

Turkey

Last update:	27 oktober 2022
Population:	85,042,736 (World Bank 2021)
President:	Recep Tayyip Erdogan
Governemental type:	Republican parliamentary democracy
Ruling coalition:	One ruling party - AKP
Last election:	31 March 2018 (Local)
Next election:	18 June 2023 (General)
Sister parties:	Republican People's Party (CHP)

Erdoğan is the president of Turkey since his electoral win in 2014. On 1 November 2015, the ruling AK Party won the snap parliamentary elections in a landslide victory, establishing a majority in parliament and a single-party rule. After the failed coup d'état on the 15 July 2016 by a part of the Turkish military and subsequent state of emergency, a referendum on 16 April 2017 intended to transfer power from parliament and ministries to the president was accepted by a narrow margin. enabled the president to appoint and fire ministers and top state officials, control the budget, issue decrees, and unilaterally declare a state of emergency. Parliamentary elections are now held every five years, instead of four, at the same time as the presidential elections. Furthermore, the office of prime minister disappeared and parliament lost its right of interpellation.

Bolstered by the result of this referendum, Turkey under Erdoğan has entered the transition to an increasingly authoritarian state. As part of his policies, opposition parties and critical journalists are marginalised, and pressure on human rights and civil liberties increased. Turkey's prospects of eventually joining the European Union have practically vanished due to Erdoğan's neglect of democratic values. Elections planned for 2019 were held early in 2018, a move that critics view as a political strategy of survival, to secure absolute power. Though the elections are still decisive, and they are generally reasonably fair, critics have no doubt that Erdoğan will do everything in his power to stay in charge, leaving Turkey a de facto autocracy. In this powerplay, the eyes are set on 18 June 2023, when parliamentary and presidential elections will be organised. The country's opposition already formed an united bloc in their bid to topple Erdoğan and his AK Party.

Political Situation

Straddling the continents of Europe and Asia, Turkey's strategically important location has given it major influence in the region and control over the entrance to the Black Sea. Turkey's progress towards democracy and a market economy was halted in the decades following the death of President Atatürk in 1938. The army saw itself as the guarantor of the constitution and ousted governments on a number of occasions when perceived to challenge secular values.

Since then, the AK Party has gained control over the government, and is now the largest party in Turkey with President Erdoğan at the front. Together with the MHP, their allied far-right party, it enjoys a parliamentary majority and can therefore consolidate authoritarian rule, passing rushed legislation, and side-lining opposition parties. The government has reshaped public and state institutions and is effectively removing checks and balances of power. Nevertheless, the opposition parties, though they are strictly opposed by Erdoğan, maintain a limited amount of power, particularly in cities such as Istanbul and Ankara.

Economic crisis

Turkey is currently in a currency and debt crisis, which began in 2018 due to the excessive current account deficit and significant amounts of private foreign currency debt in the Turkish economy. Erdoğan's authoritarian leadership and unorthodox approach to interest rate policy are exacerbating the economic crisis. While the policy of low interest rates at the beginning of Erdoğan's election served as a catalyst for generating growth in Turkey's emerging market economy, it now created high levels of debt and lending. Instead of raising interest rates, which is the conventional approach to rising inflation, Erdoğan decided to lower them. Turkey's central bank resistance to this policy led to the resignation of several bank officials.

During 2021, Erdoğan has come under increased pressure over socio-economic problems in Turkey. Many Turkish citizens are in socio-economic difficulties due to skyrocketing inflation in the country and took to the streets of Istanbul late 2021 to protest against the financial turmoil in Turkey. Unemployment rose to fourteen percent in 2021, up from ten percent in 2016. Meanwhile, the Turkish lira has lost 44% of its value in 2021 alone. Erdoğan refuses to implement inflation-curbing measures, as this will possibly be unpopular towards 2023 elections. The AK Party's popularity declined due to the economic crisis, which resulted in the parties monumental losses in 2019 local elections in Istanbul and Ankara

