

IS THERE REASON TO HOPE? TURKEY AFTER THE 2018 ELECTION

June 26, 2018

10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
1779 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036

PANELISTS

Henri Barkey

Cohen Professor of International Relations, Lehigh University;
Senior Fellow, Middle East Studies, Council on Foreign Relations

Nicholas Danforth

Senior Analyst, Bipartisan Policy Center

Howard Eissenstat

Associate Professor, St. Lawrence University;
POMED Nonresident Senior Fellow

Lisel Hintz

Assistant Professor of International Relations and European Studies,
School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University

Gönül Tol

Founding Director, Center for Turkish Studies, Middle East Institute;
Adjunct Professor, George Washington University

MODERATOR

Amy Hawthorne

Deputy Director for Research, POMED

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Amy Hawthorne: On June 24, Turkey held very consequential elections for president and parliament. That is what we're here to discuss today—what happened and what it means.

Let me very quickly run through the results. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in power since 2003, emerged victorious, winning about 52 percent of the vote and beating the center-left Republican People's Party's (CHP) Muharrem İnce, who got about 30 percent of the vote, and avoiding a runoff. Erdoğan's party, the conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP), lost its majority in parliament, winning only 42 percent of the vote, but its ally, the right-wing Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), won 11 percent and will likely join with the AKP in parliament,

ensuring a pro-AKP majority. The pro-Kurdish, liberal Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) received 11.7 percent of the parliamentary vote, above the threshold of 10 percent and earning them a place in parliament.

On the one hand, these elections were marked by vigorous campaign activity and a very high turnout of 87 percent. On the other hand, there has been much concern about the freeness and fairness of the elections—given the state of emergency that has been in place for almost two years following the July 2016 coup attempt, the arbitrary imprisonments of opposition figures and others, Erdoğan's near-full control of mass media, and a general atmosphere of growing repression. After these elections, Erdoğan will rule in a new executive presidency, following significant changes to Turkey's political system approved in a controversial constitutional referendum in April 2017. The changes will give Erdoğan vast new powers with few checks and balances and little oversight. [They include abolishing the office of the prime minister, endowing the president with the power to appoint the cabinet and vice presidents and to form and regulate ministries, to dissolve parliament, and to exercise direct power over the military and other state institutions.] It bears remembering, however, that a little less than half of Turkey's population did not vote for Erdoğan. There is significant opposition to his rule, and the country is divided.

First, I will ask the panelists a series of questions, and then we'll open it up to the audience to ask questions.

PANELIST DISCUSSION

Amy Hawthorne (moderator): *Henri, how do you explain what happened in the elections, and was it a surprise? Do you think there has been too much doom and gloom from analysts about the situation in Turkey, in light of the very significant voter participation and the robust campaigning?*

Henri Barkey: In terms of what the results mean, they mark the creation of a personalized autocracy—because there is an organized and active opposition, I would not call Turkey a dictatorship. I think the best way to

summarize what a personalized autocracy means is the French term: *L'état, c'est moi*—Erdoğan is the state and he controls the state. The results are not a surprise. No one expected Erdoğan to lose. The AKP did everything it could to secure this election.



There has already been a great deal of analysis of the national-level results, but I don't think those analyses mean anything. These elections happened under incredibly difficult conditions, there were many voting places moved right before the vote, and voter suppression was very present. We need to look at local results in context to be able to draw any meaningful conclusions. There was a massive propaganda mission for Erdoğan and the AKP led by the government—there were no posters of any HDP politicians anywhere in their strongholds in

southeastern Turkey, and perhaps as a result of this and other active measures by the government, the HDP lost ground in their strongholds. However, AKP lost seven percent of seats from November 2015, when the last parliamentary elections were held. But these results actually work well for Erdoğan. Since the HDP holds seats in parliament and AKP doesn't have a majority, he can tell Westerners worried about the political situation: look, there is an opposition; clearly Turkey is a democracy. Since parliament now holds very little power and AKP's coalition will have a majority, this change doesn't matter too much anyways.

I would argue that I don't think it's worthwhile to analyze the results. Due to the conditions, I really don't think the national-level results tell us much.

