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To cite this article: Kursat Cinar, Meral Ugur-Cinar & Ali Acikgoz (2022): Turkey's Republican People's Party (CHP): A Longue Durée Analysis, Turkish Studies, DOI: [10.1080/14683849.2022.2119849](https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2022.2119849)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2022.2119849>



Published online: 14 Sep 2022.



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Turkey's Republican People's Party (CHP): A Longue Durée Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This article employs regressive and spatial analyses to understand the correlates of the CHP's electoral support from the first competitive elections in 1950 to the present. We find that despite some continuities in its constituency, the CHP's voter base has changed significantly with regards to key political and social dynamics such as the Kurdish vote, effective number of parties, and urbanization. The findings give credence to the role of political leadership as well as the evolutionary capability of the party, both of which can have important implications regarding the future electoral trajectory of the party and of Turkey's political regime.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 13 June 2022; Accepted 17 August 2022

KEYWORDS Republican People's Party (CHP); Turkish politics; political parties; democratization; center-periphery cleavage; secular-religious cleavage

Introduction

The Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), the oldest, founding party of the Turkish Republic, plays a central role in Turkish political history. It is also in the limelight of contemporary Turkish politics, as it is the main opposition party whose actions will be decisive in shaping the contestation of the two-decades long Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) rule and the trajectory of the political regime of Turkey at large. Its deep roots in Turkish political history make the CHP susceptible to both praise and criticism. While the party is the champion of modernization and progress for many, for others it is the repressive apparatus of Kemalism and of the bureaucratic status quo against the voices of 'the people'.

Rather than treating the CHP as a monolithic and static entity, this article traces the evolution of the party due to changes that can be attributed both to

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the party itself as well as to changing circumstances. This article takes a *longue durée* approach to the CHP so as to explore the patterns, continuities and changes in the CHP's electoral support since the beginning of multi-party politics in Turkey in 1950. As we will show, its political leaders and the cadres around them have considerably altered the tone and rhetoric of the CHP throughout history to address major political, socioeconomic, and demographic changes in the society. Changes in political institutions and the nature of party competition, the macroeconomic outlook of the country, and the demographic transformations in the society have all affected the fortunes and the very structure of the party.

The article intends to contribute to the line of research on Turkish politics that focuses on spatial relationships among political parties.¹ The article also aims to contribute to the literature on Turkish political history and its relevance to the current debates in Turkish politics by offering wider perspectives, longer time horizons, and more focused and fined-tuned analyses to the study of political parties in Turkey.² In order to do so, it employs several political, economic, and demographic variables as independent variables to understand the correlates of the CHP vote in Turkey's multi-party-political history. These analyses are also supported with spatial techniques to show the distribution of the CHP support and the effects of spatial correlations.³ The approach followed in this study also aims to remedy the tendency in the literature on the CHP to treat the party and its voter base as static and monolithic.⁴

The organization of the article is as follows. The first section provides a brief overview of Turkish political history, particularly focusing on the CHP. The second section presents the various sources of data, key variables and methods that have been employed in this research. The third section covers our empirical results, which include correlative, regressive and spatial analyses to understand the path dependencies and critical junctures for the CHP's electoral support throughout Turkish political history. To offer an analytical overview, this section assumes a chronological stance, which focuses on major changes in the CHP's party structure, including leadership changes, over time. Drawing upon our findings, the fourth section presents comparative insights regarding the continuities and changes in the CHP's party structure and their reflections for the party and the society at large. These include related debates in Turkish and global politics with regard to democratization, political institutions, and political parties.

Historical background

Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the CHP has played a key role in Turkish politics. The party was the dominant, ruling political organization of Turkey until the mid-1940s. First with its initial leader and

the first President of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and then with his ally and successor İsmet İnönü, the CHP aimed to create political and civic institutions that would generate a quantum leap for society.⁵ The revolutionary changes that the single party-state brought about during the early years of the Republic included the dissolution of the institution of the Caliphate as well as religious orders and lodges, transitioning to the Swiss Civil Code and Italian Penal Code, the adoption of Western-style Gregorian calendar system and a Turkified Latin script instead of Arabic, the introduction of suffrage and election rights to women, and the transfer of the capital city from Istanbul to Ankara.

With the passing of Atatürk in 1938, İnönü assumed the role of the chairpersonship of the party and the President as the 'National Chief' (*Milli Şef*). During the 1940s, along with the economic hardships caused by the Second World War, it started to become more and more obvious that the one-party regime had achieved its *raison d'être*. The CHP could justify its hold onto power 'only through the claim that it was the guardian of the new regime and its reforms'.⁶ While it aimed to co-opt provincial elites into its ranks in some localities, it was mostly unable to establish direct contacts with the rural masses.⁷ As the single-party regime and the 'National Chiefdom' system within the CHP reached its nadir around 1945, İnönü allowed the establishment of opposition parties and Turkey's peaceful transition to multi-party democracy.⁸ With the Democrat Party's (DP) victory in 1950, Turkey fully transitioned to a multi-party-political system, which is still functioning today, despite its flaws.⁹

Since Turkey's transition to multi-party politics, the CHP has succeeded to rule the country only a few times. This includes the coalition governments led by İnönü's CHP during the early 1960s and the CHP coalition governments led by Bülent Ecevit during the 1970s. Since then, while sustaining its role in politics for most of the time, the CHP has failed to become a leading force in elections.¹⁰ Yet, the party has continuously been a target, particularly for the right-wing and Islamist parties and political actors, by whom it has been depicted as sponsoring a Kemalist modernization project that is intrinsically antithetical to the essential qualities of Turkey's predominant Sunni Muslim culture¹¹ and for being the representative of secularism, the center, and the political elites at the expense of Islam, the periphery, and the people.¹²

Despite the CHP's elitist and static image in the eyes of the many, the party has also gone through serious transformations over several decades. While İnönü led the party between 1940s and 1960s, the declining electoral success of the CHP brought about major changes in its rhetoric with the adoption of the 'left of center' position around mid-1960s, the widening of its support base to workers, peasants, and low-income groups in the urban centers, and finally the replacement of the decades-long chairpersonship of

İnönü with the energetic Bülent Ecevit in 1972. With Ecevit's leadership during the 1970s, the party turned into a mass party that attracted the highest level of support for the party in its history.

