



By: **Emre Alkin**

Each election is a milestone in Turkish political history



I don't know how much you want to know about Turkey, the country that lies in the westernmost of the East and the easternmost of the West. Turkey is about to experience its most crucial elections in its history, and to be able to understand the current situation in the country, I think it is best to start with a brief introduction, which I will do by comparing Turkey to other countries so that it can be better understood. I frequently visit many countries of the world as part of my job. No matter what country it is, each of them have certain behaviours that almost never change. For example, in middle- and higher-income countries, it has become customary to complain about the high cost of living, the general laziness of society and the quality of country politics, to keep a distance from tourists and foreigners, and to make cruel statements about immigrants. The people of these countries think the same when they are at home or work, and they do not hesitate to get into violent arguments with others, if necessary. It is possible to see the same ways of thinking in Turkey's big cities we witness in countries such as France, Germany, the UK, Italy, Spain, Serbia, Croatia, Greece, US and Canada.

People in densely populated and lower middle-income countries avoid talking politics

In densely populated and lower middle-income countries, on the other hand, people do not have much time to think about these things, because they work overtime almost constantly to meet their basic needs. Interestingly, local politics is strong in these countries, no matter how autocratic or centralised they might be, and you rarely come across people who openly criticise the government. The reason they remain silent is because they want to become more powerful by eventually using politics or ingratiating themselves with politicians, or because they are ordinary citizens who fear that something might happen to them if they say anything negative about their leaders. They therefore avoid talking politics, especially while they barely make ends meet. People in these countries are different people at work and at home. These "suffering" souls who keep their heads down at work and other social settings are either very good or very bad people at

home. They frequently vent their anger and frustrations on their family, or they are quite affectionate at home because they are in a position of authority during their day jobs. These types of behaviour can often be observed in Russia, China, India, Middle East Countries, Africa and Latin America, and of course in Turkey. The reason why there are so many people in Turkey displaying both of the different behaviours I mentioned above is about an identity crisis. According to some scholars, Turkey is "the most eastern of the West", whilst others think it's "the most western of the East" as mentioned in the beginning. When people on the street are asked whether they consider themselves "Middle Easterners", their answer is "no". But, when they asked if they think of themselves as "Europeans", their answer would vary from person to person. They do not accept being a Middle Easterner, but they often live like them, they confuse democratic rights with selfishness, they prefer individualism or being an insignificant part of the masses, instead of being a part of a group. They try to use politics to serve their own interests, and want to be on the winning side. That's why, it is not possible to know their final decision until it is time to cast their votes.

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Therefore, it is quite difficult accurately to forecast the election results in Turkey due to all the reasons I have listed above. There is a huge difference between those two citizen types, and they always have difficulty in understanding each other. It is hard to bring them together in a common interest, but, though rarely, they can unite to change the course of history. Although this change does not always bring about positive results, it is an important fact that all politicians in this country should acknowledge. I think President Erdogan is also aware of this fact, since he seems to have taken the issue very seriously, especially now he is entering an election where he has a 50% chance to win. The Government has a difficult job ahead, considering the criticisms that peaked after Turkey's February 6 earthquake. So, will his rule, which has been going on for almost 21 years, come to an end

this time? Or will it endure? To find the answer, let's take a tour in our recent history.

The "Golden Years" Started Late but Ended a Little Prematurely

The 1990s have been called the "Golden Years" in the global economy, especially in advanced economies. The Golden Years began with Clinton in 1993, and came to an end with the terrorist attacks of September 11. The Turkish economy, on the other hand, was quite volatile during that period. The 1994 financial crisis and the prominent political instability were two chief characteristics that marked the 1990s for the country. In the following years, the world economy has improved significantly, which lasted until 2008. Similarly, having started to do the right things, Turkey too managed to ameliorate its economy and to keep inflation, growth, interest and exchange rates under control despite the banking crisis in 2001.

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As soon as Erdogan and his party came to power, contrary to expectations, they adopted a west-facing policy and took important steps to improve justice and equality, all of which helped the country withstand the 2008 financial crisis. Indeed, the 2002-2013 period has been the Golden Years for most of society. Besides its sporting achievements, social life in Turkey was making international headlines. As a country where different cultures and beliefs have peacefully cohabited for ages, Turkey was being applauded, almost envied, by the international community at the time. Everything was going quite well until 2011, when tensions began to grow between the government and certain organisations that had been supporting it. These tensions remained almost hidden until the wave of demonstrations that began on 28 May 2013 and gradually became worse and worse as the government was confused about when to show compassion and when to show strength and determination. In 2015, the first of two-round elections were held in June, and

the second in November. Meanwhile, as the members of the ruling party were having violent arguments with each other, the country's political composition was worn out in the process. Changes to the political system and constitutional amendments were the two main topics on the opposition's agenda. However, despite all this turmoil, the Turkish lira managed not to depreciate as sharply as expected, which was probably due to the fact that the Government was not used to intervene constantly in the markets at the time. Those who were preparing to implement their secret agenda for quite some time finally decided to carry out their treacherous plans, taking advantage of the unstable political environment and civil unrest.

