

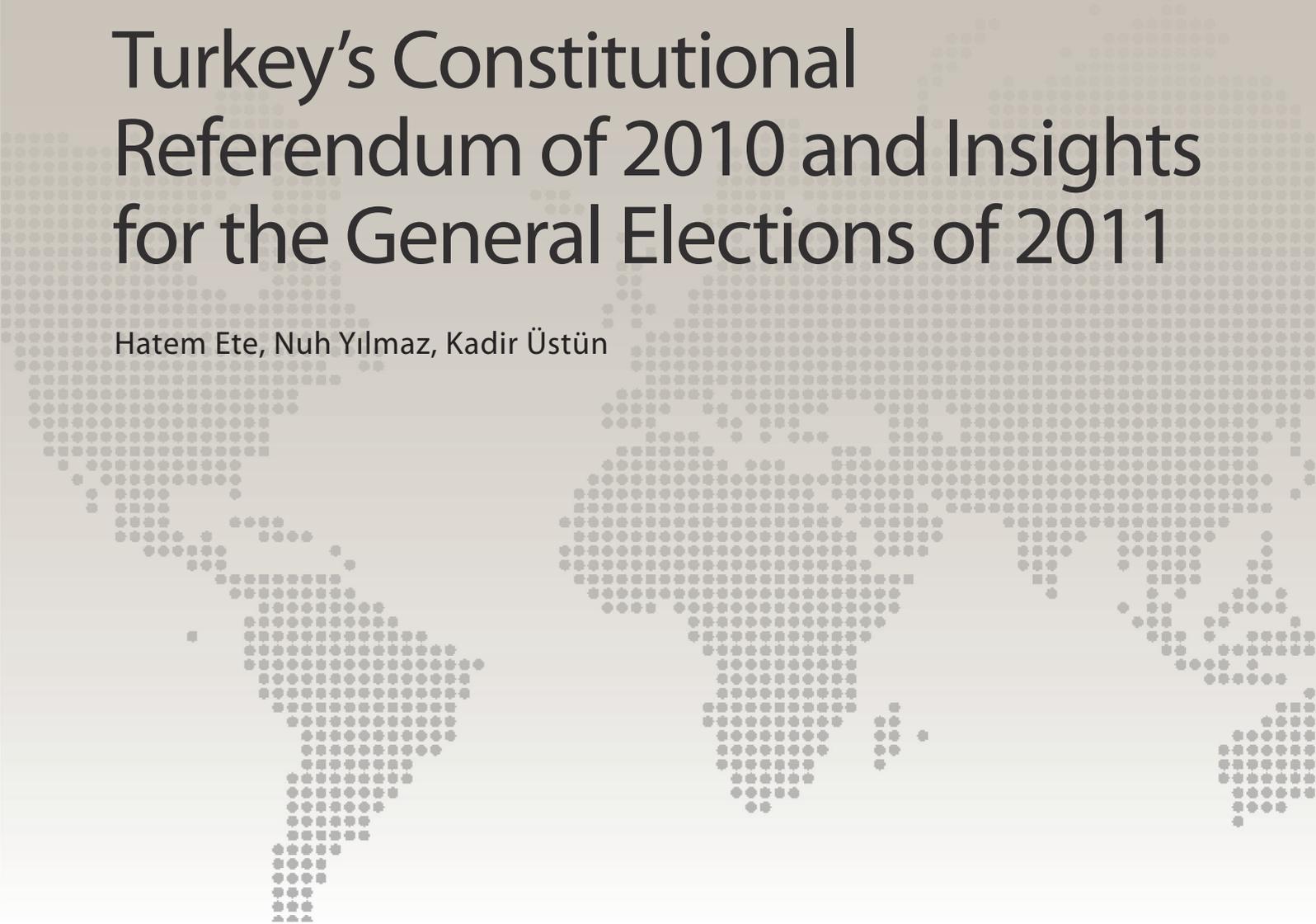
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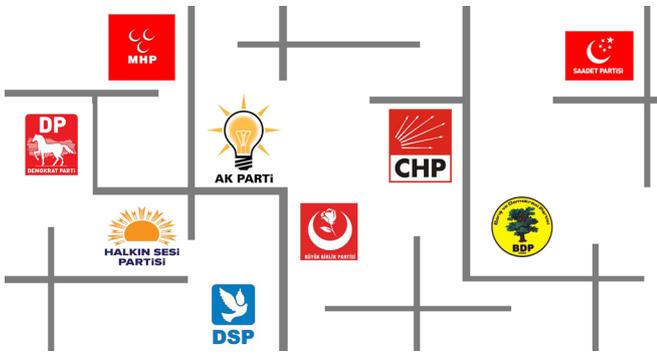
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Turkey's Constitutional Referendum of 2010 and Insights for the General Elections of 2011

Hatem Ete, Nuh Yılmaz, Kadir Üstün



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ABSTRACT

The constitutional referendum of September 2010 was a historic moment and a milestone in modern Turkey's democratization journey. Serving as the public's "final say" on the question of democracy in Turkey and paving the way for a new civilian constitution, the referendum will have far-reaching consequences for civil-military relations, independence of the judicial system, and institutionalization of democracy in Turkey. This study investigates the consequences of the referendum for the shaping of the political scene in Turkey by analyzing the political parties' campaign strategies, voting patterns, voter preferences, and likely scenarios for the June 2011 general elections.

The report is divided into four main parts that tackle the main questions that the referendum of 2010 raised. First, what is the significance of the September 2010 constitutional referendum in Turkey? Second, what campaign strategies were most effective during the referendum? Third, what can be deduced from the voting patterns and voter preferences? Fourth, what can we predict about the June 2011 general Elections based on voter behaviors during the constitutional referendum of 2010?

The study of the September 2010 constitutional referendum results revealed significant clues as to what could be the results of the June 2011 general elections. The AK Party's referendum campaign strategy, constructed around "democratic freedoms," resonated strongly among voters in Turkey. Having analyzed the geographic distribution of votes during the referendum, this report demonstrates that the opposition parties took the risk of becoming merely local or regional parties while the AK Party was the only party with the political discourse that would address the themes that concerned voters across Turkey.

