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2023 Turkish Elections: What Is at Stake, and What Are the Possible Scenarios Following the Elections?

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Adapt Long Read



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**2023 TURKISH ELECTIONS:
WHAT IS AT STAKE, AND WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SCENARIOS
FOLLOWING THE ELECTIONS?**

Assoc. Prof. Ozan ÖRMECİ¹

SUMMARY

- Türkiye will have very critical presidential and parliamentary elections on May 14, 2023. A second round of the presidential election will be organized if it is needed on May 28, 2023.
- This time, President Erdoğan and his bloc seem in a less advantageous position due to increasing problems in Türkiye, especially in the field of economics as well as the country's poor democratic performance in recent years.
- President Erdoğan and his bloc are supported by Russia, which means another victory for this bloc could further distance Türkiye from Western institutions and organizations.
- Electoral security is a key issue for the elections in two different ways. Electoral security is important firstly as part of the negative implications of the terrible earthquake in February, which forced millions of people to migrate to other cities. In that sense, hundreds of thousands of people might be unable to vote in these elections. Secondly, it is essential for the free and fair nature of the elections. Since two large blocs in the country approach these elections as a matter of political survival, there can be various attempts to affect the electoral results.
- Elections might lead to an unclear political picture, with the opposition winning the presidency but lacking a parliamentary majority to change the

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constitution/regime and make a transition into a democratic parliamentary system.

INTRODUCTION

May 14, 2023, will be a critical date and maybe a turning point for Turkish political history. As the country celebrates the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the republic, the elections will determine the president who will be ruling the country until 2028 as well as 600 members of the parliament.

The competition between two political blocs advocating divergent visions for the future of Türkiye has become a pivotal determinant in shaping the country's trajectory. On the one hand, President Erdoğan and his bloc uphold an authoritarian-leaning presidential system and espouse a nationalist/Islamic worldview as a substitute for conventional Kemalist secularism. In the foreign policy domain, Erdoğan seeks to position Türkiye as a more assertive regional power by leveraging the growing significance of the national defence industry and supporting Ankara's confrontational stance against Western policies in various realms, including the Kurdish question (PYD/YPG in Syria) and the Eastern Mediterranean (by adopting a more assertive stance in the Cyprus dispute and towards Greece), through forging close partnerships with authoritarian states such as Russia and China.

On the other hand, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and his opposition bloc advocate a return to a parliamentary regime, restoration of the conventional Western-oriented foreign policy, implementation of democratic and secular policies inside, revitalization of Türkiye's bid for EU membership in addition to renegotiated terms for Customs Union and the Syrian immigrants deal, and a democratic negotiation process involving all stakeholders in determining the future of Kurds and the Eastern Mediterranean question.

Secondly, the 2023 Turkish elections have transformed into a battleground between the West and the East over the future trajectory of Türkiye. While Russia, along with other authoritarian regimes, openly backs President Erdoğan and even delays Türkiye's natural gas debt to Moscow to bolster his prospects before the election, the United States (U.S.) and the European Union (EU) also exhibit a clear preference for the opposition to emerge victorious in

the polls (Foreign Policy 2023). Prior to becoming the 46th president of the U.S., Joe Biden even stated that democratic means should be employed to topple Erdoğan by supporting the opposition (Hürriyet 2020). Therefore, a victory for Erdoğan in the election has the potential to push Türkiye further away from the West. Furthermore, Ankara may pose a hurdle to Western political initiatives, such as impeding Sweden's accession to NATO and opposing imposing harsh sanctions on Russia for its incursion into Ukraine. If the opposition prevails, there may be new risks in Türkiye's relationship with Russia, particularly concerning the nation's energy security, as Russia is currently the primary supplier of natural gas and oil to Türkiye.

Thirdly, the Turkish elections are not conducted in a standardized democratic context. Highly polarized social groups form two large blocs, and the victory of one side could result in political pressure and legal sanctions for the other. President Erdoğan and his bloc, in particular, are seen as fighting for their survival against an opposition that seeks to punish the regime's illegal and unjustified actions over the past 21 years. Conversely, if President Erdoğan wins the presidency, he is likely to use legal mechanisms to restructure the opposition. In this sense, electoral security is crucial, as both the government and the opposition may resort to extreme measures to prevent a possible loss.

