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THE STRATEGIES AND STRUGGLES OF THE TURKISH OPPOSITION UNDER AUTOCRATIZATION

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Introduction

Turkey has undergone a major economic, social, and political transformation during the two decades of Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) rule. Despite its early democratization efforts during the European Union (EU) accession negotiations and various political and judicial reforms, the AKP has since become the main driver of rising autocratization in Turkey.

Turkey is now categorized as a “competitive authoritarian” regime,¹ where elections are held regularly but the competition among political parties is not free and fair. These regimes have ostensibly democratic elements: Opposition parties occasionally win or almost win elections; there is fierce political competition; the press may publish diverse opinions and statements by opposition parties; and citizens can organize protests.

However, upon closer inspection, cracks soon appear in the democratic facade: Opponents of the government are stifled via legal or illegal means; independent judicial bodies are controlled by pro-government officials; state funds are used for election campaigns without proper oversight; election rules are changed to favor the government and elections may

even be rigged; and press freedom and freedom of expression come under pressure. When these measures fail to deliver an outcome that satisfies the ruling party, members of the opposition may face targeted violence or imprisonment — an increasingly common reality for the Turkish opposition since 2007. Therefore, any opposition victory depends on its ability to successfully develop new ways to mobilize under these difficult conditions.

In competitive authoritarian regimes, opposition parties have a higher chance of winning elections if they form an electoral alliance. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has thus far enjoyed a fragmented opposition and utilized polarization to cement divisions. However, the introduction of a hyper-presidential system following the 2017 referendum and Erdoğan’s 2018 election victory have provided the necessary impetus for the opposition parties to form an alliance. As Turkey experiences a biting economic crisis, polls indicate that voter support for the opposition parties is a threat to Erdoğan and his ally, the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP).

This paper first charts Turkey’s autocratization under AKP rule, before addressing the strategies adopted by its political opposition and the opportunities and risks it faces in the run-up to the June 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections. The opposition’s strategy focuses on creating a strong electoral alliance to ensure a parliamentary majority, nominating a joint

1. Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, “Rising competitive authoritarianism in Turkey,” *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 9 (2016): 1581-1606, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2015.1135732

presidential candidate, and creating an inclusive platform to draw in AKP and MHP voters who are not happy with the country's recent trajectory. Meanwhile, Erdoğan has attempted to disrupt the opposition by amending the election law and increasingly targeting key opposition actors and journalists, while also taking advantage of the Russia-Ukraine war to position himself as an indispensable international actor. Although Erdoğan's approach to domestic and international politics suggests he is not willing to give up easily, opposition parties appear determined to defeat him.

Autocratization Under AKP Rule

To understand the fundamental problems facing Turkey's opposition, we must first examine how we got here and analyze how the regime has changed over time.

During its first term, the AKP took steps toward democratization by passing political and judicial reforms. However, during its second term, the party began to consolidate control over political institutions and the bureaucracy.² There were already problems regarding judicial independence, but instead of fixing the system, the AKP took politicization of the judiciary to a whole new level. The constitutional reforms ratified in a 2010 referendum significantly undermined judicial independence and increased the government's influence over the judiciary.³

At the same time, Erdoğan leaned into populism and further entrenched existing societal divisions. The government's violent response to the Gezi Park protests in 2013 intensified social polarization and tensions. During the June 2015 general elections, the first elections after the Gezi Park protests, the AKP lost its parliamentary majority; however, the parties were unable to form a government because Erdoğan actively blocked coalition talks and called for snap elections that fall. From June to November 2015, violence escalated across Turkey alongside armed conflict between Turkish security forces and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK*) in majority-Kurdish cities. At the end of a period marked by growing security concerns, the AKP regained its parliamentary

2. Şule Özsoy Boyunsuz and Berk Esen, "Türkiye İçin Yeni Bir Hükümet Sistemi: Hükümet Sistemi Kaynaklı Sorunlar ve Çözüm Önerileri," *Istanbul*, last updated on January 14, 2021, <https://www.istanpol.org/post/t%C3%BCrkiye-i-%C3%A7in-yeni-bir-h%C3%BCK%C3%BCmet-sistemi-h%C3%BCK%C3%BCmet-sistemi-kaynakl%C4%B1-sorunlar-ve-%C3%A7%C3%B6z%C3%BCm-%C3%B6nerileri>

3. Yunus Sözen, "Popular Will against Democracy: Populist Autocratization in Turkey." *Reflektif Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 1 (1):9-29, DOI: 10.47613/reflektif.2020.3.

majority in the November 2015 elections, amid mounting problems over electoral justice and impartiality. Erdoğan had hoped to win the election by capitalizing on a security crisis of his own making and convincing people to vote for stability, and he succeeded.

