

THE 2019 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN TURKEY: A DEMOCRATIC EARTHQUAKE

The 2019 municipal election had surprising consequences for both the incumbent and opposition actors in Turkey. The main opposition party won both Ankara and Istanbul for the first time in 25 years and swept the coastal provinces of the west and south. The Republican People's Party's (CHP) integrative coalition umbrella of secular-urban nationalists and Kurdish voters had a significant impact in winning in the west. Furthermore, the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) political and electoral survival has come under question for the first time in years. If the CHP-won municipalities can take democratizing steps and perform well in local politics, the balance of power in the existing Turkish party system could radically change in favor of democratizing Turkey in the medium run.

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The 2019 municipal elections were a political and electoral earthquake for both the incumbent actors in Turkey and President Erdoğan. For the first time in 25 years, the ruling right-wing conservative AKP lost the municipal elections decisively while the center-left CHP swept the major provinces and won Istanbul. The loss of Istanbul and Ankara, the two largest metropolises, was a major blow to the political elites of the People's Alliance (*Cumhur İttifakı*), a right-wing coalition between the conservative AKP and the radical-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP). The CHP won in almost all major cities in addition to the western and southern coastal provinces. The CHP's electoral breakthrough would not have been possible without the support provided by the Good Party (İYİ) and the Kurdish-left Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). This municipal election is interpreted by some experts as the potential beginning of the end for the AKP and President Erdoğan.¹

Two major blocs contested in the municipal election besides several fringe parties and the HDP. The AKP and MHP formed the People's Alliance, pursuing a cooperative strategy based on the electoral conditions and histories of electoral districts. Likewise, the Nation Alliance (*Millet İttifakı*), between the center-left CHP and center-right İYİ, worked with a similar electoral mentality. The presidential-parliamentary elections of 24 June 2018 were held under similar conditions of blocs, however, the Nation Alliance had two more party members: the conservative-pious Felicity Party (SP) and the center-right Democrat Party (DP). This time, these two small parties contested independently of the Nation Alliance. The HDP did not join the Nation Alliance for strategic reasons, but decided to support the alliance by not putting forth candidates in provinces where they were unlikely to win.

This municipal election has demonstrated a lot regarding the evolution of the political cleavages, alignments, and polarization trends in Turkish politics. In civic political contexts, municipal elections are traditionally shaped by several local and personal factors. However, political polarization in Turkey has reached such a degree in the last decade that it has affected almost all political contests, even the local ones. This polarization has been provoked by the existing political authorities, first and foremost by President Erdoğan. In fact, Erdoğan's polarizing political rhetoric became even more antagonizing in the months leading up to the municipal elections.²

¹ Ruşen Çakır, "25 Yıl Önce Açılan Sayfanın Kapanışı" [The Closure of a Page Opened Twenty-Five Years Ago], *Medyascope Tv*, 1 April 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCnEAFsweec>

² Sedat Pişirici, "Ayşen Uysal: Kutuplaştırıcı Dil Tabiri Hafif Kalıyor, Düşmanlaştırıcı Bir Dil Var" [Ayşen Uysal: Polarizing Language' Falls Short, There is an Enemy-Generating Language], *Medyascope*, 1 December 2018, <https://medyascope.tv/2018/12/01/aysen-uysal-kutuplastirici-dil-tabiri-hafif-kaliyor-dusmanlastirici-bir-dil-var/>

Inter-Party Blocs Before Municipal Elections: Tri-Polarization Effects

Turkey's foundational cleavage is the center-periphery cleavage.³ This cleavage-based approach originates from the sociological theory of party politics in Western Europe,⁴ and associates the CHP tradition with the urban, educated, secular, Kemalist social strata and the center-right party traditions with a more traditional, pious, lesser educated, and parochial strata. Turkey also witnessed the emergence of an ethnic cleavage in the later Republican years regarding the Turkish and Kurdish population. Historically, the secular-religious and the Turkish-Kurdish have been the two enduring cleavages.

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The secular-religious and Turkish-Kurdish cleavages make roughly a total of four alignment sides: secular/Kemalist⁵ CHP, pious/conservative AKP, Turkish-nationalist right-wing MHP, and Kurdish-nationalist leftist HDP. Recently, this trend has shown a tri-polarization tendency mostly because of the significant rapprochement between the two parties of the Turkish-Islamic right, the AKP and the MHP. The formation of this two-party alliance in 2015 enabled pious-nationalist Turkish politics to unite and form a single bloc.

