planning, performance management, and total quality management, and incorporated them into the public administration. New principles, including reliance on democratic governance, horizontal cooperation, engagement, interaction, negotiation, and joint development, became more popular in the public sector.[19] Finally, governments adopted a series of principles to hold public officials responsible for their performance and output.

Provided that Turkey was going through a period of political crisis in the 1990s, however, the country missed out on that global reform wave. Not only the central government but also local governments failed to transform themselves and implement key reforms. After coming to power in 2002, the AK Party attempted to implement some of those overdue reforms at the national and municipal levels. Under the AK Party, Turkey adopted four major changes related to local government reform. The country adopted the Metropolitan Municipality Law in 2004 and the Law on Provincial Special Administrations and the Municipal Law in 2005. Seven years later, the AK Party oversaw the adoption of a new law that increased the number of metropolitan municipalities and expanded the geographical jurisdiction of service providers under metropolitan administrations. Those reforms were

geared towards addressing problems of scale, financial resources, and authority, from which municipalities suffered.

In addition to implementing local government reforms, the AK Party took major steps to improve the physical infrastructure of cities across Turkey. On the movement's watch, the country made significant progress on "social local government," social services, and improving the quality of public services. At the same time, the national government made additional resources available to municipalities to promote local investments. Likewise, significant progress was made on infrastructure, housing construction, transportation projects, and social assistance.[20]

The AK Party's approach to local administration was built on Erdoğan's original recipe for the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality in 1994. In this regard, the movement's transformation of local government in Turkey dates back to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's successful mayoral campaign. In other words, Erdoğan's approach to local government as the mayor of Istanbul remained intact under successive AK Party governments. The AK Party's vision for local government, which borrowed heavily from Erdoğan's brand of local administration, became institutionalized when the party was established in 2001 and contested its first municipal election three years later. Having formed a single-party government after running a campaign stressing justice and progress in 2002, the party entered the 2004 local election with an emphasis on local development. At the same time, the AK Party's election campaign highlighted the importance of human-

19. Lawrence Susskind and Jeffrey Cruikshank, *Breaking the Impasse: Consensual Approaches to Resolving Public Disputes*, (Basic Books, New York: 1987).

20. Nebi Miş, "AK Parti Belediyeciliği: Gelenek, Uygulama ve Beklentiler" [The AK Party's Approach to Local Government: Tradition, Practice and Expectations], *Kriter*, No: 29, (November 2018).

centered social local government.[21] A dynamic campaign was designed to communicate directly with voters and to ensure that the party could engage in healthy and sustainable communication with its target audience.[22] In 2004, the AK Party won 1,750 municipal races.[23] In addition to offering solutions to structural problems related to infrastructure, transportation, and the environment, the movement built its vision for local government with new themes in future election cycles.

> Although the AK Party was established in 2001, the 1994 municipal election was key to understanding the movement's vision for local government.

In the 2009 municipal election, the AK Party stressed the importance of "branding" for urban government. The election campaign was heavily influenced by national politics - which meant that all political parties had to put their respective visions for local government and campaign promises on the back burner. Five years later, when the next municipal election took place, the AK Party built on the discourse of civilization to stress humanity, democracy, and the city in its campaign.[24]

For the first time ever, the movement issued an election manifesto, which was reserved for national elections until then, and pledged to promote horizontal architecture and eco-friendly cities. The AK Party's vision for local government was also influenced by calls to reduce red tape and promote more participation and transparency since the 1990s. In this regard, urban councils were established in 2006 to facilitate residents' direct participation in municipal affairs. Moreover, the movement created new mechanisms to promote transparency in line with global practices in local government. Finally, the AK Party pledged to attach importance to creating alternative participation mechanisms.

