

The Resurgence of CHP and the Erosion of AKP Hegemony: A Strategic Analysis of Türkiye's 2028 Electoral Landscape

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Abstract

Since the early 2000s, Türkiye's Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) maintained electoral hegemony through a combination of economic growth, institutional restructuring, and political narrative control. However, by the mid-2020s, deepening macroeconomic deterioration, institutional erosion, allegations of corruption, policy mismanagement, and growing geopolitical tensions reshaped the country's internal political equilibrium. Concurrently, the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) achieved renewed national credibility via effective municipal governance and charismatic leaders, most notably Ekrem İmamoğlu and Mansur Yavaş. Drawing from economic data, institutional analyses, political science frameworks, and cross-national comparisons, this paper argues that structural political decay within the AKP and strategic modernization within the CHP converge to make a CHP victory in 2028 not only plausible but increasingly probable.

Keywords: CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi), AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi), Mayoral Pivot, Coalition Building, Democratic Consolidation, Economic Stabilization, Tenderocracy, Social Inclusion, Governance Competence, Electoral Strategy, Conservative Voter Engagement, Digital Political Warfare, Information Operations, Institutional Reform, Post-Erdoğan Transition, Türkiye 2028 National Election

1. Introduction

Türkiye stands at a pivotal juncture in its contemporary political history. Over the past two decades, the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) consolidated an unprecedented degree of executive authority, combining economic growth, identity-based mobilization, and expansive patronage networks to maintain electoral dominance. Yet this long-standing hegemony has begun to show signs of structural erosion. Economic volatility, declining institutional legitimacy, and growing social dissatisfaction have exposed vulnerabilities within the once-monolithic political apparatus. Concurrently, demographic transformations, urbanization trends, and rising political awareness among youth and middle-class constituencies have created new electoral dynamics, challenging conventional assumptions about political loyalty in Türkiye.

Against this backdrop, the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party, CHP) has undergone a remarkable transformation. Historically perceived as a bureaucratic, state-centric formation, the party has evolved into a broad-based, programmatic, and technocratically competent actor capable of bridging ideological divides. Through strategic municipal governance in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and other key urban centers, CHP has demonstrated an ability to deliver tangible public services, uphold transparency,

and engage citizens inclusively, thereby cultivating credibility and trust among previously hesitant constituencies. These local-level successes—coined as the “Mayoral Pivot”—not only signify electoral proficiency but also function as a proof of concept for national governance, offering a scalable model for institutional and economic reform.

This research paper examines the strategic ascent of CHP as a plausible governing alternative and the structural deconsolidation of AKP support in preparation for the 2028 national election. It explores three interrelated dimensions of CHP’s positioning: democratic consolidation, economic orthodoxy, and social inclusion. The analysis situates CHP’s municipal successes, coalition engineering, and digital strategy within a broader framework of political science, electoral psychology, and comparative governance, illustrating how the party has transformed structural weaknesses into opportunities for national advancement.

Furthermore, this study situates Türkiye’s forthcoming election in the context of hybridized information warfare, AI-driven propaganda, and the strategic manipulation of digital ecosystems, arguing that the 2028 contest will be not merely a vote tally but a test of political-technological competence. The paper also assesses CHP’s preparedness for a post-Erdoğan transition, including strategies to reassure conservative constituencies, state institutions, and international stakeholders while maintaining ideological coherence and governing credibility.

Ultimately, this research contends that the 2028 election represents a defining moment for Türkiye’s democratic trajectory. It is both a referendum on AKP’s longstanding governance model and a test of CHP’s capacity to translate municipal success into national legitimacy. By combining programmatic competence, strategic coalition-building, and technologically sophisticated campaigning, CHP has positioned itself as the most viable vehicle for institutional renewal, economic stabilization, and social cohesion in a country grappling with political polarization and systemic uncertainty. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive, empirically grounded, and analytically rigorous roadmap for understanding how CHP’s transformation, strategy, and governance approach could reshape Türkiye’s political landscape in the coming decade.

Part I: The Deepening Crisis of AKP Hegemony

2. Economic Decimation and Mismanagement

2.1 The Shift Away from Orthodox Economics

Beginning in the late 2010s, Türkiye entered a structural economic deterioration that scholars increasingly describe as “state-engineered macro-instability.” A central inflection point was the Turkish government’s systematic departure from the foundational principles of central bank independence and rule-based monetary policy. Although deviations from orthodoxy had periodically surfaced during earlier AKP administrations, the post-2018 period marked an unprecedented consolidation of executive influence over the Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye (CBRT). This transformation was not incremental; rather, it emerged through explicit political directives that subordinated monetary policy to presidential preferences. President Erdoğan’s public articulation of the heterodox causal claim— “faiz sebep, enflasyon netice” (interest rates cause inflation)—became the guiding framework for monetary intervention. Empirical research consistently contradicts this claim, showing that in emerging markets, interest rate tightening generally moderates inflation by stabilizing expectations and attracting capital inflows (Açıkgöz & Develi, 2021; IMF, 2023). However, under the AKP’s political-economic model, interest rate suppression became a fixed policy objective, even as inflation accelerated.

Between 2018 and 2023, Türkiye experienced one of the steepest inflationary spirals in its republican history. According to official data from TÜİK, annual inflation fluctuated between 30 and 85 percent, while independent measurements such as ENAG estimated figures at or above 100 percent during certain months. While debates exist around measurement integrity, the direction and magnitude of the inflation trajectory are generally undisputed.

Currency depreciation accompanied this inflationary environment, reflecting mounting pressure on external balances and investor confidence. The lira's fall—from approximately 4 TRY/USD in early 2018 to beyond 30 TRY/USD by 2024 (CBRT, 2024)—cannot be attributed solely to external shocks or global tightening cycles. Academic econometric analyses (Uygun, 2022) show strong correlations between politically driven rate cuts and subsequent currency sell-offs, establishing a causative pathway wherein policy unpredictability magnified exchange-rate volatility. Time-series regressions demonstrate that each rate cut produced statistically significant downward pressure on the lira within a 72-hour window, accompanied by abnormal volatility in Borsa İstanbul and sovereign bond yields.

Türkiye's risk premium, as measured by five-year credit-default swaps (CDSs), surged to levels characteristic of economies facing imminent repayment stress. In some cycles between 2020 and 2023, CDS levels approached or exceeded 800 basis points—a threshold associated with severe balance-of-payments vulnerabilities (World Bank, 2023). This contributed to capital outflows, reduced foreign portfolio investment, and accelerated “dollarization” among domestic economic actors, with households and firms increasing their USD- and EUR-denominated holdings as a hedge against policy instability.

Moreover, the decline in orthodox policy credibility produced second-order effects. Long-term investment horizons shortened drastically. International credit ratings agencies—Moody's, S&P, and Fitch—downgraded Türkiye multiple times, citing concerns over central bank autonomy, regulatory unpredictability, and structural erosion in macro-governance. The downgrades increased the cost of external borrowing for both public and private sectors, exacerbating rollover risks in foreign currency-denominated debt.

Critically, the weakening of CBRT independence extended beyond interest rates. The central bank engaged in quasi-fiscal interventions—including the use of backdoor currency sales, opaque reserve management practices, and non-transparent swap arrangements with domestic banks and foreign central banks. Analysts have highlighted significant discrepancies between gross and net reserves, with “net reserves ex-swaps” at times falling into deeply negative territory. This signaled that the CBRT was absorbing exchange-rate pressure through administratively engineered liquidity channels rather than sustainable policy tools.

In sum, Türkiye's post-2018 monetary environment constitutes a paradigmatic case of political intervention destabilizing macroeconomic fundamentals. The decline in central bank institutional quality, combined with unorthodox doctrinal commitments, contributed to a cumulative economic downturn that reshaped the electorate's lived reality.

2.2 Crony Capitalism and the Emergence of a Tenderocracy

Parallel to monetary deterioration, Türkiye's economic governance architecture shifted toward increasingly entrenched crony-capitalist dynamics. Scholars define the AKP's model as a hybrid political economy in which state resources are concentrated among a limited number of politically loyal business groups, creating what has been described as a vertically integrated network of political, bureaucratic, and corporate actors (Buğra & Savaşkan, 2020; Sayarı, 2021).

A cornerstone of this system was the centralization of public procurement. Large-scale infrastructure projects—bridges, airports, urban transformation initiatives, and mega-hospital complexes—were

disproportionately awarded to a small cluster of construction conglomerates commonly referred to as the “Beşli Çete” (“Gang of Five”). Public procurement records indicate that these firms secured multi-billion-dollar projects often under tender procedures that lacked competitive transparency, including negotiated tenders and special exemptions (Esen & Gümüüşcü, 2021). In many cases, project costs exceeded international benchmarks, suggesting rent extraction and inflated contract valuation.

The establishment of the Turkey Wealth Fund (TVF) in 2016 further deepened the consolidation of state economic power. The TVF assumed control over major public enterprises—Türk Telekom, Turkish Airlines, BOTAŞ, Ziraat Bank, Halkbank, and others—placing tens of billions of dollars’ worth of national assets under the control of a governance structure directly accountable to the executive branch rather than parliament (OECD, 2022). This arrangement enabled discretionary asset transfers, privatizations, and credit operations without the oversight traditionally expected in a parliamentary democracy.

Furthermore, public–private partnership (PPP) models became a hallmark of AKP economic policy. While PPPs can generate efficient outcomes under certain conditions, Türkiye’s implementation created structural fiscal burdens. Many projects included “guaranteed demand” clauses denominated in foreign currency—meaning that the government was obligated to compensate operators if usage levels (e.g., vehicles on toll bridges, passengers in airports, patients in hospitals) fell below projections. As the lira depreciated, these guarantees ballooned in cost, creating contingent liabilities that contributed to the deterioration of sovereign balance sheets (World Bank, 2022). The fiscal exposure associated with these guarantees now accounts for multi-decade payment obligations that will constrain future governments’ fiscal space.

This system is widely characterized by political economists as a “tenderocracy”—a political order in which wealth accumulation flows primarily through state-mediated tenders rather than through open competition or productivity-driven innovation (Öniş & Kutlay, 2020). The tenderocracy reshaped the national economy’s structure. Capital increasingly flowed toward low-value-added sectors dominated by government contracts, such as construction, while high-value-added manufacturing and technology sectors suffered from underinvestment.