In an interview, Bekir Ağırdir, chair of the well-acclaimed research and polling company KONDA, argued that local dynamics would not affect the 2019 municipal election outcomes as much as the long-standing polarized psychology of voter orientations.⁶ In Ağırdir's words, the current trend of polarization in Turkey is tri-polar. The largest group is the right-wing nationalist-conservative bloc represented by the People's Alliance. The second largest bloc is the opposition under the umbrella of the mostly urban, secular-centrist Nation Alliance represented initially by CHP-İYİ-SP-DP in 2018, and later by CHP-İYİ in 2019. Finally, the Kurdish

³ Şerif Mardin, “Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?” *Daedalus*, Vol. 102, No. 1 (1973), pp. 169-90.

⁴ Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1967).

⁵ Secular/Kemalist people embrace the early Republican transformations of the 1920s and 1930s, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. These transformations include secularizing renovations such as the abolition of the caliphate and the adoption of mixed-secular education within the grander context of Turkey's Westernization.

⁶ Ruşen Çakır, “Yerel seçimlerde muhalefet neyi, nasıl yapabilir? Bekir Ağırdir ile söyleşi” [What Can the Opposition Do, and How? Interview with Bekir Ağırdir], *Medyascope*, 10 September 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENjMfN5cpIU>

left HDP represents the third group largely as an actor alone, together with fringe Kurdish parties of Turkey such as Democratic Regions Party (DBP) and Rights and Freedoms Party (HAK-PAR).⁷

People's Alliance vs. Nation Alliance

From 2002 until today, the two significant parties of the right, AKP and MHP, have been diverging and converging their political paths through the AKP-dominant party system. After the 7 June 2015 general elections, the AKP lost its previous parliamentary majority, and consequently, the process of the AKP-MHP rapprochement took a straightforward start. First, the day after the election, the MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli openly called for a new general election, making it clear that his party would never get involved in a coalition or solidarity with the Kurdish-left HDP.⁸ This supported the AKP and Erdoğan's efforts to legitimize a repeat election, which was held on 1 November the same year –changing the landscape to their own advantage. The political conditions changed sharply between the two elections held in 2015, and the Kurdish resolution process abruptly ended with a resort to arms by both the Turkish state and the armed, illegal Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Prior to the election in 1 November, instead of economic hardship, terrorism and security became the primary concern of the people once again.⁹ Consequently, the AKP secured enough votes and parliamentary seats to maintain a single-party government.

Following the general election, Bahçeli initiated the process for a presidential referendum, which was held in April 2017. President Erdoğan and Bahçeli defended this presidential referendum with a series of revisions in the Constitution—on the grounds that it brought separation of powers.¹⁰ Its critics argued that the revisions in total created an excessively centralized system of an over-empowered presidency that had no kind of checks and balances mechanism.¹¹ The AKP and MHP, and their respective leaders, have been engaging in a state-led propaganda for the maintenance of this partisan presidential system since then.

⁷ “Bekir Ağırdir: Karşımızda Üç Parçalı Türkiye Var” [Bekir Ağırdir: There is a Tri-partite Turkey Before Us], *Bianet*, 7 June 2018, <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/197955-bekir-agirdir-karsimizda-uc-parcali-turkiye-var>

⁸ “Bahçeli Koalisyonu Kapıları Kapatmış ‘Erken Seçim’ dedi” [Bahçeli Closed Doors for a Coalition, Called for an Early Election], *Cumhuriyet*, 8 June 2015, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/secim_2015/294061/Bahceli_koalisyonu_kapilari_kapatti_erken_secim_dedi.html

⁹ Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, “Two Elections and a Political Regime in Crisis: Turkish Politics at the Crossroads,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol.18, No.1 (2018), pp. 21-51.

¹⁰ “Erdoğan: Kuvvetler ayrılığı tam olarak sağlanmıştır” [Erdoğan: Separation of Power is Completely Provided], *Dünya*, 16 April 2017, <https://www.dunya.com/gundem/erdogan-kuvvetler-ayriligini-tam-olarak-saglanmistir-haberi-358516>

¹¹ “Prof. Kemal Gözler: Elveda Kuvvetler Ayrılığı, Elveda Anayasa” [Professor Gözler: Farewell to the Separation of Powers, Farewell to the Constitution], *T24*, 25 December 2016,

<https://t24.com.tr/haber/prof-kemal-gozler-elveda-kuvvetler-ayriligini-elveda-anayasa.379175>

After meeting with Erdoğan in late November 2018, Bahçeli declared that the MHP would not put forth mayoral candidates in the metropolises of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir in support of the AKP's candidates before the municipal elections of 31 March 2019.¹² This was later followed by a series of Erdoğan-Bahçeli meetings and joint decisions for one party to withdraw its own candidate in support of the other's candidate depending on the electoral clouts of provinces and districts.

