

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10436140>

Accepted: 25.10.2023

## 2023 Cumhurbaşkanlığı Seçimlerinin Türk Siyaseti Açısından Önemi

### The Importance of The 2023 Presidential Elections for Turkish Politics

Yücel ÖZDEN

Bitlis Eren Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Meslek Yüksekokulu,

yozen@beu.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2455-9151>

#### Özet

Yöneten ve yönetilen ilişkileri açısından seçimler bir ülkenin demokratik gelişiminde rol alan önemli bir uygulamadır. Nitekim seçim modern demokrasilerde halk denetiminin sağlanmasındaki temel araçlardan biri olarak kabul edilmektedir. Türkiye’de çok partili yaşama geçişle birlikte demokratik yaşamının gelişiminde seçimlerin önemli bir katkısı vardır. Cumhuriyetin yüzüncü yılına girerken, 2023 yılında gerçekleştirilen Cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimleri siyasi, ekonomik ve toplumsal açılardan ve siyasi partiler nezdinde yakın dönemdeki en önemli seçimlerden biri olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Cumhurbaşkanlığı hükümet sisteminin ikinci seçimlerinde de siyasi partiler tarafından yeni sistemin temel özellikleri ve gereklilikleri çerçevesinde ittifaklar kurulmuştur. İttifakların oluşumu ise iki boyutta ele alınabilir. Bunlardan ilki, Türk siyasetinde Recep Tayyip Erdoğan dönemi ile başlayan yapının ve “*Yeni Türkiye*” anlayışının devam ettirilmesine yöneliktir. İkincisi ise 2002 yılından bu yana Erdoğan liderliğindeki Ak Parti iktidarlarının uygulamalarına son vermeye ve ülkeyi yeniden inşa etmeye yöneliktir. Bu çalışmada; 2023 Cumhurbaşkanlığı seçim sonuçlarının seçimin kazananları ve kaybedenleri açısından hangi anlamlara geldiği ve bu durumun Türk siyasetine etkileri açıklanmaya çalışılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Siyaset, Cumhurbaşkanlığı Seçimi, Siyasi Partiler, Türkiye.

## Abstract

Elections are an essential practice in the democratic development of a country regarding the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Elections are thus recognized as a primary means of ensuring people's control in modern democracies. Elections have significantly contributed to the development of democratic life in Turkey after the transition to the multi-party system. As the Republic enters its centennial year, the presidential elections held in 2023 are considered one of the most critical elections of the recent period for political parties in political, economic and social terms. In this second election of the presidential system of government, political parties formed alliances within the framework of the essential characteristics and requirements of the new system. The formation of alliances can be analyzed in two dimensions. The first aimed to continue the structure and understanding of the "New Turkey" that began with the Recep Tayyip Erdoğan era in Turkish politics. The second is to end the AKP government's practices led by Erdoğan since 2002 and to rebuild the country. This study will try to explain the results of the 2023 presidential election for the winners and losers and the implications of this situation for Turkish politics.

**Keywords:** Politics, Presidential Election, Political Parties, Turkey.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

After the transition to the multi-party system, elections have played an essential role in the development of democracy in Turkey. Especially since 2014, the people's direct election of the president and the subsequent change in the system of government has brought election periods to the forefront regarding the developments that preceded them and their consequences. Hence, the presidential system of government was adopted in 2018, and the first presidential elections under the new system were held. Therefore, the 2023 elections were not just an individual victory for the winning candidate. Each candidate represents different segments in the political, economic and social dimensions. In this sense, the country's governance, power relations and power struggles between social segments will also be shaped according to the candidate to be elected.

A country's government system also determines the balance of power in that society. In this respect, there are differences between parliamentary and presidential systems, especially in defining the executive organ. The presidential systems are more likely to polarize society. In this context, the model of the presidential system of government implemented in Turkey is a derivative of the presidential system. As a result, the absolute majority rule in the president's election forces society to choose between two options, forcing political parties to form alliances before the elections and the voters to choose one of the candidates determined by the alliances.

Under these conditions, various political parties formed 5 different alliances for the 2023 presidential and 28<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections: the People's Alliance, the Nation Alliance, the Ancestral Alliance, the Labor and Freedom Alliance and the Alliance of Socialist Power Union. Among these alliances, the People's Alliance nominated Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Nation Alliance nominated Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, and the Ancestral Alliance nominated Sinan Oğan as presidential candidate. Muharrem İnce, the leader of the Hometown Party, was nominated as an independent candidate but withdrew his candidacy before the election. On May 14, none of the candidates received the absolute majority of votes, and the election went to the second round, which was held on May 28. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was re-elected as President of the Republic of Turkey with a 52.15 per cent vote.

