

“Turkey’s Elections: A Contested and Uncertain Outcome”

Featuring Steven Cook, Howard Eissenstat, Sibel Oktay, moderated by Sinan Ciddi
Introduction by Elizabeth Robbins

ROBBINS: Welcome, everyone, and thank you for joining us for today’s event hosted by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. I’m Beth Robbins, FDD’s vice president of communications. We’re pleased to have you here in person and tuning in live for this on-the-record event on Turkey’s elections.

This is a timely discussion, as Turkey held its scheduled elections on May 14th with mixed results. While President Erdogan’s Justice and Development-led People’s Alliance has likely held its parliamentary majority, the presidential election results are still unclear. Neither candidate crossed the 50 percent threshold necessary to clinch the presidency, thereby triggering a runoff election scheduled for May 28th.

Today, we have a first-rate lineup of experts here to discuss what lies ahead. Moderating the panel is Sinan Ciddi. He is a nonresident senior fellow at FDD and an associate professor of national security studies at Marine Corps University.

Joining him is Steven Cook, a senior fellow for Middle East and Africa studies and director of the International Affairs Fellowship for Tenured International Relations Scholars at the Council on Foreign Relations.

We’re also pleased to welcome Howard Eissenstat, associate professor of Middle East history at St. Lawrence University who flew in to be with us today.

And finally, Sibel Oktay, who is a nonresident senior fellow of public opinion and foreign policy at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and associate professor of political science at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Before we dive in, just a couple of quick words about FDD. For more than 20 years, FDD has operated as a fiercely independent, nonpartisan research institute exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. It is a point of pride for us that we do not accept foreign funding and we never will. To catch up on our work, please visit our website, FDD.org, and follow us on Twitter, [@FDD](https://twitter.com/FDD).

That’s enough from me. Sinan, over to you.

CIDDI: Good morning, everybody, and thank you for making time, especially so quickly following what has been quite a dramatic election season in Turkey. If for no other reason, we’re -- if we were -- if we were thinking that we might find it difficult to call out or determine what just happened in these elections, it’s even more difficult pronouncing the last name of the main contender against President Erdogan...

(LAUGHTER)

... which seems to be the main sticking point of a lot of people who are trying to cover this, so it’s quite understandable, but I have three colleagues here who have no trouble in pronouncing his last name, right? We haven’t checked on this yet, but I’m sure we won’t have any issues, but it’s understandable.

So I’m just going to spend a couple of minutes before diving in just sort of setting the scene, but not too much, hopefully, and then I have some wonderful questions lined up for our panel here, and I would like to thank them all for making the time to come in on such short notice and share with us their informed thoughts.

So yes, for months now, we’ve been waiting for essentially, you know, what is going to happen. Will this be the final moment or the last stand for President Erdogan, who has been in power for one way or another, either as prime minister or as president of the republic since 2003? The opinion polls suggested that he was facing an uphill struggle, that he was going to be severely challenged not least of all because of the state of the Turkish economy, which is right

now plagued by rampant high inflation. If I'm still correct, it's a top-three high inflation country in the world, currently sort of officially hovering around 45 to 50 percent. Unofficially, they say it's probably double that.

On top of that, what we've seen is vast allegations of corruption, nepotism and mismanagement of the country's political scene, as well as the economy on top of that. And finally, the devastating earthquakes of February in Turkey suggested -- and they that Erdogan's rule was coming to a firm and abrupt rule.

Right now, what we saw on May 14 is President Erdogan came in just under 50 percent of the vote, is hovering approximately -- I don't think the results have been quite certified yet, but let's just assume what we have is a final figure is correct, which is 49.5 percent or thereabouts. And immediately trailing him by about 4.5 percentage points is Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the leader of the Republican People's party, coming in at 45 percent or thereabouts.

Therefore, this is going to a runoff. And it is unprecedented. Turkey has no experience on -- in runoff elections. We have never faced this before. So on May 28th we will find out who the actual president of Turkey will be for another five years.

On the other side -- on the other hand, what we do have complete certainty of right now is the composition of Turkey's parliaments, unless a few seats change because of objections to the final results. But let's just assume, you know, plus or minus here, the actual composition of the parliament remains relatively stable, in which case, President Erdogan's People's Alliance of the Justice and Development Party, the AKP; the Nationalist Movement Party of Devlet Bahçeli, and a few other sort of fringe parties that were part of the alliance will have a seat majority in parliament, approximately 320 or 322 out of the total of 600.

What this shows is President Erdogan and the AKP's majorities have narrowed. Mr. Erdogan has lost some votes as president since the last election. The AKP has lost a sizable amount of votes since the last election. The MHP seems to have remained relatively stable. And, on contrastingly, not that we've really, sort of, come to terms with this, the CHP has gotten the highest percentage of votes, or let's just say Mr. Kilicdaroglu. I have never seen a vote count, or 45 percent has never been seen in CHP's history, since -- in the modern era.

So his goal has increased, but the big question remains, does he have what it takes to defeat Erdogan in the runoff election?

So that's the scene. And let's dive right into it.

So, Sibel, if I might ask -- if I could start with you, so what do you -- what do you make of it?

Is the result that -- are the results that we're seeing, are these unexpected? I think we've -- we've all been, sort of, quite anxious and apprehensive and hopeful in some respects that this might be the actual moments that President Erdogan could have faltered. What do you make the actual results?

OKTAY: The question of whether the results were expected or unexpected, can I say both?

(LAUGHTER)

It was both unexpected and expected. We have to start with the realization, or, sort of, come back to the understanding and the fact we have that this is a competitive authoritarian regime. And the playing field has been very uneven for years and including in the run-up to this election.

And so, considering the fact that the government controls 90 percent of the media; it has a well-established crony capitalist network; it has a well-established network of handouts, of social gifts and services. In that kind of an uneven playing field, I think it was expected that he would -- he would come out on top. What was unexpected was that -- was that -- there were a couple of things that were unexpected.

Number one, the fact that he could still get -- Erdogan could still get 49 percent -- 49.5 percent of the vote, considering the earthquakes of February 6, considering the terrible economy, considering the fact that the lira has lost 80 percent of its value over the last couple of years, those are -- those are -- those have direct effects on people's lives, people's livelihoods, and in spite of these -- terrible outlook -- you know, in spite of these facts, I should say, the fact that you could still get almost -- now, like, if you really clinged to this -- to 50+1 and the fact that he remained at 49.50 is still quite unexpected, considering the situation that Turkish economy is in and Turkish society has been going through.

I have a couple other things to say about that further, as far as why didn't we see this coming, but maybe later?