The June 2011 general elections may prove to be the most important elections in Turkey's recent electoral history. Just as a strong preference for "democratic freedoms" among voters became clear during the referendum, the upcoming general election in Turkey is poised to determine who is to survive Turkey's political landscape over the next decade.

TURKEY'S CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM OF 2010 AND INSIGHTS FOR THE GENERAL ELECTIONS OF 2011

Turkey's September 2010 referendum on the constitutional amendments is nothing new in terms of holding referendums or amending various constitutions. Public in Turkey is no stranger to referendums and constitutional changes. Yet, the September 12, 2010 referendum is the most significant in many ways.¹ Constitutional amendments contained in the package represent a significant step in changing the political and institutional arrangements remaining from the 1960 and 1980 coups. The package is a serious attempt at removing the virtual immunity enjoyed by the military and civilian bureaucracy in Turkey. Aiming to diversify the membership cadres of the High Judiciary by opening it up to more societal and political participation, the package aims to liberalize and democratize the political system.

Turkey has made constitutional changes a total of four times in its republican history. The 1921 Constitution was replaced with a brand new constitution in 1924. During the People's Republican Party's (CHP) one-party rule up until 1950, the 1924 Constitution was modified after virtually every national convention of the party. Following the 1960 military coup, not only was the constitution changed but the whole political system was reconstructed. Following the 1971 "coup by memorandum", the 1961 Constitution was significantly changed: autonomy of quasi-state institutions as well as personal liberties was reduced. The 1982 Constitution, drafted after 1980 coup, retained the semi-autonomous institutions (Higher Education Council, high courts etc.) in the system while taking the authoritarianism of the 1971 modifications to the next level. The 1982 Constitution itself has been modified on five separate occasions up until today.

Turkey has had a total of six referendums in its republican history. The first two referendums were held in the aftermath of the 1960 and 1980 coups (July 9, 1961 and November 7, 1982) for the newly drafted constitutions. Both constitutional referendums passed with 61,5% and 91,37% respectively. The remaining three referendums were related to the 1982 Constitution. The September 6, 1987 referendum was carried out to lift the 5-year ban on politicians and "Yes" votes were a mere 50,1%. The September 25, 1988 referendum "was held on weather" to

conduct the local elections one year ahead of the scheduled date but this measure failed with 65% "No" votes. The October 21, 2007 referendum was held in the aftermath of the political crisis over the candidacy for Turkish Presidency. The referendum was on a single item (election of the President by the direct vote of the people instead of by the parliament as was the case before) and passed with 69% "Yes" votes.

I. SEPTEMBER 2010 REFERENDUM IN TURKISH POLITICAL LIFE

The passage of the constitutional amendments through a referendum on September 12, 2010² should be considered within the context of transformation of traditional political structure in Turkey. This political structure has been characterized by a serious tension between the military and civilian politics. The military and judicial bureaucracies have enjoyed a relatively large degree of influence in Turkish political life.³

The political legacy of coup d'états over the past half-century has always lurked in the background in most political developments. Successful military interventions of 1960, 1971, and 1980 as well as the so-called "post-modern coup" of 1997 and the failed "e-coup" in 2007⁴ have limited the possibilities in the civilian political sphere. The question of whether the military's intervention would once again overwhelm the civilian initiative became particularly acute in the aftermath of the government's refusal to yield to the e-memorandum of the military in 2007.⁵ In that sense, the referendum of 12 September 2010 represents the culmination of the struggle between civilian political initiatives and militarized politics.

The political legacy of coup d'états over the past half-century has always lurked in the background in most political developments.

The fact that the military once again intervened in politics, albeit through a "post-modern" form of posting an electronic memorandum on its website in 2007 brought home the lesson that the issue of military's role in politics had to be brought before the Turkish public. As such, the proposed constitutional amendments were designed to civilianize and restrict the overarching powers of the military and judicial bureaucracy. Holding referendums in Turkey over the past decade has served as a vehicle through which deadlocks in the political system could be overcome. The ruling party has utilized this vehicle skillfully in navigating through political firestorms.

The opposition parties tried to turn the referendum into a vote of confidence for the current government while acknowledging their contentions with the existing constitution designed in the aftermath of the 1980 coup. They also alleged that the government was trying to shape the judicial bureaucracy to serve its political purposes. This was a difficult position to maintain, as they had to oppose both the military's shadow over civilian politics and the AK Party government itself. Accordingly, the opposition parties opted not to discuss the content of the proposed amendments but tried to turn the referendum into an early election and vote of confidence over the AK Party rule.⁶

2. For the full list of specific amendments, see <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/videos/justiceministryreferendum.pdf>

3. For a discussion of Turkish military's influence over civilian politics, see Steven A. Cook, *Ruling but Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

4. "Ex-Turkish army chief says 'e-coup' justified" *Reuters*, 8 May 2009 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/05/08/us-turkey-military-general-idUSTRE5471UQ20090508>

5. "Secularism v democracy: A military coup was avoided, but an early election looms. Turkey's problems are postponed, not solved," *The Economist*, 3 May 2007 <http://www.economist.com/node/9116841>

6. Hatem Ete, "AK Parti mi oylanacak anayasa paketi mi?", *Star*, July 21, 2010 <http://www.stargazete.com/acikgorus/ak-parti-mi-oylanacak-anayasa-paketi-mi-haber-279436.htm>

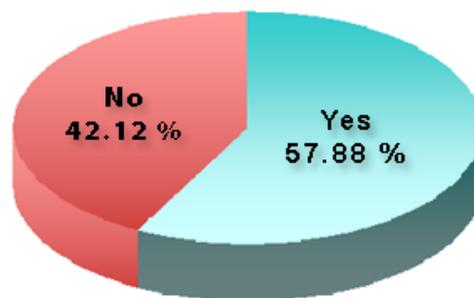
Now that the referendum package has passed, it is clear that the AK Party was able to bring public opinion over to its vision of the referendum's role by arguing that the referendum represented a choice between old-style tutelary politics versus real democracy. There are several lessons that can be drawn from the political haggling from April 2007 to September 2010:

- The majority of voters in Turkey are on the side of institutional democratization.
- General public opinion is increasingly favoring a focus on the content of political debates as opposed to old-style partisan politics.
- Any political movement perceived as opposing further enhancement of basic rights and freedoms would likely lose support.
- A vocabulary constructed around the idea of "guardianship of the Republic" will only speak to a small minority.

