

Electing the Pious:
Islamist Politics and Local Party Strategies in Turkey

By:
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Dissertation

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Theory

On a chilly February night in 2009, I walked past the municipality grounds and crossed a street in the city center of Odemis. This sleepy, agricultural town was quiet. I opened the door and stepped inside a meeting hall in a rented store space. The moment I entered the room, the town did not seem so sleepy anymore. Dozens of people had gathered around a large table, cutting pieces of cardboard into hand crafted banners. The room was full of men, women, and the occasional children sitting together, talking, and trying to listen to the local news on television about the upcoming municipal election. Tea was being served on thin bellied tea glasses to the people who just walked in from the cold. A young man and woman, in their early twenties, were frantically searching through a digital database, and reading out names of neighborhoods and people assigned to visit them that night. This was the campaign coordination center of the Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (Justice and Development Party - AKP), a moderate Islamist party in Turkey whose candidate was running for mayor. I was soon approached by a member of the party's youth organization, who told me to go upstairs if I wished to join their meeting.

In less than fifteen minutes, the meeting room above the entry hall was packed with more than thirty young AKP activists. They soon began discussing scheduling issues, the neighborhoods where the party needed more posters, and who could volunteer to accompany the women's group on one of their home visits. The young men and women in the meeting seemed like they did not want to waste a minute. When all was wrapped up, the leader of the party's local youth organization told me that they were off to join their candidate in a coffee house meeting in half an hour. The night was just beginning for this lively group of political activists.

Despite the exotic images that often accompany the word “Islamist” in Western media, contemporary political Islamists are quickly adapting to the rigors of the electoral marketplace. Whether it is the formerly banned Ennahda party in Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, or the AKP in Turkey, the Islamists are taking part in elections more often and more effectively than ever before. Yet we still know little about the micro-processes through which Islamist parties mobilize support after they are allowed to take part in competitive elections. How do Islamists appeal to their voters? What methods do they use to expand their support? How do Islamists go out on a campaign trail?

This dissertation seeks to explain the electoral success and failure of Islamist parties after they join competitive elections. It analyzes the mechanisms through which Islamist parties expand their support bases by focusing on the Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (Justice and Development Party – AKP) in Turkey through a sub-national comparative framework. I argue that the AKP is electorally successful in cities where it strategically incorporates local notables and where local party organizations are cohesive.

My research focuses on coalition building between the AKP and local elites, and the organizational factors within the local party structures. I demonstrate that in order to reach out to potential voters and *extend its voter base beyond its core constituency*, the AKP constructs strategic linkages with local notables. Expansion of the AKP’s appeal toward mainstream voters is achieved not only through the transformations in the party program and the moderation in the stated ideology, but also by internalizing elites who have local reputations as center-right politicians, socially conservative economic elites, and civil society leaders.

Strategic elite recruitment refers to a process whereby a party recruits local elites *selectively* across different *sectors of social influence* within its *non-core constituency*. Elite recruitment is targeted toward non-Islamist, socially conservative local notables who could have otherwise

joined center-right parties. It excludes those who self-identify as secularists. Local party organizations are cohesive when *no major divisions* exist within the organization and when the party behaves as a *united actor* in the local community. The AKP's strategic elite recruitment and cohesiveness of party organizations at the local level explain the success and failure of the Islamists at the ballot box, and the variation in their electoral support.

The AKP is a pivotal party not only in Turkey, but also in the Middle East as a whole. It is a political party with a radical Islamist past which has won national and local elections and is governing a major state in the region. It is publicized as a model Islamist party by Western countries, particularly the United States. It has revolutionized Turkish politics since its first electoral victory in 2002 by curbing the influence of the military, privatizing state owned enterprises at an unprecedented speed, advocating for membership in the European Union, adopting an assertive and self-confident Turkish foreign policy in the broader Middle East, and dividing public opinion over the secular future of the country like never before. It is seen as a model for Islamists across the Muslim world and especially for the successful incorporation of Islamists into mainstream political channels. The AKP's brand of Islamism is a quite different from those that generally grab the headlines in the Western press. It is a moderate ideology that attempts to bind together Islamist radicals, businessmen whose enterprises are thoroughly integrated into global export markets, merchants, migrants, clan networks, liberal intellectuals, and pro-European Union integrationists, among others. The AKP is a significant political party also because it demonstrates how other Islamist parties might behave when they are allowed to take part in mainstream political channels across the Middle East.

The Puzzle

The central question addressed by this dissertation is what explains the electoral appeal of Islamist political parties? My research contributes to our understanding of Islamist parties and

movements by examining the variation in the electoral support for the Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (Justice and Development Party - AKP) in Turkey. Although the AKP has won national and local elections by wide margins, its performance at the ballot box presents us with a puzzle: What explains the variation in the AKP's success in municipal and national parliamentary elections across cities and towns with broadly comparable characteristics? Why do some cities consistently vote Islamists into local and national office, while other cities that share extensive macro-social similarities resist the Islamists' appeal?

Existing Approaches to the Growth and Popularization of Islamist Parties

The growing literature on the strategies and support structures of Islamist parties offers multiple perspectives on the growth and popularization of Islamist movements and parties. Each of these explanations prioritizes distinct levels of analysis, socio-economic factors, and societal agents. In this section, I evaluate prominent approaches to the popularization of Islamist parties in Muslim majority states, starting with the most aggregated civilizational approach, and working toward the most contextually specific anthropological perspectives.

Responses to the Global Dominance of the West

One approach that has attracted ample attention in the media and policy circles holds that Islamist movements appeal to Muslim masses because they represent a civilizational backlash against the global domination of the West (Lewis 1990; Huntington 1992; Keddie 1994; Ayoob 2004). This interpretation holds that contemporary Muslim societies have found themselves at a significant disadvantage vis-à-vis the West, which conflicts with the self-image of the Islamic civilization as a leading world power (Lewis 1990). This discrepancy between the expectations of Muslims regarding their rightful, dominant place among world civilizations and the observed supremacy of the West leads to dissonance, which manifests itself through reactionary political movements. According to this point of view, this dissonance explains why Muslim masses seek salvation in

Islamist movements that confront modernity, the Western civilization, as well as authoritarian regimes in Muslim majority states propped up by Western powers.

Characterizing the growth of Islamist movements and parties as a civilizational response to the dominance of the West not only essentializes Islam and Muslims as undifferentiated wholes (Said 2001; Sen 2006), but also over-predicts the support Islamists receive. This interpretation would predict higher levels of electoral and popular support for Islamists in states that have lagged behind in terms of international prestige. However, the ability of Islamist movements to attract large numbers of followers in such diverse contexts as in Yemen, Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey undercuts the value of a civilizational explanation. Furthermore, the same approach predicts uniform support for Islamist parties and movements within states. However, the sub-national variation in electoral support for the AKP in Turkey contradicts this explanation. The fact that the Turkish moderate Islamists performed very differently in elections across provinces that share numerous macro-social similarities shows that national level explanations, as well as broader civilizational ones, cannot account for the growth in their levels of support.

Statist Approaches

i. The Weak States Argument

A second set of explanations focus on the state as the cause of Islamist support. One version of the statist approach links the successful mobilization of Islamist movements to weak states in the Muslim world. According to this perspective, the secular-nationalist ideologies that captured multiple political arenas across the Middle East during the twentieth century created economic and social expectations they ultimately failed to fulfill (Ibrahim 1980; Kepel 2002; Turner 2003; Gulalp 2001). Nasser's Arab Socialism, Baathist regimes in Iraq and Syria, as well as Turkey's military-dominated Kemalist democracy employed state-led economic policies, and created patronage structures that delivered economic resources unequally. Moreover, the inability of

these states to promote economic growth and redistribution was exacerbated with the onset of neo-liberal globalization during the 1980s and 1990s, when their capacity to control their economies eroded further (Gulalp 2001; Keyman and Koyuncu 2005). The emerging cohorts of young, educated urban dwellers soon discovered that they would be shut out of economic and political opportunities they had come to expect, and as a result, the Islamist call for social justice captured their imaginations and support. This perspective thus holds that the inability of secular-nationalist ideologies across the Middle East to deliver on their promises, and their failure to respond to the forces of economic globalization, created the mass support behind Islamist movements and parties (Gulalp 2001; Kepel 2002; Keyman and Koyuncu 2005; Sadowski 2006; Tugal 2007).

Similar to the civilizational approach to the popularization of Islamist movements, the weak state perspective treats Islamist movements and parties as aggregates, and therefore is not capable of explaining sub-national variations in their support structures. It leads to two contradictory predictions about the growth of Islamist support. First, it predicts comparable levels of support for Islamist parties across regions that share socio-economic similarities. According to this interpretation, we would expect the societal groups most disillusioned by the failures of secular-nationalist regimes, the young, unemployed, and underemployed urban dwellers, to swell the ranks of the Islamists in large cities. Poor, agricultural regions would be relatively immune to Islamism due to the loss of at risk populations to urban migration. Yet the same approach also leads to another prediction: Islamists should receive greater support in underdeveloped regions than in developed regions, since they have benefitted the least from the statist policies of nationalist regimes, as well as from the effects of neo-liberal globalization.

My argument and empirical analysis suggest that neither of these predictions hold. The variation in the regional electoral performance of the AKP in Turkey demonstrates that the Islamists have

performed spectacularly well in some poor, agricultural provinces with stagnant economies (e.g. Bingol), and not in others (e.g. Mus). At the same time, they dominated the political arena in some industrialized cities with dynamic economies (e.g. Gebze), and failed to win a single election in others (e.g. Corlu). Electoral support for the Islamists is consistent neither with levels of economic development, nor with the socio-economic prospects of young generations. Therefore, failures of secular-nationalist regimes and the inability of weak states to respond to the challenges of globalization cannot explain the variation in Islamist support.

ii. The Repressive States Argument

A different form of the statist approach links successful Islamist mobilization to state repression and political exclusion. According to this perspective, Islamists receive support from Muslim masses because overbearing states under authoritarian regimes repress freedom of expression as well, as the freedom to participate in political life, to varying degrees across the Middle East. As a result, Islamist movements are pushed outside the mainstream political arena, and either adopt violent means to confront the state directly (Hafez 2003; Ashour 2007, 2009; Shadi 2010), or establish “parallel Islamic sectors” to mobilize beyond its reach (Wickham 2002). Islamists that operate outside the limits of state control reach out to potential supporters through civic and religious institutions and associations like mosques, charity organizations, student groups, as well as professional chambers that cannot be policed effectively.

The repressive states hypothesis also extends to relatively more democratic contexts. Intermittent state pressure on Islamist groups raises the costs of making religious demands at the political level. Being confronted by repressive state apparatuses, Islamist movements gain popularity among politically marginalized, peripheral groups (Mardin 1973; Heper 1985; Nasr 2005; Dalmis and Aydin 2008).

The repressive states argument links the popularization of Islamist movements and parties in Muslim majority states to authoritarian state practices. However, numerous cases of ideological and behavioral moderation demonstrate that Islamists seek to appeal to mainstream audiences at least as much as to the peripheral groups. Some Islamist groups shun violence, abandon intolerant views, and embrace democratic principles when given the opportunity to join the political process (Schwedler 2006; Somer 2011). The growing literature on the *inclusion-moderation hypothesis* has documented several cases where Islamist parties and movements moderate their ideology and behavior when they are allowed to take part in mainstream political channels (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Hefner 2000; Esposito 2002; Wickham 2004; Nasr 2005; Schwedler 2006; Ayooob 2008).

Predictions that are congruent with the repressive states argument also contradict empirical evidence. This perspective predicts high rates of Islamist support under strict authoritarian regimes as opposed to democracies, since non-democratic regimes also tend to be more repressive towards oppositional movements. Yet Islamist movements have flourished under both authoritarian (e.g. Yemen, Egypt, Algeria) and relatively more democratic (e.g. Turkey, Morocco) regimes. The same approach would also predict uniform support for Islamists at the sub-national level where levels of state repression are relatively similar. My argument and empirical evidence shows that this prediction does not hold. Islamist parties in Turkey have mobilized significant societal support in regions where state suppression is negligible, such as in the capital Ankara, the cities of Konya and Gebze. However, in other regions where state repression is more tangible, such as in the Kurdish city of Mus, the Islamists have failed to appeal to the voters. Thus, the state repression approach fails to account for the variation in the support for Islamist movements at both the national and the sub-national levels.

Class-Based Approaches

i. The Social Dislocation Argument

Another perspective emphasizes the causal role of social classes and class-based politics in the appeal of Islamist parties and movements. One form of the social class approach attributes successful Islamist mobilization to the growth of the urban poor in major metropolitan areas in Muslim-majority states. The urban lower classes and migrant groups are seen as sharing a common sense of social dislocation (Ansari 1984; Kepel 2002; Eligur 2010). These groups become particularly receptive to Islamist parties because of the alternative vision of justice and social equality promoted by the Islamists (White 2002). Concomitant with the drive to urbanization in most Muslim-majority states, the inevitable growth of shanty towns surrounding large cities supply a rich social base of anomic urban masses for the growth of political Islamist movements. When they are shut out of privileged networks, the marginalized sections of society are easily courted by Islamist parties.

The social dislocation approach predicts extensive support for Islamist parties among recent urban migrants who live in shanty towns and work low wage jobs. If this prediction is correct, we should observe high levels of Islamist voting in industrial cities that receive migration, and lower levels of Islamist voting elsewhere. Subnational variation in Islamist support across Turkey does not validate this prediction. While some cities that attracted massive urban migration due to the growth of industrial sector employment opportunities consistently voted Islamists into office, others did not. Two of the cases analyzed in this research, the cities of Gebze and Corlu, are remarkably similar in terms of their levels of economic development, industrialization, migration patterns, and geographic location. Yet, while the AKP has been successful in Gebze, it has consistently failed to win elections in Corlu. Furthermore, the Islamists have mobilized voters and won local and national elections in other cases that did not receive urban migration. Bingol is a

peripheral city and a net migrant donor that has awarded the AKP landslide electoral victories. The AKP has also been successful in Odemis, which is an agricultural city where urban migration is negligible. The fact that the presence or absence of large migrant groups and the urban poor does not account for pro-Islamist voting patterns is also supported by the observation that Islamist movements bring together diverse classes and groups within their constituencies (Mecham 2004). Islamist parties are capable of integrating multiple sections of society into their coalitions due to their encompassing cultural identity claims.

ii. *The Decline of the Left Argument*

Alternatively, the second variant of the social class perspective claims that lower classes in Muslim-majority states support the Islamists because of a lack of alternatives. Migrants, the urban poor and the working classes share similar social experiences of exploitation and marginalization. They could normally be mobilized by socialist and social democratic movements. Yet the disappearance of the left as a viable ideology in Muslim-majority states has left a void in the political spectrum, which was filled by political Islamist parties. Islamists have replaced the left as the champions of social justice in an era of neo-liberal economic re-structuring, and have therefore appealed successfully to the traditional constituencies of socialist parties (Onis 1997; Zubaida 2000; Gulalp 2001; White 2002; Tugal 2007; Eligur 2010).

The decline of the left argument fails to explain why people support *Islamists* – it only suggests that other political movements and parties have lost their popular appeal. Furthermore, predictions based on this argument are not supported by the empirical evidence. Similar to the social dislocation thesis, the decline of the left argument would predict higher levels of support for Islamist parties in sub-national regions where the working classes and the urban poor constitute large voting blocks. As I have discussed above, this prediction does not hold when tasked with explaining the variation in support for the AKP across the Turkish provinces.

Islamists have won elections in some cities that do not have large working classes (e.g. Bingol and Odemis), and lost elections in the cities that do (e.g. Corlu). This thesis would also predict high levels of Islamist voting in cities where socialist and social democratic parties were dominant in the recent past. Although the cases of Gebze and Odemis do fit this description, other cases analyzed in this research do not. Secularist and social democratic parties have traditionally been successful in Salihli and Corlu, two cities where the Islamists have not won a single election. On the other hand, the city of Bingol has supplied the AKP with ample support despite the traditional weakness of the left in the province.

iii. The Professional Class Appeal Argument

The third variant of the social class approach emphasizes the role of professional and business classes in the growth and popularization of Islamist parties. Post-war statist development strategies created national business enclaves that catered primarily to protected domestic markets (Kohli 2004; Evans 1995; Bugra 1998). Gradual market liberalization in late 1970s and 1980s led to the emergence of a new kind of business class. As opposed to the state-supported, “fat cat” big business groups, these “self-made-men” developed their corporations without access to state subsidies, and mainly by competing in export markets (Cammatt 2005). These new business elites have become a driving force behind Islamist political movements, supplying it with material and human resources. Members of professional middle classes often hold leadership positions in the Islamist parties (Onis 1997; Yavuz 1997; Tugal 2002). According to this perspective, the new, conservative business elites not only foster the growth of Islamist parties, but they also cause Islamist movements and parties to moderate their ideological platform toward one that is economically liberal and socially conservative (Yavuz 2009; Nasr 2005, 2009).

The professional class appeal argument predicts that the Islamist parties would expand their support base when and where they have the support of the export-oriented new bourgeoisie. If this argument is correct, we should observe greater support for Islamist parties in the sub-national regions where the new Islamist bourgeoisie has economic and social influence, and less support for the Islamists in the other regions. The sub-national variation of support for Islamist parties in Turkey contradicts both of these predictions. When we control for the type of economic activity and levels of development across cities in Turkey, we see that Islamists have been electorally successful in some locations that are agricultural and non-industrial (e.g. Bingol), and unsuccessful in the locations that host new export-based industries (e.g. Corlu).

Culturalist Approaches

Culturalist perspectives on the growth and popularization of Islamist parties stress the role of framing and community building by Islamist actors at the neighborhood level. Though closely linked, the framing argument privileges the role of discourse while the community-building argument emphasizes the ability of Islamist activists to penetrate local social networks in their explanations of how Islamists expand their appeal.

i. The Framing Argument

According to the framing argument, Islamists appeal to Muslims by couching secular political, economic, and societal concerns in a language that makes references to Islam. The discourses that Islamists have adopted tap into shared cultural knowledge of Islamic symbols, sacred texts, and customs. Islamist activists challenge systems of meaning produced by the state and secular political movements, redefine political participation and the duties of a believer in line with their versions of correct collective behavior (Singerman 2004; Wickham 2002; Eligur 2010). It is usually assumed that Islamic messages and symbols are received readily by Muslim communities because they resonate with these communities' cultural reservoirs.

Culturalist arguments over-predict the occurrence of Islamist mobilization. This perspective assumes that Muslims are receptive to Islamist political messages because of shared cultural backgrounds and repertoires. Yet the occurrence of Islamist mobilization is not universal. The variation in support for Islamist parties at the sub-national level in Turkey demonstrates that Muslim populations do not necessarily vote for Islamists. When we control for religious composition, we see that some cities with Sunni majority populations have voted the AKP into national and municipal office (e.g. Gebze, Bingol, Odemis), while the others with very similar religious compositions consistently supported secularist and ethnic parties (e.g. Corlu, Salihli, Mus). Receptiveness to politically defined and contested “Islamic messages” is not uniform across sub-national regions and communities.

ii. The Community-Building Argument

Drawing on the key insights of the culturalist perspective, other scholars have explained the appeal of Islamist movements and parties based on their ability to access local networks and build communities around customs and traditions inspired by Islam. Political Islam is seen as a movement situated in the practices of community-making (White 2002, 2005; Tugal 2006).¹ According to this perspective, Islamist parties and movements differ from their secularist counterparts by redefining what it means to participate in the political arena. They encourage Muslims to volunteer, give charity, and participate in traditional community functions such as religious gatherings, circumcision ceremonies, and funerals.

The community-building argument focuses exclusively on the interactions between Islamist activists and Muslim voters at the neighborhood level to account for the growth in support for Islamist parties. It predicts high levels of Islamist support in communities where the Islamists have access to local social networks, and low levels of support where they lack such access. The

¹ Also see Heller’s *The Labor of Development: Workers and the Transformation of Capitalism in Kerala (2000)* on how political parties can construct civil society leading to institutional change.

variation in support for the AKP in Turkey demonstrates that community-level activism is not sufficient for Islamist electoral success. Although the AKP built an expansive network of neighborhood representatives in the city of Salihli, where Islamist activists were able to reach voters at the neighborhood level through community outreach programs, the lack of strategic elite recruitment by the local party center prevented the AKP from expanding its electoral share. Furthermore, the exclusive focus of these studies on single neighborhoods as sites for their ethnographic studies limits this perspective in terms of the generalizability of the ensuing findings. Due to their methodological limitations, these studies cannot explain differences in the Islamists' regional support structures, and the variations of electoral support for the Islamist parties across different cities at the sub-national level. Ethnographic research on Islamist-constituency linkages fails to identify generalizable mechanisms to explain Islamist growth that work across communities.

Case Selection and Research Design

In order to explain how Islamist parties expand their electoral appeal, we need to focus on both the successful and the unsuccessful cases of Islamist electoral performance. The unsuccessful cases of Islamist mobilization are not fully explored in the literature. However, the negative cases can teach us as much about the causes of Islamist electoral appeal as their positive counterparts, and should therefore be taken into account when designing research.

This dissertation is based on a comparative analysis of sub-national variation in the electoral performance of the AKP across cities where we would expect the Islamists to acquire similar rates of support. Sub-national comparative method helps increase the number of observations

while maintaining tightly controlled comparisons.² It enables the researcher to focus on the agency of Islamist actors and the effects of the local context on Islamist mobilization, while holding a broad range of potential explanatory variables constant. By focusing on both the negative cases (or cities where the AKP lost the elections) as well as the positive ones (or cities where the AKP won or even increased its vote share), comparative analysis helps identify causal relations in the party's electoral performance.

The small-n comparative research design at the sub-national level allows us to match extremely similar units based on theoretically significant macro-social variables identified in the literature as determinants of Islamist electoral success. The contrast between cities that share extensive demographic, ethnic, socio-economic, and administrative similarities where the Islamists have performed significantly differently enables us to eliminate alternative explanations that have come to dominate the discussion on Islamist party growth.

The following table shows the matched units of comparison. The columns are organized according to the political party that won the 2007 general elections in each city. The rows represent city types which share extensive macro-social characteristics.

² See Richard Snyder, "Scaling Down: The Sub-national Comparative Method," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Spring 2001, Vol. 36, No. 1 for an evaluation of sub-national comparative research.

Table 1.1: The Distribution of Cases

Winning Party in 2007 General Elections

<i>City Types</i>	<u>Secularist Party</u> CHP 	<u>Islamist Party</u> AKP 	<u>Pro-Kurdish Party-DTP</u> 
Industrial, Economically vibrant, Western, Large	Corlu	Gebze	
Agricultural, Economically vibrant, Western, Small	Salihli, Kinik	Odemis	
Kurdish, Economically depressed, Eastern, Small		Bingol	Mus Malazgirt

Corlu and Gebze represent the first matched pair of cities. Both of these cities are located in the immediate periphery of Istanbul, and share numerous macro-social characteristics generally associated with Islamist electoral success. They are both economically vibrant, industrialized cities where private investment in manufacturing is high, and where business associations are active in the public sphere. Both cities have received massive migration from across the country and from the Balkans since early 1980s. Shantytowns surround the city centers of both Gebze and Corlu, where the urban poor, working classes, and the unemployed find housing. Social democratic parties have been successful in both cities prior to the rise of Islamists. Yet, while the AKP has won every single local and national election in which it took part in Gebze, it lost all elections it contested in Corlu to the secularist Republican Peoples Party (CHP).

The second matched pair of cities is Salihli and Odemis. These cities are located in the Western Anatolian Plains, close to the port city of Izmir. They also share multiple macro-social characteristics, yet their similarities coalesce on factors that, according to the existing literature, make them not conducive to Islamist electoral success. Both cities are traditionally considered to be secularist strongholds. They have vibrant, but primarily agricultural economies. Their populations are relatively homogenous in terms of ethnicity, and both have received negligible amounts of migration. There are no shantytowns surrounding the city centers of Odemis and Salihli comparable to the ones in Gebze and Corlu. Private investment in both cities is concentrated on agricultural production, and active business associations are absent. As a result, existing theories would predict unsuccessful Islamist mobilization in both Odemis and Salihli. The AKP was, however, able to win local and national elections in Odemis, while the secularist CHP maintained its dominance in Salihli.

The third and last matched pair of cities is Bingol and Mus. These cities are located in Eastern Turkey. Both of them have primarily Kurdish populations, and have experienced the violent conflict between the Kurdish separatist forces of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish military. Both cities are among the poorest in Turkey. They lack private investment and are economically depressed. They do not attract inward migration; they are net migrant donors to large Turkish cities and to Western Europe. Existing theories would predict equal levels of Islamist mobilization in Mus and Bingol. Yet, the AKP has won every single election it contested in Bingol, whereas the pro-Kurdish parties have been more successful at the polls in Mus.

The city of Kinik is located in the Western Anatolian region and displays similarities with both Odemis and Salihli. Malazgirt is a small city located close to Mus, and is very similar in all respects to Bingol and Mus. In both Kinik and Malazgirt the AKP consistently lost every election in which it took part.

My research design effectively eliminates a number of exiting explanations of Islamist electoral success. Civilizational approaches to the growth and popularization of Islamist parties are not capable of accounting for the sub-national variation in Islamist electoral performance. If Islamist mobilization was a response to the global domination of the West, we would expect the city of Mus to support the Islamists as much as the city of Bingol, Corlu as much as Gebze, and Salihli as much as Odemis. Yet, the AKP performs very differently across these matched pairs. We can, therefore, discount civilizational approaches as an alternative explanation.

Culturalist approaches to the popularization of Islamist parties would also predict similar degrees of support for the AKP across the matched pairs of cities identified above. All of these cities have predominantly Sunni Muslim populations, with small concentrations of minority Alevis. Religious brotherhoods, particularly the Gulen order, are active in all of the matched pairs. Since the local populations of each of these cities share common cultural repertoires and have access to similar knowledge about Islamic symbolism, activists who use Islamic language to frame social and political issues should be roughly equally successful at mobilizing support. Yet the variation in the AKP's electoral appeal contradicts this expectation. Therefore, culturalist explanations cannot account for the appeal of Islamist parties.

The weak states and repressive states arguments attribute Islamist mobilization to the inability of nation-states to promote growth and redistribution, and to the protest votes against state oppression. If these explanations were true, we would expect similar rates of support for the Islamists in each matched pair of cities. Corlu and Gebze, as well as Salihli and Odemis, have experienced similar rates of economic growth. Industrialization in the first pair and the advent of mechanized agriculture in the second produced very similar economic outcomes. Furthermore, Islamist movements in each of these pairs have experienced comparable degrees of state repression. Since neither of these theories can account for the divergence in support for the AKP

across the matched pairs of cities, they should be rejected. The cities of Mus and Bingol have experienced relatively more economic hardship, as well as heavy state suppression, when compared to the other cities under examination. Yet, these factors are common to both Mus and Bingol, which means that state repression and economic failure do not account for the variation in the Islamists' electoral appeal.

Social dislocation theories argue that the receptiveness of the urban poor to the Islamists' social justice agendas leads to the growth and popularization of Islamist parties. These theories fail to explain why the AKP would lose elections in Corlu, a city with a large population of working classes and urban poor, when it won local and national elections in Gebze. Furthermore, they cannot account for Islamist electoral victories in Bingol, where there are no working classes and the kind of urban poverty that exists in large, migrant receiving cities. Similarly, the professional class appeal argument which explains Islamist mobilization with reference to the rise of conservative business elites cannot explain the failures of the Islamists in Corlu, and their successes in Bingol. Secularists dominated politics in Corlu despite the burgeoning business elites who own small and medium-sized enterprises. On the other hand, the Islamists won major electoral victories in Bingol, where private enterprise plays a negligible role in the local economy. Theories of social dislocation and professional appeal are rejected by my research design, since they cannot account for the variation in support for the AKP in each pair of matched cities.

Finally, my research design demonstrates that the "decline of the left" argument cannot account for the growth in the appeal of Islamist parties. Socialist and social democratic parties were suppressed across Turkey after the 1980 military coup. The rise in support for Islamist parties has not been uniform, however. Since this explanation also fails to account for sub-national variation in Islamist party appeal, it too has to be rejected.

My research combines the most similar systems design described above with the most different systems design. The second dimension of comparison focuses on similar outcomes across cities that differ significantly in terms of their macro-social characteristics. The AKP has consistently won local and national elections in the cities of Gebze, Bingol and Odemis. Yet, these cities are different from each other in terms of multitude of socio-economic, demographic and ethnic characteristics. The most different systems design framework enables me to eliminate sufficient causes of Islamist electoral success.³

The AKP's main competitors in the local and general elections are the Republican Peoples Party (CHP) and the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP). The CHP is the founding party of the Turkish Republic. After undergoing shifts in its ideology and political platform since its formation by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the party embraced a nationalist-laicist position in the mid-1990s. The DTP is a pro-Kurdish ethnic party, and comprises the legal wing of the Kurdish political movement. Although the pro-Kurdish political movement operates under various party platforms due to the restrictions forced upon it by the Turkish judiciary, I use the party title DTP to refer to this more general ethnic political movement.

The Transformation of Islamist Politics in Turkey

This dissertation seeks to elucidate how Islamist parties expand their appeal toward new constituencies when these parties moderate their ideological platforms and join competitive elections. The AKP's emergence and the pace with which it became a central contender in the local and national elections in Turkey have turned it into a paradigmatic case among the moderate Islamist parties. This research systematically traces *how* the AKP moved away from being a party

³ See chapter Five for a detailed analysis of the causes of Islamist electoral success across the very different cases.

with a radical Islamist agenda to become a moderate Islamist party which appeals to centrist Turkish voters.

The AKP's immediate predecessors were the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP) and the Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party, FP). Both Islamist parties were banned by Turkey's Constitutional Court due to their systematic opposition to the constitutional principle of secularism. While the old guard Islamist leaders of the FP proceeded to form a new party that would reproduce the radical-transformative elements of its predecessors, the young and reformist wing of the FP broke with its radical past and established a new party based on a moderate Islamist ideology - the AKP. Prior to the split among the Islamists, they had already established a motivated, yet rigid Islamist core constituency throughout Turkey. In a new bid to capture enough votes across the nation to form a single-party government, the founding members of the AKP moderated their ideological attachments to radical Islamist principles. Although still motivated to elevate the role of Islam in the public sphere and to reduce the influence of strictly-secularist state institutions⁴ over the decision-making processes, the new Islamists declared their intentions to make peace with the secular principles of the constitution (Mecham 2004). The founders of the AKP decided to moderate their ideology partly because of their desire to avoid new confrontations with the Turkish military and the Constitutional Court. Yet, another, more pragmatic motivation behind this decision was to overcome the inability of the AKP predecessors to garner enough votes to form a non-coalition, single-party government. In order to achieve this goal, the new party needed to expand its electoral appeal beyond its core constituency of Islamist voters. The AKP had to learn to attract the votes of the centrist voters. Unlike the AKP's core constituencies, they were not immediately motivated to vote for the Islamists because of their ideological preferences.

⁴ Particularly the Turkish Military and the Judiciary.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Abdullah Gul, and their Islamist colleagues formed the AKP in August of 2001. The early 2000s proved to be an opportune time for targeting the votes of the centrist voters. The two main parties that competed over their votes, the Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party, ANAP) and the Dogru Yol Partisi (True Path Party – DYP), were experiencing internal problems both in their national party centers as well as in their local organizations. The two parties had been major actors in the Turkish political arena during the 1980s and the 1990s. Yet particularly during the 1990s, a series of corruption scandals erupted and threatened both parties. The ANAP and the DYP gradually developed reputations of corruption and rent-seeking, which severely tarnished their public standing. In the early 2000s, both parties were losing not only voter confidence, but also their human capital. Local politicians, economic elites, and civil society leaders that were embedded into their patronage networks across Turkey’s provinces were eliminating their ties to the ANAP and the DYP.

The AKP’s motivation to target centrist voters in order to expand its electoral appeal gave rise to a new party strategy. Its predecessor, the RP had been successful in mobilizing core supporters with a carefully crafted grassroots mobilization strategy during the 1990s. This strategy relied on the creation of auxiliary civil society associations and charity foundations around the Islamist party (White 2002; Eligur 2010). These organizations worked in tandem with the RP to penetrate local social networks through the devoted volunteerism of Islamist activists. The founders of the AKP, however, needed to dissociate themselves and their new party from the trademark mobilization strategies of their radical Islamist past. They needed a new strategy which could enable them to diversify their voter base beyond their core constituents.

Thus, the AKP headquarters in Ankara decided to form its provincial branches based on a new principle of local notable incorporation. The founding members of the AKP in the provinces were to be small groups of veteran Islamist politicians who were previously active in the RP and the

FP. They were given the task of seeking out reputable former politicians, civil society leaders, and economic notables who have socially conservative reputations. The AKP reduced its reliance on social network penetration techniques, although its local party organizations would still carry out community outreach programs. The new party decided to rely on a new strategy to expand its appeal to centrist voters: incorporation of local notables with socially conservative reputations.

The rapid rise of the AKP to power makes the variation in its support across the Turkish cities all the more puzzling. Why did some cities vote the Islamists into local and national office, while other cities, with very similar macro-social characteristics, did not?

How Islamists Appeal to New Constituencies: Theory and Propositions

I argue that the variation in Islamist electoral appeal can be explained by party mobilization strategy and party organization at the local level. The following is my hypothesis regarding the AKP's electoral performance at the sub-national level in Turkey:

The AKP is electorally successful in cities where it (1) strategically incorporates local notables and (2) where its local party organizations are cohesive.

The two independent variables are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for Islamist electoral success. If both variables are coded positive at the same time, my theory predicts successful Islamist mobilization. If either or both of the independent variables are coded negative, then my theory predicts that Islamists will not be successful at the polls.

The following table summarizes the distribution and the coding of my independent variables with respect to the electoral success and failure of the AKP in each city.

Table 1.2: Distribution and Coding of Explanatory Variables

Winning Party in 2007 General Elections

<i>City Types</i>	<u>Secularist Party</u> CHP 	<u>Islamist Party</u> AKP 	<u>Pro-Kurdish</u> Party-DTP 
Industrial, Economically vibrant, Western, Large	Corlu Elite incorp. (+) Cohesive org. (-)	Gebze Elite incorp. (+) Cohesive org. (+)	
Agricultural, Economically vibrant, Western, Small	Salihli Elite incorp. (-) Cohesive org. (+) Kinik Elite incorp. (-) Cohesive org. (-)	Odemis Elite incorp. (+) Cohesive org. (+)	
Kurdish, Economically depressed, Eastern, Small		Bingol Elite incorp. (+) Cohesive org. (+)	Mus Elite incorp. (-) Cohesive org. (+) Malazgirt Elite incorp. (-) Cohesive org. (-)

In all three cases of Islamist electoral success, represented in the middle column, both the strategic elite incorporation and the cohesive party organization variables are coded positive. In the case of Corlu, located in the top left corner of the table, the AKP recruited local elites strategically, but failed to build cohesive party organizations, resulting in electoral failure. In the cases of Salihli and Mus, the AKP did not recruit local notables strategically. Even though the Islamists built cohesive party organizations, the lack of strategic elite recruitment led the AKP to electoral failure. The cases of Corlu, Salihli and Mus demonstrate that if either one of the two explanatory variables is negative, the outcome is also negative. Furthermore, the cases of Kinik

and Malazgirt show that when both independent variables are negative, the outcome is, once more, negative.

My theory of how Islamists successfully appeal to individuals who had not supported them before emphasizes political agency on the part of the Islamists within the diverse contexts they encounter at the local level. The contextually bounded agential explanation of Islamist electoral appeal is a step toward leaving the dominant socio-economic explanations behind in favor of taking the agency of Islamist actors seriously while, at the same time, recognizing the limiting and enabling effects of the varied local contexts.

In the following section, I disaggregate my model and evaluate my dependent variable (i.e. the outcome I seek to explain); and my independent variables (i.e. the factors that lead to the outcome). The section also examines the theoretical underpinnings of my model.

The Outcome of Interest

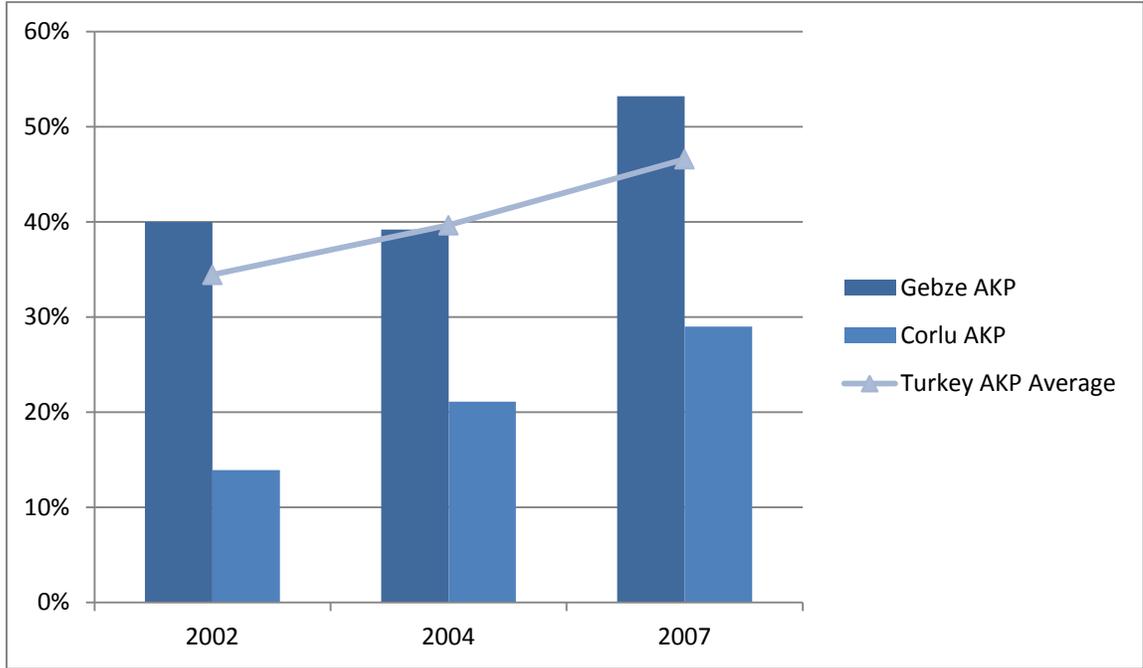
This research seeks to explain the electoral appeal of Islamist parties by accounting for the variation in support for the AKP across six matched cities in Turkey. The outcome of interest is the electoral victory or failure of the AKP in local and national elections during the party's formative phase between 2001 and 2007. This period includes the national elections of 2002, local elections of 2004, and national elections of 2007. I define electoral success as *overcoming the party's competitors in terms of vote share*. The unit of analysis is the city, so the observed electoral outcomes are recorded at the city level. The margin of success is not included in this definition of electoral victory, but the case specific analyses of the AKP's local electoral strategies in chapters Two through Five account for the change in the party's vote share relative to its competitors.

The measurement of the dependent variable is limited to three elections that took place between the years 2001 and 2007. The time frame analyzed in this dissertation covers the formative period of the AKP's life cycle. The decision to focus on the early segment of the AKP's evolution is based on a key question I posed at the outset: How did the AKP expand its electoral appeal to non-traditional constituencies? The party's formative period (between its official establishment in August of 2001 and the 2002 general elections), and the electoral cycle that followed it encompass the time frame in which the Islamists formed links to the new constituencies and expanded their appeal dramatically. The AKP's local party organizations underwent radical transformations during this period, which I describe in detail in the following chapters.

