

Turkiye Rallies Behind Erdogan

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It comes as no surprise that the United States and the European Union didn't have the face to commend the performance of Recep Erdogan and his party in the presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkiye on Sunday. The election results do not serve the geopolitical interests of the US and its European allies. It is apparent that the entreaties and media management in the run-up fell on deaf ears.

The western powers hoped for a weak unstable government and are instead worrying that a turbo-charged Erdogan with a commanding majority in the parliament will be presiding over a strong government and won't be a pushover.

Thus, pin-pricking has begun. A question mark is put on the legitimacy of Erdogan's victory over his opposition rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu who is backed by the West. A real time [report by the OSCE election observer](#) mission's preliminary findings have come handy, which alleged attempts to gerrymander the election results.

The report accuses Erdogan of enjoying "unjustified advantage" and resorting to "misuse of administrative resources"; and the election commission of "lack of transparency and communication" and independence.

In a direct attack on Erdogan, the OSCE mission report says, "The president is not explicitly subject to the same restrictions in the campaign period" and took undue advantage of incumbency... (and) blurred the line between party and State, at odds with the [1990 Copenhagen Document](#)" (which contains specific election-related commitments.)

The report said the election administration, law enforcement bodies, and courts did not enjoy the confidence of the opposition in resolving electoral grievances "impartially and effectively." The secrecy of the vote was not always guaranteed; family and group voting were frequent; and unauthorised people participated in the count, "raising concerns over its integrity." During the vote count, "several significant procedural errors were reported."

The US State Department has promptly [urged the Turkish authorities](#) to conduct “the next phase of the presidential election in line with the country’s laws and in a manner that is consistent with its commitments to the OSCE as well as a NATO Ally.”

The state department’s principal deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Monday that the Biden Administration is “continuing to closely monitor the country’s ongoing electoral process.” He noted that “broadly we congratulate the people of Türkiye for peacefully expressing their will at the ballot box, and also congratulate the newly elected parliament.”

Patel repeated the stated US position that “we’ll continue to work together with whatever government is chosen by the Turkish people to deepen our cooperation and our – deepen our shared priorities.”

But he also parried that “the election process is still unfolding, as is the work of the OSCE’s election observation mission, which, as you know, released some preliminary findings... But I’m not going to predict anything additional from here.” Patel confirmed that there were US observers represented in the OSCE team.

Taking a cue from Patel, perhaps, the EU’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell was upfront in a [statement issued in Brussels](#) on Tuesday. He stated, “We note the preliminary findings and conclusions of the International Election Observation Mission of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and call on Turkish authorities to address the shortcomings identified.”

Borrell added, “The EU attaches the utmost importance to the need for transparent, inclusive and credible elections, in a level playing field.” Borrell too welcomed the elections as such, and took note of the high turnout as a clear sign of the commitment of the Turkish people to exercising their democratic right to vote.

The salience of these remarks lies in the subtle hint by both Patel and Borrell that all is not lost yet and the jury is still out as regards Erdogan’s victory. (Interestingly, [Turkish Foreign Ministry has pointed out](#) that a total of 489 international election observers watched the May 14 elections in Türkiye and it is also “reflected in the reports of these delegations that the elections were held in accordance with the standards of free democratic elections and with exemplary participation in the OSCE and the CoE geography.”)

That said, by now, it must be sinking in surely in the western calculus that Erdogan has retained his core constituency, which has not suffered erosion, and his charisma cannot be matched by Kilicdaroglu. In “systemic” terms, the Globalists cannot match Erdogan’s nationalistic plank, either.

Erdogan is all but certain to win the runoff. The big question is about the third candidate Sinan Ogan who secured 5.2% votes in Sunday’s first round and now bows out of the race. Where will his supporters go in the runoff? No doubt, that will affect the “balance of power” in the runoff and tilt the scales decisively.

The odds are in favour of Kilicdaroglu getting the bulk of the “anti-Erdogan” votes of Ogan, but will that be sufficient to win in the second round? It may not be. Put differently, Ogan will not be able to deliver his entire electorate to Kilicdaroglu.

Clearly, if Erdogan can retain his voter base exceeding 49.5% it is and goes on to attract even a quarter of the votes Ogan secured, he is going to be the victor in the runoff. The

strong likelihood is that Erdogan will win.

The fact that AKP secured a comfortable majority in the parliamentary elections — against all forecasts — also creates a new momentum. The AKP's success goes to show that the Turkish voter seeks a stable government in Ankara when the external environment is becoming extremely dangerous for the country and the economic crisis demands attention. Whereas, the sort of rainbow coalition that Kilicdaroglu is heading used to be the bane of Turkish politics for many decades in the pre-Erdogan era, and a recipe for instability. Equally, it needs to be factored in that the groundswell of Turkish public opinion remains staunchly anti-western.

If he wins, this will be Erdogan's final term. And it is going to be a "legacy term." Erdogan will no doubt aim to transform Turkiye as a regional hub in energy, food, connectivity and transit. There is going to be breakthrough in nuclear industry, defence industry, infrastructure projects, etc. with Russian participation.

It is entirely conceivable that in the highly polarised political atmosphere in the country, there could be protests staged by the opposition if Erdogan wins in the runoff on May 28. But that won't pose a serious challenge to Erdogan.

Turkey is not ripe for a colour revolution. The point is, unlike Georgia's Eduard Shevardnadze or Ukraine's Viktor Yanukovich, Erdogan is a grassroots politician with a solid mass base and the politics he practises is in sync with the *zeitgeist* in the region.

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