The tenderocracy model also generated significant inequality in bargaining power between politically connected firms and small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). SMEs, historically the backbone of Türkiye’s growth, faced reduced access to credit, limited participation in major tenders, and declining export competitiveness due to currency volatility. Many became functionally dependent on local-level political patronage networks to secure small-scale municipal contracts.

International investors responded to these dynamics with increased caution. Reports from global financial institutions frequently cited concerns over rule-of-law deficiencies, regulatory uncertainty, and favoritism in procurement. These concerns reduced FDI inflows dramatically after 2016, depriving Türkiye of long-term capital that historically contributed to modernization and employment generation.

In effect, Türkiye’s crony-capitalist transformation represents not merely a governance issue but a structural political-economic shift that weakened the country’s growth capacity and institutional integrity. The erosion of economic meritocracy further undermined social trust and created widespread perceptions of systemic unfairness, contributing directly to public disillusionment with the AKP’s management of the economy.

2.3 Impact on Citizens: The Lived Experience of Economic Decline

Macroeconomic volatility and crony-capitalist dynamics converged to generate significant socioeconomic strain for ordinary citizens. Empirical data from TÜİK, academic studies, and international organizations

consistently document worsening household welfare indicators.

Between 2018 and 2024, Türkiye experienced a dramatic decline in real purchasing power, with households losing between 30 and 50 percent of their real income depending on socioeconomic category (Korkut, 2023). Inflation disproportionately affected essential consumption categories—food, housing, transportation, and energy—whose prices increased faster than overall inflation. As lower-income households allocate most of the spending to these categories, inflation had a regressive impact, amplifying inequality.

Housing emerged as one of the most acute pressures. Rent inflation in major metropolitan regions such as Istanbul, Ankara, and İzmir far outpaced wage growth. Young adults increasingly delayed household formation, and a growing share of the population shifted into overcrowded or substandard housing. Homeownership, traditionally a cornerstone of middle-class security, became inaccessible as mortgage rates rose and property prices—driven by speculative investment, foreign demand, and limited supply—skyrocketed.

Türkiye's Gini coefficient reached approximately 0.43 by 2023 (World Bank, 2024), reflecting a sharp deterioration in income equality. The top decile captured a disproportionately large share of economic gains, while lower deciles faced sustained real income erosion. Correspondingly, surveys from Turkish research institutes indicate rising perceptions of economic injustice and declining trust in the government's capacity to manage the economy effectively.

The labor market also experienced structural degradation. Informal employment grew substantially as firms sought to manage rising input costs and declining profitability. Precarious labor conditions expanded across service sectors, logistics, construction, and retail. Meanwhile, the real value of the minimum wage declined despite periodic nominal increases, because inflation outpaced wage adjustments. Workers increasingly took on multiple jobs or supplemented income through informal gig work.

These dynamics collectively undermined the AKP's long-standing claim to economic competence—a key foundation of its electoral success for nearly two decades. From 2002 through the mid-2010s, rapid economic growth, expanding welfare programs, and rising living standards were central to the AKP's image. However, the post-2018 downturn inverted this narrative. For the first time, large segments of AKP's traditional base, including lower-middle-class and conservative provincial voters, experienced tangible declines in quality of life.

Moreover, empirical studies suggest that economic hardship is a significant determinant of shifting political preferences in Türkiye. Public opinion surveys from 2021–2024 show a marked decrease in confidence in AKP economic management, with many former supporters citing cost-of-living pressures as the primary reason for withdrawing support.

Thus, the deterioration in macroeconomic conditions did not remain an abstract policy problem. It permeated everyday life and social realities, fundamentally reshaping the electorate's evaluations of government performance. The political consequences of this economic decline form a central pillar in understanding the erosion of AKP hegemony and the growing viability of opposition forces, particularly the CHP.

3. Corruption, Irregularities, and Deception

3.1 Evidence of Systemic Corruption

The trajectory of Türkiye's governance under the AKP from the mid-2010s onward is marked by a structural, rather than episodic, pattern of corruption vulnerabilities. While isolated scandals characterized

earlier periods, the post-2016 political environment increasingly exhibited features of systemic corruption—wherein institutional guardrails were weakened to the extent that abuses of power became embedded, routinized, and normalized within the state apparatus. This assessment is consistent across multiple classes of sources, including international watchdog organizations, prominent investigative journalism outlets, comparative political economy research, and domestic watchdog bodies (Transparency International, 2023).

One of the clearest indicators of this systemic trajectory is the transformation of public procurement processes. Academic analyses highlight a marked shift away from transparent, competitive tendering toward discretionary and opaque contracting frameworks (Esen & Gümüşcü, 2021). The share of public tenders awarded via open competition declined steadily over the past decade, while the proportion awarded through “negotiated procedures” or via presidential decrees expanded dramatically. Procurement laws were amended repeatedly—over 200 times by some counts—each iteration broadening exceptions and reducing oversight. This legislative fluidity allowed the state to direct contracts toward politically connected firms with minimal public scrutiny.

Zoning and land-use decisions constitute another critical node of corruption vulnerability. The construction sector—politically strategic, labor-intensive, and central to AKP patronage networks—benefited disproportionately from irregular zoning permits, changes to protected land status, and “parsel parsel” (parcel-by-parcel) modifications that increased the speculative value of urban land. Several academic studies document how municipalities under AKP control granted development rights that significantly increased property values for developers closely linked to political elites. These processes often occurred without environmental impact assessments or transparent justification, indicating the presence of politically motivated rent transfers rather than policy-driven urban planning.

Quasi-public institutions, including housing administration agencies, development authorities, and charitable foundations with political affiliations, frequently acted as intermediaries for these transfers. The use of foundations—often with opaque financial reporting obligations—allowed the redirection of public resources into private or partisan hands under the guise of cultural, educational, or welfare activities. These dynamic fits the broader model of “para-state networks,” in which state functions are outsourced to organizations beyond the reach of conventional transparency frameworks.

A central structural factor enabling systemic corruption was the erosion of parliamentary oversight after the 2017 constitutional referendum, which introduced an executive presidential system (Barkey, 2020). The shift significantly weakened the ability of parliament to investigate or constrain executive decision-making. Traditional oversight tools—interpellations, investigative commissions, and audit authorities—lost much of their force, while presidential decrees gained broad legislative power. These changes concentrated authority in the executive branch, reducing horizontal accountability and enabling decisions involving billions of dollars in public expenditure to be executed without transparent deliberation.

Moreover, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) increasingly became vehicles for rent distribution. Appointments to SOE boards often reflected political loyalty rather than technical competence, and these entities—many brought under the Turkey Wealth Fund umbrella—conducted financial transactions with minimal disclosure obligations. Investigative reports identified cases where public assets were sold or leased at below-market value to private firms with well-documented political ties.

Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index documented a sharp decline in Türkiye’s standing over the past decade, with the country falling from the ranks of semi-consolidated democracies toward the profile of hybrid regimes characterized by entrenched patronage and administrative opacity

(Transparency International, 2023). This deterioration is not merely a reputational concern; rather, it illustrates a structural transformation of governance, in which institutional checks are weakened and opportunities for political rent-seeking proliferate.

Overall, the evidence points to a systemic, multi-layered corruption ecosystem in which procurement, zoning, SOEs, foundations, and regulatory discretion operate as coordinated mechanisms of rent distribution. The net effect is a political economy characterized by declining state capacity, weakened institutional integrity, and resource misallocation—conditions that directly contribute to the erosion of public trust in the AKP's governance model.

3.2 Weaponization of the Judiciary and State Institutions

The attempted coup of July 2016 represented a pivotal moment in Türkiye's institutional history. The post-coup purges fundamentally restructured the civil service, judiciary, and military—ostensibly to remove actors affiliated with the Gülen movement, but functionally enabling a sweeping reconfiguration of state institutions that concentrated power in the executive and diminished institutional autonomy.

Over 100,000 civil servants, including judges, prosecutors, military officers, teachers, and technocrats, were dismissed via decree-laws (KHKs) (HRW, 2020). While some removals addressed legitimate security concerns, the scale, speed, and lack of due process led many scholars to conclude that the purges created an opportunity for political consolidation rather than targeted security reform (Bilgin, 2021). Thousands of judicial personnel were removed, hollowing out the judiciary's professional core and enabling the appointment of judges with limited experience but proven political loyalty.

These changes had profound consequences for rule of law and judicial independence. Comparative analyses of Türkiye's judicial system before and after the purges highlight a collapse of institutional autonomy, evidenced by the alignment of prosecutorial decisions with government narratives, selective targeting of opposition figures, and the politicization of high-profile trials. Several cases—including those involving prominent politicians, journalists, academics, and business leaders—demonstrated patterns of pretrial detention, charges based on broad or ambiguous anti-terror provisions, and prosecutorial reliance on evidence widely viewed as insufficient or non-credible by international legal observers.

Regulatory agencies that once functioned as technocratic bodies experienced similar transformations. RTÜK (the media regulator), BDDK (banking authority), SPK (capital markets board), and BTK (communications regulator) exhibited patterns of decision-making closely aligned with executive preferences (Yeşil, 2018). Penalties disproportionately targeted opposition-aligned media and institutions, while pro-government entities were consistently insulated from scrutiny. Such asymmetry indicates not merely regulatory bias but institutional weaponization.

TÜİK (Turkish Statistical Institute), once a respected statistical authority, became a focal point of methodological controversy. Economists and former TÜİK officials highlighted irregularities in inflation calculation methods, basket composition, sampling design, and weighting techniques. These methodological shifts consistently produced inflation rates significantly lower than independent estimates such as ENAG's. While methodological debates in statistics are not uncommon globally, the pattern, direction, and timing of these changes suggest political interference aimed at shaping economic perceptions rather than enhancing statistical rigor.

The weaponization of the judiciary and regulatory institutions served multiple political functions:

1. Suppressing political opposition by criminalizing dissent, fragmenting organizational networks, and generating a climate of uncertainty for critical voices.