The coup attempt on July 15, 2016 was another critical moment for the government to consolidate power by further suppressing the opposition and forming a new alliance with the ultranationalist MHP to solidify its parliamentary majority. After the coup attempt, the government declared a state of emergency, during which people from various political factions suffered major human rights violations and all parliamentary authority was effectively transferred to Erdoğan.

Turkey's government system transformed into a de facto semi-presidential system after the constitutional amendments in 2010; after the referendum in 2017, it became a hyper-presidential system devoid of checks and balances. Under the new system, the parliament became dysfunctional as its powers were mainly transferred to the head of the executive branch. This system made it difficult for the opposition parties, in spite of their significant numbers in parliament, to impact governance decisions and conduct oversight of other government branches. This new system only benefited those at the top, including Erdoğan's family, leading AKP officials, and allied businesses. Institutions have been hollowed out under one-man rule, and clientelism and patronage have made the system even more inefficient.⁴

Moreover, ever since the unfavorable results of the June 2015 elections, the government has extended its control over the media and civil society. It has also doubled down on its marginalization of the Kurdish people by declaring the end of the "Kurdish Solution Process" and violently targeting the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP*).⁵ Many HDP legislators, including Co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, as well as many HDP mayors and party activists, have been imprisoned. In response to the HDP's overwhelming victories across Kurdish municipalities in the March 2019 local elections, the

4. Gönül Tol and Seren Selvin Korkmaz, "The perils of personalizing power: Erdoğan's one-man rule has made him increasingly vulnerable," *Middle East Institute*, October 18, 2021, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/perils-personalizing-power-erdogans-one-man-rule-has-made-him-increasingly-vulnerable>

5. Cemal Ozkahrman, "Failure of Peace talks between Turkey and the PKK: Victim of Traditional Turkish Policy or of Geopolitical Shifts in the Middle East?" *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 4, no. 1 (March 2017): 50-66, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347798916681332>



Photo above: People walk past election posters of AKP candidate Binali Yıldırım (L) and CHP candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu (R) during campaigning in the re-run of the Istanbul mayoral election on June 01, 2019 in Istanbul. Photo by Chris McGrath/Getty Images.

government struck back with more suppression and purges of HDP mayors, to the extent that most HDP-run municipalities are now run by government-appointed “trustees.”⁶

As a result, over the years, the AKP has created a competitive authoritarian regime that justifies itself with the rhetoric of political populism. As the AKP positioned itself as the sole representative of the nation, it completely disregarded and undermined the legitimacy of many opposition groups, further deepening political and social polarization in Turkey while consolidating its control over the state. Using its parliamentary majority and the hyper-presidential system, it introduced new legislation to stifle political and social opposition and to undermine fundamental rights and freedoms.⁷ Therefore, the opposition faces both deepening polarization and political and legal sanctions.

6. Seren Selvin Korkmaz, “Could Turkey’s opposition provide a model for the defeat of populist authoritarian rule?” *Open Democracy*, May 11, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/could-turkeys-opposition-provide-a-model-for-the-defeat-of-populist-authoritarian-rule/>

7. “Freedom in the World 2022: Turkey,” *Freedom House*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2022> (Accessed August 12, 2022)

The Opposition’s Main Strategies Under Erdoğan’s Rule

The opposition actors and alliances have also changed throughout the dynamic autocratization process, searching for new strategies and approaches while navigating the slippery terrain of politics. Just as some opposition actors or parties have chosen to build alliances with the AKP, some of the ruling party’s former allies have also joined the opposition’s ranks. As the opposition struggled to operate within an increasingly polarized political landscape and survive amid a crackdown on fundamental freedoms, at times it fell into the pitfalls of polarization while mobilizing voters to amass some political power.

