

Justice and Development Party (Turkey)

The **Justice and Development Party** (Turkish: *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), abbreviated officially **AK Parti** in Turkish, is a national conservative political party in Turkey. Developed from the conservative tradition of Turkey's Ottoman past and its Islamic identity,^[16] the party is the largest in Turkey. Founded in 2001 by members of a number of existing conservative parties, the party has won pluralities in the six most recent legislative elections, those of 2002, 2007, 2011, June 2015, November 2015 and 2018. The party held a majority of seats for 13 years, but lost it in June 2015, only to regain it in the snap election of November 2015 but then lose it again in 2018. Its electoral success has been mirrored in the three local elections held since the party's establishment, coming first in 2004, 2009 and 2014 respectively. The current party leader is Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the incumbent President of Turkey.

Shortly after formation, the AKP portrayed itself as a pro-Western and pro-American^[17] party in the Turkish political spectrum that advocates a liberal market economy including Turkish membership in the European Union.^[18] The party had for a long time been supported by the Cemaat Movement of exiled Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen, whose influence in the judiciary has helped to weaken the opposition against the AKP.^[19] Having been an observer in the center-right European People's Party since 2005, it later left to join the eurosceptic Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe(ACRE) on 13 November 2013.^[20]

Controversies over whether the party remains committed to secular principles enshrined in the Turkish constitution despite their Islamist origins have dominated Turkish politics since 2002 and has resulted in numerous unsuccessful closure cases.^[21]

Nationwide protests broke out against the alleged authoritarianism of the AKP in 2013, with the party's heavy-handed response receiving international condemnation and stalling the party's once championed EU accession negotiations.^[22] Since then, the party has brought about tighter regulations on internet use, abortion and alcohol consumption, having temporarily blocked access to Twitter and YouTube in March 2014.^[23] Especially after the government corruption scandal involving several AKP ministers in 2013, the party has been increasingly accused of crony capitalism.^[24] The AKP favours a strong centralized leadership, having long advocated a presidential system of government and significantly reduced the number of elected local government positions in 2013.^[25]

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Formation

The AKP was established by a wide range of politicians of various political parties and a number of new politicians. The core of the party was formed from the reformist faction of the Islamist Virtue Party, including people such as Abdullah Gül, Bülent Arınç. A second founding group consisted of members of the social conservative Motherland Party who had been close to Turgut Özal, such as Cemil Çiçek and Abdülkadir Aksu. Some members of the True Path Party, such as Hüseyin Çelik and Köksal Toptan, joined the AKP. Some members, such as Kürşad Tüzmen had nationalist or Ertuğrul Günay, had center-left backgrounds while representatives of the nascent 'Muslim left' current were largely excluded.^[26] In addition a large number of people joined a political party for the first time, such as Ali Babacan, Selma Aliye Kavaf, Egemen Bağış and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. All of these people joined Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to found the new party

Ideology

Although the party is described as an Islamist party in some media, party officials reject those claims.^[27] According to former minister Hüseyin Çelik, "In the Western press, when the AKP administration – the ruling party of the Turkish Republic – is being named, unfortunately most of the time 'Islamic,' 'Islamist,' 'mildly Islamist,' 'Islamic-oriented,' 'Islamic-based' or 'with an Islamic agenda,' and similar language is being used. These characterizations do not reflect the truth, and they sadden us." Çelik added, "The AKP is a conservative democratic party. The AKP's conservatism is limited to moral and social issues."^[28] Also in a separate speech made in 2005, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated, "We are not an Islamic party, and we also refuse labels such as Muslim-democrat." Erdoğan went on to say that the AKP's agenda is limited to "conservative democracy".^[29]

<div>Justice and Development Party</div> <div><i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i></div>	
<div> <div></div> </div> <div></div>	
AK PARTİ	
Abbreviation	AK Parti (official) ^[1] <p>AKP (unofficial)^[2]</p>
Leader	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
General Secretary	Fatih Şahin
Parliamentary Leader	Naci Bostancı
Spokesperson	Mahir Ünal
Founder	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
Founded	14 August 2001
Preceded by	Virtue Party
Headquarters	Söğütözü Caddesi No 6 <p>Çankaya, Ankara</p>
Youth wing	AK Youth
Membership (2018)	10,100,083 ^[1]
Ideology	Conservative democracy ^[3] <p>Social conservatism^{[4][5][6]} National conservatism^{[7][8][9]} Right-wing populism^[10] Economic liberalism^{[6][11]} Neo-Ottomanism^{[12][13][14]}</p>
Political position	Right-wing ^[15]
National affiliation	People's Alliance
European affiliation	Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe
International affiliation	<i>None</i>
Colors	<div> Orange</div> <div> Blue</div>
Grand National Assembly	290 / 600 <div><div><div> </div></div><div><div> </div></div></div>
Metropolitan municipalities	18 / 30 <div><div><div> </div></div><div><div> </div></div></div>
District municipalities	800 / 1,351 <div><div><div> </div></div><div><div> </div></div></div>
Provincial councillors	779 / 1,251 <div><div><div> </div></div><div><div> </div></div></div>
Municipal Assemblies	10,530 / 20,498 <div><div><div> </div></div><div><div> </div></div></div>
Website	
www.akparti.org.tr/english	
<div> <div>Politics of Turkey</div> <div>Political parties</div> <div>Elections</div> </div>	

