

# EVALUATING ELECTION RESULTS IN TÜRKİYE AFTER SEPTEMBER 12 BASED ON MACROECONOMIC DATA

Ozan ÖRMECİ

<sup>1</sup>Prof. Dr., Üsküdar University, Istanbul, Türkiye.  
ORCID: 0000-0001-8850-6089.

## Abstract:

This study examines the parliamentary elections held in Türkiye from 1983 to the present (1983, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1999, 2002, 2007, 2011, 2015 June-November general elections, and the 2018 and 2023 parliamentary elections held after the transition to the presidential system in 2017) have been evaluated based on macroeconomic data such as inflation, unemployment rate, and economic growth performance. The study aims to create a statistical table and analysis of the conditions under which three different scenarios emerge: the consolidation of power by ruling party, the maintenance of power despite losing strength, and a change in power. In this sense, the study exhibits the characteristics of numerical research based on statistical data. The study concludes that, in Türkiye, ruling governments must achieve a minimum level of economic success to maintain or strengthen their power, and if they fail to do so, the public may turn to changing the government. The numerical findings related to this will be detailed in the research.

**Keywords:** *Turkish Politics, Economic performance, Inflation, Unemployment, Economic growth, Voting behavior.*

## Introduction

Despite years of comprehensive reforms in Türkiye (Turkey), the current constitutional order (status quo) was established by the military coup of September 12, 1980. Although the military intervention is an open foul against democracy, it should be noted that military governments in Türkiye did not aim for a permanent government, and the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) restored democracy each time (1960, 1971, and 1980) after ending the anarchy and chaos in the country. In that sense, the military regime that took over with the 1980 coup had become more competitive

and shaped by popular preferences with the adoption of the 1982 constitution and the inauguration of civilian administrations elected by popular vote since 1983. Furthermore, although Türkiye experienced the February 28 process in 1997, another form of military intervention, the Republican rallies and e-memorandum incident in 2007, and a failed coup attempt in 2016, there has been no successful military coup in Türkiye since 1980 in the classical sense, and the Turkish people have always determined the governments through the free exercise of their votes in competitive elections.

This study examines the parliamentary elections held in Türkiye from 1983 to the present (1983, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1999, 2002, 2007, 2011, 2015 June-November general elections as well as the 2018 and 2023 parliamentary elections held after the transition to the presidential system in 2017), which means a total of 12 elections; by evaluating macroeconomic data such as inflation, unemployment rate, and economic growth performance. In this direction, an attempt has been made to create a statistical table and analysis regarding the conditions for the formation of three different situations: a) the consolidation of power by those in power, b) the preservation of power despite losing power, and c) a change in power. In this sense, the study exhibits the characteristics of numerical research based on statistical data. The study concludes that for governments in power in Türkiye to maintain or consolidate their power, they must achieve a minimum level of economic success; if they fail to do so, the public may turn to changing the government. The numerical findings related to this will be explained in detail in the study.

However, some limitations regarding the study can also be mentioned. First of all, politics is a broad field, and the economy is not its only parameter; factors such as emotions or security concerns can also significantly influence election results in Türkiye and other countries. For example, in Türkiye, two general elections (June 2015 and November 2015) took place within a few months, and the results changed significantly. Considering the terrorist incidents and security risks that occurred between the two elections, it can be argued that these factors had a greater impact on the election results than the economy. In addition, since the referendum in 2017 led to the transition to a presidential system, the 2018 and 2023 general elections were held in the shadow of the presidential elections, and it is possible that voters did not behave consistently in order to send a political message in these simultaneous elections and opted for different choices. Therefore, this study should be regarded as an effort to explain one aspect of the complex and difficult-to-interpret phenomenon of political (voting) behavior in Türkiye through economic factors.

## 1. Macroeconomic Data Related to Elections<sup>1</sup>

**1983 General Elections:**<sup>2</sup> Following the military coup of September 12, 1980, a return to democratic order in Türkiye was only possible with the adoption of a new constitution through a referendum in 1982 and the 1983 general elections. Although two main parties, the military-backed center-left People's Party (HP) and the center-right Nationalist Democracy Party (MDP), were formed before the election, the Motherland Party (ANAP) and its leader, Turgut Özal, who were later allowed to participate in the election, unexpectedly won the election with 45.14% of the vote and established a single-party government, taking power from the National Security Council (MGK), the junta government.