When we define electoral success as overcoming the party's competitors in terms of vote share, the cities of Gebze, Odemis, and Bingol stand out as the success cases where the AKP consistently won the local and national elections. Thus, the dependent variable, Islamist electoral performance, is coded as successful in these cases. The AKP lost all of the local and national elections in which it took part in Corlu, Salihli, and Mus, cases where the dependent variable is coded negative, or as unsuccessful electoral performance. In Malazgirt and Kinik, the test cases I analyze in chapter Five, the AKP also lost all of the elections in which it took part. Therefore, Kinik and Malazgirt are also coded as cases of Islamist electoral failure.

The figures below summarize the vote share of the AKP in the pairs of matched cases I analyze in my comparative framework. In each pair of closely matched cities, the AKP was electorally successful in one, but not in the other:

Figure 1.1: Distribution of the AKP's Vote Share in Gebze and Corlu

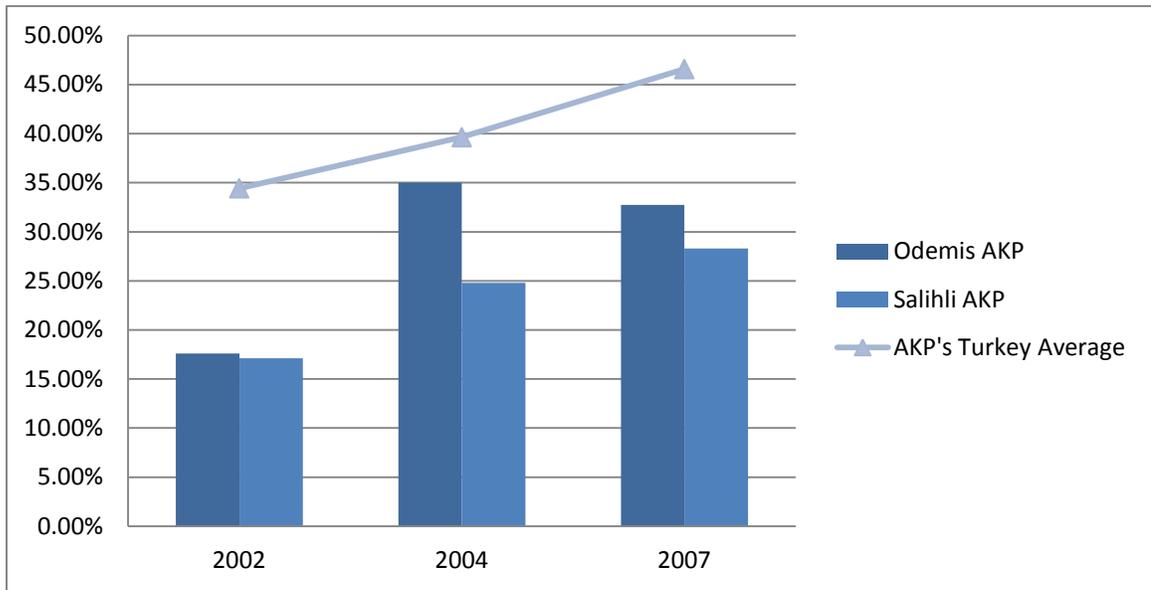


Although they share numerous macro-social characteristics, Gebze and Corlu significantly differ in their political outcomes. Gebze has consistently voted in favor of the AKP in the 2002 (40 percent) and the 2007 (53.2 percent) general elections, as well as in the 2004 (39.2 percent) municipal election. The main rival of the Islamists, the secularist Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican Peoples Party – CHP), received between 15.8 percent (in 2002), and 25.3% (in 2009) of the vote in Gebze.

In Corlu, however, the electoral performance of the two parties was reversed. The AKP lost all three elections to the CHP, and its vote share oscillated between 13.9 percent and 29 percent, while the CHP received up to 46.7 percent of the vote.

The AKP's electoral support also varied across Odemis and Salihli, the second matched pair of cities that otherwise share significant similarities. The following figure summarizes the vote share of the AKP across the two cities:

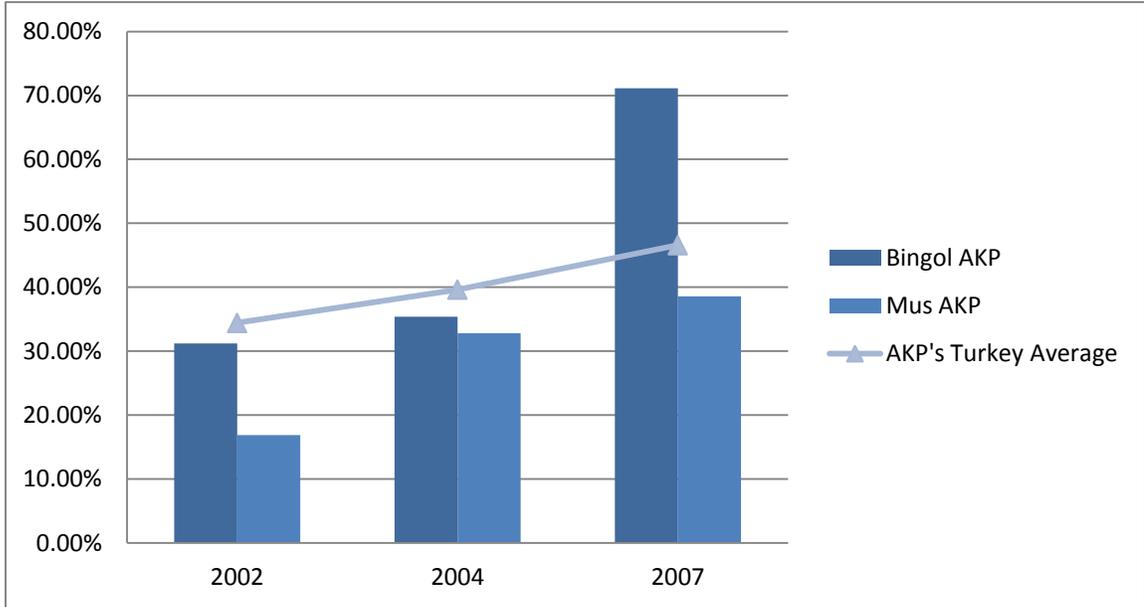
Figure 1.2: Distribution of the AKP's Vote Share in Odemis and Salihli



In Odemis, the AKP trailed both the CHP and the center-right Dogru Yol Partisi (True Path Party – DYP) in the 2002 general elections. However, the Islamists increased their votes from 17.66 percent in 2002 general elections to 35 percent in 2004 local elections; and received 32.74 percent of the votes in the 2007 general elections. In the 2009 local elections, the AKP's vote share in Odemis was 41.78 percent. The CHP increased its vote share from 22.39 percent in 2002 to 26.32 percent in 2007, but failed to match the AKP's electoral. In Salihli, however, the AKP could not achieve electoral victory. The Islamists consistently lost to their rivals, while receiving between 17.1 percent of the vote (2002) and 28.3 percent of the vote (2007).

The last pair of matched cities I analyze in this dissertation is that of Bingol and Mus. The following figure plots the variation in the AKP's vote share across these two cities:

Figure 1.3: Distribution of the AKP's Vote Share in Bingol and Mus



The city of Bingol consistently voted the AKP into national and municipal office since the party began taking part in electoral politics. In fact, the AKP increased its votes from 31.23 percent in the 2002 general elections to a record high 71.12 percent in the 2007 general elections in Bingol. In Mus, the AKP polled well in municipal elections while the pro-Kurdish candidates were more successful in the general elections. The pro-Kurdish candidates in Mus defeated the AKP in the 2002 general elections by acquiring 38.09 percent of the vote, as opposed to the AKP's 16.90 percent. In 2007, the AKP increased its vote-share to 38.60 percent, but could not match pro-Kurdish candidates' 45.81 percent.

Although Islamist movements and parties often operate under authoritarian regimes where elections do not accurately represent the will of the electorate, the experience of the AKP in Turkey presents an opportunity to analyze the appeal of Islamist parties in a context where elections do change political outcomes at the national level. Furthermore, the Arab Spring shows potential for the expansion of electoral democracies in the Middle East. The success of the

Islamist Ennahda in the 2011 Tunisian elections shows that Islamist parties are beginning to join the political arena more directly. In other states, Islamists have run in local elections under non-democratic or hybrid regimes in increasing regularity, as in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco. Understanding electoral strategies of Islamist parties at the local level necessitates taking election results seriously.

Explanatory Variables

Strategic Local Notable Incorporation

My explanation of how Islamist parties expand their electoral appeal focuses on coalition building between local elites and party organizations, and organizational factors within local party branches. The first explanatory factor is *strategic local notable incorporation*. It refers to the process through which a party recruits local elites *selectively* across *different sectors of social influence* within its *non-core constituency*.

I disaggregate the “local notable incorporation” variable below by focusing on each of the component parts of its definition, and by identifying the conditions under which it is coded positive or negative.

First, what do we mean by local notables, or elites? Local elites are individuals that occupy central positions in social networks. Status for local elites is a function of economic resources, embeddedness into the community, and reputation. They often represent *different sectors of social influence*, including economic wealth, community leadership through civic associations, and seniority in kinship networks. Others have defined local elites alternatively as elected local politicians (Eldersveld, Strömberg, and Derksen 1995; Szücs and Strömberg 2006), political actors situated at the intersection of the state and traditional society (Mittra 1991, 2001), local power brokers who often hold political office (Chibber and Eldersveld 2000), and urbanized

individuals who are better educated and wealthier than the rest of the population (Chandra 2000).

My definition of local elites relies on three criteria:

- i. Embeddedness into the local community: Elites are not absentees. They live, work and own businesses in the community. They hold central positions in social networks.
- ii. Economic prosperity: Elites are relatively wealthy individuals in their communities. Their wealth is based on different economic assets, depending on the locality. Some are landowners (e.g. clan leaders in Bingol and Mus), or merchants (e.g. economic elites in Odemis and Salihli), while others are businessmen (e.g. local industrialists in Gebze and Corlu).
- iii. Reputation as opinion leaders: Elites are opinion makers, whose views carry weight in the community. Some are experienced local politicians, while others hold leadership positions in civil society organizations.

This definition of local elites is broad enough to capture the variety of high status individuals who affect local politics across different contexts. It also identifies specific sources of social status that are shared by all local elites regardless of the setting. Clan leaders and heads of extended family networks are influential local elites in the cities of Bingol and Mus. In Gebze and Corlu, businessmen who own small and medium sized enterprises and the leaders of hometown associations constitute significant groups of local elites. Local merchants whose businesses rely predominantly on the trade of agricultural inputs and outputs are the major local elites in Odemis and Salihli. The recruitment of these individuals into the local branches of the AKP constitutes local notable incorporation.

Second, what is selective recruitment? Selective recruitment refers to coordinated processes of elite incorporation whereby a party organization targets a specific set of individuals, due to their desirable characteristics, while excluding others. The AKP targeted centrist local elites with

perceived “clean” reputations and no previous associations with explicitly secularist movements or parties. These individuals shared traditional social values, conservative approaches to family, mores, and the role of Islam in one’s personal life. It excluded individuals who self-identified as secularists, and those who were previously associated with secularist or socialist political parties such as the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and pro-Kurdish political parties.

Third, selective elite recruitment requires incorporating local elites from among the party’s non-core constituencies. Non-core constituencies, or swing voters, include voters who are mildly opposed to a party, whose voting patterns cannot be predicted with certainty, and whose support could successfully be courted under the right conditions (Cox and McCubbins 1986; Dixit and Londregan 1996; Stokes 2005, 2007). The local elites recruited from the pool of the AKP’s “potential” voters serve as the party’s primary links for attracting the support of this large constituency.

The strategic elite recruitment variable is measured by mapping out the movements of the local notables across party lines during the formative years of the AKP. The variable is coded positive if the local AKP organization brought in numerous centrist local notables with socially conservative reputations that represent different sectors of social influence. It is coded negative if the party was not able to attract local elites, or if the recruited elites were fewer in number and less central in the local social networks, when compared to the elites that joined or remained in competing parties.

The following examples illustrate how I coded strategic elite incorporation in specific contexts. This variable was coded positive in Gebze. The local AKP branch in this city successfully recruited three types of elites during its formative phase. First, the Islamists attracted local politicians who were previously associated with the center right parties, particularly the Dogru Yol Partisi (True Path Party - DYP) and the Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party - ANAP). These

elites had previously served as local party leaders, municipal office candidates, and municipal council members, and their move from the ranks of the ANAP and the DYP was highly publicized. Second, the AKP attracted local businessmen and merchants into its organization. The founders of the AKP branch in Gebze reached out to select merchants who enjoyed wide business and personal networks within the city's trade circles. This included the organization of a widely attended dinner for the local business elites, followed by private appointments with businessmen who were linked to conservative business organizations.⁵ Lastly, the AKP branch in Gebze brought in leaders of hometown associations who represent the interests of specific migrant groups according to their city of origin. As a result of the AKP's extensive recruitment efforts among reputable centrist local notables, parties that competed for the support of these voters experienced a severe elite drain which reduced their human capital. This is a clear case of strategic local notable incorporation due to the selective nature of elite targeting, and the fact that those who were recruited enjoyed high social status in terms of economic resources, political capital, and civic leadership.⁶

Strategic elite recruitment variable was coded negative in the cities of Salihli and Kinik. Unlike the case of Gebze briefly described above, the leaders of the local AKP branch in Salihli had no desire to bring in new local notables and share their power. Instead, the Islamist clique that founded the AKP organization chose to isolate itself, and in the process, prevented the party from establishing bridges to the city's large centrist constituency⁷. In the city of Kinik, the founders of the AKP were only partially successful in incorporating centrist elites into their organization, while others remained outside. Although the AKP was able to attract some merchants, the

⁵ The conservative business associations most active in Gebze at this time were the Gebze Sanayici ve Isadamlari Dernegi (Gebze Industrialists and Businessmen Association - GESIAD), Mustalik Isadamlari Dernegi (Association of Independent Businessmen – MUSIAD) and Genc Sanayici ve Isadamlari Dernegi (Association of Young Industrialists and Businessmen - GENCSIAD). The local AKP branch heavily recruited among their members.

⁶ The formative process of the local AKP branch in Gebze is discussed in detail in chapter Two. Chapter Five describes the transformation of Islamist politics in Gebze.

⁷ See Chapter Four for a detailed account of why the AKP failed to expand its electoral support in Salihli.

Islamists failed to bring in established local politicians into their organization. Politicians who were associated with the center right DYP (True Path Party) kept their alliances and posed a serious challenge to the AKP among its non-core constituencies. The inability of the Islamists to appeal to a broad set of local elites meant that their attempt to widen their support base was thwarted by a lack of elite expansion. In the cases of Salihli and Kinik, the strategic local notable incorporation variable was coded negative due to a lack of a meaningful attempt to recruit by the Islamists in the former, and their inability to bring in elites that represent diverse sources of social influence in the latter.

The correct coding of the strategic elite recruitment variable requires in depth knowledge of party-local elite relations in all the cases under investigation. Extensive field research is the best strategy for attaining the fine grained data that is necessary to evaluate which actors constitute local elites, how parties interact with them, and what they bring to party organizations in terms of benefits in local electoral competition. My data comes from more than one hundred and twenty intensive interviews with local party officials and activists, local journalists, political experts and civil society leaders which allowed me to map out the shifting political alliances of local notables in each of my eight cases. Chapters two, three, four and five describe these processes in detail across the eight cities covered in this study.

Local elite recruitment is an ongoing process that occurs over time. There are identifiable waves of new elites joined the AKP, but the overall process continued well into 2005, four years after the formation of the party. The most significant period for the AKP's elite recruitment effort was 2001 and early 2002, when the founders of the party's local branches incorporated the first batch of non-Islamist local notables.

The Islamists faced two main problems that constituted the limits of local elite incorporation. First was the availability of centrist local elites, and the second was the internal resistance within

the local AKP organizations to expansion. The first problem occurred in cities where the local elites held onto loyalties to parties that competed with the AKP. The case of Kinik identified above and elaborated on in Chapter Five is one example of this limitation. In the case of Malazgirt, also discussed in Chapter Five, the local AKP branch was unable to penetrate the countryside in order to recruit Kurdish clan elites because it was overpowered by the support network of the Kurdish violent separatist organization Partiya Kerkaren Kurdistan (Kurdish Workers Party - PKK). The PKK had already built a strong network of supporters in this part of Eastern Turkey, where the central state authority is often challenged by the separatists both militarily and politically. In other cases, the AKP was able to overcome this problem through effective recruitment tactics. In Odemis, a case I discuss extensively in Chapter Four, the local AKP branch reached out to the internal opposition groups from the competing parties and recruited local politicians by exploiting infighting among its competition. The second limitation to strategic elite recruitment occurred most clearly in Salihli. As I described above and will elaborate in Chapter Four, the founders of the AKP branch in this city utilized their close connections to Bulent Arinc, one of the leading figures of the AKP at the national level, to escape elite recruitment altogether.

Causal Mechanisms

How did strategic elite incorporation lead to the expansion of the AKP's electoral support? We can identify three primary mechanisms that connect this variable to the outcome of interest – Islamist electoral success. Strategic elite recruitment enables the party to signal its ideological moderation to its potential voters through the radical transformation of its local cadres; it enhances the party's reach among the clients and contacts of the recruited local elites; and causes a loss of crucial human capital in competing party organizations. In this section, I discuss each of these mechanisms and how they contribute to the AKP's electoral appeal.

i. Signaling a Shift in Programmatic Linkages

Recruitment of centrist, non-Islamist local notables into its party branches enabled the AKP to present a new face to its potential constituencies. Strategic recruitment changes the cadres that represent the party in each city. The mixing of new recruits with experienced Islamist politicians has enabled the AKP to strongly support its claim that it has in fact moderated its ideology, which was evidenced by the fact that its party organizations were now staffed by reputable, non-Islamist local elites that had never entered into alliances with the AKP's more radical predecessors. Thus, strategic elite incorporation enabled the AKP to signal its programmatic shift in a concrete manner at the city level, which helped the party establish new links to potential voters.

Programmatic linkages between parties and voters constitute a primary means through which political parties appeal to potential supporters (Kitschelt 2000; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). Primary focus in programmatic linkages is on policy choices, and how these choices distribute costs and benefits to the population. Social identities espoused by party elites can also constitute a programmatic link between a party and its constituencies. When ethnic parties appeal to the cultural and historical similarities between their candidates and the voters, or when religious parties invoke their interpretations of the sacred as a guide to political behavior, they build programmatic links to their voters through identity claims.

Ideological moderation by Islamist parties can be conceptualized as a shift in programmatic appeal. When an Islamist party decides to abandon its ideological ties to a strict form of political Islam, opens up to opposing points of view, and becomes tolerant of political competition, its programmatic links to voters change in line with this transformation. Ideological moderation by Islamist parties is likely to gain new votes to the party among constituencies who do not identify with a politicized Islamic platform.

The AKP's decision to moderate its ideology opened up the new possibility of appealing to a broader, non-Islamist constituency. The core constituency of the Islamists is made up of the voters the party attracts with most ease and least cost. It includes devout Muslims who have common links to religious institutions such as mosques and clerical schools, and seemingly non-religious community organizations, associations and foundations that are appropriated for the Islamist cause.⁸ Yet, the number of Muslims who support Islamist parties is significantly lower than the overall Muslim population in any given context. Political Islam, being a political and not a religious phenomenon, appeals to relatively narrow constituencies across the Muslim world (Mecham 2004; Massoud forthcoming). The decision to moderate the ideology of an Islamist party enables the construction of a new voter-outreach strategy that focuses on appealing to a broad set of potential voters.

The non-core constituencies of Islamist parties, as I have briefly discussed above, include those who are mildly opposed to the party. Individuals who espouse a strictly secular, anti-Islamist ideology can be considered "unlikely voters" for the Islamists. They can rarely be integrated into Islamist support networks even in the case of significant ideological moderation. On the other hand, the large pool of voters who share traditional social values, conservative approaches to family and mores, and assign a significant role to Islam in their personal lives constitute the "potential voters" of the Islamist parties. These non-core potential constituencies would not vote for Islamists out of ideological conviction, but might be successfully courted if the party moderates its message and targets this set of voters with benefits.

The reformist Turkish Islamists who established the AKP in 2001 decided to compromise their ideological attachments to strict religious principles in the political arena, and articulated a more inclusive political ideology. This initiated a process of ideological moderation that approximated

⁸ See Wickham 2002 for an excellent treatment of how the Muslim Brotherhood organized in Egyptian civil society, outside the regular political arena policed by the authoritarian regime.

the preferences of the median voter that was previously captured by center right parties. Similar transformations elsewhere have also led parties to move from the fringes of the political arena to its mainstream. Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe and Latin America moderated their commitments to religious ideology in order to broaden their electoral appeal, form coalitions with non-religious parties, and gain autonomy from the Catholic Church (Kalyvas 1996, 2000, 2003; Altinordu 2008; Mainwaring and Scully 2003). The BJP in India moderated its hardline pro-Hindu nationalist position after the 1998 elections (Chandra 2005). The founders of the AKP argued that they embraced liberal values and the principle of secularism.⁹

The case of Odemis demonstrates how strategic elite recruitment transformed the programmatic appeal of the AKP and enabled the creation of new links with voters who had never supported Islamist parties before. Located in the Western Anatolian plains, Odemis has historically been a stronghold of secular politics. Islamist politicians were confined to a small circle of supporters that primarily consisted of the local artisanal class until the formation of the AKP in 2001.¹⁰ The founders of the AKP lacked a viable support base in Odemis, and therefore had to construct new links to the voters from scratch. The recruitment of local elites, including politicians previously associated with center right parties, merchants, and leaders of professional chambers into the local coalition of the AKP completely transformed the party cadre. The new AKP advertised itself as a moderate, conservative political party similar to its competitors in the center right. The new party organization was staffed by individuals who had no previous affiliation to the AKP's

⁹ Ideological moderation of Islamist parties is a specific form of transformation that goes beyond regular shifts in policy preferences of centrist, pragmatist parties. Studies focusing on political parties in the United States and Western Europe have shown that to the extent to which parties can assess the distribution of policy preferences across the electorate, even ideologically motivated policy-seeking parties, will converge on the preferences of the median voter (Calvert 1985; Chappel and Keech 1986; Hinich 1977). Since policy-seeking parties have to attain political office in order to influence policy, they have to behave pragmatically and play the catch-all game during elections. The convergence toward the median voter is suggestive when examining how Islamist parties behave if they choose to expand their vote share beyond their core constituency.

¹⁰ I examine the transformation of Islamist politics in Odemis in detail in Chapters Four and Five.

predecessors. The voter outreach efforts of centrist local elites changed the party's image from that of a marginal religious party to a strong contender for centrist voters. The AKP could not expand its support base in a secularist stronghold without the major transformation in its programmatic appeal made possible by the overhauling of its party organization with the inclusion of centrist elites.

Strategic local notable incorporation at the city level enabled the AKP to display its ideological transformation by reorganizing its cadres. While some in the secularist circles in Turkey continued to doubt the sincerity of the AKP's moderation, and sought signs that would prove the party had a secret agenda to impose the Sharia, or Islamic law, on the secular Turkish Republic, the AKP's potential voters found a new party that captured both their imaginations and their votes.

ii. Elite Brokerage

The second causal mechanism that connects the strategic local elite recruitment variable to Islamist electoral success is the brokerage activities of newly recruited elites. Brokerage refers to the intermediary role played by the local elites between the Islamist party and potential voters. It takes different forms according to the social context and the resources of the local notable. I evaluate some of the central forms of brokerage activities undertaken by strategically recruited local elites below.

Local notables provide the party with access to their social status and better information on local social networks. One of the main problems of a national level political party is access to information about local constituencies: their needs and political inclinations. Notables bring local their knowledge and social status to the party. Local politicians who were previously linked to center-right parties provide access to their reputations and local connections. They also enable the party to reach existing social networks more easily. Notables tend to be at the center of local

social networks, or have ready access to them. As a result, incorporating local elites gives the party access to broader constituencies by expanding its links across social networks.

Incorporating local economic notables into the party organization enables Islamists to gain access to industrial and business networks. Individuals in these networks possess economic capital, and are usually willing to spend it on party business if it means bolstering their own positions within the party. They fund regular party activities such as dinners, meetings, and receptions. They possess the economic and cultural capital to host top-level government officials in their towns, and sponsor events in their honor. They also donate to the local party organization in the run up to elections to cover some of the costs of campaigning. For example, the inclusion of businessmen and industrialists in the Gebze branch of the AKP enabled the party organization to make use of the resources that belong to local business associations. The party regularly invites government officials to join symposia, dinners, and meetings with the local business community, using business association facilities.

Local economic notables also possess social capital. Their inclusion into the party helps improve the AKP's standing among the city's wealthy, and represents a vital move in its attempt to cement a cross-class coalition. While the AKP reaches out to lower income voters through various community outreach programs,¹¹ the incorporation of economic elites helps the party to reach out to wealthier citizens. Economic elites have access to social networks that bring business owners, well-established merchants, and successful entrepreneurs together. The meetings, talks, and dinners organized by the economic elites for party functions enable the AKP to extend invitations to new potential members and supporters.

Economic notables tend to be highly visible in their cities. Local newspapers, radio stations, and, in some cases, television channels hold regular interviews with employers and businessmen. The

¹¹ I discuss the community outreach efforts of the AKP under the *Cohesive Party Organizations* section below.

ability to create news is not only confined to economic elites. Leaders of civic associations and local politicians are also sought after by the local press to comment on political and social issues that concern their cities. These individuals interact often and effectively with the local press. The incorporation of local notables into the cadres of the AKP helps the party with information dissemination since the recruited elites have the ability and connections to make frequent appearances in media outlets.

Economic notables are also employers of the local population. In addition to their more general social capital, they have direct influence over their employees. As politically active, open supporters of the Islamist party, they can sway the support of their employees and their families through suggestion, if not through outright economic coercion. The laws that protect workers from arbitrary political or social pressure from their employers are difficult to implement, and discrimination lawsuits are rare in Turkey. The small and medium-sized businesses also tend to be family enterprises where the owners often manage the day-to-day operations. The business environment makes the subordinates susceptible to political influence by their employees. Subtle or direct, such influence puts pressure on workers to align themselves with the political activities and preferences of their employers.

Civil society leaders help to provide the party with direct channels of access to particular subsections of the population. Hometown associations that represent migrant groups often bring together sizable numbers of members. Offering party positions and municipal council nominations to association leaders is a directly recognizable method to show the party's commitment to that particular group's interests. Civil society leaders recruited into the local AKP organizations form a direct link between a well-defined migrant community and the party organization.

iii. Elite Drain from Competing Parties

The third causal mechanism that links the strategic local elite recruitment variable to the expansion of Islamist electoral support is the effect that the AKP's recruitment activities has on the human resources of the competing political parties. When the AKP started targeting and incorporating centrist notables into its local branches, it entered into a zero-sum game with its competitors in the center right. Every elite the AKP recruited was one lost by the Dogru Yol Partisi (DYP), the Anavatan Partisi (ANAP), or the nationalist Milliyetci Hareket Partisi (MHP). The finite number of local elites in each city meant that the AKP diversified its local cadres at the expense of its competitors. For example, when the clan elites associated with the Zigte tribe in the Genc region of Bingol decided to join the AKP, they were effectively making a choice not to join the DYP. Similarly, the passing of the grand local politician Haydar Baylaz of the Az clan spelled the end of the DYP influence in southern and central Bingol. His replacement, Berdibek, soon joined forces with the AKP and carried his clan votes to the Islamists.

The loss of human capital by the center-right and nationalist right parties debilitated the AKP competitors' voter outreach efforts. Not only did the DYP, ANAP, and the MHP find it more difficult to organize rallies and neighborhood meetings, they also had to compete with their former comrades who had joined ranks with the Islamists. This made it harder for center-right parties to paint the AKP as a marginal, radical Islamist party.

Cohesive Party Organization

The second explanatory factor in my model is *cohesive party organization*. This variable is defined as the existence of *no major divisions* within the local party organization and involves the party behaving as a *united actor* in the local community. I discuss the component parts of this

definition below, and examine the conditions under which the variable is coded positive and negative.

The existence of no major divisions within the party refers to the ability of party officials and activists to organize events, run day to day operations, and make decisions about the distribution of benefits and responsibilities within the party without succumbing to debilitating infighting. It implies that conflicts of interest among recruited notables are resolved internally, without causing intra-elite conflict and factionalism.

Building cohesive party organizations is crucial for parties that seek to expand their electoral share among the non-core constituencies. Forming new linkages between the voters and the party requires an effective and united party organization. This need is highlighted particularly when the party cadres are expanding through the incorporation of new elites. The differences of opinion, interest, and vision among the recruited elites could derail the party's efforts to appeal to new voters. If not resolved internally, conflicts of interest have the potential to give way to divisiveness and factionalism. A divided party organization is less likely to survive in its competition with the other political parties. Alienated local notables could leave their new party, and switch their support to competitors. They could also seek to undermine their rivals within the party organization by working against them during electoral campaigns.

The prevention of factionalism requires resources of local leadership and coalition building within the party. Effective party leaders build clear expectations among the recruited elites about the nomination of candidates to office, the procedures for promotion, and the consequences of undisciplined behavior. In the local party organizations of the AKP, the party leaders have to work closely with high status individuals. As such, leaders do not possess the tools to impose discipline from above – they have to build trust among the recruited elites. Failures of local

leadership often lead to the differences of interests among recruited elites to surface, which brings about the possibility of debilitating intra-elite conflict.

The emergence of intra-elite conflict and factionalism is easier to observe than its non-emergence. In party branches that are internally divided, disgruntled officials and notables who did not receive the nomination or promotion for which they were looking often engage in a number of disruptive activities. For example in Corlu, the local party leader abandoned her office and left the town before the 2004 municipal elections when the national party center decided not to nominate her for the mayor's position. An economic notable in the same AKP branch actively campaigned for his party's rival, the CHP mayoral candidate, when he did not receive the AKP's nomination. In the city of Kinik, multiple AKP politicians switched back and forth between the Islamists and the center-right DYP and ANAP since the party's formation in 2001. Thus, when we observe party officials engaging in activities that are aimed at debilitating their party's normal political activities at the local level, the cohesiveness of local party organization variable is coded negative. These behaviors include refusing to campaign for their own party, berating their party's candidate during elections, actively cooperating with rival political parties, and abandoning their party during election campaigns. In the cases where the party organization lacks deep divisions among the elites, the officials and notables that do not receive a party nomination for a municipal or parliamentary office continue working with their party organizations for the chosen candidate. In cohesive organizations, when a local notable does not receive a promotion within the party hierarchy, he or she continues to execute his or her current responsibilities in a timely manner.

Instances of intra-elite conflict and factionalism are very easy to observe because they are closely followed by local journalists and competing parties. Extensive field research is the best method to obtain the detailed information on how and when local notables choose to undermine their internal rivals at the expense of the party organization, and when they choose to remain loyal to

the party. I evaluate the relationships among local elites within the local AKP branches in detail in the chapters that follow.

The second part of my definition of party cohesiveness requires that the party behaves as a *united actor* in the local community. Besides the lack of factionalism and divisiveness among party elites discussed above, the presence of cohesiveness in party organizations requires that local parties have effective, capable bureaucracies. Effective local party bureaucracies are those that are active in-between elections, oversee regular meetings of committees and sub-committees, and implement regular and institutionalized community outreach programs.

First, party organizations that are active only before the elections cannot be considered effective. Particularly in the cases where a party seeks to expand its electoral base toward new constituencies, the formation of links between the party and the voters requires an ongoing relationship. The lack of continuous engagement between the party and potential constituents risks endangering the new ties between them. For example, the AKP branch in Malazgirt shut its doors for months at a time due to severe internal conflicts among party officials. During this period, the party could not accept new members, organize any meaningful events to reach out to the voters, and party officials were not able to meet with community leaders. Such intervals between the elections when the local party shuts its doors provide its rivals a significant advantage in mobilizing new support in the absence of competition.

Second, the way a local party branch operates day-to-day is also a good indicator of the effectiveness of that branch. Whether or not the party officials and activists are regularly present in the local office, engaging in party business, and are held accountable for carrying out their assigned tasks displays the extent to which the party branch is capable of implementing its mission. Although the bureaucratic routine in a party organization is not sufficient proof of effectiveness, its absence is often a worrying sign for the organization. If we observe that a party

branch holds regular meetings of its committees and subcommittees, produces timely reports relevant to its activities, and organizes regular events designed to reach out to potential voters, it indicates to us that the organization has a functioning daily bureaucratic routine.

Causal Mechanisms

How do cohesive party organizations lead to the broadening of the AKP's electoral support? It is possible to identify three main mechanisms that connect this variable to the Islamist electoral success. Cohesive party organizations are effective at reaching out to and engaging potential voters, they are active partners in their local communities, and their lack of infighting and intra-elite conflict enable them to remain competitive against their rivals. In this section, I discuss each of these mechanisms and how they contribute to the AKP's electoral appeal.

First, the internal resolution of conflicts of interest and the resulting lack of debilitating factionalism is a significant factor that keeps cohesive parties competitive. In cities where the local party branch expands its portfolio of local notables through strategic elite incorporation, the possibility of factionalism becomes particularly noteworthy. When elites that have no experience of working together are joined in the same organization, it is natural to expect conflicts of interest and divergent visions to emerge. Yet as the cases of Corlu, Malazgirt, and Kinik demonstrate,¹² infighting can spell disaster for the party. The AKP branches in these three cities were incapable of presenting themselves as effective, united parties to their potential voters. The intense rivalries inside the party often became publicized through the reports of the local media and the word of mouth. In such instances, the credibility of the party suffered due to the inability of its leaders to discipline their own members.

¹² See Chapters Two and Five for detailed examinations of these cases.

Second, cohesive parties are often very effective at reaching out to potential voters through the implementation of community outreach programs. Community outreach programs take multiple forms. Most commonly, the AKP's youth and women's groups regularly organize visits to peripheral, poor neighborhoods. These visits take place in the homes of party sympathizers, who invite their neighbors to take part in a conversation with party activists. The in-home nature of these visits adds to confidence-building between the party and its potential voters by making its representatives more visible and reachable. Institutionalization of these visits varies across different local AKP organizations, and it is a good measure of the effectiveness of party organization. Cohesive party organizations that regularly carry out community outreach programs increase their appeal among potential constituencies.

Third, cohesive parties tend to be active partners in their communities. They join weddings, funerals, circumcision ceremonies, fundraisers for various civic organizations, organize charity drives, and help the needy either through direct transfers or by encouraging local authorities to act. The AKP's cohesive local organizations often function like social clubs. They encourage volunteerism among their activists. Particularly the youth and women's organizations of the local party branches tend to be heavily engaged in community organizations. Furthermore, the AKP also forms close links with civic organizations such as hometown associations, trade unions, and chambers of commerce. Community partnership by local party branches enables the AKP to project a positive image as a responsible institutional citizen and expands its appeal among potential constituencies.

Ideological and Instrumental Forms of Party-Local Notable Linkages

The theory I have discussed above conceptualizes the links between political parties and local elites as primarily instrumental. A potential critique of my theory could take issue with this treatment, and argue that not all party-local elite relations are instrumental. Local notables could

be attracted to Islamist parties due to their ideological affinities. On the other hand, if a local elite is sympathetic to an Islamist party due to his political ideology, this places him in the core constituency of the Islamist party. Ex-radicals that have been internalized by the AKP, Islamist merchants and traders in provincial towns, and Islamist community organizers are good examples of notables who are ideologically committed to political Islamist agendas (Tugal 2009). These notables may also be receiving material benefits from their association with the party, but the fact that they are already ideologically predisposed toward the Islamist cause makes them part of the AKP's core constituency. Their incorporation into the party does not explain how the AKP broadens its support base.

The second form of Islamist party-local notable linkage, and the main focus of this research, is a pragmatic alliance between the party and the local elite. In order to extend its voter base beyond its core constituency, the AKP actively pursues local coalitions with notables who are not ideologically predisposed to join ranks with an Islamist party. As I have explained above, some of these notables were previously embedded into the patronage networks of other, centrist political parties. They migrated to the AKP due to its ideological moderation and political promise. It is the pragmatic links between the AKP and non-Islamist local elites that help the party appeal to new constituencies.

Incentives of Local Notables to Join Islamist Parties

The pragmatic alliance between the AKP and centrist local notables relies primarily on its benefits. In order to recruit new elites, Islamists have to offer attractive political posts in their local organizations. Notables willing and able to join the AKP in its formative period between 2001 and 2002 were in a position to jumpstart their political careers in the party's local hierarchy.

Among the primary benefits the AKP is able to provide the elites it recruits is favorable access to state resources in the case of electoral victory. Establishing favorable relations with the state

bureaucracy through the help of a party in government is a significant asset in Turkey. The central state bureaucracy and its provincial administration execute state investments, monitor compliance to regulations such as licensing requirements, and have the power to make or break businesses by selectively processing claims and requests at a pace of their own choosing. Local elites who are able to construct favorable relations with power centers in Ankara through a successful political party can reasonably expect advantages in their dealings with the central state bureaucracy.

Becoming a member of a party in national office also brings unique advantages to elites at the local level. Local notables can expect to establish personal, insider connections to the government if the party achieves electoral success. History of particularistic relations between state officials and business elites, coupled with a strong, centralized government that has extensive influence over the central state bureaucracy and tutelary power over municipal governments makes personal relations with politicians in government a very valuable resource in Turkey and in other contexts where Islamist parties operate, including Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco. Local elites can then translate their social ties with government officials into favorable access to state resources, and political influence in their own locality.

In addition to direct, personal channels of access to state officials, potentially successful Islamist parties offer local economic notables opportunities to expand their business connections. Chambers of commerce and industry, and business associations construct formal networks between businesses. For local economic elites who own small and medium sized businesses, the AKP provides a channel to expand their connections with other businesses that are close to the party. In effect, local economic elites gain the opportunity to form links to a network of commercial and industrial enterprises with preferred access to state resources, favorable relations with state bureaucracy, and local political influence.

Issues of Endogeneity and Multicollinearity

My argument about the importance of strategic elite recruitment and cohesive party organizations for Islamist electoral success raises two key questions. The first concerns the direction of causation. Did the AKP outperform its competitors due to its strategic elite incorporation and cohesive party structures; or did local elites join the AKP and form cohesive party organizations because it is a successful party? In other words, is there a problem of endogeneity with this explanation? The second potential critique concerns the interaction between the explanatory variables. If the Islamists recruit capable elites, these elites might be good party builders. Conversely, strong local party organizations might be more capable of attracting local notables. If these two factors do not vary independent of each other, my explanation could be suffering from a multicollinearity problem.

I assess the validity of these critiques below by examining the impact of the timing of elite recruitment on the AKP's electoral performance, and by inspecting the congruence in the values of the independent variables across the cases of Islamist success and failure. The following table demonstrates the distribution in the values of my independent variables, the timing of elite recruitment, and the electoral performance of the AKP in two of my matched pairs of cases: the cities of Gebze and Corlu and the cities of Odemis and Salihli.

