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TURKEY'S PARTY SYSTEM AND THE PAUCITY OF
MINORITY POLICY REFORM

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the question of small and incremental reform in Turkish minority policies over the last two decades, contrasting with the dramatic economic, social, and political changes that the country has experienced over the same period. The main focus will be on two partly overlapping groups living in Turkey (Alevi and Kurds); comparison with other Southern European countries will be made as background reference. The reason for this focus is analytical: these two groups are structurally different from minorities found in Italy or Greece in that they are both large enough to carry great electoral weight and politically salient enough to affect Turkey's EU accession prospects.

Minority policy is an often overlooked realm of public policy, either because it is considered too sensitive or too case-specific, as opposed to fiscal, labor, family, and immigration policy, which, at least in the European context, are now typically examined and compared by scholars on a more transnational framework. However, minority policy broadly defined (as the recognition and treatment of sections of the population identified as belonging to a special cultural heritage) touches upon a number of diverse policy areas including civil rights, education, regional development, relations between religion and state, language, culture, and national security. In Turkey minority policy in official discourse has historically been linked to the non-Muslim minorities protected by the Treaty of Lausanne, whereas Alevi and Kurds were traditionally accorded no special recognition under the Kemalist Republic.

The first part of the paper attempts to theoretically situate minority policy in the context of competitive party politics. What is puzzling about Turkey is why given a climate of increased democratization and confidence after the suppression of the PKK insurgency, the Turkish party system has not been more responsive to the long-standing grievances of Kurds and Alevi. Partly based on existing literature, the author posits that a constellation of factors is necessary for policy reform on minority issues to proceed in a democratic system: the mobilization of the minority group(s) in question and either high external pressure on the state to satisfy minority demands or significant electoral competition for the minority's votes or participation in government of a party that monopolizes the minority vote and is ideologically committed to its agenda. The second part of the paper briefly discusses the history of state attitudes towards Kurds and Alevi in Turkey, as well as more recent developments including the reforms on Kurdish language rights, the abortive Çamuroğlu recommendations regarding Alevi pious foundations, DTP's entry in parliament, and the constitutional amendment process launched by AKP. The third and final part of the paper explains why Turkey's party system for a long time lacked the necessary preconditions for more groundbreaking policy changes, underlining the importance of external pressure from the EU as an engine for reform.

Keywords

Turkey, minority policy, Kurds, Alevi, Europeanization

Introduction*

Minority policy is an often overlooked realm of public policy, either because it is considered too sensitive or too case-specific, as opposed to fiscal, labor, family, and immigration policy, which, at least in the European context, are now typically examined and compared by scholars on a more transnational framework. However, minority policy broadly defined (as the recognition and treatment of sections of the population identified as belonging to a special cultural heritage) touches upon a number of diverse policy areas including civil rights, education, regional development, relations between religion and state, language, culture, and national security. This paper will use Turkey as an illustrative case study to build a framework for understanding the preconditions for successful minority policy reform in a competitive party politics setting.¹ Some references to other Southern European countries will be made in order to place Turkey's situation in a more comparative regional context.

What is puzzling about Turkey is why given both domestic and international pressures and a climate of increased democratization and confidence after the effective suppression of the PKK insurgency, the Turkish party system has been so slow in its response to the long-standing grievances of Alevis and Kurds. The answer lies, I will argue, in the simultaneous absence of high external pressures and the structure of the Turkish party system, which has long precluded an alignment of factors necessary for a dramatic paradigm shift. To make this argument, I will briefly consider Turkish minority policy since the introduction of multi-party democracy, with an emphasis on attempted reforms in the last decade.

Minority Policy Reform: a theoretical framework

A vast literature already exists on the sources of success and failure in policy reforms, but the overwhelming majority of studies focus on economic policy. Economics and minorities are not easily comparable policy areas for a number of reasons. For any given society, economic issues can be at least as broad in scope and salience as ethnic ones, and may touch on equally fundamental aspects of the regime, particularly if there is a legacy of a dominant ideology committed to one form of economic relations. Economic policy, however, is simultaneously less and more internationally regulated than minority policy. On one hand, there is no normative guide for an internationally agreed model of economic policy, as there is for human rights, enshrined in UN declarations and conventions. Nevertheless, regional economic blocs like the EU and NAFTA have developed normative dogmas on economic liberalization that are just as strong as or at times stronger than concomitant regional commitments to democracy and respect for human rights. On the other hand, the international forums charged with regulating economic relations, like WTO, IMF, and OECD, have both standing structures and arbitration mechanisms, and hold regular summits to produce agreements. On the contrary, there is no international body outside the UN dedicated to overseeing minority policies. Only regional organizations in Europe have so far developed complex judicial mechanisms to address minority rights, while still lacking an ongoing political dialogue or a detailed common framework. This reality has rendered the international aspect of minority policy more fragmented in nature, relying on bilateral and regional agreements, and making the specific domestic dimension more important.

* An earlier version of this paper was presented in Workshop 9: 'Changing Party Political Constellations and Public Policy Reform in Southern Europe' at the Tenth Mediterranean Research Meeting, Florence & Montecatini Terme, 25-28 March 2009, organised by the Mediterranean Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute.

¹ Parts of this paper rely on fieldwork conducted by the author in Turkey in fall-winter 2008 as a visiting researcher at the METU Department of Political Science and Public Administration. I would like to thank Prof. Ayşe Ayata, Dr. Aykan Erdemir, Dr. Hayriye Kahveci, and the staff at KORA Center for their kind support.

At first observation, minority policies can have either domestic or international sources, and can be the result of a pact or imposition. In practice, of course, most regimes result from a mix of such factors, as there is bargaining even under duress and a domestic aspect to any international negotiation. Taking the level of policymaking (domestic or international) and the power relationship between the actors involved at the policy’s inception as the two axes, it is possible to schematically locate historical turning points on a two-dimensional space (see Figure 1, with examples drawn from Southern European societies). Within Southern Europe, Italy's regional minorities received rights under a mix of international agreements and gradual decentralization after World War Two; Greece and Turkey have uneasily governed their respective minorities by international accord after 1923; and Spain's federation came about as a domestic pact after the end of the Franco dictatorship. Domestic imposition is usually associated with oppressive policies, but progressive exceptions exist, such as communist Yugoslavia’s adoption of federalism.