In 2019, the AK Party's vision for local government was broadly advertised in its election manifesto; this included elements such as Urban Planning, Infrastructure and Transportation, Urban Transformation, Smart Cities, Eco-Friendly Cities, Social Local Government, Horizontal Urbanization, Government with the People, Savings and Transparency, and Value-Generating Cities. The manifesto showed that the AK Party took into account the most recent trends in urban management and integrated those developments into its core values in local government.[25] At the same time, the movement unveiled eco-friendly projects accompanied by a campaign slogan - "The Spirit of '94." Other plans, such as livable cities, protecting the environment, promoting architecture, and aesthetics, were implemented before the municipal election with the National Gardens projects.

21. "Siyasiler ve Başkan Adaylarının Seçim Çalışmaları" [Campaign Efforts by Politicians and Mayoral Candidates], *Hürriyet*, March 22, 2004.

22. "AK Parti 28 Mart 2004 Yerel Seçim Klavuzu" [The AK Party's March 28, 2004 Municipal Election Guide], http://www.akparti.org.tr/media/272261/2004-yerel-secim-klavuzu.pdf, (Accessed: March 5, 2019),

23. Ali Çarkoğlu, "One Down, Two More to Go: Electoral Trends in the Aftermath of the March 2014 Municipality Elections", *Insight Turkey*, Cilt: 16, Sayı: 2, (2014).

24. "Büyük Medeniyet Yolunda İnsan, Demokrasi ve Şehir" [People, Democracy and the City on the Road to Great Civilization], March 30, 2014 Election Manifesto, http://www.akparti.org.tr/media/272121/30-mart-2014-yerel-secim-beyannamesi.pdf, (Accessed: March 5, 2019).

25. Hazal Duran, "AK Parti'nin Yerel Seçim Stratejisi" [The AK Party's Local Election Strategy], *Sabah Perspektif*, November 17, 2018.

TABLE 2. THE RESULTS OF LOCAL ELECTIONS (PROVINCIAL COUNCILOR RESULTS, 2004-2014)						
Local Elections		AK Party	CHP	MHP	DEHAP/DTP /BDP/HDP	Voter Turnout
2004 Local Elections	Voting Rate	41.7%	18.2%	10.5%	-	76.25%
	Total Voters	13,447,287	5,882,810	3,372,249	-	
2009 Local Elections	Voting Rate	38.4%	23.1%	16%	5.7%	85.19%
	Total Voters	15,353,553	9,229,936	6,386,279	2,277,777	
2014 Local Elections	Voting Rate	43.39%	25.6%	17.6%	6.81%	89.19%
	Total Voters	19,469,840	11,493,758	7,907,067	2,845,276	

Unlike in previous years, the AK Party relied heavily on social media in its 2019 municipal election campaign. President Erdoğan described the impact of social media as follows: "Each time we post a message on Twitter is like organizing several rallies at Yenikapı." Indeed, social media was at the heart of the AK Party's 2019 campaign and a digital network was established to facilitate quicker communication among campaign officials. Finally, the intraparty voting on potential candidates took place online.

The AK Party's previous electoral successes may shed light upon the results of the March 31 local elections. In the 2004 local elections, the party came in first and got 41.7 percent of the votes. When it came to 2009, the party relatively decreased voting rates to 38.4 percent. According to the official results of the 2014 local elections, the AK Party won by a landslide and increased its votes to 43.39 percent. As the winner of the all three previous local elections, the party won the highest number of municipalities throughout the country.

The Republican People's Party (CHP)

The Republican People's Party (CHP) has been active longer than most political parties in Turkey's political history. It is possible to analyze the movement's vision for local government by looking at its track record. After Turkey's transition to multiparty democracy, the CHP won 40 municipal races around the country in the 1950 local election - compared to 560 victories by its rival, the Democratic Party.[26] In later years, the movement controlled municipalities in many cities including Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir.[27]

The CHP's performance in metropolitan areas provides valuable insights into its vision for local government. The movement

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26. "Seçimi DP Ezici Bir Çoğunlukla Kazandı" [DP Wins the Election by a Landslide], *Milliyet*, October 16, 1950.

