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**Turkish National Elections 2007: Choosing between democracy and
authoritarianism**

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**“Turkish National Elections 2007:
Choosing between democracy and authoritarianism”
by A. Kotsiaros¹**

“Turkish democracy will emerge strengthened from these elections”

R.T. Erdoğan

The Turkish National Election results of the 22nd July 2007 indisputably reveal the AKP dominance in the political scene.² The Justice and Development Party received a strong vote of confidence gathering 46.7% of the total votes and sharply increasing its share by 12.4% comparing to the 2002 parliamentary elections. The electoral success was accomplished despite opposition efforts to portray the Islamist-rooted Party as a Trojan horse which undermines Turkey's secular traditions and promotes a hidden Islamic agenda.

The threats and tricks of the military failed. The AKP was recognized as the most reliable political force to continue the modernization and the democratization process in the country. The real fight in the July elections was between a changing society that claims its rights and a dominant state which traditionally insists on defying the framework in which the society operates.

For the first time in the Turkish political history the “deep state” seems to be isolated. This is also the first time in 52 years that a party in power has increased its votes for a second term.³ As the election results show, a modernizing society overthrew the power the state, democracy won over authoritarianism.

Election results and the distribution of the votes:

In the National Elections of the 22nd July 2007 participated fourteen political parties. 7394 candidates ran for office, of which 699 were independents. According to the Supreme Election Board (Yüksek Seçim Kurulu Başkanlığı - YSK), 42,533,041

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² Turkish Elections were called earlier because of the failure of the Parliament to elect Abdullah Gül as President of the Republic. Erdoğan, by calling earlier elections, intended to defuse a showdown with the military-backed, secular establishment, which contended that the fundamental values of the state were at risk by Erdoğan and his allies. The issue came along in April, when the AKP tried to install FM A.Gül as President, prompting a threat by the military to intervene. Millions of Turks engaged in mass street demonstrations against the AKP, as opposition parties blocked the Parliamentary vote for President, forcing Erdoğan to call earlier elections. The demonstrations were organised by the Atatürk Thought Association (ADD).

³ The statement was made by Erdoğan on the night of the 22nd July in front of thousands of jubilant supporters outside his party's plush new headquarters. (See: “En Turquie, la victoire électorale de l'AKP renforce M.Erdogan”, Le Monde, 23.07.2007)

voters were registered for the elections. The turnout was more than 80 percent and the voting was largely peaceful.⁴

The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) gathered 46.7% of the vote and became the dominant party in Parliament winning **341** seats. Two other, secularist, parties made it into Parliament: the Nationalist Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP) with **112** seats and the far-right National Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi - MHP) with **71**.⁵ Politicians supported by a Kurdish party that seeks more rights for the ethnic minority returned to Turkey's Parliament for the first time in more than a decade. The independents, supported by the Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi – DTP) won **26** seats in the 550-seat Parliament.

The results of the election procedure and the distribution of the seats in the National Parliament are depicted in the diagrams below⁶:

DIAGRAM 1:

