



The Significance of the Upcoming Turkish Elections

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The future of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's political career will be decided on May 14, when his People's Alliance will compete with the Nation's Alliance in a presidential and parliamentary election round. Opposition parties hope to give a democratic and pro-Western boost to Turkey. The country is polarized and thus might be ready to make major changes, especially after 20 years of a single administration. Still, Mediterranean geopolitics are unlikely to be significantly affected regardless of the outcome. This is also true of Israeli-Turkish relations.

The Turkish presidential and parliamentary election of May 14 is of cardinal significance for the future of the country. President's Tayyip Erdoğan's administration has been in place for about 20 years, so either his exodus or his continued tenure would have political and economic ramifications. Erdoğan hopes to score yet another political victory after those of 2002, 2007, 2011, 2014, 2015, and 2018.

This time around, Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) leads a broader group of smaller parties, the People's Alliance. This grouping includes the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), a coalition partner of the AKP.

The principal opponent of the People's Alliance is another group of parties called the Nation's Alliance. Here, the main opposition Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) and five smaller parties have joined together to attempt the difficult

task of synthesizing their ideologies in order to dethrone Erdoğan. They have selected CHP leader Kemal Kiliçdaroğlu to challenge the incumbent.

It remains to be seen whether the Nation's Alliance represents a sufficiently sincere, reliable, and viable political alternative to Erdoğan to motivate a majority of Turkish citizens to oust him.

In January, the Nation's Alliance published its manifesto, which takes positions on policies ranging from public administration and the rule of law to the economy and foreign policy. Perhaps the most interesting part of the group's political program is its determination to strip the powers of the president and somewhat restore the parliamentary system that has been replaced by a presidential one since 2018. The idea is to produce several constitutional amendments [that would overhaul the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary and add accountability](#). This is a bold agenda. Even if the Nation's Alliance wins and remains united after the election, [constitutional amendments require large majorities in the Grand National Assembly](#). The process will be complicated.

The outcome of the presidential and parliamentary elections is hard to predict. Existing surveys offer controversial results, rendering prognostication risky. Generally speaking, electoral behavior in Turkey is influenced by factors such as religion, geography, and economic performance. Until the elections of 2018, the governing AKP was largely successful at gaining political approval across different social strata and advancing the national economy. In recent years, however, it has encountered serious challenges. [A Gallup survey](#) in 2022 showed that a record-high 39% of Turkish citizens were "suffering". Last year, [inflation hit 64%](#) and the lira [lost some 30% of its value against the US dollar](#). The situation became even worse after the dramatic earthquakes of February. [According to the World Bank](#), the repair costs will exceed \$34 billion.

Most Turkish citizens view the economy as their main concern. [A recent Global Academy survey](#) shows that 28.9% of respondents care most about economic problems, followed by terrorism (15.4%), the refugee crisis (9.4%), the restriction of personal freedoms and rights (7.8%), foreign policy (6.1%), and the Kurdish issue (4.6%). [According to polls, the AKP's popularity was largely unaffected by the earthquakes](#), and Erdoğan is promising to reduce inflation. In April, [Turkish consumer confidence rose 9.2%](#). For its part, the Nation's Alliance is pledging to apply more orthodox economic policies and regain the confidence of global investors.

In the foreign policy arena, the current period has seen Turkey normalize relations with several countries, notably including Israel, Egypt, and the UAE. Even Greek-Turkish relations temporarily thawed after the earthquakes. Notwithstanding this new trend, Erdoğan's acrobatics between East and West and his muscular strategy in the Mediterranean have elicited concern in Washington and Jerusalem as well as in other capitals such as Athens and Cairo. Also, Ankara's ['Axis of Turkey'](#) concept is not particularly clear. An Erdoğan victory would likely lead to a replication of standard policies in the Mediterranean in which partnerships are paired with tensions. In such an environment, Israeli-Turkish relations should continue on the same path of cautious improvement. Last year, [Turkey was the fifth most important source of Israeli imports \(\\$5.7 billion\) and the seventh most important destination for Israeli exports \(\\$2.2 billion\)](#).

A governmental change in Turkey could bring the country closer to the US, at least to a degree. The Nation's Alliance would seek to reassert Turkey's NATO identity and strengthen collaboration with the EU. However, it would arguably abandon the pragmatic strategy vis-à-vis Russia, an element of Ankara's foreign policy that Washington does not accept, especially in military affairs. Against this backdrop, [even a post-Erdoğan Turkey might not be readmitted into the F-35 program](#). Further to this, Turkey's Mediterranean priorities would scarcely shift under a new government. Kılıçdaroğlu is not very vocal about Israel, but a few weeks ago [he tweeted in favor of Palestine](#).

In analyzing next steps in Turkey, a cautious approach is required. The political situation is fluid. Voters of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), for example, will play a role in these elections, as HDP has not nominated its own presidential candidate. This party took 11.7%, 10.7%, and 13.1% of the vote in the last three polls, respectively. As long as polarization continues, new divisions can arise amid the antagonism between the People's Alliance and the Nation's Alliance. The conditions are thus not conducive to deep change. A tight election race will make things worse.

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