

“It is not Islam that is the biggest challenge facing Turkey today, but rather the rise . . . of an intolerant, extreme form of nationalism.”

## The Ebbing Power of Turkey’s Secularist Elite

JENNY WHITE

Turkey’s July 22, 2007, parliamentary election marked a historic turning point for that nation. The voting gave the ruling Justice and Development Party, known by its Turkish acronym AKP, a stunning mandate to intensify its fundamental makeover of everything from Turkey’s constitution to its culture and legal and economic systems. The AKP achieved its victory despite saber rattling by the secularist Turkish military, which is suspicious of the AKP’s Islamic tendencies and the pious lifestyle of the party’s candidate for president.

Does this mean Turkey has finally turned the corner, as the Turkish columnist Sahin Alpay put it, “from a semi-liberal democracy under bureaucratic tutelage to a truly liberal and pluralist democracy under civilian rule?” What role have secularism and Islam played in forging this new Turkey, and what are the challenges ahead?

### RISE OF THE BLACK TURKS

The AKP split off from the more radically Islamist Welfare Party six years ago and has been shedding its Islamic identity ever since. It now styles itself a conservative democratic party that has no quarrel with secularism. But secularism, to the AKP, is not the same thing as laicism (*laiklik*)—that is, state control of religious institutions and public practice, which has been the leitmotif of Turkish politics since the founding of the republic in 1923. The AKP instead defines secularism as a hands-off principle requiring government to keep an equal distance from all beliefs.

Emblematic of Turkey’s struggle over secularism is a law that forbids wearing headscarves in state institutions, including parliament and universities,

and at official government events. This restriction creates bizarre protocol problems for AKP politicians, who must leave their covered spouses at home. The AKP would like to change the law, but the headscarf ban is a line that cannot yet be crossed. The presence or absence of a headscarf is not simply a matter of religious observance. It has become a symbol of much broader issues in a power struggle between competing segments of the population.

Since the AKP first came to power in 2002 on a wave of popular revulsion against corrupt, ineffectual secular parties, it has initiated a courageous and comprehensive reform program in support of Turkey’s bid to join the European Union. Turkey has been using EU membership requirements as a blueprint to make wholesale changes in its political, economic, and judicial systems, moving ahead despite rumblings from Europe about Turkey’s unsuitability and outright attempts by France and Greek Cyprus to throw a wrench into the accession process.

Sheltering uncertainly under the AKP umbrella are a number of diverse groups—Kurdish rights activists, secular feminists, nongovernmental organizations, and social liberals—with whom the party has opened dialogue. These groups, whose voices were ignored or suppressed by previous secular governments, would never have believed 10 years ago that their champion would turn out to be an offspring of the Islamic movement they had so feared. Indeed, some remain suspicious of the AKP’s motives.

In the July election, the AKP did well in every region of the country, demonstrating that it has become a party that truly represents national interests, not just those of a subset of rural conservatives or migrants to the booming cities. The party’s early association with these populations, however, has stuck, in part because the wives of many AKP politicians wear the headscarf. Since the founding of the republic, secular urbanites have associated

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headscarves with backwardness, rural origin, and an uncivilized lifestyle. The term “Black Turk” has gained currency as derogatory shorthand for these characteristics, as has its opposite—the urban, secular, elite, and intolerant “White Turk.”

Despite the AKP’s centrist and liberal credentials, it is still seen by many as the party of the Black Turks. It is suspected of harboring a secret agenda to impose Islamic law, and is therefore seen as posing a threat to the Westernized lifestyle championed by the republic’s founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and guaranteed by the military, which sees itself as the guardian of Atatürk’s vision.

Both Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and President Abdullah Gül were born on the wrong side of the Kemalist tracks. The two men’s religiosity and the fact that their wives cover are unforgivable sins to White Turks, who consider them Black Turks no matter what their other qualities are. Erdoğan has turned this to his electoral advantage by proudly proclaiming that he is a Black Turk like many of his constituents.

Yet, despite the high-decibel rhetoric, the struggle in Turkey these days is no longer between Islamists and secularists. Rather, it is between rival elites playing a zero-sum game in which the success of one side diminishes the power and wealth of the other. Traditional republican elites who are entrenched in state institutions have been calling the shots for decades, along with senior military officers and monopolistic holding companies that have flourished with state subsidies.

