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THE CYPRIOT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 2026 AND THEIR AFTERMATH

Introduction

The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) held parliamentary elections on 24 May 2026 to elect 56 members of the House of Representatives. These elections were the 11th since the restoration of democracy in 1976. The elected 56 members of the Parliament are Greek Cypriots across six multi-member constituencies corresponding to the island's administrative districts. There are currently 24 seats reserved for Turkish Cypriots which have remained unfilled since the breakdown of the constitutional order in 1963. Voting took place under an open-list proportional representation system, with an electoral threshold of 3.6%. A total of 568,587 voters were registered.

Cyprus operates as the only full presidential democracy in the European Union. The President, who is currently Nikos Christodoulides, is both head of state and head of government and under this system he governs independently of parliamentary majorities. The composition of parliament nevertheless, remains a critical determinant of governance, since presidents have frequently been forced to seek cross-party coalitions to pass legislation.

The 2026 parliamentary elections were held in a context shaped by three interrelated dynamics: the continued

fragmentation of the political centre, a surge in anti-establishment sentiment that first manifested itself in the 2023 presidential race, and the growing salience of everyday problems such as the cost-of-living, immigration, trust in institutions and to a lesser extent the Cyprus Problem in the public debate.

Six parties crossed the 3.6% threshold required to enter parliament: the centre-right Democratic Rally (DISY), the left-wing Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL), the far-right National Popular Front (ELAM), the centrist Democratic Party (DIKO), and two newcomers, the anti-corruption movement ALMA and the populist Direct Democracy party, founded by the member of the European Parliament, well-known youtuber, Fidias Panayiotou. The result confirmed that Cyprus now operates in a genuinely multi-party parliamentary system, where no single bloc commands a majority.

Political Context before the Elections

The road to the 2026 elections was shaped by three years of political transition following the 2023 presidential race. President Nikos Christodoulides was elected as an independent (ex-minister of Foreign Affairs of Anastasiadis' government and former member of DISY) backed by DIKO,

EDEK, DIPA and the Solidarity Movement. He entered office without a coherent parliamentary majority with his coalition holding 17 of 56 seats in the parliament. Already this was seen as a structural weakness that had equally constrained his predecessor Nicos Anastasiades throughout his two terms.

The intervening period was marked by significant party realignments. DISY, after the defeat of Averof Neophytou in the first round of the 2023 presidential election, underwent internal renewal under its new leader Annita Demetriou. It sought to reposition itself as a coherent centre-right opposition distinct from Christodoulides. AKEL drew cautious encouragement from Mavroyiannis's narrow 4-point defeat, halted its electoral decline, and focused on consolidating its base. ELAM meanwhile pursued a sustained strategy of mainstreaming, intensifying its campaign on immigration and law-and-order. The 2024 European Parliamentary elections, which delivered a seat to 24-year-old YouTuber Fidias Panayiotou, confirmed an appetite for political disruption remained strong. Two new formations crystallised around this anti-establishment energy: ALMA, led by former Auditor General Odysseas Michaelides, targeting voters alienated by corruption; and Fidias Panayiotou's Direct Democracy, drawing from younger, digitally-connected demographics. Together they represented a qualitatively new challenge to the party system, distinct from the protest-vote formations that had flickered and faded in previous cycles.

Electoral Campaign

The pre-election campaign was widely characterised as very polarised. Rather than substantive policy debate, the period was dominated by personal attacks, aggressive rhetoric, and a pervasive toxicity that visibly alienated voters. Multiple televised debates generated more confrontation than clarity, with newly formed parties projecting a confidence without concrete ideological narratives that ultimately backfired. The established parties, DISY and AKEL recalibrated only in the final weeks, shelving confrontation in favour of concrete proposals and programmatic seriousness.

