



**T.C.  
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# **Istanbul Election Re-Run: An Explainer**



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# Introduction

**O**n May 6 Turkey's Supreme Election Council (YSK) announced its decision to re-do the metropolitan municipality mayor elections in Istanbul. The Council's decision came after objections to the elections in Istanbul. According to the YSK, a substantial number of ballot box committee chairs were not selected among the public servants, a clear breach of the electoral law.

The YSK also decided to remove the CHP's (Republican People's Party) Ekrem İmamoğlu from the mayoral post due to the cancellation of the elections. Istanbul's Governor Ali Yerlikaya will be running the metropolitan municipality until the new mayor is elected on June 23.

The AK Party (Justice and Development Party) welcomed the YSK's decision to accept its objections and re-do the elections. AK Party officials have long been arguing that there were many irregularities in the Istanbul metropolitan municipality elections. Commenting on the Council's decision to re-do the elections Turkey's President and AK Party Chair Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that "the YSK has done the right thing for an election that has become suspicious." The AK Party's ally in the elections, the MHP (Nationalist

Movement Party), has been supporting the AK Party's claims regarding the elections in Istanbul, including to YSK decision to re-do the mayoral election.

On the other hand, the CHP and its ally, the İYİ Party (Good Party), harshly criticised the YSK's decision. According to CHP and İYİ Party officials, the YSK's decision is a violation of the electoral law and the Council's previous rulings. Moreover, the CHP filed an objection to the YSK for a re-doing of district municipality elections in Istanbul and 2018 General Elections. The CHP argues that the same ballot box committees served in these elections and that if there is a necessity to re-do the metropolitan municipality elections other elections should also be re-done.

This info pack aims to provide necessary information regarding the latest developments in mayoral elections of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. In the first part, the electoral process in Turkey and the structure of the Supreme Election Council will be examined in detail. In the second part, the Council's decision and the AK Party's and CHP's position are given in detail to better understand the process. A section is also devoted to frequently asked questions regarding the elections and the relevant answers. Finally, expert views have been compiled in order to shed light on the reasons and implications of the YSK's decision.



(Evren Atalay - Anadolu Ajansı)



(Muhammed Furkan Güneş- AA)

# The Electoral Process in Turkey

YSK is the top authority responsible for the conduct of all electoral processes in a transparent, equal, fair, and reliable manner. The YSK oversees the entire process from its onset to the end. Provincial and District Election Boards also carry out duties assigned by the YSK and supervise the election process within their respective jurisdictions. Ballot box committees also play a critical role in supervising and documenting the electoral process during and after the elections. Political parties assign one original and one reserve member to these committees thereby strengthening transparency.

The electoral process - including before, during and after the election period - is carried out through an integrated election management system, called SECSIS. This system enables voters and political parties to monitor the whole process throughout the country. It also ensures that political parties simultaneously obtain results of the ballot boxes once they are entered into the system after counting. This system secures the conduct of elections in a transparent manner.

## What is the YSK and What Does it Do?

The YSK is an independent and impartial institution in performing its duties and exercising its powers. It is legally enshrined that no authority can give orders and instructions to the YSK. The YSK is responsible for carrying

out all procedures related to the management of the election from its commencement until its end, with a particular focus on ensuring its integrity. The YSK also examines and finalizes all possible corruptions, complaints and objections related to the election process both during and after the election.

The YSK consists of seven principal and four alternate members, six of which are elected from among the members of the Court of Cassation and the remaining five members are from among the Council of State through secret ballot and absolute majority voting. The members of the YSK serve for a six year term and can be re-elected once their terms are expired.

