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Elections in Turkey

2015 Grand National Assembly Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Middle East and North Africa

Europe

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Turkish election authorities as of June 1 , 2015, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

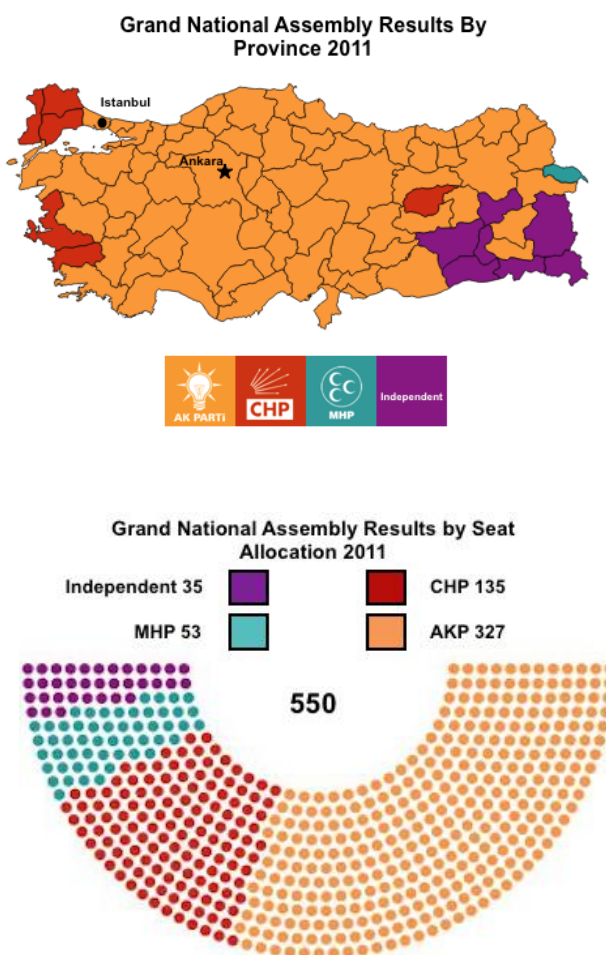
The Republic of Turkey will hold national parliamentary elections on June 7, 2015, while out-of-country (OCV) voting will occur from May 8-31 in 54 countries around the world.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Turkish citizens will vote for the Grand National Assembly, or *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* (TBMM), Turkey's unicameral parliamentary body. The 2015 general election will determine the makeup of the 24th TBMM. According to the 1982 Constitution, members of the TBMM will hold office for four years. The TBMM has 550 directly-elected members of parliament, known as Deputies, representing 85 electoral constituencies. Citizens will vote for either a pre-set list of politicians nominated by each political party or a single independent candidate. Candidates can only run in one electoral district, and can only appear on one political party list.

How did citizens vote in previous national elections?

Turkey has held two national elections in the past four years: Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* [TBMM]) elections in 2011 and presidential elections in August 2014. In the last TBMM election in June 2011, 27 political parties contested the election, but only three parties – the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Republican People's Party (CHP), and the National Movement Party (MHP) – surpassed the 10 percent national threshold to be seated in parliament. The 2011 election resulted in a third consecutive victory for the ruling AKP and its party leader, then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. While the AKP won a resounding 49.8 percent of the national vote and sat 327 Deputies in the Grand National Assembly, it lost 14 seats from its 2007 Deputy total of 341. Thirty-five independent candidates – all supported by the Labor, Democracy and Freedom coalition, built by the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) – also won seats, marking a significant rise in Kurdish political representation in parliament. Following their election to the TBMM, the BDP formed a parliamentary group in the TBMM, as legislation allowed for political parties that have over 20 members to form groups.



On August 10, 2014 Turkey held its first ever popular presidential election. Prime Minister Erdoğan won a majority of the vote in the first round, defeating Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu who was supported by the MHP and CHP, and Selahattin Demirtaş, supported by the BDP. Ahmet Davutoğlu, who was elected leader of the AKP, succeeded Erdoğan as Prime Minister.

