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Eser ekerciolu<sup>a</sup>; Gizem Arikan<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Political Science, Stony Brook University, New York, USA

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# Trends in Party System Indicators for the July 2007 Turkish Elections

ESER ŞEKERCİOĞLU & GİZEM ARIKAN

Department of Political Science, Stony Brook University, New York, USA

**ABSTRACT** *The stellar success of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has led to the interpretation of the 2002 and 2007 elections as sharp deviations from past political trends. Through an analysis of national and regional-level party system indicators in the post-1980 period, the authors find that the success of the AKP should rather be seen as the continuation of trends that started in the early 1990s. Throughout the 1990s, the pro-Islamist and nationalist bloc had already established a strong base in Central Anatolia, and the success of the AKP is due to its expansion of this voter base to Western regions and some of the predominantly Kurdish provinces in the southeast.*

The July 2007 general elections in Turkey ended with the impressive landslide of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP). The AKP is the only incumbent party since 1983 to have increased its votes in a subsequent election with the exception of the Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Parti, DSP), which ran on the coattails of the nationalist sentiment created by the capture of Abdullah Öcalan shortly before the 1999 elections. In 2007, the AKP not only managed to increase its votes by 12.4 percent but also dominated almost all geographical regions, including some of those districts that have been considered to be the strongholds of the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP), such as Antalya.

Despite building its election campaign on how much of a threat the AKP posed for the secular order of the Republic and despite the huge participation in mass rallies against the AKP and the potential presidency of Abdullah Gül, the electoral coalition of the CHP and DSP only managed to receive 20.8 percent of the vote, which is barely equal to the combined vote shared by the two parties in the previous election. The election results were a big shock to the CHP, so much so that Deniz Baykal, who was protested by many voters and party members, chose not to make a public appearance until two days after the election.<sup>1</sup>

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*Correspondence Address:* Eser Şekercioğlu, Stony Brook University, Department of Political Science, Stony Brook, NY 11794, USA. Email: msekerici@ic.sunysb.edu; Giza Arıkan, Stony Book University, Department of Political Science, Stony Book, NY 11794, USA. Email: garikan@ic.sunysb.edu

On the ultranationalist front, after its unimpressive finish in the 2002 elections, the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) managed to increase its votes by about 6 percent and pass the national threshold with 14.3 percent of the vote, becoming the third largest party in the parliament.

In an effort to circumvent the 10 percent national threshold that had prevented them from gaining representation in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, candidates affiliated with the Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi, DTP) ran as independents in the 2007 general election. Twenty-three of the candidates were elected to parliament, making them the first parliamentarians from a Kurdish ethnic party to win seats in more than a decade.

The clear losers of the 2007 election were the two center-right parties, the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi, ANAP) and the Democratic Party (Demokrat Parti, DP). After their failed unification attempt, ANAP could not even run in the elections, while the DP captured about 5.4 percent of the national vote—a drop of about 4 percent compared to its performance in 2002. The election thus underscored the erosion of the center-right that has been going on since early 1990s, as the two largest center-right parties' combined vote dropped from 14.6 in 2002 to 5.4 percent in 2007.

Although the AKP's landslide victory was a totally unexpected shock to many—especially some columnists who even denied taking notice of legitimate opinion polls—the party's success, when viewed longitudinally, is not all that shocking. The Turkish electorate has twice in history graced incumbent parties with increased vote shares: the DP in 1954 and the DSP in 1999. In both these cases, incumbent parties rode the coattails of spectacular successes. In 1999, the DSP claimed—and indeed was granted—credit for the capture of Abdullah Öcalan, and in 1954, the electorate celebrated the first four years of multiparty democracy as well as the economic boom that took place between the two elections. Whether the DSP in 1999 and the DP in 1954 were successful by objective measures is an empirical question, but there is little doubt they were rewarded by the electorate for their perceived performance in office. The same is true, to a certain extent, for the AKP in 2007. Despite the vocal



Figure 1. Winning party by province, 2007 general elections.

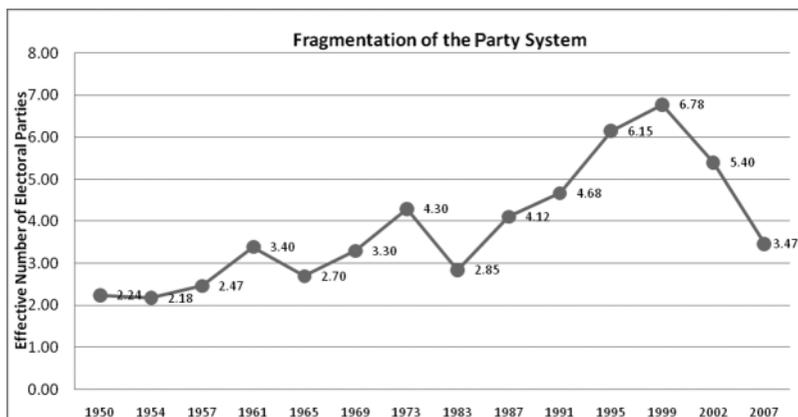
disagreement of the opposition and the popular press, Turkey's economic performance was at least satisfactory, with the inflation rate dropping to single digits and a sustained annual GDP growth rate of more than 5 percent in the four years the party held office. The AKP successfully claimed credit for the economic revival after the 2001 crisis as well as for starting accession negotiations with the European Union.

On the other hand, one should be careful about attributing AKP's success to solely retrospective evaluations. The 2007 elections, for the most part, underline the continuation of a trend that had started earlier. The collapse of the center-right, the gradual erosion of the center-left vote, and the ascendancy of pro-Islamist<sup>2</sup> and nationalist movements had been the defining characteristics of the Turkish party system in 1990s. The 2002 and 2007 elections, then, do not necessarily reflect a sudden shift in the party system. On the other hand, the 2007 elections also mark a sharp decline in fragmentation and volatility, which might be interpreted as a sign of a more stable party system.<sup>3</sup> However, this increased stability is not necessarily evidence for a new party system but a culmination of processes that had started as early as the early 1990s. In this paper, it is argued that the success of the AKP in 2007 should be seen in light of these historical trends and developments, and the 2007 elections (as well as the 2002 general elections) were more a continuation of certain trends rather than a drastic deviation. Through an evaluation of party system indicators on the aggregate and regional levels, this essay demonstrates that 2002 and 2007 were not necessarily sharp breaks from past patterns. The pro-Islamist parties have long-stabilized their voter base in the central and eastern regions of Turkey. The success of the AKP was mainly due to its success in capturing the Western regions and many of the predominantly Kurdish provinces in the southeast.