TURKISH POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

After the constitutional amendments through a controversial referendum in 2017, which was supported only by 51 % of the people, Türkiye adopted a unique type of Presidential system criticized by many for inclining towards authoritarianism. Some political scientists, such as Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, define this system as "Sultanism" (Politik Yol 2023), whereas some others use terms like "hyperpresidentialism" (Duvar English 2020). The focal point of these critics is the lack of balancing mechanisms against the powers of the president once elected.

The presidential election and the powers of the president

The Turkish Presidential election is conducted on the basis of a candidate receiving more than half of the votes (50% + 1) to secure the election. If no candidate is able to achieve this majority, a second round of voting is

conducted two weeks later, on May 28, 2023. In this second round, only the two candidates with the highest number of votes will compete, and the one with the majority will be elected president. As per Article 104 of the Constitution, the Turkish president is the head of the state and the sole authority in the executive branch (Turkish Grand National Assembly 2018). The president represents the unity of the republic and the Turkish nation and is responsible for ensuring the harmonious functioning of state institutions and implementing the constitution. The president has the power to consent or veto laws, propose law bills and constitutional amendments for referendum, and seek redress from the Constitutional Court in cases where laws conflict with the constitution. The president is authorized to appoint Vice Presidents, Ministers, important bureaucratic officials, Turkish diplomats, and representatives working abroad without the need for parliamentary approval. Additionally, the president is responsible for approving international agreements and for implementing policies to ensure national security. The President of Türkiye also has limited legislative powers. Presidential proclamations or decrees (*kararname*) can be issued by the president but cannot pertain to basic political rights and duties. Furthermore, the president cannot issue decrees on subjects that are already regulated by law. If the parliament enacts a law that contradicts the presidential proclamation, then the decree becomes null and void. Therefore, the president's legislative powers are restricted (Turkish Grand National Assembly 2018).

The parliamentary election and the powers of the parliament

Turkish parliament (TBMM), composed of 600 deputies, is responsible for making, amending, and removing laws, discussing and adopting the budget, coining money and declaring war, approving international treaties, and declaring amnesty law with a 3/5 majority of votes. Turkish parliament can ratify the law with a simple majority (301 votes) and override the presidential veto with a simple majority.

The parliament has the authority to propose constitutional amendments with a 1/3 majority, which amounts to 200 votes and can pass these changes with a 3/5 majority, which is equivalent to 360 votes. The President of Türkiye can veto constitutional amendments. However, if the parliament obtains a 2/3

majority, which amounts to 400 votes, in support of the amendment, the president can either approve it or put it into a referendum. If the constitutional amendment receives less than 2/3 majority support, which is between 360 to 399 votes, it will still be put under referendum even if the president does not veto it. This implies that while making laws in the parliament may be relatively straightforward, amending the constitution is more difficult, particularly if the president is not from the same party or bloc as the parliamentary majority (Turkish Grand National Assembly 2018).

In Türkiye, parliamentary elections are conducted using the proportional representation system. However, a calculation method known as the "D'Hondt system" is utilized, which tends to benefit larger political parties. The electorate of Türkiye casts their ballots in 87 separate electoral districts in 81 cities during parliamentary elections (TRT Haber 2023).

On February 6, 2023, a devastating earthquake struck Turkey, causing extensive damage to 10 cities, including Kahramanmaraş, Hatay-Antakya, Osmaniye, Adıyaman, Gaziantep, Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Diyarbakır, Malatya, and Adana. As a result, millions of individuals were compelled to either relocate to other cities or migrate to new areas without changing their residency status. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of people may be unable to participate in the 2023 elections if they did not update their residency or would have to travel to the affected areas to cast their votes on election day (Uluslararası Politika Akademisi 2023). This situation presents significant issues related to free and fair elections and electoral security principles. Despite this, neither the media nor the political elite have raised significant concerns.

WHO ARE THE MAIN ACTORS?