One thing I should say about CHP: for the first time the party managed to galvanize and energize the opposition. But at the end of the day, we should remember that there's a big difference between the AKP and CHP—AKP is a hierarchical political organization and it is very well organized. The leaders know who didn't come to vote, they're successful in their grassroots efforts, and so on. By contrast, CHP has shied away from traditional politics and an organized approach, and until that changes, the party will never succeed in gaining power and Turkey will be controlled and ruled by AKP forever.

Hawthorne: *Gönül, the fact that the MHP gained 11 percent of the vote, passing the parliamentary threshold and improving on its 2015 performance, surprised many Turkey experts. How do we explain the MHP's performance?*

Gönül Tol: First, I would like to respond to what Henri said. I think we should analyze the election results closely. Civil society working on behalf of opposition was very organized, and even Muharrem İnce acknowledged that though foul play was present, there wasn't as much as expected. We must analyze the election results in detail, because it does matter.

Let me say a few words about the big picture. If we look at recent Turkish elections, the big picture hasn't changed much. In the 2014 presidential election, Erdoğan received 51 percent of the vote. In the 2017 constitutional referendum, he got 51 percent, and in this election, he received 52 percent of the vote. The country is split into three—the coastal CHP base, the nationalist heartland of AKP and MHP, and the Kurdish areas where the HDP dominates. This shows me that Turkey is trapped in identity politics. In this election, we saw the result of electoral politics between the ruling bloc and opposition. For the first time, Turkish voters simultaneously voted for parliament and president. That brings me to the performance of the MHP, which was a huge surprise for me. The MHP didn't hold rallies, had only six meetings, and was polling at only around 5 percent. In addition, the İyi Party split from the MHP. So, no one was expecting MHP to perform this well. However, what we should recognize is that MHP is a brand—no matter what actually happens politically, it's a brand. It attracts protest votes—and I believe it attracted protest votes from the AKP. Some nationalist voters voted for the MHP instead of the AKP, and some decided to punish Erdoğan for overreaching on his power by voting for the MHP. This might not make sense to some of you because MHP and AKP are in the same coalition, but it seems that some voters cast ballots for Erdoğan for president and MHP for parliament. The MHP also captured young voters who don't believe in the other parties. A study showed increasing nationalism among the country's youth. This rising nationalism has been going on for some time, and largely can be explained by what's happening on the Kurdish front; there is both Kurdish and Turkish nationalism, and they're feeding off each other. In addition, nationalism has spiked after the failed coup and the conflict between the AKP and the supporters of Fethullah Gülen's Hizmet movement [a transnational Islamic social movement that the AKP blames for the coup attempt and has designated as a terrorist organization]. Anti-Western nationalism has also increased in response to American aid to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) [which Turkey considers part of the PKK].



Hawthorne: *Howard, let's talk about the HDP. Despite most of the party's leadership being in prison, the HDP surpassed the 10 percent threshold and will be represented in parliament. How did this happen and how will it shape Turkish politics?*

Howard Eissenstat: Allow me to touch on some general points first. Among analysts there is a debate about whether the election was “unfair but somehow free” or it “unfree and unfair.” I'm in the latter camp. Elections are not simply what happens on election day. Free and fair elections require media access, the ability of opposition to

campaign, voters' ability to cast ballots freely, and everything else that affects the opposition's ability to contest that election. The genius element of Erdoğan's authoritarianism is that he gives the opposition just enough freedom to give them hope they can unseat him, and keep them participating in the system. But there's a reason why you have these early election results proclaiming a huge victory for AKP, there's a reason why the courts have no say over supreme electoral commission decisions, why Erdoğan stocked the supreme electoral commission with loyalists, and why there was such major suppression in the southeast. It allows the opposition to feel like they're competing, but it's a rigged game. When you go to Las Vegas, you feel like you have a chance, but the house always wins. Erdoğan is willing to receive losses in the margins if he can win overall. He doesn't have to do massive electoral rigging because the country is so divided, he just has to influence the elections by a few percentage points.