27. CHP did not contest the 1955 municipal election. It contested all later elections before being shut down after the September 12, 1980 coup d'état. In 1981-1992, the party's elite continued their political activities as part of the Social Democracy Party (SODEP) and the SHP.

was in charge of Istanbul in 1969-1980 and 1989-1994 (as the Social Democratic People's Party), yet could not address the city's long-standing structural problems because it lacked an active management approach.[28] At the same time, the CHP's image was tarnished by widespread corruption and bribery. A bribery scandal at Istanbul's Water and Sewage Administration (ISKI), among other things, formed the basis of poor public opinion about the party's local government performance.[29] Again, the CHP's failure to address basic issues with the city's water supply and garbage collection strengthened the view that it was generally unsuccessful when it came to local government.

Another important factor that influenced the CHP's vision for local government was that the movement acted in line with the principle of "social democratic local government" since the 1970s. This approach, which was born during Bülent Ecevit's tenure as prime minister, promised to strike a healthy balance between urban areas and the countryside.[30] Yet, the movement's failure to account for globalization and other international dynamics caused it to manage major projects like *Köykent* with a narrow perspective.

In the 2000s, the CHP's approach to local government came under more visible ideological influences. In this regard, the movement built its local election campaigns around national issues and viewed mayoral races as an instrument to undermine the AK Party government. Especially from 2007 onwards, the laicity debate redefined the CHP's vision for local government. By extension, the movement's local election campaigns were overshadowed by the national debate on laicism and Kemalism. Even though the CHP mentioned a range of issues, including urban aesthetics, the right to housing, infrastructure, the environment, democracy, and participation, in its election manifestos, its main arguments were always related to laicism and Kemalism. Therefore, CHP politicians weighed in heavily on national issues.

Yet the 2009 municipal election was a turning point for the CHP. Realizing that building its entire platform around laicism was costing it votes, the movement took an unexpected step in 2009. Then-CHP Chairman Deniz Baykal personally admitted a group of women wearing the burqa into party membership in an attempt to reach out to conservatives.[31] Yet that move was not received well.

The CHP's 2014 local election campaign, in turn, introduced a new framework with an emphasis on wealth, unity, and liberty. The party's election campaign and rhetoric were heavily influenced by the Gezi Park revolts.[32] In addition to nominating many public figures who rose to prominence during the uprising, the CHP attempted to position itself as the political representative of that movement.[33] The movement's election manifesto

28. Nebi Miş, "CHP'nin Yerel Yönetim Geleneği" [The CHP's Tradition of Local Government], *Türkiye*, 8 November 2018.

29. Nebi Miş and Abdullah Eren, "Siyasal Partilerin Yerel Vizyonu: İstanbul Seçimleri" [The Local Vision of Political Parties: The Istanbul Election], *SETA Analiz*, No: 91, (March 2014).

30. "Ali Nejat Ölçen ile Söyleşi: Halk Sektörü I" [An Interview with Ali Nejat Ölçen: Public Sector I], *Aydınlanma 1923*, No: 37.

31. Nebi Miş, "CHP'nin HDP'lileşme Serüveni" [The Tale of CHP's HDP-ization], *Kriter*, No: 16, (September 2017).

32. Cengiz Erişen, *Political Behavior and the Emotional Citizen: Participation and Reaction in Turkey*, (Palgrave Macmillan, London: 2018).

33. Mustafa Altunoğlu and Doğan Eşkinat, "30 Mart'a Doğru Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi" [CHP towards March 30], *SETA Analiz*, No:90, (March 2014).