Looking at Türkiye's macroeconomic data prior to the 1983 general elections, the following picture emerges:

### *Annual Inflation:*

1981: 37.61%

1982: 29.14%

1983: 31.39%

### *Annual Economic Growth Rate:*

1981: 4.86%

1982: 3.56%

1983: 4.97%

No records are available regarding unemployment rates.

**1987 General Elections:** Following four years of ANAP and Turgut Özal rule, the 1987 general elections went down in history as an election in which ANAP retained power despite its declining performance, due to the emergence of stronger political parties and leaders on the center-left and

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<sup>1</sup> The macroeconomic data used in the study were obtained from the Macro Trends and World Bank (WB) websites.

<sup>2</sup> The election data was obtained from the official Turkish Supreme Election Board (YSK) website.

center-right, coinciding with the 1987 referendum in which the public allowed politically banned leaders to return to politics. Indeed, despite its 36.31% decline, ANAP retained power against Süleyman Demirel's True Path Party (DYP) and Erdal İnönü's Social Democratic People's Party (SHP) and continued its single-party rule.

Looking at Türkiye's macroeconomic data prior to the 1987 general elections, the following picture emerges:

***Inflation:***

1985: 44.96%

1986: 34.61%

1987: 38.86%

***Economic Growth:***

1985: 4.24%

1986: 7.01%

1987: 9.49%

No records are available for unemployment rates.

**1991 General Elections:** Following Turgut Özal's election as President, ANAP, led by Mesut Yılmaz, entered the election, but this time finished behind DYP, coming in second. SHP came in third, and in this fragmented landscape, a DYP-SHP coalition was formed, with Süleyman Demirel as Prime Minister and Erdal İnönü as Deputy Prime Minister. During the DYP-SHP (later CHP) coalition period, which saw many reforms in the name of democratization and civilianization, the rise of Political Islam in Türkiye and the chronic problems caused by the trauma of PKK terrorism continued.

Looking at Türkiye's macroeconomic data prior to the 1991 general elections, the following picture emerges:

***Inflation:***

1989: 63.27%

1990: 60.30%

1991: 65.98%

***Unemployment Rate:***

1991: 8.21%

***Economic Growth:***

1989: 0.29%

1990: 9.27%

1991: 0.72%

**1995 General Elections:** The shockwave that began with the Islamist Welfare Party (RP), led by Prof. Dr. Necmettin Erbakan, winning the Istanbul and Ankara metropolitan municipalities in the 1994 local elections, intensified further with the RP finishing first in the 1995 general elections. DYP came second and ANAP third in the elections. Among the leftist parties, Bülent Ecevit's Democratic Left Party (DSP) came fourth, while Deniz Baykal's Republican People's Party (CHP) only managed to come fifth. After the election, negotiations for a possible DYP-ANAP coalition, which was supported by the mainstream media, failed to yield results, and a coalition government called "Refahyol" was formed between the RP and the DYP. However, the political crises created by the Islamist Welfare Party with the army and secular segments in the country, combined with the harsh reactions of external powers such as the US (United States of America) and Israel, which were very influential in Türkiye at the time, to Islamist foreign policy, led to the resignation of Prime Minister Erbakan and the Refahyol government after a campaign period supported by the army, media, and public, known as the February 28 process (28 Şubat süreci). After Refahyol, the ANASOL-D (ANAP-DSP-DTP) government was formed under the leadership of ANAP Chairman Mesut Yılmaz with external support from the CHP.

Looking at Türkiye's macroeconomic data prior to the 1995 general elections, the following picture emerges:

***Inflation:***

1993: 66.09%

1994: 105.21%

1995: 89.11%

***Unemployment Rate:***

1993: 8.96%

1994: 8.58%

1995: 7.64%

***Economic Growth:***

1993: 7.65%

1994: -4.67%

1995: 7.88%

**1999 General Elections:** Following the turbulent period after February 28, Türkiye entered the elections in a nationalist atmosphere, with the capture of PKK terrorist leader Abdullah Öcalan during Bülent Ecevit's interim premiership. The DSP won the elections, partly due to the impact of Öcalan's capture. The MHP came second, again with the effect of the mood of victory after Öcalan's capture by Turkish Special Forces. On the other hand, the Virtue Party (FP), led by Recai Kutan, which was established as the successor to the Islamist RP, came third; the previous major parties, ANAP, came fourth, and DYP came fifth. The CHP failed to enter parliament, falling below the 10% threshold. After the elections, a three-party coalition government consisting of the DSP, MHP, and ANAP was formed, with Bülent Ecevit as Prime Minister and Devlet Bahçeli and Mesut Yılmaz as Deputy Prime Ministers.<sup>3</sup>

