

Erdo?an's AKP suffers setback in Turkish local elections as CHP comes first

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1 April 2024

President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) suffered a major setback in local elections held nationwide on Sunday, while the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) came first for the first time since 1977. It was the first time since 2002 that the AKP did not come first in an election. With over 61 million eligible voters, turnout dropped to 78 percent from 87 percent in last year's presidential and parliamentary elections.

The local elections marked a drastic reversal of last year's elections, which Erdo?an and the AKP won. This year, according to preliminary results, the CHP gained 37.7 percent of the vote, according to preliminary results, and the AKP only 35.5 percent. The CHP, which had won only 25 percent of the vote in the 2023 elections, increased its vote by nearly 50 percent.

The CHP won Turkey's three largest cities—Istanbul, led by CHP incumbent Ekrem ?mamo?lu, Ankara and Izmir—by a wide margin. It also carried major industrial cities such as Bursa and Manisa.

The elections were dominated by the deep inflation and cost-of-living crisis that is devastating workers in Turkey. They took place amid 67 percent official annual inflation, as real wages collapse and large sections of the working class, including pensioners, are impoverished. During the election campaign, growing working class discontent erupted in a series of wildcat strikes in sectors including metal, shipyards, and textiles.

Over a year after the February 6, 2023 earthquakes officially killed 53,000 people in Turkey, hundreds of thousands are still living in tents or containers, while no action has been taken for millions living at risk from expected major earthquakes across Turkey.

In the May 2023 elections, despite mass anger over inflation, the earthquakes and the AKP's disastrous handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, Erdo?an eked out a narrow victory. At that time, the *World Socialist Web Site*

explained that his victory was mainly due to the right-wing campaign of CHP candidate Kemal K?l?çdaro?lu. While K?l?çdaro?lu denounced migrants and pledged support for NATO against Russia in the Ukraine war, Erdo?an made phony criticisms of NATO and promises to workers, public sector employees and pensioners.

In this year's election campaign, however, Erdo?an not only failed to make social promises to the workers but was also exposed as a pro-imperialist politician amid the NATO war with Russia and the ongoing Israeli genocide against Gaza.

After the Israeli genocide in Gaza began in October 2023, Erdo?an repeatedly denounced Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and expressed support for Hamas. However, he kept supplying oil and other key war materials to Israel for its war on the Palestinians and maintained bilateral ties with the Netanyahu government, despite protests over Gaza in Turkey, where there is overwhelming pro-Palestinian sentiment.

At recent AKP campaign rallies Erdo?an attended, pro-Palestinian demonstrators holding banners calling to stop trade with Israel were violently assaulted and arrested by police.

Under conditions where masses of workers saw no left-wing or revolutionary alternative to Erdo?an, the CHP was the undeserving beneficiary of opposition to the government. It did not campaign on workers' social grievances or on the Gaza genocide but focused instead on local issues on a city-by-city basis, trying to sweep under the rug its backing for NATO expansion to Finland and Sweden and for Erdo?an's close ties with Israel.

"The CHP has now broken the invisible 25 percent ceiling over its head, it has shattered it," declared CHP leader Özgür Özel, who replaced K?l?çdaro?lu at a November party congress. He added: "The CHP is now the party of all democrats, social democrats, but also nationalist democrats, conservative democrats and

Kurdish democrats, who can vote together at the same time.”

This year, the Islamist New Welfare Party (YRP) was the only party that sought to benefit from rising social discontent and anger against the Gaza genocide.

The YRP campaigned on calls to raise the minimum wage and cut trade with Israel. On this basis, it increased its vote from 2.8 percent to 6.2 percent, suddenly becoming the third-largest party.

YRP leader Fatih Erbakan, the son of the late Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, applauded his own campaign, stating: “The debt-interest-price increases-tax economy that the government has stubbornly applied for years and the resulting poverty and economic crisis played a role in the formation of this result.”

He added, “Again, the shame and disgrace of continued trade with Israel and the Zionist murderers played a major role in this result. The approval of the NATO membership of Sweden ... played a role in this result.”

The near-total silence on these decisive issues of the Workers’ Party of Turkey (T?P), which ran in an electoral alliance with the CHP, and of other pseudo-left groups that ran their own candidates, testifies to their political bankruptcy.

For his part, Erdo?an vowed to continue the social attacks on the working class demanded by the banks and major Turkish corporations. He said, “We will see the positive results of our economic program, especially inflation, in the second half of the year.”

After the May 2023 elections, the AKP government appointed as finance minister Mehmet ?im?ek, who pursued a policy of high interest rates and slashing real wages. The central bank then raised interest rates from 8.5 percent to 50 percent, and real wages continued to fall. The US dollar exchange rate, which was around 19.5 Turkish liras at the time of the May 2023 elections, rose by nearly 50 percent after that. Before the March 31, 2024 election, it took 32 liras to buy US\$1.

According to the pro-government Türk-?? trade union confederation, the poverty line for a family of four rose to 54,700 liras in March 2024, while the minimum wage is 17,000 liras and the minimum pension is only 10,000 liras. Unlike the 2023 elections, Erdo?an announced this time that there would be no additional increases in the minimum wage and pensions, baldly claiming, “there is no money.”

The Kurdish nationalist People’s Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), which won 8.8 percent of the vote (4.8 million votes) last year, fell to 5.7 percent (2.6

million) on Sunday. However, it will reclaim many areas where the government undemocratically removed its officials and appointed trustees after the 2019 local elections.

Especially in western Turkish cities like Istanbul, Kurdish voters shifted to the CHP. Meral Dan?? Be?ta?, the DEM candidate in Istanbul, said, “Ekrem ?mamo?lu should not say that these votes are mine. They are not his votes. Our voters voted for him. Why? Because they wanted to punish the AKP.” She received only 2 percent of the vote.

On Sunday, the DEM Party alleged that the Erdo?an government was responsible for electoral irregularities in the Kurdish provinces, having brought soldiers and policemen en masse from other cities to vote in order to shift vote totals in the Kurdish provinces.

Turkey’s far-right parties did not advance. The AKP-linked Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) remained at 4.9 percent of the vote, so that the combined AKP-MHP vote fell from 50 percent in the 2019 local elections to 40.4 percent this year. The Good Party, which was allied to the CHP in last year’s elections, suffered a major setback, falling from 9.7 percent of the vote last year to 3.8 percent, with many Good Party voters supporting the CHP instead.

In the cities hit by the February 6, 2023 earthquakes, the AKP vote collapsed. In Kahramanmara?, it dropped from 67 percent in 2019 to 42 percent in this election. The AKP lost Ad?yaman to the CHP and ?anl?urfa to the YRP. The AKP only won Hatay after the CHP re-nominated L?tfü Sava?, who was hated by the population for his responsibility in the massive death toll in the earthquake.



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