TABLE 3. THE NUMBER OF MUNICIPALITIES WON BY POLITICAL PARTIES (2004-2014)				
Local Elections	AK Party	CHP	MHP	DEHAP/DTP/BDP/HDP
2004 Local Elections	1,762	469	247	-
2009 Local Elections	1,452	506	484	97
2014 Local Elections**	818	232	169	99

** The reason for the significant decrease of the numbers of municipalities won by the parties in the 2014 local election is the legal change to the form of local administrative organization in 2012.

concentrated on making urban life easier and better, preserving the architectural, historical, and cultural textures of urban areas, improving physical infrastructure, and promoting popular participation and transparency in local government.

Ahead of the 2019 municipal election, the CHP issued a 12-point statement to outline its vision for local government: tolerant cities and respect for the people, just distribution of wealth, accountability, transparency, combatting poverty, production and job creation, innovation and smart cities, social justice, support for culture and the arts, and environmental protection. The movement also used campaign slogans that promised peace and solutions to pressing problems.

The CHP has never achieved its goals in local elections. In 2004, it got only 18.2 percent of the votes and won 469 municipalities. Its voting rates slightly increased in the 2009 local elections and the CHP reached 23.1 percent of the votes. When it came to the 2014 local elections, the party got 25.2 percent of the votes but still came in second after the AK Party. Even if the main target of the CHP was winning against the AK Party, it could not succeed.

The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)

The MHP has been a key player in Turkish politics since its establishment in 1969. The movement played crucial roles in national and local politics. It is possible to claim that the MHP's approach to national politics shaped its vision for local government. The party's first major success was to win 50 municipal races in the 1977 election. It was particularly successful in Adıyaman, Muş, and Konya.

The September 1980 coup d'état and military interventions in civilian politics, however, took a heavy toll on the MHP. A 1981 law banned all political activities by the movement's founder, Alparslan Türkeş, and the MHP had to contest the 1989 municipal election as the Nationalist Labor Party. In 1992, the Turkish Parliament passed a new law permitting the reestablishment of political parties that were banned after the 1980 coup. Consequently, the MHP was born again in 1993 and enjoyed vast popular support in local elections especially against the backdrop of threats against Turkey's national security. For example, the movement performed better than average in the Mediterranean and Aegean regions in the 1994 local

election, which took place amid an uptick in the PKK's terrorist attacks.[34]

In 1999, the MHP achieved an unprecedented success by winning 499 municipalities. The movement's success was largely due to a heightened sense of nationalism nationally and locally. At the time and in later election cycles, the MHP's approach to local government focused on productivity and direct contact with the constituents. The movement argued that an approach to local government, which was unique to the Nationalist Movement, was crucial for the country, and called on its supporters to develop a holistic approach to urban administration and to focus on all social, physical, and cultural areas.[35] Chairman Devlet Bahçeli himself stressed that the MHP was trying to reconcile the global and the local with an emphasis on nationalism.[36]

The MHP's popularity at the local level decreased in the 2000s, yet did not end completely. In 2009, which marked the movement's 40th anniversary, the MHP won ten provinces including Manisa, Balıkesir, Uşak, Osmaniye, Gümüşhane, Kastamonu, Karabük, Bartın, and Isparta.[37] Five years later, it succeded in mayoral races for Adana, Osmaniyet, Manisa, Mersin, Isparta, Bartın, Karabük, and Kars.

The MHP's vision document for the 2019 municipal election, in turn, highlighted the importance of delivering public services quickly, affordably and justly, respecting the environment and promoting architectural aesthetics, and building eco-friendly social spaces. The document called for the protection of social and historical texture as well as the effective use of technology and innovation at the municipal level on the basis of nationalism, hard work, justice, honesty, modernity, development, participation, competition, and transparency.

The previous local election results of the MHP show that the party has gradually increased its voting rates. While the party got 10.5 percent of the votes in 2004, its voting rate increased to 16 percent in the 2009 local elections. When it came to the 2014 local elections, the MHP got 17.6 percent of total votes and won the elections in 169 municipalities throughout the country. As well as increasing voting rates and the number of municipalities, the MHP also gradually broadened its electoral base.

