

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

TURKEY'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS:
ACT ONE IN THE NATION'S POLITICAL DRAMA

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. KIRIŞCI: Well, good afternoon to you all. I'm delighted that you're able to join us for the launch of our third paper in our Turkey policy paper series, "Turkey Goes to the Ballot Box." There are quite a few copies of it available at the entrance.

I'm Kemal Kirişci, the TUSIAD Senior Fellow at the Center for U.S. and Europe.

Today, Ali Çarkoğlu, a very good, close friend and colleague of mine -- we spent a few years together at Boğaziçi University, at the old Robert College, where from I retired last year, and had the great pleasure and honor of joining this institution.

Ali's currently the Dean of the Administrative Studies School at Koç University. They sit at prime location, right at the exit of Bosphorus Strait into the Black Sea. I suspect and I fear -- I hope it doesn't happen, but it could get very hot these days, depending on how events unfold in Crimea and the Ukraine.

Ali Çarkoğlu is a long student of electoral studies in Turkey. We are very lucky to have him here. We're also lucky that he was able to put this report. He will be talking to us about 25, 30 minutes.

And then Michael Reynolds, from Princeton University -- he teaches at the Near-Eastern Studies there. He has had a long interest in contemporary Turkey studies, but is also a historian.

I'm looking forward -- I should have done it earlier on -- reading his book on *Shattering Empires: Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires*.

Ali has written extensively, of course, many, many academic articles in refereed journals -- but most recently with, again, a good friend and colleague of ours. They published a book called *the Rising Tide of Conservatism in Turkey*.

Michael will be responding to Ali's presentation for about eight or ten

minutes, and then we will open the session to questions and answers. I suspect with what is unfolding in Turkey these days -- and as we enter into an 18-month-long electoral cycle -- I suspect there'll be lots of questions, and I hope that we will have a lively afternoon that will warm us up a bit on an oddly and strangely cold but beautiful day here.

I think, Ali, I'll turn the floor to you, and you'll take it from there. Thanks.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here, among, again, friends, colleagues, and Turkey specialists.

I actually was prepared to make a presentation with PowerPoint, which gives you some comfort in disciplining your talk. But we were late to make the arrangements, so I'll just improvise with the findings that you can find in the report, the details. And the graphs are there.

Perhaps the first question that we should ask ourselves concerns the reasons why this election is important. I mean, this is, after all, a local election. It is not a general election. It's not going to change anything in the Parliament. You might think that, you know, this is just a regular exercise of changing hands in municipalities.

Well, it turns out it's not so. Why? For a number of reasons -- the most, perhaps, important of which is linked to the Gezi events in late May and June of last year -- which, again, took yet another young life just two days ago. The ninth -- I should have stopped counting long time ago -- 14-year-old kid.

And, all of a sudden, hundreds of thousands of people are back on the streets. That's a clear sign that the Gezi mood, if you will, is still alive -- and potentially explosive.

But to what extent will that be reflected onto the electoral theme is questionable. So, we need to evaluate that, and see how that plays out.

The other -- on-surface, at least, unrelated to Gezi event -- the most

important development over the last couple of months is the so-called December 17 process, which is the corruption allegations that were revealed, and which basically led to a “divorce” between the Gülen Movements and the AKP.

Now that we know that the divorce is basically almost official, we have to be worried about how the movement will be replaced. They had their role to play within the AKP government. They have a group of followers, obviously -- quite influential network for the media and business groups, obviously.

This divorce is expected to have some consequences -- not only for the elite-level politics, but, also, for the mass-level politics. A litmus test for the potency of the movement, if you will, to basically strike hard in this game of survival -- it looks like both sides see this as a war.

As a consequence of this, we have corruption on our agenda. I've been following public opinion evaluation of corruption in Turkey for quite some time -- for the last 10 years or so. We've done some surveys for TESEV back in 1999/2002, with Fikret Adaman and Burhan Şenatarlar. You can access those reports.

Back in those days, people were telling us that, you know, corruption is the top three, top four most important issues on the agenda. But this is before the AKP coming to power -- towards the end of the collapse of the centre-rights that brought AKP to power. And that basically ended the traditional centre-right-wing politics as we know it, all right? Corruption actually sealed that collapse.

But ever since, we've done quite a number of surveys, and the report actually goes over those. I think seven or eight surveys that I checked, wherein we asked, in an open-ended fashion, the top two most important problems in Turkey.

In no one of these surveys did we ever find any figure higher than 2.4 percent -- which means, statistically speaking, it's zero, because it's within the margin of

error, all right? It could be zero. It could be five. We basically don't know. But it's in the margins of public agenda. But the latest figure that I could find was from the spring of last year, before the Gezi events, all right?

So, we don't know. I would be much more comfortable if I had, again, a comparable piece of data that asked the same question, and got the answer for you today. We have a survey on the field, but it's just not yet completed.

My hunch is that it will be a little higher than 2.4 percent this time around. But how much higher? Would it be in the range of, you know, 30 percent? I doubt it. But that's speculation, for you to make up your mind.

Last thing that we should be worried about is -- not the last thing, but not the least important is -- the economy of this. In the aftermath of December 17, we've had quite a volatile stock market. Interest rates have been more than doubled overnight on January 25. Within four or five weeks into the crisis, the Central Bank had to raise the interest rates.

Why? Because the foreign investors are the hot money. There are economists among us, so they would know this much better than I do. When the Fed also changed its own interest rates policy, the investment money that actually flows into Turkey and the Turkey stock market basically -- so it's much safer to pull out, and sell whatever they had in the markets, and buy dollars, and transfer the money somewhere else.

When they buy dollars, obviously, what happens is that dollar exchange rate increases, and the Turkish raise automatically the value. Turkish lira lost approximately 20 percent, which effectively means if you were to make your earnings in Turkish liras and transfer the money in dollars, you basically lost more than 25 percent of your income.

