

# Political Earthquake: A Double Victory for the Peoples of Turkey

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**Turkey's municipal elections of 31 March 2024, contrary to all predictions, represented a genuine political earthquake where the bloc linked to the country's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, received its first defeat since 2002. Erdogan's victory in the 2023 elections, despite all the hopes of the opposition, had been a source of demoralization and loss of interest in politics.**

## Contents

- [A historic turning point \(...\)](#)
- [Regime's rout](#)
- [Judicial coup in the Kurdish](#)

While all the elections since then have been a kind of plebiscite concerning the “survival” of the regime and participation in the vote count has been perceived as a civic task in order to curb any attempt at fraud, this election seemed to be marked by the greatest lack of interest.

## A historic turning point for the opposition

Thus, with a lower turnout than the previous votes (78.5% compared to 87% in the 2023 parliamentary elections), the main opposition party, the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP – Republican People's Party, centre-left-republican-secularist) won an unexpected victory by obtaining 37.8% of the vote against 35.5% for Erdogan's party, the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP – Justice and Development Party). The CHP thus obtained nearly 4 million more votes than in the 2023 legislative elections. However, the CHP not only won these elections in terms of the total percentage, but also managed to win the mayoralities, in genuine AKP strongholds, both at the city and district levels.

Istanbul and Ankara, which were the central areas at stake in these elections, were also retained by the opposition. Ekrem Imamoglu won 51.14% in Istanbul, more than ten points more than his AKP opponent, Murat Kurum; while his party won 26 of Istanbul's 39 districts, 12 more than in the previous municipal elections. The outgoing mayor of Ankara Mansur Yavas (a defector from the far right), with 60.5%, won almost 30 points more than the regime's candidate. But at the level of public opinion, Imamoglu is emerging as a political leader who can rally forces beyond the traditional base of the CHP (around 25%) and is already being designated as a potential candidate for the next presidential elections.

## Regime's rout

As for the AKP and its far-right ally, the Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, (MHP – Nationalist Action Party),

they lost a total of more than 6 million votes. Among the factors of this defeat of the AKP, we must count above all inflation and the rise in the cost of living, which has become unbearable for a large majority of the population. But corruption and cronyism within the AKP is also a major source of the party's loss of legitimacy. With a hyper-centralization of political power through the figure of Erdogan, the party has also lost its ties with its electoral base. However, these results do not mean that Erdogan is no longer the undisputed leader for half of the population. It should be noted that the dynamics of local elections remain quite different from parliamentary and especially presidential elections.

While the fact that some AKP voters did not go to the polls in order to penalize their party is an important element in this setback, it is undeniable that the Islamist, homophobic, anti-vaccine Yeniden Refah Partisi (YRP - New Prosperity Party) has also benefited greatly from the discontent with Erdogan's party and his government. By going from 4% in the 2023 parliamentary elections to 6% (and winning dozens of municipalities including a metropolis, Urfa), the YRP is asserting itself as the pole of protest within the right, while the other conservative-Islamist alternatives are almost reduced to nothing. Refusing to be part of the political bloc built around Erdogan, as was the case in the parliamentary elections, Fatih Erbakan (son of the founder of the Islamic political current in Turkey), leader of the YRP, led a consistent opposition on economic issues (notably the situation of pensioners, which seems to be one of the important factors in the AKP's defeat) and financial agreements with Israel.

### **Judicial coup in the Kurdish region**

As far as the Kurdish movement is concerned, the Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi (DEM - People's Equality and Democracy Party) with 5.7%, lost 3 points compared to the 2023 parliamentary elections, but it would be wrong to consider this result as a weakening of the party. In the west of the country, the DEM, while fielding its own candidates, hardly campaigned and mostly supported CHP candidates in order to defeat Erdogan's Islamist-nationalist bloc. Meanwhile, in the Kurdish zone, the DEM once again won the majority of towns despite the fact that its mayors were systematically deposed (and detained), accused of links with "terrorism". This time, the regime first tried to get tens of thousands of soldiers, police and other "transported" voters to vote in Kurdish towns in order to influence the results. But in addition, through a "judicial coup", the electoral commission refused to allow the outgoing mayor of Van, Abdullah Zeydan, to take office by contesting his eligibility (despite this having been validated before the election) and handed the mandate to the AKP candidate who had obtained almost 30 points less than Zeydan. But following mass mobilizations and clashes in several cities, the High Electoral Council finally validated his mandate. This is a second major victory, in which the regime has for the first time in many years backed down in the face of a protest movement. This also testifies to the shift in the balance of power at the moral and political level.

However, this retreat towards the CHP did not benefit the radical left, in particular the Türkiye İşçi Partisi (TIP - Workers' Party of Turkey) which won 1.7% of the vote in the parliamentary elections, a large part of which came from CHP voters. While considering that the party fielded candidates in only 14 cities (apart from Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir), the TIP only managed to get a quarter of its 2023 votes (and two municipalities including Samandağ, the Arab-Alevi district of Hatay, affected by the earthquake).

But in any case, this victory for the opposition clearly opens a significant breach in the hegemony of Erdogan's reactionary regime. The revolutionary left will have to seize this opportunity, mobilize the blossoming hope of millions of workers, rebuild itself in social movements and class struggle in

order to conquer not only democracy but also social justice.

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