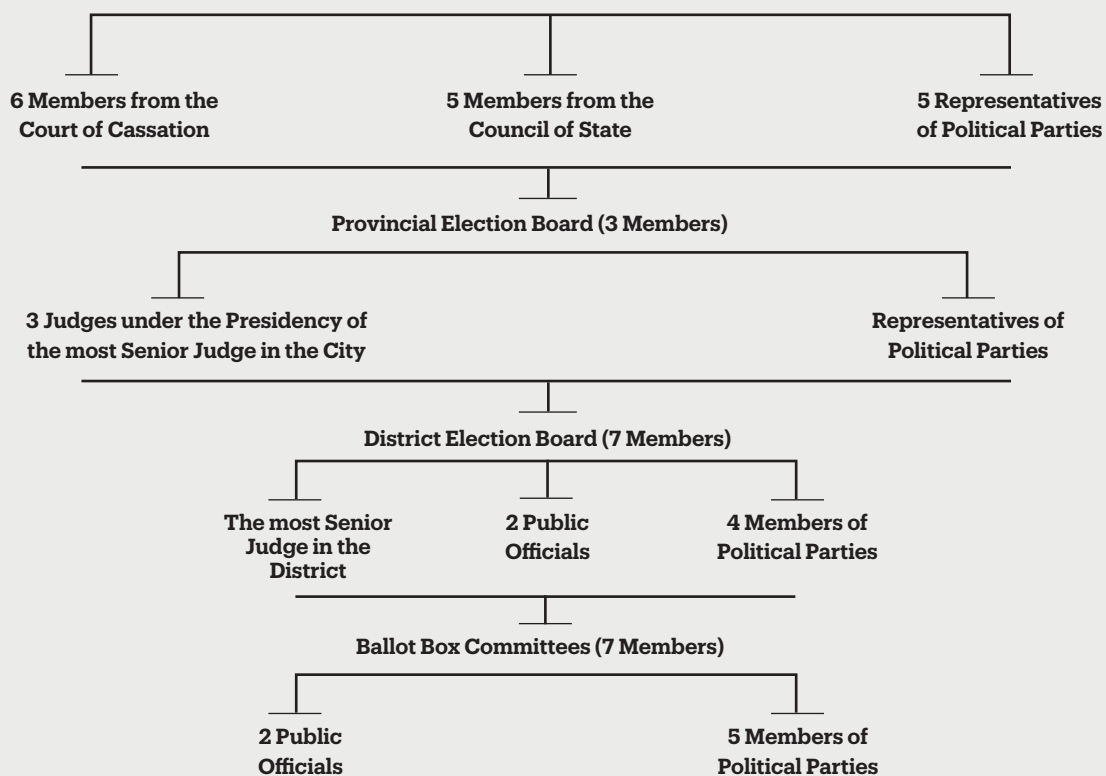
Additionally, the four political parties that received the highest votes in the most recent parliamentary elections can place one principal and one alternate representatives in the YSK. These representatives of the political parties can participate in all the works and discussions of the YSK, but they do not have a right to vote.

The YSK makes decisions by absolute majority. In case of equality of votes, the decision of the President of the YSK determines the results. The principle decisions of the YSK are published in the Official Gazette within fifteen days; other decisions related to election are published on its own official website.

## STRUCTURE OF THE SUPREME ELECTION COUNCIL



### Supreme Election Council (11 Members)



Source: Anadolu Agency

# YSK's decision to re-do the Elections in Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality

On May 6, in seven to four vote, the YSK decided by a majority vote to rerun the elections for the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. In addition to setting the date of the new elections in Istanbul for June 23, the YSK's decision also ruled to cancel the mayoral certificate of Ekrem İmamoğlu. Until that time, the governor of Istanbul will undertake the responsibilities of the metropolitan mayorship.

The official decision of the YSK states that the reason for a rerun in Istanbul is due to irregularities regarding the composition of the ballot box committee members. According to the YSK, a considerable number of the ballot box committee members were not public servants, as required by a 2018 law. The law stipulates that the at least two out of seven members of the Ballot Box Committee – one being the president – must be public servants. These public servants are selected through the local governors and district election boards. As such, the YSK filed a criminal complaint against the people allegedly responsible for these irregularities.

During the course of the March 31 vote, both parties (AK Party and CHP) maintained their respective claims to victory in Istanbul. The next day, in early hours of the morning, the YSK announced that in Istanbul, the tabulation process of 31,102 of 31,186 ballot boxes had ended, and, according to provisional results Ekrem İmamoğlu had secured 4,159,650 votes versus Binali Yıldırım's 4,131,761, putting İmamoğlu ahead of Yıldırım by 27,889 votes. In a later announcement, Chair of the YSK, Sadi Güven, stated that the election process had ended, and the objection process had begun.



