

LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

**From Kurdishness to Turkishness:
Exploring the HDP's Multi-Ethnic Identity**

By

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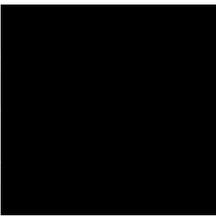
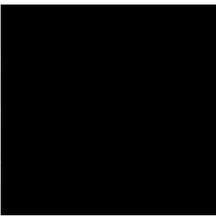
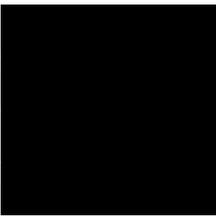
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*To Nadim Said Khalaf
& my father, Toros*

May your souls rest in peace.

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From Kurdishness To Turkishness: Exploring the HDP's Multi-Ethnic Identity

Hrag Toros Avdanian

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to contribute to the literature on ethnic identity. Despite many attempts by Turkey's ruling party and most local and international media outlets to confine the newly established Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) to its alleged Kurdish identity, the party views itself as one for all of Turkey's peoples and ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. Utilizing Kanchan Chandra's Constructivist Dataset for Ethnicities and Institutions (CDEI) and its relevant indicators for an ethnic party, this thesis analyzes the HDP's identity and demonstrates that the party chose to express a multi-ethnic, 'activated' identity, rather than limit itself to its 'nominal' identity and predominantly Kurdish base. It does so by exploring the HDP's multi-ethnic identity in the party's choice of name, party program, explicit appeals and issue positions, ethnic composition of its leadership and candidates, ability to contest elections nationwide, and the discourse used in the party's parliamentary and presidential electoral campaigns, slogans, songs, and speeches (2015-2018). The thesis concludes that identities are malleable social constructs, and that political parties, like individuals, can shape and reshape their identity.

Keywords: Turkey, Kurds, Minorities, Elections, Ethnic Identity, Constructivism, Multi-Ethnic Party, HDP, AKP

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

On February 8, 2018, the Government of Turkey released an online genealogy database called “e-devlet,” or electronic state, where citizens could trace their lineage back to the early 1800s, even before the establishment of the republic. The system crashed within hours. The amount of traffic caused by the massive number of Turkish citizens attempting to look into their ancestry and ethnic roots, forced the government to temporarily freeze the database, until technical improvements were made for the system to be able to handle the pressure. The database was accessible again one week later. More than 8 million citizens have hitherto inquired about their family registries. This only shows the thirst among Turkey’s population to find out where they originally come from, about their family lineage, and their ethnic and religious backgrounds. This self-inquiry may come as a surprise for those who are not aware of how Turkey was founded. However, for those who do, they know otherwise. Fehim Tastekin (2018) explains that “population registers in Turkey were kept secret until recently. The topic has always been a sensitive issue for the state. The confidentiality of data that identifies people’s lineage was considered a national security issue.” (para 3). The section below explains why this is the case.

1.2 The Ethnic Makeup of Ottoman Turkey

The Republic of Turkey was established in 1923, from what remained of the Ottoman Empire, both in terms of territory and population. The population was composed of an array of ethnic peoples, who had been living there for centuries, such as the Armenians, Greeks, Kurds, Turks, Arabs, Jews and many others, some of whom referred to parts of the country's territory as 'ancestral homeland'. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, however, did not bring with it an end to the discriminatory policies, oppression and even massacres to which the non-Turkic ethnic groups were subjected to by the ruling caliphate. In fact, the process of state-building and modernization in Turkey had significant implications to the now "minorities" of the new republic, who once were a noteworthy proportion of the country. The new republic continued what the Ottomans had started. The Armenian and Assyrian genocides got rid of the majority of both peoples from the Anatolia region (Kevorkian, 2011). The Pontic Genocide, and the following population exchange with Greece, significantly decreased the number of Greeks who still refer to 'Istanbul' as 'Constantinople' as a form of protest against the Ottoman conquest. Mass conversion of the non-Muslim population was not uncommon, particularly among the Armenians of Anatolia, which saw it as a method of survival (Deringil, 2009). Nevertheless, the one ethnic population that did not see a systematic, pre-planned, physical destruction of its existence during the Ottoman era were the Kurds. They, however, under the modern republic, were subject to other forms of oppression through the denial of their distinct identity and thus existence. Erik J. Zürcher (2004) explains that the republican era "witnessed the brutal suppression of minority communities: the Armenians in the first case, the Kurds in the second" (p.

172). Nonetheless, successive Turkish governments have continuously denied the above-mentioned massacres and forced conversions, as they constitute crimes against humanity (Howard, 2001). Population registries that reveal the Armenian, Greek and Christian background of supposedly “pure” Sunni Turks, are therefore indeed regarded as security threats to the foundations of the state, as they reveal hidden pages from Turkey’s bloody history, but, most importantly, challenge Ataturk’s orchestration of a single cohesive Turkish identity, regarded as a cornerstone in establishing the republic.

1.3 A Single vs. Multi-Party System

Alongside the issue of how to deal with ethnic minorities, another dilemma that defines Turkey’s internal political history is the constant struggle between a single-party or a multi-party system of governance (Yalman, 1947). Although the current political landscape accompanied with the new constitution of an executive presidency seems to be the start of a single-party, even single-person, rule, Turkey’s single-party period started long before with the establishment of the republic and the consolidation of power by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the army officer that lead Turkey’s War of Independence. Ataturk deployed a range of methods to concentrate power in his hands. This included dissolving the parliament, establishing a political party, tightly controlling the new elections, and taking charge of the security and administrative apparatuses of the state. The Ataturk administration abolished the sultanate and the caliphate, oppressed opposition figures, shut down their newspapers, and pushed for a “radical programme of secularization and modernization” (Zurcher, 2004, p. 172). This era witnessed a period of enforced westernization, secularization and Turkification of the

different ethnic groups, including the Turks themselves, in an attempt to build a new national identity. These reforms resulted in a civic and secular state, not without opposition though (Zurcher, 2004). The most militant opposition against the central government, which now had been moved to Ankara, was the Kurdish rebellion of 1925 in Diyarbakir. It was crushed by the army, however, with the capture of its leader, Sheikh Sait. Despite its strong grip on power, both internal and external pressures pressed the Kemalist one-party state to democratize and move to a multi-party system.

The multi-party period started in 1945, with the establishment of opposition parties, and the organization of the country's first multi-party elections in 1946 by the Ismet Inonu administration. The results changed the course of Turkey, with Ataturk's own party, the CHP, losing by a big margin, and saw the rise of the DP (Democrat Party). During the multi-party period, Turkey witnessed political instability, continuous struggle over power, the emergence and dissolution of several parties, but most importantly military coups that took over the state leadership. The state, however, was always returned to secular civilian hands (Howard, 2001). A new era of short-lived political stability was witnessed in Turkey as Recep Tayyip Erdogan's conservative Islamist political party, the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi - Justice and Development Party in English) scored a big win in the 2002 general elections. Although the AKP does not officially present itself as an Islamic party, the secular principles of the republic were shaken by its discourse and policies (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008). The AKP, while initially seen as a model for moderate Islamic democracy, lost its democratic momentum when it was confronted with the Gezi Park Protests in 2013. The park, situated north of Istanbul's iconic Taksim square, was planned to be demolished

and a mall to rise instead. The decision was faced with protests from environmental activists and artists. It soon grew to a full-blown mass protest by different interest groups against the ruling government. The police responded aggressively and violently. “Erdogan’s defense of the brutality of police actions, and the absence of mainstream media coverage in the first days of the crackdown” (Patten, 2013, p. 33), revealed a new image of him. The park, however, was not demolished. Erdogan witnessed his first loss there. The AKP continues to be in power, but is facing growing opposition from a number of historical and newly formed parties.

1.4 The Kurdish Issue

Since the founding of the republic, the issue of the country’s largest ethnic minority, the Kurds, and their aspirations for freedom and independence, remained a constant struggle for the ruling administrations and the military (Waldman & Caliskan, *The New Turkey and Its Discontents*, 2017). Ataturk’s promises of autonomy for the Kurdish people were not met by the Kemalist state. The administration also prohibited the public use and teaching of the Kurdish language. Key Kurdish figures and a large number of Kurds were forcibly resettled away from Kurdish strongholds, to the west of the country, in an attempt to change the demographic makeover of the south-east provinces. For the state, “the existence of a separate Kurdish identity was officially denied” (Zurcher, 2004, p. 172). This marked the start of a decades long enmity between the Kurdish nationalists and the succeeding Turkish governments. The antagonism between the two reached its peak with the establishment of the militant Kurdistan Workers’ Party, most commonly known as the PKK. Since the mid-1980s,

the PKK has been in a state of war with the Turkish state. The PKK called for the secession from Turkey and the establishment of an independent Kurdistan on the Kurdish people's 'ancestral homeland'. More recently, particularly after the failed peace process with the AKP government, the PKK calls for autonomy and self-rule, rather than complete secession. (Kaya, 2013). Nonetheless, the PKK is labeled as a terrorist organization by Turkey, and other states, and is banned from operating openly. As a result, a number of Kurdish political parties have been formed in Turkey, advocating an array of Kurdish ethnic rights, only to be dissolved and banned by the state on accusations of inciting separatism, instability or terrorism. (Kogacioglu, 2004).

1.5 Kurdish Political Parties

The history of Kurdish political parties in modern Turkey is a short one indeed. The life of each party, is even shorter. In 1990, the HEP (Halkin Emek Partisi – People's Labor Party) was the first pro-Kurdish political party to be established to engage in Turkish politics. It ran for the 1991 parliamentary elections alongside the leftist SHP (Social Democratic Party). Despite winning 22 seats in Parliament, it was banned by the Constitutional Court two years later. After the 1980 military coup, the dissolution of parties by the Constitutional Court that either had a Kurdish or Islamic sentiment was so normalized that parties had to resort to what Kocagioclu (2004) names the strategy of establishing a "spare party". The spare would serve as the replacement party as soon as the Court issues the decision that the party is a threat to the country's constitution or unity. Once dissolved, the members of the party are moved into the "spare party". In the meantime, a new "spare party" has to be formed, in case there is a

feeling that the old one is about to be dissolved. As such, a month before the HEP was banned, Kurdish MPs founded the OZDEP (Ozgurluk ve Demokrasi Partisi - Freedom and Democracy Party). However, a few months later, the OZDEP was also outlawed, and replaced by a new Kurdish party, the DEP (Demokrasi Partisi - Democracy Party). The DEP was disbanded by the Constitutional Court in June 1994. A month before its disbandment, the HADEP (Halkin Deomkrasi Partisi - People's Democracy Party) was established to substitute it. The HADEP ran for the 1995 and 1999 general elections, but did not meet the 10% threshold needed to enter the Grand Assembly. It scored much better in the local elections and took charge of 37 municipalities in the South-East region. It was outlawed in 2003 and its founding members were banned from engaging in politics. Nevertheless, the DEHAP (Democratic People's Party) was already established to succeed it. DEHAP received 7% of the total votes in 2002, and thus did not make the cut to enter Parliament. To avoid being outlawed by the constitutional Court, the party merged with the DTP (Democratic Society Party). Avoiding the 10% threshold risk, the DTP did not run for the 2007 elections as a party, but rather as independents, securing 22 seats in Parliament. In the local elections of 2009, DTP scored victory in 100 cities and towns in the Kurdish stronghold. It was banned the same year. Nonetheless, the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) had already been created in 2008. BDP candidates ran independently for the parliamentary elections, 36 succeeded to enter the parliament. The BDP is still not outlawed and continues to operate, however it only runs for the local elections (History of Kurdish Political Parties in Turkey, n.d.). The general elections have been entrusted to a new party that acts as a sister party. The latest pro-Kurdish party, the HDP (Halklarin Demokratik Partisi -

Peoples' Democratic Party), was established in 2012. The HDP follows a different trajectory than its predecessors, however.

For the first time in the Turkish Republic's history, a 'Kurdish' political party, the HDP, entered mainstream political life, by contesting the 2015 parliamentary elections of June and November as a political party, but not as independent candidates. Not only did it win, twice, it also became the second largest opposition party in Parliament, challenging Erdogan's AKP and its single-party rule (Bardakçi, 2016). The victory angered many in Turkey, including the alt-right, who deem Turkey a home for ethnic Turks. It also presented a moment of hope for Turkey's long struggling left (Gunes, 2017). Most importantly, it was deemed a big victory for the country's largest ethnic minority, the Kurds. Nevertheless, the HDP does not present itself as a Kurdish party, but rather a Turkish one. Hence the puzzle this thesis attempts to answer.

Turkey's political establishment and electorate from non-Kurdish heritage would not be easily convinced that the HDP is not a Kurdish party by proxy. The HDP had to prove otherwise, internally and externally. This thesis will aim to examine how a political party, the HDP, with a predominantly ethnic Kurdish base, constructed its 'Turkish' identity, and was, allegedly, able to attract votes from different demographic groups, and enter parliament with significant number of seats (Grigoriadis, 2016). It will particularly focus on identifying the different elements that make HDP a multi-ethnic party, and how it manifests its 'constructed identity' in its electoral campaign. It will analyze and discuss the HDP's move from 'Kurdishness' to 'Turkishness' as a strategy of intentionally activating an alternative ethnic identity, other than the nominal attributes of their Kurdishness.

The academic literature on modern Turkey's political history is extensive. This also includes research on the Kurdish issue, and the Kurdish political movement in Turkey, heavily focusing on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (Yegen, 2009) (Oguz, 2012). The HDP, however, presents a new prototype of Kurdish politics, rebranded and integrated in the Turkish political struggle for a more democratic Turkey. A softer version of this prototype is currently being put in place in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria – formerly known as Rojava, as Syria's Kurds control the territory (Sary, 2016). Understanding and evaluating the Kurdish experiment of pan-ethnic democratic struggle in Turkey may allow us to foresee future Kurdish political experiments in the region. It also allows us to have a better understanding of the challenges of emerging political parties in Turkey. Most importantly, it validates the role of identity politics and constructivism in providing an alternative explanation for modern day politics.

1.6 Research Question

Is the HDP a multi-ethnic political party as it claims to be, or is it merely another Kurdish political party operating in Turkey under a new guise? Answering this question entails examining the making of the HDP, deconstructing its image and identity, comparing it with that of pre-existing Kurdish parties and organizations, and analyzing how the 'constructed identity' shaped its discourse, electoral campaign, engagement with the general population, and activity in Parliament.

1.7 Methodology

This thesis is a single case study where the HDP, its ideology, identity formation, electoral campaign, and election outcome is examined from a constructivist lens. Although there are no internationally agreed upon indicators to determine a political party's ethnic makeover, Kanchan Chandra (2011) proposes eight ways of looking into political parties to assess whether they are 'ethnic', 'multi-ethnic' or 'non-ethnic'. To determine this, Chandra provides indicators for each of the eight classifications to measure the party against. The indicators and the relevant rules of interpretation are based on her earlier development of the Constructivist Dataset for Ethnicity and Institutions – CDEI (Chandra, 2009). Chandra suggests to look at the following political party indicators:

- 1- **Choice of name:** How a party names itself can hint on whether it associates itself with a particular group or not. “The use of a multi-ethnic label in the name indicates a multi-ethnic party (Chandra, 2011, p. 159).
- 2- **Explicit appeals:** This implies to look at explicit ethnic references in the party's platform, and determine how central they are to that platform. If the party refers to more than one ethnicity and includes them in its appeal as a central theme, it may qualify for being multi-ethnic rather than an ethnic party.
- 3- **Explicit issue positions:** this requires to examine whether a party can attach any given issue, including non-ethnic issues such as economy, to the benefit (or the disadvantage) of an ethnic group. Chandra notes that “it can often be difficult to code positions on distinct issues [...] in a way that is quantifiable and comparable” (p. 161).
- 4- **Implicit activation of ethnic identities:** this assumes looking into ‘non-apparent’ messaging and reading in between the lines of speeches and campaign slogans. A party may send coded messages by relying on “the shadow of the past” (p. 162) or the choice of candidates. Nevertheless, implicit appeals are difficult to code as they are either ‘invisible’ and/or open to multiple interpretations. A contextual analysis of the choice of words may help in revealing implicit appeals.

- 5- **Ethnic composition of its leadership:** this requires looking into the ethnic make-up and identification of those who are in the party's decision-making post, often the formal chairmanship. In HDP's case, this will require to look into the nominal and activated ethnic identity of both chairpersons as it has a co-chairmanship system.
- 6- **Ethnic arena of contestation:** "When a party competes for votes among voters from all relevant ethnic categories, we can say it has a multi-ethnic arena of contestation" (p. 165). This requires to look into the geographic distribution of where the party contests and where it doesn't.
- 7- **How ethnic groups cast their vote:** Chandra (2011) labels this as "Group Vote". She explains that a party can be classified as ethnic "if the majority of some ethnic category or categories, to the exclusion of others, support it" (p. 162). She continues, "if the majority of all relevant ethnic categories support a party, or if the majority of its own support comes from all relevant ethnic categories, then it becomes a party with a multi-ethnic support base" (p. 163). It will be a challenge to prove this. In Turkey's case, ethnic categorization of the electorate is not available, and previously illegal, as the state regarded all citizens as ethnic Turks.
- 8- **Ethnic division of the votes a party receives:** Chandra labeled this as "Party Votes". Chandra claims that if the majority of the votes a party receives comes from an ethnic category or categories, and that these categories exclude some significant proportion of the population, then it is an ethnic party. If they do not exclude an ethnic category, then they can qualify to be a multi-ethnic. The limitation of not having the ethnic divisions of the Turkish electorate persists here as well. Nevertheless, Chandra (2011) explains that a party doesn't have to meet all of the above classifications and indicators at once to be labeled as an ethnic or multi-ethnic party.

This thesis will examine the HDP's multi-ethnic identity by using the above-mentioned classifications and indicators proposed by Chandra (2011). The party's manifesto, official statements on key issues, election slogans, candidates, and results will be utilized to feed into the analysis. At times, the HDP will be cross-checked and compared with previous Kurdish political parties and organizations, including the PKK, in order to show differences and progress. This thesis, however, in no way suggests that the HDP is a subset of the PKK.

There are different types of case studies. For this thesis, the HDP will serve as a prototypical case study, as Yin (2003) labels it. A prototypical case is not chosen because it is a representative sample, but because it may be. It will help understand a phenomenon, such as a multi-ethnic, multi-cause party in an increasingly authoritarian system, and foresee where else it can be implemented and how. As the HDP's political strife is ongoing, and with the limitation of academic research on the party, the thesis will focus on primary sources such as the party's manifesto and platform, news coverage of elections, speeches made by HDP co-chairs, press releases, electoral campaigns (videos, songs, posters, slogans), and other available research documents or think pieces. HDP's entry into Parliament will be treated as a 'critical juncture' as history was made and ideas were replaced by institutions (Pierson, 2000).

One important limitation of this research is the lack of field research and interviews with key figures in the HDP party. Although initially planned, however, the timing of the snap presidential and parliamentary elections, the post-election tensions, accusations, and threats; the continuation of the "state of emergency" in Turkey; and the talks on calling for snap municipal elections, has preoccupied the party, and made it impossible to conduct the interviews in the timeframe of this thesis. Nevertheless, official HDP publications and productions will be used to authenticate findings. Another possible limitation could be the focus on material produced in the English language, rather than in Turkish. Nevertheless, the HDP has a comprehensive English website, where its platform, election campaigns, statements and stands are provided in English. Moreover, some Turkish material, in particular elections songs, slogans, and ads will be translated to English, with the help of translators. A third limitation will be

the accurate ethnic/demographic segregation of votes that the HDP (or any other party) received, as there is no crude data on that, and because the Turkish state officially views all its citizens as Turks, without segregating ethnicities, at least publicly. However, the estimate geographic distribution of Turkey's ethnic groups will be taken into consideration and will be compared with the total percentage of votes the HDP received in each province. This is not an ideal method, but the only available one given the restrictions.

1.8 Map of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The next chapter presents the existing academic and theoretical literature on the topic, particularly the different approaches, such as primordial, instrumentalist or constructivist, in analyzing ethnic identity formation and ethnic conflict. Nevertheless, since the thesis has adopted the constructivist lens, more attention will be given to that approach. The third chapter focuses on the making of the HDP and testing its claim of being a multi-ethnic political party rather than a Kurdish one, based on the indicators listed in the methodology segment. The fourth chapter focuses on presenting the HDP in action, by analyzing how the constructed identity discussed in the previous chapter is manifested in the electoral campaigns of the HDP during the 2015 twin parliamentary elections and the 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections. This will be done by studying election posters, advertisements, songs, speeches, and interviews. The results of the elections will also be presented to measure reach. The fifth and final chapter provides a summary of the above findings and draws a conclusion whether the HDP's political experiment was

successful. It also discusses the prospects and consequences of a party's multi-ethnic appeal and approach, and what it means for Turkey's shaky democracy.