By learning from its past experiences, both successes and failures, the Turkish opposition adopted a new strategy that brought it victory in the 2019 local elections. This strategy has two main pillars: forming electoral alliances to ensure unity against Erdoğan and using new discursive strategies to counter his polarizing discourse.

A. Forging Alliances

Turkey's ruling alliance appears to be rather monolithic due to the ideological similarities between the AKP and MHP in recent years, while the opposition alliance encompasses a broad range of differences stretching across the fault lines of history and identity. The opposition alliance spans across left- and right-wing, Turkish and Kurdish, and secular and conservative politics. While it may seem difficult for this broad opposition bloc to set aside its differences, the parties are united by their common stance on the choice between democratization and autocratization. Opposition actors are well aware that one more election win for Erdoğan will lead to the institutionalization of autocratization. Therefore, the 2023 elections will be a watershed moment for the opposition and the country more broadly.

The opposition has previously failed to unite against the AKP, only successfully forming alliances in the 2019 local elections after much effort, and historically this fragmentation has benefited Erdoğan. Opposition parties began forming alliances against the AKP after the 2011 elections, when the AKP started to consolidate its power after its third electoral victory. For example, the MHP (now an AKP ally) and the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), the main opposition party, agreed to put up a joint candidate, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, for the presidential elections in 2014. At the same time, the HDP and a group of left-wing parties fielded a different candidate under the umbrella of the HDP — a tactic designed to pass Turkey's high election threshold. Despite the fact that these two opposition groups ran joint candidates against Erdoğan, the main driver of the elections was not the formation of alliances. İhsanoğlu's candidacy even caused a major split within the CHP. As a result, rather than unifying against Erdoğan, the opposition has often been hampered by competition and division within its ranks, which has only benefited the AKP.

The opposition parties banded together to vote “no” in the April 2017 constitutional referendum that established the hyper-presidential system, and their current alliance strategy is shaped by the unfair majoritarian electoral conditions created under that new system.

Hyper-Presidential System: An Unexpected Opportunity for the Opposition

The current presidential system, which was expected to consolidate Erdoğan's power, has instead become his Achilles' heel.⁸ Under the new system, the president and his party face an ever-growing list of problems as he has further deepened crises instead of addressing them. Since the presidential system lacks institutional checks and balances, the regime has become increasingly authoritarian and inefficient. The bureaucracy, managed by bureaucrats recruited, promoted, dismissed, or relocated based on their loyalties rather than their merits, has failed to address Turkey's woes. Erdoğan's persistent interventions in monetary policy and changes in the top personnel at the central bank have worsened the country's already-dire economic problems, and his erratic foreign policy decisions, which bypass historically significant diplomatic institutions, have strained Turkey's foreign relations. Now, the bureaucracy has become paralyzed and the party has been rendered dysfunctional. The AKP's political strategy that was once based on building bonds with Turkish society, one of the party's main strengths, has now been undermined by the hyper-centralization of decision-making mechanisms.

The stalemate brought about by this hyper-centralized system has also created opportunities for the opposition. The “50% plus one” rule in the new system has played a key role in bringing opposition parties together in an alliance to secure an electoral victory, as the latest polls suggest that popular support for the hyper-presidential system has fallen below 50%.⁹ While a divided opposition has benefited Erdoğan for many years and perhaps encouraged him to design the current system, his rivals can no longer remain fragmented as the opposition parties are forced to rely on each other to survive in this unjust electoral system. Despite their many differences, the opposition actors agree on the need to push back against hyper-centralization and reinstate the parliamentary system.

