

## The 2026 Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Cyprus – Between Continuity and Transformation

### Executive Summary

- The 2026 parliamentary election in Cyprus shows both continuities as well as signs of a transformation of the political landscape. The centre-right Democratic Rally (DISY) remained the largest political force and the leftist Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) retained its position as the main opposition party. The most notable shifts occurred through the continued rise of the far-right National Popular Front (ELAM) and the parliamentary entry of two new political formations as well as the failure of three established parties to enter parliament.
- The far-right ELAM continued its string of electoral successes and emerged as the main winner of the election, consolidating itself as a major political force by capitalizing on public concerns over migration, security and distrust in political elites.
- The entry of two new anti-establishment, protest-oriented parties into parliament – the anti-corruption party ALMA – Citizens for Cyprus and the populist group Direct Democracy Cyprus – reflects increasing voter volatility and a weakening of traditional party loyalties.
- The campaign was dominated by domestic socioeconomic issues, particularly inflation, rising costs of living including housing costs, stagnant wages and migration. In contrast, the Cyprus reunification issue played a significantly smaller role than in previous elections. Regional instability in the Middle East and the drone attack on British military facilities on the island reinforced public perceptions of its geopolitical vulnerability.
- Due to Cyprus' presidential system, the elections will not directly produce a new government or formal coalition. However, the new parliamentary balance will shape informal alliances and strategic positioning ahead of the 2028 presidential election. President Nikos Christodoulides (independent) remains dependent on flexible parliamentary majorities.
- From a European perspective, the election underlines Cyprus' growing strategic importance for the EU in the context of migration, Eastern Mediterranean security, Middle East instability, and relations with Turkey.

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**Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The 2026 parliamentary election in Cyprus shows a more nuanced picture than many observers had anticipated. Whilst the centre-right Democratic Rally (DISY) remained the strongest political force and the leftist Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) maintained its position as the main opposition party, both parties proved to be significantly more resilient than many pre-election forecasts had suggested. The most significant shifts resulted from the continued rise of the right-wing National Popular Front (ELAM) and the entry of two new political formations, ALMA and Direct Democracy Cyprus, into parliament. Voter turnout was once again comparatively low, confirming the ongoing alienation of large sections of the population from established political elites.

The clear winner of the election was the right-wing populist and xenophobic ELAM, which, as expected, established itself as the third force in the party system. ELAM benefited in particular from the intense politicisation of the migration issue, which was closely linked during the election campaign to questions of the state's capacity to act, internal security, and national identity. At the same time, two new political formations managed to enter parliament. Particularly noteworthy are the anti-corruption party Citizens for Cyprus (ALMA) and the populist group Direct Democracy Cyprus, centred around MEP and YouTuber Fidias Panayiotou. Three established parties – the social democratic Socialist Party (EDEK), the centrist Democratic Alignment (DIPA), and the green party “Movement of Ecologists – Citizens’ Cooperation” (KOSP) – on the other hand, failed to clear the 3.6% threshold and will not be represented in the next parliament. Contrary to expectations, also the newly established progressive and pro-European Volt Cyprus, supported by many of the bicomunal peace activists, narrowly failed to clear the electoral threshold.

The elections took place in a context marked by rising social insecurity, political distrust, migration pressures and growing geopolitical uncertainty linked to developments in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. Unlike previous parliamentary campaigns, the Cyprus reunification issue played only a secondary role, while domestic socioeconomic concerns dominated the public debate. Although Cyprus operates under a presidential system and the elections do not directly determine the government, the outcome is

politically significant as it reshapes parliamentary dynamics and sets the stage for the 2028 presidential election.

**The Electoral Campaign**

The campaign was characterized by pronounced political fragmentation, high levels of voter dissatisfaction, and growing distrust toward established political elites. Public debate was less ideologically polarized than in many other European states, but it was increasingly shaped by anti-establishment rhetoric, populist messaging, and concerns about state effectiveness. Conversely, the electoral campaign was also strongly influenced by warnings from the established center-right and centrist parties – the Democratic Rally (DISY) and the Democratic Party (DIKO) – against so-called “populist” and anti-establishment forces. In particular, the new parties Citizens for Cyprus (ALMA) and Direct Democracy Cyprus were portrayed by both DISY and DIKO as threats to political and economic stability, especially as those two parties were concerned about losing significant numbers of voters to these emerging challengers.