The party's foreign policy has also been widely described as Neo-Ottomanist^[30] an ideology that promotes renewed Turkish political engagement in the former territories of its predecessor state, the Ottoman Empire. However, the party's leadership has also rejected this label.^[31]

European affiliation

In 2005, the party was granted observer membership in the European People's Party (EPP).

In November 2013, the party left the EPP to join the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (now Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe) instead.^[32] This move was attributed to the AKP's disappointment not to be granted full membership in the EPP, while it was admitted as a full member of the AECR.^[33] It drew criticism in both national and European discourses, as the driving force of Turkey's aspirations to become a member of the European Union decided to join a largely euro-sceptic alliance, abandoning the more influential pro-European EPP, feeding suspicions that AKP wants to join a watered down, not a closely integrated EU.^[34]

History

Closure cases

The Justice and Development Party has faced two closure cases in its history. Just 10 days before the national elections of 2002, Turkey's chief prosecutor, Sabih Kanadoğlu, asked the Turkish constitutional court to close the Justice and Development Party, which was leading in the polls at that time. The chief prosecutor charged the Justice and Development Party with abusing the law and justice. He based his case on the fact that the party's leader had been banned from political life for reading an Islamist poem, and thus the party had no standing in elections. The European Commission had previously criticised Turkey for banning the party's leader from participating in elections.^[35]

The party again faced a closure trial in 2008. At an international press conference in Spain, Erdoğan answered a question of a journalist by saying, "What if the headscarf is a symbol? Even if it were a political symbol, does that give [one the] right to ban it? Could you bring prohibitions to symbols?" These statements led to a joint proposal of the Justice and Development Party and the far-right Nationalist Movement Party for changing the constitution and the law to lift a ban on women wearing headscarves at state universities. Soon afterwards, Turkey's chief prosecutor, Abdurrahman Yaşınkaya, asked the Constitutional Court of Turkey to close down the party on charges of violating the separation of religion and state in Turkey.^[36] The closure request failed by only one vote, as only 6 of the 11 judges ruled in favour, with 7 required; however, 10 out of 11 judges agreed that the Justice and Development Party had become "a center for anti-secular activities", leading to a loss of 50% of the state funding for the party.^[37]

Elections

2002 general elections

The AKP won a sweeping victory in the 2002 elections, which saw every party previously represented in the Grand National Assembly ejected from the chamber. In the process, it won a two-thirds majority of seats, becoming the first Turkish party in 11 years to win an outright majority. Erdoğan, as the leader of the biggest party in parliament, would have been normally given the task to form a cabinet. However according to the Turkish Constitution Article 109 the Prime Ministers had to be also a representative of the Turkish Parliament. Erdoğan, who was banned from holding any political office after a 1994 incident in which he read a poem deemed pro-Islamist by judges, was therefore not. As a result, Gül became prime minister. It survived the crisis over the 2003 invasion of Iraq despite a massive back bench rebellion where over a hundred AKP MPs joined those of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) in parliament to prevent the government from allowing the United States to launch a Northern offensive in Iraq from Turkish territory. Later, Erdoğan's ban was abolished with the help of the CHP and Erdoğan became prime minister by being selected to parliament after a by-election in Siirt.

The AKP has undertaken structural reforms, and during its rule Turkey has seen rapid growth and an end to its three decade long period of high inflation rates. Inflation had fallen to 8.8% by 2004.

Influential business publications such as the Economist consider the AKP's government the most successful in Turkey in decades.^[38]

2004 local elections

In the local elections of 2004, the AKP won 42% of the votes, making inroads against the secular Republican People's Party (CHP) on the South and West Coasts, and against the Social Democratic People's Party which is supported by some Kurds in the South-East of Turkey.

