

# The Secret of Erdogan's Success in Turkey's 2023 Election

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**Recep Tayyip Erdogan** has won a third term as President of Turkey which will extend his time in power to a quarter of a century. The authoritarian leader has won another five years at the helm of a ship struggling in a sea of economic woes, that has seen inflation rise to an annual 44%, and the Turkish lira devalued. Economic experts point the blame squarely at Erdogan who has refused to follow economic policy and raise interest rates.

Erdogan won just over 52% of the vote against Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the opposition candidate chosen to represent a consortium of six parties in the second round run-off on May 28.

The race was close, and that means Turkey is divided down the middle, with supporters of Erdogan, and the other half feeling desperate for change, unsatisfied with the state of the country, and fearful of where it is headed. The Erdogan-controlled media played a large role as they showcased Erdogan's campaign ads, but gave almost no air time for the opposition.

## The secret of Erdogan's success

Erdogan decided to focus on an underrepresented group. Turkey is a large country, and has several sizeable and important big cities; places as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. However, the country has thousands of small villages, and the villagers are generally under-educated, Islamic fundamentalists, holding conservative values, and have felt their voices were unheard in Ankara.

Erdogan had been religious as a young man, and it was easy for him to identify with the religious people living in rural areas. People felt marginalized because their wives and daughters wore a headscarf, and this had been banned in government institutions.

A similar tactic was employed successfully by Donald Trump in 2016. He focused on supporters in rural areas, under-educated and with fundamentalist Christian values.

Mustafa Kemal, Ataturk, is considered to be the father of modern Turkey. After the 400-year reign of the Ottoman Empire in Turkey fell at the end of WW1, Ataturk came into leadership and had a new vision for the collapsed country. He banned the headscarf and banned using the Arabic alphabet in writing, instead writing in the English alphabet and from left to right, like in Europe. Ataturk wanted Turkey to look west, follow Europe, and turn its back on the old ways of Asia and the Middle East. He was a visionary and transformed Turkey into a secular, modern, and Western-looking nation.

However, the Turkish villagers didn't fully embrace the secular vision Turkey came to represent; a 99% Islamic country, but organized as a secular democracy. The villagers, the backbone of Erdogan's support, were happy for modern improvements, but they clung to their fundamentalist religious beliefs as a badge of honor. Erdogan knew how to harvest their votes, and they kept him in power for two decades, and they got him re-elected on May 28, 2023.

Many critics of Erdogan have pointed out his support of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is a global organization that supports the same goals as ISIS: to dismantle all governments and to institute the Koran as the only constitution. Islam is not only a set of religious beliefs, but it is also a life system, encompassing civil governance as well.

Egypt, Syria, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and UAE have all banned the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. US Senator Ted Cruz of Texas has tried twice to pass legislation in Washington, DC. to ban the group, but faced fierce opposition from both parties.

The Muslim Brotherhood is very powerful and connected to governments in Washington, DC., London, and Berlin. Turkey and Qatar have both been connected to the Muslim Brotherhood ideology, and this brought the two countries together as partners in the Obama administration's attack on Syria.

## **Syrian conflict participation**

The US Obama-Biden administration 2011 began an armed conflict in Syria for regime change. The weapons came from US sources in Libya, shipped to Turkey, and delivered over the border at Idlib, which Turkey still occupies today. Turkey had partnered with the US on the project to change the secular government in Damascus. Obama saw the power of the Muslim Brotherhood and formulated a plan to use them in Syria to overthrow the government. The weapons and training were administered by the CIA program Timber Sycamore in Turkey.

Erdogan's supporters in Turkey were sold the idea that the Syrian citizens wanted an Islamist leader, like Erdogan, and they bought into the idea of supporting the 'freedom fighters' in Syria. But, the project came with a cost to Turkey: they had to accept 3.6 million Syrian refugees, and they have overstayed their welcome since 2011 because the US-NATO attack on Syria failed. It was the lack of support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria which caused the plan to fail. The Free Syrian Army dissolved, and Al Qaeda and ISIS took its place.

Both Erdogan and Kilicdaroglu promised their supporters that all the Syrian refugees will be sent back to Syria. The refugees have been willing to work for very low wages, taking jobs away from Turkish workers who have Unions that set the wages higher. Syrians and Turks may share Islam, but they do not share a common language, and their cultures are very

different.

## Why the opposition lost the race

The opposition to Erdogan was formed of a coalition of six parties who banded together to remove him from power. Among the parties were several young, intelligent, and charismatic leaders. **Ekrem Imamoglu**, Mayor of Istanbul, was a leading contender to remove Erdogan, but Erdogan engineered a legal case that prevented Imamoglu from running as a candidate. Analysts also pointed to the Mayor of Ankara, **Mansur Yavas**, and politician **Ali Babacan** as able to beat Erdogan in a race, but the coalition of opposition parties instead went with an older, accountant Kemal Kilicdaroglu as their candidate to back, and he lost.

But, was it his age and looks which caused him to lose? Or, was it because he had promised the voters he would stand fully with the US and cooperate with any plans and orders they have for Turkey? The Turkish voters blame the US for their forced participation in the attack on Syria which didn't benefit Turkey, but has proven to be a significant factor in their economic demise, and contributed to Turkish families having to go without meat or chicken most days because they couldn't afford what they had previously become used to.

Erdogan has turned away from being the lap dog of Washington and has formed alliances with Russia and Iran. Ankara is not afraid of being independent, or buying military products not "Made in USA". In this successful race won, Erdogan had the winning strategy of standing as the 'anti-American' candidate, and he included plenty of jabs at the LGBTQ community in Turkey, which have been supported by the US and the opposition. **The US meddling in the election went so far that US President Biden publically said he wanted Erdogan to lose, and that one statement might have been the secret to the success of Erdogan.**

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