

Revealing Trends in Turkey's Presidential Election

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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In-Depth Reports

On August 10, Recep Tayyip Erdogan continued his prolific electoral run by collecting almost 52 percent of the vote in Turkey's presidential poll, easily besting his chief rival, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, who represented the left-right CHP/MHP coalition. A large part of Erdogan's success lay in peeling away conservative MHP voters through polarizing rhetoric, including tagging Ihsanoglu as a "mon cher" or effete snob, and provocatively calling out CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu's Alevi identity.

Still, continued victories are not assured for Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party, whose support may well have plateaued, as indicated by vote totals hovering between 19.4 and 21.4 million over the last three elections. A likely option for Erdogan, given this trend, could be to remain "president of the right," becoming further polarized and hoping to peel more votes from the MHP and other right-wing parties. Yet Turkey's leaders need U.S. assistance against emerging Middle East threats such as ISIS. More important, Turkey's economic success is the product of its stability in an unstable region. The Turkish leadership will thus walk a tightrope between cooperation with Washington in the Middle East and nationalist and Islamist political rhetoric aimed at U.S. leadership in the region.

In his latest Institute Research Note, Soner Cagaptay breaks down Erdogan's victory, while considering the implications of his move from prime minister to president. He argues that the liberal opening revealed by the election analysis, if pursued, could offer broader future success for the CHP and HDP alike.

THE AUTHOR

[Soner Cagaptay \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/cagaptay-soner\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/cagaptay-soner) is the Beyer Family Fellow and director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute. He is the author of the 2014 study *The Rise of Turkey: The Twenty-First Century's First Muslim Power* (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-rise-of-turkey-the-twenty-first-centurys-first-muslim-power>) (Potomac Books). Ege Cansu Sacikara is the Yvonne Silverman Research Assistant and Talya Yuzucu is a research intern at the Institute.



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