This study attempts to analyze the impact of the 2023 presidential election on Turkish politics, the significance of the election in terms of its winners and losers, and its contribution to the development of Turkish democracy.

## 2. System of Government and Election of the President

The system of government determines the structure and functioning of the principal organs of a state and their relations with each other. In this respect, in democratic societies, there is a consensus on the separation of powers, characterized as the principal organs of the state. According to Montesquieu's theory of separation of powers, the state's legislative, executive and judicial powers should be separated (Gözler, 2012). Within the framework of separation of powers, which is considered one of the requirements of constitutionalism, the primary powers of the state should be classified as functional and horizontal (Erdoğan, 2014).

Government systems are divided into three categories according to the separation of powers: presidential, parliamentary, and semi-presidential. The parliamentary system separates the legislative and executive powers more smoothly and in balance. A mutual cooperation is established between these powers. In the presidential system, an alternative to the parliamentary system, the legislative and executive powers are strictly separated, and the relationship between them is limited. Finally, in the semi-presidential system, the president is elected by the people (Özbudun, 2005: 349).

Within the framework of Ottoman-Turkish constitutional developments, efforts were made to establish a parliamentary system tradition in Turkish political culture, which continued with the proclamation of the Republic. In particular, the constitutions of 1961 and 1982 established the parliamentary system of government. However, in the referendum held on April 16, 2017, the people approved a constitutional amendment, enabling the transition from the parliamentary to the presidential system. After this development, as a result of the constitutional amendment, it has become necessary to make several structural adjustments to implement the new system of government fully. Thus, the implementation of the new system, known as the presidential system of government, began de facto in Turkey, with the elections held on June 24, 2018.

With the transition to the presidential system of government, the duties and powers of the legislative and executive branches were redefined in the 1982 Constitution. In this context, the executive branch was transformed into a monistic structure, and executive powers and duties were exercised by the President (1982 Constitution, Art. 8).

Under the new system, parliamentary and presidential elections are held on the same day every five years (Constitution of 1982, Art. 77). The President of the Republic is elected directly by the people from among Turkish citizens who are over forty years of age, have completed higher education and qualified to be elected as a member of Parliament. The term of office of the President of the Republic is five years, and a person can be elected President for a maximum of two terms. In a general election, the candidate who receives the absolute majority of the valid votes is elected President. Suppose this majority is not obtained in the first round. In that case, a second round is held on the second Sunday after the first round. The two candidates who received the highest number of votes in the first round will participate in the second round. The candidate with the majority of valid votes will be elected President (Constitution of 1982, art. 101).

The provisions concerning the renewal of the elections of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) and the President of the Republic are regulated in Article 116 of the 1982 Constitution. According to this article, TBMM can decide to renew the elections by a majority of three-fifths of the total number of members. In this case, the general elections of TBMM and the presidential elections shall be held together. Similarly, if the President of the Republic decides to renew the elections, the parliamentary elections and the presidential elections shall be held together.

If the Parliament decides to renew the elections during the second term of the President, the President may run for another term.

With the decision of the President of the Republic dated March 10, 2023, and numbered 2023/121, it was decided to renew the general election of TBMM and the presidential election, and with the decision of the YSK numbered 2023/90, it was decided to hold the presidential election and the general election of the 28<sup>th</sup> parliamentary together on Sunday, May 14, 2023. If the presidential election went to the second ballot, the second election would be held on Sunday, May 28, 2023. The Presidential Election went to the second ballot, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was re-elected as President in the election held on May 28, 2023.

### 3. Political Parties and Electoral Alliances

Political parties are the essential elements and major dynamics of political life. Whether the concept of politics is viewed in terms of power relations or the decision-making process, the reality is that political parties are at the center of each aspect. Hence, regardless of the nature and character of the political system, parties play a primary role in all contemporary societies (Kapani, 2007: 175). Political parties have essential functions such as uniting and channeling various interests and demands in society, bridging the gap between society and power, ensuring the election of political personnel, administrative staff and leaders, governing, ruling and forming a public opinion (Arpacı, 2013: 122).