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the People's Alliance

There are currently two main political blocs vying for power in Turkey. The first bloc is led by Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which is Islamist, conservative, and right-wing. The party's chair and presidential candidate is Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been governing Turkey since 2003. Initially, he served as Prime Minister from 2003 to 2014 and then became the president of the Republic in a parliamentary system from 2014 to 2018. Most recently he has been serving as the Turkish president since 2018, which

will be his second and last term in the presidential system if he is re-elected. Therefore, Erdoğan is a seasoned politician who has won many elections before. His party's defeat in the 2019 local elections in Istanbul and Ankara is sometimes viewed as his only loss. However, President Erdoğan's task this time is much tougher than before, as polls suggest he cannot win the election in the first or second round of the presidential election.

Erdoğan emerged as a powerful political figure in 1994, following his unexpected election as Mayor of Istanbul against the secular establishment. He hails from a traditional Sunni Turkish family in Rize and was brought up in the conservative neighbourhood of Kasımpaşa in Istanbul, where he attended an Islamic prayer and preaching school known as İmam Hatip. Erdoğan earned a degree from Marmara University's Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, although there have been claims from some critics that his diploma is not genuine.

His Islamist background has made him a controversial figure in the media and among the secular establishment due to his aggressive political style and Islamist agenda. Nonetheless, his charisma and strong connections with the Islamist masses have cemented his status as an undisputed and undefeated leader. As an Islamist leader, Erdoğan has removed many barriers against Islamism, including successfully allowing the use of "*türban*" (Islamic headscarf) in public offices and lifting restrictions on graduates of İmam Hatip schools from entering universities and state jobs.

Erdoğan's and AKP's bloc is called the People's Alliance (*Cumhur İttifakı*), which includes six parties. Previously, the bloc consisted of only three parties, including AKP, the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP), and the far-right Islamist Great Unity Party (BBP). However, before the upcoming elections, Erdoğan convinced the Islamist /anti-occidental New Welfare Party (YRP), Islamist/pro-Kurdish Free Cause Party (HÜDA-PAR), and centre-left Democratic Left Party (DSP) to join his bloc. With these additions, Erdoğan hopes to increase his popularity, but the inclusion of radical groups such as YRP and HÜDA-PAR in the People's Alliance may alienate more secular-minded voters and especially women who are concerned about Islamist groups' limitations on their freedoms. Despite this, Erdoğan's party remains

ahead in the polls, and they may well become the largest party in the parliament following the next elections.

Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and the Nation Alliance

The joint candidate of the second bloc, called Nation Alliance (*Millet İttifakı*), is Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. Born in 1948 in Tunceli, Kılıçdaroğlu comes from an Alevi-Zaza family. After working in various significant state institutions, including the Social Insurance Institution (SSK), he became a member of the parliament representing the pro-secular Republican People's Party (CHP) in 2002. With his anti-corruption campaigns and unblemished reputation, he gained swift success in politics and was elected as the new chair of the CHP in 2010, with considerable support from the media and party members. Additionally, Kılıçdaroğlu served as the Vice President of the Socialist International from 2012 to 2014.

Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu represents the classical secular/Kemalist heritage of the Turkish state. However, he has brought new voters and supporter groups to his party by following a new strategy in the last few years. Since his March for Justice in 2017, organized against the arrests made as part of the government crackdown following the July 2016 coup d'état attempt, he has been able to convince some right-wing groups to support his leadership against Erdoğan's authoritarian-leaning rule. As a result, the nationalist and Kemalist Good Party (İYİ Parti), centre-right Democrat Party (DP), and Islamist Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi/SP) all began to support him. More recently, the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) and centre-right conservative Future Party (Gelecek Partisi/GP), both new parties founded by former AKP cadres, have also joined the Nation Alliance, forming the "table of six" (*altılı masa*), and endorsed Kılıçdaroğlu. Kılıçdaroğlu's success continued when he convinced the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) not to field their own candidate in the presidential election and to support him instead. With the additional support coming from HDP, Kılıçdaroğlu leads the presidential race, and almost all polls indicate that he can defeat Erdoğan either in the first or second round.