Table 1.3: Elite Recruitment, Party Organization, and Electoral Performance

City	Timing of Elite Recruitment	Type of Elite Recruitment	Type of Party Organization	The AKP's Electoral Performance		
				2002	2004	2007
Gebze	Early	Strategic (+)	Cohesive (+)	Won (+)	Won (+)	Won (+)
Corlu	Gradual	Strategic (+)	Non-cohesive (-)	Lost (-)	Lost (-)	Lost (-)
Odemis	Gradual	Strategic (+)	Cohesive (+)	Lost (-)	Won (+)	Won (+)
Salihli	Late	Non-Recruitment (-)	Cohesive (+)	Lost (-)	Lost (-)	Lost (-)

Endogeneity

Examining the timing of elite recruitment allows us to test the validity of my causal claim by evaluating the direction of causation. If my explanation does not suffer from an endogeneity problem, we should observe strategic elite recruitment prior to electoral success, and lack of strategic elite recruitment prior to electoral failure holding cohesiveness of party organizations constant. If my explanation does suffer from an endogeneity problem, however, we should observe local elite bandwagoning with the AKP after it wins elections. Empirical evidence summarized in the table above demonstrates that my explanation is *not* endogenous.

To examine the claim of endogeneity, we should first focus on the first and third row in Table Three. The AKP won local and national elections in the cities of Gebze and Odemis. Yet, the AKP's performance did not follow the same pattern in these two cities. While the Islamists dominated their competitors and won all three elections in Gebze, they lost in their first electoral cycle in Odemis and only later went on to win the next two elections. The reason behind this difference in the AKP's electoral performance lies in the timing of elite recruitment. As I elaborate in detail in Chapter Two, the founders of the Islamist party in Gebze systematically reached out to centrist elites and recruited local notables strategically prior to the official

establishment of the party in 2001. As a result of early strategic elite recruitment and the formation of a cohesive party organization, the AKP's Gebze branch won the first election in which it took part one year after the establishment of the party. It later competed successfully in the following elections as well. In Odemis, however, the founders of the AKP could not recruit local elites early enough to make an impact at the polls in 2002. I describe in detail the difficulties the Islamists faced in a traditionally secular social terrain when they set out to expand their local influence in Odemis in Chapter Four. The founders of the AKP could only recruit new local elites following the 2002 general elections. The combination of strategic elite recruitment and a cohesive party structure resulted in electoral victories for the AKP in Odemis beginning with the 2004 local elections.

Gradual elite recruitment in Odemis postponed the AKP's electoral success, whereas immediate elite recruitment led to rapid results in Gebze. As these two cases demonstrate, strategic elite recruitment precedes electoral success, not the other way around.

This analysis brings up a different theoretically significant critique: Since strategic elite recruitment in Odemis was achieved after the AKP won the 2002 general elections at the national level, perhaps what drives local elite recruitment is national electoral success. In this case, we should observe systematic elite bandwagoning with the AKP after its 2002 national electoral victory if the explanation is endogenous. Two cases in Table Three demonstrate that this is not the case. As I mentioned above, the Islamists were able to recruit local notables strategically in Gebze even before the party was officially established in 2001. Salihli, the city shown in the last row of Table Three, provides an even starker example. Despite the growing influence of the AKP at the national level after its successive victories in general elections, the Salihli branch never engaged in strategic elite recruitment. Assuming elite recruitment occurs through bandwagoning behind an already successful party disregards the agency of local party leaders. The case of

Salihli demonstrates that the AKP's electoral victories did not lead to strategic elite incorporation. Elite incorporation preceded electoral success in all cases where the AKP won local and national elections, and therefore there is no endogeneity problem with my explanation.

Multicollinearity

Often invoked in quantitative studies, multicollinearity is also a common problem for small-N comparative research designs (Fearon 1991; King, Keohane, and Verba 1994; Collier, Brady, and Seawright 2004). If two or more independent variables are highly correlated with each other, it makes it harder to assess their impact on the outcome (Collier, Brady, and Seawright 2004). A potential weakness of my explanation could be the interaction between the strategic elite recruitment and the cohesiveness of party organizations variables. If one independent variable drives the value of the other, then we cannot distinguish which one of them, if any, is causing the variation in the outcome. This would mean that my explanation suffers from a problem of multicollinearity.

In order for this critique to hold, we should observe the presence or the absence of strategic elite incorporation and cohesive party building at the same time in each locality. If, however, the independent variables take different values in the same units of analysis, then multicollinearity is not present. However, the empirical evidence I present demonstrates that my independent variables are not correlated with each other. Their values often change in the opposite direction.

A comparison of two cases, the cities of Corlu and Salihli, illustrates this point. The AKP lost every local and national election in which it took part in these two cities. However, the Islamists' failure at the polls occurred for different reasons. In Corlu, the local AKP branch recruited elites strategically, albeit gradually, but failed to form a cohesive party organization. Factionalism and infighting within the party organization disabled the Islamists from reaching out to the electorate systematically and prevented the AKP from maintaining stable links with local and migrant

groups. In this case, the strategic elite incorporation variable is coded positive and cohesive party organization variable is coded negative. In Salihli, the pattern was reversed. A small, close-knit group of seasoned Islamists controlled the local party organization in this Western Anatolian city, and refused to share power with new recruits. Although the governing Islamist clique formed a cohesive party organization that maintained close links to the city's peripheral neighborhoods, the lack of strategic elite incorporation limited the AKP's appeal to Salihli's centrist voters. In the case of Salihli, the strategic elite incorporation variable is coded negative and cohesive party organization variable is coded positive. The cases of Salihli and Corlu show that my explanatory variables vary independently of each other, and do not necessarily take similar values. Since neither independent variable is correlated with the value of the other, my explanation does not suffer from a multicollinearity problem.

Research Methods

The original data I use to explain the electoral appeal of Islamist parties come from year-long field research I conducted in eight different cities in Turkey between July 2008 and June 2009. In the first portion of my field work, I traveled to and lived in the Kurdish-dominated parts of Eastern Turkey. In the cities of Bingol and Mus, I interviewed Islamist party officials and activists, pro-Kurdish party officials and Islamists, clan elites, current and former members of the parliament, civil society leaders, mayors and municipal staff, members of municipal councils, governors, numerous bureaucrats working for the governor's office, local intellectuals, merchants, labor union leaders, and local journalists. I also attended several meetings at the local AKP branches, joined the AKP officials and activists in their community outreach programs and funeral services. I also worked closely with local journalists who made their archives available for my research. In Malazgirt, I interviewed pro-Kurdish and Islamist party officials, the mayor and his staff, as well as a group of local politicians who consisted of an internal oppositional

clique within the AKP organization. During my fieldwork in Eastern Turkey, I also spent countless hours conversing with local Islamist and pro-Kurdish activists outside of formal interviews.

The second section of my field research took place in the Western Anatolian region where I travelled and lived in the cities of Odemis, Kinik, and Salihli. In Odemis and Salihli I interviewed Islamist activists and party officials, former mayors, secularist activists and party officials, civil society leaders, officials of center right and nationalist parties, merchants, artisans, municipal council members, mayoral candidates, and local journalists. In Kinik, I also interviewed Islamist and secularist activists, merchants and officials of center right as well as nationalist parties. My field work in these cities coincided with the 2009 local elections, which gave me the opportunity to engage heavily in participant observation. I spent days with the AKP's youth organization in Odemis, where I embedded myself as an observer in meetings and rallies. I joined both the AKP and the CHP mayoral candidates in their campaign tours that included neighborhood visits, coffeehouse meetings, and rallies. In Salihli, I joined the AKP officials in their motorized convoys, touring the city before the elections and observing neighborhood and coffeehouse meetings. Joining Islamist and secularist election campaigns as an observer provided me with first-hand experience of voter mobilization from both perspectives.

The last section of my field research took place after the 2009 local elections, in North-West Turkey. I traveled and lived in the periphery of Istanbul, and worked closely with Islamist and secularist politicians in Gebze and Corlu. I interviewed Islamist and secularist party officials and activists, merchants, businessmen, leaders of business associations, leaders of hometown associations, labor unionists, municipal and gubernatorial bureaucrats, leaders of center right and nationalist parties, and local journalists. I used my personal connections in the city of Gebze to gain access to the founders of the local AKP organization, as well as to seasoned secularist

activists and officials, including a former mayor. In Corlu, I interviewed the city's mayor as well as former AKP candidates for municipal office.

The intensive immersion into the political culture, formal and informal institutions, and constituency building efforts of Turkey's moderate Islamists and their rivals has provided me with rich, contextualized, ethnographic data which informs my analysis in this dissertation. My explanation of the variation in the electoral appeal of the AKP took shape after a rigorous process in which I eliminated alternative hypotheses, and engaged in process-tracing. Focusing on a single case where the AKP increased its vote-share and won local and national elections could lead to a thick description of an unrepresentative case, and fail to eliminate plausible but incorrect explanations. Instead, I employed process tracing in tightly controlled pairs of cases where we would expect to observe similar outcomes in Islamist electoral success, yet we do not. For instance, the literature on Islamist movements suggests that poor urban masses substitute their traditional ties to community with the solidaristic approach and religious symbolism of the Islamists, boosting their electoral appeal. However, my comparative analysis of party-migrant community relations in Gebze and Corlu demonstrate that migrants do not necessarily prefer the Islamists over the secularist parties. While the AKP and its predecessors were able to penetrate the diverse Anatolian and Thracian migrant groups in Gebze, the secularist CHP formed the closest links to the same groups in Corlu by institutionalizing party-migrant association links. This fact shows that the connection between shanty-town dwelling migrant communities and Islamist support does not hold. Using this method, I eliminated multiple erroneous explanations that are plausible at face value, yet unable to stand comparative examination. For each pair of cities studied in this dissertation, it is possible to propose a separate explanation for why the Islamists have succeeded or failed at the polls. However, these explanations fail the test of comparative analysis when held to task in other cases in my research design. My central thesis has survived this test. It is the model that "fits" the observed reality the best. When a local AKP

branch strategically recruits local notables and when the party organization is cohesive, we observe that the Islamists expand their appeal beyond their core constituencies toward the non-core voters and gain a competitive edge against their rivals in all of the cases examined in this dissertation. When either or both of these conditions are absent, the AKP is unable to mount a successful challenge against its secularist and ethnic party rivals.

Dissertation Overview

In the next chapter, I compare Islamist party politics in the cities of Gebze and Corlu. I first describe the copious macro-social similarities of the two cities, and then focus on how the local branches of the AKP evolved very differently despite facing similar social conditions. The Islamists started strategic local notable incorporation very early in Gebze, before the party was officially established in 2001. In Corlu, however, local elite incorporation was gradual. Centrist elites did not join the AKP until after the 2002 general elections, more than a year after the AKP was formed. Furthermore, while the AKP's Gebze branch developed a strong, stable local leadership, the Corlu branch lacked stability and was mired by internal conflicts among the recruited elites. This chapter examines in detail how the Islamists were able to compete successfully with secularist CHP in Gebze, but not in Corlu.

The third chapter examines the cases of Bingol and Mus, the second comparison pair. Mus and Bingol share extensive macro-social similarities. Founders of the AKP in both cities were aware of the social influence of Kurdish clans and extended family structures in the region. As opposed to the socialist ideology of the pro-Kurdish DTP, the AKP's pragmatic approach was accommodating of ties to traditional tribal structures. In Bingol, the local AKP branch established close links with clan leaders, and nominated their representatives for the parliament as well as to the municipal council. The Mus branch also attempted to use the same strategy, but was unable to prevent clan elites from preserving their connections to multiple political parties which divided

the clan vote. This chapter traces the relationship between the AKP and tribal elites, as well as the local strategies of the pro-Kurdish DTP.

The fourth chapter focuses on the cases of Odemis and Salihli. Both cities are located in the Western Anatolian plains where secularist parties have traditionally been dominant. The AKP's electoral success was highly unlikely in either of these cases. In this chapter, I explain how the AKP's Odemis branch strategically incorporated local politicians who were previously attached to the ANAP and the DYP. Coupled with the emergence of a cohesive party organization, the extensive centrist elite recruitment in Odemis effectively transformed the AKP into a moderate contender for the constituencies of the center-right parties. In Salihli, however, the old guard Islamists who formed the local party organization chose not to recruit new elites. This chapter examines how the lack of strategic local elite recruitment prevented the AKP from expanding its electoral appeal to the non-core constituencies despite the formation of a cohesive Islamist party organization in Salihli

The fifth chapter is divided into two parts. The first section of the chapter analyzes the successful cases of Islamist electoral mobilization. The AKP has won local and national elections in Gebze, Odemis, and Bingol, remarkably different cities in terms of the macro-social characteristics often associated with Islamist appeal in the literature. I first trace the recent evolution of distinct patterns of Islamist party politics in these three cities. I then demonstrate that the processes through which the AKP engaged in elite recruitment and party building were quite different across Gebze, Bingol, and Odemis due to the structural differences in the contexts the party faced in each location. The second section of the chapter examines two new cases, Kinik and Malazgirt, to test my theory. I trace the formative process of the AKP in these two cities, and show how its failures in elite recruitment and organization-building hampered the Islamists' electoral performance.

The sixth, and final, chapter summarizes my main arguments, and evaluates the consequences of Islamist mobilization for the prospects of democracy. This chapter also discusses the new research questions that are raised by my research.

CHAPTER 2

Islamist (Dis)organization: The AKP and Islamist Party Building in Turkish Industrial Cities

The first political party in Turkey to participate in elections on a self-consciously Islamist platform was the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party - MNP), founded in 1970. The Islamists were confined to the provincial backwaters of Anatolia, and did not become a significant force in Turkish politics until the mid-1980s. The same Islamist party, reincarnated after a two-year military rule, established widespread Islamist networks in the slums, migrant neighborhoods, and working class districts that surrounded major cities like Istanbul, Ankara, and their hinterland. The Refah Partisi (Welfare Party – RP) emerged from the sidelines of the Turkish political spectrum as an urban phenomenon. The rigorous organization of its local branches, street level Islamist activism, charity work by its auxiliary civil society organizations, and the fledgling conservative business groups closely linked to the RP helped transform the Islamist party into a municipal success story (White 2002, Yavuz 1997, Gulalp 2001). The extensive grassroots organizations and local social networks of the RP in the migrant hubs surrounding large, western Turkish cities made the Islamists adept at urban social mobilization.

The Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (Justice and Development Party – AKP), the moderate successor to the RP, was well positioned to take advantage of its predecessor's experience with the urban migrant masses after it was founded in 2001. Industrial towns located in the periphery of Istanbul were among the most likely cases of Islamist electoral success. In line with this expectation, the AKP won landslide victories in both municipal and national elections in Gebze, a large industrial

city bordering Istanbul on the east. Yet the same party lost every single local and national election in which it took part in Corlu, an industrial town located on the western provincial border of Istanbul which also shares extensive macro-social similarities with Gebze. Islamists' failure in electoral mobilization in Corlu occurred in the backdrop of their widespread electoral appeal across Turkey. Why did the AKP emerge as the dominant political party in Gebze, while it consistently lost elections in Corlu, a remarkably similar city?

As I have discussed in chapter one, I argue against the macro-social explanations that dominate the literature on the growth of Islamist parties. Instead, I claim that the variation in the AKP's electoral success can be explained by two factors: *strategic* local notable incorporation and the *cohesiveness* of its local party organizations¹³. The founding leaders of the AKP compromised their ideological attachments to their predecessor's Islamist agenda, and sought to transform their party cadres in order to compete for the votes of Turkey's vast centrist voters. The Islamists incorporated non-Islamist local elites with conservative reputations in a bid to expand their electoral appeal. Where the Islamists were able to incorporate local notables strategically, and where the stark transformation of local Islamist party structures did not lead to a breakdown of party bureaucracy or intense intra-elite conflict, the AKP gained a competitive edge against its rivals.

Table 2.6: Electoral Outcome for the AKP in Gebze and Corlu

	Gebze	Corlu
Cohesive Party Organization	✓	X
Strategic Elite Recruitment	✓	✓
Outcome	Success	Failure

This chapter examines the processes of local coalition building between the AKP and the local elites in Gebze and Corlu. In the next section, I examine the macro-social similarities between the

¹³ See chapter one for the definition, conceptualization and measurement of these variables.

two cities which helps eliminate some of the most common explanations of Islamist electoral success. Next, I elaborate on how the AKP recruited local notables gradually in Corlu, while its Gebze branch incorporated new elites quickly and systematically even before the formal establishment of the Islamist party in 2001. Then, I analyze the role of migrant civil society organizations, or hometown associations in shaping party-constituency linkages in Gebze and Corlu. This part is followed by an analysis of how the AKP's Gebze branch was able to construct a cohesive party structure, complete with institutionalized community outreach programs, a functioning party bureaucracy and peaceful coexistence among recruited elites. In this section I compare the Gebze branch to the Corlu branch of the AKP, which failed to build a dependable party bureaucracy and was wrecked by factionalism and infighting among newly recruited elites. I conclude the chapter by reiterating the significance of party organizational and party-constituency linkage variables in explaining Islamist electoral performance after ideological moderation.

Most Likely Cases of Islamist Success

Existing approaches have identified the urban space, particularly the migrant receiving large cities in Muslim majority states as the primary locations of Islamist mobilization. As I have described in the previous chapter, one vein in the literature claims that Islamists thrive among lower class urban poor and migrants, who share a common sense of social dislocation (Kepel 2002, Eligur 2010). It is argued that Islamist parties appeal to these populations because they provide an alternative vision of justice and social equality (White 2002). Whereas socialist and social democratic parties could have mobilized these constituencies in the hay day of state led development and Third Worldism, there is no longer a real alternative to the Islamists on the left (White 2002, Tugal 2007, Gulalp 2001, Onis 1997). Furthermore, it is argued that the failure of inward looking economic development strategies gave rise to new business classes that have

consistently supported Islamist movements (Onis 1997, Yavuz 1997, Tugal 2002). The new, conservative business elites foster the growth of Islamist parties, as well as leading them to moderate their ideological platforms toward an economically liberal, socially conservative one (Yavuz 2009, Nasr 2005, Nasr 2009).

Socio-economic approaches to the growth of Islamist movements predict strong support for Islamist parties in migrant receiving cities surrounded by shanty-towns, where small and medium scale business enterprises dominate economic life. Both Gebze and Corlu fit this description. Located in the immediate periphery of Istanbul, the two cities have received extensive migration since late 1970s parallel to their industrial development¹⁴. The development of new, informal neighborhoods colloquially called the “gecekondus” (built overnight) in both cities created the urban masses that could potentially be mobilized by Islamist movements. Furthermore, small and medium sized businesses linked to global supply chains emerged in both cities. Represented by business associations commonly associated with Islamist parties¹⁵, the newly rich were capable of supplying economic and human resources to the Islamist party in both cities.

Table 2 below summarizes the macro-social similarities between Corlu and Gebze. Both cities are located in Northwest Turkey. Gebze borders Istanbul in the east, connecting the metropolis to the rest of Anatolia. Corlu sits at Istanbul’s western border. It is on the passageway that connects Istanbul with Eastern Europe. Both cities are integrated into an economic zone that includes Turkey’s largest industrial and trade hubs. The dominant economic sectors in both Corlu and Gebze are industry and services. The rapid rate of industrial development and the emergence of a

¹⁴ T.C. Corlu Kaymakamligi, Brifing, 1999 – 2009; (Turkish Republic, Sub-provincial governorate of Corlu, 1999-2009); Gebze Kaymakamligi, “Gebze’nin Sosyo-Ekonomik ve Nufus Durumu” (Gebze Sub-provincial Governorate, “Socio-Economic and Demographic Facts of Gebze”); Celik, Gulfettin, *iki Donemde Bir Kent – Gebze*, Gebze Ticaret Odasi Yayinlari, 1999 (Celik, G., *One City in Two Ages – Gebze*, Gebze Chamber of Commerce Publications, 1999); Gebze Kaymakamligi, “Gebze’nin Sosyo-Ekonomik ve Nufus Durumu” (Gebze Sub-provincial Governorate, “Socio-Economic and Demographic Facts of Gebze”); <http://gosb.com/staticfiles/files/rakamlar/istihdam.pdf>; interviews with local politicians and journalists in Gebze and Corlu, April and May 2008

¹⁵ Most notably Musiad and local business associations referred to as the “Siad’s”.

vibrant economy brought with it massive migration into these cities. Gebze's population increased fivefold since 1970s, and Corlu's population tripled in the same time frame. The limitations of the existing built environment led to the growth of informal neighborhoods or shantytowns that surround the wealthier town centers of Corlu and Gebze. The demographic explosion through urban migration diversified the local population in terms of ethnicity. The influx of Turkish migrants from inner Anatolia, Kurdish migrants from Eastern Turkey, and Turkish immigrants from a number of Balkan countries created an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous population. Sunni Islam remained the dominant religious belief, yet minority Alevi communities also made Gebze and Corlu their home. The Gulen religious and social movement is the most visible and best organized brotherhood in both cities, particularly among businessmen, merchants and students. Massive industrial zones in each city attract foreign investment as well as private investment from local businessmen. Business associations became highly active and visible to the public in both Corlu and Gebze following the development of local capital.

Due to their copious macro-social similarities, we would expect to see similar levels of Islamist support in these two cities. Yet unlike Gebze, Corlu did not become a hotbed of Islamist mobilization. The AKP's secularist archrival, Republican Peoples Party (CHP), has dominated the local political arena both in national and municipal elections. This observation presents a puzzle. Why did Islamists fail to win the hearts and minds (as well as the votes) of Corlu-ites, when they had ample opportunities to build a strong Islamist movement in a rapidly industrializing city?

Table 2.7: Macro-Social Characteristics of Gebze and Corlu

	Gebze	Corlu
Geographic location	Northwestern Turkey	Northwestern Turkey
Ethnic composition	Heterogeneous	Heterogeneous
Religious composition	Majority Sunni Muslim, small Alevi Muslim minority	Majority Sunni Muslim, small Alevi Muslim minority
Religious orders	Active, particularly the Gulen (Nurcu) movement	Active, particularly the Gulen (Nurcu) movement
Ethnic nationalism and violence	Negligible	Negligible
Economy	Vibrant	Vibrant
Population size in 1970	46,981	59,346
Population size in 2007	310,815	190,792
Migration	Net migrant receiver	Net migrant receiver
Dominant economic sector	Industry and services	Industry and services
Primary industrial sectors	Textiles, leather processing, packaging	Consumer and industrial chemicals, consumer durables, auto industry
Private investment in production	High	High
Business Associations	Active	Active
Strength of civil society	Medium	Medium
Local Party Organization	<i>Cohesive</i>	<i>Non-cohesive</i>
Elite Incorporation	<i>Strategic Recruitment</i>	<i>Strategic Recruitment</i>
AKP's Electoral Outcome	Success	Failure

The Identical administrative structures and formal electoral institutions under the unitary Turkish state, as well as the remarkable macro-social similarities between the two cities help eliminate explanations that remain at the national level. Socio-economic theories of Islamist growth cannot account for the variation observed between Gebze and Corlu. Similarly, explanations of Islamist party success that focus on the global domination of the West (Lewis 1990, Keddie 1994, Huntington 1992), failures of secular-nationalist ideologies and economic strategies (Kepel 2002, Keyman and Koyuncu 2005, Gulalp 2001, Tugal 2007), and state repression (Wickham 2002, Mardin 1973, Heper 1985, Nasr 2005, Dalmis and Aydin 2008) cannot explain the variation in support for the Islamists in these two sub-national units.

Accounting for both Islamist electoral success and failure at the sub-national level requires that we contextualize our analysis. Close observation of the local electoral strategies of the AKP reveals that the Islamists attempted to form local coalitions with centrist elites in order to expand their appeal to the voters who would otherwise support center right parties. Both in Gebze and in Corlu, the AKP strategically recruited local notables. The party organizations in both cities incorporated merchants, businessmen, civil society leaders, and local politicians previously attached to center right parties. The AKP's competitors in the center right, such as the Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party - ANAP) and the Dogru Yol Partisi (True Path Party - DYP), lost a significant portion of their human resources at the leadership level to the AKP. On the other hand, while the Gebze AKP branch was able to construct a functioning, well-oiled party machine and maintain civil relations between the newly recruited local elites, the Corlu branch failed at both accounts. Intense factionalism among status-conscious elites eager to create opportunities for self-promotion at the expense of their comrades stifled the AKP's community outreach efforts. While infighting within the AKP branch was widely publicized at the city level, the Islamists also failed to establish functional representation in the migrant neighborhoods which prevented the party from undertaking crucial campaign efforts.

Centrist Local Notable Incorporation and the Building of a New Islamist Party

The AKP was founded by the former members of the Welfare Party (RP) in Corlu. The Islamists did not immediately recruit local notables or even ordinary party members from the political center. The founding members of AKP in Corlu included a core group of "Milli Gorus"¹⁶ politicians, and an ad-hoc group of aspiring newcomers¹⁷. When the Welfare Party's successor Virtue Party (FP) was banned by the staunchly secularist Turkish Constitutional Court in 2001, its party organization split into two. Islamist politicians in Ankara divided roughly into two major

¹⁶ 'National Outlook,' a short hand for referring to the ideology of the Welfare Party.

¹⁷ Interviews with AKP activists, Corlu, April 2008

camps - the old guard verses the younger generation. So did the Corlu Virtue Party branch. Yet the generational aspect of the divide was less clear in the local branches. The small and cohesive group of RP era politicians who established the AKP included both young, and more experienced Islamists.

Within one year of the AKP's establishment, the founders of the Corlu branch reached out to the city's economic and civil society notables who had conservative reputations to extend invitations to join their new party. However, these notables showed little interest in the AKP. Islamists tried unsuccessfully to attract new blood into their organization. Since the leading founders of the AKP were veteran Islamists from the Welfare Party era, the party continued to carry the image of a radically conservative party of the religious right. It was perceived as just another front for the Welfare Party, a new hard line Islamist organization. Nevertheless, there was hope. The growing population of Anatolian migrants gave the AKP politicians a fighting chance. These migrants were arriving from cities where Islamists and other conservative parties had historically been electorally successful. Migrants from Sinop, Aksaray, Erzurum, and Yozgat, among other Anatolian cities could become loyal supporters of the AKP. Furthermore, the founders of the AKP's Corlu organization were themselves Anatolian migrants. These Islamist politicians had arrived in Corlu earlier in hope of finding economic opportunities, and had started their political careers in the RP. Now they stood at a position where they could appeal to newer migrants and offer representation in their brand new, moderate Islamist party. This was both a blessing and a curse for the AKP. While it enabled the party to reach out to Anatolian migrants with relative ease, it caused problems of integration and representation with Corlu's locals, migrants from the European Thrace region and the Turkish immigrants from the Balkans.

One year after its formation, AKP's Corlu branch was ill prepared for the 2002 general elections. It had an ad-hoc party organization made up of seasoned Islamists and a group of unknown and

inexperienced political aspirants. Due to its old guard Islamist image and uncertain electoral appeal, it was unable to realize a meaningful expansion of its electoral appeal towards the political center. Local economic and civil society elites did not display interest in the new party. Neither was the AKP successful in incorporating politicians from center right parties such as the ANAP and the DYP. Despite the widely expected implosion of these parties, and the availability local politicians who were already severing their ties with them, the AKP did not appeal to them as a new force in Turkey's political center. On November 3, 2002, the AKP participated in general elections as an unprepared, marginal party of the old guard Islamists in Corlu.

Not surprisingly, the AKP lost the elections by a large margin. It received 13.9 percent of the vote, coming third after the CHP and the Genc Parti. The party did not represent the locals, Thracian migrants and Balkan Turks. Neither did it incorporate or represent the local economic notables or civil society elites. Yet its story was different at the national level. The AKP won a sweeping victory in the general elections, with an overall 34.43 percent of the vote, as opposed to the CHP's 19.41 percent. The discrepancy between the AKP's national electoral success and local electoral failure came as a sobering reminder that remnants of the radical Welfare Party was not enough to place AKP in a strong political position in Corlu. In order to move beyond a limited supply of core Islamist voters and capture the support of a more centrist electorate, the AKP had to attract the individuals who could remodel the party's image and its internal structure at the local level

In Gebze, as in Corlu, the division that occurred between the pro-status quo old guard cadres of the FP and the party's reformist wing split the local branch into two. Islamist politicians active within the FP could go either way: join with the reformist wing to form a new party, or stay with the tried and true "National Outlook" politicians to form the next reincarnation of Welfare Party. However, the nucleus of the AKP's Gebze branch did not emerge out of the halls of the banned

FP's party center. Rather, the new local party was formed under the close supervision of the national party. The selection of the politicians who would proceed to form the core of the AKP in Gebze took place in the provincial center in Izmit, under the close supervision of national party leaders¹⁸.

After the establishment of the provincial party center in Izmit, a group of five politicians who were active members of the FP's Gebze organization were commissioned by the provincial party leadership to go back to Gebze and recruit carefully chosen local elites to construct the core of the new party. A veteran FP politician, Metin Gokce, became the founding leader of AKP in Gebze¹⁹. His committee made initial contacts with potential political recruits. These contacts took place before the official announcement of the establishment of the AKP, and were part of the groundwork of party formation at the provincial and sub-provincial levels.

Early joiners to the embryonic AKP in Gebze included politicians who were previously active in other political parties, local economic elites, trade unionists, and civil society leaders. Local politicians who joined the AKP in this period were mainly those who had recently broken off their ties with center-right parties. As in many other cities across Turkey, the AKP heavily recruited politicians with prior links to the center-right ANAP and the DYP, as well as the ultra-nationalist MHP.

In their bid to incorporate elites that were strongly positioned in Gebze's diverse social networks, the committee that was tasked with initial local notable recruitment also approached civil society leaders and trade union representatives. Conservative unions were the natural starting point for the AKP. Hak-Is, the Islamist labor union confederation was already closely associated with the RP. In order to expand their influence over previously non - Islamist, center-right constituencies,

¹⁸ Interview with an AKP provincial official who was actively recruited by the founders of the party in 2001, Gebze, May 2008

¹⁹ Ibid.

the committee approached representatives of right-wing unions. Particularly, Turk Metal Sendikasi (Turkish Metal Workers Union) as well as other unions that belonged to the Turk-Is labor confederation became the primary targets of recruitment during this period.

The economic elites that took part in the formation of the party core were merchants whose businesses were located in the town center. Thoroughly embedded in the social networks surrounding the merchant community, some of these recruits were politically active in center-right parties prior to the formation of the AKP. Others were new to politics. They had stayed away from what some described as “the dirty, corrupt politics of local administration²⁰” during the 1980s and 1990s. For the latter, the charismatic character of the AKP’s Islamist leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was an inspiration behind their decision to participate. Nevertheless, both groups were acutely aware of the potential advantages of becoming a part of a new political party, whose existence was not yet publicly declared, if the party achieved electoral success. An increased social status, close ties to Ankara, intimate links to the municipality, and growing business connections were alluring to the local economic elites.

Shortly after the establishment of the AKP became official in late 2001, the embryonic Gebze organization held a gathering with more than two hundred local business owners. In attendance were businessmen linked not only to MUSIAD²¹, GESIAD and GENCSIAD²², but also the business owners individually contacted by the party officials. Participants describe this meeting as a milestone in AKP’s relationship to Gebze’s economic elite²³. Many recent recruits into the party were themselves merchants and businessmen. The AKP officials used this gathering to

²⁰ Interview with a local AKP politician who started his political career with the party in 2001. Gebze, May 2008.

²¹ MUSIAD – Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association, the premiere business association of the small and medium sized businesses that are closely linked to the Turkish Islamist movements.

²² GESIAD and GENCSIAD (Gebze Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association, Young Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association) are local business associations in Gebze that bring together small and medium scale business owners.

²³ Interviews with founders of the local AKP branch in Gebze. Gebze, May 2008.

communicate their newly acquired goal of moving the Islamist party closer towards the political center, and the business-friendly policy orientation of their new party.

While many business leaders declined institutional membership to the AKP, numerous members of MUSIAD, GESIAD and GENCSIAD as well as non-affiliated businessmen declared their ‘support in principle’. Some joined the party as new politicians. GESIAD board member Adnan Kosker became an active member of the party and eventually got elected mayor of Gebze in 2009 from the AKP ticket. Others made monetary donations to help with startup costs. Still some others declared their moral support, without making any tangible commitments in order to keep their options open in the future. Most importantly, the AKP cemented a close alliance with local business associations and their leaders, which would prove useful to the party both during and after the elections.

The AKP entered its first elections in a strong position a year after its formation in Gebze. The party performed well at the polls with a 40 percent support rate as opposed to the CHP’s 15.8 percent. The AKP lost the elections in Corlu, but the party’s overall national performance was a success. General elections in November 2002 would quickly change the fortunes of the AKP’s Corlu branch.

Party Run in Corlu: Local Notable Incorporation after the 2002 General Elections

The Islamists did not have to wait long. After the AKP’s impressive victory in the general elections, Corlu experienced a ‘party run’ to join the AKP. The party began to receive widespread attention and interest among a population which was, right before the elections, deaf and blind to the calls of a seemingly old fashioned Islamist party. The party branch office, an unassuming rental space in the fourth floor of a large office building in the town center, flooded with people

who wanted to register as AKP members²⁴. Some others did not have to wait in line at the branch office to get an audience. A number of industrialists, merchants and large landowners immediately approached the party officials and joined ranks with the party. These local notables who possessed considerable economic resources and business networks could bring much needed social and economic capital to the Corlu AKP branch, and lift it up from its current marginal status.

Economic elites who were independently wealthy and thoroughly integrated into Corlu's growing business network played key parts in the AKP's efforts to incorporate centrist notables into its organization. Adnan Volkan, a well-known merchant in the food sector, was a local politician in ANAP before the formation of the AKP. He joined the AKP after the 2002 general elections, and immediately became a central figure within the party. He competed for the mayoral nomination from the AKP list unsuccessfully in 2004 and 2009. On both occasions, he and his allies engaged in strong handed tactics to win the nomination, which frequently involved efforts to undermine the candidacy of other nominees within the AKP²⁵. In 2009, when he lost the party mayoral nomination for the second time, he openly switched his support to CHP, and supported AKP's arch-rival instead of working for his party's candidate.

Another economic notable who rose to prominence within the AKP branch in Corlu was Atilla Kilic. The owner of Kilicoglu Holding, a family owned construction company, Kilic joined the AKP after the 2002 general elections, and became a significant actor in the party's internal politics. Similar to Adnan Volkan, Kilic also pursued mayoral nominations from his party, and took part in factional competition. Other local notables that joined and actively sought political

²⁴ Interviews with AKP officials and local journalists in Corlu, April 2008

²⁵ Interviews with AKP activists who identified themselves as part of an internal opposition to the 'rent-seekers' within the local party organization, April 2008

office and connections through the AKP included members of Erginler family and Ersozler family, both large landowning local families, Erciller family and Kumyollar family²⁶.

Among established, centrist Corlu politicians with conservative reputations who joined forces with the AKP, two stand out. Seyfettin Meric, a former Corlu mayor who won the 1984 local elections as a candidate from the ANAP, joined AKP ranks after the 2002 general elections. He got elected to the municipal council in 2004, following intense competition among potential nominees within AKP. Meric was an established politician in Corlu, who had been an important player in the local political arena for the last thirty years. By incorporating Meric into their party, AKP officials attempted to take advantage of his reputation and loyal political following.

Another politician with an established political following to join ranks with AKP was Enis Sulun. Sulun was a versatile politician whose party alignment and political loyalties have shifted throughout his career. He served as the mayor of Marmaraereglesi, a district of Corlu, for three terms after he won the local elections in 1984, 1989 and 1994 as a candidate from the ANAP. He then successfully ran for parliament from the ANAP list in 1995 and 1999. After losing the national elections in 2002, he left the ANAP and approached the DYP and the AKP. Although Sulun ran for parliament from the DYP list in 2007 general elections, he was also a contestant in the internal party politics of AKP. His involvement in AKP's internal politics became especially apparent in the 2009 local elections, when he lobbied for a political post within the AKP list. With his established political career, he emerged as a major player in AKP's internal factional politics.

In contrast to the Corlu AKP branch, the Gebze chapter's incorporation of local notables occurred before the 2002 general elections. After the election, which clarified the strength of the AKP both nationally and locally in Gebze, the interest in the Islamist party surged. Even the optimistic

²⁶ Interviews with local journalists and former AKP candidates, Corlu, April and May 2008

expectations of the AKP's founders in Gebze proved conservative when they faced long lines at the party office²⁷. The number of party members swelled. Even though some economic notables and politicians who could have joined AKP chose not to in both Corlu and Gebze, they were unable to mount significant opposition to the Islamists from within competing center-right parties. Both the DYP and the ANAP lost their former electoral appeal at a period when they were undergoing severe corruption scandals at the national level.

Regional Bargains for Local Elections: Civil Society Organizations as Recruitment Pads

The period between the 2002 general and the 2004 local elections brought a new set of actors into the AKP's local coalition building process: hometown associations. Vibrant elements of an otherwise stagnant civil society, hometown associations bring together migrants from specific cities of origin, and claim to represent them in local political life. Both Corlu and Gebze are settled predominantly by migrant groups. While most hometown associations function as city clubs that provide space and create occasions for co-townsmen to refresh their common ties, they also serve as springboards for aspiring local politicians. In both cities, pragmatic civil society entrepreneurs who lead hometown associations bargain with political parties in the run up to local elections²⁸. Depending on the size of their migrant constituency, and the perceived degree to which they can speak for them, these entrepreneurs seek to receive political concessions from competing parties.

The Islamist politicians who founded the AKP branch in Corlu overrepresented Anatolian migrants. In the run up to the 2004 municipal elections, the AKP approached a number of Anatolian hometown associations and their leaders in an attempt to tap into the voter base that had recently migrated from the Asian cities of Turkey. The party formed close links with a

²⁷ Interview with an AKP party bureaucrat in Gebze, May 2008

²⁸ Interviews with migrant hometown association activists and local politicians in Gebze and Corlu, April and May 2008

number of associations, particularly those that claimed to represent migrants from Sinop, Yozgat, Samsun, Aksaray, Giresun and Sivas.

These associations were organizations of migrants who came from cities where the AKP had achieved electoral success in the 2002 general elections. Since these were Anatolian cities where conservative parties had an already established following, the AKP sought to focus on its potential comparative advantage with these migrants and sought their votes first. In the run up to the 2004 municipal elections, the AKP offered municipal council positions to these organizations in order to attract their leadership cadres to the party. At the cost of neglecting a large segment of the voting population that was made up of migrants from the European/Thracian region of Turkey, locals, and Turkish immigrants from Bulgaria, the local AKP branch focused on the Anatolian migrants. Anatolian regional association leaders received offers for municipal council nominations from the AKP list, and they joined ranks with the Islamists as a result of AKP's efforts before the 2004 local elections.

The AKP's Gebze branch also negotiated with hometown associations when preparing its party list for the municipal council before the 2004 local elections. Although the AKP's local party officials openly doubted the credibility of migrant associations to mobilize support for their party, the AKP continued to work with their nominees in order to ensure a representative geographic distribution among its candidates. Unlike in Corlu however, hometown associations in Gebze did not become a significant arena of elite recruitment for the purposes of expanding AKP's electoral appeal.

In Corlu, the AKP's aggressive growth between 2002 and 2004 brought together a diverse coalition of local notables and aspiring politicians. Its sudden incorporation of elites came at a significant risk. Whether or not they would remain committed to their new party was questionable from the start. In the run up to the 2004 local elections, they quickly divided into factions, and

threatened to leave the party and support competing parties if their personal interests were not met by the organization. Factional competition quickly degenerated into strong handed tactics to undermine other potential candidates within the AKP. Unable to maintain internal unity within the party organization, the local AKP leadership could not foster party cohesion necessary for effective campaigning before the elections. Although the AKP incorporated local notables strategically after the 2002 general elections, it failed in promoting party cohesiveness. Intra-party factionalism and lack of cohesiveness would remain a staple of Corlu's Islamist politics. The local elites that joined the AKP were able to capitalize on their reputations and expand the representative capacity of the local party branch. AKP's vote share gradually increased in Corlu, but its non-cohesive party organization and intense fractionalization disabled its campaigning efficacy and undermined its competitiveness in local and national elections in Corlu.