At the same time, the traditional right–left rivalry between the two dominant parties of Cypriot politics, DISY and AKEL, receded noticeably into the background during the campaign. Although both parties share a traditionally moderate position on the Cyprus issue, their long-standing rivalry and mutual unwillingness to enter into coalition in the past have allowed smaller parties, with traditionally hard-line stances on the Cyprus question, to assume kingmaker roles in presidential elections or obtain the position of the president of parliament. This dynamic has contributed to the election of three DIKO politicians to the presidency with the support of AKEL, despite DIKO's comparatively much smaller electoral base. At this election, however, DISY and DIKO increasingly presented themselves as responsible centrist actors capable of ensuring political stability, governability, and economic continuity. According to both parties, this stability was threatened above all by the rise of ELAM, ALMA, and Direct Democracy Cyprus. In retrospect, this mobilization strategy appears to have been successful and seems to have also benefited AKEL, as both DISY and AKEL as the traditional pillars of Cypriot politics retained their number of parliamentary seats, contrary to expectations of significant electoral losses in the pre-election polls. Moreover, DIKO's losses were smaller than expected.

1 The author would like to thank Zeynep Sandalli for her substantial contribution to the drafting and editing of this text.

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The elections took place within a particularly sensitive regional context. Escalating tensions in the Middle East and the drone attack on British military facilities in Cyprus on 1 March 2026 reinforced public perceptions that the island is becoming more directly exposed to regional instability, triggered by the Hamas attack on Israel in 2023. Migration and border management therefore became closely connected to broader debates about security and sovereignty.

The most important campaign issues were:

- inflation and rising costs of living,
- housing affordability and rents,
- stagnant wages,
- migration,
- corruption and distrust in political elites,
- concerns about security and geopolitical instability.

Compared to previous elections, the reunification issue and negotiations regarding the divided island played a much smaller role. While still symbolically important, the Cyprus question no longer functioned as the central electoral dividing line. The campaign also reflected broader changes within the party system. Traditional parties faced increasing competition from new movements and personalized political projects. While established parties continued to rely on traditional party structures and ideological identities, many newer actors focused heavily on social media outreach, anti-elite narratives and personalized campaigning. Unlike earlier elections dominated by party loyalty and the Cyprus issue, this campaign was strongly candidate- and issue-driven, with voters increasingly motivated by dissatisfaction, protest sentiment and economic anxiety.

### The Main Contenders

As mentioned above, the 2026 parliamentary elections also reflected a broader change within the party system with traditional parties facing increasing competition from new movements. The following parties were the main contenders in the 2026 elections:

**DISY** (founded 1976) is the main centre-right, pro-European party with a traditional moderate stance on the Cyprus issue while containing a strong hard-line<sup>2</sup> wing on this issue.

**AKEL** (1941) defines itself as a Marxist-Leninist working-class party, but its policies resemble that of a populist but also pragmatic social-democratic party with no intention of overthrowing the existing capitalist system or the liberal democracy in Cyprus. It holds traditionally moderate positions in the Cyprus question.

**ELAM** (2008) is a far-right, Greek-nationalist, anti-immigration party with roots linked to Golden Dawn in Greece.

**DIKO** (1976) is a centrist, socially conservative party with hard-line positions on the Cyprus issue.

**EDEK** (1979) is a socialist/social-democratic party with a hard-line stance on the Cyprus issue.

**DIPA** (2018) is a centrist, liberal party which split from DIKO in 2018. It is considered more moderate in the Cyprus question than DIKO.

**The Greens (KOSP)** (1996) are Cyprus's ecological Green party that was renamed "Movement of Ecologists – Citizens' Cooperation" in 2017. For most of its existence it held hard-line views on the Cyprus question.

**Citizens for Cyprus (ALMA)** (2025), which translates to "leap" in Greek, is also an acronym for the Greek words for Dignity, Accountability, Reform, and Development. It is a reformist centre, anti-corruption and institutional-modernisation party led by the former Auditor General Odysseas Michaelides who is perceived to have lost his position because of his anti-corruption prosecution of officials and politicians. It has no clear record on the Cyprus question, but it is in favour of a federal Cyprus based on UN and EU principles.

**Volt Cyprus** (2023), a branch of the pro-European Volt party, combining liberal and good governance supporters with pro-reunification activists.

**Direct Democracy Cyprus** (2025) is linked to YouTuber and Member of the European Parliament Fidias Panayiotou, who sought to translate his personal success in the European Parliament elections into the creation of a political party. The party can be described as procedural and anti-establishment rather than clearly left or right, centred on digital direct democracy through the Agora app, with members voting on policy positions and candidate selection.

