



MINORITY RULE: the Kurdish Key to the Turkish Elections

A WIKISTRAT CROWDSOURCED SIMULATION



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Turkey's upcoming June 7 parliamentary elections are due to be the most critical vote in the country's recent history. Wikistrat recently ran a crowdsourced simulation to explore the possible implications of the upcoming elections, in which analysts developed various scenarios for the elections results and discussed their plausibility and impact on Turkey's domestic and foreign policy positions.

FRAMING THE FUTURE: A REGIME CHANGE AND THE KURDISH QUESTION

Depending on how well the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) do, the country could see significant changes in the way it is governed and conducts itself abroad.

The AKP wants the government to switch from a parliamentary to a presidential democracy, giving Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, former prime minister and longtime party leader, executive powers. To do this, it needs a 367-seat (two-thirds) majority in parliament to amend the constitution. Should the AKP lose that majority but still attain between 330 and 366 votes, it could force a referendum on the issue.

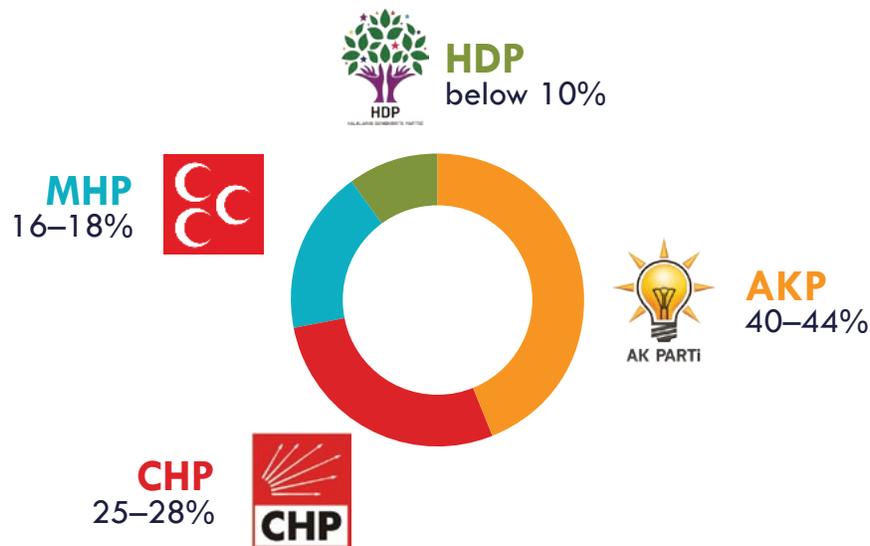
For this reason, simply winning the election isn't enough for Erdoğan. If his party doesn't win at least 330 seats, it will have to partner with at least one other party to change the constitution. However, most other parties resist the changes he wants to make, fearing an executive presidency would erode the separation of powers and weaken Turkey's democracy.

A second question is whether the pro-Kurdish HDP will clear the 10 percent election threshold. The high barrier to enter parliament has effectively prevented Kurdish parties from winning any seats at all, forcing their representatives to run as independents. This is the first time since 1980 that a Kurdish party is close to winning 10 percent or more of the vote.

ABOUT US

Wikistrat is the world's first crowdsourced consultancy. It leverages a global network of subject-matter experts via a patent-pending "Collaborative Competition" methodology to provide a variety of analytic services. Scenario generation, policy planning, risk assessment and red-teaming exercises are conducted by Wikistrat on a real-time, interactive online platform.