The transition to the multi-party system in Turkish political life is considered an essential step towards democratization (Heper, 2011: 10). In the theory of democracy, the common tendency is to accept political parties as the only actors that realize political representation. Indeed, the increase in the number of political parties in a country increases that country's level of democracy. However, it should not be ignored that along with the increase in the number of political parties, the qualities of political parties are also crucial for democratization (Sarıbay, 2014: 328).

Political parties may form alliances with each other to increase their competitive abilities, develop new policies, and use resources efficiently. The formation of these alliances varies depending on the system of government. An electoral alliance is defined as the coming together of two political parties to maximize their electoral votes; on the other hand, a post-electoral alliance is defined as two political parties coming together to work together in the post-electoral period, i.e., a coalition (Kadima, 2006).

Electoral alliances established between political parties have some advantages and disadvantages for political parties. First, by combining their powers and resources, parties can achieve some goals they could not achieve alone. Second, different political parties joining forces may increase the party's attractiveness and vote share. Third, the parties in the alliance may benefit from each other's strengths and experience. Finally, the public may appreciate the effort to establish an alliance in a culture of compromise (O'Day, 2004).

The disadvantages of an alliance between parties can be outlined under several headings. First, the parties in the alliance may have to compromise their priorities and principles to find common ground. Second, the parties in the alliance may find it challenging to maintain their lines of discourse and campaign promises in joint decision-making processes. Third, the public may perceive the alliance as abandoning party principles. Finally, if there is no strong communication between the parties in the alliance, this can lead to tension and division between the parties (O'Day, 2004).

In the presidential system, political parties can form an electoral alliance by agreeing on the same candidate before the elections. If the alliance's candidate is elected, there is a sharing of power, distribution of ministries among the alliance parties, and concessions on some political issues as demanded by the alliance. In presidential elections, alliances formed by

political parties before the elections continue after the elections. However, it is noted that in multi-party presidential systems, alliances formed before the election lose their binding force after the election. Therefore, there is no certainty that the parties that formed alliances before the presidential elections will continue to work together after the elections (Aydoğan Ünal, 2019).

In Turkish political life, it is known that electoral alliances are formed between political parties. Before the transition to the presidential system of government, electoral alliances in Turkish politics were established in coalitions per the nature of the parliamentary system. However, with the new system of government, various electoral alliances have been formed among political parties.

The legal regulation of electoral alliances made before the June 24, 2018, Presidential and Parliamentary Elections is an important step. "*The Law on the Basic Provisions of Elections and Voter Registers and Amendments to Certain Laws*," enacted on March 16, 2018, introduced significant changes to electoral alliances, including the application of electoral thresholds, the formation of candidate lists, and the distribution of seats, paving the way for Turkish political parties to form electoral alliances. In fact, under the amendment to Article 33 of Law No. 2839 on Parliamentary Elections, the 10% threshold in the parliamentary elections is based on the total valid votes received by the parties in the alliance. No separate calculation of the electoral threshold is needed for these parties. Thus, the parties in the alliance group whose total valid votes exceed 10% are entitled to represent in the Parliament even if they cannot pass the electoral threshold alone.

Following these legal arrangements, two alliances, namely the People's Alliance and the Nation Alliance, were formed between political parties before the June 24, 2018, elections. The first electoral alliance of the new system was formed by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). The second electoral alliance, the Nation Alliance, was formed by the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Good Party (IP), the Felicity Party (SP), and the Democratic Party (DP) by signing the declaration of electoral cooperation between the party leaders.

The People's Alliance aimed at both parliamentary and presidential elections. The protocol text (<https://www.milliyet.com.tr/>, 2018) emphasized that this alliance was not binding only for the period before the election; it was a historical unity that would continue after the elections as well. The goal of the People's Alliance was explained as exhibiting a moral and political consensus based on survival in the face of hostile internal and external attempts against Turkey. In this sense, it is understood that the expectations of the parties forming the People's Alliance were not only election-oriented.

The Nation Alliance was composed of parties from different political traditions and was formed only for parliamentary elections. In the declaration of the Nation Alliance, it was emphasized that the alliance's primary purpose was to ensure that the political preferences of all voters, despite their different world views, are fully reflected in the Parliament and to ensure justice in representation. In the Nation Alliance, the CHP, IP, and SP participated in the elections under the umbrella of the Nation Alliance with their own party emblems and their own lists of candidates, while the DP participated in the elections on the condition that it nominated its candidates on the lists of the IP (<http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/>, 2018). Nation Alliance was formed only for the parliamentary elections. After the elections, it was announced that the alliance formed by the alliance parties had been terminated.



