

# STATUS QUO IN TURKEY: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE NEW TERM FOR RECEP TAYYIP ERDOAN

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When [Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#)'s Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, riding widespread resentment against the establishment amid economic woes, he was a political outsider — an Islamist in a system dominated by Kemalist secularists. Twenty years later, Mr. Erdoan is the establishment — the military, traditionally the guardian of the old order, is under his thumb, institutions are at his command and the AKP, with close links to the ulema, remains a hegemonic political machine. But the economic and political situation of 2023 is comparable with that of 2002. Faced with a deepening economic crisis and accusations of backsliding democracy and freedoms, there has been widespread resentment against his long reign. The Opposition united to capitalise on this anger and [managed to deny him a first round victory](#) on May 14, but in Sunday's run-off, [he won 52.1% of the vote share, against Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's 47.9%](#). Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu has accepted the outcome, but called the election process "the most unfair in years". He has a point. Mr. Erdoan and his allies controlled the big media, shaping the information flow. State institutions, including the religious directorate (Diyanet), which controls mosques and appoints Imams, amplified the AKP propaganda. The President accused the Opposition of having ties with "terrorists" as a mainstream Kurdish party was backing his rival. Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu, a former bureaucrat from the minority Alevi community, led a spirited campaign, but failed to overcome the AKP's Islamist populism.

Mr. Erdoan, arguably the most powerful Turkish leader since Mustafa Kemal 'Atatürk', has reshaped the country's polity and society over the past 20 years. Kemal Atatürk, who abolished the Ottoman Caliphate and secularised Turkey, saw the clergy as a threat to his vision for the country. Tensions between Kemalism and Islamism have always been there in Turkey's modern history. But until Mr. Erdoan's rise to power, no Islamist leader had managed to upend the system. While doing so, he amassed powers, rewrote the Constitution, turning it into an executive presidency, got himself elected as the all-powerful President, stifled dissent, stepped up the war against Kurdish rebels, and jailed political rivals. Yet, this election was his biggest challenge. That he had to go into the second round, and with a lead of just three points, should remind him that Turkish society remains polarised. The battered economy needs urgent attention. A new term is an opportunity for Mr. Erdoan, whose legacy has already been marred by his authoritarian tendencies and mismanagement of the economy, to right the wrongs and offer a new inclusive beginning. But it is unclear whether Turkey's Islamist leader is ready for such a change.

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