

CATS Network Roundup

A roundup of news and analysis on Turkey



Çetin Demirci



Ben Zimmermann

Dear Readers,

The **arrest of the mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu**, is a worrying step towards the consolidation of autocracy in Turkey. Although the **elections were no longer fair, they were still free**.

But before we turn to current developments in Turkey in the next Roundup, we will look at **what shaped the preferences of voters of Turkish origin in Germany** in the 2025 general election.

If you have any questions or suggestions, please e-mail us at cats@swp-berlin.org.

On the Spot



picture silence / Caro | Bastian

The 2025 federal election results offer insights into Germany's evolving political landscape, especially the voting preferences of migrant groups. **Around 2.8 million people of Turkish origin live in Germany**, many of whom arrived as labour migrants in the 1960s. Over time, they have become an integral part of German society, contributing to its cultural and demographic diversity. Not all of them have German citizenship and the right to vote. **Among the 1.2 million who do possess German citizenship, there has been a marked shift in party preferences in the last decade**. This raises the question as to whether these shifts are indicative of societal fragmentation and disorientation, or deeper integration into the political mainstream.

In 2013, around 64 per cent of Turkish-origin voters supported the Social Democrat Party (SPD). **By 2017, this share had dropped to 35 per cent – a substantial decrease of 29 per cent**. It indicates that voting decisions are not influenced by one's origins, but are instead driven by living conditions. **Concurrently, the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) tripled its share of the vote among this group to nearly 20 per cent**. It is noteworthy that **none of those voters chose the radical-right Alternative for Germany (AfD)**.

[An evaluation](#) by the Expert Council on Integration and Migration (SVR) confirms this shift: SPD support halved, whereas CDU support rose from 6 per cent in 2016 to 32.9 per cent in 2018. **Three years later, voting patterns had become even more diverse, but the SPD remained the strongest party among voters of Turkish origin**, acquiring 39 per cent of Turkish-origin voters.

When considering socio-economic challenges, such as those relating to education and employment, this is not unexpected. There were reasons for this attachment to the SPD. **Historically, individuals were predominantly employed in unionised industries, and they knew where to place their checkmarks**. But upward mobility – that is, the shift from the assembly line to the office – has not only changed their lives as individuals, but also their voting behaviours.

In other words, there is an increase in political diversity among the Turkish migrant community in Germany. **In 2025, there is a greater willingness to break away from this traditional attachment to the SPD, especially among the younger generation**. Younger voters now focus on individual rather than collective interests. Parties such as the Greens, the Left, and Sarah Wagenknecht's BSW resonate with this shift.

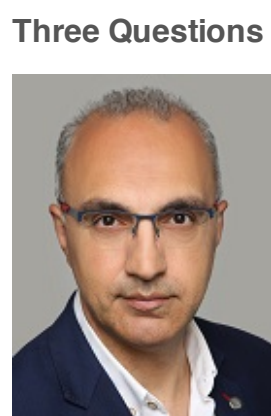
[According to an analysis](#) by the German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM), **approximately 20 per cent of migrants from the MENA region or Turkey could imagine casting their votes for the AfD**. This inclination is particularly pronounced among those who have previously experienced marginalisation. **They are now drawn to the rhetoric of those who seek to exclude them – because they want to be heard**. The established parties often do not specifically address these groups. **This may also be the reason why voter turnout among German citizens of Turkish descent is significantly below average**. With turnout below 20 per cent, the Turkish Community in Germany decided to launch a nationwide campaign to boost participation in 2025.

However, the question remains as to **which factors will be of the greatest importance to voters at the time of casting their ballots?** According to DeZIM's analysis for the 2025 federal election, one issue stands out above all: the economy. Although issues such as migration and social justice are also important concerns, **the economic situation remains a central concern for many migrants when deciding how to vote**. This aligns with the general trend observed in the German electorate, where economic issues continue to dominate.

Within this broader pattern, the voting behaviours among migrants also reflect nuanced preferences that are shaped by socio-economic factors and evolving political identities. **The DeZIM analysis argues that, among people with roots in Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa, the SPD, the Left and the BSW garnered the highest proportion of votes**. The likelihood of this demographic group voting for the SPD is 18.5 percentage points higher than for voters without a migration background. The BSW also saw a notable increase of 13.1 percentage points, while the Left scored a 7.6 percentage point rise. In contrast, the likelihood of voting for the AfD is 9.4 percentage points lower, for the Greens 9.7 percentage points lower, and for the CDU/CSU 8.1 percentage points lower.

The increased diversification of the voting patterns of voters of Turkish origin is a sign of their integration into mainstream society. They are increasingly aligning their voting behaviours with those of Germans without a migration background, resulting in a stronger focus on individual interests and values rather than collective ethnic identities. ([Çetin Demirci](#))

Three Questions for...