2 Hard-line is defined here as likely to object to any feasible negotiated solution to the Cyprus problem.

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### Winners and Losers

The elections confirmed the traditional two-party dominance of DISY (27.1%) and AKEL (23.9%). Although both parties remained central actors, neither succeeded in mobilizing broader public confidence. DISY remained the largest party but underperformed compared to previous elections (2021: 27.8%, 2016: 30.7%, 2011: 34.3%). A fate shared by AKEL, despite its electoral gains compared to the last election (2021: 22.3%, 2016: 25.7%, 2011: 32.7%), which also failed to significantly capitalize on socioeconomic dissatisfaction. On the other hand, given the ongoing fragmentation of the Cypriot party landscape and the widespread dissatisfaction with the established parties, both parties performed significantly better than expected and can reasonably consider themselves winners in this election. This is particularly true for the DISY leader and President of Parliament, Anita Demetriou, whose political future as party head would have been at risk had the results aligned with earlier expectations. Vindicated by the outcome, the possibility of her running for president in the 2028 elections has now re-emerged as a realistic option. For AKEL, achieving an increase in votes is an equally noteworthy accomplishment which is also likely to stabilize the leadership of its Secretary General Stefanos Stefanou.

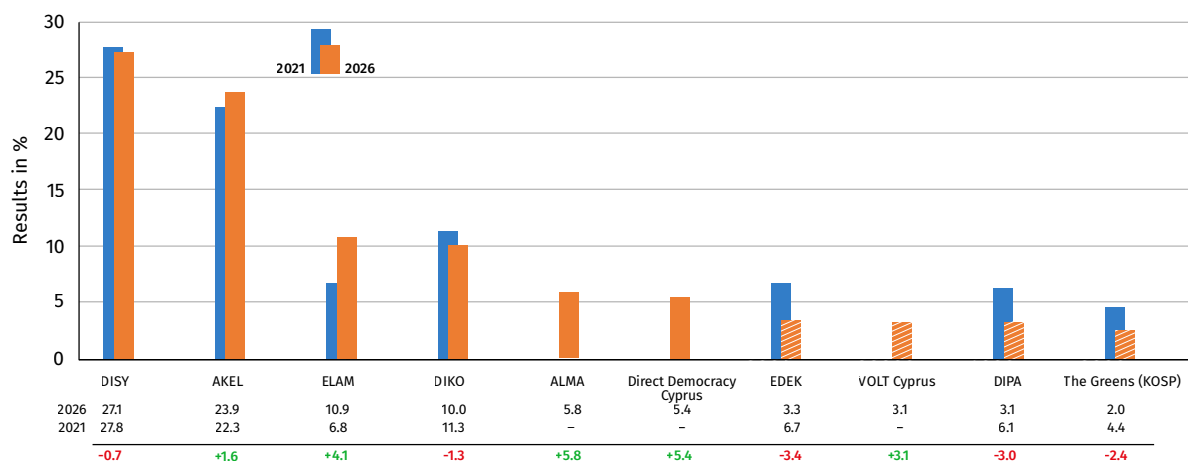
The clearest winner with an increase of 4 percentage points compared to 2021 was ELAM (10.9%), which capitalized on strong anti-migration messaging and a broader anti-establishment sentiment. The party successfully expanded beyond its previous anti-migration and protest-vote base and consolidated its position as a permanent actor within the political system, doubling its number of parliamentary seats. Another major

trend was the success of two new and protest-oriented political formations, ALMA (5.8%) and Direct Democracy Cyprus (5.4%). Both parties were expected – according to pre-electoral polls – to perform significantly better than they ultimately did. As a result, their success is mixed with a sense of disappointment. Nevertheless, the entry of these newcomers into parliament reflects growing electoral volatility and declining loyalty toward established parties.

For three established parties, the parliamentary elections proved disastrous. For the Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK), the second-oldest party on the island, years of steady decline culminated in its elimination from parliament. The party leader, Nikos Anastasiou, resigned on election night, and it remains doubtful whether the party will recover from this blow. The Democratic Alignment (DIPA), which split from DIKO in 2018, failed to secure re-election and will, in all likelihood, disappear from the political landscape. The Green Party Movement of Ecologists – Citizens’ Cooperation (KOSP) faces a similar fate, although its Green ideological foundation might still provide a basis for reinvention as it struggles to remain politically relevant.