In the southeast, though, there was a failure at the margins for Erdoğan. He would have wanted HDP to get 1 percent less of the vote because that would have driven them below the 10 percent threshold for entering parliament and resulted in the AKP winning full majority. So I believe that this was a loss, but it was at the margin. Voter suppression was evident in the southeast, including reported incidents of switching ballot boxes and other instances of fraud. Erdoğan wasn't subtle about this—he literally told AKP officials to take voter rolls and 'conduct special work' targeting HDP voters. So how did the HDP succeed to this degree? My take on why the CHP's presidential and parliamentary votes differ so much is that some CHP voters were willing to vote for HDP to get them across the 10 percent margin. I'm happy that the HDP is in parliament, but it doesn't change the game. In Vegas, you can win a hand, but the house wins the overall game.

Hawthorne: *Lisel, let me ask you about the CHP campaign. Muharrem İnce inspired a lot of hope as a presidential candidate. Getting 30 percent of the vote as a center-left candidate could be seen as a success at this point for Turkey, but in the same election, the party lost ground in parliament. How do you explain this?*

Lisel Hintz: This is an interesting point, even though we shouldn't necessarily take the election results at face value. İnce is somewhat of an enigma—he came from nowhere to receive 30 percent of the vote, despite the fact that CHP only got 23 percent of the parliamentary vote. Part of this may be because CHP voters were willing to vote for the HDP, but it's also because the CHP is kind of composed of the opposition writ large. We see this through the Anadolu Party that broke off, we see the headscarf issue and other examples, so the CHP is essentially an amalgam of different interests. Identity politics are important, but another aspect is that İnce is so much more charismatic than any other recent opposition figure. That ability to push back against Erdoğan is something that voters find exciting. I said that İnce came out of nowhere, but for people who follow Turkish politics closely, he didn't. He challenged Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu for the position of CHP parliamentary chairman twice—in 2014 and earlier this year—and failed, but he was selected as the presidential candidate. Many people were initially skeptical. But he has a lot of qualities that people find appealing. One of those qualities is his pugilistic nature, and the way he could push back against Erdoğan. I heard a story that someone in Erdoğan's inner circle even warned Erdoğan



that İnce could beat him rhetorically. İnce comes from a conservative Ankara household and people identify with him. A lot of people thought that he could beat Erdoğan, and now, after his loss, I'm concerned that people are feeling utterly defeated like they did after the 2013 Gezi Park protests. I was watching Halk TV [a Turkish opposition channel], and the anchor looked at his cell phone and said, İnce has just conceded via Whatsapp. It felt like getting broken up with over text message. Afterwards, İnce said that his concession wasn't the best way to go about it, but although votes were stolen, 10 million votes weren't stolen. At his concession speech, he kicked out the reporters from TRT [the Turkish state broadcaster] and said, you didn't cover my campaign, so why should you cover my concession. But then, he told them that he had no hard feelings and told them to wait in the lobby and that he would get coffee with them after. This type of incident shows İnce's character and why people liked him, but also shows the fact that he may not be learning or accepting responsibility for this loss. He is determined to lead a movement; maybe with his charisma he can make something happen.

Hawthorne: *Nick, you are one of the historians on this panel. Turkish democracy has a long and complex history. What can Turkish history teach us about the meaning of this election?*

Nicholas Danforth: A lot of people have been trying to find the silver lining with this election, and I just can't. Maybe if you look at this over a 75-year period of Turkish history, we could see something positive, but it's hard right now. At the very least, taking a historical perspective helps show how our expectations for Turkish democracy have evolved. Everyone was surprised when Turkey became a democracy in the 1950's. At that time, everyone looked at Turkey through the lens of the Middle East and that shaped their expectations. Despite the coups, the general sense during the Cold War was that Turkey's democracy was pretty good for the Middle East. However, by the 1990s, the expectations had changed and with Turkey's EU accession process people wanted to see it become a consolidated liberal democracy. If you want to see a silver lining, it's that if nothing else Turkey's half century-long struggle for democracy has created this expectation.



Turkish government officials sometimes ask why Erdoğan is judged so harshly for his authoritarianism and Egypt under Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is not. This is a double standard, but it's partly to Turkey's credit. The bar was always set lower for Egypt. And of course if you are going to get the benefit of America's good dictator treatment, you have to be the type of dictator America wants. Erdoğan is never going to be that kind of dictator.