Mending foreign relations

Turkey and the EU established relations in 1959 and formalised these in the 1963 Ankara Agreement. However, the accession negotiations have been stalled since 2016 amid EU accusations and criticism on Turkish human rights violations. The course of events in Turkey have drifted the country further away from EU accession. Since the European parliament committee voted to suspend accession talks with Turkey in 2019, there is little perspective for Turkish inclusion in the EU in the near future. In April 2022 relations between Europe and Turkey further deteriorated as human rights activist and philanthropist Osman Kavala has been sentenced to life in prison for his role in anti-government protests. The case raises enormous concerns over the independence of Turkish courts damaged Turkey's relations with Western countries and civil society organisations further – as the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) commenced an infringement procedure against Turkey. Since 2019, Ankara has refused to abide by various ECHR rulings, and Erdoğan has said he is not planning to do so in the future.

As a member of NATO, Turkey controversially threatened to block Sweden's and Finland's NATO accession after Russia invaded Ukraine. After an agreement was reached at the end of June to support the memberships, but ongoing negotiations are hampered by accusations from the Turkish side hinting at a new membership blockade. Turkey is using the agreement to curb Swedish support for Kurdish groups, which Ankara has classified as terrorist organisations

Amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine, President Erdoğan has been very vocal in centring Turkey as a centre-stage of diplomacy. Shortly after the invasion, he had invited Russian FM Lavrov and his Ukrainian counterpart Kuleba to the 'Antalya Diplomatic Forum', where they held much-anticipated talks. However, these remained fruitless as Russia did not cease military actions towards Ukraine. Nevertheless, Turkey remains open to hosting new negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, with Erdoğan positioning himself as a mediator in the conflict. For instance, Turkish diplomacy was one of the key contributors to the conclusion of the grain agreement that will allow Ukraine to export grain from its ports during the war. Turkey continues to maintain ties with both sides in the conflict. Erdoğan has expressed support for Ukrainian sovereignty, including returning Crimea to Ukraine. At the same time, the Turkish government refuses to join the sanctions imposed by the West on Russia and is tightening financial bonds with the Kremlin, such as a new energy cooperation.

Turkey also mended ties with various regional countries, as Erdoğan tries to boost his legitimacy towards 2023 elections and wishes to increase economic ties to improve on Turkey's economic problems. In 2022 alone, Turkey has mended ties with various regional foes, such as Israel, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The thawing of relations with Saudi Arabia is salient. In 2018, these countries were fiercely opposed after the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Turkey. Furthermore, Turkey opened diplomatic talks with its neighbour Armenia - and decided to resume flights between its capitals and open the border between the countries. This has been a major breakthrough after years of animosity over various cultural, historical and commercial issues between Yerevan and Ankara.

Towards 2023 elections

The Turkish general election will take place on the 18 June 2023. The main themes affecting these elections are the deepening economic crisis, dissatisfaction with the situation of the Syrian refugees in Turkey who cannot return home and the growing alienation of liberal and democratic-minded Turkish youth from the increasingly conservative and authoritarian government regime. The situation regarding Syrian refugees is part of an EU-Turkey migration deal, in which both parties agreed that Turkey would take any measures to prohibit irregular migration from Turkey to Greek islands and enabled the EU to send anyone arriving irregularly back to Turkey. In exchange, Turkey would be granted 6 billion euro by the EU in humanitarian aid for improvement of the refugee situation in the country and Turkish nationals would be granted visa-free travel to Europe.

Erdoğan already declared that he will run for another term as president of Turkey as the joint candidate of the current coalition between AK Party and MHP. The popularity of the MHP has steadily declined, and might prove a less valuable partner in the alliance as previously was the case. Their alliance, known as the People's Alliance, will face difficulties to retain a parliamentary majority, especially as the opposition formed a second bloc in February 2022. This opposition alliance, known as the Table of Six,

consists of Republican People's Party (CHP), Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA), Democrat Party (DP), Future Party (FP), İYİ (Good) Party and Felicity Party (SP). Their alliance is mainly unified through hostility towards Erdoğan and the aim to return democracy in Turkey, despite the ideological diversity among the opposition parties. The opposition parties are considered to stand a chance against the People's Alliance, especially as voters from the MHP and AK Party seem to switch to the Good Party, which is a breakaway fraction of the MHP.