MOST LIKELY SCENARIO: AKP MODERATELY WINS, HDP REMAINS UNDER THRESHOLD



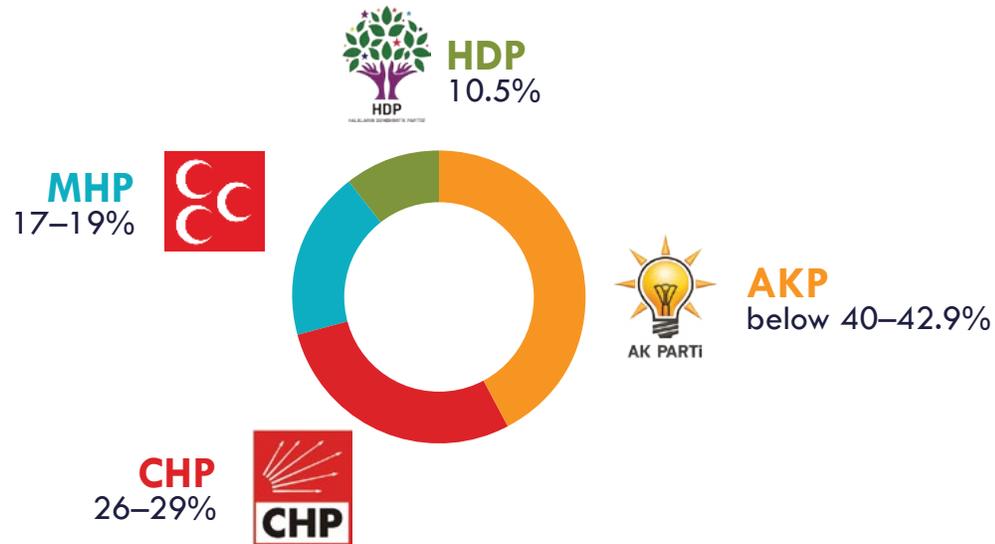
In this most likely scenario, the HDP fails to pass the 10 percent threshold (thus losing any parliamentary representation at all) and the AKP wins the election with 40–44 percent of the vote. This establishes a single-party government, but the AKP must buy votes from other parties to change the constitution. The AKP fails to reach the required 330 seats to unilaterally call for a referendum on constitutional change, let alone the 367 seats for unilateral constitutional change without referendum.

As a result, the AKP enters a period of internal crisis and must make alliances with other parties to pass every piece of legislation, making it increasingly difficult to govern. Since the HDP doesn't take any seats in the parliament, the Kurds could suffer as a weakened AKP takes a more nationalist line to muster parliamentary majorities.

Domestically, Erdoğan could become a toothless president and grow increasingly isolated. The rank and file of the AKP, frustrated with the lack of majority, find the President's intrusions into decision-making increasingly aggravating and try to isolate him further. This may eventually pacify Erdoğan, but it may also create long-term rifts between himself and the party apparatus, leading to splits and reconfiguration of loyalties.

In the foreign policy realm, there are two possibilities: first, to compensate for the loss of domestic dominance, the government may seek to gamble bigger in external affairs and muster national support by steering the country into regional conflicts. Alternatively, lack of domestic success can also lead to a period of isolationism, where Turkey returns to its pro-NATO, pro-EU stance and minimizes its involvement in the Middle East.

MEDIUM-PROBABILITY SCENARIO: HDP PASSES THRESHOLD, AKP LOSES MAJORITY



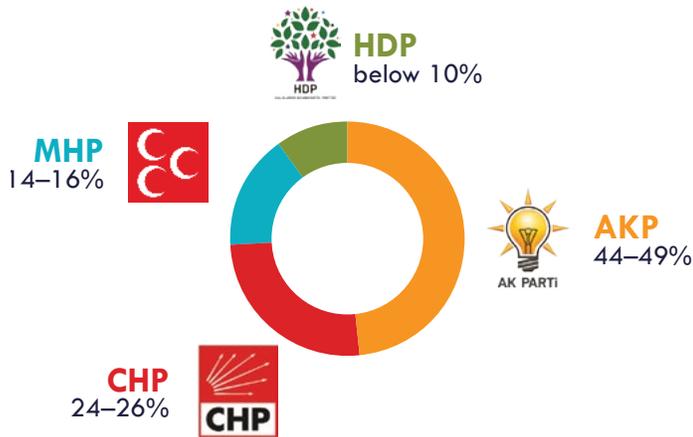
In this medium-probability scenario, the HDP wins just enough votes to enter parliament and the AKP drops below the 276-seat threshold for a majority. When the center-left Republican People's Party (CHP; the second-largest in parliament) refuses to negotiate with the AKP, the only possible coalitions are between the AKP and the HDP or between the CHP and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP). The latter would be a disaster for the Kurds, because the MHP will insist on suspending peace negotiations and increasing the military presence in Kurdish regions.

