

Ruling AKP retains majority, loses large cities in Turkish local elections

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Yesterday, voters went to the polls in municipal elections held across Turkey. The “People’s Alliance” between the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) narrowly held on to its majority, winning 52 percent of the vote.

Despite growing anger in the working class over the economic crisis, the rival “Nation Alliance” of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the far-right Good Party (IYI), backed by the Kurdish-nationalist Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), altogether won only 42 percent of the vote. At the same time, the “Nation Alliance” carried several major cities, setting the stage for deepening conflict within the state machine.

What is clear is that workers’ discontent with the AKP government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan can find no meaningful expression via the existing political set-up.

A disputed election is emerging in Istanbul, Turkey’s largest city, where voting resulted in a statistical tie. As of this writing, “People’s Alliance” candidate Binali Yildirim (AKP) leads CHP candidate Ehrem Imamoglu by 4,000 of the 8.4 million votes cast. After Yildirim claimed victory, Imamoglu gave a speech denouncing the election result as a “manipulation” and indicated that he would challenge it.

Late last night, after Yildirim’s lead shrank to only 4,000, the Official Election Commission (YSK) ceased updating vote results in Istanbul. CHP and HDP officials also stated that the YSK stopped issuing election reports nationwide for nearly an hour last night and questioned both the validity of the results and the YSK’s claim that the stoppage was due to a “technical malfunction.”

CHP candidate Mansur Yavas carried Ankara with 50.6 percent of the 3 million votes cast, and the CHP

retained its stronghold of Izmir, with 58.1 percent of the 2 million votes cast. AKP candidate Alinur Aktas carried Bursa with 49.5 percent of 1.6 million votes cast. CHP candidates carried the cities of Antalya and Adana, with 50.8 percent and 53 percent of the votes, respectively.

In the Kurdish-majority southeast, the HDP’s Adnan Selcuk Mizrakli won the largest city, Diyarbakir, with 58 percent. However, the HDP lost the vote in a number of smaller cities in the region—several to AKP “trustee” mayors imposed by the Erdogan government during its anti-democratic crackdown on Kurdish areas, and one to the Stalinist Communist Party of Turkey.

The HDP is alleging electoral fraud in one such city, Sirnak, which it carried in the last election with 59.6 percent of the vote, but lost this time to the AKP, which won 61.9 percent of the vote. The HDP stated that “since January, after the eligible voters were officially announced in each neighborhood, there has been a massive transfer of military and security forces to the city.” It continued: “Our efforts to reclaim these actions were rejected. This is a threat against democracy, this is a coup against Sirnak city.”

After the results were announced, Erdogan gave a speech hailing the elections as an AKP victory. “Turkey has completed the March 31 local elections with democratic maturity,” he said, adding: “The AKP is the winner by far, as it has always been since the November 3, 2002 elections when it won for the first time.”

Erdogan plans to respond to the elections with stepped-up austerity and war. He noted that Turkey now has no elections scheduled for nearly five years and touted his “very strong reform plan” for the economy. “We, as Turkey, will impose our powerful economic program in accordance with our aims and

without concessions on the rules of free market economy,” he declared. “Now we have a long period to carry out reforms uncompromisingly on the economy with the aim of a big and strong Turkey.”

This came after Turkey’s leading business federation, TUSIAD, issued a statement declaring: “Tighter monetary and fiscal policies prescribed in the New Economic Program introduced by the government on September 20, 2018 should be prescribed ... Only a comprehensive economic approach that adheres to free market principles, strengthens the independence and transparency of regulatory agencies, commits to structural reforms that increase competitiveness and diminish economic weaknesses can be effective.”

Erdogan has also indicated that he is planning to intensify military operations targeting Kurdish forces in neighboring Syria, where the Turkish bourgeoisie fears that US-backed Kurdish militias could set up an independent Kurdish state and win support from Kurds inside Turkey itself. On Saturday, Erdogan threatened: “We will definitely solve the Syria issue on the field, if possible, and not at the negotiating table, as our first task after elections.”

The AKP’s ability to maintain a narrow majority of support among voters points to the bankruptcy of not only the CHP, but also the HDP and a variety of petty-bourgeois, pseudo-left organizations that enthusiastically joined the CHP-led “Nation Alliance.”

Alper Tas, the leader of the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), who agreed to run for office in the Beyoglu district of Istanbul with the support of the CHP and the far-right Good Party, was defeated.

Among broad masses of workers in Turkey, the CHP and its allies are deeply mistrusted. Not only is the CHP the traditional party of the Turkish army, which carried out three bloody NATO-backed coups in the 20th century, but it refrained from criticizing the role of Washington and Berlin in organizing the failed 2016 coup attempt targeting Erdogan. The CHP supported Erdogan’s role in the NATO-led proxy war in Syria and, before the AKP took power in 2002, had already while in government established a record as a party of austerity.

The line-up of the HDP and a broad range of pseudo-left parties like the ÖDP behind the CHP only underscores that these parties themselves have nothing to offer to working people.

They failed to capitalize on mounting discontent with the economic crisis in Turkey, which has seen inflation skyrocket and unemployment rise to 13.5 percent (nearly 25 percent among youth), and on deep-rooted opposition in Turkey to NATO and imperialist wars.

This discontent is so deep that, at one point in the election campaign, sections of Erdogan’s own AKP led by former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu publicly discussed ditching Erdogan and founding their own new party.

After the elections, however, and the failure of the CHP and its allies to capitalize on discontent with the AKP, these forces aligned themselves again with Erdogan. Davutoglu took to Twitter last night to indicate his support for Erdogan. Hailing the vote of “millions of citizens, young and old,” he claimed it was the “duty” of everyone in Turkey to maintain national unity and “continue our journey of common destiny with firm steps.”

This election result shows that—as in the 2011 uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia and the current mass protests demanding the bringing down of the military regime in Algeria—effective opposition will come only from the working class, in a rebellion against the entire political establishment.



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