The People's Democratic Party (HDP) is notably absent from the Table of Six. The party was important in opposition wins at the 2019 local elections but is now deemed as too divisive to have role inside the oppositional bloc. However, HDP forms a third bloc together with five more Kurdish and leftist parties that carry little political weight. This last bloc is called the Labour and Freedom Alliance. The closer the elections approach, the more clear the expectations become. More than eight months before the elections, Turkey's economic and socio-political landscape could still undergo many shifts. With tightened media laws, for instance, Erdoğan seems to be pulling out all the stops to prevent an opposition victory. In addition, it remains to be seen whether the opposition bloc will hold, as several disputes between them could potentially cause a premature split within the alliance. For instance, the Good Party and the CHP disagree among themselves on the presidential candidate to be nominated.

Political rights and civil liberties

In the Turkey of today, political rights and civil liberties are limited, and it has the status of 'not free' according to the NGO Freedom House. The media landscape is limited to a few companies, most close to the Erdoğan presidency, sometimes as a necessity, to avoid further limitations by the president. Critical online news providers do still exist, but they are being actively targeted. Dozens of media workers and journalists are held in pretrial detention or are serving sentences for terrorism offenses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government attempted to manipulate the statistics, and critics, independent medical personnel, and even civilians sharing independent information related to the pandemic were arrested. In October 2022, the government tabled a new bill criminalising the spread of disinformation. The law's vague definition of what constitutes disinformation appears to give the government more power to censor and target government-critical organisations and journalists.

Though there remains a certain element of political pluralism, it is being increasingly limited. The government has cracked down on opposition parties and seriously harmed political rights and electoral opportunities for minority groups, most notably Kurds. Since the summer of 2021, the Kurdish party HDP is faced with a closure case, and the question remains whether the party will continue to exist. It has been accused of "terrorism" through ties with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), though the HDP denies this.

The judiciary in Turkey is also being limited in its independence. In July 2021, Parliament passed a law changing the structure of bar associations, weakening the associations' authority and independence. Though this move was met with protest by 78 out of 80 bar associations, it was enforced, limiting the independence of the judiciary.

Human rights and gender equality

In recent years the country slipped in a deepening human rights crisis with an erosion of Turkey's rule of law and democracy framework. Regarding gender equality, Turkey had long been ahead of its time, giving women the right to vote in the early twentieth century. However, women are nowadays still exposed to large amounts of violence and human rights violations, with domestic violence instances increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2021, President Erdoğan controversially withdrew from the 2014 Istanbul Convention on violence against women. This was met with large-scale protests by women in the streets of multiple cities, and the United Nations Human Rights Commission unsuccessfully urged Erdoğan to reconsider the withdrawal. The deterioration of the situation seems to stem from the political reversal initiated by Erdoğan to appease conservative forces in Turkey.

The rights of the LGBTI+ community in Turkey are also systematically violated, who face discrimination and violence, exacerbated by homophobic rhetoric from politicians. The Istanbul Pride March on June 26, 2022, became an event where hundreds of people were attacked and arrested by a police crackdown. Human right organisations consider the attitude of Turkish authorities to be a brutal campaign against LGBTI+ rights activism and freedom of expression. LGBTI+ topics remain a taboo subject in large parts of Turkish society. Meanwhile, the LGBTI+ facing prejudices, discriminatory practices by governmental authorities and are insufficiently protected under Turkish law.

Ethnic minority groups such as Kurds suffer from discrimination in Turkey, with Kurdish and pro-Kurdish civil society organisations and political parties continuing to suffer problems in exercising their rights. Kurds are the largest ethnic minority of Turkey. Since the dawn of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the relationship between the government and the Kurds has been tense. During several

rebellions in the early twentieth century, the conflict deepened. Restrictions were placed on Kurdish nationalism, leading to economic disadvantages and human rights violations. The PKK, the best known and most radical of the Kurdish movements, launched a guerrilla campaign in 1984 for a homeland in the Kurdish heartland in the southeast. Thousands died and hundreds of thousands became refugees in the ensuing conflict with the PKK, which Turkey, the US and the European Union deem a terrorist organisation. In the early 21st century several attempts were undertaken to end the hostilities. Multiple times, peace talks were shattered by renewed violence. Especially the conflict in Syria became troubling.

