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# The Turkish Electoral Map after the First Round

Unit for Political Studies

## The Turkish Electoral Map after the First Round?

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### Unit for Political Studies

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On 14 May 2023, Turkish presidential and parliamentary elections recorded an unprecedented voter turnout. Despite the ruling coalition, led by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), defying poll predictions to win the majority of parliament seats (322 seats out of 600) and incumbent President Erdogan edging a clear lead over his closest rival, the elections have yet to be decided. The presidential run-off is scheduled for 28 May. Given the intense political polarization and international interest surrounding these elections, they are considered the most important in Turkish history.

## Results

Four presidential candidates and 24 parties ran for the vote, mostly split into five major alliances that fought the battle for Parliament.<sup>1</sup> Turnout inside Turkey was recorded at more than 88 percent, in addition to 53 percent of the Turkish diaspora,<sup>2</sup> reflecting both the depth of the political division in Turkey and also a degree of faith and sense of agency in the electoral system. Furthermore, no electoral breaches or incidents compromised the integrity of the elections<sup>3</sup> with the exception of one presidential candidate withdrawing the day before polling after being threatened with the publication of explicit recordings of him.<sup>4</sup> Preparations for the run-off in the presidential elections have begun and the opposition have raised some objections to a small number of “ballot irregularities”.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1: Presidential Election Results**

Candidate	Number of votes	Proportion of vote (%)
Recep Tayyip Erdogan	27.0	49.51
Kemal Kilicdaroglu	24.5	44.89
Sinan Ogan	2.82	5.17
Muharrem İnce <sup>6</sup>	0.238	0.44

Source: Preliminary results before appeals submitted to the Supreme Elections Council are decided

- <sup>1</sup> “Turkish Elections: Decisive Battle Forces Alliances”, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 1/5/2023 accessed on 16/5/2023: <https://bit.ly/42H0lMe>
- <sup>2</sup> “Turkey Elections... a Run-Off between Erdogan and Kilicdaroglu on 28 May,” *Al Jazeera Net*, 15/5/2023, accessed on 16/5/2023 at: <https://bit.ly/3MdIFC4>
- <sup>3</sup> “Turkey Elections: Muharrem Ince Withdraws from the Presidential Race,” *Al-Hurra*, 11/5/2023, accessed on 16/5/2023 at: <https://arbne.ws/41GFRBY>. The candidate denied that this was the reason for the withdrawal.
- <sup>4</sup> “Kılıçdaroğlu: Milletimiz ikinci Tur Diyorsa Baimızın Üstüne,” *TRT Haber*, 15/5/2023, accessed on 16/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/459R0xZ>
- <sup>5</sup> “Kilicdaroglu Talks about an ‘Illegal’ Scenario after Winning the Upcoming Elections,” North Press, 6/5/2023, accessed on 16/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/41KEGBv>
- <sup>6</sup> Muharrem İnce withdrew from the presidential race after the Supreme Elections Council approved the final list of candidates, and after voting for Turks abroad began.

**Table 2: Parliamentary Election Results**

Alliance	Party	Proportion of vote (%)	Number of Seats
People's Alliance	AKP <sup>7</sup>	35.58	267
	Nationalist Movement Party	10.07	50
	New Welfare Party	2.82	5
	Great Unity Party	0.99	0
	<b>Whole alliance</b>	<b>49.46</b>	<b>322</b>
Nation Alliance	Republican People's Party (CHP) <sup>8</sup>	25.33	169
	Good Party	9.69	44
	<b>Whole alliance</b>	<b>35.02</b>	<b>213</b>
Labour and Freedom Alliance	Party of Greens and the Left Future <sup>9</sup>	8.81	61
	Workers' Party of Turkey	1.73	4
	<b>Whole alliance</b>	<b>10.54</b>	<b>65</b>
Ancestral Alliance	Victory Party	2.23	0
	Justice Party	0.20	0
	<b>Whole alliance</b>	<b>2.43</b>	<b>0</b>
Union of Socialist Forces	Left Party	0.14	0
	Communist Party of Turkey	0.12	0
	Communist Movement of Turkey	0.03	0
	<b>Whole alliance</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>0</b>

Source: Preliminary results before appeals submitted to the Supreme Elections Council are decided

The results have pushed the Turkish President, the head of the Justice and Development Party, and the People's Alliance candidate, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, 5 points ahead of his closest competitor, the head of the CHP and the Nation Alliance candidate Kemal Kilicdaroglu, with the next candidate, Sinan Ogan, coming in third by a margin of almost 40%.

