

Parliamentary Elections in Turkey – 7 June 2015

Guidebook for OSCE Parliamentary Observers

OVERVIEW OF THE OSCE PA ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION	2
Preliminary Programme	2
OVERVIEW OF TURKEY	4
POLITICAL CONTEXT	4
Campaign Environment	6
KEY ISSUES.....	7
Political System	8
Economy.....	8
Corruption Investigations	9
The Kurdish Issue	10
Foreign Policy	10
POLITICAL STRUCTURE	11
PUBLIC OPINION POLLING	16
LEGAL FRAMEWORK	18
Election System	18
Ten Per Cent Threshold.....	19
Candidate Registration	19
ELECTION ADMINISTRATION.....	20
Voter Registration	21
Voting Abroad	22
Campaign Financing	22
Polling Day Procedures	23
PREVIOUS ELECTIONS	26
MEDIA	27
HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES	30
SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS	31
ANNEX – Map of Turkey.....	32

Parliamentary Elections in Turkey

7 June 2015

Guidebook for OSCE Parliamentary Observers

Prepared by Anna Di Domenico
Research Fellow

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Tordenskjoldsgade 1, 1055 Copenhagen, Denmark
Phone: +45 33 37 80 40 - Fax: +45 33 37 80 30

E-mail: OSCE@oscepa.dk

Website: www.oscepa.org

This report represents the views of the authors and expert sources, which are cited, and is not to be considered an official document of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. It may not be reprinted in whole or in part without the official permission of the International Secretariat of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

OVERVIEW OF THE OSCE PA ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

On 26 April 2015 an invitation to observe the 7 June parliamentary elections in Turkey was extended to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA). In response, the OSCE PA has mobilized a mission consisting of some 50 Members of Parliament.

The OSCE Chairman-in-Office has designated OSCE PA Vice-President Vilija Aleknaite Abramikiene (Lithuania), as Special Co-ordinator to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission. OSCE PA President Ilkka Kanerva has appointed Ignacio Sanchez Amor (Spain) as Head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly observation mission for the election. Under the leadership of Aleknaite Abramikiene and Sanchez Amor, parliamentarians are expected to be present in at least six major cities and regions around the country on and before election day.

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has deployed a Limited Election Observation Mission which opened on 7 May. The OSCE/ODIHR mission is headed by Ambassador Geert Ahrens (Germany), and consists of 11 staff based in Ankara and 18 long-term observers deployed throughout the country. The OSCE PA mission is working closely with the OSCE/ODIHR mission and with colleagues from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The OSCE PA previously observed the Turkish parliamentary elections in 2011, as well as the first direct presidential election in Turkey, in August 2014.

Preliminary Programme

The briefing programme for the OSCE PA Observer Mission will take place in close co-operation with observers from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in the **Hilton Hotel Ankara**. An OSCE PA Office will be located in the Concaya Boardroom.

Thursday, 4 June 2015	
Arrival of observers in Ankara	
Friday, 5 June 2015	
10:00	OSCE PA registration - <i>Kavaklıdere 1 Meeting Room</i>
10:15 – 18:30	Parliamentary briefings - <i>Kavaklıdere 1 Meeting Room</i> • Opening and welcome • Briefing by OSCE/ODIHR observers • Meetings with representatives of political parties • Meeting with the election administration
Saturday, 6 June 2015	
09:30 – 12:30	Parliamentary briefings - <i>Kavaklıdere 1 Meeting Room</i> • Meetings with civil society representatives • Meetings with media representatives • Meeting with Ankara long-term observers
12:30	Meeting on deployment arrangements Departure for observers deploying outside of Ankara region
Sunday, 7 June 2015	
All day	Observation in polling stations (opening hours: 08:00-17:00)
Evening	Debriefing
Monday, 8 June 2015	
Departures	

Contacts

	Email	Local Number*	International Number
Spencer Oliver, Secretary General	spencer@oscepa.dk		
Andreas Baker Director of Elections	andreas@oscepa.dk	+90 (0)539 9246138	+45 60 10 81 26
Roberto Montella Director of Presidential Administration	roberto@oscepa.dk	+90 (0)534 7251462	+43 699 104 286 81
Richard Solash Director of Communications	richard@oscepa.dk	+90 (0)593 9255962	+45 60 10 83 80
Loic Poulain Programme Officer	loic@oscepa.dk	+90 (0)539 9245792	+45 60 10 89 63
Iryna Sabashuk Operations Officer	iryna@oscepa.dk	+90 (0)539 9246078	+45 60 10 81 73
Anna Di Domenico Research Fellow	anna.didomenico@oscepa.dk	+90 (0)539 9246143	+45 60 10 97 70

OVERVIEW OF TURKEY

Modern Turkey was founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal, also known as Atatürk. Under his leadership, the country adopted wide-ranging social, legal and political reforms to create a secular nation state.

After a period of Atatürk's one-party rule, the 1959 election victory of the opposition Democratic Party led to a peaceful transfer of power into multiparty politics. Since then, democratic governance has been fractured by periods of instability and intermittent military coups (1960, 1971, 1980, 1997). However, all of these cases eventually led to return of civilian political rule.

Demographics and national statistics¹

- Population: 74,932,641
- Population density (people per sq. km of land area): 97
- Area (total): 783,562 km²
- GDP: 822,135 USD Billion
- GDP per capita: 10,971.7 USD

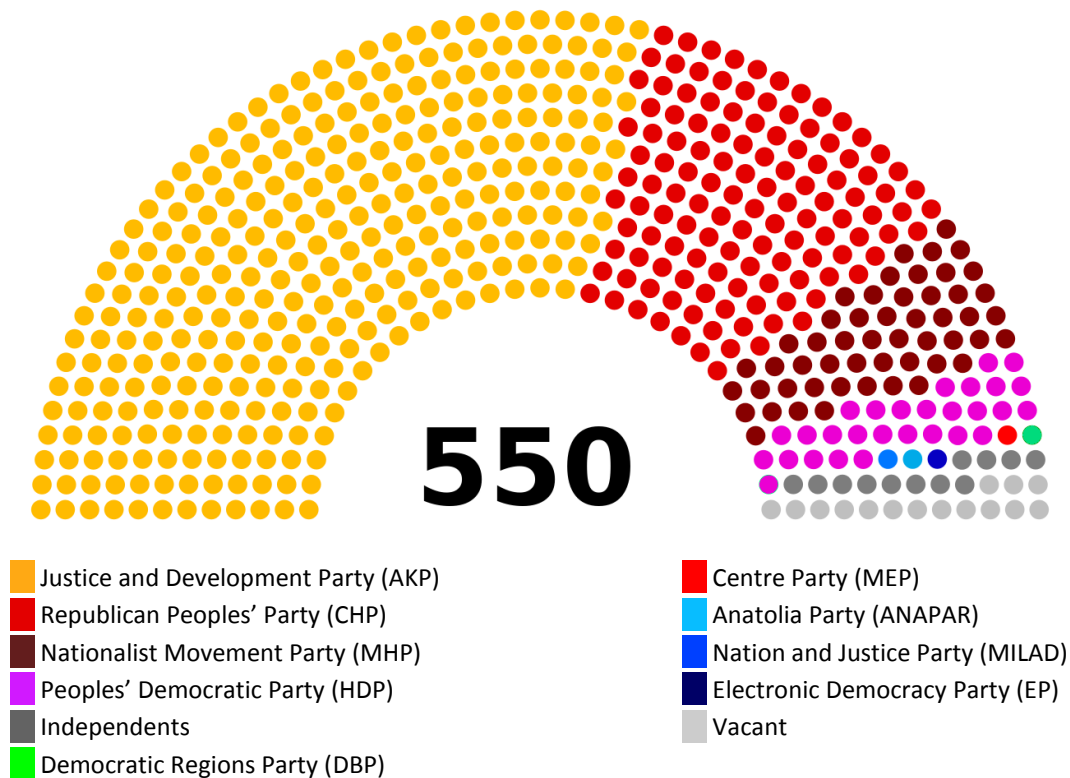


POLITICAL CONTEXT

On 5 January 2015, the Supreme Board of Elections (SBE) announced that parliamentary elections will take place in Turkey on 7 June 2015. The current 550-seat Parliament (also known as the Grand National Assembly), which was elected in the 2011 general election, is currently composed of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) with 312 seats, the Republican People's Party (CHP) with 125 seats and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) with 52 seats.

The pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) is also represented in the Grand National Assembly with 29 members who were elected individually as independent candidates. The remaining 32 seats are distributed as follows: 12 are held by independents, five by smaller parties and 15 that are vacant.²

Figure 1. Current distribution of seats in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey



Since the introduction of the parliamentary system in the 1950s, the winners have almost always come from the centre-right.³ However, many centre-right parties have been gradually marginalized by the consecutive victories of the AKP. Local and presidential elections in March and August 2014 reaffirmed the AKP's central position in the Turkish political system at different levels of government and the party is widely perceived to be the leading party in the 7 June elections.

The most significant question regarding the 2015 parliamentary elections is related to whether the ruling AKP will be able to either increase its share of seats or will see a decline. The AKP has come under criticism in recent years due to corruption allegations, the handling of demonstrations and civil unrest in summer 2013 (also known as the Gezi Park protests), as well as international criticism regarding press freedom and civil liberties. The party will need a two-thirds majority to proceed with its plans of constitutional change and to realize President Erdoğan's desire to move from a parliamentary to a presidential system of government. The focus on these proposed constitutional changes has already exposed some internal disputes within the party.⁴ The possibility of an increase in votes for the pro-Kurdish HDP and the nationalist MHP could play an important role in determining the number of AKP seats in the Parliament. The centre-right Felicity party may also draw some votes away from the AKP's base.⁵

According to a recent survey on “Public Opinion Dynamics ahead of June 2015 elections”,⁶ an increasing number of people in Turkey believe that elections in the country are not held fairly and vote counts are not to be trusted.ⁱ The survey was conducted among 2,201 respondents in 49 provinces through face-to-face interviews between 19 March and 26 April 2015. It showed that the amount of Turkish citizens who believe that elections will not be fair increased from 28 per cent in 2007 to 43 per cent in 2015. The opinions appear to be politically aligned, as among AKP voters, only 11 per cent said “the elections will not be fair,” while this rate is 69 per cent among those likely to vote for one of the opposition parties. The survey also indicates that 72 per cent of voters do not trust that the votes will be counted fairly.