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Throughout the 31 March municipal campaign, Erdoğan and Bahçeli contextualized the municipal elections within the framework of the ‘survival’ (*bekâ*) of the new presidential system and ultimately, of the Turkish state. This was an electoral strategy of political rhetoric based on a series of conspiracy theories about ‘external and internal enemies’ and ‘games being played over Turkey.’¹³ Opposing the People's Alliance, the two parties of the center, CHP and İYİ formed the Nation Alliance. This was an anti-AKP but also an anti-Erdoğan alliance, which represented urban, secular, and democratic politics. Furthermore, the Nation Alliance was formed as a potential government alternative to the People's Alliance.

The Unbreakable Solitude of the Kurdish Left

One significant issue with the 2019 municipal elections was the extraordinary situation with the municipalities of the Kurdish left HDP/DBP¹⁴ in the Kurdish-populated east and southeast. An overwhelming majority of Kurdish mayors and co-mayors

¹²“MHP 3 büyük ilde AKP’yi destekleyecek” [MHP will Endorse the AKP in Three Big Provinces], *Evrensel*, 6 September 2018, <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/360727/mhp-3-buyuk-ilde-akpyi-destekleyecek-bakanlar-da-aday-olabilir>

¹³ “Erdoğan: Bu Seçimler Sadece Belediye Değil Aynı Zamanda Beka Seçimleridir” [Erdoğan: These are not Municipal Elections Only but also Survival Elections], *Anadolu Agency*, 16 February 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gunun-basliklari/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-bu-secimler-sadece-belediye-degil-ayni-zamanda-beka-secimleridir/1394848>; “Bahçeli: Milli Bekamız Üzerinde Oynanan Oyunlar Bozulmalıdır” [Bahçeli: The Games Being Played on Our Survival Must be Broken], *Güneş*, 31 December 2018, <http://www.gunes.com/gundem/bahceli-milli-bekamiz-uzerinde-oynanan-oyunlar-bozulmalidir-941704>; “Bahçeli: Büyük Milletlerin Her Zaman Beka Meselesi Vardır” [Bahçeli: Great Nations Always Have a Survival Problem], *Haberler*, 10 March 2019, <https://www.haberler.com/bahceli-buyuk-milletlerin-her-zaman-beka-meselesi-11821662-haberi/>; “Devlet Bahçeli’den Bir Beka Açıklaması Daha!” [Another Survival Explanation from Devlet Bahçeli!], *Sözcü*, 1 March 2019, <https://www.sozcü.com.tr/2019/gundem/son-dakika-devlet-bahceliden-bir-beka-aciklamasi-daha-3744551/>

¹⁴ DBP is the HDP's fraternal party founded for local, regional, and cadre-generating purposes in the east and southeast of Turkey.

were removed from office and put either under custody or in jail under the state of emergency conditions of the post-July 15 period. The vacancies left by the Kurdish mayors were filled by the AKP government's top-down appointed trustees (*kayyım*).

One of the significant recent trends in the Kurdish-left politics has been the simultaneous electoral breakthrough and political moderation of HDP starting back in 2015. Since its emergence in 1990, the Kurdish left party tradition in Turkey has been exposed to a frequent series of closures by the Constitutional Court on the accounts of undermining Turkey's national unity/territorial integrity, supporting terrorism and the illegal, armed PKK.¹⁵ Falling below the 10 percent national electoral threshold in the earlier elections of 1995, 1999, and 2002, the Kurdish-left parties have managed to bypass the threshold by running with independent candidates in the 2007 and 2011 general elections.

Before the June 2015 general elections, the HDP made a major game-changing decision by contesting the elections directly as a party for the first time, receiving an astronomic 13.1 percent national vote, a first in the party's electoral history. This electoral success was simultaneously accompanied by a moderation strategy, which was based on the party's transformation from a regional/ethnic actor to a 'party of Turkey.'¹⁶ Even though the moderation process was halted with the comeback of the armed clashes between the Turkish state and armed Kurdish forces after the June general elections, the HDP decisively maintained the moderation process.