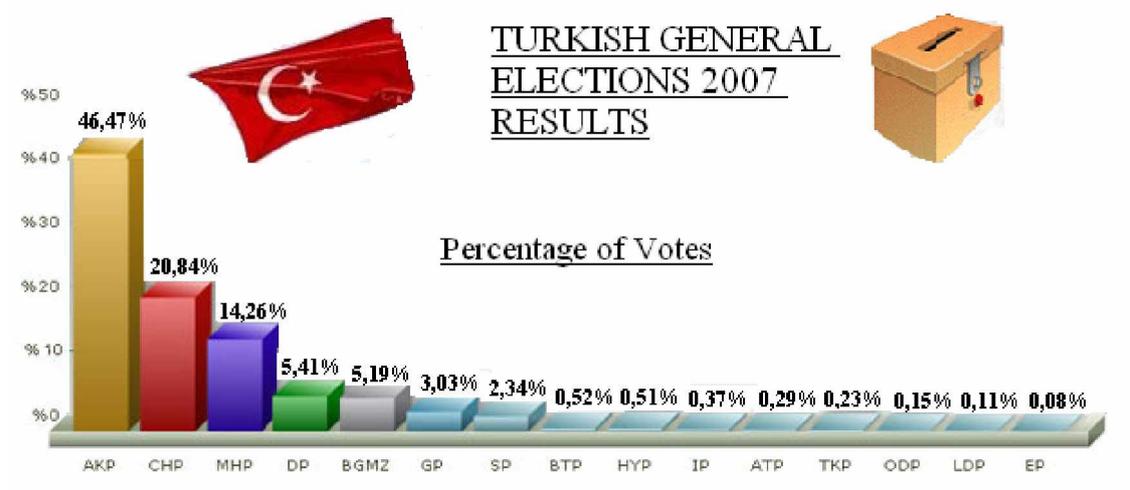
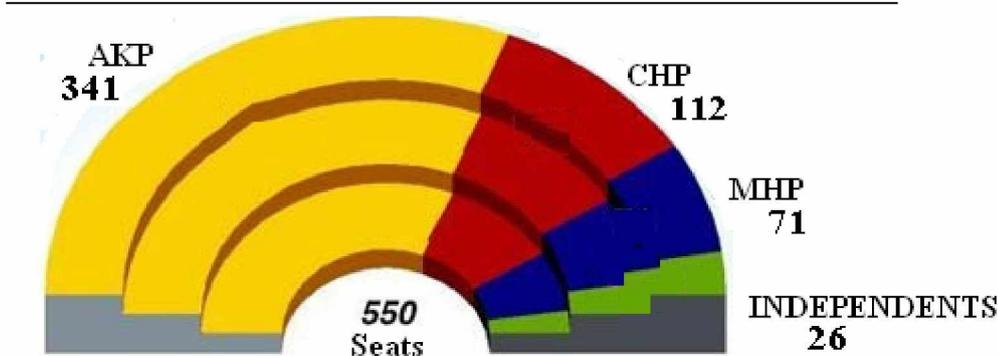


DIAGRAM 2:

DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN THE TURKISH PARLIAMENT



⁴ The total votes cast were 35,983,801 of which 35,017,315 were valid.

⁵ After the death of a MHP deputy right after the elections the seats of the Party are 70.

⁶ For the abbreviations of the Parties, see Table 1 in the Annex.

DIAGRAM 3:
VOTES TAKEN

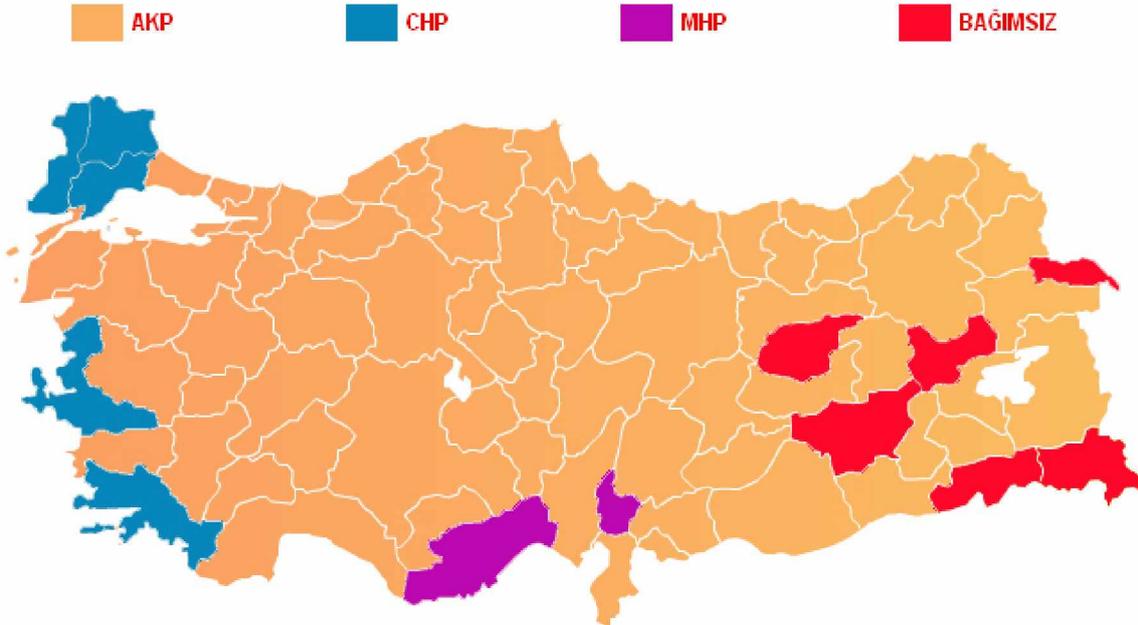
AKP		16.318.368	BĞSZ	B	1.822.253	HYP		179.373
CHP		7.316.242	GP		1.064.940	İP		129.377
MHP		5.005.587	SP		820.268	ATP		100.989
DP		1.898.679	BTP		182.184	TKP		80.092
			ÖDP		52.195	LDP		38.318
						EMEP		26.556