The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)

Kurdish nationalist political parties have been active in Turkish politics since the 1990s. Almost all of those parties pledged to strengthen local governments and called for the transfer of the central government's powers to municipalities. The HDP, which made those points in its founding declaration and election manifestos, was no exception.

The HDP's approach to local government was in line with the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), its predecessor, and reflected the idea of democratic autonomy. Both political parties

34. Hatem Ete, Hamza Taşdelen, Sami Orçun Ersay, *Ülkücülükten Tepkisel Milliyetçiliğe: MHP'nin İdeolojisi ve Seçmen Eğilimleri* [From Idealism to Reactionary Nationalism: MHP's Ideology and Voter Inclinations], (SETA Rapor, Istanbul: 2014).

35. "Üretken Belediyecilik: Bütüncül Yaklaşım-Birlikte Yönetim" [Productive Local Government: Holistic Approach-Governing Together], Nationalist Movement Party Department of Local Government, Publication No: 9, https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/mhpweb/kitaplar/uretken_belediyecilik_web.pdf, (Accessed: March 5, 2019).

36. Devlet Bahçeli, "21. Yüzyıl ve 2023 Türkiye Vizyonu" [The 21st Century and Turkey's Vision for 2023], https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/_mhp2007/kitaplar/21yy2023turkiyevizyonu.pdf, (Accessed: March 5, 2019),

37. Hamit Emrah Beriş, "31 Mart'a Doğru Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi" [MHP Towards March 30], *SETA Analiz*, No: 84, (February 2014).

built their local election campaigns around that concept - according to which municipal councils would serve as parliaments and function like political bodies. In its 2011 election manifesto, the movement described democratic autonomy as "the creation of democratic organization by all social groups, including women and young people, and the practice of politics in their own parliaments, directly, and on the basis of free-equal citizenship."[38]

Democratic autonomy was part of the political vision of the HDP, which was established in 2013 to contest its first municipal election the following year. Yet the movement's quest for nationwide appeal resulted in the campaign's division into two parts: the BDP in the East and HDP in the West.[39] Therefore, democratic autonomy did not fare equally prominently in both campaigns. Specifically, democratic autonomy formed the core of the movement's election campaign in eastern provinces, whereas it was mentioned with less frequency in the western provinces. The BDP's 49-page election manifesto was almost exclusively about democratic autonomy. The following statement represented the core of the BDP's election campaign: "Under democratic autonomy, it is important that the geography, where Kurds live, is recognized as Kurdistan. If democratic autonomy is accepted, it will be possible to reconcile with the nation-state. Democratic autonomy is the minimum requirement for living under the same roof as the dominant nation-state."[40]

Spokespeople for the movement referred to democratic autonomy more frequently as well. In this regard, BDP's (a predecessor of the HDP) Osman Baydemir made the following statement to establish that democratic autonomy would be at the heart of his party's public discourse: "There will be an autonomous East. There will be an autonomous Middle Black Sea and, at the same time, a Democratic Turkey and Autonomous Kurdistan. One of the regional parliaments will be the Kurdistan Regional Parliament."[41]

In the 2014 municipal election, the HDP and the BDP failed to perform as well as they had hoped. Consequently, democratic autonomy became more prominent in the HDP's agenda. Yet the movement, unable to reach its goals in the political arena, cooperated with the terrorist organization PKK in an attempt to attain autonomy through violence. In 2015, when the PKK ended a two-year ceasefire and resumed its terrorist campaign, 16 municipalities, including Şırnak, Silopi, Cizre, Nusaybin, and Yüksekova, answered the PKK's call to the HDP-controlled municipalities to declare autonomy. Violence erupted in eastern and southeastern Turkey when the security forces responded. During this period, an Interior Ministry investigation concluded that the HDP-controlled municipalities provided logistical support, recruited new members for the PKK, and engaged in terrorist propaganda. Consequently, the HDP-linked mayors of 93 metropolitan, provincial, and county municipalities were replaced with independent trustees.[42]

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38. "'Demokratik Özerklik' İlan Edildi" ['Democratic Autonomy' Declared], *NTV*, July 14, 2011.

