

Turkey 2023

A roundup of news and analysis on Turkey's upcoming general election



Edgar Şar



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Dear Readers,

Welcome to "Turkey 2023", the CATS Network's roundup of news, developments and analysis in the run-up to Turkey's general election.

In our second issue, we look at the **parties' use of electoral lists** and how **presidential candidates are seeking to expand their alliances**, while we also learn which **groups of voters the government is having difficulties with**.

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

On the Spot



@picture alliance / AA | Evrim Aydın

After agreeing on Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu as its joint presidential candidate, the Nation Alliance (NA) has since focused on broadening the opposition front. Already, this appears to have been successful, as the **Labour and Freedom Alliance (LFA), led by the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), recently announced its implicit endorsement of Kılıçdaroğlu**.

Nevertheless, **the opposition still lacks a complete pre-election strategy**. To realise its [post-Erdoğan vision](#), it needs to secure a parliamentary majority as much as it needs to get Kılıçdaroğlu elected. While a simple majority (at least 301 out of 600 seats) is sufficient to pass legislation, constitutional reforms, such as the restoration of the parliamentary system by abolishing the [presidentialism à la Turca](#), require at least a three-fifths qualified majority (360 out of 600 seats).

Considering its highly diverse structure, to secure the desired majority, **the opposition must pursue a smart strategy when preparing its electoral lists**. The amendments to the electoral law enacted by the ruling People's Alliance (PA) in April 2022 significantly changed the distribution of parliamentary seats among political parties, introducing the risk of wasted votes for the broad opposition bloc. To circumvent these obstacles, the opposition clearly needs to decrease the number of competing electoral lists by instead running joint lists. As the electoral lists can only be run by political parties and not alliances according to Turkish electoral law, **the strategy of running joint lists requires candidates of some parties to run under the list of another political party**, which further complicates the inter-party negotiations and jeopardises the prospects of reaching a consensus.

The leaders of both the NA and the LFA have reassured their constituencies that they would develop effective strategies to make sure that they attain the goal of maximising the number of parliamentary seats. Two options seem to be on the table: first, **the NA might run joint candidates under the list of the party believed to have the greatest potential to appeal to voters in the given constituency**; or, second, given the difficulties that candidates might face in running together with the pro-secular CHP, **the three conservative parties – namely the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA), the Future Party (GP) and the Felicity Party (SP) – may run a separate joint list, forming their own alliance within the NA**. In the LFA, on the other hand, the HDP has constantly stressed the importance of running a joint list, while the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP) and the Labour Party (EMEP) have so far insisted on running with their own logos and lists. According to electoral law, a political party must run separate lists in at least 41 (out of 81) provinces if it wants to partake in the elections with its own name and logo on the ballot paper. Crucially, a political party that wants this would lose the chance to run joint lists with its allies in almost half of all constituencies. This poses quite the dilemma for both the NA and the LFA.

Another important variable that must be considered by the opposition while setting its course is how the ruling PA, now consisting of five parties, will proceed. **The PA as the ruling bloc has had the chance to set the rules of the game, but it is by no means exempt from the above-described dilemma** facing the opposition. Although the PA has announced that the parties in this alliance will run separate lists, they might still agree to field joint lists in at least some constituencies, given that the d'Hondt method clearly favours the list with the most votes in the distribution of seats.

In sum, **the strategy for the parliamentary election is no less important than the one devised for the presidential race**, particularly for the opposition. Through its systemic advantages, the ruling PA can [easily win a majority](#) even with a minority of the total vote. In the event that the PA secures a parliamentary majority on May 14, this might open a sizable window of opportunity for the ruling bloc to win the presidential contest in a possible run-off on May 28. (*Edgar Şar*)

The Polls

In order to win the presidential race in the first round on May 14, the presidential candidates need to secure a majority of votes (51 percent). **The presidential candidates of the ruling People's Alliance (PA), Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and of the oppositional Nation Alliance (NA), Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, are both seeking to expand their alliances by reaching out to comparatively small parties**.