Islamist (Dis)organization: Factional Disputes and Cohesiveness in the Local AKP Branch

In the run up to the 2004 local elections Corlu AKP had become an inflated party organization. Sudden incorporation of local elites after the 2002 general elections, limited availability of promotion opportunities, and ineffective leadership created the conditions of an intensely competitive environment where everyone was for herself.

In the first party congress since the AKP's establishment, the Corlu branch's leadership was transferred to Gulay Dalyan-Vatansever. Dalyan-Vatansever was a new politician, with no previous connections to the AKP's radical Islamist predecessors. Under her leadership, the AKP was to prepare for the local elections in 2004, after having lost the national electoral race two years earlier. Dalyan-Vatansever was charged with not only expanding the reach of the AKP's local organization to Corlu's peripheral neighborhoods, but also with creating a supportive and peaceful atmosphere within the party organization. In the run up to the local elections, eleven

AKP members emerged as contenders for the party's mayoral candidate²⁹. These included local elites who had recently joined the party, such as Adnan Volkan, Seyfettin Meric and Atilla Kilic. The newly elected local party leader also decided to nominate herself for the office. Despite an AKP policy which prevented local party leaders from contending for mayoral nominations, Dalyan-Vatansever decided to campaign for her own candidacy.

The party candidate for the mayor's position was decided by AKP's national party center in Ankara after taking into account a local opinion poll and intensive interviews with the potential candidates³⁰. National party leaders upheld their prior decision not to nominate the local party leader as a mayoral candidate, so Dalyan-Vatansever was left out of the competition. Ibrahim Yerlioglu was chosen as the AKP's candidate for mayor.

Yerlioglu was an Anatolian migrant, who had moved into Corlu from Gaziantep more than a decade ago. An engineer by profession, he operated a water systems business for construction projects. Although his business was thriving together with the booming construction industry in Corlu, he was a junior figure in Corlu's business circles. His nomination did not inspire his colleagues at the AKP. Dalyan-Vatansever did not accept his candidacy, yet she could not dispute the decision of the national party center either. Instead, she chose not to help her party's candidate. She abandoned Corlu during the election period, did not attend any party meetings and did not take part in the campaign effort³¹. Following the party leader's departure, other local elites in the party who had also lost the nomination withdrew their support from the candidate. Lacking strong local leadership as well as oversight by the national party center, the local party apparatus was left fractured. In a city where the Islamists had already lost their first electoral contest in 2002, the AKP's candidate for the mayor's position was left to fend for himself. Yerlioglu made

²⁹ Interview with a candidate who competed for the AKP's mayoral nomination in 2004. Corlu, May 2008

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Interviews with internal opposition figures within the Corlu AKP branch. May 2008.

an individual effort to mobilize the AKP activists. He formed campaign task forces at the party. When he attempted to mobilize the AKP's neighborhood organizations, he received limited and ad-hoc participation.

In Gebze as in other cases of Islamist electoral success, the neighborhood organizations played a key role during the local elections. The AKP inherited the legacy of effective grassroots organization at the neighborhood level from its predecessors. The new Islamists continued to rely on neighborhood level society penetration techniques which required the organization of party assemblies in each precinct. While neighborhood organizations were a source of effective party-society linkages in Gebze in this period, they were weak in Corlu. The local party was divided into factions, and dissatisfied elites withdrew their support from their party's candidate. Lacking effective leadership and incentives to carry out their mission, the AKP's neighborhood organizations proved ineffective in facilitating the formation of direct party-voter linkages in Corlu.

A Party United: The AKP in Gebze

In the run up to the 2004 municipal elections in Gebze, the AKP's local organization gained steam. The founding leader of the party, Metin Gokce, left the party leadership to Ekrem Ozenir in order to run for municipal office. Ekrem Ozenir was an established local politician with previous links to center-right ANAP. He had risen in the ranks of the ANAP's local organization in late 1980s and 1990s. Disgruntled by his party's sensational corruption scandals at the national level, he resigned in 1999. Ozenir was one of the first center-right politicians to be recruited into the AKP in 2001³². Metin Gokce's decision to leave his party's local leadership less than a year after its formation to a center-right politician without prior links to Islamist parties demonstrated Gebze AKP's willingness to integrate the new elites into its top political offices at the local level.

³² Multiple interviews with Ozenir, May 2008 and November 2010.

Ozenir oversaw the creation and mobilization of the AKP's neighborhood organizations in Gebze. His branch included experienced Islamist community organizers, who had previously worked in the RP's party organization. Making use of their know-how, Ozenir pushed for the creation of party organizations in all twenty six neighborhoods of the greater Gebze area. While some of these organizations were headed by seasoned Islamists, the local branch also gave responsibility to new recruits. Trade unionists, merchants and pensioners who had no previous links with Islamist parties were integrated into the AKP's grassroots organizations³³.

During the first party congress in 2003, Ozenir switched to the party organization in Kocaeli province, and did not run for party leadership in the Gebze branch. In his stead, Mehmet Ali Okar was elected to lead the party organization in Gebze. Okar was a local merchant in Gebze's city center. A young and aspiring politician, he had never been a member of a political party prior to his decision to join the AKP in 2001. During the short tenure of Ozenir and later under Okar's leadership, Gebze AKP implemented the national party center's standards on how to manage neighborhood organizations. The national standard called for the establishment of neighborhood councils, which would be monitored not only by the local party center, but also by the women's and youth organizations of the local party.

Each neighborhood organization was tasked with raising awareness of the party in their respective districts. Practically, that meant engaging in two different community outreach programs. First, the neighborhood women's organization, in conjunction with the women's organization of the local party, organized household visits in the homes of neighbors. The meetings took the form of "misafirlik" – a neighborly visit that invokes traditional expectations of hospitality. Representatives of the local party's women's organization also joined these meetings. Since the occasion was that of a traditional neighborly visit, the AKP activists refrained from

³³ Interview with an AKP neighborhood representative in Gebze, May 2008 and November 2010.

direct propaganda in their rhetoric. Instead, they talked about the daily problems of the assembled women, giving occasional advice on how to resolve these problems. Their approach was to understate the partisan aspects of their visit, since their goal was not to proselytize. Instead, they attempted to put a friendly face on the party among the women; to build a personal relationship between them and the party³⁴.

Second, the central neighborhood organizations, which were made up primarily of men, were tasked with minding the physical aspects of their neighborhoods. They often talked to their neighbors to learn if they had any problems about infrastructure. Water outages, fallen trees, ditches left unfilled by the municipality, poor electrical infrastructure quality were among the problems they were informed about. The central neighborhood organizations also invited residents to their weekly meetings, where they could discuss issues related to their own neighborhood's wellbeing.

Ozenir and Okar implemented a strict monitoring system for the party's neighborhood organizations³⁵. Each organization was tasked with holding regular, weekly meetings without exception. A local party representative would join these meeting every week. The representative would listen to the demands of the neighborhood residents, and had to report them to the appropriate office in the municipality. Each neighborhood organization leader was also tasked with preparing a weekly report, due in the next day, and filing it with the neighborhood organizations officer at the local party. The neighborhood organizations officer kept records of all meetings, and in cases of low attendance reported it promptly to the local party leader. The strict hierarchical monitoring mechanism ensured the continuity of community outreach in and out of the electoral cycle. Unlike the AKP branch in Corlu, the local party officials in Gebze were not

³⁴ Focus group with the Gebze AKP Women's Organization. Gebze, May 2008.

³⁵ Interview with Okar, the former leader of the AKP's Gebze branch. Gebze, May 2008.

divided into factions and continuously emphasized the need to maintain functioning neighborhood organizations.

The effective leadership of Ozenir and Okar in the AKP's Gebze branch took place under the supervision of a vigilant provincial party center in Kocaeli. The ability of the Gebze branch to integrate new, centrist local notables into the top political positions of the party structure demonstrated that the AKP was serious in its claim to represent new constituencies under its political umbrella. The early and orderly inclusion of these notables into the party hierarchy avoided the scramble to power that the Corlu branch fell prey to. The cohesiveness of the Gebze branch was also evidenced by the institutionalized community outreach programs implemented by the party's neighborhood organizations. While the Corlu branch faced difficulties in creating the conditions under which its neighborhood organizations could function, the Gebze branch established a coordinated system of volunteers akin to a Weberian bureaucracy. Gebze AKP went into the municipal elections in 2004 with its united organization and active neighborhood councils in all twenty six precincts.

The AKP's Attempts to Build Local Credentials in Corlu

After the AKP's second electoral failure in Corlu in 2004, the national party center dissolved the local party administration. The local branch was pushed into its second party congress, with the task of building a new organization that would mend the AKP's relations with the voters. Both the local founders and the first municipal candidate of the Islamists had been Anatolian migrants in Corlu. With disappointing results at the ballot box, the blame was laid on the AKP's distance from Corlu's locals and Turkish immigrants from Balkan countries. The interim party

administration that was chosen by the party center was tasked with building closer links to these two communities³⁶.

This policy became increasingly apparent in 2006, when the national party center appointed Mehmet Gonul as the new local party leader. Despite his family's reputation as staunch supporters of the CHP, and his own political past within the secularist party, he was given the AKP's local leadership in a move widely recognized as an effort to bridge the party's distance with Thracian migrants and Corlu's locals³⁷. During Gonul's tenure as local party leader, Corlu AKP incorporated members from Corlu's local community and Balkan Turks into its party organization. Several top positions in the party structure were trusted to new politicians whose only tangible asset was their point of origin. The leader of the AKP's local women's organization, the deputy party leader responsible for party organization affairs and multiple neighborhood leaders were replaced with Corlu locals and immigrants from the Balkans.

Affirmative action for locals and Balkan Turks also expanded to municipal council candidates. An internal opposition group from the Balkan Turks Association (BTA), which was intimately linked to the CHP, founded BISADER³⁸. BISADER distanced itself from the CHP, and its leader, Mehmet Cebeci, joined the AKP. Although BISADER was officially neutral in terms of party politics, its leader's immediate transition into the ranks of the AKP differentiated it from the older and more established BTA. In the 2009 local elections, Mehmet Cebeci was nominated by the AKP for the municipal council. This effort expanded AKP's presence among the Turkish immigrants from Bulgaria. Yet the growth in support from the locals and Balkan Turks to AKP was not enough to compensate for the lack of cohesion in the party organization and the resulting inability of the party to field effective political campaigns.

³⁶ Interview with AKP activist. Corlu, April 2008.

³⁷ Interviews with Gonul as well as other AKP and CHP politicians. April and May 2008.

³⁸ Balkan Gocmenleri Iktisadi, Sosyal, Kulturel Arastirma ve Yardimlasma Dernegi (Balkan Immigrants Economic, Social, Cultural Research and Solidarity Association)

Local elites incorporated into the AKP remained disjointed and fractionalized in Corlu. Gonul's attempts to integrate locals and Balkan Turks into the party organization meant that existing party officials faced more competition in their attempts to advance their political careers. Furthermore, the inclusion of former CHP supporters to the top echelons of the party alienated the conservative "national outlook" politicians, who had been loyal Islamist activists since the RP era. Some of these hard liner Islamists left the AKP in order to join Felicity Party (SP), the party formed by the old-guard Islamist politicians of the former FP. The party center's attempt to reach out to local and immigrant voters led to more fractionalization among the party elites.

The national party center's decisions regarding candidate nomination and within party promotion often conflicted with the interests of the political factions within Corlu AKP. Gonul's appointment as party leader was followed by another unexpected nomination one year later. In the run up to the national elections, the former leader of the AKP's Corlu branch, Gulay Dalyan-Vatansever was nominated by the national party center as AKP's candidate for the parliament. Despite the tumultuous period the AKP had lived through under her leadership during the 2004 local elections, she received the full support of Ankara in 2007. An unpopular candidate in Corlu AKP, her campaign did not receive the support of the new local elites within the party. Factions within the AKP that had lost their bid for nomination withdrew their support for Dalyan-Vatansever prior to the elections. Multiple interviewees reported that some of the losers of the AKP's nomination process switched their support to the archrival CHP's candidates instead. The AKP's internal conflicts utterly disabled the party organization from taking any meaningful steps towards systematically backing its own candidates at the ballot box. Although the Islamists hoped to reap the benefits of their new linkages with the local and immigrant communities in Corlu, the AKP's disjointed voter outreach mechanisms obstructed its campaign efforts for a second time in 2007.

AKP Fortifies its Position in Gebze

While its Corlu counterpart was stuck in a vicious cycle of weak leadership, elite conflict and defeat at the polls, the AKP's Gebze branch maintained its dominant position in the city. The Islamists upheld a stable local leadership after the election of Okur in 2003. Okur's business minded approach to party affairs kept the neighborhood organizations as well as the party's youth group active even outside the electoral cycle. The women's organization, a mix of seasoned Islamist activists and political newcomers also contributed to the efforts of neighborhood organizations by keeping up with the biweekly neighborhood house visits.

The Gebze branch also experienced upward mobility in the party hierarchy. The former leader of the Gebze branch, Ozenir got promoted to deputy chair of the provincial party organization. Nihat Ergun, a parliamentarian from the province became a deputy leader of AKP national, responsible for the party's provincial and sub-provincial organizations. Ergun had previously worked as a local politician in Gebze, and was closely linked with the local party. As of 2011, Ergun serves as the Minister of Science, Industry and Technology in the AKP led government.

The AKP continuously cultivated its links with local business associations. The GESIAD and the GENCSIAD cooperated with the Islamists in even the most trivial of political occasions. The GENCSIAD often organized panels on economic policy and political leadership, which was attended by AKP parliamentarians. They also supplied the party with human capital. The leader of the AKP's youth organization, Zafer Kilic, was also the vice president of the GENCSIAD. The AKP's candidate for mayor in 2009, Adnan Kosker, was a seasoned member of the board of directors of the GESIAD. The AKP's links with organized business enabled the party to access the wealthy segments of Gebze's population as well as supplying the party with educated, well connected, and reputable political officials.

Conclusion

Macro-structural explanations of Islamist party success would predict similar levels of Islamist voting in Gebze and Corlu. Both towns are located in the immediate periphery of Istanbul, Turkey's largest city. Both are industrial powerhouses with vibrant economies, have witnessed the growth of export-oriented capital, and received significant and continuously growing migrant populations. Their residents are ethnically and culturally heterogeneous yet overwhelmingly self-identify as Muslim. Arguments linking Islamist voting to the mobilization of migrant youths, export oriented business groups, state suppression, economic depression and deep seated values that are inherent to Islam fail to explain the variation of electoral support for Islamists between Gebze and Corlu. The AKP's success and failure at the polls is a product of its activists' pragmatic calculations during the elite recruitment processes, and the degree to which recruited elites maintain unity. Strategic incorporation of local notables and cohesiveness of the local party organization accounts for the AKPs competitiveness in local and national elections.

The differences between the AKP's Gebze and Corlu branches emerged during their formative phases. In Gebze, a committee made up of seasoned Islamist politicians carefully picked and interviewed local politicians who were previously attached to center right parties, trade unionists, and economic elites as well as civil society leaders who had conservative reputations. The most significant part of local elite recruitment occurred in 2001 before the AKP was formally established. In Corlu, however, Islamist politicians established the local AKP branch by themselves, with some help from an ad-hoc group of political aspirants with no social capital. While both party organizations received growing degrees of interest for membership after the 2002 elections, the Gebze branch was better equipped to form a hierarchical structure within the party organization which precluded aggressive self-promotion among incorporated elites. Factional disputes within the AKP's Corlu branch persisted since the initial incorporation of local

notables in 2002. Lack of strong local leadership, disjointed relations between the national party center and the Corlu branch, and opportunistic behavior by recruited elites contributed to the non-cohesiveness of the party organization.

Although AKP branches in both Corlu and Gebze recruited local notables strategically after 2002, the Corlu branch failed to build a cohesive party group while the Gebze branch succeeded. As a result, the AKP's Gebze branch was able to compete successfully with its rivals, while Corlu AKP prevented itself from being competitive at the polls.

CHAPTER 3

Politics of Local Elite Recruitment in the Kurdish Regions of Turkey

Since its founding in late 2001, the AKP has emerged as the only party, other than the parties of the Kurdish National Movement (KNM), which can credibly claim to represent the Kurds of Turkey. In the Kurdish majority Eastern and Southeastern regions of Turkey, the AKP is the only national level party that is capable of competing for the votes of Turkey's Kurdish minority, while others are practically locked out of the region. From the cities of Bingol and Mus to Diyarbakir, Van, Mardin and Batman, the electoral race between the AKP and the parties of the KNM dominates the political arena. This chapter addresses an empirical puzzle with theoretical implications: Why did the Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (Justice and Development Party - AKP) achieve unprecedented electoral victories in the Kurdish city of Bingol whereas it consistently lost national elections to the candidates of the Kurdish National Movement (KNM) in the neighboring city of Mus?

Existing approaches to the growth and popularization of Islamist movements and parties would predict similar degrees of electoral support for the AKP in Bingol and Mus due to their extensive geographical, institutional, ethnic and socio-economic similarities. I argue that the variation in the electoral appeal of the AKP cannot be explained by the macro-social variables privileged by the existing approaches. Instead, I claim that the variation in the AKP's electoral appeal across these remarkably similar cities is due to the differences in its *strategic* local elite recruitment, and the *cohesiveness* of its local party organizations. The local AKP branch in Bingol incorporated pragmatic clan and non-clan based local notables into its party organization strategically, and built a cohesive party structure. This gave the AKP a competitive edge against the pro-Kurdish

ethnic party, the Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party – DTP). In Mus, the local AKP branch failed at strategic local notable incorporation. Despite forming a cohesive local organization, the AKP could not expand its electoral appeal beyond its core constituency due to the problems it faced at the recruitment front. As a result, it lost its competitive edge against the DTP, and lost national elections in Mus.

In order to compete for the votes of a large, non-Islamist constituency, the founders of the AKP sought to form new links to non-core constituencies by transforming their local party cadres. Rather than relying on a small but dependable core constituency of Islamist voters, the AKP incorporated non-Islamist local elites with conservative reputations in a bid to expand its electoral appeal. In Mus and Bingol, the local elites that were targeted by the AKP were primarily clan elites and extended family leaders. To a lesser extent, the AKP also incorporated businessmen and local merchants independent of their clan affiliations due to their established local reputations.

Table 3.8: Electoral Outcome for AKP in Bingol and Mus

	Bingol	Mus
Cohesive Party Organization	✓	✓
Strategic Elite Recruitment	✓	X
Outcome	Success	Failure

In this chapter, I examine the processes of local coalition building between the AKP and the local elites in Bingol and Mus. I start by elaborating on the macro-social similarities between Bingol and Mus, which according to the existing literature should have led to similar levels of Islamist electoral support. Next, I analyze the cohesiveness of the AKP’s local party structures in both Bingol and Mus. The local party branches of the AKP in both cities exhibited cohesive structures, which show that differences in party organization cannot account for the variation in electoral

outcomes between Mus and Bingol for the Islamists. Then, I discuss the persistence and political significance of Kurdish clans in Bingol and Mus, and explain the emergence of Islamist party-clan elite linkages reaching back to early 1980s. This section leads to an analysis of how the AKP was able to recruit clan elites strategically in Bingol. Lastly, I analyze the emergence of a similar Islamist - clan elite coalition and its failure in Mus province beginning with the early 1980s.

Similar Macro-Social Conditions for Islamist Support in Bingol and Mus

Existing literature focuses extensively on macro-social factors to explain the growth and popularization of Islamist parties. The dominant approaches that focus on the socio-economic origins of Islamist mobilization predict strong support for Islamist parties in migrant receiving cities, where disillusioned urban masses live in shanty-towns, and where local private investment is connected to global production chains. Neither Bingol nor Mus fit this description. They are both small cities in an area dominated by larger centers like Van, Diyarbakir and Erzurum. Neither of the two cities have a developed industrial sector. Animal husbandry has also crumbled after the forced evacuation of the rural villages during the conflict between the violent illegal wing of the Kurdish National Movement (the PKK) and the Turkish state³⁹. The State Planning Institution ranks Mus as the least developed and Bingol as the fifth least developed of all the eighty-one provinces in Turkey⁴⁰. Chronic lack of private investment makes the local economies of Bingol and Mus heavily dependent on the state. Both cities lose population to migration towards large Turkish and European cities.

The macro-social similarities between Bingol and Mus go further than their socio-economic endowments. These two contiguous provinces in Eastern Turkey share the same political context within which the AKP is competing for votes. Both cities are mainly Kurdish. Two dialects of the

³⁹ Turkish state evacuated more than 3000 villages and hamlets suspected of supporting the PKK during 1980s and 1990s.

⁴⁰ Dinçer, Özaslan, Kavasoglu, *İllerin ve Bölgelerin Sosyo-ekonomik Gelişmişlik Sıralaması Araştırması* (2003), Devlet Planlama Teskilati, Yayın No DPT 2671

Kurdish language, Zazaki and Kirmanji, are widely spoken in both cities. Furthermore, the PKK is active in the rural areas of both Bingol and Mus. In terms of historical context, both cities have witnessed violent, popular rebellions against the centralizing and secularizing reforms of the Turkish Republic after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Sheikh Said rebellion, the first of a number of violent rebellions repressed harshly by the state, started in the border area between the two provinces. Bingol and Mus are therefore very similar in terms of ethnic composition, local presence of an ethnic nationalist guerilla organization and a history of revolt and state suppression.

The religious composition of the two cities is also very similar. Kigi district in Bingol and Varto district in Mus are Alevi majority locations, yet the overwhelming majority of the residents of both Bingol and Mus are Sunni Muslims. Religious orders (brotherhoods) are active in both cities. The Gulen movement has an extensive following in the area. Interviewees in both cities reported widespread and growing influence of the Gulen (Nurcu) movement among the residents. The extensive similarities between Mus and Bingol in terms of religious composition and the strong presence of religious brotherhoods in both cities discounts the possibility that differences in religion-related characteristics may explain the variation in support for the AKP. Table 2 summarizes some of the significant similarities between the two cities, while also pointing out a crucial difference -- the electoral appeal of the AKP.

Table 3.9: Macro-Social Characteristics of Bingol and Mus

	Bingol	Mus
Geographic location	Eastern Turkey	Eastern Turkey
Ethnic composition	Kurdish	Kurdish
Religious composition	Majority Sunni Muslim, Alevi Muslim concentration in one district	Majority Sunni Muslim, Alevi Muslim concentration in one district
Religious orders	Active, particularly the Gulen (Nurcu) movement	Active, particularly the Gulen (Nurcu) movement
Ethnic nationalism and violence	PKK	PKK
GDP per capita (2001) ⁴¹	\$795	\$578
Population size	251,552 (2007)	405,509 (2008)
Migration	Net migrant donor to large cities in Turkey and to Europe	Net migrant donor to large cities in Turkey and to Europe
Women's Literacy (2000)	60%	54%
Dominant economic sector	Agriculture and animal husbandry	Agriculture and animal husbandry
Percentage of population holding a "yesil kart" ⁴²	54% (135,794)	43% (173,777)
Level of private investment	Low	Low
Pro-Islamist Business Associations	None	None
Strength of civil society	Weak	Weak
Local Party Organization	<i>Cohesive</i>	<i>Cohesive</i>
Elite Incorporation	<i>Strategic Recruitment</i>	<i>Absent</i>
AKP's Electoral Outcome	Success	Failure

By virtue of being sub-national units within Turkey, Bingol and Mus share similar administrative structures, and operate within the same formal institutions. Furthermore, the extensive macro-

⁴¹ 2001 figures, Briefing for the Provincial Governorate (Mus and Bingol)

⁴² The "yesil kart" (green card) program provides free healthcare coverage to citizens who cannot afford to pay for their healthcare expenses. To be eligible, the applicant has to be able to demonstrate financial need, which is verified by local bureaucratic institutions. Yesil Kart ownership is a good indicator for total percentage of people who need social welfare in a province. For further information: <http://sbu.saglik.gov.tr/yesil/default.asp>

social similarities between the two cities enable me to eliminate explanations that treat Islamist parties and movements as monolithic actors, and those that focus only on the national level of analysis. Just as is in chapters two, four and six, macro-social explanations of Islamist growth cannot account for the variation in the AKP's electoral appeal between Bingol and Mus.

The next section examines the AKP's local party organizations in Mus and Bingol. In both cases, the AKP was successful in building cohesive party structures, which therefore does not account for the variation in the electoral outcome. The following section analyzes the processes of local party organization construction in Bingol and Mus, and demonstrates that cohesiveness of party organizations is a necessary but not a sufficient cause of Islamist electoral success.

Cohesiveness of the AKP's Party Organizations in Bingol and Mus

This section focuses on the remarkable similarities between the local party structures of the AKP in Mus and Bingol in terms of their cohesiveness. The AKP branches in Bingol and Mus share similarities in terms of their bureaucratic organizations, the relations between recruited local elites, and the community outreach programs they employ to maintain the visibility and the image of the party.

Party branch cohesiveness is measured by two distinct, yet closely interrelated indicators. Whether or not the conflicts of interest among recruited local elites are resolved internally without creating deep fractures in the local party branch due to factionalism is the first indicator. Second, whether or not the local party branch has constructed a working bureaucracy that is organized into hierarchical levels as well as parallel committees of central, women's and youth committees, and whether the party bureaucracy is able to carry out and institutionalize community outreach programs. The AKP branches in Mus and Bingol have built functional bureaucracies, employ institutionalized community outreach programs and there are no significant frictions among local notables that have joined the party.

In Bingol, the local notables that have joined forces with the AKP do not display overt hostility towards each other or towards the local party leadership. Unlike in the north western, industrial city of Corlu where opportunistic local politicians within the AKP regularly undermined their competitors and formed antagonistic factions⁴³, the local elites within the AKP in Bingol displayed cooperative behavior before and during the elections. Bingol's influential clan elites were equally represented within the local party structure. The elites who had sizable local constituencies were offered influential positions within the AKP, both at the level of local branch leadership and as candidates during parliamentary elections⁴⁴.

Even though the Islamists nominated different notables for the parliament in the 2002 and 2007 national elections, they maintained a careful distribution of clan elites within the party. When Anik, a local notable with strong ties to the Zigte clan was replaced by Ataoglu, the Zigte clan effectively maintained its influence within the party. Ataoglu is also a clan notable within Zigte, and he was instrumental in the maintenance of AKP support within his clan⁴⁵. Concrete clan ties, particularly in the populous southern districts of Bingol removed the potential uncertainty of political clout among recruited notables, and enabled the maintenance of cooperative relations between them.

Similar to Bingol, local notables that joined forces with the AKP in the Mus province also avoided factionalization. However, unlike their counterparts in Bingol, the Islamists in Mus could not rely on the local clans to support the AKP exclusively⁴⁶. In Mus, every major political party, including the AKP and its rivals, received their share of local notables with strong clan ties⁴⁷.

Divided clans supplying elites to all major parties made all clan elites less significant as political

⁴³ Interviews with local AKP and CHP officials, local journalists and civil society activists in Corlu, Turkey. April – May 2009.

⁴⁴ Interviews with local AKP officials and local journalists. Bingol, Turkey. October 2008.

⁴⁵ Interview with a local AKP activist. Bingol, Turkey. October 2008.

⁴⁶ Multiple interviews with AKP, SP, and DTP officials, local journalists and civil society activists. Mus, Turkey. October - November 2008.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

assets. The failure of the local AKP branch to recruit local elites who possessed greater social capital compared to its rivals meant that the strategic elite recruitment variable is coded negative. This also meant that the Islamists were unable to gain primary access to clan votes through the elites it recruited. There were no visible divisions or factions within the AKP branch in Mus, partly because there was not much to fight over. On the other hand, a local notable with genuine prestige within the city of Mus, Necmettin Dede, maintained his privileged position within the AKP. A strong contender for the mayor's office, Dede delivered votes to the AKP with his palpable popularity in the city. His nomination in the local elections was not disputed within the party, which was a further indicator of cohesiveness of the local party organization.

In terms of party organization, the AKP branches in both cities performed similarly. In both cities, the Islamist party inherited a portion of its organizational structure from its predecessor Refah Partisi (Welfare Party - RP), which was previously banned by the staunchly secularist Turkish Constitutional Court. While the party hierarchies at the provincial centers were reconstructed, the system of neighborhood representatives that was established in the 1990s was inherited from the banned RP⁴⁸. The party bureaucracy of the AKP in both cities was centered on the main administration committee, which was made up of seasoned Islamist local politicians as well as recently recruited elites. The administration committee was headed by the local party leader, and the members of the parliament elected from the party ticket exert significant influence over the composition and functioning of the central committee. Awarding membership to the AKP's main administration committee at the provincial level was the principle method with which the party incorporated local notables. In Bingol and Mus, the clan and non-clan elites that were recruited by the Islamists first received membership to this body, and then awaited nomination for political office during elections.

⁴⁸ Interviews with local AKP officials and activists. Bingol and Mus, Turkey. September – November, 2008.

Bureaucracy building within the AKP faced a rocky start in the Mus province in 2001. Most of the central administrative posts were dominated by seasoned Islamist politicians, and integration of new local elites did not take place smoothly. However, the initial confusion within the Mus branch was resolved after the 2002 general elections, when the party staffed its women's and youth groups with newly recruited activists in addition to the more experienced ones, and maintained a functional bureaucracy afterwards⁴⁹.

Neighborhood representatives of the AKP also functioned similarly in Bingol and Mus, yet they collectively differed from the neighborhood representation system used by the party in larger western cities. While in the shantytowns of Istanbul the AKP's neighborhood representatives undertook crucial activities that expand the visibility of the party through vigorous community outreach programs, their efforts were relatively understated in Bingol and Mus. In both cities, the AKP's neighborhood representatives refrained from aggressive community penetration techniques that are commonplace in the other cases⁵⁰. The Islamists have adapted their strategies to the customs of the region. One interviewee in Bingol described the AKP's local community outreach strategy:

"In bigger cities the Islamists (the RP and the AKP) may be going door to door to convince people to vote for their party. They don't do that here. They don't, because the people of this region would look down on that. It is not customary for someone to knock the door of another if they do not know each other. People would not open their doors. So the parties do not visit the neighborhoods often, and it is not expected that they do."⁵¹

Both Bingol and Mus are relatively small cities, where the persistence of extended family structures and clans comprise a complex web of relationships. Most residents can relate to a significant portion of the population through clan ties. While the AKP downplays its street level activism in these two cities, it takes advantage of clan and extended family structures in its voter outreach efforts. The local notables that are recruited into the AKP provide direct links to the

⁴⁹ Interview with AKP activist and local party bureaucrat in Mus, October 2008.

⁵⁰ Interviews with local journalists. Bingol and Mus, Turkey. September and October, 2008.

⁵¹ Interview with a local journalist and a community leader. Bingol, Turkey. September 2008.

clans through their statuses as well as their central locations within the clan networks. The activities and community outreach programs organized by the AKP's main administrative body, women's group and youth group complement the more direct role local notables play for the party.

The local party structures of the AKP in Bingol and Mus were cohesive particularly following the 2002 general elections. The links between the AKP's provincial party branch hierarchy and the neighborhood representatives, as well as the community outreach organizations developed by the Islamist activists in Bingol and Mus differ from those in the western portions of the country. Yet the similarities between the local AKP organizations in Bingol and Mus show that they do not explain the variation in the electoral support for the Islamists in these two cities. The explanation lies in the differences in elite recruitment. The AKP's Bingol branch became dominant in the province while its Mus branch could not because while the Bingol branch incorporated local notables strategically, the Mus branch could not.

Having discussed what does not cause the variation in the electoral appeal of Islamists across Mus and Bingol, the next section introduces contextual factors, the differences in terrain that shape and limit the ability of the AKP to recruit local notables. It elaborates on the role of Kurdish clans in the political life of Bingol and Mus. As local authority structures with varying degrees of control over the voting behaviors of their own constituents, Kurdish clans and extended family networks hold precarious positions of political influence in both cities.

Clans: Contested Sources of Local Political Power in Bingol and Mus

In order to expand its vote share beyond its core constituency of ideologically motivated voters, the AKP recruited local notables with diverse backgrounds across Turkey. In the Kurdish regions of Turkey, where local clans maintain patchworks of political influence over their own constituencies, the AKP worked closely with clan leaders. For a party that forms strategic

linkages with local elites in order to reach out to potential voters, clan elites and leaders of extended families are prize recruits. As high status individuals in traditionally valued local social structures, they provide the party with a strong presence within the community. This also enables the clan and the party to strike deals based on access to state resources if the elites in question are in fact able to deliver the clan's votes for the party.

Despite the widespread expectation that clan loyalties should gradually weaken as a result of modernization, clan structures continue to be effective intermediaries in party-voter relations in of Eastern Turkey. However, what constitutes a clan is not uniform across the Kurdish regions. In Bingol and Mus, for instance, clans tend to be regional political unions of different families. These families need not always be blood relatives. They may consider themselves to belong to a clan based on the village in which they live and to which regional network that village belongs.

As one local Bingol intellectual put it:

Clans in Bingol are very different from clan structures in cities to our south [like Urfa and Hakkari]. Clans do not have familial bonds here. Families which consider themselves to be in the same clan usually have different stories about their own origins in the past. They may have intermarried, but we cannot really speak about these families being close relatives. Clans are regional unions here. It is a psychological union, without a common ancestral background⁵².

Clans in Bingol and Mus are by definition political constructs. Collections of extended families constitute clans, and depending on how consolidated a clan is, household leaders of these families claim political influence when interacting with outsiders, such as political parties. Some clans demonstrate stronger bonds than others in terms of their collective political action. The ability of a clan notable to negotiate an important appointment at a political party depends on the size and the perceived unity of the clan he claims to be representing. Large and unified clans, such as the Zigte Clan in Bingol, have often produced parliamentarians due to their impressive pool of

⁵² Interview with a local intellectual. Bingol, Turkey. October 2008.

dedicated voters⁵³. The AKP has built strong ties to clans like Zigte and Az in Bingol, whereas its links to the tribes in Mus remain fragile.

The close ties between local elites in Bingol and Mus and the AKP offer the Islamists a much needed local presence. In a region that is relatively rural, poor and socially organized in terms of clans and kinship networks, the AKP finds it in its interest to incorporate high-status individuals in an attempt to access their influence in their respective territories. In return, clans that overcome their collective action problems and take part in political negotiations with the AKP expect to send their representatives to the parliament, receive patronage in the form of state investment in their regions, and have access to the echelons of power in Ankara, as well as in their own provinces.

The influence of the Kurdish National Movement has challenged the primacy of clans as identity carriers for their constituents. The violent militant organization Partiya Kerkaren Kurdistan (Kurdish Workers Party – PKK) and the legal parties of the KNM have attempted to build a secular national identity based on Kurdish ethnicity and language (Kirisci and Winrow, 1997; Yavuz, 1998, 2001; Watts, 2006; Tezcur, 2009). The PKK did not only wage a war against the Turkish state, but also attacked moderate Kurds, clan elites and civilian targets. Abdullah Ocalan, the founder and leader of the PKK, personally targeted what he saw as the “feudal-comprador” class, the clan elites who were complicit with the Turkish state (Belge 2011). The antagonism between the Kurdish National Movement and the clans has shaped the local political context into one where there is a variation in the ability of clan elites to sway the votes of their constituents. Sympathy for the Kurdish National Movement within clans reduces the ability of clan leaders to enter into negotiations with the AKP and other national level parties because of their reduced ability to deliver clan votes at the polls.

⁵³ Interviews with local journalists, AKP and DTP party officials. Bingol, Turkey. September - October 2008

Although the legal wing of the KNP, the Demokratik Toplum Partisi (DTP) is ideologically opposed to so-called feudal clan structures due to the party's historical roots in socialism and close links to the base of the PKK, its officials do not categorically refuse clan support. DTP officials characterize clans as a reality of Kurdish political life; one that the party has to tolerate until they inevitably lose their political significance completely⁵⁴. Yet the DTP's inability to offer patronage or enhanced political influence over the bureaucracy reduces its appeal to pragmatic clan elites who could otherwise pursue material benefits from the AKP or other national level political parties.

The AKP's Local Notable Incorporation in Bingol

This section analyzes the links between local notables and the AKP in Bingol. Shortly after its establishment as a new political party in 2001, the Bingol branch of the AKP began recruiting local notable selectively. Coupled with its cohesive local organization, the strategic recruitment of local notables by the AKP enabled the Islamists to compete effectively with the Kurdish National Movement for the votes of Bingolites, eventually becoming the dominant party with a record 71 percent of the vote share in the 2007 general elections. However, clan support for the AKP was not predetermined. Clan loyalties toward political parties have often shifted in the past, making them fickle if desirable assets.

During the 1980s and the 1990s, two major parties of the center right (DYP and ANAP) and the more radical Islamist predecessor of the AKP (the RP) competed for the support of Bingol's populous southern clans. The Zigte clan and the extended family networks of the Genc district were divided between the Dogru Yol Partisi (True Path Party - DYP), and independent candidates from the district's own clansmen⁵⁵. While the Anavatan Partisi's (Motherland Party - ANAP) local counterparts turned out to be less dependable than the party had hoped -- switching between

⁵⁴ Focus group with DTP party officials. Bingol, Turkey. October 2008.

⁵⁵ Interviews with local journalists. Bingol, Turkey. October 2008.

the party, independent candidates and the political Islamists -- the DYP found a strong partner in the Az clan. The charismatic leader of the Az clan, Haydar Baylaz, was firmly integrated into the patronage network of the DYP. Having been a strong supporter of Suleyman Demirel, the DYP's veteran leader, Baylaz ensured his parliamentary nomination from the party list⁵⁶. His ability to mobilize the votes of the Az clan made him a valuable asset to the party, which was suffering from the increasing popularity of the radical Islamists in its strongholds in Eastern Turkey. The energetic Baylaz managed to preserve the DYP support among not only the Az clan, but also the residents of Bingol city center⁵⁷.

The Refah Partisi (Welfare Party – RP) made strong gains in the Solhan district during the 1990s. Solhan had historically been a religiously conservative region, where the social influence of Sheikhs and imams was tangible⁵⁸. Solhan was also the epicenter of the Sheikh Said rebellion, the first Kurdish uprising with religious overtones against the new Turkish Republic in 1925. Devout Muslims in this district who had common ties to religious institutions and to local religious leaders (sheikhs) were primed to become the core constituency of the political Islamists. The electoral support for the radical Islamist RP was relatively stronger in Solhan than in other districts, yet the logic of clan based voting also produced intermittent support for the DYP.

The northern districts of the Bingol province were distinct from the southern regions in three aspects. First, the northern districts were less populous than their southern counterparts. Since the early 1970s the northern districts of Bingol experienced loss of population due to migration. Second, the Alevi Muslim minority located in the northern district of Kigi made the area socially distinct from the southern clans. Kigi was less influenced by the conservative Sunni movements, and consistently voted for secularist parties. On the other hand, its shrinking population size and

⁵⁶ Interview with local journalists and civil society activists. Bingol, Turkey. October 2008.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Interview with a local Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party - SP) official, who had previously been an active member of the RP.

gerrymandering by the right-wing parties in power in late 1980s reduced its voter base significantly and gradually made Kigi voters an irrelevant actor in Bingol's politics. Third, the armed wing of the Kurdish National Movement, the PKK, was more influential in terms of gaining popular support in the mountainous Karliova district in northern Bingol. While the PKK was active throughout the rural areas of the province, the southern clans remained within their alliance with the state.