39. Tanıl Bora, *Cereyanlar: Türkiye'de Siyasi İdeolojiler* [Political Ideologies in Turkey], (İletişim Publishing, İstanbul: 2017), p. 900.

40. "BDP'den Kürdistan Çıkışı" [BDP Comes Out in Favor of Kurdistan], *Milliyet*, January 23, 2014.

41. "Osman Baydemir'den Çok Tartışılacak Açıklamalar" [Controversial Remarks by Osman Baydemir], *Milliyet*, July 31, 2010.

42. For a detailed report about this issue, see Hüseyin Alptekin and Bekir İlhan, *Kayyum Atanan Belediyelerin PKK Terörü ile Mücadeledeki Rolü* [The Role of Municipalities with Appointed Trustees in the Fight against PKK Terrorism], (SETA Rapor, Istanbul: 2018).

It is no secret that the HDP and its predecessors did not serve local communities where they won mayoral races, even if some HDP voters support that view. Instead of serving the people, the HDP used public funds to support the PKK, engage in terrorist propaganda, recruit new members to the organization, and provide ideological training to sympathizers to turn them into militants. As such, the movement paved the way to the appointment of independent trustees.

According to a report on this issue, which obtained information from field research and court documents, municipalities under the HDP or the Democratic Regions Party (DBP) illegally paid salaries to individuals at the PKK leadership's request even though they did not actually work for those municipalities, received kickbacks from recently hired staff and contract employees, as well as regular payments from employees' salaries and companies that worked on municipal projects as "donations" to finance PKK's activities.[43]

The same report established that the abovementioned municipalities offered logistical support to PKK terrorists in the form of food supplies, vehicles, and heavy machinery. According to various media reports, PKK terrorists used municipal vehicles to transport militants and carry out VBIED attacks. Moreover, the PKK utilized supposed cultural centers to engage in propaganda, provide ideological training to supporters, and recruit new members. Finally, DBP/HDP municipalities took steps to undermine counterterrorism operations against PKK targets.

According to Interior Ministry reports, the security forces performed better in counterterrorism operations and the recruitment of new members by the PKK slowed down after the appointment of the independent trustees to the relevant municipalities.[44]

Democratic autonomy was mentioned in the HDP's election manifesto for the 2019 municipal election under "democratic, liberal local government." The movement's decision raised the question whether the Turkish authorities would once again replace elected mayors with independent trustees if the HDP were to win the relevant municipalities. Government officials clearly said that they would not ignore any attempt to finance the PKK's activities or any activity that places national security at risk.

The previous local election results of the HDP are inconsistent for drawing a road map for the future elections. In 2004 local elections, the party did not join the elections on its own and nominated some of its candidates in the SHP's lists. In 2009, the party got 5.7 percent in elections and won 97 municipalities most of which were in the eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey. According to the 2014 local election results, the party increased its votes to 6.81 percent, thus experiencing a slight increase. Nevertheless, the party was still effective only in the eastern and southeastern parts of the country.

The Good Party

The Good Party was established by a group of politicians that resigned from the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) on October 25, 2017. It contested a national election for the

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43. Hüseyin Alptekin and Bekir İlhan, *Kayyum Atanan Belediyelerin PKK Terörü ile Mücadeledeki Rolü* [The Role of Municipalities with Appointed Trustees in the Fight against PKK Terrorism], (SETA Rapor, Istanbul: 2018).

44. "Teröre Destek Veren Belediyeler" [Municipalities Supporting Terrorism], *Sabah*, February 27, 2019.

first time in June 2018. Although the Good Party entered the race as part of the Nation Alliance (along with the CHP and the Felicity Party), the bloc's failure fueled a bitter power struggle within the movement. Although Chairwoman Meral Akşener announced her resignation, she ended up remaining in charge. Still, the party was severely damaged by resignations and factionalism, which made their marks on its municipal election campaign.

