On the 30th of March 2014, 52,695,831 people were eligible to vote at 194,310 ballot boxes. Participation was quite high at 91%. All 26 parties that entered the elections manifested that this was more than just a local election. This year’s local election was virtually a matter of life and death for some parties and their leaders. Although, officially 26 parties had entered the elections, in reality, the election was between AKP, CHP and MHP and then all three of these against the BDP/HDP. These elections were made extremely significant by developments in the run-up to the section; however, these elections must now be analysed for future developments.
Before we analyse the elections, it may be useful to share some facts and figures.

**The results of the election:**

At a first glance we can see that the AKP polled in the most votes, so for the third time in a row they are the winners of the election. The main opposition party, the CHP, were the main losers of the election.

- AKP: 45%
- CHP: 25%
- MHP: 18%
- BDP/HDP: 6.2%

The BDP/HDP protected the majority of its councils and added 1 metropolitan city, 3 cities and numerous districts. According to unofficial results, the BDP will administer 103 councils of which, 3 are metropolitan cities, 34 metropolitan districts, 8 cities, 25 districts and 33 boroughs.

**Fraudulence and constraints during the election**

Although the citizens of Turkey are still deprived of an uninterrupted electricity supply, during this year’s elections, despite all prior warnings, electricity supplies were cut off in many towns and cities precisely when the vote counting had begun. This situation was analysed by the BDP/HDP and the CHP as a direct attempt at manipulating the election results. These “black-outs” occurred in Mardin-Omerli, Urfa, Mardin-Artuklu, Batman-Hasankeyf and in Adana.

During election day, news bulletins and news agencies were full of stories of state security forces forcing citizens in Kurdistan to vote openly, armed personnel pressurising people by hanging around ballot boxes and village guards and AKP officials attacking BDP sympathisers. Alongside these, pre-stamped ballot papers, stolen ballot boxes and burnt ballot papers containing votes for the BDP were common place across Kurdistan.

**Some of the fraudulence reported on election day:**

- In the district of Dicle, in Diyarbakir, AKP supporters attacked vote-counters in the courthouse. Many people were injured. In this attack, Mehmet Celebi and Abdulhadi Binbir were both injured by gunfire. Abdulsamit Bilgin stated that “they attacked the women. One of our female friends has a broken arm and two women were badly beaten by batons”. Bilgin also said that “their main ambitions was to disperse the BDP supporters that were gathering in from of the building in which the votes were being counted. They wanted to do this to be able to freely manipulate the vote count. However, the people resisted, and remained in front of the building until the end”.
- In the Tatvan district of Bitlis, clashes between the people and the police are continuing after it was reported that police officers were trying to confiscate the ballot box. As a result of these clashes 20 people were injured.

- There were further infringements in Dicle. In the village of the AKP’s candidate Faysal Ensarioglu, the AKP official at the ballot box was confiscating all the voters’ ballots and voting on their behalf. The BDP official at the ballot box was beaten by armed AKP supporters when he contested this infringement.

- In the district of Nizip in Antep, fake ballots indicating votes for the AKP were found. The fake ballots were found near the ballot boxes in the neighbourhoods of Ataturk and Fatih Sultan Mehmet.

- In the neighbourhood of Yenisehir in Mersin fake ballots were found just near ballot box no. 1064.

- In the district of Bismil in Diyarbakir, Haci Atilgan stated that in the mayoral ballot he was given the AKP candidate had already been stamped.

- In the village of Ormegoze in Batman, AKP supporters attacked BDP supporters. The AKP supporters he’d demanded that the men use all the women’s votes in the village. The BDP officials at the ballot box rejected this and were then badly beaten. Ercan Kaya, Ahmet Ekici and Baris Kirmizitas were taken to hospital with head injuries. BDP MP Ayla Akat Ata and lawyers from the Batman Bureau visited the village.

- The AKP used all the tricks in the book to win in Bingol. Firstly, thousands of fake ballots were found in the city. Even before the voting had officially begun, many fake votes for the AKP were found in the ballot boxes. One person was caught redhanded with a sack full of votes.

- In Tatvan the situation was no different. Again, there were fake votes in the ballot boxes even before the voting had begun. Also, there were people who used multiple votes at separate ballot boxes. There were pictures of ballot papers scattered around in a classroom.