CIDDI: Well, no, let me just jump on it if -- if you just -- if you -- if you could add a couple of more points on the end of there's been sort of sporadic commentary about -- especially from the -- from the CHP sources since the election, saying, or let's just say there are a relative number of disputes coming out suggesting was there foul play, what -- you know, could you talk to us a little bit about what you make of the tabulation of votes, the cries of foul play possibly?

What to make of this versus the others -- you know, an ever-emerging sort of narrative, which is to say no, let's -- let's -- you know, the CHP's clearly -- sort of mishandled this, the organization, the -- the tabulation of the results, and just, you know, ballot box monitoring, and the results are not -- nothing to -- but essentially a fairly accurate representation of what's going to -- what's your sense of that, of the two sides there?

OKTAY: Sure. So there are about 200,000 ballot boxes across the country, right? And let's assume that -- or let's hope that, in the second round, the CHP will have, let's say, three, four, five people monitoring each and every ballot box across the country. That makes about a million people. The CHP's registered members are more than a million, so, you know, in a -- in an ideal circumstance, the entirety of the party apparatus should have been mobilized to -- to oversee.

Within -- across that 200,000 ballot boxes, the reports that come out yesterday and the day before say that political parties, including HDP --the Peoples' Democratic Party--the Kurdish party; and the CHP, combined, I think, disputed some-5,000 ballots, again, out of 200,000, right?

And so that's not enough and they -- as they acknowledge it, the -- that kind of dispute. And even though some of these numbers might have been tallied to pro-government political parties, like the National Action Party or the Justice and Development Party, they are not significant enough to alter the results.

It can move margins, right? You know, a seat in the Parliament --might move from one candidate to another, but an outright, blatant fraud is not only unseen -- we didn't observe that -- but I don't think it's possible, given the way the election monitoring system has been set up in Turkey.

Turkish people and -- civil society in Turkey has always been a three-legged dog, but precisely because of that, Turks really value their elections and they value its integrity and they consider it's a sort of sacred practice of democratic will.

And even though the vote is compulsory, Turks go not out of being fined or being put in a short-term jail sentence but they go to the polls because they respect it. And so I think because of all of these reasons, I don't think that the -- the election was fraudulent enough to give a clear majority or plurality to -- to President Erdogan or his political parties.

CIDDI: Yeah, I mean, I must say, in the -- in the -- in the number of days since watching the -- sort of the antics play out, the whole notion of, like, the CHP's initial attempt at "stop the steal" seems to have -- be giving way to -- to -- and I agree with you. I think, if -- if anything, what we saw on Election Night was the CHP sort of -- leadership going on TV with the Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu saying "hang on a minute. You know, a -- the Anadolu Agency is misreporting this, they're mis-tabulating it, so we don't recognize them," and then we've seen, you know, ballot box sort of allegations of stuffing, and then -- then they all went quiet suddenly.

So I agree with you. I think, given what's at stake -- and also, I might add that it's now emerging that the CHP didn't have monitors at over 20,000 boxes around the country out of that 200,000 you mentioned, which seems to suggest to me a gross mis-negligence on the part of the CHP organization, which is also the oldest and most organized party that has the resources to employ and ensure to -- ballot box monitors are in place. And let -- let's be realistic, they've had years to prepare for this.

So Steven, let me move on to you. One of your favorite questions -- cause you and I have been ruminating over -- in the last few days, when -- which is -- so let me -- let me ask you a favorite question. So what went wrong in terms of -- you know, was polling off? Were we -- were we not essentially set up from -- in the last few months to say this is the moment, Mr. Erdogan is done? There'd been a lot of writing, there's been a lot of analysis to suggest this was a done deal, and then in the first round -- or following the first round, Erdogan will be done and we'd have President Kilicdaroglu. What -- what went wrong?

COOK: Thanks, Sinan. First of all, before I answer the question, I just want to thank you for the kind invitation to be here on this panel today. It's wonderful to be with Sibel and Howard, two people whose commentary and work I very much admire.

I -- I think -- you know, I -- there's a lot that went wrong in terms of the expectations regarding the -- the outcome here, and it began actually months ago. This election has been anticipated by Turkey analysts and Turks for the better part of the last two years.

I can remember, you know, two summers ago, turning on -- you know, looking at my Twitter timeline and wondering why people were arguing about the 2023 Turkish presidential election, knowing what we know, that things really don't crystallize until literally the few weeks before the election.

I think there was -- in terms of creating a set of expectations, both in Turkey as well as in Washington, I think there was too much focus on polling. We know from our own experiences here in the United States that polling is faulty, that people don't necessarily tell pollsters the truth, and that polling only captures certain things at certain moments in time, and that no question is foolproof.

And secondly, I think that there's -- was a problem -- and -- and I don't mean any disrespect to -- to anybody either in this room or outside of this room -- but I do think that there was a -- a bleeding of hope into analysis. There was this sense that how could possibly be, after all of these years, after the terrible economic years, after an earthquake, after this slide, I -- and in -- Sibel used the term "competitive authoritarianism." I'm searching for new definitions of Turkey. I think we -- we need -- as political scientists -- at least the two of us political scientists, we need new categories for it. Howard's a historian. He doesn't need a new category.

(LAUGHTER)

And I say that as someone who actually wants to be a historian now. So I think that the -- the idea and -- and something that's kind of drilled into heads, that people vote on their pocketbook, is wrong. I think it's wrong in the United States, I think it's wrong in Turkey.

Remember, there was a book written here in the United States, "What's the Matter with Kansas?" Kansans aren't voting their pocketbook. And so that -- that really highlights the -- the potency of culture and identity.

I think also we kind of misread things -- you know, the earthquake was supposed to devastate Erdogan and -- and the response, and clearly the response was bad and it was bad because of this centralization of power. But at the same time, in those kind of AKP strongholds that were in the quake zone, people said it was God's will, not it was the fault of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It was God's will for -- for whatever -- for whatever reason.

And then, of course, there's, you know, the kind of the typologies of the analytic world in general these days, which is too much Twitter navel-gazing and wanting to be, you know, out there and -- and gain followers and -- and -- and kind

of go with the flow without really recognizing that the commentary on Twitter is a straw hole of society, and we're not getting a big enough picture.

So I think that there were -- there were a whole host of things that went into a narrative that -- an expectation about Kilicdaroglu's victory that overshadowed the fact that Erdogan is an entrenched authoritarian; can weaponize and instrumentalize the state. Look at what he did. He threatened Twitter. "I'm going to shut you down." Controls the media, and in general, has a potent message that still resonates with large numbers of Turks. Those are significant advantages.