Table 1: 2018 General Election Results, MP Distribution and Alliances

Party	Vote Share (%)	Number of MPs Won	Alliance	Vote Share of the Alliance (%)	Number of MPs of the Alliance
AKP	42.56	295	People's Alliance	53.66	344
CHP	22.65	146			
HDP	11.70	67			
MHP	11.10	49	Nation Alliance	32.61	189
IP	9.96	43			
SP	1.34	0			

Source: <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/>, 2018

According to Table 1, showing the election results of June 24, 2018, AKP became the first party with 42.56% of the votes, while CHP became the second party with 22.65%. Regarding the alliances formed before the elections, the People's Alliance won 344 parliamentary seats with 53.66% of the total votes. In comparison, the Nation Alliance won 189 parliamentary seats with 32.61% of the total votes. Regarding these results, comparing the alliances formed before the first election of the new system clearly shows that the People's Alliance was more successful than the Nation Alliance.

### 3.1. Alliances Formed Before the 2023 Elections

The second election of the presidential government system, both the presidential and general elections for the 28<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term, was held on May 14, 2023. As a result of the new government system, the electoral alliances were reshaped in the 2023 elections, as in the 2018 elections, after negotiations between political parties. The number of alliances and parties in alliances increased in the 2023 elections.

Regarding electoral alliances, significant changes were made with the legal regulation covering the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections to be held on May 14, 2023. Under the "Law on Amendments to the Law on the Election of Deputies and Certain Laws," which was adopted on March 31, 2022, and entered into force on April 6, 2022, the electoral threshold was lowered to 7%, and it was accepted that all parties within the alliance would pass the threshold if the total number of votes received by the alliance exceeded the general threshold. Furthermore, if the vote threshold exceeds the general threshold, the number of MPs of the political parties forming the alliance is calculated by distributing the total number of MPs received by the alliance according to the percentage of votes received by each party. (<https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/>, 2022).

The alliances formed by Turkish political parties for May 14, 2023, Presidential Elections and 28<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary Election can be listed as follows;

- **People's Alliance:** The People's Alliance, established in the 2018 electoral period, also continued in the 2023 elections. On March 24, 2023, the protocol of the People's Alliance was submitted to the Supreme Electoral Council (<https://www.ntv.com.tr/>, 2023). According to the protocol, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the Great Unity Party (BBP) and the New Welfare Party (YR) decided to participate in the elections under the umbrella of the People's Alliance. The alliance parties have declared that they will participate in the elections as separate political parties within the framework of Law No. 2839 and that the joint candidate of the alliance in the presidential elections will be President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The protocol text also explains the founding, principles and vision of the People's Alliance. It emphasized that the People's Alliance emerged as a natural result of a domestic and national stance against the attacks that Turkey was exposed to after July 15. Therefore, the People's Alliance, established before 2018, is characterized

as an alliance embodied in a moral and political consensus based on national survival. In addition, the text of the protocol prioritized the goal of healing the wounds of the earthquake disaster that occurred on February 6, 2023, the guarantee of human rights and the rule of law, the presidential system of government, and the vision of Turkey's century, and the goal of a strong, influential Turkey, a determinant of global balances in the new century of the Republic (<https://www.ntv.com.tr/>, 2023).

After the 2018 elections, the People's Alliance has been expanded regarding the parties joining the alliance. Finally, on March 11, 2023, HUDA PAR announced its decision to support President Erdoğan and join the People's Alliance. After this development, HUDA PAR's MP candidates participated in the elections from AKP's lists (<https://www.haberturk.com/>, 2023).

- **Nation Alliance:** Regarding the alliance protocol submitted to the Supreme Election Council on March 22, 2023, before the 2023 elections, the Nation Alliance consists of 6 parties: Republican People's Party (CHP), Good Party (IP), Felicity Party (SP), Future Party (GP), Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) and Democratic Party (DP) (<https://www.haberturk.com/>, 2023).