### **Party System Indicators in 2007: Change or Continuity?**

Throughout the 1990s, the Turkish party system was characterized by high volatility, high fragmentation, the weakening of party identification among voters, the erosion of support for center parties, the rise of pro-Islamist and nationalist (PIN) parties, ideological polarization, the rise of leadership politics, and the weakening of party organizations.<sup>4</sup> In this section, the trends in fragmentation and volatility throughout the post-1980 period are investigated, with an emphasis on the 2007 elections.

As can be seen from Figure 2, fragmentation in the party system constantly increased starting with the 1987 elections, reaching a climax in 1999. Thanks to the lifting of the ban on former political leaders shortly before the elections, the effective number of parties rose from 2.85 to 4.12 in 1987. In 1991, fragmentation increased even more, when ANAP and the Social Democrat People's Party (Sosyal Demokrat Halk Partisi, SHP) lost even more electoral support in favor of their rivals, the DYP and the DSP, and the electoral coalition between the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP) and the Nationalist Task Party (Milliyetçi Çalışma Partisi, MCP) captured about 17 percent of the votes. The election thus yielded two almost evenly

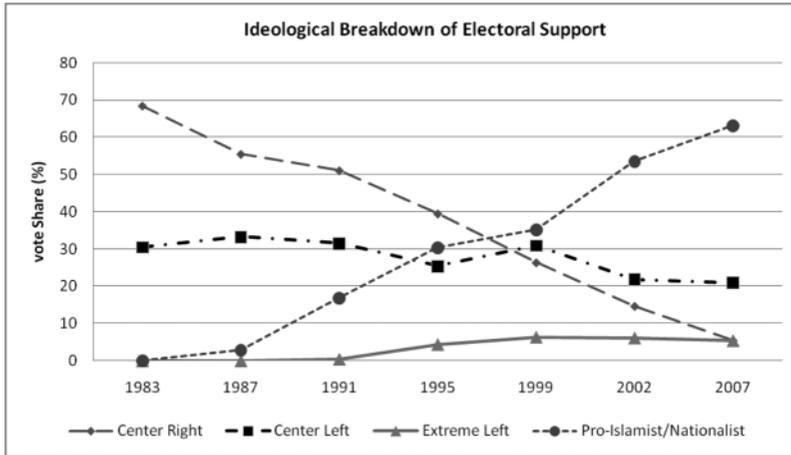


**Figure 2.** Fragmentation of the Turkish party system, 1950–2007. The fragmentation measure used here is Laakso and Taagepera's effective number of parties measure (Markku Laakso and Rein Taagepera, "Effective Number of Parties: A Measure," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol.12, No.1 (1979), pp.3–27). The effective number of electoral parties is calculated with the formula  $1/\sum v_i^2$  where  $v_i$  is the vote share of party  $i$ . Another formula also widely used is the Fractionalization Index, which is calculated as  $1 - \sum v_i^2$ . Both formulas give a measure of the fragmentation in the electoral system. Mathematically speaking, both measures are equivalent since one can be transformed to the other with no loss of information. Choice of formula is merely presentational.

divided center–right parties, two parties on the center–left, and a pro-Islamist/nationalist camp, increasing the effective number of electoral parties to 4.6. As the RP and MHP increased their electoral support in 1995, the party system fragmented even more. Yet it was the 1999 elections that marked the highest fragmentation in the Turkish party system, with 6.78 effective electoral parties. Despite the 10 percent national threshold, five major parties were able to pool enough votes to gain representation in parliament; the CHP came close to passing the threshold; and the largest party, the DSP, only managed to receive about one-fifth of the total vote. The 2002 elections, on the other hand, portrayed a different picture. After almost two decades, fragmentation finally started to decline. Yet compared to the early 1990s, the effective number of parties was still high. In the 2007 elections, the effective number of parties dropped from 5.4 to 3.4, and fragmentation declined remarkably. Despite the prevalence of ethnic and religious cleavages that divide the electorate,<sup>5</sup> the elections produced the second least fragmented results in the post-1980 period.

On the other hand, the sharp decline in fragmentation in 2002 and the continuation of this trend in 2007 was mainly due to a continuing process. The steady decline of popular support for the two major center–right parties finally culminated in their exclusion from parliament in 2002, a trend they failed to reverse in 2007.

Figure 3 shows the ideological breakdown of party support in general elections in the post-1980 period.<sup>6</sup> The most striking observation is the consistent decline of the vote shares of the center–right parties since 1983.



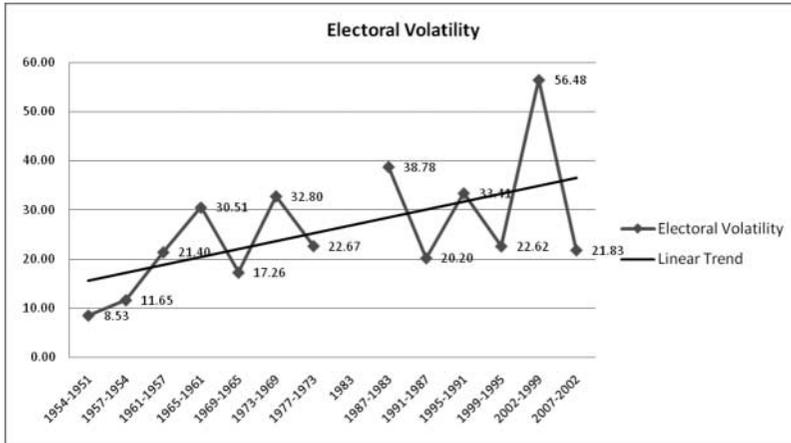
**Figure 3.** Ideological breakdown of electoral support in general elections in the post-1980 period.

The 2002 and 2007 elections also mark a visible decline in electoral support for the center-left parties, the DSP and the CHP. Support for center-left parties floated around 30 percent for most of the 1980s and 1990s, with the exception of 1995, in which the combined votes of the two parties totaled about 25 percent. The first two elections of the 2000s indicate electoral support of an all-time low for parties of the center-left. In the 2002 elections, there was a sharp 10 percent decline, which was mainly due to the erosion of the DSP's vote. The 2007 elections did not prove to be a blessing for the DSP-CHP coalition either, as the coalition received the lowest percentage of votes cast for the center-left in the post-1980 period. It may still be too early to conclude that support for the center-left in Turkey has stabilized around 20 percent.