The Kurdish coalition in Syria became increasingly a target of Ankara. In 2018 Turkey launched a full military invasion against the Kurds in Syria. Erdoğan defended the move by claiming that it was intended to expel the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - viewed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, due to the PKK being part of the SDF - from the border and create a 30 km-deep safe zone. This safe zone would house around 3.5 million Syrian refugees currently residing in Turkey. Soon after the invasion started, the underpowered Kurdish militias made a deal with the Syrian government, allowing the Syrian army to move into the area of the Kurds - an area over which they lost control over a few years ago. This opened up the way for Turkey and the SDF to agree to a ceasefire. On 22 October 2019 a deal was made, which entailed the use of joint Russian-Turkish patrols to ensure the 30 km-deep safe zones. The invasion can be seen as a Turkish victory, since they regained more control over their border and could now start housing the millions of refugees in the safe zone.

The People's Democratic Party (HDP) is a legal Kurdish political party. This party, too, has faced increasing difficulties as Erdoğan is extending his hate towards the Kurds. In the summer of 2021, an indictment was leveled against the HDP, calling for a closure of the party and the banning of hundreds of individuals associated with it. Critics see the closure case as a political move to clamp down on opposition, particularly as the government has been increasingly vocal on their distrust of the HDP.

Rising authoritarianism

On 15 July 2016, forces loyal to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan quashed a coup attempt by members of the military that began in the evening and devolved into turmoil and violence. He blamed the coup attempt on rival Fethullah Gulen (leader of Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation (FETÖ)), a cleric and former ally who lives in exile in the US. Erdoğan repeatedly demanded the US to arrest or extradite Gulen. More than 40.000 people have been detained and nearly 20.000 have been arrested in response to the failed July 15 coup attempt, 79.900 civil servants were suspended and 5.014 were dismissed 4.262 institutions. After the coup, the government held a referendum under emergency law on replacing the current parliamentary system by a presidential system, which was narrowly accepted. In the three biggest cities Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir - and in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast the majority voted 'no'. However, in many regions in the Anatolian heartland the 'yes' vote won. This authoritarian turn was a response to the crises that Turkey experienced while being governed by Erdoğan.

The constitutional changes enabled Erdoğan to become a rising authoritarian leader, who can appoint and fire ministers and top state officials, control the budget, issue decrees, and declare emergency rule. Through a crackdown on dissidents, human rights defenders and political opposition, Erdoğan attempts to eliminate threats to his leadership. Despite having regular elections, Erdoğan has taken various anti-democratic measures to erect hurdles to politically contests his leadership. These include changes to the electoral laws, introduce limitations to media freedom and freedom of expression and controversial detainment of people in Turkey's judicial system.

According to the Turkish government, the presidential system strengthens leadership and frees the country of unstable coalition governments. Critics, however, claim that by allowing the president to retain ties to his political party the separation of powers is jeopardised and checks and balances have become limited or disappeared. Commonly, in presidential systems, the president and leader of a political party are two different individuals to avoid overlap between the legislative and executive branches. In the Turkish system, however, the president is both leader of a political party and president. In addition, critics are concerned that Erdoğan is establishing a one-man rule.

Rifts within AK party

On 12 December 2019, Ahmet Davutoğlu, prime minister of Turkey from 2014 to 2016 and former member of the AK Party, registered a new political party called "the Future Party" at the interior ministry. Davutoğlu criticised Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AK Party) in the past, accusing them of economic mismanagement and limiting basic liberties and free speech. The former prime minister was a close ally of Erdoğan but fell out of favour over multiple issues. Disagreements about the proposed changes in the constitution, increasing the power of the president, forced Davutoğlu to resign from his position in May 2019. Davutoğlu remained quiet for a while but in anticipation of establishing a new party, he left the AK Party in September 2019, arguing

that it could no longer provide solutions for the problems at hand and was preventing internal debate about the party policy. Davutoğlu was not the only former Erdoğan ally to break ranks. Former economy minister Ali Babacan also set up a new party, the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA).