Figure 1: A two-dimensional categorization of South European minority policy watersheds

	International	Domestic
Pacted	Lausanne Treaty (Greece-Turkey, 1923) Gruber-De Gasperi Treaty (Italy-Austria, 1946)	Moncloa Pact (Spain, 1977) Social Council of Citizens (Bulgaria, 1990)
Dictated	Dayton Accords (Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1995) Ohrid Agreement (FYR Macedonia, 2001)	AVNOJ Conference (Yugoslavia, 1943) The Revival Process (Bulgaria, 1984)

Imposed solutions have little to do with democratic politics, so they are not useful in developing theories about the role of political party systems in policy reform. Contemporary international organizations can exert multilateral pressure for change, but a country may resist, even at the cost of isolating itself. Therefore, imposition is not an accurate description of such relations. A form of pact can be seen in institutional conditionality as in the EU accession process where a state is offered membership if it proceeds with a number of reforms.² Keeping this as one possible source of change for Turkey, I will leave aside all kinds of imposed and internationally agreed minority reforms and theorize the process of domestically generated policy reform.

Three main strands of thought from the political economy literature dominate the debate on policy reform failure. The interest group strand—based on the classic ideas of Mancur Olson—predicts failure when the benefits of reform are spread across citizens, whereas the costs are expected to be incurred by a much smaller group, which can effectively organize to influence or capture the state apparatus. The J-curve hypothesis developed by Adam Przeworski, predicts failure when the short term costs of reform are so great as to create a majority of voters opposing it. Finally, more recent trends in institutional models of politics have focused on the role of veto actors in the political process

² Gwendolyn Sasse, “The Politics of EU Conditionality: The Norm of Minority Protection during and beyond EU Accession,” *Journal of European Public Policy* vol. 15 no. 6 (2008): 842-860.

as a critical factor in policy reform.³ Although some of these theories are not directly pertinent to minority policy, their basic insights about democratic politics are transferable to situations where the benefits and costs are more symbolic and not at all or not entirely monetary in nature. The interest group hypothesis is applicable only if a rival group stands to directly lose from a certain minority policy reform. J-curve effects can be observed in situations where political practice on minority affairs has evolved into a societal norm, and reform is likely to be met by widespread resistance. Minority policies are textbook examples of self-reinforcing institutions, which can become entrenched in national political culture over time.⁴ Veto powers exist in most political systems, but are more acutely felt wherever there are unelected positions in government and bicameral legislatures or strong presidents, elected non-concurrently and under different rules.

The sources of minority policy per se have been much less theorized. Political inclusion of a minority party would seem to be an obvious favorable condition, and there is evidence from the United States and other countries that an increase in minority representation is connected to pro-minority policies.⁵ Conversely, persistent exclusion from power should be an index for lack of minority recognition.⁶ An important upcoming contribution by Şener Aktürk emphasizes the role of counter-elites in altering the prevailing political discourse on ethnicity.⁷ Also using Turkey as a case study, Aktürk argues that such a counter-ideology came to prominence for the first time under the governing Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP).

Keeping these arguments in mind, I will posit that for policy reform on minority issues to proceed, the following constellation of factors is necessary in a democratic system:

- a) actual social mobilization of the minority group(s) in question with a coherent set of demands and EITHER
- b) high external pressure on the state in the direction of satisfying these demands OR
- c) high electoral competition for the minority's votes between major parties OR
- d) participation in government of a party that monopolizes the minority vote and is ideologically committed to its agenda of demands.

The first is a background condition stipulating the politicization of ethnicity. The second incorporates the international dimension, which in Turkey's recent history is represented by its relations with its Western allies. The third and fourth conditions are again domestic, and entirely related to the party system and electoral politics. By "high competition" I mean a situation in which a political party does not have guaranteed hegemonic control over a minority's votes and the minority's votes would make a significant difference for seat distribution in the legislature. Alternatively, if a minority is captured by one political party, that party's commitment to the minority rights agenda *and* its participation in

³ For defining works in each of these fields, see Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and George Tsebelis, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁴ Minority policies can thus be viewed through the lens of path-dependence developed by Paul Pierson in *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*. Princeton: Princeton, University Press, 2004.

⁵ For the United States, see Liza Abram Benham, *From winning elections to influencing policy: the electoral-policy link for minority voters* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publications, 2008) and Michiko Ueda "Does Minority Representation Matter for Policy Outcomes? Evidence from the US States" unpublished paper, California Institute of Technology, 2008. URL: <http://www.hss.caltech.edu/SSPapers/sswp1284.pdf>

⁶ In her recent book, *Ethnicity and Electoral Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), Johanna-Kristin Birmir argues that resort to violence is more likely for ethnic groups that are excluded from government.

⁷ See forthcoming Şener Aktürk, "Alevi, Kurds, and Others: Fault Lines of Identity Politics under AKP, 2002-2008." in Hakan Yavuz ed., *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009).

government are necessary conditions for change. Furthermore, attempts at reform can be delayed or in extreme cases blocked by hostile interest groups, an entrenched anti-minority ideology, and institutional actors with veto powers who lie outside the control of governing political parties.

