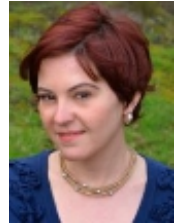


Success for the pro-Kurdish HDP in Turkey's general election could reshape the country's politics

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Turkey will hold a general election on 7 June. [Firat Cengiz](#) previews the election, noting that while the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is likely to win the most votes, it is unlikely the AKP will secure enough support to allow Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to enhance the powers of the presidency. She argues that a key development will be whether the pro-Kurdish HDP can secure a large representation in parliament as this would significantly alter the dynamics of Turkish politics and potentially spell an end to the era of AKP single-party governments.



Election campaigns are in full swing in Turkey as the country waits for the general elections to take place on 7 June. The last three parliamentary terms have been marked by the governing AKP's ([Justice and Development Party](#)) and President Erdoğan's increasing electoral popularity and the consequent consolidation of their political power.

The AKP is more than likely to come out of the elections as the most popular party once again. However, the June elections still offer hope to Turkey's increasingly marginalised opposition and a prospect of the beginning of a transition in the country's political landscape.

Background to the 2015 Turkish general election

After the AKP came to power in 2002 following the collapse of Turkey's central parties, the subsequent AKP governments have engaged in a steady process of [disciplining](#) the country's non-majoritarian veto players, particularly the military and the Constitutional Court. Recently, Turkey has witnessed the AKP directing similar actions toward the rest of the judiciary and political groups that were previously in alliance with the party and provided political support to it.

Most importantly, an economic conflict between the government and the [Gülen community](#) with regard to the Turkish education sector transformed into a political conflict and tit-for-tat criminal investigations. In this process the remains of justice and the rule of law in the country's governance were destroyed. A criminal [corruption investigation](#) targeting high-ranking state officials and their families with alleged ties to Erdoğan's own family was blamed by Erdoğan on a so-called '[parallel structure](#)' within the state formed by Gülen supporters with the aim of taking political institutions under their control.

This was followed by a retaliatory investigation against the members of the so-called 'parallel structure' within the state bureaucracy and the media. Most recently, Turkey's High Judges and Public Prosecutors Council started [disciplinary action](#) against judges who ruled for the release of arrested suspects in this case.

Erdoğan and the AKP's actions in the third governmental term have been calculated to embed their political power legally into the country's [constitutional architecture](#) and symbolically into the public sphere. In August 2014 Erdoğan accomplished his long-standing dream of becoming the country's [first publicly elected president](#). This was followed by the building of a [presidential palace](#) that symbolises the shift in the political power structure with its massive size and the massive budget ([£385 million](#)) allocated to it, as is usual in authoritarian regimes.

Nevertheless, Turkey continues to be a parliamentary democracy, which means the President's constitutional powers are limited. Erdoğan relies on the AKP to achieve a supermajority in the forthcoming elections, so that the party can send a constitutional amendment to a referendum singlehandedly with a view to establishing a [semi-](#)

[presidential regime](#) in which the President enjoys extraordinary powers. Since Erdoğan has left the AKP's leadership to [Ahmet Davutoğlu](#), evidently long-standing [conflicts](#) between key party members have been voiced publicly. Thus, despite Erdoğan's continuing tutelage, the AKP is not going to the elections at its strongest.

The AKP's and Erdoğan's consolidation of their power in their third term has been met with an increasing reliance on the 'street' as an alternative avenue for opposition and resistance, increasing class awareness and politics on the side of the working classes and an increasing role for gender politics in public discourse. In the absence of functioning legal and political outlets for opposition, the [streets](#) of several Turkish cities have become the platforms for Turkey's vibrant, politically engaged and diverse youth to express their frustration with authoritarianism.



Severe health and safety risks facing workers, exemplified among others in the [Soma mining accident](#) that claimed more than 300 lives, translated into widespread protests and strikes. Turkish men and women took to the streets to express their frustration at increased gender based violence after [Özgecan Aslan's](#) brutal murder. In all three issues, President Erdoğan has been blamed for using a [polarising discourse](#) that covertly encourages violence and takes the perpetrators' side.

The campaign

[Opinion polls](#) with regard to the forthcoming elections offer varying predictions. The AKP is not expected to protect its current majority in the Parliament, far less achieve the supermajority necessary for constitutional amendments desired by Erdoğan, although the party is still predicted to come out of the elections as the most popular with around 40 per cent of the vote.

The central left and right opposition parties CHP ([Republican People's Party](#)) and MHP ([Nationalist Movement Party](#)) are expected to enjoy marginal increases in their share of the vote, as both parties' conservative leaderships can only partially attract Turkey's young and vibrant opposition. Interestingly, much like the central role played by the Scottish National Party in recent electoral politics in the UK, the post-election political landscape of Turkey will depend primarily on the performance of the Kurdish HDP ([People's Democratic Party](#)).

The HDP's election [manifesto](#) appears to be the most progressive among the alternatives, as the party fully embraces not only Kurdish minority rights and autonomous democratic local governance, but also other fundamental rights and freedoms, LGBT rights, workers' rights and sustainable green politics. The HDP is also the only Turkish political party fully committed to gender equality, as nearly 50 per cent of the party's candidate MPs are women. The party enters the elections with a national list, rather than with independent candidates from the Kurdish region where the party is strongest.

This is a divergence from the party's previous election strategy and is risky as it means that the party will have to attract at least 10 per cent of the vote to beat Turkey's rather high national election threshold to make it to the parliament. For this to happen, the party needs 600 thousand additional votes to that attracted by the party's co-leader Demirtaş in the recent [presidential elections](#). This, however, is a necessary strategy if the party is to establish itself as a national left-wing opposition party in the foreseeable future rather than a regional party appealing to the

Kurdish electorate alone.

The HDP's performance in the forthcoming elections could change Turkey's political predicament dramatically. The party's potential entry into the parliament with a predicted 72 MPs (at present) would mean the end of the era of single party AKP governments. Even though an AKP-led coalition government would still be a possibility, the AKP's aspirations for the presidential regime would all but vanish, since all other political parties strongly reject a system that will give Erdoğan extraordinary powers.

The HDP's success against the AKP in the Kurdish region is almost guaranteed. With the Kurdish peace process essentially [stalled](#), the Kurdish electorate has less sympathy and trust than ever in the AKP. In the light of the [Kurdish victory](#) against ISIS in Kobane, despite the Turkish government's [refusal](#) to give military support to Syrian Kurds to prevent a potential genocide, Turkey's Kurdish citizens feel vindicated.

Nevertheless, the Kurdish issue still provokes nationalist sensitivities in the rest of the country. Thus, the HDP's electoral performance will depend primarily on whether or not left-wing opposition voters in the rest of the country, and in particular the middle class voters on the coast lines, will be able to put nationalistic tendencies aside and vote on the basis of issues. In this, the forthcoming elections offer a crucial test case for Turkey's political future.

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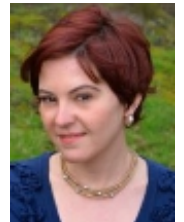
Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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