2. Securing control over information by shaping media landscapes, restricting access to accurate economic indicators, and suppressing independent oversight mechanisms.
3. Facilitating corruption by weakening investigative and audit bodies that might otherwise expose irregularities.
4. Centralizing decision-making authority within the executive, reducing institutional friction, and accelerating politically motivated economic or administrative actions.

The cumulative effect is a state apparatus that operates less as a neutral administrator of public interest and more as a hierarchical structure embedded within the AKP's broader political project. This structural transformation significantly undermined institutional legitimacy, both domestically and internationally, and contributed to the erosion of trust that forms a key driver of AKP deconsolidation.

3.3 Media Capture and Narrative Control

Media control is a cornerstone of contemporary competitive authoritarian regimes, and Türkiye's experience under the AKP after the 2010s exemplifies this trend. Media capture—defined as the systematic acquisition, co-optation, or coercion of media outlets to shape political narratives—accelerated significantly following the 2013 Gezi protests and the 2016 coup attempt.

By the early 2020s, media ownership had become highly concentrated within conglomerates either directly aligned with, or dependent upon, the ruling party. These conglomerates operate across sectors, including construction, energy, finance, and telecommunications, linking their commercial fortunes to continued political favor. As a result, editorial independence eroded, with news content increasingly structured around the priorities of the government rather than journalistic norms.

Studies of airtime allocation during electoral cycles show a systematic imbalance: state broadcasters and many private networks provided overwhelmingly positive coverage of AKP officials while marginalizing or demonizing opposition figures. Quantitative media monitoring data from both domestic and international observers reported that pro-government candidates received multiple times more coverage—often 20 to 40 times more—compared to opposition leaders during key electoral periods.

Regulatory pressure amplified this imbalance. RTÜK routinely imposed fines, broadcast suspensions, or license threats against independent networks critical of the government. Some channels were forced to close entirely. Investigative journalists faced defamation lawsuits, tax probes, or criminal charges. The legal environment surrounding speech tightened, with vaguely defined anti-terror or disinformation laws enabling broad interpretation by prosecutors.

Digital platforms emerged as a partial counterweight, but these too faced increasing regulation. The 2020 social media law mandated local representatives for major platforms, enabling authorities to demand content removal or data access. The political communication landscape thus shifted from a semi-pluralistic environment in the early AKP era to a more tightly controlled information ecosystem in which the ruling party held significant narrative dominance.

The consequences of media capture extend beyond electoral advantage. Scholars argue that narrative control shapes citizens' perceptions of economic performance, national security, and political alternatives (İncirli & Kaliber, 2023). In Türkiye, pro-government outlets frequently propagated narratives framing economic decline because of foreign conspiracies, currency manipulation, or external actors seeking to undermine national sovereignty. Similarly, opposition leaders were often depicted as untrustworthy, foreign-backed, or insufficiently nationalist.

However, cracks in this information regime emerged as economic hardship intensified. Public trust in mainstream media declined significantly, with audiences shifting toward online platforms, independent

journalists, and municipal media channels controlled by opposition parties. The limitations of narrative management became evident when deteriorating economic realities contradicted official narratives. While media capture slowed the erosion of AKP support, it could not fully counteract the experiential knowledge of citizens living under rising inflation, unemployment, and economic insecurity.

Thus, media capture—while central to the AKP’s efforts to maintain control—ultimately exposed the regime’s vulnerabilities. Overreliance on narrative control created a brittle information environment unable to adapt to reality-based grievances, contributing to the deconsolidation of AKP power and generating space for opposition narratives to take hold.

4. Migration-Related Policies and Electoral Engineering

4.1 Citizenship-for-Investment Policies

Türkiye’s citizenship-by-investment regime, formalized in 2017 and significantly expanded in subsequent years, represents a major pivot in the country’s political economy of migration. Official data indicates that over 200,000 individuals received citizenship through this scheme, primarily via property purchases meeting threshold values set by the government (Ministry of Interior, 2024). While superficially analogous to golden passport programs in EU member states, the Turkish model differs in scale, transparency, and regulatory supervision.

A central analytic concern is the opacity surrounding applicant origin, screening procedures, and geographic distribution of new citizens. Scholars such as Kaya (2022) argue that a weak regulatory environment—combined with rapid procedural turnaround—creates an information asymmetry between state institutions and the public, fueling suspicion of electoral engineering. In contrast to countries where naturalization procedures involve multi-tiered due diligence, Türkiye’s model relies heavily on documentation provided by foreign intermediaries, real estate brokers, and private consultancies. This has produced a fragmented monitoring regime vulnerable to data inconsistencies and rent-seeking.

Politically, the narrative that the program may be used to reshuffle demographic balances—particularly in swing metropolitan districts—has gained traction. Although empirical evidence directly linking naturalized investors to coordinated electoral influence remains limited, perception has become a political variable in its own right. Icduygu (2023) notes that the program’s public image, shaped by opposition parties and independent media, has heightened anxieties around the integrity of voter rolls, especially in Istanbul, Ankara, and Antalya where narrow electoral margins increased sensitivity to even small demographic shifts.

Furthermore, the program intersects with real estate speculation dynamics. Foreign investor demand contributed to housing price inflation in major cities between 2019 and 2023, indirectly placing pressure on local residents and reinforcing anti-government sentiment. Housing has long been a politically salient issue in Türkiye, and rising costs serve to amplify criticism of both migration governance and broader AKP economic management. Thus, while not designed as an electoral tool, the policy has nonetheless generated political spillovers that shape public attitudes, voting behavior, and partisan trust.

4.2 Socioeconomic and Political Strain

Türkiye hosts the world’s largest refugee and irregular migrant population, including Syrians under temporary protection, Afghans, Iraqis, and other regional migrants. Although the humanitarian calculus behind these policies—open-door reception, non-refoulement, and emergency services—received international praise early on, their domestically uneven social and economic consequences have gradually transformed the migration portfolio into an electoral liability.

From a labor-market perspective, the influx of refugees into low-skill sectors created wage compression and displacement effects, particularly in construction, textiles, agriculture, and informal services. Empirical assessments by the World Bank (2022) document localized downward pressure on wages, especially in provinces with high refugee-to-citizen ratios. This disproportionately impacted populations that historically constituted AKP's working-class support base. The resulting grievances were not merely economic but also sociopolitical, feeding perceptions that the government failed to prioritize the needs of Turkish citizens during a period of economic deterioration.

Municipal fiscal strain also became a source of political contention. CHP-led municipalities—especially Istanbul and Ankara—published detailed reports outlining increased budgetary burdens associated with healthcare, sanitation, transportation, and social assistance for refugees. These municipalities argue that central government allocations have not kept pace with demographic realities, forcing local administrations to absorb disproportionate costs. Politically, this narrative enabled the CHP to highlight what it frames as the inefficiencies and externalities of AKP's centralized governance model.

The persistence of informal settlements, overcrowded districts, and service bottlenecks intensified negative perceptions. Sociological surveys reveal rising intergroup tension, partly driven by competition for affordable housing and public assistance. Such dynamics have become fertile ground for opposition political messaging, linking migration mismanagement to broader claims about governmental incompetence and democratic erosion.

4.3 Political Narratives and Electoral Behavior

Migration has evolved from a humanitarian and administrative concern into an issue capable of reshaping Türkiye's electoral geography. The AKP initially framed its migration policies within religious and civilizational discourse—emphasizing solidarity with oppressed Muslim populations—which resonated with conservative constituencies. Over time, however, socioeconomic pressures eroded this solidarity-based framing, giving rise to increasingly negative public sentiment.

Opposition actors, including CHP, İYİ Party, and newly emergent nationalist-conservative parties, have instrumentalized migration as a campaign issue, presenting themselves as custodians of border security, economic protection, and social stability. This realignment reflects broader trends in comparative politics, where migration functions as a high-salience wedge issue capable of mobilizing cross-class dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the AKP's strategy of portraying opposition critiques as xenophobic or destabilizing proved less effective in the face of rising inflation, unemployment, and deteriorating living standards. Public opinion research indicates that voters increasingly perceive migration as intertwined with economic mismanagement, governance deficits, and weakened state capacity.

4.4 Administrative Practices and Electoral Engineering Concerns

Electoral engineering concerns arise not only from citizenship policies but also from issues related to voter registration systems, residency verification, and municipal population transfers. Opposition figures have repeatedly alleged irregularities in district-level population shifts preceding local elections. While many of these claims remain unverified, the opacity of administrative processes and limited independent auditing contribute to persistent suspicion.

Moreover, the presence of large non-citizen populations in major cities shapes demographic calculations even without enfranchisement. Political scientists argue that public perception of demographic change can influence voting behavior, pushing residents toward opposition parties that promise stricter migration control—even if migrants themselves cannot vote. Thus, perceptions of demographic engineering can produce real electoral effects through voters' anticipatory behavior and identity-based anxieties.

4.5 Macro-Political Implications

Overall, migration-related policies have become deeply embedded within Türkiye's domestic political economy. Their consequences extend beyond immediate humanitarian or administrative considerations, influencing:

1. Electoral competition, by reshaping voter preferences and party alignments.
2. Urban governance, by imposing fiscal and infrastructural demands on municipalities.
3. Public trust, by eroding confidence in bureaucratic transparency, demographic data accuracy, and long-term policy planning.
4. Political legitimacy, as opposition parties leverage migration to challenge the government's broader governance narrative.

The cumulative outcome is a politically charged environment in which migration functions as a multidimensional stressor—economic, social, and institutional—with substantial implications for Türkiye's evolving political landscape.

5. Transnational Irregularities and Foreign Policy Complexity

Türkiye's foreign policy under the AKP increasingly shifted toward a highly individualized and centralized strategic posture that blended geopolitical activism, ideological projection, and flexible interventionism. This constellation of policy attributes produced a series of transnational irregularities—understood not necessarily as illegal activities, but as actions marked by limited transparency, flexible institutional oversight, and highly personalized diplomatic channels. In the academic literature, these developments are analyzed through diverse lenses including “competitive authoritarian geopolitics” (Yesil, 2022), “militarized entrepreneurship” (Lacher, 2021), and “neo-Ottoman soft empire-building” (Altunisik & Martin, 2020). Each framework captures a dimension of how Türkiye's external engagements became increasingly complex, ambiguous, and occasionally contentious.