In January 2005, the AKP was admitted as an observer member in the European People's Party (EPP). However, it left the EPP to join the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR) in 2013.



Party leader Erdoğan on a poster thanking the people for the election results.

2007 elections

	1. dilim en yoksul	2. dilim	3. dilim orta gelir	4. dilim	5. dilim en zengin	Toplam
AKP	43,9	44,9	35,8	28,8	18,9	39,4
CHP	6,8	12,2	18,5	27,6	40,5	16,1
MHP	8,1	11,0	13,5	11,4	13,5	11,6

Voter base by monthly household income. AKP is the largest party in group 1, 2, 3 and 4, while CHP is the largest in group 5, the richest 20% of Turkey.

On April 14, 2007, an estimated 300,000 people marched in Ankara to protest the possible candidacy of Erdoğan in the 2007 presidential election, afraid that if elected as President, he would alter the secular nature of the Turkish state.^[39] Erdoğan announced on April 24, 2007 that the party had decided to nominate Abdullah Gül as the AKP candidate in the presidential election.^[40] The protests continued over the next several weeks, with over one million reported at an April 29 rally in Istanbul,^{[41][42]} tens of thousands reported at separate protests on May 4 in Manisa and Çanakkale,^[43] and one million in İzmir on May 13.^[44]

Early parliamentary elections were called after the failure of the parties in parliament to agree on the next Turkish president. The opposition parties boycotted the parliamentary vote and deadlocked the election process. At the same time, Erdoğan claimed the failure to elect a president was a failure of the Turkish political system and proposed to modify the constitution.

The AKP achieved victory in the rescheduled July 22, 2007 elections with 46.6% of the vote, translating into control of 341 of the 550 available parliamentary seats. Although the AKP received significantly more votes in 2007 than in 2002, the number of parliamentary seats they controlled decreased due to the rules of the Turkish electoral system. However, they retained a comfortable ruling majority.^[18] "No Stopping, Push On!" was the slogan of the Justice and Development Party in the general elections of 2007.

Territorially, the elections of 2007 saw a major advance for the AKP, with the party outpolling the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party in traditional Kurdish strongholds such as Van and Mardin, as well as outpolling the secular-left CHP in traditionally secular areas such as Antalya and Artvin. Overall, the AKP secured a plurality of votes in 68 of Turkey's 81 provinces, with its strongest vote of 71% coming from Bingöl. Its weakest vote, a mere 12%, came from Tunceli, the only Turkish province where the Alevi form a majority.^[45] Abdullah Gül was elected President in late August with 339 votes in the third round – the first at which simple majority is required – after deadlock in the first two rounds, in which a two-thirds majority is needed.

2007 constitutional referendum

After the opposition parties deadlocked the 2007 presidential election by boycotting the parliament, the ruling AKP proposed a constitutional reform package. The reform package was first vetoed by President Sezer. Then he applied to the Turkish constitutional court about the reform package, because the president is unable to veto amendments for the second time. The court did not find any problems in the package and 69% of the voters supported the constitutional changes.

The reforms consisted of:

- electing the president by popular vote instead of by parliament;
- reducing the presidential term from seven years to five;
- allowing the president to stand for re-election for a second term;
- holding general elections every four years instead of five;
- reducing the quorum of lawmakers needed for parliamentary decisions from 367 to 184.



A rally of the Justice and Development Party in 2007

2009 local elections

The Turkish local elections of 2009 took place during the financial crisis of 2007–2010. After the success of the AKP in the 2007 general elections, the party saw a decline in the local elections of 2009. In these elections the AKP received 39% of the vote, 3% less than in the local elections of 2004. Still, the AKP remained the dominating party in Turkey. The second party CHP received 23% of the vote and the third party MHP received 16% of the vote. The AKP won in Turkey's largest cities: Ankara and Istanbul.^[46]

2010 constitutional referendum

Reforming the Constitution was one of the main pledges of the AKP during the 2007 election campaign. The main opposition party CHP was not interested in altering the Constitution on a big scale, making it impossible to form a Constitutional Commission (*Anayasa Uzlaşma Komisyonu*).^[47] The amendments lacked the two-thirds majority needed to instantly become law, but secured 336 votes in the 550 seat parliament – enough to put the proposals to a referendum. The reform package included a number of issues: such as the right of individuals to appeal to the highest court, the creation of the ombudsman's office, the possibility to negotiate a nationwide labour contract, positive exceptions for female citizens, the ability of civilian courts to convict members of the military, the right of civil servants to go on strike, a privacy law and the structure of the Constitutional Court. The referendum was agreed by a majority of 58%.

