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Selin Çınar

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*Keywords:* türkiye's election; erdoğan; may 14.

*Classification:* LCC: JF2011-JF2112

*Language:* English



Great Britain  
Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 573344  
Print ISSN: 2515-5784  
Online ISSN: 2515-5792

London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 23 | Issue 7 | Compilation 1.0



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## ABSTRACT

*According to the system of government in Türkiye, the president is the head of the state and the highest and most authorized person who shows his or her activities in legislative, executive, and judicial proceedings according to the constitution. In Turkish history, as of July 9, 2018, the parliamentary system was abolished and the presidential system was officially put into practice. On May 14, 2023, parliamentary elections and presidential elections will be held in Türkiye. In this year's elections, which take place every five years, the thirteenth president and the twenty-eighth term deputies will be announced. The presidential candidates are Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Muharrem İnce and Sinan Oğan. These elections in Türkiye do not only have an impact within the country but also attract the attention of other because of to the country's geographic location and its international relations with other part of the world. The purpose of this paper is to understand the meaning and importance of the 2023 elections in Türkiye in the international dimension and to examine the political significance of the elections in foreign countries in an unbiased manner.*

**Keywords:** türkiye's election; erdoğan; may 14.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The presidential and parliamentary elections, which are held every five years, were scheduled for June 18, 2023. However, the date of the elections was moved to May 14 due to a number of reasons, including the overlap in the dates of the annual university entrance exams for a segment of the country's population, seasonal working people, the religious season of the cross and summer holidays, and the perception of political uncertainty caused by the February 6,

2023, earthquake disaster, centered in Kahramanmaraş and affecting ten other cities, as well as the perception of political uncertainty that the elections would create due to the advanced date of the elections, so that they would not disrupt the public policies to be implemented after the earthquake. After President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan approved and signed the early election decision according to Article 116 of the Turkish constitution, the date of the early elections was finalized after the approval of this decision was published in the official newspaper.

On May 14, the people will elect both the thirteenth president and the twenty-eighth parliamentary candidate at the same time. The Supreme Electoral Council (YSK) stated that thirty-six political parties will take part in the elections and that the political parties have formed four alliances: "People's", "Nation", "Ata" and "Labor and Freedom". The People's Alliance includes the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the Grand Union Party (BBP), and the Re-Refah parties. Outside parties that will support the People's Alliance include Hüdapar, the Democratic Left Party, and the Great Türkiye Party. In the National alliance, there are the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Good Party, the Deva Party, the Felicity Party, the Future Party, and the Democratic Party (DP). Other parties supporting the alliance from outside are the Labor Party of Türkiye, Independent Türkiye Party, Right Party, People's Liberation Party, Women's Party, Liberal Democratic Party, Nationalist Türkiye Party, Left Party, Türkiye Change Party, Communist Party of Türkiye, and Central Party. The Ata Alliance is composed of the Victory Party, the Justice Party, and the Turkish Alliance Party. The Labor and Freedom Alliance includes the Peoples' Democratic Party, the Workers' Party of Türkiye, the Labor Party, the

Labor Movement Party, and the Greens and Left Future Party.

There are four candidates for the presidency. The candidate of the People's Alliance is Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The candidate of the National Alliance is Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. The other candidates are Sinan Oğan, candidate for the ATA alliance, and Muharrem İnce, chairman of the Homeland Party. Even though there are four different presidential candidates, it can still be seen that the election race will be between two candidates, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. The main reason for this is that the highest opposition vote against the current government belongs to the Republican People's Party according to previous election data.

As stated by the Supreme Election Commission, 60 million, 904 thousand, and 499 people within the country will be able to cast their votes on May 14. From abroad, 3 million, 286 thousand, and 786 people will go to the polls and cast their votes between April 27 and May 9. The total number of people who will vote both inside and outside the country is 64 million, 191 thousand, and 285 people.

The May elections in Türkiye will not only affect domestic politics but are also important for foreign countries. Both the geographical location of the country and its diplomatic relations increase its importance in terms of international relations. Even the Washington Post, in an article press 9 January 2023 titled "The World's Most Important Election in 2023 Will Be in Turkey", acknowledged that the elections significance in Türkiye. Because the elections consequences will be effect for Türkiye's mediator position in the Russia-Ukraine war, European Union process, relations with international politics, Finland-Sweden NATO process the fate of the Middle East, Africa, from a strategic point of view. As Ziya Meral says, "What happens in Türkiye doesn't just stay in Türkiye"(The World's Most Important Election in 2023 Will Be in Turkey, 2023).

