

Erdo?an's AKP wins surprise fourth term amid escalating violence in Turkey

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According to initial returns, Sunday's snap election in Turkey was won by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an, giving it a solid parliamentary majority. The AKP had lost its majority in the June 7 election, which resulted in a hung parliament.

According to official figures, with 99 percent of the vote counted, the AKP obtained 49.4 percent of the vote and a comfortable majority of at least 316 seats in Turkey's 550-seat parliament. Voter turnout was 87.3 percent, up from 85.8 percent in June.

With 25.4 percent of the vote and approximately 134 seats, the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) failed to make expected gains over its result in the June elections. The CHP, long the Turkish bourgeoisie's preferred party of rule, came in first in only six of Turkey's 81 provinces.

CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu said at a brief press conference Sunday night, "Today's outcome puts more responsibility on the CHP... We respect today's outcome as we did on June 7. Nobody should feel itself above the law and every citizen's life and property should be protected."

The far-right National Movement Party (MHP) and the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) both lost votes compared to the June elections, with the MHP declining from 16 percent to 11.9 percent and the HDP falling from 13 percent to just over 10 percent, the cutoff point for representation in parliament.

The elections took place amid escalating violence and political turmoil. Fighting has erupted between Turkish security forces and members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Kurdish-majority areas of southeastern Turkey, and the AKP government has threatened to directly intervene in the civil war in neighboring Syria to crush Syrian Kurdish fighters there.

A series of deadly bombings targeted Kurdish organizations and HDP rallies during the election campaign, adding to the atmosphere of fear. The AKP blamed the bombings on the Islamic State (IS) militia in neighboring Syria and Iraq, but many in Turkey blamed them on the AKP itself, which has long been one of IS' main backers.

During the campaign, hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees stranded in Turkey fled to Europe, leading to increasingly desperate scenes in Turkish cities and coastal regions.

The AKP used its stranglehold on the media, including some 32 newspapers and 22 television channels, to dominate news coverage and drown out reporting on opposition parties. A few days before the elections, it ordered security forces to storm the Koza-Ipek media corporation, the main remaining pro-opposition television news outlet, and take it off the air.

Despite the tension of the campaign, there were no reports of violence during the voting. Polls closed early, at 4 p.m., in 32 eastern provinces amid extensive security deployments in regions that had seen fighting between PKK and Turkish forces. In some areas, voting stations had to be moved because the normal locations were hidden behind trenches and barricades built by local inhabitants to protect themselves from the security forces.

After the election, however, clashes broke out in Diyarbak?r, the largest city in the Kurdish-majority region of the country, between HDP supporters and security forces, who fired water cannon and tear gas.

"I cannot believe this. I feel heartbroken. [The AKP] steals and kills, they put pressure on everyone, they muzzle the press, but they still win. I have lost faith in this democracy," a retired teacher in Diyarbak?r told the *Guardian*.

Others were more critical of the HDP and the escalating fighting between Kurdish and Turkish government forces. “This shows that the party needs to ask itself how these bad results can have happened,” commented a Diyarbakır shopkeeper.

While the AKP has kept power by turning the election into a referendum on its security measures, there is little popular support for Erdoğan’s political agenda. His involvement in the US-led proxy war in Syria is deeply unpopular, and as the previously booming Turkish economy continues to cool, there is rising opposition among workers and youth to exploitation and social inequality.

Erdoğan aims to suppress these social contradictions and impose more authoritarian forms of rule centered on the office of the presidency by exploiting the bankruptcy of the major opposition parties. The CHP ran a campaign focused on pledges that it would increase wages and social spending, which masses of Turks no longer believe, while issuing appeals for calm and national unity that played into the hands of the AKP. With its long history of ties to NATO and military juntas in Turkey, it can make no appeal to popular discontent with Erdoğan’s reactionary foreign policy.

As for the Kurdish side, there are widening divisions between the HDP and the PKK, as well as divisions more broadly within Turkey’s Kurdish population over the wisdom of re-launching a civil war against the Turkish government that threatens to import the Syrian war into Turkey.

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu gave an initial victory speech in the AKP stronghold of Konya, declaring, “Today is a victory for our democracy and our people. ... Hopefully, we will serve you well for the next four years and stand in front of you once again in 2019.”

Speaking later from the balcony of AKP headquarters in Ankara, he said: “I’m calling on all parties entering parliament to form a new civilian national constitution. ... Let’s work together towards a Turkey where conflict, tension, and polarization are non-existent and everyone salutes each other in peace.”

The formation of an AKP government with a parliamentary majority will not solve the intractable social and political crisis in Turkey, which is rooted in the international economic crisis and the ever bloodier

breakdown of the nation-state system in the Middle East. None of the driving forces of this crisis can be controlled by the ruling class from within the borders of Turkey.

Europe’s economic downturn under the impact of austerity measures against working people is undermining Turkey’s main export markets, and the country’s economy remains dependent on large inflows of foreign capital that are at the mercy of a potential hike in US interest rates. Turkey’s markets in the rest of the Middle East are, if anything, even more vulnerable to the impact of war and bloodshed spreading across Syria, Iraq and beyond.

Turkey’s involvement in the Syrian civil war, as it escalates into a conflict involving the United States, the European powers, Russia and Iran, threatens Turkey with dire consequences. Its opposition to Syrian Kurdish groups threatens not only to bring it into conflict with Washington, which has begun directly arming an alliance between Syrian Kurdish and Arab opposition militias, but also to spark a lasting civil war within Turkey itself.

“How can Turkey overcome this polarization? It’s difficult to say,” Sinan Ekim and Kemal Kirisci commented in a recent report by the Brookings Institution think tank in the United States. “What is certain is that distancing Turkey from the brink of a civil war will be one of the greatest challenges for the country’s next administration.”



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