1500 BDP votes were found burned in Ceylanpınar

Infringements were extensive in Urfa too. In Ceylanpınar where the BDP were comfortably in the lead, suddenly fell behind the AKP after a timely power-cut. Until now, the official result of the vote in Ceylanpınar has not been declared. Thousands of people have taken to the streets due to the reason that the AKP is seeming to be head to head with the BDP although initially - until the power cut - the BDP had had a comfortable lead. At the Ataturk Primary School 1500 BDP votes were found burned.
In the Gevas district of Van, the AKP supposedly won the election by 7 votes. It was reported that one of the officials at the ballot box took a sack full of votes to a separate room and scattered them across the room. BDP candidate Basri Arslan stated that they have pictures of this and will appeal to the Supreme Election Committee.

**Infringements in the eyes of the observatory delegations**

Thomas Schnauzer, one of the spokespersons of the delegation, stated that in some places in Diyarbakir voters went to the ballot under the shadows of guns. Schnauzer stated “we were a delegation of 38 that separated into four groups. Throughout the day we witnessed various infringements. At every ballot box we were at, there were armed and uniformed military personnel. These armed men were in the same rooms as the ballot boxes. This forms a psychological pressure on the voters. When we told them that this was not right, they threatened us. The elections were conducted in an anti-democratic atmosphere”.

**The political atmosphere in the run-up to the elections**

As everyone knows, last year was a significant year for politics in Turkey. At the end of 2012, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan had revealed that meetings with Kurdish people’s leader Abdullah Ocalan had resumed after a break of over one and a half years. However, after a brief period of high hopes and expectations, in September 2013 the process had reached an impasse due to the fact that the government was unwilling to take the necessary steps forward and its one-sided approach. If the process has not been terminated, this is due to the sensitivities shown by the Kurdish movement. The hopes and expectations of the people regarding the solution of Turkey’s most important problem was left unanswered by the AKP government.

Despite the fact that the AKP government had promised a new constitution in the run-up to the general elections in 2009, since that time the AKP has not taken any steps towards this or the democratisation of Turkey in general. During the discussions on the new constitution, the CHP and the MHP stated that the “Turkishness” of the constitution was a “red line” for them. The AKP did not put forward an alternative to this. These three parties tried to restore the old constitution in a way that benefited themselves. A compromise could not be found and the commission for a new constitution dispersed without any decision.

The Gezi protests which started as the people’s revulsion of the despotic policies of the AKP government and the hard-handed policing tactics applied by the government that led to the deaths of seven protestors are still fresh in the memory. A statistic released in June 2013, states that during the government of the AKP a total number of 388 people had been killed by the police force, 121 extra-judicial killings and 45 people were killed during protests and demonstrations.

Alongside internal affairs, Turkey’s external affairs were also in disarray. The AKP has a direct responsibility in the vicious cycle that is the war in Syria. Although, it has not been
proven yet, Turkey’s logistical, military and political support for groups like the al-Nusra Front and ISIS is almost common knowledge. However, the search of a Lorry belonging to the Turkish Secret Services full of arms en route to Syria and the recent leaked tapes leave no room for doubt. Despite all warnings and criticisms regarding this policy, Turkey has continued to drive the region towards instability.

The rift between the AKP government and its 12 year long ally the Fethullah Gulenist Movement three months before the election was a significant development. Corruption claims surrounding Prime Minister Erdogan and the various damaging leaked tapes were of a parallel significance in the run-up to the elections. Instead of shedding light on the allegations of corruption, Erdogan went down the route of passing protective laws, sacking state prosecutors who brought these cases against him and his government and banning social media outlets such as Twitter and Youtube. Until the day of the elections, speculation on Erdogan stepping down from office before the elections was being spread.

Why these elections were so important:

- The AKP was hoping for a renewed legitimisation of its government after 12 years of being in power. The AKP was subjected to heavy criticism from within and also from outside its borders due to the policies it had adopted. The opposition parties are hoping for the opposite, and see this election as an opportunity to delegitimise an AKP government.