In the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, the CHP and its leadership cadres were banned from politics (until a national referendum in 1987 that lifted the ban for prominent politicians including Ecevit). Former-CHP cadres mostly joined the Populist Party (*Halkçı Parti*, HP) (1983–85), Social Democratic Party (SODEP) (1983–85), and Social Democratic Populist Party (*Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti*, SHP) (1985–1995). Ecevit also formed his own Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Partisi*, DSP) in 1985 and assumed its leadership in 1987. With the annulment of the ban on pre-1980 parties in 1992, another prominent politician, Deniz Baykal, and his followers reestablished the CHP. The SHP unified with the CHP in 1995. However, the DSP under Ecevit continued its own path. In essence, the SHP, DSP, and the new CHP shared the legacy of the pre-1980 Republican People's Party during the 1990s.¹³

After the weakening of the DSP and its ailing leader in the new millennium, the CHP reassumed its role of the strongest heir of the Republican tradition in Turkey during the 2000s. While some of its central elements such as secularism are still at the core of the party's program and rhetoric,¹⁴ the CHP has also undergone important changes, especially after Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu replaced Baykal as the chairperson in 2010. As 'more fluid value groupings [have emerged] as the basis of political representation'¹⁵ and the nature of salient social cleavages is in flux whereby the center and peripheral actors are switching roles in light of the political and social changes in the Turkish society,¹⁶ the CHP under Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership has tried to stand as a viable opposition against the predominance of the AKP under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. To do so, it has moved closer to the center and toned down its Kemalist rhetoric (on hotly contested debates such as the headscarf issue) in the hopes to attract a wider group of the electorate that would include minority groups (such as the Kurds and Roma), and centrist and center-right voters with a pious way of life.¹⁷ While being harder to implement, this strategy has proved relatively successful for the CHP in broadening its appeal and enhancing its electoral fortunes. Indeed, the most recent local elections in 2019 proved to be a major blow to the AKP's hegemonic ambitions, as the CHP won the three biggest cities (İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir, the former two of which have been governed by the AKP and its predecessors since 1994), as well as many important metropolitan provinces including Adana, Antalya, Aydın, Hatay, and Mersin. To this end, the upcoming 2023 national elections will be pivotal for the CHP to test whether it (with its alliance partners) could replace the two-decades long AKP rule in the country.

This historical overview aimed to cover the milestones of the CHP and Turkish politics, which reflect the internal changes in the party leadership and party organization¹⁸ as well as external macro-political and economic changes in the society.¹⁹ Considering the pivotal role that changes in leadership and party program have played in the CHP, this article will use these milestones as critical junctures for the CHP and Turkish politics in order to analyze the changes and continuities behind the electoral support of this party and what these could mean for the greater discussions for the scholars of democratization, party politics, and Turkish politics.

Data, key variables, and methodology

To capture changes and continuities in the CHP's electoral support and its correlates and effects on Turkish politics, this article utilizes national and international data sources, introduces important political, economic, and demographic variables, and undertakes several methods. To present a fuller and consistent picture of Turkish politics, all the empirical analyses are done at the local (provincial) level. This section presents these key aspects for our analyses.

Data sources

The article relies on official records for electoral results. These include Turkey's Supreme Election Council (*Yüksek Seçim Kurulu*, YSK) and Turkish Statistical Institute (*Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu*, TÜİK). Urbanization data are drawn from TÜİK. The Kurdish population data are projected based on the most recent official records in 1965 census and Mutlu's influential work on the subject.²⁰ GDP growth rates are gathered from the World Bank Database.

Key variables

Dependent variable

The dependent variable (DV) of this research is the electoral support for the CHP over Turkey's multi-party-political history since 1950. As the historical overview section has covered, the CHP has been an important political actor throughout this period. The party operated under the leadership of İnönü between 1938 and 1972 and Ecevit between 1972 and 1980. During the interregnum between the CHP's ban on politics after the 1980 military coup and the CHP's reopening in 1992, the SODEP, the SHP, and the DSP continued its legacy. During the 1990s, the DSP continued its operations, while the SHP merged with the CHP in 1995. Hence, for the 1980s and 1990s, we take into consideration the vote shares of these parties both separately and combined

where necessary as our DV. For the 2000s, the CHP has been mostly the sole heir of the older CHP legacy. Thus, we consider only the CHP's vote shares over national elections in 2002, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2018 as our DV.

Independent variables

Political variables

We utilize three independent, political variables in our analysis.

Electoral Turnout: The turnout rates in national elections could offer important insights for the Turkish politics to better comprehend the levels of mobilization of the masses based on political parties' rhetoric and mobilization and macropolitical and macroeconomic conditions.²¹ In Turkish political history, populist political parties including the DP and the AKP have been quite successful to mobilize the masses especially in the early years of their tenure. For instance, while the DP's first victorious elections in 1950 yielded almost 90 percent electoral turnout, the turnout rates diminished to below 80 percent in its succeeding elections. Hence, it is worth testing how electoral turnout is correlated with the CHP support and analyzing what this means for each historical episode in Turkish political history.

Effective Number of Parties (ENP): It is not the nominal number of political parties that enter elections in a polity, but it is rather their weighted importance in their electoral support and representation that really matter in the course of politics. To this end, this article uses Laakso and Taagepera's widely used formula for effective number of parties (ENP).²² The ENP index could prove very illuminating regarding the nature of party competition in a polity, i.e. whether it is effectively a two-party or a multi-party competition and how this could affect the fortunes of political parties. The index would hence be relevant for understanding historical electoral successes of the CHP too.

Margin of Victory (MoV): For each electoral cycle, the CHP vote shares are compared with the vote shares of the victorious party (if the CHP trails) or its closest contender (if the CHP is the winner of the election) for each province. This variable can also be informative about the competitiveness of electoral race in each electoral district.

Economic variables

The macroeconomic conditions in a polity may affect its political outcomes. This is especially true in times of economic turmoil. Existing research covers how economic crises have indeed affected political institutions in Turkey.²³ Additional research also reveals how economic voting matters in Turkish politics and how voters punish or reward incumbent governments retrospectively based on their macroeconomic performance.²⁴

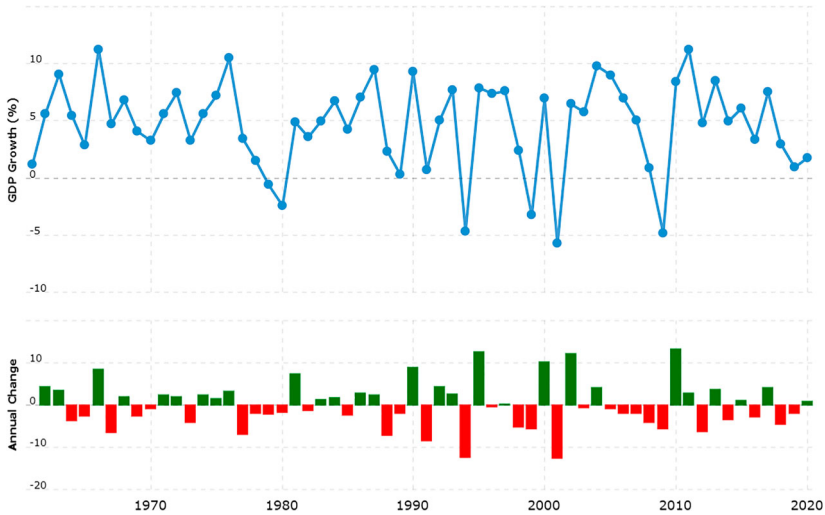


Figure 1. Turkey's macroeconomic performance based on annual GDP growth rates. Source: World Bank.