And then Kilicdaroglu imposed himself on the Nation Alliance. He was the one who polled -- I know I just criticized polls, but he's the one who consistently polled the weakest against -- against Erdogan, which was the reason why Meral Aksener bolted briefly in March. As we wrote together, more people should have listened to her. She understood the weaknesses of -- of the candidate. But he still did well because of countervailing things. But again, Erdogan is entrenched, and we should have paid closer attention to those advantages, rather than weaknesses that seemingly would topple the great master, but he's the great master for a reason. That's not an endorsement; that's -- I'm just saying what people say about him.

CIDDI: All right, well, the -- onto the historian here. So Howard, based on what Steven just said, it seems that President Erdogan's sort of polarizing electoral campaign which many people said was off-key, right, suggesting that the pocketbook issues were going to be salient in determining people's out you know, choices. But this anti-LGBTQ, fear-mongering among -- against Kurds, you know, that mosques would be shut down if the CHP comes to power seems to have paid off, especially in the first round.

So going into this runoff, which is an unfair question, I guess, but let -- I've tailored it such that, you know, you're not on the -- you're not on -- on the record for, like, you know, making the decisive sort of call. But who do you think's got -- given that sort of -- the strength of the identity message that Erdogan's succeeded in getting nearly 50 percent, who do you think has the advantage going off into the -- into the runoff? And it -- are there any weaknesses on either -- on either side, or strengths that you see particularly salient into our rationale?

EISSENSTAT: So I guess I would start out by saying, you know, I agree. Turkey's a electoral authoritarian regime, but we don't -- we don't actually know for sure how much of it's electoral and how much of it's authoritarian. Is it -- is it Vegas, where you don't bet against the house, or is the -- the game entirely fixed, and if you -- if you pull a royal flush, you're still not getting paid off, right?

So -- so I don't -- I don't actually have an answer to that, and I think that my -- my Turkish colleagues point to the strength of the Turkish electoral tradition and the importance with which Turkish citizens feel about elections, and -- and all of which is true. And I look at other elections, right, elsewhere where -- where -- that also had strong electoral traditions and were nonetheless questioned, rejected. So I don't -- I don't know for certain that there was anything that the opposition could have done.

That said, to go to your question, I think that -- I think that the LGBTQ stuff and the mosques was meant to cement the base. I think the Kurdish stuff was to bring in the nationalists. Those are the -- sort of the two legs of Erdogan's political character at this point.

We see Kilicdaroglu today making a case for the nationalists, and he obviously can't -- he can't attack the Kurds because that's a big part of his coalition, so he's -- he's doubling down on sort of anti-Syrian, anti-refugee stuff, and you know, those folks by and large can't vote, and so -- so they're a relatively safe target.

I always thought it was an uphill battle. I think it is more of an uphill battle now, and I think that we can see that in the degree to which the AKP has talked less about, "this is an attempted coup." This is -- which a -- which I saw as really worrying rhetoric in the first round, that this is an attempted coup, this is the West trying to -- to overtake the Turkish government. This is FETO -- whatever. All of that stuff laid the ground, it seemed to me, for a potential rejection of the election.

They're not doing any of that now. They're -- they're sort of -- this is the people's will. We're going to have a debate. They're relaxed, and I think that that speaks to the perception on Erdogan's part that he -- he's not in any great danger anymore. I think he felt like he was in real danger for Sunday's election. I don't think he feels that way anymore.

CIDDI: So this is more for Sibel, but anybody can jump on this subsequent to her. I'm -- I've been thinking over the last few days, my colleague and our colleague and friend, I should say,-- Gonul Tol from the Middle East Institute wrote an interesting piece suggesting that Turkey may not necessarily in its authoritarian stage may not necessarily be resembling of Russia or China in that elections do still have possibly uncertain outcomes.

Just given what you just said, Howard -- and this is something for you to consider, Sibel -- is Turkey beyond the point of possibly a peaceful transfer of power following election? Simply because what Howard just mentioned, it's an up -- uphill battle to overcome Erdogan electorally. Is it too uphill in the sense that, you know, we may not get Mr. Erdogan to recognize, even if he is electorally defeated? Or another way of putting this is, will we look back at this election and the subsequent one coming up, if Erdogan's successful, as a sort of hinge moment, the day that sort of -- the -- that the -- the sort of occasion when democracy finally -- or electoral democracy -- just finally died, and we cannot see...

OKTAY: Right.

CIDDI: ... until Erdogan is out of the picture, voluntary or otherwise? That -- that, you know, power -- power transition doesn't happen by electoral means anymore in Turkey?

OKTAY: Right. So let me start by that first question, because I think it ties beautifully to the second one.

So I think a peaceful transfer of power is possible, in the event that he gets defeated. However, it hinges on a couple of other conditions.

Number one, he is not going to go down silently, right? So, actually, it hinges on three different things. Number one, defeating him in this system that favors him structurally, institutionally favors him, is very difficult to start with -- I mean, considering all this -- all the campaign. Despite our best, you know, hopes or optimism, maybe misplaced optimism -- right, Steven? -- that the opposition ran this campaign that got a lot of traction, and still the party, or the opposition, fell behind four percentage points, is huge, right?

That speaks to the structural opportunities that Erdogan enjoys. But let's assume that, you know, something great happens in two weeks, and -- and he gets defeated. He's not going to go down quietly, right?

And so first we will see a long, drawn-out battle in the courts, right, taking several thousands of ballots for a recount. Several different districts, several different cities will have -- you know, will probably have re-elections, right?

And so just, you know, let's think about the Istanbul election of 2019. The contestation of the initial vote, which Ekrem Imamoglu won by 14,000 points, that process was drawn out 3-1/2 months. And that's just one city for a local election, right?

(LAUGHTER)

So the stakes for Erdogan himself might say -- you might say relatively are lower. And that still took almost four months for Ekrem Imamoglu to reclaim the rightful mandate that he had gained the first time.

And so that is not going to be an easy process for Turkey. That's going to be a very messy battle if it comes to that. And we might see something like January 6th in Turkey. I think that's also in the cards, in the event that -- that he -- he gets defeated by an electoral vote and yet he contests the election, the integrity of the election, and so on and so forth.

So I don't think it's going to be an easy path forward for either side, right, to -- to continue, let's say, if that scenario plays out on May 28th. As far as the hinge moment question, right? And that goes back to some of the things that -- that both Howard and Steven said about, you know, how much of this system is electoral; how much of this system is authoritarian, and whether democracy is -- is only about free and fair elections, which the political scientists in the room will say no, right?

(LAUGHTER)

It's more than that. So as far as this election happens in any which way, I think democracy had -- had eroded to a level of, sort of, having put on life support several years ago.

CIDDI: Yeah.

OKTAY: So I think that the constitutional referendum and the -- and the transformation of the political system from this parliamentary system to what we would call a super-presidential, like this decree-based presidential system that really revolves around one man and one many only, that's when democracy died in Turkey. If you want to call it a hinge moment, I think that was the inflection point.

