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Author(s): Ugur Akinci

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THE WELFARE PARTY'S MUNICIPAL TRACK RECORD: EVALUATING ISLAMIST MUNICIPAL ACTIVISM IN TURKEY

Ugur Akinci

Following the March 1994 municipal elections, Turkish mayors elected from the Islamist Welfare Party injected their ultra-conservative morality into the daily life of the cities they governed, while making improvements in municipal services. They also did not prove to be immune to the kind of corruption which plagued their secular predecessors. Thus in the 1999 elections they will have a harder time winning "reaction votes," since they are no longer an unknown quantity. The disappointment of ethnic-Kurdish voters is another obstacle that Islamist mayors will have to cope with in the next elections.

Islam as a political platform first emerged on the Turkish electoral scene in 1970 with the formation of National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi, MNP), which was shut down in 1972 by the Constitutional Court. The MNP was succeeded in 1972 by the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi, MSP), formed by the same Islamist¹ leadership and headed by Necmettin Erbakan. After a coup d'état in 1980, the MSP was also closed down for activities violating Article 163 of the Turkish Penal Code, which prohibits using

Ugur Akinci is an Adjunct Scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington, DC. He is also the Editor of The Turkish Times, a bi-weekly newspaper published in Washington, DC by the Assembly of Turkish American Associations.

1. In this article, by "Islamist" and "political Islam" is meant a political movement which utilizes the discourse and symbols of Islam to come to power and to establish a non-secular social order based upon *shari'a* (Islamic Law). All Islamists are of course observing Muslims. But there are many secular non-Islamists in Turkey who are also devout Muslims and observe the required practices of their faith. Thus, in this article, what differentiates an "Islamist" or "political Islamist" from a "Muslim" is the organized collective effort of the former to capture political power.

religious propaganda for political purposes. The third Islamist party Erbakan formed, the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP), won 21 percent of the votes cast in the December 1995 general elections and rose to power in 1996 as the senior partner of a coalition government formed by the center-conservative True Path Party (Dogru Yol Partisi, DYP). Because of their successes at the polls, the Islamists have experienced a head-on collision with the secular Turkish establishment, which includes the Turkish Armed Forces as well as a large number of civil society organizations.

In 1997, the RP-DYP coalition collapsed in the face of widespread parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition. In 1998, the RP was shut down by the Constitutional Court for violating secularism, and its chairman Erbakan was banned from politics. Today, the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi, FP) carries Erbakan's mantle of Islamist reformation, albeit under a much milder cultural format, carefully trimmed to not trigger a backlash from the secular establishment.

This article assesses the municipal activism of the RP since the March 1994 municipal elections in Turkey, when the RP shocked the secular establishment by capturing over 200 mayoralties,² including those of Turkey's two largest cities, Istanbul and Ankara.³ This article will seek to interpret the possible impact of this record on the upcoming April 1999 municipal elections.

GRASSROOTS PRAGMATISM

The Islamists' agenda at the municipal level in Turkey is a curious mixture of social democratic populism and cultural radicalism. The RP spent "more time and energy discussing equality, social security, welfare, and social justice than any other political party, including the leftist parties."⁴

Thus, Islamist municipalities have been "radical" in both senses of the term: they both supplied their followers with more pre-election incentives and post-election services than their secular competitors, and they also tried to inject a heavy dose of Islamic-Ottoman (and clearly anti-secular and anti-Western) sensibility at a cultural level. Their rhetoric is replete with references to the good-old-Ottoman times as an era anchored firmly

2. According to an official of the local administrations section at Welfare Party headquarters, the total number of municipalities controlled by the party in early 1996 was 238, 17 of them in Istanbul alone. See M. Akif Beki, "Two Years of Refah Rule in Istanbul," *Turkish Daily News* (Ankara), 1 April 1996. As of 22 June 1998, the Virtue Party's Internet site listed 27 FP provincial mayors, and 298 subprovincial mayors, for a grand total of 325 municipalities controlled by Islamists.

3. Among the numerous English-language studies of political Islam's rise to power in Turkey are Sabri Sayari, "Turkey's Islamist Challenge," *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1996, pp. 35-43; Metin Heper, "Islam and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Reconciliation?" *The Middle East Journal* 51, no. 1 (Winter 1997), pp. 32-45; Ugur Akinci, "Welfare Party's Political Rise: A Re-Evaluation" (parts I, II and III), *Turkish Daily News*, 15, 16 and 17 September 1994; and M. Hakan Yavuz, "Political Islam and the Welfare Party in Turkey," *Comparative Politics* 30, no. 1 (1997), pp.63-82. The selected works in Turkish include Rusen Cakir, *Ne Seriat Ne Demokrasi* (Neither Shari'a nor Democracy) (Istanbul: Metis Yayinlari, 1994); Soner Yalcin, *Hangi Erbakan* (Which Erbakan) (Istanbul: Basak Yayinlari, 1994); Erbil Tusalp, *Seriati Beklerken* (While Waiting for Shari'a) (Istanbul: Papirus, 1996); and Serkan Oral, *Kargatulumba Refah* (Refah Railroaded) (Istanbul: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1998).

4. Nicole and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: Atatürk and After* (London: John Murray, 1997), p. 333.

in Islamic morality which in turn, they argue, brought wealth and power. Their commitment to radical activism, in both the above senses, is beyond any doubt.

The RP's grassroots pragmatism included in-kind "incentives," which RP mayoral candidates distributed generously among the needy, especially right before the March 1994 local and December 1995 general elections. Muzaffer Dogan, the RP mayor of Bahçelievler, a suburb of the greater-city municipality of Istanbul, for example, distributed 1,500 tons of coal in winter, free of charge, as well as 250-kilogram grocery packages during the holy month of Ramadan to 3,500 families, clothing for 100 college students, and paid for the circumcision ceremonies of 1,000 children.⁵ The RP Mayor of Kartal (a suburb of Istanbul), Mehmet Sekmen, made the news by reportedly distributing not only coal and groceries to prospective voters, but money and gold coins as well.⁶ RP mayors have also distributed clothing and soup for the poor, thus in effect working more like a social welfare agency than a political party.⁷

Various commentators claimed that anyone who can handle the "three C's" will also win the elections: *cop*, *cukur* and *camur*, in Turkish. They translate as "garbage," "potholes," and "mud." In RP-controlled municipalities "buses run, the garbage is collected, and social services in general have improved," said one observer in January 1997.⁸ "Three years ago this town was known as 'Mud Sincan,' because of neglect from previous secular local governments, which residents say were also corrupt," noted a more recent US news media story, referring to Sincan, a suburb of the capital Ankara. "But Sincan today is well-paved, boasting green areas and a huge children's park, and most people have water. Largely because of that, Sincan is a Welfare stronghold—a case study of how grass-roots good works by Islamists have been turned into political support."⁹

"Rubbish is collected regularly [in Islamist-run Istanbul]," two veteran Turkey-watchers similarly reported. "Trees have been planted and better coal has been introduced to replace the foul lignite responsible for the Istanbul winter smog."¹⁰

5. Rusen Cakir, *Ne Seriat Ne Demokrasi*, p. 185. It is ironic that Dogan, who came to power with the 1989 local elections, was probably the only RP mayor in Istanbul who was not re-elected in the March 1994 municipal elections, when the Islamists registered unprecedented gains. His detractors within the Welfare Party claimed Dogan prepared his own defeat by declaring at every public opportunity that he was pro-shari'a. "By talking too much and generating little service, Dogan had scared the voters," was the sort of very rational explanation provided by his Islamist critics (ibid. p.225). Dogan's unusual defeat in an election when Islamists won *en masse* supports the secularist argument that those who vote for the Islamists do so more in expectation of better service than ideological radicalism.