Figure 1 below illustrates the fluctuations in the Turkish economy based on annual GDP growth rates since 1960. Both national economic performance and international conditions have affected how the Turkish economy has fared over decades. Over these years, as indicated in the Figure 1, Turkey has undergone some serious economic crises especially in 1994, 2001, and 2008. This macroeconomic performance has surely reflected on the electoral outcomes of political parties including the CHP, whether it is in government or on opposition. To this end, while most of our empirical analyses are done at the local (provincial) level, we also take into account the macro-level economic situation in the country and discuss its relevance for the case of the CHP in the article.

Demographic variables

We employ two demographic variables in our analysis.

Urbanization: Urbanization is considered to be one of the key indicators of socioeconomic development and is thought to be key for democratic institutions.²⁵ It boosts literacy rates, industrialization, access to media sources, and political participation. While the direct causal linkage between economic development and democratization is still debated,²⁶ there is certainly a correlation between development and democratic political institutions. To this end, it would be logical to test whether rates of urbanization is indeed correlated with the support levels for the political parties in Turkey including the CHP to see whether developed localities or underprivileged ones have supported the party over time.

Kurdish population: Ethnic cleavages have been one of the most salient divides in the Turkish society.²⁷ When the Turkish state started to struggle with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) insurgency and terrorism during the 1980s, the Kurdish problem became (and remains) a significant issue on the national agenda.²⁸ The AKP government tried to address this problem with the 'Kurdish opening' around 2009.²⁹ Yet, fearing political repercussions and not being able to strike the deals with Kurdish politicians regarding Erdoğan's bid for the presidential system, the AKP reneged on tackling the issue and started to side with the ultra-right-wing Nationalistic Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) against the Kurdish minority. The Kurdish issue is also relevant for seeing the historical changes over the Kurdish vote for the CHP. To capture this, this article uses two important sources. First, it utilizes the data from the 1965 census in which information about ethnic identities were last gathered by the Turkish state. Second, it also benefits from an influential work³⁰ which uses inward and outward migration rates for each province, the fertility and mortality rates for different ethnic groups (including the Kurds), and draws realistic projections for the distribution of the Kurdish population in each province for the year 1990. Drawing upon these two sets of data, we determine the growth rates of the Kurdish population in each province for five-year intervals and calculate our own projections for every five-year filling the missing values for the years 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, as well as 1995 and onwards until 2020. While not perfectly accurate, these projections enable us to include the effect of the Kurdish vote for the CHP support over different time periods. To this end, they are significant in seeing whether localities with predominantly Kurdish population (especially in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia) have supported the CHP or not and if so, when.

Further research can elaborate on how electoral variables such as electoral turnout, ENP and the margin of victory are affected by macro-structural variables, such as economic development and demographic change. After presenting our key variables, we present our empirical results in the next section.

Empirical analysis

The times of the National Chief: İnönü's CHP (1950–1972)

İnönü assumed the role of the 'National Chief' after the passing of Atatürk in 1938. As this article focuses on the multi-party politics in Turkey, our empirical analysis of the İnönü period starts with 1950 and continues until 1972 when Ecevit took the reins of the party. During this period between 1950 and 1972, major political events occurred. After the DP ended the CHP's one-party rule in 1950, it won two additional elections in 1954 and

1957. Its success in the 1954 elections with 58.4 percent of the votes is still unmatched by any political party in Turkey. As Table 1 shows below, the CHP came second in all these elections with its vote dwindling to 35 percent in the 1954 elections.

The 1950s produced mostly a two-party system as the ENP figures in Table 1 also illustrate. While the initial elections during the 1950s ensured voters flocking to the ballot box, the turnout rates diminished during the late 1950s and 1960s. For the period under analysis, it was particularly the 1969 elections that produced comparatively very low turnout, with a mean score of 66 percent electoral turnout at the provincial level (and a national turnout of 64.3 percent). Other noteworthy phenomena for the said time period were the military interventions in 1960 and 1971, the execution of the key DP politicians including Adnan Menderes in the aftermath of the 1960 coup, and the adoption of the more liberal 1961 Constitution. On the socioeconomic front, Turkey experienced the introduction of import-substitution industrialization (ISI) policies and growing rates of industrialization and urbanization starting with the 1960s.

The 1960s also experienced a transition from a majoritarian winner-takes-all electoral system to proportional representation systems including the national remainder system (used in 1965) and d'Hondt formula with no national electoral threshold. This institutional change led to rising number of political parties both on the right and the left (as could also be observed with the rising ENP figures in Table 1). This surely affected the CHP's

Table 1. Key political indicators for the İnönü Era (1950–1972).

	1950	1954	1957	1961	1965	1969
CHP Vote	41.94 (10.85) [23.2– 100]	35.22 (7.08) [22.4–54.3]	40.43 (8.52) [11.5–65.3]	36.68 (6.85) [23.2– 67.3]	28.78 (6.91) [16–51.2]	25.98 (7.13) [7.3–41.4]
Margin of Victory	–9.79 (21.69) [–40– 100]	–21.63 (13.02) [–44.8– 11.2]	–7.15 (12.88) [–37.1– 32.5]	6.72 (22.06) [–33.8– 63.1]	–20.81 (16.70) [–51.3– 32]	–18.60 (14.34) [–67.1– 26.9]
Effective Number of Parties (ENP)	2.12 (0.31) [1–3]	2.14 (0.27) [1.73–2.88]	2.37 (0.27) [1.8–2.9]	2.73 (0.49) [2–3.9]	2.65 (0.56) [1.8–4.1]	2.98 (0.67) [0.7–4.7]
Electoral Turnout	89.32 (4.42) [64.2– 96.9]	88.92 (3.55) [77.8–95.3]	78.36 (4.55) [63.0–86.7]	81.68 (3.44) [73.3– 87.5]	71.42 (4.91) [58.6–82.2]	65.99 (5.76) [52.4–80.2]
N	63	64	67	67	67	67

Notes: Mean scores are shown as the main figures. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses and the range for the respective figures are in brackets. While İnönü assumed the CHP's chairmanship in 1938, this article starts its analyses with 1950, the year in which Turkey transitioned to multi-party politics. Margin of victory figures compares the difference between the CHP vote and major contender party in each election for each province. ENP calculations are based on Laakso and Taagepera, "Effective" Number of Parties. Data analyses are done in Stata 17.

Source: Supreme Election Council (YSK).

electoral fortunes during the 1960s with declining support from the electorate as the voters saw alternatives to the CHP (cf. Table 1), especially the Republican Reliance Party (*Cumhuriyetçi Güven Partisi*, CGP) and Workers' Party of Turkey.