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In July 15th of 2016, a failed coup, maybe one of the greatest misfortunes that The Turkish Republic suffered, and this was perhaps the beginning of the economic and political difficulties we are currently experiencing. Since that day, Turkey has not had a single calm day. The economic difficulties experienced in 2018 and 2019 were similarly due to the country's gradual move away from the free market economy. Already hit by political and economic troubles, the COVID-19 pandemic caught Turkey totally unprepared. Of course, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict that emerged later has worsened the situation even further. The February earthquake, on the other hand, changed the political balance in the country in many ways. As for the economy, let me show you one example to sum up its rapid deterioration. Holding on to around TRY 3 in July 2016, the USD has reached TRY 20 today. In other words, the national currency has experienced a seven-fold depreciation in the last six and a half years.

The lessons we should learn from all these problems

Despite every encouraging speech, everybody

must admit that Turkey gets directly affected by any global crisis; When we abandon the principles of the free market economy, we become even more vulnerable to the side effects of global crises; The tense political environment may help those who govern the country win votes but, in the process, it deeply damages the economy and citizens; When making international alliances, we must take a strong diplomatic stand against wrongs, regardless whether they are the wrongs of the East or the West; We must abide by the founding principles of our Republic and therefore avoid forming alliances with leaders who are considered criminal by the international community and the international law; We must keep a diplomatic distance with Russia and Arab Countries, and not interfere in their internal affairs; We must manage our US and Israeli policies in complete coordination with each other; We must accept that disasters can happen any time, and learn from past mistakes we made in emergency response and preparedness; We must understand that our country will grow when the economy grows, but it will develop and flourish when art, sports, culture, equality and justice develop and flourish; Politicians have to accept that citizens must not be judged by their faith, but by their good deeds. The suggestions I have listed above are not meant only for Turkey, but for all politicians in the region. Now let's take a quick look at the election forecasts. In light of all the information and the impressions I have had so far, I could say that:

- The elections will most likely go to the second round, but if Turkey has a winner by the end of the first round, that winner will be Erdogan. But if a second round is held, both candidates will have equal chances to win.
- Even if the opposition gets more votes with the D'Hondt method, both sides will have almost equal number of deputies of in the parliament, in which case the Green Left Party will gain strength. And as GLP tries to use this situation to its advantage, the political atmosphere in the country will get more tense.
- The outcome will take us to another

early election, which might take place earlier than expected depending on the result of the local elections, to be held one year after the 14 May elections.

The Winner Must Reform Justice

In parallel with the upcoming elections and their outcomes, the following parameters in Turkey might be subject to change:

- GDP could grow between 2-3% this year.
- Inflation rate could hit at least 50% this year.
- Interest Rates: Although policy rates may not go up too high, market rates may remain high. They are already above 30%.
- Exchange rates could fall after a sharp rise (overshoot) and remain stable above 20-25% of today's level.
- The unemployment rate could exceed 12% again.

In addition to all these disruptions, the budget deficit and the current account deficit are most likely to deteriorate. Since democracy is not just about elections, it will take longer than expected for Turkey to find its balance again. But, whoever wins the elections, they must first start establishing social justice and peace, in lieu of immediately returning to orthodox economic policies. Even a bad economy should be among the medium priority issues. A gradual return to a market economy, judicial reform, eliminating unequal and discriminatory practices towards people from different backgrounds, ensuring that the business world can once again muster its courage to face the government and show them the truth, and finally not making frequent changes to legislation will definitely have a greater positive impact than a mere interest rate decision. Let's remind ourselves of the founding philosophy of the Republic of Turkey: "To do what is necessary for the stability of an advanced and civilised country

where men and women have equal rights and work together for a prosperous future".Whoever comes to power must know that the market economy, justice, equality, and coexistence of different cultures are protected by the Constitution, and any effort to change these fundamental rights and freedoms will only take Turkey backwards.I believe that if those who run the country adopt such an approach, it will calmly and patiently restore Turkey to its factory settings, and it will make a great contribution to world peace and prosperity. But, most optimistically, we need at least five years to achieve that.