Having endured heavy state suppression due to their initial support for the Sheikh Said rebellion in the 1920s, clans in the provincial center, Solhan and Genc districts in the south kept their distance from the PKK. Tribes around the Genc district, particularly the Zigte clan, increased their cooperation with the state in the 1980s and 1990s and supplied strong numbers to the military's 'village guard system' of rural militias⁵⁹. On the other hand, the politically marginal and administratively disconnected northern clans grew more sympathetic towards the PKK. They did not supply as many village guards to the military. Unlike the more populous southern clans, they had never received patronage benefits from engaging with mainstream political parties. The historical context in which the less populous, socially heterodox, and politically marginalized northern clans encountered the war between the Turkish state and the PKK placed them closer to the Kurdish Nationalist Movement rather than the state and the mainstream parties of the Turkish political system. As a result, Bingol developed a regional logic in its support for the armed and legal parties of the Kurdish National Movement. While the southern regions consistently supported either the parties of the center right (DYP and ANAP), or the political Islamist movement, the north did not. Instead, the secularist CHP dominated the northern vote until the violence of the 1980s and 1990s when its voter base either migrated west or got gerrymandered into smaller pieces. During the 1990s, the parties of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement picked up where the CHP had left off, and the pro-Kurdish candidates established a firm voter base among

⁵⁹ Interview with a local journalist and senior civil society organizer. Bingol, Turkey. October 2008.

the clans of the Karlioiva district. When the state initiated its policy of forced migrations from the countryside to the city centers in mid-1990s (Balta, 2004) as part of its effort to ‘dry the sea of support for the PKK in the villages,’ PKK sympathizers who moved into the Bingol city center in the tens of thousands also brought with them a significant network of electoral support for the DTP.

During the formative period of the AKP, its founders made the critical decision to expand their cadres and support base towards the center and target the voters that were traditionally courted by the DYP and the ANAP. At the local level in Bingol, the AKP aggressively sought to form new alliances with clan leaders who were embedded into the patronage networks of the DYP and the ANAP, as well as preserving its ties to the clans which had supported the radical Islamist RP in the past. Reshuffling of political loyalties at a time of crisis for established parties of the right benefited the newly formed AKP. Its new Bingol branch immediately reached out to the leaders of the southern clans, where they found receptive ears.

The AKP’s Strategic Incorporation of Clan Notables in Bingol

Local politics in Bingol was already in uncertainty when the AKP’s immediate Islamist predecessor was banned in 2001. The ANAP and the DYP were in decline across the country due to their extensively publicized corruption scandals. More significantly, however, there were local reasons behind their decline within Bingol. Haydar Baylaz, the most charismatic local politician Bingol had seen in recent decades had passed away. With him, the DYP lost a strong local notable. Baylaz had been able to maintain consistent electoral support for the DYP within his clan, Az, as well as in the Bingol city center where he had a strong personal presence⁶⁰. In his stead, Feyzi Berdibek, a local contractor who built a sizable construction business through military contracts, was appointed the local DYP leader. Berdibek was not a tribal leader per se,

⁶⁰ Interviews with local journalists, current and former politicians of the AKP. Bingol, Turkey. October 2008.

but he received the backing of the Az clan, of which he was a member. Berdibek had previously been an active politician within the DYP, but had severed his ties with his old party by the end of the 1990s. As an independent politician with a strong clan constituency, Berdibek kept his options open before joining another party.

When Turkey's Constitutional Court banned the AKP's predecessor, Berdibek began working with the young generation of Islamists who were about to form their new party. He pioneered the establishment of the AKP in Bingol, where he became the dominant personality within the new party⁶¹. Berdibek was a local notable who was not a part of the Islamist movement prior to joining the AKP. His involvement was an early signal to the voters of Bingol that the Islamist movement itself was changing. Unlike its radical Islamist predecessors, the AKP was eager to cooperate with political entrepreneurs who did not share strong ideological commitments to a politicized Islamist ideology⁶². In order to expand the electoral appeal of the Islamists beyond the core constituency of devout Muslims with common links to religious institutions and local Sunni-religious leaders, the local party branch convened with sympathetic local notables.

Yusuf Coskun, a prominent lawyer in Bingol, was another AKP recruit with previous ties to center-right parties. Coskun was originally from the Solhan region, with familial ties to the Taus clan. As a successful student, he received his education at the Ankara Hukuk Fakultesi (Ankara University Faculty of Law), a highly regarded law school in Turkey. After a brief career of public service as a judge, he resigned from the Ministry of Justice and moved to Bingol to run his own private law office. Coskun made a career and a strong reputation in Bingol by taking on controversial cases. He successfully sought compensation from the state for the villagers who had been forced out of their property in the 1990s during the height of the war with the PKK⁶³. An

⁶¹ Interview with Feyzi Berdibek. Bingol, Turkey. October 2008.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Interviews with local AKP politicians and civil society activists in Bingol, September and October 2008

active member of the ANAP, Coskun became a prominent professional and politician in Bingol by the end of 1990s. During the formative phase of the AKP, he joined Berdibek as an early recruit to the new Islamist Party. His move from the battered ANAP to the AKP strengthened the centrist credentials of the new party, while giving it access to Coskun's strong professional reputation and close clan ties to Taus.

While recruiting new notables from the center right who have clan ties and professional reputations, the AKP did not completely sever its ties with its Islamist predecessors in Bingol. The intended expansion of its electoral appeal towards the political center did not entail a full scale rejection of the Islamist movement's more radical elements. The founders of the new party instead tried to hold on to their core constituency of devout Muslims who were ideologically predisposed to vote for an Islamist agenda while building a wider electoral base. In addition to bringing in new elites who were previously associated with parties of the center-right, the AKP also maintained Islamist politicians who had been active in its predecessor Islamist parties. Dr. Mahfuz Guler was one of these politicians. Born in Bingol's Solhan district, Guler received his Ph.D. in biochemistry and became a professor of medicine in the central Anatolian city of Eskisehir. After serving as a deputy general manager of the Sosyal Sigortalar Kurumu (Social Insurance Institution), Guler was elected as a parliamentarian from Bingol on the Welfare Party (RP) ticket. Guler's close ties to the Solhan district and the Taus clan helped cement the local influence of the radical Islamist RP in the south of Bingol. Guler became one of the founding members of the AKP in Bingol in 2001. His credentials as an experienced politician from the ranks of the banned RP helped preserve the support of AKP's religiously conservative core constituency.

Abdurrahman Anik, a local notable from the Zigte Clan, was also invited into the new party. Similar to Guler, Anik was closely linked to AKP's core constituency of Islamist voters. He had

served as the mufti of the Genc district – the state appointed office of religious authority. He had also served as the mayor of Genc for one term. Located in the Genc district of Bingol, the Zigte is a leading clan in terms of political activity. In addition to the Islamists, the mainstream conservative parties of the center-right compete with each other for the support of Zigte’s elites. Bingol residents generally acknowledge the clan’s political clout. An interviewee explained why:

“Zigte is the exemplary clan in Bingol – it is extremely successful in its relations with the state and its negotiations with parties. It has tasted the ‘fruits of politics,’ and its members know how important it is to act collectively before elections. Other clans see it as an example; they want to be like Zigte. Northern regions get very little state investment. Why? Because they do not have the same influence over political parties in power as Zigte does.”⁶⁴

Keen to establish a strong support base in the Zigte Clan, the AKP also recruited Kazim Ataoglu, an influential member of the clan elite. The inclusion of Ataoglu and Anik aligned the Zigte clan closely with the AKP. The clan’s influence within the AKP grew strong, particularly as Ataoglu inched closer to parliamentary nomination in 2007.

A particular feature of the AKP’s initial phase of local notable recruitment in Bingol was the strong representation of southern clans within the party at the expense of forming new ties with the northern clans. In the absence of a strategy to incorporate local notables with links to Bingol’s northern districts, the Islamists could not penetrate this region before the 2002 general elections. Nevertheless, the relatively less populous northern districts could not reverse the election results, and the AKP won the elections with 31 percent of the vote. Thirty-one percent made the AKP the leading party in the electoral race in Bingol, yet it was not a landslide victory Berdibek and others in the AKP had hoped for. Independent candidates with clan connections, the radical Islamist Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi - SP), and the (Turkish) Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi – MHP) each received slightly less than ten percent of the vote. Although these candidates prevented the AKP from dominating the political arena in Bingol in 2002, their support base would desert them for the AKP within five years.

⁶⁴ Interview with a local intellectual and thinker. Bingol, Turkey. October 2008.

During the initial years of the first AKP government, Berdibek maintained his dominant status within the party in Bingol. He was able to have his own candidate, Ketenalp, nominated for the mayor's position from the AKP list in 2004⁶⁵. Although the DTP's mayoral candidate, Selahattin Kaya, could have provided the AKP with strong competition in the local elections, the internal problems of the DTP during the 2004 local electoral campaign worked in favor of the Islamists⁶⁶. The AKP received 35 percent of the vote, and Ketenalp comfortably became the mayor of Bingol. His municipal council, made up of candidates from the AKP list as well as and to a lesser degree from the DTP list, also took office. Similar to its practices in other municipalities across the nation, the AKP used its municipal council nominee list as a tool to construct and maintain good relations with dominant local societal groups. In Bingol, the AKP's municipal council seats were distributed according to clan lines, with each significant clan (particularly the Zigte, Az and Taus) receiving its share of council seats.

Toward the end of the AKP's first term in government, its support base in Bingol had grown significantly. While the alternatives to the AKP in the center-right, and the hard-liner Islamists in the SP demonstrated an inability to gain meaningful electoral support at the national level, the AKP continued to attract their supporters. Its strong connections to the southern clans enabled the party to make rearrangements in its local cadre. Before the 2007 general elections, the AKP's national party center shuffled its parliamentary nominees in Bingol while preserving the distribution of clan elites within the party. The Zigte clan notable Ataoglu became a parliamentary nominee, as well as the local party leader Coskun. Instead of the local strongman Berdibek, the AKP nominated a high achieving bureaucrat from the State Planning Agency (Devlet Planlama Teskilati) who was originally from the Pog region in Bingol Province. At the

⁶⁵ Interviews with local DTP officials, journalists and civil society activists. Bingol, Turkey. September and October 2008

⁶⁶ Interview with local DTP officials, young DTP activists, and Selahattin Kaya. Bingol, Turkey. September and October 2008.

time, Cevdet Yilmaz was the general manager of the state Planning Agency's European Union Relations department. The move reflected the needs of the party center in Ankara for competent statesmen. Although Yilmaz's nomination was not directly linked to his local status in Bingol, it quickly acquired significance in terms of clan votes at the local level. His family connections in the northern regions of Bingol, specifically in the Pog area, enabled the AKP to dramatically increase its electoral support in an otherwise unfriendly region. The AKP made use of this opportunity to acquire votes from its strongest rival, the DTP.

The influence of Cevdet Yilmaz's nomination on Pog clan's electoral behavior was captured in the words of young DTP activists in Bingol:

"When we went to the Pog region to ask for their votes in this [2007] election, they told us that they cannot vote for DTP this time. They said they had voted for DTP before, but in this election one of their relatives is on the top of the AKP list. This was going to be the first time when one of their own will become a parliamentarian. So they apologized and said no to us. So we lost Pog to the AKP⁶⁷."

The national elections of 2007 were a great success for the AKP in Bingol. The Islamists scored 71 percent of the vote, the highest level of support across the nation. Its strong links to local clans propelled the party to victory in its competition with the pro-Kurdish DTP. The AKP's local notable recruitment in Bingol was strategic— the Islamists incorporated clan leaders and local elites with strong clan ties into the party so as to achieve representation of all the significant clans within Bingol. Even in the northern parts of the province, where the clans were unsympathetic to the Islamists and tended to support the Kurdish National Movement, the AKP made inroads into the Pog region by nominating a candidate who had familial ties to Pog. In the southern parts of Bingol, where the Kurdish National Movement receives only negligible support, the AKP was able to overcome its centrist and radical Islamist rivals by rigorously recruiting clan elites who had previously been embedded into the patronage networks of competing parties.

⁶⁷ DTP youth group interview, October 2008, Bingol

The AKP could not duplicate its success with local clans in the neighboring province of Mus. The next section examines how the AKP attempted to incorporate clan elites strategically in Mus, but could not succeed in the face of divided clans that pursued multiple party alliances.

The AKP and the Local Clan Elites in Mus

This section analyzes the links between local notables and the AKP in Mus. The Mus branch of the AKP failed to achieve strategic notable recruitment. The clans in Mus were divided within themselves, which prevented the AKP from building a viable local coalition. Although the Mus branch of the AKP was cohesive particularly in the period following the 2002 general elections, its failure in strategic elite recruitment caused the Islamists to lose national elections to the solidified core constituency of the DTP. Despite challenging the Kurdish National Movement successfully in local elections in some districts, the AKP gathered significantly less support in Mus than in its neighboring province, Bingol.

Similar to Bingol, Mus also shares provincial borders with the large regional center Diyarbakir. Diyarbakir is the urban home of the Kurdish National Movement, and its contentious political climate inspires the supporters of the DTP in Mus as well as in other Kurdish cities across Eastern Turkey. Although Mus is a strong supporter of the DTP similarly to Diyarbakir, its style of doing politics resembles that of Bingol's where the Islamists are the dominant force. Not so far from Diyarbakir where the commotion and fanfare surrounding large and contentious demonstrations, concerted protests by merchants that shut down the city's commercial centers, and high profile media appearances by the leaders of the Kurdish National Movement, Mus gives silent and persistent support to the DTP without any noticeable social events. Supporters of the Kurdish National Movement populate the plains of Mus, a primarily rural province. The DTP's core constituency resides mostly in the rural parts of the province, although the pro-Kurdish candidates have also made significant gains in the Mus city center. Avowedly opposed to so-called "feudal"

clan structures that dominate the region, the DTP receives much support from voters thoroughly integrated into clan networks.⁶⁸ As opposed to the AKP's elite recruitment strategy that calls for strategic incorporation of clan notables however, the DTP prioritizes its ideology of ethnic identity representation to maintain and increase its votes.

The elite members of the communities in Mus province are, to a large extent, clan notables. The Kurdish clan structures are regional in their origin, with each tribe comprising a set of villages in the plains of Mus. Clan ties connect residents of the city with their rural counterparts, and cut across the urban-rural divide. The AKP's elite incorporation strategy directly targets family elders, and aims to recruit clan notables or influence their decision making over supporting Islamist candidates. For the clan elites, the AKP provides the possibility of bringing in patronage in the form of access to state resources. Particularly in Mus as in Bingol, where persistent unemployment and poor economic performance has made entire communities dependent on the state for social support, the ability to find jobs for clansmen is a highly coveted one. For the wealthier members of the clan elite, the AKP also provides opportunities in terms of receiving lucrative government contracts.

On the other hand, the growing influence of the Kurdish National Movement has curbed the capacity of the clans to alter the outcomes of elections⁶⁹. Although clan elites see opportunities in building close relations with parties that may potentially win local or national office, the ability of these elites to shape the electoral behavior of their constituents is questionable in Mus. As a seasoned civil society activist in Mus put it:

"Clans no longer determine politics in Mus. The Kurdish movement has broken the influence the clans used to enjoy here. This is the same for municipal and national elections. Some clans still try to peddle their influence to receive benefits from the AKP or other parties, but their own

⁶⁸ Interviews with local journalists. Mus, Turkey. October and November 2008.

⁶⁹ Interviews with local journalists and DTP officials. Mus, Turkey. October and November 2008.

people are voting for the DTP. How can they get what they want from the parties of the system when the people support the Kurdish movement?⁷⁰”

As opposed to the populous and cohesive clans of southern Bingol like Zigte, Az and Taus, many clans in Mus have lost their capability to engage in collective action in order to barter votes for benefits in local and national elections. The consequences of local elite recruitment by the AKP are conditioned by contextual factors the party faces in each locality, that are not necessarily captured by the macro-social variables privileged in existing approaches. In the case of Bingol and Mus, the ability of clan elites to deliver the votes of their constituencies was influenced by whether or not their clans were penetrated by social support for the Kurdish National Movement in the past. In Bingol, the struggle between the Turkish state and the PKK consolidated southern clans which supplied rural militia and village guards to the military, while the northern districts were penetrated by the KNM. Unlike this geographic division in Bingol, the conflict between the Kurdish National Movement and the Turkish state did not create pro-KNM and pro-state clans in Mus. Instead, support for the KNM cut across clan lines. All Kurdish clans in Mus have families whose children are among the Kurdish guerillas. The lack of a clear separation between the clans that stood by the state and clans that were open to PKK influence in Mus meant that the pro-Kurdish politicians could potentially receive support from portions of all clans. This decreased the ability of clan elites to shape the voting behavior of their own constituents, since it created the possibility that parts of their constituents could defect and vote for the parties of the Kurdish National Movement.

The emergence of the Islamist movement in Mus shares substantial commonalities with the historical course it took in Bingol. The context within which the Islamists contended for the votes of Mus residents was also shaped by the historical legacy of the Kurdish rebellions that had occurred in the region beginning with early 1920s. The Sheikh Said rebellion’s epicenter, the

⁷⁰ Interview with a civil society activist and longtime resident of Mus city center. Mus, Turkey. November 2008.

Solhan district of contemporary Bingol, lies to the west of the Mus city center. The rebellion engulfed the clans in the Mus region, particularly the Zaza clans in the rural periphery of the city. The initial success and ultimate failure of the rebellion, followed by an intense period of state suppression domesticated the local clans, while also creating a rift between the institutions and reforms of the Kemalist government and the local population. The Kurdish clans, despite their history of repression, maintained peaceful relations with the central state institutions until the emergence of the Kurdish National Movement in late 1970s.

As the war between the PKK and the Turkish military intensified in mid 1980s, the mountainous parts of the Mus province became contested territories between the two organizations. In the city center, which lies on a small hill overlooking the plains, the PKK could find no refuge. The rugged landscape of the northern and eastern districts of the province provided shelter to the armed wing of the Kurdish National Movement. The PKK was also able to recruit members heavily from the villages that dotted Mus plains.

In this context, the Islamist movement in Mus attracted followers as an alternative to the Kemalist institutions of the state, and the growing influence of the Kurdish National Movement. While the radical Islamist RP enjoyed considerable electoral support in 1995, it never achieved electoral dominance in Mus. Overall, clan support in the province remained fluid, shifting between parties of the center right (ANAP and DYP). The Sosyal Demokrat Halkci Parti (Social Democratic Populist Party – SHP) also built electoral support in the northern district of Varto, an important center of the Alevi Muslim religious minority. The influence of the Kurdish National Movement gradually replaced SHP support in Mus, as the protracted war between the PKK and the military continued well into late 1990s.

The Failure of the AKP's Elite Recruitment Strategy in Mus

The transformation of the Islamist movement that culminated in the foundation of the AKP by the young generation moderates of the former Welfare Party (RP) did not produce impressive electoral outcomes in Mus. Unlike in Bingol, the AKP could not dominate the electoral arena in Mus, losing national elections to the pro-Kurdish DTP.

The local politicians that founded the AKP in 2001 mainly included former RP politicians with intimate ties to the Zaza clan in Mus. In Bingol, a former politician who had experience as the local party leader of the center right DYP, Berdibek, was vital in the formation of the AKP. However, in Mus, an early infusion of non-Islamist local elites was missing during the formative period of the party. Furthermore, the Zaza clan itself was divided between the moderate AKP and the radical Islamist SP, which was formed by old-guard Islamist politicians. Part of the core constituency of the radical Islamists, members of the Zaza clan was present in both the moderate and the radical Islamist parties that emerged in 2001⁷¹. The newly founded AKP could neither establish a cohesive party structure, nor could it reach out to clan notables that could potentially negotiate to join forces with the moderate Islamists during this period. It had access to the votes of a divided clan, but was unable to construct fresh links to new clan leaders. The AKP consequently lost the 2002 national elections to the legal wing of the Kurdish National Movement. While the pro-Kurdish candidates received 38 percent of the vote, the AKP could only muster 17 percent. Despite a twenty-one percent difference in electoral results, the AKP was able to receive three parliamentary seats out of four from the Mus province, while none of the pro-Kurdish candidates could take their seats in the nation's capital. The ten percent threshold in the Turkish elections law prevented the candidates of the Kurdish National Movement from entering the parliament, and rewarded the seats to national parties according to their overall

⁷¹ Interview with a local SP official who is also a member of the Zaza Clan. Mus, turkey. October 2008.

electoral performance across the nation. The AKP received three seats from Mus, and the CHP received one seat.

Following the 2002 elections, the Mus branch of the AKP experienced a period of reconstruction. Despite its electoral failure in the face of strong competition from the pro-Kurdish candidates, the fact that the party had won three seats in the parliament made it a more attractive political organization that can potentially reward its partners. The AKP received ample attention among the clans in Mus and incorporated multiple clan elites during this period. In an attempt to expand its vote share beyond its core constituency, particularly the Zaza clan, the AKP recruited local notables that had clan ties to the rural regions surrounding the city center, and to the Bulanik, Haskoy, Korkut and Malazgirt districts. Yet unlike in Bingol, the clan elites the AKP recruited did not possess higher social status or prestige compared to the clan elites that joined or remained in competing parties. Clans in Mus continued to supply politicians to other political parties, which restricted the influence of the elites that joined the AKP over their own constituents. Since the same clans had elites in the AKP's competitors as well as in the AKP, the ties between the Islamists and these clans were compromised at their roots and did not result in a mutually exclusive symbiotic relationship.

In Mus, the two clans that have traditionally been most active in political life are the Batikanlilar clan and the Sasonlar clan⁷². Batikanlilar and Sasonlar clans are leading local authority structures in Mus in terms of the political positions their elites have traditionally held in the city. Their political influence is comparable to that of the Zigte, Az and Taus clans have in Bingol. While Bingol's powerful southern tribes have invariably been partners to center-right or Islamist political parties, the Batikanlilar clan has been in close cooperation with the social democratic,

⁷² Interviews with local journalists, civil society activists, and politicians associated with the AKP, SP, MHP and DTP. Mus, Turkey. October and November 2008.

secularist, and ethnic parties⁷³. It has sided strongly with the pro-Kurdish candidates since the early 1990s when the PKK emerged as a powerful actor within the region. Yet similar to other clans in Mus, the Batikanlilar has also been divided, supplying politicians and votes to CHP and DSP as well as the pro-Kurdish candidates.

The presence of a strong local clan that is outside the reach of the AKP due to its secular and pro-Kurdish political preferences has presented a limit to the Islamist party that is not present in the neighboring Bingol province. Despite the loss of Batikanlilar to non-Islamist parties, the AKP still had numerous clans to reach out to. Sasonlar, the other grand coalition of extended family structures in Mus, did indeed heed the Islamists' call⁷⁴. Local notables that have ties to the Sasonlar clans were traditionally integrated into the patronage networks of DYP and ANAP, center-right parties. After the 2002 national elections, elite members of the Sasonlar clan joined the AKP, yet this did not prevent other elites from the Sasonlar clan from remaining within AKP's center-right competitor, the DYP. During the 2007 national elections, the Demokrat Parti (Democrat Party – DP, the successor to the DYP) candidate was prominent Sasonlar elite, which divided the votes of this powerful local clan. The Sasonlar clan elites within the AKP could not ensure the full support of their constituency.

Similarly, the Zaza clan remained divided between the AKP and the radical Islamist SP⁷⁵. As active members of the banned Welfare Party (RP), members of the Zaza clan were present in both the AKP and the SP when the Islamist movement split into two. Despite the rising national prominence of the AKP, its relative weakness in Mus province continued as clan elites divided the votes of their constituencies across different parties.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Interviews with local journalists and local AKP officials and activists. Mus, Turkey. October and November 2008.

⁷⁵ Interview with a local SP official who is also a member of the Zaza Clan. Mus, turkey. October 2008.

The Hiyanlılar, Bekiriler, and Elmani clans failed to make a difference in the political fortunes of the AKP. Their constituents continued to support the pro-Kurdish candidates even though their clan elites joined multiple parties including the AKP, the parties of the center-right as well as the DTP. Despite the general lack of cohesiveness among the local clans in Mus, one of them stands out as an exception. The Bidriler clan, located in the Haskoy district of Mus, formed close links with the AKP and its members upheld the decision of their clan leaders. The Bidriler clan is separate from the others, however, since it is made up of ethnically Arab residents who live in Haskoy and a cluster of villages surrounding this district⁷⁶. With the exception of the Bidri clan, the elites of the Kurdish clans in Mus were not in a position to convince their constituents to vote for a single, specific party in order to exchange their votes for access to state resources. The AKP's elite recruitment strategy takes place in competition with other political parties. In Mus, the AKP's competition had similar levels of access to local elites as did the Islamists, effectively eliminating the relative impact of AKP's electoral strategy.

Compared to Bingol, where the AKP's close links to the southern clans have delivered the Islamists to electoral success, Mus displays significant differences in its patterns of Islamist and pro-Kurdish party support. As my examination of the AKP's elite recruitment efforts in Bingol shows, the populous and influential southern tribes have consistently voted for centrist or Islamist parties in Bingol. The geographic logic of party support in Bingol has meant that while the northern regions of the province have consistently voted for secularist and pro-Kurdish candidates, the Zigte, Az and Taus clans in the southern regions remained unaffected by the Kurdish National Movement. These clans display very small amounts of defections to the pro-Kurdish candidates in elections, while most of the clan members vote in accordance to the decisions of their clan elites. In Mus, however, the influence of the Kurdish National Movement cuts across clans. Most clans in Mus, with the exceptions of Zaza and the Bidriler clans, have

⁷⁶ Interviews with local journalists and civil society activists. Mus, Turkey. October and November 2008.

significant populations that vote for the Kurdish National Movement regardless of what their clan leaders decide. The ideological appeal of the Kurdish National Movement has depleted the political maneuverability of clan elites from within by turning their constituents to non-conforming clan members who defect from the political deals brokered by their elites. Since the Zazalar clan is divided between the two Islamist parties, and the Bidriler clan is too small to have a major impact on elections on its own, the AKP is faced by clans that are inconsistent partners.

Confronted with significant and growing support for the Kurdish National Movement from within their own constituents, clans in Mus cannot credibly commit to support any single party in return for access to state resources. Instead, they tend to place their “men” in all major political parties, which means that the clans do not have to commit to any single party during the elections. It also means that they will have access to all the parties regardless of which one wins the elections. The DTP’s inability and unwillingness to promise any form of patronage, access to echelons of power in the capital, or favorable relations with the bureaucracy keeps it outside the clan-party bargain. Due to its ideological political platform, the DTP does not attempt to partake in the elite recruitment strategy.

This section has analyzed the links between local notables and the AKP in Mus. In comparison to the relations between local elites and the Islamists in Bingol, the AKP has failed at strategic local notable recruitment in Mus. The growing support for the Kurdish National Movement that cuts across clan lines has divided the local clans, making them unable to commit credibly to political bargains their elites brokered with the AKP. Although the Islamists constructed a cohesive party structure in the aftermath of the 2002 general elections, the lack of strategic elite recruitment caused the AKP to lose national elections to the core constituency of the DTP. Despite challenging the Kurdish National Movement in municipal elections, the AKP performed significantly worse in Mus than in its neighboring province, Bingol.

Conclusion

The AKP's local coalition building strategy is the centerpiece of its attempts to expand its voter base beyond its core constituency of Islamist voters with common links to religious institutions towards the vote-rich political center. In Eastern Turkey, where the historical legacy of repressive state practices and a powerful Kurdish National Movement structure the political field, the AKP has been electorally successful in some cities (Bingol) and not in others (Mus). The AKP's dominance in Bingol stems from its cohesive local party organization, and strategic notable incorporation. The Islamists built on their previous relationships with local Kurdish clans and added new elites into their party hierarchy who used to be embedded into the patronage networks of other, center-right parties. These notables boasted strong ties to large and populous clans particularly in the southern districts of Bingol. The local elites with links to the Zigte, Az and Taus clans offered cohesive clan votes to the AKP in return for access to state resources, and close relations to the bureaucracy in Bingol as well as in Ankara. While the DTP remained popular in the northern districts of the province, the relatively small population of this region could not dent the overall success of the Islamists in Bingol.

The AKP failed to recruit local notables strategically in Mus. Despite constructing a cohesive local party organization and recruiting elites from the majority of Kurdish clans in the province, the AKP was not able to secure the votes of these clans because it could not strike an exclusive bargain with them. The support for the Kurdish National Movement cut across clan lines, and reduced the capability of Kurdish clan elites to strike credible bargains with national level political parties. Therefore, instead of relying on elite level negotiations with a single political party, clans in Mus placed their candidates in all parties running for elections and distributed their risk. While the AKP did recruit notables in Mus, they did not possess higher status than the clan

notables that joined or remained in other, competing political parties. As a result, the AKP could not become the dominant party in Mus, losing national elections to its competitor DTP.

CHAPTER 4

Islamist Mobilization in Secularist Strongholds

When the Justice and Development Party (AKP) was established in 2001, its leaders voiced a bold claim. Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Abdullah Gul, the future prime minister and the president of the Turkish Republic respectively, firmly believed in the transformative ability and political appeal of their new party. As the leaders of the young generation of an aging Islamist Party (the Refah Partisi, or Welfare Party - RP), they were willing to compromise their ideological ties to the strict Islamist agenda of the RP. By doing so, they would not only avoid being banned by the staunchly secularist Turkish Constitutional Court, but also attract votes from the broad constituency of the center-right parties.

The founders of the AKP might have expected to win electoral victories in the shanty-towns of Istanbul, migrant neighborhoods of Gebze, or the religiously conservative central Anatolian city of Konya, but electoral success in the heart of the Western Aegean region was unlikely. Bastions of secular, centrist politics, cities in the Western Aegean region were among the least likely cases of Islamist success in Turkey. Despite the historical weakness of the Islamist movement in the region, the AKP won national and local elections in the city of Odemis, an agricultural city in Western Anatolia. The Islamists were able to win neither national nor local elections in the neighboring city of Salihli, which shares numerous macro-social similarities with the city of Odemis. What explains the variation in the AKP's electoral success in these two cities? Why were the Islamists electorally successful in one, but not in the other city? This chapter provides an

explanation that addresses how the AKP competed for votes in a region where previous Islamist parties had little to no political significance.

Existing approaches to the growth and popularization of Islamist movements and parties would predict similar degrees of electoral support for the AKP in Odemis and Salihli due to their extensive geographical, institutional, ethnic and socio-economic similarities. I argue that the variation in the electoral appeal of the AKP cannot be explained by the macro-social variables privileged by the existing approaches. Instead, I claim that the variation of the AKP's electoral appeal across these remarkably similar cities can be explained by the differences in *strategic local elite recruitment*, and the *cohesiveness of local party structures*.

The local AKP branch in Odemis incorporated pragmatic, centrist local notables who were previously associated with center-right parties into its local party organization, and built a cohesive party structure. This gave the AKP an edge in its competition against the secularist Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican Peoples Party - CHP). In Salihli, the local AKP branch remained captured by an old guard Islamist clique that resisted ideological and organizational transformation. The local party leaders chose not to incorporate new elites into their party organization. Despite maintaining a well-functioning, cohesive party structure, the lack of strategic elite recruitment limited the AKP's appeal to centrist constituencies by fostering its perceived image as a hard-liner Islamist party in Salihli. As a result, the AKP could not expand its electoral appeal beyond its numerically limited core constituency, and lost its competitive edge against its rivals in Salihli.

In order to compete for the votes of a large, non-Islamist constituency, the founders of the AKP not only compromised their ideological attachments to their predecessor's "Milli Gorus" (National Outlook) Islamist agenda, but also sought to transform their party cadres. Rather than relying on a small but dependable core constituency of Islamist voters, the AKP incorporated

non-Islamist local elites with conservative reputations in a bid to expand its electoral appeal. In Odemis and Salihli, the local elites that were targeted by the AKP were primarily local politicians who were previously affiliated with center-right parties, merchants and civil society leaders.

Table 4.10: Electoral Outcome for the AKP in Odemis and Salihli

	Odemis	Salihli
Cohesive Party Organization	✓	✓
Strategic Elite Recruitment	✓	X
Outcome	Success	Failure

In this chapter, I examine the processes of local coalition building between the AKP and the local elites in Odemis and Salihli. I start by discussing the weakness of the Islamist movement in Western Anatolia compared to Turkey as a whole, and the historical processes that led to the persistence of a strong centrist vein in the region’s political preferences. Next, I elaborate on the macro-social similarities between Odemis and Salihli, which according to the existing literature should have led to similar levels of Islamist electoral support. This section leads to an analysis of how the AKP was able to recruit local elites strategically in Odemis. I then examine the failure of the AKP’s Salihli branch to form a similar Islamist – centrist local elite coalition after 2001. Lastly, I analyze the cohesiveness of the AKP’s local party structures in both Odemis and Salihli. The local party branches of the AKP in both cities exhibited cohesive structures, which show that differences in party organization cannot account for the variation in electoral outcomes between Odemis and Salihli for the Islamists.

Weak Islamists, Strong Centrists: Mainstream Politics in Western Turkey

Politics in the Western Anatolian plains and the Aegean coast has historically been centrist. The roots of centrist politics in the Aegean go back to the crucial role played by its residents in the

Turkish nationalist uprising and the defeat of the Greek forces during the war of independence⁷⁷. The port city of Izmir and its peripheral cities in the Aegean plains were not only the sites where the emergent Turkish forces sealed their victory on the Anatolian mainland; they were also instrumental in the organization and execution of the nationalist struggle. The early involvement of the region in the formative struggles of the Turkish Republic has led to the emergence of strong state institutions. With the notable exception of the harshly suppressed “Menemen uprising” of November 1930, when a disgruntled group in the small town of Menemen captured, killed and beheaded a young military officer, the Aegean region has generally been acquiescent to republican reforms.

During the formative period of the Turkish Republic, Odemis emerged as a town that supplied critical individuals to the new regime. These elite members of the Odemis society still resonate in the popular culture of the city, their names adorning sport complexes, streets and avenues. Doctor Mustafa Bengisu, commonly referred to as “the Great Doctor” in Odemis, was a local organizer of the nationalist militias against the Greek invasion in late 1910s. His friendship with Mustafa Kemal and his role in the resistance movement earned him a privileged place as a founding member of the Republican People’s Party (CHP). After a brief stint in the parliament (the Grand National Assembly), Bengisu chose to return to his hometown. He became the mayor of Odemis, and played a major role in drafting the urban plan for the city and connecting it to the water supplies of the Boz Mountains. He is still heralded as the exemplary Odemis resident and politician, and remains a significant symbolic figure for the CHP’s political outreach efforts.

Sukru Saracoglu was also a highly educated Odemis resident, who joined the nationalist resistance against the Greek invasion forces in 1919. His efforts as a militia organizer placed him in the company of Mustafa Kemal and his comrades during the war of independence.

⁷⁷ The conflict between the Turkish national forces and the Greek invasion forces: 1918-1922.

Immediately after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Saracoglu became the first mayor of Odemis. His short stint as a local politician and administrator ended when he was invited to the parliament. Saracoglu went on to become a top CHP official, holding multiple diplomatic and ministerial posts during the one party state era of the Republican People's Party (CHP). Saracoglu had held the positions of Prime Minister and the Speaker for the Parliament before his retirement from politics in 1950.

Although Odemis was a small, agricultural town in 1920, personalities like Bengisu and Saracoglu promoted its significance in the national arena. Odemis' close ties to the CHP cadres continued well into late 20th century. The emergence of Demokrat Parti (DP) from within the ranks of the CHP in 1945 marked the end of the one party rule in Turkey. In Odemis and Salihli, the DP attracted the support of landed elites as well as ordinary villager-farmers and merchants. Its traditionalist conservative ideology appealed to the voters who were disgruntled by the growing authoritarianism of the CHP cadres. An interviewee in Salihli, a local merchant and a longtime leader of the local DP/DYP branch, explained:

“During the single party era people were afraid of the gendarmerie. Everyone used to run away from the tax collectors. The 1940s were years of poverty. While the ordinary people got rationed bread, the elites of [CHP's] ‘Peoples Houses’ did not even want to allow the poor folk into the cities. They called us, the Demokrat Parti, the party of the ‘barefooted.’ We were with the poor, not the [civilian and military] elites.”⁷⁸

The DP's growing influence over the agricultural regions of Western Turkey never fully overwhelmed the support base of the CHP. As the successive military coups forced the DP to change its name to first the Adalet Partisi (Justice Party - AP), and then the Dogru Yol Partisi (True Path Party - DYP), the CHP and the DP-DYP line continued to compete for the votes of Salihli and Odemis' citizens. Particularly in the 1970s, the social democratic agenda of the CHP

⁷⁸ Interview with former leader of the Salihli DYP branch, March 2009

succeeded in penetrating the countryside, and the party of Ataturk maintained its significant degree of support in the region.

While the DP-DYP line of parties adopted a traditional conservative political ideology, political Islamist parties that first emerged in 1970 could not gain a foothold in Odemis or Salihli. The Refah Partisi (Welfare Party - RP) meticulously built networks of Islamist activists; tentacle like party structures, ancillary civil society organizations that surrounded its party organizations and used Islamic symbols to couch their outreach programs particularly in large urban centers across Turkey. The RP's web of Islamist activists were very effective at building communities in working class migrant neighborhoods in large cities (White, 2002). An activist of the Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party - FP), the political organization of Turkey's old guard Islamists, described how the RP operated in Odemis:

“To be completely honest, [the RP] was never strong here. Odemis’ politics is always closer to whatever happens in [the capital] Ankara. We set up our party organization throughout the city and its districts. We are still organized in nine districts and the city center. We have neighborhood representatives in each neighborhood. Our women’s and youth groups are also organized. It is not like in the big cities though. In Istanbul you would find the ‘Anatolian Youth Centers’ active throughout the year; the women organizing meetings whether there is an election or not. Our organization here does not do that. It really gets activated before the elections.”⁷⁹

The RP reached its zenith in the 1994 local and 1995 general elections, capturing the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and forming a minority government in coalition with its center-right rival, the DYP. Yet due to the weakness of the Islamist movement in Odemis and Salihli, the RP failed make any significant impact in these two cities. The Islamists lost both the national and the local elections in Odemis and Salihli in mid 1990s, at a time when they received largely favorable electoral results across the country.

⁷⁹ Personal interview with Saadet official, March 2009

Table 4.2: Election Results for the Islamist Refah Partisi (Welfare Party – RP) in Odemis and Salihli

	Odemis	Salihli
1994 Local Elections	4.99%	4.82%
1995 National Elections	7.39%	6.66%
Outcome	Failure	Failure

When the AKP was established in 2001, the organizers of the Odemis and Salihli branches did not have the strong foundations that other local AKP leaders enjoyed across the country. The branches of the Islamist party they previously headed contained their own bureaucracies, but they did not enjoy popular support in either city. The lack of Islamist movement vibrancy in Odemis and Salihli imposed a number of constraints on the AKP. First, the party could not rely on an established Islamist core constituency to kick start its political campaign. Where they already existed, the Islamist core constituencies offered the AKP a relatively small but dependable source of votes. Just as significantly, they presented a pool of dedicated activists who could be relied upon to undertake party duties at the local level. The lack of a strong Islamist pool of manpower in Odemis and Salihli meant that the AKP had to recruit low level party members and potential activists very early in 2001 in order to be effective at the polls in the 2002 general elections. Second, the AKP did not inherit a functioning party bureaucracy from its predecessors in Odemis and Salihli. The local RP branches were for the most part constricted to their party offices in each city. The neighborhood representative system that came to define the RP’s voter outreach efforts in other cities across the nation functioned only haphazardly in these two cities. Such representatives existed only in name, and lacked the ability to carry out effective community outreach programs and civil society functions. Third, the weakness of the Islamist movement in these two cities meant that the AKP’s only source of votes would be its ‘potential constituency’, the swing voters who comprised of the support structures of the DYP and the ANAP. The AKP was required to expand its cadre of politicians rapidly to include non-Islamist local elites in order to appeal to the center-right constituency.