Figure 2 illustrates the geographic distribution of the CHP votes during the İnönü Era (the darker colors represent higher vote shares for the CHP). During the 1950s, the party garnered the highest vote shares in the Central and Eastern Anatolian regions. Provinces such as Malatya (İnönü's hometown), Erzincan, Sivas, Kars, and Tunceli ensured the highest level of support for the CHP during the 1950s and the most of 1960s. The CHP's support base partly shifted toward southern provinces such as Gaziantep, Adana, Şanlıurfa during the 1960s. This could be attributed to the party's rising clientelistic networks with the local elites in the area during this period. However, Turhan Feyzioğlu's CGP, which was a splinter party of the CHP, transferred some of its voter-base during the late 1960s, in which the CHP vote shares decreased both in these areas, as well as throughout Turkey.³¹

When we look at the spatial regression analyses in Table 2, certain findings stand out for the CHP support level for this time period. To begin with, electoral turnout is mostly negatively correlated with the CHP vote. This means that in those localities where voters were mobilized, they mostly chose to punish the CHP at the ballot box during the 1950s and 1960s. On average, one-unit increase in turnout rates would be associated with a decline of 0.50 percent vote for the CHP, which is a substantial finding. Same goes for the ENP figures, with a negative correlation between ENP and the CHP support. This could be interpreted as the fact that a move from a two-party competition to a multi-party competition with the introduction of third parties at a given locality decreased the CHP's fortunes substantially.

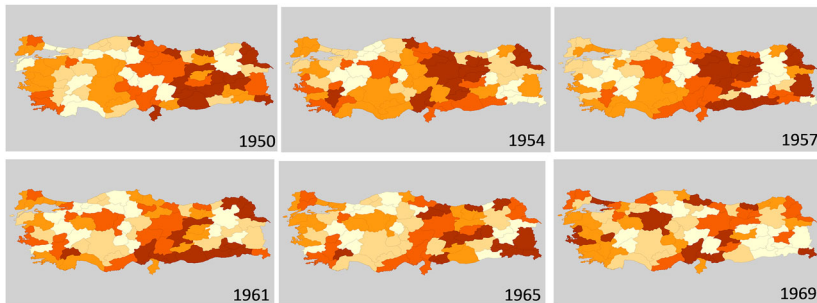


Figure 2. The CHP support for the İnönü era (1950–1972).

Notes: Quintile maps are done in GeoDa. Darker colors represent higher support levels for the CHP. Source: Supreme Election Council (YSK).

Table 2. Spatial regression analyses for the İnönü era.

DV: CHP vote	1950	1954	1957	1961	1965	1969
Turnout	-0.51* (0.27)	0.48* (0.24)	-0.40* (0.23)	-0.43* (0.24)	-0.28* (0.17)	0.03 (0.19)
ENP	-12.46*** (3.56)	-0.60 (3.40)	-12.15*** (3.77)	-3.60** (1.62)	-2.76 [†] (1.83)	-1.17 (1.39)
Urbanization	-0.16* (0.08)	0.01 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.09)	0.11 [†] (0.06)	0.05 (0.07)	0.13* (0.07)
Kurdish Population	0.15*** (0.05)	-0.04 (0.03)	0.01 (0.04)	0.03 (0.03)	0.08* (0.04)	-0.07 [†] (0.04)
Moran's I	0.12	0.34	0.23	0.22	0.18	0.16
R-Squared	0.42	0.08	0.17	0.15	0.08	0.17
N	63	64	67	67	67	67

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses.

Sources: Supreme Election Council (YSK), Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK).

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$, [†] $p < 0.15$. Data analyses are done in GeoDa and Stata 17.

On the demographic front, urbanization is at first negatively correlated with the CHP vote for the 1950 election. However, in the succeeding elections during the 1950s and 1960s, urbanization is positively correlated with the CHP support. This is especially true for the 1961 and 1969 elections, in which a unit increase in urbanization rates would be translated with around a 0.10 percent increase in the CHP vote. The Kurdish population variable also has its own fluctuations over the time period. While it garnered a positive effect for the CHP vote for most of the elections during the İnönü era (especially for the 1950 election, as well as the 1965 election), it brought about a decrease in the CHP support in the 1954 and 1969 elections (though their substantive effects are not that salient).

As for the spatial autocorrelation for the CHP vote (i.e. whether there is spatial dependence on the electoral outcomes of neighboring localities), Moran's I figures offer us important information about the spatial relationships across the country for the CHP support levels. The highest Moran's I figures (and hence the highest levels of clustering of the CHP's vote shares) are for 1954, 1957, and 1961 elections. The spatial dependence is the highest in the 1954 election with a Moran's I of 0.34. This can also be supported with the illustration of the clustering of the CHP votes as can be seen in [Figure 2](#). As we move onto the succeeding period under Ecevit, we will continue to analyze the statistical, substantial, and spatial relationships between our key variables.

The era of the Karaođlan³²: Ecevit's CHP (1972–1980)

Starting his political career as a CHP parliamentarian in 1957, Ecevit climbed the ladder within the party as its General Secretary and a government minister during the 1960s. His clash with İnönü and the party's old guard after the 1971 military memorandum, when Ecevit called to keep a safe distance

from the military officers, reached a crescendo in the party's convention in May 1972, where Ecevit rose victorious. The leadership change in the party was not nominal and indeed brought about major changes in the CHP's rhetoric. Ecevit (also nicknamed as 'Karaoğlan' during this time) attracted popular support from the masses. Under Ecevit's leadership, the CHP substantially widened its support base to peasants, workers, and the urban poor and garnered much higher levels of support. Indeed, the CHP earned 33.3 and 41.4 percent of the votes in the 1973 and 1977 national elections. In fact, the 1977 election recorded the highest vote share for a left-wing political party in Turkey's political history, including the CHP.

Table 3 first presents the key political indicators for the Ecevit era. On average, the mean scores for the CHP vote are 30.63 and 37.67 percent at the province level for the 1973 and 1977 elections respectively. The CHP was the first party in both of these elections, followed by Süleyman Demirel's center-right Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, AP). The margin of victory figures for these two political parties in Table 3 reflect the close contest between the CHP and the AP in the 1970s.

During this time period, the CHP also competed with Behice Boran's Turkish Workers' Party, Ferruh Bozbeyle's center-right Democratic Party, Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist National Salvation Party (*Millî Selâmet Partisi*, MSP), Alparslan Türkeş's MHP, and the CGP. The presence of these political parties is reflected with the rising ENP figures in Table 3. For many provinces, this time period witnessed multi-party competition with mean score of the ENP figures of 4.00 and 3.05 for the 1973 and 1977 elections. Finally, declining levels of electoral turnout during the

Table 3. Key political indicators for the Ecevit era (1972–1980).