President Erdoğan recently included the overtly religious-conservative New Welfare Party (YRP) into the PA and gained support for his candidacy from the HÜDA-PAR, a Sunni Kurdish Islamist party affiliated with Hezbollah. **The YRP – with a voter base of around 1.5 percent – demands the revision of Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women, as well as that adultery be treated as a criminal offense and that LGBTIQI associations be prohibited**. When the Justice and Development Party (AKP) Group Deputy Chairwoman Özlem Zengin received hundreds of threats for defending Law No. 6284, the leadership of the party remained silent. She was even attacked by her fellow party members, but was supported by female figures in the opposition. Despite appealing to small Islamist parties to strengthen its conservative alliance, **the cracks within the AKP might hamper its electoral support**. The latest polls show the PA reaching 36-38 percent of the vote.

Meanwhile, **the tacit support of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) for Kılıçdaroğlu's candidacy increases the chances of the opposition winning in the first round**, as the HDP has a 10-12 percent vote share. The primary challenge for Kılıçdaroğlu at the moment is posed by Muharrem İnce, the leader of the Homeland Party. His electoral support ranges between 5 and 6 percent according to the polls. (*Hürcan Aslı Aksoy*)

Recommended Readings

Public polls point toward an electoral defeat for Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the Justice and Development Party (AKP). In that regard, *Cengiz Günay* evaluates what the potential demise of President Erdoğan would mean for Turkey, and asks: ["Is this the beginning of a next phase of autocratization or the revival of democracy?"](#)

In this report, *Fazıl Hüsnü Erdem* takes stock of the government system brought about by the 2017 constitutional amendment, and seeks answers to the question ["What kind of a parliamentary system?"](#)

In their [SWP Comment](#), *Hürcan Aslı Aksoy* and *Salim Çevik* look at the earthquake in Turkey and its political and economic implications.

Three Questions for...



Galip Dalay

Galip Dalay is an associate fellow at Chatham House, a doctoral researcher in the Faculty of History at the University of Oxford and a non-resident fellow at the Brookings Doha Center (BDC). His areas of interest include Turkish politics, regional Kurdish politics and Political Islam.

Most of the polls indicate that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and President Erdoğan will find it hard to win the elections. What are the reasons behind the decline in support for him and the AKP?

Turkey's economic downturn of recent years is a major factor. The president tried to overcome this by implementing an election-economy strategy, and this has partially worked. Despite the severity of Turkey's economic turmoil, the government's loss of popular support has been modest. Prior to the earthquake, the government was regaining some of its lost support, but its electoral recovery has since stopped. In particular, the government has difficulties with new voters and Kurds. Its voting share amongst new voters is significantly less than for the electorate as a whole, while due to its nationalist turn it has lost a considerable amount of Kurdish votes. However, it would be premature to foretell the result of the upcoming election as the contest is too tight. For the time being, the opposition has a fragile advantage.

The AKP is forming alliances with even more religious-conservative political parties. Will it return to more Islamist policies or is this just a tactical move to increase public support before the election?

"Every vote counts" is the overarching logic behind today's party alliances. However, the recent inclusion of two small Islamist parties will impact the image and language of the ruling coalition - making it slightly more Islamic. The New Welfare Party has made a few demands vis-a-vis curtailing women's rights as precondition for joining the coalition. That signifies further regression for women's rights, a trend that was already gathering momentum as illustrated by Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. However, ideology is not the driving force behind the alliance formation. For a long time, the governing coalition has tried to lure the right-wing secular-nationalist Good Party from the opposition bloc, but to no avail. Ultimately, co-opting other nationalist or conservative/Islamist parties is in line with the ruling coalition's overarching ideology of nationalism and conservatism/Islamism.

Recently, the AKP Group Deputy Chairwoman Özlem Zengin stated that she is being targeted and abandoned by her party for defending the Law on the Protection of the Family and Preventing Violence Against Women. Is the AKP struggling with infighting and undergoing an internal crisis?

This is an isolated incident and does not have much significance in terms of internal party politics and infighting.

Interviewed by Salim Çevik

That's all until the next issue!

Kind regards,

The CATS Team