The protocol emphasized that six political parties have formed an electoral alliance to crown the Republic with democracy, establish justice, live freely by accepting differences as richness, ensure social peace and tranquillity, ensure that all citizens lead a life worthy of human dignity, build a pluralist, democratic Turkey and bequeath these values to future generations. In addition, in line with the consensus text on a strengthened parliamentary system, constitutional amendment proposal, the consensus text on common policies prepared by the parties of the Nation Alliance with a complete consensus and the accepted principles, it was stated that the parties forming the Nation Alliance entered the elections under the umbrella of the Nation Alliance to ensure that the political preferences of the citizens are fully reflected in the Parliament and to ensure justice in representation by preserving different world views (<https://chp.org.tr/>, 2023).

The founding protocol of the Nation Alliance did not specify a presidential candidate, stating that the name agreed after the meetings of the leaders of the six political parties would be announced to the public. However, the Nation Alliance faced a crisis over the nomination, and IP leader Meral Akşener walked away from the table. The members of the alliance, who took the initiative to solve the problem, met again at the invitation of the Felicity Party. Temel Karamollaoğlu announced the presidential candidate of the Nation Alliance in front of the Felicity Party headquarters. The presidential candidate of the Nation Alliance became CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. In the roadmap for the transition to a strengthened parliamentary system, it was agreed that the presidents of the political parties that form the alliance and the mayors of Istanbul and Ankara would-be vice presidents (<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/>, 2023).

- **Ancestral Alliance:** The election protocol of the Ancestral Alliance, which was formed before the May 14 elections, was submitted to the Supreme Election Council on March 24, 2023. The Ancestral Alliance consisted of the Victory Party and the Justice Party. The issues emphasized by this alliance during the election process were Kemalism, Turkish nationalism, anti-immigration and parliamentarism. Sinan OĞAN was nominated as the presidential candidate by the Ancestral Alliance (<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/>, 2023).
- **Labour and Freedom Alliance:** The Labor and Freedom Alliance, founded by the Party of Green and the Left Future (YSP), the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP) and

the Labor Party (EMEP), has submitted its election protocol to the Supreme Election Council and announced that these three parties would participate in the May 14 elections under the umbrella of the alliance. The protocol of the alliance stated that the alliance aims to accomplish tasks that need to be accomplished quickly in the economic and political fields. It also emphasized the construction of a democracy based on the absolute sovereignty of the people based on democratic, libertarian and egalitarian principles (<https://www.haberturk.com/>, 2023). In the Labor and Freedom Alliance, each party participated in the 28<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections under its own name and did not nominate a candidate for the presidential elections.

- ***Alliance of Socialist Power Union***: This alliance, founded on August 21, 2022, ahead of the 2023 general elections, includes the Left Party (SOL), the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), the Communist Movement of Turkey (TKH) and the Revolutionary Movement (DH). The alliance did not nominate a candidate for the presidential elections, and it was announced that each party would run under its own name in the parliamentary elections. It was also announced that the alliance is not election-oriented and that this partnership will continue within the framework of fundamental principles such as secularism, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism (<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/>, 2023).

### 3.2. Status of Alliances According to Parliamentary Election Results

The May 14, 2023, elections occupy an important place in Turkish politics because of the developments that occurred before and after the elections. Indeed, both the executive and legislative branches of government would be reshaped in these elections. The principal political debate topics in the sometimes fierce competition between the ruling, opposition and alliance parties were Turkey's economic woes in recent years, foreign policy developments, regional problems and the earthquake disaster that deeply affected Turkey. As a result, policy proposals addressing these problems have been at the center of the political parties' campaign promises. The AKP government, which has been in power for twenty-two years, wanted to continue its presence in the country's administration as the People's Alliance, while the main opposition CHP and other opposition parties wanted to have a say in the country's governance by winning the elections under the umbrella of the Nation Alliance. According to the Supreme Election Council (<https://www.ysk.gov.tr/>, 2023), 55,835,895 out of 64,145,504 registered voters voted in the May 14, 2023, parliamentary elections, and 54,442,588 of the votes were considered valid. Thirty-six political parties participated in the May 14 elections, and the voter turnout was 87.05%. Regarding the elections held in Turkey in the last two decades, it can be said that the May 14 elections had the highest voter turnout.

**Table 2:** Distribution of Political Parties in the Parliament According to Parliamentary Election Results

Political Party	Number of Votes	Vote Share (%)	Number of MPs
AKP	19,392,462	35.62	268
CHP	13,802,183	25.35	169
IP	5,275,981	9.69	43
MHP	5,484,820	10.07	50
TIP	956,057	1.76	4
YR	1,527,048	2.8	5
YSP	4,803,922	8.82	61

Source: <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/>, 2023.



