

Hope is shipwrecked: Erdogan's regime wins again

After twenty years in power, writes *Uraz Aydin*, Recep Tayyip Erdogan won again in the second round of the presidential elections on 28 May 2023. Faced with his rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who won 47.84 per cent of the vote, Erdogan, whose bloc had also obtained a majority in parliament, was the winner with 52.16 per cent. Which means that the "Reis" should normally reign over an autocratic, fascistic and Islamist regime for another five years.

The reactionary bloc wins the majority in parliament

The bloc formed around Recep Tayyip Erdogan is probably one of the most reactionary coalitions in the country's political history. Already, since 2015, the AKP [*Erdogan's party*] had been in alliance with the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). For this election Erdogan included in his bloc the Islamist party Yeniden Refah, led by Fatih Erbakan, son of the historic leader of political Islam in Turkey, Necmettin Erbakan.

Another more Islamist wing of the far right, the Great Union Party (BBP) also forms part of Erdogan's camp. This bloc was also joined by HÜDA-PAR, the legal party of Hezbollah in Turkey, mainly established in the Kurdish region and which in the 1990s had been used as an armed force by the Turkish Gladio against the PKK [*Kurdish Workers Party*] and had committed numerous massacres. The regime will try to use this organization to break the hegemony of the Kurdish political movement, which has maintained itself despite a level of fierce repression since 2015.

During the legislative elections of 14 May, which were held at the same time as the first round of the presidential elections, the pro-Erdogan bloc obtained, with 49.4 per cent of the votes, 323 deputies (out of 600). Although his votes were down compared to the election of 2018 when he obtained 344 deputies, Erdogan still has the majority in parliament which allows him to adopt or prevent bills. The results obtained by the AKP were also down, but the MHP, which was estimated to have fallen to 6-7 per cent, almost regained its 2018 level, reaching 10 per cent. However it should be noted that the bloc came first in almost all the cities of the earthquake zone.

A defeat for the opposition

Opposite this bloc was the Alliance of the Nation, whose main party is the Republican People's Party (CHP), a centre-left party whose origins lie in the foundation of the Republic. The other "big party" in this bloc is Meral Akşener's Good Party (İYİP), which is a far-right split, representing a more secular nationalism than the MHP, but trying to reposition itself towards the centre-right .

Also part of this alliance are two parties whose leaders were previously leaders of the AKP, one led by Ahmet Davutoğlu, former Prime Minister, and the other by Ali Babacan, former Minister of Economy. Finally, the Saadet Partisi (SP), which comes from the historical current of Islamism from which the AKP emerged, also participates in this bloc, as well as another small right-wing party.

Politically, this opposition alliance defends a return to a parliamentary regime (abolished by Erdogan in 2017 following a referendum) and the recovery of the economy through a restored neoliberalism with certain "social" traits. With 35.4 per cent of the vote, the opposition bloc obtained 212 deputies, 23 more seats than in the previous election.

The parties of Babacan and Davutoğlu , as well as the SP, whose candidates were presented under the CHP lists, seem to have contributed 3 per cent to the results of the CHP. These right-wing parties thus obtain 40 seats, while they only brought in 22 more. The eligible places reserved for right-wing candidates in these lists had sparked debate among the rank and file of the CHP.

Nationalist turn of the opposition after the first round

During the 14 May presidential election, despite all the opposition's predictions, Erdogan won 49.5 per cent of the vote, thus beating the leader of the Alliance of the Nation by 5 points, the latter only receiving 44.8 per cent. Given the importance of the President of the Republic in the autocratic system, Kılıçdaroğlu's victory was decisive for regime change. He led a campaign that was able to embrace large sectors of the population. The fact that he is an Alevi Kurd (a minority stream of Islam seen as a heresy by traditional Sunnism) had generated debate, with many believing that he could not unify the opposition. However, the leader of the CHP led a campaign proudly claiming his adhesion to Alevism and calling for a reconciliation of the population of Turkey in the face of the polarizing policies of Erdogan.

A third candidate, Sinan Ogan, an ultra-nationalist from the ranks of the MHP, won 5.2 per cent. He was the candidate of a small nationalist, anti-migrant and anti-Kurdish bloc, who refused to support Kilicdaroglu, in particular because the latter was also supported by the pro-Kurdish party HDP. He thus held a crucial position for the second round.

In order to be able to rally the electorate of Ogan , Kilicdaroglu, himself a candidate from a bloc made up of various centre-left, conservative, Islamist and far-right currents, thus operated a nationalist turn.