Minority Policy in Turkey: from stagnation to cautious reform

My empirical focus here will be on the two demographically largest minorities in Turkey: Alevi and Kurds. There has been significant recent progress on tolerance, visibility, and state responsiveness to the historical grievances of both of these groups. However, it is an undeniable fact that compared to the dramatic economic, social, and political changes that the country has undergone in the last two decades minority policy reforms have been small and excruciatingly incremental. In Turkey, minority policy in official discourse has historically been linked to the small non-Muslim minorities protected by the treaty of Lausanne, whereas Alevi and Kurds were traditionally accorded no special recognition under the Kemalist Republic. The reason for focusing on Kurds and Alevi is primarily analytical: these two groups are structurally different from minorities found in Italy, Greece, or Spain, in that they are both large enough to carry great electoral weight (unlike Germans in South Tyrol or Muslims in Western Thrace) and politically salient enough to affect Turkey's EU accession prospects (whereas Greece and Spain were deemed to have sufficient minority safeguards by the time they initiated negotiations).⁸

Both Kurds and Alevi have developed a conscious, highly politicized identity and their position in Turkish society continues to be controversial. There is some overlap between the two, so that the categories 'Alevi' and 'Kurd' are not mutually exclusive. Activists from both groups claim that their people have been historically oppressed by the unmarked majority population (Sunnis or Turkish speakers respectively). For the Kurdish movement within Turkey, language rights, demands for regional autonomy, and accusations of harboring terrorism are the bones of contention. After quelling revolts in the eastern provinces in the 1920s and 30s, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Republican People's Party (CHP—*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) followed assimilationist policies and even the use of the word 'Kurd' became an official taboo. Throughout the Cold War, multi-party competition in Turkey did not lead to any loosening of the non-recognition policy or a significant change in the state's attitude towards minorities. The insurgency waged by the Marxist-inspired PKK (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*—Kurdistan Workers Party) since 1984 has cost almost 40,000 lives, although it has greatly subsided after its leader's capture in 1999. The continuing raids and border skirmishes between PKK and the Turkish armed forces and the presence of independent Kurdish deputies in parliament since the 2007 election are highly divisive issues in current Turkish politics.

Unlike Kurds, Alevi make no territorial demands and have been historically very loyal to the Turkish Republic.⁹ Most Alevi consider themselves Muslims of a different denomination (*mezhep*) than Sunnis, a minority consider themselves closer to Shiism, while a more radical wing places Alevism outside Islam. The Alevi community includes people of Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic origin. Some scholars strongly object to the term 'ethnic' when referring to Alevi, given the group's tolerance to its linguistic diversity. Nevertheless, it is also the case that, Alevi identity has generally been considered hereditary. Alevi grievances revolve around recognition and religious equality. Alevi organizations typically criticize the state of favoritism towards Sunnis, exemplified by Sunni domination of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DİB—*Diyanet İşleri Bakanlığı*). They complain

⁸ The cases of pre-accession Romania and Bulgaria are also somewhat different, in that Romania already formally recognized its Hungarian minority while Bulgaria reversed Zhivkov's policies towards Turks almost immediately after the fall of communism.

⁹ Kurdish Alevi are an exception. See Michiel Leezenberg, "Kurdish Alevi and the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s," in *Turkey's Alevi Enigma: a Comprehensive Overview*, edited by Paul White and Joost Jongerden (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), pp. 197-212.

that the school curriculum, which includes compulsory education courses, does not incorporate Alevi beliefs, that the state funds mosques in Alevi areas but not Alevi religious activities, and that successive right-wing governments have tried to assimilate Alevis to the Sunni faith.¹⁰ For these reasons, Alevis have been particularly sensitive to the principles of secularism and suspicious of parties of the religious right.

During the Cold War, mainstream Turkish parties appealed to minority voters but did not embrace minority agendas, while fringe parties with specific minority appeal were either officially banned or electorally unsuccessful. In the 1950s, a strongly majoritarian electoral system condemned any party with geographically dispersed electoral support to guaranteed failure. Since Alevis are a geographically dispersed minority, it is not surprising that no specifically Alevi party was formed. Alevi politicians sought membership in the two major parties, CHP and DP, with preference for the governing DP (*Demokrat Parti*). The same does not hold for Kurds, whose demographic concentration would have guaranteed representation to a Kurdish ethnic party, but whose vote was also split between the two major parties. The larger backdrop of the 1950s was not the political party system, but the low level of economic and social development in the east. Kurdish society in particular was completely dominated by landlord families and still reeling from two decades of disastrous revolts.

After the military coup in 1960, a more liberal constitution and a proportional electoral system created more space for meaningful party competition. Although public expressions of ethnicity remained a problem, the electoral formula favored small parties while coalition governments gave them extra leverage. Urbanization and social mobility also facilitated ethnic awareness among Alevis and Kurds. Indeed, some small parties succeeded, but they came from the far right (MHP and MSP) and were expressing extremist positions within the Sunni Turkish majority. An unmistakably Alevi party (TBP—*Türkiye Birlik Partisi*) was formed in 1966, but Alevi organizations did not back it wholeheartedly.¹¹ Alevis reacted to the rise of the Islamic and nationalist right by turning decisively to CHP in the 1970s.¹² Kurdish politics remained divided and dominated by notable families, who oscillated between the various parties. The New Turkey Party (YTP—*Yeni Türkiye Partisi*) was a characteristic political formation of eastern landowners that was eventually absorbed by the mainstream right. Candidates of notable family backgrounds with strong local ties in the southeast often ran on a different party's ballot from one election to the next, and none of them openly voiced Kurdish claims until the late 70s. The only party that dared to do so was the Workers' Party (TİP—*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*). In its short history, the Marxist TİP only managed to win one seat in the region (in 1965 in Diyarbakir), and that was not thanks to the urban proletariat but to the rural votes of its well-to-do Kurdish candidate's home town.¹³ TİP was banned after the 1971 military intervention and served primarily as a preparatory school for the post-1980 Kurdish far left. By the late 1970s, the first independent radical leftist Kurdish candidates that did not hail from landowning families appeared in the southeast.¹⁴

¹⁰ Harald Shüler, "Secularism and Ethnicity: Alevis and Social Democrats in Search of an Alliance," in *Civil Society in the Grip of Nationalism: Studies on Political Culture in Contemporary Turkey*, edited by Stefanos Yerasimos, Günter Seufert, Karin Vorhoff, (Istanbul: Orient-Institut, 2000), pp. 197-250.