What is the election management body that will manage the election process?

The election management body in Turkey is known as the Supreme Board of Elections, or *Yüksek Seçim Kurulu* (YSK). The YSK is a permanent commission composed of 11 members from the judiciary that are elected for a six-year term. Six of the members are elected by the General Board of the High Court of Appeals and five of the members are elected by the General Board of the Council of State. In addition to this central board, the YSK is made up of 81 Provincial Election Boards, 1,436 District Electoral Boards and roughly 174,240 Ballot Box Committees.

What electoral system will be used to elect the Assembly?

The Grand National Assembly is elected for a four-year term using a system of closed-list proportional representation with a 10 percent national threshold.

How are seats allocated?

The 550 seats of the Grand National Assembly (TBMM) are allocated geographically among 81 administrative provinces. Each province is guaranteed one seat. The remaining 469 seats are allocated based on population, with the largest provinces receiving the most Deputies. Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir provinces have the largest populations and the most Deputies in Turkey. Provinces are broken down into electoral constituencies. Electoral constituencies within each province are determined by the number of Deputy seats allocated to the province. If the province is allocated 1-18 Deputy seats, the province will be one electoral district. If a province elects 19-36 Deputies, the province will be split into two electoral districts, as in the case of Ankara and Izmir. If a province elects more than 36 Deputies, as in the case of Istanbul, then it will be split into three electoral provinces. The Supreme Board of Elections (YSK) is tasked with reallocating seats to fit the most recent population totals per province before each election. On February 1, 2015, the YSK reallocated seven seats to fit population changes based on data compiled after the 2014 presidential election.

Who is eligible to vote?

According to the 1982 Constitution, Turkish citizens at least 18 years of age on the day preceding Election Day and who are on the voter lists are eligible to vote, with the exception of: active conscripts; cadets; and prisoners who have committed intentional crimes, regardless of the severity. Voting is mandatory

under the Parliamentary Election Law, but punishment for those who abstain from voting, in the form of a small fine, is rarely enforced.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Out-of-country voting (OCV) was first conducted during the 2014 presidential elections; previously voters had to present themselves at the border. Voting will be held at 112 polling stations in 54 countries and at 64 border crossings during the 2015 Grand National Assembly elections. One District Electoral Board has been created in Ankara to oversee the Ballot Box Committees established for OCV.



When did voter registration take place?

Voter registration in Turkey is passive. The permanent central voter register is maintained by the Supreme Board of Elections and linked to a registry operated by the Ministry of the Interior. The registry uses personal identification numbers to identify citizens and maintain their place of residence. The initial voter registration list was publicly displayed by District Electoral Boards from March 14 to April 8, at which time voters were expected to verify their information and request changes be made if necessary.

How many registered voters are there?

The total number of registered in-country voters is 53,741,883, while there are 2,866,940 voters registered for out-of-country voting.

What are the measures to encourage women's participation as candidates?

There are no constitutional or legal provisions to encourage women to run as candidates. However, some political parties have implemented gender quotas for candidate lists for national and sub-national elections. In the 2011 Grand National Assembly election, 79 women were elected, representing 14.36 percent of Deputies.

Who is competing in these elections?

The Supreme Board of Elections deemed 31 political parties eligible to contest the June Grand National Assembly elections, 20 of which submitted candidate lists. The criteria for eligibility, detailed in the Law on Political Parties, requires that parties have an organizational structure in at least half of the provinces and present a full list of candidates in a majority of provinces. The total number of registered candidates

is 9,861, including 9,696 from 20 political parties and 165 independent candidates. The 20 parties that will contest the upcoming elections are as follows:

- True Path Party (DYP)
- Anatolia Party (ANAPAR)
- Rights and Freedoms Party (HAK-PAR)
- Communist Party (KP)
- Nation Party (MP)
- Rights and Justice Party (HAP)
- Centre Party (MEP)
- Social Reconciliation Reform and Development Party (TURK-P)
- People's Liberation Party (HKP)
- Liberal Democrat Party (LDP)
- Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)
- Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)
- Felicity Party (SP)
- Republic People's Party (CHP)
- Justice and Development Party (AKP)
- Democratic Left Party (DSP)
- Homeland Party (YURT-P)
- Democrat Party (DP)
- Patriotic Party (VP)
- Independent Turkey Party (BTP)

What are the major platforms and ideologies that parties and candidates will be running on?

Of the 20 parties contesting the upcoming elections, only three received a large enough portion of the vote share in the 2011 general elections to be seated in the Grand National Assembly (TBMM). The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which is seeking a fourth consecutive term as the largest party in the TBMM, is typically seen as a right-of-center party and has sustained broad levels of support since its establishment in 2001. Through party leader Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and former party leader President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the AKP has announced its intent to pursue the constitutional amendments necessary to instate a presidential system in Turkey. The support the AKP receives in the upcoming elections will therefore determine to a large extent the AKP's ability to enact such amendments; it will need to increase its number of seats to a minimum of 330 in order to hold a referendum on the issue, or 367 seats (a two-thirds majority) to enact such amendments without a referendum. If the AKP maintains the support it received in the 2011 elections – which delivered 327 seats – or loses support, it is unlikely that it will be able to gain sufficient backing to move forward with a presidential system.

The other two parties who won seats in the 2011 elections, the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the National Movement Party (MHP), are also expected to easily surpass the 10 percent national threshold in

the upcoming elections. The CHP, which traces its roots to the earliest days of the Republic, focuses primarily on a pro-secular platform. The party with the third largest presence in the parliament is the MHP, whose conservative ideology centers around Turkish nationalism and is in direct opposition to that of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party's (HDP) platform.

The fourth party with a formal presence in the TBMM, the HDP, did not arrive there by being elected as a party but rather by forming a group of independent candidates. Its agenda focuses primarily on a political solution to the ongoing Kurdish dispute; however, over the years, issues such as other ethnic and religious minorities' representation, gender equality, and LGBT rights have been incorporated into the HDP's platform. In the upcoming elections, the HDP will utilize demographic shifts to attempt to surpass the national threshold as a party, rather than field candidates as independents.

The HDP has been encouraged by its finish in the 2014 presidential elections, in which the HDP's party leader Selahattin Demirtaş received 9.7 percent of the national vote. To further expand its political appeal across the country, the HDP has sought to broaden its electoral coalition by incorporating ethnic minorities in Western Turkey into candidate lists to compete in non-Kurdish regions. Recent polls show that the HDP might receive voter support ranging from 10.1 to 11.4 percent, which would bring them past the threshold. Alternatively, if the HDP is unable to maintain its projected levels of support, it will mean the new TBMM will lack the presence of a party with a prominent pro-Kurdish agenda, which could slow the process of political reconciliation with the Kurdistan Worker's Party and prevent the TBMM from pushing for additional rights for Kurds. Failure by the HDP to pass the threshold may also have a secondary effect, as it is likely that many of the seats contested by HDP candidates will be reapportioned to the AKP. In this scenario, the AKP may be able to gain the seats that it needs to push forward with its desired constitutional amendments.

What are the rules on campaigning?

Campaigning began on March 10 and will end on June 6, 2015. The electioneering period, during which additional restrictions are placed on campaigning, will begin on the morning of the tenth day in advance of Election Day (May 28, 2015) and will end at 6:00 p.m. on the day before Election Day (June 6, 2015). During the electioneering period, additional provisions on campaign activities include allocating free airtime to political parties and candidates, banning the use of State resources for campaign purposes, and prohibiting electoral contestants from organizing and contributing to events related to publicly funded services.