Sadi Güven, Head of YSK (Muhammed Selim Korkutata -Anadolu Agency)

AK Party officials filed various objections to the results of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. Some of these objections were accepted by the YSK and its sub-bodies and necessary actions were taken, while some objections were rejected and no action taken. The AK Party initially was keen on the recount of the invalid votes as their number was thought to be approximately 300 thousand. The CHP

opposed the recount of all invalid votes citing lacking evidence of any wrongdoing, and as it requires legitimization and evidence by the electoral law. The YSK subsequently decided in favour of the recount of all invalid votes. The margin between the candidates consequently narrowed; however, CHP's İmamoğlu was still leading by over 13 thousand votes ahead of AK Party's Yıldırım.

On April 18, 2019, the YSK presented the mayoral certificate to İmamoğlu, marking the beginning of his duty as the Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.

However, the objection process continued as the AK Party further objected to the results by using the "extraordinary objection" mechanism. Their objection can be categorised under three parts.

The First one claims that there were irregularities and errors regarding final ballot box documents, which indicates the number of votes that candidates received. The second one claims that there were people who were not eligible to vote, yet managed to still cast a ballot. Finally, the AK Party claimed that the composition of the ballot box committees was illegitimate as there were non-public servant presidents and members of the committee. The YSK, according to its preliminary statement, ruled out the objections in the first and second parts but accepted the third one.

# AK Party's position regarding the YSK's decision

The AK Party welcomed the YSK's decision to annul the results of mayoral elections in İstanbul. They claim that the renewal of the İstanbul mayoral elections is the result of the judicial process. Moreover, the AK Party declares that the objection process is a democratic right enshrined in Turkey's electoral process. Therefore, they believe the YSK's re-run decision is not a political decision but a legal one, taken by an independent institution. The YSK's decision has been criticized as being a political, however the AK Party rejects these claims and gives examples of YSK decisions which were against AK Party's stance, such as 2014 local elections in Yalova district.

The AK Party explained the re-do decision of the YSK by arguing that 19 thousand ballot box committee officers were not public servants and irregularities on vote count and final ballot box documents. For instance, 42 thousand suspect ballot paper have been detected in 123 polling stations. The number of suspect ballot papers potentially influence the results because the difference between the two candidates was only 13,729 votes. On the other hand, they highlight there are 31,280 ballot boxes and 31,280 Ballot Box Committees in İstanbul. Their president and one of the members of the ballot box committees have to be selected from public servants. According to AK Party's findings, 6,644 of presidents and 13,098 of members of Ballot Box Committees were not public servants.

Following the YSK's judgment, one of the crucial disputes has revolved around why the İstanbul mayoral election was cancelled but not the district mayor and municipal council votes. The AK Party has replied that their objection was only related to the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality and Büyükçekmece District Mayor, along with the MHP objection for the Maltepe district. Consequently, the YSK decided to accept İstanbul objection and rejected Büyükçekmece and Maltepe districts. Since there was not any objections in other districts of İstanbul, YSK has not made a decision for the remaining districts. In this regard, the YSK has no authority to decide other districts. It can only consider actual objections raised. 42 thousand suspect votes could affect to the result of İstanbul Municipality but not the districts such as Büyükçekmece and Maltepe.

According to the YSK, the vote will be held on June 23. AK Party officials have stated that the re-run election will remove a stain on the İstanbul Mayoral Election and protect the integrity of people's votes. In this context, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said, "we observe this decision is an important step to strengthen our democracy. The objection documents, which were submitted to YSK, were strong. There are concrete pieces of evidence that cannot be denied in AK Party's objections." Furthermore, Erdogan declared that "the YSK listened to representatives of the AK Party and other parties, examined information and documents in this direction made a decision on the election. We hope that the decision will be beneficial to our country, our nation and İstanbul." AK Party's İstanbul mayoral candidate Binali Yıldırım also made a statement on the decision: "During and after the elections, our party has followed all of the processes of the law due to mistakes, some irregularities, tricks and convictions. The process of provincial election boards was completed. The YSK has been doing the necessary works and researches on the objections. Finally, the final report was prepared and discussed. The YSK subsequently decided to renew the elections in İstanbul."