Hawthorne: *Henri, some have suggested that Erdoğan will loosen his grip slightly after the election. How do you see the future under Erdoğan's greatly expanded powers?*

Barkey: Erdoğan has a choice: he can be magnanimous in victory, or he can use his new powers to crack down further. With a divided country, it might make sense to be magnanimous by releasing people from jail and ending the state of emergency. However, Turkey now has a new political system and he is the state. He can blame the Americans and globalists for conspiracies against him, but the reality is that the people voted for him and now he owns Turkey. When you are confronted with a situation like this, it is difficult to be magnanimous. He is surrounded by people loyal only to him; it's a completely clientelistic system. If you look at the people who used to be around him, he used to have no more than six to nine close advisors. None of them are there anymore: they were kicked out or resigned. He is surrounded by people now who always agree with him, who also have no interest in pushing an agenda of magnanimity. They were born into his propaganda. I was on a French television program yesterday and we were talking about the election when a woman came who is an advisor to Erdoğan. She said, this was a free contest, the HDP candidate was able to participate from prison! The fact that [party leader and presidential candidate Selahattin] Demirtaş was able to use his ten-minute phone call from prison to

talk to his supporters is proof for these people that it was a free election. That is the mindset. All power is now concentrated around Erdoğan. People have criticized the massive palace he built in Ankara—but it's not because he is narcissistic. Instead, he wants every important office to be moved into that palace in order to consolidate his control.

If I had to take a bet, I would say Erdoğan is going to be vengeful. There are two issues that loom very big. One is economics—there is a serious economic crisis in the making. It may not be a full crisis, but it will be severe. The other is the Kurdish issue—structurally, look at parliament. Not that parliament is especially important in the new political system, but the MHP and the İyi Party are both ferociously anti-Kurdish and together they have 20 percent of the vote. Add to that Erdoğan's animosity towards the Kurds currently, and if you were hoping there would be a peace process, those odds are not very good. Erdoğan is not going to be magnanimous; he's not going to look for new ways to govern. He is going to look for ways to survive the coming economic crisis.

Hawthorne: *Gönül, one of the complexities of the political scene is that there is this parliament in which Erdoğan's party doesn't have a majority. Does this matter? Or is parliament now basically just a safety valve for opposition to release frustration?*

Tol: First, can I say something in response to Howard's comment about how some CHP voters voted for HDP? I think he's right, but I'm not sure how significant in number they were. I think some HDP voters voted for Muharrem İnce for president and for HDP in parliament, while CHP lost votes to both the MHP and İyi Party.

Eissenstat: Look, this is less than a percentage point. When I was talking to many of my CHP contacts, none of them were talking about strategic voting. For many of them, the HDP is the PKK. But I talked to younger people and there was a movement to get the HDP in parliament—and it didn't have to be by a large amount. Fifty-thousand votes could change things.

Tol: As I mentioned in my opening remarks, there are structural issues also, and there is only so much a center-left party can do. But credit to İnce, he was able to garner votes from the Kurds, the Islamists, and more. He mobilized the opposition but was unable to steal voters from the AKP. The CHP still represents radical secularism, and until that changes, the electoral breakdown will not change.

Responding to what Henri said about what might happen next, the way that Erdoğan acts may depend on how the MHP works with the AKP. With 11 percent, they have significant control over the parliament. The MHP leader recently stated that he thought that AKP voters wanted the MHP to act as a check and balance on the AKP. I don't think he means on democracy and rule of law, but on the Kurdish question. I also think if the economic conditions worsen, it's possible that MHP will withdraw their support. I agree that this doesn't bode well on the Kurdish question. In terms of the diversity of the new parliament; yes, eight parties are represented, but in terms of ideology, there is no diversity. Twenty percent of the parliament is composed of Turkish nationalists in MHP and İyi Party, plus AKP, and even in CHP there are nationalists. There are Islamist members, which I suppose is diversity, but that doesn't mean much. So you have Turkish nationalists, you have Kurdish nationalists, and somewhere in between that you have CHP moderates. However, since AKP doesn't have a majority, if the opposition bands together, they could have some role in making Erdoğan's life difficult.