Source: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/secimsonuc>, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/secim2007>

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) won the majority of the votes in 76 of the 85 electoral regions. The Kemalist party (CHP) won the electoral regions of the Eastern Thrace, Izmir, Muğla in the Aegean Region, where the base of its supporters are traditionally located. The Nationalists (MHP) won the majority in the İçel and Mersin regions. In the Southeast Turkey, the independent candidates, supported by the Kurdish party, won the Hakkari, Muş, Bingöl, Iğdir, Diyarbakir and Tunceli regions.⁷ AKP dominated in the rest of the country.

The following diagram (4) presents the distribution of the votes in the electoral regions:

DIAGRAM 4:



⁷ For a more detailed presentation of the results in the electoral regions see: TÜRKİYE GENELİ SEÇİM SONUÇLARI, <http://secim2007.hurriyet.com.tr> and <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/secim2007>

Explaining the results: the dominance of the AKP and the failure of the opposition parties

Turkish voters had to choose between the continuity of the reforms process generated by the Erdoğan government and the authoritarian rule of the Kemalists and the military. The high percentage that AKP gathered reveals that the Turkish public opted for democracy and clearly showed its opposition against the extensive involvement of the armed forces in the political life.

Before the July elections, the Republican People's Party and the Nationalist Movement Party have both adopted nationalist and neo-nationalist and pro-statist discourses.

The CHP created deep disappointment and the election results are believed to be a failure of D. Baykal and his party.⁸ The CHP gathered only 21 percent of the vote and consequently secured 110 seats in the Parliament. The election outcome reveals that 'secular – anti-secular debate' was not well received by the public. The CHP's cooperation with the Democratic Left Party (DSP) was of no use either. Despite this, 13 DSP candidates who participated in the elections under the umbrella of the CHP were successful in winning a seat in the new Parliament.

Baykal has not realized that the politics of fear did not manage to convince the electoral body for an existing threat. Even more, his alliance with the military and the justice portrayed its party politics as being an extension of the generals undermining democratic order.⁹ In addition, the CHP is not a mass party. It's more of a doctrine party. The reason the CHP could not get votes from the eastern provinces of the country is that its political stance and its definitions of what the nation is don't appeal to the people of the region. The amount of votes a party gets doesn't determine whether it is a mass party or not. Mass parties are those that intent to increase the number of believers in their cause rather than the number of voters. In this context, the CHP and the MHP are doctrine parties.

On the other hand, the MHP, before elections, targeted getting 20 percent of the ballot due to rising nationalism. It appears though that MHP managed to steal votes mainly from traditional CHP voters, rather than the AKP, and also from the Motherland Party (ANAVATAN) and the Democrat Party (DP).¹⁰ The far-right nationalist party generally appeals to fiercely conservative Turks who want a purely Turkish society, free of ethnic minorities. It gained strength in recent months as

⁸ See: "Les électeurs kemalistes amers et inquiets", *Le Monde*, 23.07.2007

⁹ See: "AK Party sole centre party in elections", *News Analysis, Zaman*, 21.07.2007

¹⁰ See: Bozkurt G., "AKP's triumph jolts left and right", *Turkish Daily News*, 22.07.2007

militant Kurdish separatists, the principal enemy stepped up killings of Turkish soldiers in the country's southeast. The recent surge in foreign investment into Turkey's growing economy is also cause for alarm among its supporters.¹¹ MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli is expected to represent the nationalist structure in Parliament as an opposition Party and seriously challenge the AKP. Both the CHP and the MHP were criticized of lacking a concise political program.

The Democratic Party appears to be the other disappointed party of the general elections. The party's leader, Mehmet Ağar, announced his resignation well before 20 percent of the ballot boxes were counted. The election outcome also unveiled that the public punished the DP after their abortive plans to join plans with ANAVATAN ahead of the polls.¹² For once more, the center-right will not be represented in the TBMM, a development that clears out the way for the independent candidate Mesut Yılmaz to stand out as the leader of the center right.

At the same time, in the East and Southeast Turkey, the two parties have failed to find support from all groups. In these regions the race was rather between the AKP and the independent candidates, supported by the Democratic Society Party (DTP). For many Kurdish nationalists, the CHP was as dangerous as the MHP, even though it harboured them in the past.