Although the Good Party will contest a municipal election for the first time, its chairwoman Meral Akşener participated in two mayoral races in her political career. She unsuccessfully ran for Kocaeli Metropolitan mayor in the 1994 local election on the True Path Party (DYP) ticket before entering national politics. A decade later, she competed in the race for the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality on behalf of the MHP. Unlike the AK Party and the CHP, Akşener built her 2004 mayoral campaign around Istanbul's potential as a tourist hub - rather than problems with infrastructure.[45] She received just 4.1 percent of the votes before returning to national politics.

The section on public administration reform in the Good Party's June 2018 election manifesto is a key to understanding its vision for local government. In this section, the Good Party describes the basis of its approach to local democracy as "public service, active participation, fair and equal representation, joint government, political responsibility, efficiency, transparency, and accountability."[46] Moreover,

the party pledged to use the integrated e-government system as part of its commitment to public reform. Yet many of the projects that the Good Party pledged to implement already existed. Existing practices, including the use of e-government applications to promote participatory democracy, the rearrangement of the rights and responsibilities of metropolitan and county municipalities, and the disability-friendly cities program, were mentioned in the Good Party's election manifesto.

The Good Party's 2019 municipal election manifesto, in turn, promised to promote a nationalist, pluralistic, and participatory approach to local government with an emphasis on citizen satisfaction - which it described as "good local government." The movement maintained that it would build self-sufficient cities and distinguish local government from national politics.

CONCLUSION

The March 31 municipal election will be the fifteenth electoral contest in Turkey since 2002. The AK Party and the MHP, which jointly formed the People's Alliance, concentrate their efforts on metropolitan areas including Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. Keeping in mind that metropolitan districts provide insights into broader trends in national politics, it is easy to understand why. As the maxim goes, "Whoever controls Istanbul controls Turkey." In other words, the management of metropolitan municipalities influences national politics. Hence the emphasis of major political parties on metropolitan areas.

After the municipal election, the top items on both the AK Party's and Turkey's political agenda will be the presidential system's

45. Hazal Duran, "Meral Akşener'in Siyasal Anlamı ve İyi Parti" [Meral Akşener's Political Significance and the Good Party], *SETA Analiz*, No: 223, (October 2017).

46. "Milletimizle Sözleşme: Toplumda Birlik, Ekonomide Güven, Yönetimde Liyakat" [A Covenant with the People: Unity in Society, Trust in the Economy, Meritocracy in Government], The Good Party's Election Manifesto, https://iyiparti.org.tr/assets/pdf/secim_beyani.pdf, (Accessed: March 5, 2019).

consolidation and the improved compatibility of public institutions with the new system of government. In the wake of the April 2017 constitutional referendum and the June 2018 general election, the presidency became the center of Turkey's public administration vis-à-vis the development, implementation, and assessment of public policy.[47] Moreover, a number of laws have since been amended with presidential decrees in order to make the bureaucracy compatible with presidentialism and launch a comprehensive reform of the public sector. Although a detailed assessment of the new system will be necessary after the March 2019 local election, steps will certainly be taken to expedite the bureaucratic decision-making process and improve the public sector's ability to implement policy decisions.

Under a law enacted in February 2018, it became possible for political parties to form electoral alliances since the new system of government required cooperation among them. The People's Alliance and the Nation Alliance, which originally emerged before the June 2018 election, will compete against each other once again in March 2019. Provided that the law on electoral alliance was limited to parliamentary elections, the various political parties formed *de facto* alliances ahead of the March 2019 municipal election. In this regard, the AK Party and the MHP will contest races in 51 provinces as part of the People's Alliance, while the CHP, the Good Party and the HDP will join forces in 50 provinces under the Nation Alliance.

