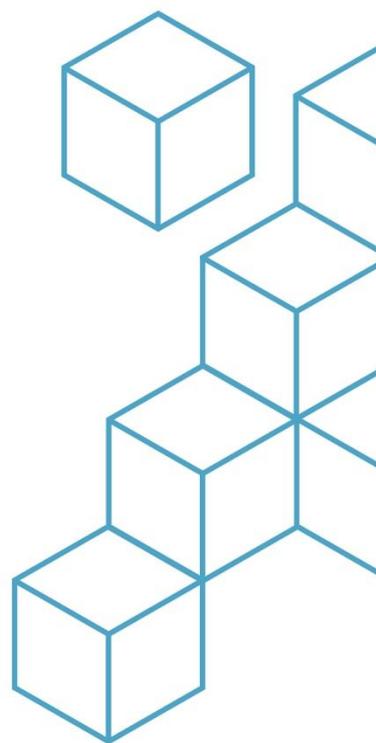


POLICY BRIEFS

The 2023 Turkish elections: An unmarked road



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None of the proposed alternatives have the political stature or experience of Erdogan, and it may be difficult to persuade a majority of voters to take a risk with a relative unknown, regardless of dissatisfaction with Erdogan or his actions as president. [Al Jazeera]

Turkish parliamentary and presidential elections will be held in eight short months; and in opposition circles, it is widely believed that they will put an end to the long rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. While Turkey's severe economic and fiscal challenges mean that Erdogan and his party are facing their most difficult electoral contest since 2002, the outcomes of both presidential and parliamentary elections are still uncertain at this point.

Thus far, three main electoral blocs have taken shape. The People's Alliance, a holdover from the last election, brings together the AKP and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). While the alliance seems stable, the MHP's popularity has steadily declined, so it may be less useful in helping the AKP retain its parliamentary majority or re-electing Erdogan. The second bloc, known as the Table of Six, is less a coherent political alliance than a loose assemblage of ideologically diverse opposition parties united only by their hostility to Erdogan and his party. It includes Turkey's main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), and the Good Party, a breakaway faction of the nationalist MHP, as

well as the Islamist Felicity Party. The alliance members have yet to agree on any electoral or governing platform, save for the general intention to return the country to a parliamentary system if they win elections. Finally, there is the Labour and Freedom Alliance, made up of six Kurdish and leftist parties with no real weight except for the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which is allegedly linked with the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and enjoys considerable political influence among an important slice of the electorate. The remaining parties seem to be there as window-dressing, to give the alliance a more Turkish, rather than Kurdish, identity.

Various polls conducted over September show a tangible decline in the AKP's fortunes since the previous election, with the party receiving the support of 30-34 percent of the electorate, while the MHP is drawing only 7 percent of the vote. The main beneficiary of this decline has been the Good Party, now polling at 15 percent, while the CHP is still polling at 23-24 percent, much like the last parliamentary election.

The presidential election is harder to gauge because thus far the only known candidate is Erdogan, who is eligible to run for one final term. Polls that pit Erdogan against an unnamed competitor find that he has the support of some 34 percent of the electorate, which is roughly equivalent to the AKP's projected support. This could change, however, depending on who throws their hat into the presidential ring.

Polls thus indicate that the People's Alliance could lose their parliamentary majority, but much depends on economic and political developments in the coming months. While Turkey has avoided a recession since the war in Ukraine began, the economy remains fragile. The Turkish lira has lost 40 percent of its value over the last year, while inflation reached 83 percent in September; energy costs remain high as well. But the defeat of the AKP is not inevitable. The opposition is still in disarray,

having reached no consensus on a political programme or electoral coordination and cooperation. The AKP's main rivals in the Table of Six Alliance have yet to articulate a strong platform that could position it as a clear alternative to the AKP. The electoral law further complicates matters. The smaller parties in the coalition will not garner enough votes to reach the threshold for parliamentary representation. The CHP and the Good Party may therefore need to cede space to these parties on their own electoral lists if they hope to retain their support.

The opposition will have an equally hard time agreeing on a single presidential candidate. As the leader of the biggest and oldest opposition party, CHP head Kemal Kilicdaroglu believes himself best positioned to beat Erdogan. But his coalition partners in the nationalist Good Party do not agree; they are also less than pleased by Kilicdaroglu's warm relations with the Kurdish HDP, which has already signalled its support for Kilicdaroglu. The Good Party has floated other possible candidates, such as the mayor of Istanbul, but has thus far been unable to build a consensus around them. None of the proposed alternatives have the political stature or experience of Erdogan, and it may be difficult to persuade a majority of voters to take a risk with a relative unknown, regardless of dissatisfaction with Erdogan or his actions as president.

As the date of elections approaches, the political and economic landscape will undoubtedly come into clearer focus. But at this point, amid so many uncertainties, it is still too early to predict electoral outcomes with any confidence.

*** This is a summary of a policy brief originally written in Arabic, available [here](#).**