AK Party's İstanbul candidate Binali Yıldırım.  
(Erhan Elaldi- Anadolu Agency)



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and AK Party's Istanbul candidate Binali Yıldırım. (Cumhurbaşkanlığı / Kayhan Özer - Anadolu Agency)

# CHP's position regarding the YSK's decision

The reaction of the CHP and its supporters to the YSK's decision to re-do the mayoral elections for Istanbul's Metropolitan Municipality was a big disappointment. Party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu condemned the YSK's rule and said that the decision was politically motivated. The CHP's Istanbul mayoral candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu emphasised that there was no justifiable ground to re-do elections he had already won. The CHP's ally in the local elections, the İYİ Party, likewise opposed the YSK's ruling. İYİ Party leader Meral Akşener, visited her CHP counterpart Kılıçdaroğlu shortly after the YSK's decision in order to announce their continued support for Ekrem İmamoğlu.

CHP officials argue that the YSK's decision on Istanbul is not consistent with the electoral law and the Board's previous rules. According to the CHP's claims, the objection process to the ballot box committees ended on March 2, nearly one month before the elections took place. CHP officials base their claims to the YSK's decision regarding the İYİ Party's objection in Mustafa Kemal Paşa District of Bursa. Shortly before the decision on Istanbul, the YSK rejected the İYİ Party's objection to the same irregularities in some ballot box committees in this district saying that the process had ended on March 2. Based on this, the CHP believes that the YSK should not have accepted the AK Party's objection to the ballot box committees in Istanbul since the date of objection had long past.

The March 31 elections saw citizens of Istanbul elect their metropolitan municipality mayor, district mayors, municipal council members and neighbourhood representatives. All of these elections were monitored by the same ballot box committees. However, the YSK's rule only dictates a re-doing of metropolitan municipality elections. In opposition to the YSK's decision, the CHP argues that if there is a necessity to re-do the metropolitan municipality elections, all of four of these ballots should be re-done since same ballot box committees served in all of them. Moreover, the CHP argues that the same ballot box committees had also served in the 2018 general elections. Therefore, if the local elections are cancelled so should the general elections since the unlawful structure of the committees also existed in the general elections. The CHP has filed an objection regarding these claims to the YSK. However, at the time of writing this info pack, the YSK has not announced its ruling.

Although Nation's Alliance's CHP and İYİ Party objected to the YSK's decision over Istanbul, both parties announced that they will be participating in the re-election on June 23. Ekrem İmamoğlu will continue to be the alliance's candidate for the mayoral post of the metropolitan municipality.

Meanwhile, some other parties such as the Communist Party of Turkey and Labourist Movement Party as well as a number of independent candidates announced that they would withdraw from the elections in order to support Ekrem İmamoğlu. Despite the fact that these parties only gained around 20 thousand votes, taking into account that the difference between İmamoğlu and Yıldırım was 13 thousand on March 31, their votes may play an important role in determining the winner of on June 23.



CHP's Istanbul candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu.  
(Muhammed Enes Yıldırım - Anadolu Agency)



CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and CHP's Istanbul candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu. (Raşit Aydoğan - Anadolu Agency)



# FAQs of the re-run election

## ■ What is the Objection Process?

Objections to the election results are regulated by Law 298. According to this law, people who are eligible to vote, political parties or their relevant bodies, observers and candidates have right to object to the decisions of the Ballot Box Committee, District Election Board and Provincial Election Board. Objections to the decisions of a ballot box committee are put to the District Election Board, while objections to the decisions of the District Election Board are the responsibility of the Provincial Election Board. The YSK is the final authority for dispute settlement in the objection process, and its verdict cannot be objected any further.

## ■ What is the issue regarding the formation of ballot box committees?

The YSK's decision to cancel the Istanbul Municipality elections is based on a breach of the law regarding the formation of the ballot box committees. With the amendments in the Turkish Election Law in March 13, 2018, the rules regulating the formation of ballot box committee was changed. According to this change, the chairman and one member of ballot box committee should be selected from among the relevant public officials. The district election board is responsible for the selection process.

The process unfolds as follows: the district governor sends the list of all public officials working in the district to the district election board. The chairman of the district election board identifies the twice as many public officials as the number of ballot boxes, a process completed by drawing lots. Those who have no legal obstacles among the iden-

tified public officials are determined as the chairman of the ballot box committees. A similar process is applied for the members of the committee.