8. Gönül Tol and Seren Selvin Korkmaz, “The perils of personalizing power: Erdoğan's one-man rule has made him increasingly vulnerable,” *Middle East Institute*, October 18, 2021, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/perils-personalizing-power-erdogans-one-man-rule-has-made-him-increasingly-vulnerable>

9. “Yöneyem anketi: Cumhurbaşkanlığı Hükümet Sistemi'ne destek yüzde 28,5,” *Gazete Duvar*, <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yoneylem-anketi-3-kisiden-2si-parlamente-sistem-dedi-galeri-1577740> (Accessed August 29, 2022)

Tenuous Alliance in 2018

Following changes to the electoral law in 2018, political parties were allowed to form official electoral alliances for parliamentary elections. Alliances also provide a new option for small political parties to overcome the 10% electoral threshold for parliamentary representation, because if an alliance's votes exceed 10% in total, small parties will automatically pass the threshold. As a result, in order to ensure a majority in parliament, opposition parties formed coalitions for the 2018 elections. However, this collaboration can only be described as a "tenuous alliance." The opposition alliance — known as the Nation Alliance — comprising the secularist CHP, the MHP-split nationalist Good Party (*İYİ Parti*), the Islamist Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*, SP), and the right-wing Democrat Party (*Demokrat Partisi*, DP), was formed only for the parliamentary elections, while each party fielded its own presidential candidate against Erdoğan, instead of putting up a joint candidate. This strategy meant that the opposition parties' presidential candidates had to run against each other, as well as Erdoğan. In the highly polarized political climate, this froze the parties' respective voter blocs, as each party mobilized its own base instead of turning out the vote for a single opposition candidate, and Erdoğan secured victory in the first round with the support of his ally, the MHP. As a result of this fragmentation, the AKP-MHP People's Alliance also won a parliamentary majority in the elections as well.

Strong Alliance in the 2019 Local Elections

The opposition parties learned their lesson after the 2018 elections. For the 2019 local elections, they agreed to nominate joint candidates in metropolitan areas instead of competing against each other. The HDP also implicitly supported the opposition candidates in metropolitan constituencies by not putting up its own candidate. This collaboration led to electoral victories for the opposition and also damaged Erdoğan's reputation as a leader who could not be challenged.

In Istanbul, the ruling alliance contested the opposition's mayoral victory and secured a rerun of the election by using its tight grip on the judiciary. However, the opposition candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu, won the second election by an even bigger margin, which positioned the now-united opposition as a potential alternative to the ruling alliance. This important

victory mobilized opposition parties, sparked hope in the country, and laid the groundwork for larger coalitions. For Erdoğan, the opposition victory was a significant loss because of the strategic importance of Istanbul; one of Erdoğan's adages is: "Whoever wins Istanbul, wins Turkey." But despite this victory, the opposition faces more electoral challenges ahead. The AKP's outright rejection of the opposition's victory in Istanbul, as well as the rerun of the election, has heightened the risks of electoral fraud, especially in the upcoming 2023 presidential elections.

These victories in metropolitan municipalities were also significant in that they allowed the opposition to demonstrate how it would rule if it were in power. Erdoğan has consistently singled out the CHP to argue that opposition parties are incompetent at governing. Erdoğan's main talking points about the opposition over the past two decades have focused on the failure of opposition parties since the early years of the republic, turbulent times under coalition governments, and unsuccessful local governments. The CHP's electoral victories, as part of a wider victory for the opposition, gave them a chance to push back against Erdoğan's criticisms. Since the elections, Ekrem İmamoğlu and Mansur Yavaş, the mayors of Istanbul and Ankara respectively, have gained remarkable popularity. These two names also stand out in election surveys as potential presidential candidates who may have a chance of winning against Erdoğan. After scrambling to find a common candidate in 2018, the opposition now has multiple potential presidential hopefuls.

Consolidating a Strong Alliance Strategy

On the eve of the 2023 elections, as Turkish citizens prepare to vote for both parliamentary representatives and the president, the opposition's election strategy is based on forming the broadest possible alliance to win both the presidency and a parliamentary majority.

Recently, the Nation Alliance and two AKP splinter parties, the Democracy and Progress Party (*Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi*, DEVA) and the Future Party (*Gelecek Partisi*, GP), both led by former AKP elites Ali Babacan and Ahmet Davutoğlu, set aside their differences and together put forward a proposal for a "Strengthened Parliamentary System." At a time when the AKP is exacerbating identity-based polarization in society, this proposal signals the potential for a broader social and political



Photo above: Leaders of the “table of six” opposition alliance attend a presentation on the “Strengthened Parliamentary System” and signing ceremony in Ankara on February 28, 2022. Photo by Baris Oral/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images.

alliance for the future. For the first time in Turkish history, political parties with diverse socio-political orientations have collaborated to present a unified post-election vision. Leaders of six opposition parties regularly meet to discuss their post-election vision and election security issues. This alliance has been called the “table of six.” As the CHP and the İYİ Parti have larger bases, the other parties like the SP, DEVA, and GP have symbolic importance as potential political homes for disillusioned AKP supporters.