Allegedly due to these rifts, the COVID-19 pandemic and the failing economy, President Erdoğan's popularity fell further. Polls from March 2021 show combined support for the AK Party and the MHP falling below 45%. In order to ensure the MHP remains in parliament regardless of the failing popularity, the threshold for entering parliament was lowered from 10% of votes, to 7%. Through this change, Erdoğan could ensure that MHP remains in parliament to strengthen the voice of the AK Party. Nevertheless, popularity of the parties is falling, and the question remains what this will mean for the elections in 2023.

Parliamentary Elections

In June 2018, early parliamentary elections were held, enforcing the constitutional changes from the 2016 referendum. Thereby, these elections marked the transition from a parliamentary system to a presidential system of government.

In the run-up to the elections, Turkey's opposition formed an alliance not to win the elections as a coalition, but to challenge Erdoğan's ability to rule without needing the authority of the parliament. Nonetheless, supporters of the AKP's main opposition, the Republican People's Party (CHP), were disappointed in the results, as the CHP managed to secure a mere 22.6% of votes. A new opposition party, the Good Party (İYİ), achieved 9.96% of the votes, giving it 43 seats, while the HDP Kurdish opposition party achieved 67 seats. The Felicity Party, also an opposition party, got 1.34% of the votes, not enough to earn a place in parliament. The AKP, together with its allied party MHP, won 344 seats, giving them a majority in parliament. Through this, the AKP and MHP, together the People's Alliance, can completely sideline opposition.

The campaign format has been accused of being biased towards the AKP, and political analysts have described Turkey's electoral system as one of façade and authoritarianism. The opposition suffered from a lack of public attention. Kurdish HDP candidate Selahattin Demirtaş was imprisoned at the time of the elections and throughout the course of the campaign, on charges of terrorism for allegedly supporting the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Demirtaş was thus denied to hold speeches and rally properly, and he later accused the media of acting as if he was not running for the elections at all. Apart from the HDP, which in the end managed to secure 11.7% of the votes and thus pass the 10% threshold to get into parliament, small oppositional parties received little attention. Additionally, the ongoing state of emergency since the coup seriously impacted other oppositional party's options for campaigning, and barred certain groups from entering polling places.

Party	% of votes	Seats in parliament
Justice and Development Party (AKP)	42.56%	295
Republican People's Party (CHP)	22.64%	146
People's Democratic Party (HDP)	11.70%	67
Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)	11.0%	49
Good Party (İYİ)	9.96%	43
Total	100%	600

Presidential Elections

In June 2018, the presidential elections were held along with the parliamentary elections. These elections were the second presidential elections held in Turkey. Several candidates ran for president: Erdogan (Justice and Development Party, AKP), Muharrem Ince (Republican People's Party, CHP), Selahattin Demirtaş (People's Democracy Party, HDP), Temel Karamollaoglu (Felicity Party), Dogu Perincek (The Patriotic Party), and Meral AKsener (The Good Party, İYİ). Erdogan came out as the winner with 52.59% of the votes, followed by Muharrem Ince with 30.64% and Selahattin Demirtas with 8.40%. Turnout for these elections was 82.57%.

Critics say that both the elections and the campaigns leading up to them were marred by an uneven playing field. The incumbent party received excessive coverage in the national media, and had extended access to public and private resources. There were no large-scale allegations of fraud, but they were held in what Amnesty described as a “climate of fear” due to the uneven playing field and unfair and unfree media landscape.

Official election results:

Candidate	Parties	%
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	Justice and Development Party (AKP)	52.59%
Muharrem İnce	Republican People's Party (CHP)	30.64%
Selahattin Demirtaş	Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)	8.40%
Meral Aksener	Good Party (İYİ)	7.29%
Temel Karamollaglu	Felicity Party (SP)	0.89%
Doğu Perinçek	Patriotic Party (VP)	0.20%

(Social) Democratic Parties

Republican People's Party (CHP)

Party Leader: Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu

Number of seats: 135

<http://www.chp.org.tr/>

The Republican People's Party (CHP) is a social-democratic party, founded as a political party by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923. Since 2002 the party is the main opposition party in Turkey. . The party is fundamentally founded upon the principles of Kemalism (Atatürkism). The party is a founder of the opposition coalition bloc named Nation Alliance, which further consists of the Good Party, Felicity Party and Democrat Party. The party is also an associate member of the Party of European Socialists (PES) as a member of the Socialist International and Progressive Alliance. The ideological stance of the party towards foreign relations is pro-European, in which CHP advocates for accession of Turkey to the European Union and maintaining strong relations with the NATO.

