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Turkey

Elections in Turkey confirm authoritarian regime and tasks for an Anticapitalist Alternative

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The elections held on 24 June in Turkey confirmed the one-man rule of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and caused more disappointment than the previous ones. Several factors had created a wave of hope amongst supporters of the broader opposition parties that the ruling party would do less well this time.

Firstly, economic stagnation that was likely to turn into a crisis was expected to decrease the support for the government. In fact, the main reason for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its ally the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) deciding to hold an early election was to prevent negative political consequences of the worsening economy. [1] [2]

Secondly, Muharrem Ersoy, the presidential candidate of the social democratic Republican People's Party (CHP) carried out a very successful campaign that mobilized the masses. [3] It was the first time after Gezi protests that millions of people occupied the street, breaking their fear and the bans imposed by the government.

Another reason that was expected to deprive the ruling bloc of a majority was the establishment of Good Party (İYİ Parti) as an anti-AKP alternative by a group which split from the MHP. [[İYİ Parti, established 2017, described as nationalist, liberal conservative and secularist \(Wikipedia\)](#)]

Finally, the majority of the opposition including the CHP, Good Party and Felicity Party (SP) formed a coalition against the AKP and MHP, which they named "Nation Alliance", to support each other, to act in a united way in the second round of the presidential election and combat electoral corruption. [4] Although they did not include pro-Kurdish Peoples Democratic Party (HDP) in this process, the HDP announced that they would support any candidate of the Alliance against Erdoğan in the second round. [5]

Despite some partial successes by the opposition parties, the abovementioned reasons did not lead to significant reduction of support for the power bloc. Erdogan was elected again as president with 52.6% in the first round, while his party the AKP got 42.6 % of the parliamentary votes.

Compared to the elections on 1 November 2015 there was a decrease of 7% in the votes of AKP but more than 1 % increase in Erdoğan's support. Although the MHP did not hold any rally or campaign, it kept its votes of more than 11 % since 2015, which shows that majority of the voters who abandoned the AKP voted for MHP while İYİ Parti got at least half of its votes from MHP. This shift from AKP to MHP shows the impact of harsh nationalist propaganda that the government has adopted for three years as well as the nationalist and chauvinist direction of the popular discontent.

Another notable thing about the MHP's results was its increased votes in the Kurdish populated region compared to the last elections. Those votes are overwhelmingly from the Turkish and Arab residents who previously voted for the AKP. In addition, although the scale of the corruption is not known in the region some images and videos appeared on media showing many fraudulent votes were put in the ballot boxes in favor of the MHP. On the other hand, some Kurdish commentators said that few Kurdish people who have been involved in the patronage network of the MHP would vote for Turkish nationalists.

Not Free Not Fair At All

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When it comes to the opposition parties, the results cannot be considered just as another defeat particularly when the unequal and unfair conditions are taken into account. The elections were held under the state of emergency which has abolished many civil and political rights and generally meant there was great pressure on the opposition. The financial resources of the state were used to increase the votes for the ruling party. The mainstream media which is overwhelmingly controlled by the government gave almost no coverage to the positions of the opposition.

Among the presidential candidates Selahattin Demirtaş, the jailed leader of HDP, hardly appeared on the state TV channels that operate as propaganda instruments of the government. In addition to the smear campaign against the HDP for being terrorists and traitors and police pressure on their members, the ballot boxes for 145,000 voters in Kurdish populated southeastern region were moved to other places, supposedly for security reasons. Many voters had to walk long distances to vote, which inevitably decreased the participation rate in the region.

Under these unfavorable conditions, Selahattin Demirtaş got 8.4% of the presidential votes, and the HDP got 11.70% of the parliamentary votes and 67 seats. Although the support for the HDP decreased in the southeastern region, it increased in western parts of Turkey due to the strategic voting of CHP supporters to make the HDP pass the 10% threshold. If the HDP did not achieve this, all the seats in the southeastern region would go to AKP as the second most powerful party in the area. That is why many people voted for HDP while they supported Muharrem İnce (30.64%) for the presidency. It would not be an overinterpretation to say that HDP will be demonized and that the AKP will try to break its links with the West and CHP voters in the near future.

The İYİ Party, which positioned itself on the center-right, got 10% of the secular and nationalist votes and got 43 seats in the very first election in which they took part. It is estimated that at least 60% of their votes were from MHP and 25% from CHP. It seems quite probable that both the İYİ Party and CHP will move further right in order to pick the fruits of the nationalistic tendencies of the society. The CHP spokesperson recently announced that they will change their discourse from one that only addresses their supporters to using the language of the AKP and MHP supporters.

One of the fears of the opposition was electoral corruption. All the parties requested their voters not to leave polling places until the end of the counting to prevent fraudulent voting and unfair counting and be prepared in front of the Higher Election Council at the end of counting to make the Council announce the true result of elections. Because the Higher Election Council that announces the final results is under the total control of the government, the only way to check the results was collecting the totals from individual ballot boxes.

They also asked people not to follow the elections through the state news agency Anatolian News Agent (AA), which generally manipulates facts in the government's favour, but from the website they established for the last elections. But that website did not work at all. When AA announced the victory of Erdogan and AKP, the opposition first denied the results and claimed that Erdogan had not won. But then they disappeared for hours after that and then seemed to concede that Erdogan was the winner when his victory celebrations had already started. In many places the supporters of Erdoğan occupied the streets with guns to celebrate the election victory before the results were not clear. This led to some conspiracy theories alleging that opposition parties had to accept the victory of Erdoğan although he did not get enough votes in order to escape from clashes between the armed Erdoğan supporters and opposition supporters. Some protests held by CHP members called for the resignation of their party executives who were accused of surrendering to AKP, which has not yet had any visible effect.

Anti-Capitalist Alternative

Radical left groups did not have a similar and clear-cut position and strategies in this snap election. Some groups ran

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their own candidates some had unclear declarations about the presidential candidates and parties to be supported and some groups openly called for a vote for HDP – which undoubtedly stands on the far left in the current array of political parties. The common point for the whole far left was that you could not raise and make popular any anti-capitalist demands before the elections. Thanks to the HDP's overcoming the threshold of 10%, some popular candidates coming from radical left will now take part in the parliament.

The majority of the Turkish socialist movement is in solidarity with the Kurdish movement, and the HDP has created an opportunity for the socialist movement to be politically active in electoral politics. Nevertheless, this relationship with HDP and political priorities raised during the elections reveal that Turkish radical left is not an alternative on its own – not an independent political power. Hence, instead of constructing its own existence with the values of democracy, ecologism, feminism, anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism socialist movement, it prefers to situate itself as an anti-AKP movement without raising any concrete demands, and sometimes builds opportunistic relationships with more powerful forces in the name of the fight against the AKP. But the uphill task for the socialist movement to build an independent anticapitalist alternative in order to break up the nationalist and conservative policies and discourses of the AKP has become more urgent than ever.

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[1] AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi is a conservative political party founded in 2001. Recep Tayyip Erdogan is the current party leader

[2] MHP, Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi is a far right nationalist party founded in 1969.

[3] CHP Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi was founded in 1919, the oldest party in Turkey

[4] Felicity Party, Saadet Partisi) an Islamist Turkish political party founded in 2001

[5] HDP, Halkların Demokratik Partisi, Peoples' Democratic Party, founded in 2012.