Substantively, four issues structured the campaign. Firstly, it was corruption and the lack of transparency and accountability of the political elites. ALMA built its entire campaign around anti-corruption themes, and Odysseas Michaelides's credibility as a former Auditor General gave the party a distinctive positioning. Secondly, the focus was on economy and more particularly, inflation and housing affordability which were the issues most cited by voters. Immigration was also discussed widely but with less intensity compared to previous elections despite ELAM making immigration the centrepiece of its campaign. Finally, the Cyprus Problem, while broadly consensual among the two larger parties around a bizonal bicomunal federation, produced no momentum during the campaign with progress on negotiations being elusive.

Table 1. Electoral results as reported by the Electoral Service of Cyprus on 100% of votes counted.

Party / Formation	Votes	%	+/-	Seats	Result
PARTIES ENTERING PARLIAMENT (ABOVE 3.6% THRESHOLD)					
DISY – Democratic Rally	101,245	27.1%	-0.8	17	✓ Entered
AKEL – Prog. Party Working People	89,241	23.9%	+1.4	15	✓ Entered
ELAM – National Popular Front	40,712	10.9%	+4.1	8	✓ Entered
DIKO – Democratic Party	37,356	10.0%	-1.3	8	✓ Entered
ALMA – Citizens for Cyprus	21,658	5.8%	NEW	4	✓ Entered (new)
Direct Democracy (ÁDK)	20,160	5.4%	NEW	4	✓ Entered (new)
PARTIES BELOW THRESHOLD (DID NOT ENTER PARLIAMENT)					
EDEK – Movement Social Democracy	12,319	3.3%	-3.5	—	X Below threshold
KEKK – Hunters & Rural	11,947	3.2%	-0.1	—	X Below threshold
Volt Cyprus	11,572	3.1%	NEW	—	X Below threshold
DIPA – Democratic Alignment	11,196	3.0%	-3.1	—	X Below threshold
Ecologists – Citizens Cooperation	4,847	1.3%	-0.6	—	X Below threshold
Other parties & independents	11,570	3.1%	—	—	X Below threshold
Total valid ballots	372,063	100%		56	
Voter turnout	66.91% (+1.2pp vs. 2021)				
Abstention	33.09%				
Unrepresented voters	~16.7% of valid ballots cast for parties below threshold				

Results

The elections were contested by 23 parties and independent lists with a record 753 candidates submitting their candidacies, 102 more candidates than the previous elections in 2021. The final results are shown in Table 1.

Looking at the electoral result, we immediately realise that there are five winners, DISY, AKEL, ELAM and the two new entries, ALMA and Direct Democracy.

For DISY, the result was simultaneously a relief and a warning. Opinion polls had consistently indicated that the party would suffer a significant loss of support, which would have led to calls for Annita Demetriou's stepping down. Instead, the party maintained its share of the vote, preserved its title as the biggest party, and kept all 17 seats it had held since 2021. In that narrow sense, the result was a personal vindication for Annita Demetriou, who had taken over the party leadership in March 2023 in difficult circumstances, following the party presidential (Averof Neophytou) candidate's humiliating elimination in the first round of the presidential election (he finished third with just 26.1% of the vote). The deeper structural story, however, is less comfortable. DISY's vote share has declined at each of the last three parliamentary elections. So, the 27.1% represents a party that has lost roughly ten percentage points since its peak. The party's decision to govern from opposition against Christodoulides proved electorally sound and allowed it to rebuild a distinct identity rather than being absorbed into a government whose support parties were punished at the polls.

For AKEL, the 2026 result carried a significance that went beyond the modest numerical gain. Improving from 22.3% to 23.9% and retaining all 15 seats, the party achieved something it had not managed in over a decade: reversing a downward electoral trend that had come to define its trajectory since its peak years in the late 2000s. The electoral result was received with enthusiasm by the party and was attributed to concrete ideological positioning and policies on workers' rights, housing, cost of living, and support for pensioners and youngsters. The deeper question the result leaves open is whether 23.9% represents a genuine floor from which AKEL can rebuild, or simply a temporary stabilisation.