Given the strength of centrist movements and parties and the weaknesses of the Islamist movement in Odemis and Salihli, AKP success in local or national elections was highly unlikely in these two cities. The existing literature also suggests that the macro-social characteristics found in Salihli and Odemis are not conducive to the growth of Islamist movements and parties. Yet the Odemis branch of the AKP was able to win both national and local elections despite these weaknesses. The AKP's electoral victories in Odemis demonstrate that previous Islamist mobilization does not explain future electoral success. The Islamists were able to recruit local notables strategically and construct a cohesive party structure in Odemis, which allowed them to capture the votes of centrist constituencies who might have otherwise voted for center-right parties. Party-local notable relations and organizational factors within the Islamist party are more significant determinants of the AKP's electoral competitiveness than previous Islamist mobilization.

Similar Macro-Social Conditions for Islamist Support in Odemis and Salihli

The literature that focuses on the socio-economic origins of Islamist movements predicts strong support for Islamist parties in migrant receiving cities. Shanty-towns that surround city centers house the working classes and the urban poor, whose loss of traditional ties to community is replaced by the solidarism propagated by political Islam. The growth of export oriented capital owned by conservative entrepreneurs is also considered a predictor of Islamist electoral support. However, neither Odemis nor Salihli fit this description. They are both small cities that have received few migrants. They are located an area dominated by Izmir, the large metropolis which also acts as the port city for the Aegean Region. Both have agricultural economies in which industry plays a limited role. The socio-economic characteristics that are often linked to the growth and popularization of Islamist parties and movements are conspicuously absent in both Odemis and Salihli.

The following table summarizes the theoretically significant similarities between the two cities. It also identifies a crucial difference – the electoral appeal of the AKP.

Table 4.3: Macro-Social Characteristics of Odemis and Salihli

	Odemis	Salihli
Geographic location	Western Turkey	Western Turkey
Ethnic composition	Majority Turkish, with small Kurdish and Roma populations	Majority Turkish, with small Kurdish and Roma populations
Religious composition	Majority Sunni Muslim	Majority Sunni Muslim, minority Alevi villages
Religious orders	Active, particularly the Gulen (Nurcu) movement	Active, particularly the Gulen (Nurcu) movement
Ethnic nationalism and violence	Negligible	Negligible
Migration	Receives migration from rural hinterland	Receives migration from rural hinterland
Dominant economic sector	Agriculture and small agri-businesses	Agriculture and small agri-businesses
Level of private investment	Medium	Medium
Pro-Islamist Business Associations	Weak	Weak
Strength of civil society	Weak	Weak
Local Party Organization	<i>Cohesive</i>	<i>Cohesive</i>
Elite Incorporation	<i>Strategic</i>	<i>Absent</i>
AKP's Electoral Outcome	Success	Failure

Odemis and Salihli are predominantly Turkish cities in terms of ethnicity, with small pockets of Roma and migrant Kurdish populations. The ratio of migrants to locals is very small. The population movements that have taken place have been gradual, and from the rural villages to the urban city center. Social unrest, demonstrations and protests have been very rare since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Unlike the Kurdish regions of Eastern Turkey, state society relations in the Aegean region have been peaceful and without major disruptive events.

Salihli and Odemis also share similarities in terms of their geographic locations and socio-economic characteristics. They are both rural cities located on rich, arable farmlands. While

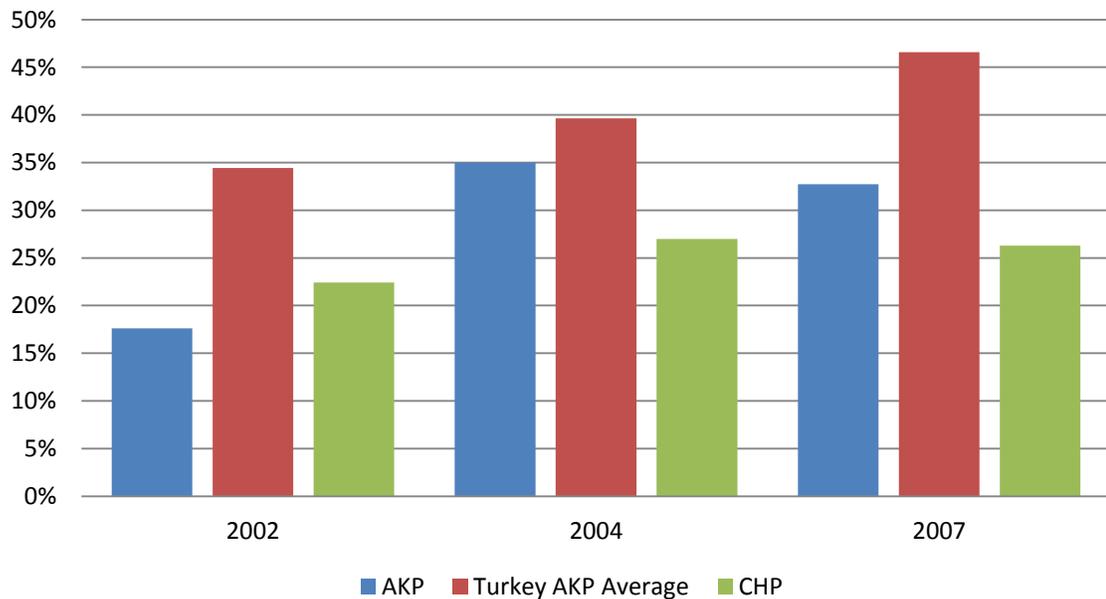
Odemis is a major agricultural center in the Kucuk Menderes plains, Salihli is located in the adjacent Gediz River plains. Izmir is a major metropolitan area in the region, and acts as a port city for the agricultural exports that originate from smaller surrounding cities like Salihli, Odemis, Tire and Bayindir. While the economies of both Odemis and Salihli are dominated by mechanized agriculture, small agri-businesses also provide a source of employment in the region. Located in the fertile plains of Western Anatolia, economic well-being in both cities is dependent on prices of agricultural goods, prices of agricultural inputs and state agricultural subsidies.

The religious compositions of Odemis and Salihli also display broad similarities. Their residents are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim, while Salihli also has a small Alevi Turkish population in some of its rural villages. Parts of the dominant Sunni population in both cities belong to religious brotherhoods. The Nurcu (Gulen movement) is the fastest growing religious brotherhood in both cities. Suleymancilar and Adiyamanlilar (Menzil brotherhood) also have a limited number of followers. Sunni religious identification in both cities and small but vibrant religious brotherhood communities overall point to a significant similarity between the two cities.

The existing literature on Islamist mobilization would lead us to expect the Islamists to be unsuccessful in both Odemis and Salihli. This approach suggests that Islamist movements and parties gain support under conditions of migration into poor shantytowns, growing populations of anomic urban masses, active civil society organizations that politicize Islamic symbols and concepts and growing influence of independent export based business classes that are organized into Islamist business associations. Virtually none of these factors was present in Odemis or in Salihli. Yet the Islamists succeeded in expanding their share of the vote in Odemis which led to local and national electoral victories, while at the same time losing every single election in Salihli.

In Odemis, the AKP's electoral appeal grew significantly when the local party organization recruited centrist local notables and built a cohesive party structure that undertook institutionalized community outreach programs. As a result, the AKP became an unlikely winner of national and local elections in 2004 and 2007. Even though the AKP lost the first national elections it took part in 2002, its rapid institutionalization in the city after the elections and the rapid rate with which the party incorporated new local notables in the aftermath of the elections enabled the Islamists to make a strong comeback in 2004 and win the local elections. During the 2007 general elections, the Islamists maintained their competitive edge and delivered the city for the Islamist party.

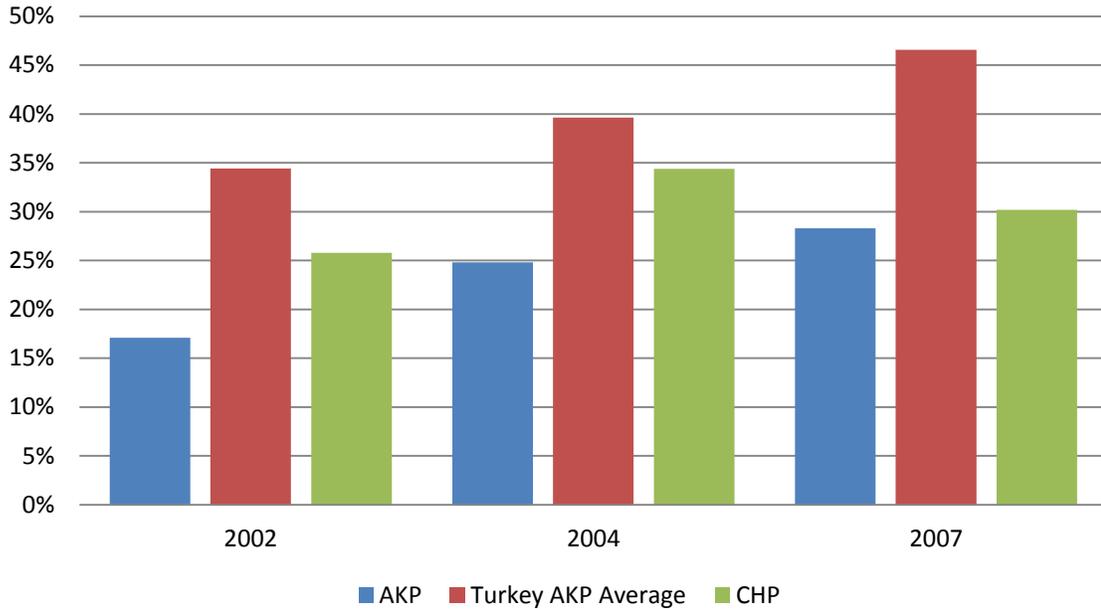
Figure 4.1: Election Results in Odemis: AKP vs. CHP



By contrast, the AKP consistently lost local and national elections in Salihli. The Islamists admitted new members into the AKP after the party's establishment and fully staffed their organization which resulted in the formation of an effective party bureaucracy. Yet the reluctance of the local party leadership to integrate new notables into the party's ruling body crippled the AKP's efforts to expand its electoral appeal towards centrist constituencies. As a result, the AKP

maintained the image of a marginal party of the radical Islamists, and could not compete with the CHP and the MHP at the ballot box.

Figure 4.2: Election Results in Salihli: AKP vs. CHP



Broad similarities between the two cities in terms of ethnicity, geographic location, socioeconomic characteristics and religious affiliation show that macro-social characteristics cannot explain the variation in the electoral success of the AKP. The next section elaborates on the links between the AKP and local elites in Odemis and Salihli. While neither city provided a favorable environment for the Islamists to seek votes, the AKP’s Odemis branch managed to expand its electoral appeal by gradually integrating the city’s local notables into its organization.

Islamists, Local Notables and Party Politics in Odemis

The first party of the Islamist movement, Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party - MNP) was founded by Necmettin Erbakan in 1970. While the MNP immediately found a small but dedicated following particularly among the merchants of provincial cities, its influence and vote share would not grow to significant levels until the 1990s. In Odemis, the first Islamist party was

founded by Mustafa Badem. Badem was a local cobbler who owned a shop in the town center. The initial recruits to the Islamist movement were local artisans, merchants and pious residents who had common connections to the mosques in Odemis. Badem's organization was small, and made up mostly of middle aged to elderly men. The Islamist movement in the 1970s was predominantly comprised of traditional, pious townsmen and did not build grassroots activism until well into the 1980s.

After the establishment of the Welfare Party (RP), the Odemis chapter fashioned its internal bureaucracy based on the model employed by the Islamists across the country. The party was still centered on mosque communities, and was dominated by small merchants and artisans. It was in this period in the 1980s that the RP initiated its neighborhood representatives program and established points of contact for the party at each neighborhood. The women's and youth organizations of the RP were also founded in this period. While the RP's organizational model proved successful in large metropolitan areas like the peripheral neighborhoods of Istanbul, it did not produce the same results in Odemis. The Islamist party remained restricted to a relatively small, elderly constituency. The artisanal group that founded the Islamist movement in Odemis remained largely at its helm. The vibrant youth groups and women's activism that came to define Islamist grassroots politics in large cities did not take hold in Odemis. The Democrat Party and its successors, which had already established deep roots in the region since mid-1940s, preserved their traditional conservative constituency against the radical transformative agenda of the RP's Islamists.

Before the establishment of the AKP in 2001, political competition in Odemis revolved around the enduring rivalry between the CHP and the contemporary successor of the Democrat Party, the Dogru Yol Partisi (True Path Party – DYP). As opposed to the CHP's coalition consisting of highly educated, middle class urban dwellers and sections of the rural districts, the DP-DYP line

of parties attracted the voters who were disaffected by the high-modernist policies of the previous CHP administrations. The DYP found strong support among the religiously pious, traditional communities that were apprehensive of the Kemalist reforms that had fundamentally altered the practice of religion in the public sphere. The constituency of the DP-DYP line of parties was quite inclusive, ranging from agricultural workers, landowners and small merchants. In Odemis, the DYP traditionally received more votes from the peripheral neighborhoods of the city and from parts of the rural districts. The DYP tended not to attract the highly educated, professional or state employed middle classes.

While the CHP represented constituencies that were explicitly secularist and Kemalist in Odemis, the DYP's sympathy towards traditional values and the role of Islam in society did not take anti-secular forms. In comparison, the large peripheral neighborhoods of Istanbul such as Sultanbeyli and Umraniye were dominated by Islamist politicians who were openly defiant against the secularism of Kemal Ataturk and demanded rapid reforms that would bring Islam to the forefront of policy making both at the local and at the national levels. The transformative ideology of the Islamist RP had taken root in many shantytowns across major cities as well as in multiple provincial cities. The activist network of the RP, complete with charity foundations, youth organizations and cultural associations that were nominally separate from the Islamist party, took over social and cultural functions for their communities as well as their indispensable political role. The core constituency of the RP was not only Muslim or pious, but also politically and socially linked via official and non-official party channels. However, devout Muslims were also among the constituencies of the DYP and the Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party – ANAP). Religious piety did not necessarily compel voters to join or vote for political Islamists in Odemis, Salihli or across Turkey. The DYP had cultivated its appeal among the more traditional and pious elements of Turkish society, yet the party did not envision a fundamental shift in Turkey's secularist policies. From the transition to multiparty elections in 1945 up to late 1980s, no

political Islamist party posed a real challenge to the centrist politics of the DP-DYP line of parties.

While in the rest of the country the RP reached the apex of its electoral success in the 1994 local elections, the same election in Odemis was contested between two dynamic candidates from the DYP and the CHP. The CHP's municipal leader candidate was an energetic local teacher, Mehmet Eris. Eris was an active civil society organizer and a passionate social democrat. He was a member of the Egitim-Sen educators union, and had been a member of the CHP since his early youth. His candidacy in 1994 was the starting point of his long political career at the local level in Odemis.

The DYP's mayoral candidate was Munir Bezmez. Bezmez was a young architect in his early 30s when he was nominated by the DYP. Originally from Odemis, he had studied in Istanbul before returning to his native city to practice architecture. Before his municipal candidacy, Bezmez had been an active member of the local DYP branch, and helped organize the local elections campaign for the party in 1989. By his own account, he was unexpectedly given his party's nomination, and he was not particularly enthusiastic about political office at the time. Nevertheless, Bezmez won the local elections after a close race with Eris. Although he was relatively popular, he did not envision becoming a career politician. His stint as mayor ended after one term when he announced that he would not be seeking a second term.

In 1999, Eris returned to the campaign trail when the CHP nominated him for a second time. He had already built his political standing in the city through his party both before and after the 1994 local elections. After Bezmez stepped down from the DYP's candidacy, Eris' campaign faced no major obstacles. As a well-known local activist and teacher, Eris was able to garner enough votes to win the 1999 local elections and bring the CHP back to the municipality.

The establishment of the AKP in Odemis coincided with Eris' municipal leadership. The context was not favorable for the electoral success of the new Islamist party. The political arena in Odemis was dominated by secularist politicians, both within the DYP and the CHP. Their organizational networks were old and well rooted within the urban and the rural population. Although the DYP was undergoing a period of turmoil in late 1990s, its local organization in Odemis was still formidable. Recent electoral victories and the party's competitiveness with the CHP kept the center right party in political competition.

The Formation and Strategic Local Notable Incorporation of the AKP in Odemis

When the Constitutional Court of Turkey banned the AKP's immediate predecessor, the short lived Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party – FP) in 2001, the Islamist movement split into two major camps across the nation. The younger generation of Islamists that established the AKP was abundant in numbers across the nation, and the formation of the local chapters of the new party was undertaken by these cadres in most cities. In Odemis as well as in Salihli, the process did not follow the common path. The old guard Islamist leadership of the FP took over the mission to form the AKP chapter in Salihli, while a very small and incoherent group of younger Islamists were tasked with the establishment of the new party in Odemis. Due to the small size of the Islamist constituency and the lack of a vibrant and widespread Islamist network, the Odemis branch was suffering from inadequate human resources in 2001. The younger Islamist activists were too few in number and too far from the circles of local influence to complete the task of kick starting a new party that would compete for the support of centrist voters. They were compelled to recruit new politicians at the initial stages of the party's construction. However, the existing political context in Odemis was not favorable for elite recruitment due to two key factors: the Islamists lacked a tight network on the ground, and they did not possess the human resources to attract and evaluate new entrants into the party.

In the initial phase, the Islamists incorporated a small number of politicians from the ANAP. One of these early recruits, who had experience working with the local party organization of the ANAP, described his decision to join the AKP⁸⁰:

“I joined the party from the very beginning. I was not from the Welfare Party [RP], like our national leaders. I had been a member of the ANAP before. The reason I joined the AKP was because I was a fan of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He is a very charismatic leader, and I believed in his potential. Although our party came out of the Welfare-Virtue Parties, most of our colleagues here have diverse backgrounds. Many had never been a member of the RP.”

The politically diverse local party cadre mentioned by the official quoted above did not emerge quickly in Odemis. The founders of the local party branch had difficulties incorporating new members during the first year of the party’s existence. Their predecessor had been a marginal Islamist party in Odemis. Even at the best of times, the RP could not gather more than 7.39% of the vote (1995 general elections). The pragmatic local notables who had centrist and conservative reputations in Odemis did not see the AKP as a viable alternative to more established parties in the center-right. They were not completely wrong either. The DYP local branch was still an active body, its offices busy with supporters old and young. Despite the AKP’s impressive national electoral victory in the 2002 general elections, the Islamists received only 17.66 percent of the vote in Odemis. In comparison, the AKP’s national average in this election was 34.43 percent. On the other hand, the DYP received the most votes in Odemis, with 22.99 percent of the vote, and the CHP trailed closely at 22.39%. The DYP outpaced its national average by 13.45 percent in Odemis. While the center-right party lost the elections by a large margin at the national level, its local organization scored a final victory.

The period following the 2002 general elections proved to be fruitful for the AKP in terms of local elite recruitment. The Islamists targeted various groups within Odemis in order to attract them into their party. The fact that the AKP had just formed the government at the national level also made the party more appealing to pragmatic elites. Local notable incorporation is an ongoing

⁸⁰ Interview with local AKP official, February 2009

process, and the AKP branch in Odemis was able to reverse its course in a city which never had a strong Islamist movement.

The local elites that were targeted by the AKP's first leadership comprised of an eclectic group of individuals who had socially conservative reputations in the city. Most of the economic and social elites in Odemis know each other personally due to the city's small size⁸¹. The elites the Islamists tried to recruit were already aware of the new found national influence of the AKP, and the massive loss of votes by the DYP and ANAP at the national level. Capitalizing on the weakness of the center-right at the national level, the Islamist politicians in Odemis officially and unofficially invited a select group of local elites into their organization. The group included current and former politicians attached to center-right parties, local merchants and civil society leaders. The common denominator among the elites invited into the AKP was their conservative reputations in the city. Their elite status emerged from their privileged positions in diffuse social networks.

The local merchants the AKP contacted in Odemis were small tradesmen who worked with agricultural inputs and products. The majority had shops or offices in the city center, where they participated in the economic life of the city. Their close connections to agricultural producers in the rural areas as well as their economic activity in the city center made them prime candidates to become local politicians. Some had already taken part in political life in center-right political parties in the 1980s and 1990s. The value they could bring to the AKP stemmed not from their political expertise, however, but rather from their extensive business and social connections in the city and in the countryside. The Odemis merchants were smaller in terms of capital and business volume compared to the economic elites the AKP incorporated into its organization in larger cities like Gebze and Corlu. While the AKP branches in large, industrialized cities worked with

⁸¹ Interview with local journalist, February 2009, Odemis

business associations and individual businessmen who had considerable investments in manufacturing and construction, the Odemis branch was restricted to provincial merchants who did not have large amounts of capital. The small merchants of Odemis were, nevertheless, significant local elites in their own right in a small city whose economy is based on agriculture.

Furthermore, the Gulen movement was a binding factor among the local merchants that joined the AKP. The Gulen movement had slowly built its connections in Odemis since the late 1970s. Although the brotherhood itself did not grow into a significant force in local politics, its membership included a portion of the local merchant class that was more likely to take part in the political process. The soft ties of religious and social community that bound conservative merchants helped the AKP in its effort to recruit local notables.

The AKP branch in Odemis was also particularly interested in recruiting politicians who were active or former members of the center-right parties. In most cities across Turkey, the weakening of the DYP and the ANAP at the end of the 1990s led conservative local politicians to detach themselves from their former parties. The crisis in the parties of the center right created a pool of former politicians which the AKP could easily access and recruit new members from. However, the local dynamism of the DYP in particular posed a problem for the AKP in Odemis. Since the Islamists aimed to expand their vote share to include the constituency of the DYP, they needed to recruit local politicians who were well known and respected among that constituency.

The local leaders of the AKP followed a distinct strategy to attract these politicians. An official from the ultranationalist Nationalist Action Party (MHP) described what the local AKP branch did in 2002⁸²:

“The AKP made a good investment at that time. They reached out to the internal opposition groups within their rivals. They invited these opposition groups into their own party, since these individuals had less to lose from leaving their old parties. They talked to a wide array of

⁸² Interview with MHO official in Odemis, February 2009

politicians from every corner of the political arena. That's why the AKP has people from very different backgrounds."

The founding members of the AKP in Odemis reached out to the oppositional factions within its rivals in order to recruit them into their own organization. Their offers were particularly intended for the local politicians attached to the DYP, but also included politicians with ties to the MHP and the ANAP. The Islamists did not extend the same offer to ideologically secularist parties such as the CHP and the Demokratik Sol Parti (Democratic Left Party - DSP). Their supporters would be "unlikely voters" for the AKP who were ideologically opposed to the Islamists. Therefore the AKP concentrated its recruitment efforts on the DYP, the ANAP and the MHP.

The third group of local notables that the AKP attempted to recruit consisted of civil society leaders. Civil society associations tend to be weak in Turkey, and Odemis and Salihli are no exceptions. While hometown associations provide a degree of social organization for specific groups in large, migrant receiving cities, there are no equivalents to these groups in Odemis. Odemis has received migrants in the past, but the recent migration movements did not bring new masses to the city. Other than migrant associations, ideological and charity based civic organizations tend to serve very small communities, relatively insignificant at the city level. However, the civil society groups that cluster around economic sectors are a notable exception to the rule. Merchant, artisan and tradesmen chambers are the only parts of civil society that are actively organized and that seek political attention at the local and national levels. As elected sector representatives, the leaders of local chambers make viable political partners for political parties in Odemis. The Chambers of Tailors, Drivers, Metal traders, Carpenters and Food producers are some of the civic artisanal associations that are politically significant in the city of Odemis. The organization that serves as the focal point for all others is the Odemis Chamber of Commerce, which is an official establishment under the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (Turkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birligi - TOBB). The official nature of

chambers precludes its leaders from openly participating in party politics, and the chambers are prohibited from openly supporting one party over the others. Yet as in other cities across Turkey, the leaders of local chambers unofficially align themselves with political parties at the local level. In Odemis, the CHP has actively cultivated close links to local artisanal chambers. Following the 2002 general elections, local chamber leaders, particularly the Chamber of Commerce grew close to the AKP. Due to the official restraints on political participation, chamber elites did not join the AKP or its competitors, but the unofficial support from the organized sectors of the local economy helped the AKP establish itself as a legitimate party of the center-right in Odemis.

The AKP established itself as a contender for the votes of centrist constituencies following the 2002 general elections by swiftly incorporating local merchants with socially conservative reputations, local politicians in center-right and nationalist parties who were in opposition positions within their parties, and the support of artisanal and commerce associations. Recruiting local elites enabled the AKP to transform its cadre in Odemis. The party departed from its image of a marginal, radical Islamist political organization and acquired the credentials of a mainstream center-right party by showcasing its centrist elites.

The 2004 local elections and the 2007 general elections that followed the AKP's transformation in Odemis displayed growing electoral support for the party. During this period, the Islamists also built their internal party organization that rivals any of the more established AKP organizations in the country. The Odemis branch of the AKP successfully engaged in community outreach programs that were novel in the small city. The AKP office functioned similar to a civil society organization. Its activists organized regular household meetings, coffee-house meetings, charity events and youth outreach programs across the city, particularly focusing on the relatively poor peripheral neighborhoods. The political leadership of experienced centrist politicians coupled

with the newly constructed institutionalized party bureaucracy constituted a cohesive party organization⁸³.

As the AKP branch in Odemis recruited local notables strategically and constructed a cohesive party organization, it developed a competitive edge against its rivals. When the DYP, ANAP and MHP's local support bases began slipping towards the AKP, the CHP found a new opponent in the city. Although Odemis had never had a vibrant Islamist movement, the AKP's incorporation of centrist notables in the city and its effective local organization enabled the Islamists to access the support structures of the DYP and the ANAP that had already lost their prominence at the national level.

Islamists, Centrists and the Failure of the AKP in Salihli

Located in the periphery of the large port city of Izmir, Salihli shares more than geographic and socio-economic similarities with Odemis. Local politics in Salihli has also followed a course broadly comparable to Odemis, particularly until the 1990s. The foundations of modern party politics in both cities go back to the nationalist resistance movement against the Greek invasion in 1919. In both Salihli and Odemis, the forces of the "Kuva-i Milliye" movement joined with the broader struggle for Turkish independence and linked themselves to the forces headed by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the Republican Peoples Party (CHP) was represented at the local level with its party organization and ancillary institutions that supervised the implementation of Kemalist reforms. Both Odemis and Salihli were receptive to the CHP and the rapid pace of reforms that sought to transform Turkish society.

The transition to a multi-party regime and the establishment of the Demokrat Parti (DP) transformed the nature of local politics in Salihli. The leader of the DP, Adnan Menderes, was originally a CHP parliamentarian from the Aydin area, which lies in the Western Anatolian plains

⁸³ The cohesiveness of the Odemis and Salihli branches of the AKP are addressed below.

to the south of Salihli. The DP built its support structure in Salihli and around its rural hinterland, particularly attracting the more traditional, peripheral sections of the society. A long serving party leader of the DP-DYP line of parties in Salihli referred to his party as the “Party of the bare foots, the party of the poor as opposed to the elitism of the CHP.”⁸⁴ On the other hand, the CHP persisted with a steady stream of popular support after the transition to the multi-party regime. Turkey’s Republicans not only counted the privileged in their support base. They attracted electoral support from the peasants living in the surrounding villages as well as the non-elite residents of the city of Salihli.

The CHP’s adoption of a social democratic ideology in the 1970s also helped bolster its credentials as a party of the working and lower classes in Salihli. The CHP of the 1970s reached out to the urban poor as well as the rural agricultural workers under the charismatic leadership of Bulent Ecevit. Although the party swung between social democratic ideals and nationalist-Kemalist principles throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the left wing, social democratic base of the CHP remained a powerful force within the party in Salihli.

The 1970s also saw the rise of ultra-nationalism in Salihli. Unlike in Odemis, the ultranationalist groups led at the national level by Alpaslan Turkes increased their local support in a bid to oppose what they saw as the “communist threat” coming from the socialist movement. The nationalist youth organizations of the MHP, which were heavily involved in urban conflict during the height of the cold war, established the foundations of their party in Salihli. The MHP grew to challenge the traditionally dominant CHP and the DYP in the 1990s. The secularist and left-leaning CHP often benefitted from the intense conflict between the MHP and the DYP when the two right-wing parties struggled over the votes of a large and intersecting constituency. The MHP won the local elections in 1994. Cengiz Tunc, a young and energetic engineer led the

⁸⁴ Interview with ex-party leader of the DYP, March 2009, Salihli

ultranationalists to their first electoral victory. The evolution of the MHP into a strong competitor for conservative and nationalist votes in Salihli shaped the political context within which the AKP was founded in 2001. The DYP remained the unchallenged party of the center-right in Odemis until after the 2002 general elections. The competition between the MHP and the DYP produced a vibrant political environment for conservative voters in Salihli, where they could vote for either of the parties.

While the MHP and the DYP competed for the votes of nationalist and conservative voters in Salihli, the political Islamists were conspicuously absent from the political arena. In both Odemis and Salihli, the political Islamists of the Welfare Party (RP) consisted of small mosque communities that experienced difficulties in expanding their electoral base. However, while the Islamist cadre in Odemis was a relatively isolated group of artisan men, their counterparts in Salihli had a distinct advantage. One of the leading Islamists of the RP at the national level, Bulent Arinc, was a parliamentarian from the same province as Salihli. Arinc was not only a prominent personality at the party center in Ankara, he also was the dominant politician in the RP in his own province. The leaders of the radical Islamist party in Salihli cultivated close links to Arinc, which strengthened their leadership positions at the local level. The consistent poor performance of the RP in Salihli did not serve to undermine the position of the RP's local leadership. Instead, the low stakes the Islamists had in the city enabled the party's top clique to remain at the helm of the party.

The Lack of Strategic Local Notable Incorporation by the AKP in Salihli

The establishment of the AKP in 2001 brought about a major shift in the political Islamist movement across Turkey. The younger generation of Islamists separated themselves from the old-guard, which they found dogmatic in its beliefs and unable to adapt to the reality of Turkish politics. The leaders of the AKP moderated their ideology, and targeted the votes of the median

voter in a bid to expand their electoral appeal towards the political center. This general trend was observed in numerous provincial and sub-provincial organizations of the AKP as well, including in Gebze, Corlu, Odemis, Bingol and Mus. But not in Salihli. Instead, the founding leaders of the AKP branch in Salihli made virtually no effort to differentiate their party from its more radical Islamist predecessors. Neither did they recruit new local notables in order to expand the appeal of their party towards centrist constituencies. Rather, the old guard Islamists of the RP captured the new AKP branch from the start, and maintained their privileged position within the party at the expense of transforming it.

The founders of the AKP in Salihli were distinct from their counterparts in Odemis. The younger cohorts of Islamists in the local RP branch established the AKP in Odemis, whereas the old guard of the party switched to the Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party - SP). However, the same division among the younger and the older generation did not take place in Salihli. When the Islamist 'strong man' of the province Bulent Arinc decided to join the AKP, the local leaders of his party also switched with him. Bulent Arinc, a seasoned "Milli Gorus" (national outlook - RP) politician represents the conservative elements within the AKP. He maintained close links to his former leader Necmettin Erbakan until the latter passed away in 2011. Arinc's decision to join the AKP prompted his local followers to follow suit. As a result, the AKP branch in Salihli was formed by the same leadership that had for years headed the local RP branch. This tight group was much less open to change within their party when compared to their counterparts in Odemis. The Salihli AKP branch was characterized by continuity while a transformative process overtook so many AKP branches across the country.

The maintenance of the status quo within the Islamist movement in Salihli defied the newfound purpose of the AKP. The national leaders of the party had chosen to moderate their ideological attachments to political Islam in return for increased access to large, centrist constituencies. The

party's ideological moderation was complemented by its shifting electoral strategies. Local branches were instructed to contact and recruit non-Islamist local notables who had clean names and conservative reputations in their communities. In order to attract centrist voters, the AKP strategy was to integrate centrist politicians with the Islamists who were at the nucleus of the party. Not only did the aging RP leadership maintain its privileged position within the AKP in Salihli, it also resisted the incorporation of new politicians. As a result, the local AKP branch looked no different from the banned RP, complete with the same party leaders who maintained their positions thanks to their old patron, Bulent Arinc. The continuation of the status quo inside the party contributed to the maintenance in Islamist -constituency relations. The RP had remained a marginal party in Salihli throughout the 1980s and the 1990s. Even during its heyday in the 1994 and 1995 elections, the RP could only receive 4.82% and 6.66% of the vote. Furthermore, the secularist vision of the CHP was relatively uncontested in the region. Even the DYP, the CHP's arch rival during much of the 20th century, did not fundamentally challenge the Republican principle of secularism. When the newly founded AKP proved to be the direct continuation of the Islamist RP in terms of leadership, the CHP immediately stamped the new party as a challenger to the institutions of the Republic. Concerns over whether or not the AKP had actually moderated its ideology and abandoned its predecessors' call for the transformation of the state as well as the society according to their vision of Islam were voiced openly and forcefully in Salihli by the secularists.

The founding leader of the AKP in Salihli was a veteran Islamist politician, Ismail Bilen. Bilen had proven himself to be a close ally of Arinc, and was looking for a role in the parliament should his new party be successful at the polls. A key figure in the close-knit leadership clique leading the AKP branch, Bilen was a migrant from the Mus province who had settled in Salihli. So were a number of his colleagues in the Islamist party. Salihli had received few migrants over time. An overwhelming majority of the city were originally either from the city itself, from its rural

districts, or from surrounding cities in the region. Similar to Odemis, Salihli had received a small amount of migration from the Kurdish regions of Turkey. A distinctive feature of the Islamist movement in Salihli was its Kurdish activists and officials. Bilen, who was originally from Mus, and his Kurdish colleagues had attained leadership positions within the RP and later the AKP. The perceived concentration of Kurdish leaders and the significant support the Islamist movement received from the Kurdish migrants in the city led to the stigmatization of the AKP as a ‘party of the Kurds’. An interviewee who is an experienced local journalist in Salihli explained that:

“For better or worse, the AKP has been branded as a party of the Kurds in Salihli. Ismail Bilen, who got elected to the parliament from the province, is originally from Mus. There was also a widespread perception that the AKP leadership overrepresented the Kurdish migrants. This is a city where the [Turkish ultranationalist] MHP is very popular. This association did not help the AKP, in fact it hurt it.”⁸⁵

Turkish ultranationalists did not waste any time in their attempts to delegitimize the AKP as a party of the Kurds, playing on ethnic and racial prejudices. Their campaign appears to have been successful in Salihli. A number of interviewees in from civil society associations, local media and rival political parties confirmed that the AKP carried such a stigma in Odemis. Thus, when the AKP was established in 2001, it faced two major criticisms that identified it as a marginal party in the city. While the CHP claimed that the AKP was just a new front for the same old radical Islamists who posed a threat to Turkish secularism, the MHP and other nationalist elements in society branded the AKP as a fringe party hijacked by an ethnic minority. The AKP found it hard to dismiss either of these epithets in Salihli, and the party went into the 2002 general elections battered by social mistrust and criticism.

The Islamists performed poorly in the 2002 general elections in Salihli, acquiring 17.6 percent of the vote. The majority of its support came from the rural districts in the mountainous part of the region. The Islamists also made a strong showing in some of the peripheral migrant neighborhoods, but the party failed to capture any significant population center within the city.

⁸⁵ Interview with a local journalist, March 2009, Salihli

Although the AKP won a major electoral victory across the nation, its Salihli branch failed to expand its vote share significantly enough to make it competitive with its rivals. On a brighter note for the local AKP branch, their founding leader Ismail Bilen got elected to the parliament from the province, despite the AKP's electoral failure in his home city.

In the aftermath of the 2002 general elections, the AKP leadership in Odemis aggressively recruited non-Islamist local notables from among the city's merchants, centrist politicians and civil society leaders. On the other hand, the AKP leadership in Salihli chose to tighten its ranks and showed no signs of bringing new politicians in. The AKP signed new members into its party organization, yet these members were integrated into the lower echelons of the party structure. Between the 2002 general elections and the 2004 local elections, the AKP branch in Salihli focused on building its party bureaucracy. The party established a functioning women's group and a dynamic youth group. The AKP's women's organization in particular formed neighborhood representatives across the city of Salihli, and initiated a series of community outreach programs that sought to make the AKP more visible to the city's residents. The party's youth group, made up predominantly of male members⁸⁶, assisted the women's organization in their outreach efforts. A close-knit local leadership coupled with a functioning party bureaucracy produced a cohesive party structure for the AKP in Salihli. Yet the refusal of the party leaders to incorporate new local notables into their organization ensured that the AKP remained a marginal party of the radical Islamists in the eyes of the wider public. While their counterparts in Odemis were actively seeking out and bringing in former politicians from the DYP and ANAP, local merchants and tradesmen and civil society leaders who possessed clean names and socially conservative reputations under the umbrella of the AKP, the Salihli branch refused to transform its leadership cadres.

⁸⁶ Interview with young AKP activist, March 2009, Salihli

Furthermore, a specific event organized by the AKP branch in Salihli before the 2004 local elections became a public relations disaster for the Islamist party. In preparation for the elections, the AKP leadership decided to display a show of force in the city. Organizing collective walks by supporters, automobile and motorcycle convoys headed by party busses are typical techniques most parties employ to attract attention and to display their strong support base before elections. What the AKP decided to do in preparation for the 2004 local elections was a walk by its supporters through the city center. Numerous interviewees in Salihli identified this event as a significant one that remained in the city's collective memory. As one interviewee put it:

“They organized a big demonstration in the city center. The idea was to have their supporters walk through the city with their party flags in their hands to show support for the AKP. So they brought their supporters from the outer neighborhoods, mostly migrants from the Kurdish areas. Everyone thought: This is a Kurdish party. It would be better for them if they hadn't done the walk.”⁸⁷

The event increased the nationalist attacks against the AKP. In a city that has a small migrant Kurdish community and a strong Turkish nationalist movement, the association of the party with the Kurds hurt its relations with the larger population which was influenced by the nationalist rhetoric. Additionally, the AKP's candidate for the mayor's office was easily dismissed by the CHP as a marginal, radical Islamist politician. A religious education and ethics teacher, the AKP candidate was a seasoned Islamist from the ranks of the former RP. The secularists accused the AKP of adopting the divisive, radical politics of the Welfare Party which openly challenged the principle of secularism.

During this period, the DYP was experiencing an unprecedented decline in its support both at the national and at the local levels. The AKP stepped into the political space vacated by the DYP and incorporated some of its local politicians into its own structure in Odemis. In Salihli, not only was the local AKP branch unwilling to expand its political appeal towards the constituency of the DYP, but it also faced a formidable rival in the form of the ultranationalist MHP. Throughout the

⁸⁷ Interview with local journalist, March 2009, Salihli

1990s and the 2000s, the MHP attracted votes and politicians from the ranks of the DYP. In fact, the distinction between the two parties got blurred particularly in the 2004 local elections when Cengiz Tunc, a former Salihli mayor from the MHP list, ran for the municipality from the DYP. Local politicians switched between the two parties with relative ease. The declining prominence of the DYP at the national level bolstered the support for the MHP in a city where the AKP made no visible efforts to attract this constituency.