## ■ Why did YSK cancel Istanbul Municipality elections but not district elections and City Council elections?

On March 31, people in Istanbul voted for Municipality Mayor, District Mayor, City Council Members and Mukhtars. The same envelopes were used for the ballot papers regarding for each election. The YSK only annulled the Municipality election results citing the unlawful formation of the ballot box committees, ruling that the results of the remaining elections are not affected. Departing from this point, the main opposition CHP has condemned the YSK's decision and claimed that if there is unlawfulness in the municipality elections, it should have affected the results of the other elections as well. They further claim, since the four ballot papers were in the same envelopes and the same ballot box committees were responsible for the results of these elections, the remaining three elections should also have been annulled. As such, the CHP and İYİ Party appealed to the YSK for the total annulment of the elections in the Istanbul, yet, the YSK rejected this appeal.

In response to this claim, the AK Party claims that since the gaps between the leading two candidates in district elections are too large to be covered by total number of votes in the unlawfully composed ballot boxes, there is no need to cancel them. On the other side, since the difference between Yıldırım and İmamoğlu is only around thirteen thousand votes the total number of votes in these ballot boxes (over forty two thousand votes) can change the result of the

election. Additionally, the AK Party claims that the YSK examines only the cases where objections have been made. Since no party made objections regarding these elections, it is not possible for YSK to consider them.

## ■ Should the previous elections be repeated, too?

The CHP argues that the 24 June 2018 Presidential Elections should also be annulled and a re-run election should take place. CHP officials filed an objection to the YSK requesting annulment of the 24 June Presidential Elections, claiming that if the Istanbul mayoral election is annulled due to the lack of public officials in some of the ballot box committees, the same action should be taken for the 24 June Presidential elections as the ballot box committees were established in the same way. The AK Party, on the other hand, argues that the CHP's claim to annul previous elections cannot be carried into effect because the time period of objection to the 24 June elections have passed. Moreover, it is claimed that even if the ballot box committees were formed in the same manner, the vote difference between the candidates were much bigger and the results cannot be effected by the irregularities in the ballot box committees. The YSK rejected the CHP's objection regarding the annulment of 24 June election in 2018.

## ■ Are there other examples of re-run local elections in Turkey?

### *Yalova Re-run Decision*

In the 30 March, 2014 Local Elections, the AK Party won the election by one vote in Yalova Province. Following this result, the CHP objected and the votes were recounted. CHP's candidate came first with six votes and CHP's candidate became Mayor of Yalova. The AK Party objected this result by claiming that ineligible voters casted votes. Upon the objection, the YSK decided to re-run the Yalova election after identifying seven people who voted in the elections despite they were not eligible. The election was repeated and CHP won the re-run.

### *Yusufeli Re-run Decision*

In the 31 March, 2019 Local Election, the AK Party's candidate won the election by three votes in the Yusufeli district of Artvin. The CHP subsequently objected to the results by addressing issues regarding non-eligible voters. The YSK then annulled the Yusufeli election after it detect-

ed that two restricted voters cast their votes and the difference between two leading candidates was only one in the district. Additionally, the YSK also identified that five ballot papers were lost. In light of these findings, the election will be renewed on June 2, 2019.

### *Honaz Re-Run Decision*

The YSK decided to re-do the election in Honaz district of Denizli. The CHP's candidate won the election by eight votes. On the objection of the AK Party, the election was cancelled due to restricted voters. The re-run election will be held on June 2, 2019.

## ■ Are there other examples of re-run elections across the world?

### *United States - North Carolina Ninth Congressional District Elections 2018*

North Carolina Board of Elections ordered a re-run of elections in the Ninth Congressional District after fraud in the election process was discovered by the authorities. According to the reports, the winner-candidate had financed an attempt to draw voters by ballot-harvesting which is illegal in the North Carolina. The Ninth District seat in the Congress will remain empty until the new election process is completed and the winner is announced.

### *Austria - Presidential Elections 2016*

The Constitutional Court of Austria cancelled the second round of the presidential elections after an appeal was made to the court. According to the appeal many irregularities such as unordered vote counting and non-citizens going to the polls. Although the Interior Ministry accepted the allegations of irregularities in the elections they argued that such irregularities were small and did not affect the outcome of the elections. Nonetheless, the High Court accepted the appeal and ordered a re-run of the election.