Chapter Two

Explaining Ethnic Identities: The Established Theories

2.1 Introduction

The next section presents a review of the literature on the different theoretical approaches in explaining ethnic identity formation. It first outlines the core assumptions of each of the primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist schools of thought regarding ethnic identity. It then defends why this thesis adopts a constructivist discourse to analyze the party under study. Moreover, it discusses the different attempts in quantifying and measuring ethnicity and/or ethnic appeals using a constructivist approach. Finally, it presents the constructivist tool which will be adopted by this thesis in its assessment of the case study. This chapter places the case study used in the thesis in its proper theoretical context.

2.2 Literature Review

Identity politics, as one might assume, is an important feature of Turkish politics, to the extent that the republic was founded upon a myth of one, unified, cohesive, Turkish ethnicity. This, not only disregards the existence of other ethnicities that were inherited from the Ottoman empire, but also lays the ground for ethnic conflict, as minority groups will eventually demand recognition. That is particularly the

case with the Kurds. While most Kurdish parties took upon themselves the responsibility to act as ethnic parties for the Kurdish population, the HDP did more than that. It represented itself as a party for all of Turkey's peoples, Kurds, Turks, Armenians and others alike. What explains the HDP's pan-ethnic identity formation? Three theoretical approaches have dominated the field in their attempt to explain ethnicity, ethnic identity, and ethnic conflict. They are primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism. The next section summarizes the core assumptions of each approach, respectively.

2.2.1 Primordialism

As a theoretical approach primordialism was first explicitly set out by Clifford Geertz in *The Integrative Revolution* (1973). The two defining assumptions on ethnicity that the book suggests is that individuals have a single identity, and that that identity is fixed, regardless of where it initially comes from. Early scholars of ethnic identity and conflict adopted the primordialist approach and treated identity as simply given, static, singular, and non-changing, passed from one generation to another (Geertz, 1973). This approach views ethnicity differences as historical, deeply rooted, hate- or fear-driven, and irreconcilable. Individuals have deep natural connections with people of the same ethnic group as well as natural divisions with others from different ethnic groups. Since ethnic groups are composed of individuals, the primordialist assumptions on an individual's identity can also be implied to the identity of an ethnic group and the larger ethnic demography of which it is a part of (Chandra, 2001). In the primordialist view, identity (and, therefore, ethnic groups) is treated as an exogenous variable, independent of all other variables in the system. Consequently, primordialism "ignores the structural,

economic, and political processes within which [...] conflict[s] erupt” (Williams, 2015, p. 147). While once the dominant school of thought, primordialism was soon replaced with the instrumentalist and constructivist approaches, as it failed to analyze social and identity change or how ethnicity could be instrumentalized (Seol, 2008).

Despite widespread scholarly agreement on the dismissal of primordialism, Stephen Van Evera (2001) argues that the approach deserves revisiting. Van Evera suggests that even if ethnic identities are historically constructed, as constructivists claim, they are “hard to reconstruct once they form” (p. 20), and are thus fixed. Van Evera claims that mass literacy and violent conflict make it difficult to transform or reconstruct identities, and instead proposes that they can only be made more benign. This approach, however, cannot explain the HDP’s multi-ethnic approach. It sees ethnic Kurds as Kurds and ethnic Turks as Turks and the historical divide between them as irreconcilable. This view does not justify the fact that Kurds and Turks have coexisted and cooperated, more or less in peace, during the Ottoman Caliphate. Moreover, not only does it deny the fact that an individual or an ethnic group can have more than one identity, it also cannot justify how a group’s strong, even militarized, Kurdish identity can be reconstructed, transformed, and alternated with an overarching ‘Turkish’ identity. Thus, the rest of this section focuses on the instrumentalist and constructivist methods of examining ethnic identity.

2.2.2 Instrumentalism

“The core idea of instrumentalism” as Ashutosh Varshney (2007) explains, “is the that ethnicity is neither inherent in human nature nor intrinsically valuable” (p. 282). Instrumentalists, as the name suggest, see identity as an instrument; a tool to attain

resources. They argue that identities, including ethnic identities, are the products of stimuli by political entrepreneurs and their intentional strategies to enhance some sort of material or political gain (Bates, 1974). Therefore, elite interests play an important role in understanding how ethnic identities are constructed. Leaders and political elites strategically deploy or activate identities in order to mobilize masses based on individual or group interest and benefit, with the aim of either greater political influence or more economic benefits from the state. In this regard, ethnicity is a “technical necessity” (Rex, 1994). This decision does not come randomly. It is strategic and rational, however.

Kanchan Chandra (2004) explains that actors in ethnic conflict are rational agents that aim to maximize political or economic power with the logic of rational choice theory. This assumes that an ethnic group decides to clash with another, if the sum of the total benefits of competition is much more than the benefits of cooperation. In fact, many cases of ethnic conflict have been motivated by the drive to acquire more scarce resources, such as water or oil.

“Instrumentalists regard ethnicity as a socially constructed focal point for mobilization” explains Seol (2008, p. 345). The concept of a “focal point” in a coordination game was initially proposed by Thomas Schelling (1963) to explain how members of a group have mutual expectations of behavior without necessarily communicating them explicitly. Identity plays that role. Instrumentalists believe that a charismatic leader can also play the role of a “focus” in an ethnic group by stimulating mutually accepted rules of behavior and cooperation among members (Hardin, 1995). Similarly, leaders can play a negative role in society by capitalizing different loyalties

and instrumentalising existing identities. Sectarian identity is one frequent example, in parallel to ethnic identity, that has been wide exploited and capitalized by political entrepreneurs. Lebanon, Ireland, Iraq, and Bosnia among many others have all been witnesses to that. In their research on sectarian identity in Lebanon, Clark and Salloukh (2013) deconstruct the role of political/sectarian elites in reproducing sectarianism by strategically penetrating civil society to pursue their own benefit by extending clientelist networks. Identities, whether sectarian or ethnic, can clearly be utilized for political gains. It particularly becomes more complicated when each ethnic group professes a different religion, exacerbating the divide, and increasing the room for manipulation and maneuver. Bell (1975) summarizes the instrumentalist approach by stating that ethnicity is best understood “as a strategic choice by individuals who, in other circumstances, would choose other group memberships as a means of obtaining some power and privilege” (p. 171). History has continuously proved that the pursuit of power has ultimately pushed for violence.

One particular mechanism for instrumentalizing ethnicity is through political parties. The formation of political parties based on particular ethnic membership and ethnic agendas is not uncommon among minority groups. The formation of successive ethnic Kurdish parties in Turkey is proof of that. Even dominant ethnic groups may be ascribed with ethnic parties. Turkey’s nationalist MHP can be viewed as an ethnic party for the Turkish race, although it does not officially present itself as such. Meanwhile the dominant party in Turkey, the AKP, does not mobilize masses based on ethnicity, but it does so on religious, even sectarian, identity. Instrumentalism is not an alien strategy for Turkey. So is ethnic politics. Despite the lack of one unified definition of what exactly

an ethnic party is, a common understanding, however, is that it is a party that champions the interests of an ethnic group (Chandra, 2011). This theme will be further discussed below in the constructivist segment.

An instrumentalist take on the HDP would be that the Kurdish elite strategically decided to activate a pan-Turkish identity, instead of an ethnic Kurdish one, in order to overcome the structural barriers of the electoral law's minimum 10% threshold needed to enter parliament, and thus guarantee more political power to advance their own (Kurdish) agendas. This view is particularly supported by the fact that the PKK's founder, Abdullah Ocalan, through letters sent from his prison cell, called for laying down arms, start negotiations, and supported the notion of a multi-ethnic struggle against the ruling establishment. One letter called upon the Kurdish population "to determine political and social strategies and tactics in accordance with the spirit of the new era" (Yeginsu, 2015, para 3). Despite the temptation and the convenience to employ the instrumentalist approach in the case of the HDP, this thesis suggests that constructivism can better explain the HDP's multi-ethnic identity formation, particularly because the role of entrepreneurs in manipulating master narratives is also noted in this approach. After all, elites may play a role in constructing a new identity rather than just manipulating an existing one. Another important factor to choose constructivism over instrumentalism is that this thesis suggests that the HDP's multi-ethnic identity is a long-run reconstruction of identity, constructed to "stick", rather than a short-run rational attempt displaying the fluidity of identity (Varshney, 2007). That's an important differentiation between the two approaches. While instrumentalism aims to show the fluidity of identity to attain more strategic gains, constructivism aims to

display that identity can be shaped, transformed, and constructed to stick, given the context. With the change of factors and variables in the process, identities can be renegotiated. The section below more elaborately discusses the constructivist approach, and the renegotiation of identity.

2.2.3 Constructivism

Constructivism as an approach is not only reserved to political science, but is also utilized in anthropology, sociology and literature, among other disciplines. In many ways, it assumes the exact opposite of primordialism. Two important assumptions stand out: individuals have multiple identities; and that they can choose which identity to identify with. Constructivism believes that ethnicity is a social construct rooted in socioeconomic and political material struggles and is thus malleable, shaped, and reshaped via interactions, perceptions, and imaginings. Identity is, therefore, fluid. Individuals can identify with more than one identity, and the choice of identity they choose to identify with depends on the social, economic, political, and geopolitical context. If the variables in the context change, the mode of identification may also change (Chandra, 2001).

The earlier scholarly attempts to explain ethnic identity formation could be attributed to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), where he argues that the rise of "print capitalism" allowed to transform local identities into national ones, as a mechanism for state-building and modernity. Anderson detailed the process of how capitalist entrepreneurs in Europe started the use of vernacular, the local everyday language of a community, instead of Latin, which was considered a language for the elite. The messages they wanted to transmit were now reachable to a much larger

audience and more understandable among different communities. This resulted with the emergence of a common language and a common discourse among the members of these ‘imagined communities’, laying the foundations for the establishment of the first European nation-states. On modernity and state-building, Varshney (2007) notes that “modernity transformed the meaning of ethnic identities by bringing the masses into a vastly expanded framework of consciousness and meanings” (p. 285). This is how national identities are formed, in fact, constructed. Technological and ideational mechanisms, constructivists argue, show how that was achieved.

Anderson’s aforementioned “print capitalism” constitutes the technological mechanism. In modern years, technological advances, including social media, replaced the role of the printing press. National broadcasting channels, newspapers, radio stations, even social media accounts are adjusted to transmit the state’s discourse and consolidate the “nation-state”. Dominant and minority ethnic groups within a state have their own stands vis-à-vis the official state discourse. They either aim to keep the status quo as it is, or challenge it, demanding more recognition and rights. In order to do this, ethnic parties, claiming to represent minority groups, need to capitalize on the differences between the dominant and the minority. It requires creating an “us” vs “them” myth and constantly feeding into it. Party messages, including online presence, is tailored to meet the taste, worldview, and concerns of the targeted communities. Nevertheless, most parties are not trying to establish a nation-state. Even among ethnic parties, only a handful have the explicit aim for secession or independence. Secessionist claims to become popular demand; a party needs to stimulate the ethnic identities of the imagined communities. That is not an easy task.

The ideational mechanism of constructing a new identity, as proposed by Varshney (2007), is derived from Charles Taylor's *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (1994). Taylor argues that modernity and state building, often as a result of conquest, colonization, or immigration, have introduced the notion of dignity for all. Hereditary hierarchies were no longer simply accepted by people, but rather challenged, and mobility was now seen as possible. Throughout the modern history of Turkey, Kurds were denied professing their Kurdish identity. They were initially referred to as mountain Turks, and then as pseudo-Turks (Yegen, 2009). It is only in recent years that the state speaks of a distinct 'Kurdish' ethnic identity, and that Kurds were allowed to publically speak their language. Taylor (1994) notes that our identity is "partly shaped by recognition or its absence," he continues to point out that "persons or groups of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining, demeaning, or contemptible image of themselves" (p. 25). Non-recognition is indeed a form of oppression. The HDP's attempt was, therefore, to move beyond the demand for recognition of Kurdish rights, and call for the recognition of the rights of Turkey's oppressed and marginalized groups. This included the recognition of the country's different ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, as equal citizens of Turkey, a newly activated identity of a multi-ethnic, multi-cause struggle.

Constructivists claim that language, history, symbols, and cultures have an important role in understanding oneself, perceiving the other, and defining the type of relationship (enemy or ally) between the two. They see ethnic conflict as a product of historical, political or economic processes. Chandra (2001) notes that the "constructivist

approach to ethnic groups has generated among the most important cumulative findings in the study of ethnic politics” (p. 7). She proposed that ethnic groups have ‘nominal’ and ‘activated’ identities (Chandra, 2012). Nominal ethnic identities are those categories in which an individual is born into, such as being an ethnic Kurd. Activated ethnic identities are those identities that an individual or a group intentionally decides to profess and own, such as being a culturally aware Kurd that practices Kurdish traditions, or choosing to be a Turkish citizen above any other ethnic or religious loyalties. Groups and individuals, thus have the option to select which identities they want to activate and profess in. Constructivists believe that even if identities are constructed, they could still be internalized and carry deep meaning of belonging for the members of an ethnic group, very similar to how primordialism sees ethnicity (Varshney, 2007).

Constructivists argue that “each society has a historically constructed master cleavage and narrative that political entrepreneurs can manipulate” (Williams, 2015, p. 149). The master narrative in Turkey is very much set forward by the founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, himself. Ataturk gave a 36-hour long speech at the 1927 CHP congress. The speech, known as the ‘Nutuk’, is considered as a very influential text that framed the Turkish national movement as the process of establishing the Turkish nation-state. Zurcher (2004) explains that “the text [of the speech] has become the basis for nearly all Turkish historiography” as it determined the “historical vision of the genesis of the new Turkish state for generations” (p. 175). This is partly because the speech was inserted into the national curriculum and thought in schools all over the country.

Aysel Morin and Ronald Lee (2010) note that “from its beginnings to its collapse the Ottoman Empire was a multicultural realm” (p. 6). Nevertheless, in the Nutuk, Atatürk narrated the story of the people of Anatolia, during the War of Independence, by referring to the Turkish people as a unified, militarized collective facing external and internal enemies wishing to break it into bits and pieces. “Christian elements were [...] at work all over the country [...] trying to realize their own particular ambitions and thereby hasten the breakdown of the state” (p. 1). Atatürk made particular reference to the Greeks and the Armenians. There was also reference to the Kurdish issue. “The propaganda aiming at the erection of an independent Kurdistan [...] has been successfully countered and the followers of the movement have been dispersed” (p. 15), Atatürk explained. “From one end to the other [...] the population is united” (p. 15), he confirmed. Atatürk claimed that this was possible because,

“the Turk is both dignified and proud; he is also capable and talented. Such a nation would prefer to perish rather than subject itself to the life of a slave. Therefore, Independence or Death!” [...] “We had to bring the whole nation and the army into a state of rebellion”. [...] “It was essential that the entire nation take up arms against whoever would venture to attack the fatherland of Turks and Turkish independence” (p. 10).

In the segment above, Atatürk introduced the idea that the former lands of the Ottoman empire are in fact the fatherland of the Turks. No reference was made to the other ethnicities that live on the land. Atatürk concludes the Nutuk by reminding the future generations of their duty to preserve their identity and their fatherland.

“We Turks are a people who during the whole of our historic existence have been the very embodiment of freedom and independence” (p. 580). “Turkish Youth! Your first duty is forever to preserve and to defend the Turkish Independence and the Turkish Republic. This is the very foundation of your existence and your future. [...] The strength you need is already imbedded in your noble blood” (pp. 740–741).

“In the telling of the story of a people [people]”, Charland (1987) writes, “a people [people] comes to be” (p. 140). A new image of the Turk was thus narrated. The Nutuk constructed the official narrative of the modern Turk. A narrative that would dictate the official state discourse on ethnic identity.

Varshney (2007) notes that while constructivism can explain identity formation, it cannot explain ethnic conflict abundantly, because while “master narratives” (for example, one cohesive Turkish ethnicity) and “political entrepreneurs” (for example, Atatürk) can be found on the national level, ethnic conflicts tend to be at the local or regional level (for example, the Southeastern Kurdish-majority region of Turkey). As such, he proposed to look at three things to fill in this gap. First, how local structures discourage entrepreneurs to include ‘local cleavages’ in ‘master narratives’. Second, how political entrepreneurs are unable to instigate violence. And third, how the master narrative is threatened by local or regional ones. The last one is quite relevant for Turkey. As Chandra (2001) notes, “constructivists advances suggest that ethnic homogeneity, like ethnic heterogeneity, is an artifact that can only be created and maintained under specific conditions” (p. 9). Nevertheless, this thesis focuses less on ethnic conflict and more on ethnic (or, to be exact, multi-ethnic) identity formation. In this regard, the constructivist approach can be summarized as viewing ethnicity as being constructed, subject to historical and sociocultural contexts, revised and revitalized given the context in which it is professed. Of course, groups may choose to profess a particular identity (for example, Turkish citizenry) and not the other (for example, Kurdish ethnicity), this, however, does not deny their basic and most apparent ethnicity

(Kurdishness in this example) and will always “function as a boundary in the relation to other ethnic groups” (Seol, 2008, pp. 344-345).

Despite some limitations of the constructivist discourse, it added significantly to the way we look at political dynamics and the behaviors of actors. It shed light on new and soft variables that can play a significant role in explaining how individuals, ethnic groups and even states self-identify, and how this informs their social interaction, political behavior, and the structures around them. Even Arend Lijphart (2001), internationally known for his ‘Consociational Theory’, recognizes that “the constructivist-based proposition has significantly enhanced the explanatory and prescriptive value” of his theory (p. 13). It is, therefore, puzzling why the majority of scholarly research continues to avoid utilizing a constructivist discourse in their analysis.

2.3 Measuring Ethnicity

One important reason that deters scholars from employing a constructivist analysis in their research is the fact that measurement is quite difficult in a constructivist approach. As such, many constructivists have committed to creating different methodologies, coding systems, and indicators in order to make constructivist claims measurable and quantifiable, with uneven results. Some attempts are noteworthy to mention. The Minorities at Risk Database (MAR) is a research project based at the University of Maryland. The database gathers political, economic, and sociocultural information on more than 284 ethnic groups that are politically active and larger than half a million in population size. The data is then analyzed according to set dataset. The

project soon expanded to study “all” minorities at risk rather than just perceived ones. Thus, in 2014, project became to be known as All Minorities at Risk (AMAR), studying 1200 ethnic groups, and neutralizing any selection biases. The dataset can be used to analyze the relationship between ethnicity and violence.

A constructivist attempt to study the relationship between ethnicity and political parties is the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP), currently known as The Manifesto Project (TMP). The project studies the party manifestos and elections manifestos of more than a thousand parties since 1945, and provides coded and uncoded analysis based on particular dataset that it has developed. Although some analysis is available on the AKP, CHP, and MHP, the Project, however, has not covered the HDP.

In terms of actually measuring the reach of ethnic parties and their ability to mobilize masses based on ethnic appeals, Oliver Strijbis and Michel Kotnarowski (2015) have looked into the different formulas and methods that have been suggested. Although the ideal measure is knowing “the share of a targeted ethnic group that votes for the corresponding ethnic party” (p. 459), one important limitation remains, often the share of votes or the actual size of an ethnic group is not available in administrative data. This issue of not having access to ethnic data, that the authors refer to, also exists in our case study.

One of the biggest inputs to filling in the gap of the constructivist school is Kanchan Chandra’s development of the Constructivist Dataset for Ethnicity and Institutions (CDEI) at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology. The title of this segment *Measuring Identity* also comes from Chandra. To make ethnicity a much more understandable and measurable concept, the dataset developed by Chandra aims to

gather forty-eight different variables on ethnicity, and covers more than a hundred countries. The aim is to make ethnicity narrow enough to be able to explore its different roles in different contexts. At the broadest level, Chandra suggests to first distinguish between the structural and practical elements of ethnicity. Ethnic structure refers to the “set of identities that are considered commonsensically real by a population, whether or not individuals actually identify with them” (p. 4). Ethnic practice refers to “the act of actually using one or more identities embedded in this structure to guide behavior” (p. 4), in others words professing in the activated identity. The CDEI particularly focuses on how political parties activate ethnic identities, implicitly or explicitly, and attempts to collect data and design measurement of some sort. This is done by further looking into the activated identities in private life and political life, and whether they are institutionalized in politics or not, whether they implicitly or explicitly exist in party rhetoric, and whether this ultimately affects voter behavior. The variables can be divided into three categories:

- a) Explicit mobilization of ethnic identities by political parties (16 variables):
These variables are derived from, and in turn assist in, the classification of political parties as “ethnic”, “non-ethnic”, and or “multi-ethnic”. Explicit appeals are often noticeable as they are clearly labeled, and a party is quite direct in naming the ethnic category which it claims to represent.
- b) Implicit mobilization of ethnic identities by political parties (16 variables).
These variables are developed in order to account for the fact that parties may activate ethnic identities without explicitly naming any ethnic category. This is where “coded” appeals play a role.