2014 elections

In the presidential election of 2014, the AKP's long time leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected President. In the party's first extraordinary congress, former foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu was unanimously elected unopposed as party leader and took over as Prime Minister on 28 August 2014. Davutoğlu stepped down as Prime Minister on 4 May 2016 following policy disagreements with President Erdoğan. Presidential aide Cemil Ertem said to Turkish TV that the country and its economy would stabilize further "when a prime minister more closely aligned with President Erdoğan takes office".^[48]

2015 general election

In the general election held on 7 June, the AKP gained 40.87% of the vote and 258 seats in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Turkish: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, TBMM). Though it still remains the biggest party in Turkey, the AKP lost its status as the majority party and the power to form a single-party government. Until then it had held this majority without interruption for 13 years since it had come to power in 2002. Also, in this election, the AKP was pushing to gain 330 seats in the Grand National Assembly so that it could put a series of constitutional changes to a referendum, one of them was to switch Turkey from the current parliamentary government to an American-style executive presidency government. This pursuit met with a series of oppositions and criticism from the opposition parties and their supporters, fearing the measure would give more unchecked power to the current President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been drawing fierce criticisms both from home and abroad for his active role in the election, abandoning the traditional presidential role of maintaining a more neutral and impartial position in elections by his predecessors in title. The result of the Kurdish issues-centred Peoples' Democratic Party (Turkey), HDP, breaking through the 10% threshold to achieve 13.12% out of the total votes cast and gaining 80 seats in the Grand National Assembly in this election successfully derailed the AKP from maintaining its hold of power as the majority party and a single-party government as well as enacting a referendum necessary to change the constitution. The AKP is now forced to form a coalition government in negotiation with other parties.

Merger with People's Voice Party

In September 2012, two-year-old conservative-oriented People's Voice Party (HAS Parti) dissolved itself and joined the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) with a majority of its delegates' votes.^[49] In July 2012, following long-held speculation that former HSP leader Numan Kurtulmuş was on Prime Minister Erdoğan's mind as his possible successor as party head, Erdoğan personally proposed to Kurtulmuş the idea of merging the parties under the umbrella of the AKP

Criticism

Critics have accused the AKP of having a 'hidden agenda' despite their public endorsement of secularism and the party maintains informal relations and support for the Muslim Brotherhood.^[50] Both the party's domestic and foreign policy has been perceived to be Pan-Islamist or Neo-Ottoman, advocating a revival of Ottoman culture often at the expense of secular republican principles, while increasing regional presence in former Ottoman territories.^{[12][51][52]}

The AKP are staunchly "anti-academic" with many academics, researchers and teachers being sacked from their positions since the failed coup attempt in 2016. An alleged 13,000 tons of textbooks were scrapped and the rest expunged of 'terrorist' content. Primary, lower secondary and secondary school students spent most of the first day of school watching videos about the 'triumph of democracy' over the coup plotters, and listening to speeches equating the civilian counter-coup that aborted the takeover with historic Ottoman victories going back 1000 years. Campaigns are being organised to release higher education personnel and to drop charges against them for peaceful exercise of academic freedom.^[53]

Imprisoning of political activists continue, the chair of Amnesty Turkey has been jailed for standing up to the AKP on trumped up "terrorist charges". These charges have drawn widespread international condemnation, including from the US State Department, the EU and many international and domestic human rights organisations.^[54]

Party leaders

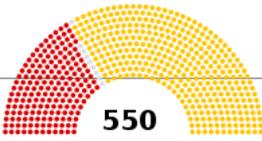
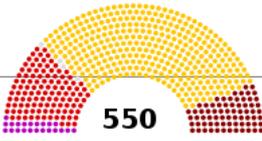
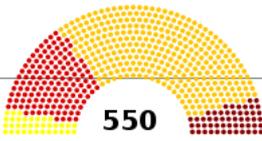
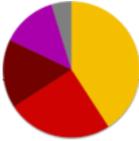
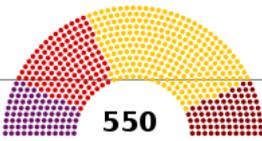
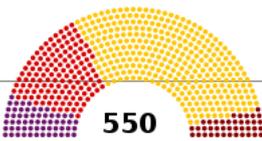
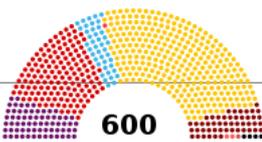
No	Leader (Birth–Death)	Portrait	Constituency	Took Office	Left Office	Leadership elections	Term length
	<u>Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</u> (1954–)		Siirt (2003) İstanbul (I) (2007, 2011)	14 August 2001	27 August 2014	2003 Ordinary Congress 2006 Ordinary Congress 2009 Ordinary Congress 2012 Ordinary Congress	13 years, 13 days
	<u>Ahmet Davutoğlu</u> (1959–)		Konya	27 August 2014	22 May 2016	2014 Extraordinary Congress 2015 Ordinary Congress	1 year, 269 days
	<u>Binali Yıldırım</u> (1955–)		İstanbul (I) (2002) Erzincan (2007) İzmir (II) (2011) İzmir (I) (Nov 2015)	22 May 2016	21 May 2017	2016 Extraordinary Congress	364 days
	<u>Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</u> (1954–)		Incumbent President	21 May 2017	Incumbent	2017 Extraordinary Congress 2018 Ordinary Congress	