- There are two more very important elections on the horizon for Turkey. One is the Presidential election; the first time in which the countries president will be elected by the people. The other is the general election soon after. Erdogan has presidential aspirations. These local elections will be an important precursor for both of these elections.

- The political crisis in Turkey is signalling towards a parting of the ways. Turkey will either have to continue its current style of custodial politics; or, it will, as the AKP has promised for so many years, delve into a radical democratisation of the country. These elections will be a good indicator to which of these it will be.

- These elections will also determine how the Kurdish question will be approached.

Two elections in Turkey; one in the East and one in the West

During both local and general elections in Turkey, the East of the country and the West of the country have differing agendas. The elections in the East are mostly between two parties; one of them represents the monistic nation-state mentality and the other represents the demands of freedom of the Kurdish people. Turkey’s aspirations of a qualitative advancement can be read in the situation of the Kurdish question.
The history of the Kurds’ political struggle is one of a struggle against state parties who benefit from all the facilities of the state. The Kurds, despite being heavily handicapped, come out stronger from each election.

Kurdish party politics was first established in 1990 with the formation of the people’s labour party (HEP). Since that day, 7 pro-Kurdish political parties have been banned in Turkey. The oppression of the state was not only evident in party closures. Many members of these parties were murdered, imprisoned, tortured and threatened.

The first local elections that the Kurdish political movement took part in was held in 1999. At that time, the name of the party was HADEP and it polled in 3.37 per cent of the vote, winning a total number of 38 councils. The Kurdish political movement went into the 2004 elections in an alliance. SHP, DEHAP, Freedom Party, SDP, ODP and EMEP formed the democratic union of forces. This time 5 cities, 33 districts and 31 borough were won.

In 2009, the DTP won a total number of 98 councils, it polled 5.21 per cent of the votes. This unsettled the Turkish state and elites. Only a few weeks after the local elections were held, a police operation was conducted in which many Kurdish politicians were arrested on an unprecedented scale. This was the biggest collective arrests in Turkish history.

In the same year, the DTP was closed down by the constitutional court. The number of people that were imprisoned were in the hundreds 6 of whom were members of parliament and 32 of which were mayors.

In this year’s local elections the BDP once again furthered its gains. A total number of 102 councils were gained by the BDP and in many places the AKP was pushed further backwards.

While the BDP raised its number of votes, it also added 3 new cities to the previous councils it had held. Agri, Bitlis and Mardin were taken off the AKP. The BDP retained Dersim, Batman, Van, Diyarbakir, Sirnak, Siirt, Igdır and Hakkari. Of these cities, Van, Diyarbakir and Mardin are metropolitan cities. In Dersim the BDP won for the third time in a row, polling 42.84 per cent of the votes.

The general manager KONDA, of one of the most reliable research companies, stated that: “I believe that the winners of the local elections were the AKP and the BDP. The BDP polled in a good share of the local vote, and gained as a result of the new metropolitan cities law. They have the potential to be a real alternative to the other three main parties. They advocate a localised administration, and claim that they will devolve power to the people. For this reason the main opposition when it comes to local politics is the BDP. The percentage of votes is insignificant. I believe that with the style of administration it adheres to, and when you take the circumstances of the country in mind then you have to say that the BDP are the real opposition.”
Journalist Rusen Cakir also analysed the BDP’s results: “The BDP has retained its major councils and added three new cities to them. They also won more districts than five years ago too. This shows, that despite all their complaints, the peace process has benefited the BDP.”

In this regard, it is widely accepted that the Kurdish political movement was a winner in the local elections.

This year, the BDP did not enter the election in the west of the country. Rather, its sister party the People’s Democracy Party (HDP) entered the elections in the west of the country. The Kurds have for a long time constructed their own alternative politics to that of the system, it was time for the people in the west of the country to do so too and the HDP was the first step to this end.