So, this is serious economic cost for some segments of the society, but, electorally speaking, this is not important. Why? Because we have 52, 53 million voters. Very few of them actually make their earnings in Turkey, and make their expenses abroad.

So, for them, what matters is inflation. For them, what matters is unemployment. And therein, do we see any deterioration indicators? The last time I checked, the Turkish Statistical Institute had the consumer inflation -- consumer prices rise on the yearly basis -- I think around 7.5, 8 percent.

By American or by European standards, this is high. But by Turkish standards, it's not that high. However, there are here question marks that I'm going to come back to later on that might have some influence on the way the voters might actually change their minds.

Now, obviously, local elections are also important for simply political sequencing of three different elections. We'll have the first one on March 30. We'll have the second one on, I think, August 7 or 10. And then if the first round doesn't result in the election of the President, two weeks later, we'll have another round.

So, by August 20 or so, we will know, who will the President be? Then the scheduled date for general elections is about 10 months later, in June 2015.

So, why do we care about all these developments leading to the local elections? It's primarily because these local elections will set the tone for the next two elections -- elections for the presidency and the election for the next Parliament.

And for all we know, the Prime Minister is preparing himself for the presidency. And, obviously, if the election signals to him that, you know, the presidential election will be an easy race for him, he'll probably come forth as a candidate. If, on the other hand, the local elections signal that, you know, he might actually -- maybe not lose,

but he might have to really campaign hard to win the election -- he might not want to take the risk, basically.

And, obviously, all of this gears us up for a local election that serves as a vote of confidence for the government -- and for the Prime Minister's charismatic leadership. Is he still an important, powerful political leader that can pull yet another electoral victory with about 40 percent of the vote?

Anything below 40 will be questionable. I've listened to colleagues and friends a couple of hours ago, and yesterday, and in other settings. All of us have different ideas about, what is the threshold beyond or below which we will say, "This was a success," or, "It was a failure"? Anyway, I'll make my speculation later on.

Since I'm not helped by the PowerPoint, let me not go over the graft allegations and the events that followed it. But what's important to keep in mind is the following: What Gülen Movement has done is something quite extraordinary.

Why? Because the coalition within the AKP government appears to crack, basically. They already lost nine MPs -- not large enough of a group to form a Parliamentary group, for instance. You need 20 MPs for that.

Hakan Şükür, I think, was the first one to leave the ship.

MR. KIRIŞCI: You should mention that Hakan Şükür --

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Hakan Şükür, I thought -- yeah. But maybe who I thought --

MR. KIRIŞCI: He's not an American football player.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: He's not, yes. But he's a famous Turkish soccer player.

MR. KIRIŞCI: He's a great soccer player. We can tell.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Okay. So, Hakan Şükür and eight others have left the

AKP group. I have to say, I'm a little surprised.

Why? Because the number of MPs that leave the group actually is a good indicator of what elites expect to happen in the future. If they see the ship sinking down, I think there will be lots of people leaving.

The fact that we only had nine is a signal to us that, you know, people are expecting something that the Prime Minister can pull out of this election -- or at least they give him the benefit of the doubt, and they wait until March 31.

If, on the 31st, we see the general evaluation of the elite and the masses as a failure rather than a success for the incumbent government, then, I think, you can expect to see more people leaving, more cracks within the AKP. But that's why, again, this election is also important. It's going to determine whether or not the AKP group is going to stay, you know, strong and solid together. Okay.

So, what are the issues that we should be concerned about in this election? The first issue that I want to attract your attention to is turnout. Political scientists should know a lot about what determines turnout. But I follow the literature. We know almost next to nothing about, you know, why people turn out. We can say a few things in general terms, but the error term in all our explanatory models is quite large.

But what we know is this: If people think that the outcome of the election is almost certain, they'll stay home, and they'll watch TV. They'll do something else. Okay? The cost of going out and casting your vote will not let you out of the house, basically. You would want to stay home and enjoy the family life -- or, you know, do something else.

If we have a predominant party getting into the election, confident to pull out 40, 50 percent of the vote -- if you have 40 percent of the vote, I can assure you that the next runner-up will not have more than 20, 25 percent, all right?

So, the difference in a first-past-the-post-election system -- that's the second expectation we have -- in proportion representation, it's always valuable to cast your vote, because the parties will get their seats in accordance to the percentage of vote that they receive. If you are above 10 percent, of course, in the Turkish case, you will get a seat, and your vote will have an influence on your party's seats.

But in a first-past-the-post-election system, if your operant gets one more vote, then he or she wins the election, and all of the votes cast for the other candidates are wasted, basically.

That's why, in a mayoral election, if you think that the winner is already known, and there is no way a serious candidate can challenge that candidate, you would not go out to vote.

But the same is true for both the opposition, as well as the winners.

So, again, the outcome is still uncertain. Will those people who stay home be mostly from the winning party or from the opposition party? Because they will both have the same incentives to stay home.

So, it's important for the political parties to mobilize their supporters to come out and vote. The party that has the organization, that can actually knock from door to door to urge people to get out and cast their votes, is more likely to win in the first-past-the-post-election. It's all likely to win in any election, but especially in first-past-the-post-election, this matters most.

And what we know from past research is that that kind of mobilizing organizational power simply doesn't exist in the opposition. I mean, the CHP, the MHP, they don't have the organizational networks that would canvass door-to-door, and pull people to the election booths.

However, if you notice, the Prime Minister is very frequently making

references to the Gülen Movement activists who apparently -- that's his claim, not mine -- going from door-to-door, and campaign against Erdoğan and his government. And he says, you know, he actually urges his own people to counteract that campaign -- which means Erdoğan is very much up to this theory of, you know, turnout, and he knows that his organization should come out and mobilize.

If he's aware of this, I think he's going to use this. And they will have a good organizational effort to bring bear on voters to vote.