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper is based on the qualitative research method of observation in the Türkiye. In the qualitative method, the researcher is the instrument of the research paper. The descriptive way of qualitative research is, according to the author's main objective, to be unbiased and aware of the importance of giving the data about phenomena. The author's approach is to cut away from personal perspectives when the research reports.

The author collected for this research paper generally written data from newspapers and oral data. The analysis of the written and oral data included three phrases: Initially, the researcher analyzed the information and explained the documents that were taken by geographical areas, followed by an explanation of the importance of the part information. Secondly, the data are analyzed and the details identified. After that, the major information is descriptive and compared to other geographies. The aim of the study is to examine and understand the combined expectations of the world's countries for the 2023 Turkish elections in behavioral ways.

## III. RUSSIA- UKRAINE

One of the most important aspects of the May 14<sup>th</sup> election in Türkiye is that the country's position on the 24 February 2022 date of the Russia-Ukraine war will become even more crucial during this election period.

If Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wins the elections again, he will maintain the position of neutrality he has maintained since the beginning of the war, but if someone else wins the government, whether neutrality will continue or not is important for both Russia and Ukraine in terms of Turkish foreign policy. So, these reasons explain why it gains vital.

At the same time since, Türkiye trades with both countries and is a member of NATO, Türkiye, Russia, and Ukraine. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is attending the 77th United Nations General Assembly in New York, gave an interview in which he was asked which country is superior to the other in the war between Russia and Ukraine;

"Honestly, as a leader, I am not looking for 'whether Russia is more effective or Ukraine is more effective'. Our only desire is for this war to end in peace. This has been my request and advice to both Mr. Putin and Mr. Zelensky. There is no winner in a war that results in the death of people" (Servisi, 2022).

He has always expressed his opposition to war and his neutrality unequivocally. On the one hand, the reason for Türkiye to remain neutral in the war between the two countries is to ensure its security of Türkiye. As seen in the Cold War Period or in World War I, Türkiye does not want to be a front country in the war. Because at the same time, the geographical security of the Black Sea is also in question here.

Relations play a key role. At the same time, the responsibility of the Montreux Agreement, signed on July 20, 1936, continues to rest with Türkiye. Convention and did not allow the passage of Russian ships by implementing Article 19 of the treaty, thus Türkiye did not make itself a front country in the war.

On the one hand, Türkiye has purchased S-400 missiles from Russia. In addition, Türkiye and Russia are jointly undertaking the Turkish Stream project. Another point, if we examine the relations between Türkiye and Ukraine, since Türkiye is a leading country in the defense industry, Türkiye is cooperating with Ukraine with unmanned aerial vehicles that Türkiye produces. At the same time, Türkiye imports wheat from Ukraine (GÖRÜŞ- Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşının Türkiye'ye Etkileri, n.d.). Although good relations were established with the Russia, Türkiye condemned Russia's behavior in NATO and expressed peace instead of war. However, Türkiye was not included in the embargo policy of European countries against conversations with Putin and Zelenski were not affected by the war situation. He spoke to the leaders via telephone. At the same time, Erdoğan visited Kiev.

In addition, in order to ensure peace, Erdoğan invited the leaders of both countries to the Antalya Diplomatic Forum in 2022 to ensure

peace. The Antalya Diplomacy Forum, which was held between March 11 and 13 at the Belek Tourism Center and attended by more than 2000 people, including 20 heads of state, more than 70 ministers, 50 international organizations, and 500 journalists, was held at the ceremony of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. It was held this year with the theme of "Re-establishing Diplomacy". It was important to ensure that these intense talks were provided by Türkiye in terms of finding a solution to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Türkiye has also clearly demonstrated its success in the field of diplomacy. The Antalya Diplomacy Forum gains importance as it is the first meeting between Russia and Ukraine since the beginning of the crisis. A very important meeting took place regarding the meeting of the foreign ministers of both countries. President Erdoğan met with Zelenski and Putin before the forum and conveyed his desire to bring both sides together.