The third winner is clearly ELAM that achieved the most striking result of the election, more than doubling its seat count from 4 to 8 and pushing its vote share from 6.8% to 10.9%. This makes ELAM the third-largest party in parliament for the first time in its history, overtaking DIKO. The trajectory is striking in its consistency: from 2 seats in 2016, to 4 in 2021, to 8 in 2026 manifests a doubling of parliamentary representation at each successive election. The result nonetheless came in below what pre-election polling had suggested, with several surveys placing the party above 13%. Yet the shortfall relative to polls should

not obscure the structural significance of what was achieved. ELAM has now consolidated itself as a permanent fixture of the Cypriot political landscape. The normalisation dimension is perhaps more consequential than the vote share itself. For the first time, other parliamentary parties will need to engage with ELAM's positions on immigration, national identity, and law and order not as fringe provocations but as the stated preferences of approximately one in nine Cypriot voters. Yet the arithmetic of the new parliament makes such categorical exclusion increasingly difficult to sustain in practice, particularly on immigration legislation where ELAM's positions overlap with those of a significant portion of the centre-right electorate. How the mainstream parties navigate this tension will be one of the defining governance challenges of the 2026-2031 term, and a critical variable in determining whether its trajectory continues upward toward 2028.

Turning to DIKO, we observe that the party held broadly steady at 10% (down 1.3%), retaining 8 seats. As a core member of the Christodoulides government coalition, DIKO's result was seen as satisfactory by the party leadership compared to what was depicted by opinion polls before the elections, though the loss of one seat signalled some erosion of its centrist electoral base to newer formations.

ALMA and Direct Democracy each entered parliament for the first time with 4 seats apiece. Together, they collectively represent approximately 11% of the electorate which is a clear indication of the anti-establishment feeling in Cyprus. ALMA's founder Odysseas Michaelides had built his public profile as Auditor General through high-profile investigations into public sector corruption. Fidas Panayiotou's Direct Democracy capitalised on his social media notoriety and the momentum built during the 2024 European elections. However, it should be noted that both parties fell significantly short of their pre-election polling figures, which had consistently placed them in double digits. The final weeks of the campaign exposed their structural weaknesses: an absence of organisational machinery, a lack of concrete policy proposals, and a campaign tone that many voters perceived as presumptuous. Their parliamentary durability will depend largely on the cohesion and seriousness they demonstrate once inside the House.

Among the losers, the socialist EDEK suffered the sharpest proportional decline of any established party, falling from 6.7% to 3.3%, just below the 3.6% threshold, losing all four of its parliamentary seats. Notably, its previous vote share was itself achieved in alliance with the smaller EVROKO party, meaning EDEK's standalone support was already weaker than that number suggested. The collapse to 3.3% therefore likely reflects not merely electoral volatility but the true depth of the party's decline, raising serious questions about whether this is a recoverable setback or a sign that EDEK has

become a fundamentally weakened political force. This is a historic low for a party continuously represented in parliament since the 1970s, and the result was widely attributed not to external circumstances but to years of internal fragmentation, ideological drift, and an entrenched tendency toward self-destructive intra-party conflict.

The Greens similarly failed to retain their seats, slipping to 1.3%, a result that reflected the party's inability to replace high-profile cadres who had stepped back from frontline politics, leaving it without the visibility or organisational energy needed to defend its parliamentary presence. *For a party that had introduced environmental politics to Cyprus and held parliamentary representation continuously for 25 years*, the result represented a significant setback which eventually may lead to a terminal decline.

DIPA, the Democratic Alignment, suffered an equally painful exit, falling from 6.1% and four seats in 2021 to just 3.14% in 2026, losing all its parliamentary representation. The result was particularly bitter given the party's role as a founding pillar of the Christodoulides governing coalition. Founded in 2018 by Marios Karoyan as a splinter from DIKO amid disagreements over the handling of the Cyprus dispute, DIPA had positioned itself as a credible centrist liberal alternative in the Renew Europe tradition, and its 2021 debut of six percent had suggested genuine staying power. What followed, however, was a steady haemorrhaging of support, which was visible already in the 2024 European Parliament elections. Analysts pointed to organisational complacency, an inability to carve out a distinctive identity separate from the President it supported, and the absence of Karoyan as a candidate on election day as contributing factors. The vote that DIPA had attracted in 2021 migrated in multiple directions such as toward DIKO, which absorbed some of the centrist space, and toward ALMA, which offered a more compelling reform narrative. Whether a party of its size and resources can recover without parliamentary representation and the funding, visibility and legitimacy that comes with it, remains an open and difficult question.