Finally, a noteworthy yet unimpressive increase in the electoral fortunes of the extreme left over the years is observed. Electoral support for this group has stabilized at around 5 to 6 percent, and there has not been much change since 1999 in the overall support for these parties.

Therefore, it seems that the diminishing fragmentation in the party system owes more to the erosion of the center-right than anything else. It looks like the AKP, by distinguishing itself from the MSP tradition and by committing itself to a moderate agenda, managed to appeal to the voters in the center, which led to the total collapse of the center-right parties in 2007.

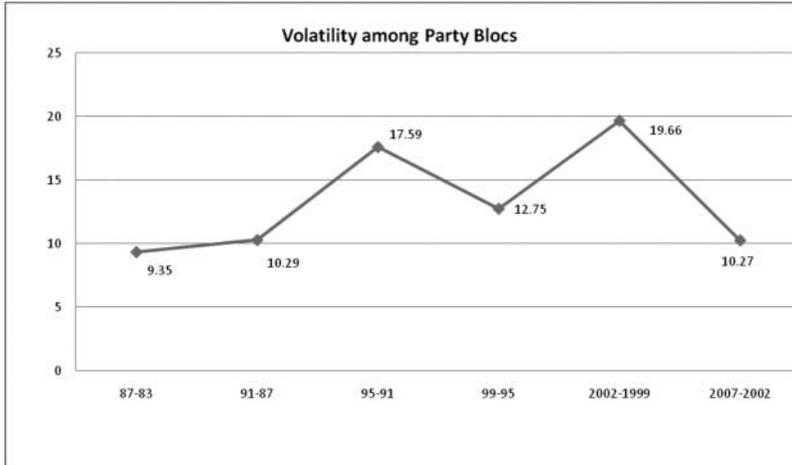
High volatility is also considered to be among the maladies of the Turkish party system of the 1990s. As Figure 4 shows, volatility has always been high in Turkey with no less than 20 percent of the electorate switching parties from one election to the next. In general, since 1960 volatility has varied within the 20 to 40 percent range. Yet the post-1980 period has seen the highest volatility levels in the party system. Between 1983 and 1987, 38.78 percent of Turkish voters switched their



**Figure 4.** Volatility in the Turkish party system, 1954–2007. Total volatility is the sum of the absolute value of all changes in the percentages of votes cast for each party from one election to the next:  $\sum |v_{it} - v_{it-1}|$ , where  $v_{it}$  is the vote share of party  $i$  in election  $t$ , and  $v_{it-1}$  is the vote share of the same party in election  $t-1$ .

party preferences. Although volatility declined in the next elections, it was still among the highest in the developing world.<sup>7</sup> Yet it is the 2002 elections that mark the record level in volatility, as more than half of the electorate changed their preferences between 1999 and 2002.

Since high volatility could be due to shifts in party support within the same ideological orientation<sup>8</sup> it might be more instructive to look at volatility among party blocs. Figure 5 displays trends in ideological volatility—the change in vote from one party bloc to another in the post-1980 period.<sup>9</sup> From this perspective, occurrences of switching between ideologically dissimilar parties were relatively low in most of the elections. Except for in 1995 and 2002, most of the volatility was due to voters changing parties within the same ideological bloc. Yet in those elections in which the RP (1995) and the AKP (2002) made a breakthrough, high ideological volatility is observed. The change in vote between party blocs was the highest in 2002, with about 20 percent leaving one ideological bloc in favor of another, which mainly stemmed from the flight of many voters from centrist parties to the AKP. After both the 1995 and 2002 elections, there was a dramatic decline in ideological volatility. On the other hand, despite the AKP increasing its vote share by about 12 percent and the MHP rising once again to enter parliament, in 2007 volatility and fragmentation decreased. Can this be a sign of a higher degree of institutionalization of the party system? It is hard to say. One source of volatility and fragmentation in the Turkish party system has been the existence of multiple parties within ideological blocs. In 2007, there was finally only a single major party in each ideological bloc. The CHP, in the 2002 and 2007 elections, was the sole power of the center–left represented. The MHP represented the nationalist camp, after having shared the niche with the Young Party (Genç Parti, GP) and the AKP in 2002. The AKP's electoral success in



**Figure 5.** Volatility among party blocs in the post-1980 period.

2002 induced party mergers and electoral coalition attempts in 2007. A steady shift to the right characterizes post-1980 electoral dynamics, and the 2007 elections are the latest point in this long-term reorganization of the party system. In some circumstances, high volatility could be indicative of a continuous process of realignment, such as the case of party systems in southern Europe where, after a critical election, volatility declined, and party systems became more stable and predictable.<sup>10</sup> The results in 2002 and 2007, with a peak and then a sudden drop in volatility, could be interpreted as the manifestation of a continuous realignment process that had been taking place throughout the 1990s.

### Regional Patterns in Party System Characteristics in 2007

Having explored national indicators of party system characteristics, regional electoral patterns are now examined since the seemingly homogeneous election map in Figure 1 hides regional differences that are worth investigating.

As has been mentioned above, the most cited characteristics of the Turkish party system are high volatility and fragmentation. While there is a certain degree of decline in both indicators, a sweeping generalization generally blurs emerging regional patterns. These regional patterns reflect the dynamics of social cleavages and adjustment (or lack thereof) of the party system to such changes. In this section, the regional patterns are analyzed by first focusing on the 2007 elections and then extending the time frame to the post-1980 era.

In order to study the regional electoral patterns that emerged in the 2007 general elections, a cluster analysis was conducted. A method that was utilized by Ali Çarkoğlu<sup>11</sup> to analyze the 1999 elections, cluster analysis creates clusters of observations in a dataset such that members in one cluster are similar to each other in some

respect (in this case voting behavior) and dissimilar from members of all other clusters. In essence, cluster analysis is a data reduction method, which makes inference from large and complex datasets easier. The key choice is the number of clusters to be created. A general, non-parametric rule of thumb is to have at most a number of clusters so that the smallest cluster has at least two observations. The cluster analysis presented here yielded six clusters, the smallest cluster having five members.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 6 illustrates the six clusters on the map of Turkey, and Table 1 summarizes the structure of the clusters. The first cluster has 26 provinces, characterized by a dominance of the AKP, which received about 40 percent of the vote, followed by the CHP with about 23 percent and the MHP with 18 to 19 percent. Ankara, Istanbul, the Mediterranean regions, and most of the non-coastal Aegean provinces belong to this cluster. Another cluster with five provinces is composed of the Thracian provinces and İzmir and Muğla, characterized by above average vote shares for the CHP. In fact, this is the only cluster where the CHP was the largest party. Clusters 3 (14 provinces) and 4 (22 provinces) are marked by considerable AKP dominance. In both clusters, the AKP had more than half the votes, the only difference being that in Cluster 3 the CHP and MHP are both well below their national vote shares. Clusters 3 and 4 are relatively scattered around the map, but together they comprise most of the Central Anatolia and Black Sea regions. Clusters 5 (five provinces) and 6 (nine provinces) are characterized by the high vote share of independent candidates affiliated with the DTP. What differentiates Cluster 5 from 6 is the high vote share of the AKP. In Cluster 5, the AKP averaged about 60 percent of the vote, making independents a distant second, while in Cluster 6 independents