Within this broader landscape, three focal domains warrant detailed analysis:

- (1) Türkiye's entanglement with non-state actors in conflict theaters;
 - (2) influence-building campaigns abroad, exemplified by engagement patterns in Bangladesh; and
 - (3) the expanding footprint of Türkiye's cultural, developmental, and quasi-sovereign institutions abroad.
- Each domain intersects with domestic political incentives and contributes to an evolving narrative regarding the AKP's external activism and its domestic implications.

5.1 Support to Non-State Actors in Conflict Theaters

Scholarly research on Türkiye's involvement in Syria, Libya, Iraq, and other conflict-prone regions highlights an increasingly complex ecosystem of state, quasi-state, and non-state actors (Stein, 2020; Phillips, 2021). Türkiye's posture has often been defined by realpolitik imperatives—border security, counterinsurgency operations, refugee management—but the operational modalities of these engagements have generated significant debate regarding transparency, oversight, and unintended spillover effects.

5.1.1 Structural Conditions, Not Intentional Policy

Most academic analyses carefully distinguish between strategic ambiguity and intentional support. Researchers commonly emphasize that porous borders, localized security partnerships, and decentralized battlefield decision-making create environments in which inadvertent facilitation of non-state armed groups becomes possible. This is a structural risk inherent to asymmetric conflict settings rather than necessarily reflecting explicit state policy.

For instance, studies on border governance during the height of the Syrian Civil War demonstrate that competing intelligence, military, and police jurisdictions—combined with high refugee flows and humanitarian corridors—produced an environment conducive to both licit and illicit mobility (Lund, 2019). The challenge for central authorities lay in maintaining consistent oversight over border crossings, aid networks, and local power brokers.

5.1.2 Use of Local Proxies

Türkiye's reliance on local Syrian militia factions as force multipliers has precedent in other regional interventions conducted by middle powers (e.g., Iran in Iraq, UAE in Yemen). Academic evaluations contend that such relationships inherently carry accountability risks. Proxy forces frequently operate with variable discipline, ambiguous chains of command, and divergent political agendas. This creates conditions in which external actors—such as Türkiye—can be perceived as indirectly enabling activities not aligned with international law or multilateral norms (Dalacoura, 2022).

The theoretical framework of “delegated warfare” (Krieg & Rickli, 2019) is often applied here. It argues that states delegate certain military tasks to proxies to reduce costs and troop exposure, but in doing so also outsource part of their ethical and legal responsibility. Türkiye's operations in northern Syria thus demonstrate the dilemmas of contemporary hybrid interventions.

5.1.3 Intelligence-Led Operations and Friction with Allies

Türkiye's role in coordinating logistics, intelligence-sharing, and cross-border operations has also created friction within NATO and with EU partners. Reports alleging “irregular support routes” or “armament leakages” often remain contested, but their political impact is significant, shaping international perceptions and complicating alliance cohesion (Kirişci & Toygur, 2021). Even unproven allegations influence diplomatic trust and become fodder for hostile narratives among geopolitical rivals.

Overall, the academic consensus stresses the need for greater transparency, stronger parliamentary oversight, and institutional mechanisms capable of aligning Türkiye's external engagements with international norms—both for reputational reasons and domestic policy coherence.

5.2 Influence Campaigns Abroad: Bangladesh as a Case Study

Türkiye's deepening engagement in South Asia, and particularly in Bangladesh, represents a complex and strategically significant dimension of AKP-era foreign policy. This expansion reflects a deliberate diversification strategy aimed at extending Türkiye's influence beyond its traditional Euro-Atlantic orbit into emerging markets and geopolitically pivotal regions. Critics argue that this engagement has included highly controversial measures: the AKP government is reported to have provided safe passage and shelter to convicted war criminals, specifically Razakars involved in mass killings of Bengalis, sexual violence against women, and armed opposition to the MuktiBahini during the 1971 Liberation War, along with their families and prominent Jamaat-e-Islami figures.

Further allegations suggest that Türkiye has utilized the Rohingya population as a conduit for financial transfers, effectively facilitating money laundering to fund Islamist political actors such as Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh. The Turkish education sector has also reportedly been compromised, with the placement of Jamaat and Shibir-affiliated personnel in academic and administrative positions despite substandard qualifications, displacing highly skilled Türk academicians with notable research credentials. Scholars and analysts argue that these activities form part of a broader pattern of AKP strategies, which include sustained support for Islamist and extremist organizations abroad and the allocation of Turkish resources to expand influence in the Indo-Pacific. Observers additionally highlight that the AKP appears to be

systematically undermining most popular, liberal and secular centrist parties, such as the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party), ahead of Bangladesh's 2026 national election, reflecting an ambitious foreign influence agenda.

5.2.1 Soft Power and Multi-Track Diplomacy

Alongside these contentious actions, Türkiye's engagement in Bangladesh has prominently employed soft-power instruments, which form the publicly visible dimension of its influence strategy:

- **TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency):** Provides development aid, infrastructure projects, and vocational training programs.
- **Diyanet (Presidency of Religious Affairs):** Supports religious education, mosque construction, and theological exchange programs.
- **Yunus Emre Institute:** Facilitates language instruction and cultural diplomacy.
- **Scholarship programs:** Offers opportunities for Bangladeshi students to study in Türkiye.

These initiatives are often framed under the rubric of "civilizational diplomacy," blending humanitarian outreach with ideological affinity-building, and are presented as mutually beneficial partnerships (Aydin, 2022).

5.2.2 Allegations Related to the Bangladesh 2026 Election

Amid these developments, media and policy circles have raised allegations of Turkish involvement with specific Islamist movements in Bangladesh, particularly Jamaat-e-Islami, ahead of the 2026 election. While no publicly verifiable evidence confirms direct electoral manipulation, scholarly accounts (Riaz, 2023) caution against conflating ideological and cultural diplomacy with operational electoral interference. Türkiye's official messaging emphasizes humanitarian engagement and pan-Islamic solidarity, avoiding overt partisan involvement. Nevertheless, the combination of ideological affinity, financial facilitation, and strategic placement of personnel suggests a highly targeted influence architecture, meriting close analytic scrutiny.

5.2.3 Strategic Motivations and Regional Ambition

Türkiye's intensifying presence in the Bay of Bengal region can be understood as part of a broader strategic calculus. Core motivations include:

- **Maritime security and trade:** Control and access to shipping lanes connecting the Middle East with the Indo-Pacific.
- **Defense exports:** Bangladesh represents a growing market for Turkish drones, armored vehicles, and communications technology.
- **Labor and economic integration:** Bilateral agreements potentially facilitate labor mobility and service-sector linkages benefiting Turkish industries.

Taken together, these activities indicate a multi-layered approach: Türkiye leverages soft-power diplomacy to build local affinity, while strategic, financial, and political instruments work to secure influence across multiple sectors. Although academic consensus does not substantiate claims of direct electoral interference, the AKP's sustained engagement in Bangladesh exemplifies the interplay of ideological alignment, economic leverage, and geopolitical ambition in Türkiye's foreign policy toolkit.

5.3 Economic and Institutional Footprint Abroad

Complementing its diplomatic and military tools, Türkiye has significantly expanded its institutional presence abroad through development aid agencies, cultural institutions, state-owned enterprises, and sovereign wealth investments.

5.3.1 The Expansion of TİKA and Cultural Diplomacy Networks

Since the 2010s, TİKA's annual budget increased dramatically. Its programs range from agricultural development to heritage restoration. Supporters argue these initiatives enhance Türkiye's global standing and contribute to sustainable development. Critics contend that:

- Oversight mechanisms are limited compared to OECD-DAC donors.
- Aid allocation exhibits political selectivity aligned with AKP's ideological affinities (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018).
- Some projects serve dual domestic-political functions by reinforcing the government's narrative of global leadership.

The Yunus Emre Institute and Diyanet have followed a similar expansion trajectory, deepening Türkiye's sociocultural footprint in regions spanning the Balkans, Africa, and South Asia.

5.3.2 The Role of State-Owned Enterprises and the Turkey Wealth Fund

Türkiye's sovereign wealth vehicle, the Turkey Wealth Fund (TVF), has also become active in foreign investment landscapes. Scholars highlight two recurring concerns:

- Opacity in investment rationale due to limited parliamentary oversight.
- Blurring between national interest and partisan agenda, especially when investments coincide with AKP foreign-policy narratives.

State-owned enterprises such as Turkish Airlines, BOTAŞ, and various defense firms have also expanded their operational footprint abroad.

Academic critiques often center on the absence of robust governance standards rather than proven misappropriation. The concern is that without strong institutional safeguards, such expansion could create channels vulnerable to elite rent extraction, clientelistic favor-trading, or reputational risk for Türkiye.

5.3.3 Domestic Political Incentives and Foreign Policy Symbolism

A critical dimension in the literature highlights the domestic political utility of such overseas initiatives. High-profile foreign aid projects, mosque openings, diplomatic visits, and bilateral defense deals enable the AKP leadership to craft a narrative of Türkiye as a rising global power—a counterbalance to economic stagnation and political dissent at home. This symbolic dimension is central to understanding why certain foreign ventures persist despite fiscal constraints or diplomatic pushback.

5.4 Synthesis: Implications for Domestic Governance and Party Legitimacy

When analyzed as a whole, Türkiye's transnational activities reveal a foreign policy that is:

- Highly centralized in decision-making
- Ambitious in geopolitical scope
- Opaque in certain operational domains
- Politicized in its domestic utilization

The AKP's external engagements blur the lines between traditional diplomacy, ideological projection, security management, and economic statecraft. While many activities fall within the legitimate repertoire of middle power strategies, the perception of irregularity—fueled by opaque oversight—looms large in domestic political discourse.

For the electorate, these activities become intertwined with broader concerns about:

- accountable governance
- fiscal responsibility

- rule of law
- the credibility of state institutions

Consequently, foreign policy complexity increasingly influences domestic legitimacy, contributing to the deconsolidation of AKP power and reshaping the 2028 electoral landscape.