Domestically, the political power vacuum witnesses the re-emergence of traditional power actors such as the military and judiciary in Turkish politics. In doing so, however, Erdoğan – as the head of state – is now at the helm of these traditional actors and does not face significant backlash from their return, with senior ranks in the military already beginning to benefit from his political leadership. Rather, the AKP must deal with the intrusions of the state apparatus into decision-making as Erdoğan seeks to retain the party's influence through this new channel, speeding up the AKP's dissolution and the creation of new political parties.

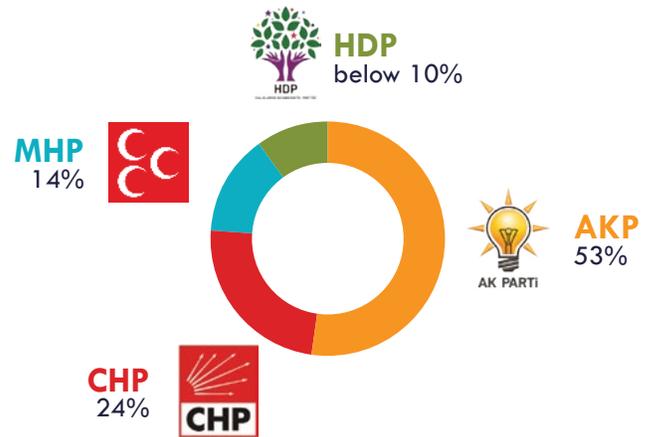
In foreign policy, Turkey is most likely to turn to isolationism since it has lost a strong parliamentary legitimacy to back foreign policy initiatives. In the absence of a strong political support, Turkey reduces its foreign policy to bare minimums and follows the long-term trajectory set by its security institutions (e.g., the military and intelligence). Calls for a change in foreign policy strategy have a stronger voice, and pro-NATO, pro-EU positions have a more pronounced effect.

LEAST LIKELY SCENARIO: AKP LANDSLIDE

REFERENDUM WIN



CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE WIN



In what is probably the least likely outcome, the ruling party wins enough support to change the constitution, either directly or through a referendum. Such an outcome strengthens Erdoğan's mandate and gives him more control over not just the country as an executive president, but over his party as well. The opposition's fears of the president turning into a strongman come true.

With the dual legitimacy of having won all elections he participated in and being the first publicly elected president of Turkey, Erdoğan governs domestically through a very loyal and wide party base along with all the capabilities of the state apparatus he controls. He has the final say in all policy areas.

There is greater involvement in the region on the foreign policy front, as Turkey seeks to reinvent itself as an active player. Turkey assumes a more direct approach in Syria, escalating its support of any and all anti-Assad groups.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- If the HDP clears the 10 percent threshold, Kurdish priorities will have a significant impact on Turkish policy in the next four years. Predominantly Kurdish areas will push for greater autonomy from Ankara, potentially leading to the creation of autonomous Kurdish police and paramilitary institutions. Abroad, the Kurds will push for more direct Turkish involvement against ISIS, asking for Turkish troops to engage the group alongside Kurdish fighters.
- The most likely outcome is that the AKP will win a majority and continue to govern, though without the ability to change the constitution unilaterally. It will most likely have to bargain with other parties to take the country to a constitutional referendum. This could prove difficult, however, as all other parties prioritize checking the AKP's power above all other political considerations. Even if it gets a referendum, the AKP might not win, in which case Erdoğan would be discredited and the party will call for new leadership. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu is unlikely to be that leader; a more realistic candidate is former president and AKP founder Abdullah Gül.
- Turkey's return to a pro-NATO, pro-EU foreign policy is more likely than a continued emphasis on the Middle East, though the extent to which this happens will hinge on the EU's and NATO's approach to Turkey as well. Ankara will in any event remain lukewarm to uncertain U.S. policies in Iraq and Syria.
- The military could make a comeback in Turkish politics if the elections leave a power vacuum. If the AKP gets little support and must enter a coalition, the army will be tempted to get more involved in security policy – especially regarding a move back to NATO. In such a case, however, the Kurdish peace process will gradually die down due to lack of legitimacy, and there may be a danger of re-securitization of the Kurds' demands, with a risk of resumed armed conflict between the military and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

ATTRIBUTIONS

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This report is based on the collaborative effort
of more than 35 Wikistrat analysts.
The simulation lasted for four days.



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