

Erdogan's AKP wins Turkish municipal elections

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The conservative Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan emerged victorious from municipal elections held Sunday in Turkey.

Erdogan declared the elections to be a vote of confidence in his government, which has been shaken over recent months by a series of corruption scandals and has responded with increasingly authoritarian measures. He had set a target of 39 percent of the vote, which the AKP received in 2009 in the last municipal elections.

The AKP achieved a significantly better result, with 45 percent of the vote. But it remained behind its result in the 2011 parliamentary elections, when it received almost 50 percent. The AKP also won in the two largest cities, Istanbul and Ankara, although in Ankara the result was extremely close. The AKP candidate defeated his rival from the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) by only 1.0 percent of the votes cast.

Under conditions of a polarised political atmosphere, turnout was more than 90 percent, a record. Some voters stood in queues for hours to cast their ballot. In the southeast of the country, eight people were killed and 60 injured in violent clashes between supporters of rival candidates.

It is now expected that Erdogan will stand in the presidential election in August this year or remain as prime minister until parliamentary elections in 2015 and possibly beyond. However, a further term as prime minister would require a legislative change.

The AKP's election victory will not defuse the tense political situation in Turkey. Quite the opposite. Erdogan is likely to employ even more authoritarian methods against his political opponents and attempt to provoke a war with Syria.

Appearing before jubilant supporters Sunday evening, Erdogan threatened war with Syria and revenge against his political opponents. He was accompanied by his wife Emine, his daughter Sumeyye, and his son Bilal, who is involved in a corruption scandal.

"Syria is in a state of war with us," he said. "They are harassing our planes. They have martyred our brothers. Can we remain silent about such a thing?"

Addressing his political rivals, he stormed: "They will pay for this! There are people who will perhaps flee after tomorrow!" The ranks of his enemies would, he declared, be "penetrated." He added, "Then they will have to give an accounting."

These threats are directed above all against supporters of the Muslim preacher Fethullah Gülen, who were accused by Erdogan of having penetrated the police and judicial apparatus, initiated corruption investigations of government officials, and published compromising telephone conversations on Internet platforms. Prior to the election, he replaced thousands of police, judges and state prosecutors who were suspected of being Gülen supporters, and blocked YouTube and Twitter in order to prevent further exposures.

The Gülen movement originally backed Erdogan, but fell out with him after he took a confrontational course towards Israel, suppressed the Gezi Park protests, and supported the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and radical Islamists in Syria, which led to conflict with the US government.

Fethullah Gülen, who has lived for years in Pennsylvania, has close ties to the American foreign policy establishment.

The sharp conflict between Erdogan and Gülen ultimately reflects growing tensions and differences within the Turkish bourgeoisie. The military coup in Egypt, the civil war in Syria stoked by the imperialist

powers, and the differences that have broken out between Middle East regimes have cut the ground from under Erdogan's foreign policy, based on becoming the leading regional power without provoking disputes with Turkey's neighbours.

Since the Gülen movement works in the background and does not campaign as a political party, the Kemalist CHP had hoped to profit from the AKP's problems. It proved unable to do so, receiving only 28 percent of the vote. The right-wing Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) won 15 percent, and the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) was able to increase its support in eastern and southeastern Anatolia.

Since the election results were announced, there has been considerable speculation as to how the AKP was able to win the election in spite of the Gezi Park protests, corruption scandals, its criminal role in the Syrian civil war, and its increasingly authoritarian rule. Some commentators have referred to election fraud, the intimidation of the press and the disadvantaging of opposition parties in the media. Such factors may play a role, but they cannot alone explain the result. Much more important is the absence of any credible opposition.

The Kemalist CHP, the nationalist MHP and the Kurdish BDP are all right-wing parties that orient in one way or another to the imperialist powers and finance capital, offering the mass of the population no perspective. The pseudo-left groups active in Turkey subordinate themselves to one or the other of these bourgeois parties.

Erdogan's eleven-year rule is associated by many voters with the economic upturn that has taken place during his time in power. The most they expect from the opposition parties, and the Kemalist CHP, in particular, is a deterioration of the situation.

Despite its undisputed corruption, the AKP has also invested in social and infrastructure projects. The percentage of the gross domestic product spent on the health care system grew from 3.9 percent to 5.1 percent between 2004 and 2009. More than ten million people now have a green card, which gives them free, limited access to health care regardless of means. In 2003, the figure was only 2.5 million. The provision of electricity, gas, water and public transport has also improved.

However, these achievements are built on sand. The

economic boom is built to a large degree on foreign investment, which has been withdrawn in the face of the crisis in the region. Economic growth has declined. With an official unemployment rate of almost 10 percent and a huge low-wage sector, the situation will rapidly bring the working class into conflict with Erdogan's authoritarian rule.



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