II. POLITICAL PARTIES' CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES DURING THE REFERENDUM

Debates over the meaning and significance of the passage of the constitutional reform package in the September 12 Referendum are likely to continue as analysts ponder about the prospects of democratization and the nature of political transformation in Turkey. One of the most important points to be noted is that the referendum result represents the crystallization of the political transformation going on since the 1990s. The proportion of the "Yes" and "No" votes as well as the distribution of votes according to the political blocs and alliances point to the change in the traditional structure of politics in Turkey.

2010 Constitutional Referendum Results



It has not been possible to measure the full dimension of the political transformation – at work since the 1990s – beyond party politics because observations were limited to voter behavior in municipal and national elections where voters cast their votes for a particular candidate or a party. The so-called "e-coup" attempt of April 2007 when the Turkish military posted an electronic memorandum on its website citing the army's guardianship of the secular regime triggered a process which would result in the 2007 Referendum on the issue of the president's election directly by the people (the president was elected by the parliament prior to the 2007 Referendum).

This was the latest confrontation between the Turkish military and the civilian politicians. It was also the beginning of a national conversation on the role of the military in politics and the tutelary attitude of the state elites. The 2010 Referendum symbolized the climax of the political discussions about "civilianizing the state." While all political parties since the 1990s had supported this agenda, they had not been truly tested as to whether they would seriously contribute to changing the constitution drafted by the 1980 military junta. This was an opportunity for the civilian politicians to prove that they were serious about changing the constitution.

However, the main opposition parties, the CHP and MHP, did not see the referendum in that way. For them, the AK Party was simply trying to take over the state institutions. Therefore, fighting the AK Party on the referendum meant saving the state and the nation from a "hidden agenda." In this way, the 2010 Referendum created a fierce polarization between different party leaders. The referendum results are particularly telling in that they demonstrate the differences between the rhetoric of the parties and their constituencies. This provides us with the opportunity to analyze the content and the scale of the broader transformation in Turkish politics. This is especially true when we consider the fact that many voters have refused to vote along their traditional party allegiances.

The tension between traditional tutelage and democracy has taken the center stage in the new "map of political values" in Turkish politics. This new dynamic has brought about the formation of many unprecedented alliances and oppositions while, at the same time, diminishing the influence of traditional ethnic, confessional, ideological, and political dichotomies. Nationalism, which was assumed to retain its power as a political force, was widely employed as a dynamic reference point in opposing the constitutional amendments but it failed to play the role it was expected of by the opposing parties.

This can be interpreted as the failure of efforts to turn the referendum into a vote of confidence on the ruling AK (Justice and Development) Party government by mobilizing the language and themes of nationalist politics. Voters, instead, chose to perceive the referendum in the context of tutelage versus democracy perspective as the government continuously advocated shifting the political framework toward a more democratic one.

By focusing on "settling accounts with the coup d'état" and the need to draft a brand new constitution, the AK Party managed to overcome traditional political polarizations and found support from constituencies of different convictions and identities.

During the referendum campaign, the AK Party defined its political platform around the democracy versus coup d'état dichotomy.⁷ By focusing on "settling accounts with the coup d'état" and the need to draft a brand new constitution, the AK Party managed to overcome traditional political polarizations and found support from constituencies of different convictions and identities. The main opposition party, CHP (Republican People's Party), tried to build an anti-AK Party and anti-Erdoğan coalition but this strategy proved ultimately unsuccessful.

The fundamental question of tutelary politics versus pluralist democracy had now assumed the central stage in Turkish politics but not everyone was ready to concede this fact. The opposition parties, the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) and the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party), prioritized their rather limited agenda by shying away from confronting this central question the referendum brought home for all parties. The referendum proved to be a test of whether nationalism as opposed to the tutelage-democracy dichotomy could determine the fate of the constitutional reform. When we analyze the MHP and BDP's political behavior during the referendum process, nationalism, which can work as a dynamic tool in general and local elections, proves ineffective in the face of a broader political dynamic.

Another important result of the referendum is the failure of the anti-AK Party bloc. For the "No" campaigners, the referendum was basically about opposing the AK Party. During the campaign, no opposition party produced

7. Nuh Yilmaz, "Turkey's referendum: thwarting the specter of coup d'état," *MEC, Foreign Policy*, September 15, 2010, http://mideast.foreign-policy.com/posts/2010/09/15/turkey_s_referendum_thwarting_the_specter_of_coup_d_etat,

convincing arguments opposing the content of the constitutional amendments package. The opposition parties campaigned by criticizing the AK Party rule of the past eight years to use this opportunity as a rehearsal for general elections. The AK Party, however, insisted on focusing on the content of the amendment package. Therefore, all the political parties on the opposing side campaigned to vote “No” not because they were against a particular measure in the package but because they wanted to oppose the AK Party itself. The passage of the constitutional amendments package with 58% “Yes” votes shows that the opposition’s strategy to turn the referendum into a vote of confidence on the AK Party rule backfired.

AK Party’s anti-coup platform

The AK Party couched its campaign rhetoric within the tutelage versus democracy question, advanced the idea of “settling accounts with the coup d’etat,” and promoted the drafting of a new constitution. This strategy proved effective and the party was able to galvanize support beyond the traditional political oppositions and identities. The AK Party learned important lessons from the 2010 Referendum experience in shaping its future political approach. Among these lessons, the AK Party saw that by responding to the demand for change in society and rallying its base around the democratic cause, the AK Party can mobilize a variety of political groups. The AK Party was able to create the political legitimacy to draft a new constitution. Insofar as it does not neglect the correct consultation mechanisms, the party has the potential to lead in such an initiative.

