

# Teim



## TEIM Election Watch Analysis

**PRE-ELECTION ANALYSIS:**

**TURKEY / General elections - 12 June 2011**

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Pre-election opinion polls before Turkey's 2011 general elections are predicting that the government of the AKP (Justice and Development Party, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) will be returned for another term, situating it as the dominant party in the Turkish party system. Its leadership seems unrivalled, despite the fact that the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) has been strengthened by the impetus of its new leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who has been at the helm of the party since May 2010. The party's former leader, Deniz Baykal, had to resign following an Internet sex scandal. The CHP is an emblematic party in Turkey given that its initials are the same as the party Atatürk founded back in the 1920's. The CHP made a lurch to the centre-left and social democracy under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit in the sixties and seventies, and was banned following the 1980 military coup. A decade later it reappeared on the political scene with rather patchy election results, but has little by little confirmed its place as the country's second major political party, especially since the 2002 elections. Nonetheless, while effectively the country's second largest party, its scores are far lower than those of the AKP. In 2002 it scored just 19% of votes compared with the AKP's 34% and in 2007, 21% versus the AKP's 46.6%.

Another major party, the ultra-nationalist MHP (Nationalist Movement Party, *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*) has had to face a pre-election bombshell with the dissemination of sex videos involving senior party members, severely limiting the party's electoral prospects. It has even been suggested that the MHP will not make it over the 10% national threshold necessary to make it into parliament, which would represent a real slump from the 14.3% of votes the party obtained in 2007.

The country's fourth biggest party as it heads into the 2011 polls is the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party, *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*), a pro-Kurdish party whose prospects are similarly conditioned by the 10% national threshold, given that its support is concentrated geographically. One way of getting past this barrier is by presenting independent candidates, as the now illegalised Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, DTP) - whose mantle the BDP has picked up - did in 2007.

### **The special significance of these elections**

These general elections have considerable importance not because of the effect they will have on the configuration of the party system - strengthening or weakening the main parties institutionally - but because their results will be decisive for determining the preparation and ratification of a new constitution, due to be carried out in the next parliamentary term. If the elections give an absolute majority in parliament to the AKP, this party may be tempted to produce a constitution on its own, without regard for political consensus from other parties. But a new Turkish constitution that is not the fruit of general consensus will be unable to offer the country institutional stability.

To obtain a qualified majority in parliament, the AKP would need to obtain 367 of the 550 seats. Different opinion polls suggest that the AKP will obtain between 43 and 55 percent of the votes, the CHP between 23 and 32 percent, the MHP between 9 and 15 percent and the BDP between 5 and 8 percent. The percentage of votes that the AKP obtains will be central to deciding the course of legislation over the next four years. The CHP's score will be decisive not only for shaping the new constitution, but for consolidating Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership over his party. The elections will also be key for the MHP and BDP,

which despite their limited percentage of votes, play a fundamental ideological role in the party system.

### **Election campaign themes**

It should be noted that the initial decision taken by the Supreme Election Board (*Yüksek Seçim Kurulu*, YSK) to bar the independent candidacies of several members of the pro-Kurdish BDP, although eventually withdrawn, created a furore throughout the country and among some very different political groups.

The treatment that the Turkish press has given to the political parties' electoral promises is also noteworthy.

Regarding the AKP, major investment and infrastructure projects have been the subject of the most frequent news items. Prime minister Erdoğan has propose the construction of a new canal around Istanbul, a remodelling of the city of Diyarbakir (the highest populated city in Eastern Turkey), as well as the construction of railway lines connecting Ankara and Istanbul with İzmir (the country's third biggest city) and other cities. The news media have not announced any of the party's major proposals for the new constitution. On the other hand, regarding the CHP the media have given most coverage to the party's proposals to democratise the country, including lowering the electoral threshold to 5 percent, granting local autonomy to the Kurdish population, and investigation into the crimes that have taken place with impunity in the country's east. It is worth pointing out the huge change that Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership has meant for the party, compared with his predecessor Baykal, who seemed to favour the status quo instead of democratization.

With respect to the BDP, the news media have been less specific, focussing on the party's attitudes in favour of the EU and a new constitution that might also represent Turkey's Kurdish citizens. As for the MHP, during the campaign it has attacked the AKP for having promoted ethnic separatism and accused Erdoğan of discrimination against the CHP's leader for being an Alevi and not a Sunni Muslim. Regarding foreign policy, the MHP has expressed its preference for strengthening ties with the Turkic republics of Central Asia.

If the majority of election rallies have gone ahead without incident, it is important to point out the bomb that went off in the Etiler district of Istanbul on May 26th wounding at least seven people. Just as significant were the protests of left-wing demonstrators at a rally attended by Erdoğan in Hopa (Artvin province), which left nearly thirty people wounded, including several police officers, and one protester dead from a heart attack provoked by the altercation.