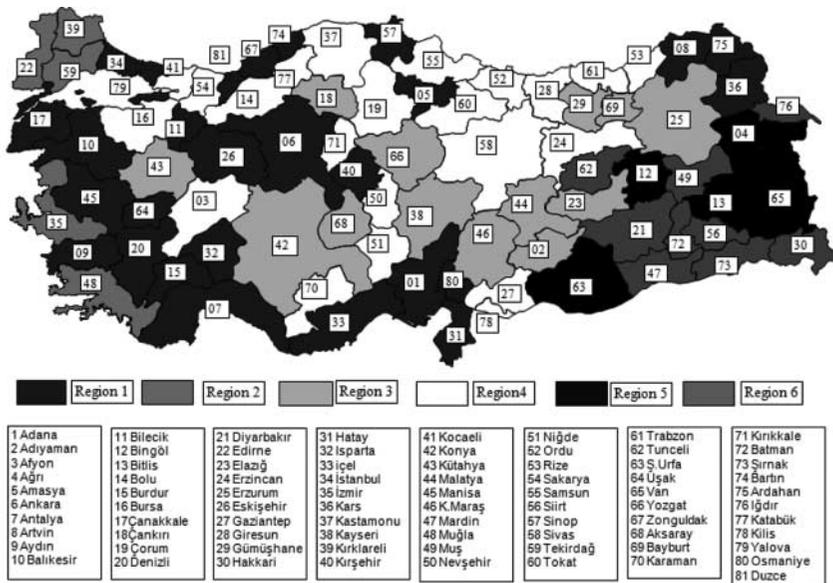


Figure 6. Regionalization of electoral support in 2007, cluster analysis.

had about 47 percent of the vote, making them the largest electoral group. In both clusters, other parties were well below their national averages. Thus, the electoral geography of Turkey was dominated by three main features in 2007, culminating in three distinct regions: a region where the center–left dominated (Cluster 2); regions where pro-Islamist/Nationalist parties dominated (Clusters 1, 3, 4, and 5); and a region where pro-Kurdish parties/candidates dominated the elections. The AKP was dominant in four of the six clusters derived from the election data; however, the nature of competition in these four clusters was quite different. While the AKP's domination was not seriously challenged in any of the regions, the runner-up was different in all of them. In western Anatolia, the center–left was the main challenger to the AKP, while in the Black Sea region and Central Anatolia, the MHP was the runner-up party. In parts of Eastern Anatolia, the AKP was challenged only by the independents affiliated with the pro-Kurdish party, the DTP.

This regionalization pattern is not very different from what Çarkoğlu<sup>13</sup> found for the 2002 elections. Çarkoğlu also derived six clusters and identified three regions. However, similarities between the two maps are not limited to the number of clusters and the overall voting patterns. The provinces in each regional group are also very similar in the two cluster analyses. For the 2002 elections, Çarkoğlu identified a cluster where the AKP was dominant and the CHP a clear second, with 20 provinces.<sup>14</sup> This roughly corresponds to Cluster 1 presented here, where the AKP was dominant, with the CHP being a clear runner-up with 26 provinces. Of the 20 provinces on the 2002 map, 16 are found in this Cluster 1 too. Similarly, Clusters 3 and 4 on the map of 2007 corresponds roughly to Çarkoğlu's Cluster 2. Of the 29 provinces in Cluster 2 of the 2002 map, 28 are in either Clusters 3 or 4 on the 2007 map, where the CHP trailed the AKP by a larger margin than the national average.<sup>15</sup> However, there are stark differences between the 2002 and 2007 electoral maps too. Basically, the difference in 2007 is twofold: first, the size of the region dominated by the center–left shrunk considerably from 15 provinces to five. Second, in the cluster where the AKP led and pro-Kurdish elements came in second, the AKP's domination is far more complete, with an average vote share of 60.03 percent; the same figure for 2002 was about 34 percent. More significantly, in 2007 the AKP performed better than its national average in the east and southeast, while AKP support was significantly lower than its national average in 2002.

Another measure of continuity in regionalization patterns is the socioeconomic characteristics of the 2007 clusters and how they compare to similar previous analyses. Çarkoğlu<sup>16</sup> found that electoral regions are socioeconomically differentiated. His two key observations are: first, centrist support was mostly concentrated in the coastal provinces where socioeconomic development was relatively higher; and second, regions where pro-Kurdish support was highest stood out in socioeconomic indicators as those provinces that lag behind significantly in almost all indicators.<sup>17</sup> Though this study did not use as many indicators as Çarkoğlu's, the few key indicators used show that the second observation—that pro-Kurdish parties and candidates draw support in the least developed parts of the country—is still relevant. In these analyses, it was found that what used to be a single electoral cluster in 2002 became

Table 1. Regionalization of Electoral Dynamics: Party System Indicators in Extracted Clusters in the 2007 Elections

	Cluster 1 (N = 26)		Cluster 2 (N = 5)		Cluster 3 (N = 14)		Cluster 4 (N = 22)		Cluster 5 (N = 5)		Cluster 6 (N = 9)		Turkey (N = 81)	
	Mean		Mean		Mean		Mean		Mean		Mean		Mean	
GDP per Capita (2001, \$)	2,539.28		3,160.72		1,417.47		2,182.73		861.37		1,075.10		2,146.00	
Literacy (%)	85.81		89.32		79.78		82.33		60.96		60.68		87.30	
Population per Expert Doctor	4,045.35		1,971.60		5,732.85		4,122.55		11,004.40		16,627.11		4,499.00	
Ratio of High School Graduates	0.12		0.11		0.09		0.09		0.06		0.07		0.10	
Ideological Volatility	14.06		9.85		14.27		13.11		27.53		22.42		10.27	
Volatility	26.57		28.77		22.96		22.70		40.19		32.92		21.83	
Fragmentation (ENP)	3.70		4.15		2.28		2.89		2.39		2.69		3.47	
AKP	40.17		25.63		63.35		53.93		60.03		35.59		46.58	
CHP	23.50		35.94		9.34		15.86		5.32		6.00		20.88	
MHP	18.79		15.94		13.91		15.04		4.44		3.95		14.27	
DP	7.39		8.40		5.47		5.14		3.50		4.47		5.42	
GP	2.83		9.51		0.81		2.04		0.33		0.45		3.04	
Independents	2.47		1.14		1.59		1.79		22.63		47.01		5.39	

Cluster 1: AKP dominant, CHP a clear second (mostly non-coastal Marmara and Aegean and Mediterranean).