Now, not only has the upstart AKP cornered political power, but the socially conservative majority that makes up the party’s core support has begun to challenge the republicans in economic development and global outlook. Social conservatives have become confident enough to generate a highly visible Muslim cultural renaissance. Women in fashionable Islamic dress now drive sports utility vehicles from their gated communities to upscale shops—and the presidential palace—places that were previously the province of secular elites.

Paradoxically, those touting the superiority of a secular European lifestyle are the least likely to appreciate the introduction of European-inspired liberal values that reduce the power of the military, loosen state control of religious practices and clothing, protect free speech, and expand the rights of

Turkey’s ethnic and religious minorities. Some of the Turkish old guard view minorities such as the Armenian, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish communities as a European fifth column intent on undermining Turkish territorial integrity. Indeed, it is not Islam that is the biggest challenge facing Turkey today, but rather the rise, in both the secularist camp and the general population, of an intolerant, extreme form of nationalism. The danger is not that Turkey will turn east, but that it will turn inward.

## COUP.ORG

In the past half century, the army has intervened four times to replace governments it felt were deviating too far from Atatürk’s vision. The last major military intervention in politics was the so-called “soft coup” of 1997, in which the military-dominated National Security Council, an advisory body to the government, pushed out an Islamist prime minister whom the army suspected of being insufficiently committed to the secular foundation of the state. Since that time the military’s power, over the council and elsewhere, has begun to be reduced in line with EU requirements that a nation’s military be subordinate to its elected government.

But this year Turkey’s military used a surprising new tool to influence politics—its website, [www.tsk.mil.tr](http://www.tsk.mil.tr). On April 27, the parliament voted to put forward the name of then-Foreign Minister Gül to replace Turkey’s strongly secular president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, whose term in office had come to an end. The opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) claimed the vote was invalid because it lacked a quorum. That night the military posted a memorandum on its website that has come to be called the first attempted coup by website, or “cyber coup.” In an unsigned and somewhat coyly worded statement, the army in effect threatened to interfere if the election of Gül went ahead. A subsequent posting called for a social reaction against “forces who act in the guise of democracy and freedom of speech,” leading many to wonder if the army was urging a popular uprising against the government and liberal institutions.

On April 29, nearly 1 million people converged on Caglayan Square in Istanbul to support the generals in defending secularism against the AKP. Other such demonstrations in towns and cities around the country were well attended. Voting,

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however, would show that the broader population did not agree with the demonstrators. In response to the building political crisis, the government announced early elections for July 22. The AKP calculated that its record in office would ensure the party an even larger presence in the parliament and make it politically difficult for the military to counter the wishes of a democratically elected government with a clear mandate. The AKP swept the July election with 47 percent of the vote, gaining 341 of 550 seats in the parliament.

The military may have overplayed its hand. A new generation has come of age with no experience of coups against elected governments (the last such direct coup was in 1980). The younger generation was surprised and disturbed by the military's blatant intervention in the democratic process, and the popular reaction may well have had an impact on the election outcome, as thousands of newly eligible young voters had their say and chose the embattled AKP. (A referendum also was held, on October 21, approving changes to the constitution desired by the AKP to allow the president to be elected by popular vote.) After the July election, the parliament elected Gül as president, with the military grudgingly standing by.

### ECONOMIC MIRACLE?

The AKP's first five years in power have been a resounding success in many ways, especially on the economic front, although the benefits have been unevenly distributed. Turks had long suffered from high unemployment, low wages, and stupendously high inflation. During the AKP's time in office, per capita income has more than doubled (to \$6,000), as has gross domestic product. Inflation has dropped from 30 percent to below 7 percent, and interest rates have fallen from 63 percent to 17 percent. The minimum wage has been doubled.

The promise of stability, along with Turkey's enormous entrepreneurial potential, has begun to attract foreign investment. Many cities and towns in the Turkish heartland of Anatolia are thriving, their capitalist potential unleashed by the country's leap into a liberal economy and its opening to world markets in the 1980s. This economic miracle, more than ideology or religion, explains why so many people voted for the AKP.