Considering this declining trust, representatives from several civil society organizations stated their intention to observe the elections and to mobilize volunteers to ensure an accurate counting of the votes. The legislation allows for observation of the electoral process by representatives of political parties and independent candidates but does not contain provisions for observation by international and citizen observers.⁷ Therefore, some civil society organizations will observe on election day via political parties.ⁱⁱ

Campaign Environment

The election campaign started on 10 March 2015 and will conclude on 6 June 2015 at 18:00. The main parties that have engaged in active campaigning in the run-up to the election and that have a realistic chance to surpass the 10 per cent threshold include: the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Ahmet Davutoğlu, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) led by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) led by Devlet Bahçeli and the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) co-led by Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ. Sixteen other parties and 176 independent candidates are also running.

The election campaign has seen a continuation of the political polarization observed since the Gezi Park protests when the government, in particular Turkey’s European Union Minister, openly referred to protesters as “terrorists”. During the current campaign AKP members have used similar language to describe CHP and MHP members, which they consider affiliated with the Gülen Movement.ⁱⁱⁱ In reply, in reference to the government corruption allegations, CHP

ⁱ The survey was conducted by academics Ali Çarkoğlu and S. Erdem Aytaç with the support of the Open Society Institute, Koç University, and the Ohio State University School of Communication.

ⁱⁱ “Oy ve Ötesi” (Vote and Beyond), which was founded in the aftermath of the Gezi Protests of June 2013, plans on deploying 120,000 volunteers in 45 provinces where the results are expected to be close.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Gülen Movement is a transnational religious and social movement inspired by the ideas and activities of Turkish Islamic scholar and preacher Fethullah Gülen. The movement has no official name but it is usually referred to as *Hizmet* (“the Service”). The movement describes itself as a faith-inspired, non-political, cultural and educational movement whose basic principles stem from Islam’s universal values, such as love of the creation, sympathy for the fellow human, compassion, and altruism. Although the Gülen Movement’s origins are tied to the Turkish-Muslim identity, the movement is now active in as many non-Muslim as Muslim countries and attracts participants of diverse

representatives have called AKP politicians as “thieves”.⁸ The AKP has also pursued an increasingly aggressive policy towards the pro-Kurdish HDP in the hope of pushing the party below the 10 per cent national threshold while simultaneously preventing Turkish nationalists amongst the AKP’s own voters from defecting to the MHP.⁹ The HDP, on the other hand, has accused the AKP of attempting to systematically rig the 7 June elections, allegations that Davutoglu has rejected as “slander” and an attempt to “push people to take the streets”.¹⁰

During a OSCE/ODIHR Need Assessment Mission (NAM) conducted in April, interlocutors raised concerns over potential misuse of state administrative resources. President Erdoğan’s active role in the campaign and his public support for the governing party was repeatedly raised as an issue of concern, given that the presidency in Turkey is constitutionally bound to remain above party politics.¹¹

Some OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed concerns regarding potential intimidation of voters, particularly in the east and south-east provinces.¹² Particular concerns were linked to the provisions of a recent Security Law, granting police and Governors authority to reinstate public order without prior court authorization.¹³

Several attacks that appear to be election-related have taken place. In particular, on 18 May two bombs targeting HDP offices in Adana and Mersin exploded, injuring six people.¹⁴ According to Prime Minister Davutoglu, the twin bomb attacks were carried out by a militant linked to an ultra-leftist group. In a separate statement, the interior ministry said both attacks had been carried out by a man who had been arrested in 2007 in Ankara for links to the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C). Davutoglu also claimed that the DHKP-C and the separatist Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) had co-operated in the attacks.¹⁵ However, investigations are underway.

KEY ISSUES

The 2015 parliamentary elections are being held in a highly contested political climate with a number of significant issues being debated. These include the question of possible constitutional reform towards a presidential system, corruption investigations, economic issues, the Kurdish peace process, and foreign policy issues.

faiths and cultures. Gülen has publicly stated that “we are in equal proximity to all parties”. The movement has often been criticized by both secular and conservative forces in Turkey.

Political System

The Turkish Constitution provides for a parliamentary system in which the Prime Minister is the head of government and the President is the head of state. The Presidency is largely a ceremonial office but has some important functions granted by the Constitution such as chairing the National Security Council and appointing judges to higher courts. The President is expressly prohibited from being a member of a political party.

A referendum to modify the Constitution of Turkey was passed on 2 September 2007, establishing the direct election of the President for a term of five years, with a maximum of two terms. Former Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won the first direct presidential elections with 51.8 per cent of the popular vote in August 2014. Before and after the elections, Erdoğan vowed a change of the political system towards a presidential system modeled on the United States, arguing that a presidential system would make governing Turkey more efficient by streamlining the current complex decision-making mechanism. Erdoğan remains the most vocal advocate of moving to a presidential system.¹⁶

In order to enact amendments to the Constitution without a referendum, the AKP needs to win with a two-thirds majority (367 legislative seats). Although he is legally prohibited from being a member of a political party, he has reportedly called for people to elect 400 MPs from one party (presumably the AKP) in order to have a stable parliament that can change the Constitution.¹⁷

However, tensions and divisions surfaced as members of the party's elite expressed the need to consider and discuss all the existing proposals and views. Several senior members have been critical of the proposed changes. A senior AKP member, Mustafa Şentop, has recently suggested that France's semi-presidential system was the most appropriate for Turkey.¹⁸

The AKP's ambition to replace Turkey's current parliamentary system with a presidential one has been heavily criticized by the main opposition parties, none of which support the AKP's proposals. The Republican People's Party leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, has repeatedly accused Erdoğan of seeking to impose a kind of dictatorship on Turkey by seeking the new system of rule.¹⁹ The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the Peoples' Democratic Party also expressed disapproval of the presidential system. MHP, which previously advocated a presidential system, now claims that a system similar to the United States' would divide Turkey.²⁰

Economy

Despite a period of strong economic growth that followed the 2008 financial crash, Turkey's economy is now going through a period of stagnation. This will be one of the greatest challenges for the new government.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Turkey's GDP is expected to grow by around three per cent in 2015 and 2016, representing a slowdown for the economy.²¹ In early 2015, the

official unemployment rate rose above 10 per cent for the first time in many years, while youth unemployment rose above 20 per cent.

The economic stagnation has been attributed to a combination of global and domestic factors. Political turmoil, lack of structural reforms, and Turkey's over-reliance on foreign investment to sustain growth are leading factors. Moreover, Turkey's main trade partners in the Middle East and Europe have been lately facing serious economic and security challenges.

Corruption Investigations

A wide-ranging corruption scandal involving President Erdoğan's inner circle has been a central focus of opposition parties' criticism of the AKP government. Indeed, CHP deputies criticized the government's handling of the allegations and alleged attempts to cover up the scandal.²²

The investigations, led by Istanbul district prosecutors in December 2013, involve several key people in the Turkish government – including ministers as well as Erdoğan and his family.^{iv} The AKP government has long countered that the corruption probes, along with the Gezi protests, are an attempted coup to overthrow the government, orchestrated by the “parallel state” composed of followers of Fethullah Gülen and backed by foreigners.²³ In response, the government imposed widespread changes in law enforcement forces; according to Freedom House, more than 45,000 police officers and 2,500 judges and prosecutors were reassigned to new jobs.²⁴ Journalists covering the investigation are also reported to have come under pressure.²⁵ Soon after Erdoğan became Turkey's President, the investigation was officially dismissed, while a parallel parliamentary inquiry took place. However, Turkey's parliament rejected sending the former ministers involved in the scandal to face the corruption trial, instead maintaining their immunity.²⁶

A recent survey conducted by the Turkish chapter of Transparency International revealed that 67 per cent of the population believes that corruption has increased in the country over the last two years. This opinion is split politically, with only 26 per cent of likely AKP voters considering corruption to be on the rise, but more than 80 per cent of opposition-affiliated respondents

^{iv} On 17 December 2013, the Financial Crimes and Battle Against Criminal Incomes department of the Istanbul Security Directory detained 47 people, including officials from the Housing Development Administration of Turkey, the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning, and from the District Municipality of Fatih. Barış Güler, Kaan Çağlayan and Oğuz Bayraktar, who are sons of the Turkish ministers, Muammer Güler (Minister of the Interior), Zafer Çağlayan (Minister of Economy), and Erdoğan Bayraktar (Minister of Environment and Urban Planning) were implicated, as well as Mustafa Demir, the mayor of the district municipality of Fatih; the real estate businessman Ali Ağaoğlu; Süleyman Aslan, the general manager of Halkbank and the Iranian businessman Reza Zarrab. Egemen Bağış, the Minister of European Union Affairs, was also cited in newspaper articles as a potential suspect of bribery. The police confiscated some \$17.5 million as money used in bribery during the investigation. Prosecutors accused 14 people including Barış Güler, Kaan Çağlayan, Süleyman Aslan and Reza Zarrab of bribery, corruption, fraud, money laundering and smuggling gold. On 21 December, the court ordered their arrest. In total, 91 people were detained in the investigation; 26 of them were arrested by the court.

believing that corruption has increased.²⁷ Corruption remains one of the key issues affecting the accession of Turkey to the European Union.

The Kurdish Issue

The AKP government's negotiations with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) remains an important issue in public debate. After 2012, which was the most violent year in the fighting between the Turkish state and the PKK since 1999, the AKP government initiated official negotiations, reaching out to jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.²⁸

The Kurdish issue has represented a major topic in the 2015 pre-election debates in Turkey, particularly because of the decision taken by the Kurdish-dominated HDP to contest Turkey's general election as a party rather than as independent candidates as in the past. Indeed, for more than two decades, Kurdish-affiliated parties have run as independents to circumvent the 10 per cent national electoral threshold. The HDP's choice to formally participate in the June elections came after its co-chairman, Selahattin Demirtaş, received 9.8 per cent of the vote in the presidential election in August 2014.²⁹

If the party, whose voters are mostly from the Kurdish southeast, fails to reach the threshold, all formerly HDP-aligned seats are likely to go to the Kurdish regions' next most popular party, the ruling AKP. Should the HDP pass the 10 per cent threshold, the AKP could secure more than 50 seats in parliament.

According to some analysts, the PKK may emerge as the primary representative of the Kurdish community if the HDP fails to pass the threshold. Kurds' frustration with the government policy towards the siege of Kobani has reportedly already increased support for the PKK.³⁰

Foreign Policy

The wars raging in Syria and Iraq currently represent the most pressing foreign policy challenges for Turkey.