Finally, the party of Volt, which pre-election polling had given a credible chance of crossing the threshold at around 3.6%, ultimately fell short in circumstances that were partly self-inflicted. The so-called "Sandy affair" centred on Makarios Drousiotis, Volt's lead candidate and a well-known investigative journalist and author, who was already known for a corruption cases against the former President of the Republic, Nikos Anastasiades. The "Sandy affair" implicated him in connections with figures of questionable reputation, undermining his image as promoting transparency by revealing corrupted cases and scandals. What compounded the damage was not the controversy itself but Volt's handling of it: the party failed to distance itself swiftly or clearly, allowing the story to fester precisely at the moment it needed to consolidate support. This cost it dearly among the reform-minded urban voters it needed most, an audience with little tolerance for exactly the kind

of opacity and association with vested interests that Volt had positioned itself against. Volt's natural electoral profile overlapped heavily with both ALMA and Direct Democracy, and in a crowded anti-establishment field it lacked the differentiation, name recognition, and ground-level infrastructure to convert sympathy into votes. The result was deeply disappointing for a party that had genuine momentum and represents a political tradition of pan-European federalism, institutional reform and evidence-based governance all of which remains underrepresented in the Cypriot parliament.

Turnout and Abstention

From 1976 to 2001, turnout remained consistently above 90%, peaking at 95.7% in 1981 which is now considered as a golden era of intense party identification, strong ideological polarisation, and a civic culture in which voting was not only mandatory by law but it was also treated almost as a social obligation. The Cyprus Problem kept political stakes permanently high, ensuring that elections carried existential weight beyond ordinary domestic policy. Party membership was dense, community networks were mobilised at every election, and the act of voting carried deep social meaning across generations. The decline begins after 2001 and accelerates steadily through 2011, driven by generational change, weakening party loyalty, and growing disillusionment with a political class increasingly perceived as self-serving. EU accession in 2004, rather than reinvigorating civic participation, appears to have contributed to a degree of depoliticisation among younger voters for whom European integration reduced the sense of existential urgency that had historically sustained high turnout. The four historic parties began losing their grip on voter identity, and abstention started to normalise as a legitimate political response.

The financial crisis then delivers the decisive blow. The drop of thirteen percentage points in a single decade, from 78.7% in 2011 to 65.7% in 2021, directly tracks the trauma of the 2013 bail-in, the Golden Passports scandal, and cascading corruption revelations that shattered institutional trust. The 2021 figure was further depressed by the residual effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which reduced both the logistical ease and the social pressure of turnout. By that election, one in three eligible voters chose not to participate, an outcome that would have been unthinkable in the civic landscape of the 1980s.

The 2026 recovery to 66.9% with 380,851 ballots cast from 569,182 registered voters offers only cautious grounds for optimism. The 1.2% gain does not signal a structural reversal, and abstention at 33.1% remains far above the sub-25% rates that defined the 1990s and 2000s. The entry of ALMA and Direct Democracy may have had a modest mobilising effect on younger and previously abstaining voters, with exit polling suggesting stronger support for both formations among first-time voters and those under 35.

Most critically, the 2026 elections produced a deeply troubling representation deficit. Combining the 33.1% abstention rate with the approximately 17% of valid ballots cast for parties that failed to cross the 3.6% threshold, roughly half of the total electorate is effectively unrepresented in the new House of Representatives. This figure, which has worsened since 2021, constitutes perhaps the most significant democratic challenge Cyprus faces in the years ahead, and one that no party has yet placed seriously at the centre of its political programme.

What does the electoral result mean?