6. Jenny B. White, "Pragmatists or Ideologues? Turkey's Welfare Party in Power," *Current History*, January 1997, p. 26.

7. "Refahli baskanin yaptigina bakin!" (Look at What the RP Mayor Has Done!) *Hurriyet*, 7 October 1994.

8. Jenny B. White, "Pragmatists or Ideologues? Turkey's Welfare Party in Power," p. 26.

9. *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 January 1998. The RP-controlled Sincan hosted a pro-Iran and anti-secular "Jerusalem Night" in February 1997, at which large portraits of Hizballah and Hamas leaders were displayed. As a result, the military arranged a "coincidental" rolling of tanks through downtown in order to send an appropriate message to the then ruling RP-DYP coalition. Iran's ambassador to Ankara had to leave Turkey after the incident. RP Mayor of the city, Bekir Yildiz, who reportedly has said "we will forcefully inject shari'a into the secularists," was sent to jail briefly.

10. Nicole and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: Ataturk and After* (London: John Murray, 1997), p. 333.

Even secularist media claimed that, one year after he took office, Istanbul's Mayor Tayyip Erdogan managed to get a handle on Istanbul's notorious transportation problem.¹¹ A well-known secular columnist, Rauf Tamer, was recommending patience with Erdogan in August 1994. He cautioned against premature criticism after personally hearing many favorable comments on the efficiency of the municipality.¹²

THE RISE OF THE WELFARE PARTY

The RP, formed by Necmettin Erbakan on 19 July 1983 under the watchful eye of the leaders of a coup in 1980, had a rather slow start, since it was not allowed to participate in the November 1983 general elections. The first elections in which the RP took part were the municipal elections of 25 March 1984, when the RP won five percent of the vote and control of 17 municipalities, including two provinces: Van and Urfa.

Five years later, in municipal elections in 1989, when the ruling Motherland Party (ANAP) received a severe beating, the RP doubled its share of the votes and won 100 municipalities including several major cities: Konya, Sivas, Van, Urfa, and Kahramanmaraş.

But the real shocker was the RP's even more unexpected performance in the 27 March 1994 local elections, when the party captured 327 municipalities, including Ankara and Istanbul, as well as other sizable centers like Konya, Diyarbakir, Erzurum, and Kayseri. The RP won 28 of the 76 provinces, or 36.8 percent, although it received only 19 percent of the votes cast.

One close observer of Turkish politics, Paul Henze, described the Welfare Party's municipal rise as follows: "[The Welfare Party] owed its rise in the polls to a combination of two factors: (1) strong voter disillusionment with all the center parties, and (2) widespread recognition of the effective performance of WP leaders at the local level. Where it captured control of Turkish cities, [Welfare Party leader Necmettin] Erbakan's party gained a reputation for honest, clean government."¹³

Sabri Sayari, Executive Director of the Institute of Turkish Studies in Washington, DC, had a similar assessment: "The municipal administrations controlled by the Islamist mayors since the 1994 elections have generally received high marks, particularly with respect to curtailing corruption in the city halls and providing municipal services to the working-class neighborhoods."¹⁴

THE PICTURE ACCORDING TO THE RP

In general, the Islamist mayors have boasted about progress registered since their 1994 victory in addressing the following problems: congested transportation, water and

11. "Rayli ulaşım ve metro hızlandı" (Metro and Rail Transportation Quickened), *Yeni Yüzyıl*, 27 March 1995.

12. Rauf Tamer, "Yumusama" (Détente), *Hürriyet*, 14 August 1994.

13. Paul B. Henze, *Turkey: Atatürk's Legacy, U.S. Relations and Prospects for the 21st Century*, with a foreword by Zbigniew Brzezinski (Haarlem: SOTA, 1998).

14. Sabri Sayari, "Turkey's Islamist Challenge," *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1996, p. 37.

fuel (natural gas) shortages, insufficient housing, environmental pollution, rising food prices, bribery and corruption, and “cultural elitism.” Solutions to this last problem including removing public statues which RP leaders deemed “immoral.”

According to RP sources, the progress has been almost miraculous. Party Leader Erbakan provided the following numbers in 1997: The RP-controlled municipalities inherited \$16 billion of debt in 1994, Erbakan claimed. The budgets of RP municipalities reportedly went from \$1.2 billion in 1995, to \$2 billion in 1996, and \$3.8 billion in 1997.¹⁵ Such figures, of course, must be corrected for the effect of chronically high annual inflation in Turkey, which hovered between 75 and 100 percent throughout the 1990s. Erbakan also pointed out the following explosion in revenues of municipalities in general: \$150 million in 1994; \$390 million in 1995; \$980 million in 1996; and \$1.87 billion in 1997.¹⁶

Thus, it seems, the municipalities made money right after the RP won the largest cities in Turkey in the March 1994 local elections. If Erbakan’s figures are correct, then municipalities made \$25 million profit in 1995; \$295 million in 1996; and a stunning \$1.2 billion in 1997.

Speaking at the same 1997 meeting, Tayyip Erdogan, the Islamist mayor of greater metropolitan Istanbul, said he took over Istanbul’s municipality with an external debt of \$2 billion dollars. “The revenues of ISKI (Istanbul Waterworks and Sewage Administration) were [\$1 million] a month when we took over [in 1995]. Today this figure has reached [\$17.5 million],” Erdogan claimed.¹⁷

Ankara’s Mayor Melih Gokcek, another committed political Islamist, painted a similar picture of superior service when he said that from 1994–97, his municipality laid down 613 kilometers of clean water pipes and 921 kilometers of waste water and rain water pipes.¹⁸

MOUNTING DEBT

Four years later, however, Islamist-controlled municipalities do not present a picture of unqualified financial success. As a matter of fact, among the public sector institutions that owe the most in non-paid social security premiums are the following RP-controlled municipalities: Sivas (\$5 million); Fatih (\$1.4 million); (Greater) Diyarbakir (\$1.2

15. “Hizmet Kervani Yuruyor” (Service Convoy Marches On), *Milli Gazete*, 28 March 1997. All dollar conversions are based on a rate of \$1 = TL 200,000, the average (mean) exchange rate valid for most of 1997.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.* There are over 2,000 municipalities in Turkey with populations under 10,000. Islamists control a minority of the total number of municipalities, but they control the largest ones. For example, almost one in every four Turks lives either in Ankara or Istanbul. Again, in terms of the distribution of investments, Islamist-governed Istanbul and Ankara alone received 23 percent of \$138 million dollar total investments made in Turkish cities between 1990–96, according to official figures released by Turkish Union of Chambers of Commerce and Bourses. The top 12 cities received 74 percent of all investments. See: “Istanbul’un Yildizi Hala Parlak” (Istanbul’s Star Shines Bright), *Radikal*, 28 July 1997.