The Syria conflict has had significant political and economic consequences for Turkey, with the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey fueling social tensions, particularly in border areas, and concern growing in Ankara about the growing autonomy of Kurds in Syria and Iraq. Turkey has not participated in the bombing raids on Islamic State positions carried out by the U.S., some Gulf States and NATO allies.³¹

Turkey has vocally denounced Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and relations with other neighbours including both Armenia and Israel, remain tense. Ankara's relationships with Egypt and its allies in the Gulf have been strained since president Erdoğan was publicly critical of the Egyptian government of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and voice support for the ousted Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi.

The Turkey-EU relationship remains one of the key foreign policy issues and challenges for the new government. Open accession negotiations on topics such as the justice system and human rights would be needed.

POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Turkey is a parliamentary republic based on the separation of powers. The President is the head of state and holds a mainly ceremonial role but with some important functions. The Prime Minister is the head of government, which holds executive power, while legislative power is exercised by the Parliament. The judiciary is independent from the executive and the legislative.

The President

The President is directly elected for a five-year term (eligible for a second term). Last year saw the first direct election of the President, which had previously been elected by a two-third majority of the Turkish Parliament. According to Article 101 of the Constitution, if the President is a member of a party, his/her relationship with his party shall be severed and his/her status as a member of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey shall cease.

The current President is Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. His duties and powers are stated in Articles 101-106 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey. He is former Prime Minister (2003-2014) and AKP leader (2001-2014).

The Parliament

The Grand National Assembly of Turkey (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*) is the unicameral Turkish legislature.³² It is composed of 550 deputies elected through a closed-list proportional representation system. Elections for the Grand National Assembly are held every four years. However, the Assembly may decide to hold a new election before the termination of this period, under conditions set forth in the Constitution.³³

Each party must reach a national threshold of 10 per cent and at least one D'Hondt quotient in the district from which it gains seats.

Parties who have at least 20 deputies may form a parliamentary group. Currently there are four parliamentary groups at the Grand National Assembly: the governing AKP, the CHP, the MHP and the HDP.³⁴

The Government

Executive power is exercised by the Council of Ministers. The Prime Minister, appointed by the President from among members of parliament, is the head of government. Since August 2014

this has been Ahmet Davutoğlu. A Council of Ministers is appointed by the President upon nomination by the Prime Minister.³⁵

The Prime Minister, as chairperson of the Council of Ministers, ensures co-operation among the ministries, and supervises the implementation of the government's general policy. The Council of Ministers has collective responsibility for the implementation of this policy. Each minister is responsible to the Prime Minister, for the conduct of affairs under his/her jurisdiction, and for the acts and activities of his/her subordinates. The Prime Minister ensures that ministers exercise their functions in accordance with the Constitution and the laws.³⁶

The Judiciary

According to the Constitution, judicial power is exercised by independent courts on behalf of the Turkish nation.

The judicial system is composed of general law courts, specialized heavy penal courts, military courts, the Constitutional Court – the nation's highest court, and three other high courts. The Constitutional Court is the highest judicial body in Turkey. It consists of 11 regular and four substitute members. Appointed by the President, they may remain in office until the age of 65. The members of the Constitutional Court are appointed for a term of 12 years.³⁷

Turkey has a civil law system which derives from various continental European legal systems. Turkey is a party to the European Convention on Human Rights and accepts limited jurisdiction from the European Court of Human Rights.

PARTY PROFILES

Justice and Development Party (AKP)



The Justice and Development Party (Turkish: *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* - AK PARTİ or AKP) is a social conservative political party that was founded in 2001 by members of various right-leaning parties and a number of new politicians. The AKP has roots in the tradition of Islam, but has disavowed Islamist ideology in favour of conservative democracy.³⁸

It is currently the largest party in Turkey, with 312 Members of Parliament. Turkey's Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, is the current AKP leader, while former party leader and founder, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, became President of the Republic of Turkey in August 2014 at which time he disassociated from the party in line with legal requirements.



In the Turkish political spectrum, the AKP positions itself at the centre as a party that advocates a liberal free-market economic model and, while adhering to nationalist ideas and religious values, supports Turkish membership in the European Union.

The AKP favours a strong centralized leadership. A new constitution and the adoption of a presidential system are two major goals of the party. In its election strategy '2023 Political Vision', the AKP suggests that either a presidential, semi-presidential or party-affiliated presidency choice should be selected and implemented. Since its foundation, the AKP has been determined to draft a new constitution that would reflect its political vision. Announcing the party's manifesto on 15 April, Davutoğlu claimed that his party aimed to win 55 per cent of the votes. Besides the need for an updated civil constitution and presidential system, the manifesto focuses on social policies, human rights, infrastructure and the economy. The manifesto also commits to a greater foreign policy role in the Middle East and North Africa and continues to aim for EU membership.³⁹

Republican People's Party (CHP)



The Republican People's Party (Turkish: *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* - CHP) describes itself as a modern social-democratic political party that upholds the founding principles and values of the Republic. It is currently the main opposition in the Grand National Assembly and is traditionally supported by the middle and upper-middle classes. The Party was founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, just after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, and was re-established in 1992. The six arrows in the party's logo represent the six fundamental ideologies of the party: republicanism, populism, nationalism, secularism, statism and revolutionism.



The CHP positions itself as a centre-left political party. The current chairman, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, was elected to Parliament in November 2002. Since May 2010, he has served as the chairman of the CHP. Since the AKP came to power in 2002, the CHP has been the leading opposition party in Turkey. Kılıçdaroğlu stated that his party would lead the next government if they won 35 per cent of the vote, which would mean a nine per cent rise since the 2011 general election. At the 2007 general election the CHP suffered a heavy defeat, receiving 20.85 per cent of the votes. At the general elections held in June 2011, the CHP was able to increase its share to 25.98 per cent.

The CHP planned 50 electoral rallies throughout Turkey. The party's inaugural electoral rally was held on 11 April in the Kartal district of İstanbul.

The CHP manifesto announced on 19 April includes measures to increase disability benefits and the minimum wage and also to extend general health insurance to 3.2 million people in order to

combat poverty. A significant pledge made by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is to grant payouts to pensioners twice a year on Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. The party also planned to abolish the controversial ‘Taşeron’ workers contract^v in order to guarantee workers’ rights. The party aims to lower inflation to four per cent and unemployment to five per cent.⁴⁰

After Erdoğan’s electoral victories in 2014, a group of CHP deputies called on the party leadership to resign. However, at the extraordinary congress held in September 2014, the secularists’ candidate to the chairman position, Muharrem İnce, lost against Kılıçdaroğlu, who was reconfirmed. Many independents who could oppose his leadership didn’t get nominated.

Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)



Founded in 1969 and re-established in 1992, the Nationalist Movement Party (Turkish: *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* - MHP) is the third largest political party in Turkey. Initially established as a vocal anti-communist and secular party, it has been reshaped by the current leadership as a nationalist right-wing political party. Its nine basic principles are: nationalism, idealism, morality, social-mindedness, scientific advancement, liberalism, populism, peasant care and developmentalism and industrialization.

Devlet Bahçeli was elected as chairman of the MHP in July 1997. He served as Deputy Prime Minister from 1999 to 2002 in the coalition government of Bülent Ecevit. The party polled 13.01 per cent at the 2011 elections and has currently 52 deputies in the Grand National Assembly.



Under its main election slogan “Walk with us Turkey”, the MHP was the last major party to announce its election manifesto. The MHP has pledged to investigate those who were involved in the 2013 government corruption scandal and to establish an anti-corruption commission to lead the investigation. It pledges to end Turkey’s ongoing peace process with the Kurds. Bahçeli denounced the presidential system put forward by AKP and stated that the 7 June elections will bring an end to this debate.⁴¹ The MHP has also promised a strong international response to terrorism and to raise the minimum wage.⁴²

^v The Taşeron is a subcontracting system, which allows workers to be hired for a temporary period by subcontractors to work on state projects. A subcontracted worker enjoys much fewer rights than a regular worker and can be easily dismissed at the end of the contracting period without receiving compensatory payment. The CHP promised to offer the subcontracted workers state jobs.

Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)



The Peoples' Democratic Party (Turkish: *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* - HDP) is a left-wing political party, which acts as the fraternal party to the pro-Kurdish Democratic Regions Party (DBP, previously BDP). It was founded in 2012 as a union of left-wing movements that had previously run as independent candidates to bypass the 10 per cent threshold.

Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ are the current co-chairs. Encouraged by the 9.77 per cent of the vote won by Demirtaş in the 2014 presidential election, the HDP will contest the election by fielding party candidates rather than independent candidates. This has been seen as a risky move, as failure to reach the 10 per cent threshold would likely result in relatively few Kurdish representatives in the parliament, despite making up almost 20 per cent of the population.



The party has a 50 per cent quota for women and a 10 per cent quota for the LGBT community when fielding candidates. It announced its election manifesto on 21 April 2014, through which the HDP hopes to gain votes beyond its traditional Kurdish supporters.⁴³ The HDP emphasizes “democratic autonomy” and “common homeland,” as well as seeking a solution to the Kurdish issue through nonviolent methods. The party is also opposed to the proposed switch to a presidential system. Other promises include the creation of women and youth ministries, the lowering of the voting age to 16, the end of compulsory religious education, a raise of the minimum wage and an abolishment of special courts and the National Security Council.⁴⁴ It has also expressed opposition to the introduction of nuclear power in Turkey.⁴⁵