HDP and the Labour and Freedom Alliance

Another important bloc in Turkish politics is the Labour and Freedom Alliance (*Emek ve Özgürlük İttifakı*) led by the Party of Greens and the Left Future, also

abbreviated as Green Left Party (Yeşil Sol Parti/YSP). YSP was established in 2016 by famous leftist Turkish intellectuals such as Murat Belge, Ufuk Uras, and Kutluğ Ataman. Not being able to show a real presence in Turkish politics, the party has recently become the focus of attention thanks to pro-Kurdish HDP's decision to enter the 2023 parliamentary elections from the list of this party. HDP has become a main actor in Turkish politics in recent years, with 10-11 % solid support from Kurdish voters. Although the party's former charismatic young leader Selahattin Demirtaş has been imprisoned for many years, the party keeps its strength and popularity among the Kurds. Four other small socialist parties, the Turkish Labour Party (TİP), Labour Party (EMEP), Labourist Movement Party (EHP), and Social Freedom Party (TÖP), also joined this bloc recently. The bloc is endorsed by the Federation of Socialist Assemblies (Sosyalist Meclisler Federasyonu) as well (Euronews 2023b). The Labour and Freedom Alliance has decided not to nominate its own presidential candidate and instead declared its support to Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu.

Other presidential candidates

In addition to Erdoğan and Kılıçdaroğlu, there are two minor candidates running for the presidency in Turkey. Muharrem İnce, a former member of the CHP, is now the leader of the Kemalist Homeland Party (Memleket Partisi). He is likely to get around 4-5 % of the vote by appealing to classical CHP and İYİ Parti supporters who would otherwise vote for Kılıçdaroğlu. However, İnce's supporters are likely to switch their support to Kılıçdaroğlu in the second round of the presidential election. Sinan Oğan, on the other hand, is a former MHP member who is endorsed by a small electoral bloc called the Ancestral Alliance (*Ata İttifakı*). This alliance is made up of four small nationalist parties led by the anti-immigrant and ultranationalist Victory Party (Zafer Partisi). Oğan is not expected to receive more than 2-3 % of the votes, but he could become an influential figure and even the leader of the Turkish far-right in the future. In a potential second round, Oğan's supporters will likely vote for Erdoğan due to the HDP's open support for Kılıçdaroğlu.

FOREIGN POLICY PROSPECTS

Although foreign policy has traditionally not been a significant factor in Turkish elections, the outcome of the upcoming elections will likely have a substantial impact on Turkish foreign policy.

The opposition bloc, led by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, has expressed a desire to improve relations with both the U.S. and the EU. This has been publicly stated by Kılıçdaroğlu and other influential members of the Republican People's Party (CHP), including former Turkish Ambassador to London, Ünal Çeviköz. CHP also chose Türkiye's former Tel Aviv and Washington Ambassador Namık Tan as a deputy from Istanbul (who might become the head of the Turkish Parliament's Foreign Policy Commission), which shows their inclination to straighten out things with the West. Kılıçdaroğlu could choose Ünal Çeviköz or former Turkish diplomats within the CHP ranks such as Faruk Loğoğlu and Osman Korutürk as his Minister of Foreign Affairs. He could also choose a clean and unknown "surprise" figure (e.g. the party's EU representative Kader Sevinç) to create a new beginning. However, the diverse coalition supporting Kılıçdaroğlu, including Ahmet Davutoğlu's Future Party, may constrain his foreign policy choices. As a result, Kılıçdaroğlu may have to compromise on key issues such as the Syrian civil war, migration, and territorial disputes with the EU, such as Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The CHP has openly advocated for Türkiye's full membership in the European Union, renegotiating an agreement with the EU regarding the situation of Syrian immigrants, updating the Customs Union, and improving relations with the Western world in general. However, it is not realistic to expect the opposition to quickly resolve complex issues such as the Cyprus Problem, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Kurdish question and make concessions to Washington and/or Brussels in these core issues. Kılıçdaroğlu seeks to negotiate a deal with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad regarding the civil war in Syria and the situation of Syrian immigrants, which may not be feasible under Erdoğan's leadership. However, Kılıçdaroğlu's promises may also be unrealistic given that the Assad regime may not want to accept millions of rebellious Sunnis onto its soil. Furthermore, it is unknown how Assad could regain control of large territories currently controlled by Kurdish and Sunni groups. Moreover, it would be highly controversial for Kılıçdaroğlu to advocate

for a deal with Assad, given the Syrian regime's egregious human rights abuses, and it could indirectly normalize Putin's harsh methods in Ukraine.

