

The disappointing aftermath of the Turkish elections

Tuesday 16 May 2023, by [COURT Mireille](#) (Date first published: 15 May 2023).

All the polls predicted at least a strong lead on Sunday 14 May for Kemal Kiliçdaroglu, the candidate of the CHP. Eventually, it is Erdoğan who won this large lead.

Kemal Kiliçdaroglu, the candidate of the CHP (social-democratic party whose emblematic figure is Kemal Atatürk), had for some time become the darling of the Western media. Pro-European, neo-liberal, with no sulphurous links with Turkey, he had everything to please.

All the polls predicted at least a strong lead on Sunday 14 May, or even a victory in the first round, against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan worn out by 21 years of power, entangled in a serious economic crisis and criticised for his calamitous management of the two earthquakes that hit Turkey in February 2023.

On the morning of the elections in Diyarbakir, the capital of the Kurdish region of Turkey, all the passers-by were enthusiastic. Zelia, 56 years old told us: "Of course we are going to win! We are fed up with Erdoğan, we want freedom for our prisoners and for us, nobody will vote for Erdoğan here! All the young people want him to leave". A little further on, young people are waving the flag of Yesil sol, the New Green Party, created following the threats of dissolution of the HDP. They are 20 years old and have only known Erdoğan as president.

On the pavement opposite, Hadi Abdou Khader, 73, is having tea with his friends under the sun. "There was no other choice for the Kurds in the presidential elections than to vote for Kemal Kiliçdaroglu. If I had any other choice I would have done it. Kurds start being oppressed the moment they are born. And many other spontaneous testimonies, affirming their confidence in the fall of the tyrant.

But in the evening, in the premises crowded with HDP activists, which have become the premises of Yesil sol, when the first estimates start to appear on the screen, faces close. Erdoğan has a large lead, and even if the results of the big cities favourable to the CHP, such as Istanbul, Ankara or Izmir, are not yet known, the hope of a defeat of Erdoğan in the first round collapses. In the CHP offices, from 10pm onwards, the activists no longer believe in victory and desert what they thought would be the night of victory.

At midnight, in front of the court under heavy police protection, bales of ballots continue to arrive for endless recounts, but for the HDP youth gathered behind the gates, their hearts are no longer in it. "If he is elected again, we are leaving! In Europe, anywhere! We can't take it anymore!"

So how to explain this last-minute turnaround in relation to the many polls? Some believe that it was the agreement with the Kurds that demotivated part of the CHP electorate, others that it was the religion of Kemal Kiliçdaroglu, an Alevi, that put off the predominantly Sunni electorate, or still others evoke frauds and manipulations.

It is true that Erdoğan holds all the powers, from the electoral commission to the machinery of the State, including judges and the Parliament, but a fraud on the scale of several million votes seems implausible. A possible manipulation, however, would be to deliberately invalidate enough votes to provoke a second round. The AKP has a significant vote reserve with the 5.3% of votes cast for Sinan Ogan, an ultra-nationalist who advocates the expulsion of all Syrian refugees, and a second round in which he would triumph would have the advantage of silencing the rumours of fraud and above all of legitimising his election in the eyes of the Westerners who had abandoned him.

As for the second round, it really offers little hope, even for the leadership of Yesil Sol.

Serra Bucak, a member of the party leadership told us on Monday morning, the day after the first round: "We knew that it wasn't an easy election. We knew that it would be difficult for the first round but we didn't know that Erdoğan would get so many votes, especially in the earthquake areas. I hope the CHP will use these 2 weeks well, they will have to find new strategies, not for the Kurdish region, which is won to him, but for the rest of Turkey."

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P.S.

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