- c) General variables on each country or party (14 variables). These variables are usually contextual and assist in situating the party in a particular frame. The year the party was formed, the year the elections took place, campaign policies, and boycotts are some of the variables that fall under this category.

The CDEI proposes calculating an EVOTE, which is the aggregate percentage of votes won by ethnic parties in a country. It is the sum of the percentage of all the votes all ethnic parties receive in a given country. A country can score from 0% (if it does not have any ethnic parties) up to 100% (in case all parties are ethnic parties). This would require looking into every single party running for general elections and assessing whether they are ethnic or not. For Turkey, and for the case study under examination, EVOTE does not really add any significant information or insight. What is more interesting is to unpack whether the HDP's votes come from a single ethnic group, or a range of ethnic categories. Nevertheless, as suggested in chapter 1, two things are almost impossible to find out: a) the percentage of the targeted ethnic group that was mobilized by the HDP, and b) the percentage of non-Kurdish votes that went to the HDP.

The existing literature on ethnic parties shows different, and often limited, approaches in treating and analyzing what constitutes an ethnic party, and how successful it is in its mobilization. Chandra (2011) has attempted to fill in the gap by providing eight different indicators to look into parties. Since this thesis uses the methodology developed by Chandra, it is important to present how she defines the labels she uses to mark parties as 'ethnic', 'multi-ethnic' or 'non-ethnic'.

An 'ethnic' party is defined as "a party that is the champion of the particular interests of one ethnic category or set of categories" (p. 155). A 'multi-ethnic' party is "one that champions the interests of all significant ethnic categories in a society without excluding any" (p. 155). Accordingly, a 'non-ethnic' party is simply a party that "does not champion the interests of any ethnic group" (p. 155). With the HDP at hand, the latter label is disqualified. It is thus a choice between 'ethnic' or multi-ethnic', which in many ways defines the everyday struggle of the HDP, and its attempt to be more than an ethnic party for the Kurds.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the existing literature on the different theoretical approaches in explaining ethnic identity formation. Primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism, as the three most established schools of thought, were separately presented. The chapter also reasoned why this thesis adopts a constructivist analysis of the HDP's multi-faceted identity. Moreover, it discussed the different constructivist attempts in quantifying and measuring ethnic appeals in party programs or garnered votes. The last section presented the Constructivist Dataset for Ethnicity and Institutions (CDEI) developed by Kanchan Chandra. Most importantly, this chapter placed the thesis in its proper theoretical context. The following chapter will be applying eight indicators derived from the CDEI to assess the ethnic (or multi-ethnic) identity of the political party under study.

Chapter Three

Exploring the HDP's Multi-Ethnicity

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on exploring the multi-ethnic manifestations of the HDP. It opens by introducing the HDP. It then chronologically suggests a range of events that contributed to laying the ground for its establishment and consolidation. The core assumptions of the HDP's acclaimed identity are then introduced. The HDP is then tested against each of the eight indicators of an ethnic (or multi-ethnic) party as proposed by Chandra (2011). The chapter closes with some concluding remarks pertaining to the HDP's multi-ethnicity are presented.

3.2 The HDP at a Glance

In 2011, Turkish and Kurdish leftist movements, feminist organizations and political parties from all over Turkey joined forces to establish the HDK (*Halkların Demokratik Kongresi* - Peoples' Democratic Congress), an anti-capitalist political union that aims to represent the different segments of Turkish society and all those who are exploited and oppressed by the ruling regime. The Congress, although composed of several political parties, needed a new overarching political party that would act as its political wing on a national scale. It also needed to construct a new identity that would overshadow its predominantly Kurdish base. Thus, in 2012, the HDP was founded.

The HDP is composed of about 40 organizations, political parties, and movements. Needless to say, an umbrella organization, like the HDP, cannot be formed and unified in a blink of an eye. It takes time. This is especially the case in Turkey, where so many differences exist, and any kind of association with Kurdish organizations is seen as a threat and a risk. These challenges are compounded by the existence of long historical grievances between the different ethnic groups. For many, the HDP was seen as a dream, a hard one to achieve, however. The party had to prove otherwise. It had to win the loyalty of not just the Kurdish population, but also non-Kurdish ethnic groups living in Turkey. Different factors contributed to prepare the ground for the establishment of such an organization.

3.3 Paving the Way for the HDP

A range of historical events in Turkey paved the way for the creation of the HDP and the consolidation of its new multi-ethnic, multi-cause identity. These events are considered chronologically.

3.3.1 The Rise of the AKP - 2002

The most important factor that led to the establishment of Erdogan's fiercest opponent, the HDP, is Erdogan himself. AKP changed the rules of the game and created a new ideational divide among the Turkish electorate. The new divide was the fight between Islamism and secularism, and between Kemalism and Ottomanism (Kissane, 2014). The AKP government also reshaped the Turkish economy based on neo-liberal principles. The more AKP-Erdogan grew in power, the more authoritarian elements

were apparent in the regime, particularly after 2011. The more Erdogan's grip became stronger, the more resentment grew among his opponents, particularly among leftist parties and groups. Moreover, the AKP supported Turkey's accession into the European Union. It therefore led a policy of "Kurdish Opening" and a softer policy towards minority rights (Pusane, 2014). As a result, a public sphere was created that was more receptive of civil society organizations, cultural organizations, and ethnic associations. Ethnic groups were now freer to speak and teach their language. With language, however, came a resurgence of collective memory and ethnolinguistic sentiments.

3.3.2 The Assassination of Hrant Dink – 2007

Opposition newspapers took advantage of the new margins for freedom of expression in light of EU accession. Hrant Dink's *Agos* was one of them. Dink was a Turkish journalist of Armenian descent. He founded the *Agos* bilingual newspaper published in both Turkish and Armenian. The newspaper was critical of the state's violation of human rights, denial of the Armenian genocide, and the treatment of minorities (Harvey, 2007). *Agos* provided a different rhetoric to the Armenian-Turkish community than the one narrated by existing conservative newspapers. Turkish nationalists did not welcome Dink's political messages and discourse, however. Dink was accused of insulting Turkishness and persecuted as per the infamous Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Law. On January 19, Dink was assassinated in broad daylight in Istanbul in front of his office. Dink's assassination became a nationwide issue. Tens of thousands of people attended his funeral in Istanbul. The mourners were not just Armenians, but also ethnic Turks and Kurds, and other minorities. They all gathered

bearing signs “We are all Hrant, we are all Armenians”. Protest signs written in the Armenian language returned to the streets of Turkey. “Huge crowds of mourners, including senior Turkish and Armenian officials joining for a rare display of unity”, reported the *Washington Post* (Arsu & Fowler, 2007, para 1). Despite his family’s requests, the crowd also chanted in solidarity with Turkey’s different minorities. A new virtual alliance among different activists and peoples emerged demanding justice for all of Turkey’s oppressed.

3.3.3 The Establishment of the Peoples’ Democratic Congress – 2011

In the most literal sense, the HDK can be considered the birthplace of the HDP. With growing antagonism against the Erdogan government, the leftist movements, women’s organizations, LGBTI groups, and political parties joined forces and established the HDK and its political wing, the HDP. As presented in the introduction, the congress aimed to create a unified opposition bloc, composed of different ethnic, religious and sexual components, in a platform to share ideas, support one another, and transform Turkish politics. Nevertheless, its political power only became significant when the BDP MPs officially joined the HDP party in April 2014. During the merging ceremony, then co-president of the HDP, Ertugrul Kurkcu, explained that the “the bearers of the freedom struggle of Kurdistan are joining with the democratic forces of Turkey. [...] We are heading out with a new strategy. A new political possibility has been opened before us. [...] We will walk this road together” (The Rojava Report, 2014, para 3). As for Selahattin Demirtas, who was the co-leader of the BDP, he announced that this is a “new phase in the quest for democratic unity in Turkey”

(*Hurriyet*, 2014, para 2). Demirtas added that “we have to be the common struggle and common voice of all [of Turkey’s] oppressed identities” (para 3).

3.3.4 The Peace Process – 2012

The three-decade-long armed struggle between the PKK and the Turkish state came to a (temporary) end, with what was called the “Peace Process” or the “Solution Process” (Waldman & Caliskan, *The New Turkey and Its Discontents*, 2017). Erdogan, more than any other Turkish leader in the history of the republic, did the most to achieve such a peace, albeit a short term one. During this time, Kurdish movements experienced a shift in discourse and strategy. It was made more feasible to shift Kurdish political thought towards more inclusion as the PKK’s founder Abdullah Ocalan moderated his views (Turkey’s Newest Party, 2015). Ocalan called for stopping the military operations against the state and allowing room for political rather than military struggle. “This is not abandoning the struggle, but a start to a different struggle,” one of his letters reads (BBC News, 2013, para 20). Thus, the PKK gave up its demands for the establishment of an autonomous Kurdistan and, instead, advocated for “Democratic Confederalism,” as articulated by Ocalan. This granted the HDP more room to take the lead in representing the Kurdish people and Turkey’s other minorities.

3.3.5 Gezi Park Protests – 2013

Erdogan witnessed his first loss in a park in Istanbul. The Gezi Park that stands just north of the iconic Taksim square became the ground for anti-government protests.

It all began when the AKP government decided to demolish the park and create a mall instead. The decision was faced with protests from environmental activists and artists. It soon grew to mass protests against the ruling government (Patten, 2013). The park was not demolished and a new cross-ethnic struggle emerged. “Here [in the Gezi Park] different ethnic Turks found themselves side by side on the barricades with the Kurds”. (Turkey’s Newest Party, 2015, para 2). The state-orchestrated media coverage of the Gezi Park events led many ethnic Turks to question how the violence in the Southeast between the PKK and the Turkish military were being covered, and whether the state was misrepresenting reality. The Gezi solidarity is just what the HDP needed. For the first time, “it became possible to form a party that would transcend the traditional boundaries of the Turkish and Kurdish left”, the same paragraph suggests.

3.3.6 The Turkish Presidential Elections – 2014

The HDP knew that it has no chance in winning the presidency of the republic, but still nominated its co-chair Demirtas as a candidate running against Erdogan. It could have decided to vote for the Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu as the joint candidate of the opposition bloc. However, the HDP had other plans. The aim of running separately for the presidential elections was to test its own reach and popularity, and its geographic distribution of votes, in preparation for the parliamentary elections of June 2015. The HDP’s candidate garnered 9.7% of the votes. The party leadership was now even more assured that it is safe to run as a party rather than independents, as previous Kurdish parties used to do. The HDP spent the next few months actively working to guarantee that its support base grows to bypass the structural barrier of the 10% threshold. It was

now ready to put its multi-ethnic identity into action, to contest for the general elections as a party, and aim to represent all the peoples of Turkey.

3.4 The HDP's Acclaimed Identity

The HDP is a left-wing, pro-minority, party that believes in political pluralism, participatory democracy and egalitarianism. The HDP presents itself as a democratic party that believes in honest politics. It is a bottom-up political organization. It has started from the streets, and then reached Parliament. It has shaped Turkish politics since it entered the Grand Assembly, and transformed Kurdish political thought in Turkey. The HDP is distinguished from its predecessors in many ways, but most importantly in its self-identification as a party for all of Turkey's oppressed segments, not just the Kurdish people. This includes different ethnic, religious and sexual minorities. The HDP identifies itself as a party that stands for freedom and equality, for peace, the labor, for self-government, gender equality, and the environment. As such, it is indeed "Turkey's new left" as Cengiz Gunes (2017) calls it. The HDP developed what Antonio Gramsci considers a subaltern identity, one defined in a political and class sense.

One important feature of the HDP's identity and mission is that it is pro-peace. This refers to the Kurdish issue that had taken a militarized turn in Turkey. The HDP finds it very important to label itself as pro-peace to distance itself from the outlawed PKK. The HDP announces that it does not support violence and arms, and does not want war. This is why "achieving peace in Turkey is [the] HDP's top priority", their website notes. This approach, however, did not prove to be sufficient to change popular

perceptions regarding pro-Kurdish parties. The HDP was, and still is, continuously accused of being a proxy of the outlawed PKK, but they plead otherwise. Although both organizations share a common goal of protecting the rights of the Kurdish people, they differ in many ways. The more the HDP presented itself in contradistinction to the PKK, the more a new, democratic, and pro-peace image of a party emerged. An image not just welcomed by Kurds, but also ethnic Turks, and foreign governments as well. This shift in image had to be communicated internally, and externally, that is among the Kurdish base, as well as the general Turkish electorate and public opinion. What makes the HDP a multi ethnic party? The following section-aims to test the HDP's claims of being a multi-ethnic party.

3.5 Testing the HDP's Multi-Ethnicity

Before exploring the HDP's ethnic identity, it is important to note that there are no internationally agreed upon indicators to determine a political party's ethnic makeover. In order to fill this gap, Chandra (2011) proposes eight ways of looking into political parties to assess whether they are 'ethnic', 'multi-ethnic' or 'non-ethnic'. To determine this, Chandra provides indicators for each of the eight classifications to measure the party against. The indicators and the relevant rules of interpretation are based on her earlier development of the Constructivist Dataset for Ethnicity and Institutions – CDEI (Chandra, 2009), as discussed in chapter two. Chandra suggests to look at the following political party indicators: a party's choice of name, its explicit appeals, explicit issue positions, implicit activation of ethnic identities, the ethnic composition of its leadership, the ethnic arena of contestation, how ethnic groups vote

in that particular country, and the ethnic divisions of the vote a party receives. The following analysis considers each classification, explains what the indicators under each ethnic label are, and discusses whether the HDP qualifies for any of these indicators.

The HDP claims to be the sister party of the DBP, which is the last in line in Turkey's chain of Kurdish parties. The HDP, thus, by substitution, qualifies to be an ethnic party. That is, a party that champions the interest of a particular ethnic group, the Kurds. Therefore, this segment is less about deciding whether the HDP qualifies as an ethnic party; rather, it examines if it qualifies to be labeled as a multi-ethnic one. The indicators below are in no particular order.

3.5.1 Indicator #1 - Choice of Name: what name a party assumes is part of the question of whether it associates itself with a particular group or not. "The use of a multi-ethnic label in the name indicates a multi-ethnic party (Chandra, 2011, p. 159). The HDP stands for the Peoples' Democratic Party. Both 'people' and 'democracy' are quite popular terms among the previous Kurdish political parties in Turkey. If we look at the names of the HDP's predecessors, every single one of them has either the term 'people' or 'democracy' in its name. Two of them, the HADEP and the DEHAP use both terms. At first sight, the HADEP (People's Democracy Party) and the HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) may look identical, but the trick is the grammatical form. The emphasis with HDP's naming is on 'peoples' in the plural form of the word as opposed to 'people' in the singular form. All previous political parties which have used the term 'people' in their name, used it in the singular form, including the country's first ever political party, the CHP (Republican People's Party). In fact, when it was initially

founded by Ataturk himself, the CHP was simply called the People's Party, the 'republican' aspect of it was added at a later stage. It does not come as a surprise that Ataturk named the party he established upon a discourse he aggressively pushed for. A discourse based on the idea that the population of Turkey is composed of one ethnic people, the Turks, and therefore the country's only party is the party of the people.

The Kurdish parties that named themselves after the 'people' may be referring to the Kurdish people exclusively, or the general population of Turkey, one can never be sure. But the point is, the people are always referred to as one singular entity. What is so different, and unique, about the HDP is that it refers to the population of Turkey as peoples. Not one people, but a population composed of different peoples and ethnicities. The choice of using the plural form of people serves two purposes. First, it challenges the myth that Turkey was founded upon, and tackles the years-old-taboo of ethnicity in Turkish society. It explicitly states that the Turkish population is not composed of one people or ethnicity, but rather multiple peoples and multiple ethnicities. Secondly, it avoids being labeled as a party that champions the interests of just one people, in this case the Kurds. The choice of name explicitly claims to be a party for more than one people, and thus it should not be labeled as a Kurdish party.

The term 'democratic' in the HDP's name is less related to the party's ethnic makeover, more on the ideational worldview and belonging of the party. A democratic system is founded by the people and for the people. Thus, this democratic party, the HDP, is of the people, from the people, and for the people. A democratic organization respects diversity, differences, and listens to everyone's views. The HDP not only claims that it represents the many peoples of Turkey, but also their different opinions. In

a rather different dimension, using the term “democratic”, the HDP implies that it is different than the existing system, and that it is distinguished by its democratic mechanism. In light of a growingly authoritarian AKP, a democratic HDP would be more welcomed by those who do not identify as Kurds, but still want to transform the system into a less religious and more democratic one.

On this level of observation, the HDP qualifies for being a multi-ethnic party. Although it does not carry an explicit ethnic name, given Turkey’s ruling discourse on ethnicity, the use of the plural form of people is by implication the ethnic, in fact multi-ethnic, reference in the party’s name.

3.5.2 Indicator #2 - Explicit Appeals: This level of observation is a three-stage process. It first looks for explicit ethnic references in a party’s platform. The ethnic category or categories have to be overtly mentioned or “explicitly identified in some other way through speech” (p. 160). Implicit appeals do not qualify, at least in this category (see indicator #4). If there are no ethnic references, then it is a non-ethnic party. If there are ethnic references, then the observation moves to the second stage. The second stage requires determining how central the ethnic appeals are to the party platform. If it is not central, then it is a non-ethnic party. If it is central then it is an ethnic one. To determine whether it is a multi-ethnic party, the third stage comes in. The third and final stage of analysis looks into the ethnic appeals and attempts to determine whether it is exclusive or inclusive. If it is exclusive to a particular ethnic category, then it is an ethnic party. If it is inclusive to all major categories of the population, then it may qualify for being a multi-ethnic party rather than an ethnic one.

The HDP does not officially present itself as an ethnic party, but rather identifies as a party of freedom and equality, a party that is pro-peace, labor, self-government, gender equality, and environment. The HDP is a left-wing, pro-minority party, that believes in political pluralism, participatory democracy and egalitarianism. It defines itself as an umbrella party, where the

“democratic and peaceful forces of Turkey; representatives of labor, ecology and women’s rights associations, artists, writers, intellectuals, independent individuals, workers, representatives of different ethnic and religious groups, the unemployed, the retired, farmers, the handicapped, scientists and those whose cities are being destroyed have united.” (HDP - Who Are We?, n.d., para 2)

Although initially it vaguely claims to be the representative of different ethnic groups without naming one explicitly, nevertheless, it does make explicit ethnic references further down in its party program. It mentions two ethnicities, Kurdish and Alevi.

“We believe that in order to bring peace to Turkey, everyone’s, primarily the Kurdish and Alevi peoples’, righteous demands should be respected and recognized rather than be ignored.” (HDP - Who Are We?, n.d., para 8)

It does not, however, mention the ethnic categories that it does not champion. It is exclusive by implication, and thus qualified for being labeled as an ethnic party.

Looking into the party program, it is quite apparent that ethnic groups and minority issues are a recurring theme throughout the document. It references the right of ethnic groups to speak their own language, to govern their own religious affairs, to be provided local self-government or some sort of autonomy, to be accepted as equal citizens, not to be discriminated against at work or in public life, among many others. Thus, from a party program perspective, the HDP qualifies to be the champion of protecting the rights of different ethnic minority groups, not just the Kurdish one.

Nevertheless, the HDP's multi-ethnic claim is most apparent during the 2014 presidential elections in Turkey, where the HDP nominated its co-chair, Selahettin Demirtas, for the country's leadership. In his candidacy speech, Demirtas clearly points out that his party stands for the rights of all of Turkey's peoples and aims to build a state where ethnic diversity is celebrated rather than oppressed. Instead of focusing just on the Kurdish issue, it frames the case of the Kurdish people, in the general context of how ethnic minorities are treated in Turkey. It references the different ethnic groups it claims to stand for.

“Our diversity is our strength, not our weakness. Our democratic nation is made up of Turks, Kurds, Alevis, Armenians, Greeks, Ezidis, Suryanis, Keldanis, Arabs, Circassians, Laz, Pomaks, and Romanies. We will move away from every form of imposed uniformity to a pluralist democratic model for the nation” (Demirtaş: Call for a New Life, n.d., para 21).

On the level of party program and explicit appeal observations, the HDP qualifies for being a multi-ethnic party that champions the rights of ethnic categories that do not belong to the dominant ruling ethnic category. It does not have a negative tone or an aggressive stand regarding the ruling ethnic category, and instead aims to live in coexistence. It is, however, very critical of the ruling party, the AKP, and its state-led strategy of subverting minority groups to control them.

3.5.3 Indicator #3 - Explicit Issue Positions: This level of observation requires examining whether a party can attach any given issue, including non-ethnic issues such as economy, to the benefit (or the disadvantage) of an ethnic group. Chandra notes that “it can often be difficult to code positions on distinct issues [...] in a way that is quantifiable and comparable” (p. 161). However, contextual analysis is possible. This

indicator is less concerned with the nature of the issue, and more with how a party can, sometimes unintentionally, justify the issue with ethnic ‘winners’ and ‘losers’.