The Kurdish policy proposed by Kılıçdaroğlu poses several potential political risks. The proposal involves referring the Kurdish question to the Turkish parliament (TBMM) for resolution, which is ostensibly a commendable approach. However, it must be noted that throughout its 103-year existence, the TBMM has not been able to effectively address this significant issue in practice. There might be new openings related to Kurdish cultural and political rights within the limits of a unitary state in Türkiye; however, solving the Kurdish question in Iraq and Syria is not something the Turkish parliament can do. These issues are mostly regulated by the security bureaucracy in Türkiye (Turkish Armed Forces-TSK and Turkish Intelligence agency-MİT) and the Turkish Foreign Ministry, which these institutions have always possessed (especially TSK and MİT) a hawkish/Turkish nationalist attitude to these matters so far. So, Kılıçdaroğlu will be immediately surrounded by security bureaucracy, and he will probably become more distanced from pro-Kurdish groups in the near future. Moreover, without adopting a coherent policy with Washington and Brussels, Türkiye cannot solve the whole Kurdish question. In addition, there might be serious problems within the new government, especially between the İYİ Parti and HDP supporter groups about the Kurdish policy.

The opposition will also be more pro-Western in its foreign policy attitude and criticize Russia more severely for its Ukrainian invasion than the current government. However, this might bring new risks in terms of relations with Russia, especially concerning the country's energy security. Furthermore, since some influential figures from the opposition, such as İYİ Parti leader Meral Akşener and CHP's Ankara Mayor Mansur Yavaş, harshly criticize China for the repression of Uighurs, Türkiye's relations with China might also be spoiled during his tenure in the office. Although this seems idealistic for the Western world, an unstable country having energy security problems and a narrowed international market could create an even worse situation.

In the event that the incumbent president wins the upcoming election in Türkiye, the current status quo will continue. Repairing relations with the

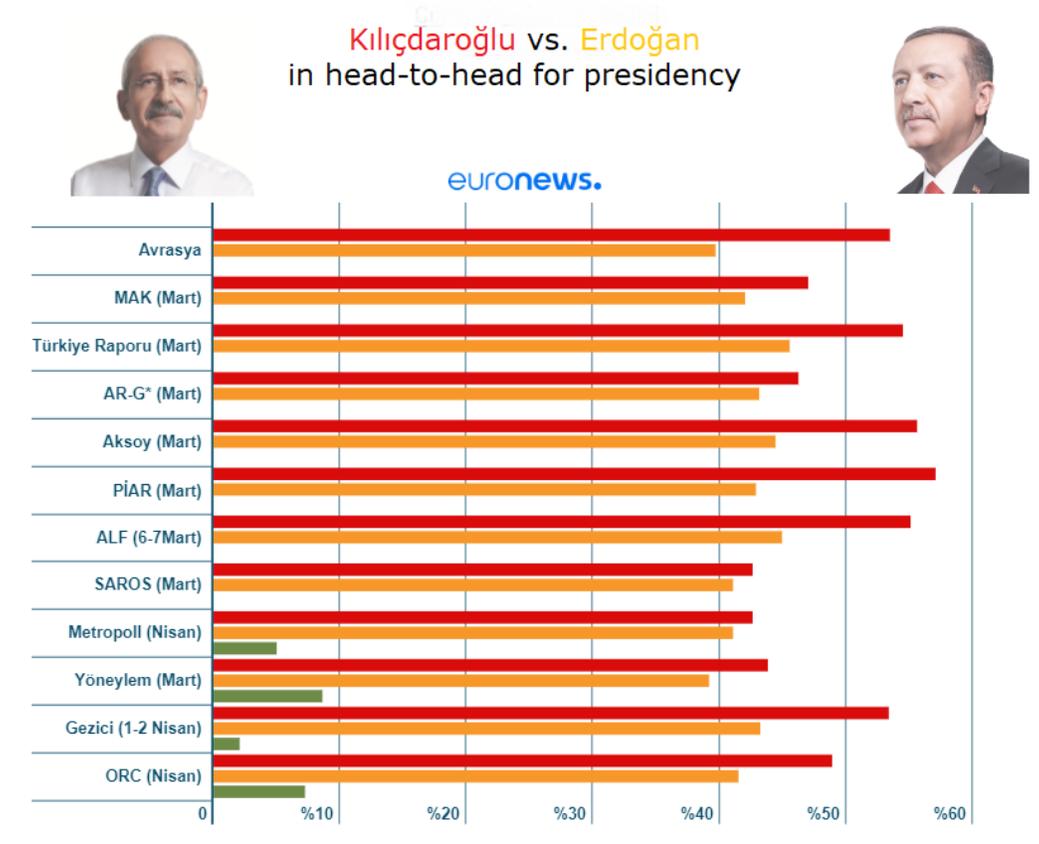
United States appears to be an uphill battle for President Erdoğan, given Joe Biden's position on his regime. Biden has expressed his firm opposition to Erdoğan's government and has excluded Türkiye from participating in the Democracy Summits organized in Washington. The U.S. Congress has also taken an increasingly hostile stance towards Türkiye in recent years, with the adoption of its most anti-Türkiye measures in history. These measures include efforts to prevent all military sales to Ankara, in addition to the CAATSA sanctions already imposed. Thus, Türkiye's problem is not limited to President Biden but also extends to Capitol Hill. As a result, this situation incentivizes Erdoğan to continue to strengthen his ties with Moscow, which serves to alienate two traditional allies, the United States and Türkiye. However, if a new U.S. President is elected in 2024, it may present an opportunity to improve Turkish-American relations during Erdoğan's presidency.