The only number that has not budged is the unemployment rate. It continues to hover around 10 percent of the workforce. Privatization of state industries has meant that many workers have lost their jobs. Many of the country's ubiquitous small

shops have begun to disappear, driven out by competition from large chain stores; traditional crafts cannot compete with cheap goods from abroad. Except for large commercial enterprises, agriculture is in decline. More than two-thirds of Turkey's population is now urban, crowding into megacities like Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara.

The government has tried to offset the pain of job losses by beefing up retirement benefits and social assistance programs and distributing free schoolbooks, coal for heating, and other necessities. And the AKP remains in any case the party of choice for the Black Turks, reflecting both their conservatism and their aspirations. The highly visible success of politicians and business owners from the wrong side of the tracks offers those still struggling a sense of future possibility.

There is also an enormous regional disparity between Turkey's western and eastern provinces. The southeast Anatolian region bordering Iran, Iraq, and Syria is inhabited primarily by Kurds and has some of Turkey's most challenging climate and topography. Vast, inaccessible mountain ranges harbor Kurdish separatists, whose desire for regional independence has been fanned by the Turkish state's position that Kurds in Turkey must give up their ethnic identity and assimilate. Until recently, teaching the Kurdish language or speaking it in public were forbidden. While broadcasts and private classes in Kurdish are now permitted, harassment and arrests continue.

As with many other recent reforms, including those allowing non-Muslim minorities greater freedom to open schools and expand their activities, there is a lag between changes in the laws and the changes' implementation. Some of this is simply inertia, but the rise in Turkish nationalism and anti-minority feeling also has put a brake on liberal practices. Prime Minister Erdogan has suggested that developing the east economically and expanding Kurdish cultural rights would go a long way toward undermining the separatist movement. He may be right. More Kurds in the east supported the AKP in the July election than supported the traditional Kurdish parties.

Over time, Erdogan has purged the more extreme Islamists from his party and surrounded himself with well-traveled, urbane, and highly educated men (and to some extent, women) who cannot be simply cast as White or Black Turks. He has enticed Westernized Turks like his foreign policy adviser, Egemen Bagis, to return from abroad and help him build the party.

Bagis was born in eastern Turkey and educated at Baruch College in New York, where he worked for many years. He served two terms as president of the Federation of Turkish American Associations. He drinks alcohol and his wife does not veil. Now Bagis, along with serving as foreign policy adviser, represents Istanbul in the parliament. A month before the July elections, I asked him about the continuing problems of unemployment and government corruption. He said the government had plans to deal with issues of economic and social justice, but that you cannot do everything at once. "Phase one was developing the economy. Phase two is trickle down." He quoted Erdogan as promising "first development, then justice."

## WOMEN'S PLACE

Another success story has been recent changes in the legal position of women in Turkish society. In the first decade after the republic was founded, Atatürk pushed through reforms that granted Turkish women equality and the right to vote long before European nations did so. He encouraged a select group of urban elite women to unveil and pursue education and professional careers as doctors, lawyers, judges, and even pilots. Later generations of Kemalist women, such as the ones recently demonstrating in Caglayan Square in support of the generals, organized to safeguard this legacy against the dangers of resurgent Islam, even if that meant supporting an authoritarian over a democratic regime.

Women outside the urban centers saw little benefit from these reforms, however, and Turkey's civil law continued to discriminate against women. For instance, while women were free to pursue careers, they still needed their husbands' permission to work. In the 1980s, women's groups began to organize sustained, professional campaigns to change the civil code, but met with little success until the AKP came to power. The new crop of liberal feminists was interested in pursuing individual rights, rather than protecting the state's legacy—a legacy in which women's rights were bound up with Kemalist ideology and women had to espouse a secular lifestyle to be considered emancipated. Islamic women's organizations also pushed for reforms. In the 1990s, riding the success of their movement, women who covered their heads began to claim a place in Turkey's social, economic, and political life. The AKP

came to power in 2002 partly on a wave of support from these conservative women.

Since then, a new civil code has reformed employment law and marital rights. Spouses have become equal partners, with the same rights over decision-making, children, and property. A new penal code treats sex crimes as violations of individual women's rights, rather than as crimes against families or public morality. Rape in marriage has been criminalized. Judges may no longer hand down reduced sentences for honor killings. Nevertheless, a European agency noted recently that across Turkey there are still judges and prosecutors unaware of the changes in the law. Popular attitudes, moreover, will take time to change. In a recent international study, Turkey ranked 105th of 115 countries in equality between men and women.