Yaşar Aydın is a researcher at the Centre for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS) in Berlin. His research focuses on German-Turkish and EU-Turkish relations as well as Turkey's economy and customs union. His previous experience includes positions at the University of Hamburg and the Hamburg Institute of International Economics, where he specialised in migration and integration research, especially Turkish-German migration.

Why is voter turnout so low among Germans with Turkish roots?

There is a strong sense of disappointment among Turkish people in Germany, which is partly shared by a majority of society, particularly regarding the economic situation or perceptions of the former traffic light coalition. However, there are also issues specific to the Turkish community, such as Germany's stances on Israel and Gaza. A common perception is: "When Turkey intervened militarily in Syria, German politicians called for an arms embargo – yet Israel is given a free hand in Gaza." Furthermore, political elites, including those with Turkish backgrounds, have failed to make the Turkish community feel heard. They have not succeeded in bridging the gap between established non-migrant elites and the Turkish community, leading to a sense of disconnection.

Is there really sympathy for the AfD within the Turkish community, as is often claimed?

There are several reasons for the interest in the AfD within the Turkish community in Germany. Like many other segments of the population, some people of Turkish origin see the AfD as a way to express their frustration with established political parties and policies. Others appreciate the AfD's sceptical attitude towards Islam, especially because they are fed up with the political instrumentalisation of Islam in Turkey. Finally, part of the Turkish community sees the new migrants coming to Germany – such as those from Ukraine or Arab countries – as potential competitors who could exacerbate anti-migrant sentiments in mainstream society. From this perspective, the AfD is seen as a party that could limit this unwanted immigration. However, sympathy for the AfD's positions does not necessarily translate into support at the ballot box; we don't have data on what proportion of Turks actually voted for the AfD.

What can parties and politicians do to win back Turks' trust and votes?

As the Turkish community in Germany becomes more diverse, it is no longer predominantly aligned with the SPD and the Greens. This shift creates opportunities for other political parties to capture these votes, especially those that can bridge the perceived divide. We have already seen efforts from the left in the last election, successfully reaching out to young Germans of Turkish origin through targeted social media campaigns and their positions on the Gaza issue. Friedrich Merz, with his anti-migrant rhetoric, showed how not to engage with this community. With a targeted campaign, the conservative CDU has the potential to win conservative votes from the more traditional segments of the Turkish community. It is important that politicians communicate openly with the Turkish community to make high-level decisions more transparent and understandable.

Interview by [Ben Zimmermann](#)

Recommendations

In the latest Atlantic Council TURKEYSource, [Hürcan Aslı Aksoy](#) discusses how the new German government will approach relations with Turkey, emphasising the need for constructive engagement despite differing foreign and domestic policies with increasingly divergent political norms and views. The article highlights common interests in areas such as trade, energy, and regional security, while acknowledging potential challenges on issues such as human rights and democratic governance.

[Heinrich Kreft, Çiğdem Nas, Ebru Turhan, and Johanna Wietschel](#) explore the growing politicisation of foreign policy in Germany in this recent IPC Mercator Analysis. They highlight the increasing trend towards transactionalism in EU-Turkey relations and the potential for a renewed but pragmatic engagement strategy under the leadership of Friedrich Merz.

CATS Network Partner [Ayşe Yüreki \(IstanPol\)](#) points to the possible consequences of the CDU/CSU governing with a fragmented Bundestag. Merz is set to become German Chancellor and form a coalition with the SPD, but the far-right AfD has gained ground, deepening polarisation. Germany's new government might affect Turkish-German relations bilaterally – at the EU level as well as through the Turkish community in Germany.

In this EDAM research article, [Zeynep Alemdar and Yaşar Aydın](#) analyse the potential effects of Germany's 2025 federal elections on Turkish-German relations, focusing on economic, security, and diplomatic dimensions. They highlight the likelihood of a CDU/CSU-led grand coalition, which opposes Turkey's EU membership but acknowledges the country's importance in security cooperation, energy partnerships, and migration.

This DeZIM analysis by [Jannes Jacobsen, Mara Junge, Long Nguyen, and Friederike Römer](#) examines (in German) the political concerns, everyday anxieties, and party preferences of migrant minorities in Germany. They highlight the significant disparities in political engagement, with lower voter turnout among migrants compared to the general population. The authors analyse the most pressing issues for this demographic, including economic insecurity, housing, pensions, and crime.

In this SWP podcast episode, [Yaşar Aydın and Melanie Müller](#) explain (in German) how geopolitical shifts are reshaping global supply chains and what role Turkey plays in this evolving landscape. They examine Turkey's position as a key manufacturing and logistics hub, the country's growing importance for European markets amid supply chain disruptions, and the challenges posed by political and economic instability.

Kind regards,

The CATS Team