



Global Expertise. Local Solutions.  
Sustainable Democracy.

# **Elections in Turkey**

## *2019 Local Elections*

### Frequently Asked Questions

Middle East and North Africa

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

2011 Crystal Drive | Floor 10 | Arlington, VA 22202 | [www.IFES.org](http://www.IFES.org)

March 25, 2019

## Frequently Asked Questions

When is Election Day?.....	1
Who are citizens voting for on Election Day? .....	1
What is Turkey’s electoral system for local elections? .....	1
What is the election management body? What are its powers? .....	1
Who can vote in these elections? .....	2
What is the age and gender disaggregation of Turkish voters? .....	2
What provisions are in place to guarantee equal access to the electoral process for persons with disabilities? .....	3
Who has priority voting rights at polling stations?.....	4
What provisions are in place to promote the equal participation of women as candidates? .....	4
Is out-of-country voting allowed?.....	4
Which parties are allowed to run? .....	4
When is the voter information sheet sent out? .....	4
Is it possible to enter the voting booths with a video recorder or communication devices? .....	5
Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation? .....	5
What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?.....	5
What is the campaign period and what are the rules for the media during the elections? .....	6
How are votes cast? .....	6
Where are voting, counting and tabulation held?.....	6
When will official results be announced? .....	7
How will election disputes be adjudicated? .....	7
Resources .....	8

### *Disclosure:*

*These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Turkish elections authorities as of March 25, 2019, 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 local elections on Sunday, March 31, 2019. Local elections are held every five years with the last one taking place on March 30, 2014. The election process officially kicked off on January 1, 2019. Election campaigning began on March 21 and will end on the evening of March 30, a day before the election.

## Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Turkish citizens will vote to elect mayors, provincial council members, municipal council members in cities and mukhtars and members of council of elders in rural areas.

Elections to be conducted on Sunday, March 31, 2019		
In metropolitan cities, voters will elect:	In non-metropolitan cities, voters will elect:	In villages, voters will elect:
Mayor of Metropolitan Municipality	Provincial Council members	Provincial Council members
Mayor of Province	Mayor of Province	Headman and Council of Elders
City Council Members	City Council Members	
Mukhtar and Council of Elders	Mukhtar and Council of Elders	

## What is Turkey's electoral system for local elections?

Turkey uses a simple majority system for all local elections.

## What is the election management body? What are its powers?

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 who 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. The YSK is made up of 81 Provincial Election Boards, 1,436 District Electoral Boards and roughly 174,240 Ballot Box Committees.

Based on article 6 of law number 7062 regarding the Organization and Duties of the Supreme Board of Elections, the primary duties and powers of the YSK include the following:

- To carry out all procedures related to the management and ethical conduct of elections, from the start to the end of the elections;
- To examine and make a decision on all charges of corruption or other complaints and objections related to election issues during and after the election;
- To determine the procedures and principles regarding the creation, update, management and supervision of the voter register;
- To inform citizens about the importance of and regulations surrounding voter registration and provide voter education programs about voters' duties and responsibilities;
- To prepare or arrange preparation of public education programs that explain the rights and obligations of voters and the election process. There is compulsory broadcasting of these programs on radio and television stations;
- To facilitate the voting of voters with disabilities;
- To facilitate the voting of voters abroad;
- To cooperate with domestic and foreign institutions on matters related to elections;
- To make any other determinations and issue regulations necessary to implement this law and matters falling within its scope, authority and responsibility; and
- To carry out other duties given by the Constitution and laws.

## Who can vote in these elections?

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, except for active conscripts, cadets and prisoners who have committed intentional crimes, regardless of the severity. Voting is mandatory under the Parliamentary Election Law, but the penalty for those who abstain from voting, in the form of a small fine, is rarely enforced.

## What is the age and gender disaggregation of Turkish voters?

While age and gender disaggregation are not provided by the election management body for the upcoming local elections, the following two charts were published by the Supreme Board of Elections following the 2018 presidential election.

Age Range	Number of Voters	Percentage of Voters in Each Age Range
18-29	13,970,568	24.8%
30-39	12,400,323	22.0%
40-49	10,789,605	19.2%
50-59	8,662,944	15.4%
60-69	5,937,664	10.5%

<b>70+</b>	4,561,528	8.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>56,322,632</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<b>Domestic and International Voter Gender Distribution</b>					
	<b>Women</b>		<b>Men</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	
<b>Domestic</b>	28,589,477	50.8	27,733,155	49.2	<b>56,322,632</b>
<b>Out-of-country</b>	1,429,198	46.9	1,618,130	53.1	<b>3,047,328</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30,018,675</b>		<b>29,351,285</b>		<b>59,369,960</b>

## What provisions are in place to guarantee equal access to the electoral process for persons with disabilities?

The list of older people and persons with low mobility and visual disabilities who have registered as having a disability is automatically sent by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies to the General Directorate of Voter Registration to be processed into the voter registration system. Voters who have not registered as having a disability on the voter register may fill out a request form and forward it to the county election board where their address is located, to the district office or directly to the General Directorate of Voter Registration and must mark the “disabled” box on the form. This enables voters with disabilities to vote at the entrance floor of the polling center.

Only voters residing in provincial or district centers are permitted to apply to use portable ballot boxes. Voters with disabilities who cannot leave their homes will need to obtain a form from their doctor and fill out an official request for use of a portable ballot box and submit it to the chairman of the District Electoral Board or the head of the District Electoral Board. They will then be able to vote by means of the portable ballot box at the address they are registered.