18. “RP’liler Memnun” (RP Members are Satisfied), *Radikal*, 27 March 1997.

million); and Sanliurfa (\$1.2 million).¹⁹ Another RP-controlled city, Corum, also reportedly owes \$1.7 million to the Social Security Administration (SSK) in unpaid social security premiums.²⁰ Murat Basesgioglu, the Interior Minister of the coalition government which replaced the previous RP-led coalition in July 1997, said the municipal agencies of the RP-held municipality of Greater Istanbul lost \$80 million between 1994–97.²¹

TREASURY SUBSIDIES

The secular critics of the RP charge that whatever financial improvement was registered by Islamist-led municipalities during the last four years has been accomplished at the cost of either consumers or the State Treasury which, during the 1996–97 period of the coalition of the RP and the True Path Party (DP), heavily subsidized the RP-mayors' initiatives.

The municipalities of both greater Istanbul and Ankara made drastic price hikes in unit prices of water, natural gas and public transportation, despite promises given by Islamist mayors Erdogan and Gokcek to the contrary.²²

There is also evidence that \$5 billion worth of "external debt" accumulated by the RP-controlled municipalities was shouldered by the Turkish Treasury when the localities defaulted on payments. According to the Turkish Undersecretariat of the Treasury, the Treasury co-signed and guaranteed the repayment of \$4 billion of the total \$5 billion in external debt accumulated by Turkish municipalities. The Treasury had already paid back \$1 billion between June 1992 and February 1997 on behalf of the local administrations,²³ a period which of course includes the era of previous secular coalitions as well. As of July 1997, the time of the resignation of the Islamist-led RP-DYP coalition, the total value of matured but defaulted foreign loans borrowed by Turkish municipalities had reached \$727.5 million.²⁴ By the end of 1995, the Islamist-controlled Istanbul metropolitan administration owed \$507 million, and Ankara had accumulated \$1.3 billion in foreign debt. The Treasury, as of July 1997, had paid \$350.4 million on Ankara's behalf and \$189.9 million for Istanbul—with no reimbursements.

The municipal utilities, the services of which are cited by the RP as a source of pride, were among those institutions that relied heavily on unpaid external borrowing. Ankara's water and sewage works administration, ASKI, for example, owed \$293 million to foreign

19. "Top Ten Debtors to Turkish Social Security Administration (SSK)," Anatolian News Agency news story, 8 July 1998. However, one should note that these debts were not exclusive to the Islamist-run municipalities. Among the top debtors were also some municipalities run by the center-left Republican Peoples Party (CHP): Yenimahalle municipality owed \$1.9 million to the Social Security Administration; and Kucukcekmece owed \$1.7 million. Kecioren in Ankara, run by the ultra-nationalist National Action Party (MHP), owed \$1.4 million.

20. "Ogretmenden Itfaiye Muduru" (Teacher Becomes Fire Chief), *Hurriyet*, 25 March 1997.

21. *Hurriyet*, 23 October 1997.

22. Goksel Ozkoylu, "Uc Yil Once, Uc Yil Sonra" (Three Years Earlier, Three Years Later), *Radikal*, 27 March 1997.

23. "Belediyeler Dis Borc Bataginda" (Municipalities are Stuck in the Muck of External Debt), *Radikal*, 28 July 1997.

24. *Ibid.*

creditors by the end of 1995. Istanbul's ISKI owed \$339 million. Ankara's electricity, gas and public bus administration, EGO, accumulated \$982 million in external debt.²⁵ These examples suggest that there has been some degree of subvention provided by the central government to underwrite the Islamist-controlled municipalities' attempt to convert expanded local services into political capital.

BREAD WARS

Critics of the Islamist mayors point out that the consumers, and especially the masses with fixed incomes, had to foot the bill for expanding local services. Prices of a long-list of items from gasoline to bread have risen sharply since RP mayors took office in 1994—although in all fairness one must note that such price hikes also occurred frequently during the rule of previous secular governments.

The price of one loaf of bread (perhaps the most critical food item for fixed-income, large-family Turks) in Istanbul, for example, jumped from TL 3,000 to TL 6,000 within the six months in 1994 after Taysyip Erdogan became the city's first Islamist mayor.²⁶ By November 1996, the bread price reached TL 18,000 despite the Islamist-led coalition's efforts to keep it down to TL 15,000.²⁷ That translated into a price hike of 600 percent within two years—an increase that certainly outstripped the cumulative annual inflation of about 200 percent.

"Since the coming to power of the Welfare Party-True Path Party (RP-DYP) government, we have faced three increases in the basic ingredients of bread," said Sakir Demirci, a bakery owner and member of the Istanbul Bakers Cooperative in November 1996.²⁸ "Flour prices increase nearly every 15 days. Yeast and fuel prices increase every month. This time, the bakers are left to face the citizens. We are obliged to reflect these increases in bread prices. . . The [RP-DYP] government has proposed a decrease in flour prices. Although we meet the authorities every day, we haven't received anything," Demirci added.²⁹ Within the two years since then, bread prices have nearly doubled again in many metropolitan markets.³⁰

POLITICIZATION OF CADRES

Islamist leaders in municipalities preserved a time-honored tradition perfected by the preceding secular administrations: they fired secular cadres and replaced them with personnel who shared their Islamist world-view.³¹ They continued to pursue patronage at

25. Ibid. All figures include principal and interest accrued.

26. "The Welfare Mayors After Six Months," *Turkish Daily News*, 16 October 1994.

27. "Cheap Bread or Pie in the Sky?" *Turkish Daily News*, 22 November 1996.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Note that not all Islamist mayors first came to power with the March 1994 elections, since the RP's municipal prominence was ushered with the 1989 local elections. The Istanbul sub-provinces of Kagithane, Bahcelievler, Sultanbeyli, and Arnavutkoy, for example, were run by Islamist mayors beginning in 1989. The

its worst, since a number of such appointees were totally unqualified for the job at hand. When early in his career Istanbul's Erdogan appointed non-Welfare personnel to municipal posts, the party organization exploded in indignant furor and accused Erdogan of "betrayal."³²

Even judges were not immune from such partisan policy. "Welfare tried to move hundreds of secular-minded judges to posts in rural districts and replace them with Islamist judges, prompting an outcry before the move was blocked by a supervisory council."³³

The RP "has shifted non-Islamist civil servants [whom it cannot fire] to unpleasant and even absurd jobs—such as standing all day in the middle of a busy intersection counting cars—in an attempt to induce them to take early retirement so that their positions can be filled with Islamists."³⁴

In Istanbul's Eminonu district, Mayor Ahmet Cetinsaya dismissed over 200 municipal workers, citing insufficient funds. "But the municipality recruited an equal number of pro-RP staff immediately after the redundancies. The remaining university graduate managers of the municipality have been appointed to the duties of counting stray dogs and collecting garbage."³⁵

The Islamist mayors placed partisanship before merit in their personnel decisions. Yahya Dai, a saxophonist employed by the Greater Ankara municipality's City Band was reassigned by Mayor Melih Gokcek to water the municipal gardens.³⁶ Dai later resigned and joined the critically acclaimed pop-fusion group, Asiaminor.