As shown in indicator #2, minority rights are central to the HDP’s party program. They are also central in their explicit issue positions, including on non-ethnic issues. This segment will take five issues that the HDP has explicit positions on and analyze whether they can be interpreted to have ethnic implications: that is, if they can be considered to give advantage to the ethnic groups they claim to represent, and possibly to the play to the disadvantage of the categories they do not. The issues are: critical state institutions, administrative governance, environment, economy, and gender.

a) State Institutions

In his 2014 presidential candidacy speech, Demirtas vowed to downplay two important state institutions that are seen as vital to the ruling establishment. The first is the National Security Council (Milli Guvenlik Kurulu – MGK) which is composed of the country’s most senior civilian and military officials; it sets out Turkey’s high-level security strategy and policy. The MGK was established in 1961 as a result of the 1960 military coup and became a constitutional body, acting as a parallel military executive body to the council of ministers. With the rise of the AKP, the military has lost its upper hand in the council, and Erdogan has become more of a hegemonic force in the body. The MGK periodically produces a top secret “Red Book” that lists Turkey’s domestic and external threats. Among the domestic threats, the PKK and the Kurdish issue are always central (Cizre, 2003). The MGK is also the body that takes decisions on entering

a “state of emergency”. The state of emergency is often the cover used to validate otherwise unacceptable security measures and purges in the Southeast region and elsewhere. The HDP challenged the MGK. Referring to the MGK, Demirtas publicly stated that “Turkey will no longer be run by institutions that defend the status quo” (Demirtaş: Call for a New Life, n.d., para 15). Losing the MGK, the ruling party could lose its dominant voice on security decisions. Thus, there are clear ethnic ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ with the HDP’s explicit stand on the MGK.

The second institution, which Demirtas called for its complete shutdown, is the ‘Diyanet’ or the Directorate of Religious Affairs. Established in 1924 to replace the Ottoman Caliphate’s highest religious authority, the Shaikh al-Islam, the Diyanet was tasked with governing Islamic education all over the country and overseeing religious affairs on behalf of the state. With the AKP in power, the Diyanet gained more power and prominence. Its manpower doubled and its budget increased fourfold (SOL International, 2017). On a weekly basis, the Diyanet continues to dictate the Friday sermon to thousands of mosques across the country and beyond. Under AKP, the Diyanet’s mandate evolved from making sure religion does not contradict with the republic’s secular identity, to being both a foreign and internal policy tool (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018). The Diyanet became the state’s active mechanism in spreading the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, often at the expense of other schools and sects within Islam. In fact, millions of Muslim Turks are Alevi, Shiite, and Alawites, who do not follow the Hanafi school. The majority of the Kurds, although Sunni, follow the Shafi’i, not the Hanafi, school. It is thus safe to say that at least one third of Turkey’s Muslim population is excluded from consideration by the country’s highest Islamic authority.

This is one of the main reasons Demirtas accused the Diyanet of only existing “to make religion serve the official ideology of the state” (Demirtaş: Call for a New Life, n.d., para 30).

The HDP called for the abolishment of the Diyanet, proposed granting Turkey’s different ethnolinguistic groups the right to pray in their native language, the legalization of Alevi places of worships (Cemevis), and a revision of school textbooks. It also called for the establishment of a “libertarian secularism that frees all from the state monopoly over religion and enables those of any faith or of none to live freely as they chose” (para 32). The explicit issue position that the party has vis-à-vis the Diyanet is clearly in favor of the minority ethnic groups that the party claims to represent. It is considered a threat to the country’s Sunni Hanafi majority and the ruling party.

b) Administrative Governance

In terms of governance structures, the HDP supports direct democracy and the establishment of autonomous local governments. It has adopted a version of Ocalan’s model of ‘Democratic Autonomy’; it does not explain what this is, however. The HDP does not support a central administration, neither a separatist movement, but rather calls for allowing local mechanism to govern local affairs, provide education, healthcare and security according to local contexts. As such, governors should not be appointed, but rather elected. The HDP believes that the participatory approach of regional administrative assemblies strengthens democracy, as it allows people to govern themselves according to local contexts. In this scheme, for example, the Kurds will have the opportunity to feel engaged as a decision maker in governance. Achieving local

governance is indeed regarded as the biggest advantage for the Kurdish majority areas, and to the disadvantage of the dominant Turkish ethnicity and the ruling party. The Alevis, Armenians and Greeks are not necessarily advantaged when it comes to this issue position as they do not have a defined geographic area where they present a significant majority to be able to govern an entire local assembly by themselves.

c) Environment

The HDP identifies itself as a green party, one that is environmental friendly, and cares for the nature's wellbeing. The HDP claims that nature is not a commodity, and thus is not for sale. It is not owned by humans, and therefore should not be destroyed. By advocating for the protection of nature, it distances itself from the ruling party's mega industrial projects. The provinces where the Kurds and Arabs represent a majority in terms of population, are predominantly rural areas, with a great emphasis on farming and agriculture. The more nature is preserved, and agriculture, rather than construction is supported, the better the living conditions of the HDP's ethnic base. The HDP also opposes "mega crazy projects" that take over green spaces and pollute the air and water. In many ways, this reminds the Turkish electorate of images from the Gezi Park protests, where Erdogan saw his first loss. Ironically, the park is built on a onetime cemetery of Istanbul's Armenians, but, hardly anyone remembers this anymore. The HDP, thus, capitalized on the victory of Gezi Park where clear 'losers' and relative 'winners' could be identified.

d) Economy

On the economy, the HDP is clearly left-wing and critical of the capitalist system. HDP claims that it is “part of the struggle of the oppressed masses” and vows to establish better working standards and living conditions for the working class. It stands for the right of workers and calls for humane life standards for all. It supports labor unions, and fights unemployment and poverty. Many Kurds are working class employees, and thus, by advocating for better working conditions for laborers, the HDP is also calling for better working and living conditions for its ethnic base. Learning from the mistakes of its predecessors, the HDP proposed more of a reformist economic policy, rather than a radical socialist, Marxist economy. It calls out the neo-liberal order as an oppressive and exploitive system. The same system that the AKP is often praised for. By doing so, it pointed at the ruling party as the basis for the misery of the Turkish people.

e) Gender

On gender equality, the HDP is indeed a record breaker, not just for Turkey, but for the region. It vehemently stands for the equal rights of women and the LGBTQ community. It believes that both at home and at the workplace, women are being mistreated and exploited, and it opposes the male-dominated socioeconomic and political order. As such, it implements positive discrimination policies where on all levels of party organization, the leadership is split between co-chairs, one male and one female. The same applies to municipalities that the HDP controls. The HDP commits that these positive discriminatory policies will continue to exist, until true equality among genders is achieved. On the discrimination against the LGBTQ community, the HDP sees it as a form of racism, considers violence and hate-crimes as unacceptable, and pledges to

raise the voice and the concerns of the community. On the issue of gender, the HDP supports the rights of the categories that it claims to represent although they do not qualify as “ethnic” categories.

3.5.4 Indicator #4 - Leadership Ethnic Composition: this requires looking into the ethnic make-up and identification of those who are in the party’s decision-making post, often the formal chairmanship. The level of analysis is also a three-stage process. It first entails assessing whether the party leader places him/herself in a particular ethnic category. “This would be the ethnic identity self-activated by the leader” (Chandra, p. 165). The second stage is assessing whether others place the leader in an ethnic category. It may not be the same category as the leader self identifies with. The third and final stage is for the researcher to assess whether the leader’s nominal or activated ethnic identity is relevant to the study under process. In the HDP’s case, this will require to look into the nominal and activated ethnic identities of both chairpersons as it has a co-chairmanship system.

The HDP’s co-chairmanship system entails having one male and one female on all levels of leadership, including at the highest post in the party. The HDP is currently in its 4th pair of chairpersons. For the purposes of this segment, this thesis will focus on Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksekdag, who were the chairpersons when the party first contested national elections for the presidency (2014) and Parliament (2015). It is worth noting, however, that despite the HDP’s attempts for a co-chairmanship system, the gender norms in the region and the lack of access to women in the political sphere, have often provided the male chairman more media coverage and political leverage.

Selahattin Demirtas

No other Kurdish leader has gained more international attention than the founder of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, who is currently imprisoned on the Turkish island of Imarli, after his capture in 1999. Mahmoud Barazani, with the 2017 Kurdish referendum for independence in Iraq, also received his share of news coverage and temporary momentum in the diplomatic circles. Nevertheless, the Kurdish bloc has a new face, and that's the HDP's co-chair Selahattin Demirtas. He does not come with a gun, but with a Saz, a traditional folk instrument among the Turks, Kurds, Armenians and Azeris, and a mission to democratize Turkey, not establish an independent Kurdistan. Ethnically speaking, Demirtas is a Zaza, a minority group within the larger Kurdish population. The Zaza have their own language, and often referred to as Zaza Kurds. They are generally concentrated in the Dersim region of Turkey and parts of Diyarbakir and Demirtas's own hometown of Elazig.

For Demirtas, his turning point as a Kurd, or the activation of his Kurdish ethnic identity, was at the funeral of Vedat Aydın, a prominent Kurdish politician and an official in the People's Labor Party (HEP). Aydın was taken into custody by the Turkish state in 1991. Two days later, he was found dead under a bridge in Elazig, with signs of severe torture and multiple gunshots. The murder of Aydın had shaken Turkey's Kurdish population (Wife of Slain Kurdish Politician, 2010). It is reported that more than a hundred thousand people attended the funeral, including then eighteen-year-old Demirtas. The Turkish state had understood the severity of the situation, and took its own security measures during the funeral. At the cemetery, the mourners were surprised by special paramilitary Turkish forces present at the gates who opened fire at them.

Several people died, and many were wounded. At the end of the funeral, as the attendees were returning to the city center, the paramilitary forces opened fire again, killing and wounding even more mourners (The First Bullet: Murder of Vedat Aydın, 2017). The incident is often referred to as a massacre. Demirtas questioned why this was happening to his people, and dedicated his life to stand up for human rights. He studied law, and committed himself to stand for human rights through the Human Rights Association (IHD) in Diyarbakir.

Demirtas has been subject to name calling by Erdogan himself. He has been referred to as a ‘pop star’ because he plays music and sings, while also being a politician. He has been called an infidel because he pledged to abolish the Directorate for Religious Affairs. Erdogan also called him ‘pretty boy’ for being young and for his looks (France-Presse, 2015). However, the most dangerous labels of them all is when he was referred to as a “terrorist”. Erdogan wanted to create parallels between Demirtas and Ocalan, and between the HDP and the PKK. This is where the HDP responded with a press release, pledging to hold Erdogan accountable for the terms he used (HDP Statements, 2017). Demirtas was criticized for meeting with Ocalan, which he responded to very wittily. Demirtas explained that it was Erdogan himself who wanted peace with Ocalan, and that his delegation only played the role of mediators and facilitators in the peace process (Weise, 2016).

Needless to say, Demirtas is very different than Ocalan. While Ocalan is often depicted in military attire, Demirtas is in suits. Ocalan is associated with the AK-47 and his ability to lead fighters, while Demirtas is associated with his Saz, his music, and communication skills. Ocalan is viewed as a seasoned guerilla fighter, a godfather for

the Kurdish aspirations for freedom, while Demirtas is seen as a young charismatic leader, a new force for change. Ocalan has a radical Marxist discourse, while Demirtas speaks the modern language of liberal socialism. ‘Democracy’, ‘will of the people’, ‘pluralism’, and ‘equality’ are part of his daily vocabulary; ‘separatism’ and ‘independence’ are not. Demirtas represents a political rather than a military solution of the Kurdish issue.

The international media also had names for Demirtas. UK based *The Guardian* newspaper called him the “Kurdish Obama” for his good looks and dynamic speaking style (France-Presse, 2015). His supporters refer to him as “Selo Can”; ‘Selo’ being short for Selahattin, and ‘Can’ (pronounced Jan) being a term for endearment in Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Persian, and Urdu. Hasnain Kazim (2015) explains that “For months, he [Demirtas] has been trying to rid himself of his image as a Kurdish politician and position himself as anti-Erdogan” (para. 16). Creating this image would play a crucial role in legitimizing the HDP’s claims for Turkishness, rather than Kurdishness. To what extent this attempt was successful is hard to tell, as Demirtas is still seen as a ‘Kurdish’ leader. The AKP government played its role in maintaining Demirtas’s Kurdish image. In November 2016, Demirtas was arrested by the state. He currently has 93 lawsuits against him from 18 different provinces for insulting the president, offending Turkishness, and spreading terrorist propaganda, which are common accusations for PKK affiliates (HDP Parliamentarians in Prison, n.d.).

Figen Yuksekdog

In many ways Figen Yuksekdog balances out the HDP's leadership. Not only was she a female, but also an ethnic Turk. Having a non-Kurdish politician at the most senior position of the party allow the HDP to showcase its claims for a multi-ethnic identity. Yuksekdog was born in Adana in a rural family. During high school, she grew interest in politics and the leftist movement, and would take part in distributing feminist leaflets. At a young age, she took part in political activities and was arrested during an International Worker's Day demonstration. Her political activism kept her at odds with her family. She left home at the age of eighteen, and found her way to Istanbul. She continued her activism and became an active member in feminist movements. She also served as the editor of the *Socialist Woman* magazine. Yuksekdog was also involved in a communist newspaper called *Atilim*, which led to her arrest in 2009. A year later, she cofounded the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP) that aimed to protect the rights of workers and laborers via revolutionary means. ESP took part in the 2013 Gezi Park Protests. It also joined the HDK. As a result, the party merged with the HDP, and in 2014, Yuksekdog was elected as its co-chair (HDP Parliamentarians in Prison, n.d.).

Yuksekdog's nominal identity is Turkish. Nevertheless, she has politicized other identities that define her more. She is a feminist and a socialist. She sees well beyond ethnic boundaries and belongings, and has dedicated her life to liberate the oppressed from the capitalist/imperialist system. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that Yuksekdog publicly identifies with the Kurdish issue and supports the rights of different ethnic minorities in Turkey. Nevertheless, for many Kurds, the HDP is seen as a Kurdish party, despite HDP's official stand on the matter. For those who see the HDP

as such, they do not see an ethnic Turk fit for the position of co-leader. For example, Kurdish political analyst and writer Barış Yildirim, referring to Yüksekdağ's non-Kurdish ethnicity, accused her of failing to “really understand the Kurdish issue”. Yüksekdağ responded that “the Kurdish issue is something that should concern all Turks” (Palet, 2016, para 8). She has done her the best to please the HDP's Kurdish base. She even wore traditional Kurdish garments when visiting Kurdish strongholds. In November 2016, Yüksekdağ was arrested by the Turkish police on charges of spreading “terrorist propaganda”. The Supreme Court of Appeal increased her initial 10 months sentence with an additional 15 months by citing her reference to the PKK as “a people's liberation movement” during an interview with Deutsche Welle, a German public broadcaster, in 2015. She currently has 21 lawsuits filed against her (HDP Parliamentarians in Prison, n.d.).

On AKP-led accusations of the HDP being an extension of the PKK, Yüksekdağ re-iterated the party's diversity and its offer of an alternative narrative than the existing Kurdish political thought. She responded as such:

“We are nobody's extension. If we as a party were the extension of the PKK, we would not be the umbrella organization for more than 40 groups. However, the PKK is also an undeniable reality. It has a base, and so are our constituents. We cannot deny this. These people want an alternative to the PKK, they desire to participate outside the PKK and the armed struggle with a party on policy. A rational president would have seen the HDP as an opportunity. If the government wanted peace in the country, they would support us. They see us, but on the contrary, as enemies.” (Turkey Jails HDP MP Figen Yüksekdağ – Again, 2017)

HDP spokesman Osman Baydemir explained that Yüksekdağ was deliberately being targeted by the AKP government and its judicial system because of her Turkish ethnicity. In an interview with the *Morning Star*, Baydemir claimed that “the

government was determined to sabotage the solidarity between the Turkish public and the Kurds” (Sweeney, 2017). The solidarity and unity among the different ethnic groups is the central theme of the HDP. It is also Erdogan’s worst nightmare. It does not come as a surprise that Yuksekdag defines the HDP’s struggle as “a unified movement of the oppressed in these lands” (Sweeney, 2017).

The HDP however was not able to keep the ethnic balance in its top-level leadership. Both co-leaders were replaced with ethnic Kurds after the imprisonment of Yuksekdag and Demirtas. Pervin Buldan and Sezai Temelli were unanimously elected as the new co-leaders of the party during the HDP’s 3rd congress in Ankara (Reuters, 2018). The reasons why this became the case is not easy to answer, as it is not public. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Kurdish bloc, which is the dominant bloc within the HDP, stressed on having both leaders from the Kurdish ethnicity as a reaction to the state’s attack on the Kurds and to keep the Kurdish electorate, including nationalists, loyal to the HDP. Nevertheless, the HDP’s Armenian member of parliament, Garo Paylan, was appointed deputy co-leader of the party.

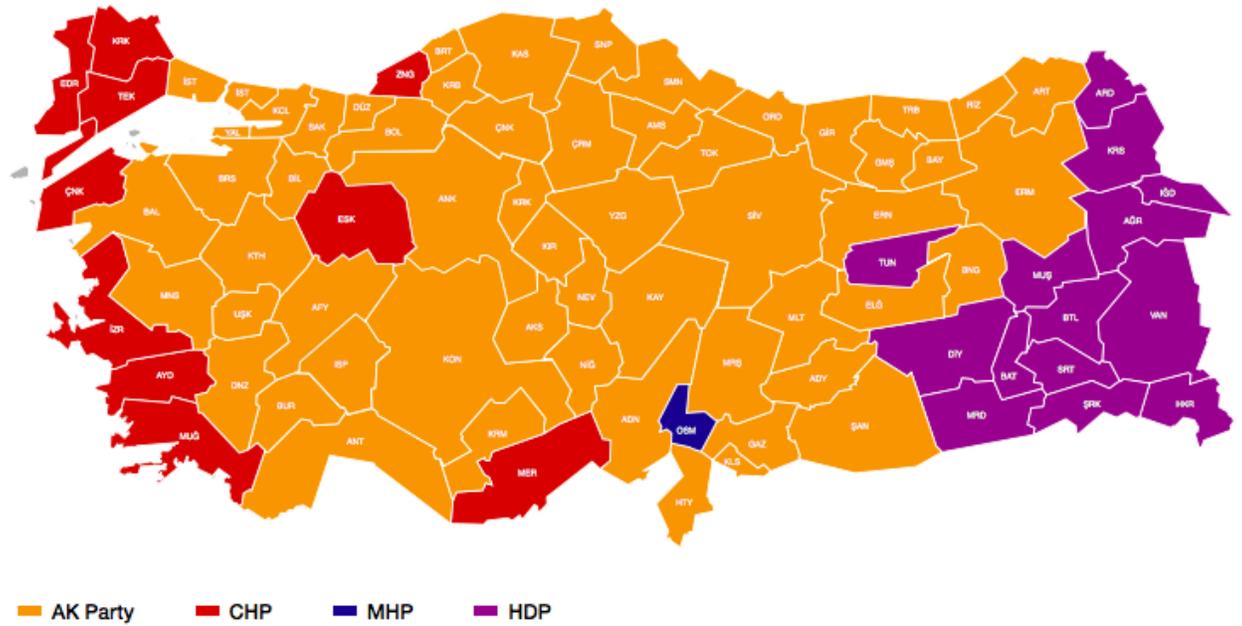
3.5.5 Indicator # 5 - Ethnic Arena of Contestation: “When a party competes for votes among voters from all relevant ethnic categories, we can say it has a multi-ethnic arena of contestation” (p. 165). Three scenarios help assess whether a party has an ethnic arena of contestation. The first is whether ethnic groups have separate electorates, which is not the case in Turkey. The second is whether there are seats reserved for voters from a particular ethnic category. Again, not the case of Turkey. The third scenario, which is very relevant to the party under study, is whether a party “contests

exclusively in some region and not in others” (p. 165). This requires to look into the geographic distribution of where the party contests elections and where it does not.

One important move the HDP leadership took in 2015 is to nominate candidates across all provinces of Turkey, including major cities like Istanbul, Izmir, and the capital Ankara, instead of focusing only on the predominantly Kurdish South-East provinces, like its predecessors (Full List of HDP Candidates, 2015). This was significant to emphasize the claim that the HDP represents all of Turkey, west to east, north to south, not just the south-east. It ran candidates for almost every single seat in every single province, regardless of the ethnic makeover of the province. It competed for the votes of Turkey’s different ethnicities, not just the Kurdish ones. Nevertheless, geographically speaking, the Kurdish-majority areas were the key provinces. “The main battleground in the elections was the Kurdish-populated southeast and east Anatolian regions, where the HDP and AKP were the main competitors”, explains Bardakci (2016, p. 5).