The AKP lost the 2004 local elections to the CHP in an election closely contested between the winner and the nationalist candidate from the MHP. The fact that the AKP remained a marginal party in Salihli whereas it was scoring major electoral victories across the nation prompted the local party organization to make changes in its strategy. Particularly in 2005 and afterwards, the local AKP branch recruited local notables into its party organization and placed some of these recruits to the upper levels of the party hierarchy. Among the notables that were recruited were former politicians associated with the DYP and the ANAP and local merchants. According to a number of interviewees, these changes were long overdue, but they were too little and they came too late. Despite integrating new politicians into the leading body of their party, the old guard Islamists still maintained a significant degree of control over the organization. Whereas the newly recruited local notables populated the vast majority of the party posts in the Odemis branch, the Salihli branch did not experience a significant shift in power from the founders of the party to the new recruits. Thus, although the AKP did capture a small portion of the centrist constituency vacated by the collapse of the ANAP and the DYP during the 2007 general elections, its move towards the political center was half-hearted and incomplete. Local notable incorporation by the Salihli party branch was not strategic due to the unwillingness of the old-guard Islamists to restructure their organization. As a result, the AKP failed to become a competitive party in Salihli. Its cohesive party organization and the limited number of centrist local elites it

incorporated after 2004 helped the party increase its vote share in 2007, but the change was not strong enough to make a real impact on the AKP's electoral fortunes.

The AKP's Cohesive Party Structures in Odemis and Salihli

The AKP lacked the resources to establish a strong presence in Odemis or Salihli at the time of its founding in 2001. The historical weakness of the Islamist movement in both cities left the AKP's predecessor, the Welfare Party (RP), bereft of both human and material resources. Neither did the Islamists enjoy the support of ancillary civil society organizations such as youth groups and charity foundations. Thus, the AKP did not inherit a functioning party bureaucracy that had the capability to operate at the grassroots level in Odemis or Salihli. The AKP was unlikely to win elections in either of the cities in the absence of a strong core constituency of Islamist voters and an effective party organization.

The Odemis branch of the party underwent a rapid transformation after the 2002 general elections and managed to incorporate local notables strategically while building a cohesive party structure. The AKP branch in Salihli was not as open to change. While the old-guard Islamist leaders of the new party resisted the incorporation of new elites into their organization, they did form a cohesive party structure after the 2002 general elections.

The AKP branch in Odemis was founded by the younger cohort of its radical Islamist predecessors. Departing from their old parties, the founders faced a difficult situation where they lacked the human resources to establish a functioning party bureaucracy and attract the support of local notables that could enable the party to target the votes of centrist constituencies. After undergoing a brief period of stagnation before the 2002 general elections, the founding members of the party initiated a transformative program to integrate local notables into the AKP and to build a functioning party bureaucracy. The strategic incorporation of local merchants, former politicians and civil society elites into the AKP had a transformative impact on the local party

organization. The AKP also managed to construct a cohesive party structure by forming its local activist cadres in the image of a civil society organization. The Odemis AKP branch owes its dynamism to its ethos of volunteerism, which at times borders on the apolitical. The youth and women's organizations within the party as well as its 'Coordination Center for the Elderly and the Disabled' work like civic associations that are more interested in charity and volunteer work than partisan propaganda. The leader of the AKP's women's group in Odemis described what they do:

"I see our job not as a political one but as a social one. I have gained so many social contacts due to my work at the party. Our job is to be helpful to people. It is purely a volunteer activity."⁸⁸

The same AKP activist explained how she was not interested in politics before she joined the AKP. Her friends who had recently become members had convinced her to join. She described how she discovered the value of helping those in need with volunteer work after she joined the party. The most appealing part of her political activity was not the politics behind the work, but the ability to reach out to her community by organizing a group of like mind individuals. As the leader of the AKP women's group, she found ample opportunities to make this happen.

The AKP women's group is intimately linked to the party's neighborhood representatives system. In Odemis, the neighborhood representatives are tasked with providing information about their neighbors to the party. With their help, the women's group learns which families are in need of material help, and which require guidance in their relations with the state bureaucracy. In fact, one of the major concerns of the AKP women's group in Odemis is to provide help to women in the city who do not know how to apply to state programs such as the 'yaslilik maasi' (elderly income support) or the disability support. The AKP has also established a coordination center to address specifically the issues concerning the elderly and the disabled in the city. In our interview, the AKP activist managing the coordination center explained how they not only raised

⁸⁸ Focus group with the members of the AKP women's group in Odemis, February 2009

funds to buy wheel chairs for the disabled in need, but also spent considerable time and energy advising people on how to apply to government programs.

The AKP's women's organization in Odemis is also active in raising funds for its efforts. The activist women in my focus group claimed that the Odemis party center does not possess the funds to distribute charity to the needy, so they actively raise money themselves. They organize 'tea parties' and other events for which they sell tickets. The activists also frequently contact local merchants, particularly those who are in the governing bodies of the local party, to ask for their contributions to their charitable activities. The members of the women's group explained that they prefer to distribute the funds they raised in conjunction with their weekly neighborhood visits. In response to the information provided by their neighborhood representatives, the AKP's women's group organizes household visits to spread the word about the party's activities and to create awareness of the AKP among potential voters in an informal environment. In such events they also observe which families are in need and later contact them discreetly to provide support. The activists were particularly proud of one of their accomplishments. During the month of Ramadan, they rented out a space in the city center where they organized a clothing donation center. The center attracted ample interest from by donors and recipients, which led the municipality to take over the initiative. The center was still functional at the time of the interview, and it bore the name "Gonul Evi" or the House of Heart.

The AKP's youth group in Odemis was also founded in 2001 but gained steam after the 2002 general elections. The youth group mostly complements the activities organized by the local party center and the women's group. Together with the AKP central committee, the youth group periodically organizes coffee house visits in each of the city's neighborhoods. These visits take place on a regular basis, and the emphasis is placed on the peripheral neighborhoods that are relatively poorer than the city center. The youth group is particularly active in its community

outreach programs towards the peripheral neighborhoods and the villages in Odemis' rural hinterland. Together with the party's central committee, they visit each of the 75 villages at least once each year. The youth group also organizes music nights and other events for the benefit of the party in order to attract the local young to their party organization.

The dynamism of the Odemis AKP branch shows that the prior existence of Islamist activist networks is not necessary for the new party to construct cohesive local organizations. The volunteerism at the heart of the Odemis AKP branch and the conjugal relations between the local notables newly recruited into the party resulted in a cohesive party structure. Coupled with strategic notable incorporation, the Odemis AKP branch became competitive with its rivals, and won unlikely national and local victories.

The formation of a cohesive party structure did not follow the same pattern in Salihli as in Odemis. While the Odemis AKP branch reached out to centrist notables in order to expand its political appeal, the Islamists in Salihli refused to incorporate new local elites into their leadership. The tight, clique-like structure of the AKP leadership in Salihli precluded the possibility of factionalism in the party, since there were no new recruits who could form new factions. The AKP established its local party structures under the guidance of its old-guard Islamists chiefs in the aftermath of the 2002 general elections. The Salihli branch did not inherit a well-organized network of activists they could rely on as a starting point for their new party.

While the central party committee of the Salihli AKP branch remained unchanged since the days of the Welfare Party (RP), the formation of the women's and youth organizations were completed in 2002. Although the Salihli branch never achieved the levels of civic activism of the Odemis branch, its activists were also diligent in implementing their community outreach programs across the city. The women's organization of the Islamist party functioned particularly well under the conditions of a stagnant party leadership. Similar to their counterparts in Odemis, the Salihli

AKP's women's organization focused on volunteerism and charity work towards the relatively poor, peripheral neighborhoods of the city. Despite lacking material resources, they cooperated with the AKP's neighborhood representatives in identifying particularly needy families in these neighborhoods and delivering social aid. What they lacked in material resources they tried to compensate in volunteer time. The AKP's women's group in Salihli included professionals such as accountants, doctors and lawyers who provided guidance to needy families in applying to government programs that provide subsidized healthcare and direct monetary benefits to the poor. Bureaucratic assistance as a form of civic engagement and social support became a major part of their outreach efforts towards the public. Similar to the Odemis branch, the AKP's women's organization in Salihli carried out household visits on a regular basis and used these events as a source to advertise their volunteer services to the community.

Unlike the Odemis branch however, the AKP's activists in Salihli did not attempt to raise funds from the local merchants and other wealthy individuals. Part of the reason behind this discrepancy was that the Salihli branch did not recruit local merchants into its structure as did the Odemis branch. Lack of access to economic notables within the party constricted the movement space of its activists in terms of financing charity and community outreach programs.

The party's was also limited in its ability to reach out to the general population. It functioned like an ancillary organization of the central committee and the women's group. The youth group comprised mostly of men, and its activities catered mostly to the young male population. For instance, they organized soccer tournaments in the city which attracted interest disproportionately from young men. However, the AKP's youth group was particularly useful during the elections campaign. Political parties traditionally organize vehicle convoys in the weeks preceding the elections in Salihli. These convoys meet in the evenings and drive through the city, with young activists waving party flags and shouting their support for the party while leaning out of their car

windows. The youth group is responsible from arranging the convoys, and they also help with setting up the coffee house meetings that take place directly following the convoy ride. The activists believe that the loud honking and shouting throughout the city is a necessary part of political life in Salihli. Otherwise the voters might think that the AKP lacks the support or organizational ability to field these events while their rivals are on the streets. Election campaigns are lively events in Salihli, with multiple parties organizing meetings, demonstrations and convoys in numerous locations throughout the city every day. Although the AKP was unable to win any local or national elections in Salihli, its local organization was nevertheless very competitive in the events it fielded during the campaign period.

Despite its lack of meaningful local notable incorporation, the Salihli branch of the AKP formed a cohesive party organization with a capable party bureaucracy. Its clique of local leaders provided stable albeit stagnant leadership. The party's neighborhood representatives, women's organization and youth group actively arranged community outreach programs that penetrated the local community particularly in the poor, peripheral neighborhoods. On the other hand, lack of political transformation in the local party and the marginal character of its leaders meant that the AKP remained a marginal, radical Islamist organization in the eyes of the public. Thus, the AKP could not appeal to the centrist masses in Salihli, and consistently lost local and national elections to its rivals CHP and MHP.

Conclusion

The AKP has won landslide elections at both local and national levels across the country since its establishment in 2001. However, cities in the Aegean Region have mostly resisted the advance of the Islamist party. The AKP's predecessors had never been successful in building Islamist networks in the region. Lacking a core constituency of Islamist voters, the AKP was less likely to be electorally successful in the Aegean Region when compared to other sub-national regions.

This paper has analyzed the causes behind the variation in the AKP's electoral success in Odemis and Salihli, two cities that share extensive macro-social characteristics. While the AKP has won local and general elections in Odemis, it consistently lost all the elections it joined in Salihli.

The AKP's local founders in Odemis reached out to centrist local notables following the 2002 general elections. Despite the party's initial weakness, the Islamists succeeded in recruiting politicians from center right parties who were in opposition positions within their own parties. The Islamists also incorporated local merchants and civil society leaders. Strategic local notable incorporation in Odemis, coupled with the party's cohesive structure gave it a competitive edge at the ballot box. As a result, the AKP was able to win local and general elections in a city where its electoral success was very unlikely.

The founders of the AKP branch in Salihli were different from their counterparts in Odemis. The leadership cadre of the AKP's banned radical predecessors did not splinter into two. Instead, Salihli's old-guard Islamist leaders switched over to the AKP when their provincial patron, Bulent Arinc decided to join the party in 2001. The continuity in political leadership and the unwillingness of this clique to integrate new local elites into the top ranks of the party caused the AKP to remain a marginal party of the radical Islamists in Salihli. Unable to change its local image, the AKP could not effectively target the votes of centrist constituencies. In addition, the association of the AKP with the small Kurdish minority in the city by Turkish ultranationalists served to further marginalize the party. The effective community outreach programs fielded by a cohesive local party organization were not enough to change the AKP's local image. The AKP remained restricted in support to its small core constituency of Islamist voters, and consistently lost local and national elections in Salihli.

CHAPTER 5

Multiple Paths to Islamist Electoral Success and Failure

Having examined pairs of cities with different levels of support for the Islamists, we now proceed to a separate but complementary form of comparative analysis. The previous three chapters focused on cities that share extensive macro-social characteristics that are often associated with Islamist mobilization. I addressed the puzzling differences in Islamist electoral success in otherwise very similar cities. The first section of this chapter examines a closely related empirical puzzle: What explains the electoral success of the AKP in cities that are very *different* from each other in terms of their cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic characteristics? How did the Turkish Islamists appeal to large groups of voters in Gebze, Odemis, and Bingol – cities that share very few commonalities? I first trace the recent evolution of distinct patterns of Islamist party politics in these three cities. I then demonstrate how the AKP's strategic local notable incorporation and the cohesiveness of its party organizations enabled the Islamists to outperform their competitors in local and national elections. At the same time, I argue that the processes through which the AKP achieved strategic recruitment and cohesiveness were quite different across Gebze, Bingol and Odemis due to the socio-structural differences in the contexts the party faced in each location.

I bring in two new cases to test my theory in the second section. In Malazgirt and Kinik, the AKP failed to incorporate local elites selectively, while at the same time its local organizations lacked cohesiveness. My theory predicts that the Islamists should lose their competitive edge in these cities since neither variable is coded positive. I trace the formative process of the AKP in Kinik and Malazgirt, and show how its failures in elite recruitment and organization building did indeed

hamper its electoral performance, resulting in the loss of every single electoral race in which it took part.

Most Different Systems Design: How the AKP Outperformed Its Rivals across Different Contexts

Sub-national variations in cultural, socio-economic, demographic, and ethnic characteristics imply that political parties face very different opportunities and constraints in their relations with voters across different provinces. Gebze, Bingol, and Odemis posed distinctive challenges to the Islamists during the formative period of the AKP.

In Gebze, the AKP's radical predecessor, the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party - RP), had already established a sizable core constituency in the 1990s. The founders of the AKP built their new party in an environment where the Islamists had already created a neighborhood representative network that enabled continuous engagement with voters. The challenge they faced was to *transform* the linkages between the Islamist party and the electorate. As I explain in detail below, the local politicians within the AKP moved away from their predecessor's strategy of mobilizing ancillary civic associations to a strategy of elite brokerage.

The presence and political significance of clans in Bingol led the AKP to *maintain* the strategy through which the Islamist party traditionally interacted with its local voter base. The first avowedly Islamist party in Turkey, the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party - MNP), was formed in 1970 with the support of traditional provincial elites. While the Islamist party implemented alternative voter outreach strategies involving the use of ancillary civic organizations and charity foundations in urban centers throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it continued to rely on traditional elite brokerage in Bingol. The founders of the AKP sought to expand their electoral appeal by recruiting new local clan elites who were previously embedded into the patronage networks of other parties.

The lack of an existing Islamist network in Odemis placed the founders of the AKP in a position where they had to *form new links* with the electorate. In line with the strategy adopted by the AKP's national party center, the Odemis branch recruited local notables with non-Islamist backgrounds. It established itself as a party of the center-right, and targeted the voters who traditionally supported centrist parties following the 2002 general elections. During its formative stage in 2001 and early 2002, the AKP faced diverse local conditions across the provinces of Turkey. The Islamists managed to expand their appeal to centrist voters through strategic elite recruitment and the efforts of cohesive party organizations. However, the particular methods of selective local notable incorporation and party building differed due to the local contexts in which the AKP was operating.

Table 5.1: Electoral Outcomes for the AKP in Gebze, Bingol, and Odemis

	Gebze	Bingol	Odemis
Cohesiveness	✓	✓	✓
Strategic Elite Recruitment	✓	✓	✓
Outcome	Success	Success	Success

In this section, I employ a new axis of comparison in order to evaluate the causes of Islamist electoral success. The most different systems design involves the comparison of cases that share few theoretically significant commonalities but exhibit the same outcome of interest. It is particularly useful in eliminating the necessary causal factors (Collier, Brady, & Seawright, 2004; Dion, 1998; Gerring, 2007; Mahoney, 2007). The aim of this section is to complement the analysis provided in the previous chapters by adding a new comparative dimension centered on the cases where the AKP has increased its vote-share substantially and won local and national elections. Factors that vary across cases that share the same outcome can be eliminated as a necessary cause, and therefore be discounted from the explanation of Islamist electoral success.

The most different systems design, or the “method of agreement,” is seldom used for sub-national comparative analysis due to the limitations imposed by case selection. Since all the units of analysis in this research are provincial and sub-provincial areas within the same country, they share historical and institutional similarities that remain constant across the board. The historical legacy of state imposed secularism, common electoral institutions (such as the system of proportional representation and the ten percent threshold in general elections), similarities in religious composition, the presence of religious brotherhoods, and the rules and regulations that apply across the entire territory of the Turkish Republic are common to all the cities examined in this section. The underlying parallels between these cases are a source of analytical strength for the most similar systems design that formed the basis of the comparative framework in the previous chapters. The same similarities limit the elimination of alternative explanations when using the most different systems design. On the other hand, there are sufficient empirical differences between Odemis, Bingol, and Gebze that merit the use of this analytical tool. Despite sharing some of the characteristics common to *all* provinces in Turkey, these three cities are significantly different from each other in terms of factors that are theoretically relevant to the explanations of Islamist electoral success. For instance, their economic structures and levels of development are highly dissimilar. Levels of private investment, migration patterns, and strength of civil society are also significantly different across these cases. While the most different systems design would provide more traction for causal inference if the units in question were completely unrelated (Gerring 2007), this is rarely the case in comparative research. Thus, the purpose of this section is to complement the analyses provided in the previous chapters rather than to lead to causal explanations on its own.

Despite being a unitary and centralized state built on the historical legacy of a strong state tradition (Heper, 1985), Turkey displays surprising diversity across its geographic regions. Levels of economic development, ethnic and linguistic characteristics, local authority structures, as well

as cultural norms vary across the Anatolian mainland and the European Thrace region. Support structures for secularist, Islamist, social democratic, and conservative parties also display spatial and temporal variation (Mecham, 2006). The AKP has won local and national elections in Bingol, Odemis, and Gebze despite the major differences in their macro-social characteristics summarized in the following table:

Table 5.2: Macro-Social Characteristics of Gebze, Bingol, and Odemis

	Gebze	Bingol	Odemis
Geographic location	Northwestern Turkey	Eastern Turkey	Western Turkey
Ethnic composition	Heterogeneous	Kurdish Dominated	Turkish Dominated
Ethnic nationalism and violence	Negligible	Violent conflict between the PKK and Turkish Military	Negligible
Religious composition	Majority Sunni Muslim, small Alevi Muslim minority	Majority Sunni Muslim, Alevi Muslim concentration in one district	Majority Sunni Muslim, minority Alevi villages
Religious orders	Active	Active	Active
Economy	Vibrant	Stagnant	Moderate
Population size	310,815 (2007)	251,552 (2007)	129,210 (2009)
Migration	Net migrant receiver	Net migrant donor to large cities in Turkey and to Europe	Receives migration from rural hinterland
Dominant economic sector	Industry and services	Agriculture and animal husbandry	Agriculture and small agri-businesses
Level of private investment	High	Low	Medium
Business Associations	Active	None	Weak
Strength of civil society	Medium	Weak	Medium
Local Party Organization	<i>Cohesive</i>	<i>Cohesive</i>	<i>Cohesive</i>
Elite Incorporation	<i>Strategic Recruitment</i>	<i>Strategic Recruitment</i>	<i>Strategic Recruitment</i>
AKP's Electoral Outcome	Success	Success	Success

Gebze, Odemis, and Bingol are located in different geographic regions within Turkey. Gebze lies in the north-western Marmara region, on the eastern border of Istanbul. It has a relatively large, urban, and ethnically heterogeneous population. The growth of the industrial sector since the early 1970s made Gebze an attractive location for migrant workers. The city received migration from the Turkish Anatolian mainland and the European Thrace region in parallel to its industrialization. Gebze also received immigration from Bulgaria with the inflow of co-ethnic Turks between 1989 and mid-1990s. Its population increased more than fivefold since 1970, which resulted in the emergence of a diverse, cosmopolitan city. The dominant economic sectors in Gebze are industry and services. Consumer and industrial chemicals, consumer durables, and the auto industry have a particularly strong presence in Gebze's multiple organized industrial zones.⁸⁹ Private investment by national and multinational firms is high. Local business associations have created a vibrant environment for civic and political activism led by small and medium sized capital groups which are thoroughly integrated into global supply chains. In addition to voluntary business associations, hometown organizations and idea-based civic associations have created a moderate level of civic activism.

While Gebze sheds light on the transformations, challenges, and promises that surface with industrialization in a developing country, Bingol's experience as a city displays profound contrasts to that of Gebze. It is located in the Eastern Anatolian region, where economic stagnation and violent conflict have threatened local communities since late 1970s. The majority of Bingol's population is ethnically Kurdish. Its residents speak the Zazaki as well as the Kirmanji dialects of the Kurdish language. The protracted conflict between the Turkish military and the armed wing of the Kurdish National Movement, the Partiya Kerkaren Kurdistan

⁸⁹ Gebze Kaymakligi, "Gebze'nin Sosyo-Ekonomik ve Nufus Durumu" (Gebze Sub-provincial Governorate, "Socio-Economic and Demographic Facts of Gebze"); Gebze Kaymakligi, "Gebze'nin Sosyo-Ekonomik ve Nufus Durumu" (Gebze Sub-provincial Governorate, "Socio-Economic and Demographic Facts of Gebze"); <http://gosb.com/staticfiles/files/rakamlar/istihdam.pdf>

(Kurdistan Workers Party - PKK), have plunged the area into insecurity. During the height of the conflict in the early 1990s, the Turkish state implemented a policy of village evacuations. More than 3000 villages and hamlets were transplanted into cities in the Eastern and Southeastern regions of Turkey (Balta, 2004). This policy resulted in the near-collapse of the peasant agriculture and animal husbandry in Bingol. The state-dependent local economy continued to stagnate well into the late 2000s.⁹⁰ Private investment is very low, and unemployment remains high. Bingol has steadily supplied migrants to large Turkish cities as well as to European countries. Multiple interviewees in Bingol expressed the belief that there were more Bingol-ites living in Istanbul in 2008 than in Bingol.⁹¹ Clan structures composed of extended family networks maintain close ties with political parties. Civil society is very weak in Bingol, and civic associations play no visible role in the province's social, cultural, or political life.

Odemis is different from both Gebze and Bingol in terms of its macro-social characteristics. It is located in the Western Anatolian plains, in the rural periphery of the large Aegean port city of Izmir. Odemis sits on one of the most productive agricultural regions of Turkey. Its geographic location close to sea transportation has led to the development of a relatively lucrative mechanized agricultural economy, which supplies products both to the Turkish and international markets. Despite the existence of a number of agro-businesses, industrialization in Odemis remains low. Private investment takes place within the agricultural sector in the form of family farming. Chambers of commerce and artisan chambers provide a limited degree of civic life

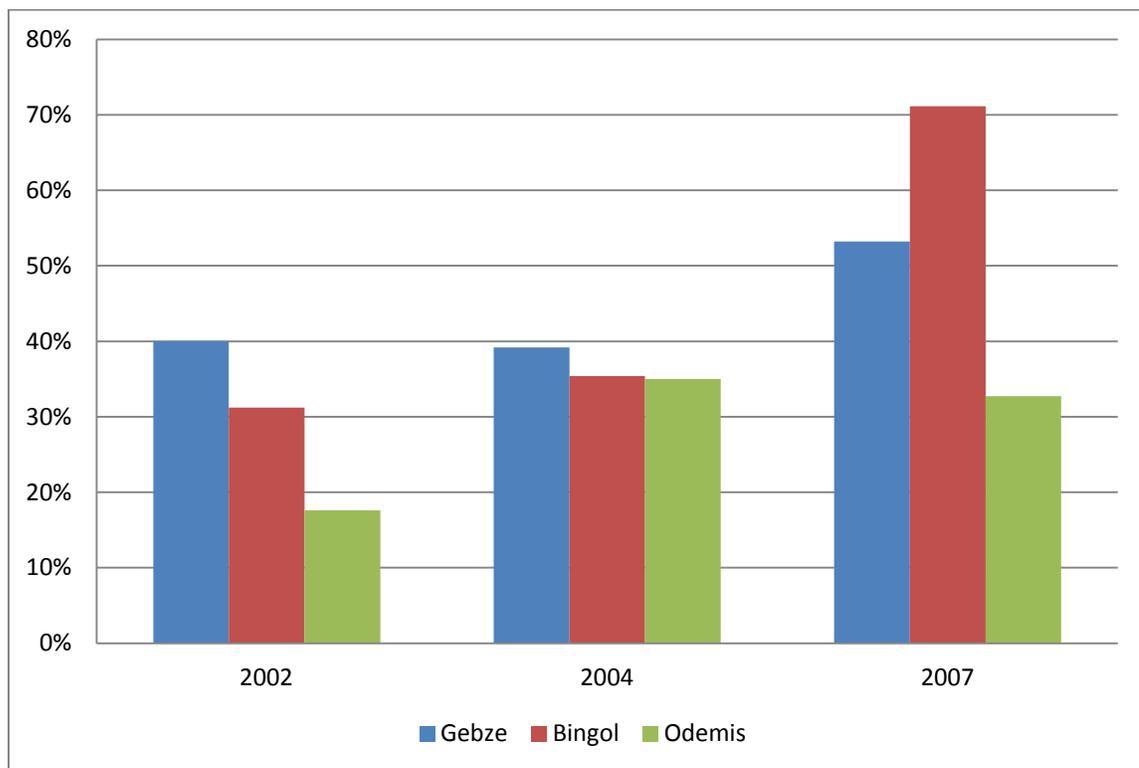
⁹⁰ The State Planning Agency ranks Bingol fifth out of 81 among the least developed province in Turkey: Dinçer, Özasan, Kavasoglu, *İllerin ve Bölgelerin Sosyo-ekonomik Gelişmişlik Sıralaması Araştırması (2003)*, Devlet Planlama Teskilati, Yayın No DPT 2671

⁹¹ Multiple interviews with journalists, political party officials and civil society activists in Bingol, October 2008.

under corporatist institutions.⁹² Idea-based civic associations are also present and active in Odemis, but they typically have few members.⁹³

The following figure demonstrates the AKP's vote-share in Odemis, Bingol, and Gebze in the 2002, 2004, and 2007 elections. Despite the differences in the levels of support for the AKP, the Islamists have outperformed their secularist and pro-Kurdish rivals and placed first in the ballot box. Furthermore, they have expanded their electoral appeal beyond their core constituencies in all the success cases, regardless of the extent and reach of Islamist support networks that existed before the AKP's formation.

Figure 5.1: Distribution of the AKP's Vote Share in Gebze, Bingol and Odemis



⁹² Interviews with officials in Odemis Mimarlar Odasi (Odemis Chamber of Architects), Odemis Terziler Odasi (Odemis Chamber of Tailors) and Odemis Berberler Odasi (Odemis Chamber of Hairdressers).

⁹³ Interviews with civil society activists associated with the Ataturkcu Dusunce Dernegi (Ataturkist Thought Club - ADD) and the Egitim ve Bilim Emekcileri Sendikasi (Union of Education and Science Laborers – Egitim Sen).

The next section discusses the diverse paths through which the AKP established new links to local notables and incorporated them into its local organizations with a broad scope in Gebze, Bingol, and Odemis. In the cases examined in this section, the Islamists showed flexibility and entrepreneurship in how they transformed their party's relations with potential voters.

Gebze: The Case of Party-Voter Linkage Transformation

With its gray, concrete buildings, dusty streets, endless road construction, and the crowded old-city "carsi" (bazaar), Gebze epitomizes the hardships and promises of industrialization in a developing country. It is a city of migrants, and its population boom in the last three decades replaced the social fabric of this once small, agricultural town and turned it into a hodgepodge of diverse inhabitants, industrial plants, and copious neighborhoods that did not exist merely a few years ago. Gebze is a buzzing, dynamic city that is growing with the pains of industrial development, and the lives of its residents are rapidly transforming.

The trajectory of Islamist politics in Gebze sheds light on the political aspects of its transformation. Unlike that of the other cases studied in this dissertation, the growth of Gebze's Islamist parties and their support structures occurred in parallel to industrialization and inward migration. The Islamists emerged from obscurity in the early 1980s to become a powerful force in local politics by the mid-1990s. Yet this transformation was not preordained. Gebze was once a bastion of centrist politics. Until the early 1990s, the city consistently voted either social democratic or center-right parties into local and national office. The last mayor to be elected from a non-Islamist party won the local elections in 1989 with the Sosyal Demokrat Halkci Parti (Social Democratic People's Party - SHP) ticket. The last secularist mayor, Mehmet Emin Akin,

described his election in 1989 as the work of a combination of industrial workers and migrants who united behind the social democratic flag⁹⁴.

The same factory workers and migrants Akin claims voted for him soon began supporting the Islamists. Celal Dulger was one of them. He was a blue collar worker at a large home electronics factory in Gebze. In his own words, his political inclinations before 1987 consisted of “dreams and aspirations, but no real commitment to any political party.”⁹⁵ During that year, his friends at the factory convinced him to visit the Welfare Party (RP) organization in a migrant neighborhood of Gebze. That visit marked the beginning of a political journey that would see him become the local party leader of the Islamist Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party - SP) in 2008. Soon after joining the Islamist party in 1987, Dulger became a community organizer in the trenches. He first joined the Gaziler⁹⁶ neighborhood organization. One of twenty-two similar neighborhood organizations that covered every single precinct in Gebze, the Gaziler group was made up of smaller functional and geographic units. Consisting of a central neighborhood council, a women’s group, a youth group and street representatives, the RP neighborhood organizations were structured like a tentacle that reached deeply into the fabric of Gebze’s emerging society. During our conversation, Dulger reminisced that they “even had representatives for each apartment block in some places.”⁹⁷

By the early 1990s, the RP constructed an impressive party organization that reached every migrant neighborhood in Gebze. The Islamists were also aided by ancillary civic associations, charity foundations, and volunteer groups in their efforts to reshape political life. Milli Genclik Vakfi (National Youth Foundation) acted in parallel to the RP’s youth groups, and aided the Islamists in their efforts to recruit party members among the young generations. The local chapter

⁹⁴ Interview with Oner, former Gebze mayor, in Gebze. May 2009.

⁹⁵ Interview with Dulger, Gebze, May 2009.

⁹⁶ A peripheral migrant neighborhood in the northern section of Gebze.

⁹⁷ Interview with Dulger, Gebze, May 2009.

of the MUSIAD (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association) consisted of local businessmen who owned small and medium sized businesses and sympathized with the Islamist movement. Under the local leadership of Ahmet Penbegullu, and with the help of civic associations, as well as Islamist activists that reached Gebze's migrant population on a continuing basis, the RP was able to transform local politics and wrench the mayor's office from the hands of the secularists in 1994. The Islamists never lost a single election in Gebze since.

Dulger's personal story parallels the transformation of the Islamist movement in Gebze. He rose from the neighborhood organizations of the RP to his party's local administrative committee. He belonged to a time when the Islamists grew in strength with their street-level activism and quotidian engagements among neighbors. When the RP's successor, the Virtue Party, was banned in 1999, Dulger chose to stay with the old-guard Islamists and joined the newly formed Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party). So did a significant number of his colleagues from the local chapter of Virtue. A relatively small number of reformist Islamists in Gebze established the local AKP branch under the supervision of the provincial AKP taskforce that operated out of the city of Izmit. The Gebze branch of the AKP was founded with the help of non-Islamist politicians who were strategically recruited into the new party.

As I describe in Chapter 3, the AKP's Gebze branch did not emerge out of the halls of the banned Virtue Party. Instead, it was formed by a mixed group of Islamist politicians and centrist local elites, who were recruited by a team set up by the provincial party organization. The strategic inclusion of centrist local notables during the formative phase of the AKP not only changed the local party cadre, but also reshaped the way the Islamists interacted with their potential voters.

In Gebze, the AKP's founders built their new party in the context of an already existing Islamist support network. Due to the efforts of Dulger and countless other activists, the Islamists already received extensive support from the migrant neighborhoods. Yet, the RP had not succeeded in

penetrating Gebze's central neighborhoods, which still supplied ample support to secularist parties. In line with the directives of the national party center, the founders of the AKP's Gebze branch reached out to local politicians previously associated with parties of the center-right, local businessmen, trade unionists who had conservative reputations, and civil society elites. A local politician formerly associated with the center-right Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party - ANAP) stated that he was recruited into the AKP by a small team of Islamists. Five politicians sent by the provincial AKP group came to his store and invited him to join their new party. He was told by Gokce, the leader of this taskforce, that he was among a small group of people who were carefully selected due to their "clean" names and favorable local reputations.⁹⁸ The same centrist politician later worked with Gokce and his team to recruit more local elites that had no previous association with the Islamists.

The AKP's recruitment process in Gebze was targeted – it was directed at and highly inclusive of centrist notables. The Islamists only pursued local elites who possessed socially conservative reputations. They excluded local elites who had previously been associated with secularist and social democratic parties,⁹⁹ left wing labor unions,¹⁰⁰ and secularist civil society associations.¹⁰¹ Among the local elites who did enjoy conservative reputations, the AKP recruited broadly. The top leadership cadres of the center-right parties were integrated into the AKP during its formative phase. Businessmen linked to the Gulen movement and local business associations received high ranking party offices. The founders of the AKP's Gebze branch also held individual and group meetings with merchants, civic activists, and trade unionists and brought them into the emerging moderate Islamist party.¹⁰² Strategic recruitment of local elites from different sectors of social

⁹⁸ Interview with Ozenir, a founding member of the AKP in Gebze. May 2009

⁹⁹ Particularly the CHP, SHP and the Demokratik Sol Party (Democratic Left Party - DSP).

¹⁰⁰ Unions that belonged to the left wing Devrimci Isci Sendikalari Konfederasyonui (Revolutionary Workers Unions Confederation – DISK).

¹⁰¹ Civil society organizations including the Ataturkcu Dusunce Dernegi (Ataturkish Thought Club - ADD) and the Cagdas Yasami Destekleme Dernegi (Association for the Support of Modern Life - CYDD).

¹⁰² Interviews with AKP officials Ozenir, Yetis, Okur, and local journalists in Gebze. May 2009.

influence led to a diverse local organization that included seasoned Islamist politicians, their former rivals from the DYP and the ANAP, labor unionists, businessmen and merchants.

As the AKP incorporated new, non-Islamist local elites into its organization, its relations with the electorate consequently shifted. The party maintained its predecessor's neighborhood organizations, but distanced itself from its ancillary civic organizations. The AKP's links to civil society grew stronger among business associations, but the new party abandoned the Islamic street-level activism of the Milli Genclik Vakfi and Islamist charity foundations. Its neighborhood organizations were tasked with engaging the community through one-on-one interactions. The AKP's women's group in particular was very active in terms of organizing home visits to potential supporters. However, its activists no longer sought to reframe social and political issues using a distinctly Islamic language. Instead, their new goal was to focus exclusively on forming personal relationships between the party and its supporters.¹⁰³

The supervision of the provincial party center and the business-like leadership of Okur ensured the emergence and maintenance of a cohesive local party organization. Okur received the support of the national party center, and the continuity in local leadership helped reduce the tendencies for factionalism within the party organization. The close cooperation between the Gebze branch, the Izmit provincial branch, and the national AKP organization in promotion and political nomination decisions reduced perceptions of favoritism and corruption within the party. Okur also institutionalized the activities of the AKP's neighborhood organizations. The officials at the Gebze branch compiled timely reports on every community outreach program conducted by the party's neighborhood organizations, and supervised their activities by organizing weekly meetings with the party's neighborhood leaders. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, cooperative relations between recruited elites, lack of within-party factionalism, and the establishment of an

¹⁰³ Focus group with members of the Gebze AKP Women's Organization. May 2009.

effective party apparatus are requirements of a cohesive party organization, and the Gebze branch emerged as a highly cohesive local organization. As a result, the AKP's Gebze branch was able to stand as a unified party in the face of competition, and effectively undertake community outreach programs.

The inclusion of centrist local politicians, economic notables, and civil society leaders helped expand the AKP's appeal among the residents of Gebze's central neighborhoods. The mass migration of centrist and conservative politicians and local elites into the AKP invalidated the geographic division in support for the AKP within Gebze. A local journalist explained this shift by stating that everybody who was anybody in the center-right had switched to the AKP in 2001.¹⁰⁴ The former local leader of the True Path Party (Dogru Yol Partisi - DYP), Eyup Ayar, was among the first to join the Islamists together with his colleagues. He was elected to the parliament from the AKP ticket in 2002. Ozenir and his colleagues from the ANAP had done the same. Except for a few dedicated politicians, the DYP and ANAP lost most of their leading cadres to the Islamists before the 2002 general election.¹⁰⁵ As a result, not only did the AKP expand its own organization with the inclusion of centrist elites, it also shrank the human resources of its competitors. The AKP thus expanded its appeal to all segments of Gebze's population.

The transformation of the Islamists from ardent community builders to a pragmatic party of local elites made them the dominant political force in Gebze. The AKP achieved its electoral success by building on the Islamist networks established by its predecessors. At the same time, the Islamists changed the way they related to potential voters. They recruited socially conservative local elites with a broad scope, and built a cohesive and dynamic local organization that could reach out to all segments of Gebze's society. By internalizing non-Islamist local notables, they

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Adnan Bey, a local journalist, in Gebze. May 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Adnan Bey, a local journalist, in Gebze. May 2009.

were gradually able to expand their electoral appeal beyond the core constituencies of the RP, and bring in the voters who formerly backed center-right parties into their local coalition.

Bingol: The Case of Continuity and Expansion in Party-Voter Linkages

When the young generation of Islamist reformers who founded the AKP decided to focus their efforts on recruiting new and centrist politicians, the idea of using elite brokerage for votes did not come as a surprise to the residents of Bingol. Politics in Bingol has historically been elite-based due to the prominence of local tribal structures. The local authority of clans and kinship networks has oscillated in response to changing state-clan relations since the mid-19th century “Tanzimat” (reorganization) reforms of the Ottoman Empire (Belge 2011, Van Bruinessen 1992, Yavuz 1998, 2001). However, since Turkey transitioned to multi-party political competition in 1945, the political significance of clan elites for inter-party competition has remained a constant feature of political life. Anticipating an upswing in the strategic importance of local clans, even the leaders of the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican Peoples Party-CHP) readjusted their antagonistic positions toward clan leaders before allowing multi-party elections to take place in 1945 (Belge 2011). Conservative parties of the center-right, particularly the succession of parties including the Demokrat Parti, the Adalet Partisi, and the Dogru Yol Partisi (Democrat Party, Justice Party, and True Path Party, respectively) relied heavily on clans for electoral support.

Islamist parties in Bingol have also cultivated links to Kurdish tribes starting with the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party - MNP) in 1970. The Solhan district, which lies in the southwest of the Bingol province, was particularly attractive for the Islamists of this era. One of the interviewees in the Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party - SP) in Bingol captured the significance of local clans and religious leaders, and how Islamists chose not to turn a blind eye to them:

“The memory of the one party state [1923-1945] is very powerful in this region. Particularly in [the district of] Solhan, people still remember the hanging of their grandfathers because of their role in the [Sheikh Said] rebellion. We cannot ignore their sensitivities, and this is the same when

it comes to their sheikhs and clan leaders. We cannot ignore the requests of the sheikhs and clan leaders.¹⁰⁶”

Solhan’s historical grievance with the central state institutions enabled the Islamists to cultivate links to its pious constituency. While the RP was expanding its support base in Solhan, the parties of the center right continued to dominate clan politics across much of Bingol until the mid-1990s. The DYP had formed a strong alliance with Haydar Baylaz, a charismatic politician from the Az clan. His personal influence was not limited to the south of the Bingol province where the Az clan is located. He also dominated the local politics of the city center through his energetic campaigning and personal connections.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, the Zigte clan was divided among the ANAP and the independent candidates who emerged from within the clan’s constituency. As the Turkish state increased its reliance on the village guards recruited from the Kurdish clans in its struggle with the PKK (Balta, 2004), the political significance of tribal structures remained central in Bingol. The competition between the parties of the center right and the Islamist RP was focused on which party would attract and maintain the support of influential clan elites.

