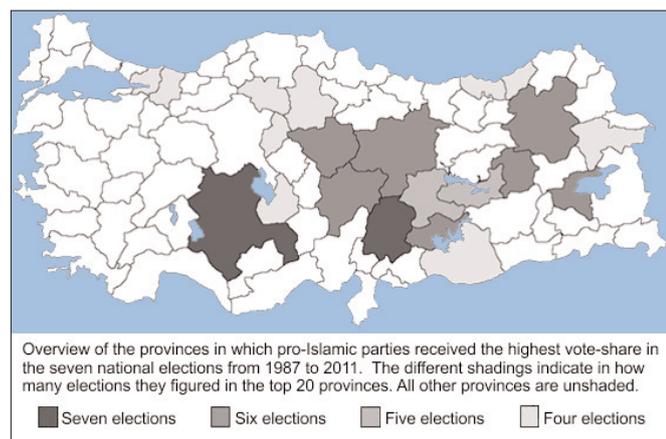


all provincial results are averaged, the main pro-Islamist party in each election did indeed seem to show far less difference in comparison to the average of all parties. Similar results also emerge at regional levels. A second means of examining the rootedness of Islamist parties aimed to map out the areas in which they were particularly successful and had continuously obtained their best electoral results. This was done by counting those provinces that repeatedly appeared in the best 20 results at each national election. As seen in the map below, the best results tended to be concentrated in central and eastern Anatolia, especially in provinces like Konya and Kahramanmaraş.



A first evaluation of these preliminary statistical findings would indicate that the Islamist party spectrum is by far more socially rooted in Turkey than any other ideological political grouping, giving it a crucial advantage over its electoral competitors. However, it will be far easier to arrive at more definite results after the next local elections which will be in 2014. Furthermore, the implications of such an imbalance in social rootedness between the Islamist party spectrum and the rest of the party system also needs to be examined at this point in terms of the implications for further democratic consolidation. Have other parties felt compelled to create genuine links with their electorates in order to compete meaningfully? It must also be seen whether this imbalance may indeed facilitate a long-term shift towards a party system dominated by one party actor like the AKP, which would be detrimental towards Turkey's further democratisation. If this were to be the case, this process would contribute towards entrenching one particular party at the expense of the party system and the wider democratic political process.

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The Church of the East and the construction of identity

N. Kaitlyn Pieper | School of Oriental and African Studies

The Assyrian Church of the East, an international church with modern communities ranging from the US to Iraq, Australia to Russia, traces its origin back to Mesopotamia and the early Persian Church. Known commonly as the Syrian Church, or Nestorian Church following the fifth century schism, a portion of its members eventually settled in the southeasternmost corner of what is now Turkey. Here, the Syrians, or Chaldeans as they were often called, functioned within the boundaries of the Ottoman empire as an ethno-religious community, part of which was known as the Nestorian millet and part of which was self-governed. The major forces that helped shape their modern identity began in the early 19th century and continued for about a century. My research hopes to flesh out our understanding of the forces that contributed to the trajectory of this ethno-religious community, and particularly to the development and construction of its identity.

'Western' influence has often been cited as being majorly influential for the course the Church took, with American and European travellers (primarily missionaries and archaeologists) establishing a presence there as early as the 1830s and 1840s. And, indeed, much research has demonstrated how the interactions of East and West left their mark. Western publications presenting theories concerning the national heritage of the members of this community would later become very influential, as the community itself selected and gradually adopted an identity during the nationalist movements in the early 1900s. Among the heritages suggested by the English-language Western writers were the Lost Tribes of Israel, ancient Assyrians and ancient Chaldeans. Due to British and American dissemination and usage, the term 'Assyrian' rose in prominence and popularity, and was eventually the appellation selected by the community itself, and subsequently justified linguistically and academically. Since then, attempts have been made to show the continuity of the Assyrian race, and a number of ancient Assyrian motifs have been introduced into the modern Church's culture and identity projection.

My research looks at the role that other traditions played in the historical and cultural trajectory of the Church of the East, and explores, specifically, the extent to which the Russian Orthodox Church may have been influential in the process of identity construction. The Russian empire had interests in the region and the Church from the early 19th century. In 1898 a mass conversion of Eastern Christians to the Russian Orthodox Church took place and a Russian mission was sent to the Ottoman empire. This point of interaction between cultures, religions and empires remains an under-developed field of study; few of the primary documents have been explored. Perhaps an in-depth look at this aspect of Russian/Assyrian interactions will shed light on the history of a multi-faceted Church, in addition to furthering understanding of the way that identity formation occurred within the Ottoman empire.