In the lead-up to the election, an intriguing development was President Erdoğan's decision to select all his ministers as deputy candidates. This suggests that he may be concerned about a possible electoral loss and wishes to keep prominent figures from his party within the parliament. Alternatively, it could indicate that he intends to completely overhaul his cabinet following the election. If Erdoğan secures another term, he will likely have to appoint new and unfamiliar faces to his cabinet. Therefore, he may opt to nominate new individuals in an effort to mend relations with Brussels and Washington, but it remains uncertain whether such a move would be sufficient to achieve his objectives.

If elected, it is likely that President Erdoğan will strive to establish a lasting legacy and promote Türkiye's status as a regional power by bolstering its military strength and economic influence. This ambition may be supported by far-right political figures, such as Fatih Erbakan of the New Welfare Party, who may advocate for increased emphasis on Islamism and nationalism in Türkiye's foreign policy. This could manifest in issues related to Cyprus, the Eastern Mediterranean, and relations with the United States, Israel, and the Kurdish question. However, recent positive developments, such as Greece's support for Türkiye following a devastating earthquake, make a severe military or political confrontation between Ankara and Athens unlikely. Additionally,

Türkiye is expected to continue strengthening its relationship with Armenia, as the issue of Karabakh has been mostly resolved.

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS FOR ELECTIONS



Source: Euronews 2023a

1. Kılıçdaroğlu elected president in the first or second round, hung parliament

According to several polls, it is expected that Nation Alliance candidate and CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu will win the presidential election against incumbent President Erdoğan, either in the first or second round (Euronews 2023a). However, these same polls suggest that the AKP and People's Alliance could maintain their majority in parliament, resulting in a hung parliament where neither bloc has the required 301 seats (Euronews 2023c). To amend the constitution and return to a parliamentary system, the opposition needs the

presidency and 360 votes. Therefore, a parliamentary majority of less than 360 make constitutional amendments or transition to a parliamentary system.

It is noteworthy that AKP could still become the largest party, allowing Erdoğan to form a government and become the Prime Minister, increasing his chances of ruling the country. Despite this, the opposition would still benefit since the president has significant powers to shape domestic and foreign policy. In this sense, Kılıçdaroğlu is expected to adopt a more pro-Western stance compared to Erdoğan.

