

1. WHO CAN DEFEAT ERDOGAN

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Who can defeat Erdogan?

COMMENTARY | BY ISTAR GOZAYDIN & AHMET ERDI OZTURK *

If the elections aren't moved forward, Turkey will go to the polls in June 2023 to elect both the president and the parliament. Although it may seem like a normal process when viewed from this perspective, certain dynamics in the country mean that these elections could bring an end to the period in which the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has ruled by means of various unofficial coalitions. This makes them crucial. Erdogan seems at his weakest point in his political career. However, the opposition seems, in a sense, to have lost the momentum that gave it such a boost in the summer months. In fact, considering Turkey's economic and social situation, Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu seems to have had made a very good point when he said, "The government cannot win the election under these conditions, but the opposition can lose." At this point, the presidential candidate to be produced by the Table of 6 (the name of the six-party alliance in the Turkish opposition) becomes important.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu

Since Kemal Kilicdaroglu, chairman of the Republican People's Party (CHP), is both the leader of the main opposition party and the representative of the party with the highest vote in the Table of 6, it is natural that it should be he who faces off against Erdogan.

Kilicdaroglu joined the process of forming a more active opposition after the Justice March he held in 2017. In this context, the short videos he published, the fact that the institutions responsible for these events came to his door after the events, and his agenda-setting rhetoric could all be plus points for him. Likewise, the fact that he played a role in the Good Party (İYİ Party) entering parliament and that he brought together six parties with different views can also be read as plus points in his favor. As a result of these, he achieved a significant victory in winning the metropolitan cities in the 2018 lo-

cal elections by fielding the right candidates.

However, Kilicdaroglu has disadvantages that outweigh his advantages. First and foremost, his CHP has proved unable to significantly increase its share of the vote since he became its leader, and has not won any victories against Erdogan. Secondly, from past election campaigns, it is clear that the chance of Kilicdaroglu making mistakes and blunders during the campaign is very high. Moreover, Kilicdaroglu, who does not fit the profile of a charismatic leader in Turkish politics, which has become a more evident requirement during the Erdogan era, does not seem to excite the masses.

Over and above these disadvantages, the fact that Kilicdaroglu is an Alevi is still a problem in Turkey,

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especially since he would be facing the AKP government, which uses religious structures and arguments to make political gains in a country with a Sunni majority.

Ekrem Imamoglu

Since Ekrem Imamoglu won the Istanbul elections for the second time, whether he will be a candidate or not is one of the most debated issues in Turkish public discourse. According to many experts, Imamoglu also has the profile of a winner, given his way of doing politics, the good relations he has established with different sectors of public, and the fact that he has already won two victories against Erdogan. However, crucially, his conviction by the judiciary on December 14, 2022 and the fact that this



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Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu speaks during a rally in front of City Hall in Istanbul, on December 15. A member of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), Imamoglu was sentenced to more than two years in prison and banned from politics for 'insulting' Turkish officials.

verdict paves the way for his being banned from politics, has completely changed the situation regarding Imamoglu. And this situation could well alter the fate of Turkey.

If we do not take the lawsuit decision into account, we can say that two of Imamoglu's biggest advantages over Erdogan are his popularity and his young age. And this popularity extends abroad. Another advantage is that he can produce arguments that are both effective during the campaign and that can free Erdogan's hand when necessary. At the same time, Imamoglu has the political language and understanding required to win votes from Kurdish, Sunni, Alevi, Turkish and other voter groups. He is able to achieve this thanks to the team he

has established in Istanbul. At the same time, having a political story from Istanbul makes his story similar to Erdogan's, which is also an advantage.

On top of all these advantages, Imamoglu also has a new one: specifically, the political ban placed on him. Over and above approval or disapproval of the court decision, the Turkish judiciary has somehow made Ekrem Imamoglu into a hero and drawn comparisons with Erdogan's own political story. In this context, he has increased the chances of the Istanbul mayor being made a candidate with his own hand. If the Erdogan-controlled judiciary imposes a political ban, which would mean he cannot run in the elections, Ekrem Imamoglu

will have been revealed as a major actor in Turkey's future.

Mansur Yavas

Ankara Metropolitan Mayor Mansur Yavas, who has always been presented in the polls as the candidate who can win easily against Erdogan, is a little more cautious than Kilicdaroglu and Imamoglu regarding his candidacy.

Yavas' biggest advantage is that he is seen as a reliable candidate by the Turkish public, who consider him to be honest and transparent. It is also to his advantage that he has administered Ankara's public works and the tendering process in a transparent manner. However, this is also a disadvantage, as we do not know what Yavas has to say about Turkey as a whole and world politics – and what he would do on the national and international stage. Also, we do not really know what sort of political stuff Yavas is made of. Yavas has two other disadvantages: The first is to what extent he can manage a presidential campaign. Because, against an opponent like Erdogan, this campaign will be very tough in every field. A big question mark hangs over whether he has the political ability to sustain it. Finally, another factor that will determine the result of the election is the attitude of the country's Kurdish nationalist movement. Here, Yavas' nationalist background, and the fact that he still uses former Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) cadres in the staff of the municipality, may cause the Kurdish political movement to keep its distance from him.

All in all, the most logical thing for the Table of 6 to do is to announce its candidate as soon as possible, and for this candidate to be selected rationally in the light of current conditions. In short, Turkey's 2023 election depends on what the opposition does in anticipation of the moves Erdogan makes to stay in power.

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