In the Ukraine-Russian war, Türkiye has undertaken the mediation task to end the war as soon as possible and ensure peace. Following the peace talks held on March 11, which lasted for about 1.5 hours after Russia declared war on Ukraine. Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Minister Dmitro Kuleba told the press that this forum was the first time a meeting was held with Russia after Russia's attacks and that this was achieved by the Republic of Türkiye. He also stated that he supports every step towards a solution. He then said that there was a humanitarian tragedy in Ukraine and that he was trying to find a diplomatic solution. He said that the civilian population of Ukraine was used as a shield. He stressed that the Ukraine crisis should be resolved as soon as possible. (ADF—Antalya Diplomasi Forumu, n.d.) Finally, Russia reaffirmed its position toward NATO. In addition, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that this meeting was held at the suggestion of Erdoğan. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said that he hopes the talks will have a positive effect on achieving stable peace. He also stated that he hoped the war would end as soon as possible. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu also had one-on-one meetings with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitro Kuleba



and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov prior to the forum.

Then the three-way negotiations took place successfully. Mr. Cavusoglu stated that he would continue to work to restore peace and reconciliation. He also stated that mediation is an indispensable element. As the President of Türkiye's spokesman, Ambassador İbrahim Kalın stated that Türkiye, as a friend of both Russia and Ukraine, can provide any type of assistance to ensure peace in both countries. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's wife, Emine Erdogan, on the other hand, emphasized that Antalya was the heart of democracy until the 13th century BC and said that in order to strengthen solidarity, it is necessary to be united against all wars (Today, 2022).

According to foreign policy experts, these tripartite talks will be very effective. It was stated that the meeting held by both Russia and Ukraine was effective. In addition, Deputy President of Ukraine Mihay Podolyok said in a statement in Kiev that Recep Tayyip Erdogan understands the problem in the region.

Russia and Ukraine are interested in Türkiye's elections in May for a number of reasons. According to BBC Turkish, Yuri Mavashev, head of the Center for New Turkish Studies (YETAM), said that Russia is generally interested in the Turkish elections. He also said that;

"Putin clearly does not want to recognize any other leader except Erdogan. I am 100 percent sure of this. It is easier with him, it is clearer and it is clearly seen that Putin supports Erdoğan" (Akpamuk, 2023).

Looking at Türkiye's foreign policy from the perspective of the National Alliance, presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu told Aydın Sezer that if he wins the elections, he will maintain a consistent relationship with Russia. But Yuri Marashev believes that Moscow does not have much of an opinion about Kılıçdaroğlu. The Russians see Kılıçdaroğlu as a European-backed candidate against Erdoğan.

Ukraine, on the other hand, has a neutral approach to the elections in Türkiye. It does not have a clear opinion. Yevgeniya Gaber, a Ukrainian foreign policy expert at the Atlantic Council, is grateful for Erdoğan's support for Ukraine. Although Gaber is grateful for this support, Ukraine is ready to welcome a new leader to Turkey. The reason for this is that relations between Türkiye and Ukraine are based on a long history and trust. (Rusya Ve Ukrayna, Türkiye'deki Seçimlere Nasıl Bakıyor, 2023). Relations between Russia, Ukraine, and Türkiye have become more visible since the outbreak of the war between Ukraine and Russia, with Türkiye acting as a mediator. If Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wins the elections again and comes to power, the foreign policy between these countries will continue to be stable. If the opposition wins, the long-established order of the Justice and Development Party, which has been in power in Türkiye for twenty-one years, will change radically. Although Kılıçdaroğlu has stated that if he wins the elections, he will adopt a consistent stance between Russia and Ukraine, Ali Babacan, who supports the national alliance, defends the behavior of the Europeans towards Russia. (Ukrayna'daki Savaşın Kaderini Türkiye'deki Seçimler Belirleyecek, 2023). Even within the National Alliance, there are disagreements on foreign policy, and it is unclear what kind of foreign policy he will adopt if he wins the elections.

#### IV. SWEDEN-FINLAND

Two of the countries that came to the fore during the election process were Sweden and Finland. The process of both countries becoming members of NATO has also brought the relationship between them and Türkiye to the forefront. In order for a country to become a member of NATO, the unanimous approval of all countries present in NATO are required for the new member of country Türkiye, which has been a member of NATO since 1952, has given its approval for Finland to join NATO, while Sweden has not yet been approved.