Eighteen female workers employed at the administrative offices of Pendik municipality (a suburb of Istanbul) were reassigned to trash collection by the RP Mayor Erol Kaya. The female workers protested their reassignment by saying that they were high-school graduates, and knew how to type and use computers. Some of them were actually attending the Open Education College. They claimed they were discriminated against by the Islamist municipality on the basis of their gender.³⁷

Aydin Talay, the RP mayor of Van, created waves when he reassigned his Director of Legal Affairs, Semsettin Polat, an attorney with 23 years' experience, to work as a

city of Sivas in central Anatolia had an RP mayor beginning in December 1991, when a by-election was held to replace the previous left-of-center mayor who wanted to run for the parliament. Thus, by the time the RP won over 300 municipalities in March 1994, some of the municipalities had long been struggling with the negative impact of the partisan personnel policies implemented by Islamist mayors over a four year period. Kagithane of Istanbul was one such municipality where 342 municipal workers had been fired by its Islamist mayor by the time of the 1994 elections.

32. Baki Kosar, "Buyuksehire buyuk ofke" (Great Anger at Greater-City Municipality), *Nokta*, 31 July-6 August 1994, p.28.

33. White, "Pragmatists or Ideologues? Turkey's Welfare Party in Power," p. 29.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

35. Sevinc Kara, "Eminonu Municipality and Hizmet Foundation: Serving the people of Eminonu?" *Turkish Daily News*, 18 December 1996.

36. "Bahcivan saksofoncu sahnede" (Gardener Sax Player on the Stage), *Hurriyet*, 4 July 1994.

37. "Kadin Iscilere Refah Surgunu" (Female Workers Forced to Exile by Refah), *Hurriyet*, 2 December 1994.

gardener at the Parks and Gardens Directorate.³⁸ Talay had previously fired 165 municipal employees but had to readmit them when a court decided in favor of the employees.

Greater Erzurum's RP Mayor Ersan Gemalmaz assigned Mehmet Yalcintas as Erzurum's new Directorate of Culture—although Yalcintas did not even have a high-school diploma and has previously worked for five years as the director of the city's slaughterhouse. "I don't have the faintest idea about theater. Nor do I know how to play any instruments. I'll make use of the expertise of my friends who are more knowledgeable in this field," Yalcintas confessed to the press.³⁹

The Director of the municipal firefighting department in Corum (central Anatolia), Yasar Tortum, does not even have a middle-school diploma. Tortum also admitted that he had no experience in firefighting prior to his assignment.⁴⁰ Tortum's most important credential turned out to be his role as a campaign worker during the electoral campaign of the city's Islamist mayor, Arif Ersoy.

Hamza Yanilmaz, a two-time Karate champion, had served as Erbakan's personal body guard. That apparently was sufficient to qualify Yanilmaz to serve as the mayor of Elazig, an eastern city with a population of 400,000.⁴¹

One of the most explosive confrontations over the RP's personnel policy took place in the Istanbul suburb of Gebze. When Gebze's Islamist Mayor Ahmet Pembegullu fired 653 temporary municipal workers, and another 80 who, he claimed, were hired through fraudulent exams, Gebze became the scene of violent confrontations between the fired protesters and the police.⁴² One hundred workers and 15 policemen were wounded (three critically) in the confrontations that followed. The violent demonstrations continued for a whole month.

ATATURK'S LEGACY ATTACKED

Some Islamist mayors took it upon themselves to challenge Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's secularist and pro-Western legacy head-on, thereby creating widespread resentment on the part of the many who did not vote for the RP in the December 1995 elections. Some RP mayors overshadowed others in their zeal to undo more than 70 years of secular public administration.

Rize's Islamist Mayor Sevki Yilmaz became the *enfant terrible* of radical Islamists with his unreserved attacks on some of the most revered symbols of Kemalist past. He achieved national notoriety in August 1994, by trying to change the name of a main street in Rize to "Ziya Hursit"—a Rize deputy of the first Turkish Parliament who had planned to assassinate Ataturk in Izmir, in June 1926. Hursit, together with others similarly

38. "Van'ın RP'li Baskanı, Avukatı Bahçıvan Yaptı" (RP Mayor of Van Assigned the Attorney as Gardener), *Hurriyet*, 28 November 1994.

39. "Mezbahacıyı Sanat Muduru Yaptılar" (They Made an Art Director Out of a Butcher), *Hurriyet*, 19 June 1994.

40. "Ogretmenden Itfaiye Muduru" (Teacher Becomes Fire Chief), *Hurriyet*, 25 March 1997.

41. *Milli Gazete*, 30 July 1998.

42. "Gebze'de Gergin Gün" (Tense Day in Gebze), *Turkiye*, 3 July 1994; and "Gebze Karisti" (Gebze Explodes), *Turkiye*, 9 July 1994.

accused, was tried by a special tribunal and then hanged. As a result of tremendous pressure brought upon the Rize municipality by the secular parties in the Parliament, Yilmaz's proposed name change was not carried out.

Yilmaz soon made the headlines again for refusing to attend the official celebrations of the "Day of Victory" on 30 August, the date on which, in 1922, the invading Greek armies were repulsed from the heart of Anatolia. In September 1994, he was also conspicuously absent when the 70th anniversary of Atatürk's arrival in Rize was commemorated.⁴³ Yilmaz was sentenced to two years in absentia in May 1998 for "insulting the Turkish Parliament" during a television program broadcast in 1994.⁴⁴

LIFESTYLES CHALLENGED

The RP-run municipalities raised a lot of eyebrows among secularists (the 79 percent of the electorate who did not vote for the RP in the December 1995 general elections) when the mayors began to inject a heavy dose of Islamist morality into public life. They seemed to be determined to establish "cultural populist Islam, committed more to promoting gradual, long-term cultural change than to altering the legal and prohibitionist framework of the political system."⁴⁵ This pro-Islamist intervention in the public domain was especially pronounced during 1994–95, when a number of the RP's new mayors displayed a noticeable lack of finesse. Such mayors as Sukru Karatepe of Kayseri, who frequently made the headlines, came across as arrogant and vengeful, and not as representatives of a more tolerant order.⁴⁶

The Islamist mayors challenged secular and Western lifestyles in ways that both disrupted the status quo and forced the Turkish establishment to question whether such a heavy injection of "cultural Islam" in Islamist-run cities would be a precursor for demands of "political Islam" at a constitutional and legal level.

A ban on alcohol was favored and implemented by RP mayors on several occasions, when the political cost of doing so was not too high. When he was Minister of Interior in the 1970s as a member of the National Salvation Party, Oguzhan Asilturk, who later was Secretary General of the RP, required all restaurants that wanted to serve alcohol to obtain a new special permit.⁴⁷ In 1994 the Islamist Mayor of Gaziantep's Merkez Sehitkamil district, Mehmet Bozgeyik, banned the sale of alcohol in over 50 retail kiosks owned by

43. "Ataturk'ten Yine Kacti" (He Again Ran Away from Atatürk), *Hurriyet*, 18 September 1994.

44. "Sevki'ye 2 Yil Hapis" (Two Years Jail Time for Sevki), *Hurriyet*, 26 May 1998. Article 159 of the Turkish penal code makes "insulting the Turkish Grand National Assembly" a crime. At the time of the sentencing, Yilmaz was in Germany.

45. Umit Cizre Sakallioglu, "Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, 1996, p. 248.

46. Karatepe went on record by recommending the Islamists "not to ever forget your anger and disgust" against the secular regime. In 1997, Karatepe admitted that he went too far and could not "step on the brake." See Faruk Bildirici, "Kayseri'de Refah Holding" (Refah Holding in Kayseri), *Hurriyet*, 27 March 1997. Karatepe was found guilty of provoking the public to hatred by creating religious, racial and class discrimination in a speech in December 1997, and was sentenced to one year in jail.

