

# Erdogan's AKP loses parliamentary majority in Turkey

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The conservative Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won the largest share of the votes in Sunday's general election, but lost its absolute majority in the Turkish parliament.

Erdoğan must now call on the parliamentary leader of the AKP, outgoing Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu or some other AKP legislator, to try to put together a coalition government.

Clearly stunned by the result and anxious to avoid another election in the near future, the president adopted a conciliatory tone and urged all the political parties to work together to preserve stability. Davutoğlu, while promising to maintain Turkey's political stability, said of his opponents, "No one should try to build a victory from an election they lost."

The election marks an end to the 13 years of single-party rule and a defeat for Erdoğan and the AKP, which it largely fought on the issue of amending the constitution in favour of an executive presidency that would be even more authoritarian and with a reduced role for parliament.

While the electorate has decisively rejected that proposal, the results, far from resolving Turkey's deep-seated social and political problems, will only intensify the crisis of rule in the country.

More than 86 percent of the registered electorate turned out to vote. According to official figures after 99 percent of votes had been counted, the AKP won 41 percent, the main opposition Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) 25 percent, the ultra-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) 16.5 percent, and the predominantly Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) 13 percent. This translates into 258 seats for the AKP in the 550-seat parliament, 132 for the CHP, 81 for the MHP and 79 for the HDP.

The AKP led in most provinces and cities, including

Istanbul, the largest city, and Ankara, the capital, with its highest percentage of the vote in central Anatolia. The CHP's strongholds are in Thrace, parts of Istanbul and the coastal cities along the edge of western Anatolia, including Izmir, while the MHP ran most strongly in Adana and Osmaniye. The HDP's vote came almost entirely from the impoverished southeastern and predominantly agricultural and Kurdish region that has derived little benefit from Turkey's recent economic growth.

This was the first time that the AKP's total vote has fallen since 2002 when it first came to power. Its votes were nearly 10 percentage points below that of the last general election in 2011, when it received 50 percent of the vote and 327 seats, although more than the votes it won in 2002. While it maintained its support in the capital Ankara, it lost votes in the two other biggest cities, Istanbul and İzmir.

This reflects growing discontent over increasing poverty, unemployment, social inequality, rampant corruption that pervades Turkey's corporate and political elite, opposition to the AKP's backing for right-wing Islamist forces against the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad, as well as the crackdown on all forms of dissent.

The CHP is so discredited that, despite opposing Erdoğan and the AKP's authoritarianism, promising an increase in the minimum wage, reducing the price of fuel and doubling the aid to poor families, it actually lost votes.

In contrast, the nationalist MHP increased its vote by 3 percentage points compared to 2011. It made similar promises to increase the minimum wage, get rid of taxes on fuel and fertilizers, fight corruption and grant job security to public sector workers, but largely focused on nationalist appeals, whipping up anti-Kurdish sentiment.

The main winner was the predominantly Kurdish HDP,

which sought to reposition itself as a “left” party along the lines of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Following the largely middle-class protests that started in Gezi Park in June 2013, it has secured the backing of most of the petty-bourgeois liberal left that previously supported the AKP government either openly or through the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), the HDP’s predecessor, under the mantra of “peace and democracy.” The HDP has consciously orientated towards these layers, campaigning on women’s and gay rights and opening up 50 percent of the party list to women.

The HDP won a significant vote in the southeast and also picked up some votes from former CHP voters in Istanbul, İzmir and Ankara. It also won a measure of support from Turkey’s US and European allies, among whom Erdoğan’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has engendered considerable distrust.

It was the first time the HDP fielded a national list, rather than independent candidates from the Kurdish region where the party is strongest, although it is by no means the only party to which the Kurds give their allegiance. It was a gamble that meant the party had to win at least 10 percent of the nationwide vote to beat Turkey’s prohibitively high election threshold to win representation in parliament.

This measure as set out in the 1980 military-authored constitution was aimed at least in part at reducing Kurdish representation in the parliament. Its practical effect since 2002 was to give the leading party a disproportionate share of the seats relative to the popular vote. In the event, the HDP did better than the polls had predicted. A factor involved is that some CHP voters cast their votes for the HDP to enable it to pass the threshold and scupper Erdoğan’s ambitions for an executive presidency.

Though as president he is supposed to be above party politics, Erdoğan focused his attacks on the HDP, accusing party members of being terrorists and anti-Muslim infidels. In the last two months, there have been nearly 60 reported attacks on HDP offices and election stands, including the bombings of the party’s local headquarters in both Mersin and Adana on May 18. While there is no evidence of AKP involvement, many believe the attacks were the result of Erdoğan’s interventions.

During the election campaign, the CHP and HDP ruled out any possibility of forming a coalition with the AKP, at least as long as Erdoğan plays a leading role in his position as president. The MHP did not categorically rule out joining an AKP-led government, but its support for an

anti-corruption campaign against the AKP leadership and Erdoğan make it difficult. At the very least, it would further imperil the much-stalled “peace process” with the Kurds.

It would also be technically possible for the CHP and MHP to form a minority government with HDP support, as touted by the liberal bourgeois media, something the HDP and CHP have not yet ruled out. A government dependent on the support of both the Kurdish HDP and the Turkish-chauvinist and anti-Kurdish MHP would be inherently unstable.

But with no party keen on holding an early election, which, according to the constitution must be held within 45 days if parliament fails to approve a government, all called for “responsibility” and the need for stability—indicating that at least some of the opposition parties will go back on their pledges not to participate in particular coalitions.

The political uncertainty sent the lira to a record low against the dollar in after-hours trading, while the stock exchange tumbled.

In a statement on Monday, Turkey’s leading business organization, the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (TÜSİAD) that has been a target of the AKP government for its alleged alliance with “foreign powers” to topple the government, stressed the importance of a robust coalition government and respect for the voters’ preferences.

Turkey’s allies are very concerned about the looming instability of a major regional power and a key NATO ally in the Black Sea as Washington and Berlin ratchet up the pressure on Russia, adding to the explosive situation in the Middle East.

Regardless of the ultimate composition of any coalition, it will be unstable and short-lived. Any coalition would seek to push through measures demanded by big business and rebuild relations with its Western allies, all of which will necessarily bring it into conflict with an increasingly restive working class.



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