### *Belgium - Bilzen Municipal Council Elections 2018*

The Council of State of Belgium ruled that there were irregularities in the vote counting process of in the municipal council elections. Such irregularities may have affected the allocation of the seats in the municipal council. Due to this reason the elections will be renewed.

# Expert Views

**1** What is the reason behind the YSK's decision to re-do the Istanbul elections?

**2** Why does the opposition object to the YSK's Istanbul decision?

**3** Could the YSK decision have an effect on voters' decision in the 23 June elections?

**4** What are the implications of YSK's decision on political life in Turkey?



**Professor Talip KÜÇÜKCAN**  
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The Supreme Election Council's decision to re-do the Istanbul Metropolitan Mayoral elections was triggered by the application of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) which claimed that election law was violated based on the evidence they collected and presented to the Council. The AK Party claimed that balloting committees were composed in contradiction with the rules set out in the Election Law. To be more precise, the Election Law requires that chairpersons and at least one member of the balloting committees, which supervise the voting process including counting, recording, and submitting the results with all documents to the district election committees must be a civil servant and public employee. As the evidence presented by the AK Party officials indicate, this article of the law has been clearly violated because non-civil servants were appointed as chairs of the balloting committees in many instances. The Supreme Election Council acknowledged the violations and decided for the re-run of elections.

The opposition objects to the decision of the Supreme Election Council on two grounds. First, the opposition claims that the Council was under pressure and therefore took a political decision rather than a legal one. However, it is difficult to justify this claim, as members of the Council are not political appointees. The Council members were not appointed neither by the President nor by the Parliament but independently elected from among the members of Court of Cassation and from Council of State by the members of these institutions. Second, the opposition claims that the Supreme Election Council has only partially cancelled the elections although people not only voted for the mayor of metropolitan municipality but also for district mayors, the municipal councils and neighbourhood administrators (muhtars) all in one envelope. The opposition argues that results of all these four elections in Istanbul should have been cancelled. Against this reasoning, the Council stated that it has no mandate to take action in matters beyond what

it was asked to consider if there has been no application to do otherwise in time.

Two main blocs will be competing during the re-run elections in Istanbul: the People's Alliance and the Nation's Alliance. People's Alliance candidate Binali Yıldırım of the AK Party and Nation's Alliance candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu of the CHP who was declared a winner on 31 March elections with a small margin will re-run against each other once more. Before the Council decision, the AK Party claimed that their candidate Binali Yıldırım was the victim of irregularities in the elections, which were recognized as such by the Supreme Election Council that gave another chance to Mr. Yıldırım to compete on fair grounds as believed by AK Party members. After the decision of the Council however, CHP began a campaign of victimhood as its officials and members claim that Ekrem İmamoğlu's mandate was taken away despite he won the elections on 31 March. It seems that both candidates will use the rhetoric of victimhood that might appeal to the public. Given the narrow margin of difference (around 13 700) between the two candidates, what will be more influential on voter's decision is not the decision of the Council but the proportion of people who will be willing to go ballot boxes on 23 June. More than a million eligible voters did not turn up for the 31 March elections. Whoever consolidates their existing support base and persuades more than a million non-voters to vote on 23 June will be the winner.

Turkish political life has always been dynamic and it has gained maturity over decades. Although Turkish democracy has been interrupted by direct or indirect military interventions (the last failed attempt was on 15 July 2016 which was averted by the Turkish people), one the strengths of Turkish democracy has been the election system, with fair and transparent elections and high rate of political participation in the country. The Supreme Election Council's decision is a rare one with its own justification and has caused heated debate across political parties. All debates around election security, confidence in the electoral system, respecting the fair election results will remain on the political agenda for some time to come but will function to further mature Turkey's vibrant democracy.



**Ass. Professor  
Cem Duran UZUN**  
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The YSK has not declared its detailed reasoning of the decision but we can evaluate it by taking the initial decision and information reflected in the press into consideration. According to this, there are two reasons for the annulment. The first reason is that the ballot box committees were not formed according to Law 298. According to the law, the district election board, which receives the list of public servants from the district administration, determines the heads of ballot box committees through the lot. Committee members are elected in the same manner. It is said that around 225 heads and around 3500 members were selected from outside while they should have been ranking public servants according to the law. The second reason is that some counting and casting tables have been found empty, unsigned, unsealed or missing. A total of 123 ballot boxes were identified with these two irregularities. In other words, there are 123 ballot boxes where both irregularities – unlawfulness in the formation of ballot box committees and in counting and casting tables, exist. Counting and casting tables from 22 ballot boxes are either missing or were put as empty on the YSK's electronic system. Similarly, counting and casting tables of the remaining 101 ballot boxes were unsigned, unsealed or missing. All in all, the total number of votes in these ballot boxes is 42,000. As such, the election is annulled because this number is greater than the 13, 729 vote difference between the two candidates.