The proposed parliamentary system includes safeguards and checks and balances to prevent the rise of a new Erdoğan. The president’s role under the proposed system is mainly symbolic and representative rather than playing an active role in the executive branch. In comparison to the previous Turkish parliamentary system, the draft eliminates the president’s veto power and limits it to revoking laws passed by Turkey’s Grand National Assembly. The proposed regulations are aimed at creating an efficient and participatory legislative branch; a stable, transparent, and accountable executive branch; and an impartial and independent judiciary.

The pro-Kurdish HDP and five other leftist parties, including the newly emerging populist Worker’s Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TİP), have recently formed the Labor and Freedom Alliance. For voters dissatisfied with right-wing-dominated political alliances, this leftist alliance serves as an alternative. The HDP’s regional power provides the main driving force of this third alliance, ensuring that it can maximize its parliamentary seats and have a say in any institutional change. With its potential for winning 10-13% of the vote, this alliance will have a significant impact on the presidential elections because the table of six will need its support to ensure a majority without the risk of running in the second round.¹⁰

B. New Discursive Strategies

Another challenge for the opposition is to develop an inclusive, convincing, and effective discourse to counter the ruling alliance’s polarizing policies. The polarization strategy has

10. “MetroPOLL anketi: Altılı masa, Cumhur İttifakı’nı geçti,” *Medyascope*, <https://medyascope.tv/2022/09/02/metropoll-anketi-altili-masa-cumhur-ittifakini-gecti/> (Accessed September 3, 2022)

played to the favor of the populist authoritarian parties in power, dividing the opposition and ensuring that the majority of votes go to the ruling alliance. The CHP's communication campaigns from 2002 to 2010 were based on negative messaging that capitalized on fear, which managed to mobilize the party's own voter base but alienated AKP supporters. In the run-up to elections in 2018, Muharrem İnce, the CHP's presidential candidate at the time, mobilized his supporters with a revanchist and populist discourse, but also stoked polarization, which mostly benefited Erdoğan.

In the current system, the opposition needs the support of People's Alliance voters to secure victory, which requires a different approach. In the 2019 municipal elections, the opposition managed to attract diverse groups of voters with its positive campaign strategy entitled "radical love."¹¹ Despite all of Erdoğan's attempts, the opposition managed to avoid the pitfalls of polarization. Rather than targeting Erdoğan and the AKP or responding to their accusations, opposition candidates in the local elections focused on their own projects and explained their desire to represent all residents of the city.

This is the biggest challenge for the opposition in the run-up to 2023: embracing an inclusive discourse that attracts supporters of the ruling bloc while keeping its own voters satisfied.

The populists in power have given one clear message to their voters: "If I lose, you lose. If I go, there will be chaos and crisis." By contrast, the opposition has focused on steering outside the ruling bloc's established political grounds, creating new areas for discussion that often lead the AKP astray. For example, by proposing real solutions to everyday problems, instead of emphasizing polarizing identity politics, the opposition has been able to set the agenda, forcing Erdoğan to follow its policy proposals on pressing economic issues, like raising the minimum wage and canceling interest on student loans. It's not easy to maintain this, however.

Challenges Ahead

Although the opposition appears to agree on its strong alliance strategy, there are significant challenges ahead.

11. F. Michael Wuthrich and Melvyn Ingleby, "The Pushback Against Populism: Running on 'Radical Love' in Turkey," *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 2 (April 2020): 24-40, DOI: 10.1353/jod.2020.0034

First, in the midst of a deep economic crisis, Erdoğan and his party have struggled to appeal to their voters; hence they will stick to polarization strategies to divide the opposition. As Erdoğan stokes fears among his voters that they will lose their status or rights if the opposition wins, the opposition in turn must run a more positive and inclusive campaign that may not completely satisfy its own base. The government will also attempt to divide the opposition by targeting Kurds and potentially including the HDP closure case on its election agenda. Since increasing its nationalist tone by collaborating with the ultranationalist MHP, the AKP has targeted the pro-Kurdish HDP and attempted to associate the party with terrorism by using pro-government media. The Kurdish issue is one of the historical rifts in Turkish politics that divides different camps, and it is one of the most difficult issues to manage for the opposition bloc, which includes right-wing Turkish nationalist parties, liberals, and social democrats. As a result, by focusing on it and bringing any issues involving the HDP to the forefront, the government hopes to both suppress the influential Kurdish political movement and split the opposition bloc. The table of six must overcome such polarization efforts and open a dialogue with the HDP to include Kurds in the opposition.