To cut a long story short, turnout is also important in this particular election context, primarily because what we know from past research everywhere, as well as in Turkey, those who do not vote are more likely to be younger voters, rather than older voters, for a number of reasons.

Younger voters have to work. In the U.S., it's a working day. The elections are on Tuesdays. In Turkey, it's on Sunday, but, still, younger people's opportunity costs are higher, all right? So, they are more likely to stay home -- or do something else, because they can't afford to go out and vote.

Plus, younger people are also known to be alienated from politics -- more so than the older generations. Their party identification is not yet solidified. They have not yet voted for the same party over and over for a number of elections.

So, electoral behavior has not become a habit formed by younger generations. And they are mobile. I mean, you are registered in Izmir, but you go to school in Istanbul. So, you have to basically jump on a bus or a plane to actually cast your vote -- and then you say, "No, I can't afford it, first. Secondly, I don't have the time," you will say and stay home.

And this keeps the younger voters out of elections. Why is this important? Well, guess what? I mean, if the younger voters are not voting, the Gezi

protestors are also not voting. And what type of younger voters will be more likely to vote? Not the Gezi type, but the counter-Gezi type will be more likely to vote.

So, unless the opposition makes a conscious effort to bring the younger voters to vote, I think AKP has a much larger chance to bring their own younger voters to vote, and basically turn this to their advantage.

But no matter what, I did a very basic analysis. In local elections, turnout tends to be lower than general elections. And in this election, it could be anywhere between 70 percent to 85 percent, all right? The higher it is, the better for the opposition, you might think, but that also depends on what type of younger voters will go out and vote.

I mean, I've read quite a number of articles about the Gezi movement. And one important diagnosis that is shared by many is that this is not a protesting group, a group of protestors who are keen on electoral participation. They are mostly alienated. They might protest. They might be engaged in civil society movement. They might be engaged in environmental movements, but tell them to go out and vote. They'll say, "That's *passé*. The vote doesn't change anything. It doesn't count."

So, they are very cynical, and it takes a real effort on the part of political parties to convince them to be part of this process. That's what I don't observe in Turkish politics, as we speak.

If it occurs, it doesn't occur in the opposition. It's more likely to occur in the governing party. So, I'm preparing myself for a surprise.

I'm about to be done.

Two factors are important in voting behavior almost everywhere, but it is so in Turkey, as well. We find that short-term factors and long-term factors are important in party choice, in determining party choice. Long-term factors, by their very definition,

are impossible or next-to-impossible to actually manipulate, change. You can't do anything about them. You take them as given.

And what are those factors? Those are, you know, ideological predispositions of your voters. What do we know about that? What we know is that, over the past two, three decades, the Turkish electorate has moved predominantly from a centrist position to a right-of-centre position, which can only help the nationalist opposition, but not the CHP opposition.

And, most likely, that creates a good environment for a conservative, Islamist -- no matter how you want to call them -- a new Turkish right-wing that is represented by the AKP.

So, in Turkish, we have a saying: They open up their shop in a nice place. So, it serves well.

So, that factor of ideological predispositions -- being right-of-centre is not likely to change, and it's going to help AKP. And AKP was -- and Erdoğan himself was very effective in communicating this, and polarizing right after Gezi movement, rendering his whole argumentation targeting the liberals who are sleeping under the tents, drinking -

MR. KIRIŞCI: Boozing.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: -- and boozing, yes. The argument is actually very effective to polarize and strengthen your conservative, right-of-centre electorate, all right? And I think he's making a conscious effort to keep his long-term, committed voters intact.

The short-term factors can, obviously, be manipulated. It depends on mostly policy evaluations, performance in different policy areas. Are they successful in their policy towards Syria? That's not very important for the time being, in the minds of the Turks. The foreign policy issue is very complicated, but they see refugees --

hundreds of thousands of them -- and we've had bombs exploding all over the place. And that evaluation might go against the government.

Most important in these policy evaluations are those concerning the economy. That's why I noted at the very beginning that the events of December 17 are having their influence over the economy, but those developments -- to actually sink in, you need a couple of months' time.

It's short term, but it's not one, two, three months short-term period. It's going to take at least a year to observe what's happening in the economy. And we don't have that much time. Within two weeks, we will have elections. And, as of today, I don't know -- again, I wish I had the data with me -- but how do people evaluate the performance of their government in the economic policy area?

If they are satisfied with it, then Erdoğan will not have any trouble. Why? Because they have the long-term factors working for them. Short-term factors will then work for them. And they should have smooth sailing.

However, one thing that we should keep in mind is that the younger generations are "spoiled." Why? Because for the last 12 years, we've had quite a comfortable economic scene. I mean, our generation would remember inflation rates in excess of 70 percent, 80 percent --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Lines, too.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Yes -- I mean, if you are as old as we are. Most of this group will not remember the lines, but, you know, back in the late '70s, you would remember getting into a line to buy a light bulb, yes.

This generation is used to, you know, buying imported stuff.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Abundance.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Yes. I mean, I had to go to an illegal, underground

market to buy Converse sneakers. These younger generations -- I mean, they buy them from, you know, their neighborhood --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Shopping malls.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: -- shopping malls.

But that actually creates a very critical danger for AKP. Since they are spoiled, having inflation rise from five percent to seven percent might not mean much for me -- because I say seven percent is nothing. I'm used to 50 percent. But the younger generation, if they are just about to start -- or if they just started working and just making the ends meet -- they are not used to high inflation. And they say, "Oh, inflation has not risen from five to seven, but inflation has risen by 40 percent," they'll say.

That's a completely different packaging of the same data. Are you with me? So, two percentage points means nothing for me, but that two percent is 40 percent increase for them. So, that actually -- the success of AKP now turns out to work against them. And that's one danger that I see that might hurt the AKP.

But Kemal told me that I should be talking a little bit about -- maybe we should leave that to --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Yeah, I think leave that here.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: All right.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Let's turn to Michael.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Okay.