Looking at Türkiye's macroeconomic data prior to the 1999 general elections, the following picture emerges:

***Inflation:***

1997: 85.67%

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<sup>3</sup> Ozan Örmeci (2025), "A New Islamist Political Party in Türkiye: The Case of New Welfare (YRP)", *Journal of Dalian University of Technology*, Vol. 32, no: 10, p. 185.

1998: 84.64%

1999: 64.87%

***Unemployment Rate:***

1997: 6.84%

1998: 6.89%

1999: 7.69%

***Economic Growth:***

1997: 7.58%

1998: 2.40%

1999: -3.26%

**2002 General Elections:** Following the 2001 economic crisis, which shattered the positive atmosphere created by Türkiye's acceptance as a candidate country for the European Union (EU) at the 1999 Helsinki Summit, the 2002 general elections were held. The Justice and Development Party (AK Parti/AKP), a newly formed right-wing party led by the charismatic young leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who had attracted attention with his high performance as Mayor of Istanbul and his sharp political statements, and who had been briefly imprisoned for a speech he made, emerged victorious and secured an absolute majority in the Grand National Assembly with 34% of the vote. The only other party to enter the TBMM was the CHP led by Deniz Baykal, with a total vote of around 19%, while all other political parties from the previous period were punished by voters and failed to pass the electoral threshold.

Looking at Türkiye's macroeconomic data prior to the 2002 general elections, the following picture emerges:

***Inflation:***

2000: 54.2%

2001: 54.40%

2002: 44.96%

***Unemployment Rate:***

2000: 6.50%

2001: 8.38%

2002: 10.36%

***Economic Growth:***

2000: 6.93%

2001: -5.75%

2002: 6.45%

**2007 General Elections:** Due to the Islamist rhetoric of the AK Parti and Prime Minister Erdoğan, secular concerns became the target of high-level circles. In those years, a President of the Republic whose wife was wearing a headscarf was still deemed incompatible with state traditions, Turkish-American relations were in a serious crisis due to the rejection of the March 1, 2003 memorandum, and a politically turbulent period marked by events such as the Republican rallies and the memorandum published from the Turkish Armed Forces' website, was present. In this context, the presidential election in the Grand National Assembly led to a crisis. But strangely enough, in this politically turbulent period, Türkiye was remarkably successful economically and democratically thanks to its EU harmonization reforms. The government had the legitimacy it gained from the international community through its support for a federal solution in Cyprus and its strong economic performance. The government emerged from the election with increased support and a strengthened position. In this way, the AK Parti and Erdoğan's government continued on its path with greater strength and began transforming the system.

Looking at Türkiye's macroeconomic data prior to the 2007 general elections, the following picture emerges:

***Inflation:***

2005: 8.18%

2006: 9.60%



2007: 8.76%

***Unemployment Rate:***

2005: 10.64%

2006: 10.23%

2007: 10.29%

***Economic Growth:***

2005: 8.99%

2006: 6.95%

2007: 5.04%

**2011 General Elections:** Following the 2007 elections, exaggerated legal operations were carried out against nationalist-militarist groups believed to support the coup-supporting *ancien regime* (the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials) – operations that later became largely obsolete. While steps were being taken towards a new political order in Türkiye with the start of the resolution process in 2009, aimed at getting the terrorist organization PKK to lay down its arms, and the acceptance of the 2010 constitutional referendum, Erdoğan and the AK Parti emerged stronger from the 2011 general elections.