During the campaign, no opposition party produced convincing arguments opposing the content of the constitutional amendments package. The opposition parties campaigned by criticizing the AK Party rule of the past eight years to use this opportunity as a rehearsal for general elections.

CHP’s anti-AK Party platform

CHP failed to bring about the “No” coalition it hoped for as a result of conducting an anti-AK Party and anti-Erdogan campaign instead of dealing with the main question of the referendum – tutelage versus democracy. The party employed political and economic arguments at intervals in different contexts – often giving contradicting arguments depending on the locality – as opposed to putting forward a vision for future based on consistent arguments. It seemed to have wanted to capitalize on a certain degree of paranoia about the amendments without tackling the content of the amendments package. The party hoped to gather and build upon the emotional and reactionary support from voters unhappy with the AK Party government. Despite the fact that it has organized the highest number of public meetings around the country, it could not secure the level of mobilization and support it hoped for.

MHP’s nationalist platform

The MHP took for granted the symbolic meaning of the referendum in terms of tutelage in Turkey as well as the fact that the party’s own constituency has historically sided with democratic measures as opposed to the bureaucratic tutelary system. Instead, the MHP considered the referendum as an opportunity to weaken the AK Party. At the cost

of siding with its historical rival the CHP, the MHP reduced its campaign to an anti-AK Party platform. Despite the fact that there was no single item in the constitutional amendment package regarding the Kurdish question, the MHP justified its opposition through nationalist arguments. The party claimed that the referendum was part of the “destruction project”⁸ the AK Party had started with the “Democratic Opening” and that the country would be divided if the referendum obtained a majority favorable vote. The MHP pursued a strategy of identifying the AK Party’s “Democratic Opening” with the referendum without providing evidence that any of the proposed amendments amounted to serving separatist tendencies in the country. The referendum served as a platform to deliver a more radicalized nationalist message with a clear disregard for the content of the constitutional amendments package.

BDP’s ethno-localist platform

BDP strategized its campaign on the referendum based on a narrow platform: boycott of the referendum altogether. This strategy also disregarded the tutelage vs democratic rule meaning of the referendum. The party could have interpreted the referendum package as part of the larger democratization process of Turkey, which BDP has strongly advocated over the years. Instead, they chose a narrow platform arguing that the Kurds do not share the referendum’s agenda.

The Kurdish question remains an issue discussed within the context of the security-oriented paradigm, dominated by military and judiciary oversight. Although the referendum was an important opportunity for the BDP, the party insisted that it did not see the referendum package, which sought to limit such undemocratic powers of the military and judiciary, as a meaningful contribution to its agenda. This attitude drew a lot of criticism from both its constituents and the politically influential NGOs in the region.⁹ In the end, the BDP stuck to a narrow nationalist agenda by choosing not to contribute to the Referendum package aimed at increasing the democratic standards and credentials of the country. By doing so, the party defended a position that separated the resolution of the Kurdish question from the broader democratization struggle in Turkey.

III. ANALYSIS OF VOTER BEHAVIOR

AK Party: Solidification of Anatolian votes

The AK Party emphasized the actual content of the proposed amendments package and focused the campaign strategy on “combating the legacy of coups” and “freeing civilian politics from bureaucratic tutelage.” The referendum results indicate that this message resonated with the party’s constituents. The majority of voters in Turkey supported the package as a progressive measure while the CHP called it part of an attempt at “civilian dictatorship” and MHP called it a “separatist” measure.

Detailed analysis of voter behavior shows that the AK Party received support from non-AK Party voters, from the MHP’s idealist (ülkücü) base (especially in central Anatolia), and from liberal-left civil society organizations, which do not consider CHP as a truly “left” option. The fact that these seemingly opposite political groups agreed on supporting the referendum package clearly indicates the powerful resonance of the tutelage vs democracy message that can overcome ideological differences. Here, it will be beneficial to analyze which political groupings were able to keep the “democracy struggle” at the forefront and overcame ideological differences through the “democratization”

8. “Bağçeli: Açılım denen yıkım projesi” *CNN Türk*, April 11, 2010 <http://www.cnnturk.com/2010/turkiye/04/11/bahceli.acilim.denen.yikim.projesi/571688.0/index.html>

9. “Ensarioğlu Demirtaş’ı çileden çıkarttı,” *Internet Haber*, 24 August 2010 <http://www.internethaber.com/ensarioglu-demirtasi-cileden-ci-kartti-285569h.htm>

agenda. This is crucial in understanding the dynamics of the referendum process as well as the chances of future democratization efforts.

In the late 1980s, Turkey's democratization struggle began acquiring a political language that emphasized political freedom rather than security, especially following the end of the Cold War. Ethnic (Kurdish issue), religious (Islamism), and sectarian (Alevism) demands paved the way for libertarian recognition of various identities and differences. This was in contrast to a political agenda of the past half a century that was limited to discussions on "security" and "development."

When center-right and center-left parties, which had been founded not to overstep the domain of political activity as delineated by the 1961 Constitution, proved insufficient to accommodate identity-based demands, they lost their societal support and eventually dissolved. Identity-based parties filled the space left over by the center-right parties. The military and judicial elites chose to deny this natural transformation and moved to shut down such parties in an effort to open up the political space for center-right parties once again. Two major groups filled the political arena:

1. identity-based parties with societal support but lacking the approval of the tutelary actors,
2. center parties with no real societal support but approved by the tutelary institutions.

Thus, the 1990s witnessed a weak national political scene where the tutelary actors struggled against the society in general.