MR. KIRIŞCI: But let me thank Ali for, really, a fascinating presentation here.

Some of the factors that he's been referring to, like especially turnout rates and the role of the young in electoral behavior are factors, dare I say, somewhat gray, difficult to follow, maybe technical. But I think it was very helpful, the way you

framed it into a Turkish context.

But I'd like to get some credit for it, because, though he has sounded a bit critical of Brookings Institution because we didn't make a PowerPoint facility available, I am trying to wean him out of PowerPoint presentations, which, sometimes, I think, do get a bit overwhelming for the audience.

And in this way, I think you got your message --

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: That's true, yes.

MR. KIRIŞCI: -- in a much clearer way. You may have had to sweat a bit --

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Yes, yes, I did sweat a bit. But, I mean, I had, like, 30 different slides. They actually saved you from my Turkey slides.

MR. KIRIŞCI: I think now, I'd like to turn to Michael Reynolds, who will take a different perspective on the upcoming election. Then we can return to many different aspects -- and more colorful aspects -- as to what might happen in Istanbul, in Ankara, and Izmir.

Michael?

DR. REYNOLDS: Thank you, Kemal, for inviting me to comment on Ali's paper. And let me also thank Ali for writing what really is an excellent paper -- one that I commend everyone here to read. It's very clear. It's well-written, and it's not very long. And it makes a number of very provocative points, and it's those points I want to respond.

I found the paper, by and large, persuasive. And so what I thought I would do is highlight those points that I thought were the most important ones -- or the ones that I found most provocative.

And I'll raise a bunch of questions, and maybe Ali can answer those questions that he chooses to. Maybe some people in the audience can follow up on

them, if they find them of interest.

In other words, I'm not going to expect Ali, you, to answer every single one of these questions. But I think it raises a number of very important and interesting questions.

I think the basic theme of the paper is that the end of the AKP's supremacy is not imminent -- that, you know, the predictions that we're going to see -- the fall of the AKP -- these predictions are still premature.

Now one might think, okay, we're looking at a party that's had remarkable electoral success now for over a decade. What's surprising or interesting about a paper saying, "Well, this is likely to continue"?

That doesn't sound very interesting, but, of course, what does make it quite interesting is, this prediction comes despite the turbulence that we've seen inside of Turkish politics -- in particular, with the Gezi protests, which that has not died away, but more, especially, is the corruption scandal in December that's still ongoing -- that has my mind reeling, at least, trying to -- not make sense of the corruption scandal, because I think the weight has not knocked Erdoğan and the AKP like one would assume it would.

And so that's why I found that this paper -- its prediction, really, is, in many ways, very counterintuitive -- and, therefore, worthwhile paying attention to.

One of the most interesting things about the paper, I thought, was how it openly addresses the rift between the AKP and the Gülen or Hizmet Movement.

One thing the paper suggests I thought was interesting -- I guess I'd like to press you on this, Ali -- is, you suggested that it was probably the debates over foreign policy that provoked the split. And I find that plausible, but I'd like you to maybe follow up. Do you really think that's the key thing -- differences over foreign policy?

You cited, one, the Mavi Marmara Incident, the investigation of Hakan

Fidan -- who is the Director appointed by Erdoğan -- Director of Turkish National Intelligence.

And then you also -- maybe policy differences over Iran. And, again, I find that policy -- are there other things going on inside of Turkey that might explain it? And foreign policy maybe is a secondary issue.

I mean, I don't know if anyone can know this, other than those who are actually in the ranks, so to speak, fighting this fight. But I thought that was an interesting suggestion, that it might be foreign policy.

Another point I thought very interesting in the paper is, you suggest that the electoral success of the AKP bodes ill for the Gülen Movement -- that you would see that there's a strong likelihood that the AKP will succeed in crushing the movement. I hadn't thought about that, but, as you pointed out, the AKP is in charge of the state. That does give it a lot of resources.

And that's another question, maybe, if you could address -- what is the likelihood that you would see -- or at least people in the audience can think about -- that the AKP might succeed. And maybe I should say Erdoğan -- what is the likelihood that he might succeed in really crushing the Gülen Movement?

At the end of the paper, you suggested -- there was a pessimistic sort of scenario -- an optimistic scenario with the AKP winning elections. And if I recall, with the optimistic scenario, one of the things you thought would be -- with the elimination of the Gülen Movement, that would be seen as a triumph of openness and democracy. And part of this scenario would also see the AKP proceeding with an opening, with the Kurds rewriting the constitution and attaining some sort of resolution of the Kurdish question.

And I was wondering if -- of course, maybe in the negative scenario, where the AKP continues to take more of an authoritarian turn -- would, therefore, the

elimination of the Gülen Movement -- would the Gülen Movement then be seen as the last gasp of Turkish civil society -- that this is a group that saw the wrongdoing inside of the state, exposed it as good patriots, and then was punished for it?

So, I thought, you know, two very different spins that could be put on the potential demise of the Gülen Movement, which is quite a prediction or possibility.

I think one of the interesting points you made early on in the paper is explaining the success of the AKP. You suggested that the success of the AKP in its early years had a lot to do with its need to balance a variety of constituencies -- both within the AKP, but then, more importantly, with, also, groups outside of the AKP. And that forced it to really be very careful and moderate in its policies, and this explains its success.

And in part, I suppose, maybe the overreach that the AKP has engaged in is not so much maybe due to the strength of the AKP, but the flip side of that, which is the weakness of the opposition -- which, I always think, really, Turkey's biggest problem has been not so much a strong AKP, but a weak opposition, which is disastrous for any democracy.

And you do suggest in the paper that the CHP is becoming not simply the party of the centre-left, but the centre-right has moved in that direction. And I thought that was -- so do you see this as likely to push the CHP to become a credible opposition, or is it simply the remnants of the centre-right are joining with the remnants of the centre-left, and it really doesn't mean much?