The opposition objects to the YSK's annulment decision by saying that people who are not public servants have been assigned as head or a member of ballot box committees and this has been the norm of the YSK. However, the necessity of the head of the ballot box committee to be a public servant was adopted by Law 7102 on February 13, 2018. Therefore, there was no such rule in the elections preceding the law. Since this law was adopted before the elections on June 24, 2018, it could be questioned whether this rule was obeyed. However, there was no timely objection at that time and no queries were made.

Another criticism of the opposition is the fact that only the results of the metropolitan elections were cancelled and those for district mayors, municipal council members and mukhtars were not. They argue that if there is any irregularity, all of these elections should be annulled. First and foremost, it is imperative to state that the YSK make queries upon issues which are objected. It is impossible for YSK to take action by its own without any objection received and investigate all of the irregularities took place. The reason why the district mayor elections were not annulled is because the YSK has not received any objection to these elections. Also, it can be observed that the irregularities of the ballot box committees cannot change the results in districts and therefore no annulment took place

regarding the districts. In order for the annulment took place, the irregularities should be able to change the results. As such, we should consider the irregularities on the formation of the ballot box committees and the difference between the number of votes casted on these ballot boxes and the vote difference between the candidates.

CHP candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu took his position on April 17 and ran İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality for 18 days. The CHP and İmamoğlu argue that the decision of the Council is unlawful and he was unjustly taken away from the mayorship. Accordingly, we can say that up until the June 23 election, the opposition will keep the YSK's annulment decision on the agenda and try to influence the electorates with the discourse that they are downtrodden. On the other hand, the AK Party and its candidate Binali Yıldırım emphasize that the YSK's decision is lawful and that their aims are to protect the will of the electorate. I think that from now on, the AK Party will remove the YSK's decision from its agenda and highlight Binali Yıldırım's executive personality and his past services and future projects.

It is claimed that the CHP's and İmamoğlu's discourse highlighting victimhood and unfairness may have a certain amount of impact on voters. Yet, I think this will be very limited. I expect that the results of the June 23 elections will be very close to the results of the March 31 election, there will be no dramatic changes and both candidates will get more than 4 million votes. It seems that the elections will end with tight differences on June 23 again. The decision of 1.7 million voters who did not vote on 31 March election will be decisive in this election. If these voters, the majority of whom are considered as the supporters of the AK Party, can be brought to the polls, the result will be in favour of the AK Party. Additionally, the over 340 thousand invalid votes in the March 31 election will also affect the results.

It is very difficult to predict the long-term effects of the YSK's decision on Turkish politics. Nevertheless, we can say some things about the short-term consequences. Ekrem İmamoğlu became the candidate of the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality while he had been an unknown district mayor. During the campaign period, he did not become prominent, too. In fact, the name of the CHP's Ankara Metropolitan Mayor candidate Mansur Yavaş was spoken of much more. However, İmamoğlu receiving 48.80 % of the votes, the discussions about the election process and the YSK's cancellation decision have carried out Ekrem İmamoğlu to forefront. The rate of İmamoğlu's vote was almost double the rate his party received in the last year's election (26.45 %). We can foresee that these developments will make İmamoğlu stand out as the leading candidate of the opposition and the CHP.

We can measure the impact of the YSK's decision after we see the reaction of the voters in the June 23 election to some extent. If İmamoğlu succeeds and wins the election in the June 23 elections, this will open the way for him and his party. However, if the AK Party wins İstanbul again, the wind behind İmamoğlu will decrease.



