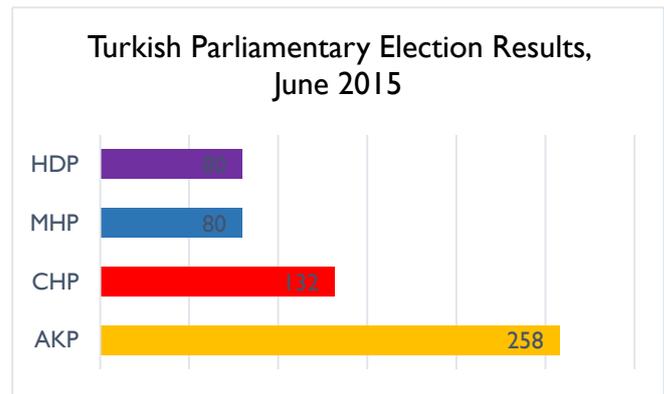




# In Focus

## Parliamentary Elections in Turkey, 2015

On Sunday 7 June 2015, parliamentary elections were held in Turkey. According to [preliminary results](#), the incumbent Justice and Development Party (AKP) has lost its majority in the Grand National Assembly for the first time in 13 years. The election result was [widely seen](#) as a rejection of the AKP's plans to replace the existing parliamentary system with one in which more powers are concentrated in the presidency. The election was also [seen](#) as a success for the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), which won 80 seats after fielding candidates for the first time.



### Background

Formed in 2001 by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the AKP first came to power in [2002](#) following a period [which has been described](#) as Turkey's "lost decade", during which time the country experienced "war with Kurdish separatists, polarisation over the role of religious values, economic turmoil, and unstable coalition governments". The [New Yorker](#) reports that, as Prime Minister, Mr Erdogan was initially seen as a reformer because he instituted measures to liberalise the Turkish economy and granted new rights to the Kurdish minority. The [Economist](#) writes that during the AKP's time in office the country experienced rapid GDP and foreign investment growth, the banks were strengthened and inflation was "tamed".

However, Mr Erdogan [has been criticised](#) for allegedly attempting to "quiet political dissent and bolster his power". In mid-2013, public protests against the proposed destruction of Istanbul's Gezi Park became, according to the [New York Times](#), a focus for the expression of broader dissatisfaction with "the authoritarian style of Mr Erdogan". In December 2013, a series of leaked telephone conversations posted on social media purported to reveal corruption by Mr Erdogan and his associates, including his son. The [New York Times](#) reports that, in response, the government blocked social media channels, stifled news media coverage and purged thousands of police officers, prosecutors and judges.

Mr Erdogan won [presidential elections in 2014](#), stepping down as Prime Minister to be succeeded by Ahmet Davutoglu. In the run up to the 2015 parliamentary elections, the AKP [announced](#) plans to turn Turkey's parliamentary system into a more presidential system, with more powers concentrated in an executive presidency (the position currently held by Mr Erdogan). The [Guardian](#) observes that in order to make these changes without putting them to a referendum, the AKP would have needed a two-thirds

majority in the parliament. Therefore, according to the *Guardian*, the parliamentary elections effectively became a referendum on the AKP's constitutional changes.

The 2015 parliamentary elections marked the first time that the pro-Kurdish HDP fielded candidates officially running under the party's banner. Previously, HDP candidates had run as independents in order to avoid the rule that only parties that receive over ten percent of the popular vote are allowed to take their seats in parliament. According to the *Telegraph*, no Kurdish party has ever before managed to surpass the ten percent threshold. The *Washington Post* writes that the HDP has direct ties to the "violent three-decade Kurdish separatist insurgency" in the south-east of the country. However, the author observes that during the campaign the party highlighted its commitment to inclusion and diversity, fielding candidates representing "virtually all" of Turkey's major ethnic groups, a large number of women, and Turkey's first openly gay candidate. As such, it has framed itself as "a leftist movement for all Turks".

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## Election results

In results [widely reported](#) on 8 June, it was announced that the AKP had won [258 seats](#) in the Grand National Assembly, 69 seats fewer than in the [2011 elections](#). This left the party 18 seats short of the 276 needed for a majority. The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) won [132 seats](#), 5 fewer than in [2011](#), and the HDP won [80 seats](#), the same number as the [right-wing](#) Nationalist Movement Party (HDP). As at 11 June, the official election results had [yet to be announced](#).

On 8 June, the *Telegraph* reported that all the other parties with representation in the parliament had indicated they would not join a coalition with the AKP. With no other combination of parties "likely", according to the *Telegraph* the AKP will either have to try to govern alone or agree to new elections.

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## Comment

Writing in the *Financial Times*, David Gardner argues that since the election there has been "a change of tone in Turkish public life". According to Gardner, the recent success of the HDP in uniting disparate groups—including "the left, liberals, secular Turks and women, as well as religious and tribal Kurds"—demonstrates that "there are alternatives to Turkey's zero-sum political culture". Gardner contends that, while the AKP was in power, Mr Erdogan used his position to "trample on" the country's institutions, and it is now time for parliament to fight back and create a viable opposition.

According to the *Economist*, the election results show that the Turkish people have "unambiguously repudiated Mr Erdogan's ambitions for a strong presidency", and that, as a result, Mr Erdogan should take a less active role in politics and allow other leaders to emerge. The author writes that Turkey faces significant challenges, including nurturing civil society and "reinvigorating" the Kurdish peace process. On the economy, the author recommends reforms to "improve competitiveness, ease regulation, cut unemployment, raise labour-force participation and reduce reliance on construction". Finally, the *Economist* argues that the European Union should speed up negotiations over Turkey's accession, "now that Turks have so thrillingly demonstrated their democratic credentials".

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