When the 2002 elections paved the way for the AK Party rule, this fragmented picture of the political space ended. While speeding up the EU accession process and implementing measures to include the identity-based social demands, the AK Party incorporated the "development" agenda of other center-right parties into its own platform. In this way, it ended the political instability that had characterized Turkey by merging two areas (liberties and development), which historically caused conflicts among societal groups since the late 1980s. During its first rule, the AK Party took care not to overstep the political space allowed by the tutelary system. Starting with the general elections on July 22, 2007, the AK Party met stiff resistance by the bureaucracy when it tried to implement structural changes through drafting a new civilian constitution, demanded by the EU or Turkish society in general.

As the possibility of the military bureaucracy's intervention narrowed due to reforms required by the EU, the judicial bureaucracy took over the role of overseeing the system. However, the judiciary abused its role and felt justified in violating the "separation of powers" principle in order to "protect the regime."¹⁰ Because both the power of the military bureaucracy as well as the opposition parties had been weakened, the executive judiciary branch took it upon itself to undermine the AK Party's political platform¹¹ – although this would undermine its own legitimacy and respectability in the eyes of the Turkish public. Turkey's Constitutional Court delivered its decisions based on political considerations rather than on the rule of law. The AK Party decided to make structural changes to the judicial system when Turkey's Constitutional Court locked down the political system based upon politically motivated decisions. The constitutional amendments package is the product of such a political context. The referendum results indicate that the local agendas became less important than the democratization agenda for Turkey's civil society in general. The agreement of seemingly opposite political camps on this referendum proves that tutelage vs democracy struggle constitutes the singlemost important political issue in Turkey. This struggle had always been there but no political party has been able to take on the challenge of confronting the political system as defined by the state elites.

10. Morton Abramowitz, "Turkey's Judicial Coup D'Etat," *Newsweek*, 05 April 2008 <http://www.newsweek.com/2008/04/05/turkey-s-judicial-coup-d-etat.html>

11. İzgi Güngör, "From Landmark Success to Closure: AKP's journey," *Turkish Daily News*, 22 July 2008 <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsiv-news.aspx?id=-634073>

By moving forward with the referendum process despite the opposition by the political parties in the Turkish parliament to the referendum package, the AK Party reaped the benefits of taking such a risk. This was only possible, however, with the party's core central Anatolian constituency's positive response to the AK Party's national agenda.

In Turkey's electoral history, Central Anatolian voters have occupied an important place since they often represented the "mainstream values" of Turkish society. With their nationalist-conservative political leanings, the central Anatolian voters have supported the MHP and the AK Party since 2002. During the two general elections of 2002 and 2009 and the two local elections of 2004 and 2009, support for AK Party increased while support for the MHP decreased. In addition, the AK Party's domestic and foreign policies have begun to transform the very definition of the "nationalist-conservative" leanings of these voters. The "reactionary" and "closed" nationalism of the Cold War era is being replaced by a more outwardly and proactive nationalist outlook.

The MHP has been unable to keep up with this transformation of the central Anatolian voters. The more it positions itself around a defensive/reactionary nationalism, the more it loses votes to the AK Party. This development can be observed in the elections results as well as the "Democratic Opening" discussions. The MHP defined the process, which was conceived as a bold move to finally resolve the Kurdish issue, as "separatism" and "treachery." The party based its referendum campaign on this radically confrontational theme. Yet, the referendum results demonstrated that even the MHP base thought differently.¹²

Notwithstanding the embarrassment of not being able to cast his vote due to a paperwork mishap, the fact that Kılıçdaroğlu went through an active campaign presented him with the opportunity to get in touch with different segments of society while introducing his own party to new ideas.

By pursuing a theme of "struggle for democracy," the AK Party solidified its central Anatolian votes, who seem to perceive their own nationalist outlook differently than the MHP leadership. Consolidation of Anatolian votes for the AK Party will prove crucial for the June 2011 general elections.

CHP: "Coastal" politics

The CHP entered the referendum process with a change of leadership. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu became the party chairman in May. He symbolized the party's hope for change, growth, and their chance to accede to power. However, Kılıçdaroğlu (put in Turkish spelling) had little room to maneuver in his stance on the referendum, as Deniz Baykal – the previous party leader- had already announced the party's position as "No" for the referendum vote. Despite the fact that many observers advised CHP to vote "yes" as part of their platform of "change," Kılıçdaroğlu leadership decided to continue the party's previously proclaimed position. Arguably, this decision diminished Kılıçdaroğlu's ability to change the party's platform and policies.

Kılıçdaroğlu argued that the proposed constitutional amendments package would eliminate the independence of the judiciary and bring forth a pro-AK Party judiciary. However, he did not make this argument the very center of his

12. There were earlier signs of this rift between the "idealist" base and the MHP leadership, see "MHP grass roots to vote for reform package in memory of coup victims," *Today's Zaman*, 13 July 2010 <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-215879-100-mhp-grass-roots-to-vote-for-reform-package-in-memory-of-coup-victims.html>

"No" campaign. Instead, he focused on the AK Party government's general policies. The CHP's strategy was to turn the referendum into a "vote of confidence" for the government. While distancing itself from the Baykal-era rhetoric of guardianship of the secular regime, the new leadership aimed to embrace different segments of the society through its criticism of socio-economic policies of the AK Party government.

While condemning AK Party government's "Democratic Opening" in strongest terms,¹³ Kılıçdaroğlu made several announcements that deviated from the traditional CHP policies: he promised to lift the headscarf ban when his party came to power;¹⁴ he said it would be normal for the Turkish state to talk to the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan;¹⁵ and a general amnesty towards PKK militants could be considered if they surrendered their arms.¹⁶ These unexpected promises created a positive expectation that the CHP would make significant changes in its traditional statist/laicist policies. However, Kılıçdaroğlu could not stand behind these promises as he received criticism from within the CHP. Furthermore, he did not offer clear strategies as to how to achieve those objectives, which rendered his statements ineffective. While forcing his own party to face certain realities, he could not convince non-CHP voters of his true intentions. He did not seem to command the support of his own party nor have the ability to be able to implement such fundamental policy changes.