Erdogan came first in 51 provinces, including 14 major cities, most of which are concentrated on the coasts of the Black Sea and central Anatolia, while Kilicdaroglu topped the vote in 30 provinces, including 16 major cities, most of which are located on the western coastal strip (CHP stronghold) and the south and southeast of the country (Peoples' Democratic Party stronghold).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Four candidates from the Free Casue Party and a candidate from the Democratic Left Party won seats in parliament after running on the AKP list.

<sup>8</sup> 14 candidates from the Democracy and Progress Party, 11 candidates from the Future Party, 10 candidates from the Felicity Party, and 3 candidates from the Democrat Party won membership in Parliament.

<sup>9</sup> The Peoples' Democratic Party ran in the parliamentary elections under the name "Green Left" as a precaution against the Constitutional Court's ban on the party due to a lawsuit filed against it by the state prosecutor.

<sup>10</sup> "Presidential Election Results", Haberturk, 15/5/2023, accessed on 16/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3M4VcGG>



Turkish electoral law requires a presidential candidate to obtain 51% of the vote to win, so the Supreme Elections Council announced a run-off two weeks after polling day.<sup>11</sup> The ruling People's Alliance coalition secured a simple majority in the Turkish Parliament with 322 seats against 278 seats won by the two opposition coalitions: the Nation Alliance with 213 seats and Labour and the Freedom Alliance with 65 seats. The People's Alliance came first in 58 governorates, the Labour and Freedom Alliance came first in 13 governorates, and the Nation Alliance came first in 10 governorates.<sup>12</sup>

## Implications

The results of the Turkish elections are characterized by some important features:

- Relative stability in the political and party map, as represented by the shape of Parliament.
- The AKP is down 7 points from the last elections in 2018 (35.58 compared to 42.52), a decline that has continued since the referendum on the presidential system in 2017, at the very least. Significantly, the main decline has been recorded in the major cities.
- The growing strength of nationalist currents in the country in various alliances, including the nation alliance, where the Nationalist Movement, the Good Party, the Power Union Party, and Victory Party obtained nearly 23 percent of the votes. Furthermore, a general turn towards nationalist discourse can be observed in all the major parties, including AKP and CHP, emphasizing Turkey's greatness and status, and stressing the relationship with the countries of the so-called "Turkish world".
- As the major parties are no longer able to achieve a majority on their own, including AKP, small parties are gaining greater importance in the Turkish political scene.
- Accordingly, there is more diversity in the parliament with the presence of representatives from 15 political parties, with candidates from several small parties on the lists of the two major parties winning seats.
- A remarkable state of relative balance has emerged between the ruling coalition and the opposition coalition, which indicates the depth of the political division in the country. This was reflected in President Erdogan's failure to win the presidential elections in the first round, in a first since his initial presidential victory in 2014. Moreover, Kilicdaroglu obtained an unprecedented number of votes against Erdogan,<sup>13</sup> despite overall much less than the polls' has predicted.

<sup>11</sup> "Turkey Elections... a Run-Off".

<sup>12</sup> "The Results of the Legislative Elections", Haberturk website, 15/5/2023, accessed on 16/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/431coUh>

<sup>13</sup> Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu was Erdogan's rival with the highest votes in the 2014 elections with 38.4 percent of the vote, while Muharrem Ersoy was his rival with the highest votes in the 2018 elections with 30.6 percent.



- In Parliament, the ruling coalition won an absolute majority, but neither party was able to achieve the overwhelming majority needed to unilaterally draft a new constitution or make constitutional amendments, neither directly through Parliament (a two-thirds majority) nor even by submitting the matter to a popular referendum (60 percent). This means that any amendments regarding the presidential system or activating the idea of drafting a civil constitution for the country will be contingent on reaching a consensus between the two sides. The opposition coalition has become less homogeneous with the entry of religiously conservative parties into the lists of the CHP, and they will likely be closer to the AKP and its parliamentary coalition's agenda regarding issues of religious or cultural significance.
- The election results have settled the debate about the country's political system; The failure of the opposition to obtain a majority in parliament means that any attempts to bring back the parliamentary system will be postponed till the next elections.