¹¹ For a history of this party, see Kelime Ata, *Alevilerin İlk Siyasal Denemesi: (Türkiye) Birlik Partisi (1966-1980)* (Istanbul: Kelime Yayınevi, 2007).

¹² Alevi left-wing voting behavior has been amply recorded by both countrywide and village- and suburb- specific research. See Shankland, *The Alevis in Turkey*, Appendix 4; Harald Shüler, *Türkiye'de Sosyal Demokrasi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998), pp. 157-185, and "Secularism and Ethnicity," in *Civil Society in the Grip of Nationalism*, pp. 197-250.

¹³ Lice, the birthplace of Tarık Ziya Ekinci.

¹⁴ See Gilles Dorronsoro and Nicole F. Watts, "Toward Kurdish Distinctiveness in Electoral Politics: the 1977 Local Elections in Diyarbakir," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 41 no. 3 (August 2009): 457-478.

Policies after the 1980 coup hardened, as Alevi were overrepresented in the far left, and armed insurgency raged in the predominantly Kurdish southeast. By 1991, after the Soviet boogymen behind PKK evaporated, attitudes began to change. The bans on the local commercial use of Kurdish were relaxed and politicians began to openly use the word 'Kurd'. Alevi organizations, both in Turkey and in the European diaspora, mushroomed. Alevi continued and Kurds began to append themselves to the mainstream leftist Social-Democratic Populist Party (SHP, later merged with CHP). The experiment failed on the Kurdish side, as deputies from the southeast provocatively attempted to take their oath in Kurdish and had their parliamentary immunities removed. A leftist Kurdish party was then formed that has persisted across several elections and judicial bans, albeit without gaining universal support among Kurdish voters.¹⁵ The party, whose manifestos and literature have always included references to Marxism and appeals to non-Kurdish leftist voters, has had to change names as frequently (HEP, HADEP, DEHAP, DTP) as the Islamic parties of the religious right (MSP, RP, FP, AKP). In 2007, its candidates run as independents for the first time, gaining twenty parliamentary seats.

The electoral system in the post-1980 era created strong incentives for political parties to coalesce in order to cross the high 10% threshold introduced in 1983. Party mergers did take place several times, but what would have been a truly historic marriage, the affair between the Turkish and the Kurdish left in 1987-1991, ended with a divorce. From that point on the Kurdish left kept control of local government in the southeast and an approximate five percent of the national vote, which left it out of parliament. As much as CHP struggled to stay in parliament itself (and failed to do so in 1999), it calculated that it had suffered too much from its association with the Kurds and was better off reclaiming its traditional Turkish voter base in western Turkey. Under its new leader Deniz Baykal, CHP adopted a more nationalist rhetoric against Kurdish separatism and its position deteriorated in the southeast, to the extent that it now finds it hard to field enough candidates for local elections.¹⁶ HADEP/DTP has clearly faced many obstacles in its political activity, but the Islamic party has also faced persecution and still managed to obtain both Turkish and Kurdish votes, eventually rising to power. Most importantly, the two larger patterns of ethnic voting that characterize Turkey's party system (the attraction of Alevi voters by the secular center left and the attraction of Sunni Kurdish voters by the religious right) are observed continuously since the 1970s and cannot be attributed to the electoral reform (see Maps 1-4).

The biggest historical changes in state attitudes towards minorities came only in the last few years, and have often been associated with EU pressure on the road of potential accession.¹⁷ In the midst of financial turmoil, a coalition government in 2002 passed a reform package which, among other items, lifted the ban on broadcasting in Kurdish and recognized the right for primary education in one's native language. After coming to power later in the same year, AKP announced an intention to introduce further constitutional amendments. The reform package submitted to parliament in 2008 contained a mild concession to Kurdish demands, not naming Kurdish but also omitting to mention Turkish as the only official language of the state. This will potentially serve to end prosecutions for using Kurdish in public rallies and official publications in DTP-controlled municipalities, and for using the letters w, x, and q, (which exist in romanized Kurdish script but not the Turkish alphabet) in signs and name spellings. Meanwhile, the implementation of the language provisions in state media and education has been slow. Broadcasting in Kurdish and other minority languages was until recently limited to an early morning program, although Kurdish newspapers and radio stations flourish in the

¹⁵ Aylin Güney, "The People's Democracy Party," in *Political Parties in Turkey*, pp. 122-137; interviews with Ufuk Uras and Tarik Ziya Ekinci. The DTP maintains cordial relations with fringe Marxist Turkish parties like the ÖDP, and launched a new initiative in 2008 for an all-inclusive leftist party (Çatı Parti).

¹⁶ Interviews with Yakup Kepenek and Korel Göymen.

¹⁷ See for example Kivanç Ulusoy, "Turkey's Reform Effort Reconsidered, 1987-2004" EUI Working Paper RSCAS No. 2005/28. URL: http://www.iue.it/RSCAS/WP-Texts/05_28.pdf

southeast.¹⁸ A long-awaited full-fledged public channel in Kurdish was finally launched at the end of 2008. Kurdish courses are still not offered at any level of public education, although the opening of Kurdish studies departments at universities has also been announced. Discourse on Alevi affairs has also changed, but practical progress has not been made. AKP tried to court the Alevi vote by attracting conservative Alevi candidates in its ranks, like Reha Çamuroğlu, who proposed a bill equalizing Alevi prayer houses with mosques in 2007. The package was viewed with suspicion from the pro-CHP Alevi organizations, who saw in it a veiled attempt at assimilation aimed at bringing Alevi institutions under Diyanet control. They also criticized the government for not sufficiently involving them in its public consultations. In the wake of bitter confrontation between AKP and CHP during 2007 over the presidential election, the Çamuroğlu package was dropped from the agenda and Alevi groups are planning demonstrations to advance their demands.