	1973	1977
CHP Vote	30.63 (10.39) [10.3–70.0]	37.67 (11.09) [12.3–66.3]
Margin of Victory	1.02 (15.65) [–47.7–55.7]	0.55 (17.26) [–48.3–58.1]
Effective Number of Parties (ENP)	4.00 (0.88) [1.9–6.3]	3.05 (0.68) [1.9–5.0]
Electoral Turnout	67.39 (6.64) [49.8–90.6]	74.18 (5.21) [62.4–84.1]
N	67	67

Notes: Mean scores are shown as the main figures. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses and the range for the respective figures are in brackets. Margin of victory figures compares the difference between the CHP vote and major contender party in each election for each province. ENP calculations are based on Laakso and Taagepera, "Effective" Number of Parties.' Data analyses are done in Stata 17. Source: Supreme Election Council (YSK).

1960s continued for the 1973 election. Yet, the turnout figure increased in the following 1977 election.

As [Figure 3](#) above illustrates, the CHP's support base started to shift during Ecevit's tenure. While the party ensured still high levels of support in some of its older strongholds including Tunceli, Kars, Erzincan, Malatya, it started to get a considerable share of the vote in more urbanized, Western segments of the country. In fact, urban centers such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara, as well as Thracian and Aegean provinces including Edirne, Kırklareli, Çanakkale, and Muğla, started to produce much higher levels of support for the party as compared to İnönü's era in the 1950s and 1960s. The positive relationship between urbanization and the CHP support is also reflected in the spatial regression analyses as shown in [Table 4](#). For both 1973 and 1977 elections, one-unit increase would be translated into a vote share increase around 0.15 percent for the CHP. This finding is important to highlight the changing support base of the CHP. It also coincides with the changing nature of party competition during the 1970s that goes along with the rising trend of urbanization and the resultant shift to urban machine politics from more rural forms of clientelism.³³

[Table 4](#) also shows us how the multi-party competition hurt the CHP's fortunes during the 1970s as indicated by the ENP figures. Substantively, an addition of an 'effective' party to party competition at the provincial level translated into drops of approximately 5 and 9 percent in the CHP votes for the said time period. Moreover, the Kurdish population continued its negative (albeit still weak) correlation with the CHP vote (which started in the late 1960s), as indicated by declining levels of support for the CHP in localities with a higher Kurdish population.

Finally, Ecevit's CHP produced spatially correlated electoral results during the 1970s as indicated by Moran's I figures. This figure is particularly high for the 1977 election, in which the CHP vote at the provincial level was

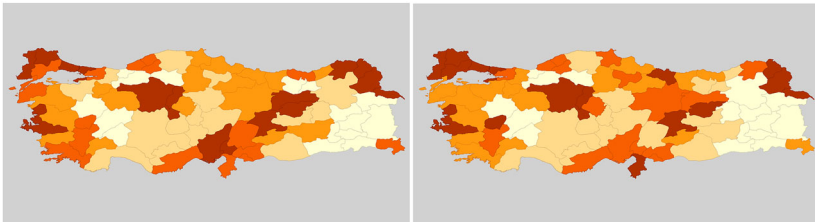


Figure 3. The CHP support for the Ecevit era (1972–1980).

Notes: Quintile maps are done in GeoDa. Darker colors represent higher support levels for the CHP. Source: Supreme Election Council (YSK).

Table 4. Spatial regression analyses for the Ecevit era.

DV: CHP vote	1973	1977
Turnout	0.01 (0.20)	-0.76*** (0.20)
ENP	-4.72*** (1.34)	-8.90*** (1.80)
Urbanization	0.14 [†] (0.09)	0.14* (0.08)
Kurdish Population	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.05)
Moran's I	0.24	0.34
R-Squared	0.26	0.47
N	67	67

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses.

Sources: Supreme Election Council (YSK), Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK).

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$, [†] $p < 0.15$. Data analyses are done in GeoDa and Stata 17.

spatially dependent with neighboring localities particularly in the Thracian and Southeastern provinces, which can also be checked in [Figure 3](#).

The interregnum years (1980–1992)

As the historical overview section presented, the years between 1980 and 1992 acted as the interregnum period, in which CHP ceased to exist (due to the political bans of the 1980 military coup) and no political party fully established itself as the CHP's successor. The HP/SHP and the DSP vied for the pre-1980 CHP's legacy during this period until the CHP was reestablished in 1992 (and merged with the SHP in 1995). [Table 5](#) below presents the

Table 5. Key political indicators for the interregnum period (1980–1992).

	1983	1987	1991
HP/SHP Vote	29.87 (8.76) [5.2–63.5]	23.21 (7.93) [9.5–54.8]	22.17 (11.49) [5.0–61.2]
DSP Vote	–	8.31 (4.40) [2.3–26.9]	8.30 (5.93) [0.9–25.4]
Margin of Victory	-14.02 (16.85) [-46.4–47.3]	-12.31 (11.49) [-39.2–35.7]	-4.62 (17.84) [-53.1–54.5]
Effective Number of Parties (ENP)	2.68 (0.24) [1.89–3.00]	3.91 (0.55) [2.41–5.52]	4.02 (0.56) [2.3–4.9]
Electoral Turnout	91.86 (3.21) [82.2–96.4]	93.67 (2.35) [87.2–97.2]	84.62 (5.59) [70.6–94.9]
N	67	67	74

Notes: Mean scores are shown as the main figures. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses and the range for the respective figures are in brackets. Margin of victory figures compares the difference between the biggest left-wing party vote and major contender party in each election for each province. ENP calculations are based on Laakso and Taagepera, "Effective" Number of Parties.' Data analyses are done in Stata 17. Source: Supreme Election Council (YSK).

key political indicators for this interregnum era. As can be seen, the accumulation of the vote shares of the successor parties (i.e. the HP/SHP votes plus the DSP votes) was around 30 percent throughout this period.

While the HP/SHP was the second party during the 1980s after Turgut Özal's center-right Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, ANAP), the lifting of the ban on the political parties and politicians of the pre-1980 era and the emergence of new political figures produced a multi-party system during the late 1980s and the 1990s, as seen by the ENP figures at the local level.

The electoral turnout also increased considerably during this interregnum period, mostly surpassing 85 percent of turnout in many localities. This is a stark contrast to the pre-1980 era, in which electoral turnout hovered mostly below 70 percent.³⁴

Figure 4 below illustrates the distribution of vote shares of the HP/SHP and the DSP during this period. For the HP/SHP, voters in some eastern and southeastern provinces (such as Tunceli and Diyarbakır) as well as those in some more urbanized, western provinces such as İzmir and Edirne consistently cast their ballot for the party. For the 1991 election, the pro-Kurdish, left-wing People's Labor Party candidates competed under the SHP list, which ensured higher support in localities with predominantly Kurdish population including Şırnak, Mardin, Batman, and Siirt. For the DSP, Black Sea provinces (such as Zonguldak, Sinop, Kastamonu) as well as Thracian provinces (including Edirne and Tekirdağ) stood out as the strongest localities for the party.