2. Kılıçdaroğlu being elected president in the first or second-round, People's Alliance majority within the parliament

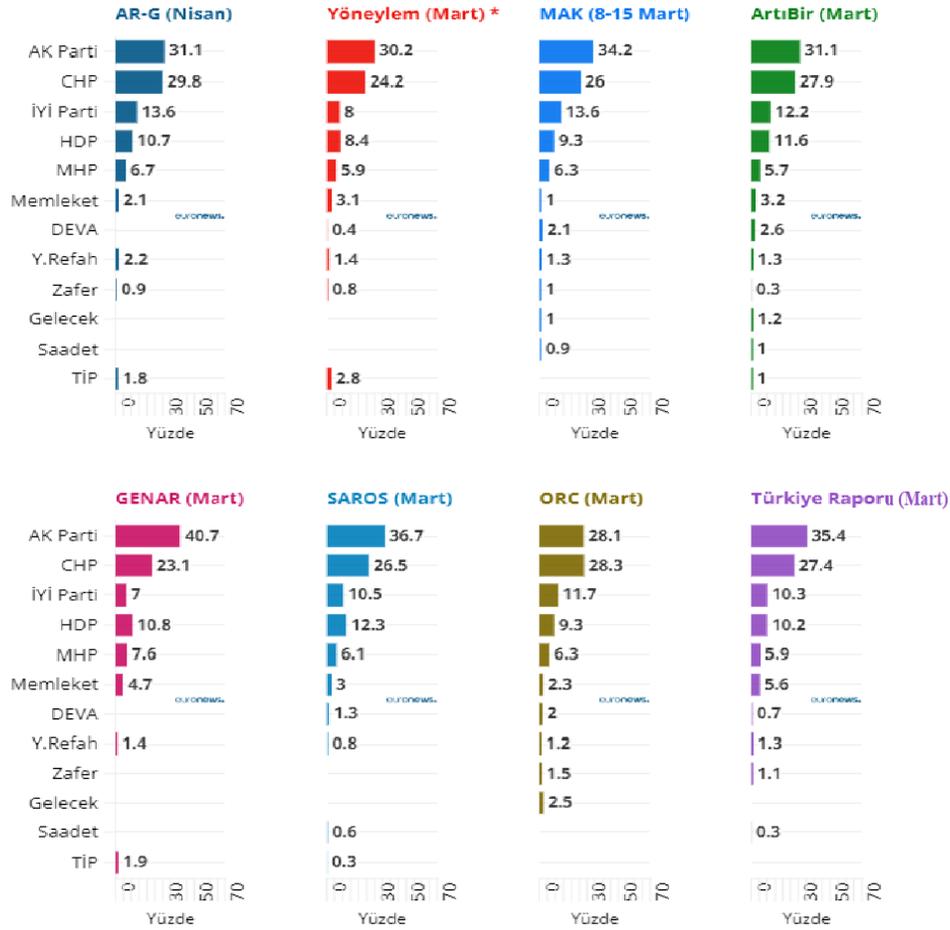
In this scenario, Kılıçdaroğlu is elected president, but the parliamentary majority stays within the hands of the People's Alliance. Again, this would mean Kılıçdaroğlu staying as president and not being able to change the system unless he agrees with AKP. This scenario will bring more pressure on Kılıçdaroğlu's presidency as he will have to deal with Erdoğan's questioning of his authority with the People's Alliance majority in the parliament. In that sense, if this happens, Kılıçdaroğlu's presidency will be weaker, and policies might be similar to the current situation in terms of the West-Russia balance.

3. Kılıçdaroğlu being elected president in the first or second round, Nation Alliance + HDP majority within the parliament

In this scenario, Kılıçdaroğlu is elected president either in the first or second round, and his bloc (Nation Alliance) gets the parliamentary majority with support coming from HDP. This is the ideal scenario for the opposition since Kılıçdaroğlu will be able to govern Türkiye as the new Turkish president with a parliamentary majority. In that sense, he could reshape Türkiye as he wishes and bring a new type of strengthened democratic parliamentary system. Kılıçdaroğlu can also act more decisive steps in foreign policy about ameliorating relations with the U.S. and the EU. However, a radical change in Türkiye's attitude in terms of the Kurdish question and the Cyprus problem should not be expected as Kılıçdaroğlu will be elected with the support of 5 different right-wing parties. Moreover, problems might appear between

Kılıçdaroğlu's right-wing support and HDP due to the Kurdish question and Türkiye's military operations in Syria and Iraq.

OPINION POLLS' RESULTS FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS (MARCH 2023)



Source: Euronews. 2023c.