During this 10-day period, the Law on Basic Provisions on Elections and Voter Registers only allows collective verbal campaigning in public squares as designated by District Electoral Boards. Meetings may be held by political parties and independent candidates during the election, but cannot be held in temples, schools, military barracks or buildings, or any other places where public services are rendered.

Beginning one week before the election, political parties may conduct campaign activities on TV and radio until the end of campaigning. Political parties are given a small amount of time to explain their program

and projects, and are apportioned additional time based on their proportion of seats in the previous Grand National Assembly. No provision in the law includes allocation of free airtime to independent candidates. A former provision in the election law that required Turkish as the main language used in campaign activities was amended in 2014 and the new provision provides that any language or dialect can be used in campaign activities. This amendment came into force in 2015. Political parties are also banned from publishing any campaign materials that print the Turkish flag or religious statements.

What are the rules for campaign finance?

The Republic of Turkey does not have comprehensive regulations for campaign financing. While some restrictions are placed on the amount and sources of donations to political parties, few of these laws place limits on donations to candidates. Moreover, campaign spending by political parties and candidates is not regulated.

The Law on Political Parties (LPP), the primary legislation addressing campaign financing, prohibits political parties and candidates from receiving material or in-kind contributions from anonymous sources, foreign States, international organizations and foreign natural or legal persons. The law also bans corporations with government contracts or partial government ownership from donating to political parties. However, the law does not prevent these same corporations from donating to candidates. The LPP does not ban or limit contributions by professional organizations such as public institutions, charities, foundations, trade unions or employers' associations to either political parties or candidates.

The LPP also specifies limits on the amount of donations that can be made annually. However, this provision does not contain a limitation on the amount that can be donated in relation to a specific election. Furthermore, the law only applies to donations made to political parties, not to candidates, and it does not apply to some organizations such as public institutions, charities, foundations, trade union or employers' associations, and the cap on donations is adjusted annually.

Political parties are entitled to public finances by the 1982 Constitution. However, the LPP stipulates that political parties will only qualify for State funding if they received three percent or more of the national votes in the last election, and will receive funding proportionally based on their share of the national vote. This three percent threshold was lowered from seven percent in March 2014.

Finally, vote buying is illegal. Sanctions for violations of the above provisions can be punished with a variety of penalties, fees, and jail time to be determined by the Supreme Board of Elections.

How many ballot box committees and polling stations are set up on Election Day?

Ballot Box Committees are responsible for setting up polling in their respective jurisdiction in order to make polling accessible for voters in each voting district. As a result, the number of physical polling stations is not quantified by the Supreme Board of Elections. Instead, the Supreme Board of Elections has

quantified the number of Ballot Box Committees (BBCs), as there may be more than one Committee in each polling station. According to the Supreme Board of Elections, there will be roughly 174,240 BBCs established. There will be 360 BBCs at penitentiary institutions on Election Day (the latter figure may change by the June 4 deadline), 402 BBCs at 112 polling stations for out-of-country-voting and 78 BBCs at custom gates and borders.

What will the ballots look like and how should they be marked?

Each ballot will have a row of boxes listing the political parties in an order determined by a random drawing. Above each box will be the political party's logo, followed by: the abbreviation of the name of the political party; the full name of the party; the name of the party's leader; the list of party candidates; and an empty circle where voters will indicate their selection. Independent candidates will print their own ballot papers, in compliance with the rules outlined by the Supreme Board of Elections, and will be responsible for delivering their ballot papers to their Provincial Election Board. On Election Day, voters will receive a stamp, inscribed with the word "YES" ("EVET" in Turkish), which they will use to mark the circle of the political party for which they are casting their vote.

What are the polling procedures on Election Day?

Polling stations will open at 8:00 a.m. and close at 5:00 p.m. on June 7, 2015. Voters in line at closing time will be allowed to cast their votes. Voters must bring a State-issued form of identification, such as a birth certificate or passport, to the polling station where they are registered to vote.