When we look at the spatial regression analyses for the HP/SHP in Table 6,³⁵ certain findings stand out. To begin with, while for the 1983 election, a multi-party competition benefited the HP, this trend was reversed in

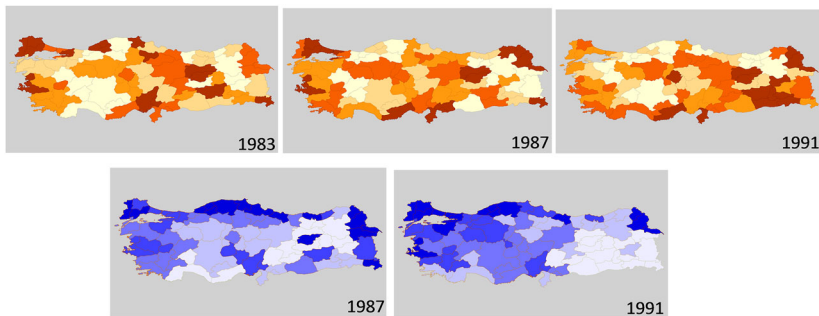


Figure 4. Electoral support for the HP/SHP & DSP during the Interregnum Period (1980–1992).

Notes: Quintile maps are done in GeoDa. Orange maps represent the HP/SHP vote shares, whereas the blue maps illustrate the DSP vote. Darker colors denote higher support for these political parties. Source: Supreme Election Council (YSK).

Table 6. Spatial regression analyses for the interregnum era (1980–1992).

DV: HP/SHP vote	1983	1987	1991
Turnout	0.34 (0.39)	-0.17 (0.40)	-0.02 (0.20)
ENP	11.73*** (4.23)	-4.26** (1.68)	-4.64** (2.23)
Urbanization	0.07 (0.08)	0.15** (0.06)	0.14* (0.08)
Kurdish Population	0.07 [†] (0.05)	0.02 (0.03)	0.21*** (0.04)
Moran's I	0.07	0.18	0.37
R-Squared	0.14	0.19	0.40
N	67	67	74

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses.

Sources: Supreme Election Council (YSK), Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK).

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$, [†] $p < 0.15$. Data analyses are done in GeoDa and Stata 17.

the succeeding two elections with the entrance of multiple political parties to the scene. As was the case since the 1960s, urbanization is positively correlated with the HP/SHP vote during the interregnum era. A unit increase in urbanization is associated with an increase around 0.15 percent for the 1987 and 1991 elections.

For the Kurdish vote, the 1991 election was exceptional due to the entrance of the People's Labor Party candidates under the SHP lists. This is also evident with a stronger correlation for the said election with a coefficient of 0.21. As for Moran's I figures, the HP/SHP vote became more spatially dependent in the later elections, with Moran's I figure reaching to 0.37 for the 1991 election. This is partly due to the consolidation of the SHP vote in the provinces densely populated by the Kurds, but also because of the rising spatial dependence of the SHP support in more urbanized centers in the Aegean and Thracian regions (cf. Figure 4).

Baykal's CHP: back to the Kemalism's default settings? (1992–2010)

Deniz Baykal first became a member of parliament (MP) for the CHP in 1973. He became actively involved in politics during the 1970s as a minister. He worked within the SHP during the 1980s as a MP and General Secretary. He became the chair of the reestablished CHP in 1992, which later merged with the SHP in 1995. During the 1990s, Baykal's CHP was behind the shadow of its rival DSP. This is evident in Table 7 with the comparison of the CHP and DSP vote shares for this era.

Moreover, a multiplicity of parties from both sides of the political spectrum were present in this era, as indicated with high figures for the ENP in Table 7. In the 1999 elections, Baykal's CHP earned only 8.7 percent of the votes, remained below the 10 percent national threshold, and recorded the CHP's lowest vote share in its political history.

Table 7. Key Political Indicators for the Baykal era (1992–2010).

	1995	1999	2002	2007
CHP Vote	9.67 (5.17) [1.7–26.7]	7.81 (3.94) [1.3–19.6]	15.88 (7.36) [2.5–32.8]	16.47 (9.33) [2.0–40.1]
DSP Vote	11.66 (8.88) [1.0–38.6]	17.11 (10.99) [2.2–45.6]	–	–
Margin of Victory	–12.44 (12.61) [–46.4–20.7]	–9.30 (11.29) [–36.2–10.8]	–16.80 (16.94) [–48.8–20.3]	–31.41 (19.42) [–67.0–19.9]
Effective Number of Parties (ENP)	5.08 (0.81) [2.7–6.8]	5.47 (0.74) [3.7–7.3]	4.24 (0.90) [2.43–6.14]	3.01 (0.64) [1.88–4.38]
Electoral Turnout	84.43 (4.89) [70.0–91.9]	87.39 (3.83) [79.4–94.5]	79.05 (5.48) [61.8–89.5]	84.20 (4.74) [71.0–92.8]
<i>N</i>	79	80	81	81

Notes: Mean scores are shown as the main figures. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses and the range for the respective figures are in brackets. Margin of victory figures compares the difference between the CHP vote and major contender party in each election for each province. ENP calculations are based on Laakso and Taagepera, “Effective” Number of Parties.’ Data analyses are done in Stata 17. Source: Supreme Election Council (YSK).

As the DSP led the coalition government after the 1999 election and Turkey experienced a massive economic crisis in 2001 (cf. [Figure 1](#)), many political parties (except for the AKP and the CHP) remained below the national threshold in the 2002 elections. This acted as a new chance for Baykal’s CHP to reclaim the position of the strongest left-wing political party. The CHP’s vote shares indeed increased in the 2002 and 2007 elections (to 19.4 and 20.9 percent respectively) under Baykal’s leadership. However, the party could be said to reach its natural boundaries of electoral support, due to the party’s rigid rhetoric that attracted only Kemalist secular voters and Alevis under Baykal’s stern leadership.³⁶

During Baykal’s tenure, the CHP continued its evolution to become a party of more urbanized, affluent, and secular voters. This is particularly reflected during the 2000s as can be seen in [Figure 5](#). The party’s vote share started to concentrate in the Western portion of the country in the Aegean, Mediterranean, and Thracian regions and in metropolitan centers such as Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir. This spatial correlation is especially striking for the 2007 elections, as evidenced with a very high Moran’s I score of 0.49 (see [Table 8](#)). The urban nature of the party is also supported in [Table 8](#) with a positive correlation between urbanization and the CHP support.