The election swept at least 23 Kurdish candidates into Parliament, a significant victory for Turkey's Kurds, who make up nearly a fifth of the population. They have not been represented on a national level in more than a decade, since a deputy was ejected from Parliament for insisting on speaking Kurdish during a swearing-in ceremony. Kurds ran as independents to avoid a 10 percent hurdle to get into Parliament, resulting in a larger number of independent candidates than ever before in Turkish history. According to the Turkish press, the independents that are supported by the Democratic Society Party (DTP) are expected to declare that they officially represent their party in the Parliament.¹³

AKP breaking off from its Islamic past: towards a new mass centre party?

In the pre-election period, the AKP was eager to prove it has broken off with its Islamic roots. Turkey's ruling party "clear out" the candidate list from the Islamists related to the National View Movement (Milli Görüş) and fielded prominent

¹¹ See: Tavernise S., "Hard-liners make gains in Turkey election", The Associated Press, 23.07.2007

¹² See: Bozkurt G., "AKP's triumph jolts left and right", Turkish Daily News, 22.07.2007

¹³ In the forthcoming Party Congress, Ahmet Turk will be elected as President of the Party. A.Turk is elected as independent candidate in Mardin. (See: NTV - STAR, 26/07/07)

candidates with no known links to political Islam for the general elections. Well known politicians from the centre-left and right were employed for the AKP. Women known for their liberal views, business people and economists are among fresh troops the Justice and Development Party enrolled before elections. Standing out among them is Ertugul Gunay, a social-democrat ideologue and former secretary general of the staunchly secular Republican People's Party.¹⁴ This new AKP line up aims at establishing the Party in the centre of Turkish politics, taking advantage of a notoriously fractured opposition.

The Justice and Development Party proved itself to be the only party with a truly national appeal. The AKP got the votes of the rural, religious Turks who form the backbone of the AKP electorate, but it also mustered support from traditionally centrist voters. The government was widely credited for economic growth, keeping inflation low and attracting record foreign direct investment. It has also identified its foreign policy with the prospect of the EU membership. Erdogan's government carried out a series of reforms that ensured the start of membership talks with the European Union. Moreover, easing access to medical care, providing free textbooks to schoolchildren and supporting the poorest with food and fuel aid the AKP government won the sympathy of the low and middle class. By this, AKP managed to play the role of the protector of the weak and offered the only opportunity for the unprivileged part of the society to participate in the political scene.¹⁵ For these parts of the society, the debate about the kemalist model or the democratization process is more of a luxury.

According to the election results, AKP managed to appeal to many voters from different geographic areas of Turkey. It had the backing of all segments of society who vote mainly on the basis of economic, social and cultural issues. The AKP managed to overcome the religious, ethnic, geographical and factional cleavages in the country. Apart from the above, one other important reason that AKP that got support from voters that have no relation with his traditional electoral base was the will to reject the policy of Baykal that required from the military and the justice to intervene against the popular will. Leftists, atheists, nationalists and religious minorities identified the moderate Islamic party with the fight for democracy against the intervention of the generals and for the release from the nationalistic hysteria.

As former Minister of Justice Çemil Çiçek explained: "Sociologically speaking, the AK Party is able to get votes from all segments and regions of Turkey. If a party is able to do this, it means it has managed to establish a relation with them

¹⁴ See: Burak A., 'AKP strives to shrug off Islamist image', AFP, Turkish Daily News, 22.07.2007

¹⁵ See: Μασσαβέτας Α., «Ηχηρό «όχι» στο Κεμαλικό κατεστημένο», Καθημερινή, 29.07.2007

based on love. The DNA of the AK Party and that of society are compatible with each other. In the past, the Democrat Party DP and the Justice Party and the Motherland Party ANAP, now ANAVATAN achieved this.”¹⁶

The factors that contributed to the AKP's success can be summarised in the following:

- Ü the economic stability and relative prosperity achieved since 2002 under the AKP government
- Ü the military's involvement in the presidential crisis and the compromising of the opposition parties with the generals
- Ü the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
- Ü the organisational superiority of the AKP, down to its local branches
- Ü the weakness of the opposition parties.

Erdoğan: defending the secular order and guaranteeing the continuity of reforms

Prime Minister Erdoğan pledged to safeguard the country's secular traditions and to do whatever the government deems necessary to fight separatist Kurdish rebels. He thanked the army for his “contribution to the security of the elections” and promised to carry on with the hard work for Turkey, which is a democratic, secular state, founded by its great leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Concerning the fight against PKK, he promised to take measures according the principles of one flag, one homeland and one state.” Finally, Erdoğan stressed that the new government will continue its policy towards the European Union and carry on with the reform process.