**Table 3: Percentage of votes for Erdogan in major cities in 2018 and 2023**

	2018 (%)	2023 (%)	Difference (%)
Istanbul	50.0	46.6	3.4-
Ankara	51.5	46.0	5.5-
Izmir	32.9	31.4	1.5-
Bursa	55.5	51.4	4.1-
Adana	44.1	43.9	0.2-
Antalya	42.8	39.8	3.0-
Diyarbakir	27.3	26.4	0.9-
Gaziantep	63.9	59.7	4.2-

Source: Prepared by the Political Studies Unit

- There is no doubt that the economic situation was a major factor in this decline, taking into account the length of Erdogan's presidency and the desire for change, especially among the young generation who have never known another president.
- The Homeland Party, led by Muharram Ince, who split from CHP, failed to cross the threshold necessary to enter parliament, winning just 0.92%. The party was affected by the withdrawal of its leader from the presidential race. While the Future Party, led by Ahmet Davutoglu, and the Democracy and Progress Party led by Ali Babacan, dissidents from AKP, managed to enter parliament and won 14 and 10 seats, respectively. However, these two parties – along with the Felicity Party, which won 10 seats – entered Parliament on the lists of CHP and did not run alone,



which makes it impossible to measure the size of their support in the street or their voting weight. There is a clear gap between the votes they brought to the coalition and the number of seats they won, which led to restlessness within CHP regarding their entry at the expense of its votes.

- On the other hand, the “Welfare Again” party, which is allied with AKP, was the surprise of the elections, as it won five seats in Parliament, with nearly 3 percent of the vote. It is clear that the party benefited from the alliance of other religiously conservative parties with CHP and the decline in support for AKP, to constitute an alternative within the conservative segment that did not want to vote for the latter but was not enthusiastic about voting for CHP lists.<sup>14</sup>

## Outcomes

As a result of the ongoing political polarization and each party’s reliance on mobilizing its electoral support base, the second round of the presidential elections will be held with similar enthusiasm. Nevertheless, President Erdogan’s chances seem better due to the large difference in the votes he won against his closest rival, which numbered about two and a half million votes, and the majority secured by his alliance in Parliament, which may encourage a harmonious vote in the run-off to avoid friction between the presidency and Parliament, as well as declining morale among the opposition. Nevertheless, some observers affiliated with the ruling party fear that its electoral base will rely on an inevitable victory and hesitate to go out to vote in a scenario where the opposition manages to pull off a victory by mobilizing its base.

The results sent shockwaves across the opposition, so former internal disputes will likely resurface. While the head of the Good Party, the second of the coalition parties, Meral Akşener, strongly opposed Kilicdaroglu’s nomination as a consensus candidate for the coalition, on the grounds that he was unable to defeat Erdogan,<sup>15</sup> and this led to her withdrawal from the six-party table, she later returned. But if Erdogan manages to win in the second round, the opposition alliance will likely disintegrate.

The results will likely have some reverberations within the parties as well, among them the CHP and the Good Party in particular. Kilicdaroglu imposed himself as a candidate for the presidential elections, first within his own party, despite some opposition,<sup>16</sup> and then on the six-party coalition, with reluctance from the Good Party in particular. Then he nominated on his party’s lists, hoping to pull the rug from under the feet of the ruling party, a significant number of leaders of religiously conservative parties, his party’s traditional opposition, enticing criticism within the party. Thus, his failure to win a majority in Parliament and repeating this result in the presidential run-off will cause

<sup>14</sup> Saeed Al-Hajj, “Turkey... What Do the Parliamentary Candidate Lists Say?”, *Al Jazeera Net*, 16/4/2023, accessed on 16/5/2023 at: <https://bit.ly/3nY398M>

<sup>15</sup> “Meral Akşener in the Lose – Lose Trap,” *SETAV*, 15/12/2022, accessed on 16/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3o6WV6s>

<sup>16</sup> “Kılıçdaroğlu, ‘Ya Bana Katılın Ya Da Yolumdan Çekilin’ Diyerek Kime, Hangi Mesajları Verdi,” *BBC Türkçe*, 27/4/2022, accessed on 16/5/2023, at: <https://bbc.in/44Yhh2e>





a wave of internal dissent again, potentially leading to him losing the leadership of the party, if not immediately in the long run.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

Turkey will remain on tenterhooks until the run-off scheduled for 28 May. The run-off elections are a stand-alone election, independent of earlier votes, requiring clearer messages from the two contestants to win over the undecided masses to resolve the outcome, as well as motivate voters to turnout en masse again, which will be a challenge in itself. Part of the outcome will also depend on who third place candidate Sinan Ogan endorses, for his supporters to vote.

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<sup>17</sup> The party law in Turkey grants the party president wide powers, including the selection of candidates for parliament and the heads of its branches in cities and provinces.