47. Metin Heper, "Islam and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Reconciliation?" *The Middle East Journal* 51, no. 1 (Winter 1997), p. 37.

the municipality.⁴⁸ The rental contracts of those kiosk lease-holders who insisted on carrying alcoholic beverages were simply not renewed.

The same prohibition was adopted in Kayseri, the large Islamist-controlled municipality in central Anatolia whose metropolitan Mayor, Sukru Karatepe, has already been mentioned. Karatepe declined to renew the alcoholic beverage license of many restaurants and beer-halls in the city after he became mayor in 1994. According to one account, some entrepreneurial sons of Kayseri benefited nicely from the situation by loading up their cars with beer and Raki (the Turkish spirit similar to Greek *ouzo* and Arab *'araq*) and selling them at a nice profit alongside the highways outside the city.⁴⁹

“Fighting prostitution” in particular, and “eradicating immorality” in general, was a campaign promise of many RP mayors. When Imdat Sutluoglu, the RP Mayor of Ardesen (a sub-province of Rize near the Black Sea), was asked to reflect on his three-month record following his victory in the March 1994 elections, he said “we have constructed 200 meters of concrete road although I’ve been in power for only three months.” He followed this with an indication of the moral agenda all the Islamist mayors brought to the job: “We have neutralized prostitution. We can’t say that we have eradicated it totally, because we are being hampered by the existing laws. We have to obey the laws,” Sutluoglu said.⁵⁰ Brothels are legal in major Turkish cities and they are closely regulated by the government.

Nusret Bayraktar, the RP Mayor of Beyoglu, a busy downtown sub-province in the heart of Istanbul, which also hosts the city’s legal red-light district, created waves in 1994 when he announced his intention to close down the walled-in brothel quarter. Bayraktar could not carry out his promise in the face of wide-spread resistance to his initiative.⁵¹ He also had to reverse course on his proposal to paint the traffic stripes on the pavement Islamic green, instead of the customary yellow.

The Islamist Mayor of the eastern city of Agri, Zeki Basaran, denied operating licenses to some television stations, which he claimed were making “immoral broadcasts.” He terminated the broadcasts, made from antennas conveniently placed on top of the municipality building. “The people called us repeatedly to put an end to such immorality,” Basaran said.⁵²

Despite similar attempts to “clean up the airwaves” in other Islamist municipalities, there is some evidence that such zeal by RP officials was not always shared by the citizens that they represented. A survey carried out by the Chief Directorate of Turk Telecom to gauge the viewing habits of cable TV subscribers in decidedly-Islamist Konya, for example, revealed that almost 100 percent of the subscribers preferred stations that include

48. “RP’li Baskandan Icki Yasagi” (Alcohol Ban from RP Mayor), *Hurriyet*, 15 July 1994.

49. “Kayseri’de Refah Holding” (Refah Holding in Kayseri), *Hurriyet*, 27 March 1997.

50. “Ardesen Belediyesi Hizmet Atagi Baslattı” (Ardesen Municipality Launches Service Initiative), *Turkiye*, 12 July 1994.

51. It is curious to note that Bayraktar, during an interview before the 1994 local elections, said he expected 45 percent of the prostitutes working in the legal brothels to vote for the RP. Bayraktar was trying to demonstrate the broad voter base and the populist appeal of his party. See Cakir, *Ne Seriat Ne Demokrasi*, p. 213.

52. “RP’li Baskandan Ozel TV’lere Sansur” (RP Mayor Censors Private TV Stations), *Hurriyet*, 31 October 1994.

pornographic broadcasts, according to a report by the semi-official Anatolian News Agency.⁵³ Almost all the participants in the survey were interested in watching channels SAT1, RTL and PRO7, which air such programs.

Greater Erzurum's Virtue Party member Mayor Eran Gemalmaz banned a billboard on one of city's main streets rented by LCW, a company known for its quality youth and children's apparel. The billboard in question showed a group of young adults, including a tall young woman in shorts. Gemalmaz denied permission for the advertisement on the grounds that "there is no need for swimming-suit and underwear advertisements in Erzurum, which has an altitude of 2,000 meters."⁵⁴

In another major Turkish city, Izmir, the retail sale of panties and bras in the Kemeralti district was banned on the grounds that such underwear was "immoral" and it was against Turkish "customs and traditions."⁵⁵ Izmir is run by Mayor Burhanettin Ozfatura who, although currently not a member of the Virtue Party, is well known for his pro-Islamist conservatism. The municipal policemen who confiscated 5,000 ladies panties and bras said "there are thousands of families who shop here everyday. Sale of such items is not proper for our society."⁵⁶

Some Virtue Party members continued this preoccupation with ladies' fashion. Ramazan Yenidede, FP deputy from Denizli, created an uproar when, in objecting to the characterization of headscarves as a "political statement," blurted out that "some women's dresses may also be said to be a sign of immorality and prostitution."⁵⁷

Some hotels in RP-ruled cities volunteered to enforce their own version of public morality by segregating recreational facilities by gender, and refusing to admit couples as customers unless they could prove that they were married. The five-star, 1894-bed Caprice Hotel near Didim on the Aegean coast is an example. The luxurious hotel not only advertised that no alcoholic beverages were served, but also segregated its swimming pool and beach by gender.⁵⁸ Caprice advertised that it had separate prayer halls for men and women as well.

Islamist vigilance was also applied to aspects of daily life that were not previously suspected of any ethical infringement. Lottery ticket vendors in Ankara were certainly surprised when the RP administration of the city increased the pressure against lottery ticket sales. Islamists regard the lottery as "sin," because it is unearned income. The municipality's police began to write hefty tickets for the lottery vendors for "loitering the streets." Huseyin Poyraz, President of the Ankara Chamber of Artisans, which represents lottery ticket vendors, complained that "they are telling people in Corum and Konya that

53. "Cable TV Subscribers in Konya Interested in Pornography," *Turkish Daily News*, 22 June 1998. There are 9,223 cable TV subscribers in Islamist Konya, with 444 people on the waiting list for service.

54. Ferit Ozcan, "Bacak Sansuru" (Leg Censure), *Milliyet*, 14 June 1998.

55. "Isportaciya Sutyen Kilot Satma Yasagi" (Vendors are Forbidden to Sell Bras and Panties), *Hurriyet*, 17 May 1998.

56. *Ibid.*

57. "Yenidede: Bazi giysiler fahiseligin simgesi" (Yenidede: Some Clothes are Symbols of Prostitution), *Milliyet*, 26 June 1998.