Based on the findings, multi-party competition is also found to be beneficial for the party during Baykal’s era. This is particularly true for the 2000s. The CHP benefited from a multi-party competition at the local level, instead of a two-party competition with the ruling AKP during this

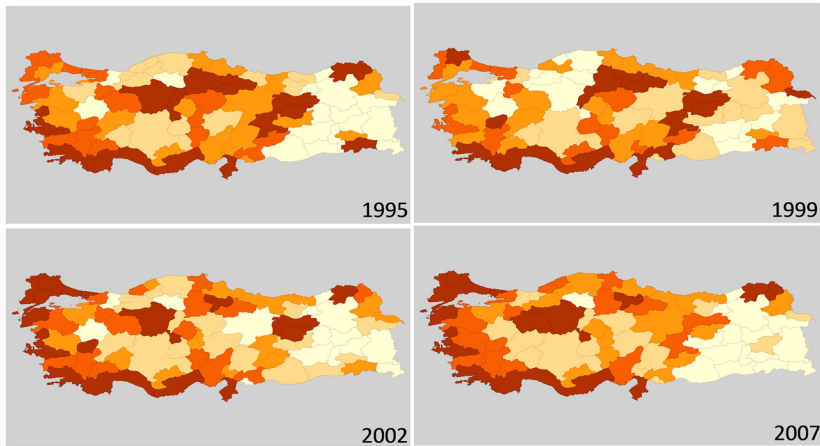


Figure 5. Electoral support for the CHP during the Baykal era (1992–2010).

Notes: Quintile maps are done in GeoDa. Darker colors represent higher support levels for the CHP. Source: Supreme Election Council (YSK).

time period, as evinced by the positive and strong spatial findings for the ENP figures.

Lastly, during Baykal's tenure, CHP started to distance itself from the Kurdish vote as indicated with the negative correlation between localities with higher Kurdish population and the CHP support. This is due to the CHP's nationalistic (*ulusalçı*) rhetoric during Baykal's leadership, which resulted many Kurdish voters to shy away from the party.

Kılıçdaroğlu's CHP: new horizons for the party? (2010-present)

Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu assumed the CHP's leadership in 2010. As was the case for Ecevit's transfer of power in the 1970s, the leadership change in the party

Table 8. Spatial Regression Analyses for the Baykal Era (1992–2010).

DV: CHP vote	1995	1999	2002	2007
Turnout	-0.18 (0.13)	-0.07 (0.13)	-0.11 (0.12)	0.23 [†] (0.15)
ENP	1.68** (0.68)	1.53*** (0.57)	4.61*** (0.68)	9.18*** (1.04)
Urbanization	0.03 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.12** (0.04)	0.10* (0.05)
Kurdish Population	-0.06*** (0.02)	-0.03* (0.01)	-0.09*** (0.02)	-0.07*** (0.02)
Moran's I	0.18	0.14	0.32	0.49
R-Squared	0.21	0.13	0.51	0.66
N	79	80	81	81

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses.

Sources: Supreme Election Council (YSK), Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK).

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$, [†] $p < 0.15$. Data analyses are done in GeoDa and Stata 17.

Table 9. Key political indicators for the Kılıçdaroğlu period (2010-present).

	2011	2015	2018
CHP Vote	21.09 (13.41) [0.9–57.5]	20.26 (13.86) [1.5–57.5]	18.47 (11.18) [1.8–47.5]
Margin of Victory	–29.76 (22.06) [–64.3–41.7]	–31.71 (23.83) [–70.5–29.0]	–25.49 (17.63) [–53.2–20.6]
Effective Number of Parties (ENP)	2.52 (0.44) [1.5–3.7]	2.33 (0.51) [1.32–3.67]	3.03 (0.53) [1.8–4.6]
Electoral Turnout	86.66 (3.57) [74.8–92.0]	86.28 (3.07) [75.3–90.4]	87.35 (3.06) [77.9–91.3]
N	81	81	81

Notes: Mean scores are shown as the main figures. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses and the range for the respective figures are in brackets. Margin of victory figures compares the difference between the CHP vote and major contender party in each election for each province. ENP calculations are based on Laakso and Taagepera, “Effective” Number of Parties.’ Data analyses are done in Stata 17. Source: Supreme Election Council (YSK).

was not nominal as it brought about major changes in the party’s rhetoric.³⁷ The CHP, with Kılıçdaroğlu at the helm, has started to broaden its appeal in the eyes of some centrist voters who are growing disgruntled with the AKP’s rising authoritarian tone. Indeed, the CHP received 26 percent in the 2011 election, 25 percent in the November 2015 election, and 23 percent in the 2018 election. This increase in electoral support is also reflected at the local level (as shown in Table 9), with rising mean scores for the CHP vote.

Still, Turkey’s many localities produced two-party competition (as indicated by the ENP figures), instead of multi-party competition. This in turn appears to hurt the CHP’s electoral fortunes as shown in Table 10. In illustrative terms, a unit increase in the ENP (a transition from a two-party competition to a three-party competition) would be associated with increase of 10–15 percent in the CHP support. This finding is particularly important in

Table 10. Spatial regression analyses for the Kılıçdaroğlu period (2010-present).

DV: CHP vote	2011	2015	2018
Turnout	1.08*** (0.37)	1.01*** (0.38)	1.23*** (0.34)
ENP	14.28*** (2.59)	15.12*** (2.12)	11.46*** (1.74)
Urbanization	0.07 (0.08)	0.02 (0.08)	–0.03 (0.06)
Kurdish Population	–0.09** (0.04)	–0.12*** (0.04)	–0.03 (0.03)
Moran’s I	0.51	0.62	0.61
R-Squared	0.51	0.61	0.62
N	81	81	81

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses.

Sources: Supreme Election Council (YSK), Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK).

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$, † $p < 0.15$. Data analyses are done in GeoDa and Stata 17.

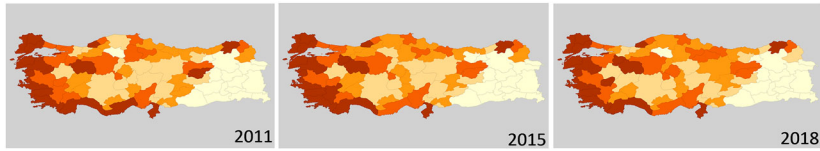


Figure 6. Electoral support for the CHP during the Kılıçdaroğlu era (2010-present).

Notes: Quintile maps are done in GeoDa. Darker colors represent higher support levels for the CHP. Source: Supreme Election Council (YSK).

Turkey's growing polarizing political atmosphere, in which the AKP leadership tries to downgrade political contestation in Turkey to binaries (i.e. secularism-Islamism, center-periphery) and ensure electoral support from its staunch voters.

Based on quintile maps in [Figure 6](#), the CHP geographically continues to garner sizeable electoral support in the Western portions of the country. Yet, it appears to be extending its support base to other regions of the country in recent elections, including the Central and Eastern Anatolia and Black Sea regions, which mostly have acted as the strongholds for the ruling AKP.