The pre-electoral environment in Cyprus was clearly hostile to the established order. Yet when the votes were counted on 24 May 2026, DISY and AKEL together still captured over 51% and 32 of 56 seats. How was this anti-systemic mood ultimately reconciled with such resilience from the established parties? The answer lies in several reinforcing dynamics.

The anti-systemic vote was real but extremely fragmented. ELAM, ALMA, and Direct Democracy collectively took around 22%, but they split it three ways across entirely different ideological profiles: nationalist-conservative frustration, civic anti-corruption sentiment, and digitally-native post-ideological politics respectively. These electorates barely overlap. DISY and AKEL, by contrast, command dense, loyal core constituencies built over decades with deep roots in trade unions, professional networks, church connections, and inherited family political

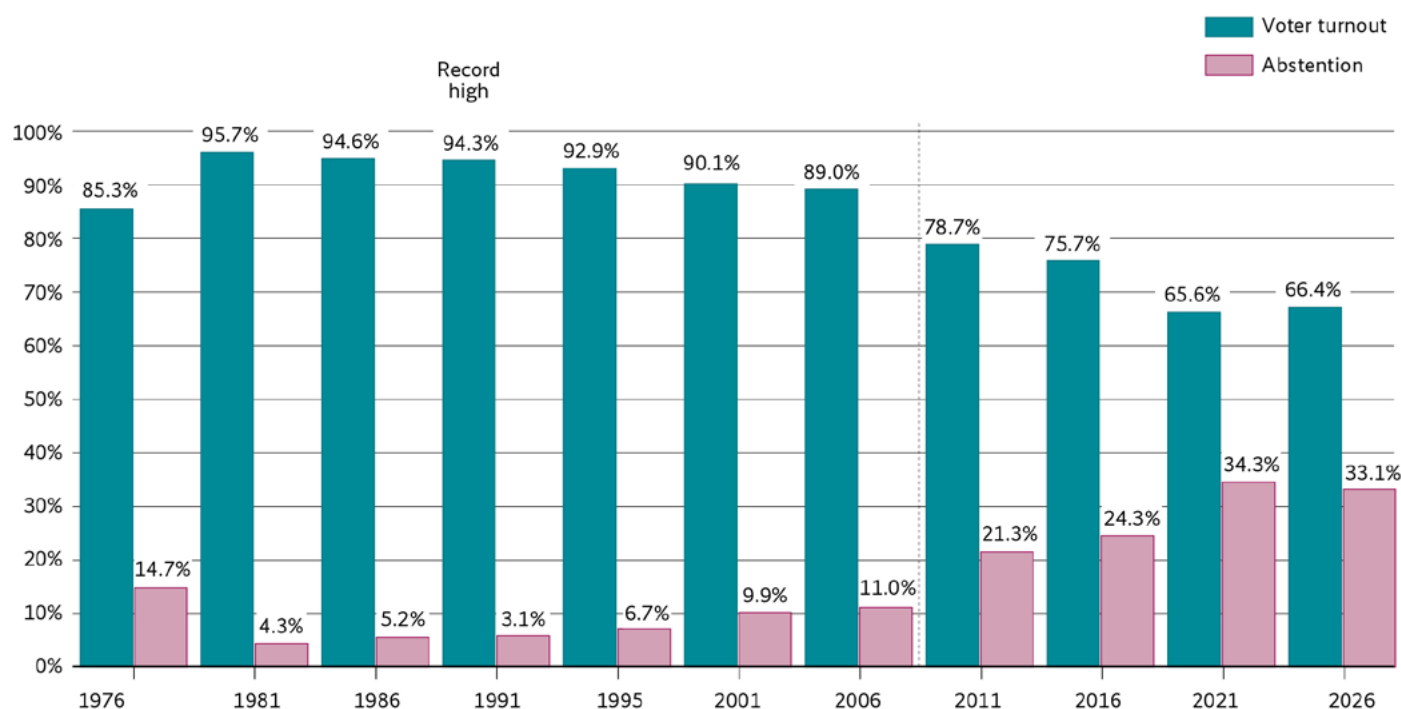
identity. That organisational depth proved decisive in the final stretch, in ways that no polling figure could fully capture.