The results of the elections were satisfying for the HDP. It won seats across different provinces, with an overwhelming majority coming from Kurdish strongholds, however (see Figures 1, 2, and 3). In all four elections, “in the eastern and southeastern Anatolian regions, [...] the HDP replaced the AKP as the largest party” (Bardakçi, 2016, pp. 8-9). After the results of the June 2018 parliamentary elections were announced, the co-leaders of the HDP made the following announcement: “We advise those who claim that HDP is not a political party representing the whole of Turkey to look at these results” (HDP Statements, 2018, para 8). The co-chairs also made sure to thank their Kurdish and multi-ethnic support base. “And a very special thanks to all

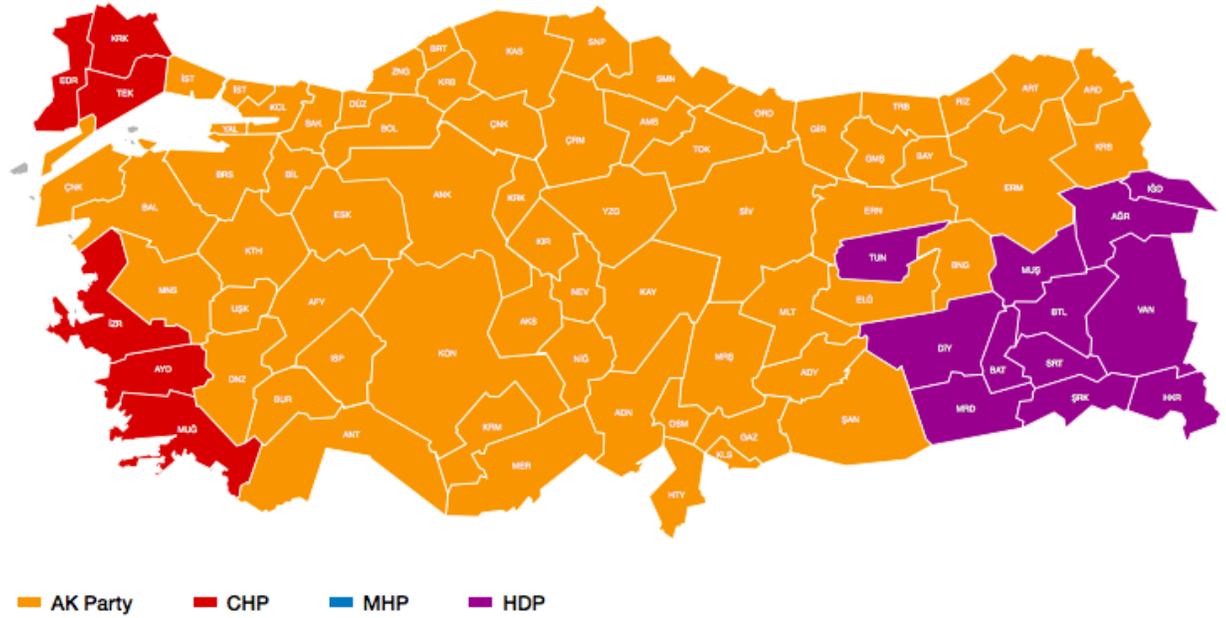
peoples of Turkey [...] who have been insubmissive and said no to persecution and devotedly worked and struggled despite all the difficulties, oppressions” (para 3).



*General Election June 2015 results data provided by Anadolu Agency.
*The results have been calculated taking votes casted abroad into consideration.

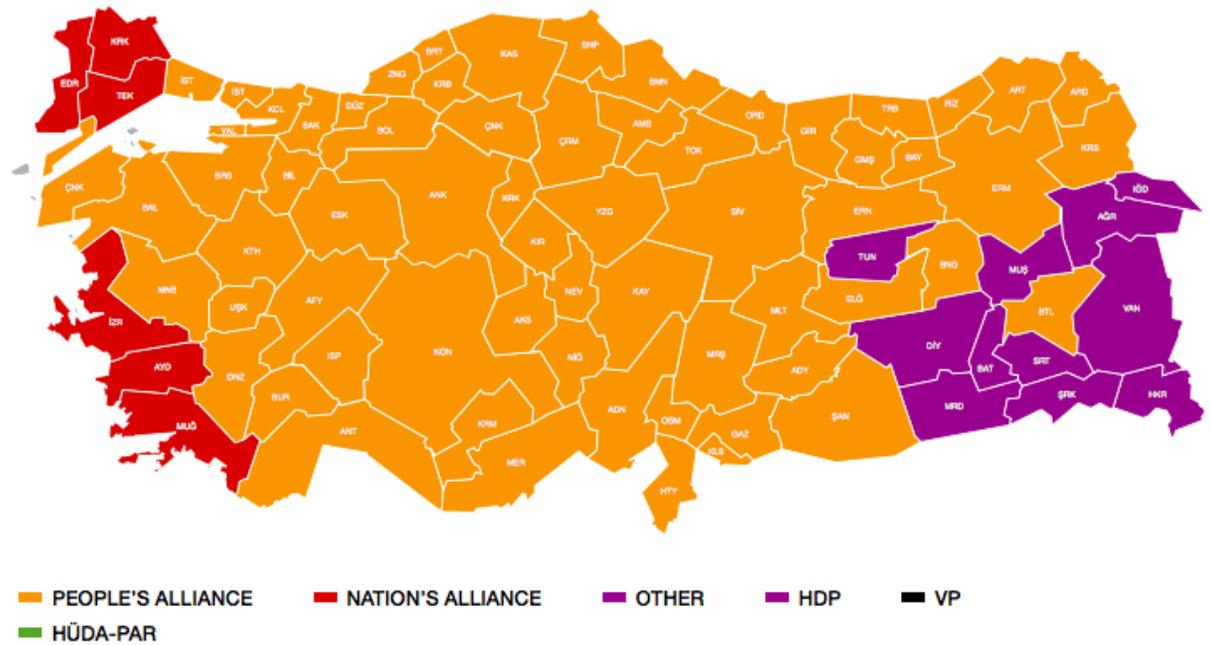
Figure 1 - Leading parties per province in June 2015. Source: yenisafak.com

Figure 2 - Leading parties per province in November 2015. Source: yenisafak.com



*November 2015 General Election results data provided by Supreme Electoral Board.
 *The results have been calculated taking votes casted abroad into consideration.

Figure 3 - Leading parties or alliances by province in June 2018. Source: yenisafak.com



*2018 General Election results data provided by Anadolu Agency.
 *The results have been calculated taking votes casted abroad into consideration.

3.5.6 Indicator #6 - Implicit Activation of Ethnic Identities: this assumes looking into ‘non-apparent’ messaging and reading in between the lines of speeches and campaign slogans. A party may send coded messages by relying on “the shadow of the past” (p. 162) or the choice of candidates. Nevertheless, implicit appeals are difficult to code as they are either ‘invisible’ and/or open to multiple interpretations. A contextual analysis of the choice of words may help in revealing implicit appeals. Electoral campaigns, slogans and songs will thoroughly be covered in chapter 4 of this thesis. Thus, for this indicator, this discussion only focuses on the HDP’s choice of candidates as a method of implicit activation of ethnic identities.

A reflection of the HDP’s multi-ethnic claim was its ability to attract non-Kurdish figures, politicians, activists, and intellectuals, all known to the Turkish electorate, as well as veterans of the Kurdish movement as its parliamentary candidates (Full List of HDP Candidates, 2015). Palet (2016) recalls interviewing Yuksekdag right after the candidate’s lists were being finalized. She was three hours late to her interview, Palet explains. When the HDP co-chair finally entered the room, she said “sorry to keep you waiting, [we were] putting together a candidate roster that will change Turkish politics forever” (para 1). Indeed, it did. It is worth noting though, that the HDP’s candidates were not chosen via primaries, but rather through consultations with relevant organizations and political parties, such as the HDK and the Kurdish DBP. “Final decision over a candidate rested then with the party leadership” (Turkey’s Newest Party, 2015, para 17). For some analysts, the consultations with the Kurdish bloc to receive their ‘blessings’ of the candidates, contributed to the belief that the HDP is, in fact, not independent of the Kurdish political will.

Nevertheless, Bardakci (2016) explains, that the HDP “sought to project a pluralist image [...] by submitting a parliamentary candidate list that was composed of 48 percent women.” It also included “Armenian, Ezidi, Syriac, Alevi, Roma and LGBTI” candidates (p. 7). For example, during the 2015 parliamentary election, in the western coastal cities of Turkey, traditionally a stronghold for the CHP party, whose chairman is Alevi, the HDP nominated Ali Kenanoglu (for Istanbul’s 3rd district), Muslum Dogan (for Izmir’s 2nd district), and Turgut Oker (for Istanbul’s 2nd district), all three being important figures in the Alevi community, providing an alternative choice for CHP and Alevi voters. Ertugrul Kurkcu, one of the founders of the HDK, and a highly regarded socialist activist, was also selected to run for Izmir (1st district). Istanbul had its own share of diversity. Garo Paylan, an active member of Istanbul’s Armenian community was placed on top of the list for the 3rd district, only after Pervin Buldan, the current co-chair of the party. Huda Kaya, an Islamic feminist writer, along with a well-known feminist activist figure Filiz Kerestecioglu were also chosen as candidates for Istanbul (1st and 2nd districts, respectively). Demirtas himself ran for Istanbul’s first district. As for Ankara, Turkmen activist Surreya Onder’s candidacy was put forward. The HDP diversified the Grand National Assembly. For the first time in Turkey’s history Yezidis made it to the Parliament. Feleknas Uca for Diyarbakir, and Ali Atalan, co-chair of the European Ezidi Associations Federation, for Batman, both candidates of the HDP won. Mehmet Ali Aslan, founder of the first Mhallami association in Turkey was the HDP’s winning candidate for Mardin. Mardin was also represented by another candidate of the HDP, Erol Dora, who is of Assyrian ethnicity. Both were elected. Given the order on the ballot lists, it seems that the HDP

intentionally listed its non-Kurdish candidates at the top of its electoral lists to ensure they make it through. In so doing, the HDP was able to claim that it was genuinely an ethnically-diverse party.

The HDP's promised diversity was thus put in practice. Gunes (2017) confirms that "the HDP proved to be more diverse than its predecessors" (p. 18). The HDP was thus able to have Turkish, Alevi, Assyrian, Yezidi, Armenian, Assyrian, and Mhallami MPs, nevertheless the majority of its MPs were still Kurdish. Istanbul's Armenian newspaper, *Agos*, rejoiced with the ability of minority ethnic groups entering the legislature. It published the results with a heading reading "A More Colourful Parliament" (Agos, 2015).

3.5.7 Indicator #7 - How Ethnic Groups Cast their Vote: Chandra (2011) labels this as "Group Vote". She explains that a party can be classified as ethnic "if the majority of some ethnic category or categories, to the exclusion of others, support it" (p. 162). She also argues that "if the majority of all relevant ethnic categories support a party, or if the majority of its own support comes from all relevant ethnic categories, then it becomes a party with a multi-ethnic support base" (p. 163).

It is indeed a challenge to operationalize this indicator. In Turkey's case, ethnic categorization of the electorate is not available and previously illegal because the state considers all citizens as ethnic Turks. The one exception are the Kurds, because they live in a geographically concentrated area. Thus, when the majority of a particular province from the South-East region of Turkey votes to a particular party, and since the majority of the population of that region is ethnically Kurdish, then, by deduction, the

Kurdish ethnic group is voting for that party. In both the 2015 and 2018 elections, the HDP garnered the most votes in the South-East region. Thus, it is safe to say that the majority of the Kurdish ethnic group voted for the HDP. Borzou Daragahi (2018) argues that “while most Kurds vote HDP, a sizable minority support AKP” (para 8). These are usually religious conservatives or businessmen close to the ruling establishment. “An important turning point for the [2015] election was the withdrawal of AKP support among the conservative Kurdish voters” as “no tangible steps had been made to resolve the Kurdish issue” (Bardakçi, 2016, p. 10).

However, Kurds are not the only HDP voters. A few days before the 2018 elections, renowned Turkish journalist Murat Yetkin suggested that ethnic Turks will resort to “tactical voting” by voting for the HDP. Yetkin (2018) proposed that “a number of [ethnic] Turks are now again [like in 2015] seriously considering a vote for the HDP, not because they like or support it, but simply because they want to help it get into parliament and thus prevent President Erdoğan from gaining a parliamentary majority” (para 6). A week after the elections, the largest American international broadcaster, Voice of America (VoA), reported that “while the HDP’s support remained largely unchanged in its traditional electoral stronghold in Turkey’s predominantly Kurdish southeast, its votes increased in large cities in the West inhabited mainly by Turks” (Dorian, 2018, para 4). The news outlet reiterated the strategy of ‘tactical voting’ by some ethnic Turks to increase the chances of the HDP to pass the 10% threshold and retain roughly 60 seats which otherwise would have been transferred to Erdoğan’s AKP. The HDP, however, aims to consolidate its multi-ethnic voter base. “I believe this section of voters are going to stay with [the] HDP if we can develop a more

coherent line of opposition” explains the HDP’s honorary chair, Ertugrul Kurkcu (Dorian, 2018, para 7).

With the aim of garnering more votes from the Turkish left and from metropolitan cities, the HDP formed an electoral alliance with six socialist parties, but not with ethnic Kurdish nationalist parties (Arti Gerecek, 2018). The emphasis on progressive, rather than ethnic, discourse that the HDP adopted angered conservative Kurds. This even led to its Diyarbakir MP, Altan Tan, to leave the party (Cumhuriyet, 2018). The HDP, however, clearly needed to capitalize on its multi-ethnic identity, rather than appear as solely a Kurdish ethnic party. It is, eventually, also competing for non-Kurdish and non-Turkish votes as well.

Nevertheless, it is almost impossible to prove how other ethnic groups voted. What can be noted, however, is that the European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy (EAFJD), a Brussels-based Armenian grassroots organization claiming to represent the Armenian communities of Europe, prior to every election in Turkey, issued a statement announcing its support for the HDP and calling upon Turkish citizens in Europe to vote for the HDP. “We consider the HDP to be a progressive force in Turkey, actively struggling for peoples’ rights in their vernacular and with respect to their cultural, religious beliefs and background”, one statement read (EAFJD Statement, 2015, para 2).

A few days before the 2018 twin parliamentary and presidential elections, *Agos*, one of Turkey’s Armenian newspapers, printed an article by its columnists, Sevan Deyirmenjian, entitled “A Vote for HDP, a Vote for Demirtas”. Deyirmenjian (2018), an ethnic Armenian, recalled how the elderly would always advise him to keep his

political views private, and never reveal who he voted for, to avoid problems. He also recalls how during previous elections, community leaders, as well as government employees, would “indirectly” advise members of the Armenian community to vote for the ruling establishment. It’s funny, he says, how they were “allowed” to publicly announce their support and their vote if it were to the ruling government, but not if it were to the opposition. “We will no longer remain silent”, he adds, “it’s enough” (para 8). Deyirmenjian ends the article by calling upon the readers to collectively vote for the HDP and for Demirtas, mentioning the HDP’s usage of the Armenian language in its electoral campaigns, and the inclusion of the Armenian Genocide and the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia in its platform.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that Turkey’s Armenian ethnic group is unified in its support of the HDP. The community itself is divided. Tensions grew particularly after the community was not allowed to elect its own patriarch. Instead, the Armenian Orthodox Church is governed by an ‘interim’ guardian, who has been occupying this position for the past decade, and is regarded as a figure close to the ruling government. Garo Paylan, the HDP’s Armenian MP, publicly criticized the scheme that was put in place, and denounced the ‘interim’ guardian’s legitimacy. A few days before the June 2018 elections, the patriarchate denounced Garo Paylan, and accused him of disrespecting the leadership of the church (Arabian, 2018). The timing of the denunciation, falling a few days before the elections, raises question marks whether this announcement was politically driven, and acted as an informal memo for the community not to vote in favor of the HDP. However, the patriarchate does not possess full control over the community.

One Armenian youth association based in Istanbul, the ‘Nor Zartonk’ (meaning the new awakening), issued a statement calling upon the community to vote for the HDP. Nor Zartonk played an active role in campaigning for the HDP in 2015 and 2018, as well as during the referendum vote of 2017, where they launched a “No” campaign in the Armenian language. The 2018 statement, which they published a few weeks ahead of elections day, made reference to the ruling party’s grip on freedom and its human rights violations. It recalled that the establishment did not allow the Armenian community to elect its own patriarch. The statement also mentioned that Erdogan’s racist undertone and policies have further marginalized the oppressed peoples of Turkey, and forced them to want to live away from their lands. It presented the HDP as an alternative force and invited members of the Armenian community living in and outside of Turkey to vote for both the HDP and its jailed co-leader, Demirtas (Press Releases, 2018). Other Armenian gatherings such as the Association of the Armenians of Sasoun and the Association of the Armenians of Sivas, separately hosted the HDP’s Armenian candidate, Garo Paylan, in their centers and learned about the HDP’s vision and electoral campaign. Even for the Armenians living outside of Turkey, Garo Paylan, has a sentimental value. “The image of Paylan standing in [the Turkish] parliament holding pictures of Armenian members of the Ottoman legislature who were murdered during the Genocide has been etched in our memories—collective and individual” explains Ara Khatchatourian, the editor of the English version of *Asbarez*, the newspaper of the Armenian community of Western USA (Khatchatourian, 2016). All this suggests that some segments of the Armenian ethnic community did support the

HDP and voted for it. Consequently, the HDP's votes did not come from Kurdish voters exclusively.

3.5.8 Indicator #8 - Ethnic Division of the Votes a Party Receives: Chandra labeled this as “Party Votes”. Although very similar to the above indicator, this indicator looks at the votes a party receives rather than at voting behaviors of ethnic groups. Chandra claims that if the majority of the votes a party receives comes from an ethnic category or categories, and that these categories exclude some significant proportion of the population, then it is an ethnic party. If they do not exclude an ethnic category, then they can qualify to be a multi-ethnic party. The limitation of not having the ethnic divisions of the Turkish electorate persists here as well. The HDP qualifies for being an ethnic party, as the Kurdish vote makes a big proportion of its votes. In 2015, for example, at least half of its 6 million votes came from Kurdish majority areas, and another million from Istanbul (Gunes, 2017). Gunes further explains that the HDP “won support among university students and the intelligentsia from more affluent districts” (p. 18).

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated empirically this study's main research question: Is the HDP a multi-ethnic party? Eight indicators of an ethnic party, developed by Chandra, were tested against the HDP. Multi-ethnic qualities were identified in many elements, such as in its name, its official program, its explicit issue positions, and in its choice of candidates. Less multi-ethnic traits were identified in the ethnic composition

of its leadership and votes received. Nevertheless, Chandra (2011) explains that a party does not have to meet all of the above classifications and indicators at once to be labeled an ethnic or multi-ethnic party. The indicators are just different ways of looking into a party. For example, while a party may not have an ethnic reference in its naming, it may still qualify to be an ethnic party if its implicit and explicit appeals claim to benefit a particular ethnic category over another. The HDP proved to be a multi-ethnic party across most layers of assessment.

Nevertheless, as a result of state-led propaganda to equate them with outlawed Kurdish PKK, the HDP is still very much seen as a ‘Kurdish’ party, rather than a Turkish one, particularly among half of Turkey’s population who are loyalists to Erdogan. International media continues to refer to them as a pro-Kurdish party, rather than a Turkish one. Regardless, the HDP stands firm on its claim that it is a Turkish party for all of the peoples of Turkey, particularly the oppressed and the marginalized. It is this evolution of Kurdish political thought that allowed the rise and persistence of the HDP. A think piece on the HDP by the Heinrich Boll Stiftung (Turkey’s Newest Party, 2015), confirms that the party’s electoral victory was possible due to a “strategy called ‘*Türkiyelileşme*’ [which is the process of] transforming into a movement that represents the whole of Turkey” (para 2). The HDP’s strategy was to systematically move away from Kurdishness and activate their electorate’s Turkishness. This observation confirms the title of the thesis. The relative success of this strategy is what made HDP popular, but also a target by the ruling establishment. But how did the HDP actually do in the 2015 and 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections? How did it market itself during those elections? How did it transmit its acclaimed multi-ethnic identity into its electoral

program? Did the pre-election campaigns profess the HDP's values and core lines? And what were the election outcomes? These are some of the questions that the next chapter will attempt to answer.

Chapter Four

The HDP in Action: Election Campaigns and Results

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter attempted to empirically identify the multi-ethnic elements of the HDP. Many of them require intentional focus to be revealed. Thus, the risk of them being missed by the average voter cannot be ruled out. What should not have skipped the Turkish electorates' attention, however, is the HDP's creative electoral campaigns of 2015 and 2018. This chapter focuses on these electoral campaigns, and how they aimed to portray a new (constructed) identity of a modern, democratic, leftist, feminist, egalitarian, and most importantly, pan-Turkish party. It also focuses on the election process, the contexts in which the HDP campaigned, and the results.