Clearly, Erdoğan’s words highlight the main challenges that the new government has to face within the next period. Simultaneously, his speech also aimed at guaranteeing the union and security of the state, as well as disavowing his Islamist past and re-labeling himself as conservative democrat. Above all, the re-affirmation of the importance of Kemal Atatürk for Turkey and the role of the army as protector of the state intended to clear any doubts about respecting the secular order and avoid a possible reaction from the deep state.

Challenges for the new government

The next government will quickly face new challenges ranging from the revision of the Constitution, the election of the President, negotiations with the

¹⁶ “AK Party sole center party in elections”, Turkish Daily News, 23.07.2007

European Union, continuing of economic reform and dealing with the insurgence in Southeast Turkey.

Despite its extensive win, the AKP did not overcome the threshold of 367 parliamentarians (2/3 of the total), which is necessary for the election of the President. Therefore, the leading party needs to find support with other parties. According to the words of Wolfango Picolli, a well respected Turkey analyst, “arguably it's the best-case scenario because we have a solid majority but not so strong, so it will be necessary to compromise”¹⁷.

In the area of **Domestic politics**, party must find put forward the revision of the Constitution. The APK must also primarily achieve a compromise candidate for President.¹⁸ The continuity of the reform process is also high in the AKP agenda. Furthermore, Erdoğan must tread gingerly between supporters who hope his victory might mean an easing of religious restrictions in public life -such as a ban on headscarves in public offices- and army generals who see defending a secular system as their duty.¹⁹

With respect to the **Turkish Foreign policy**, two are the main challenges: a) the European perspective of the country and b) the developments in the Southeastern Turkey and the fight against PPK rebels.

Concerning the **Turkish European relations**, the next period seems to be crucial for the prospect of the accession of Turkey into the EU. “We will continue to work with determination to achieve our European Union goal”, Erdogan said. According to the economists, Erdogan could now press on with free-market policies and kick-start stalled EU talks, although disillusionment at joining the bloc and resistance from France could spell trouble ahead. “The economic program and structural reforms will continue in the same way”, Finance Minister Kemal Unakitan told Reuters. With respect to the prospect of the Turkish accession in the EU, the new government has to try to achieve a compromise in the Cyprus issue.²⁰ Clearly, the resolution of the Cyprus remains a main challenge of the Turkish Foreign Policy.

With regard to the **developments in the Southeast Turkey**, Erdoğan has to decide whether to stage an offensive into northern Iraq to thwart Kurdish separatists who have bases there. Such an operation would require close cooperation with the

¹⁷ See: Butler D., “Turkey's AKP faces challenges after poll victory”, Reuters, 23.07.2007

¹⁸ Recent developments imply that A. Gül remains a candidate for President. (See: interview of A. Gül in the NTV on 23.07.2007)

¹⁹ Relations with the military fell to fresh lows after the chief of general staff warned in April it would intervene in politics if the republic's secular values were at risk, the start of a crisis that triggered the early election.

²⁰ See Jenker C., “EU-Erwartungen nach der Türkei Wahl”, Spiegel online, 23.07.2007

military. Though, a possible operation in Northern Iraq could bring serious implications with respect to the relations with the USA. Therefore, Erdoğan has to resist army pressure to move against the Kurdish PKK bases in northern Iraq. This will involve patient negotiation with the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, the Kurdish leaders of northern Iraq and much behind-the-scenes arm-twisting by Washington.

Conclusion: opting for democracy

For 84 years, modern Turkey has been defined by a holy trinity - the army, the republic and its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Each was linked inextricably to the others and all were beyond reproach. But a deep transformation under way and elections on Sunday proved a watershed: Liberal Turks, once the principal political supporters of the nation's ruling elite secular, are turning their backs on it and pledging their votes to religious politicians as well as a new array of independents.

According to Zafer Uskul, a prominent constitutional lawyer and human rights advocate who ran with AKP in southern Turkey, “this election was a power struggle between those who want change and those who don't. Religion was just an excuse.”²¹

As Turkey moves ahead, it will have to grapple with where Islam fits in the building of an equitable society. But the argument, liberals contend, will not be over whether Islam should be part of the government, but instead over what type of secularism fits best.