Cluster 2: CHP largest party, AKP second (Thrace and Coastal Aegean).

Cluster 3: AKP very dominant, MHP second largest (mostly Central Anatolia).

Cluster 4: AKP dominant, CHP and MHP competing for second far behind (mostly Black Sea coast and some central provinces).

Cluster 5: AKP dominant, DTP-affiliated independents with considerable vote.

Cluster 6: Independents receive most votes, AKP second, no other party close to 10 percent.

two distinctly different regions in 2007. Cluster 5 and Cluster 6 cover the predominantly Kurdish provinces, but some of these provinces (Ağrı, Bingöl, Bitlis, Şanlıurfa, Van) heavily supported the AKP while other provinces in the region (Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Mardin, Muş, Siirt, Tunceli, Batman, Şırnak, Iğdır) lent support to the independents affiliated with the DTP.

The centrist coastal zone continued to shrink in 2007, now confined to only five provinces in which the center-left was the dominant force. There are no provinces where a center-right party led. The regionalization pattern reflects this fact quite starkly: There are no electoral regions where centrist parties dominated except for Cluster 2, where the CHP was the dominant party. However, this more confined zone of center-left domination is socioeconomically more differentiated from the rest of the country than the centrist zones depicted in Çarkoğlu's study.<sup>18</sup> The five provinces in Cluster 2 (Edirne, İzmir, Kırklareli, Muğla, and Tekirdağ) are on average 50 percent wealthier than the country average, better educated, and have access to better services. In fact, in almost all indicators used, the rank order of the CHP vote is identical to the rank order of the indicator (ranked from most developed to the least developed). For example, the wealthiest region, Cluster 2, is highest in income. Clusters are ranked in income from highest to lowest as 2-1-4-3-6-5; the CHP vote is ranked identically. The same ranking relation is true for literacy and population per specialist doctor. The relation between the AKP vote and socioeconomic indicators is almost completely reversed. As illustrated in Table 1, in clusters where the AKP was the most dominant, party development is lagging behind. In the two clusters (1 and 3) where the AKP was the largest party but was followed by the CHP, income and education figures are better than in the two clusters (4 and 5) where the AKP was more dominant, and CHP support was negligible. This probably shows that the AKP's support, despite the stellar increase in 2007 throughout the country, is more concentrated in areas in search of solutions to immediate economic and social hardship.

Intercluster differences are not limited to vote patterns and socioeconomic indicators; electoral regions are also different with respect to party system indicators (Table 1). Clusters 5 and 6, reflecting the massive shift to the AKP, are more volatile than the country average. In Cluster 2, where the CHP was the largest party, an interesting fact is observed: While electoral volatility is above country average, ideological volatility is the lowest of all clusters. Provinces that resisted the AKP surge could do it because of relatively high levels of ideological stability, most probably an indication of loyalty to the CHP. However, this also leads to higher levels of fragmentation in the system. In Clusters 1 and 2, where the CHP was either a clear second (Cluster 1) or the leading party (Cluster 2), fragmentation is higher than the country average. On the other hand, where the AKP dominated, fragmentation decreases as expected. However, a striking observation is that the lowest fragmentation levels occur not where the AKP is the most dominant but where independents and the AKP share the spoils more or less equally. This is interesting because the southeastern provinces were historically marked by not only high volatility but also high fragmentation.<sup>19</sup> It seems that the southeastern and eastern

provinces split their electoral loyalties between the two ideological approaches that appealed to them: pro-Islamist on the one hand and pro-Kurdish on the other. The AKP's insistent emphasis on democratization and accession to the European Union, at least on paper, seems to have finally convinced the voters in the predominantly Kurdish-speaking provinces.

Thus, in line with previous studies,<sup>20</sup> three regions can be identified. Even though the regionalization characteristics are not identical across elections, commonalities are hard to miss. Like in 1999 and 2002, in 2007 the country was divided into three regions: a region where conservative elements dominated; a region where pro-Kurdish elements were powerful; and a region where the center-left and/or the center-right had the upper hand in elections. The centrist region had been declining continuously in the 1990s, and in 2007 only a cluster with five provinces where the center-left led in the elections could be identified. The center-right now plays almost no role in regionalization. Another difference in 2007 from the previous cluster analyses is the patterns observed in southeast and eastern Anatolia. First of all, unlike in 1999 and 2002, predominantly Kurdish provinces do not comprise a single cluster but two clusters, as noted above. However, unlike in 1999 when volatility was low but fragmentation was high, the region in 2007 presented the reverse characteristic. Fragmentation was low and volatility high due to the shift to the AKP. This observation is true even when the relative volatility and fragmentation comparing the region to the country averages is examined.

### **Regionalization of Party System Indicators in the Post-1980 Period**

Having described the regional patterns in the 2007 general elections, a temporal analysis of regional patterns is now undertaken. This requires a change in the definition of region. Cluster analysis is a very useful tool with which to take a cross-sectional snapshot at a given time. However, using regions created by cluster analysis to compare dynamics over time is problematic. First of all, clusters change. If a comparison is to be made of how different regions of the country responded to political phenomena differently over time, stable regions are needed. Therefore, the familiar regional partition of the country will be used. Granted, geographical regions defined as such do not necessarily reflect political and social cleavages and dynamics. Yet they are still instructive.