Since the 2002 elections, CHP has structurally taken its place in the opposition as the AK Party's main challenger. In 2018, the party received 22% of the votes, and holds 146 parliamentary seats. Together with the other parties of the National Alliance, yielding a total of 33% of the votes, this was not enough to beat the AK party in the election. However, in the following 2019 local elections, the National Alliance ran as a coalition again, resulting in electoral victories for CHP candidates in Istanbul, Ankara, Antalya and Izmir. In the 2023 election, the CHP and the National Alliance will be joined by the Future Party and DEVA as a new opposition alliance named 'Table of Six'.

Under former party leader Deniz Baykal, who led the party for roughly 18 years over two periods (1992-1999 and 2001-2010), the party deviated from social-democratic values, and focused its support on secular urban and Alevi voters to thwart the AKP's agenda. This failed strategy led the CHP to a series of electoral defeats since 2002 and ushered in the party's electoral stagnation. After current party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu became head of the CHP in 2010, a change of strategy toned down the CHP's intolerant view on the Kurdish issue. Despite the party's social-democratic label, the CHP seems mainly a Kemalist and left-nationalist party, which does not fit the current description of global social democracy.

Other Parties

Justice and Development Party (AK Party)

Party Leader: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

Number of seats: 286

<http://www.akparti.org.tr/english>

The AK Party (also known as AKP), or the Justice and Development Party, is the governing party in Turkey. The party won all general elections since its first entered in 2002. The AK Party is a social conservative party mostly characterised by an Islamist and neo-liberal reformist agenda. The party draws significant support from non-secular Turks, mainly from the Anatolian heartland. This group contains about 35 million people, which are no longer poor but not rich yet, an in-between group looking for power, money and identity. These people are keen on the rhetoric of AK Party, because it is communicated to oscillate between conservatism, fundamentalism and progress. However, critics in Turkish society slammed the increasingly more Islamist course in Turkish domestic politics, a claim rejected by officials of the AK party. Several academics state the party had an ideological turn in recent years, where Turkish nationalism and right-wing populism dominate the AK party's ideological stance.

When the AK Party was launched in 2001, it initially looked to blend a pro-Western and Islamist outlook. Together with the democratic and liberal market approach, the party enjoyed popular support among Turkish society. The AK Party always advocated for centralised leadership in a presidential system, which eventually became reality after the constitutional changes following the 2017 referendum. However, in recent years, the party suffered from a decrease in Erdoğan's popularity following his increasingly authoritarian grip on the country and ideological nationalist turn. Multiple high-ranking party officials left the AK Party, including conservative Ahmet Davutoglu, who proceeded to form the Future Party. Ali Babacan, a former liberal member of the AK Party, proceeded to form the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA). Former president Abdullah Gül, one of the co-founders of the AK Party together with Erdoğan, broke ranks with the party following his discontent with the party and Erdoğan.

Despite the party proving its dominance in general elections since its first entry in 2002, this trend was broken when the 2019 local elections in Istanbul and Ankara were lost to opposition party CHP. The opposition now controls 5 out of Turkey's 6 largest population centres, as CHP candidates also won again in Izmir and gained the majority in Antalya from the AK Party. The vote in Istanbul even turned into a landslide victory for the CHP after a re-run at the insistence of the AK Party. The 2019 local elections could be a harbinger that the AK Party's two-decade-long dominance may be broken in the 2023 elections.

People's Democratic Party (HDP)

Party Leader: Mithat Sancar & Pervin Buldan

Number of seats: 56

hdp.org.tr

The People's Democratic Party (HDP) is a left-wing pro-Kurdish minority party in Turkey. The main objective of the party is to challenge marginalisation of the ethnic Kurds in Turkey and bringing a solution to the Kurdish issue. The party rallies for a federal Kurdish state and campaign for an end of Turkish military campaigns in Kurdish areas in Northern Iraq and Syria. The party mainly finds support in the eastern provinces of Turkey, where most Kurds are living. Turkey's President Erdoğan has repeatedly tried to ban the party, as he claims it has links to the PKK, that is considered a terrorist organisation.

