# Turkey 2014 Presidential Election

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## The 2014 Turkish Presidential Election and the Rise of Erdoğan

The presidential election was conducted on 10 August 2014. The election was held to elect the 12th Turkish president (News, 2014). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the incumbent prime minister, emerged as the winner with an absolute majority of the vote in the first round. Hence, this made it unnecessary for a runoff to be scheduled. Categorically, the election took place under reforms adopted in the 2007 constitutional referendum. The constitution introduced a direct national vote instead of the previously used vote by members of parliament. Approximately fifty-five million people voted both in Turkey and in the diaspora (Online, 2018).

To be precise, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's campaign involved a lot of pledges to voters, and he made grand promises to them. He pledged to offer a new constitution that presumably would give executive powers to the presidency and hence to himself. However, this had to wait since he did not have the majority in parliament needed to enforce the proposed charter. As a former prime minister who had already served for more than a decade and then wished to be president for another decade, he could not enforce a new constitution to rule uncontested.

Henceforth, some legal experts indicated that the constitution had given the president adequate powers to do much of what Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wished. He arguably said that the constitution does not limit the president's actions. Indeed, he wanted to be the main controller of everything, as he stated to voters that the main difference was that the will would act accordingly, hence allowing him to remain a partisan leader. He actually pledged to move forward with a number of major developments, such as transforming Turkey's infrastructure and building the third Istanbul airport.

## Electoral Rules, Campaign Timing, and the Role of the Supreme Electoral Council

As the Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey is entitled to do, this institution declared that the first-round election campaign was to be conducted from 11 July to 9 August. It was during this campaign period that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan campaigned against two other candidates, with the campaign centered on the December 2013 government corruption scandal, the Gezi Park protests, the PKK

peace process, and the Gaza conflict.

Additionally, it was on 1 July 2014 that the incumbent prime minister announced his presidential candidacy in a speech that was one hour long. Although there was a lot of speculation that he could be the chosen candidate for the AKP, this was confirmed on that day as the logo was also unveiled. The logo brought about criticism because of its resemblance to the campaign logo used by Obama in the 2008 election and even the Holiday Place logo. The logo was also claimed to have features related to Arabic, as the print was said to resemble the Prophet Muhammad's name, enlarging accusations over political and religious conflicts surrounding the campaign. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's slogan stated, *Milli İrade, Milli Güç, Hedef 2023* (National Determination, National Power, Objective 2023). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's campaign also had the slogan *Yeni Türkiye Yolunda Demokrasi, Refah, İtibar* ("Democracy, Prosperity and Prestige on the Path to a New Turkey").

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's campaign was dominated by electoral rallies, beginning in Samsun around 5 July and then heading along a route intended to imitate Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's path during the Turkish War of Independence. Ideally, his speeches at the rallies focused on the achievements he had made as prime minister (Akkuş, 2018). He also attacked both the opposition and Fethullah Gülen, the Hizmet movement leader who lived in Pennsylvania. In a rally he held at Hatay on 21 July, Erdoğan blamed Israel for following Hitler's footsteps and blamed Gülen because he did not speak out properly about Gaza's Palestinians. At another rally in Kahramanmaraş on 1 August, he argued that the opposition and the CHP had fully supported the government's position on the Gaza crisis.

# Political Rallies, National Symbolism, and Campaign Controversy

In one of his rallies, Recep Erdoğan was attacked by a rival because he had purportedly mistaken the Independence March, the national anthem of Turkey, for a composed poem regarding the Çanakkale fallen soldiers in the Gallipoli Campaign. During the rally he led on 1 August in Kahramanmaraş, he showed a video clip of Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu misreading the Independence March.

However, in addition to the rallies he held, AKP activists also engaged in door-to-door campaigning to look for support as they distributed clothing, food, and other necessities to families. His campaign had planned *iftar* tents during the Ramadan period and delivered women's scarves and toys during campaign rallies. His initiatives also led the government to start a massive distribution of free coal to families living in İzmir. At the end of the campaign period on 9 August, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared that he had received donations from approximately 1,350,796 people, adding up to ₺55,260,798, or approximately US$25,560,037. However, this was seen as a huge amount of donations compared with the other two candidates, resulting in allegations of fraud and malpractice by the opposition (Akkuş, 2018).

Generally, politically, Recep Erdoğan was an ideal candidate who utilized opportunistic tactical claims

against his opponents, hence winning over voters. As an incumbent, he used mobilization and the powers and resources he had to win voters. From his methods, one can recognize the strategic support he gained by taking advantage of citizens in İzmir. He gave out food and other necessities in expectation of receiving votes in return. Also, as a sitting prime minister, he had access to donations contributed by both national and international organizations and individuals, with an expectation that they might become interconnected with governmental affairs. Therefore, the Recep Erdoğan campaign shows an energetic move that was strategically designed to outdo the other two candidates by massive margins through the types of offers he gave at rallies and the appeals he made. His approach operated at a basic level that ordinary people could understand, hence creating a sympathetic platform for votes as voters widely relied on what Recep Erdoğan presented as fact and considered him their only rescuer. Moreover, he said he would make differences as a newly elected president so that citizens could see a president who was closer to them.

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