And so I think what's really important for both Turkey observers and Turkish parties, particularly those on the opposition, should really need to think about going forward is not necessarily about the democratic practices, which I think are, you know, as far as the elections are concerned, are well-entrenched for the most part, but the -- but the staggering and unexpected rise of Islamism and ultra-nationalism in Turkey that were -- that were portrayed and proven by the parliamentary results that I hope we get to talk about.

That has, I think, dire consequences for, firstly, women in Turkey, children in Turkey, but also the society as a whole. And so I think, if we're talking about a hinge moment, I think this is a hinge moment not necessarily for democracy but certainly for what the Turkish society and social fabric will look like going forward.

CIDDI: Steven, you want to jump in?

COOK: Yeah, I do. Just a couple of comments, and I'm sorry that Gonul is not here. I don't mean to criticize her while she's not here. And this is -- actually isn't a criticism. But I don't think that Russia and China are the best analogies for -- for Turkey. In fact, I think was a leading edge in -- in the reversal of democratic practices.

You know, before even Hungary, Turkey, sort of, perfected this and, kind of, blew away all of the data sets that I looked at when I was in grad school in the late 1990s about what makes consolidated democracies.

What it strikes me is that there has been this kind of development of this thing, competitive authoritarian -- I don't know what it is, but Sibel anticipated something that I was going to say, is that the moving forces that have resonated with at least half of Turkish society -- and off course we'll see what happens in -- in -- in the runoff election, but nationalism and Islamism, I think, are extraordinarily potent and may point to another hinge. I think 2017 was a hinge. And they point to this potential hinge, which is that these are two inherently anti-democratic worldviews, and that Erdogan is going to, if he wins, seek legitimacy out of those two things, something that's not unheard of in Turkey, but through an election.

I don't think elections are going to go away in Turkey. But you...

CIDDI: Right.

COOK: ... Erdogan gets another five years. The AKP and MHP dominate the parliament. You'll see the continued innovation of institutions that will ensure the trajectory of Turkey is not, maybe not even competitive authoritarian, even with -- with elections. And I think that the -- the kind of societal undercurrents of nationalism and Islamism. And

that doesn't make Turkey unique at all. I mean, nationalism in some sort of, kind of, religious chauvinism is something that we're seeing throughout the world. And democracy's under threat throughout the world.

And so I think that -- that that is a phenomenon that is worth thinking hard about in -- in Turkey. And so I do think it's a potential hinge.

CIDDI: Howard, you wanted to weigh in?

EISSENSTAT: Yeah, I guess I want to firstly say I don't think that we've tested how democratic Turkey is because we -- we haven't come to a real crisis in which Erdogan had to decide whether to step out of power or not, right?

So it is -- it is an unanswered and unanswerable question whether he would have really stepped down.

COOK: In 2015?

He didn't -- he wouldn't accept a coalition government.

EISSENSTAT: Right. But -- but he was still -- he was still fundamentally manipulating the...

(CROSSTALK)

COOK: Understood.

EISSENSTAT: The -- the other thing, I'm going to jump on the opportunity to disagree with Steven because we do so, so rarely...

(LAUGHTER)

COOK: Other than on music, I don't know -- I can't think of a thing.

EISSENSTAT: And -- and you -- you stole my "What's the matter with Kansas?" line.

(LAUGHTER)

So I'm going to...

(LAUGHTER)

COOK: You're mad at me. I can...

EISSENSTAT: The -- the...

(LAUGHTER)

I -- I think that Islamism, for a Western audience, isn't a great way to understand Erdogan's politics.

CIDDI: Right, I agree.

EISSENSTAT: He's not particularly Islamist within the context of the Middle East. Arguably, he's less Islamist than Sisi is...

CIDDI: Yeah.

EISSENSTAT: ... and we -- he -- think of Sisi as the secularist.

So but I do -- so I think that a -- a better way of thinking about him is religious conservative using these sort of cultural -- Islam as cultural symbol, Islam as symbol for tradition, for the symbol of the nation. Islam's really important to -- to Erdogan and to Erdogan's voters but there's only rarely do I see his politics as Islamist in the way that we tend to use it sort of comparatively.

It really reminds me more of social conservatism in the United States than it does the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

COOK: Well, let me -- let me just -- I'm going to disappoint you because I don't necessarily disagree with you on this. What -- having studied both Egypt and Turkey very seriously, it -- certainly you're right that Sisi is the Islamist, if you put the two together, and what I'd often said was if you took Turkish Islamists and you put them in a genuinely Middle Eastern context, they wouldn't even be on the religious wing of the -- of the ruling party.

However, the context here is Turkey, and there is this religious conservative Islamist world view that is at the kind of base of where the AKP springs from. I think it's important. I don't think we should totally dismiss that -- those ideas as being a moving force for people and -- and that they resonate society-wide and gives him a certain legitimacy.

CIDDI: Well, let me jump on and -- and offer you just a -- a little anecdote myself and see what maybe Sibel, the senior political scientist in the room, could come back at and see how she evaluates this.

This whole notion of what's been -- you know, Turks have -- justifiably proud of the fact that over 90 percent of people turned out and voted, which immediately made me think of the first book I ever read when I sat down at, you know, my grad school, that was shoved in front of me, saying "you've got to read this cause it's part of the requirement," which was Seymour Martin Lipset, "Political Man."

And I can't remember what page number it was but it really struck me as, like, one of my life-changing sort of moments as a young person. It was, like, strong turnout or high turnout elections is not a -- a good representation of a consolidated democracy. The higher the, you know, consolidated democracies is a -- more representative countries which have lower voter turnout because there are other institutional safeguards for democratic governance being consolidated and et cetera, et cetera.

What's left in Turkey, other than elections? I mean, it -- what's -- what are the remnants of democratic governance outside of -- and this goes to what -- what Steven and Howard are both ARE going back and forth, are -- which I think, you know, both compliment each other on that level, but I think -- is there any vestige of democratic governance left outside of election and that's -- and that's why people just turn out?

OKTAY: Well...Twitter is still up. Sometimes, it gets slowed down, but, you know, people still can access it and, you know, I guess -- you know, these Virtual Private Network apps still work. But, you know, joking aside, I mean, I want to go back to what I said earlier, and I think -- I mean, it's not, you know, my job to say Seymour Martin Lipset was right.

(LAUGHTER)

But he was, right? So when there isn't a flourishing social -- a sort of civil society, right, where there isn't a free media where people can get their news freely and fairly and factually, where there isn't a -- there isn't rights and freedoms protected around assembly, around protests, around people basically being free to express their minds, ballot box becomes the only way in which people can express their rights.