Once admitted to the polling station by the Chairman of the Ballot Box Committees, voters will present their identification documents. The Chairman will find the voter's name in the ballot box voter list, give the voter a ballot paper and seal with the word "YES," guide the voter to the voting booth, and explain to the voter how to cast his/her vote and fold and seal the ballot paper into an envelope. Once the voter has marked one candidate list and sealed the ballot paper into an envelope, the voter will exit the voting booth and insert the envelope into the ballot box to which they are assigned in the voter registry. The Chairman will then return the voter's identification document to him/her and have the voter sign the box adjacent to the voter's name on the voter list and mark his/her left index finger with indelible ink. Voters lacking the left index finger may imprint any other finger and the Chairman shall write on the list to which finger the print belongs. The chairman shall mark the neck part of voters having no fingers.

How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?

According to the Law on Basic Provisions on Elections and Voter Registers, any disability that would prevent a voter from casting their vote will be noted during voter registration. Voters with disabilities will be assigned to accessible polling stations and ballot boxes when the voter registry is announced. The number of accessible polling stations is determined by the Supreme Board of Elections (YSK) based on the number of votes with disabilities in the voter registry. Voters with disabilities must apply to transfer to an

accessible ballot box if they were not already assigned to one during the voter registration period. There is no public transportation program or absentee voting system to assist voters with disabilities that prevent them from leaving their homes or traveling to polling stations.

At the voting station, voters with physical disabilities may be accompanied in the booth by a relative who votes in the same electoral district, or, in the absence of a relative, by any other voter willing to provide assistance. A voter cannot accompany more than one voter with a disability. Additionally, disabilities that prevent voters from signing the box adjacent to his/her name in the voter list may alternatively mark their fingerprint in the signature box. The YSK is currently in the process of developing a braille alphabet for ballots, but this will not be available for the upcoming general elections.

Are there any special provisions to assist illiterate voters to cast their ballots?

The ballot will be in color and will contain party symbols next to candidate lists in order to assist illiterate voters to visually distinguish between parties. The Supreme Board of Elections has also produced voter information posters with drawings detailing how to correctly vote. There are no legal provisions that specify whether an illiterate voter is permitted to bring someone with them on Election Day in order to assist them in casting their ballot.

Where are voting, counting and tabulation held?

Polling stations will be placed in public places such as schools, cafes, and restaurants. Polling stations will not be placed in military buildings, police stations, political party buildings, or community chief aldermen's offices. The location of ballot boxes and polling stations is determined by Ballot Box Committees (BBCs) with the supervision of District Electoral Boards (DEBs). The BBCs will take measures to ensure voters with disabilities have ease of access to polling stations and ballot boxes.

Following voting, vote counting and tabulation will commence in several rounds. The first round of counting will occur at polling stations and will be open to the public. BBCs will review all ballots, mark votes as valid or invalid and record the total number of valid votes for each candidate or party. The Chairman of the BBC will announce the results to the public and post a roster of results near each ballot box for one week. Certified copies of the roster will be immediately given to observers of political parties and independent candidates upon request.

All contents of the ballot boxes will then be signed, sealed, and delivered to DEBs, who will conduct the same process in the presence of election observers. Once DEBs have counted the votes from all polling stations in its jurisdiction, the Chairman of each DEB will deliver the results to Provincial Election Boards (PEBs). A copy of the results will be delivered to each of the political parties and to observers of independent candidates upon request, and a copy of the results will be posted on the front door of the DEB offices for one week. This process will be followed by each PEB, which will combine the ballots from the county election boards, count the ballots, post the results for one week, and send the results to the

Supreme Board of Elections for announcement and finalization. Any complaints or objections lodged during counting and tabulation will be recorded in the minutes and passed along with the ballots to each level of review.

When will official results be announced?