While the party's common denominators with the AK Party and the CHP are conservatism and secularism respectively, its main platform is a nationalist rhetoric with a special focus on the fears of terror and division of the country.

When we look at the referendum results, we can argue that Kılıçdaroğlu's unconventional statements did not alienate CHP's own constituency, however, they did not convince non-CHP voters either. It seems that advocacy of democratic policies did not provide the CHP with the kind of advantages it did the AK Party. As such, we can say that the referendum did not result in major changes either in the CHP's voter profile or the percentage of votes it received.

Although the referendum did not allow the CHP to enlarge its voter base, it had other advantages for the party. Notwithstanding the embarrassment of not being able to cast his vote due to a paperwork mishap,¹⁷ the fact that Kılıçdaroğlu went through an active campaign presented him with the opportunity to get in touch with different segments of society while introducing his own party to new ideas. This could be the beginning of a process where different groups in society will get used to the idea of a new CHP.

As the leading party in the anti-AK Party camp, the CHP could represent the "alternative" for the voters of political parties such as the MHP and the DP (Democratic Party). Since the MHP was in the same camp as the CHP and used similar arguments, we can expect that a considerable section of the MHP voters may feel an affinity with the CHP. If Kılıçdaroğlu can manage to realize the hope of meaningful "change" associated with his personality, he may be able to turn the CHP into a serious alternative for MHP and DP voters. Clearly, this still would not secure enough momentum to pose a serious challenge against the AK Party.

13. "CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu condemns democratic initiative," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 6 June 2010 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=chp-leader-kilicdaroglu-8216condemning-the-initiative8217-2010-06-06>

14. "Turkish opposition chief denies controversial headscarf remarks," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 1 July 2010 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=chp-leader8217s-headscarf-remarks-spark-controversy-2010-07-01>

15. "Kılıçdaroğlu: Apo ile görüşülebilir," *Taraf*, 26 August 2010 <http://www.taraf.com.tr/haber/kilicdaroglu-apo-ile-gorusulebilir.htm>

16. "CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu calls for general amnesty," *Today's Zaman*, 27 August 2010 http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action;jsessionid=2EE7457310E2F1CF1038640DFD8EEE3B?newsId=220165

17. "CHP lideri Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu referandumda oy kullanamadı," *Ntvmsnbc*, September 12, 2010 <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25130796/>

Until now, it had proven difficult for the central Anatolian voters to appreciate the change in the leadership's political priorities and outlook because the party did not have to make such a clear choice between the two major constituencies. When the referendum brought two voter blocs head to head, the MHP went along with the preferences of its coastal regional voter bloc, which the party felt was more secure for its future. The party's calculation seems to be that the Kurdish issue will not be resolved for a long time and it can rely on a reactionary nationalism, which would resonate more strongly with the voters in the coastal regions.

However, the MHP is the party that was affected most negatively by the referendum result. The party based its "No" campaign on the condemnation of the "Democratic Opening" with a nationalistic rhetoric, which cost the party the central Anatolian votes. The post-referendum discussions within the party reached a point where the local MHP branch leaders called on the party leadership to account for what they perceived as "defeat" in the referendum.¹⁹

Despite the nationalist rhetoric and threats of separatism, these voters found the tutelage-democracy tension more relevant by voting affirmatively in the referendum. It is clear that the promise of democracy proved to be a more powerful political instrument rather than the fear of separatism. This result underscores the fact that the AK Party has transformed the central Anatolian voters' priorities, which the MHP ultimately failed to address.

The biggest danger for the MHP in this process is losing the central Anatolian voters entirely. Referendum results and the ensuing discussions exposed the differentiation between the party leadership and the central Anatolian base with respect to concepts such as "idealism" (*ülküçülük*, a core concept for the MHP base) and nationalism. Instead of attempting a major ideological revision in line with the transformation of the voters, the MHP is likely to follow the nationalist line along the coastal regions. In addressing the referendum results, the MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli reflected, "With the Turkish nation's acceptance of the constitutional amendments, we have entered a dark era full of vital risks and dangers for Turkey." The party leader of a nationalist party qualified the voters' choice as leading Turkey to a bleak future. This statement is a clear evidence of the intellectual shift within the party leadership caused by the nation vs. state and democracy vs. tutelage tensions.

It is clear that the party's leadership has given up on the central Anatolian voters in favor of the coastal regions. The MHP's general secretary, Cihan Paçacı, responded to the criticism that the party is losing its traditional constituency in the following manner:

In Osmaniye, where our party's chairman is from, two out of four parliamentarians belong to MHP. In Erzurum, which is supposed to be an AK Party stronghold, we have one parliamentarian. What kind of a stronghold is that? In Yozgat, one out of six parliamentarians belong to our party. In Çorum, we do not have representatives among five parliamentarians but we have four from Adana and Mersin; in Antalya, Manisa and Aydın, three parliamentarians said no. Manisa, Balıkesir, Adana, and Uşak, where the mayors are from MHP, said no as well.²⁰

Given the emphasis on the relative success on coastal cities, the quote reads as an admission of the party's weakness in non-coastal regions. This might turn the MHP into a party with an exclusively nationalist agenda. Today, reactionary nationalism and concern about preservation of a secularist lifestyle seem compatible in coastal regions.

This harmony allows the MHP and the CHP to compete in the same districts. However, if this constituency felt that it had to make a choice between the two, the MHP may face the same dilemma it experienced during the referendum campaign. The future of the MHP will depend on which set of values will win over its leadership and what choices they will make. Even today, when there seems to be no such choices to be made, the MHP is being affected by a recently energized CHP. As a result of its leadership change, the CHP is increasing its support while the MHP is losing ground. In the upcoming general elections of June 2011, the MHP will have to contend with the CHP just to make it over the national threshold of 10 percent. Realizing this difficult situation, the MHP may increase the tone of its nationalist rhetoric. Fearing to remain below the threshold, the party may pursue an uncompromising policy on the Kurdish issue, thus, contributing to a deadlock on this vital issue.