As in the past, a number of inhibiting factors for policy reform have certainly been in operation. The military has had an impressive degree of influence over policymaking at least since 1960, constitutionally embodied in the National Security Council (NSC). After the 2002 reforms, the role of the NSC has been verbally downgraded in the constitution, but the military continues to express its views on a variety of domestic and foreign policy issues. However, claiming that the military has been the main impediment to change on minority policy would be a stereotype of little analytic value. The Turkish Armed Forces simply echo the most conservative wing of a larger social establishment representing the legacy of Kemalism in public affairs. As Turkish society renegotiates its relationship with Kemalism and debates the merits and perils of institutionalized secularism and assimilation, reaction to minority reforms will continue on the street and at the polling booth long after the military's formal political role has been eclipsed. The presidency, which was dominated by the military until the 1990s and was seen as a Kemalist bulwark as late as 2007, is a source of veto power that is now safely in AKP's hands after the election of Abdullah Gül. Interest group activity, on the other hand, is both a boon and a bust for minority policy under AKP, depending on the minority group concerned. The emergence of Islamic civil society in modern Turkey has been the object of fascination for social scientists for the past two decades. AKP has built on a long tradition of Islamic organizations among the Kurds to cultivate its electoral base and its minority agenda in the southeast.¹⁹ But for the exact same reasons, Alevi organizations are particularly apprehensive of the Directorate of Islamic Affairs under Islamic party government. Given its Sunni underpinnings, AKP has not been able to argue convincingly that it can keep an equal distance from all sects of Islam.

The EU and the Council of Europe have repeatedly criticized Turkey's stance towards minorities, including Kurds and Alevis.²⁰ These pressures have been in a consistent direction, but the slow implementation and occasional regressive interpretation of laws by Turkish authorities demonstrate that supranational judicial review is a very inefficient channel for minority policy reform. The European Court of Human Rights has ruled against Turkey in numerous cases of human rights violations concerning the situation in the southeast, but admittedly the *acquis communautaire* does not include clear-cut prescriptions on linguistic and religious policy. In 2007 the European Court of Human Rights ruled in favor of an Alevi parent who asked for his daughter to be exempted from religious school courses (Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey); in other instances it has upheld the ban on the Islamic headscarf (Leyla Şahin v. Turkey, 2005) and the high electoral threshold which has repeatedly left the Kurdish party outside parliament (Yumak and Sadak v. Turkey, 2008). Turkish officials have argued that France has traditionally had a similar stance on minority issues with no official recognition for regional languages and restrictions on religious expression on secularist

¹⁸ Kurdish satellite television broadcasts from Northern Iraq and Europe are also widely available. Turkey has successfully lobbied European governments to close down the latter, on account of terrorist propaganda. See "NATO Chief Says Roj TV Could Be Shut down if Links to PPK Proved," *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 6 2009.

¹⁹ For the foundation of Islamic political networks among Kurds under AKP's predecessors, see Fehmi Çalmuk, *Erbakan'ın Kürtleri: Milli Görüşün Güneydoğu Politikası* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2001).

²⁰ For a latest example, see Commission of the European Communities, *Turkey 2008 Progress Report*, pp. 24-28.

grounds. While monitoring progress on minority issues, the European Commission's approach is simply to encourage dialogue between the state and minority organizations for commonly agreed solutions to the latter's concerns.²¹

Turkey's Party System and Minority Policy: inhibiting factors and future prospects

Among the proposed necessary factors for minority policy reform, Turkey only clearly possesses the first background condition. Both Alevis and Kurds are politically mobilized along identity lines, and despite occasional criticisms to the contrary, it is not true that governments are faced with an array of conflicting demands. The respective agendas of Alevi and Kurdish pressure groups are widely understood and relatively well defined. It is also not true, however, that external pressure for reform—precondition (b)—has been sufficiently high. Pressure originating from Europe has been the most decisive, but the EU lacks a unified model of minority policy to export on either language or religion. Besides, enthusiasm for accession, the ultimate reward in a stick-and-carrot approach, has recently cooled on both sides.²² No external actor other than the EU is either committed enough or capable of putting pressure on Turkey on minority issues; the United States treads particularly sensitive territory as it wants to maintain good relations both with its key NATO ally and with the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq.

Regarding the two alternative domestic preconditions (c and d), the structure of the Turkish party system had long precluded either meaningful electoral competition or participation in government by a strongly reform-minded party. This is not primarily because of the electoral system. Given the complete lack of official data and the traditional taboos on ethnic expression, it is fair to say that neither Kurdish nor Alevi voters have a clear idea of their exact numbers, although if a hegemonic ethnic party could rally either identity, it would most likely cross the ten percent barrier.²³ Despite this institutional hurdle for minority parties, Alevis and Kurds are demographically sizable enough to affect the overall outcome of any Turkish election. In fact, the existence of the threshold makes attracting the minority vote a decisive factor in determining which parties make it to parliament. It should be also noted, that the Kurdish party could have entered its candidates as independents in previous elections as well, but chose not to do so for ideological reasons. Therefore, theoretically, Turkey's political system should have made Alevi and Kurdish votes highly coveted, satisfying the third precondition (c).

In reality, though, there is very limited competition for the Alevi vote. Most Alevis have avowed loyalties with CHP.²⁴ Alevi civil society organizations feel comfortable associating with the party of Atatürk, which embraces a secular agenda and incorporates them in a wider vision of Turkey, even if it did not push for their demands when it was last in power and is very unlikely to win an election at any point in the near future. This political choice may also be due to the cultural uniqueness of Alevis, who have a tradition of concealing their identity and, at least the Turkish-speaking ones, a profound devotion to the Kemalist republic.

²¹ Interview with Diego Mellado.

²² See Micheal Gunter, "Turkey's Foundering EU Candidacy and its Kurdish Problem," *Middle East Policy* vol. 14 no. 1 (2007): 117-123.

²³ Most analysts believe that each minority makes up approximately 12-15% of Turkey's population. For an estimate of the Kurdish minority's size using a projection of 1960s census data, see Servet Mutlu, "The Kurds in Turkey: a Demographic Study," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 28, no. 4. (November 1996): 517-541. No census has ever included a question on Alevi religious affiliation, so their numbers can only be estimated from survey responses. For one such survey, see Ali Carkoglu, "Political Preferences of the Turkish Electorate: Reflections of an Alevi-Sunni Cleavage," *Turkish Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, (June 2005): 273-292.