Second, with the increase in opposition parties and their ideological differences, compromising on certain issues will become more difficult. Furthermore, as the AKP loses power, opposition parties may believe that they can win under any circumstances, leading them to compete against each other instead of cooperating with one another.

Third, the opposition seems to have three possible candidates for the presidency: Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the CHP, and the mayors of Istanbul and Ankara, Ekrem İmamoğlu and Mansur Yavaş. The process of choosing the candidate to face Erdoğan opens up the opposition to internal division and polarization.

Last, by introducing amendments to the election law in March 2022, the AKP and the MHP aimed to divide the larger opposition alliances.¹² The 2018 amendment made it possible for small parties that did not meet the 10% threshold to win seats in parliament if they ran as part of an alliance. Although

12. Nevzat Devranoglu and Ali Kucukgocmen, "Turkish draft law dampens early election talk," *Reuters*, March 14, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/turkeys-ruling-parties-draft-law-suggesting-vote-more-likely-next-year-2022-03-14/>

the new amendment lowered the threshold to 7%, it also changed the overall regulation, which would hurt small parties and force them to join the elections as part of bigger parties like the CHP and the İYİ Parti. In this way, the government may aim to prevent AKP voters from defecting to DEVA and GP by forcing them to vote under the CHP and İYİ Parti banners. However, recent discussions show that the opposition is well prepared for these changes and may adopt flexible strategies to maximize its seats in parliament.

Potential Scenarios for the 2023 Elections

It appears that the opposition has a better chance of winning the presidency than a parliamentary majority, as the ruling coalition is using the latest legislative changes to hamper the opposition's parliamentary efforts.

A scenario in which the opposition loses both the presidential seat and the parliamentary majority will mean a looming risk of further autocratization in Turkey. Furthermore, losing an election at a time when victory seems so near may lead to major disillusionment among the opposition parties' bases.

If the table of six only wins the presidency, a defeat for Erdoğan still means a huge blow to the ruling bloc, and the opposition may then move toward democratization through parliamentary negotiations with the AKP. In this scenario, the AKP could also support reinstating the parliamentary system after losing control over the executive body.

If the opposition only wins a parliamentary majority, Erdoğan will once again solidify his image as an "invincible leader." Moreover, in the event of any dispute between the legislative and executive bodies, the AKP will try to lay the blame on the pluralistic and therefore fragmented nature of the opposition. The opposition will have to carefully navigate this scenario and avoid polarization.

If the government loses both the presidential seat and a parliamentary majority, it can always resort to electoral fraud. The electoral law amendment contains provisions that could jeopardize election security. Because the judiciary is dominated by pro-government officials, any decision regarding electoral security runs the risk of favoring the government over the opposition. To prevent electoral fraud, the opposition,

regardless of formal electoral alliances, should work together at the local level to ensure a transparent and fair process, and international observers should closely monitor the elections.

Erdoğan and the AKP have transformed Turkish politics and state institutions over the course of their two decades in power, while the opposition parties' strategies, ideological positions, and leadership have been highly dynamic. Understanding the opposition's shift will be critical for gaining a better understanding of Turkish politics. While there are various scenarios for how the 2023 elections might play out, recent polls clearly show Erdoğan losing ground. As Erdoğan and his party face a severe economic crisis and elite division within the ruling coalition, Turkey's opposition has learned from its mistakes and developed strategies to combat populist authoritarianism in a politically polarized environment. The Turkish opposition's tactics and struggles are thus not only crucial to understanding Turkish politics, but will also be added to the international playbook of democratic opposition strategies for opposing populist autocrats.

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