4. Erdoğan being elected president in the first or second round, hung parliament

All polls indicate that President Erdoğan's chance of getting elected in the first round is impossible (Euronews 2023a). However, in case Muharrem İnce reaches high votes (5-6 %) in the first round and the election goes to the second round, Erdoğan could convince voters to vote for him one last time since the

opposition would not have a majority in the parliament. Erdoğan could say that the opposition's whole rhetoric and plan to go back to the parliamentary system is not possible anymore, so the new system should continue under his leadership. Erdoğan's victory in the presidential election will mean the continuation of the current state of affairs and Türkiye's further distancing from democracy and the Western world in order to transform into a regional power.

5. Erdoğan being elected president in the first or second-round, People's Alliance majority within the parliament

In this scenario, Erdoğan is elected as president in the second round on May 28, 2023 after his party gets the majority in the parliament on May 14, 2023. Again, Erdoğan could convince voters that the opposition's big plan to return to the parliamentary system is not feasible anymore, so he should be the leading name for the sake of political stability since his bloc possesses the majority. In this scenario, Erdoğan will be even stronger and shape the country's future as he wishes without any constraints and barriers.

6. Erdoğan being elected president in the first or second-round, Nation Alliance + HDP majority in the parliament

In this scenario, President Erdoğan is elected in the second round, but his bloc stays short of the parliamentary majority. Accordingly, with the support of the HDP, the opposition gets the parliamentary majority. This would still be advantageous for Erdoğan in case the opposition stays short of 360 seats in the parliament since Erdoğan will have the veto power. In other words, for a return to the parliamentary system, consent via a referendum would be needed from the opposition. Moreover, since all polls indicate that AKP is to become the leading party in the parliament, strangely, a return to the parliamentary system could mean Erdoğan's chance to continue in politics by trying to become a Prime Minister.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the 2023 elections in Türkiye are critical for the future of the country, as two fundamentally opposing visions are competing for power.

Regardless of whether the government or the opposition wins, the country's problems related to polarization and democratization will persist due to existing political cleavages and identity-based issues. Governing Türkiye with either a presidential or parliamentary system will be challenging, as both systems must contend with deep political cleavages and societal trauma caused by state repression and terrorism.

Based on published opinion polls, the most likely scenario in this election is the election of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu as the 13th Turkish president in either the first or second round. However, a hung parliament or a weak Nation Alliance majority with HDP support is also likely, meaning that Kılıçdaroğlu would not be able to restore the parliamentary system without parliamentary consensus with the AKP and/or MHP. It is possible that Kılıçdaroğlu may have to work with a slight People's Alliance majority in parliament, which would require a consensus within the parliament between the two groups to amend the constitution and change the system.

However, a hung parliament or a People's Alliance majority in the parliamentary election may increase the chance of Erdoğan winning if the presidential election goes to the second round. Muharrem İnce's relatively high percentage of votes, mostly taken from the classical voters of CHP and İYİ Parti, could easily cause the presidential election to go to the second round, even with as little as 5-6 % of votes for İnce combined with 2-3 % for Sinan Oğan. Erdoğan may then use polarizing tactics based on religious or sectarian identity differences to appeal to voters, particularly in relation to Kılıçdaroğlu's Alevi faith and open admission of his identity.

In terms of the potential outcomes of the election, if the opposition is successful, there could be an improvement in relations with the Western world, and the country's democratic process could potentially be restarted. However, it is important for the opposition to be mindful not to antagonize the large Sunni bloc in the country, which largely support the AKP. On the other hand, if the incumbent president wins, the author is concerned that Türkiye's divergence from the West could be amplified unless there is a significant shift in Erdoğan's approach to politics and his team.

The strained relationship with U.S. President Joe Biden and his administration, as well as the negative sentiment toward Türkiye in Capitol Hill, could potentially drive Erdoğan to deepen his cooperation with Russia and prioritize relations with China over the U.S. and the EU.

In conclusion, the author believes that the Western world should remain impartial during the election process and avoid any accusations of political interference, while still supporting the opposition due to their prioritization of democracy, human rights, and peaceful conflict resolution - values that are important to Western countries. Additionally, the opposition is expected to have better relations with the U.S. and the EU than the current government, as the latter has lost its credibility with the U.S. and may struggle to repair its relationship with Washington while the Biden administration remains in power.

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