And to this day, it's -- it's still closed vote, right? So no one can -- although it's being sort of being poked here and there, you know, people want, you know, screenshots with your face on it so people want to -- you know, some people from any side of the political spectrum want to see who you voted for, but it's something that you can do anonymously.

And especially in a country like Turkey, which is quite authoritarian and quite polarized, having the opportunity to reflect your true preferences behind sort of a trifold, where no one can see you and you can be anonymous -- you know, your name isn't on the ballot -- I think that's still something that Turks cling onto.

And so I think, considering the absence of other democratic practices and sort of pressure valves that can let out this steam, I think the elections are the only way in which Turkey can express its true preferences.

CIDDI: OK, so let's pivot to this question, which I think American audiences and Washington loves, and I'll start with -- with Steven and then -- but feel free, everyone else, to sort of ruminate and jump in on this.

Does it really matter what the outcome is in the election, in terms of where, you know, the relationship between Turkey and the United States is heading? Does it really matter at this point whether Kilicdaroglu wins or whether Erdogan wins on May 28th? Steven?

COOK: No. My answer might have been...

CIDDI: OK. Howard?

(LAUGHTER)

COOK: I -- I -- I could stop there...

EISSENSTAT: We disagree there, that's great...

COOK: I -- I think if -- if you had asked me that question in January or February of 2021, I would have said that -- possibly because this was a moment in which the Biden administration was talking very much about values and having a value-forward foreign policy.

I think we've seen very quickly, at least since the spring of 2021, that the administration still talks about it, and I don't -- I don't expect any American President to not talk about American values, but I don't -- you don't see any real infusion of American values in our approach to countries around the region -- around the -- around the Middle East, in Turkey in -- in general. It's rare actually that a President is consistent with this idea of values in foreign policy.

Maybe during the Cold War, because we were concerned about the Soviet Union, it was a useful wedge, but if you look at what the United States has done, it has been how is country X going to help advance our strategic interests?

And so to the extent that Erdogan has not been willing to do that, doesn't want to be an asset or appendage of NATO, wants to carve out a more independent foreign policy from the United States, there has been friction -- there has been friction.

Kilicdaroglu, to the extent that he will play ball, improve the coordination with NATO, walk away from that gray area policy that the current government has pursued in Ukraine and Russia, that would improve relations between Turkey and the United States.

There have been moments where, from the podium, a State Department spokesperson would say "it's very bad, what's happening to the LGBTQ community at Bogazici University and we strongly condemn it." That's the -- that's the extent of it. And I would expect that there would be similar types of criticisms for other transgressions but no real consequences.

And I think that the -- what I think sometimes people don't understand is that as perniciously anti-American as Erdogan and the AKP has been at times, that the opposition is, as well. I remember having this argument with

someone who's now a senior U.S. government official who said, "Well, we can't be so critical because what about the tens of millions of people who don't vote for Erdogan?" I said, "Well, they hate the United States also."

(LAUGHTER)

So I think that Kilicdaroglu's instincts will also be to not view or -- or carve out a policy that's independent of the United States, which I think is perfectly appropriate for Turks to do, but it will create tensions, and that's where the relationship really.... If for some reason the Turkish government wants to be more cooperative on a variety of issues -- Eastern Mediterranean, relax on the Aegean. Of course, they've relaxed on the Aegean since the earthquake. A variety -- Cyprus, which Kilicdaroglu's has staked out a -- I -- I think a very tough position -- those things are going to be sources of tension...

So no, there will be tension if President Erdogan is reelected, and there'll be tension if Kemal Kilicdaroglu becomes the next president of Turkey.

Now Howard would like to...I've filibustered long enough ... and Howard would like to disagree with me.

EISSENSTAT: So I mean, will there be tension? Of course, there'll be tension, right? There -- there's certainly -- Turkey's position on Cyprus is not going to be the American position on Cyprus, you know, for the foreseeable future.

That said, I imagine that under Kilicdaroglu, Sweden would be brought into NATO. I imagine that some deal would be finessed on the S-400s. I imagine that Turkey would cease to engage in the sanctions-busting with Iran and with Russia. I imagine that Turkey's increasingly large role in the drug trade would decrease as institutions were reestablished, and I imagine that in general, Turkey would be more concerned about FDI from -- from the European Union and work to reassert basic institutions, which simply makes it easier for us to work with them.

COOK: I -- I think you have an active imagination, because you imagine this, you imagine that. I -- I will point out that Kilicdaroglu has made no commitments on any of those things; been very cagey on S-400s, been very cagey on Sweden, been -- and -- and of course, if he were to win, he'd have the politics of this issue with a -- a -- a fierce majority in the Grand National Assembly ready to attack him for his being soft on important nationalist issues.

So I -- I -- I think it's -- you may very well be right, but I think that you're sanitizing out some of the politics of this, and I think you're sanitizing out some of the actual worldview of -- of Kilicdaroglu. Clearly, he's an...

OKTAY: If I may? Sorry, go ahead.

(LAUGHTER)

No, I was just -- I was just playing the moderator.

CIDDI: No, jump in, Sibel, and Howard can

OKTAY: I guess I can...

CIDDI: He can -- he can formulate -- Howard can formulate his -- his comeback against Steven.

OKTAY: Right.

CIDDI: But Sibel, go ahead, please.

OKTAY: I just want to add that Kilicdaroglu -- this -- I mean, I agree with both of you, right? And -- and I -- if I were to answer that question, it's, no, tensions will continue, but maybe with some caveats, right?

There are two things that we need to be aware of. Number one, elections are coming in the U.S. too, so we don't know what even's going to happen, like, after next year, so that's something that we -- like, it -- it -- it's a -- it's a two-way street, and it takes two in this -- in this relationship.

But also, going back to what Kilicdaroglu said earlier, I agree with the -- with the nationalist tone that he will take and how that's going to continue creating these tensions with the United States, especially now that we know that he desperately needs the nationalist vote, right, for the second round. But also, he's -- I mean, Kilicdaroglu is on the record for saying that he wants to manage the relations with the United States, with NATO specifically, or -- or more broadly, and I think -- I think the -- the opposition and -- and Kilicdaroglu himself will genuinely try to do that going forward. So despite everything that you guys have said, and I agree, I think he -- I think the basis or the -- the foundational sort of foreign policy vision for him is to make sure that Turkey is once again a respectable ally and a reliable ally for the United States and for the NATO partners.