The political directions lead by the People's Alliance paved the way for the formation of an implicit, unspoken rapprochement between the two parties of the left, HDP, and CHP. Even though the CHP was careful about not coming to a common political table or displaying a friendly demeanor with the HDP, it still pursued a careful policy not to alienate the Kurdish voters and the HDP. Some of the CHP's mayor candidates were acceptable for the HDP's electoral base – depending on their approach to the Kurdish issue and the Kurdish voters. These 'Kurdish-friendly' CHP mayor candidates were Ekrem İmamoğlu (İstanbul metropolitan), Tunç Soyer (İzmir metropolitan), and Zeydan Karalar (Adana metropolitan).¹⁷ Demirtaş's call to endorse the party base to vote for CHP and İYİ candidates days before the election also played a role in the HDP electorates' CHP-friendly voting behavior.¹⁸ Demirtaş

¹⁵ Dicle Koğacıoğlu, "Dissolution of Political Parties by the Constitutional Court in Turkey: Judicial Delimitation of the Political Domain," *International Sociology*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2003), pp. 258–76.

¹⁶ Ödül Celep, "The Moderation of Turkey's Kurdish Left: The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 5 (2018), pp. 723–47.

¹⁷ "HDP İstanbul, Adana ve İzmir'de Büyükşehir Belediyesi için Aday Göstermeyecek" [HDP Will Not Nominate Candidates for İstanbul, Adana, and İzmir Metropolitan Municipalities], *BBC Türkçe*, 28 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/live/haberler-turkiye-47026282>

¹⁸ "Demirtaş'tan seçime katılım çağırısı" [A Call for Participation in Elections by Demirtaş], *Gazete Duvar*, 29 March 2019, <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/politika/2019/03/29/demirtastan-secime-katilim-cagrisi/>

justified his action by arguing that his call did not mean he expected his fellow party voters to be able to vote for these two parties, CHP and İYİ, with their minds in peace. He mentioned that, on the contrary, he knew the HDP voters would do this with hardened hearts.¹⁹

The Repeat Istanbul Elections and Beyond

Surprisingly to many, the Supreme Election Board (YSK) cancelled the Istanbul metropolitan elections won by CHP's candidate İmamoğlu after a series of complaints made by the AKP's prominent figures. Nevertheless, the repeat Istanbul municipal elections held on 23 June 2019 further solidified İmamoğlu's victory as the difference of votes between him and Binali Yıldırım increased from around 20 thousand to more than 800 thousand in raw numbers, and from less than one point to more than nine points in total.

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Considering the fact that Erdoğan's first municipal win of Istanbul took place in 1994, and that his party had never lost Istanbul and Ankara ever since, the latest municipal elections together with Istanbul's repeat election, constitute an earthquake election for President Erdoğan, MHP chair Bahçeli, and at large, the People's Alliance. Whether or not the outcomes of these elections will be a game changer in the long run is yet to be seen. Under normal circumstances, Turkey does not have a tight election schedule in the next four years. This is why President Erdoğan's initial reaction was to state that Turkey would not have any elections in the next four-and-a-half years.²⁰

Nevertheless, what a political earthquake is for President Erdoğan and Bahçeli could signify a larger 'democratic earthquake,' in terms of Turkey re-routing with democracy. This municipal election brings a new opportunity for Turkey's normalization and democratization, a rapprochement among left-wing and right-wing

¹⁹ “Demirtaş'tan CHP ve İyi Parti'ye Oy Çağrısı” [A Call for Voting for CHP and İYİ Party by Demirtaş], *Sol*, 23 March 2019, <http://haber.sol.org.tr/turkiye/demirtastan-chp-ve-iyi-partiye-oy-cagrisi-259123>

²⁰ “Erdoğan Balkon Konuşması Yaptı: Buyursunlar Yönetsinler” [Erdoğan Made a Balcony Speech: Let Them Govern Now], *Bianet*, 1 April 2019, http://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/206982-erdogan-balkon-konusmasi-yapti-buyursunlar-yonetsinler?bia_source=rss

actors, between secular and religious actors, as well as with government and opposition actors. All actors, including opposition parties, will benefit immensely if Turkey chooses to loosen some of the political restrictions, and embrace a program of democratization and the rule of law.