58. "Islami Otele Goz Hapsi" (Islamic Hotel on Watch List), *Yeni Yuzyil*, 7 April 1996.

to purchase lottery tickets is a sin.” Poyraz continued: “We earn our livelihood legally and pay our taxes too. Yet the attacks are on the rise.”⁵⁹

Suleyman Canan, Islamist mayor of Kutahya, a western Anatolian city famous for its beautiful ceramics, removed the “European Diploma” sign from the central plaza. The “diploma,” given to Kutahya by the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly in 1993, consisted of twelve stars, each representing one EU member, encircling an abstract symbol of ceramic pottery. Turkey has long sought membership in the European Union, and the refusal of the EU to grant this membership at the Luxembourg Summit in December 1997 was a deep disappointment to the Turkish secular establishment. It was necessary to “save” the “Ottoman city of Kutahya” from this European award, Canan reportedly claimed and added: “This is Crusader mentality. They are aiming to convert the people to Christianity by distancing them from their own [Muslim] beliefs. We have to collapse this Byzantine game. We do not want the diploma of Europe which could not stop the flow of Muslim blood in Bosnia.”⁶⁰

Mehmet Kayacan, the Mayor of Afyon’s Bolvadin sub-province, removed the statue of a bull from the center of the city, on the grounds that the statue was nothing but an “idol,”⁶¹ prohibited in Islam. Critics said the bull was merely a symbol of the most vibrant industry of the region, i.e. livestock breeding. Mayor Kayacan was not impressed. “I have to deliver what I’ve promised to the people before the elections. The statue has been removed by decision of the City Hall and stored at the municipality depot,” he said.

Ankara metropolitan Mayor Melih Gokcek similarly made headlines when he removed public statues, commenting “let me spit on such so-called ‘works of art.’” In 1998, Gokcek was sentenced by a Turkish court to pay over \$1,000 in penalty to Mehmet Aksoy, one of the artists whose statue Gokcek ordered removed and broken in half.⁶² At the time, Istanbul Mayor Erdogan said he totally supported Gokcek in the matter,⁶³ as attested by nine statues removed by Erdogan from public display.⁶⁴

In the past, a frequent public target of the Islamists has been the statues of Ataturk, usually standing in the center of municipal plazas. Some have been attacked and broken by Islamist mobs. The Ticani sect gained notoriety in the 1950s with its attack on Ataturk’s busts, and recent removals of statues by the RP were taken by secularists as *prima facie* evidence of the RP’s “reactionary” nature.

CORRUPTION REVISITED

Advocates of political Islam at home and abroad argue that such “cultural initiatives,” no matter how “reactionary” and “regressive” they may seem to the secular establishment,

59. “Bilet Almak Gunahmis” (Buying Lottery Tickets is Said to be a Sin), *Hurriyet*, 23 June 1994.

60. “RP’li Baskan Odul Sokturdu” (RP Mayor Removes the Award), *Hurriyet*, 1 May 1994.

61. “RP’li Baskan, Put diye Boga Heykelini Kaldirdi” (RP Mayor Removes Bull Statue, Claiming its an Idol), *Hurriyet*, 26 April 1994.

62. “Sculpture Causes More Trouble for Mayor Gokcek,” *Turkish Daily News*, 24 June 1998.

63. Husamettin Kocan, “Bak su muzirlara!” (Look at those Rascals!), *Hurriyet*, 20 June 1994.

64. The whole subject of cultural policy as implemented by Islamist mayors easily deserves a separate study of its own.

can and should be accommodated if Turkey is to remain the pluralistic democracy that it claims to be. But even if this premise is accepted, the Islamists still appear to have violated a major campaign promise, one which supposedly was going to set them apart from all the other preceding administrations: the elimination of corruption and cronyism.

As recently as January 1997, there were indications that the Islamists were in fact keeping this campaign promise: "For the most part, Welfare mayors have been more efficient and less corrupt than their predecessors."⁶⁵ Another long-time observer echoed this, also in 1997: "Many people praised the [Islamist] mayors for bringing in better management, and, unusually in Turkey, even Istanbul's biased and scandal-hungry media was unable to track down any of the gross financial irregularities that featured in previous administrations."⁶⁶

In April 1996, two years after coming to power, Greater Istanbul Mayor Tayyip Erdogan boasted that during his first two years in office, the city's revenue had increased from \$105 million to \$300 million, "largely due to the prevention of corruption."⁶⁷ "The first problem of Istanbul was corruption, and the water question followed this . . ." said Mayor Erdogan, and he declared that the RP had solved both of these problems.⁶⁸

But the recent data suggest that such claims are either empirically incorrect (i.e. corruption did in fact continue in a number of Islamist municipalities), or empirically spurious (i.e. corruption is alive and well under new disguises). Mayor Erdogan himself recently admitted that, after four years of RP administration, he could not totally eliminate bribery in a municipality that employs 32,500 workers. He said over 70 cases of bribery were currently before the courts for prosecution.⁶⁹

Moreover, Erdogan now stands accused by the Prime Ministry's Audit Commission with a variety of corruption allegations.⁷⁰ These include having 14 municipal agencies give all their advertisement and promotion businesses to a company owned by the Islamist television station, Kanal 7; improper sale of land to Kombassan Holding, a holding company known for its ties to Islamist brotherhoods; hiring a person as a consultant who had been sentenced to 1.5 years in prison for insulting Ataturk,⁷¹ etc.

Ankara Mayor Melih Gokcek similarly had to defend himself against a number of corruption allegations,⁷² including using public funds to provide materiel for Quranic courses and student dormitories run by Islamist sects, illegally providing land and business opportunities to RP party elite and their relatives, and illegally shifting funds to the

65. White, "Pragmatists or Ideologues? Turkey's Welfare Party in Power," p. 26.

66. Nicole and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: Ataturk and After*, p. 333.

67. M. Akif Beki, "Two Years of Refah Rule in Istanbul," *Turkish Daily News*, 1 April 1996.

68. Ibid.

69. "Rusveti bitiremedim" (I Couldn't Eliminate Bribery), *Hurriyet*, 3 July 1998.

70. Samil Tayyar, "Erdogan'a Buyuk Sorusturma" (Big Investigation for Erdogan), *Yeni Yuzyl*, 9 July 1998. In September 1998, Erdogan was sentenced to four months in jail for the content of a speech he delivered in Siirt, in December 1997. The sentence has effectively ended Erdogan's political career.

71. Kadir Ercan, "Topun Agzindalar" (They are about to be Fired), *Hurriyet*, 31 March 1998.

72. Ibid.

pro-Islamist television station, Kanal A. Similar detailed allegations of corruption have been made against Islamist Mayor of Sanliurfa.⁷³

The following former RP and current Virtue Party mayors were also being investigated for corruption in 1998: Istanbul Umraniye Mayor Mehmet Bingol; Gaziosmanpasa Mayor Recep Koral; Kahramanmaras Kilili Mayor Mehmet Bezirci; Diyarbakir Yenisehir Mayor Mehmet Guran, Diyarbakir Sur Mayor Celal Toptanci; Elazig Mayor Hamza Yanilmaz; Bitlis Guroymak Mayor Huseyin Mutlu; and Icel Bozyazi Mayor Muzaffer Unal.