Despite the lag in implementation of reforms, Turkey's sprint toward a liberal, pluralist democracy seems well under way. In June, Erdogan asked

Ergun Özbudun, a liberal and highly esteemed constitutional lawyer and professor, to form a group of experts to draft a replacement for the 1982 constitution, which was drawn up by the military after the

1980 coup. The new constitution is to be "civilian" and "democratic." It is to enshrine the primacy of parliamentary government and guarantee the basic rights and freedoms of citizens, which have been severely limited in the past.

A draft was leaked to the media, causing a predictable furor. Kemalists accused the AKP of planning to use the new constitution to dismantle the secular regime and turn Turkey into another Malaysia. In addition, more than 80 women's groups joined together to protest the elimination of a clause that ensures equality for women, a clause they had fought hard to incorporate into the present constitution. The new draft replaces that with a description of women, along with children, the elderly, and the infirm, as a vulnerable group needing special protection. The protest by women's rights activists offers evidence of the tension within the AKP between its liberal intentions and its conservative base, but it also underscores the vibrancy of the debate.

## THE KURDISH CONUNDRUM

One of the most vexing challenges faced by the government has been taming the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), whose decades-long war

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against the Turkish state has cost around 37,000 lives. In recent years the PKK has been using bases across the border in Iraq to stage attacks inside Turkey. More than 200 Turkish soldiers and security officers have been killed this year, 30 in the first week of October alone. Dozens of Kurdish and non-Kurdish civilians have been killed, some targeted by the PKK as suspected collaborators, others victims of mines, bombings, or crossfire.

Popular and media pressure after the loss of life in October spurred the parliament to authorize cross-border raids into northern Iraq, something the government had been loath to do. For months, the military had repeatedly and publicly asked for authorization. But the government resisted, arguing that the Kurdish problem should be addressed first on the Turkish side of the border, through regional development and targeted action by special forces.

The recent escalation in PKK violence, however, has put the government between a rock and a hard place. Refusing to give the military the go-ahead to respond would have made the AKP look soft on terror. On the other hand, if diplomatic efforts fail to push either the Iraqi government or the United States (and its proxy, the Iraqi Kurds) to act against the PKK, the Turkish military will cross the border and in so doing unleash destructive forces both in Iraq and within Turkey.

Incursions would further damage Turkey's relations with the United States and the EU. They could also set off a regional conflict between Turkey (a NATO country) and the Iraqi Kurds, whom Turkey accuses of aiding the PKK. In a domino effect, other players in the region such as Iran might launch their own incursions. Within Turkey, a military operation and the resulting casualties would fuel both Kurdish resentment and anti-minority nationalism, while undermining the government's liberal program.

The Kurdish problem has had a powerful effect on US-Turkey relations. A recent poll by the German Marshall Fund found that only 11 percent of Turks have positive views of the United States—a precipitous drop in a country that once was friendly to America. One of the main factors in the extraordinary growth of anti-US sentiment has been America's unwillingness to pressure its ally Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, to stop the PKK from crossing into Turkey. Among Turks, this apparent disregard of Turkey's own terrorism problem seems an unforgivable act on the part of a close ally that has asked a great deal of Turkey in recent years to address its own security needs.

Some suspect the United States' attitude is payback for Turkey's refusal to allow the US military to invade Iraq from its soil, but it may be based on something more prosaic: oil. The Kurds want oil-rich Kirkuk for themselves, and to that end have been driving Arabs and Turkmen from the city in preparation for a referendum on its status. If the United States in the future sets up bases in Iraqi Kurdistan, as seems likely, having the oil wells in Barzani's hands rather than those of an unstable Iraqi regime might seem to America the better bet.

The region at the moment resembles a smoke-wreathed room full of serious, deep-pocketed poker players, prepared to ante up the fates of whole populations in the high-stakes game that Iraq has become. In the meantime, the Turkish military continues to mass troops and equipment along the Iraqi border. Among Turks, alienation and bitterness toward the United States flourish.

## MUSLIM POWER

Feeling abandoned by the United States and rejected by Europe, Turkey has been strengthening its economic and political ties with other countries in the region. It maintains relatively good relations with Iran, which has been helping Turkey control the PKK in northern Iraq. (Iran has its own Kurdish problem, so mutual support makes sense.) Turkey also has strengthened its ties with Russia. The two countries dominate the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Force, established in 2001, and the slightly older Black Sea Economic Cooperation Pact, establishing de facto Russian-Turkish leadership in the region.