Other parties

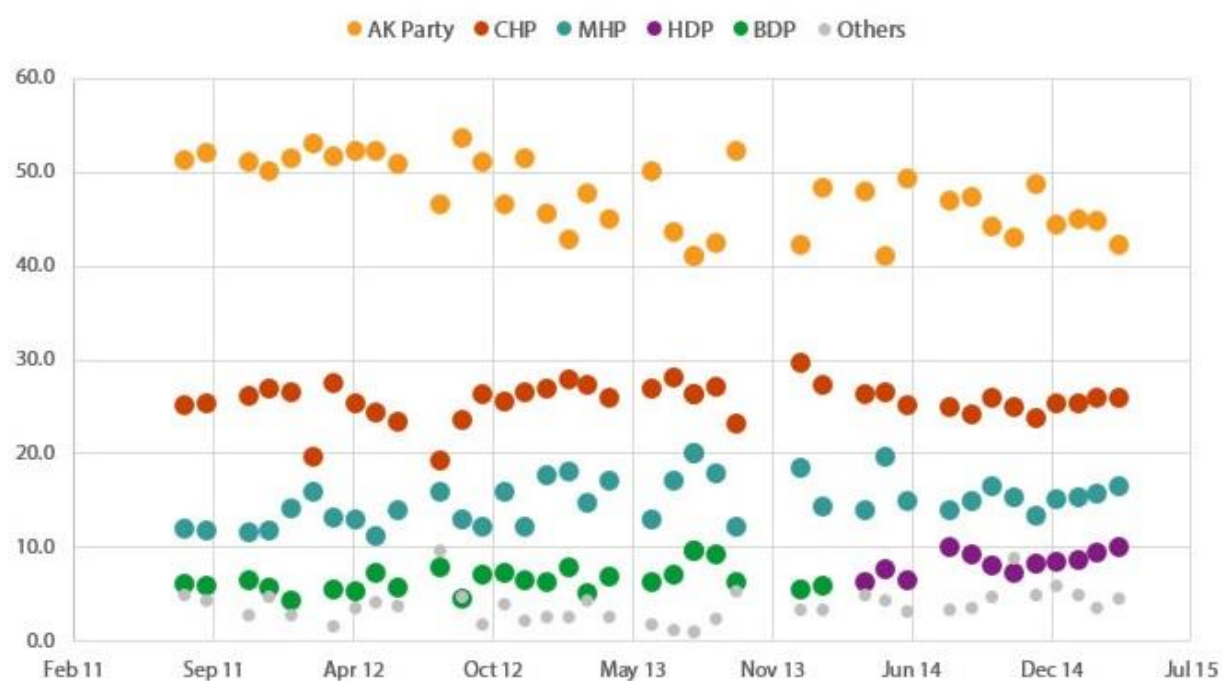
The Felicity Party (Turkish: *Saadet Partisi* - SP), mainly supported by conservative Muslims, has formed a new alliance with the Great Union Party (Turkish: *Büyük Birlik Partisi* - BBP), a far-right Islamist political party, to increase their chances of surpassing the election threshold and gain representation in Parliament. The new alliance was named the National Alliance. The social democratic-oriented Democratic Left Party (Turkish: *Demokratik Sol Parti* - DSP), which was expected to form an electoral alliance with the CHP and list joint candidates, will contest the 2015 elections on its own. In the year leading up to the election, several other small political parties were founded, mostly by defectors in parliament from the AKP or CHP. Those contesting elections are: the Communist Party (Turkish: *Türkiye Komünist Partisi* - TKP), the Patriotic Party (Turkish: *Vatan Partisi*- VP), the Anatolia Party (Turkish: *Anadolu Partisi* -AnaParti), and the Centre Party (Turkish: *Merkez Parti*- MEP).

PUBLIC OPINION POLLING

In the run up to the 2015 general election, various Turkish organizations have carried out opinion polling to gauge voting intention, with the results varying widely. Most polls, however, indicate that support for the ruling AKP is declining, while the major opposition party, the CHP, has recorded a slight rise of its vote share, although far short though of the 35 per cent its leader predicted.⁴⁶ The MHP has also further increased its share, and there remains a high possibility for the pro-Kurdish HDP to become the fourth party in the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

The following chart shows a record of the publicly available voting intention data from Turkish polling companies since 2011.

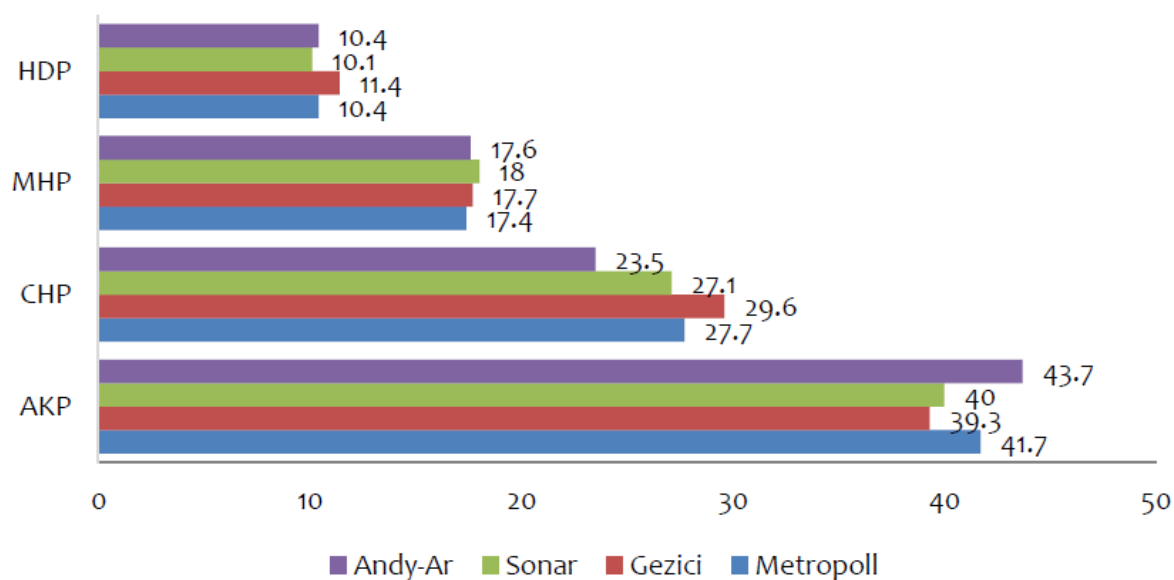
Figure 2. Poll tracker (3 May 2015)⁴⁷



As seen above, all polls have predicted the AKP to win the 7 June elections, and are forecast to receive between 39 and 44 per cent of the vote, while the CHP is ranging from 23 to 29 per cent. The polls show that the MHP is fluctuating between 16 and 18 per cent, while the HDP is around 10 per cent.

Much focus is on whether the pro-Kurdish HDP will pass the 10 per cent threshold. In fact, a failure of the HDP would result not only in limited Kurdish representation in the Parliament, but also likely result in a greater share for the AKP.

Figure 3. Polls (vote share %) (March - April 2015)⁴⁸



Maps below show the results of the two previous elections.

Figure 4. 2014 Turkish presidential elections results⁴⁹

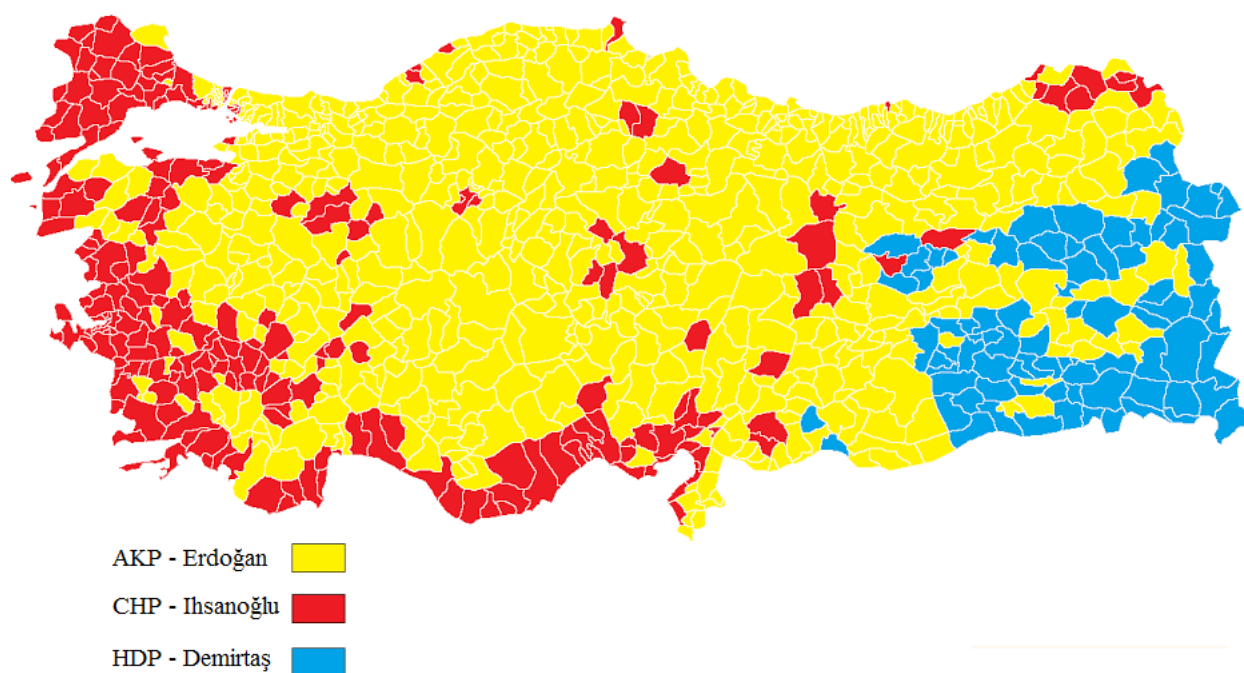
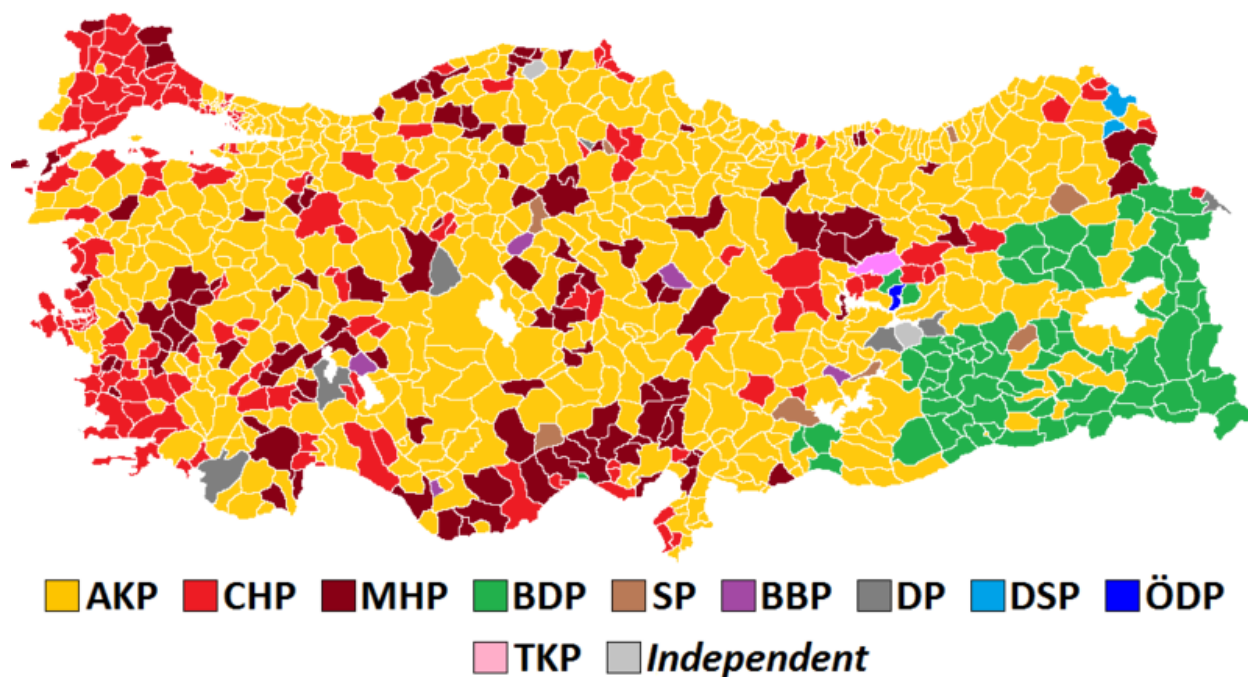