CIDDI: So Howard, in your answer or your rebuttal -- and -- and after this, I think we can hopefully open it up to -- to the floor before Steven has to leave because he -- we want to field more questions and get to questions before he heads out. But aren't all sides, whether it's Kilicdaroglu or -- or Erdogan fundamentally seeking some sort of reset with Washington? We've heard indications that even Erdogan may be willing to throw a bone towards Washington in terms of possibly divesting the country of the S-400s. They've already made some overtures with designating certain entities to -- and -- and -- and persons with U.S. Treasury who've been sort of terrorist financiers. Are we expect -- aren't -- aren't both sides actually heading for a reset because they have to? I mean, Turkey fundamentally has to engage with the West, no?

EISSENSTAT: Yeah, I think that -- I think that there's truth to that. I think that fundamentally, Erdogan does -- sees all resets as temporary. I don't have any great faith that -- that, you know, a change in tone with Israel or the United States is -- is necessarily going to last longer than is convenient. I think that, as -- as Sibel was suggesting, Kilicdaroglu is imagining a different country. We...

Look, we -- we can get along with lots of countries that disagree with us on specific details. We get along with Canada, and we have disagreements over fisheries all time. The challenge with Erdogan is first of all how personalized the decisions are. It's not his nationalism that -- that got him into the S-400s; it's the personalization. No bureaucracy would have gone along with that.

CIDDI: Agree.

EISSENSTAT: The -- the other -- the other component is the fundamental breakdown of institutions within the country. That's where we -- where we see the sanctions-busting. That's where we see this growth in the drug trade. The -- you know, we -- we tend to think of corruption as a local problem, but it is a problem that -- that has global implications, and for us, those global implications have real content.

CIDDI: OK. So with that, if we may, we're going to open up the -- the floor to questions, and there -- there's a microphone coming around, so please raise your hand and our colleague will hand you the microphone so our audiences that are live-streaming can hear it. Please state your name, your affiliation, and hopefully, a brief question. All right, in the front here.

QUESTION: Thank you. Jerry Hyman of...

CIDDI: Yeah, we can hear you.

QUESTION: Is this on?

CIDDI: Yup.

QUESTION: Jerry Hyman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. First of all, just a quick comment on the question for -- what is -- is there any remnant of democracy left? Don't forget the -- the municipal elections in Ankara and Istanbul and to -- and to some extent in the Kurdish area. So it seems to me there -- that wasn't -- wasn't much discussed.

I wonder -- I guess I thought the elections would be closer like everybody else did. In which case, the question I have really -- it may not be any use anymore, and that was if there had been a closer parliamentary balance, what would be the future of the National Alliance? You've got this unwieldy collection of six, eight parties that really have no -- relatively little policy coherence or personal coherence. Their main thing was they didn't like Erdogan.

CIDDI: Right.

QUESTION: So what -- what is the future? Is there a future for the -- for the National Alliance in Parliament as a potential source of policy debate, discussion, dissent from the Erdogan policies, et cetera?

CIDDI: OK. Should we take one more? Sibel, I want to hand you that question, so think about that one. If there's one more, let's take one more.

QUESTION: Sure. Mike Hsieh, FDD NSN alumni. So a very good panel and this is very edifying, as all FDD events are.

So I think most of us are disappointed that both candidates and both parties are anti-American, you know, in their -- in their inclination, but I wonder whether or not, when you consider things like Turkey's accession to SCO, BRICS, and other sort of alternative structures and very case-by-case kinds of issues as well too, such as Huawei 5G adoption and also the sort of -- the increasing, you know, semiconductor tensions between the U.S. and China for instance, whether or not either party really has a difference over the other in terms of perhaps the pacing and the tenor and the -- the timetable for how they might engage these sort of, what we'll call, alternative structures? Thank you.

CIDDI: OK, thank you. Sibel, you want to take the first shot and then Steven and Howard for the second one hopefully, or do -- do as you will.

OKTAY: I came with notes, right, cause I -- I was hoping this question would come up. And you're looking at a very colorful Parliament. Colorful could be all different shades of gray. In this case, given pretty much every single -- every single political party, except maybe for the *Yesil Sol*, the Green Left that -- that the -- that the Kurds ran under, these are all different shades of nationalism and some of them are different shades of Islamism.

And I agree with you when you say -- when you point out that this is a very -- and -- and the -- the opposition coalition is a very interesting conglomeration of political parties, given that their one uniting force that they fill their -- you know, this -- this wind that they fill their sails with is this opposition against Erdogan, but when it comes to policy-making, what are these different nationalist parties, like E Party, which is a sort of center-right but still nationalist political party, will -- will align with, right?

And -- and I think these political -- especially E Party, I would assume, is -- you know, Turkish political parties have historically been characterized as sort of very homogeneous, very uniform, they vote in blocks and so on and so forth, but I think going forward, there's also room for a lot of inter-party dissent, especially in a party like E Party. Are they going to vote for -- are -- are -- vote alongside CHP or are they going to sort of splinter and some of them will -- will vote for AKP when the -- when the bill -- bills come to floor?

The other thing I want to add is that, again, AKP has -- has very much, I think, given the reins to MHP but also *Yeniden Refah Partisi*, this sort of reincarnation of the Welfare Party of the 1990s where AKP actually stems from.

So I think these two political parties will start calling the shots. I mean, if coalition politics, which is something I -- I've -
- I've done quite a bit of research on -- if coalition politics research is telling us anything, that these two smaller

political parties, the *Yeniden Refah* as well as MHP, the Nationalist Action Party, will have stronger grip on AKP's policy-making or -- or, you know, positioning going forward.

And I want to add one last thing, which is something that we haven't discussed in the public sphere as much as we should, is how similar Turkish politics have become compared to Israeli politics, right?

One of the things that you mentioned is that this hodgepodge of coalition -- or -- or opposition political parties who -- who want to get rid of Erdogan but they probably have no way of politically, policy-wise, ironing out their differences and -- and having a vision for the future, in the event that they assume power, is not existent, and that was very similar to what we saw in Israel, right? After, what, four, five, six elections, we finally had this coalition government that included Arab parties for the first time ever and they only survive for, what, less than a year, right?

And so that was a fundamental pathology of this opposition coalition in Israel. I suspect that it might be a pathology of the opposition coalition here -- not here but there in Turkey. And I think that's something that the opposition parties need to reckon with and I think there are a lot of lessons that we need to draw from the Israeli case.

CIDDI: Thank you. Steven?

COOK: I -- you -- one of my most successful papers in grad school was a -- it was a comparison of Shas and Welfare Party. I'll have to find it, it's on a floppy disk somewhere.

(LAUGHTER)

Anyway -- half of you don't even know -- like, not even laughing cause they don't even know what a -- a floppy disk is.

(LAUGHTER)

Anyway, to your -- to your question about how either Erdogan or Kilicdaroglu would relate to these new structures, Shanghai Cooperation or -- is that -- or the BRICS, I think, you know, with Erdogan, the -- the answer is very, very easy -- and this gets to your question about reset.