With its oil and gas pipelines, ports, and location astride the Bosphorus Strait—through which tankers bring oil from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean—Turkey has become a major “energy bridge” linking the Caspian region, the Middle East, and Europe. This increases Turkey's strategic value, but is a potential source of friction with Russia, because the Turkish routes allow Caspian oil to bypass Russian territory.

Meanwhile, the government in Ankara is playing its Muslim card by offering to mediate in Middle Eastern disputes. It is also investing in, and establishing business ties with, a number of countries around the region, including Israel. It is even doing business in Iraqi Kurdistan, despite tense relations with Barzani over the PKK. The fact that an openly Muslim party won an election in Turkey and was allowed to take office has sparked enormous interest in the Middle East, particularly among Islamic

resistance movements such as Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. Governments in the region, on the other hand, are more likely to see AKP successes—and Turkey's attempts to mediate in the region as a Muslim power—as encouragement to their own Islamic movements and a threat to their stability. None of these regimes welcome free democratic elections like Turkey's.

It makes the Americans uncomfortable to see Turkey cozying up to Iran and Russia. These strengthening relationships are seen in Washington as another worrisome sign that a liberal, democratic Turkey is not the same as a pro-US Turkey. The closer Turkey positions itself to the EU, moreover, the more it will adopt EU policies that are at cross purposes with those of the United States. Some in Washington miss the days of close cooperation with Turkey's previous governments, which were more under the sway of the military.

A US military officer acknowledged in a recent conversation that, while the top Turkish brass might be considered “disappointed friends” vis-à-vis Washington and its policies in the region, some lower-ranking officers feel outright hostility toward the Americans. This lends an additional element of unpredictability to events in Turkey. Many remember that the 1960 coup was led by lower-ranking officers over the objections of the generals.

## THE DEEP STATE

Some aspects of Turkey's relations with the West can be attributed to a deep-rooted autarchic impulse, a sense of exceptionalism. This attitude not only leads to independent-mindedness, but also encourages a distrust of foreign intentions, ambivalence toward the world economy and privatization, and a Gaulist pursuit of narrowly focused national interest. The Turks led a world-class empire for 500 years, one that was dismembered by European powers in the early twentieth century—not very long ago in popular memory. Distrust of foreign powers remains strong.

Turkish nationalism today has three strains: the AKP's neo-Ottomanism, Kemalist secularism, and ethno-racism. The most benign is the AKP's effort to expand Turkey's sphere of influence in the lands of its former empire. The most conflicted nationalists are the Kemalist secularists, including the military, who support Westernization but are wary of the

consequences of letting go the reins of authoritarian democracy. After all, as they argue with some justification, if the military had not brought to heel the more radical Islamist parties that preceded the AKP, that moderate party would not likely be the dominant Muslim party in Turkey today. Islamist politicians have learned to be careful so as not to be ousted or put in jail, but that does not mean, from the Kemalist viewpoint, that their intentions are to be trusted. Kemalist secularists fear that a civilian constitution that muzzles the army and gives minority ethnic claims a voice will make Turkey vulnerable to a return of radical Islam and a renewed dismantling of its territory.

The most disturbing development in recent years has been the spread of an extremist and sometimes violent form of nationalism based on Turkish ethnic identity and blood. On January 19, 2007, the Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink was shot dead in front of his office in Istanbul. A teenager from Trabzon claimed he killed Dink

because he had insulted Turkish blood. Dink had been found guilty in October 2005 of “insulting Turkishness” under the infamous Article 301 of Turkey's penal code. The

prosecution of Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk on the same charges in 2005 drew considerable international attention, but last year alone, more than 50 new cases were brought against writers and activists under Article 301. The real aim of these prosecutions has been to harass and intimidate writers, keep them tied up in hearings lasting months, undermine them financially, and terrify them with increasingly violent attacks by far-right agitators. Bodyguards have become a must-have accessory in literary circles. After Pamuk's case was dropped, he moved to New York.