Figure 5. 2014 Turkish local election results



LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Election System

The legal framework for the conduct of parliamentary elections includes the 1982 Constitution (adopted under military rule), the 1983 Law on Parliamentary Elections, the 1963 Law on Basic Provisions on Elections and Voter Registers and the 1983 Law on Political Parties. This legal framework is supplemented by regulations and decisions of the Supreme Board of Elections (SBE). Since the 2011 elections, some of the election-related laws have been reviewed, addressing certain previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, leaving however a large number of OSCE/ODIHR recommendations unaddressed.^{vi}

According to the Constitution, elections in Turkey are to be held under the direction and supervision of the judiciary, in accordance with the principles of free, equal, secret, direct, universal suffrage, and public counting of the votes.⁵⁰

The SBE is requested to execute all the functions to ensure the fair and orderly conduct of elections from the beginning to the end, carry out investigations and take final decisions, during and after the elections, on all irregularities, complaints and objections concerning the electoral

^{vi} “These include certain restrictions on active and passive suffrage rights; limited regulations for campaign finance; a lack of a possibility to challenge SBE decisions and an absence of provisions for international and citizen election observations.” OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, 14 – 17 April 2015.

matters, and receive the electoral records of the members of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and presidential election.⁵¹

Turkey elects 550 Members of Parliament to the Grand National Assembly using a party-list proportional representation system with general, equal and secret ballot.⁵² The territory of Turkey is split into 85 electoral constituencies that each elect a certain number of MPs in proportion to their population. Turkish citizens over 18 years of age have the right to vote,⁵³ however the legislation contains several restrictions: in particular, conscripts, students in military schools and convicts serving sentences in penal institutions are not allowed to vote.

A number of draft amendments to the electoral framework have been initiated but not adopted. These include removing the requirement for candidates to have completed military service, comprehensive political party and campaign finance regulations and increased oversight for the dissolution of a political party.⁵⁴

Ten Per Cent Threshold

To qualify for seat allocation in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, parties must surpass an electoral national threshold of 10 per cent, the highest in the OSCE area. Independent candidates are awarded a seat if they receive sufficient votes in their district.

The HDP has long called for the threshold to be lowered, asserting that it is designed to keep the party out of Parliament. Recommendations to consider lowering the threshold have also been made by the OSCE/ODIHR, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament which considered it excessive and impacting the parliament's representativeness.⁵⁵

Candidate Registration

According to the law, Turkish citizens over the age of 25 years can stand for elections, however certain categories are disqualified. The list of disqualifications includes legal incapacitation, ongoing or uncompleted military service and limitation on public service as confirmed by court and certain criminal convictions, even if cleared or pardoned.⁵⁶

On 1 February 2015, the SBE announced that 32 parties fit the criteria in order to field candidates in the general election. In order to be eligible, parties need to have formed local organizations at least six months before the election and have completed their party congresses by the election. To qualify for seat allocation, political parties must present a full list of candidates in more than half of the provinces and pass the electoral threshold. Headquarters of political parties submit to the Supreme Board of Elections their lists of candidates for each election district in which they stand for elections.⁵⁷ Independent candidates may apply for candidature to the provincial board of elections, making a non-refundable electoral deposit equal to the gross salary of a civil servant

of the highest rank (approximately EUR 3,500).⁵⁸ Independent candidacies have declined steadily in recent years, with 769 in 2002, 465 in 2007, 249 in 2011, and 176 in 2015.⁵⁹

Objections may be lodged against candidatures to the responsible provincial board of elections within two days of the announcement of the provisional lists of candidates. Provincial boards of elections must resolve the objections within two days.^{vii}

Once candidatures have become definitive, the SBE announces all candidates and their respective election districts 55 days before election day through the Official Gazette and radio.⁶⁰

The candidate nomination period ended on 4 April 2015. Twenty political parties out of 31 submitted their parliamentary candidate lists to the SBE.^{viii} On 24 April 2015, the SBE announced that it shortlisted 9,271 candidates on party lists, and 176 independents.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Parliamentary elections in Turkey are administered on four levels of election administration: the Supreme Board of Elections, 81 Provincial Election Boards, 1,436 District Election Boards and 174,244 Ballot Box Committees. The decisions of each level of election administration may be appealed to the next higher level, with the SBE serving as the final instance for appeals. Political parties and independent candidates may assign observers to supervise procedures performed at each ballot box. Voters are entitled to watch the counting of ballots in their own polling station.

Governors of the Provinces, governors of towns, mayors, aldermen and all public servants have the responsibility to dispatch the information and documents required by election boards concerning election procedures and to issue voter registers correctly, timely and without delay.⁶¹

The election administration is primarily composed of judges, but allows for the representation of political parties and is solely composed of their representatives in the Ballot Box Committees.

The Supreme Board of Elections

The Supreme Board of Elections (SBE) is an 11-member permanent body composed of judges tasked with the overall authority and responsibility for the conduct of elections. It consists of

^{vii} The concerned may raise objections against the resolutions before the Supreme Board of Elections within 2 days. The Supreme Board of Elections shall resolve the objections within three days but not later than the day the definitive lists of candidates are announced (Article 22, *Idem*).

^{viii} The 20 parties are: AKP, CHP, MHP, HDP, Hakve Adalet Partisi, Halkın Kurtuluş Partisi, Komünist Parti, DSP, Doğru Yol Partisi, Hakve Özgürlükler Partisi, Millet Partisi, Demokrat Parti, Liberal Demokrat Parti, Vatan Partisi, Anadolu Partisi, Bağımsız Türkiye Partisi, Merkez Parti, Saadet Partisi, Toplumsal Uzlaşma Reform ve Kalkınma Partisi, Yurt Partisi.

seven principal and four alternate members. Six of the members are appointed by the Supreme Court of Appeals and five of the members by the Supreme Council of State by ballot amongst their own members, with absolute majority of the full number of members. The members elect a chairman and a vice chairman amongst themselves. Members of the SBE serve six-year terms. A member whose term of office is terminated may be re-elected. Because there is no appeal against its decisions to a higher body, it serves as a supreme authority on election issues.

Provincial Election Boards

Provincial Election Boards (PEBs) are permanent bodies established at the end of January once every two years. They are composed of the three judges with the highest rank in the province. These boards consist of a president, two members and two substitute members appointed from among the judges. PEBs take office for a period of two years and carry out the electoral work at provincial level.

District Election Boards

District Election Boards (DEBs) are also permanent bodies, but with a mixed structure. DEBs are composed of six regular and six substitute members and are chaired by the most senior judge in the district. Four principal and four alternate members are provided from political parties. The chairman appoints two members from among civil servants. DEBs take office for a period of two years.

Ballot Box Committees

The Ballot Box Committees (BBCs) are the lowest tier of the administration and consist of a chairman along with six principal and six alternate members. The five political parties that gained the most votes nationwide in the previous parliamentary elections may each appoint one principal and one alternate member, while one principal and one alternate member is nominated by the local council. The chairperson is chosen by lot from among nominations of political parties.

Voter Registration

Citizens over 18 years of age have the right to vote. However, under Article 67 of the Constitution, active conscripts, cadets, and convicts serving sentences in penal institutions are not eligible to vote. Associated to the SBE, a “Voter Register General Directorate” in Ankara and “Voter Register Office” have been established in every district. The permanent central voter register (SECSYS) is maintained by the SBE and is linked to a civil and address registry (MERNIS), managed by the Ministry of Interior. Information regarding some categories of ineligible voters is provided to the SBE by the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Justice.

The civil registration system, MERNIS, was introduced at the end of 2007. This nationwide electronic system links the voter’s 11-digit personal identification number with a unique address

declared by the voter as his/her place of residence. During election periods, the SBE extracts the information on citizens of voting age from the MERNIS system and forwards the lists to DEBs to be posted for public review. During the two-week period of public scrutiny, from 14 March to 8 April 2015, voters were entitled to request changes to the lists. Voters can also verify their information on voter lists at DEBs or online.

A total of 53,741,883 voters are registered on in-country voter lists.

Voting Abroad

Following the introduction of election reforms in 2012, in the 2014 presidential election Turkish citizens were given the opportunity to vote abroad for the first time, if registered with their resident consulates and embassies. For a citizen to be able to vote out of the country, he/she needs to be registered at the Foreign Country Voter Registry. Voting abroad has taken place between 8 and 31 May 2015 in 112 polling stations in 54 countries and at the Turkish customs gates (airports in Turkey).

A Foreign Country District Electoral Board under the Ankara Provincial electoral Board is constituted to co-ordinate out-of-country voting and to facilitate the counting of these ballots. If needed, more than one foreign country district electoral board can be established.⁶²

A total of 2,866,940 voters are registered abroad.