Challenges and Opportunities for the CHP-led Metropolitans and Provinces

One of the challenges for the CHP-led municipalities is the potential obstructionism from the Erdoğan-led government. Erdoğan's initial reactions to the CHP's wins in Ankara and İstanbul were not very cooperative; he gave quite fettering signals before the repeat elections were even held. Describing the polling companies' research that showed İmamoğlu far ahead of Yıldırım as manipulative and custom-made, Erdoğan spoke of the repeat elections as symbolic and İmamoğlu as a 'lame duck,' pointing that the AKP still held the majority in all commissions and local assemblies of İstanbul.²¹ This was quite a radical diversion from the common belief, as well as Erdoğan's legendary conviction of, "winning İstanbul is winning Turkey."²²

In addition, there were early signs of legal efforts by President Erdoğan and the AKP government to curb the effective rule of mayors from the CHP. This included a recent judicial case about the appointment powers of Ankara and İstanbul mayors. In particular, the Ministry of Trade decided that mayors would no longer be responsible for appointments in municipal trading companies, giving this power to municipal assemblies, which are mostly in the AKP's control in Ankara and İstanbul.²³ The decision by the ministry was appealed to the 10th Ankara Commercial Court of First Instance and the commerce court overturned the decision by the ministry. This decision was further appealed to the Court of Appeals. The decision by the appeals court is currently pending.²⁴

Another significant challenge for the CHP-led municipalities is about maintaining the election coalition with a diversity of opposition parties in support of the

²¹ "Erdoğan: Ortada 'Topal Ördek' Var, Bu Seçim 'Sembolik'" [Erdoğan: There is a Lame-Duck, This Election is Symbolic], *Diken*, 20 June 2019, <http://www.diken.com.tr/erdogan-ortada-topal-ordek-var-bu-secim-sembolik/>

²² Aram Ekin Duran, "Yerel Seçimler: İstanbul'u Kazanan, Türkiye'yi Kazanır" [Municipal Elections: Who Wins İstanbul Wins Turkey], *Deutsche Welle Türkçe*, 27 March 2019, <https://www.dw.com/tr/yerel-se%C3%A7imler-istanbulu-kazanan-t%C3%BCrkiyeyi-kazan%C4%B1r/a-48087068>; "Erdoğan: Çok Kritik Bir Döneme Giriyoruz, İstanbul'u Kazanan Türkiye'yi Kazanır" [We Are Entering a Very Critical Period, Who Wins İstanbul Wins Turkey], *İstanbul Gerçeği*, 28 September 2017, <https://www.istanbulgercegi.com/erdogan-cok-kritik-bir-doneme-giriyoruz-istanbulu-kazanan-turkiyeyi-kazanir-81403037.html>

²³ Marian Demir, "Ankara and İstanbul Mayors Stripped of Their Power by (pro-Erdogan) Municipal Assemblies," *Asia News*, 26 June 2019, [http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Ankara-and-Istanbul-mayors-stripped-of-their-power-by-\(pro-Erdogan\)-municipal-assemblies-47390.html](http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Ankara-and-Istanbul-mayors-stripped-of-their-power-by-(pro-Erdogan)-municipal-assemblies-47390.html)

²⁴ "Mansur Yavaş'ın Elinden Alınan Yetki Konusunda Önemli Gelişme" [Critical Development on the Authority Taken Away from Mansur Yavaş], *Sol*, 26 June 2019, <http://haber.sol.org.tr/turkiye/mansur-yavasin-elinden-alinan-yetki-konusunda-onemli-gelisme-265442>

same bloc. The Nation Alliance is far more politically diverse than the People's Alliance. On the one hand, there are historical and ideological differences between the two right-wing parties, AKP and MHP. For instance, the AKP comes from political Islam, which considers the community as 'umma,' an all-inclusive Islamic community, while the MHP comes from Turkish nationalism, which sees the community as a 'nation,' of which the interpretation can be traced to racial theories. While the AKP's Islamic roots have been at odds with the former secular establishment, and the predecessors of the AKP have been frequently shut down by the Constitutional Court on the accounts of the violation of secularism, the MHP has never had an existential problem with the founding principles of the Turkish Republic – including secularism. Despite these differences, however, the two parties still embrace their own version of a Turkish-Islamic synthesis one way or another, and therefore the voters of these two party traditions can largely overlap in central Anatolian and social conservative regions of Turkey.