The RP maintained its traditional roots in Bingol, while, at the same time, it was transforming itself into a party of the urban masses in large cities like Istanbul and Ankara. The Islamists continued to rely on their links to clan notables instead of forming activist networks and ancillary civil society organizations that could penetrate the capillaries of the society. Elite brokerage remained the central method of voter linkage for the RP.

When the young generation of Islamist reformists in Ankara decided that their new party - the AKP - would target the votes of centrist voters by bringing non-Islamist politicians into their organizations, the Bingol branch was already on this path. The clan elites that were embedded

¹⁰⁶ Interview with a SP official in Bingol, October 2008.

¹⁰⁷ Interviews with local journalists and AKP officials in Bingol, October 2008.

into the patronage networks of the DYP and the ANAP were its prime targets. While the parties of the center-right were shedding their links to their local brokers, the AKP was in a position to appeal to these notables with its clean reputation and political potential.

The founders of the AKP strategically incorporated Kurdish clan elites into their party in Bingol. The former leader of the local DYP chapter, Berdibek, had left his post and joined the embryonic AKP organization by early 2001. He had ties to the Az clan, which had recently lost its political standard bearer, Haydar Baylaz. Berdibek was also joined by Guler and Coskun, who were associated with the Taus clan. Together with the support of the Zigte clan politicians Anik and Ataoglu, the AKP became an alliance of populous Kurdish clans in Bingol. These local elites represented the most populous, politically significant clans of Bingol. They covered the city center, and the entire southern arc of the province. The strategic recruitment of clan elites that were previously associated with parties of the center right expanded the appeal of the Islamists beyond their core constituencies in Bingol. Clans that had supplied few votes to the Islamists in the past were integrated into their support network.

The AKP's party organization that emerged as a result of the political unification of local tribal elites was a united, cohesive organization. The Az, Zigte, and Taus clans were equally represented within the AKP branch. Parliamentary nominations and municipal council seats were allocated among the local AKP officials and recruited elites according to the logic of clan representation. The tribal elites also maintained the support of extended family networks within their own constituencies. The distribution of political influence among the province's populous Kurdish clans helped maintain unity and decreased the incentives for factionalism within the party organization.

Following the establishment of the party and its first electoral victory in the 2002 general elections, the AKP consolidated its ties to the local clan structures through strategic service

provision. The southern, populous clans of Bingol were already familiar with the practice of patronage-seeking. The Zigte clan had become particularly adept at negotiating with political parties for benefits in return for the allegiance of its rich voter base.¹⁰⁸ As the party in power, the AKP was in a position to deliver on its promise and supply selective services to the regions where the local clans had allied themselves with the party. The stark distinctions between the northern regions of Bingol, where the clan networks tended to support the pro-Kurdish candidates, and the southern clan areas in terms of social service provision by the state reinforced the negotiated links between the AKP and the clan elites. Local journalists and civil society activists have consistently reported that the city center and the villages of the southern clans consistently receive more state investment in infrastructure compared to the northern regions.

Elite brokerage between political parties and voters is a common practice in Bingol due to the persistence of clan networks in political life. The AKP continued with the voter-linkage strategy of its predecessors while taking advantage of the availability of local elites that were shedding their ties to center-right parties. The Islamists expanded on the links already established by their predecessors, and recruited a broad range of clan notables particularly from the populous southern regions of Bingol.

Odemis: The Case of Party-Voter Linkage Formation

The development of Islamist party-voter linkages in Odemis followed a very different pattern compared to that of Gebze and Bingol. Unlike in Gebze, the AKP in Odemis did not inherit an already established Islamist support network. Neither did it have close contacts with influential local notables like its Bingol branch. In Odemis, the AKP rose as a political power by forming new links to potential voters in a context where its predecessors had remained largely disconnected from the society.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with a local journalist and civil society activist in Bingol, October 2008.

As Chapter 5 shows, Odemis was traditionally a stronghold of centrist politics. The city's rise to national prominence occurred even before the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, when the nascent Turkish nationalist movement was waging a war against the Greek occupation in the Aegean region. A number of figures who were central to Turkey's War of Independence were from Odemis. "Koca Doktor" Bengisu (Great Doctor Bengisu) helped organized resistance forces in Odemis and later became its first Republican mayor. Sukru Saracoglu, another colleague of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and a long-serving statesman, was born and raised in the city. Thus, the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican Peoples Party - CHP) was firmly entrenched in Odemis from the early days of the Turkish Republic.

After the transition to multi-party elections, the center-right Demokrat Parti (Democrat Party - DP) and its successors also found ample support from the voters. The DP's socially conservative, rural support base extended into the Western Aegean region and challenged the dominance of the CHP. Although the party names changed over the second half of the twentieth century, the rivalry between the secularist-nationalist CHP and the conservative DP and its successors remained a constant feature of political life in Odemis and in its surrounding regions. The Islamist parties that emerged in 1970 and continued to evolve since then found no significant support from Odemis until the establishment of the AKP.

The radical Islamist RP was at its peak during the mid-1990s. It held the municipalities of Istanbul and Ankara, and numerous local governments across the country. Its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, was the prime minister from 1996 to 1997. At a time when radical political Islam in Turkey was at its peak, the RP remained a small, marginal party in Odemis. Although the city had an Islamist party branch since the 1970s, it was what the locals referred to as a "signpost party." The phrase signified a party that lacked supporters and was marginal. Its small group of dedicated followers was organized around a mosque community in the old "carsi" (bazaar). The mosque at

the center of the old bazaar was the social and religious hub of the artisans and merchants who owned shops in the vicinity. It was these artisans who founded the Islamist party, and continued to be its main constituency.

Outside the old bazaar, the presence of the Islamists was hardly felt. The competition between the center-right Dogru Yol Partisi (True Path Party – DYP) and the center-left CHP dominated local politics. The 1994 local election was won by Munir Bezmez from the DYP ticket. Bezmez was an architect who owned a private business in Odemis, and he ran on a secular platform emphasizing urban development issues.¹⁰⁹ He competed with CHP’s Eris, who would be elected the next mayor in 1999. Eris was a former teacher who had long been a CHP sympathizer. His approach to campaigning involved riding his bicycle across town and getting to know as many voters as possible.¹¹⁰ The civil competition between Bezmez and Eris was testament to the low stakes in Odemis’ political life. The DYP and the CHP were long-term, stable rivals, and the RP’s anti-systemic rhetoric had not taken root.

The establishment of the AKP’s Odemis branch in 2001 did not lead local politicians to reassess their calculations. It was formed by the RP’s Islamist politicians, lacked any meaningful connections to a wide constituency, and appeared as the continuation of a failed and marginal party. The new party did attract some attention from the disgruntled members of the local Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party - ANAP), but for the most part it remained dominated by the “Milli Gorus” (national outlook) politicians of the former RP. During this period, the Gebze and the Bingol branches of the AKP were expanding their political cadres with the inclusion of new local elites. However, the Odemis chapter was unable to branch out until after 2002.

The 2002 general elections was a lost cause for the Islamists in Odemis. The AKP trailed both the CHP and the DYP at the polls. At a time when its national party center won the elections and

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Bezmez, Odemis. February 2009.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Eris, Odemis. February, 2009.

formed the government, the AKP's performance in Odemis was weak. The local party organization saw this failure as an opportunity to restructure its organization and establish new links to the electorate. At the same time, the victors of the local electoral race, the DYP, faced a bitter reality. Their party had all but collapse at the national level. Soon after the elections, a number of DYP politicians that comprised of the internal opposition within the local DYP organization quit their party and joined ranks with the AKP. The strategy of recruiting politicians who were in opposition positions within their parties brought new joiners from the DYP, ANAP, as well as the Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party - MHP).

The founders of the AKP also targeted local merchants and civil society leaders for recruitment. The economic elites of Odemis were merchants who traded on agricultural inputs and outputs. They did not possess the capital the industrialists of Gebze had built, but their close links to agricultural producers made them an asset for the AKP. At the same time, the Islamists also built close ties to the local chapter of the Chamber of Commerce. Although the Chamber of Commerce was not allowed by law to take sides among political parties, the AKP received unofficial support from its managers.

The Islamists in Odemis were not content with attracting only one type of local elite, such as local politicians. They complemented and enlarged their incorporation efforts to include diverse sectors of social influence, such as merchants and civic leaders. The commonality between these recruits was their central locations in local social networks and their socially conservative reputations.

During this period, the local branch of the AKP also built a dynamic, cohesive local organization. The lack of an established Islamist network in Odemis meant that the AKP had to assemble it from scratch. In order to complement its centrist local elite recruitment, the party modeled its local organization similar to a social club rather than an Islamist outreach group. Its women's and

youth groups brought together members who were interested in community service, helping the needy and fulfilling a social function rather than in an ideological struggle.¹¹¹

Within two years after the 2002 general elections, Odemis' AKP branch had become quite indistinguishable from the local DYP or ANAP branches in their hay-days. The Islamists who founded the party had become a minority in it. The new recruits from center-right parties and the local economic elites staffed central positions in the party hierarchy. Together with the newly invigorated local party organization that engaged in civic activities, the new leaders of the AKP situated their party into the center-right in Odemis' political spectrum. They formed new ties to the electorate in ways similar to how DYP and ANAP had done it before. An Islamist party bereft of its ideological content, the local AKP branch looked and behaved like any other center-right party in Odemis.

To sum up, the electoral victories of Turkey's reformist Islamists were far from certain when Erdogan, Gul, and their comrades decided to form their new party just before 2001. The variation in the AKP's electoral performance across very similar cities shows that the Islamists had to compete with formidable opponents. They displayed impressive flexibility and adaptation skills in cities where they outperformed their opponents. They faced very different sets of social contexts in locations ranging from the Kurdish cities of Eastern Turkey to the migrant-dominated industrial hubs surrounding Istanbul. Furthermore, the AKP was a new party with considerable historical baggage that could have bogged down the best efforts of its founders. Two of its predecessors had been banned by the Constitutional Court just three years prior to its establishment. Its leader, Erdogan was imprisoned. The Turkish Military was overtly critical and often hostile to the Islamist movement. The party leaders decided to moderate their ideology, but it was not clear if the Turkish public would find this change credible, or desirable. Despite the

¹¹¹ Interview with the members of the AKP women's organization, Odemis. February 2009.
Focus group with the leaders of the AKP youth organization, Odemis. February 2009.

challenges it faced at the outset, the AKP was able to transform itself from a party that advocated radical social transformation with the help of an extensive Islamist activist network, to a pragmatic party that appealed to a wider constituency through a socially conservative ideology, and inclusive and effective local organizations.

The diversity of contexts within which the AKP transformed itself and competed in elections required localized strategies on the part of Islamist politicians. In Gebze, where the RP had already built an extensive Islamist activist network, the AKP *transformed* its party-voter linkages from grassroots mobilization to elite brokerage. This transformation helped the local AKP chapter appeal to a broader constituency that included voters that would have otherwise supported parties of the center-right. The Islamists also targeted centrist voters in Odemis, but in a completely different context. Due to the lack of an Islamist grassroots movement, the AKP *formed new links* to the local voter base where none had existed before. The branch used the social ties of the economic elites, civic notables, and centrist politicians who had recently joined the AKP. The Islamists in Bingol were already familiar with the strategy of building ties to the electorate through local notables. Their predecessors, as well as the ANAP, DYP, MHP and the CHP, pursued a similar approach to party-voter linkages due to the strength of clan ties. The founders of the AKP extended the relations the RP had built with clan leaders and heads of extended family networks. The inclusion of tribal elites from the Az, Zigte, Taus, and eventually the Pog clans expanded the electoral reach of the AKP deep into the social fabric of Bingol.

Electoral success for the AKP resulted from strategic local elite recruitment and cohesive party organizations. As the experience of Bingol, Odemis, and Gebze illustrate, the AKP followed multiple paths to reach this outcome. The specificities of each path depended on the social context of each city, but the outcome hinged on the way pragmatic Islamist politicians interacted with local social structures.

The Negative Cases: the AKP's Consistent Electoral Failures in Kinik and Malazgirt

The second section of this chapter introduces two new cases to evaluate my explanation. I have demonstrated that across cities that share relevant macro-economic characteristics, the AKP won municipal and national elections where its (1) local elite recruitment was strategic, and (2) party organization was cohesive. The previous section of this chapter has also shown that the Islamists achieved electoral success in diverse local contexts in which they got their elite recruitment and branch organizations right. Consequently, my theory predicts that when the Islamists fail to incorporate local notables strategically, and at the same time fail to build cohesive party structures, they should be electorally uncompetitive. This is indeed the case. Both of the causal factors underlined in this dissertation were coded negative in Kinik and Malazgirt. As a result, the AKP lost all local and national elections which it contested in these two locations. Strategic local notable incorporation and cohesive party organizations are individually necessary, jointly sufficient causes of Islamist electoral success.

Table 5.3: Electoral Outcome for the AKP in Kinik and Malazgirt

	Kinik	Malazgirt
Cohesiveness	X	X
Strategic Elite Recruitment	X	X
Outcome	Failure	Failure

Kinik is located in the northern part of the Aegean region, in Western Turkey. It is a small, mostly rural city with more than thirty villages surrounding the town center. Agriculture and mining are the two significant sectors of an otherwise stagnant town economy. Farming permeates the life of all of its inhabitants. Every resident's economic well-being is tied to the harvest at least as a secondary source of income.¹¹² The level of private investment is very low

¹¹² Interview with a local journalist, Kinik, Turkey. March 2009.

and almost always directed at the family farm. Merchants trading on agricultural inputs and outputs constitute the economic elite since there are no other businesses or businessmen in the city.¹¹³

Kinik is ethnically homogenous. Ethnic Turks account for the overwhelming majority of its population. On the other hand, it is characterized by a heterogeneous religious composition. A large Alevi minority resides in one neighborhood of the town center, and in approximately half of all its villages. Religious heterogeneity, on the other hand, is not an obstacle to the AKP's electoral appeal, as is evidenced by the party's performance in other heterogeneous cities in Turkey. The presence of the large Alevi minority plays a major role in local political contestation.

Traditionally, dominant political cleavages in Kinik were organized around the Sunni-Alevi religious divide, and the local – immigrant demographic split.¹¹⁴ The polarization of the residents among the local versus immigrant identities was more pronounced before the 1970s, when the Turkish immigrants from the Balkans were newly settling the area.¹¹⁵ Unlike Corlu and Gebze, Kinik did not receive new immigrants from Bulgaria during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In time, the relations between the locals and the Balkan Turks normalized, leaving the Sunni-Alevi divide the main line of social cleavage. Similar to the Alevi minority across Turkey, Kinik's Alevi community has historically supported secularist parties. The CHP consistently benefitted from their votes. The Sunnis were less homogenous in their support for specific political parties. However, with the Alevi minority swelling the ranks of the CHP, the constituencies of the center-right parties consisted mostly of the local Sunni Turks.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Interviews with local journalists and political officials of the CHP, AKP and the DP. Kinik, Turkey. March 2009.

¹¹⁵ Interview with the leader of the CHP's women's group, who is also an immigrant from the Balkans. Kinik, Turkey. March 2009.

¹¹⁶ Interview with a Demokrat Parti official, Kinik, Turkey. March 2009.

Similar to Salihli and Odemis, the other two Western Aegean cases analyzed in this dissertation, Kinik consistently voted centrist parties into power. The enduring rivalry between the CHP and the successors of the center-right Demokrat Parti (Democrat Party - DP) defines the recent history of Kinik's local politics. The stability of partisan choices gave few opportunities to parties representing alternative visions for societal change to take root. Islamist parties were particularly weak. Even when the radical Islamist Welfare Party (RP) was at its zenith in the mid-1990s, the RP could not make a dent in the support bases of the center-right and secularist parties in Kinik. The Islamists ranked fifth during the national elections of 1995, trailing two center-right and two secularist parties.

Despite the weakness of the radical Islamists at the local level, the founders of the AKP could have turned their fortunes around. The AKP was able to surpass all its rivals and win local and national elections in other cities where the Islamist movement had also been weak. As I have discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the AKP built a composite local organization with the recruitment of centrist politicians and local notables in Odemis, and absorbed the support networks of its center-right rivals. A similar strategy in Kinik would involve the recruitment of local politicians who were previously active in center-right parties, local merchants, and representatives of the Alevi community in order to challenge the monopoly of the CHP over the support of the religious minority. However, the local AKP branch in Kinik failed to construct a viable local coalition with its non-core constituencies, and continued to lose local and national elections to its competitors.

The process that led to this failure followed a familiar pattern. The local AKP organization was initially dominated by hardliners, and did not recruit local notables until after the 2004 local elections. When the party began to incorporate new elites, it did so with a narrow scope. Individuals with strong local reputations and established political capital who could have joined

the AKP were left out. As the party gradually integrated new notables into its organization, the recruits promptly separated into factions. While these factions sought to undermine each other, they debilitated the party organization from behaving as a united actor in the local community. The failure of the AKP to recruit local notables strategically and to form a cohesive party organization resulted in defeat for the Islamists in local and national elections.

The founders of the AKP in Kinik were experienced Islamist politicians who had been active in the Welfare Party (RP). Similar to Odemis and Salihli, the RP branch in Kinik remained a “signpost party,” devoid of any significant connections to the electorate, throughout the 1980s and 1990s when its colleagues were establishing vast Islamist networks in cities like Istanbul and Ankara. The party was confined to a small group of dedicated Islamists who had little impact over the electoral choices of Kinik’s residents. The AKP emerged out of the local branch of the banned Welfare and Virtue Parties. The Islamist leadership of the local organization remained intact during the formative years of 2001 and 2002. The centrist politicians showed little interest in joining the AKP, and the party’s Islamist leaders made no discernible effort to reshape their local organization.¹¹⁷ The power of the Alevi minority as well as the entrenched support bases of center-right parties made it unlikely for the Islamists to grow in local influence.

The leaders of the AKP could have shifted this perception by incorporating new local elites after the national electoral success of their party in 2002. Unlike in the Odemis branch, however, change was slow and very selective. The Islamists started bringing in new politicians into their organizations very gradually. The clique that held the party’s local leadership maintained its hold over the organization by limiting local recruitment, and channeling it into the lower ranks of the party organization.

¹¹⁷ Interview with a nationalist activist who later joined the AKP, Kinik, Turkey. March 2009.

The 2004 local elections provided an opportunity to the AKP to switch its strategy towards inclusiveness by nominating non-Islamist, centrist politicians to the mayor's office and to the municipal council. During this period, some of the most experienced and well known centrist politicians of Kinik started seeking the AKP ticket for local office. Among them, Rifat Ates stood out. Ates was the leader of the local Dogru Yol Partisi (True Path Party - DYP) branch. He had served as Kinik's mayor twice, during the 1980s and once again in the second half of the 1990s. He could have helped the AKP expropriate the support network of the DYP by switching his allegiance. Yet without much explanation, his request was denied by the local AKP leadership. This decision would turn out to be a strategic mistake for the Islamists. Leaving Ates out of the party caused unintended consequences that hurt the AKP's chances at the polls.

After Ates was denied entry into the AKP, he returned to the DYP. Despite the national level collapse of his party, he was determined to put up a struggle by rallying his proverbial troops in local elections. A DYP official described Ates' political influence by using a well-known Turkish saying: "If he nominated his hat for office, the hat would get over 1500 votes," meaning that his loyal voters would not abandon him in elections. "When he ran for the mayor's office with an ANAP ticket in the 1980s, even we [as DYP activists] voted for him."¹¹⁸ Indeed, Ates went on to revitalize his party at the local level. He bolstered the DYP's links to civic and corporatist organizations. The DYP's local politicians included the leader of the Esnaf ve Zanaatkarlar Odasi (Chamber of Merchants and Artisans), and the leader of the Kamyoncular Dernegi (Truck Drivers Association).¹¹⁹ Furthermore, Ates sought to increase the DYP's votes among the Alevi minority by bringing in the leader of a Cem Evi (Cem House – Alevi place of worship) into his party organization. As the DYP bolstered its links to civic organizations and the Alevi minority, the local notables who could have otherwise switched their allegiances toward the AKP remained in

¹¹⁸ Interview with a DYP official, Kinik, Turkey. March 2009.

¹¹⁹ Interview with a nationalist activist who later joined the AKP, Kinik, Turkey. March 2009

its competitor. Despite the collapse of the DYP at the national level, its local resurgence under the leadership of Ates attracted the votes of centrist constituencies and thus undermined the local AKP branch.

The seasoned Islamists in the AKP still declined to let go of their leadership positions. Yasin Gunes, an Islamist politician who had been active in the local RP organization during the 1990s remained the party leader until 2008. The local AKP branch became a hotbed of small factions that precluded within-party unity during this period. Some local elites that sought political nominations from the AKP unsuccessfully during the 2004 local elections became disgruntled and left the party immediately. Others remained within the party but were courted by its competitors in the next electoral cycle. For instance, the mayoral candidate of the Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party) in 2009 was a local politician who had previously sought nomination from the AKP in 2004. The local AKP branch in Kinik lacked the continuity and the unity that characterized the successful local organizations of the Islamists.

The AKP also failed to build a functioning local apparatus. An activist in the party's women's group stated that they tried to reach out to voters, but their efforts mostly took place right before the elections and did not extend to the period in-between elections.¹²⁰ In contrast, the AKP's women's organization in Odemis and Salihli organized institutionalized home visits, charity drives and tea nights throughout the year in order to establish and maintain personal relations between the AKP and its voters. The youth organization of the Islamist party also lacked dynamism and vitality. It did not take part in voter outreach programs. Unlike the AKP's youth organization in Odemis, the Kinik branch did not build a regular role for the youth group in its local activities.

¹²⁰ Interview with a local AKP activist who works with the party's women's group, Kinik, Turkey. March 2009.

The AKP's failure in strategic local elite recruitment and the lack of cohesiveness of its party apparatus led the Islamists to remain uncompetitive in Kinik. While the AKP was divided within and had to compete with a resurgent DYP for the support of centrist Sunni voters, the CHP reaped the benefits. The secularists maintained close ties to the Alevi minority and the Sunni voters at the town center.¹²¹ As a result, the AKP lost every single local and national election it contested in Kinik.

The AKP's Thwarted Growth in Malazgirt

Another Islamist electoral failure predicted by my theory occurred in Malazgirt. Just as in Kinik, the local AKP branch in Malazgirt failed to recruit local notables strategically, and was unsuccessful in building a cohesive party organization. The absence of these two crucial factors meant that the AKP's efforts to expand its vote-share among non-core constituencies were fruitless. The Islamists consistently lost elections to their rival, the Kurdish National Movement.

Similar to Kinik, Bingol and Mus, the city of Malazgirt is small in size, and has a rural population engaged in agriculture. It is located in Eastern Turkey; where it is geographically proximate to the cities of Mus and Bingol. It supplies migrants to large Turkish cities and to European countries. Kurds comprise the majority of Malazgirt's population. Small groups of Arab and Turkish families also live in the town and its surrounding villages. The overwhelming majority of its religiously homogenous population is Sunni Muslim. Ethnic identity plays a major role in Malazgirt's local political arena. The legal and illegal wings of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement (KNM) have an extensive support network in the city.

Similar to Bingol, the central political rivalry in Malazgirt is between the identity politics of the KNM and the clan-based politics of the national-level parties. The sources of allegiance to the KNM take their roots not only from a shared sense of ethnic identity, but also from organic links

¹²¹ Interview with a local journalist, Kinik, Turkey. March 2009.

to the Partiya Kerkaren Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers Party – PKK). The illegal armed wing of the KNM has an extensive support network in Malazgirt that is bolstered by the presence of thousands of Malazgirt youth in the PKK’s guerilla forces.¹²² Families that have sons and daughters “in the mountains” tend to be very sensitive about military operations against the PKK, as well as the policies of the Turkish state vis-à-vis the Kurdish minority.¹²³ These families constitute the core constituency of the KNM in Malazgirt. Their support for the pro-Kurdish candidates transcends the local authority of clan structures.

The extensive reach of the KNM’s support network not only transformed the small town into a stronghold of pro-Kurdish politics, but has also made it very difficult for other political parties to mobilize voters in the area. Until the emergence of the AKP in 2001, no other national level party competed against the parties of the KNM as a united front. The AKP could have challenged the dominance of the KNM as it did in Bingol. However, the inability of the Islamists to unite local clan leaders in a front against the Kurdish National Movement, and the debilitating factionalism among recruited elites prevented the AKP from outperforming its rival in local and national elections.

The Islamist parties that preceded the AKP had built a modest local organization in Malazgirt during the late 1980s and the 1990s. The Refah Partisi (Welfare Party - RP) and the Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party - VP) established links with local tribes in the area, but they had to compete with the parties of the center right for their support.¹²⁴ At the same time, the influence of the KNM over the local Kurdish community was growing as more of the city’s young were joining the guerrilla movement.¹²⁵ When the AKP was established in 2001, local clans were still divided among the Islamists and center-right parties. Moreover, clan elites were losing their clout over the

¹²² Interview with the leader of the local DTP branch, Malazgirt, Turkey. November 2008.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Interview with local AKP politicians, Malazgirt, Turkey. November 2008.

¹²⁵ Interview with the leader of the local DTP branch, Malazgirt, Turkey. November 2008.

families that had relatives who joined the PKK. While the Kurdish National Movement formed an identity-based movement with strong, organic links to local families, the other parties, including that of the Islamists, became arenas where clan elites competed for political influence. The AKP could not form a wide coalition among local elites during its formative year of 2001. It was dominated by a small clan fraction, and remained as one of multiple national level parties in which local clan elites competed with each other.

The AKP lost the national elections in 2002 to the pro-Kurdish candidates in Malazgirt. Yet the party had won an astounding victory at the national level. When the reformist Islamists formed the government in Ankara, its local party organizations immediately became more attractive to local elites. The AKP's Malazgirt party branch experienced renewed interest following the elections. Individuals who were previously embedded into the patronage networks of the center-right Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party - ANAP) and the Dogru Yol Partisi (True Path Party - DYP) began to seek membership and official status within the AKP. On the other hand, the small clan fraction that controlled the party branch sought to preserve its influence in the organization. Two interviewees who described themselves as members of an oppositional group within the Malazgirt AKP branch interpreted this process with the following words:

“When the AKP formed the government, many new people wanted to join the party. The people who controlled the party signed their own men first. They wanted to own the party here. They brought in the people who were close to them so that they could control the organization. They did not really care about getting more votes as long as they could control the organization.”¹²⁶

At a time when a stake at the AKP had become a hot commodity, the Islamists who founded the local party in Malazgirt were struggling to preserve their privileged positions. The new local elites that gradually joined the party were relegated to lower positions in the official hierarchy.

¹²⁶ Interview with local AKP politicians, Malazgirt, Turkey. November 2008.

The rivalry among clan notables over the control of the AKP branch was a small-scale affair in a city that was considered a stronghold of the KNM. Yet the rivalry among clan elites over status within the party was enough to turn some clans away from the Islamists. Instead of seeking to expand their reach across clan lines by including new elites, the founders of the AKP in Malazgirt struggled to keep them out. The lack of inclusiveness in local elite recruitment meant that the AKP alienated some clan elites while bringing in others.

Although the AKP's local notable incorporation was not inclusive, the Berjeri, Karaca, and Markori clans did place some of their elites into the Islamist party. The contested process through which they joined the AKP precluded the possibility of internal harmony. The newly recruited local elites continued to struggle for more prestigious positions in the party branch. The competition over status and office within the AKP prevented the party from acting as a united organization in the local community. One of the implications of turmoil was the limited physical accessibility of the party organization. The local party branch was locked down, with no activists or politicians in sight, for months at a time in Malazgirt.¹²⁷ While the KNM was actively courting voters in Malazgirt's town center, as well as in its villages, the AKP's doors were literally locked. Unlike in most other cities examined in this dissertation, the AKP branch in Malazgirt did not implement community outreach programs at the neighborhood or the village level. The Islamists were particularly weak in terms of their access to the villages. The strong support network of the KNM and the within party conflict among recruited local elites prevented the Islamists from mobilizing potential supporters in Malazgirt's rural hinterland.

The exclusion of local clan elites from the party organization following the 2002 general elections, and the intense struggles among the recruited elites for positions of influence within the party paralyzed the AKP. Meanwhile, the pro-Kurdish politicians preserved their links to the

¹²⁷ Interviews with local politicians within the AKP and the DTP in Malazgirt, Turkey. November 2008.

families who had relatives fighting in the PKK ranks. As a result, the AKP consistently lost local and national elections to the parties of the Kurdish National Movement in Malazgirt.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that while differences in strategic local notable incorporation and cohesive party organization explain the variation in Islamist electoral success, the local context shapes the way the party pursues its electoral strategies. In the three cases examined in the first section, the AKP succeeded in expanding its electoral share beyond its core constituencies in diverse social settings. The Islamists transformed their links to the electorate by switching from the use of grassroots mobilization techniques and ancillary civic associations to elite brokerage in Gebze. This transition enabled the AKP to reach out to centrist constituencies that had never supported them before. In Bingol, the Islamists maintained and expanded their links to clan elites. In Odemis, the founders of the AKP built an entirely new support network by appealing to the constituencies that used to support center-right parties. The lack of Islamist activism and the weakness of the AKP's radical predecessors in this city did not prevent the party from winning local and national elections. The myriad ways through which the Islamists managed to construct popular local coalitions and dynamic local organizations attests to the agency, creativity, and adaptability of the Islamists when they adopt pragmatic political goals.

However, the AKP did not replicate the same success in other cities across Turkey. In Kinik, the unwillingness of the old guard Islamist elite to share power with new recruits led to the local level resurgence of a competitor in the center-right: the Demokrat Parti (Democrat Party - DP). The local DP leader's success in enlisting multiple centrist elites who could have otherwise helped transform the fortunes of the AKP divided the potential constituency of the Islamists. The secularist party reaped the benefits of the division in the center right, and won all the local and national elections it contested in Kinik. In cases where a single individual or a small clique

monopolizes power within the party organization, intervention by the national party center may help foster more inclusive elite recruitment strategies.

In Malazgirt, the intense struggles between clan elites over the domination of the local AKP branch left the party paralyzed. The AKP both figuratively and literally shut its doors, and could not campaign openly in the city or in its villages. The lack of inclusiveness in elite recruitment and the factionalism within the party organization cost the AKP every local and national election in which it took part in Malazgirt.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion: Rethinking the Linkages Between Islamist Parties and Voters

The preceding chapters addressed two important empirical puzzles: First, why did the AKP's electoral success vary significantly across cities in Turkey that share numerous macro-social characteristics? Second, what explains the AKP's electoral victories across cities that are very dissimilar to each other in terms of social, economic, ethnic and cultural characteristics? The recent literature on Islamist movements and parties has proposed several socio-economic factors to explain their growing appeal. The comparative framework at the core of this dissertation has enabled me to discount these explanations. I demonstrated that (1) migration patterns, (2) levels of economic development, (3) the emergence of the urban poor and shanty towns surrounding large cities, (4) the prospering of small and medium sized business groups, as well as several other factors commonly prioritized in the literature cannot account for the sub-national variation in Islamist electoral success. Instead, I have shown that the internal composition of Islamist party organizations at the local level and the way they recruit local notables to form new links to local communities determine whether or not the Islamists can compete successfully with their political rivals.

This dissertation challenges our understanding of the sources of Islamist appeal in Muslim majority societies. I argue against multiple strains in the literature that link the growth and popularization of Islamist parties to macro-social processes. Essentialist conceptions that link Muslim societies to political Islam due to their supposedly inherent cultural traits not only fail to acknowledge the multiplicity of identities Muslims hold, but also over-predict the instances of Islamist electoral success (Lewis 1990; Huntington 1992). The socio-economic theories of

Islamist mobilization that have become dominant in the literature also fail to disaggregate the support structures of Islamist parties and account for sub-national variation in their appeal (Ansari 1984; Onis 1997; Zubaida 2000; Gulalp 2001; White 2002; Kepel 2002; Tugal, 2002 2007; Nasr 2005, 2009; Yavuz 2009; Eligur 2010).

My theory fills this gap in the literature by providing a contextually bounded agential explanation. I have demonstrated that Islamist parties are able to expand their electoral appeal toward non-core constituencies when they incorporate centrist local elites comprehensively across different sectors of social influence, and when they construct cohesive party organizations. Strategic local elite recruitment and the cohesive local party organizations are individually necessary and jointly sufficient variables that explain Islamist electoral success as well as failure at the sub-national level.

My theory of how Islamists successfully appeal to individuals who had not supported them before emphasizes political agency on the part of the Islamists within the diverse contexts they encounter at the local level. Social context of local politics provides both limitations and opportunities. The sources of social influence that elites enjoy at the local level, as well as their availability for recruitment and freedom of movement across political parties depend on the context. Whether or not the Islamists choose to pursue centrist elite recruitment, and whether they can provide or promote local leadership that can maintain the diverse interests and ambitions of recruited elites without descending into factionalism and corrosive conflict depends on the agency of seasoned Islamists as well as the newly recruited centrist elites. The empirical evidence I bring from the provincial organizations of the AKP demonstrates how this uneven and non-linear process takes place across different contexts within the same country.

In this dissertation, I have employed concepts that are central to the party-voter linkages literature to understand an Islamist party's emerging links to new constituencies (Kitschelt 2000; Kitschelt

and Wilkinson 2007; Stokes 2005, 2007, 2009; Przeworski and Sprague 1986). The concepts of core and non-core constituencies, swing voters, and programmatic and clientelist appeals are central to my explanation of how the AKP reached out to Turkey's political center. Much of the literature on political Islam focuses on its social movement aspects at the expense of a systematic account of how Islamist parties strategize, behave, and change (Wickham 2002; White 2002; Hafez 2003; Wiktorowicz 2004; Eligur 2010). This gap in our understanding is partly due to the exclusion of many Islamist movements from regular channels of political influence under the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East. However, the experience of the Turkish Islamists demonstrates that political Islam is not always pushed outside the regular political arena by secular and authoritarian regimes. Despite the intermittent repression they have faced at the hands of Turkey's laicist military and civilian bureaucratic institutions in the past, Islamist parties have competed in elections since 1970 and have been in elected executive and legislative office since 2002.

Furthermore, the potential for the emergence of electoral regimes across the Middle East following the Arab Spring of 2011 makes it even more urgent for us to understand how Islamists could behave if they choose to and were able to develop into regular political parties, participate in elections, and seek office by increasing their vote shares. My dissertation contributes to our understanding of political Islam by analyzing Islamist parties as strategic actors. Further research is needed to expand our grasp of how Islamist parties form new linkages with voters in Muslim majority states that are moving towards adopting competitive electoral regimes.

Conversely, my dissertation contributes to our understanding of party-voter linkages by bringing in the Islamist parties to a field that has largely neglected them. The pioneers of this literature have focused on the programmatic and clientelist links between voters and European Social Democratic Parties (Przeworski and Sprague 1986; Kitschelt 1994; Kitschelt and Wilkinson

2007) and Christian Democratic Parties (Kalyvas and van Kersbergen 2010; Kalyvas 2000). Recent attempts to employ this framework outside the European context have produced detailed analyses of party-voter linkage transformations in Latin America and South Asia (Luna 2010; 2007; Thachil 2010a; 2009; 2010b). This dissertation's focus on Turkey, a country that lies at the intersection of the Middle East and Eastern Europe, and the focus on a moderate Islamist party contributes to this literature by expanding its scope into a region and a type of political organization that has been ignored in the past. This research also moves beyond the common practice of treating Islamist parties as unique organizations. One of the central implications of my thesis is that once Islamist parties choose to expand their vote share in a competitive electoral system by appealing to new constituencies, they strategize, behave, and sometimes falter just like any other party going through a similar movement from the fringes of the political system to its mainstream. We need further research on cross-regional comparisons of party-voter linkage transformations as parties situated around different social cleavages move from the fringes towards the mainstream of political life.

This research also contributes to our understanding of *how* Islamist parties change in terms of ideology and strategy. Recent studies of political Islam have increasingly focused on the distinction between its moderate and radical forms, and the conditions under which Islamist groups can move from one to the other. Moderation of Islamist movements and parties is the central concern of much of this literature. The "inclusion-moderation hypothesis" posits that once Islamists are included into the pluralist political process, they will become more moderate (Schwedler 2011). For some scholars, moderation entails the decision to abandon violence in favor of non-violent means in pursuit of political goals (Ashour 2007). Others conceptualize moderation as a process whereby Islamist groups abandon rigid and intolerant viewpoints and become more open to opposing perspectives (Schwedler 2006; Somer 2011). In terms of political behavior, this includes accommodating the demands of existing state institutions (Tezcur 2009)

and opposing ideologies (Turam 2007). Moderation also implies a transition in party ideology, as Islamist groups come to embrace democratic principles such as political pluralism and citizenship rights (Wickham 2004, cited in Schwedler 2011; Somer 2011).

My research addressed the next logical but neglected question: How do Islamists appeal to new constituencies *after* the national party elites decide to moderate their ideology? The preceding chapters elaborated on how the AKP constructed new party-voter linkages with non-core constituencies, and the impact of its local electoral strategies on Islamist electoral success. I thereby focused on the mechanisms through which the AKP achieved moderation by forming new links to non-Islamist voters.

This dissertation has also identified a weakness in the literature that examines the inclusion-moderation hypothesis. The growing body of work centered on this thesis has not addressed the unevenness of moderation within parties, across different sub-national regions. It treats Islamist parties as monolithic organizations. It also does not identify or evaluate how provincial party organizations diverge from the expressed policies and ideological positions of the national party center. Consequently, this literature privileges the preferences and behavior of the national party organization over the complexity of regional party politics. The focus on the national party organizations and the party elites in the pinnacle of these hierarchies is understandable, since most significant decisions regarding political strategy and expressed policy preferences are made by the top party elite. However, the failure to examine the ways in which provincial party organizations can diverge from the positions adopted by their leaders in the capitol limits our understanding of the processes through which Islamist parties change in terms of ideology and strategy. The contexts within which provincial party elites engage in vote-seeking and policy-making differ significantly from those faced by the national party center and other provincial branches. Local politicians respond to electoral opportunities and the directives of their superiors

in different ways. Diversity in local contexts, available political opportunities, and in the preferences of local politicians lead to variation in the adoption of ideological and strategic shifts that originate at the national party center. Moderation is far from being a uniform process. It is uneven and non-linear across both time and space.

By focusing our attention on the local electoral strategies of Islamist parties, my dissertation informs us about the impact of party-voter linkages on the quality of democracy that are often invisible to observers of national-level politics. One of the most significant achievements of political Islamist movements in Muslim majority states was their ability to mobilize civic activism at the grassroots level, which bolstered citizen participation in the political process (White 2002; Wickham 2002). The AKP's adoption of an elite-based voter-linkage strategy improved its access to centrist voters that were not ideologically inclined to vote for Islamist parties. However, the same strategy also empowered local elites at the expense of broader political participation. While Islamist activists continued their community engagement programs, the voters became passive receivers rather than active participants in the political process. Even though the AKP's political platform proved very popular in Turkey, its success came with the price of returning to elite-based politics at the local level. Further research on Islamist party-voter linkages is needed to identify the conditions under which Islamists bolster citizen participation in the political arena.

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