²⁴ Bülent Ecevit's DSP (Demokratik Sol Partisi), the other leftist party that was competing with CHP for the Alevi vote in the 1990s, was wiped out of the political map after the 2001 financial debacle, and is essentially on its way of being absorbed by CHP.

Kurdish voting behavior is another matter. The Kurdish vote has always been split among different parties, but in the 1990s it became polarized along a left-wing/secular/separatist versus right-wing/religious/assimilated cleavage.²⁵ The last two general elections in the southeast have been exclusive duels between the AKP and HADEP/DTP. It is true that the AKP has attracted Kurdish votes due to the material benefits it delivers and that some Kurdish AKP politicians openly advertise their ethnic heritage. The Islamic party has always stressed the multiethnic character of Islam as a bridging attribute between Turks and Kurds; AKP detractors have even mocked it by claiming that its acronym stands for Arab-Kurdish Party.²⁶ Today many people of Kurdish ancestry do not have a working knowledge of Kurdish, and sentimental adherence to a Kurdish identity or support for language revival varies widely. AKP's gestures to delete Turkish as the official language from the constitution and the creation of a Kurdish public television station are symbolically important for its Kurdish voter base; but they are gradual, tactical concessions, rather than the policy revolution demanded by the Kurdish left. AKP's deputies and officials in the southeast tend to view cultural demands as secondary to the economic problems of the region. DTP cadres have the opposite attitude: they regard the economic underdevelopment as a side-effect of long-standing cultural oppression.²⁷ The accusation that DTP is too sympathetic to the PKK rebels is not entirely unfounded, but there is no doubt that a demand to rectify Kurdish linguistic oppression lies at the core of the movement. AKP has so far proven unwilling to pull the carpet under DTP's feet by swiftly introducing policies that would reverse decades of discrimination against the Kurdish language. Some sympathetic commentators might argue that AKP is reluctant to further raise tensions with the military and the opposition, and thereby follows a gradualist approach. It is more likely though that AKP's leadership is acting strategically, being aware that too pro-Kurdish a policy will entail more cost than gain in votes, as the CHP experienced first-hand in 1995.

Some of the electoral variation in the southeast can be explained by ethnic and political subdivisions within the region. The Turkish army used recruits from the west to do most of the heavy fighting, but the conflict also had a fratricidal dimension, with certain Kurdish tribes and individual soldiers (*köy korucu*, village guards) pitted against other tribes and youngsters recruited by the PKK. Within Diyarbakir province, eastern mountainous areas where villages were destroyed by the military are DEHAP/DTP strongholds; the AKP is stronger in the Tigris valley and in the predominantly Turkish-speaking western areas. In 2002 DEHAP won respectively 77 and 74% of the vote in the eastern districts of Silvan and Lice in Diyarbakir province; it won only 15 and 22% in the westernmost districts of Çüngüş and Çermik. In Batman and Mardin provinces, Arabic-speaking villages fought against the PKK and have been traditionally voting for right-wing parties. Despite its detractors' wordplay, the AKP is more like an Arab-Turkish than an Arab-Kurdish party in this part of the country.

The ideological weakness of the left in Turkey forestalls the creation of a wide social-democratic coalition favoring wide-ranging minority reforms. This is unconnected with the post-Cold War global crisis of the left.²⁸ It is rather a particularly Turkish problem of negotiating the Kemalist legacy of integrative nationalism with the leftist turn that the Kemalist party has taken since the late 1960s. Turkey has been primarily governed by right-wing parties in the last sixty years, so it has been a major challenge particularly for the left to increase its vote share. But the secularist Turkish left has repeatedly demonstrated (in 1991 and 1999) that it prefers the Turkish center-right as a coalition

²⁵ Hakan Yavuz and Nihat Ali Özcan, "The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Justice and Development Party," *Journal of Middle East Policy* vol. 8 no. 1 (Spring 2006).

²⁶ See Ergün Poyraz, *Hilafet Ordusundan Arap Kürt Partisine* (Istanbul: Toplumsal Dönüşüm, 2004).

²⁷ Interviews with Abdulrahman Kurt, Hilmi Aydođlu, Abdurrahim Hattapođlu, Muzafer Deđer, Salih Altun, Hilmi Öncü and Cemal Vesko.

²⁸ In fact an attempt to explicitly incorporate ethnic grievances into the center-left's agenda was only made by SHP in the late 1980s, at the very end of the Cold War

partner to the Kurdish far left. Historically in Turkey parties with strict minority agendas are either unsuccessful (in the case of Alevi) or when successful they are politically marginalized (in the case of DTP); while parties with wider non-ethnic agendas that attract minority voters are either weakly committed to the minority platforms (SHP in the 1990s for Alevi and Kurds, AKP in the early 2000s for Kurds) or unlikely to come to power (CHP for Alevi currently). Therefore, Turkey's party system has traditionally lacked either precondition (c) or (d), leaving little potential for purely domestically generated reforms.