Dink was convicted under Article 301 for using language in one of his newspaper columns that, according to prosecutors, implied that Turkish blood was “dirty.” Dink appealed on the basis that the article said no such thing and, to the contrary, was aimed at improving Armenian-Turkish relations. His appeal was denied, even though the chief prosecutor's office at the Appeals Court agreed that the remarks were not insulting. Like others prosecuted under this law, including those whose charges have been dropped, Dink was convicted in the street. He was greeted outside the courthouse by a violent mob and began receiv-

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ing death threats. After his murder, thousands of Turks participated in demonstrations, holding signs that said “We are brothers” in Turkish, English, and Armenian. But photos also appeared in which grinning police officers posed in front of a Turkish flag with Dink’s accused killer. His ongoing trial has opened a Pandora’s box of further revelations. A recently released taped conversation seems to confirm that the plot to kill Dink was known to police beforehand and that a wider conspiracy was involved. Meanwhile, important evidence has disappeared.

Links have been found between a group of former military officers and suspects implicated in Dink’s murder and in several other political murders over the past year. The alliance between Kemalist extremists and ultranationalists who are suspicious of religious and ethnic minorities runs deep. In the 1990s evidence emerged of something Turks call the “deep state,” a mysterious group of conspirators with connections high in the state and military bureaucracies. They are said to have funded and protected groups—including some espousing radical Islamism—that killed Kurdish leaders, leftist intellectuals, journalists, judges, and other broadly defined “enemies of the state.”

## A NEW MANDATE

The AKP government has broken a host of twentieth-century taboos: Kurds have been allowed to broadcast in their own language; religious minorities are allowed to establish institutions and maintain properties; an international scholarly conference to discuss the Armenian massacres received government support; and the government agreed to negotiate on divided Cyprus. All of this has triggered a nationalist backlash. The radicalization of Turkish nationalism is given oxygen by continuing PKK attacks from northern Iraq with no US interdiction; by the perceived US support for an independent, oil-rich Kurdistan on Turkey’s border; by the EU’s increasingly apparent reluctance to allow Turkey’s accession to the union; and by the EU’s refusal to recognize northern Cyprus despite concessions by Turkey.

Also boosting jingoism among Turks is the perennial Armenian Genocide Resolution in the US Congress. The resolution condemning the Ottoman Empire’s 1915 massacre of Armenians was approved this year by a US House committee but has been losing support as members of Congress belatedly realize that major American interests are at stake. Passage of the resolution would endanger Turk-

ish cooperation essential for resupplying troops in Iraq, for eventually withdrawing the troops, and for bombing Iranian nuclear sites. It would also raise nationalism to a fever pitch in Turkey, potentially destabilizing the AKP government.

In his post-election speech, Erdogan recommitted his country to the path of liberal reform and EU membership. Now Turkey’s military establishment, which sees itself as the guardian of Atatürk’s dream of a Westernized Turkey, must decide whether the project of joining the West (in the form of eventual EU membership, or establishing an EU-style liberal democracy) will safeguard Turkey’s national identity and secular lifestyle to the extent that the military can permit itself to be slowly shorn of power. Anyone witnessing some EU countries’ internal convulsions about the role of religion and minorities in public life, and the possible loss of national sovereignty and identity, can well understand the Turkish military’s reluctance to take the dream of Westernization to its conclusion. The military faces this dilemma: While its past interventions had a moderating effect on the country’s formerly more radical Islamist movement, the resulting moderate Muslim regime is now remaking the Turkish state and society in such a way that, in the near future, the military’s power to shape events will be compromised.

What is most frightening to Turkey’s old elite is the AKP’s increasing ability to occupy the political center, where the interests of most Turkish voters lie. A popular and centrist AKP, devoted to liberal values, is a much greater threat to the secularist, Westernized, but essentially illiberal establishment than an AKP harboring a secret Islamist agenda. The AKP has been successful where the old guard has not been, at least not since the 1980s—in uniting Turkey’s fractious political field from a position in the moderate middle. The establishment’s response to the AKP’s success has been to spread fear that secularist lifestyles are in danger and the nation is being undermined by foreign powers. This has emboldened extreme nationalists to attack liberal voices, and in the pre-election period forced the AKP to try to prove it is as nationalist as its opponents.

Following this summer’s election, however, the government has gained a strong new mandate that bolsters its efforts for reform and, it can be hoped, makes it relatively immune from nationalist manipulation. Whether or not the military will continue to stand by remains an open question. ■