19. "MHP grass roots calls party leaders to account for defeat," *Today's Zaman*, 15 September 2010 <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-221685-mhp-grass-roots-calls-party-leaders-to-account-for-defeat.html>

20. "MHP kaleleri çökmedi," *Osmaniye*, September 14, 2010 <http://www.osmaniye.biz.tr/haber/siyaset/mhp-kaleleri-cokmedi.html>

BDP: Ethno-Localist Success

BDP pursued a strategy of rejection of the national agenda during the referendum process²¹ to demonstrate its capacity to represent the political leadership of the Kurdish population and to emphasize the reality of the Kurdish problem in Turkey. It is understood that political parties want to demonstrate their relevance, particularly during electoral campaigns. Yet, in a referendum process where the preferences over national issues are tested, the BDP's "show of strength" vis-à-vis the Kurdish issue is open to criticism. It could be argued that the BDP gave up on issues relevant to the national agenda in favor of a more ethnicized and localized agenda. The party was able to show through its boycott platform that it holds a serious mandate in the East and Southeast parts of Turkey. Basically, establishing that it's still a political force to be reckoned with.

The boycott decision's main rationale was to prove that the party was the true representative of the Kurdish political preferences and that the Kurds in general prioritized the need for a solution to the Kurdish problem. BDP made a somewhat difficult argument for its boycott decision as it said that Turkey needed a new constitution regardless of the referendum result and life would go on with either a "Yes" or "No" result.²² This is clearly in contrast with the national public opinion of the September 2010 election as the single most important event of 2010.²³ In this way, BDP was focused on retaining its strength in the Kurdish-majority provinces rather than contributing to a constitutional change process nationally.

Although the results were lower than what the party expected, the BDP reached its goal thanks to the success of the boycott in many of the Kurdish-majority cities. The strategic goal for the party during the referendum campaign, however, had already been accomplished in almost all the elections in which the party participated. It will likely reach the same goal in the next elections as well. Therefore, the BDP has not achieved a new political goal but simply reconfirmed its general goal – a claim to the leadership of Kurdish political movement in Turkey.

If the margin between the "yes" and "no" votes had been as close as expected by some analysts, the value of the BDP's participation in the referendum would have been much greater.

While the BDP achieved its goal to a large extent, it used the boycott tool in a referendum, which ended in a clear victory for one side (58% Yes, 42% No). If the margin between the "yes" and "no" votes had been as close as expected by some analysts, the value of the BDP's participation in the referendum would have been much greater. It could have potentially provided the BDP with much more leverage. The wide margin of the referendum results lessened the symbolic and political meaning of the boycott.

The BDP could not energize potential voters; it had to be content with keeping its base with minor losses. Political parties' capacity to mobilize the base to boycott an election or a referendum is significantly higher than for general elections. In a boycott situation, it becomes exceedingly difficult for voters to escape the physical and psychological pressure of the boycott. Thus, the cost of going to the polls to vote is incomparably higher than it is in a boycott environment. For example, the businessman Raif Türk declared that he was going to vote "yes" at the referendum, which led to a PKK attack on the mines he was operating and the vehicles used in the mines. This attack was to remind

21. "BDP: Boykot Başlatacağız," *Sabah*, 9 July 2010, http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2010/07/09/bdp_boykot_baslatacagiz#

22. "New constitution necessary in Turkey regardless of vote result, says BDP," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 31 August 2010 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=new-constitution-is-unavoidable-despite-the-referendum-result-says-the-bdp-leader-2010-08-31>

23. "Türkiye Toplum – Siyaset Araştırması: 2010'un Ardından," *Genar Araştırma Danışmanlık Eğitim*, January 2011 http://www.genar.com.tr/files/TURKIYE_TOPLUM_SIYASET_2010UNARDINDAN.pdf

everyone the serious cost of a “yes” vote.²⁴ In other words, relative success of the boycott cannot be attributed solely to the BDP’s success. Furthermore, the fact that the boycott percentages correspond to the traditional percentage of BDP votes raises questions about the party’s political capacity and prospects for success at the national level. Numbers show that BDP succeeded in convincing its base of the rationale of the boycott, however, this stance did not speak to groups not affiliated with the BDP.

DTP (later BDP) Votes and Participation Levels in Kurdish-Majority Cities during 2009 Local Elections with Participation Levels in 2010 Referendum

	DTP Votes (%)	Participation, 2009 Local Elections (%)	Participation, 2010 Referendum (%)	Change in Participation (%)	“Yes” Votes (%)
HAKKARİ	73.72	86.32	9.05	-77.27	94.27
ŞIRNAK	60.75	86.19	22.50	-63.69	89.08
DİYARBAKIR	59.44	81.60	34.80	-46.80	93.92
BATMAN	53.22	80.38	40.62	-39.76	94.69
VAN	48.27	81.03	43.61	-37.42	94.45
MARDİN	44.19	81.08	43.00	-38.08	93.45
MUŞ	42.53	78.36	54.09	-24.27	92.21
SİİRT	37.32	86.86	50.88	-35.98	95.17
AĞRI	37.23	78.94	56.42	-22.52	95.75
IĞDIR	32.37	82.02	51.09	-30.93	53.75

* This table shows the effectiveness of the BDP’s boycott of the 2010 referendum, as the drop in participation levels indicate. However, it also shows that the BDP does not have a comfortable command of voter preferences as it failed to convince significant numbers of voters from casting their votes in the referendum. Moreover, the overwhelming percentages of “Yes” votes among those who went to polls indicate the considerable strength of the AK Party and its democracy versus tutelage platform.