Founded in 2012, the HDP entered the general elections of June 2015, in which it won 80 seats and became part of the short-lived interim election government. However, new elections were held again after just 5 months, in which the party lost 21 seats and came to a total of 59 seats in the parliament. In 2018, the party won 67 seats. In the latest elections, HDP became part of the opposition. Since 2022, HDP heads the Labour and Freedom Alliance in which six Kurdish and (smaller) left-wing parties cooperate. HDP is also an associate member of the Party of European Socialists (PES) and participates in the Progressive Alliance. In the presidential elections, HDP candidate Selahattin Demirtaş came in third in 2014 and 2018. The party is currently led by Pervin Buldan and Mithat Sancar, as the party uses a co-presidential system of leadership with one chairwoman and one chairman.

Nationalist Action Party (MHP)

Party Leader: Devlet Bahçeli

Number of seats: 47

http://www.mhp.org.tr/mhp_dil.php?dil=en

The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) is a far-right ultranationalist party. The party has a controversial reputation with the MHP youth movement, nicknamed the Grey Wolves, which is known for paramilitary activities. Since the elections of 1999, in which the party became Turkey's second party, the MHP is led by Devlet Bahçeli. In the following years, the party booked varying success but its popularity seems to have declined since MHP became part of the People's Alliance together with AK Party to secure the re-election of Erdoğan.

The ideological stance of MHP is based on the Nine-Light doctrine which is developed by the founder of the party Aparslan Türkes. The doctrine principally promotes Turkish nationalism fundamentally shaped by Islam. Critics often describe the party to show signs of neo-fascism, despite efforts of current leader Bahçeli to make the programme of the MHP more moderate and pro-democratic since he came to power. The MHP is strongly opposed to the pro-Kurdish HDP, and takes an un-democratic and authoritarian stance towards the opposition party.

İyi Party (Good Party) (İYİ)

Party Leader: Meral Akşener
Number of seats: 37

The İyi Party (İYİ) was established on 25 October 2017 by Meral Akşener, and the party adheres to the principles of Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The party follows a centrist ideology and prioritises the restoration of the parliamentary system and the integrity of the judiciary institutions. The party is regarded as an anti-Erdoğan alternative for disillusioned MHP and AK Party voters on the right side of the political spectrum. The party strives for positive relations with the European Union and rapprochement of Turkey to the Western Bloc. The party also advocates for civic nationalism and is critical of the ineffectiveness of Turkey's political system. Furthermore, the party pleads for harmony between ethnic minorities based on Kemalist principles.

The party was formed by prominent former members of the MHP and CHP, most of these MHP defectors came up with the idea to form a new party after the controversial referendum of 2017, in which the MHP voted in favour of granting Erdoğan more power. The party quickly gained strength when five members of the Turkish parliament joined the party, and on 22 April 2018 a further 15 MPs from the CHP moved to the party. Which allowed the party to establish a parliamentary group, that would be eligible to field a candidate for the presidential election without the need to collect signatures. In the 2018 election, İYİ participated as part of the Nation Alliance. In the 2023 election, the party will be a member of the newly formed opposition alliance 'Table of Six'.

Biographies

Recep Tayyip Erdogan

President

Recep Tayyip Erdogan was born on 26 February 1954 in Rize, a small city on the Black Sea coast. When Erdogan was 13, his family moved to Istanbul. He went to an Islamic school and studied business management at the Marmara University of Istanbul. After having finished his studies, Erdogan worked for Istanbul's transportation authority, until he was sacked for refusing to shave his moustache, on religious grounds.

Subsequently, Erdogan entered politics. In 1994 he was elected mayor of Istanbul. At that time he was the leader of the Islamic oriented Welfare Party, which was banned from politics in January 1998 by the highest court of Turkey. This was on the grounds that the party sought to undermine Turkey's secular basis. Erdogan got indicted on subversion charges and was sentenced to ten months in jail from March 1999. Upon his release from prison, Erdogan was one of the founders of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), in August 2001, and became its leader in 2002. That same year, the AKP won the parliamentary elections and came to power. Because of his previous conviction, Erdogan was banned from serving in any government position. Nonetheless, his party's parliamentary majority revoked the ban by passing a constitutional amendment. Erdogan became Prime Minister in March 2003, replacing Abdullah Gul. In 2014, Erdogan won the presidential elections and, therefore, became the first directly elected President of Turkey.