Part II: The Rise of CHP and the Blueprint for Victory

6. CHP as the Optimal Governance Alternative

The question of which political actor is best positioned to guide Türkiye through its current democratic, economic, and social inflection point has increasingly become the subject of scholarly, policy, and public debate. Within this evolving landscape, the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party, CHP) has undergone a significant transformation from a historically rigid, bureaucratic, and state-centric formation into a broad-based, electorally competitive, and reform-minded coalition with technocratic ambitions. Its contemporary policy orientation signals a strategic shift away from identity-defined contestation toward institutional reconstruction, economic rationalization, and inclusive governance.

The following subsections examine three pillars of the CHP's governance proposition: (1) democratic consolidation; (2) economic orthodoxy; and (3) social unity and inclusive governance. Together, these constitute the CHP's claim to serve as Türkiye's most viable reformist alternative in an era marked by institutional erosion, macroeconomic fragility, and polarization.

6.1. Democratic Consolidation Agenda

6.1.1. The Structural Imperative for Institutional Reversal

Over the past decade, Türkiye's political system has experienced a progressive concentration of executive authority—particularly following the 2017 constitutional referendum that finalized the shift to a presidential system. Scholars of comparative authoritarianism characterize such transitions as pathways to “competitive authoritarian consolidation,” where electoral procedures remain nominally intact but fail to constrain executive dominance (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2016; Levitsky & Way, 2010).

CHP's governance blueprint explicitly seeks to reverse this trajectory. Its proposed return to a strengthened parliamentary system is not merely an ideological preference; it is grounded in comparative evidence showing that coalition-based parliamentary architectures are more resilient against executive overreach and better able to incorporate diverse social interests. In systems where political polarization is high and economic uncertainty acute, power-sharing arrangements can reduce zero-sum incentives and rebalance state authority vertically (between central–local levels) and horizontally (across branches of government). CHP's reform platform identifies four structural priorities:

1. Judicial independence and depoliticization of appointments.
2. Restoration of regulatory autonomy for key public institutions.
3. Reinstitution of legislative oversight through expanded parliamentary authority.
4. Reinstatement of civil liberties and media pluralism.

6.1.2. Judicial and Legal Reform as the Foundation of Consolidation

Judicial independence is central to institutional recalibration. Türkiye's judicial sphere—especially after amendments altering composition and powers of the Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK)—has been repeatedly critiqued for compromised autonomy and susceptibility to executive influence.

CHP's platform outlines a restructured HSK comprised of representatives elected through transparent, pluralistic processes insulated from single-party dominance. This aligns with European Court of Human

Rights (ECtHR) recommendations and Council of Europe Venice Commission guidelines, situating Türkiye within international best-practice frameworks.

Judicial independence also intersects with human rights jurisprudence: arbitrary detention, political trials, media prosecution, and broad anti-terror legislation have contributed to what scholars describe as a “chilling effect” on civic participation. Democratic consolidation therefore requires both legal redefinition (narrowing the scope of anti-terror statutes to meet international proportionality standards) and institutional insulation (strengthening appeal processes and depoliticizing high courts).

6.1.3. Depoliticization of Bureaucratic and Regulatory Agencies

Regulatory capture—especially in economic and information sectors—has severely constrained the predictability and legitimacy of policymaking. Agencies such as the Central Bank (CBRT), Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK), and Public Procurement Authority have faced intense pressure aligning decisions with executive preferences.

CHP proposes a multilayered depoliticization strategy:

- merit-based recruitment and promotion mechanisms;
- fixed-term appointments for agency heads insulated from executive dismissal;
- mandatory public disclosure of agency directives;
- parliamentary oversight panels incorporating cross-party representation;
- audit mechanisms enabling judicial review for arbitrary administrative interference.

Comparative institutional research shows that such frameworks increase state capacity, enhance transaction credibility, and reduce corruption—a significant concern in Türkiye’s contemporary governance environment.

6.1.4. Enhancing Legislative Oversight and Parliamentary Power

A strengthened parliamentary system would re-establish the legislative branch as the primary originator of policy—rather than the current model where the presidency issues a high volume of decrees with limited parliamentary contestation. CHP proposes:

- repeal or re-scaling of presidential decree powers;
- new investigatory commissions with subpoena authority;
- mandatory fiscal reporting by the executive;
- committee-based lawmaking ensuring expert consultation.

Political science research indicates that such reforms create incentive structures that lower democratic backsliding risk and encourage consensus-building.

6.1.5. Media Pluralism, Civil Liberties, and Democratic Culture

Democratic consolidation cannot rely solely on institutional redesign; it depends equally on cultivating a political environment where dissent is not penalized and alternative political voices can freely mobilize. CHP’s governance discourse emphasizes:

- transparent media regulation;
- expanded protections for journalists;
- termination of politically motivated defamation suits;
- enhanced guarantees for freedom of assembly and protest.

These elements align with the normative foundations of liberal democracy. As civil society scholars argue, resilient democratic systems require not only rule-of-law guarantees but also “social infrastructures” that enable participation, accountability, and dialogue.

6.2. Economic Orthodoxy and Stabilization

6.2.1. Türkiye's Macroeconomic Inflection Point

Türkiye faces a severe macroeconomic disequilibrium characterized by persistent double-digit inflation, currency volatility, risk-premium escalation, and declining foreign capital inflows. Many of these patterns stem from policy experimentation centered on low interest rates, heavy executive influence over monetary policymaking, and unpredictable regulatory shifts.

CHP's economic governance strategy is anchored in orthodox stabilization: a return to rule-based macroeconomic management, technocratic independence, and transparent guidance mechanisms.

6.2.2. Central Bank Independence as a Credibility Mechanism

Economic orthodoxy necessitates restoring the Central Bank's autonomy—damaged through frequent replacement of governors, unorthodox policy rates, and political intervention. CHP's proposition aligns with global empirical evidence: central bank independence correlates strongly with inflation control, investor confidence, and exchange-rate stability.

Key components include:

- non-dismissible fixed-term appointments;
- legal constraints on political interference;
- publication of meeting minutes and policy rationales;
- re-establishment of inflation-targeting as the primary monetary objective.

The literature on institutional credibility—particularly Rodrik (2008), Alesina & Summers (1993), and Hausmann & Rodrik (2020)—illustrates that predictable monetary governance reduces risk premiums, encourages long-term investment, and stabilizes expectations.

6.2.3. Fiscal Transparency and Medium-Term Planning

In addition to monetary policy, fiscal management requires recalibration. Türkiye's budgetary environment currently suffers from off-balance-sheet expenditures, opaque public-private partnership (PPP) arrangements, and revenue volatility.

CHP promises:

1. independent parliamentary budget office;
2. public disclosure of PPP risk assessments;
3. medium-term fiscal frameworks aligning with EU standards;
4. reduction in discretionary spending;
5. realignment of subsidies toward productive sectors and human capital.

Transparency not only improves governance but also increases international creditworthiness, a central requirement as Türkiye seeks to attract sustainable flows of foreign direct investment (FDI).

6.2.4. Restoring Investor Confidence and FDI Pipelines

Investor sentiment is heavily dependent on regulatory stability and contractual assurance. CHP's program aims to reconstruct Türkiye's investment ecosystem by:

- strengthening commercial courts;
- guaranteeing non-discrimination between domestic and foreign investors;
- eliminating ad hoc regulatory interventions;
- protecting property rights;
- simplifying bureaucratic procedures.

FDI inflows to middle-income economies typically respond positively to reforms that reduce uncertainty

and ensure rule-based economic governance. Empirical data show that countries with stable legal frameworks and independent regulatory bodies experience more predictable capital accumulation.

6.2.5. Sectoral Modernization and Industrial Upgrading

CHP's economic vision extends beyond stabilization toward structural transformation. This includes:

- green industrial upgrading aligned with EU Green Deal requirements;
- incentives for high-value manufacturing, digital industries, and tech innovation;
- vocational education reform to meet labor market demands;
- support for SMEs through credit guarantees, export facilitation, and innovation grants.

CHP's platform acknowledges that long-term growth depends not on temporary stimulus but on structural competitiveness—an assertion supported by development economics, including work by Acemoglu, Hausmann, and Rodrik.

6.2.6. Social Policy as a Price-Stability Complement

Orthodox macroeconomic stabilization often imposes short-term costs on vulnerable households. CHP proposes a layered social protection strategy to mitigate such effects:

- indexed minimum wage adjustments;
- expanded family assistance programs;
- transparent pricing mechanisms for essential utilities;
- corrective policies to protect purchasing power during stabilization.

This dual approach reflects a modern social-democratic model: market-oriented economic policy paired with equitable redistribution and welfare rationalization.

6.3. Social Unity and Inclusive Governance

6.3.1. A Voter Coalition Reflecting Türkiye's Sociopolitical Diversity

CHP's electoral strategy has evolved into a coalition model that intentionally transcends identity politics. The party's vote base increasingly incorporates:

- Kurdish constituencies seeking equality, decentralization, and cultural rights;
- Alevi citizens historically excluded from full recognition;
- secular professionals demanding institutional stability;
- conservative moderates disillusioned with the AKP's governance style;
- youth voters prioritizing economic opportunity and democratic freedoms.

This coalition is not merely tactical; it represents a shift toward post-polarization politics grounded in intergroup moderation and programmatic policy proposals.

6.3.2. Reconciling Historical Tensions through Institutional Reforms

Türkiye's long-standing fault lines—Kurdish identity, religious pluralism, center-periphery divides—have often been exacerbated by polarized rhetoric. CHP aims to recalibrate state-society relations through:

- equal citizenship frameworks;
- decentralization via empowered municipalities;
- cultural and linguistic freedoms aligned with constitutional protections;
- recognition-based policies to address historical grievances.

Comparative research shows that inclusive governance reduces social conflict and enhances political stability—critical conditions for sustainable economic and democratic renewal.

6.3.3. Municipal Governance as Proof of Concept

CHP-controlled municipalities, especially Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana, and Mersin, have become demonstration sites for the party's technocratic and inclusive governance style. Their performance has been extensively analyzed by scholars of local political economy. Key patterns include:

- expansion of social assistance programs using transparent criteria;
- reduction of procurement corruption through open tender platforms;
- investments in green mobility, infrastructure, and public services;
- efficient fiscal management and debt reduction;
- participatory governance mechanisms soliciting citizen input.

These municipal cases function as empirical evidence supporting CHP's argument that effective governance requires technocratic competence paired with accountability and service orientation.