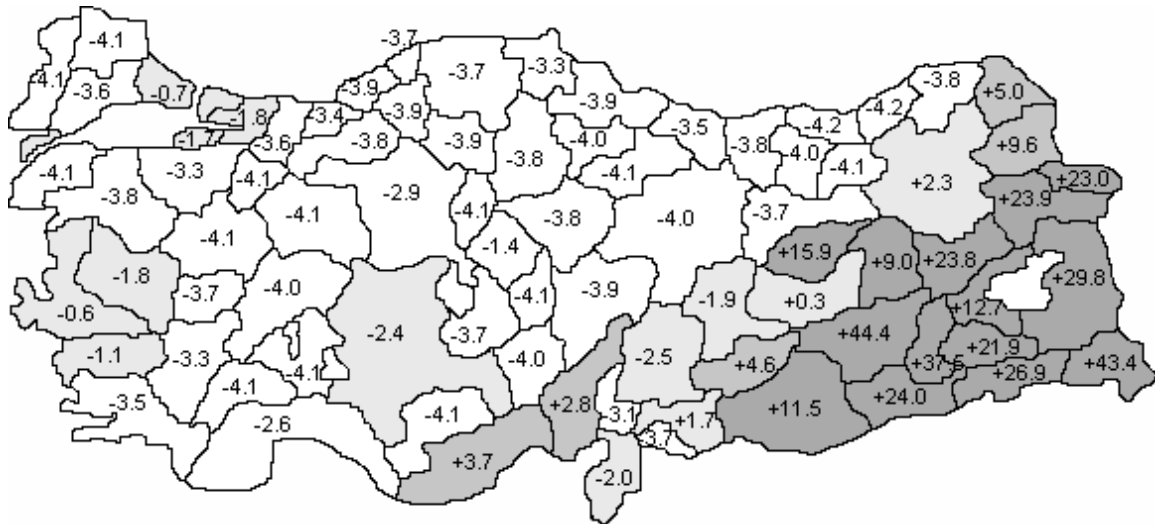
Assessing the impact of party structure on ethnic conflict in Turkey in the long term, it is worth observing that inclusion in a larger party for Alevi did not reduce sectarian tension, compared to the period when a narrowly ethnic Alevi party (TBP) existed. Alevi attitudes towards the far right and vice versa continue to be very hostile. Similarly, for many years the success of right-wing parties (like ANAP) at attracting Kurdish votes in the southeast did not produce a groundbreaking political solution to the Kurdish question. Turkish mainstream parties—right and left of center—have traditionally pursued agendas based on integrative, unitary citizenship, which are synonymous with assimilation and oppression for the Kurdish left. Cross-ethnic voting in Turkey, therefore, has not had a clear mitigating effect on ethnic conflict, and in the southeast it may indicate underlying ethnic rifts between Kurds and Arabs, between religious and secular Kurds, between those who accept and those who reject assimilation or between those that fought with the PKK and those that fought against it. Nor can the Kurdish question be exactly described as a problem of access to power for Kurds. Assimilated Kurds have been able to rise to many positions of authority and there has never been a governing party in Turkey that did not poll at least decently well in Kurdish areas.

Advancing democratization, external pressure from the EU and the different approach to ethnicity that the Islamic party represents (at least as far as Muslim ethnic groups are concerned) have all played their role in the dramatic developments of the past decade. For several months since spring 2009, AKP has been engaged in a prolonged media campaign, advertising a “Kurdish package” whose contents are intentionally left vague, while the government tests the ground. AKP's particular attention to the Kurdish issue, compared to its clumsy effort to approach Alevi, is not only due to the pressing security concerns arising from the PKK remnants operating from Northern Iraq. The Kurdish population is a strategically critical pool of votes for AKP, whereas Alevi votes are the traditional turf of the secularist opposition and constitute a far more distant, almost inaccessible political prize. The irony of the matter is that Alevi demands should theoretically be easier to meet within the political framework of the Kemalist republic. A crucial feature of Turkish politics with respect to ethnicity is the qualitative difference between Alevi and Kurdish grievances. Alevi can be satisfied either with a state that abstains from religious affairs or one that engages them as a religious community on an equal footing with Sunnis. For the Turkish left, either of the two agendas is acceptable, and the latter may now begin to be acceptable to the right as well—even though Alevi are rightly suspicious of assimilationist intentions by the AKP. On the contrary, Kurdish demands to reverse linguistic discrimination or to consider territorial autonomy for the southeast are still not endorsed in principle by any mainstream Turkish party—although attitudes on language at least are changing. At the same time, there is a conservative segment within Kurdish society which values Islamic religious identity above Kurdish linguistic identity and on this finds common ground with conservative Sunni Turks within AKP.

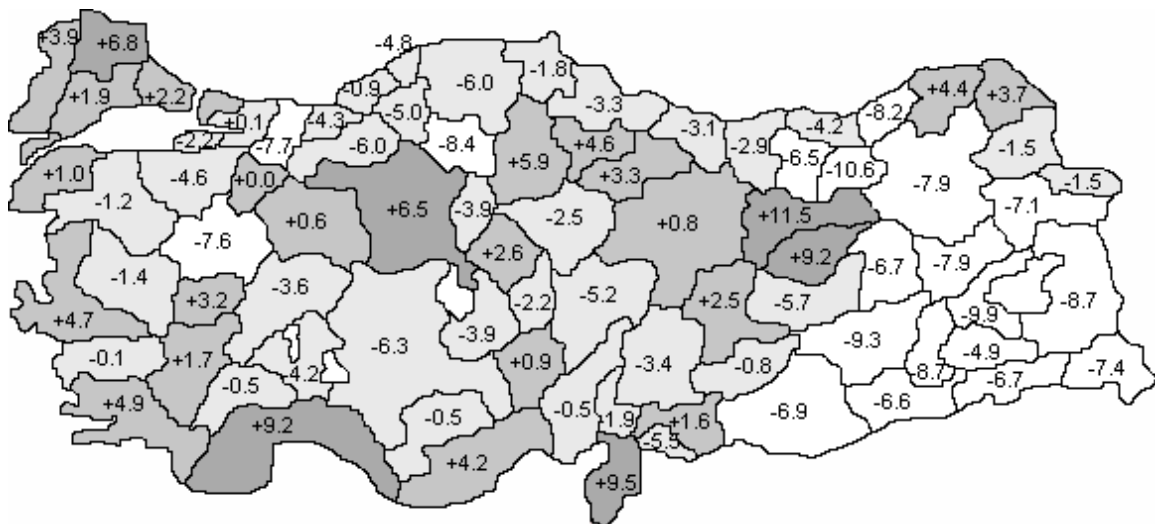
The fact that competitive party politics in Turkey were for a long time unable to become an engine for minority policy reform attests to the party system's weakness and the presence of multiple inhibiting factors, both domestic (the presence of a strong anti-minority political culture and strong extra-parliamentary institutional blocks) and international (the absence of constructive pressure from international actors and the securitization of the Kurdish questions in the region). For the first time in modern Turkish history, Turkish political parties are openly discussing ethnic grievances and beginning to compete over the minorities' votes on ethnic and sectarian platforms. Exactly because Turkey has experienced a shaky path to democratization and minority policy has been one of the most

controversial aspects of its transition, the role of external actors (namely the EU) remains crucial in maintaining and reinforcing this present, promising dynamic.