For example, Parliament has the power to veto Erdoğan's decrees. On the Kurdish question, as long as MHP and AKP are in alliance, there's not much that parliament can do. Bahçeli, the leader of the MHP, hinted that he will question Erdoğan on other things, but likely not on the Kurdish issue or foreign policy.

Hawthorne: *Let's talk about foreign policy. Lisel, do you expect any shifts in Turkey's relationships with Europe and the West? If so, how do you think things will change? I've heard some Western analysts and officials saying that Turkey is increasingly authoritarian, but it's the Turkey we have, so we have to work with it. What do you think?*

Hintz: In terms of the previous question, there are structural challenges, and I believe that my forthcoming book, *Identity Politics Inside Out*, does a good job addressing how the Turkish political sphere and the parties have evolved. But İnce had a lot going for him. He wasn't from the "white Turk" secular Kemalist faction and is actually from a conservative family. He brought his mother in a headscarf up on the stage at a rally, showing that he could appeal to more conservative voters, he didn't vote for immunity for the HDP, and in general he seemed more willing to defy the current system.

In terms of foreign policy, AKP has been in election mode almost all the time, so it will be interesting to see how the party will act now that the elections are over. One of the main tools the party has used is nationalist rhetoric to distract attention from the economic situation by hitting back at the United States, calling Angela Merkel a Nazi, and so on. So does this change now? I'm not sure. I think perhaps the nationalism is already very entrenched. One example was when Congressman Adam Schiff (D-CA) tweeted that Trump shouldn't congratulate Erdoğan, and an AKP member who is known to be relatively moderate tweeted back at him to say that we don't need your congratulations, you should shut up.

Another issue is the July 2016 coup attempt: Erdoğan fully believes that the United States was involved in the coup, partly because Fethullah Gülen is in the United States and the United States won't extradite him. During Erdoğan's speech proclaiming victory in the election, he said something like, "you know, Gülen lives in the United States, and there are a whole lot of Turks living in the United States who voted for the opposition." Erdoğan was trying to connect anyone who votes for the opposition to Gülen. Seventy percent of Turkish voters in the United States did vote for İnce, which was much different than the Turkish Diaspora in Europe, where Erdoğan is still very popular. I think there is a real question of tension between the U.S. and Turkey and the defining factor will likely be American support for the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and People's Protection Units (YPG). Turkey, for its part, says that the United States is arming a terrorist group that is attacking Turkey, despite the fact that the United States is supposed to be Turkey's ally. I don't see a softening between Turkey and the United States, and Turkey's economic crisis is coming. Foreign policy switches in Turkey often come when Turkey is in need of economic aid: for example, apologizing to Russia due to the prospect of economic help. If economic crisis hits and Turkey needs help, I could see perhaps a softening of relations with Europe if Turkey believes it will be financially helpful.



Danforth: I would add a broader point regarding the Kurdish issue. There is a tendency to discuss the future of the Kurdish peace process as a choice that Erdoğan has to make. However, his awareness of the strength of his nationalist opposition makes it deeply unlikely for a peace process to be politically viable even if he launches one. Public opinion on the Kurdish issue has only hardened over the last three years. So if the plan is to win enough military victories to get enough concessions to sell a deal on the Kurds to Turkish nationalists, it's not clear if this will happen anytime soon. From the other side, from the HDP perspective, they had a fantastic candidate in Demirtaş who tried to transcend the party's exclusively Kurdish origins with more liberal rhetoric, to, reach beyond his party's base and work with the CHP. İnce even visited Demirtaş in prison. But now the HDP might ask what this got them. The risk is if they decide this new approach that we all admired didn't really work and they'd be better off sticking to armed struggle. A meaningful peace process is difficult to imagine due to many structural factors right now.

AUDIENCE QUESTIONS

No one has mentioned the issue of Syrian refugees in Turkey. I'm from Istanbul, and people in Istanbul feel very strongly about the refugees. Can you speak to that issue?