Different regions experienced the reorganization of the party system after the 1980 coup differently. For example, the eastern and southeastern regions saw for the first time the emergence of political parties that explicitly bid for the representation of the Kurdish population. Thus, there was high volatility in east and southeastern Anatolia. However, once Kurdish nationalist parties became a regular force in elections, despite frequent party closures, voters in the predominantly Kurdish provinces settled for a relatively less volatile pattern. These regional patterns are illustrated in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 breaks down electoral volatility on a provincial basis<sup>21</sup> across geographical regions, and Table 3 illustrates the deviations from the national mean. Even though regions are drawn mostly out of geographical convenience and

**Table 2.** Electoral Volatility Across Regions, Post-1980 Period

	Marmara	Ege	Akdeniz	Karadeniz	Central Anatolia	Eastern Anatolia	SE Anatolia	Turkey (Avg.)
1987	38.25	38.47	44.4	44.38	38.26	46.07	45.62	42.56
1991	20.36	19.61	19.92	19.43	28.27	24.12	24.2	22.42
1995	28.95	32.46	38.58	29	32.96	44.09	49.37	35.88
1999	21.85	26.63	24.59	22.12	25.63	24.95	20.64	23.74
2002	59.45	53.99	50.12	56.03	58.97	44.58	42.35	52.42
2007	24.17	29.23	24.64	25.45	20.72	32.32	29.96	26.73

are not based on political cleavages of any kind, investigating regional patterns based on this conventional partition is instructive.

The first striking observation is the fluctuation in volatility in the east and south-east. Volatility in the predominantly Kurdish provinces remained slightly above the country average in 1987 and 1991, indicating that voters in these regions were searching for a party to represent their preferences in the absence of a distinctly Kurdish nationalist party. In 1991, the DEP (Democracy Party) entered the elections under the SHP banner. After its closure in 1994, HADEP (People's Democracy Party) was founded and entered elections on its own in 1995. This was the first time a political party that distinctly identified with the Kurdish population ran in general elections. As a result, electoral volatility in southeast and east Anatolia shot upwards. In the southeast, volatility was 13.49 percent higher than the country average in this election. Once Kurdish nationalist parties became a regular force in the general elections, voters in southeast and east Anatolia continued to pledge their support for them, largely oblivious to other electoral dynamics.

In 1999 and 2002, volatility was significantly lower than average in the southeast. The 2002 elections in particular were striking. The collapse of the center-right and mass flight to the AKP led to the highest level of volatility in the history of Turkey. However, volatility in the southeast was more than 10 percent lower than the country average. What do these patterns imply? While this is not definite evidence of

**Table 3.** Volatility Across Regions: Deviations from Country Mean

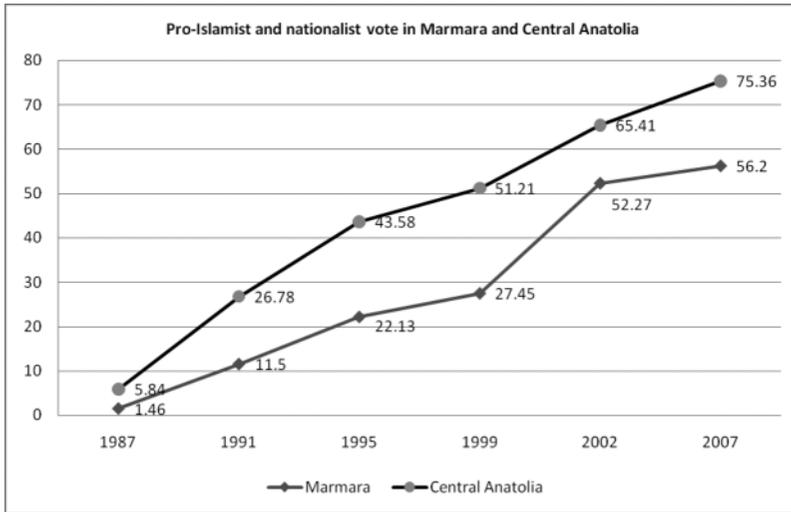
	Marmara	Ege	Akdeniz	Karadeniz	Central Anatolia	Eastern Anatolia	SE Anatolia	Turkey (Avg.)
1987	-4.31	-4.09	1.84	1.82	-4.3	3.51	3.06	42.56
1991	-2.06	-2.81	-2.5	-2.99	5.85	1.7	1.78	22.42
1995	-6.92	-3.42	2.7	-6.88	-2.92	8.21	13.49	35.88
1999	-1.89	2.89	0.85	-1.62	1.89	1.21	-3.1	23.74
2002	7.03	1.57	-2.3	3.61	6.55	-7.84	-10.07	52.42
2007	-2.56	2.5	-2.09	-1.28	-6.01	5.59	3.23	26.73

voter preferences and relevant social and political cleavages, these indicators are still instructive. First of all, it can be inferred that electoral dynamics in the east and southeast are most influenced by the availability of Kurdish nationalist parties on the ballot. When these options are not presented to the electorate, they search for second-bests. When these options are present then voting patterns in the predominantly Kurdish regions are relatively stable. While these results are not necessarily definitive evidence, the electoral dynamics in the east and southeast are indicators of social cleavages. Major cleavage in this region, especially during the post-1980 era, has been pitting Kurdish identity against Turkish nationalism. Two ideological stances have been successful in the region: Kurdish nationalist and pro-Islamist. Both ideological stances offer alternatives for Turkish nationalism,<sup>22</sup> which has been on the rise, which was especially the case in the 1990s. Dynamics of electoral volatility in the region reveal that vote swings mostly occur when there is a profound change in the availability of a party that would explicitly identify with the Kurdish-speaking population; when such a party is available the electorate goes for it; when not, there is vote-switching to the pro-Islamist party, which is the best alternative since it emphasizes religious bonds over national and ethnic heritage.

East and southeastern Turkey are not the only interesting cases. The rise of political Islam and Turkish nationalism in the early 1990s can also be traced as it spread from the central provinces towards the west. In 1987, the RP made its appearance in the polls, but it was not until the 1991 elections that pro-Islamic and nationalist movements made their true electoral debut. The RP and the MHP entered the election together and received 16.88 percent of the vote in 1991. However, most of that support came from the central provinces. Central Anatolia with its strong Sunni tradition was the first region to respond to the reappearance of Necmettin Erbakan and Alparslan Türkeş on the Turkish political scene. This surge of nationalist and religious movements led to an increase in electoral volatility in Central Anatolia, where volatility was about 6 percent higher than the national average.

The vote share of pro-Islamist and nationalist parties eventually rose in the western provinces too, but until the mass flight to the AKP in 2002, the Marmara region in particular remained less volatile than the country averages. In 2002, however, the Marmara region was more volatile than any other region in the country. This is probably because relatively moderate voters were seduced only by the combination of the disappointment created by the 2001 economic crisis, the continuing weakness of the center-right parties, and the AKP's relatively catchall rhetoric. This dynamic is also apparent when the vote share of pro-Islamist/nationalist (PIN) parties across regions is examined. Figure 7 compares the vote share of the pro-Islamist and nationalist parties of the Central Anatolia and Marmara regions.