One means by which traditional corruption continued in some Islamist-run cities was the mandatory “contribution” asked of those who submitted proposals for various municipal tenders, to be made either to the party organization or various “foundations” supported by the party. In one detailed case study of the RP-controlled Eminonu district in Istanbul, for example, it was claimed that business owners had to make large donations to the “Hizmet Foundation” in order to get permission for construction, renovation, and a number of property development works which needed the approval of the municipality.⁷⁴

Eminonu was apparently not an isolated case. Similarly deceptive practices were carried out in other Istanbul municipalities as well. Illegal construction has always been a major problem for all Turkish cities, in an attempt to cope with migration from rural Anatolia. Under RP rule in Istanbul, such illegal buildings were permitted in return for a suitable “donation” to the Greater Istanbul municipality, headed by Erdogan. Erdogan’s municipality officially admitted that “donations” were accepted from the owners of illegal construction projects.⁷⁵ Such donations apparently formed an important part of the \$275,000 worth of bonuses Erdogan distributed to his municipal workers.⁷⁶

Another means through which corrupt practices allegedly continued in Islamist-run municipalities was the award of city tenders to contractors with direct or indirect (but clearly inappropriate) ties to RP officials. For example, the Magic company, which in 1994 won the \$1.45 million advertising contract from the Istanbul municipality’s Electricity, Telephone, Tramway (IETT) administration only two months after Magic was formed, turned out to be a small family company, with no previous track record, unable to post any customary performance bonds. One of Magic’s partners, Ismail Hakki Senguler, was a pro-Islamist businessman with known connections to religious orders. Four other partners with the same surname were very close friends of Greater Municipality Secretary General Kahraman Emmioglu. Furthermore, IETT Director General Muammer Kantarci had previously worked for the Islamist bank Al-Baraka, where his supervisor was none other than Emmioglu.⁷⁷

73. Emin Colasan, “GAP’in Uyanik Belediye Baskani” (GAP’s Smartaleck Mayor), *Hurriyet*, 5 June 1998; and “Bahcivan’in Aciklamasi” (Gardener’s Explanation), *Hurriyet*, 11 June 1998.

74. Kara, “Eminonu municipality and Hizmet Foundation: Serving the people of Eminonu?”

75. “Kacak yapiya ilgin cozum” (Interesting Solution to Illegal Construction), *Yeni Yuzyil*, 27 March 1995.

76. *Ibid.*

77. “Trilyonluk garip ihale” (Weird Tender Worth Trillion), *Hurriyet*, 15 September 1994.

THE KURDISH FACTOR

Whether the mayors of the new Virtue Party can win the sort of votes in the April 1999 municipal elections which the RP won in 1994 will, to some extent, depend on how the ethnic Kurdish population in southeastern Turkey will vote.⁷⁸ Since 1973, in election after election, the Islamists (whether under the RP or Erbakan's earlier National Salvation Party flag) received well-above-national-average votes from those provinces that are dominated by an ethnically Kurdish electorate.⁷⁹

In the 1994 local elections, for example, the RP received 44.5 percent of the votes in Bingol, 38.0 percent in Bitlis, 36.7 percent in Mus, 33.7 percent in Batman, 33 percent in Diyarbakir, 31.5 percent in Siirt, and 29.2 percent in Adiyaman, although the RP's national average was 19 percent. Earlier, in the 1989 elections, the RP won 27.8 percent in Bitlis, 27.7 percent in Mus, 25.2 percent in Bingol, 24.0 percent in Siirt, and 19.6 percent in Diyarbakir—although the RP's national average was only 9.8 percent.⁸⁰ All the above cities are situated in the Southeast region where ethnically Kurdish voters are the majority. The picture has been similar in almost all the other elections since 1973.

But there is evidence that disillusioned ethnic Kurds may this time withhold their protest votes from the RP's successor, the Virtue Party—just as they switched from the RP to the Social Democratic Peoples Party (SHP) between the 1989 local and 1991 general elections, when the pro-Kurdish Peoples Labor Party (HEP) entered the 1991 elections on the SHP ticket.

In Sirnak, for example, a predominantly ethnic Kurdish city in the southeast, the RP received only 2.6 percent of the vote (in sharp contrast to their 19 percent national average) while the SHP won a commanding 61.2 percent. In Mardin, the RP dropped from 14.4 percent in 1989 to 8.7 percent in 1991, while the SHP jumped from 29.4 percent to 53.9 percent. In Siirt the RP dropped from 24 percent in 1989 to 20.6 percent in 1991, while the SHP rose from 26.6 percent to 39.6 percent.⁸¹

Hashim Hashimi, an RP deputy of Kurdish origin from Diyarbakir and Chairman of the Turkish Parliament's Migration Commission, made it clear that Kurds were disappointed with RP Chairman Erbakan for not keeping his electoral campaign promises of 1995. During an interview he gave to Voice of America (VOA) in 1997, Hashimi claimed that Erbakan's unkept promises included annulling the military cooperation agreement between Israel and Turkey and the promise not to renew Operation "Provide Comfort," the

78. See Henri Barkey, "Turkey, Islamic Politics, and the Kurdish Question," *World Policy Journal*, Spring 1996; Burhanettin Duran, "Approaching the Kurdish Question via Adil Duzen: An Islamist Formula of the Welfare Party for Ethnic Coexistence," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18, no. 1 (April 1998); and Umit Cizre Sakallioğlu, "Kurdish Nationalism from an Islamist Perspective," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18, no. 1 (April 1998).

79. Barkey, "Turkey, Islamic Politics, and the Kurdish Question."

80. *Ibid.*

81. For a comprehensive and comparative table showing the top twenty provinces that Islamists won in seven elections since 1973, see Cakir, *Ne Seriat Ne Demokrasi*, p. 218.

US and allied overflights of northern Iraq. Hashimi told VOA at the time that Erbakan's popularity was beginning to wane among grassroots supporters.⁸²

Murat Bozlak, the Chairman of the pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HADEP), has also been critical of Erbakan's performance. Bozlak said Erbakan did not keep his pre-election promise to "solve the Kurdish problem."⁸³ Before the elections, Erbakan convinced a number of Kurdish voters in the southeast that, under the wider banner of Islam, the emerging antagonism between the Turks and the Kurds would diminish. Four years later, there were fewer Kurds who believed that Erbakan or his successors could magically solve this longstanding problem.

CONCLUSIONS

In the December 1995 elections, not all who voted for the Islamist Welfare Party did so because they wanted to replace Turkey's secular democracy with a theocracy based on shari'a. The "hard core" of Islamists who voted for the RP in 1995 has been estimated at around seven percent of the total electorate.⁸⁴ The question is whether, on the basis of past four years' performance in the municipalities, the RP's successor, the Virtue Party, will be able to increase the number of voters who voted for the Islamists primarily because they wanted better services.

There is a possibility that, true to the law of diminishing returns, it will prove to be difficult for Islamist mayors to continue providing services in the future at such a satisfactory level. First of all, the provision of basic services (garbage collection, fixing potholes, etc.) which made the most dramatic initial impact on the electorate, has lost its novelty value. The promise to supply such services today no longer has the political value it did in 1994.

Islamist mayors have also instituted novel administrative mechanisms such as "peoples' councils," where mayoral representatives meet with neighborhood people once a week to hear their grievances and give an account of a city's past performance.⁸⁵ In Istanbul, Beyoglu Mayor Bayraktar has authorized citizen volunteers as "honorary inspectors" to conduct price and quality checks on the spot.⁸⁶ By their success in providing such services and instituting such innovations, the Islamist mayors raised the bar for what constitutes a "successful record" for a mayor. Even if they do not share the Islamist agenda of the RP/FP, the future mayors of Turkey, regardless of their party affiliation, will be held to a higher standard. So, in one sense, Islamist mayors may ironically become the victims of their own success if they cannot keep up the pace of efficient and innovative service which they themselves have set.