Campaign Financing

While some rules have recently been introduced on campaign financing of presidential candidates,⁶³ the Turkish legislation does not contain specific and comprehensive regulations of campaign financing for parliamentary election. It imposes some restrictions on the amount and nature of donations, including an exclusion of foreign funding and loans, but there are no limitations on general party and campaign-related spending. Political parties declare their campaign-related incomes and expenditures through the annual party financial reports which are submitted to the Constitutional Court by 30 June of each year. However, the Law on Political Parties does not regulate individual expenditures of candidates standing on behalf of a party, or of independent candidates, who disclose their campaign-related incomes and spending through individual tax declarations. The review of financial reports by the Constitutional Court is focused on compliance with reporting requirements and with parties' internal regulations. In case of lack of compliance, sanctions ranging from a warning to the dissolution of the party may be applied.⁶⁴

During the OSCE/ODIHR NAM, representatives of the HDP expressed the intention of voluntarily self-reporting campaign-related incomes and expenditures.

Political parties are also entitled to receive funding from the State. An amendment introduced in the Law on Political Parties on 2 March 2014, in line with previous OSCE/ODIHR

recommendations, has lowered the threshold from seven to three per cent of votes received in these elections for parties to qualify for state funding.

Polling Day Procedures

The SBE sends to provincial and district election boards the seals of provincial, district and ballot-box committees, voter marker pens and stamping pads as well as all kinds of stationery and supplies that cannot be provided locally.⁶⁵ The chairman of provincial election board, at least 10 days in advance of the election day, provides DEBs with material necessary for the elections. The chairman of DEBs then, at least 48 hours in advance of the election day, provides BBCs with the material.

Ballot papers

The SBE also sends combined ballot papers grouped in packages of 400, stamped and numbered, containing the political parties participating in the election together with a sufficient number of vote envelopes printed in a designated colour so that they are received by the related DEBs no later than three days in advance of the election date. DEBs receive the packages and determine which package has been assigned to which BBC with identification numbers. The BBC receives the package and opens it just before the beginning of the casting of votes, and stamps each combined ballot paper with the seal of the BBC.⁶⁶

Independent candidates have their own ballot papers printed complying with the rules determined by the SBE concerning size, form and amount.⁶⁷

In preparation for the election, the Supreme Electoral Council ordered the printing of 73,988,955 ballot papers.⁶⁸

Time and place of voting

Voting takes place on election day between 8:00 and 17:00. Opening and closing hours of voting time may be determined by the SBE either in the entire country or in election districts considered necessary, depending on seasonal and regional properties and transportation, provided that the length of time is maintained and that the said times are announced not later than one week in advance of the election day.⁶⁹

Opening of voting

Prior to initiating voting procedures, the chairmen and members of the BBC are required to swear an oath to act fairly and according to the law.⁷⁰

The chairman of the BBC is then required to check whether the ballot-box is empty in the presence of BBC members and observers, close the ballot box and seal it so that it cannot be opened without breaking the seal.⁷¹

The numbers of ballots and envelopes received are to be noted in the minutes.

Organization of voting

A voter admitted by the committee must prove his/her identity by presenting his/her identification certificate which includes the identification number of the Republic of Turkey. The chairman then finds the voter's name in the ballot box voter list and after giving the voter the ballot paper, the voter proceeds to the voting booth to cast his/her vote.⁷² At the moment of casting their votes, each voter is also given the seal with the inscription "evet" (in English: yes).

Voters have to stamp the "evet" seal only on the circle under the name of the political party he/she prefers, to fold the ballot and insert the paper in the envelope or place the ballot paper of the independent candidate he/she prefers in the envelope. The voter has to close and seal the envelope, and insert it personally in the ballot-box.⁷³

The chairman of the BBC then delivers the voter his/her identity card, and asks the voter to sign the box adjacent to his/her name in the voter list and marks the left index finger of the voter with special permanent ink. Voters not able to sign may affix their finger print on the signature box in the list.⁷⁴

Closing and vote counting

Voters still waiting in line to vote at 17:00 are counted by the chairman and allowed to cast their votes in sequence.

Counting and listing is done publicly. Persons present at the place of voting may supervise the counting and listing procedures in their own polling stations.

The completion of voting will be announced by the chairman of the committee, and all objects on the table removed. Subsequently, the total number of voters contained in the ballot-box voter list and the total number of voters who have actually cast their votes is determined by counting the number of signatures or finger prints set adjacent to the names of the voters, and the result announced.⁷⁵

Unused envelopes or ballot papers are counted, packed, sealed and numbered.⁷⁶

The chairman, before initiating the vote counting and listing procedure, shows to attendants that counting and listing schedules are blank and contain no writing and assign the following duties among the committee members:

- a) Two members of political parties assigned to fill out lists;
- b) A member of a political party assigned to remove the envelopes from the box and deliver them to the chairman;
- c) One member assigned to insert the listed ballot papers into the bag.

The ballot box is opened by the chairman of the polling station committee in front of those present. The number of envelopes is compared with the number of voters. If the number of the envelopes is higher than the number of voters who have cast their votes, all envelopes are checked and envelopes not bearing double seals and not complying with certain conditions set by the law or envelopes defining the identity of the voter must be set aside. If subtracting the number of such envelopes from the total number does not remove the excess, the chairman of the committee shall randomly select envelopes in such quantity necessary to achieve equilibrium between the number of envelopes and the number of voters. The number of envelopes set aside shall be recorded and these envelopes shall be destroyed by burning without opening.⁷⁷

The commissioned member selects the vote envelopes one at a time and delivers them to the chairman who opens the envelope and reads the ballot paper in a manner to be seen and heard by all attendants in the area. The committee decides whether a ballot paper is valid. Votes considered valid and taken into consideration by the committee are written in the schedule. Ballot papers not considered valid and not taken into consideration are packed and stored separately. As the reading of the ballot papers proceeds, one of the two members assigned to fill the schedule marks the schedule as appropriate. The chairman hands the ballot papers to the other commissioned member who inserts them in the bag.⁷⁸

The counting and listing of votes must continue without pause; no objections may suspend the procedure.⁷⁹

Immediately after the counting of votes and the recording of results, the chairman of the BBC announces the results.⁸⁰ The results are noted in the minutes.

A roster showing the names of parties and their candidates and of independent candidates, the number of votes they obtained, the total number of ballot papers and the number of valid and considered ballot papers and signed by the chairman and members of the committee, is posted up in the vicinity of the ballot box. The roster shall be left in place for one week. Certified copies of the rosters must immediately be given to observers of political parties and to independent candidates if they request.⁸¹ There is no specific right for international observers to obtain a certified copy.

Procedures after the voting

The DEB shall work without interruption to receive and combine the minutes/protocols coming in from polling stations by means of recording them in special protocols belonging to each election type and electoral district in the order of their arrival. The work is carried out openly and without interruption.

PREVIOUS ELECTIONS

*Presidential Election (10 August 2014)*⁸²

The joint statement of observers from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, OSCE/ODIHR, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) noted that the 2014 presidential election represented an important opportunity for Turkish voters to directly elect their president for the first time. The three candidates were generally able to campaign freely and freedoms of assembly and association were respected. However, observers noted that the use of his official position by the Prime Minister as well as biased media coverage gave him a distinct advantage over the other candidates. The misuse of state administrative resources and a lack of clear distinction of key institutional events with campaign activities granted him an undue advantage, observers concluded.

The election administration bodies administered the election in a professional manner, observers said, and the legal framework was deemed to be generally conducive to the conduct of democratic elections. Despite previous recommendations, the law did not provide for meetings of the SBE and lower electoral boards to be open to observers and the media, and some regulations and decisions were not publicly available, reducing the transparency of the work.

For the first time, almost three million voters were able to vote abroad, although the procedure was at times problematic, according to the SBE.

The observers noted that the introduction of campaign finance regulations was a positive development, but some areas require improvement.

The legal framework for media coverage did not provide for a clear definition of the impartiality requirement for broadcasters, and three out of five monitored TV stations displayed a significant bias towards the Prime Minister, observers found. The disproportionate coverage and the limited coverage of other contestants significantly restricted pluralistic information on political alternatives for voters.

Election day was generally organized in a professional and efficient manner, and election procedures were followed, observers noted. Where observed, counting and tabulation processes were transparent and well organized.

*Parliamentary Elections (12 June 2011)*⁸³

The joint statement of observers from the OSCE PA and PACE noted that the 2011 elections for the Turkish Grand National Assembly demonstrated that changes enacted by the Turkish government had improved the electoral system. The electoral process was generally characterized by pluralism and a vibrant civil society, observers noted. However, some elements

of the legal framework constrained activities of the media and political parties. According to the observers, the 10 per cent threshold for political party representation remained one of the central issues limiting the representative nature of the legislature.

For the first time, contestants were allowed to buy political advertising, but opposition parties claimed that they received significantly less coverage in Turkish media compared to the governing party. The government control over media groups, biased reporting and self-censorship limited media freedom, the observers found.

The SBE prepared voter lists for the elections based on a nationwide electronic civil registration system that links a voter's registered residence with a unique personal identification number. However, questions about remarkable changes in the number of registered voters in recent years and the printing of a disproportionately high number of excess ballot papers were raised.

Observers noted that the counting was done efficiently and in compliance with the existing regulations. Party representatives and observers had access to the results in the polling stations. Turnout was reported at 84 per cent.

MEDIA

Media landscape

Turkey's media landscape is lively and diverse. There are approximately 3,100 newspapers operating in the country, including some 180 national papers. However, only 15 per cent of these are published daily and many have small circulations. Turkey also has a diverse broadcast media, with hundreds of private television channels and more than 1,200 commercial radio stations. There are also local radio and television stations providing some content in minority languages, such as Kurdish. An Armenian-language radio outlet, Nor Radio, began broadcasting over the Internet in 2009. Media ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few private holding companies. The majority of media outlets are perceived to be associated with one of the various political parties, with significantly more outlets generally associated with the governing AKP.⁸⁴

Social media has emerged in recent years as an important alternative forum for public debate. The statistics on social network penetration in Turkey show that social media services are widely used. The most popular social network was Facebook with a 26 per cent penetration rate. Overall, 52 per cent of the population were active social media users.⁸⁵

Regulatory framework

Media coverage of elections is regulated by the Law on Broadcasting, the Law on Basic Provisions, and some SBE decisions and regulations adopted for each election. Among general principles for broadcasting, media are obliged to ensure accuracy, impartiality and objectivity of reporting.

The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTSC) ensures compliance with media laws. It consists of nine members appointed by parliament and has the authority to review complaints related to coverage by local and regional broadcasters. During the election campaign period, the RTSC submits weekly reports to the SBE which has the authority to apply sanctions for violations.

