

Erdogan wins Turkish elections with reduced majority

Halil Celik
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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan won the presidential election on Sunday with 52.3 percent of the vote. Earlier predictions that he might fall short of an absolute majority and face a second-round runoff against the leading opposition candidate did not materialise.

His main rival, Muharrem Ince, from the Republican People's Party (CHP), received 30.7 percent of the vote. Selahattin Demirtas, the imprisoned leader of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), obtained 8.3 percent. Meral Aksener of the far-right Good Party garnered 7.4 percent of the vote.

In the parliamentary election, Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) registered considerable losses. Compared to the last election in November 2015, its support fell from 49.5 percent to 42.4 percent. It secured 293 out of 600 seats in the Turkish parliament. However, it maintains control due to its coalition with the fascist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), which won 50 seats. The People's Alliance of the AKP and the MHP gained a total of 53.7 percent of the vote.

The main opposition party, the CHP, has won 146 seats. With 22.7 percent of the vote, it received 2.6 percent less than in 2015. The far-right Good Party, the CHP's main ally in the Nation Alliance, gained 44 seats and 10 percent of the vote. The CHP-led Nation Alliance as a whole received roughly a third of the vote.

The HDP clearly surpassed the 10 percent threshold for parliamentary representation. With 67 seats and 11.6 percent of the vote, it is the third largest party in the Turkish parliament, with more delegates than the two far-right nationalist parties, the MHP and the Good Party.

The HDP's improved result is mainly due to its success in Kurdish areas, where it is the strongest party and where Demirtas received the most presidential votes, along with its support from pseudo-left, liberal and social democratic non-HDP voters who backed it in an effort to block an AKP majority in parliament. Had the HDP fallen short of

the 10 percent electoral threshold, the AKP would have received an extra 50-60 seats because it is the only other party with strong support in the Kurdish-populated south-eastern areas of the country.

The election reflects a growing polarisation of the country. The urban areas bordering the Aegean Sea, including the metropolises of Istanbul and Izmir, as well as a section of Ankara, the capital, voted for the CHP, the south-eastern areas voted for the HDP, and the entire rest of the country showed a clear majority for the AKP.

The elections were originally scheduled for November 2019. However, amid an escalating war drive in the Middle East and an economic collapse that has seen a sharp fall of the Turkish lira against the US dollar and the euro, Erdogan decided to call a snap election in anticipation of growing opposition against his government. He also calculated that he could capitalise on nationalist sentiment amid ongoing military operations against Kurdish militias in Syria and Iraq.

With the June 24 election, the new constitution approved in an April 2017 referendum will come into force. It establishes a presidential regime giving Erdogan more powers than are granted to the US and French presidents, effectively entrenching one-man rule with no serious checks and balances. Erdogan will simultaneously be head of state and official leader of the AKP. He will nominate cabinet ministers, the chief of staff, the principals of the universities and some of the highest judges.

There was no shortage of voting irregularities. These, however, were not on a scale to alter the result. Following initial warnings of possible electoral fraud, largely provoked by the huge discrepancy between reports on the results by the Anadolu news agency and figures obtained by the opposition parties, the latter accepted the results as fair. Prior to the elections, the Nation Alliance had formed the "Fair Election Platform," which included the HDP

and some trade unions, to “prevent possible electoral corruption.”

The electoral success of Erdogan and his AKP is mainly due to the bankruptcy and anti-working-class character of the opposition. Despite Erdogan’s alliance with the fascistic MHP, an escalating crackdown on the opposition and a compliant media, the AKP suffered a substantial decline in its vote.

Since a failed coup on July 15, 2016, Turkey has been under a state of emergency. Some 150,000 public servants and soldiers have been dismissed from their jobs and more than 50,000 people have been imprisoned. Hundreds of critical journalists and academics have been jailed or forced into exile.

The June 24 elections have revealed the growing distrust and anger of workers against the establishment parties. While the AKP lost votes, its pro-NATO, pro-European-Union opponents could not offer any solution to the deepening economic and political crisis of Turkish capitalism other than to escalate Erdogan’s militarist and anti-working-class agenda, peddled by Ince with pseudo-democratic populist appeals.

The June 24 election has also exposed the pro-imperialist and anti-working-class character of the pseudo-left groups, which worked to channel growing opposition behind the CHP and HDP. They did their utmost to line up working-class opposition behind the CHP-led Nation Alliance and the HDP. There is no doubt that the same pseudo-left groups that have tried to divert the working class and the youth behind the bourgeois opposition will respond with extreme hostility to workers who challenge capitalist rule.

The June 24 elections have major implications for the working class not only in Turkey, but in the Middle East as a whole.

In its statement published in advance of the elections, the Socialist Equality Group of Turkey wrote:

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“As Turkey is engulfed in the imperialist-led war drive and the economic crisis in the Middle East, the decisive question is the political perspective for the working class. The bloodshed in Iraq and Syria and war threats to Iran, the AKP’s threats to ‘eradicate’ the PKK leadership that fuel the civil war in Kurdish areas of Turkey, and the capital outflow driving the collapse of the lira rule out a stable and peaceful development. Enormous shocks and crises lie ahead, in which the working class will intervene.”

It is not the factions of the ruling class, supported by the petty-bourgeois opponents of Erdogan, but the Turkish working class, in close cooperation with Middle Eastern, American and European workers, that will fight against the drive toward imperialist war and its devastating economic and social consequences, including the authoritarian forms of rule prevailing in Turkey.

While the European and other imperialist powers would clearly have favoured a victory by the bourgeois opposition, they immediately began to seek a new arrangement with Erdogan.

In a speech to his followers late Sunday, Erdogan insured them that there would be no retreat from his drive to transform Turkey into a “reputable, honourable and influential country in all areas in the world.” His main rival, the CHP’s Ince, conceded defeat only on Monday, warning that the Turkish presidential system under Erdogan was “very dangerous.”

Also on Monday, the Turkish Industry & Business Association (TUSIAD), representing the country’s main conglomerates, released a statement calling for reconciliation and reform, including “a rational economic program and financial discipline,” i.e., further austerity measures and intensified exploitation of the working class. The TUSIAD also stressed the necessity for an “acceleration of the process of adaptation to the European Union.”

At his daily press briefing in Brussels, European Commission spokesman Margaritis Schinas expressed the hope that “Turkey will remain a committed partner for the European Union on major issues of common interest such as migration, security, regional stability and the fight against terrorism.”

Speaking at a news conference in Berlin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s spokesman Steffen Seibert said the chancellor was “looking forward to continuing a constructive, beneficial working relationship between the German and Turkish governments.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin, Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan congratulated Erdogan for his electoral success.



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