Election results

Presidential elections

Presidential election record of the Justice and Development Party (AKP)							
Election	Candidate	First round		Second round		Outcome	Map
		Votes	%	Votes	%		
<u>10 August 2014</u>	 <u>Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</u>	21,000,143	51.79%	N/A	N/A	Erdoğan elected	
<u>24 June 2018</u>	 <u>Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</u>	26,324,482	52.59%	N/A	N/A	Erdoğan elected	

General elections

General election record of the Justice and Development Party (AKP)						
■ 0–10% ■ 10–20% ■ 20–30% ■ 30–40% ■ 40–50% ■ 50–60% ■ 60–70% ■ 70–80%						
Election	Leader	Vote	Seats	Result	Outcome	Map
3 November 2002		 10,808,229	 363 / 550 (▲ 363)	34.28% ▲ 34.28 pp	#1st	
22 July 2007	 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	 16,327,291	 341 / 550 (▼ 22)	46.58% ▲ 12.30 pp	#1st	
12 June 2011		 21,399,082	 327 / 550 (▼ 14)	49.83% ▲ 3.25 pp	#1st	
7 June 2015	 Ahmet Davutoğlu	 18,867,411	 258 / 550 (▼ 69)	40.87% ▼ 8.96 pp	#1st Hung parliament	
1 November 2015	Ahmet Davutoğlu	 23,681,926	 317 / 550 (▲ 59)	49.50% ▲ 8.63 pp	#1st	
24 June 2018	 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	21,333,172	 295 / 600 (▼ 21)	42.56% ▼ 6.94 pp	#1st AKP-MHP Majority	

Local elections

Local election record of the Justice and Development Party (AKP)									
Election	Metropolitan		District		Municipal		Provincial		Map
	Vote	Mayors	Vote	Mayors	Vote	Councillors	Vote	Councillors	
28 March 2004	46.07% 4,822,636	12 / 16	40.19% 9,674,306	1,750 / 3,193	40.33% 9,635,145	16,637 / 34,477	41.67% 13,447,287	2,276 / 3,208	
29 March 2009	42.19% 7,672,280	10 / 16	38.64% 12,449,187	1,442 / 2,903	38.16% 12,237,325	14,732 / 32,393	38.39% 15,353,553	1,889 / 3,281	
30 March 2014	45.54% 15,898,025	18 / 30	43.13% 17,952,504	800 / 1,351	42.87% 17,802,976	10,530 / 20,500	45.43% 4,622,484	779 / 1,251	

Referendums

Election date	Party leader	Yes vote	Percentage	No vote	Percentage	AKP's support
October 21, 2007	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	19,422,714	68.95	8,744,947	31.05	Yes
September 12, 2010	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	21,789,180	57.88	15,854,113	42.12	Yes
April 16, 2017	Binali Yıldırım	25,157,025	51.41	23,777,091	48.59	Yes

Footnotes

- ^[55] "AK PARTİ" (in all capital letters) is the self-declared abbreviation of the name of the party, as stated in Article 3 of the party charter, while "AKP" is mostly preferred by its opponents; the supporters prefer "AK PARTİ" since the word "ak" in Turkish means "white", "clean", or "unblemished," lending a positive impression.^[56] The Chief Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals initially used "AKP", but after an objection from the party^[57] "AKP" was replaced with "Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi" (without abbreviation) in documents.

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See also

- Gezi Park protests
- 2013 corruption scandal in Turkey

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External links

- Official website (in English) (in Turkish)
- AK Youth (in Turkish)
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- AK Kanal (in Turkish)
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- <https://www.wikileaks.org/berats-box> (English and Turkish)

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