The March 2019 election will be crucial for the consolidation of both blocs, the Peo-

ple's Alliance and the Nation Alliance, that were born out of the June 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections. Both the presidential system of government and the new law on electoral alliances facilitated the reorganization of Turkey's political arena along two major blocs. Provided that Turkish politics has historically been a battleground between center and periphery, left and right, conservatives and seculars, the two-bloc system will establish itself quickly under the new system. By contrast, political parties that fail to appreciate the presidential system's two-bloc structure will face an existential crisis. Ahead of the June 2018 elections, most observers expected the AK Party to assume leadership of the People's Alliance and the CHP to speak for the Nation Alliance. Yet the CHP's tug-of-war with the Good Party and the HDP established that the party could not serve as an agent of change within the Nation Alliance.[48]

Provided that the CHP fails to generate political value ahead of the March 2019 municipal election, it will probably encounter a new intra-party crisis after election day. In the wake of the June 2018 elections, a group of CHP delegates led by Muharrem Ince had called for an emergency congress for the purpose of removing Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu from power. At the time, however, those delegates announced that they would rather wait until after the local election - reportedly not to cause more harm to the CHP. If the Nation Alliance and the CHP fail to impress voters in the local election, the intraparty opposition is likely to resume its activities. As such, the March 2019 municipal election could shape the CHP's future.

47. Şener Aktürk, "Turkey's Fifth Republic and the 2018 Elections", *Daily Sabah*, June 27, 2018.

48. Nebi Miş, "İki Bloklu Siyasetin Dengesi" [The Balance of Two-Bloc Politics], *Türkiye*, February 5, 2019.

Same goes for the Good Party. The movement had faced a serious crisis after the June 2018 election, as many of its founders resigned from the party. Chairwoman Meral Akşener also left the movement before coming back to reassume its leadership. At this time, the Good Party finds itself on thin ice. That the HDP threw its weight behind the Nation Alliance, moreover, could fuel intraparty polarization if the bloc falls short of expectations on election day. As such, what role the Good Party will play in the future of Turkish politics will be closely related to the outcome of the March 2019 election.

THE MARCH 31
LOCAL ELECTIONS IN TURKEY

NEBİ MİŞ · HAZAL DURAN

SETA | ANALYSIS

On March 31, 2019, Turkey will hold local elections in 30 metropolitan districts, 51 provinces, 922 counties, 32,105 neighborhoods, and 18,306 villages. This local election will be the fifteenth electoral contest since the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power 17 years ago. Yet there will be a range of new dynamics at play, as Turkey's political arena undergoes major changes. The April 2017 constitutional referendum facilitated the country's transition from the parliamentary system of government to a type of presidentialism known as the "Presidency System of Government." The country's political arena has been reshaped under the new system. On June 24, 2018, Turkey held a national election for the first time under presidentialism. Parliamentary and presidential elections took place on the same day and various political parties contested races by forming electoral alliances among themselves. Those alliances made a significant impact on the election results.

A large number of political parties will participate in the March 2019 local election as part of broader electoral alliances. As a matter of fact, those electoral alliances have deepened since last year's national election, with each alliance endorsing a joint mayoral candidate in many provinces. In some cases, they even jointly nominated a group of candidates for the city council. As such, Turkey will discover for the first time how electoral alliances will influence voter behavior in local races.

This analysis explains the March 2019 local election's significance to Turkish politics and concentrates on the ways in which the visions of various political parties for local government have changed over the years. Accordingly, the analysis primarily discusses the upcoming election's key dynamics. It proceeds to analyze the March 2019 election's significance for each major political party's internal agenda and future projections. Moreover, this analysis offers a detailed account of how each political party's vision for local government has changed over the years and how their respective visions have been tailored for the 2019 local election campaign. Finally, it identifies a number of issues that will possibly set the post-election political agenda in Turkey.

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