I suspect there's a good chance that -- looking from the outside, it seems that's the more likely scenario -- because I think the big problem with the opposition is the lack of a credible vision for a Turkish future.

So, that was one question -- is the CHP likely to really become a credible

opposition? Will it have a vision that can mobilize people, and be convincing to the Turkish electorate?

Maybe the flipside of that question is, the AKP doesn't remain Erdoğan's party. I've always been struck by Turkish politics -- how the parties were so much a reflection of the individual who leads them.

And the AKP, at least, early on, was something of an exception. It was a party that emerged around an idea. It had a vision. It had an ideology, a platform. Now maybe that was a mistaken vision in the beginning. But at some point, it clearly did become Erdoğan's party. And it is today. What moment it became is maybe a matter of discussion -- it always was, or it was after 2007, really after 2011.

But that's another question that the paper provoked in my mind -- is, what is the future of the AKP? Are Erdoğan and the AKP synonymous, or is there a possibility that there will be, as people talk about Abdullah Gül maybe represents another constituency in the party? There might be other people inside of the AKP. Might that be another way out of the impasse?

You predict, most likely, we will see continued AKP's electoral success. However, this is a very big change. The AKP will be much weaker in its ability to implement policies. It's not going to have the free hand that it's had before.

And, you know, we can see the impact, I think, right now -- with paralyzed Turkey foreign policy, particularly against Syria. Another remarkable thing is everything that's going on in Ukraine, Turkey's by and large silent. A few comments have been made, but Turkey's preoccupied with its problems.

And two years ago, I think we would have seen a great deal more -- at least rhetoric, perhaps even action -- with what's going on in Ukraine.

But, of course, besides Syria and Ukraine, there are many other issues

around Turkey's borders. Iraq's still very unstable. The Caucasus is not exactly a stable environment. You know, Cyprus, Egypt -- very much in play. All these areas that Turkey was quite involved in, those areas have not settled done, and those problems have not gone away.

So, that's the question -- the AKP's potential -- if not paralyze; it may be too strong a word -- but the fact that it may not be able to move as decisively inside of Turkey as it was in the past. This has implications for Turkish foreign policy, but it also has great implications, of course, for Turkish domestic policies.

One of the biggest hopes that people have had for the AKP -- and Erdoğan in particular -- is that this might be the party or the individual who's able to actually achieve some kind of resolution of the Kurdish question -- which, I think, is really the biggest problem facing Turkey.

And so that would be kind of a final question -- what are the implications of the elections for the possibility that Erdoğan -- is there any chance that he's going to be able to move on this issue, or is he now so boxed in -- it's still a very controversial question.

Does he have the political capital to spare on trying to push for resolution of the Kurdish question -- which many people saw bound up with rewriting the constitution, which, in turn, bound up with Erdoğan's aspirations to become President, et cetera. Is that out of the question now, the resolution of the Kurdish question?

And those were my thoughts. And, again, I really recommend people do read this paper. It's, again, well-written. It's clear, and it's not that long -- and very provocative -- in the best sense.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks, Michael. I really appreciate the long series of questions you've raised -- but they are precisely the kind of questions that I think do a lot

of justice to the substance of the report.

But, as Michael just said, Ali, don't feel obliged to address all those questions, because I know there'll be many that will be fired from the floor.

So, give you a crack for maybe five minutes or so, and then we'll turn to the audience. Thank you very much, Michael.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: I'll start with the very last one -- the Kurdish issue is, obviously, perhaps, the defining issue for the republic at-large and its success in the future. Will Turkey be able to continue in a peaceful coexistence with the Kurds?

AKP has offered, I think, the most significant attempt to resolve this problem. We have to give that to them. I think they saw the problem as a priority. They acted on it, but I think now the plans of the Prime Minister become the next President actually is creating counterproductive dynamics.

I'm on record to suggest to him that, you know, he should forget about becoming the next President if he wants to resolve the Kurdish problem.

Why? Because, then, the whole issue becomes one of an electoral exchange. Wait until I win the next presidential election, and the Kurdish leadership basically becomes somewhat paralyzed to act in the necessary demands that is necessitated by any sensible opening.

And, you know, if you listen to the Kurdish leadership, you see that, you know, they work without any legal framework, for instance, and this is making them very vulnerable for future rounds of negotiations.

But the AKP leadership cannot deliver on that. Why? Primarily because they're afraid to lose votes in the west, in a presidential election. Well, I mean -- but if you don't --

MR. KIRIŞCI: It's a Gordian knot.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: If you quit that aspiration of the presidency, everybody knows that, you know, AKP can't get a secure vote in a general election, and you can actually continue along the lines of consensus building -- and include more from the opposition -- invite the CHP more into the negotiations, rather than trying to get this deal of winning the presidential election with the support of the Kurdish vote.

So, I think this is an important consideration, and it is likely that, in this local election, the HDP, BDP, west, east division of labor could prove itself to become a significant electoral player. And that might actually prepare them for a more meaningful role to play after having obtained a larger electoral support -- let's say around eight percent to ten percent of the vote.

Then, of course, the BDP will have more self-confidence to claim that they are the party of not only the Kurdish regions, but also for the larger country. I think, if you follow what's happening in Ula, my hometown in Izmir, I mean, it's shameful to see the attacks to BDP representatives all over country. You don't observe this only in the conservative provinces, you know Yozgat, Çorum, but you observe them in Ula, in Izmir. The slow town of Ula has these attacks.

This is a challenge, but I think if we survive this challenge, I think Turkey will be a stronger entity by having the Kurdish party basically contribute to the electoral and political negotiations, by taking a more active role.

That can actually help "control" more authoritarian tendencies of the AKP, as well, because, every now and then, people in Turkey came to the conclusion that the only opposition you have is the BDP's opposition. I mean, you don't get to hear other parties that much.