The impasse of the peoples of Turkey: without alternative

Although there were and are many criticisms of AKP’s style of government, the fact that it still can come out as a winner in the local elections is a point that needs to be evaluated; however, this can not be seen solely as the success of the AKP. We are well aware of the fact that many people say that they voted for the AKP because there was no other alternative. This is an important problem for the Turkish political sphere. For a long time in Turkey, similar Turkish political parties have come to power, instead of solving the people’s problems they have benefited from government, oppressed the people and stolen from them. There is a serious lack of trust towards Turkey’s political parties. At no other time have opposition forces and movements been as pacified as they have been under the current AKP government. Money, fraud, bribery, intimidation, suppression, blackmail, abuse, closures, arrests etc. have been extensively deployed to pacify the media, artists, intellectuals, Alevi, Kurds, leftists, human rights activists, labourers, trade unionists, sports clubs, youths, women, students and businesses. These have either led to the victims surrendering to the AKP, or the elimination of those who did not.

It is without a doubt that the organisation who was victim to the largest share of the above mentioned attacks in the run-up to the elections was the HDP. We cannot analyse the attacks against the HDP as isolated attacks by racist/fascist groups. This will only serve to hide the real motivations of these attacks. Although it seems as if the main system parties are quarrelling with each other, when it comes to the will of the people, they are side by side. The policies deployed against the Kurdish parties are a visible example of this. However, the system has finally realised that it is unable to prevent a representation of the will of the Kurdish people; but nevertheless, it is now attempting to prevent this will spreading to the west of the country. The attacks against the HDP should be read within this context.

Sociologically Turkey has come to the brink of destruction

The transition of the Turkish Republic from being a “citizen for the state” to being a “state for the citizen” will surely be a difficult one. The state and its political parties have always spread
the virtual fear that “the state is collapsing” or “we are surrounded by enemies” in order to preserve its power over the people. Any state with a moderate acceptance of the standards of democracy and the rule of law would have seen the government step down immediately if any of the sorts of accusations against the AKP had been mentioned. Despite the corruption cases, the killing of 34 civilians in Roboski, the supporting of terrorist organisations active in Syria, the fabrication of evidence to raid a neighbouring country, the deployment of state terrorism during the Gezi protests and the fact that the country is one big prison, the AKP is still in government. This is due to the fact that the Turkish Republic has always imposed that the people’s responsibility is to protect the state. This why that rather than the people holding the state to account, it is the state that is keeping the people in line.

During the AKP government, Turkey has increasingly become a polarised country. The core values that the people have been injected with have been shaken, and the people are beginning to question everything. What was once the most “reliable institution” in Turkey - the army - is now not so. The model of moderate Islam that was implemented through the AKP has been left in shambles after the rift between the AKP and the Gulenist movement. For years the Kurds were propagated as separatists and evil; however, the people now see that this was not true either. The AKP’s recent problems with corruption has also led to many people that supported the AKP questioning their integrity. There are certain factions of society, however, that do say that “yes Erdogan is stealing, but at least he is sharing some of it with us”.

In opposition to this, the people that have always been suppressed by the state, the Kurds, the Alevis, youths, women, labourers, leftists and liberals are now saying that enough is enough. These people cannot be governed as before, nor can the state system preserve itself in its current form. What has come to light in Kurdistan and in Gezi, is that nothing can remain the same.

**What do the election discussions indicate for the future?**

Any party that believes it can run the county like it did before is badly mistaken; an insistence of this will only lead to more social tension. It is, however, possible to see this insistence on the way the local election campaigns were run by the main parties.

In the run-up to these local elections, the atmosphere was one of a general power struggle rather than that of a municipal election. This struggle was not based on the democratisation needs of Turkey; rather, it was based on a pure and simple power struggle.

When we take a closer look at the campaigns, we can see an obvious lack of projects for local service. All the main system parties based their campaigns on one rhetoric: “the state is being weakened, you must vote for us to strengthen the state!”

The AKP based its campaign around the rift it has had with the Gulenist movement. Erdogan’s argument can be summarised as follows: “They [the Gulenist movement] have
infiltrated the state. They want to weaken a growing Turkey, they are aided by foreign governments. To support us, is to support a growing and strengthening Turkey”.

The CHP’s campaign revolved around the rhetoric “if you vote for the AKP the secular state will vanish, government will be in the hands of corrupt individuals”.

The MHP, in reference to the peace process, said that “to vote for the AKP will be the same thing as dividing the country and handing it over to foreign rule”.

Until a year ago, Turkey was a discussing a new constitution. However, no other party, other than the BDP/HDP, stated the need for a new constitution. The three main parties just abused each other and accused one another of being fraudsters, corrupt, thieves, traitors and collaborators. What is interesting is that they were all right.