This chapter opens with an analysis of the June 2015 general elections. The general atmosphere in which the elections took place is presented. Then, the HDP's electoral campaign is introduced. This includes official slogans, songs, advertisements, music videos, and speeches. Finally, the election results are presented, along with observations of the HDP's reach. The same structure will then be applied to the November 2015 general elections and the 2018 presidential and general elections.

4.2 The June 2015 General Elections

4.2.1 Election Background and Environment

The June 2015 general elections were the first time the HDP ran as a party, taking a “calculated risk” of potentially not passing the 10% threshold needed to enter the Grand Assembly, and thus not having any MPs in parliament. To avoid this, previous Kurdish or pro-Kurdish parties had run as independents, where the 10% threshold condition does not apply. It can thus be regarded as the most important electoral battle that the HDP had fought. The other main players of this electoral battle were the AKP, the CHP, and the MHP. In total, twenty political parties contested the elections.

“The elections were of utmost importance for the Turkish political system,” explains Bardakci (2016, p. 4). This is because it would either allow the AKP to secure the 330 seats needed to singlehandedly push for constitutional change to transform the political system from a parliamentary one to a presidential one, concentrating executive power in Erdogan’s hands, or it would not allow Erdogan’s master plan to be realized. The HDP had a very critical role in allowing or hindering this plan. If the HDP passed the 10% threshold, it would deny the AKP securing the parliamentary majority it was aiming for. If it failed to pass the threshold, the seats would be proportionally redistributed to those who have, the bulk of which would then go to the AKP. In this regard, “any vote cast was very important in determining the fate of the HDP, and thus also the AKP,” as Bardakci contends (2016, p. 5). The AKP thus focused on raising negative propaganda against the HDP, accusing it of having close ties with the PKK and capitalizing on their pledge to abolish the Diyanet, thus attempting to divert

conservative votes away from the HDP. The HDP, however, focused on projecting its pluralist image through a full-scale campaign. The next sections present examples of that campaign.

Campaign

Election Campaign conduct in Turkey is regulated by the Law on Basic Provisions. It attempts to ensure fair and equitable situations for all competing parties. The law particularly focuses on the last 10 days of campaigning, where harsh regulations are implemented. This leaves the earlier period in a looser and under-regulated situation.

The OSCE Election Observation Mission notes that “contestants were generally able to campaign freely and did so extensively” (p. 13). Nevertheless, there were instances of cancelling or restricting rallies of opposition parties in favor of the ruling party. Some MHP posters were removed as the judiciary ruled that they insult the president or provoke hatred. Similarly, the CHP chairperson was sued by the president himself for insulting him in a campaign speech. The observation mission also noted that there were reports of “students and civil servants being instructed by their superiors to attend campaign events of the AKP” (p. 13). For the first time, however, campaigning was not limited to the Turkish language only. The parties, particularly the HDP, made use of this right, and in addition to Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac and Zaza were used. Although officially prohibited, both the president and the prime minister abundantly took part in AKP elections rallies, using state resources for campaign resources.

The HDP was targeted during its campaigning. On May 18, two bombs exploded near their Adana and Mersin offices. On June 5, the HDP rally in Erzurum was deliberately disrupted, leaving at least 38 people injured. On June 5, another two bombs exploded in Diyarbakir during an HDP rally. The incident resulted in four people dying and 100 being injured.

On campaign financing, the political parties that passed a seven percent threshold during the last general elections were entitled to state funds to be used for campaign purposes. While the AKP, the CHP and the MHP qualified for the funding, the HDP was not eligible, because its MPs were elected as independents. Thus, the HDP's campaign financing was now solely based on individual voluntary donations.

The OSCE report notes that “Despite the high number of media outlets, mainstream media ownership is concentrated in a few companies, which limits media pluralism” (p. 15). Moreover, indirect pressures over media outlets forced them to limit their negative coverage of the ruling party. The Turkish Law on Broadcasting also grants the contesting parties free airtime on the public broadcaster, the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT). Even here, the ruling party, the AKP, had a privilege of 50 minutes free airtime coverage. The CHP, as the main opposition, was granted 40 minutes. The HDP and the MHP each acquired 30 minutes, while other contesting parties had their share of 20 minutes each. Nevertheless, paid political advertising is allowed, and no ceiling is set in this regard. The OSCE election observation report notes that the AKP alone purchased 51% of paid political advertising, followed by the CHP with 19%. TRT1 which is the public broadcaster, “offered largely biased coverage in favor of the ruling party, which benefited from 46

per cent of the airtime” (p. 17). The NTV allocated 32% of its election coverage to the AKP, as for the ATV, the AKP coverage was at 34%. In contrast, CNN Turk offered coverage to the CHP at 30% and the HDP at 27%. The AKP only received 12%. Thus, the election campaign, particularly access to media was not fair. The ruling party could afford and enjoyed longer and more frequent coverage, while the opposition parties, had to accept their limited capabilities and less preferential status vis-à-vis the public broadcaster.

4.2.2 Slogans

The HDP’s electoral campaign was called “Buyuk Insanlik” or “Great Humanity”. The term is borrowed from the title of a poem by Nazim Hikmet, Turkey’s most famous intellectual and poet, who faced detention and exile during much of his adult life for his beliefs and views. The main theme of the poem is that regardless of all the difficulties and the injustices that the order imposes on people and the working classes, great humanity has hope, and one cannot live without hope. It, therefore, does not come as a surprise that the HDP chose “Buyuk Insanlik” as a campaign title, as it saw itself the new hope of Turkey’s oppressed and marginalized.

As for the election slogan, the HDP adopted “Biz’ler HDP, Biz’ler Meclise”. The slogan roughly translates into “We are the HDP, we are for the Parliament/or we are going to the parliament”. The HDP used the slogan to introduce itself to the public, as it was the first time it ran for general elections. It also reiterated its confidence that it will break structural and political barriers and enter the Turkish Grand Assembly. The slogan called upon the peoples of Turkey to vote for the HDP as a party, because they are heading to Parliament not as independents, but as a Turkish party from all over the

country. Psychologically speaking, the choice of words also played an important role in creating a discourse of victory by telling the average Turkish voter that their vote will not go to waste, as the HDP will pass the 10% threshold.

During the weeks leading to the elections, the country was covered by posters and TV ads of faces upon faces of people of all walks of life smiling at the camera, with both the campaign name and the slogan behind them. For many, the HDP's "Great Humanity" called for the triumph of hope, humanity and peaceful coexistence. The HDP was signaling to the Turkish public that they are a peaceful, non-armed, political movement that believed in brotherhood and a great humanity, rather than armed struggle and bloodshed. It also reflected its leftists, socialist ideology and the fact that it aims to be the hope of the oppressed and the working class.

4.2.3 Songs

Words and songs can play an important role in constructing a new identity.

Benedict Anderson (1983) explains how:

"Nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism — poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts - show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles." (p. 141)
"There is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests - above all in the form of poetry and songs. [...] No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance." (p. 145)

In fact, songs played an important role in the HDP's electoral campaign.

The HDP deployed a strategy of mixed genres of music to appeal to different segment groups. The genre of music ranged from folk, to rap, rock and Anatolian beats.

In 2015, the HDP released a song entitled “HDP Secim Halay” which translates as “The HDP’s election circle dance”. The lyrics of the song are as follows:

“We are the Spring, the hope, the peace,
We are the wedding, the horon, the zeybek, and the dance”

Spring stands for the season of new life, which HDP is promising for the peoples of Turkey. The song suggests that the HDP is the hope and the long-awaited peace for the region. The song also touches upon the multi-ethnicity of the HDP as it references the different dances of different parts of turkey. The song is called Halay, which is the dominant form of folk dance in the central and south-eastern provinces. The Horon is the folk dance of the north, particularly the black sea region. It is the folk dance of the Pontic Greeks. The Zeybek is the folk dance of the western coast of Turkey, by the Aegean Sea. The HDP thus claims to be representing all of Turkey, north to south, east to west, by embracing its multiculturalism and folklore.

“We are against [coopted] press, we are the HDP,
We are against the exploiter, we are the HDP,
We are against prohibitions, we are the HDP,
We are against impropriety, we are for the Parliament,
We are the HDP, we are for the Parliament.”

The HDP opposes the cooption of media by the state, and calls for freedom of speech. In many ways, this phrase also stands in solidarity with all the journalists that the AKP has put behind bars, and the liberal press that it has shut down. It stands in face of oppression and exploitation and calls for better living and working conditions.

“We are Turkish, we are songs, we are melody
We are women, we are young, we are laborers
We are love, we are equal, we are brothers
We are red, yellow, purple, green.”

By stating “we are Turkish”, the HDP clearly shouts out that it is a Turkish, not a Kurdish party. This is one of the most explicit references to its constructed ethnic identity. The HDP has felt it is important to include this in its official electoral song, as it is one of the biggest challenges it faces. It also tackles gender equality and women’s rights, another pillar of its ideology. It calls for love as it views all ethnic groups and peoples as brothers. They cherish diversity and the different colors that make up Turkish society.

“We are for freedom, for brotherhood
We are for justice, for democracy
We are the HDP, we are for the parliament.”

The HDP claims that it is for freedom. Freedom can mean different things for different ethnic groups. This could entail freedom to speak and teach one’s native language, or to be able to conduct religious rituals according to particular traditions. The HDP, as the song suggests, stands for justice, as history has witnessed injustices with different ethnic groups in turkey. These include assassinations, massacres, genocide, forced disappearances, exile among others. Another recurring message is that the HDP is meant to be for the Parliament and in fact it is going to enter the Grand Assembly.

The song’s accompanying music video, which became a major hit in Turkey, starts with a gathering at someone’s backyard. Lots of people, friends and family, come together, wearing big smiles, hugging and greeting one another. With the start of the music, they all start to dance the traditional “Halay”, Anatolia’s circle dance, popular among the Turks, Kurds, Armenians and others. The people featured are a representative sample of Turkey’s different demographics. Men and women holding

hands, veiled and unveiled women dancing together, the younger generation helping the elderly. Soon the co-chairs, Demirtas and Yuksekdog join in for the Halay, and dance away with the crowd. The HDP signaled that it will dance its way through the 10% threshold and enter parliament. The music video ends with a male voice calling upon voters to “Vote for the HDP, we are for the Parliament”.

Another song prepared by the MED Cultural Centre, and endorsed by the HDP, literally calls upon the Alevis, Sunnis, Turks, Armenians, Kurds, Laz, and the Cherkez to unite under the HDP. It promised a new life with the HDP, and the prevalence of democracy. The song claims that HDP will fight against the capitalist and fascist system (referring to the AKP government), it will protect the rights of laborers and workers, men and women. The song claims that with the HDP entering the system, the system will be a democracy. The song is a pure reflection of the HDP’s activated identity and ideology. It aims to be an umbrella organization for different ethnic and religious minorities. It also portrays the HDP’s leftist, socialist approach in a country where the AKP-led liberal economy is the governing system.

4.2.4 Speeches

Ozge Kemahlioglu (2015) notes that the electoral campaign of all parties “was dominated by the party leaders. Their election rallies, the presentation of the parties’ election manifestos by their leaders, and interviews with them on TV formed the core of the election campaign” (pp. 450-451). Indeed, that was the case. The HDP, however, capitalized on its co-chairpersonship structure and launched their electoral manifesto together. The main electoral speech was presented jointly between Demirtas and

Yuksekdag, who took turns conveying a 1.5-hour long speech. Yuksekdog, conducted the opening speech in front of a full-house. Yuksekdog announced that years of struggle and dreams have finally led to this day. “This is not the work of 1, 2, 3 people [...] it is a collective effort [...] by women, by youth, by all peoples, by Turks, by Kurds, by the oppressed, by the LGBT community, and by student unions [...]”. Yuksekdog announced “we will unite Turkey [...] and will live a New Life”. She claimed that the HDP was a dream to all of the peoples of Turkey. While the experiment was a dream for the people “it is the nightmare of the Sultan” (referring to Erdogan). “They will see many more nightmares,” she added. Yuksekdog concluded that the unity found in the HDP cannot be found anywhere else.

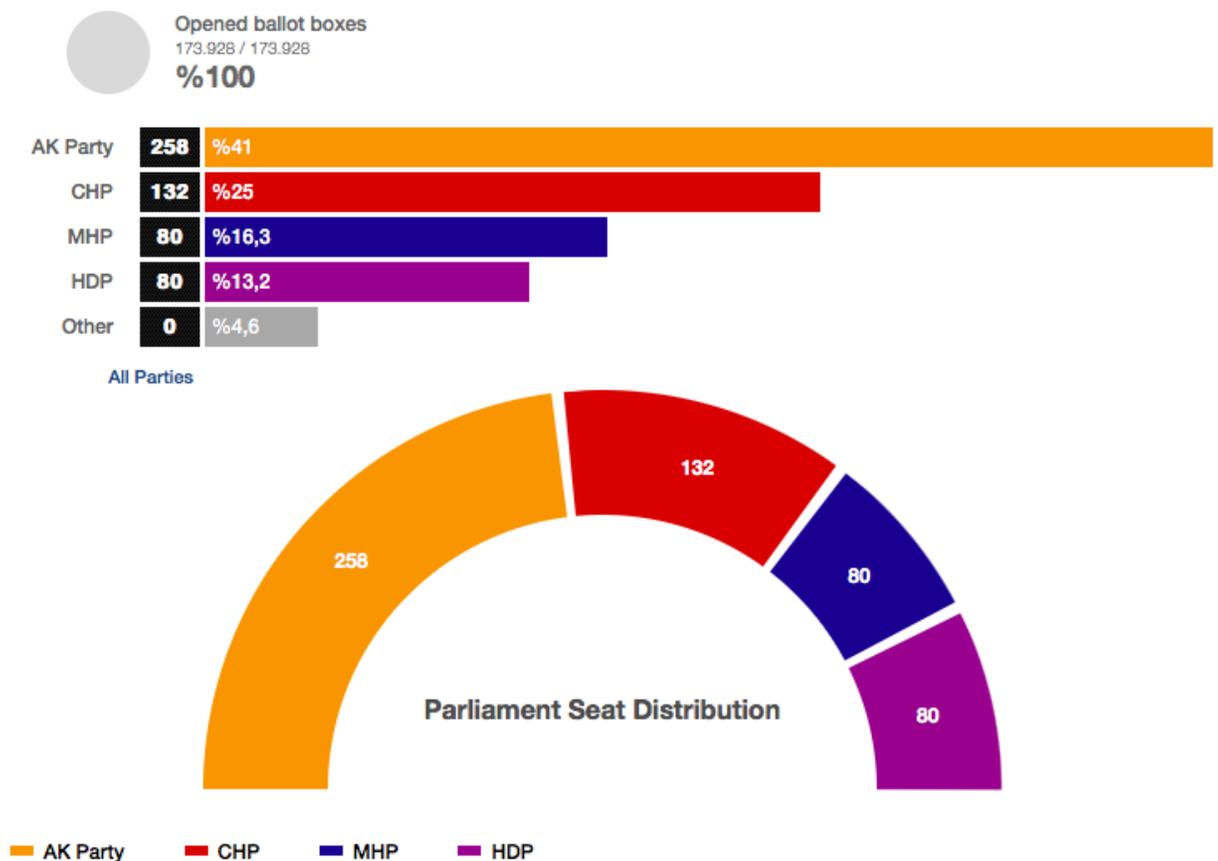
It was now time for Demirtas to greet the attendees. Standing next to Yuksekdog, he started his speech in his native language, Kurdish, a language once forbidden in the realm of Turkish politics. The entire hall cheered and rejoiced the Kurdish words that he uttered. He continued the rest of the speech in Turkish. Demirtas claimed that the HDP will be the hope in every angle where once resided fear. “We are done with seeing arms and violence [...] we want to live together” he added. Demirtas explained that this cannot be achieved alone. He explained that the HDP is already in the street, among the people, within the factories, on the fields. The HDP is the people he explained. He concluded by the party’s electoral slogan “We are the HDP, we are going to the parliament”.

4.2.5 Election Results

As part of its election observation mission, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights reported that the “parliamentary elections were

characterized by active and high citizen participation during the campaign and on election day” (OSCE/ODIHR, 2015, p. 1). One important outcome of the elections was that the HDP passed the 10% threshold and garnered around 13.2% of the total votes. In total, it received 5,847,134 votes from the ballot boxes within Turkey, and 196,827 votes from out-of-country, totaling 6,058,489 votes. In terms of seat allocation, the HDP received 80 seats, 39% of which were by women. The HDP scored first place in provinces of Diyarbakir, Van, Mardin, Batman, Sirnak, Agri, Mus, Ardahan, Hakkari, Siirt, Bitlis, Kars, Igdır and Tunceli, and second place in Sanliurfa, Adiyaman and Bıngöl

Figure 4 - Election results and distribution of seats in June 2015. Source: senisafak.com



*General Election June 2015 results data provided by Anadolu Agency.
 *The results have been calculated taking votes casted abroad into consideration.

The AKP garnered 40.9% (258 seats) of the votes, continuing to represent the largest party in Parliament. However, it witnessed a relative loss, as its vote share dropped by 9% from 2011, and it was no longer able to form a government on its own (276 seats are required to form a majority). The CHP and MHP garnered 24.95% (132 seats) and 16.29% (80 seats), respectively. The HDP thus became the third largest party in the assembly and the second largest opposition party in the legislature. The historic result was celebrated by the HDP. However, it didn't last long. As no political party agreed to form a coalition government with the AKP, a state of political paralysis emerged. What followed next was the escalation of violence in the south-east region between the Turkish Army and the PKK, as well as terror attacks and suicide bombings by ISIS.

4.3 The War Between Elections

The aftermath of the June elections was bloody. Terrorist attacks and suicide bombings resurfaced throughout the country. On July 20, 2015, an ISIS suicide bomb attack targeted HDP supporters, killing 33 and injuring more than a 100-year-old activist in Suruc, South-East Turkey. The extent to which Turkish intelligence services were not aware of the operation was a heated topic among the HDP bloc. The same day, probably in response, the PKK killed a Turkish corporal in nearby Adiyaman. "This marked the breakdown of a two-and-a-half-year ceasefire between the PKK [...] and the Turkish state" (Mandıracı, 2017, para 1). On July 24, the Turkish Air Force attacked PKK position in northern Iraq by air, leading to an open war with the PKK in the South-East

provinces. The Bipartisan Policy Center notes that “Turkish efforts against the PKK are broad, proactive, and often politically motivated” (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2016, p. 2). The same report notes that a number of times the Turkish state has been quick to blame the PKK or its affiliates for terror attacks that were later proven to be by ISIS. The Turkish military resorted to mass arrests of alleged PKK sympathizers throughout the country.

The return of violence to the south east, and the escalation of ethnic nationalism among the Turks and Kurds, placed the HDP under immense pressure. The Kurds, who are the majority of its voter base, wanted the HDP to react on their behalf. The non-Kurds were very wary of what the HDP would say, and whether it would distance itself from the terrorist organization. The HDP was caught in between. It had a decision to make. Demirtas claims that they “called on the PKK to stop fighting against Turkey. I repeat this call every day. The two sides should take their fingers off the trigger and the weapons should be silenced” (Scott, 2015, para 18). Nevertheless, at times of war, those who control the arms have more say than those who can only preach peace and unity. The violence continued. The HDP failed to take the lead. The PKK, or military power, proved victorious in times of crisis. The HDP’s reputation was stained. Many ethnic Turks who did not vote for the AKP in June had to rethink about their decision.

It is widely believed that the reemergence of the war in the South East was a state strategy and the Kurds fell into the trap. Demirtas himself claimed that the “government tried to make the HDP pay the political price [for denting its majority]... It attacks us and tries to destroy our votes and our public prestige so that it can call an early general election and come to power on its own” (Scott, 2015, para 10). Indeed, the

AKP made use of the general state of instability in the country, blaming it on the party's failure to win a majority in Parliament. It thus disseminated a discourse linking the AKP to stability, and the HDP to chaos and terrorism. It called upon voters to vote in favor of a strong and stable Turkey, under AKP leadership. This strategy proved effective in the November 2015 elections.

4.4 The November 2015 General Elections

4.4.1 Election Background and Environment

Sixteen parties contested the November 2015 elections. The main competitors, however, were the same as in June 2015. The total number of voters increased by 300,000 driven by those who reached the age of 18.

The section above gave an overview of the situation in which the elections were to take place. The Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions of the OSCE Election Observation Mission confirmed that “the challenging security environment, [...] including attacks against party members and on party premises, hindered contestants' ability to campaign freely in all parts of the country” (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2015, p. 1). The HDP was particularly targeted by the attacks. On October 10, a bomb exploded during a “Labor, Peace and Democracy” rally in Ankara, organized by several CSOs, trade unions and organizations. The HDP and the CHP also joined the rally. The terrorist attack killed over a hundred people and injured about five hundred. As a result, most parties temporarily suspended their campaign activities. According to the HDP, during both elections, its offices were attacked 129 times, 2,590 members were taken into custody,

and 630 were arrested, including candidates. The Ministry of Information (MoI), on the other hand, only acknowledged seven attacks against the HDP offices. The MoI also suspended 20 HDP mayors (officially DBP members) over investigation charges. Moreover, HDP campaign leaflets were confiscated.