According to the data in Table 2, there was no significant difference in the MP distribution of political parties compared to the previous period. In the 28<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election, the AKP won 268 parliamentary seats with 35.62% of the votes and became the first party. The CHP, the second party in the elections, won 169 parliamentary seats with 25.35% of the votes. Regarding the alliances in the light of these results, the People's Alliance entered the Parliament with 323 MPs, the Nation Alliance with 212 MPs and the Labor and Freedom Alliance with 65 MPs. However, the Ancestral Alliance and the Alliance of Socialist Power Union failed to win any seats in Parliament.

#### 4. Evaluation of the Presidential Election Results

Following the amendments made in the presidential system of government, the presidential elections were held on May 14, 2023. As it is known, since the first round of the elections did not yield enough votes to elect the President of the Republic, the runoff elections were held on May 28, 2023. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected as the 13<sup>th</sup> President of the Republic.

According to Article 101 of the 1982 Constitution, one of the candidates nominated by political parties for the presidential election must obtain the absolute majority of the valid votes to win the election. This rule has led political parties to nominate joint candidates, especially in nominating a presidential candidate, which can also be seen as a reflection of the presidential system of government. Considering the Turkish political parties and their social projections, it is clear that the probability of a candidate outside the alliance winning the election is very low.

The final list of candidates for the presidential and 28<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections to be held together on Sunday, May 14, 2023, has been announced under the Supreme Election Council's decision number 2023/321 (<https://www.ysk.gov.tr/>, 2023). According to the list, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Muharrem İnce, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Sinan Oğan were the presidential candidates. The People's Alliance candidate was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Nation Alliance candidate was Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the Ancestral Alliance candidate was Sinan Oğan, and Muharrem İnce ran as an independent candidate.

According to the Supreme Election Council (<https://www.ysk.gov.tr/>, 2023), 53,993,683 out of 60,721,745 registered voters voted in the presidential election held on May 14, 2023, and 52,972,934 of the votes were considered valid. The voter turnout for the presidential election was 88.92%.

**Table 3:** Vote Distribution of Presidential Candidates

Candidate	Number of Votes	Vote share (%)
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	26,086,102	49.24
Muharrem İnce	216,470	0.41
Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu	23,873,749	45.07
Sinan Oğan	2,796,613	5.28

*Kaynak: <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/>, 2023.*

Regarding the distribution of votes in Table 3, the presidential candidates did not reach the required absolute majority to be elected, and the presidential election was left to the second round. The Peoples' Alliance candidate, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, came in first with 49.24 % of the vote, and the Nation Alliance candidate, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, came in second with 45.07 %. Therefore, these two candidates with the most votes competed again in the May 28, 2023 elections.

According to the data of the Supreme Election Council (<https://www.ysk.gov.tr/> 2023), 54,023,601 out of 64,197,454 registered voters voted in the second round of the presidential

election held on May 28, 2023, and 53,339,313 of the votes cast were considered valid. The turnout in the presidential election was 84.15%.

Table 4: Vote Distribution of Presidential Candidates in the Presidential Runoff Election

Candidate	Number of Votes	Vote share (%)
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	27,834,589	52.15
Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu	25,504,724	47.82

Kaynak: <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/>, 2023.

According to the data in Table 4, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the leader of the AKP and the candidate of the People's Alliance, won the second round of the presidential election with 52.15% of the votes and was re-elected as the president. Thus, the presidential election process was completed within the framework of democratic procedures and methods.

Every election period in Turkish political life is very important for domestic and foreign policies. The 2023 elections, which took place on the eve of the Republic's centennial, are also evaluated in this sense. In this election period, the competition occurred between two opposite candidates who were completely different. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the leader of the AKP and the candidate of the People's Alliance, ran on the theme of "Turkey's Century". On the other hand, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the CHP and the candidate of the Nation Alliance, ran on the theme of "The Second Century of the Republic". It can be said that the political discourse of the leaders and their policy proposals to the electorate in their election manifestos impacted the election results directly.

In the AKP election manifesto, the main characteristics of the party were emphasized. Accordingly, the main characteristics of AKP were declared as (i) a movement for a cause, (ii) the party of the future, (iii) the party of the people, (iv) a democratic and reformist political movement, and (v) the ideal of being a fully independent Turkey (<https://www.akparti.org.tr/>, 2023). In addition, the leaders of the alliance, especially Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, emphasized Turkey's becoming a world power with the concept of the Turkish century, the continuity of the presidential system of government and that the existence of the People's Alliance is a matter of survival for Turkey.