The changing electoral base of the CHP is also evident in [Table 10](#) considering urbanization figures. The urban vote, which characterized one of the CHP's electoral pillars since the 1960s (cf. Tables 2, 4, 6 and 8) is not reflected during the Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership. The effect of urbanization diminished steadily during this period and turned to negative in the 2018 elections. In other words, CHP garners electoral backing, not only from its traditional urban strongholds since the 1960s, but also from less urbanized localities, especially in the Central and Eastern Anatolia and Black Sea regions.

Lastly, the latest elections in 2018 also show a decreasing trend in the negative correlation between the Kurdish population and the CHP vote. More recently, the party leadership (including Kılıçdaroğlu) paid visits to localities such as Diyarbakır and Van with predominantly Kurdish population and attracted considerable interest in these cities. Whether the CHP under Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership would widen its support base to more Kurdish voters is to be seen in the upcoming elections.

Comparative insights and conclusions

According to our research, the CHP's voter base has changed significantly over several decades. From the early 1950s until the end of 1960s, the CHP gathered votes mostly in rural areas with clientelistic ties. In this period, the CHP was also more successful in gathering Kurdish votes. After the 1960s, the CHP started seeing more and clustered votes in the

metropolitan areas as well as in coastal provinces. With the 1980s, the successors of the CHP (HP/SODEP/SHP and DSP) mostly shared this legacy. With the new millennium, the CHP garners support mostly from metropolitan areas on southern and western portions of Turkey, as well as having a presence in more urbanized northern and central parts of the country. To this end, it could be argued that the CHP's support has mostly overlapped with the urbanization trends in Turkey starting with the 1970s. As our findings suggest, the shift in urban focus in the 2018 elections might point to a slight shift in this trend and indicate a reopening of the CHP to voters in more rural areas of Turkey. Moreover, the 2018 elections might also indicate a potentially new era for the CHP to get in touch with the Kurdish voters, which the party failed to attract electoral support for most of the periods since the 1970s.

As this study shows, the CHP has not been a unique and static entity over the course of Turkish political history and its voter base cannot be reduced to structural explanations such as center-periphery discussions. Despite some continuities in its electoral support base, it garnered electoral support from diverse segments of the society politically, socioeconomically, and demographically. As of today, this evolutionary capability of the party can be promising for Turkey's democracy as the CHP may lead the opposition's efforts to transition to a more democratic system with higher checks and balances and freedoms of speech and association. Yet, ongoing struggles within the party with regard to defining the CHP's identity will be pivotal to this end as to whether the CHP could be a pioneer force of democratization both within and beyond, which would integrate diverse voices from Turkish society.

Notes

1. Secor, "Ideologies in Crisis"; West, "Regional Cleavages"; and Özen and Kalkan, "Spatial analysis."
2. Most of the scholarly works on this topic emphasize a certain time period or specific elections, dealing with correlative or spatial relations. For such illuminating works, see for instance Kalaycıoğlu, "Elections and party preferences"; Çarkoğlu and Hinich, "A Spatial Analysis"; and Özen and Kalkan, "Spatial analysis." The present research goes beyond these works by offering correlative, regressive and spatial techniques with a more fine-tuned analysis for a specific political party based on its political history that extends multiple decades and covers the entirety of Turkish multi-party political history.
3. Agnew, "Mapping Politics"; Johnston and Pattie, *Putting Voters*; and Leib and Warf, *Revitalizing*.
4. For classical examples, see, Küçükömer, *Düzenin Yabancılaşması*, and Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations." For discussion of the treatment of the CHP as a monolithic entity with a predefined voter base, see for instance, Yardımcı-Geyikçi and Esen "Siyasi Partiler."

5. Karpat, "The Republican People's Party," 42.
6. *Ibid.*, 45.
7. Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations," 182–3.
8. Koçak, "Tek Parti Yönetimi," 122.
9. Turan, *Turkey's Difficult Journey*, and Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*.
10. The CHP also joined the True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*, DYP) in a ruling coalition as the junior partner for 4 months in 1995.
11. Kasaba, "Kemalist Certainties," 17.
12. Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations," and Özbudun, *Party Politics*.
13. Kalaycıoğlu, "Elections and Party Preferences," and Turan, "Old Soldiers."
14. Turan, "Old Soldiers," and Ciddi and Esen, "Turkey's Republican People's Party."
15. Güneş-Ayata, "The Republican People's Party," 102.
16. Bakıner, "A Key to Turkish politics."
17. Ciddi and Esen, "Turkey's Republican People's Party," and Kiriş, "The CHP."
18. Ayan, "Authoritarian Party Structures"; Ciddi and Esen, "Turkey's Republican People's Party"; and Kılıçdaroğlu, "Change in political party."
19. Güneş-Ayata, "The Republican People's Party"; Kiriş, "The CHP"; and Bakıner, "A Key to Turkish politics."
20. Mutlu, "Ethnic Kurds."
21. Kasaba, "Kemalist Certainties"; Özbudun, *Party Politics*; and Turan, *Turkey's Difficult Journey*.
22. Laakso and Taagepera, "'Effective' Number of Parties."
23. Cizre and Yeldan, "The Turkish Encounter"; Öniş and Güven, "Global Crisis"; and Çınar and Köse, "Economic Crises."
24. Çarkoğlu, "Macroeconomic Determinants"; Akarca and Tansel, "Economic Performance"; Başlevent and Kirmanoğlu, "Economic Voting"; and Aytaç, "Economic Voting."
25. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites."
26. Przeworski and Limongi, "Modernization"; Barro, "Determinants"; and Boix and Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization."
27. Secor, "Ideologies in Crisis," and Özbudun, *Party Politics*.
28. Kayhan-Pusane, "Turkey's Military Victory," and Akkaya, "The PKK's Ideological Odyssey."
29. Kardeş and Balcı, "Inter-societal security trilemma."
30. Mutlu, "Ethnic Kurds."
31. Kili, *1960–1975*, 251.
32. "Dusky boy": the Dark-haired, olive-skinned young-man, referring to Ecevit's complexion.
33. Çınar, "A Comparative Analysis."
34. Demirkol, "Factional conflicts," 106–7.
35. HP/SHP was the largest left-wing party which also shared the pre-1980 CHP legacy during the interregnum period. Hence, for the sake of brevity, we share the spatial analyses for this party. The spatial regressions for the DSP are also available upon request.
36. Ayan, "Authoritarian Party Structures," and Ciddi and Esen, "Turkey's Republican People's Party."
37. For a relevant and recent discussion, see Kılıçdaroğlu, "Change in political party."

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work has been supported by Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi (Middle East Technical University) Scientific Research Projects Coordination Unit [grant number #AGEP-401-2022-10963].

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