Voters who are blind may bring a family member of their choosing to the polling station to assist them to vote. If a family member is not available, another voter present in the polling station may assist them to vote. Polling station staff are not allowed to enter the polling booth to assist the voter.

## What provisions are in place for voters who are illiterate?

Voters who are illiterate cannot have a relative enter the voting booth to assist them in voting. If the illiterate voter asks for assistance from the ballot box chairman, the chairman can point on the ballot to

the political party or candidate the voter asks to vote for. The voter then enters the ballot booth alone and votes for their candidate or party.

### **Who has priority voting rights at polling stations?**

Pregnant women, persons with disabilities, the elderly and individuals assisting these voters are given priority and do not have to wait in line to vote. Security personnel who are stationed at the polls and poll workers who assist priority voters can also vote as soon as polls open without waiting in line.

### **What provisions are in place to promote the equal participation of women 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 2014, only four women were elected as mayors across all provincial mayors. Among all 912 district mayors in 2014, only 33 women were elected.

### **Is out-of-country voting allowed?**

Out-of-country voting is not allowed during local elections.

### **Which parties are allowed to run?**

Out of the 19 political parties that applied to run in the elections, the following 13 parties have been deemed eligible to run by the Supreme Board of Elections. The parties will appear in the following order starting from left to right on the ballots.

1. Felicity Party - Saadet Partisi
2. Independent Turkey Party - Bağımsız Türkiye Partisi
3. Communist Party of Turkey - Türkiye Komünist Partisi
4. Homeland Party - Vatan Partisi
5. Great Union Party - Büyük Birlik Partisi
6. Free Cause Party - Hür Dava Partisi
7. Republican People's Party - Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi
8. Justice and Development Party - Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi
9. Democratic Party - Demokrat Parti
10. Nationalist Movement Party - Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi
11. Good Party - İyi Parti
12. Peoples' Democratic Party - Halkların Demokratik Partisi
13. Democratic Left Party – Demokratik Sol Parti

### **When is the voter information sheet sent out?**

Voter information sheets are mailed to each voter and identify which polling station and ballot box a voter will be voting at. They are typically sent out 21 days prior to Election Day by the District Electoral Boards.

## **Is it possible to enter the voting booths with a video recorder or communication devices?**

It is prohibited to enter the voting place with a video recorder or communication devices such as mobile phones, and any violation is subject to penalty. Such devices should be left with the poll workers until the voter has finished casting his or her ballot.

## **Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?**

Any citizen may visit polls to watch vote tabulation without interference. Based on law number 298 on Elections, observers are assigned specifically to different polls by political parties and independent candidates who they volunteer for. Observers are granted identification cards that indicate which party or candidate authorized their observer status. Observers do not need to be a member of the party they obtain accreditation from. They partake in observing all voting, counting and finalization of minutes and tabulation of votes. During this procedure they are entitled to provide verbal warnings to the poll workers if they see something amiss and can file formal complaints.

## **What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?**

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 unions or employers' associations.

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.

## **What is the campaign period and what are the rules for the media during the elections?**

The official campaign period starts on March 21 and political propaganda bans start on March 30 at 6:00 p.m. for both political parties and the media. Reporting on the results of the elections is strictly prohibited until the Supreme Board of Elections has lifted the broadcast ban, which is at their discretion but is typically lifted a few hours after tabulations start.

## **How are votes cast?**

Most polling stations will open at 8:00 a.m. and close at 5:00 p.m. except for those in Adıyaman, Ağrı, Artvin, Bingöl, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Erzincan, Erzurum, Antep, Giresun, Gümüşhane, Hakkari, Kars, Malatya, Maraş, Mardin, Muş, Ordu, Rize, Siirt, Sivas, Trabzon, Dersim, Urfa, Van, Bayburt, Batman, Şırnak, Ardahan, and Iğdır ve Kilis. In these provinces, elections start at 7:00 a.m. and close at 4:00 p.m. 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 national identification card, 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 on the voter list assigned to a given ballot box, give the voter a ballot paper and a seal with the word "YES," guide the voter to the voting booth, and explain to the voter how to cast his or 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 register. The chairman will then return the voter's identification document to him or her and have the voter sign the box adjacent to the voter's name on the voter list and mark his or 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.

## **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 access to polling stations and ballot boxes, which are typically placed on the first floor of buildings.

Following voting, vote counting and tabulation will commence in several rounds. The first round of counting will occur at polling stations and 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 outside the polling station 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 their 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, the Supreme Board of Elections will 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 who 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.

### **How will election disputes be adjudicated?**

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 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.

## Resources

- [Constitution of the Republic of Turkey](#)
- [Law Concerning Referendums on Constitutional Amendments](#)
- [Law on Basic Provisions on Elections and Voter Registers](#)
- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [Needs Assessment Mission Report](#), February 22-24, 2017
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#) – Supreme Board of Elections (YSK)
- [Duties and Authorizations](#) – YSK
- [Order of Parties on Ballot](#) – YSK
- ["Election Guide: Things people wonder about the March 31, 2019 local elections"](#) – BBC
- [Statistics of the Presidential and 27th General Elections](#) – YSK
- [Election Observers Handbook](#) – Oy Ve Otesi
- ["On the incontrovertibility of YSK decisions"](#) – Constitutional Court of Turkey
- ["Voting Without Limits"](#) – YSK