Looking at Türkiye's macroeconomic data prior to the 2011 general elections, the following picture emerges:

***Inflation:***

2009: 6.25%

2010: 8.57%

2011: 6.47%

***Unemployment Rate:***

2009: 14.03%

2010: 11.88%

2011: 9.79%

***Economic Growth:***

2009: -4.82%

2010: 8.43%

2011: 11.20%

**2015 General Elections:** Instability in Türkiye's peace process, problems in foreign policy with the US and EU, ongoing political friction and confrontation between the AK Parti and the old elites and the CHP, and most importantly, the threats posed by ISIS and similar religiously motivated radical terrorist organizations, which began in 2011, the AK Parti, led by Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, entered the elections with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan elected as President in 2014. In the June elections, the AK Parti fell below 41% and failed to achieve the majority needed to form a government on its own. However, as a result of the failure to form a government, in the November 2015 elections, the AK Parti managed to retain power despite a partial loss of votes, due to major security risks experienced in the period between the two elections. Since there was no significant change in macroeconomic data between June and November 2015, the November results were included in our analysis.

Looking at Türkiye's macroeconomic data prior to the 2015 general elections:

***Inflation:***

2013: 7.49%

2014: 8.85%

2015: 7.67%

***Unemployment Rate:***

2013: 9.71%

2014: 9.90%

2015: 10.30%

***Economic Growth:***

2013: 8.49%

2014: 4.94%

2015: 6.08%

**2018 Elections:** The 2018 elections, held during a period of major political transformation following the failed July 15, 2016, coup attempt, should be considered primarily parliamentary elections given the transition to the presidential system of government in 2017. This is because a presidential election was held concurrently with these elections, and AK Parti Chairman Recep Tayyip Erdoğan defeated CHP candidate Muharrem İnce, continuing his term as the 12th President.

Looking at Türkiye's macroeconomic data prior to the 2018 general elections:

***Inflation:***

2016: 7.78%

2017: 11.14%

2018: 16.33%

***Unemployment Rate:***

2016: 10.90%

2017: 10.92%

2018: 10.96%

***Economic Growth:***

2016: 3.32%

2017: 7.50%

2018: 3.01%

**2023 Elections:**<sup>4</sup> Ahead of the 2023 general elections, expectations for a change in government had peaked in the international public opinion due to Türkiye's major earthquake disaster, ongoing economic problems (high inflation, depreciation of the Turkish lira, etc.), corruption cases that naturally occurred due to the government becoming very powerful, unchecked, and uncontrollable, and Ankara's troubled relations with the Western world (especially with the Joe Biden administration in the US). However, elections resulted in an unexpected landslide victory for AK Parti and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Thus, Erdoğan was elected president for the second time under the presidential system, defeating Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu of the CHP, while the AK Parti, despite suffering partial losses in the parliament, secured its majority in the Grand National Assembly thanks to the People's Alliance (*Cumhur İttifakı*) it formed with the MHP and several smaller right-wing (BBP, YRP, HÜDA PAR, BTP, DYP) and left-wing (DSP) parties.

Looking at Türkiye's macroeconomic data ahead of the 2023 general elections, the following picture emerges:

***Inflation:***

2021: 19.60%

2022: 72.31%

2023: 53.86%

***Unemployment Rate:***

2021: 11.97%

2022: 10.47%

2023: 9.39%

***Economic Growth:***

2021: 11.44%

2022: 5.53%

2023: 5.11%

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<sup>4</sup> Summaries of some elections are taken from this source; Ozan Örmeci (2023), *2023 Turkish Elections in All Aspects*, Berlin: Peter Lang.

## 2. Interpretation of Data

After analyzing ten general elections (1983, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1999, 2002, 2007, 2011, June 2015, and November 2015) and two parliamentary elections (2018 and 2023) held in the country between 1983 and 2023, based on the 1982 Constitution established after the military coup of September 12, 1980, it is possible to make some interesting observations and statistical inferences based on three different election scenarios:

1. The government emerges stronger from the election,
2. The government loses power but retains control,
3. Change in power.

These can be listed as follows:

- ✓ In elections where the government increased its vote share and emerged stronger (2007 and 2011), annual inflation was below 9%, average annual economic growth was 7% or higher, and unemployment did not exceed 12%.
- ✓ In elections where the government retained power despite losing votes (1987, 2015, 2018, and 2023), annual inflation was kept below 12%, economic growth exceeded 4.6%, and the annual unemployment rate did not exceed 11%.
- ✓ In elections where there was a change in power (1983, 1991, 1995, 1999, and 2002), high inflation exceeding 32%, or even 50% if the 1983 general elections are excluded, economic growth performance below 4.5%, and unemployment rates above 7% were observed.