On the other hand, CHP President and Nation Alliance Candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and the leaders of the Nation Alliance stated that Turkey was going through one of the deepest governance and economic crises in history, that the main reason for this crisis was the presidential system of government and its arbitrary and rule-breaking approach to governance, and that the current system has become a survival problem for the state. In this context, the goals, policies and suggestions were outlined by the memorandum under nine main headings, namely (i) law, justice and the judiciary; (ii) public administration; (iii) economy, finance and employment; (v) science, R&D, innovation, entrepreneurship and digital transformation; (vi) sectoral policies; (vii) education and training; (viii) social policies; and (ix) foreign policy, defense, security and migration. It was also emphasized that these policies, goals and suggestions form the backbone of the government program (<https://chp.org.tr/>, 2023).

The 2023 presidential election is one of the most critical elections in the last two decades for the political parties that make up the Nation Alliance and their candidate, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. The 2023 elections were a challenging test for the government led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, especially in light of the elections held after 2000, due to the negative developments in the country's economy, instability, problems with immigrants and current developments in foreign policy. However, the Nation Alliance and presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu were not able to turn the unfavorable circumstances to their advantage. In particular, the discourse on Turkey's reconstruction and strengthened parliamentary model did not create the desired effect. It can be attributed to the leadership style of Kemal

Kılıçdaroğlu, his electoral strategy, the ideological differences of the parties that make up the Nation Alliance and its multi-actor structure. In addition, the HDP, which was not a member of the Nation Alliance, did not nominate a presidential candidate and announced that it would support Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu in the election, causing ruptures in nationalist voters' support for the Millet Alliance.

Although the presidential election was left to the second round, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan consolidated his power. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been successful in presidential elections since 2014. The alliance formed by the center-right AKP, MHP and BBP parties after the implementation of the new system of government in 2018 gained more power after the 2023 elections. For Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the 2023 elections do not only mean the presidency and the representation of the executive power. It also means the continuation of the presidential system of government, the People's Alliance, and the AKP governments that started after 2002 and the continuation of domestic and foreign policy goals.

On the other hand, success in the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections is also crucial for the 2024 local elections. In order to regain the metropolitan municipalities lost in the previous elections, especially Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, the 2023 elections are seen as a reassurance for the winning side. Therefore, the dominance and supremacy of the AKP and the People's Alliance in the executive and legislative branches will create a disadvantage for the Nation Alliance and other opposition parties, especially CHP, in the local elections.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Holding elections under certain principles is an essential indicator of the existing democracy understanding in a country. It is impossible to speak of a democratic structure in a country if elections are not held. Elections, the prerequisite of democracy, ensure that the people choose the political actors who will represent the legislative and executive bodies, which are the major powers of a country. In Turkish political life, elections have played an important role in developing democracy after the transition to a multi-party system. After the transition from the parliamentary system to the presidential system, the people directly elect the president according to the absolute majority rule.

The 2023 elections can be considered one of the most critical elections in our recent history, both for political parties and voters, in which new regulations in Turkish politics were put into practice as a requirement of the presidential system of government implemented since 2018. Regarding its results, this election is important in setting the direction in which the country's governance, power relations and the struggle between social forces will develop. Although the candidates running in the elections were diverse, there was no doubt that the elections would occur between the two opposing fronts. In fact, the president was not elected in the first round, in which four candidates competed, and the second round of voting was between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu.

Considering the position of the two candidates in Turkish politics and their leadership styles, there was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on one side, who has been consistently winning elections since 2002 and advocated the goals of change, a new Turkey and a global vision, and there was Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu on the other side, who has been the main opposition leader for years and advocated the model of a strengthened parliamentary system and the vision of the second century to solve the instabilities in the country against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the policies led by him.

The 2023 presidential election has brought significant results regarding some features of the Turkish political structure, such as the high voter turnout, experiencing the second round of the presidential election and the existence of two main blocs in the ruling and opposition axis. As a result, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was re-elected as the president with 52.15% of the

votes (27,834,589 votes), one of the most significant achievements of his political life. Therefore, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's electoral success is also a sign of social approval, which will be the mainstay of his policies and goals in the coming years.

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