The OSCE Local Election Observation Mission's media monitoring findings showed that "three of the five monitored television stations, including the public broadcaster, favoured the AKP in their programmes, while the other two offered mostly negative coverage of the AKP" (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2015, p. 2). Websites were blocked, journalists and media outlets were investigated for defaming the president or for what the state calls "supporting terrorism", which often means disseminating pro-Kurdish messaging.

On campaign financing, although the HDP was now qualified to receive state funds because it ran as a party during June election, but did not receive the funding, because the state releases the payments in January. The HDP requested from the Ministry of Finance an early release of the funds to be used for the November elections. The request, however, was not accepted. This of course limited their campaign capabilities. The HDP had to resort to existing materials, and heavily focused on social media.

4.4.2 Slogan

The HDP adopted the following slogan for its November elections "Inadina Baris, Inadina Beraber, Inadina HDP". It is hard to accurately translate the term "Inadina", but it can mean anywhere between 'purposefully', 'in your face', 'in spite of

everything’, or ‘out of spite’. As for Baris, it means peace. Beraber means together. The HDP, attempting to transcend the violence that followed the June elections, reiterated its commitment to ‘peace’. The slogan thus can be read as “in spite of everything, [we advocate for] peace, we will remain together, the HDP [persists] in your face [referring to the AKP]”. The slogan reflected the HDP’s resilience and persistence. It aimed to portray an image that it was not intimidated by the AKP or the state-led war upon its strongholds. It was willing to take the risk, again, and run as a party, instead of adopting the easier option and running as independents.

4.4.3 Song

The HDP released an electoral ad and song with the same title as its slogan. The text of the ad and the lyrics of the song are almost identical, with a lot of emphasis on “Inadina”. Below is an extract from the song.

“Inadina, hope,
Inadina, peace,
Men and women equal, side by side, Inadina,
Horon, Halay, Saz
Multi-colored and multi-lingual
Inadina Zilgit,
Inadina, laughter
Inadina mother tongue,
Inadina together,
Inadina, HDP”

As in its electoral campaign, the ad/song refers to ‘hope’ for the marginalized and ‘peace’ for all of Turkey. The song also makes references to the HDP’s multiculturalism. It refers to the ‘Horon’ and ‘Halay’, again. Interestingly, the HDP does not use the Kurdish word ‘Govend’ to describe Kurdish folk dances and instead focuses on the Turkish word ‘Halay’. It also mentioned the Saz, which is a common

instrument among Alevi communities. The song also capitalizes on the HDP's commitment to gender equality and women's rights, asserting that women and men are equal and next to each other, in spite of everything. It also calls for 'zilgit' which is a popular sound that Arab and Anatolian women make with their tongues, often in weddings, and happy occasions, as a form of celebration. The HDP ad/song also calls for people to laugh, purposefully. This sentence is accompanied by images of women laughing together in public. It is a direct reference to one AKP official who suggested that woman must not laugh in public, as per the AKP's Islamist ideology. The HDP's female co-chair Yuksekdag, responded to the suggestion during the HDK's Women Assembly on November 12 by stating "we will not waive our womanly laugh and solidarity while we are resisting womanly. Women will prevail!" (Yuksekdag, 2016, para 3). Through this election song, the HDP emphasizes its resistance to the AKP and its restrictions on how people live, how they dance, the sounds they make, and the language they speak.

4.4.4 Speeches

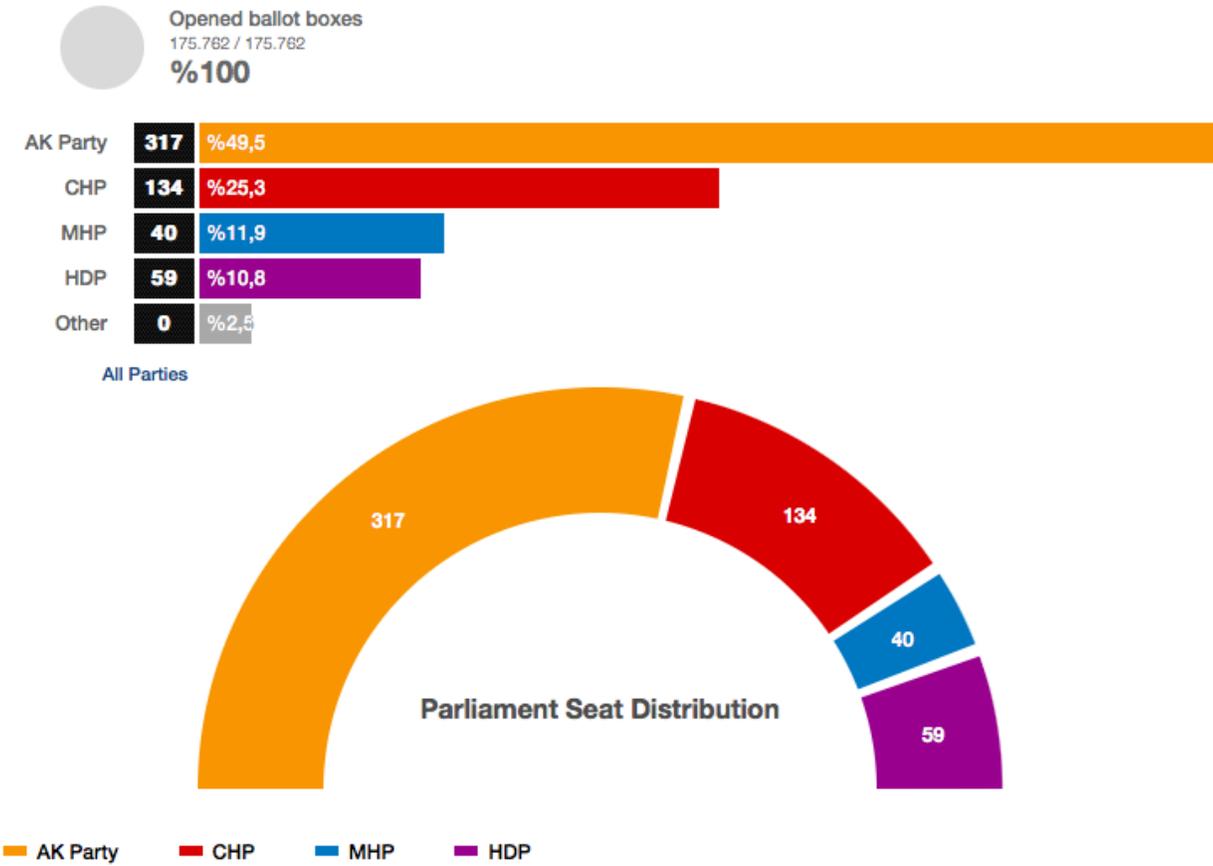
The HDP launched its electoral manifesto from Ankara. The ceremony featured the co-chairs of the party as they gave a long but assertive speech on the HDP's resilience. The co-chairs claimed that the HDP gave hope to the people and they vowed to continue the struggle. "Those who only saw black and white, started to see colors because of the HDP". They saw colors, light and hope. The speech presented the HDP as a platform for those who feared tomorrow, for those who await justice, for those who do not enjoy their rights. "The HDP is the brotherhood of colors" stated Yuksekdag.

The co-chairs explained that the HDP “is not one leader or one group, the HDP is us, its everyone”. The HDP represents the diversity and the unity of the “peoples of Turkey and Kurdistan”. When these peoples united, the others feared for their lives. In many ways, the speech reiterated the main themes that the HDP stands for. What stood out was the use of the term “the peoples of Kurdistan” instead of the “Kurds”. Referring to the region as Kurdistan in an electoral speech by the party’s Turkish co-chair was a clear signal to the HDP’s ethnic base. Reacting to the war in the South-East region, the HDP had to reassure the predominantly Kurdish population of the region that the HDP stands by them. It did not afford to lose their support, and thus used words and terminologies that are appreciated by the Kurds.

4.4.5 Results

With the closure of the ballot boxes, the AKP was able to guarantee the majority it needed to form a government on its own. The AKP garnered an impressive 49.50% of the total votes and secured 317 seats in an assembly of 550. The HDP’s share of votes decreased from 13% in June to 10.76% in November. It garnered a total of 5,148,085 votes, 220,059 of which from out of country. The HDP was the second most popular party in the Turkish diaspora after the AKP. What is important however, is that it was able to pass the 10% threshold and secured 59 seats in the parliament, a drop from 80. The CHP received 25.32% (134 seats), and the MHP received 11.90% (40 seats). The HDP won first place in the provinces of Agri, Batman, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Hakkari, Igridir, Mardin, Mus, Siirt, Sirnak, Van. It scored second place in Bingol and Kars, and

continued to be Istanbul’s third most popular party. Moreover, 23 out of the 59 elected HDP MPs were women.



*November 2015 General Election results data provided by Supreme Electoral Board.
*The results have been calculated taking votes casted abroad into consideration.

Figure 5 - Election results and seat distribution in November 2015. Source: yenisafak.com

Although the AKP was able to secure an absolute majority, it was not able to neutralize the HDP. The HDP came to prove its resilience and kept its language of unity, peace, and democracy. It was able to consolidate its position as a parliamentary party for the upcoming four years. Nevertheless, Turkey witnessed another round of violence, uncertainty, and political persecution in the months that followed.

4.5 The Failed Coup and Its Aftermath

On 15 July 2016, a faction of the Turkish military organized a series of operations to topple the Erdogan-led government. Soldiers and tanks took to the streets of Istanbul and Ankara, and the fighter jets bombed Parliament and the Presidential Palace. Erdogan, who was on holiday inside the country, conducted an interview with CNN Turk via FaceTime, while on an airplane en route to Istanbul. He called upon his supporters to gather in city squares and resist the coup. Thousands of supporters responded to his request. By the morning of July 16, the rebel soldiers surrendered and Erdogan was back in charge (Al Jazeera, 2017). The Turkish state responded by declaring a state of emergency for three months, which eventually lasted for two years. The state of emergency “allows the president and cabinet to bypass parliament when drafting new laws and to restrict or suspend rights and freedoms” (BBC News, 2016, para 2). As a result, the AKP led a campaign of purging of what it labeled as “terrorist threats”.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a report in March 2018 detailing the impact of the state of emergency on human rights throughout the country. The report notes that 152,000 civil servants were dismissed following the coup attempt. 160,000 Turkish citizens were arrested, as provided by the Ministry of Interior. These include lawyers, judges, teachers, academics, soldiers and army generals. 50,000 passports were cancelled immediately after the coup. The HDP’s support base in the South-East also witnessed its share of the new emergency laws. OHCHR confirmed patterns of human rights violations in the predominantly Kurdish South-East region. This included “killings;

torture; violence against women; excessive use of force; destruction of housing and cultural heritage; prevention of access to emergency medical care, safe water and livelihoods; and severe restrictions of the right to freedom of expression” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018, p. 4). Moreover, 100,000 websites were blocked and no longer accessible. Many of them pro-Kurdish websites and TV channels (Turkey: UN Report, 2018). Amnesty International released a statement referring to Turkey as a dungeon for journalists. More than 120 journalists have been imprisoned since the coup attempt. Amnesty’s Deputy Europe Director, Gauri van Gulik explained that “In Turkey, what we are witnessing is an attempt to end all independent journalism. Turkey has become the world’s biggest jailer of journalists with some sentenced to life imprisonment simply for doing their jobs” (Amnesty International UK, 2018, para 17).

Erdogan’s tightened grip did not spare the HDP. On November 3, 2016, the party’s co-chairs, Demirtas and Yuksekdag, along with eleven other members of Parliament were detained across Turkey. The HDP dubbed it the “end of Democracy in Turkey” (HDP Statements, 2016). The arrests were followed the next day by a bomb attack in Diyarbakir. On November 6, the HDP’s Central Executive Committee and the Parliamentary Group released a joint statement reiterating their persistence and multi-ethnic discourse. The statement read as follows:

“The path for all the peoples, faiths and cultures of Turkey to live together, equally, and in peace is through the existence and strengthening of the HDP and its alliances. The government may imprison those who want peace, those who raise their voices for democracy, justice and freedom, or our Co-Chairs, and may envisage extending its existence through violent means, but this will not deter us from our democratic political struggle” (HDP Joint Statement, 2016, para 9).

In the run-up to the June 2018 early elections, more than 100 HDP or pro-HDP elected co-mayors from the South-East region were arrested, municipal boards dismissed, and city councils banned from meeting (Institute Kurde, n.d.). They were replaced by “trustees” appointed by Ankara, who were now in charge of governing regional affairs (Reuters, 2016). Curfews and restrictions were implemented. The *New York Times* noted that although the crackdown on democracy has been nationwide, “but on the political front it has been concentrated in the mostly Kurdish southeast, though there is no evidence, or even a government accusation, that Kurdish parties, legal or illegal, had any role in the attempted coup” (Nordland, 2016).

4.6 The 2018 Early Presidential and General Elections

4.6.1 Election Background and Environment

In April 2018, president Erdogan called for snap elections to take place in June 2018, eighteen months ahead of schedule. Erdogan explained his decision for the early election by stating that “developments in Syria and elsewhere have made it urgent to switch to the new executive system in order to take steps for our country’s future in a stronger way” (BBC News, 2018, para 5). Erdogan had reached an agreement on this matter with the MHP’s leadership, and the two were to make an electoral alliance for the June 2018 elections. The decision put the other parties in a rough situation: either accept the challenge or accept defeat.

The main opposition parties, the CHP and the HDP both accepted the challenge. The HDP’s co-chair Pervin Buldan announced the decision at the party’s headquarters

in Ankara. “We, as the HDP, accept the challenge. Count us in for the elections. I am calling on all our provincial heads to be prepared for early elections” (Hurriyet Daily News, 2018, para 3), she announced. The HDP also questioned how democratic elections will take place in a state of emergency where undemocratic rules have been put in place by the AKP government. Nevertheless, it still decided not to back down. Buldan called upon “all democratic fronts, women and leftist and socialist segments [to join the HDP’s battle]. The time to defeat the AKP has arrived” (para 4), she concluded. The CHP’s spokesman Bulent Tezcan, announced on behalf of the party, that “we are ready for the elections. We are as ready as if they would be held tomorrow” (TRT World, 2018, para 4).

The 2018 electoral battle witnessed a new promising player, the IYI party. The party was established in late 2017 mostly of MHP and CHP defectors. The party’s ideology focuses on Turkish nationalism and Kemalism, and is critical of Erdogan. The party’s founder, Meral Aksener, announced that they will be contesting the elections in opposition to the ruling AKP and that the “IYI Party is the most-ready party for the elections” (TRT World, 2018, para 8). For the first time in Turkey’s history the parliamentary and the presidential elections were to take place on the same day. Both the AKP and the IYI party nominated their respective party leaders, Erdogan and Aksener, as their candidates for the presidential race. The HDP nominated its former co-chair Demirtas (Hurriyet Daily News, 2018). The CHP nominated an MP, Muharrem Ince, as a result of an internal power struggle between the current chairperson and Ince. The MHP did not nominate anyone for the presidency, and supported the AKP candidate.

4.6.2 Slogans

The HDP's electoral slogan for the 2018 general elections was "Senle Degisir" (pronounced Senleh Deyishir), which translates into "It Changes with You". Capitalizing on the harsh economic situation, the devaluation of the Turkish currency, and the increasing consolidation of power by the Erdogan regime, the HDP's slogan promised people that the situation can change, and will change, based on how they vote, thus the slogan "it changes with you." The campaign aimed to give voters agency and power in shaping the country's fate and future. As every vote counts, everyone has the capacity to change the system.

As for the presidential elections, the HDP adopted "Yurttas, Yoldas, Arkadas, Demirtas" as a slogan for the campaign of its presidential candidate, Selahattin Demirtas. The slogan has three adjectives for Demirtas. The first is Yurttas, which means citizen. The slogan suggests that Demirtas, although imprisoned, has rights as a citizen of Turkey, and that voters should not forget that. The second is Yoldas, which means comrade. A comrade is someone who shares a political vision with the rest of the particular group. The slogan suggests that Demirtas is that comrade, without naming the particular category to which they are referring to. The third adjective is Arkadas, which means friend. The slogan suggests that Demirtas is their friend. A friend is there to help and support. Demirtas is everyone's friend. Nevertheless, most electoral ads and banners did not separate the twin elections and viewed it as one struggle to save the system from a dictatorship. Most HDP materials included the phrase "Bir Oy HDP'ye, Bir Oy Demirtas'a", meaning a vote for the HDP, and a vote for Demirtas. The propaganda guided voters on how to cast their vote in both elections.

4.6.3 Songs

The HDP's official election song was called "Senle Degisir" (It changes with you), like their election slogan. The song, being simple, short and catchy, found wide acceptance among the population. The song begins by claiming everything can change. The wind, the world, life, destiny, and, most importantly, the country can change, all in a day – which is E-day. The song continues to say that Demirtas's air can change (referring to his prison cell, as he'll be released if the ruling party changes), it also claims that the HDP's share can change (referring to the party's share in the parliament), all in a day, on election day. The chorus sings, repeatedly, "it changes with you, it changes with you".

An unofficial song in Turkish prepared by the HDP's close circle found great popularity on social media. It is entitled "Gule Gule" (Bye Bye). The song hints at Erdogan without naming him, and as the title suggests, they bid him farewell. The song aims at fighting Erdogan's image as invincible 'Sultan' and presents him as a thug and dictator. The song is basically a message sung in four languages: Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian and Arabic. For the first time in modern Turkish history, an electoral campaign song was performed in Armenian and Arabic. The HDP was able to return the languages of the native peoples of the land, of what once was the Ottoman Empire. The lyrics of the song roughly translate as:

"You destroyed, you sold off, you stole, it's enough already!
A day like this, a day like that, you are confused, it's enough already!
We are people, we are millions,
We do not succumb, we cannot be overthrown.
We will not stay silent, we will not forget,
We are here!
We are the hope, we are the faith,
The good days are waiting for us,

While you are voyagers by now, bye bye!”

The song touches upon old grievances of the Kurds and Armenians. Both peoples have been oppressed by consecutive Turkish governments, including the Erdogan government. The once victims, however, in the song, say that they will not forget, and will not stay silent. This very much resembles the slogan of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide, which was ‘I remember, I demand’. As for the millions, they are clearly the Kurds, but also the leftists, and the academics who have all been affected by the “emergency situation” and persecuted. They pledge that they will not be succumbed nor overthrown. They will continue the struggle. The song touches upon the collective memory of both peoples, and how this collective memory shapes identity, and in turn informs actions. Of course, Erdogan did not leave, as the song suggests, but it creates a momentum of hope and possibilities before elections.

Kurdish songs were also utilized throughout the electoral campaign. The HDP released its official Kurdish song for the presidential elections, entitled “Tu Dikari”, which means “you can” or “you are able to” in the Kurdish Kourmanji dialect. A rough translation of the lyrics is as follows:

“The HDP against distortion,
Against injustice,
Against false excuses,
Against forced obligations
The HDP for women, the HDP for you,
The HDP for the youth, for freedom
The HDP for humanity, for soundness, and for life”

The song reiterates the HDP’s stands on fascism, violence and oppression. It reminds the electorate that the HDP is for the youth, for women, for everyone. It will fight injustice and the unjust obligations enforced upon the people in light of the state of

emergency that the AKP government imposed after the failed coup. The HDP promises freedom, empathy and peace. The music video ends with an image of the HDP's presidential candidate, Selahattin Demirtas, holding a white dove in his hand as a token for peace.

The HDP also endorsed an electoral song in Kurdish composed by the women of the Mesopotamia Cultural Center (MKM). Entitled "Hatin Hatin", or 'they come' in Kurdish, the song's chorus sings:

"They come, here they come,
The candidates of the people come,
For a free life [...]
The candidates of the HDP come".

The music video is made by women and for women. The song is composed for the HDP's female candidates, who are featured continuously in the video. Images of women dancing, singing, riding horses, farming, conducting meetings and even protesting are the main features of the video. Women holding the HDP flag and other flags are also featured. The song presents the HDP's candidates as the candidates of the people, unlike the candidates of the establishment.

4.6.4 Speeches

This segment will mostly focus on the speeches and writings of the HDP's jailed presidential candidate and former co-chair Selahattin Demirtas. For the first time in Turkey's history, a jailed citizen ran for the country's highest seat. Demirtas's opinion piece for *The New York Times* entitled "I Am Running for President in Turkey. From

My Prison Cell” went viral. Demirtas describes the maximum-security prison in which he is jailed and the unfair situation in which he is forced to campaign.