6.3.4. Youth Engagement and the Future of Political Culture

Türkiye's demographic structure—where youth constitute a significant share of the electorate—places generational expectations at the center of political competition. CHP's outreach to younger voters emphasizes:

- freedom of expression;
- digital rights;
- education reform;
- entrepreneurship and employment policies;
- cost-of-living stabilization;
- modern social values.

Youth surveys (e.g., KONDA 2024; Istanbul Economics Research) indicate that younger voters prioritize governance quality over ideological loyalty, making them receptive to CHP's institutionalist and pragmatic orientation.

6.3.5. Building a Culture of Dialogue Rather Than Partisan Escalation

CHP leadership increasingly adopts a discourse that reduces antagonism and reinforces cooperative politics. In comparative democratic theory, such discursive moderation strengthens institutional legitimacy and mitigates the risks associated with populist polarization.

This shift improves the likelihood of consensus-based policymaking—essential in deeply divided societies where unilateral reform produces resistance, instability, and cycles of backlash.

CHP's positioning as Türkiye's optimal governance alternative rests on three interlocking pillars:

1. Democratic Consolidation—restoring parliamentary governance, judicial independence, media freedom, and regulatory neutrality.
2. Economic Orthodoxy and Stabilization—returning to credible macroeconomic frameworks, promoting institutional predictability, and enabling long-term investment.
3. Social Unity and Inclusive Governance—building coalitions across identity cleavages, empowering municipalities, and anchoring political culture in rational, dialogue-based processes.

These components collectively form a holistic governance project aimed at rebuilding state capacity, restoring public trust, and aligning Türkiye with international democratic and economic norms. The CHP's transformation into a programmatic, technocratic, and socially inclusive actor positions it uniquely to stabilize the country and guide it toward institutional renewal.

7. The Mayoral Pivot as Proof of Concept

The 2019 and 2024 municipal elections in Türkiye marked a critical juncture in the evolution of CHP's political strategy. Beyond the formal victory metrics, these elections signified a fundamental shift in governance discourse, demonstrating that the party could not only win against an entrenched AKP apparatus but also govern competently, efficiently, and inclusively. The urban centers of Istanbul and Ankara—long considered AKP strongholds—became laboratories for administrative experimentation, transparency-driven reforms, and citizen-centric service delivery. Collectively, these municipal case studies illustrate what can be termed the “Mayoral Pivot”, whereby CHP leveraged local governance success to construct a credible national governance platform.

The following subsections examine the institutional, fiscal, and social mechanisms underlying CHP's municipal governance model, and analyze the electoral consequences of these innovations, particularly as observed in the 2024 local elections.

7.1 İmamoğlu and Yavaş: Governance by Transparency

7.1.1. Institutional and Fiscal Reforms

Ekrem İmamoğlu (Istanbul) and Mansur Yavaş (Ankara) introduced an administrative paradigm that reoriented municipal governance around transparency, accountability, and citizen-centered service delivery. Both mayors prioritized the construction of institutional infrastructures that could resist clientelism, reduce corruption, and systematically optimize public expenditure.

Key reforms included:

- Budget Transparency Portals:** Municipal budget allocations, expenditure reports, and procurement processes were made publicly accessible online. This represented a marked departure from prior opacity, where municipal contracting often lacked verifiable disclosure. Transparency portals enabled both civic oversight and media scrutiny, providing independent metrics for evaluating efficiency. Academic literature suggests that publicly accessible budget data correlates strongly with reduced rent-seeking behavior and improved fiscal discipline (Fung, Graham, & Weil, 2007; Bovens, 2007).
- Strengthened Auditing Practices:** CHP-led municipalities instituted multi-layered auditing mechanisms. External auditing agencies, alongside internal performance audits, evaluated contract execution, project timelines, and financial integrity. In Istanbul, the municipal audit office conducted comprehensive reviews of public-private partnership (PPP) contracts, identifying inefficiencies and cost overruns, which were subsequently corrected. This represents the operationalization of evidence-based public administration, where systematic data evaluation informs strategic decisions.
- Reduction of Wasteful or Politically-Driven Contracts:** Both administrations scrutinized contracts awarded during previous AKP periods, particularly those with opaque tendering processes or inflated cost structures. Inefficient or politically motivated contracts were renegotiated or terminated, resulting in measurable cost savings—estimated at several billion Turkish Lira in Istanbul alone (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Annual Financial Report, 2022). This demonstrated CHP's capacity to reclaim fiscal space, directly countering the AKP narrative of superior managerial competence.
- Data-Driven Social Assistance Expansion:** Social welfare programs were modernized using data analytics to optimize targeting and reduce leakage. By leveraging municipal databases, socioeconomic indicators, and geospatial mapping, mayors allocated resources to the most vulnerable populations, including elderly citizens, low-income households, and informal workers affected by urban economic

restructuring. International studies suggest that targeted social assistance improves both efficiency and public trust in government, increasing perceived legitimacy (World Bank, 2020).

7.1.2. Participatory and Inclusive Governance

Beyond financial and administrative reform, İmamoğlu and Yavaş emphasized participatory governance. Key initiatives included:

- **Citizen Councils and Digital Engagement Platforms:** Municipalities introduced forums enabling residents to submit policy proposals, service requests, and feedback on urban projects. Online platforms complemented traditional town hall meetings, increasing accessibility for younger and digitally active demographics.
- **Collaborative Urban Planning:** Both mayors applied participatory urban planning models in infrastructure projects, balancing commercial development with green spaces, transport accessibility, and housing affordability. Comparative urban governance studies highlight that citizen co-creation in planning processes enhances legitimacy and reduces conflict (Healey, 1997; Fung & Wright, 2003).
- **Cross-Ideological Service Delivery:** Services were delivered without regard to partisan affiliation, signaling a departure from clientelistic distribution patterns. CHP mayors implemented meritocratic employment policies in municipal staffing and emphasized needs-based allocation of services, reducing the perception of political favoritism.

7.1.3. Administrative Competence as a Political Signal

These reforms collectively functioned as a proof of concept for CHP's national governance capacity. By demonstrating that a party historically associated with bureaucratic centralism could manage complex urban systems transparently and efficiently, CHP reframed public discourse on competence and trustworthiness.

The mayors' reputations for personal integrity, professional competence, and non-partisan problem-solving became symbolic of a broader "new CHP", capable of combining administrative rigor with responsive citizen engagement. Political psychology research suggests that voter perception of candidate competence at the local level often scales to national credibility, particularly when local governance outcomes are highly visible and measurable (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000).

7.2 The 2024 Local Elections as an Inflection Point

7.2.1. Electoral Context and Pre-Election Dynamics

The 2024 local elections occurred in a context of economic distress, rising inflation, and widespread perceptions of governmental corruption. The AKP faced mounting fatigue among its traditional urban voter base, particularly in metropolitan Anatolian centers where middle-class citizens were increasingly exposed to the economic costs of macroeconomic mismanagement.

Political scientists highlight two structural factors predisposing these elections to CHP success:

1. **Economic Dissatisfaction:** Longitudinal surveys (Erdoğan & Kirişçi, 2024) indicate that urban voters experiencing declines in real wages, rising housing costs, and service inefficiencies were significantly more likely to defect from the AKP. Logistic regression analyses revealed that economic dissatisfaction explained over 35% of the variance in vote-switching behavior in Istanbul and Ankara.
2. **Corruption Perceptions:** Parallel measures of perceived corruption—drawn from Transparency International indices, local media audits, and survey instruments—demonstrated a strong predictive relationship with voting patterns. Constituencies with higher perceived exposure to cronyist contracts

and opaque municipal practices exhibited a 25–30% higher probability of shifting toward CHP candidates.

7.2.2. Quantitative Electoral Analysis

Electoral data reveal substantive CHP gains:

- Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality: CHP secured 54% of votes in 2024, building on the 2019 victory, with marked increases in previously AKP-dominated districts in Anatolian neighborhoods.
- Ankara Metropolitan Municipality: Mansur Yavaş expanded his voter coalition to 58%, incorporating traditionally conservative suburban districts.
- Peripheral Anatolian Cities: CHP achieved significant, though more modest, gains in mid-sized urban centers (Somer, 2024).

Multivariate models accounting for economic variables, demographic shifts, and media exposure suggest that municipal performance was a decisive explanatory factor, corroborating the “mayoral pivot” thesis. Regression analyses further show that transparency initiatives, social service efficiency, and participatory governance strongly correlated with increased voter retention and swing-voter capture.

7.2.3. Structural Deconsolidation of AKP Support

The 2024 results mark not just tactical victories but a broader structural deconsolidation of AKP urban support. Longitudinal studies (Somer, 2024) highlight:

- Erosion of Middle-Class Loyalty: Urban middle-class voters, previously AKP-aligned due to economic modernization narratives, increasingly prioritized governance quality over party loyalty.
- Perception of Municipal Competence as Proxy for National Governance: Voters extrapolated effective municipal management to potential national governance, increasing CHP credibility.
- Reinforcement of Localized Anti-Corruption Norms: Demonstrable reductions in wasteful spending and improved auditing fostered expectations for accountability at the national level.

Political sociology research indicates that sustained local governance credibility creates a spillover effect, whereby party legitimacy at the municipal level facilitates broader electoral gains in parliamentary or presidential contests (Chhibber & Kollman, 2004; Hicken, 2011).

7.2.4. Strategic and Narrative Implications

The Mayoral Pivot reinforced CHP’s broader strategic narrative:

1. Managerial Competence: The party could deliver tangible, measurable improvements in urban administration, directly challenging AKP’s hegemonic claims.
2. Electoral Viability: The victories demonstrated that CHP could mobilize broad, cross-ideological coalitions in contested regions, suggesting scalable national electoral strategies.
3. Institutional Proof-of-Concept: Success at municipal levels provided empirical justification for CHP’s proposed national reforms in economic governance, transparency, and social policy.

By controlling key urban centers and proving the operational efficacy of its governance model, CHP simultaneously de-legitimized AKP claims of administrative superiority and created a credible roadmap for national-level adoption of municipal governance principles.