The fourth major loser of the election was the progressive, liberal, and pro-European party Volt Cyprus, which enjoys support from many bicomunal peace activists on the island. Although it contested parliamentary elections for the first time, it already held a seat after a Member of Parliament had defected from the Green Party to join Volt Cyprus. The party had expected to surpass the 3.6% electoral threshold but was left deeply disappointed. However, given the strong commitment of its leadership, the party is likely to continue

Figure 1: Election Results in 2026 in Comparison to the Elections in 2021



Source: 2026: <https://live.elections.moi.gov.cy/>;  
2021: [https://results.elections.moi.gov.cy/greek/parliamentary\\_elections\\_2021\\_127/islandwide](https://results.elections.moi.gov.cy/greek/parliamentary_elections_2021_127/islandwide)

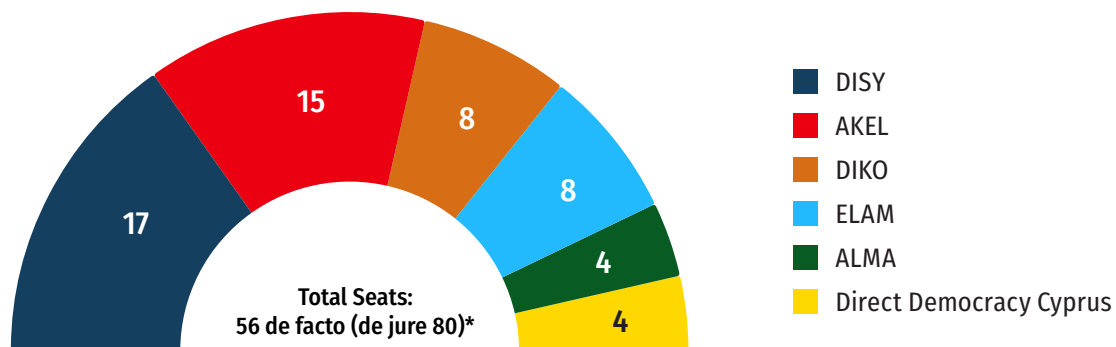
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its efforts to establish itself as a lasting force in Greek Cypriot party politics.

Domestic and international observers generally assessed the elections as free and fair. No major allegations of electoral fraud or systematic irregularities emerged. However, low voter turnout (only 66.9%) re-

mained a significant concern and highlighted continuing public disillusionment with political institutions. Minority and diaspora voting did not play a decisive role in shaping the final result, although the elections again highlighted the unique constitutional situation of the island, where the 24 parliamentary seats formally allocated to Turkish Cypriots remain vacant.

Figure 2: Distribution of Seats by Electoral Formation



Source: <https://live.elections.moi.gov.cy/>

\*The 24 seats reserved for Turkish Cypriots have been vacant since 1963, so in practice the parliament has 56 seats.

### Political Implications

The direct consequences of the elections for government formation are limited because Cyprus is a presidential republic. The House of Representatives does not form the government, does not choose the President or head of government, cannot bring down the government through a no-confidence vote, and operates alongside a separately elected executive. The President may also return legislation, refer laws for constitutional review, and exercise a final veto in areas such as foreign affairs, defence and security. The competences of the House of Representatives include enacting legislation, approving and scrutinising the annual state budget, exercising parliamentary control through questions, debates and committee work, receiving key reports such as those of the Ombudsman, approving or rejecting a state of emergency, and amending the Constitution, except for basic articles protecting the presidential form of government, the bicomunal character of the state and separation of powers.

Since the elections do not produce a government in the parliamentary sense, no formal coalition negotiations comparable to those in many European parliamentary systems are expected. Coalitions are built for the presidential elections and then are either main-

tained or transformed during the five-year term of the president. Nevertheless, the election outcome will significantly shape parliamentary cooperation and strategic alliance-building ahead of the 2028 presidential election. In line with traditional Cypriot politics, the election of the President of Parliament will likely serve as the first important indicator of future alliance patterns and possible presidential alignments for 2028.

President Nikos Christodoulides continues to govern without a parliamentary majority and remains dependent on flexible, issue-based support. The elimination of two of the three parties that had previously backed him (EDEK and DIPA, with only DIKO remaining) complicates this strategy and may force the president to seek a broader understanding with DISY or other parliamentary actors. In all likelihood, this will also involve ELAM, whose at least informal support Christodoulides may require in his bid for re-election in 2028.

Since DISY, contrary to expectations, avoided significant losses and maintained its position as the largest party, the question now arises regarding its future relationship with Christodoulides. As a former DISY member, Christodoulides – who successfully ran in the last election against the party's official candidate and

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was subsequently expelled – had his best chance of reelection in reconciling with his former party. While the party has often supported the president on key policy issues thus far, the election result may give it greater confidence to distance itself and field its own candidate in the 2028 presidential election. Whether DISY continues to prioritize cooperation or instead seeks to assert its leadership in Cypriot party politics in opposition to Christodoulides is likely to become one of the central political questions in the coming years. In either case, this is not expected to lead to major difficulties in governing – such as a blocked state budget or paralysis in key decisions – as parties like DISY, DIKO, and ALMA but also AKEL seek to present themselves as responsible political actors while still leaving their mark on the legislation proposed by Christodoulides. Even ELAM and Direct Democracy are not by default obstructing policy proposals by the government.