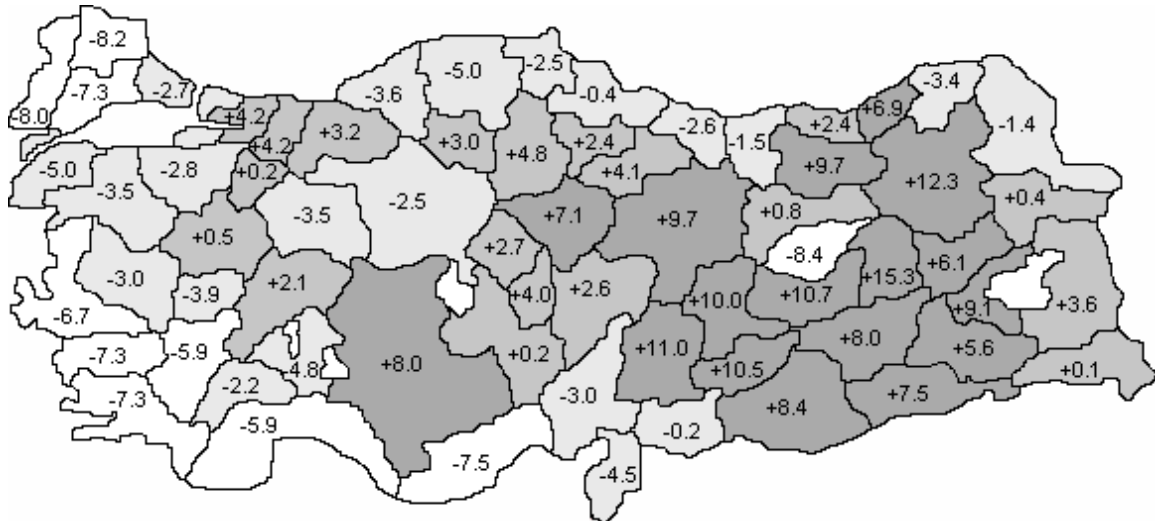
Map 1: Deviations from the average national HADEP/DEHAP vote share in 1995-2002 by electoral district (dark grey for provinces where the party received 200% or more of its national average vote, medium grey where it received between 150% and 200%, pale grey where it received between 50% and 150%, white where it received below 50% of its average). The party's stronghold in the southeast is evident.



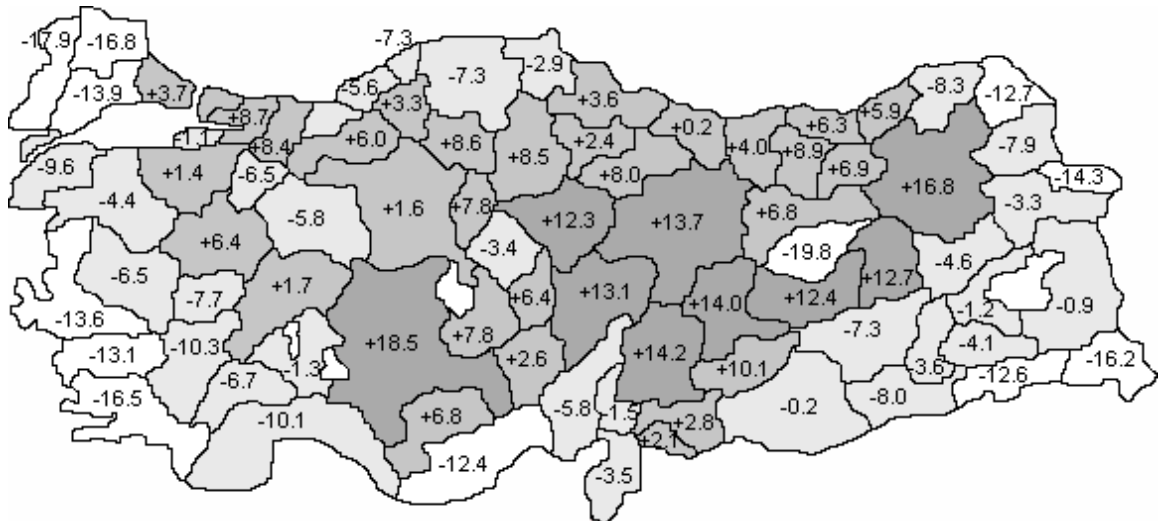
Map 2: Deviations from the average national CHP vote share in 1995-2002 by electoral district (dark grey in districts where the party received 150% or more of its average national vote, medium grey where it received between 100% and 150%, pale grey where it received between 50% and 100%, and white where it received below 50%). CHP performs best in the capital, in western coastal regions, and in Alevi areas; and worst in the southeast and the religiously conservative Central Anatolia and Black Sea regions.



Map 3: Deviations from the average national MSP vote share in 1973-1977 by electoral district (dark grey for over 150%, medium grey for 100-150%, pale grey for 50-100% and white for below 50% of the national average). Already in the 1970s, the Islamic party had established itself both in Sunni Turkish Central Anatolia and in the Sunni Kurdish southeast. The votes in Alevi minority areas came from Sunnis. This is evident from Tunceli, the only Alevi majority district, which is a white island in the east (-8.4).



Map 4: Deviations from the average national RP/FP/AKP vote share in 1995-2002 by electoral district (dark grey for over 150%, medium grey for 100-150%, pale grey for 50-100% and white for below 50% of the national average). The party has retained and enlarged its power base in Central Anatolia and the Black Sea, facing competition from the Kurdish HADEP/DEHAP/DTP in the southeast, and from CHP in Alevi and western areas.



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