(Ajansı, 2023). The beginning of the negotiations between Türkiye, Sweden, and Finland was

determined by the mutual expectations signed at the NATO Leaders' Summit in Madrid, Spain, on June 28, 2022 (Karşılıklı Beklentiler Işığında Türkiye Ve İsveç İlişkileri, n.d.). Türkiye made demands for Sweden's and Finland's membership in NATO to address Türkiye's security concerns, according to the memorandum signed in 2022 (BBC News Türkçe, 2022).

Finland and Türkiye have a long history of good relations, dating back to the friendship treaty signed in 1924. At the same time, Finland has accepted Türkiye's conditions and tried to fulfill them. On the other hand, Finland's solidarity did not go unnoticed by Erdoğan, who tried to help during the earthquake disaster in Türkiye on February 6, 2023:

"The helping hand extended by Finland in the face of the earthquake disaster has strengthened our friendship. I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank the Finnish government and people for their solidarity and the aid they have sent." (Türkiye'den Finlandiya'nın NATO Üyeliğine Vize, 2023)

The May 14 elections are important for Sweden as they will determine whether Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party will remain in power. Either Sweden will accept Türkiye's demands in order to become a member of NATO, or there will be renegotiations after the elections. Finland joined NATO before Sweden, becoming the thirty-first country to join NATO. Finland's President Sauli Niinistö has stated that talks with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have been held, and he believes that they will have a smooth process (Finlandiya NATO'nun 31. Üyesi Oldu, BBC News Türkçe, 2023). But if Erdoğan loses the elections, Finland, which is already a member, is unlikely to be affected much by the election results.

## V. UNITED STATES

Although the relations between Türkiye and the U.S have their differences and discrepancies, the White House and Ankara seem to have rational cooperation and understanding of foreign policies with each other. The main principles of foreign policy between the US and Türkiye are security

and defense mechanisms (BloombergHT, 2022). Before and after the elections, the politics between the US and Türkiye gain importance. The constant dialogue between Presidential Spokesperson İbrahim Kalın and US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan addresses the events between the two countries from a broad perspective and pragmatically. On the other hand, the S-400 and Syria crises are still ongoing between the US and Türkiye. At the same time, the US has been neutral in the periodic tensions between Türkiye and Greece. The US administration, which also supports Sweden's recent membership in NATO, closely follows Türkiye-Sweden relations in this context. On the other hand, Turkish-US relations have developed especially in the field of trade in 2022, apart from defense and security. A volume of 28 billion dollars was achieved in January and October (Bloomberg HT, 2022). At the same time, the presence of nearly 980 US companies in Türkiye also shows developments in relations between the two countries. (Bülteni, 2018).

The US Ambassador to Ankara, Jeff Flake, paid a pre-election visit to Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who is running for the presidency. In addition, the US government has openly stated that it supports the National Alliance against Erdoğan in the elections (Euronews, 2020). This was also stated in a video in the program called The Weekly in 2022, prepared by the New York Times. (BBC News Turkish, 2020). In other words, if Kılıçdaroğlu wins, it seems that a closer and smoother relationship with the US will be maintained. Kılıçdaroğlu also stated that he would attract US investors to Türkiye. As for relations with NATO, it is expected that a path closer to Europe will be followed. (Yetkin, 2023). According to the research conducted by Foreign Policy magazine, in the article published in "What if Kemal Kilicdaroglu Wins Turkey's Election?", he mentioned the election processes and stated that Erdogan has a high chance of winning the elections. (2022'de Türkiye-ABD İlişkileri: Ortak Çalışma Grubu Ve ABD Kongre Seçimleri, n.d.). Regardless of the election results, it can be predicted that the situation regarding Syria, defence and security relations will continue to be ongoing.

## VI. EUROPE REGION

The importance of the May 14 elections for Europe can be categorized under the following countries: Germany, Spain, France, Greece, and Cyprus. In Germany, where many Turkish citizens reside, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Türkiye maintain a harmonious relationship (Nû, n.d.). Both countries are strategically important to each other. For Germany, which follows a neutral policy in the elections, the importance of these elections is the political policy between the two countries and their communication on migration and refugees. In 2023, the foreign trade partnership between Germany and Türkiye will gain importance. Therefore, the election results will directly and strategically affect relations with Germany.

Spain, which has historically maintained good relations with Türkiye, has consistently maintained good relations. The reason for this can be interpreted as the fact that they have historical commonalities. Spain is important for Türkiye because it supports Türkiye's accession to the EU, and Türkiye sees Spain as a true friend in Europe. Whatever the results of the elections between Türkiye and Spain, it is expected that a harmonious and real relationship between Spain and Türkiye can be maintained.