According to the law, political parties contesting the elections have the option of paid political advertisement and during the last 10 days of the campaign they are granted free airtime on the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), the Turkish public broadcaster. Parties are entitled to two 10-minute slots on radio and television each. Additional airtime is granted to parties with a parliamentary group (10 minutes), the party in power or senior partner in a coalition government (20 minutes), minor partners in the coalition (15 minutes) and the main opposition party (10 minutes). Independent candidates do not qualify for free airtime. Concerns were expressed by some OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors regarding TRT's impartiality and objectivity as they noted that a recent CHP paid advertisement was not broadcast.^{ix} Debates among party leaders have not taken place and are not expected during the remainder of the campaign.

Media freedom

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed in Turkey, but critics say that the constitutional guarantees are partially undermined by provisions in the penal code, the criminal procedure code, and the antiterrorism law that effectively leaves significant discretion to prosecutors and judges.⁸⁶

The Chair of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, Isabel Santos (MP, Portugal), in May expressed deep concern over continuing restrictions placed on freedom of media and freedom of speech in Turkey. She noted that the country continues to have one of the highest numbers of imprisoned journalists among OSCE participating States and condemned any form of pressure on and intimidation of journalists.

"During the current election campaign period and beyond, the Turkish government and courts must demonstrate respect for dissenting views, whether spoken, printed or posted online. Doing so is essential if Turkey wants to take democracy seriously", Santos said.⁸⁷

^{ix} The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation refused, late on Friday 10 April 2014, to broadcast an ad prepared by the CHP as part of its electoral campaign launch ahead of the general election. In a written statement sent to the CHP headquarters explaining its decision to censor the electoral ad, the TRT administration said it had decided not to broadcast it on the grounds that it harshly targets the AKP government. The decision has been criticized by press unions and opposition political parties' representatives.

Following the arrest of numerous members of the media during raids on a newspaper and television station in December 2014, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatović, wrote to Turkey’s Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu calling for the immediate release of detained journalists. She noted that in recent years there was a substantial decrease of imprisoned journalists in Turkey and wrote that “laws should not be used to curb dissenting views in a society”.⁸⁸ As reported also by Freedom House, after several years of decline, conditions for media freedom in Turkey continue to deteriorate.

Figure 6. Turkey’s decline in press freedom

Turkey:
5-Year Decline in Press Freedom
 Media freedom deteriorated as new laws increased the government’s censorship power over websites and news media.



Source: Freedom House

In 2014 new laws enacted by the government further restricted freedom of expression. Among others, amendments to Law No. 5651, the Internet Law of Turkey, expanded the power of the Telecommunication Authority (TIB) to block websites without prior court approval. However, for the block to remain in place, a court had to uphold the order within 48 hours. The surveillance capability of the National Intelligence Organization was increased in April 2014, granting increased access to personal data.

In April 2015, the Turkish press agency Bianet reported about 23 journalists and nine publishers currently in prison.⁸⁹ The number of legal inquiries and lawsuits

against journalists, bloggers and social media users, mainly based on insulting the President have increased in recent years. Freedom House has reported that throughout 2014 hundreds of journalist who had been working on corruption investigations had to quit due to pressure or were fired from their posts.

Defamation remains a criminal offense and frequently results in fines and prison terms. Several articles of the penal code are also often used against journalists. Article 301 enables prison terms of six months to two years for “denigration of the Turkish nation”. Article 314 also includes a broad definition of terrorism and membership in an armed organization. Turkey also has a separate anti-terrorism law, widely criticized by the international community, including the European Court of Human Rights, which has been used to charge and jail journalists for activities that Human Rights Watch describes as “nonviolent political association” and speech.⁹⁰

On 14 December 2014 security forces conducted raids against media outlets, including the newspaper *Zaman*, as part of a crackdown on supporters of exiled cleric Fethullah Gülen. Several senior journalists and media executives were arrested under the suspicion of “establishing and managing an armed terror organization”. Among others, Ekrem Dumanlı, *Zaman*’s editor in chief, and Samanyolu Broadcasting Group General Manager Hidayet Karaka were also arrested. On 19 December, a court ordered that Dumanlı and seven others be released due to lack of evidence, Karaka still remains in jail on suspicion of being a member of an armed organization. The charges against him are based on a fictional TV series that was broadcast a few years ago.⁹¹

In May 2015, an Ankara court fined one of Turkey's top newspapers, the *Hurriyet* daily, for insulting President Erdoğan in a column that recalled extensive corruption accusations against Erdoğan two weeks after his victory in presidential elections. The court deemed that the 25 August 2014 column by commentator Mehmet Yilmaz was an “attack on the personal rights” of the President and ordered him and the newspaper’s chairwoman to pay 20,000 lira (€7,063) in damages to Erdoğan.⁹²

President Erdogan on 25 May accused *The New York Times* of meddling in Turkey’s affairs with an editorial entitled “Dark Clouds Over Turkey” that was critical of Erdogan. In response to the 22 May editorial, which alleged an Erdogan-led crackdown ahead of the polls, the President told the U.S. daily to “know your place”.⁹³

Law No. 5651 allows the authorities to block sites that insult Turkish Republic founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk or contain content that incites suicide, pedophilia, drug abuse, obscenity or prostitution, among others. Between January and March 2015, 49 news items, 312 Twitter messages, three news portals, two journalists, two films, a book, two columnists, and a picture were censored.⁹⁴ According to Twitter’s biannual Transparency Report, between 1 July and 31 December 2014, the Turkish government asked Twitter to withhold 477 tweets, concerning 2,642 accounts.⁹⁵ During the same period, Facebook restricted access to 3,624 items reported by the Turkish courts and Telecommunication Authority.⁹⁶ Twitter and YouTube were blocked in Turkey once again on 6 April 2015 after the mass circulation of photos from the hostage crisis on 31 March that ended with the death of government prosecutor Mehmet Selim Kiraz and two leftist militants.⁹⁷

HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Turkey’s human rights record has recently come under internal and international scrutiny, with controversial changes which critics allege unduly restrict civil liberties. The government’s response to the 2013 Taksim Gezi Park protests and anti-government protests in other cities were widely criticized as demonstrating intolerance of the right to peaceful assembly and free

expression. Hundreds of individuals involved in the protests were charged for participating in unauthorized demonstrations and other offences, while dozens faced additional terrorism charges in connection with the protests.⁹⁸

Although freedom of association and assembly are constitutionally protected, and despite the presence of many politically active nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), many cases of Turkish authorities monitoring and harassing some NGOs have been reported. Many public gatherings have been forcibly broken up by the police “due to alleged radical elements among the protesters”.⁹⁹ The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but Human Rights Watch has raised concerns about alleged efforts by the government to influence judges through appointments, promotions and financing. The government also adopted a law to restructure the Higher Board of Judges and Prosecutors to tie it closer to the executive. However, parts of the law were annulled by a Constitutional Court.¹⁰⁰

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

Since the Syrian crisis began in 2011, Turkey – estimated to host close to two million Syrians – has maintained an emergency response at a consistently high level and declared a temporary protection regime, ensuring *non-refoulement* and assistance in 22 camps, where an estimated 217,000 people are staying. The number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Turkey is expected to rise in 2015 to nearly 1.9 million, including 1.7 million Syrian refugees.¹⁰¹

Turkey has made a significant contribution to address the Syrian refugee crisis, not only in terms of the numbers of refugees it is hosting, but also in terms of financial resources it has committed to receiving them. However, Turkey’s response to the crisis, despite the resource commitment and many positive policy initiatives, is increasingly showing its limitations, following several years of crisis and an ever-growing number of refugees in the country.

In January 2015, a delegation from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly led by President Ilkka Kanerva (MP, Finland) and Third Committee Chair Isabel Santos (MP, Portugal) visited a refugee camp in Harran, Turkey, near the country’s border with Syria, to observe conditions and raise awareness of the worsening human toll of the Syrian crisis. In a joint statement, Kanerva and Santos praised Turkish efforts and the amount of resources the government has devoted in response to the refugee crisis. At the same time, they said that “the international community must not grow complacent and must boost its assistance to this vulnerable population right now”.¹⁰²



Endnotes

¹ The World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/>

² Allocation of seats in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/milletvekillerimiz_sd.dagilim

³ Turkey's 2015 election prospects, Rethink Institute, <http://www.rethinkinstitute.org/turkeys-2015-election-prospects/>

⁴ Tension in AKP rises as ruling party's grasp on power weakens, Today's Zaman, http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/cafer-solgun/tension-in-akp-rises-as-ruling-partys-grasp-on-power-weakens_377967.html

⁵ Turkey's 2015 election prospects, Rethink Institute

⁶ Public trust in fair elections declining in Turkey, Turkish weekly, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/185092/public-trust-in-fair-elections-declining-in-turkey.html>

⁷ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, 14-17 April 2015, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/153211?download=true>

⁸ Ruling AKP like a coin-operated music box: Main opposition, Hurriyet Daily news, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/ruling-akp-like-a-coin-operated-music-box-main-opposition.aspx?pageID=238&nID=77535&NewsCatID=338>

⁹ Creeping Shadows: The Repercussions of the AKP's Aggressive Policy towards the HDP, Turkey Analyst, <http://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/389-creeping-shadows-the-repercussions-of-the-akp%E2%80%99s-aggressive-policy-towards-the-hdp.html>

¹⁰ Turkish PM accuses opposition party provoking protests, <http://europe.newsweek.com/turkish-pm-accuses-opposition-party-provoking-protests-327549>; "I will resign if election fraud claims prove to be true", Turkish PM, Hurriyet Daily News, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/i-will-resign-if-election-fraud-claims-prove-to-be-true-turkish-pm.aspx?pageID=238&nID=82682&NewsCatID=338>

¹¹ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, 14-17 April 2015

¹² Idem

¹³ The Law on Amending the Law on Duties and Powers of Police, Law on Gendarmerie Organization, Task and Authority, Law on the Civil Registration Services and Other Decree Laws published on 3 April 2015

¹⁴ Bomb blasts hit HDP offices in southern Turkey wounding three, Today's Zaman, http://www.todayszaman.com/latest-news_bomb-blasts-hit-hdp-offices-in-southern-turkey-wounding-six_380989.html

¹⁵ Turkish bombing suspect tied to far left – PM, news24, <http://www.news24.com/World/News/Turkish-bombing-suspect-tied-to-far-left-PM-20150521>

¹⁶ Time to discuss the presidential system, stresses President Erdoğan, Daily Sabah, <http://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2015/01/26/time-to-discuss-the-presidential-system-stresses-president>