Since then, Erdogan has moderated his position. In the 2007 parliamentary elections, his position as Prime Minister was consolidated. He experienced an important victory in 2008 when parliament voted to repeal a ban on wearing the headscarf on private or public university campuses.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan is married and has two children.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu

Chairman of the Republican People's Party (CHP)

Kemal Kilicdaroglu was born on 17 December 1948 in Nazimiye, in the province of Tunceli. He is from Kurdish origin and also has Armenian ancestry. Kilicdaroglu was educated in economics at the Gazi University in Ankara. After having finished university in 1971, Kilicdaroglu served in the Ministry of Finance as a Deputy Accountant and later on as an Accountant. In 1983 he became Deputy Director General of the Revenues Department in the same ministry. Eight years later, in 1991, Kilicdaroglu was appointed Director-General of respectively two social security administrations.

He entered politics in 1994, but did not manage to get on the candidate list of the Democratic Left Party (DSP). However, he was invited by the leader of the CHP, Deniz Baykal, to join his party. In 2002 he was elected into parliament as a deputy from Istanbul, to be re-elected in 2007. Kilicdaroglu's efforts to uncover corruption among the AKP carried him to headlines in the Turkish media.

Kilicdaroglu was nominated as candidate for the Mayor of Istanbul for the CHP in the 2009 local elections, gaining 37 percent of the votes. When Deniz Baykal resigned in May 2010, Kilicdaroglu was elected as the leader and breath new life into the party.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu is married and has a son and two daughters.

Ekrem İmamoğlu

Mayor of Istanbul

Ekrem İmamoğlu is the current Mayor of Istanbul since 2019. He was elected in the March 2019 mayoral elections, running for the Nation Alliance, consisting from CHP and the İYİ Party. The results were cancelled by the Supreme Electoral Council due to concerns about the credentials of several members of the polling staff. Many regarded the ruling as politically motivated since the AK party claimed the elections results were invalid from the moment they became public. A new election was held on 23 June 2019, in which İmamoğlu was re-elected as mayor. This time his main challenger and AK party member Binali Yıldırım, congratulated İmamoğlu with his victory and soon after that President Erdoğan congratulated him as well. As mayor of Istanbul, İmamoğlu has cut funding for groups related to Erdoğan's government which are estimated to be worth around 350 million Turkish Liras. The election of İmamoğlu and his subsequent actions against organisations related to Erdoğan are seen as one of the biggest achievements for the opposition in Turkey. Especially since they struggle to keep their influence in the Turkish society, following the attempted coup in 2016 and subsequent arrests of prominent opposition members.

Selahattin Demirtaş

Leader of the HDP

Demirtaş has been the leader of the HDP from 2014 till 2018 alongside Figen Yüksekdağ. In November 2016, Demirtaş was detained by the Turkish on charges of spreading propaganda for militants fighting the Turkish state. The HDP is considered to be a pro-Kurdish party. He was fielded as the presidential candidate for the HDP in 2018, and got 8,4% of the votes, which is quite an achievement considering he ran his campaign from prison. On 7 September 2018, Demirtaş got sentenced to 4 years and 8 months for a speech he made on 20 March 2013. Meanwhile Turkish prosecutors said they were seeking for 142-year prison term for Demirtaş.

Source

- [Wikipedia: Turkey](#)
- [Wikipedia: Politics of Turkey](#)
- [CIA World Factbook: Turkey](#)

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- [Turkish Daily News](#)
- [IFES Election Calendar](#)
- [TheEconomist.com](#) [Human Rights Watch: country report on Turkey](#)
- [Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict: the Turkey's Kurdish Question](#) [My Country and NATO: Turkey](#)
- [Geoinvestor.com: Turkey's Economy](#)
- [Guardian on Turkey](#)