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The Supreme Election Council's reasoning for allowing a re-vote in the Istanbul elections is essentially that observers at ballot box committees were not adequately certified. According to the Election Council, civil servants must be present at ballot boxes to certify results. The Justice and Development Party (the AK Party) objected to the results of ballot boxes in which civil servants were not present to certify the result. The AK Party claimed that the results of the elections was marred by voter fraud and that those ballot boxes without adequate oversight (in the form of civil servants) could have reasonably impacted the outcome of the election. At the final vote count, the declared winner of the Istanbul elections, Ekrem İmamoğlu won by one-tenth of one percent. The AK Party claims that voter fraud was responsible for far greater than this difference and the Supreme Election Council agreed with this assessment granting a new election.

The opposition disagrees with the AK Party's claim. It claims that although this regulation does exist, it has in the past been ignored. It claims that the AK Party's influence over the Council is so great that its members have sided with the AK Party's assertions and have ruled in their favour. It also claims that in the past employees of private banks have been called upon to serve as observers in polling places and that they have been asked to participate by the Supreme Election Council itself. Furthermore, it claims that the Council now objects to the use of private bank employees as observers when it never did in the past. The opposition also asked the Council to nullify all results of the March election, including at the district-executive level. The AKP and MHP also applied for the results of specific districts results to be cancelled. The Supreme Election Council rejected all appeals to the results of the Istanbul election at the district-executive level and only has called for a re-vote at the mayoral level. This move has been widely criticized by supporters of the opposition candidate.

The YSK's decision has polarized both sides and will undoubtedly effect voters' decision in the June 23 elections. Supporters of Binali Yıldırım, the AK Party's candidate, believe that their candidate was robbed. They point to incidences of clear fraud in which the opposition benefited. They believe that had fair elections been held their candidate would have won as polls predicted. Supporters of opposition candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu disagree. They believe that the post-election decision by the Supreme Election Council is itself a travesty of justice. They believe that the Council has cowed under pressure from the ruling AK Party and question the reputation of members of that council. They don't believe the instances of fraud amount to

anywhere near the amount necessary to impact the outcome of the election. This vast chasm between the two electorates will make this upcoming election even more divisive. I expect voter turnout to increase even more than the previous election and for the votes of the remaining candidates to decrease. Voters will most likely vote for Yıldırım or İmamoğlu and skip "third-party" candidates.

The Supreme Election Council's decision will continue to further divide Turkish voters it appears. Whatever the outcome of the new election approximately half of residents of Istanbul will feel wronged. This is a situation where ultimately everyone loses. While the renewal of an election in which fraud is suspected is not unprecedented in developed democracies, such as the United States, it is new to Turkish politics. As such, it will be difficult to accept and whomever wins the June 23 election will not be viewed as the undisputed winner. This is unfortunate for Turkey and for Istanbul. Should both sides agree to all ballot box observers and certify the results together, then perhaps this cloud hanging over the election will be lifted. Should a renewed election (with both sides in agreement over the results) produce a much wider gap in the outcome, the winner may be easily accepted by both parties.

# Conclusion: What is Next?

Upon the objections of the AK Party to the election results in Istanbul, the YSK has decided to re-run the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality elections on June 23. Although the YSK has not revealed the details of the decision so far, in a short statement, the Council stated that the re-run decision was taken because presidents and at least one member of some of the ballot box committees were not civil servants as they should have been as per Turkish electoral law. Additionally, the YSK has ruled to remove Ekrem İmamoğlu from his post in the Municipality.

The ruling AK Party and the MHP welcomed the decision. AK Party officials stated that the re-run would help remove any doubts and speculations attached to the election results and will strengthen Turkish democracy. On the other hand, the main opposition CHP and the İYİ Party have condemned the decision claiming that the decision was taken with political motivations.

The two main candidates in the race, AK Party's Binali Yıldırım and CHP's Ekrem İmamoğlu, will both stand for the election once again. Both sides, together with their alliance partners, will concentrate their attention on the re-elections in the upcoming days in an effort to tilt the balance in their respective favours. Whether the other parties that participated in the original elections will continue with their own candidates will be consequential, given the closeness of the results of the original election.

For the June 23 Istanbul Municipality re-elections, there will be no update in the registered voter lists except for those who are restricted, in military service and in prison. Additionally, those who reached 18 years of age between the date of the original election and re-election will not be eligible to vote. The voter turnout in the original election in Istanbul was 83.9% and it is expected to increase in the re-election, as both sides will try to mobilize their supporters.



(İbrahim Yozoğlu - Anadolu Ajansı)