A second dynamic was negative consolidation and the psychology of the Cypriot voter. The anti-establishment mood was real but existed largely as a polling phenomenon. Even lukewarm DISY or AKEL voters parked their ballots with the familiar rather than risk the unknown. Centre-right voters nervous about ELAM's radicalism had nowhere else to go but DISY. On the left, AKEL's recovery to 23.9% almost certainly absorbed the significant pool of centre-left votes freed by EDEK's collapse from 6.7% to 3.3%. These were voters who had no natural home in ALMA or Direct Democracy, neither of which offered a coherent left-wing positioning.

Third, the presidential nature of the Cypriot system insulates parliamentary elections from anti-establishment waves in ways that purely parliamentary systems do not. In Cyprus, the parliament does not elect the government instead the president does, independently. The 2023 presidential election was a more genuine moment of systemic disruption. The 2026 parliamentary elections were, by comparison, a lower-stakes secondary outlet. Voters could safely support DISY or AKEL in parliament while having already expressed their desire for change through Christodoulides three years earlier.

The self-destructive behaviour of the new parties also actively rescued the majors. ALMA and Direct Democracy entered the campaign convinced that pre-election polls

Table 2. Data on turnout and abstention in all parliamentary elections (1976-2026)



were already victory, projecting an arrogance and toxicity that alienated the very voters they needed to convert. DISY and DIKO, meanwhile, executed a late tactical pivot, shelving confrontation and leaning into their identities as serious, stable political forces. In the final weeks both parties issued pointed warnings about the risks of political instability and institutional chaos that a surge of anti-systemic parties could produce. This message appears to have landed with more cautious voters who may have been tempted by protest voting but ultimately stepped back from the brink. AKEL similarly presented concrete proposals and projected seriousness in the closing stretch. As a result, parties with a clear ideological narrative and a credible governing identity were vindicated, while those running on anti-systemic energy alone fell short when it mattered most.

The underlying conclusion is that 51% for the two traditional heavyweights is actually historically low and the trend line is unambiguously downward. The anti-systemic energy is structurally real and growing. It is simply being absorbed gradually rather than explosively, cushioned by the presidential system's design and by the failure of the alternatives to coalesce into a single credible governing force. The critical question for 2031 is whether ALMA and Direct Democracy mature into durable, programmatic parties capable of sustaining their electoral base across a full parliamentary term or whether their energy dissipates as quickly as it gathered, leaving the two historic parties to consolidate once more by default.

The way forward

The 2026 election led the Christodoulides government's natural coalition, DIKO, EDEK, and DIPA to a weak position with DIKO's 8 seats alone since the other two partners failed to cross the threshold. This structural weakness was only partially offset by the early post-election move by Direct Democracy, which joined DISY and DIKO in re-electing Annita Demetriou as President of the House with 29 votes. Such a coalition simultaneously complicated neat predictions about the emerging political axes and confirmed that parliamentary alliances in the new legislature will be fluid and transactional rather than ideologically fixed.

The road to 2028 is already being mapped. Two broad axes are taking shape: a centre-right bloc anchored by DISY, with DIKO and potentially ELAM in orbit and a potential progressive alliance built around AKEL, ALMA, and possibly Direct Democracy. DISY enters this contest as the dominant force in the presidential combined with a unified party apparatus. AKEL's modest recovery is encouraging, but its third consecutive exclusion from executive power, alongside EDEK's collapse and Volt's failure to enter parliament, points to a structural gap in Cyprus's progressive ecosystem.

For President Christodoulides, governance through the second half of his term will demand constant negotiation across a fragmented legislature. Progress on the Cyprus Problem, credible anti-corruption reform, and the management of immigration and the housing crisis will be the metrics against which voters render their verdict in 2028. Any party, government or opposition that reads the 2026 result as an endorsement of business as usual risks a far harsher judgement when the next reckoning arrives.

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