So, it's important that, you know, this local election provides a new ground for electoral engagement between not only the Kurdish parties and the AKP, but,

also, the CHP and the Kurdish parties -- and the MHP also having a role to play in these links and negotiations. This is perhaps asking too much, I know, but I think it's still a possibility.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Maybe for those of you who are not deeply versed on acronyms in Turkish politics -- BDP stands for Peace and Democracy Party, and mostly represents the Kurdish electorate now. MHP is the right-wing nationalist party. And CHP is the social democrat republican -- the oldest party on the scene there.

And maybe this would be a chance to respond very quickly to Michael's question about weak opposition --

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Sure.

MR. KIRIŞCI: And then we'll turn to the -- for --

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Okay. Well, Turkey now has a predominant party. Predominant parties, the likes of the Turkish predominant party, can be found in Japan -- Liberal Democrats -- or --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Italy.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: -- or Italy -- the Christian Democrats -- or you go to Sweden -- I think Labor Party --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Social Democrats.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: -- Social Democrats up there. This is a party system wherein the outcome of the election becomes not a puzzle, basically. Everybody knows who's the winner.

And in successive elections, a party continues to win elections -- typically, three elections in a row is the criteria that we look in a party system.

But very rarely will you see a party system wherein a party will win three times in a row, with increasing its own vote share. I mean, Maggie Thatcher had a

predominant party, but she won with declining vote shares. So, what AKP has accomplished is a rarity.

What's important in a predominant party system, what creates this kind of repeated wins is precisely the lack of credible opposition. Obviously, if you did have a credible opposition, then it's very difficult to score big-time in elections.

So, almost by definition, it is necessary to have a weak opposition if you happen to have a predominant party.

So, will the CHP be able to succeed in raising its vote shares? I mean, this is one election where, I mean, they cannot fail to increase their elections, their electoral support -- you would think.

But, you know, how much of a raise are we talking about? I mean, the first thing I noted is that you kept saying, "You predicted this; you predicted that" -- thank you, but I refuse to have made any predictions. A prediction is very difficult. I would claim it's impossible for us, the academics, to do.

But what we observe in different polling results -- and this is public information. I mean, if you go into websites of different newspapers, you will find -- if you are fastidious, as we were, you would find 75 or so polling results published over the last six months, all right? Not a few -- quite a number of them.

And I basically summarize that in the paper. You can find the summary there in, I think, figure two.

What you see is interesting, because prior to the draft allegations, the AKP appears to have about 50 percent in, like, three or four different polling results that got published.

After that, it loses by about 10 percentage points, but then it recovers. And now we seem to have about, on average, 42 percent reported for AKP.

This is not my research. I don't find these polling results at all credible. I mean, if you are a fan of Nate Silver, he has a famous book now from Penguin. Since it's not my book, I can actually recommend that to all of you. It's a very interesting book.

You know, he predicted in all 50 states for the last presidential elections in the U.S. What he does is, he gives credibility scores to different polling firms. So, I said, "If I don't like the polling firms, then I should give credibility scores to them."

So, I did. I had, like, 18 different criteria. I shouldn't give the average, but it ranges between 38 percent to 68 percent. So, the highest scorer in all of those 75 polls got 75, 78 percent of those 18 questions.

So, the credibility of these polling results is very low. Nevertheless, on average, they can't miss the whole picture unless they are all sold out, basically. And I doubt that they can manipulate the results that much. I mean, we've seen -- if you follow Turkish politics, we've seen, you know, Prime Minister talking to one of the newspaper editors, and asking him, you know, to do something -- not him; somebody else.

Anyway, don't quote me on that.

But we know that at least a few have been manipulated. But give one percentage, take one more from others --

MR. KIRIŞCI: The trend is there.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: The trend is there. They are losing, but they're not losing that much.

And that's where we are. But these are not predictions.

MR. KIRIŞCI: One prediction that maybe we would be able to do from the trends is that, as the elections approach, there might be more recordings and cassettes, et cetera, that might come out.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Sure.

MR. KIRIŞCI: I'd like to turn to the floor and maybe take three questions, and then we'll turn back to Ali. And, hopefully, we'll be able to have yet another -- all right.

Cathy -- yeah, the microphone is coming. Two questions from the front, and maybe one further behind.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much for a very interesting speech. And I have two questions -- or, actually, you answered the second question.

But what role are the non-Muslim minorities playing in the local elections, especially in Istanbul -- because even MHP for example, have Armenian candidate. Can you say this one?

And my second question was, do you think that the evidence of the last two days can really have influenced Erdoğan's score?

Thank you.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks.

Phil -- if you could maybe just mention your name, too, and --

MR. WILLIAMS: Yeah, I'm Phil Williams. First of all, Kemal, I want to thank you for not finding the means to get the PowerPoint up; otherwise, Ali might have missed his own plane tonight back to Turkey. I have basically two questions.

One is, assuming social media doesn't get shut down in the next two weeks, does social media provide a platform for more effective organization, potentially, than one would expect in the absence of real organization to mobilize the youth vote?

And my second question is, I think we're counting out the Gülenists too much and too early. I think that part of their objection -- and part of the objection that they've had coming out of foreign policy, to make it real simple, is that it's bad for business.

And I think if the economic and philosophical principles that underline their movement -- and Hizmet Movement -- not just the foreign policy implications of problems in Egypt or Syria -- suggests to me that they have a longer and more significant role to play.

I'd like you to comment on that. Thank you.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks. Cathy, there's a question sort of halfway down the aisle -- on the right.

MR. COUGORES: Hello. Thank you very much for your comment. My name's Stephen Cougores. I'm with the American Atlantic Institute.

Can you please comment on Erdoğan removing and reassigning police and top prosecutors in corruption investigations -- yet the lack of strong political opposition makes it so he is still a candidate for presidency. And what does it say about the AKP's notion of democracy?

