



**McLARTY**  
ASSOCIATES

WASHINGTON | BRUSSELS | BEIJING | SINGAPORE | [www.maglobal.com](http://www.maglobal.com) | [@McLartyAssoc](https://twitter.com/McLartyAssoc)

## **Turkey: President Erdogan taking the helm of an all-powerful executive presidency**

June 25, 2018

Recep Erdogan, the populist leader who has dominated Turkish politics since 2002, defied the challenges of a resurgent opposition and an ailing economy to claim victory in decisive presidential and parliamentary elections on June 24th. The election was the first to be held since Turkish voters narrowly approved a referendum last year to give the president sweeping executive powers. Having received 52.5% of the presidential vote, thus avoiding a runoff, Erdogan will now control a powerful system of government that abolishes the role of prime minister and places unprecedented power in his hands.

Mr Erdogan served as prime minister for eleven years before becoming president in 2014. Under the new constitution, he could stand for a third term when his second finishes in 2023, meaning he could potentially hold power until 2028.

Erdogan was also hoping for a decisive majority in parliament for his Justice and Development Party (AKP) to have full control as he unfolds his political, economic and social agenda over the next five years. The AKP, however, lost its parliamentary majority by getting only 42.5% of the parliamentary vote and will have to enter into a coalition with the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP), with which it formed an alliance prior to the elections. The alliance proved to be an astute move, because it not only increased Erdogan's vote but also ensured that his coalition will have a parliamentary majority, even if it fell short of the number required to introduce constitutional changes. The MHP's leader, Devlet Bahceli, is expected to become vice president. The opposition CHP and its allies won only 33% of the parliamentary vote and will have 190 seats in parliament. The pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), whose presidential candidate, Selahattin Demirtas, remains imprisoned, won 11.7% of the vote, or 67 seats.

### **What lies ahead?**

Turkey's turn toward a combination of political Islam and ultra-nationalism is unlikely to produce the cures for the country's mounting ailments that many Erdogan supporters expect, especially with regard to the weakening economy.

The election was seen in large measure as a referendum on Erdogan's rule, with many voters expressing concerns about what they say is his growing authoritarian style and a struggling economy, which they blame on mismanagement and corruption.

The economy has stumbled badly in the last year. Turkey has accumulated significant foreign debt; the Turkish lira has lost 20 percent of its value, and direct foreign investment has plunged as investors have been scared off by the president's increasingly belligerent and anti-Western tone.

The economic turmoil may make President Erdogan more careful about picking fights with the West, but it could also spell growing unrest and political challenges at home against a newly energized and unified opposition.

The official election results will be released on July 5<sup>th</sup> and Parliament is expected to reconvene on July 8<sup>th</sup> to elect a speaker. The appointment of key members including vice president and cabinet members could take the remainder of the summer.

The president is planning to improve the efficiency of the state apparatus with a new government structure including offices, boards and a cabinet. The four new offices in the Presidency (Finance, Human Resources, Investment and Technology) are expected to house staff who are close advisors of the president. Eight policy boards will also be appointed with the task to formulate policies that will be executed by the ministries under the cabinet. The number of ministries will be reduced to sixteen from twenty-six, and there will also be eight agencies or directorates that will report to the president. Though the aim is to promote efficiency, the new structure also provides President Erdogan with complete control over his government with no checks and balances.

**Conclusion:**

The elections' results are a combined victory for Erdogan's brand of political Islam and the ultra-nationalism of the MHP. This generally does not bode well for Western-style liberal democracy in Turkey or for Ankara's capacity to resolve its Kurdish problem, let alone unifying the strongly divided Turks. Defeated CHP opposition candidate Muharrem Ince said Turkey was now entering a dangerous period of "one-man rule." He might not be wrong. For now, though, this is Mr. Erdogan's time. With his sweeping new powers, he becomes Turkey's most powerful leader since its founding father Ataturk.

