

Kurdish parties form alliance ahead of March elections

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On Sunday 06 January, eight of the major Kurdish political parties in Turkey announced they would be forming an alliance ahead of the 31 March 2019 elections.

The alliance will be formed under the umbrella of the People's Democratic Party (HDP), which [released a statement](#) on Sunday 06 January entitled "Kurdish parties are coming together in an election alliance."

The other members of the alliance, called the "Kurdistan Election Alliance", were [announced](#) on Monday 07 January in a joint press conference in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir featuring the chairpersons and co-chairpersons of each party. The members of the alliance are as follows: the Azadi Movement, the Democratic Regions Party (DBP), the Revolutionary Democratic Kurdish Association (DDKD), the Human and Freedom Party, the Kurdistan Communist Party (KKP), the Platforma Demokraten Kurd (PDK), and the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Turkey (PDK-T).

The purpose of the alliance is for the pro-Kurdish HDP to secure more votes in

Turkey's southeast region, where 95 of the 102 Kurdish-majority municipalities have been taken over by administrators appointed (and not elected) by Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP). Erdogan began cracking down on HDP politicians following the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey over their alleged ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and has since removed more 80 of 103 democratically elected HDP mayors, imprisoning more than 60. Erdogan [stated](#) last October that he would take over any municipality won by the HDP in the March elections, calling the politicians 'terrorists' for alleged links to the PKK. With the alliance, Kurdish parties are hoping to secure political representation and avoid further attacks from AKP.

This news comes after the ruling AKP and the far-right ultranationalist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) [announced](#) in November of last year that they would be continuing their alliance first formed ahead of the 24 June 2018 elections, reportedly over fears of losing control in Ankara, Istanbul, and Diyarbakir. According to [Rudaw](#), "Kurdish parties held similar meetings [to form an alliance] in the run-up to the June 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections, but were unable to reach an agreement." Nevertheless, the HDP [won](#) 11.7% of the vote in the June elections, crucially passing the 10% threshold to earn seats in parliament for the second consecutive term, making them the second-largest opposition party behind the Republican People's Party (CHP).

Towards the end of last year, the HDP announced they would again seek to establish an alliance ahead of the March elections. In a press conference in Diyarbakir on 27 October 2018, HDP co-chair Pervin Buldan [stated](#), "Hegemonic forces come together, so why do Kurds not come together? I think we have to discuss this issue." Kurdish parties reportedly [began meeting](#) to discuss a possible alliance in December of last year.

Many have hailed the alliance as a great step forward: at the 07 January press conference, DBP Co-chair Mehmet Arslan said he is "hopeful that this step will be an important step in the Kurdish people achieving national unity," and KKP Chairperson Sinan Ciftiyurek added that it was "a historic day." HDP co-chair Sezai Temelli closed the press conference, stating, "This is a historic moment, because it is an election alliance but it is so much more than that. It is very important to put forth this will despite animosity against Kurds and the policies enacted in all 4 lands [of Kurdistan]. I believe this alliance will grow and advance in the future." However, the alliance is not without controversy; a member of the Azadi Movement, Sidki Zilan, has reportedly resigned over the alliance, citing ethical differences with the HDP.

Another significant aspect of the alliance is that it signifies cooperation between the

HDP and the PDK, the ruling party of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Iraqi Kurdistan, led by former president of Iraqi Kurdistan Masoud Barzani. The parties have had numerous differences in the past; for [example](#), in August of last year, KDP the intelligence service Parastin detained an HDP member three weeks after deporting another. In the press conference on Monday, PDK-T chairperson Mehmet Emin implied this alliance could represent the two parties coming together to work in the interest of all Kurdish people, stating, “We must form a table after the election and carry an alliance into the future within the framework of principles for our people.”

The alliance was also praised by imprisoned HDP Selahattin Demirtas, who ran for president in the June 2018 election from prison, coming in third with 8.4% of the vote. Demirtas reportedly sent a letter to HDP leadership in support of the alliance, stating that the responsibility for Kurdish regions under attack, such as Turkish-occupied Afrin in northern Syria, falls not just on the “enemies of the Kurdish people”, but on Kurdish politicians as well. The Kurdistan Election Alliance may represent the shouldering of this responsibility by Kurdish political representatives, and, one might hope, could signal a coming unity of Kurdish political expression for the betterment of people throughout Kurdistan.