MR. KIRIŞCI: Okay. Ali, you have five questions -- and better than three.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: I'll start with the very last one (inaudible).

Yes, I mean, the majoritarian tendencies of AKP have long been noted. I mean, we knew from almost very beginning that the party and its leadership -- and their notion of democracy, basically, is, you know, get the most votes, and you'll do whatever you want.

And every now and then, especially during the course of the debates concerning the presidential system, I mean, we have to be really attentive. And we couldn't believe our ears, as we say in Turkish -- that, you know, Erdoğan's conception of presidential system is one wherein he doesn't have to deal with the Congress, nor the Supreme Court.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Nor media.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Nor media, of course. Media is a complete nuisance. And he has to do whatever it takes to get things done.

So, he basically doesn't have a clue as to how Presidents in White House has to deal every year with their own budgets and --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Every day.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Every day, yes. I mean, you know, the balance of power basis of the presidential system in its ideal form in the U.S. is completely missed in the mind of the AKP leadership. I mean, they would talk about the U.S. as an example of presidential system, but they'll never tell you when and why the federal system has shut down, for instance. It has its own problems, and he basically believe that these are nonexistent.

So, these moves that you mentioned about, you know, getting rid of the prosecutors, and changing laws that have been approved by a referendum, for instance - - you know, these are all issues that can only comfort someone like Erdoğan, basically. And you cannot defend these on the basis of, you know, solid democratic principles.

The Gülenists -- why? First of all, I also tend to think that, you know, we have not yet seen the very last move in that chess game.

MR. KIRIŞCI: War.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: War -- or chess game, let's say. There might be a lot of new openings. Speculation -- there might be its influences, as well. But are they moved by trade worries? I'm not sure.

But no matter what these worries are, I think the movement has a solid grounding in a thin layer of elites in Anatolia. I say "thin" because this is not a movement that has millions of followers, for instance.

But this is an influential network, and it's important to observe whether they lose -- and when they do lose, whether they'll go under the surface, and basically hide away from the public scene. This is almost unthinkable in the way the movement is so public nowadays.

But if the war ends in a very Ottoman fashion, then it will have implications for the way Turkey civil society will act in the future.

So, social media is effective, but not very effective, I have to say. It's effective for protest mobilization. But is it effective for, you know, getting the vote out? I'm not sure.

MR. KIRIŞCI: It's a very interesting question on non-Muslims.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Yes, that's next on my list.

MR. KIRIŞCI: My job is to police the questions.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Yes, okay.

I notice that parties are, nowadays, more sensitive. In the '50s, we used to have seats earmarked for Jewish -- and, I think, also, for Armenian -- one seat for each. This is a gentlemen's agreement. It's not written in the law, but the parties would have a representative from each community.

I mean, in the Özalyears, we had one. I remember one Jewish MP -- in the Parliament, a prominent businessman.

But, to my knowledge, we no longer have that in BDP -- maybe one. I'm not sure -- yes -- MP, yes.

The BDP is very --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Sensitive.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: -- sensitive to minority and women representation.

But other parties, we don't have that. Now that MHP even has shown an Armenian

candidate, I think it's only a good sign.

But mobilizing the non-Muslim minorities have very little --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Return.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: -- return for the parties. The numbers of these groups -- you would know -- it's very small. Even in Istanbul, we have less than 100,000 in total, to my knowledge. But it is important that these groups have their own representatives in councils -- in municipal councils. And if they can win a municipality, like in Kurtuluş I think it would be a new era for Turkish local elections.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Mm-hmm. Let's go for another round.

Cathy, yes, please -- and then -- yes, Cathy, there -- the gentleman -- can you just mention your name?

MR. SCHLEIFER: Yes. Hi -- Yigal Schleifer with the eurasianet website.

Over the last few months, I've heard more and more people expressing concerns over election fraud of some kind. And, initially, it sounded sort of panicked and maybe hysterical. But, then, looking at, you know, recent events and the government's desire to hang onto power, you know, suddenly the questions become a bit more relevant.

So, I was wondering, based on previous experience, how realistic are these concerns? And if they are realistic, you know, what are the methods?

MR. KIRIŞCI: Yeah, very good question.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Can I immediately answer?

MR. KIRIŞCI: Yeah, go ahead, please.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Thank you very much, (inaudible), for this.

This is one election I'm most fearful of having these rumors. In every election, we'll have these rumors -- and we've had them. But in Turkish electoral

tradition, we have very few and very limited fraud in elections. The famous one is 1946 election -- you know, manipulated by the then-single party.

But after 1950, in smaller constituencies, we'll have these claims and real fraud. But the most important example I remember is from (inaudible) always gives this example that, you know, the first thing in the morning, the mufdar will take the polling boxes to the district election committee and say, "All right, here are our results." It's 9:00 in the morning. He says, you know, "We already voted yes to this, and the results are here."

So, these kind of examples are a rarity in Turkey. But these rumors -- again, in the social media-based rumors -- every now and then, I would receive a re-tweet from some unknown source, claiming that the address-based population registry system is rigged.

You have to check your name -- and check other people, as well, which is very strange. See if unrecognized people are on your list.

You know, in a neighborhood like mine, in Istanbul, how would I be able to recognize everybody? I know. It's impossible.

So, these rumors are dangerous, if the pressure upon the media creates an environment where almost anything goes, basically. Then the rumors will actually be a reality, and people will react.

So, my fear is that on March 31, if people feel that the outcome of Istanbul election is very close, very close -- so up to the day of the election, the expectation is that the election result will be apart only by one percent or less, and then we see that it's 15 percentage points between the winner and the loser -- the first runner-up.

Then I think people will react to this, and that's the danger.

And I think that can actually push people to the streets, even, and that's why it should be avoided -- because once we lose confidence in the election results, that will be the end of Turkish democracy as we know it, basically.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Ari -- I mean, if I may just chip in very quickly -- the way I look at Turkish democracy right now is that there's only one pillar that is holding it. And the fact that -- how many is it, 14 or 15 general elections have been held since 1950 -- and, by and large, they are recognized as free and fair.