**Table I.** Classification of elections held in Türkiye between 1983 and 2023 according to macroeconomic data

| Result | Inflation Situation Analysis | Economic Growth Situation Analysis | Unemployment Situation Analysis |
|--------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|--------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|

|                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The government emerging stronger from the election (2007, 2011)               | <i>Annual inflation rate below 9% in the last three years before the elections.<sup>5</sup></i>                                                                                                                                                                   | <i>An average economic growth rate of 7% or higher before the election.<sup>6</sup></i>              | <i>An unemployment rate not exceeding an average of 12% in the last three years before the election.<sup>7</sup></i>  |
| The government retaining power while losing strength (1987, 2015, 2018, 2023) | <i>Inflation below an average of 12% in the last three years before the elections in 2015 and 2018.</i><br><br><i>High inflation rates exceeding 39% in the last three years in the 1987 and 2023 elections, which could be considered anomalies.<sup>8</sup></i> | <i>Average economic growth of over 4.6% in the last three years before the election.<sup>9</sup></i> | <i>An unemployment rate not exceeding an average of 11% in the last three years before the election.<sup>10</sup></i> |
| Change of government (1983, 1991, 1995, 1999, 2002)                           | <i>Inflation exceeding 32% in the last three years before the elections. In fact, excluding the 1983</i>                                                                                                                                                          | <i>Economic growth performance below an average of 4.5% in the last three</i>                        | <i>An unemployment rate exceeding an average of 7% in the</i>                                                         |

<sup>5</sup> Before the 2007 elections: 8.84%; Before the 2011 elections: 7.09%.

<sup>6</sup> In the last 3 years before the 2007 elections: 6.99%; In the last 2 years before the 2011 elections (not counting 2009, the year of the global economic crisis): 9.81.

<sup>7</sup> Before the 2007 elections: 10.38%; Before the 2011 elections: 11.9%.

<sup>8</sup> 1987: 39.47%; 2015: 8%; 2018: 11.75%; 2023: 48.59%.

<sup>9</sup> 1987: 6.91%; 2015: 6.50%; 2018: 4.60%; 2023: 7.36%.

<sup>10</sup> 2018: 8.39%; 2023: 10.61%.

|  |                                                                                                                                                    |                                                |                                                         |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <i>elections, which were the first elections after the coup, inflation exceeded 50% in the last three years before the elections.<sup>11</sup></i> | <i>years before the election.<sup>12</sup></i> | <i>last few years before the election.<sup>13</sup></i> |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|

In this regard, it is understood that economic performance, as expressed by macroeconomic data, is quite important for the continuity of governments in Türkiye. To summarize, specifically in Türkiye, economic growth below 4.5%, unemployment exceeding 10%, and inflation exceeding 30% are warning signs for a government. Conversely, an inflation rate below 10%, economic growth of 7% or above, and unemployment levels not exceeding 10% guarantee the success of governments in Türkiye.

However, extraordinary developments in the superstructure factors of politics (such as the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan before the 1999 elections or the public's renewed support for the AK Parti and Erdoğan in the atmosphere of unrest and polarization created by the earthquake before the 2023 elections) can also be effective, alongside economic factors, especially in societies such as Türkiye, where emotional tendencies are strong. This emotional side of voting behavior is up to the discipline of Political Psychology for further analysis.

Focusing on the macroeconomic data on the other hand, it can be concluded that these statistics prove the necessity of the government to address economic issues in order to secure another electoral victory in the next presidential and parliamentary elections.

## Conclusion

<sup>11</sup> 1983: 32.71%; 1991: 63.18%; 1995: 86.80%; 1999: 78.39%; 2002: 51.18%.

<sup>12</sup> 1983: 4.46%; 1991: 3.42%; 1995: 3.62%; 1999: 2.24%; 2002: 2.54%.

<sup>13</sup> 1991: 8.21%; 1995: 8.39%; 1999: 7.14%; 2002: 8.41%.

In conclusion, this study analyzes changes in power its consolidation, maintenance, or collapse following elections held in Türkiye from 1983 to the present, using macroeconomic data. To this end, Macro Trends and World Bank data were used, along with brief histories of the elections.

The study obtained concrete data on the effects of economic factors on government performance and explained these findings. In general, high inflation, high unemployment rates, and low economic growth performance can displace or severely challenge governments, while low or controlled inflation, controlled or low unemployment rates, and high or promising economic growth performance can help keep governments in power.

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