¹⁷ Erdoğan vows to transform entire political system, again demands 400 MPs, Hurriyet Daily News, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-vows-to-transform-entire-political-system-again-demands-400-mps-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=81780&NewsCatID=338>

¹⁸ Presidential System tops AKP's election campaign, Hürriyet Daily News, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/presidential-system-tops-akps-election-campaign.aspx?pageID=238&nid=77644>

¹⁹ CHP grills Erdoğan over ambition to establish presidential system, Today's Zaman, http://www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa_chp-grills-erdogan-over-ambition-to-establish-presidential-system_371140.html

²⁰ Objections to presidential system and AK Party, Daily Sabah, http://www.dailysabah.com/columns/yahya_bostan/2015/02/05/objections-to-presidential-system-and-ak-party

²¹ Country Profile, IMF, <http://www.imf.org/external/country/TUR/index.htm>

²² National CHP criticized PM for steering public debate away from corruption scandal, Today's Zaman, http://www.todayszaman.com/national_chp-criticizes-pm-for-steering-public-debate-away-from-corruption-scandal_335829.html

- ²³ Turkey's corruption probe turns into plot and power for Erdoğan, Bloomberg, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-08/turkey-s-corruption-probe-turns-into-plot-and-power-for-erdogan>
- ²⁴ Freedom in the world 2015, Freedom House, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/turkey#.VUeD_CGgqko
- ²⁵ Nearly 70 journalists prosecuted for covering corruption investigation, Reporters without borders, <http://en.rsf.org/turkey-ban-on-coverage-of-corruption-27-11-2014,47288.html>
- ²⁶ Turkey's parliament rejects sending four former ministers to face corruption trial, Euronews <http://www.euronews.com/2015/01/21/turkey-s-parliament-rejects-sending-four-former-ministers-to-face-corruption/>
- ²⁷ TI survey: corruption has increased, will continue to increase, Today's Zaman, http://www.todayszaman.com/business_ti-turkeys-survey-corruption-has-increased-will-continue-to-increase_379133.html
- ²⁸ Turkey-PKK peace deal shaky but not broken, Voa news, <http://www.voanews.com/content/turkey-pkk-peace-deal-shaky-not-broken/2487317.html>
- ²⁹ Kurdish votes key to Turkish elections, Hurriyet Daily News, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/kurdish-votes-key-to-turkish-elections.aspx?PageID=238&NID=79652&NewsCatID=409>
- ³⁰ Turkey's Kurds weigh election choice, Rethink Institute, <http://www.rethinkinstitute.org/turkeys-kurds-weigh-election-choice/>
- ³¹ Identity Crisis: Turkey, Europe, and Erdoğan, Bloomberg Business week Middle East, <http://businessweekme.com/Bloomberg/news/190/newsid/599#cnttop>
- ³² Art. 7, Constitution of the Republic of Turkey
- ³³ Art. 77, *Idem*
- ³⁴ Party Groups in Parliament, The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, https://global.tbmm.gov.tr/index.php/EN/yd/siyasi_parti_gruplari
- ³⁵ Art. 109, *Idem*
- ³⁶ Art. 112, *Idem*
- ³⁷ Art. 146-147, *Idem*
- ³⁸ Duran, Burhanettin (2008). "The Justice and Development Party's 'new politics': Steering toward conservative democracy, a revised Islamic agenda or management of new crises". Secular and Islamic politics in Turkey.
- ³⁹ AKP's Manifesto for the 2015 Elections, <https://www.akparti.org.tr/english/akparti/parti-programme#bolum>
- ⁴⁰ CHP's manifesto for the 2014 Elections, <http://www.chp.org.tr/Assets/dosya/chp-program-2015-01-12.pdf> [TUR]
- ⁴¹ Nationalist MHP announces election manifesto ahead of June 7, Daily Sabah, <http://www.dailysabah.com/elections/2015/05/03/nationalist-mhp-announces-election-manifesto-ahead-of-june-7>
- ⁴² MHP website, https://www.mhp.org.tr/mhp_index.php
- ⁴³ HDP normalizes both Kurdish and Turkish politics, Hurriyet Daily News, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/hdp-normalizes-both-kurdish-and-turkish-politics.aspx?PageID=238&NID=81378&NewsCatID=409>
- ⁴⁴ National HDP's election manifesto favors self-determination and concept of common homeland, Today's Zaman, http://www.todayszaman.com/national_hdps-election-manifesto-favors-self-determination-and-concept-of-common-homeland_378593.html
- ⁴⁵ HDP website, <https://hdpenglish.wordpress.com/about/>
- ⁴⁶ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/28365674.asp> [TUR]
- ⁴⁷ Turkish opinion poll tracker, James in Turkey, <http://www.jamesinturkey.com/elections/turkeys-general-election-2015/poll-tracker/>
- ⁴⁸ Turkey 2015, Election Prospects, Rethink Institute
- ⁴⁹ Electoralgeography.com
- ⁵⁰ Article 67, Constitution of the Republic of Turkey
- ⁵¹ Article 79, *Idem*
- ⁵² Article 2, Parliamentary Elections Law
- ⁵³ Article 67, Constitution of the Republic of Turkey
- ⁵⁴ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, 14 – ~~37~~ April 2015

- ⁵⁵ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, 2011, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/76837?download=true>
- ⁵⁶ Article 11, Parliamentary Elections Law
- ⁵⁷ Article 20, *Idem*
- ⁵⁸ Article 21, *Idem*
- ⁵⁹ Impact of Party Regulation on Small Parties and Independent Candidates in Turkey, Ömer Faruk Gençkaya, Marmara University Turkey, Party Law in Modern Europe, page 16, <http://www.partylaw.leidenuniv.nl/uploads/wp4114.pdf>
- ⁶⁰ Article 24, *Idem*
- ⁶¹ Article 9 (1st Article of Law 2234, amended on 17 May 1979), Law on Basic Provisions on Elections and Voter Registers (1961).
- ⁶² Article 10, *Idem*
- ⁶³ Law No. 6271 on Presidential Elections of 19 January 2012
- ⁶⁴ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, 14-17 April 2015
- ⁶⁵ Article 68, Law on Basic Provisions on Elections and Voter Registration
- ⁶⁶ Article 27, Parliamentary Elections Law
- ⁶⁷ Article 26, *Idem*
- ⁶⁸ Turkey: 75m ballots to be printed for June 7 elections, Anadolu Agency, <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/492099--turkey-74m-ballots-to-be-printed-for-june-7-elections>
- ⁶⁹ Article 89, Parliamentary Elections Law
- ⁷⁰ Article 70, *Idem*
- ⁷¹ Article 77, *Idem*
- ⁷² Article 91, *Idem*
- ⁷³ Article 28, Parliamentary Elections Law
- ⁷⁴ Article 93, *Idem*
- ⁷⁵ Article 96, *Idem*
- ⁷⁶ Article 97, *Idem*
- ⁷⁷ Article 98, *Idem*
- ⁷⁸ Article 100, *Idem*
- ⁷⁹ Article 99, *Idem*
- ⁸⁰ Article 105, *Idem*
- ⁸¹ Article 106, *Idem*
- ⁸² *Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions*, International Election Observation Mission, Republic of Turkey – Presidential Election, 10 August 2014, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/122553?download=true>
- ⁸³ Turkey's well-managed, democratic elections demonstrated pluralism, but also showed a need for improvements on fundamental freedoms, Joint Statement OSCE PA and PACE, <http://oscepa.org/publications/all-documents/election-observation/past-election-observation-statements/turkey/statements-24/2156-2011-parliamentary-5/file>
- ⁸⁴ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, 14-17 April 2015, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/153211?download=true>
- ⁸⁵ Turkey social network penetration, Statista, <http://www.statista.com/statistics/284503/turkey-social-network-penetration/>
- ⁸⁶ Turkey – Freedom of the Press 2015, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/turkey#.VWY3F8-qoko>
- ⁸⁷ Turkey must urgently demonstrate commitment to free media and speech, says OSCE PA's Santos, Press Release, OSCE PA, <http://oscepa.org/news-a-media/press-releases/2207-turkey-must-urgently-demonstrate-commitment-to-free-media-and-speech-says-osce-pa-s-santos>
- ⁸⁸ OSCE media freedom representative calls on authorities in Turkey to release detained journalists, OSCE, <http://www.osce.org/fom/131896>
- ⁸⁹ The summary of three months: Erdogan is chasing the dream "The media of the Majesty", Bianet, <http://www.bianet.org/english/media/164316-the-summary-of-three-months-erdogan-is-chasing-the-dream-the-media-of-the-majesty>

⁹⁰ Turkey – Freedom of the Press 2015, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/turkey#.VWY3F8-gqko>

⁹¹ National independent journalism struggling for survival in Turkey on world press freedom day, Today's Zaman, http://www.todayszaman.com/national_independent-journalism-struggling-for-survival-in-turkey-on-world-press-freedom-day_379703.html

⁹² Top Turkish newspaper fined for insulting Erdogan, Daily Star, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/World/2015/May-21/298836-top-turkish-newspaper-fined-for-insulting-erdogan.ashx>

⁹³ 'Know your place', Turkey's Erdogan tells New York Times, AFP, <http://news.yahoo.com/know-place-turkeys-erdogan-tells-york-times-182105310.html>

⁹⁴ The summary of three months: Erdogan is chasing the dream “The media of the Majesty”, Bianet

⁹⁵ Removal requests worldwide, Twitter, <https://transparency.twitter.com/removal-requests/2014/jul-dec>

⁹⁶ Government requests, Turkey content restrictions, Facebook, <https://govtrequests.facebook.com/country/Turkey/2014-H2/>

⁹⁷ Are the worlds biggest internet companies under the Turkish president's thumb?, Global voices, <https://globalvoicesonline.org/2015/04/07/are-the-worlds-biggest-internet-companies-under-the-turkish-presidents-thumb/>

⁹⁸ World Report 2014, Human Rights Watch, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/turkey?page=1>

⁹⁹ Freedom in the world 2015, Freedom House

¹⁰⁰ World Report 2015, Human Rights Watch, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/turkey?page=1>

¹⁰¹ 2015 UNHCR country operations profile – Turkey, UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e0fa7f.html>

¹⁰² Senior OSCE PA delegation visits refugee camp on Turkey-Syria Border, urges strengthened global response, OSCE PA, <http://www.oscepa.org/news-a-media/press-releases/2057-senior-osce-pa-delegation-visits-refugee-camp-on-turkey-syria-border-urges-strengthened-global-response>