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²¹ See: Tavernise S., “Turkish voters face choice of traditions”, The Associated Press, 17.07.2007

ANNEX

Internet Resources:

- <http://www.ysk.gov.tr>
- <http://www.bygem.gov.tr>
- <http://secim2007.hurriyet.com.tr>
- <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/secim2007>
- <http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr>
- <http://www.zamanonline.com.tr>
- <http://www.ntv.com.tr>
- <http://www.star.com.tr>
- <http://www.akp.org.tr/>
- <http://www.chp.org.tr/>
- <http://www.mhp.org.tr/>
- <http://www.mfa.gov.tr>
- <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/vote2007/>
- <http://www.spiegelonline.de>
- <http://www.diewelt.de>
- <http://www.faz.de>
- <http://www.sueddeutsche.de>
- <http://www.lemonde.fr>
- <http://www.figaro.fr>
- <http://www.iht.com>
- <http://www.ft.com>
- <http://www.guardian.co.uk>
- <http://www.tanea.gr>
- <http://www.kathimerini.gr>
- <http://www.enet.gr>
- <http://www.in.gr>
- <http://www.euractiv.com>

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Abbreviations of the Turkish Political Parties:

- § **AKP** (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi): Justice and Development Party, <http://www.akp.org.tr/>
- § **CHP** (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi): Nationalist Republican People's Party,
<http://www.chp.org.tr/>
- § **MHP** (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi): National Movement Party, <http://www.mhp.org.tr/>
- § **DP**(Demokratik Partisi): Democratic Party, <http://www.dp.org.tr/>

- § **BĞSZ: Independents**
- § **DTP** (Demokratik Toplum Partisi): Democratic Society Party, <http://www.dtp.org.tr/>
- § **GP** (Genç Partisi): Young Party, <http://www.btp.org.tr/>
- § **SP** (Saadet Partisi): Felicity Party, <http://www.sp.org.tr/>
- § **BTP** (Bağımsız Türkiye Partisi), Independent Party of Turkey, <http://www.btp.org.tr/>
- § **ÖDP** (Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi), Freedom and Solidarity Party, <http://www.odp.org.tr/>
- § **HYP** (Halkın Yükselişi Partisi), People's Ascent Party , <http://www.hyp.org.tr/>
- § **İP** (İşçi Partisi), Workers Party, <http://www.ip.org.tr/>
- § **ATP** (Aydinlik Türkiye Partisi), Light Turkey Party, <http://www.atp.org.tr/>
- § **TKP** (Türkiye Komünist Partisi), Communist Party of Turkey, <http://www.tkp.org.tr/>
- § **LDP** (Liberal Demokrat Partisi), Liberal Democrat Party, <http://www.ldp.org.tr/>
- § **EMEP** (Emek Partisi), Labour Party, <http://www.emep.org>
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2007 ELECTIONS
DETAILED RESULTS

Parties	Votes			Seats	
	No.	%	±	No.	±
Justice and Development Party (<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP</i>)	16,340,534	46.66	+12.38	340	-23
Republican People's Party (<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP</i>)	7,300,234	20.85	+1.46	112	-66
Nationalist Movement Party (<i>Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP</i>)	5,004,003	14.29	+5.93	71	+71
Democratic Party (<i>Demokrat Partisi, DP</i>)	1,895,807	5.41	-4.13	0	±0
Independents (<i>Bağımsız</i>)	1,822,253	5.20	+4.20	27	+18

Youth Party (<i>Genç Parti, GP</i>)	1,062,352	3.03	-4.22	0	±0
Felicity Party (<i>Saadet Partisi, SP</i>)	817,843	2.34	-0.15	0	±0
Independent Turkey Party (<i>Bağımsız Türkiye Partisi, BTP</i>)	178,694	0.51	+0.03	0	±0
People's Ascent Party (<i>Halkın Yükselişi Partisi, HYP</i>)	175,544	0.50	+0.50	0	±0
Workers' Party (<i>İşçi Partisi, İP</i>)	127,220	0.36	-0.15	0	±0
Bright Turkey Party (<i>Aydınlık Türkiye Partisi, ATP</i>)	99,938	0.29	+0.29	0	±0
Communist Party of Turkey (<i>Türkiye Komünist Partisi, TKP</i>)	77,657	0.22	+0.03	0	±0
Freedom and Solidarity Party (<i>Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi, ÖDP</i>)	51,945	0.15	-0.19	0	±0
Liberal Democratic Party (<i>Liberal Demokrat Parti, LDP</i>)	36,717	0.10	-0.18	0	±0
Labour Party (<i>Emek Partisi, EMEP</i>)	26,574	0.08	+0.08	0	±0
Total (turnout 84.4%)	35,017,315	100.0	—	550	