He will see his victory as a vindication of the things that he's done. He's never been magnanimous in -- in victory, he's never -- he won't see it as coming -- you know, being reelected by the skin of his teeth, he won't see the need to kind of pull back and change in certain areas.

I absolutely -- if there's one thing I'm certain of, they're not giving up the S-400. It's going to remain in the hands under -- under Erdogan and they will go forward because it's part of a pattern that we have been seeing for years now, which is that Turkey wanting to be Turkey, Turkey not being West, not being East, and it's going to pursue an independent foreign policy.

And it's why I think -- yes, you can't pull Turkey institutionally at that financial level away from the West, but increasingly, those very large sovereign wealth funds in the Gulf are becoming much more important to Turkey -- the Qataris, the Emiratis, the Saudis. That -- that -- that may not be because it's -- it's brotherly, it's not -- not -- maybe not a lot of *asabiyya* there but it may be that those countries want to manipulate or influence Erdogan in ways that they want, but those are increasingly important to Erdogan.

I believe that Kilicdaroglu won't want that. I agree with Howard on that. Yeah, the Middle East will be something important but not as important and that his gaze really is West.

The problem that he won't confront is -- and there's no indication that, you know, that a Kilicdaroglu-run Turkey will, you know, go running off to SCO, but the BRICS may be very, very attractive to it because a kind of American-led order is anathema.

I mean, there will be a reset between a Kilicdaroglu Turkey and the United States if we have a Sanders-Omar administration, not...

(LAUGHTER)

... any other.

(LAUGHTER)

I'm just saying that because that's who he met with when he was here last October.

So it strikes me that, yes, there will be this kind of gaze towards the West and improved dialogue with the European Union, but of course he'll be hammered by the nationalist politics in Turkey to not actually be able to move as forward, not actually have the kind of reset he might want to have. And I don't think that there's even a reset on the - on the -- on the table with the United States. It's very unclear what Kilicdaroglu -- you know, he's been here twice in 10 years; he's kept it secret because he's afraid of the nationalists in his -- in his own party.

So I think that the -- we are an unfortunate necessity for Turkey, but I do think that there is a lot of desire to be, kind of, independent of the United States across the political spectrum.

With that, I should go to the airport. My apologies. Please, I'm sorry to miss the last...

CIDDI: You've got to step out. Yes, absolutely...

COOK: ... of this conversation.

CIDDI: ... step out.

EISSENSTAT: Now, let me tell you why Steven -- no.

(LAUGHTER)

COOK: Yeah, can you can disagree with me as much possible.

(LAUGHTER)

EISSENSTAT: I basically agree with Steven. I think that, for Erdogan, these alternative relationships are -- they're ideologically driven, even when they're not necessarily in Turkey's best interests.

With Kilicdaroglu, I expect he'll still want good relations with China; he'll still want investment from the Gulf. But the truth is that Turkey's strongest economic and political ties are not with Russia; they're not with China; and they're not with the United States. They're with the EU.

And that's where the lion's share of investment comes from. That's where Turkey -- I don't think that EU accession is on the table, ever. But I do think that a customs union is, and I think that, under a Kilicdaroglu government, I would expect Turkey to be taking very real, tangible steps towards that.

CIDDI: More questions?

While someone is thinking one up, let me just go back to this point, though, Howard, and possibly Sibel, if you want to jump on this, which is, in that case, does that not require, whoever the new administration in Turkey is following May 28th, to give a little?

I mean, if Turkey is serious about wanting to re-engage or re-engage with the European Union, to renegotiate the customs union or visa-less travel for Turkey's citizens, you know, asks that are quite significant of the European Union, does that not mean that it would have to be somewhat more collaborative, cooperative, beyond just transactionism?

And, similarly, with the United States, regardless of who's in power -- so if Steven's point is Turkey will never give up the S-400s. Well, that's going to be a problem if they want F-16s. The shopping list between the United States and of asks, which is long, is long. Something needs to give, no, if Turkey is going to have whatever sort of short honeymoon -- honeymoon period there will be. Anyone?

OKTAY: You want to take that, or no?

EISSENSTAT: Historians have -- have remarkably foggy crystal balls, but , so I can't predict the future. I don't think that Erdogan is capable of resetting relations with the EU or the United States in the ways that you're describing. I don't think that he's capable of giving up the S-400s in a way that would maintain his relationship with Russia and satisfy the United States. I don't believe that he's capable of -- or understands the idea of a relationship that's anything other than transactional.

And so yes, Erdogan will make reset noises now and again, but a reset with Saudi Arabia is -- is qualitatively different from a reset with the United States or the EU, and I don't think that Erdogan's capable of the latter.

QUESTION: OK.

OKTAY: All of that being said, the foreign policy in Turkey's very much pegged to Turkey's domestic politics, right? Anyone who watches, follows Turkey and Turkish politics closely would know this. And I think some of the friction and -- and the tension, if you -- I have this sort of ideal project where I want to track Erdogan's rhetoric against the United States along with, you know, how far away from we are from elections, right? And so I would assume that as elections come, you know -- as elections are approaching, he's becoming very polarizing, very antagonistic, very sort of vilifying of the West, of the United States and so on and so forth. And then after the elections, it's kind of like a typewriter, right? Is, you type it, the thing goes on one side, and then after election time it goes...

So -- so I would assume that there would be some softening of the tone, some opportunity for a reset, whichever way it's defined. I don't think it's -- it's going to go to the way or to the extent of, you know, "We're going to dismantle S-400s and we're going to -- we're going to get them -- you know, give them back, get our money back," right? That's never going to happen.

But -- so -- so I think there will be some softening of tone, A, because elections are over; B, because there is now this newfound or -- or replenished legitimacy, and we've seen Erdogan do this several times over in the last 20 years. But to what extent that's a reliable reset or a reliable change of tone is -- is anybody's guess, and my guess would be that it's not, so, yeah.

QUESTION: OK.

CIDDI: My esteemed predecessor who established the -- the Turkey program here at FDD, Aykan.

QUESTION: Aykan Erdemir, Anti-Defamation League. I have a quick question about demographics. Will Turkey's vulnerable minorities vote, continue to vote in greater numbers with their feet following the second round? That is, do you expect a mass exodus not only of, you know, Christians and Jews, or you know, Kurds and other ethnic minorities, or a new minority, maybe the secularists, but also the, you know, the LGBTQ community? Do you -- do you expect -- and this has already been in process, right?

OKTAY: Yeah.

QUESTION: This mass exodus.

OKTAY: Yup.

QUESTION: But follow the second round with different shades of ultra-nationalism and racism and Islamism, including the Hezbollah shade in Parliament and in power, do you expect this to be like a remarkable turning point whereby we now see a -- a massive, concentrated exodus?