Comparison of AK Party votes in Kurdish-Majority Cities during 2009 Local Elections with “Yes” Votes in 2010 Referendum

	AK Party Votes 2009 Local Elections	“Yes” Votes 2010 Referendum	Change in Number of Votes
AĞRI	58,534	142,311	+83,777
BATMAN	70,619	94,218	-23,599
DİYARBAKIR	202,609	262,031	+59,422
HAKKARİ	21,752	9,910	-11,842
IĞDIR	18,595	28,023	+9,428
MARDİN	81,995	147,344	+65,349
MUŞ	44,003	99,403	+55,400
SİİRT	41,764	68,845	+27,081
ŞIRNAK	49,496	33,626	-15,870
VAN	135,082	208,501	+73,419

*Although it is not possible to identify the votes for the AK Party in the 2009 Local Elections with “Yes” votes in the 2010 Referendum, we can surmise that the AK Party’s referendum rhetoric couched in terms of democracy versus tutelage resonated strongly with the voters in Kurdish-majority cities. This is especially true when we take into account the fact that the DTP did not boycott the elections in 2009 as its successor BDP did in the 2010 Referendum.

24. “Quarry attacked after owner declared ‘yes’ vote in Turkish poll,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, September 16, 2010 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=anti-boycott-businessman8217s-mine-raided-before-referendum-2010-09-16>

The BDP, through the boycott decision, chose not to tie its political position with the national political agenda. It disregarded the new political dynamics of the country during the referendum process by excluding itself from the national discussion on the referendum. This has clearly created discontent among BDP's potential voters and those who are keenly aware of the primacy of the Kurdish issue. Such discontent could lead some voters to distance themselves from the BDP, believing that they might be concerned with one agenda item only. When the boycott decision was declared by party leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), known for their sensitivity on the Kurdish issue, declared that they would say, "Yes" at the referendum.

This is a clear indicator of discontent and of a potential rift. The BDP and NGOs are pursuing different strategies in terms of local versus national agenda or single issue versus national agenda item. Considering that the constitutional amendments included items that would contribute to the solution of the Kurdish problem, NGOs found it more meaningful and politically expedient to engage constructively in the tutelage versus democracy conversation. Refusing to see the referendum as a mutually exclusive process vis-à-vis the Kurdish question, NGOs regarded the solution as part of the country's general democratization. In this way, they were able to merge their specific and local agendas with the more general and national agenda.

IV. INSIGHTS FOR JUNE 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS

The referendum result is a clear sign of two major changes in Turkish politics. The first change has to do with the basic dynamics of politics, which in the past revolved around right vs. left and center vs. periphery dichotomies. Clearly, a broader debate, i.e. democracy vs. tutelary system, has taken the center stage in Turkish politics. The second major change is the fact that AK Party is, and has been since 2002, able to determine the "rules of the game" of politics. That virtually all opposition parties determined their position on an anti-AK Party platform is the proof that the AK Party has gone beyond a traditional political party to become a major actor in the political life in Turkey.

- The AK Party is likely to hold onto its base and current constituency while trying to expand its mandate by making inroads into the MHP and BDP strongholds.
- The AK Party may try to frame the general elections as a vote for the continuation of democratic processes by arguing that there remains the unfinished business of drafting a new constitution, as the party leader Erdoğan has already promised.
- The CHP faces a serious dilemma: it will either remain a marginal party with an ultra-secularist and nationalist agenda or it will move to the center by adopting some of the issues most voters care about.
- The CHP is likely to hold onto its coastal base to a large extent, however, it may find it very difficult to penetrate AK Party and MHP strongholds in central Anatolia and elsewhere.
- If the CHP can respond meaningfully to demands for "change," it may be able to increase its votes. If Kılıçdaroğlu fails to change the party in a significant way, it can only hope to hold onto its traditional voter base.
- The MHP has already indicated that it will continue its nationalist agenda. The question for the MHP will be to what extent it can incorporate some of the libertarian language to engage liberals while trying to reach out to conservatives in central Anatolian regions.
- The MHP's success will depend on the extent to which it can make adjustments in its secularist and hardline rhetoric in order to swing AK Party voters.
- The BDP seems to have made the choice of being an ethnic-based party. Given that the ten percent national threshold is unlikely to be repealed, the party will try to show its strength in its traditional strongholds while trying to expand its voter base in large cities where there are large numbers of Kurdish immigrants.

- The BDP's success depends on the AK Party's ability to seriously build upon its 'Democratic Opening' by finding a viable solution to the Kurdish problem. If the AK Party is seen by Kurds as taking noteworthy steps in that regard, the BDP's reach will likely remain limited if not diminished.
- The BDP will need to be careful about alienating non-governmental organizations whose main agenda often reflects a concern for democratization as opposed to ethnic politics.

The constitutional referendum of September 2010 was a historic moment and a milestone in modern Turkey's democratization journey. Serving as the public's "final say" on the question of democracy in Turkey and paving the way for a new civilian constitution, the referendum will have far-reaching consequences for civil-military relations, independence of the judicial system, and institutionalization of democracy in Turkey. This study investigates the consequences of the referendum for the shaping of the political scene in Turkey by analyzing the political parties' campaign strategies, voting patterns, voter preferences, and likely scenarios for the June 2011 general elections.

The report is divided into four main parts that tackle the main questions that the referendum of 2010 raised. First, what is the significance of the September 2010 constitutional referendum in Turkey? Second, what campaign strategies were most effective during the referendum? Third, what can be deduced from the voting patterns and voter preferences? Fourth, what can we predict about the June 2011 general Elections based on voter behaviors during the constitutional referendum of 2010?

The study of the September 2010 constitutional referendum results revealed significant clues as to what could be the results of the June 2011 general elections. The AK Party's referendum campaign strategy, constructed around "democratic freedoms," resonated strongly among voters in Turkey. Having analyzed the geographic distribution of votes during the referendum, this report demonstrates that the opposition parties took the risk of becoming merely local or regional parties while the AK Party was the only party with the political discourse that would address the themes that concerned voters across Turkey.

The June 2011 general elections may prove to be the most important elections in Turkey's recent electoral history. Just as a strong preference for "democratic freedoms" among voters became clear during the referendum, the upcoming general election in Turkey is poised to determine who is to survive Turkey's political landscape over the next decade.

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