Tol: The presence of 3.4 million Syrian refugees in Turkey is a significant vulnerability for Erdoğan. There isn't a problem in the media, because the state-controlled narrative has emphasized the need to help Muslim brothers and sisters. But there has been a significant backlash from Turkish nationalists, especially in border regions that are hosting large refugee communities. In these areas, many Turkish people think that the refugees and migrants stealing jobs and the crime rate is up, which is resulting in a backlash. Host communities in Western Turkey also believe in some ways that their lifestyle is under threat because they think the demographics of Turkey have changed forever, first with the Kurds and now the Arab migrants and refugees. I think that will become a significant vulnerability for Erdoğan, especially if the economic situation worsens.

Erdoğan has already changed his narrative by saying that Turkey will send the refugees back and send them to safe zones, and they have reported the numbers of people going back because of Turkish military victories in Syria. However, in the long term most of these people are in Turkey to stay and Erdoğan needs to find a political solution. Granting citizenship is a big step, and it's the right step, but the nationalist backlash would be severe. If the economic situation is good he can probably do it, but if it's not, Erdoğan will have to walk a very thin line.

Hintz: One explanation for the shift in votes to MHP seems to be that some AKP voters and perhaps others are frustrated with Erdoğan's inconsistent policy regarding Syrian refugees and the rhetoric regarding the refugees as Muslim brothers and sisters. The MHP is less religiously focused and though it has religious members, they are not as motivated by the Muslim Brotherhood rhetoric. Also, it is important to note that the CHP also has called for the return of refugees to Syria.

I just got back from Turkey, where I had the chance to participate in OSCE's monitoring of the election. I have some anecdotes from my time there and was wondering if you could provide some context. One was the subject of strategic voting—we were observing the voting in central Istanbul in a heavily Greek and Armenian area and İnce garnered 65 percent of the vote, but when it came to the parliamentary vote, CHP was 15 percent down from the presidential numbers and HDP received 20 percent more of the vote than Demirtaş did. I was also surprised by the number of HDP election observers around Istanbul—are there significant shifts demonstrated in this election of HDP having broader purchase and becoming a more national party? I also wanted to ask about MHP's surprising performance and İyi Party's underwhelming numbers.

Eissenstat: I'll start out talking about the Syrian refugee issue. There's a pretty broad consensus across political parties that they don't want Syrians to become Turkish citizens because it'll be a drain on resources. I think Erdoğan has largely supported Syrians in Turkey because he thinks it's the right thing to do and he's recognized the political costs and is now addressing them.

I am happy to see Alan Makovsky here in the audience because he wrote a masterful paper about how the parliament could keep AKP in check—a masterful paper that I disagree with. The first reason I disagree is because of Erdoğan and AKP's control over the security services and courts. Erdoğan has lots of sticks to use to keep control; pushback in the parliament is not so relevant. Second, Erdoğan is very good at controlling the opposition because he is the one with the guns and the cash. With the parliament, he'll use the cash, and if parliamentarians form a significant barrier, Erdoğan has lots of levers he can use to maintain control, and he's very good at this. Third, any parliamentary resistance requires the opposition to be unified enough to stand up to him in great numbers. Is that possible? Yes. I don't preclude the possibility of a black swan event or an economic crisis creating an opening, but I think the possibility that the opposition will be able to leverage resistance against Erdoğan is remote. You know how they say that you're more likely to be hit by lightning than win the lottery? I think it's more likely that you win the lottery than that the opposition will be able to stand up to Erdoğan.



Tol: I just want to add that I don't think the Iyi Party underperformed. Ten percent for a new party is still impressive despite being lower than pre-election polling.

Barkey: As to whether HDP is becoming a national party, I don't think so. There are certain areas where Kurds have moved for work reasons, and in major cities like Izmir and Istanbul, there are liberals voting for HDP. One thing that is important is that HDP is vertically organized (like the AKP) and can mobilize people on the ground, unlike CHP. Regarding the Iyi Party and MHP, MHP controls the police forces today and we shouldn't underestimate their power. However, one of the things we should look out for is a reconstitution between MHP and Iyi Party—they're completely shut out of the rent system that makes you rich, they're not going to get contracts from the state, they're not going to get any help from the state. There is an incentive for the two parties to join together in parliament, and they didn't really go at each other during the campaign, and that's interesting because together they'll be 20 percent. Regardless, I still think that the MHP will go with AKP, and there are rumors that the MHP leader, Devlet Bahçeli, will be the speaker of parliament.