82. Ugur Akinci, "Abdullah Gul to VOA: Our electoral strength is 30 percent," *Turkish Daily News*, 14 August 1997.

83. Saadet Oruc, "HADEP Chairman Bozlak: PM Erbakan did not keep his promise," *Turkish Daily News*, 2 May 1997.

84. *Nokta*, 26 June-2 July 1994.

85. Cakir, *Ne Seriat Ne Demokrasi*, pp. 179-80.

86. Sukran Ozcakmak, "RP'li Belediyenin Fahri Mufettisi" (Voluntary Inspector of RP Municipality), *Nokta*, 5-11 June 1994.

Second, one reason why the Islamist mayors may not be able to maintain the current level of services in the future is because some of the most crucial municipal projects tackled since 1994 were actually handed over to the Islamists by the preceding secular mayors. Rail transportation projects in Istanbul, which received much attention from Erdogan, for example, were planned during the tenure of greater Istanbul's previous mayor, the social democrat Nurettin Sozen. The city's transportation plan up to the year 2010 reportedly looks "remarkably like the one which Sozen presented."⁸⁷ There are a number of important water projects in Istanbul, such the North Collector and Baltalimani Pre-Treatment Facility, which date to the time of Motherland Party (ANAP) Mayor Bedrettin Dalan.⁸⁸ The "Fast Tramway" project for Istanbul also dates back to Dalan's administration.⁸⁹ Islamist mayors may find the going harder once they run out of projects inherited at no cost from previous secularist administrations, and have to design new projects of their own, encountering new political and financial risks.

Third, there is now evidence that the Islamists' comparatively superior service record did have a cost for the Turkish taxpayers, in terms of substantial price hikes on basic staples such as bread and gasoline, generous Treasury subsidies, and mounting debts to agencies such as the Social Security Administration. Their claim of "financial success" needs further research before it can be accepted at face value. Turkish voters now know that "there is no free lunch" under Islamic populism.

Fourth, corruption is by no means exclusive to Islamist mayors. Past Turkish mayors of all stripes and/or their underlings were accused of many major wrongdoings in the past. The hefty bribes paid to the head of ISKI, the Istanbul water and sewage works, under Istanbul's previous Mayor, social democrat Nurettin Sezgin, is one such recent example. But what Islamist mayors did demonstrate is that they are not above such abuses of power. They eliminated, to some extent, old-fashioned bribery, only to replace it with "voluntary contributions" to party organizations and the steering of municipal contracts and municipal real estate to the party faithful.

Municipal corruption tarnished the Islamists' reputation at a level close to home for the average voter. Some of the mayors in question, such as Erdogan and Gokcek, lost some of their "clean" image. They no longer represented a new generation of administrators who could stay above the all too familiar morass of patronage and cronyism which suffuse Turkish society at large.⁹⁰ The "new generation" of Islamist mayors proved to be as adept at corruption, blind patronage, and populist shallowness as their "older generation" secular counterparts.

87. Gul Demir and Niki Gamm, "Winning is All About Keeping Promises – the RP in Istanbul," *Turkish Daily News*, 31 October 1995.

88. *Ibid.*

89. "Rayli Ulasim ve Metro Hizlandi" (Metro and Rail Transportation Quickened), *Yeni Yuzuil*, 27 March 1995.

90. Currently there are 215 cases before the Turkish Parliament's Constitution and Judicial Joint Committee to have the immunities of 104 deputies (out of 550) removed so they can be tried in a court of law on various charges of corruption and wrongdoing. See Sebahat Karakoyun, "Meclis'te Suclu Rekoru" (A Record of Criminals in the Parliament), *Cumhuriyet*, 21 July 1998.

Fifth, at a cultural level, Islamist mayors did not merely employ Islam as a “communication system,”⁹¹ but also as an obscurantist reaction to the secular, Western lifestyle of a majority of Turks. By their frequent attacks on Atatürk’s principles and secularist legacy, their radical rejection of Western art and values, and a majoritarian swagger masquerading as pluralistic tolerance,⁹² some Islamists at the municipal level have shown that their anachronistic agenda is far from the modernist synthesis that some younger generation RP/FP politicians like Abdullah Gul and Bahri Zengin are said to espouse.

It is still too early to predict who will win the local elections of April 1999. Their record of municipal service will certainly help the Islamists, but there are three more factors that need to be taken into consideration:

First, ethnic Kurdish voters are not as hopeful of the Islamists as they were in 1994 and 1995. All other factors being equal, one should expect a drop in support for Islamists in east and southeast Turkey, as well as in the shanty town districts of major cities like Istanbul, Ankara, Adana, Icel, Antalya, and Izmir, to which ethnic Kurds have migrated within the last four years.

Second, when all is said and done, it may all come down to the state of the economy in 1999. By the second half of 1998, the domestic market was going through a slow down which hit small businessmen and shopkeepers—the traditional bedrock of the Islamists—especially hard across the nation.⁹³ If the voters face continuing economic doldrums on election day, Islamists may use this issue successfully against their secular opponents, as they did in 1994 and 1995.

Third, if the cultural radicalism of Islamist politics reaches a level where it is perceived as leading not merely to a marginal change, but to an irreversible mutation in the state’s legal and political “genetic code,” then there could be an electoral backlash at the polls by the 79 percent of the electorate which did not vote for the RP in 1995.

The recent decision of the Edirne Administrative Court to allow a student to enter classes wearing her headscarf, a symbol of Islamic piety, created turbulence since the court reached its decision on the basis of a positive decree (*fetva*) given by the Prime Ministry’s Religious Affairs General Directorate.⁹⁴ This case was cited as the first time in republican history when a secular court deferred to the decision of a religious body. There is evidence that such developments galvanize the usually placid secularists into activism, as witnessed in the explosive growth in the number of provincial branches of the Society of Atatürkist Thought.⁹⁵ If the Virtue Party does not assuage such emerging fears on the

91. M. Hakan Yavuz, “Political Islam and the Welfare Party in Turkey,” *Comparative Politics* 30, no. 1 (1997), p. 74.

92. Istanbul Mayor Erdogan displayed this “majoritarianism masquerading as pluralism” well when he stated at a ceremony in 1995 to inaugurate the party’s Umraniye (Istanbul) branch that “if people want it, of course we will abolish secularism, and you can’t stop that.” Erdogan continued: “The Islam world of 1.5 billion is waiting for the Muslim Turk nation to get on its feet. And we will stand up. We can see the lights. This rebellion will start.” See Hasan Cemal, “Tayyip Acik Sozlu” (Tayyip is Candid), *Sabah*, 8 July 1998.

93. Omer Faruk Guder, “Esnafin Cigli!” (Scream of Shopkeepers), *Sabah*, 8 July 1998.

94. Alper Balli, “Yargida Fetvali Karar” (Decision Based on Fatwa in Courts), *Cumhuriyet*, 30 July 1998.

95. Ugur Akinci, “Ayata: Atatürkists Thwart RP in Provincial Towns,” *Turkish Daily News*, 24 April 1996.

part of the secularists, it may suffer from an electoral backlash at the polls, especially if the economy is doing well by election day.

Turks have learned that to kick the chessboard is not just another move in the game. The Islamist mayors frequently came close to kicking the chessboard of Turkish society, and a few actually have done precisely that while at the same time trying to replace it with a larger, high-tech board, coming with a set of much harder-working pieces. The 1999 elections will be the next test in determining whether the spectators care about the game itself more than they do about the awards promised by the players.