In this regard, Turkey requires a new political context in which the people’s welfare and not the wealth of parties is a priority.

Only the BDP/HDP ran its campaign on its style of local government and their prospective projects. They systemised and presented the real interests of the people which are peace, participatory politics, ecological administration, gender equality and multiculturalism. They never believed that the state had to be protected from the people; rather they stated that the people had to be protected from the state.

The introduction of the co-chair system was the BDP/HDP’s attempt at revolutionising local politics in Turkey. Rather than concentrating power in an individual, which most of the time is a male, co-chairs identify the need to share power and introduce women into decision making roles. The effects of this new system will be seen by all in the very near future.

**How should the results be read?**

The AKP, after 12 years of despotic government, has lost legitimacy. The AKP is now on its way down. The only way it can preserve itself is to delve into a real attempt at democratisation and to enter into dialogue to solve the Kurdish question. No there route can help the downward spiral that the AKP now finds itself in. Due to the fact that a real democratisation of the country will eventually lead to its own prosecution, it does not seem likely that the AKP will adopt this. Although it may seem that the AKP has won an important local election, it will no longer be allowed the comfort previously afforded to it. The presidential elections will be important in the sense that if Erdogan does enter the race for the presidency, then the filling of the empty Prime Minister’s seat will gain a new significance.

Huseyin Ali: “There are two parties who can be deemed successful in the local elections: the BDP and the AKP. Despite allegations of corruption, the fact that the AKP did not lose votes can be seen as a success.
There are two reasons as to why the AKP did not lose votes despite these allegations. The first is due to the fact that it made people believe that the peace process, which was initiated by the Kurdish people’s leader Abdullah Ocalan, was initiated by itself. Depsite not taking any steps for the preservation of the ceasefire, the AKP benefitted from the fact that there was no violence in the past eighteen months.

The second reason is the fact that the AKP has made certain significant gains for Muslims in Turkey. This is why the Muslim community has stood behind the AKP despite corruption allegations. These are the reasons behind the AKP’s ability in protecting its percentage of the votes, if not its political effectivity. I believe that among others, these are the two main reasons.

However, this is not enough to save the AKP. To be more precise, this will not, in itself, enable the AKP to overcome the current political crisis. This is not only true of internal politics but also of Turkey’s external affairs. This is because Turkey’s internal and external policies are policies of war. Internally, there is a sort of civil war. A country in this situation cannot overcome its problems unless there is a complete overhaul of the system. The vote that the AKP received is due to severe polarisation of the country. It is increasingly more evident that the struggle within Turkey is more a political civil war.”

The losers of this election was the CHP. Despite the fact that there were serious allegations against the ruling AKP, the main opposition party was unable to benefit from this and once again proved to everyone that it was not a social democratic party. In its current form the CHP is Turkey’s hunchback. There is no hope in the CHP for the peoples of Turkey. The CHP, as the founding party of the Turkish Republic, has a significant responsibility in all of Turkey’s current problems. The CHP cannot renew itself unless it addresses its internal problems through extensive self-criticism. The main role it has played throughout its history is to suck up and pacify the people’s anger and disgruntlement towards the state. It played the same role in this election. It seems almost impossible for it to overcome this.

The MHP is another noteworthy party during this period of transition. If and when the country changes into a country in which the state is for the people and not vice-versa, the MHP is a party that will become increasingly marginal. The MHP for years was the “hit-man” of the deep state. Its main policies stem from racism, policies of hatred and the polarisation of society.

The local elections are over. However, the real choice lies ahead for Turkey: “either democratisation or chaos and corruption”. Democratisation goes through the solution of the Kurdish question and a new democratic constitution. This seems increasingly unlikely with the AKP, the CHP and the MHP.

The circumstances are ripe for alternative political parties
There is a real opportunity for the formation of a democratic, participatory and egalitarian political party. In this sense the BDP/HDP has a very important mission and future.

The HDP is an umbrella organisation for all alternative political and social communities. In this regard, rather than being a narrow ideological party, it is a party in which all social factions who take issue with the current system, who believe that Turkey can be a more liveable, egalitarian, peaceful country for everyone can come together and voice these demands. Maybe this role was not fulfilled this time round. However, this was the start and it was promising for the future.