Hintz: I disagree. HDP is trying to expand and appeal to other parts of the country. I'm a grammar freak, so I think it is important to note that the name of the HDP is the Peoples' Democratic Party—"Peoples," not "People's"—indicating that it is intended to represent multiple peoples, not just Kurds. They are trying to reform into being a party that's LGBT-friendly, concerned about human rights, emphasizes gender equality, and is generally progressive. Demirtaş has pushed back at times, but there have been many attempts to push forward a platform that is supposed to be about minority rights, human rights, and liberalism in general instead of just Kurdish nationalism. The question is whether people will assume that there is an inherent link between the HDP and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), but the party is trying to be perceived as a party focused on minority rights and human rights.

During the Turkish offensive in Afrin in January [the Turkish military captured the northern Syrian city of Afrin from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and People's Protection Units (YPG) control in March 2018], there was a lot of rhetoric targeting nationalist voters and reports about the operation were broadcast all day, every day for more than a month. However, there was no clear bump in the polls at the time as a result. What do you think this means for AKP and the use of foreign policy for domestic political gain?

Eissenstat: I think we often have a tendency to inflate the connection between Erdoğan's actions and his attempts to galvanize support. I see Erdoğan ultimately as a very typical Turkish Republican leader in terms of this type of action. I think he saw the possibility of a PKK state near Turkish borders as a threat in the same way that other Turkish leaders would have. As Nick once said, we went from the Turkish Islamic synthesis to the Turkish very Islamic synthesis, but I don't think that this was just about electoral considerations.

Tol: I do think electoral considerations play a large part and this was evident with the 2009 elections. Again, in 2015, after being threatened by support for the HDP, peace talks broke down. I think you're right that Erdoğan is a nationalist and conservative and pragmatic, but electoral considerations also play a large part in his governance, not just ideology.

Eissenstat: Look, he didn't win these elections by being dumb. He knew that he could get votes by reaching out to Kurdish voters on cultural issues and emphasizing Islam. And he's succeeded on local issues, but the minute that there was a concern about the sovereignty of the state and a threat to the country, that ended. I'm not saying he's incapable of strategic politics, but I think a conception that everything has to be instrumental and politically strategic is incorrect.

Hintz: In terms of Kobani, after the Kurds realized that Islamic State fighters were streaming across the border and that no one was protecting the Kurds in Syria, the Kurds decided that they would not support Erdoğan for president. In the elections, Erdoğan saw a fundamental betrayal and saw these Kurds, who he thought were faithful interlocutors, threaten him in parliament. He then moved towards more MHP-friendly nationalist and anti-Kurdish rhetoric.

[Audience Member] Alan Makovsky: I just want to say something regarding what Howard said about my paper on the parliament. I want to thank him for what I think was a compliment. In the article, what I was trying to respond to was that many people - who had not carefully read the constitutional amendment - thought that the parliament now will have no power. But if the opposition was in control of parliament, they could end the state of emergency just like that, and they could override every decree, but this is only if the opposition controlled parliament. Instead, AKP is only six votes short of a majority in parliament, and even without a full alliance with MHP, Erdoğan can find those six votes. I do think that right now, Turkey is becoming something very close to a dictatorship.

I want to ask about İnce's press conference on June 25, the day after the election, when he conceded defeat. I thought his approach to whether or not there was electoral fraud was strange—the important difference wasn't the 10 million votes that he mentioned, it was the 1.5 million votes were needed to trigger a run-off for the presidency. Why did he take this stance, and what is his long game?

Hintz: So many of his supporters were baffled—İnce said that the reason he didn't have a press conference until the next day was because he was waiting to see if the results would change, but people were asking where he was and even starting rumors about him being missing. I really don't know what his long game is. It's definitely strange, especially saying that Erdoğan was no longer the head of the AKP but should be respected as the head of the country.

Barkey: This may not be correct and I don't have solid proof, but my sources tell me that İnce was waiting to see if the CHP could prove that there had been fraud that affected 1.5 million votes so that he could successfully contest the result. However, the CHP couldn't. So I think that is what he was doing, and why he didn't appear in public until the next day to give his speech.

** Text of panelist discussion and remarks has been edited for length and clarity.*