Without DISY's support, Christodoulides' chances of re-election appear slim, given that only DIKO and possibly ELAM are expected to back him in the next presidential contest. In Cyprus, a presidential candidate must secure an absolute majority in the first round; otherwise, the two candidates with the highest vote shares proceed to a decisive second round. The key question, therefore, is whether a more coherent centre-right bloc will gradually coalesce around DISY, potentially prompting DIKO to withdraw its support for the president in exchange for the House presidency and, in turn, lend its backing to a DISY candidate in the presidential election.

Another important issue concerns the future relationship between mainstream parties and ELAM. While formal cooperation with the far-right remains politically taboo, ELAM's strengthened position is expected to increase its influence over debates on migration, security, and national identity. If DISY fields its own candidate at the presidential elections, Christodoulides' only chance of re-election would be to secure formal or informal support from the right-wing ELAM, which would significantly tarnish his reputation both on the island and in Europe. He has already appointed at least one politician perceived to be close to ELAM to a position in his cabinet, clearly in anticipation of such a scenario.

From a democratic perspective, the growing fragmentation of the political system may further complicate legislative governance and increase political volatility. However, with the possible exception of ELAM, all other parliamentary actors remain fundamentally commit-

ted to democratic institutions, a smooth functioning of the state and Cyprus' European orientation. Political paralysis or disruption is therefore very unlikely. Regarding relations with the European Union, no major strategic shift is expected. Cyprus is likely to maintain its pro-European orientation, close security cooperation with EU partners, and its increasingly important geopolitical role in the Eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, the stronger performance of ELAM and other anti-establishment actors may push mainstream parties toward tougher positions on migration and border policy at the European level.

### Conclusion

The 2026 parliamentary elections in Cyprus point to a political system undergoing a rapid – though not yet fully consolidated – transformation. Traditional parties continue, at least for the time being, to dominate the institutional core of the political system. However, this formal continuity masks a deeper structural shift, as anti-establishment and far-right actors are increasingly shaping both the political agenda and voter behaviour. The simultaneous entry of two new parties into parliament and the elimination of three established ones marks a critical juncture. Far from being a routine electoral fluctuation, this outcome signals a reconfiguration of the party system, weakening long-standing organisational pillars and fragmenting the political centre. In this sense, the elections should be understood as a decisive step towards a more volatile, less predictable, and potentially more polarised political landscape in Cyprus.

The elections were decisively structured by socioeconomic insecurity, migration, and deepening distrust of political elites, while the Cyprus reunification question was relegated to the margins. This reordering of issue salience signals not merely a temporary shift, but a potential decoupling of electoral competition from the island's historically dominant cleavage. Instead, distributive concerns and perceptions of political failure have emerged as the primary drivers of voter behaviour. Against this backdrop, DISY, AKEL, and DIKO engaged in a strategic last-minute mobilisation effort aimed at reasserting their issue ownership over political stability and institutional competence. By framing ELAM, ALMA, and Direct Democracy as fundamentally unfit for governance – emphasising their threat to political stability and sound governance, their lack of credibility, and their incapacity to govern – these parties sought to activate risk-averse voting behaviour and contain the momentum of anti-establishment challengers. This strategy did not simply defend elec-

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toral ground; it underscored the extent to which the political centre now relies on securitising populist alternatives in order to maintain its dominance in an increasingly fragmented and volatile party system.

Although the elections do not directly determine the government, they significantly reshape parliamentary dynamics and constitute an important prelude to the 2028 presidential election. At the European level, the results also highlight broader trends visible across the EU: political fragmentation, declining trust in traditional parties, and the growing political salience of migration and security issues.

Despite all of these worrying developments the prospects for the work of the next parliament are not bleak.

The new parliament is unlikely to cause paralysis or prevent decisions on core political issues, given the relatively moderate domestic political climate in the Republic and a culture of political responsibility within parliament. For the independent President Christodoulides – who, even before this election, lacked a party fully committed to supporting all his policy initiatives – bargaining has now become more difficult, and securing majorities more challenging, particularly if parties are tempted to sharpen their profiles in the run-up to the next presidential elections in 2028. Despite the tectonic changes in the political landscape, the smooth functioning of the Republic of Cyprus is nevertheless likely to continue – at least for the time being.