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Compared to the challenges of maintaining the People's Alliance, the Nation Alliance is ideologically far more diversified. While the Nation Alliance is officially composed of the CHP and İYİ, it is also known that this alliance survives on the electoral support provided by the Kurdish left HDP and its voters. There is an unofficial, unwritten solidarity with not only the HDP but also the Islamist-conservative SP. Even though they come from similar political roots, the SP has recently developed one of the harshest criticisms against the AKP and the partisan presidential system. What unites the four major parties of the opposition is their objection to the People's Alliance and the partisan presidential system that Erdoğan and Bahçeli represent.

However, when it comes to public policy and policy-making, these four parties show quite diverging orientations, mostly on identity issues, such as Kurdish and LGBT issues. While the HDP is often the most supportive of identity rights pertaining to both, the SP would be welcoming of discussing and resolving the Kurdish issue, but definitely not the LGBT issue. As for the CHP and İYİ, while the former would be cautiously positive on both issues, this probably would not be the case for the latter. The AKP-MHP circles would be willing to use these topics – particularly

the Kurdish issue –to divide the opposition. As opposed to such efforts, the opposition parties should ‘agree to disagree’ on some controversial issues in advance, and focus on those topics that they can cooperate and coordinate the best. For instance, the most recent discussion by the SP member and lawyer Ali Aktaş on whether the CHP and SP could agree on a ‘social contract’ (i.e., a new civilian constitution) is a substantial development. Aktaş’s emphasis on making the state ‘identity-less’ to restore democracy is narrative-breaking.²⁵

One of the most significant contributions of the CHP-led municipalities would be introducing the ‘decentralization of power’ for participatory democracy; in other words, ‘teaching’ people that local politics is the key to real, grassroots democracy. The HDP has been trying to legitimize this over the years, but because of the HDP’s controversial history and it being associated with separatism and terrorism, the HDP cannot lead people on this topic. As for the AKP and MHP, they fall short since they have behaved in accordance with the extremely centralist state tradition in Turkey over the years. The CHP can do this by introducing effective local assemblies, starting the energy of local dynamics at the smallest administrative units such as neighborhoods, as well as by bringing transparency to city and district councils. Both İmamoğlu and Yavaş televised the council meetings of Istanbul and Ankara to the public, which was a significant step for transparency. In particular, Yavaş expressed his willingness for a transparent, participatory, and reviewable municipalism – working together with civil society, the city council, and universities.²⁶ If realized, this would be a giant step towards democracy in Turkey.

Another significant contribution of the CHP-led municipalities would be about the depolarization of society. People of Turkey from all political colors and traditions are exhausted by the polarizing rhetoric of the existing governments and leading figures in the last couple of years. One of the reasons why both İmamoğlu and Yavaş won in the two largest municipalities is their non-exclusive, constructive, and peace-making language. Both candidates were quite careful about political correctness on identity issues and mindful not to alienate anybody during their municipal campaigns. This positive strategy as opposed to the polarizing strategy of the People’s Alliance was appreciated and welcomed by voters as well. If CHP can retain this positive language, it will also encourage the members of the People’s Alliance to switch to a more encompassing and non-polarizing language, which will contribute to the overall political psychology and democratization of Turkey.

²⁵ “CHP-SP Yakınlaşması: Yeni Bir Toplumsal Sözleşme Teklifi mi?” [CHP-SP Rapprochement: An Offer for a New Social Contract?], *Medyascope*, 28 June 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdnH15916CU>

²⁶ Seda Karatabanoğlu, “Türkiye’de Vatandaşın Şeffaf Belediyecilik Talebi Artıyor” [Citizens’ Demand for Transparent Municipalism on the Rise], *Deutsche Welle Türkçe*, 30 June 2019, <https://www.dw.com/tr/tr/C3%BCrkiyede-vatanda%C5%9F%C4%B1n-%C5%9Feffaf-belediyecilik-talebi-art%C4%B1yor/a-49417927>

Lastly, a third contribution of the CHP municipalities could be in the field of social policy. Even though the municipal governments do not have the full power and authority on all national issues, there are many social fields in which they can make people ‘feel’ positive in regard to municipal services. The municipalities can serve people in a large number of social policy fields including ecological projects, employment opportunities, improvement of transportation, economic assistance for the needy, easing traffic problems, providing technical (vocational) and linguistic training for the youth, handling urban gentrification processes with humane (people-friendly) principles, revitalizing arts and cultural activities, improving sports facilities, resolving agricultural problems of farmers as necessary, as well as strengthening the connection between municipal administrations and ordinary citizens (i.e., introducing community centers and effective service lines).