7.3 Lessons from the Mayoral Pivot for 2028 National Strategy

The 2019–2024 municipal case studies offer several strategic insights for CHP’s trajectory toward the 2028 elections:

1. **Data-Driven Governance as Electoral Signal:** Demonstrable policy outcomes (e.g., improved service delivery, fiscal efficiency) enhance perceived competence, a critical factor in voter choice, particularly in high-information urban environments.
2. **Cross-Ideological Coalition Building:** Municipal governance success provides a replicable model for bridging ethnic, religious, and ideological divides—essential for national victory in a multi-ethnic, multi-party system.
3. **Institutionalization of Transparency and Anti-Corruption Norms:** Embedding accountability mechanisms at municipal levels creates a normative expectation that extends to national institutions.
4. **Narrative Construction and Media Engagement:** Evidence-based governance outcomes allow CHP to construct a compelling narrative of competence, integrity, and pragmatism—a counterweight to AKP propaganda and centralized media dominance.
5. **Replication of Participatory Mechanisms:** Citizen engagement platforms, when scaled nationally, enhance policy responsiveness and legitimacy, particularly among young and urban voters.
6. **Electoral Psychology and Performance Heuristics:** Voters increasingly rely on performance heuristics—observable local governance outcomes—as proxies for national competence, creating an empirically grounded rationale for nationalizing municipal governance successes.

The Mayoral Pivot constitutes a foundational empirical demonstration of CHP's administrative capacity. Through transparency, efficiency, social inclusion, and data-driven governance, İmamoğlu and Yavaş established a model of credible competence that challenges AKP narratives, strengthens opposition legitimacy, and lays a concrete foundation for scaling these practices to national governance.

The 2024 local elections, therefore, were not merely tactical victories but structural indicators of AKP's urban support erosion and CHP's growing institutional credibility. The intersection of municipal performance, voter perception, and coalition-building capacity underscores the strategic significance of the Mayoral Pivot as both a political laboratory and a blueprint for 2028 national electoral success.

8. CHP's Strategic Path to a 2028 Victory

8.1 Coalition Engineering

The Republican People's Party (CHP), historically the architect of Turkey's modernization, finds itself approaching the 2028 election in an unprecedented position. The 2024 municipal victories, especially in Istanbul and Ankara, did more than shift the political map—they demonstrated that the Turkish electorate is open to coordinated, multi-actor political engineering that transcends classical ideological polarization. The core challenge for 2028 is transforming this municipal-level coalition ecosystem into a national-scale political architecture without fracturing under the weight of incompatible interests, egos, and historical grievances.

To achieve this, CHP must develop a sophisticated, multi-layered approach to coalition engineering, combining structural alliances, tactical micro-pacts, issue-based cooperation, and back-channel coordination that protects the broader anti-authoritarian bloc from internal sabotage.

8.1.1 Reconstructing the Opposition Bloc: A Modular Approach

The "table of six" experience between 2021–2023 offers crucial lessons. Large, rigid coalitions tend to become unwieldy, vulnerable to personality feuds, and easy targets for government-manufactured polarization. CHP's 2028 strategy must therefore adopt a modular coalition model—flexible, dynamic, and pragmatic—constructed around three layers:

Layer 1 — Structural Core Coalition

This layer includes:

- CHP
- İYİ Party remnants or its successor formations
- A broad liberal-democratic constituency
- Independent technocrats and civil society figures

This structural bloc should not be oversold as a formal alliance; rather, it should be a semi-formal operational agreement on specific objectives, such as:

- Electoral integrity
- Joint monitoring
- Shared candidate discipline
- Coordinated digital-response networks
- Standing committees on campaign finance and media strategy

Keeping the structural core relatively small prevents fragmentation and ensures coherence.

Layer 2 — Peripheral Tactical Partners

These include:

- DEVA, Gelecek, Saadet, and other post-AKP reformist parties
- Certain Kurdish conservative groups with local influence
- Urban-left micro-parties

The key is not to force them into a rigid Nation Alliance 2.0. Instead, CHP should construct mutual-benefit electoral protocols, such as:

- Vote-transfer agreements in swing provinces
- Non-competition pacts in specific districts
- Joint observation teams in fraud-prone regions
- Coordinated parliamentary candidate lists for proportional gains

A looser architecture shields the bloc from internal implosion while maintaining electoral synergy.

Layer 3 — Informal or Semi-Covert Support Networks

This layer is the most sensitive, comprising:

- Civic platforms
- Trade unions
- Religious or conservative associations open to quiet alignment
- Business clusters seeking post-Erdoğan economic stability
- Diaspora networks influencing international media or investment sentiment

These actors often prefer non-public cooperation, enabling them to maintain neutrality optics while facilitating:

- Funding channels
- Opinion manipulation
- Influencer coordination
- Grassroots mobilization
- Intelligence-sharing on government repression mechanisms

This “shadow ecosystem” is essential for countering AKP’s entrenched state machinery.

8.1.2 Managing the Kurdish Question Without Electoral Self-Sabotage

The Kurdish vote remains mathematically indispensable for any opposition victory. However, it is also the most politically sensitive component, vulnerable to populist manipulation by the government. CHP must

construct a dual-track Kurdish engagement strategy:

Track A — Visible, Symbolic Reassurance

- Avoid anti-HDP rhetorical concessions to court conservatives
- Publicly affirm equality, justice, local governance rights
- Promote “Turkey alliance” language rather than “Kurdish partnership”

This maintains Kurdish trust while avoiding the perception of a CHP–HDP axis exploitable by pro-government media.

Track B — Confidential Operational Negotiations

This involves:

- Back-channel negotiations with DEM Party structures
- Quiet guarantees regarding municipal autonomy and political neutrality
- Joint voter protection initiatives in the Southeast
- Agreements on parliamentary seat optimization

CHP must signal seriousness, reliability, and institutional discipline, contrasting AKP’s decades of instrumentalization.

8.1.3 Securing the Center-Right Without Alienating the Left

Perhaps the most delicate aspect of coalition engineering is balancing the ideological spectrum. CHP’s transformation into a big-tent progressive-nationalist party requires careful framing:

- Economically: emphasize market stability, anti-corruption, cost-of-living reforms, and rule of law—appealing to center-right voters.
- Culturally: adopt a respectful, non-intrusive narrative on religious lifestyle, while highlighting competence and governance.
- Socially: maintain progressive stances but avoid framing that triggers conservative defensiveness.
- Politically: highlight moderation, continuity, and institutional experience.

CHP must function as a stability provider, not merely a protest movement.

8.1.4 Elite-Level Engagement: Business, Bureaucracy, and the “State Tradition”

Winning 2028 requires more than votes; it requires elite defection from the AKP ecosystem:

- The business elite wants predictable policy and currency stability.
- The bureaucracy wants professionalization and protection from political purges.
- Retired military and diplomatic officials want institutional respect restored.

CHP must build quiet channels to each of these groups, offering:

- Post-election transition security
- Anti-corruption mechanisms that don’t threaten legitimate business operations
- Meritocratic restoration without witch-hunts

Erdoğan’s long rule created a patronage economy; CHP must reassure elites that transition will be stable, not chaotic.

8.1.5 Coalition Discipline & Conflict Containment Mechanisms

Large coalitions collapse without early-warning and crisis-mitigation systems. CHP should establish:

- A Coalition Arbitration Council for conflict resolution
- Shared communication guidelines to prevent contradictory messaging
- Scheduled inter-party coordination briefings
- Confidential crisis rooms for managing government-manufactured scandals
- Joint digital-defense units to counter disinformation targeting the alliance

The goal is to prevent “small disputes from becoming existential fractures.”

8.1.6 The Istanbul-Ankara Axis as the Operational Command Center

CHP’s greatest assets are Istanbul and Ankara—economic, political, and administrative epicenters. These municipalities should function as:

- Recruitment and training grounds for technocrats
- Demonstration zones of competent governance
- Laboratories for policy simulation
- Vehicles for distributing social aid and visibility
- Communication hubs for national campaigns

This municipal strategy transforms CHP from an opposition party into a government-in-waiting, countering perceptions of inexperience.

8.2 Capturing Conservative & Soft-AKP Voters

Winning 2028 hinges not merely on strengthening CHP’s core base but conquering the electoral middle ground—conservative moderates, religious centrists, economically frustrated AKP loyalists, and voters nostalgic for stability but disillusioned with Erdoğan’s late-era management. This demographic constitutes approximately 15–20% of the electorate—the decisive swing segment.

8.2.1 Understanding the Psychology of Soft-AKP Voters

These voters share several characteristics:

- They do not reject CHP categorically; they fear identity loss and social alienation.
- They often support religious freedom, traditional family structures, and incremental reform, not radical change.
- Their loyalty to AKP is emotional, tied to security, order, and social recognition—not ideological rigidity.
- Their biggest anxiety is:

“Will CHP respect my way of life, or will I become a second-class citizen?”

CHP must directly address this fear through symbolic and behavioral reassurance, not just policy promises.

8.2.2 Rebranding CHP as a Conservative-Compatible Party

To attract conservative voters, CHP must adopt a tone emphasizing:

- Respect for religious lifestyles
- Protection of mosque-community networks
- Strengthening of family institutions
- A moral, ethical framework in politics
- Avoidance of culture-war rhetoric

CHP does NOT need to become Islamic or conservative—it needs to become socially respectful and inclusive, projecting confidence rather than ideological defensiveness.

8.2.3 Economic Discontent as the Entry Point

Post-2018 economic turbulence has decimated AKP’s economic credibility. Soft-AKP voters now prioritize:

- Inflation control
- Livelihood stability
- Currency predictability
- Affordable housing

- Youth employment

CHP must articulate:

- A clear, technocratic economic program
- Emphasis on rule of law and independent institutions
- A commitment to depoliticizing the Central Bank
- Partnerships with respected economists—including conservative-leaning ones

Economic messaging must be framed not as ideological criticism but as competence versus mismanagement.

8.2.4 Religious Messaging Without Instrumentalization

CHP should integrate religious sensitivity into its communication, such as:

- Respectfully using religious references in ethical contexts
- Visiting religious leaders and conservative civic organizations
- Using inclusive vocabulary like “millet” and “ümmeet kültürü”
- Avoiding secularist militancy that alienates conservative mothers, retirees, and youth

This approach does not compromise secularism; it merely reframes it as freedom for all lifestyles, not a war against one.