On this topic, the co-chair of the BDP in his first statement after the elections said that: “We should have had an election in which local administrations were evaluated and discussed. We ran an election campaign that even had an impact on the whole of the Middle East. The Gezi uprising, the 17th of December, leaked tapes and recordings had an impact on the whole election campaign. Prior to the election, we reached out to 80% of our target audience. We could have achieved much more. The media, as usual, never supported the BDP. We witnessed a blatant discrimination. The Anatolia News Agency and the TRT especially imposed an embargo upon us. Social media was hit extremely hard. Many of our colleagues were in prison. The BDP was very successful in spite of this. Maybe the only winners of this election were women. Under the BDP and the HDP women were able to succeed. The co-chair system has entered our political domain. Everywhere, there is a female mayor. This result, is more important than any other numerical result.”

The message of the elections

- The lack of a political alternative in the west of Turkey was open for everyone to see.

- An open support for the peace process came out of these elections.

- In the Kurdish regions, the people supported and declared their self administration.

- The system’s parties were pushed even further back in Kurdistan, thus consolidating their own political will. The BDP has announced itself as the main opposition party.

Footnote:
(*1)

Diyarbakır
Bağlar
Bismil
Çinar
Dicle
Ergani
Eğil
Hani
Hazro
Kayapınar
Kocaköy
Kulp
Lice
Silvan
Sur
Yenişehir
Hinis (Erzurum)
Karaçoban (Erzurum)
Karayazı (Erzurum)
Tekman (Erzurum)
İğdir
Tuzluca
Hoşhaber Borough
Ağrı
Diyadin
Doğubeyazıt
Tutak
Dersim
Mazgirt
Mazgirt’in Akpazar Borough
Mardin
Dargeçit
Derik
Kızıltepe
Mazıdağı
Nusaybin
Artuklu
Ömerli
Savur
Bozova (Urfa)
Halfeti (Urfa)
Suruç (Urfa)
Viransehir (Urfa)
Şırnak
Beytüşşebap
Cizre
İdil
Silopi
Uludere
Balveren
Kumçatı
Findık
Sırtköy
Akdeniz (Mersin)
Hakkari
Çukurca
Yükseková
Şemdinli
Büyükçiftlik Borough
Esendere Borough
**Van Büyükeschir**
Bahçesaray
Başkale
Çaldiran
Çatak
Özalp
Saray
Edremit
Erciş
Gürpinar
İpekçolu
Muradiye
Batman
Beşiri
Gercüş
İkiköprü Borough
Balpınar Borough
Bulanik (Muş)
Malazgirt (Muş)
Varto (Muş)
**Bitlis**
Güroymak
Hızan
Mutki
Ovakışla
Ahlat
Yolalan Borough
**Şır}rt**
Baykan
Eruh
Atabağı
Veyselkarani
Digor (Kars)
Kağızman (Kars)
Dağpınar (Kars)
Karakoçan (Elazığ)
Pınarbaşı Borough (Adıyaman)
Kömür Borough (Adıyaman)

**2009-2014 BDP LOCAL ELECTION COMPARATIVE VOTES**

**DERSİM (TUNCeli)**

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**AMED (DIYARBAKIR)**

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(2*) According to the women’s coalition the figures for female candidates are as follows:
- Out of AKP’s 1394 candidates 16 were women = 1.15%
Out of CHP’s 1180 candidates 51 were women = 4.32%
Out of MHP’s 1394 candidates 35 were women = 2.52%
Out of BDP’s 224 candidates 124 were women = 55.35%
Out of HDP’s 232 candidates 169 were women = 72.84%
Out of BBP’s 73 candidates 3 were women = 4.11%
Out of IP’s 74 candidates 5 were women = 6.76%
Out of LDP’s 36 candidates 9 were women = 25%
Out of ODP’s 5 candidates 1 was a woman = 20%
Out of TKP’s 8 candidates 1 was a woman = 12.5%
Out of SP’s 1394 candidates 0 were women = 0%
DYP, HEPAR and HUDAPAR also had no female candidates.

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