“After my arrest, I was not allowed a courtroom hearing for more than a year. My prosecution has been unjust. My arrest was a political decision. I remain a political hostage”, Demirtas explains (Demirtas, 2018, para 8).

“Mr. Erdogan sought to punish the Kurds, who robbed his party of its parliamentary majority, and to consolidate the nationalist vote” (Demirtas, 2018, para 16). Demirtas, however, goes further and claims that it is not just Kurds who are targeted by the Erdogan, but anyone who opposes him. “What was limited to the Kurds has become the norm for Mr. Erdogan’s opponents elsewhere too.” (para 23). He thus calls on the peoples of Turkey to unite in face of the AKP oppressive regime. “The only hope for a liberal, democratic future lies in our coming together to defeat the authoritarian regime” (para 23). Collective action is a core feature of HDP’s discourse.

The HDP’s candidate confirms that the HDP is confident of crossing the undemocratic threshold to enter Parliament, but warns that “if we fail to get 10 percent of the vote, around 80 of our parliamentary seats will go to Mr. Erdogan’s party, which would deliver him a comfortable majority” (Demirtas, 2018, para 19). It reminds voters of the importance of voting for the HDP and presents the worst-case scenario of how Erdogan benefits if the HDP loses. Nevertheless, his opinion pieces are mostly targeting foreign governments and the international community’s public opinion. Demirtas’s reach with the Turkish electorate was much more limited. He needed to resort to creative ways to transmit his messages.

Demirtas is allowed a 10-minute phone conversation with his family every 15 days. On June 6, he used his right to a phone call not to talk to his daughters, but rather

to speak with the Turkish public. He launched a phone rally from his prison cell. In his phone speech, Demirtas referred to Turkey as an open prison and called upon everyone to join efforts to change the system.

“Now is not the time to be defeated or fearful. We can solve all the problems of our country through peace, solidarity and unity. Without demonizing, marginalizing or hampering any citizen, we will become a unified country” (Demirtas, 2018, para 10).

He stated that the HDP is for all ethnic, sectarian and sexual groups, not just a particular group, and labeled Turkey as a joint homeland for all peoples. This is a clear reflection of the HDP’s multi-ethnic constructed identity.

“We will not divide up people on basis of their political party, identity, sect, or gender. [...] If the state is our state, if the country is our joint homeland, then it is our duty to create a governance system that treats everyone in fair and equal manner (Demirtas, 2018, para 11).

Demirtas went further and explained that the HDP will be inclusive and will treat everyone equally.

“No one should feel like a step-child. In order to prevent anyone from experiencing discrimination, we are going to implement policies to embrace all 81 million citizens” (Demirtas, 2018, para 12).

Demirtas concluded his phone call by naming the different ethnicities, religious and socioeconomic groups that he claims to represent.

“I am here within four walls, but I know that thousands of Demirtaş’ are out in fields, on farms, picking hazelnuts. Demirtaş is in the mine, in the factory. He is in class, at university, on the ground. Demirtaş is on construction sites, on strikes, in protests. He is the fired, he is the unemployed, the poor. He is the youth, the woman and the child. He is Turkish, Kurdish, Circassian, Pomak, Bosnian. He is Alevi, Sunni, but he is still hopeful and vigorous. Demirtaş is the halay, govend, horon.” (Demirtas, 2018, para 14).

On June 17, a few days before election day, Demirtas gave a long-awaited TV speech on the national broadcaster, TRT, from his prison cell. The HDP had set up a giant screen in Diyarbakir where thousands of HDP supporters gathered to listen to what Demirtas had to say. Demirtas surprised everyone with his performance. He appeared to the public as a strong, resilient and promising leader. He utilized his charisma to mobilize masses in favor of the HDP and spread a discourse of victory. The below extract of his speech reflects his resilience.

“Do not worry about me. As long as you are well, I shall be well. As long as you are free, I shall be free. Even if they keep me in this cell for [...] 20 years, I will not submit to this tyranny. For peace, for democracy and freedoms, I will continue my resistance here for your sake. Those who think they can scare us with prison, with cells, with death, have become fearful of their own shadows. Let us [...] walk hand in hand towards sunny, bright days”.

Further in his speech, Demirtas referenced the HDP’s multi-ethnic constructed identity by explaining that

“We [the HDP] are Kurds and Turks, women and men, Alevis and Sunnis, but above all: we are human. We are not superior to one another. Our anger is only directed at tyranny” (Demirtas, 2018, para 19)

Demirtas reiterated that the HDP is not just a Kurdish party, but rather a party for all of Turkey’s ethnicities and religious categories. Most importantly, the HDP conveyed a message of equality. It aimed to confront the nationalist discourse and explain that the struggle of the Kurds is not to become superior to the Turkish race, but rather ask for equality in rights and treatment.

Demirtas concluded his speech by the paragraph below, which reminds listeners of the HDP’s multi-ethnic identity:

“We were Joseph in the well,
Hussein in Karbala.
Our name is Ahmet Kaya in exile,
Yılmaz Güney in prison.”

The characters Demirtas used in his speech wins the empathy of different communities. Joseph is a Biblical character who was dropped in a well and sold by his brothers as a slave. Joseph eventually became a powerful authority in Egypt and forgave his brothers for their mistreatment. The Jews also share Joseph's story. By referencing Hussein in Karbala, who is a central theme in Shia history, literature and theology, Demirtas recognizes Turkey's Alevi and Shia communities as one of his own. Demirtas also referenced two Kurdish celebrities: Ahmet Kaya and Yilmaz Guney. Kaya, who won Turkey's Musician of the Year award in 1999, used his winning speech to announce that he is a Kurd, not a Turk, and wanted to sing in his native language, Kurdish. The attendees, including celebrities, did not accept his confession and insulted him with names and boos, throwing forks and knives at him and his family. As for Guney, he is a film director from the Zaza ethnic minority, who won the Palme d'Or at the 1982 Cannes Film Festival for his movie 'Yol' about Turkey. Guney was imprisoned a few times, and was able to escape from his cell and seek refuge in France. He was stripped of his Turkish citizenship in 1982.

4.6.5 Results

This section will first present the results of the general elections and then move to analyze the presidential ones. The HDP, despite the harsh and unfair situations in which it was campaigning, was able to pass the 10% threshold, again, and garnered 11.7% of the votes. The HDP received a total of 5,866,309 votes, an increase of about 718,000 votes since the last election in November 2015. Thus, 67 seats from a 600-seat chamber were allocated to the HDP. The ruling AKP garnered 42.6% (295 seats), the

CHP received 22.6% (146 seats), and the MHP received 11.1% (49 seats). The IYI party was also able to enter Parliament by garnering exactly 10% of the total votes (43 seats). The HDP is thus the third largest party in the Turkish parliament. It scored first place in the South-East provinces of Iğdir, Ağrı, Van, Hakkari, Muş, Siirt, Şırnak, Tunceli, Diyarbakır, Mardin, and Batman. It came in second place in the provinces of Bitlis, Bingöl, Sanliurfa, and Kars. The HDP was Istanbul's third most popular party.

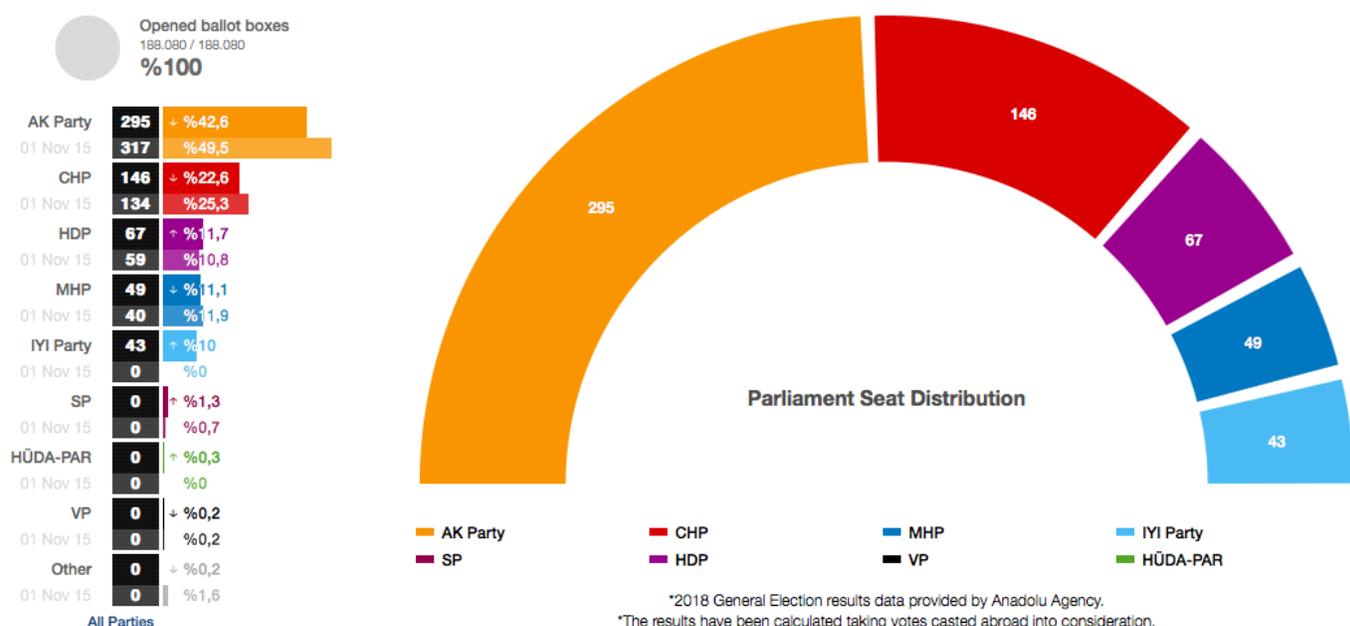


Figure 6 - Election results and distribution of seats in June 2018. Source: yenisafak.com

As for the presidential results, the AKP's candidate Recep Tayyip Erdogan received 52.6% of the votes. The CHP candidate Muharrem İnce received 30.6%. The HDP's candidate Demirtaş received 8.4%, and the IYI candidate Meral Akşener received 7.3%. The MHP did not have a candidate and supported Erdogan's candidacy. Erdogan thus took over the country's presidency which by now moved to be an executive presidency with the constitutional changes initiated by the AKP.

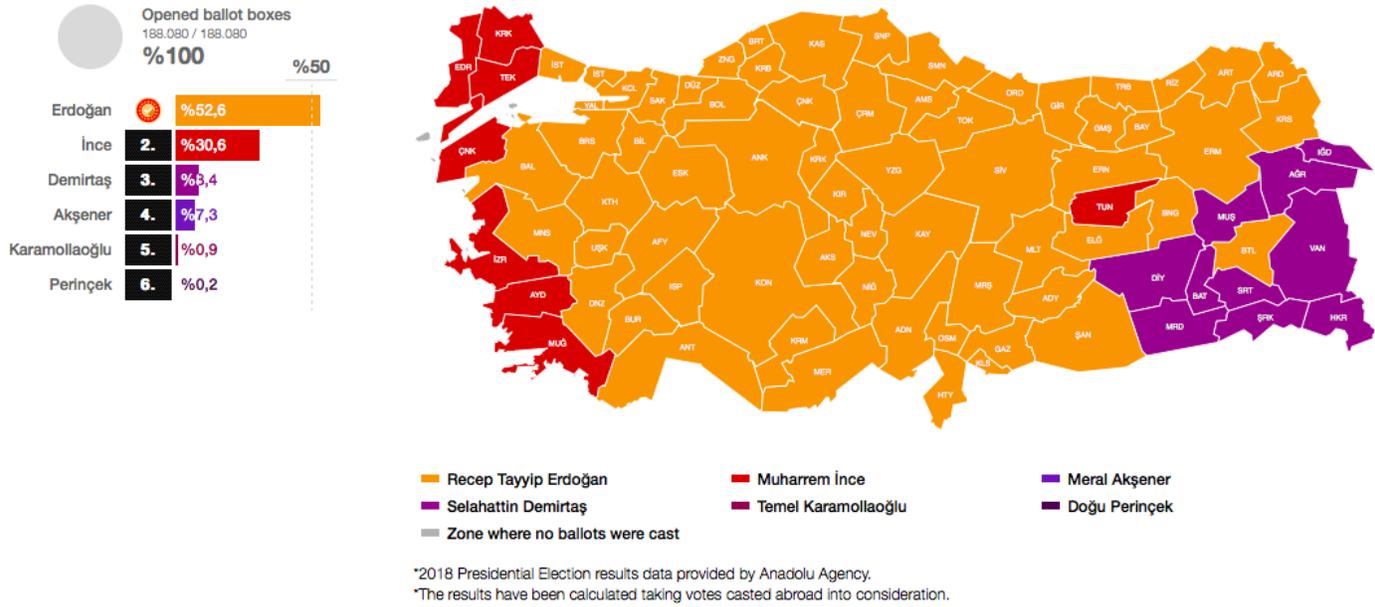


Figure 7 - Presidential election results and leading candidate per province in June 2018. Source: yenisafak.com

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the election conduct of the HDP. It analyzed the election slogan, campaigns songs, ads/music videos, and the official speeches of the HDP leadership and the results of the June and November 2015 general elections and the June 2018 general and presidential twin elections. The HDP, despite all odds and the pressures exerted upon it, was able to pass the 10% threshold and enter the Grand Assembly during all three parliamentary elections, garnering 13.12%, 10.75%, and 11.75% of the total votes, respectively. In every election, it launched a creative campaign throughout the country that reflected the social and political situation in which they led the electoral battle. The findings of the content analysis of those campaigns revealed that the HDP remained loyal to its multi-ethnic identity and

discourse. Ethnic and linguistic diversity, women and youth empowerment, peace and democracy were recurring themes throughout election songs, ads and speeches. The HDP was able to put its multi-ethnicity into action. Alongside the official Turkish language, the usage of the Kurdish language in campaigning more than any other language does not come as a surprise as the majority of its roughly 6 million votes came from the Kurdish ethnic group. Nevertheless, the HDP's main discourse, before and after the elections, during times of conflict and peace, remained balanced and inclusive. The HDP was up to the challenge of representing all of Turkey's ethnic and religious groups, alongside the Kurdish one. Whether or not the HDP will be able to consolidate its multiethnic identity and appeal remains an open question, however. The next, and last, chapter summarizes this work's main arguments and spells out its theoretical and policy implications.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

5 Conclusion

The study of identity continues to attract research in the field of social and political sciences, often analyzed through the lenses of three classical schools of thought: primordialism, institutionalism, and constructivism. This thesis adopted the constructivist view as it treats identity as a malleable, negotiable, social construct rather than a fixed concept. The study of ethnic identity in a constructivist discourse portrays the many added values and explanatory features of the constructivist approach. Kanchan Chandra's differentiation between nominal identity (the identity in which an individual or group is born into) and activated identity (the identity in which an individual or group chooses to profess in) is one example of the approach's usefulness, and very central to the argument and methodology adopted by this thesis. In fact, this thesis studied a very niche aspect of ethnic identity in the context of Turkey, where a range of ethnicities and peoples such as the Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Greeks and others exist, but the state has adopted a very strict understanding of Turkish nationalism and national myth of unity. The identity and activities of the HDP, a predominantly Kurdish political party in Turkey, was put under the microscope throughout the thesis. While the ruling regime in Ankara, the majority of the Turkish population, and most local and international media refer to it as a Kurdish or pro-Kurdish party, sometimes even the

political wing of the outlawed PKK, the party viewed itself as a party for all of Turkey's peoples and ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. Thus, the HDP chose to profess in an inclusive, pan-Turkish, activated identity, rather than limit itself to its Kurdish nominal identity. Despite the many attempts to limit the HDP to its Kurdish identity, it proved to be more than that. Time and time again, as chapters three and four of this thesis demonstrated, the HDP was able to communicate its activated identity and manifested its multi-ethnic identity in its choice of name, which is inclusive rather than exclusive to a particular group; in its party program, which clearly names more than one ethnicity and marginalized group; in its explicit appeals and issue positions, in the ethnic diversity of its leadership and candidates; in its ability to contest elections nationwide not just in predominantly Kurdish areas; in the multi-ethnic and pro-minority discourse in its electoral campaigns, slogans, songs, and speeches (2015-2018), among others. The theoretical conclusion that follows from this thesis is that identities are social constructs, and that political parties, like individuals, can shape and reshape, negotiate their identity.

It cannot be denied that the majority of the HDP's electoral base, even birthplace, is the Kurdish stronghold. However, this should not overshadow the HDP's systematic attempt, even institutionalized approach, to become a party for all of Turkey's peoples and ethnicities, not just for the Kurds. The study of the HDP's multi-ethnic political experiment reiterated the constructivist notion that individuals, groups, and ethnic categories can construct a new image and belonging of themselves by activating a new identity in which they choose to manifest. This is exactly what the HDP was able to do, while remaining loyal to its ethnic majority. The parliamentary

elections of June and November 2015 and the twin presidential and parliamentary elections of June 2018, were opportunities for the HDP to test its multi-ethnic discourse and multi-ethnic reach. The next such test is the local municipal elections that will take place in a few months.

In the elections and years ahead, the HDP will continue to face an identity dilemma. It will be stuck between two options. On one side of the axis stands the constructed identity of a multi-ethnic political party that works from within the system to represent a collective struggle for a democratic state that treats all peoples and ethnicities equally. On the other side stands the great temptation, even pressure, to act as a political wing of Kurdish political strife in Turkey. Erdogan and the AKP will aim to capitalize on the latter, as witnessed after the June 2015 elections. The more pressure Erdogan's regime exerts on the Kurds in the southeast provinces and in the region, including Iraq and Syria, the more the HDP will be pressured from its own ethnic majority to act as a mouth piece for the Kurds. While it has the complete right to act as such, nevertheless, if the HDP wants to remain loyal to its acclaimed multi-ethnic identity, it has to internalize and solidify its multi-ethnic roots, membership, discourse, platform, appeal, reach, and votes. The HDP's future actions will either verify or refute the assumption of this thesis that constructivism can best explain the HDP's multi-ethnic identity as a reconstruction of an activated ethnic identity, made to stick and persist, rather than being instrumentalized for temporary Kurdish gains and advances.

Nevertheless, this will not be an easy journey and the HDP will not go unchallenged. Its charismatic co-leaders continue to sit behind bars along with several other HDP officials and members of parliament. State-led media continues to negatively

cover its activities and label it as PKK-linked. The military continues to have a big presence in its strongholds. Erdogan's executive presidency continues to oppress any opposition to the AKP and its leader. The fate of the HDP is the fate of Turkey's democracy. The durability of the party, in many ways, is subject to the HDP's ability to continue mobilizing masses, and by remaining loyal to its multi-ethnic constructed identity. The HDP's experiment will continue to serve as a prototype for other similar ethnic strife and struggles. Nonetheless, the HDP is still very much a story in progress. It opens room for further research on the contribution of a party like the HDP to Turkish democracy and diversity in the parliament. It is equally important to study how to maintain and mainstream platforms that allow the solidarity of peoples, and become the collective voice of ethnic, religious, and gender minorities, in a context like Turkey.

It cannot be denied, however, that Turkey's Kurdish issue will remain volatile due to the geopolitics surrounding Turkey, another key topic that deserves further research. The Kurds continue to be a growing force in the Middle East. Kurdish political and military achievements in Syria and Iraq only alarm Ankara. The more the Kurds advance in the region, the more Ankara sees the urge to contain them back home and abroad. Internally speaking, the state of emergency imposed throughout the country, the detention of Kurdish mayors and officials, the closing down of many Kurdish media outlets, and the ongoing war with the PKK is a reflection of that. The Turkish invasion of Syria's Afrin and the targeting of PKK strongholds in Iraq are just some examples of Turkey's readiness to use force outside its borders, to contain its internal ethnic mess. In many ways geopolitics directs the internal peace within Turkey. The Kurdish peace process, for example, was relatively working before the enhanced

and militarized status that the Kurds earned in Syria and Iraq by defeating ISIS and other extremist groups.

Consecutive Turkish nationalist regimes, whether Islamist or secular, will continue to hinder the expansion of the HDP, or whatever that may succeed it, not because they oppose its core values of multiculturalism and coexistence, but because they are not ready to face many of the omitted pages of Turkey's history book. In many ways, the HDP's discourse shakes the foundations and the national myth upon which the republic is formed. The demand for recognition and equality for all of Turkey's peoples is not only about democracy, but also about accountability; the state's accountability to its own people(s). It will pave the way to questioning the very existence of a pure Turkish race. It will raise questions about Turkey's past on the genocide against the Armenians and Assyrians, the massacre of the Greeks, the oppression of the Kurds, the forced assimilation of the different ethnic groups within its newly established borders, and most importantly the state's systematic denial of those incidents and the manufacture of a different narrative. No administration wants to be held accountable for that fiasco. Turkey's only way out, however, is to face its own history.

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