France is also at significant with Türkiye over the East Aegean issue. This will be especially evident in 2020 with France's open support for Greece. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Macron last met about the earthquake on February 6, and both NATO allies took into account the situation in Ukraine and Russia. In other words, the importance of the May 14th elections is important for France, as it is for Greece, for the Eastern Mediterranean policy, and for the Russia-Ukraine war situation.

One of the problems between Greece and Türkiye is the Eastern Mediterranean. The beginning of the Eastern Mediterranean problem between Türkiye and Greece started with the Greek Cypriot region's involvement in international agreements. The Greek Cypriot administration carried out hydrocarbon studies in the overlapping area belonging to Türkiye, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and the

Greek Cypriots. Türkiye then invited Greece to talk about the issue, but Athens chose to ignore the calls (5 Soruda Doğu Akdeniz'de Neler Oluyor?, n.d.). The Aegean issue, on the other hand, is a different matter and dates back to the 1970s. The problems in the Aegean Sea can be categorized as territorial waters, militarization, national airspace, and search and rescue activities.

One of the main problems is that the maritime boundary between the two countries is not clearly defined, even though it should be. This includes areas where the coasts are next to each other. Greece's territorial waters make up 40%, but Greece wants to increase its territorial waters to 70%. The size of the high seas would thus fall to 19%, while the size of Türkiye's territorial waters would fall to 10% if this were to happen. This raises the question of geographical docking.

As for the issue of disarmament, it was approved by the Treaty of Lausanne and the Paris Agreement and is still in force. However, since 1960, Greece has acted against the agreement and armed the islands. The issue of national airspace is again rooted in territorial waters. Since there is no defined border in the territorial waters, it also affects the airspace according to the rules of international law. Finally, search and rescue activities were defined by the Hamburg Convention in 1979, but coordination in the Aegean has still not been established. Türkiye has defined its own area and continues its activities. But Greece continues to be in dispute. (Ege Sorunu Nedir, Ne Demek? TÜBİTAK Ansiklopedi ile Ege Sorunu Ne Anlama Gelir Ve Neyi İfade Eder?, 2023).

Cyprus, the Aegean, and the Eastern Mediterranean are just a few of the many problems that have remained unresolved for years. This is precisely why the elections in Türkiye directly affect the relations between the two neighboring countries. Because Greece will go to elections in 2023 and Prime Minister Mitsotakis is in favor of not overlapping the election dates with Türkiye (Merkezi, 2023a). Greek's Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias made the following remarks about the elections in Türkiye: February 6, 2023:



"I hope that after the elections in Türkiye, whatever the outcome of the elections, conditions will prevail that will allow for a gradual improvement of relations" (Service, 2022).

## VII. MIDDLE EAST

Türkiye's strategic depth starts in the Middle East. This strategic depth is shaped by geoeconomic and geographical factors. Immigration policies and security policies follow each other. Türkiye is itself a Middle Eastern country, and its overall policy in the region is based on a peaceful and unifying attitude that embraces its people. Achieving a lasting peace is one of the main goals of Turkish foreign policy. Türkiye's High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council seeks to sustain Türkiye-Middle East foreign policy relations. In other words, Türkiye's post-election economic, peaceful, and cooperative policy is important for the Middle East. For Azerbaijan and Türkiye, which characterize each other as two brotherly countries, Türkiye's support for Karabakh gains importance in these elections. If there is a change of government, the developments between Türkiye and Azerbaijan are not expected to be affected, but there may be changes to the Middle East policy.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

As a result, the May 14th elections in Türkiye have gained importance not only within the country but also on the world agenda. The main reasons for this are the country's geographical importance with its territories in Asia and Europe, its mediation role in the Russia-Ukraine war, the NATO processes of Switzerland and Finland, its foreign policy communication with the US, the large number of Turks residing in the European region, especially in Germany, and its trade relations; Türkiye's historically good relations with Spain and its support for Türkiye's accession to the EU, the dispute with Greece over Cyprus and the seas; the role of France; and Türkiye's role in the Middle East, migration policy, security, and Karabakh. It is precisely for these reasons that the elections in Türkiye affect the world. As

Deputy Chairman Numan Kurtulmuş said, "This is the election of the century." (İha, 2023)"

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