OKTAY: Yes. Yeah. I wholeheartedly agree that that's going to be the case. We saw a massive exodus after the -- after the coup, including people that we personally know, right?

CIDDI: Yeah.

OKTAY: And -- and so -- and I'm not just talking about the people who run away because they were affiliated with the Fethullah Gulen organization, right? I'm talking about ordinary people who want to live a life that's not in Turkey...

QUESTION: Yeah.

CIDDI: ... because they think that it's not a wise decision to do so economically, socially, politically, and they just want a better life elsewhere. And I think I agree -- well, I -- not that you made a point, Aykan, but -- but I would assume, I would expect that there is going to be a mass exodus from -- especially by -- by college-educated, sort of Western-oriented folks in Turkey who think that this country has become too ultra-nationalist, too conservative, too Islamist, and they just want a different life elsewhere.

CIDDI: Howard, do you want to...

EISSENSTAT: A hundred percent agree.

CIDDI: Journalist David Lepasca just was reporting there's already been a mass exodus out -- out of Turkey in the last -- I don't actually recall the timeframe, but of recent, more so than 2022, I think, whereby Turks crossing the Mexican border and -- and -- and trying to -- to -- to claim for some status inside of the United States that way is really on the uptick. I don't know the demographics in that, but I assume -- I agree with my colleagues about, I think, you know, there's already been a mass sort of leaving of Turkish -- Jews from Turkey in the last 10 years...

OKTAY: Yup.

CIDDI: ... particularly since the coup attempt. It's actually very traceable, Portugal being a -- an ideal -- Portugal and Spain being an ideal destination, as well as the United States and -- and to a lesser extent, I believe, Israel. But there has been a sort of an exodus, and I expect that to go on, too. That's -- that's a good question.

I think we have time for just one more question before we have to end it. This gentleman at the front here.

QUESTION: Thank you. Thanks. Steve Flanagan from RAND and Georgetown University. Thank you all for a terrific panel. I wanted to pull on a thread that Sibel mentioned about perhaps if Erdogan survives, continuing, and maybe even expanding his reliance on MHP and some of the other nationalist factions, and how that will -- might play in the development of Turkish foreign policy, particularly in the region. The -- you know, many of those -- many of those parties, of course, are believers in this sort of Eurasianist vision for Turkey...

OKTAY: Right.

QUESTION: ... or Turkey being between East and West somehow and -- and playing this -- this balancing role even more fully than they have been doing.

OKTAY: Right.

QUESTION: But how does that mitigate against the realities that Howard was pointing out to or countered by, you know, many Turks realize still and Erdogan still himself probably knows that their -- Turkey's economic and other ties to the West, security ties are -- remain fundamental.

OKTAY: Right.

QUESTION: So you know, would -- would you see that Eurasianist sort of vision growing, particularly depending upon - and this then relates to, what about policy on Ukraine and the endgame?

OKTAY: Right.

QUESTION: Do you think we'll see continuity in the balancing game they've been playing, you know, sort of under -- under-the-table support to Ukraine with drone sales and other things, and -- and again, playing this role of being the great mediator between Russia and the West in the endgame in the war in Ukraine?

OKTAY: Right. Thank you for that. So I think the -- the -- I think foreign policy will largely remain the same for two reasons. Number one, neither MHP nor the *Yeniden Refah Partisi*, the -- the -- the reincarnated or...

CIDDI: Welfare.

OKTAY: ... New Welfare Party is -- is -- is -- they don't have a big claim on foreign policy issues. They have become niche parties that are more interested in domestic policy issues, issues surrounding nationalism, but also issues surrounding, you know, women and religious rights and freedoms. So again, very similar to some of the things that we -- we observe in Israel.

And again, if -- if coalition politics research is -- is telling us one thing, is that these political parties will support whatever foreign policy that AKP champions going forward in return for some sorts of concessions or policy concessions or policy reforms in these particular areas, like women, like the education system, like religious freedoms, and -- and maybe, you know, media freedoms and -- or whatever is left of it, and -- and so on and so forth.

And so what we call in the sort of political science jargon, which is logrolling, which is, you know, you scratch my back, I scratch yours, right? I will let you continue your balancing act in Ukraine and I will continue supporting you for, you know, whatever concessions you might give to the United States down the road, as far as F-16s are concerned, and yet in order for me to do that and vote for you in the Parliament, I would want certain policy concessions or policy reforms when it comes to banning LGBT organizations outright or codifying adultery as a criminal act, which it -- it isn't right now, right?

And so these will be some of the domestic policy demands that these smaller parties will have and the AKP, given its given its seat share, given the decrease in its vote share, will be increasingly succumbing to those kinds of dynamics within its -- what I can now probably call a coalition.

So I hope that answers the question.

CIDDI: Howard?

EISSENSTAT: So I'm not sure that -- that I entirely agree with Sibel, that the -- the smaller parties are going to have a -- a very large say, but we'll find -- we'll see.

Regardless, I do agree that -- that they're not particularly foreign policy oriented. Their foreign policy is more about mood than about specifics. I would point to three places where we might see them intensifying Erdogan's own instincts.

One would be Israel-- you know, HUDA PAR, for -- to the extent that they matter. They're -- they're certainly not going to be sympathetic to a reset with Israel, but then again, Erdogan's -- you know, probably was going to find a reason to scuttle the reset within a few months anyway.

The other two places are maybe -- maybe more important in terms of the direct effects. One would be Azerbaijan/Armenia and the other would be Cyprus.

CIDDI: Yeah.

EISSENSTAT: And I -- I think that, particularly on -- on those two fronts, the -- the profile of the new Parliament and Erdogan's continuation in office are -- are not going to mean good things.

CIDDI: Yeah, you -- you jumped on that point that I was just -- the one -- the one thing I was going to mention. I think - with particular niche issues, I think the one -- strong demands could come from, you know, the maintenance of networks, such as Hamas in Turkey. I think that's a strong identity issue for some of these smaller parties who would like to sort of keep that balance, you know, inside of Turkey for now.

But we could keep going on forever and we'll have to wait and -- the Turks keep us on the -- on the seat -- edge of our seat for May 28th. So watch this space. We'll have a lot more coming out hopefully in terms of -- as the results come - - become clearer from FDD's work.

But for now, I would like to thank my colleague that -- who's not sitting there and -- on his -- happily on his way to some sort of vacation or celebration. Steven Cook, my very good friend and colleague, Professor Howard Eissenstat, and Professor Sibel Oktay, thank you for your time, your insights, and -- and -- and making this possible. And thank you to all of the FDD team for making this possible at a very short notice. And thank you for coming and humoring us with your time. Thank you.