

# Don't underestimate independents

Thursday 5 July 2007, by [Yusuf Kanli](#)

**While some may say people should avoid wasting their votes by voting for independent candidates, in the new Parliament independents might play a key role in government formation.**

Turkey is heading towards an election but the nation appears still unaware of it. There is no excitement. Unlike past elections, there is total ambiguity and except a strong anticipation that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) will maintain its leading status no one can say for sure how many parties - and how many independent candidates - will make into the new Parliament and what kind of a government formation we will have.

There are many public opinion polls. Even in the poll sponsored by the ruling AKP, it appears that there will be at least three parties and scores of independent deputies in the new legislature. Some polls are going as far as forecasting that there might be five parties in the new Parliament. These polls - though we reiterate our conviction that they are all sponsored and indeed cannot be trustworthy at all other than showing a blurred national inclination - all underline that there will be at least 20 and even up to 30 independent deputies, a record in the republican history.

We do agree that there will be scores of independent deputies in the new legislature. However, because of the last minute political and anti-democratic intrigue of the AKP together with the main-opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) - inclusion of the names of independents in the ballot sheet rather than the old practice of separate ballot papers for independent candidates - many votes that would go to the independents might be declared invalid and the number of independents might not be as high as expected in the new Parliament. Still, we believe that there will be at least a high number of 15 to 20 independent deputies.

## Campaign against independents

The prime minister and his AKP are appealing to the electorate not to vote for independents on grounds that votes that go to independents would be "wasted." Instead, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is appealing voters to send back AKP to Parliament with at least two thirds majority, that is 367 seats, so that it can easily elect Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül to the presidency and make the constitutional amendments enabling popular election of the future presidents.

On the other hand the main opposition CHP, the party which will be affected the most from the votes going to independents, is stressing the need of producing a strong CHP presence in Parliament sufficient enough to bring the party to government, deny the AKP the possibility to elect the next president the way it preferred and avoid a crisis in the country.

Besides the many ethnic Kurdish personalities from the Democratic Society Party (DTP), many prominent personalities, including former Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz (from Rize), Great Unity Party (BBP) leader Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu (from Sivas) and Baskın Oran, a prominent intellectual that many people have high respect for, (from Istanbul) are running in this election as independent candidates.

Over the past many days, I went through many of the public opinion polls, including the one sponsored by the AKP and the one that is claimed to have been made for the CHP, but I could not verify. Based on the 1999 and 2002 election results, I made simulations and tried to figure out what kind of a Parliament we might have on the morning of July 23.

## Kingmakers

First of all, it is highly probable that even if the AKP increases its vote share to around 40 percent, if we

have three parties and scores of independents in the new legislatures, it is very likely that it will not have the strength to form the next government on its own. As it is - so far - it is out of the question for the CHP and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) to forge a coalition government with the AKP, independents will hold the key for any future AKP-led coalition. Interestingly enough, because of the independents it is very likely that the anticipated coalition partners - the CHP and the MHP - will not be able to form the government without the support of independents either. If we have five parties in Parliament, the independents may not have such a crucial role to play for the anti-AKP block of parties, but for the AKP to come to power they still will have a major role to play.

So those leaders who are campaigning to convince people not to vote for independent candidates may tomorrow badly need the support of independent deputies in order to come to power.

Now, a fantasy. Can you close your eyes for one second and think Erdoğan or CHP leader Deniz Baykal knocking on the door of Baskın Oran and asking him to join a coalition government as the state minister in charge of human rights?

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## **Sources**

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