In Central Anatolia, pro-Islamist/nationalist parties increased their vote shares very rapidly in the first three elections of the 1990s—in fact, much more rapidly than in Marmara. Whereas the deviation from the national average was 4 percent in 1987, it rose to 24 percent in the 1999 elections. It almost seems that the rise of the pro-Islamist/nationalist parties in the Marmara region follows Central Anatolia by a one election lag. In 1999, Central Anatolia had already become a stronghold



**Figure 7.** Pro-Islamist and nationalist vote in Marmara and Central Anatolia, 1987–2007.

for pro-Islamist and nationalist parties, whose vote share averaged more than 50 percent of the total vote. Marmara reached that mark in 2002. In fact, in 2002 PIN parties almost doubled their vote share, largely thanks to the rise of the AKP.

Looking at the regional vote share of PIN parties over the years (Table 4), once again the differences between regions is witnessed. While the 2002 elections were most notable for the success of the AKP and the collapse of the center-right, right-wing explosion in Marmara is also noteworthy. Of course, the most important question is whether voters in the western provinces have suddenly become more conservative or whether the AKP managed to appeal to a relatively centrist electorate while managing to keep a pro-Islamist posture in an undertone. Most probably both factors contributed to the result. Immigration has been put forward as the culprit responsible for the rise of the extreme right in the outskirts of the major cities. Ever since the RP's successful urban campaigns in Istanbul and Ankara in the early

**Table 4.** Regional Vote Share of Pro-Islamist/Nationalist Parties

	1987	1991	1995	1999	2002	2007
Marmara	1.46	11.5	22.13	27.45	52.27	56.2
Ege	2.1	10.73	22.85	29.3	49.83	62.07
Akdeniz	4.01	15.00	31.71	40.42	53.04	66.82
Karadeniz	3.31	19.3	32.00	38.03	56.59	69.13
Central Anatolia	5.84	26.78	43.58	51.21	65.41	75.36
Eastern Anatolia	2.83	21.93	35.44	31.61	39.38	59.22
SE Anatolia	1.36	15.03	29.23	25.19	33.68	54.33

1990s, shantytowns of the big cities were seen as the breeding ground for extreme right mobilization. Socially alienated and economically disappointed masses embraced nationalist and religious positions. However, in 2002 the flight from the center–right was so massive and PIN parties' vote share increase so great that such gradual dynamics cannot explain it. The AKP, unlike its predecessors the RP and the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi, FP), was successful in capturing the conservative, right-wing vote with a milder religious tone, a strong pro-EU stance, and great emphasis on democratization. Many voters who might have been sympathetic to the Islamic undertone but feared radicalization tilted towards the AKP. Therefore, when electoral trends are analyzed, it must be remembered that ideological classifications are never solid but relatively fluid and changeable. The voters of the RP in 1995 are very unlikely to be ideologically identical to AKP voters in 2002. 2007 AKP voters are probably a relatively different bunch than the AKP voters of 2002. However, even though the pro-Islamist and nationalist parties presented more catchall characteristics than their counterparts in the early and mid-1990s, they still are distinguishably different from staple center–right parties.

When moving from 2002 to 2007, it is observed that the AKP, rather than increasing its votes in the whole country, found new niches to exploit. The most visible pattern in 2007 is the AKP's penetration into east and southeast Anatolia. It is true that these provinces have always been favorable to pro-Islamist parties, emphasizing religious commonalities over ethnic differences. In particular, the RP's pan-Islamism appealed to ethnic Kurdish voters in 1995.<sup>23</sup> Table 3 demonstrates that the vote share of pro-Islamist parties in east and southeast Anatolia were about same or slightly higher than other regions except Central Anatolia until 2002, though the relative vote share of pro-Islamist parties declined from 1991 through 1999. In 2002, while the AKP exploded in every region, the eastern and southeastern provinces experienced only modest gains. This possibly reflects the effects of the AKP's relatively milder religious positioning. De-emphasis on religiosity bought votes in the west but at the expense of the eastern and southeastern vote. Apparently, emphasis on EU accession and democratization had not caught up with the voters in the predominantly Kurdish provinces. However, things changed in 2007. The AKP's vote share increased almost 20 percent in both regions.

Interestingly, voters in the Marmara region did not see pro-Islamist and nationalist parties as favorably as the rest of the country. While in every region PIN parties enjoyed more than a 10 percent increase in their vote share, they could muster only a 4 percent increase in Marmara, mostly because the Thracian provinces remained loyal to the CHP.

All in all, when temporal dynamics across regions are examined, it becomes apparent that change in the party system and distribution of ideological preferences did not occur simultaneously in every region of the country. Ideological movements first flourished in a confined geographical space, affected by corresponding social cleavages reigning in that particular region. While the analysis presented here uses regions as they are defined primarily geographically without any major concern for economic or political forces at work, regional dynamics in party system indicators

cannot be pinned down. This is in and of itself an important observation. While other scholars have ventured into geographical analyses before, the practice has never taken off. Yet the authors believe that geographical cleavages in electoral behavior hide important messages that interest political scientists.

## **Conclusions**

At a first glance it looks as if the elections of 2002 and 2007 represent a big break from past trends: The high fragmentation and volatility that had defined the Turkish party system in the 1990s changed drastically with the rise of the AKP at the polls. Yet a closer look shows that, despite all the turbulences, the Turkish party system was undergoing a continuous transformation marked by the reshuffling of party preferences in favor of right-wing parties at the expense of the center-right. By the 2000s, the shift of the electorate to the right was complete. In addition, the vote shares of center and extreme left parties stabilized around 20 and 7 percent, respectively.

The analysis of regional party system characteristics also supports the argument that recent elections are part of a trend that started earlier. Starting with the early 1990s, the shift of Black Sea and Central Anatolian provinces to pro-Islamist and Turkish nationalist parties made this region a stronghold for extremist parties by the end of the decade. Except for during the 2002 elections, volatility in these regions was below the national average, which shows that the voting patterns remained relatively stable.

The eastern and southeastern provinces also realigned much earlier, with the establishment of Kurdish nationalist parties and the development of a pro-Islamist ideology by the RP that would present a clear alternative to Turkish nationalism. Since the mid-1990s, voting patterns in this region have also become stable. While pro-Islamist parties usually receive considerable support, their success depends on the strength of pro-Kurdish parties. Analysis of regional voting patterns shows that voters in these predominantly Kurdish-speaking provinces split their vote between the AKP and the independents affiliated with the DTP.