If a crack occurs in that pillar, I think we risk being in serious trouble.

Cathy, just here.

Mr. OZCAN: Thank you very much for your presentation Yurter Ozcan, CHP representative to United States.

The other day, I was in a meeting, and somebody asked me whether I get offended when they say opposition's not successful. And I said, "No, because if we are successful enough, we will not have any opposition; we will be ruling." So, constructive feedback is always appreciated; thank you.

I just want to make a few comments about what CHP is doing differently in these upcoming local elections.

For the first time ever, we had close to a million people who voted in primaries, as well as some of the surveys that we've cast as a party. And despite some of the criticism, you know, we've placed the strongest candidates in every single location -- even though some of them came from MHP. Some of them were previously excluded from CHP, including in the case of Istanbul and Ankara.

And I think the second most important thing that we will change this time is, basically, the effort to take the party from the left side of the political spectrum to the center -- because we realize that, you know, times change. And now, in today's world --

not only in Turkey; in today's world -- the battle is not over ideologies. The battle is over values, and I think that's something that we witnessed during Gezi moment, when people from different walks of life came together in the name of democracy and freedom.

And I'm off to Turkey tonight for three weeks, so it's going to be an exciting trip.

And I'm very optimistic, actually, about how things are going to go. I know it's not going to be a very sudden change, but I think we are going to make some strides in a more democratic Turkey.

Thank you.

MR. KIRIŞCI: All right. Thank you.

Well, if there are no more questions, I have a question for Ali that I think many of you may have in the back of your minds.

Ali, could you maybe reflect a little bit on how the elections for Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir might unfold, and the significance of them?

And then we'll call it a day.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Okay. The one thing that you missed for not having the PowerPoint is precisely this. It's precisely this, because we didn't have enough space in the report to include, you know, province by province polling results that got published in the newspapers. So, my assistant and I went over all of those, and tracked them over time.

What you see is, in Istanbul, there is a comfortable lead of about -- I don't know -- about 10 percentage points between the AKP and the CHP.

Now this might mean absolutely nothing, because it's February. It's before Balkans death. You know, it's a snapshot that reflects at least a month or six weeks before our present day. So, things might change -- might have already changed.

I don't know. But the trend, it looks like there's some comfort there.

In Ankara, again, Gökçek seems to have a lead. But there's a slight tendency upward in both MHP and CHP, in the last few polling results that got published.

In Izmir, the gap between the two parties are smaller than the gap we observe in Istanbul and Ankara, which is a surprise to me. Being from Izmir, I thought the CHP would have a much larger margin, but it looks like AKP has closed down the margin. But, still, CHP is slightly above. But --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Yurter is going to Turkey tonight, so things might change.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: Yes. Well, I think -- yeah.

SPEAKER: That's not reflected in the polls.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: It's not yet reflected. That factor is not yet taken into account.

But the problem with the opposition is that, you know, they are also competing with one another. I mean, when MHP rises, then CHP votes go down. I mean, that's the main problem for the opposition.

In Eskişehir, the gap in favor of CHP appears --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Solid.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: -- solid. But those of you who follow Turkish politics would have noticed that, you know, Prime Minister Erdoğan took his time, and went to Eskişehir -- personally attacked the CHP candidate for being old.

You know, this is unthinkable in other parts of the world.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Yeah, but --

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: He also said that he called Vladimir Putin, and that the Tartars should be okay in Crimea. Eskişehir is a city that is closely associated with the Tartar population in Turkey.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Yes, there's something going on there.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: There's something going on.

So, I mean, it's a survival game. They are using every single tool in their hands to win the election.

In Adana, the race is very close. All three parties are about the same votes. MHP, CHP, AKP -- but I think in Adana or in somewhere else, one of the party candidates actually withdrew in support of the other, right -- very recently; I'm not sure.

So, that kind of backdoor negotiations between the opposition parties might actually take place.

In Antalya, the race is, again, close. I mean, within the margin of error -- but MHP seems to also increase its vote share there.

In Diyarbakır, the BDP candidate (inaudible) has very comfortable lead -- and it's --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Widening.

DR. ÇARKOĞLU: -- even widening.

But I have to also note here that if you are interested, you can actually go into <http://www.oypusulasi.org/> wherein we actually put a simple map for placing the parties, as well as yourself, on a simple map to observe which party is closer to you -- or which candidate is closer to you -- in eight cities and a generic Turkey setting.

Those eight cities are Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Diyarbakır, Antalya, Samsun, and Kayseri -- so one from each region, basically.

And what's interesting to me was that in Ankara, the ideological content of the competition actually is pulling the candidates apart from one another -- while in Diyarbakır, it's actually pushing them towards the center.

And in Izmir, Antalya, in other Anatolian towns, what you observe is that

the national dimension of the debate actually dominates over the local dimension -- which is an oddity, because you're not electing Erdoğan for your mayor in Izmir. But the debate is about the national issues, more than the local issues.

So, these are -- I mean, we have 81 races, 81 provincial races -- you know, more than 900 district races -- so it's a mess out there. But I think this would give you an idea as to where the issue of content of the competition actually shapes up.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Michael, before I end, I was wanting to ask you if you had any final comments or points to make.

DR. REYNOLDS: No, other than, again, to recommend that people read the report. That's --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Yeah, all right. Thanks, Michael. Maybe your privilege is, you won't have to vote at these.

DR. REYNOLDS: Yeah, I think I'll take that.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Well, allow me to thank Ali, as well as Michael, for this occasion.

And thank you all so, and I hope this occasion has given you a chance to have a little bit better understanding of the municipal elections coming up.

Our next paper will actually be on energy. I think it's bound to be a hot topic, given, again, the developments in the region. And it will take place on April 28.

Thank you.

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