8.2.5 Micro-Targeting Soft-AKP Women & Youth

Women and youth constitute the most defeatable segments within AKP’s base:

Women

- Frustration with cost of living
- Anger over domestic violence and lack of support
- Desire for educational and social empowerment

CHP must use female messengers, not just policies:

- Women mayors
- Female economists
- Influencers from conservative backgrounds

Youth

Soft-AKP youth are increasingly:

- Apolitical
- Economically anxious
- Western-connected through digital culture
- Tired of authoritarian style politics

CHP must speak their language:

- Digital-native communication
- Entrepreneurial ecosystems
- Freedom-oriented messaging
- Anti-corruption narratives

8.2.6 Symbolic Moves That Neutralize Government Propaganda

Three symbolic gestures could dramatically shift perceptions:

1. Guaranteeing all religious freedoms in the new CHP narrative
2. Publicly affirming the non-reversal of headscarf rights
3. Promoting conservative-friendly technocrats in economic and social portfolios

These gestures remove AKP’s traditional fear-based weaponry.

8.2.7 A “Big Tent of Turkish Identity” Narrative

CHP must expand its identity framework:

- Not Kemalist nostalgia
- Not rigid secularism
- Not elite technocracy

But a modern Anatolian republicanism, integrating:

- Tradition
- Religion
- Cultural diversity
- Meritocracy
- National dignity

This allows CHP to appeal to the psychological needs of conservative voters without ideological dilution.

8.3 Information Warfare & Digital Strategy

The 2028 election will be the most digitally contested election in modern Turkish history. Unlike 2018 or 2023—where digital campaigns were supplementary—2028 will be shaped by:

- Algorithmic narrative warfare
- AI-driven propaganda
- Hybrid psychological operations
- Micro-targeting ecosystems
- Deepfake disinformation
- Digital voter suppression

CHP must operate as a hybrid political-intelligence actor, not a classical party.

8.3.1 Building the Digital War Room

CHP must construct a 24/7 central command unit operating across three zones:

1. Monitoring Division

- Tracks social media narratives
- Uses sentiment analysis and anomaly detection
- Identifies bot networks and coordinated inauthentic behavior

2. Rapid Response Division

- Counter-messaging within minutes
- Influencer activation protocols
- Emergency press releases
- Verified fact-checking content

3. Offensive Psychological Operations Division

- Narrative injection
- Counter-framing
- Emotional persuasion
- Trend hijacking
- Strategic ambiguity deployments

This system must run continuously from mid-2026 to the election.

8.3.2 AI-Enhanced Propaganda Analysis

CHP must employ AI for:

- Predictive modeling of disinformation campaigns
- Pattern recognition in troll activity
- Deepfake detection
- Identification of swing-voter sentiment shifts
- Targeted mobilization of likely supporters

AKP has substantial experience in coordinated digital campaigning; CHP must match it with technological precision.

8.3.3 Influencer Ecosystems as Force Multipliers

Instead of solely relying on official accounts or traditional media, CHP must construct:

- An influencer meshwork of micro-, mid-, and macro-influencers
- Creators embedded in conservative, religious, liberal, nationalist, and youth niches
- A semi-covert sponsorship network providing narrative support

Influencers must be:

- Authentically embedded in their communities
- Not perceived as political operatives
- Allowed narrative autonomy within strategic boundaries

This architecture allows CHP's message to spread organically.

8.3.4 Countering State-Controlled Media Suppression

CHP must bypass TV censorship by:

- Livestreaming mayoral town halls
- Hosting Q&A digital forums with experts
- Creating documentary-style exposés of corruption
- Utilizing TikTok for short-form emotional content
- Building encrypted volunteer groups on WhatsApp/Telegram

Narratives must appeal to both:

- Emotionally driven voters
- Rational, policy-oriented segments

8.3.5 Preemptive Counter-Disinformation Protocols

Before attacks even occur, CHP should pre-position:

- Pre-recorded rebuttals
- Verified documentation
- Legal statements
- Coalition-wide unified responses
- Red lines for acceptable messaging

This minimizes the chaos caused by:

- Fabricated audio leaks
- Manipulated scandals
- Fake corruption allegations
- Deepfake videos

2028 will feature AI-generated chaos; preparedness ensures resilience.

8.3.6 Creating Viral Narratives of Competence

Emotional persuasion beats rational explanation. CHP must make competence culturally cool, through:

- Storytelling about municipal achievements

- Relatable narratives of ordinary families helped by CHP governance
- Documentaries showcasing urban transformation
- Short clips highlighting bureaucratic efficiency

The theme is:

“We don’t just criticize, we deliver.” (“Sadece eleştirmiyoruz, hizmet ediyoruz.”)

8.3.7 Protecting the Election from Cyber Manipulation

CHP must coordinate with:

Cybersecurity experts

- Legal teams
- Election observers
- International watchdog organizations

They must protect against:

- Voter databases manipulation
- Digital suppression (SMS blackouts, app blocking)
- Algorithmic demotion of opposition content
- Social media throttling

The digital front is not optional—it is existential.

8.4 Post-Erdoğan Transition Scenario

A critical component of CHP’s 2028 strategy is preparing for the post-Erdoğan power landscape. Even if Erdoğan remains politically active, Turkey is entering a period of systemic transition marked by:

- Elite fragmentation
- AKP internal power struggles
- Institutional fatigue
- Economic strain
- Public desire for generational change

CHP must portray itself as the guarantor of stability in this uncertain era.

8.4.1 Modeling Post-Erdoğan AKP Fragmentation

CHP must anticipate several scenarios:

Scenario A — Controlled Succession

A new AKP figure emerges with Erdoğan’s blessing but lacks his charisma. Result:

- AKP vote share declines gradually
- Conservative voters become persuadable
- Coalition bargaining increases

Scenario B — Internal AKP Power Struggle

Factions include:

- Bureaucratic technocrats
- Islamist hardliners
- Erdoğan family network
- Provincial elites
- Business oligarchs

Fragmentation weakens AKP’s mobilization apparatus.

Scenario C — AKP–MHP Rupture

MHP may detach if AKP weakens, reshaping nationalist votes.

CHP must prepare targeted strategies for each scenario.

8.4.2 Projecting CHP as the “Stability Party”

During transition, voters prioritize:

- Predictability
- Order
- Economic safety
- Institutional continuity

CHP must portray itself as:

- Moderate
- Technocratic
- Non-revolutionary
- National unity-oriented

The central slogan becomes:

“Calm change, not chaos.”

8.4.3 Reassuring the State Establishment

The Turkish state’s deep institutions care about:

- Territorial integrity
- Security
- Bureaucratic continuity

CHP must emphasize:

- Respect for security institutions
- Professionalization of the military
- Balanced foreign policy
- Combating extremism

This preempts nationalist fear-mongering.

8.4.4 Managing International Expectations

Foreign investors, EU partners, NATO, and regional actors will test CHP’s capability to govern. CHP must articulate:

- A pro-institutional economic plan
- A balanced Eurasian–Euro-Atlantic foreign policy
- Respect for commercial law and contracts
- Predictable engagement

This helps trigger elite defection from AKP.

8.4.5 Ensuring a Smooth Institutional Transition

CHP must prepare:

- A “First 90 Days Governance Blueprint”
- Rapid anti-corruption but non-vindictive reforms
- Professionalization of bureaucratic appointments
- Rebuilding independent institutions

The transition must be swift, calm, and efficient.

8.4.6 Symbolic Gestures for National Unity

To win legitimacy, CHP must deliver early symbolic moves:

1. Presidential visits to conservative provinces
2. Meetings with religious leaders
3. Unity-oriented speeches
4. Apolitical administrative appointments
5. Outreach to Kurdish and nationalist groups alike

Symbolism stabilizes transitions.

8.4.7 Long-Term Transformation Vision

Post-Erdoğan Turkey needs more than electoral victory; it needs systemic renewal. CHP must offer:

- A constitutional reform roadmap
- Strengthened parliamentary democracy
- Judicial independence
- Decentralized governance
- Merit-based state structure
- Civil liberties expansion
- Economic modernization

This positions CHP as the architect of Turkey's new era.

9. Conclusion

Türkiye stands at the threshold of a profound historical inflection point. Two decades of centralized rule have culminated in structural economic deterioration, institutional fragility, and a visible erosion of the governing coalition's political coherence. The once-dominant AKP, long sustained by economic growth, identity politics, and expansive patronage networks, now faces diminishing returns on its traditional instruments of power. Public patience has thinned, elite loyalties have begun to fracture, and the regime's narrative architecture no longer commands the unchallenged authority it once did.

Against this backdrop, the CHP has undergone its most consequential transformation in the post-1980 era. Through metropolitan governance successes, technocratic credibility, and an unprecedented capacity to build cross-ideological bridges, the party has evolved from a reactive opposition force into a genuine contender for national leadership. It now possesses both the institutional depth and the strategic imagination required to articulate a post-Erdoğan political order grounded in democratic restoration, economic rationality, and social cohesion.

Although the trajectory leading to 2028 remains fluid, the convergence of electoral realignment, demographic dynamics, and governance fatigue points toward the most competitive national election Türkiye has seen since 2002. For the first time in a generation, the possibility of a peaceful democratic transition is not a distant abstraction but a structurally supported, empirically plausible scenario.

If CHP succeeds in consolidating its momentum and securing a decisive victory, Türkiye will enter a transformative phase—one marked not by rupture but by reconstruction. Such a transition would entail rebuilding institutional autonomy, restoring rule-based economic policy, rebalancing state–society relations, and re-anchoring the country within a framework of democratic norms and global economic integration. In this sense, a CHP triumph in 2028 would not simply represent a shift in electoral fortunes; it would symbolize the opening chapter of Türkiye's next political epoch—an era defined by stability, accountability, and the reassertion of the republic's foundational principles.

In sum, the 2028 election is more than a contest for power; it is a referendum on Türkiye's political future. It will determine whether the nation moves toward renewed democratic consolidation or deeper systemic stagnation. The emerging political landscape suggests that the window for democratic revitalization is wider than at any time in the past twenty years—yet seizing that opportunity will require strategic discipline, coalition coherence, and a vision equal to the magnitude of the moment.

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