On the other hand, the alignment of the coastal regions, and especially Marmara, took a longer time. The regions dominated by the parties of the center have shrunk since 1999; by 2007 there was no region dominated by the center-right. Voters in the Marmara region shifted their support overwhelmingly to a pro-Islamist party only when the AKP offered a relatively moderate agenda with emphasis on accession to the EU. Thus the AKP's successes in 2002 and 2007 can be viewed as the continued expansion of right-wing domination from Central Anatolia towards the west. Since the western provinces are more densely populated, once the AKP could appeal to voters in these regions a sharp increase in its vote share had to be expected.

The 2002 and 2007 general elections then can be viewed as the culmination of a process that started after the military coup of 1980 rather than as a radical overhaul of the party system. While the dramatic effects of the AKP's 2002 victory were largely exacerbated by the lingering effects of the economic crisis and the overwhelming

parliamentary majority of the AKP, the voting behavior itself was not an indication of a new party system.

Finally, regional voting patterns across the post-1980 elections show that the pro-Islamic and nationalist parties first consolidated their electoral support in the central regions and then expanded towards western Anatolia and, in the case of pro-Islamic parties, to east and southeast Anatolia as well. However, this expanding base of support has an opportunity cost as well. Now drawing a high level of support from across the whole country, especially following the 2007 elections, the AKP will find a wider variety of interests and preferences to which to appeal. No longer a crisis management government, demand from the AKP in terms of economic performance will also increase. What remains to be seen is whether the AKP will use this larger electoral support to further bring the party towards the center. Of course, the AKP faces a dilemma of sorts. Continued electoral support from provinces located in the coastal regions of the Marmara, Ege, and Akdeniz will require a moderate agenda, while moving towards the center to consolidate this newly acquired electoral base jeopardizes the support of more conservative voters.

### Acknowledgments

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### Notes

1. "Baykal's Leadership in Question after Election Failure," *Turkish Daily News*, July 23, 2007; "Baykal: Niye Gideyim?" [Baykal: Why Should I Go?], *Radikal*, July 25, 2007.
2. Despite the AKP's commitment to a moderate agenda, the authors still label the AKP as part of the pro-Islamist movement both because the party leadership has its roots in the pro-Islamist movement and because the constituency of the party still continues to be more religious and conservative than the base of other parties.
3. Sabri Sayarı, "Towards a New Turkish Party System?" *Turkish Studies*, Vol.8, No.2 (2007), pp.197–210.
4. See Birol Akgün, "Aspects of Party System Development in Turkey," *Turkish Studies*, Vol.2, No.1 (2001), pp.71–92; Ali Çarikoğlu, "The Turkish Party System in Transition: Party Performance and Agenda Change," *Political Studies*, Vol.46 (1998), pp.544–71; Ali Çarikoğlu, "The Geography of the April 1999 Turkish Elections," *Turkish Studies*, Vol.1, No.1 (2000), pp.149–71; Ali Çarikoğlu, "Turkey's November 2002 Elections: A New Beginning?" *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal*, Vol.6, No.4 (2002), pp.123–56; Ali Çarikoğlu, "The Rise of the New Generation pro-Islamists in Turkey: The Justice and Development Party Phenomenon in the November 2002 Elections in Turkey," *South European Society and Politics*, Vol.7, No.3 (2002), pp.123–56; Ergun Özbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics: Challenges to Democratic Consolidation* (Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner, 2000); Ergun Özbudun, "The Institutional Decline of Parties in Turkey," in Larry J. Diamond and Richard Gunther (eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Sabri Sayarı, "The Changing Party System," in Sabri Sayarı and Yılmaz Esmer (eds.), *Politics, Parties and Elections in Turkey* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2002).
5. Ali Çarikoğlu and Melvin J. Hinich, "A Spatial Analysis of Turkish Party Preferences," *Electoral Studies*, Vol.25 (2006), pp.369–97.

6. Following Çarkoğlu, “Turkey’s November 2002 Elections: A New Beginning?” and Çarkoğlu, “The Rise of the New Generation Pro-Islamists in Turkey,” the authors coded the Kurdish nationalist parties (including the independent candidates who were affiliated with DTP in the 2007 election) as well as socialist and communist parties as extreme left; SHP, CHP, and YTP as center–left; DYP, ANAP and fringe parties such as MDP, YDH, YP, DEPAR, DTP, and LDP that come from that same tradition as center–right; and MHP, RP, and its successors including AKP, as well as GP, as extreme right. This categorization is also consistent with voters’ perceptions of party positions, with the exception of the GP, which is usually placed in the middle of the ideological spectrum. Nevertheless, the authors prefer to include the GP in the extreme right category due to its ultranationalist overtone in electoral campaigns. In any case, coding the GP as a center–right party does not lead to significant changes in any of the analyses.
7. Çarkoğlu, “The Turkish Party System in Transition.”
8. Sayarı, “The Changing Party System.”
9. The classification of the party blocs is the same.
10. Özbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics*; Özbudun, “The Institutional Decline of Parties in Turkey.”
11. Çarkoğlu, “The Geography of the April 1999 Turkish Elections.”
12. STATA 9.1 software package was used to conduct all statistical analyses in this paper. The authors used the Kmeans cluster analysis routine of Stata.
13. Çarkoğlu, “The Rise of the New Generation Pro-Islamists in Turkey.”
14. *Ibid.*, pp.144–5.
15. The authors also conducted cluster analyses of their own for the 2002 and 1999 elections, reaching similar results. Thus the results for 2007 are compared with already published data.
16. Çarkoğlu, “The Rise of the New Generation pro-Islamists in Turkey.”
17. *Ibid.*, pp.149–51.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Çarkoğlu, “The Geography of the April 1999 Turkish Elections,” p.162.
20. *Ibid.*; Çarkoğlu, “The Rise of the New Generation pro-Islamists in Turkey.”
21. Volatility for each given region is calculated as the mean volatility of the provinces in that region. Similarly, scores for Turkey are average volatility scores across all provinces, and therefore slightly different from the figures reported above.
22. Burhanettin Duran, “Approaching the Kurdish Question *via Adil Düzen: An Islamist Formula of the Welfare Party for Ethnic Coexistence*,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol.18, No.1 (1998), pp.111–28.
23. *Ibid.*