Once preliminary results have been received from Provincial Election Boards (PEBs), the Supreme Board of Elections shall promptly announce them publicly through radio and TV and in the Official Gazette, including: the names of the elected; the number of voters; the number of voters which have cast their vote; the rate of participation; the number of valid votes; and the votes obtained by each political party and independent candidate for each province and election district.

Who will observe during Election Day? How can they receive accreditation?

Political party representatives and independent candidates are allowed to observe Election Day proceedings, in addition to some international observation delegations. Civil society organizations wishing to observe must submit an application to the Supreme Board of Elections, but these requests are not commonly accepted. Nonetheless, some civil society groups have announced their intention to observe the elections.

What role will media play in the elections?

During campaigning, political parties contesting the elections are given free airtime – determined primarily by their vote share in previous elections – on the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT). Independent candidates do not receive any free airtime on TRT.

Media sources are prohibited from broadcasting election news, estimates, or comments on election results until 6:00 p.m. on Election Day. At that time, only radio will be permitted to broadcast the official declarations from the Supreme Board of Elections (YSK) until 9:00 p.m., when all media coverage will then be unregulated.

Media coverage of the elections is regulated by the Law on Broadcasting, the Law on Basic Provisions on Elections and Voter Registers, and YSK decisions made before each election. The Radio and Television Supreme Council is responsible for ensuring broadcasters are complying with regulations, and submits weekly reports to the YSK.

Can election results be contested?

Election results can be challenged via objection and complaint. Complaints are challenges to election procedures conducted by election boards, while objections are stated or written challenges to either

election results or to rulings handed down on complaints. Complaints and objections to election results can be made by political parties, independent candidates, and all citizens who are eligible to stand for elections. The Supreme Board of Elections (YSK) is the only body responsible for examining all election-related disputes and its decisions cannot be appealed. Objections are adjudicated by the highest level of election board overseeing the jurisdiction in which an objection is raised. In other words, an objection to results announced by a Ballot Box Committee (BBC) is adjudicated by a District Electoral Board (DEB); an objection to results announced by a DEB will be adjudicated by a Provincial Election Board (PEB); and an objection to results announced by a PEB will be adjudicated by the YSK. Objections and complaints that are adjudicated by the YSK are considered final and cannot be appealed to a different judicial authority. The recent 2010 constitutional changes introduced the right to file individual petitions to the Constitutional Court. When a complaint was filed concerning the 2014 municipal elections, the court ruled that it did not have any jurisdiction over municipal elections. It remains to be seen whether the court will follow a similar line for the 2015 national elections.

What is the government formation process?

Following the election, the President will appoint the Prime Minister from among the members of the Grand National Assembly (TBMM). The Prime Minister will then nominate and the President will appoint the Council of Ministers from among the members of the TBMM. The Council of Ministers is responsible for implementing the government's policies. The complete list of the Council of Ministers must be submitted to the TBMM for a vote of confidence within one week of convening the new parliamentary session. In order to receive a vote of confidence, a simple majority (276) of Deputies must vote in favor of the complete list of the Council of Ministers. If a Council of Ministers cannot be formed within 45 days or fails to receive a vote of confidence, the President of the Republic in consultation with the Speaker of the TBMM may decide to renew the elections.

Resources

- [Brookings Institution: "Turkey, the Twitter Ban, and Upcoming National Elections"](#)
- [Constitution of the Republic of Turkey](#)
- [International IDEA Political Finance Database: Turkey](#)
- [Law on Basic Provisions on Elections and Voter Registers](#)
- [Law on Political Parties](#)
- [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Needs Assessment Mission Report](#)
- [Parliamentary Elections Law](#)
- [Rethink Institute: "Turkey's 2015 Election Prospects"](#)
- [Supreme Board of Elections](#)
- [Supreme Board of Elections: List of Ballot Box Committees](#)
- [Supreme Board of Elections: Provisional List of Political Parties](#)
- [Supreme Board of Elections: List of Out-of-Country Voting](#)