He argued that, in the context of a victory for Erdogan, 10 million new migrants would arrive in the country, that the cities would be under the control of refugees and the mafia, that young girls would no longer be able to walk around on their own, that violence against women was going to increase (because of the refugees) and that finally Erdogan was going to make concessions in the face of "terrorism" (therefore of the Kurdish movement). He was thus trying to ride the (massive, among Turks and Kurds) anti-migrant wave by declaring that he was going to send them all back to their own country, but also to reverse Erdogan's main argument during his campaign, that the opposition supposedly supported the "terrorism" of the PKK.

Indeed, the fact that the HDP (pro-Kurdish left) supported Kilicdaroglu, himself Kurd and Alevi, and that it promised to release Selahattin Demirtaş (former HDP leader, imprisoned for seven years) had been Erdogan's main angle of attack against the opposition. After having maintained a more democratic discourse before the first round, Kilicdaroglu ended up criticizing Erdogan himself for having conducted negotiations with the Kurdish movement (in 2009-2014).

Eventually Ogan preferred to express his support for Erdogan, but the most prominent party in the bloc for which Ogan had been a candidate, the Victory Party, whose main political stance was anti-migrant nationalism, declared its support for Kilicdaroglu. On this, the latter signed a protocol with this party, where the anti-migrant position was reaffirmed but which also promised (within the framework of the laws) the continuation of the appointments of administrators in place of HDP mayors in the Kurdish region, who were accused of having links with the PKK (about fifty municipalities are concerned by this). While in the initial programme of the opposition it was a question of new elections for the town halls concerned... Although the HDP protested this decision, it continued to call to vote for Kilicdaroglu, but the percentage of participation

in Kurdistan, which was already below Turkey's average in the first round, fell further in the second round. Despite everything, the opposition candidate emerged a winner in all the towns of the Kurdish region.

HDP, TIP and the “Work and Freedom” Alliance

Another opposition alliance was the one called “Work and Freedom,” made up of the HDP (Democratic People's Party, left-wing party from the Kurdish movement), the TIP (Workers' Party of Turkey, in which our comrades of the [Fourth International](#) are active) as well as four other formations of the radical left. For the presidential elections this coalition supported Kılıçdaroğlu. For the presidential elections the HDP participated in the elections under the name of its “replacement party”, against the probability that it would be banned, the Green-Left Party (YSP).

The TIP did not present itself in the cities where the HDP had a large majority (Turkish Kurdistan) and in some where it risked losing deputies to the HDP and the CHP; it submitted slates in 52 out of 81 cities. The fact that the TIP wanted to run within the alliance but with independent slates in some cities is a question that has generated a lot of debate. For the HDP, the TIP should have included its candidates in the lists of the YSP; its opinion was that having two competing lists within the same alliance would divide the votes and lose potential elected representatives.

The TIP had another proposal. The party had been observing an influx of members for several months. It had quadrupled its membership since mid-January, going from 10,000 to 40,000 members in four months, in particular because of its mobilization in solidarity with the city of Hatay (Antioch), seriously affected by the earthquake. This participation, but above all the sympathy that was expressed towards the party

and its elected representatives, who for five years had led a very combative policy, came from political and social sectors that were largely different from those who had previously voted for the HDP. An important part came from the left of the CHP, but also from an electorate which previously voted for the right but which (especially through the elected representatives of the TIP) discovered a combative left, which does not mince its words vis-a-vis the ruling circles and gives a prominent place to workers' rights. It was clear that the TIP could not channel all of these votes to the HDP-YSP lists. So its proposal was that the alliance candidates present themselves in certain cities under the TIP lists (even if it meant putting HDP candidates at the top of the list) and thus having a plurality of candidacy tactics according to the demographic, ethnic and social specificities of the localities. This would have increased the results of the alliance at the national level, but also the number of elected representatives. In the end, the two parties failed to agree on this tactic, mismanaged the controversy (which had negative repercussions on the networks) and the TIP ended up presenting itself with its own lists in fifty cities. Among the TIP lists there were also candidates from two Trotskyist currents, the Workers' Democracy Party (IDP) and the International Workers' Solidarity Association (UID-DER).

The HDP-YSP obtained 8.8 per cent in the legislative elections, 3 per cent less than in the previous ones. It is still too early to make substantial analyses, but it seems that support for Kılıçdaroğlu for the presidential elections was understood as support for the CHP (in the legislative elections) and therefore votes went to this party. On the other hand, the 10 per cent barrier (to enter parliament) was an important source of motivation to vote for this party and allow its representation in parliament (and reduce that of the opposing bloc). The fact that this barrier is currently 7 per cent (a threshold that the HDP should easily exceed, according to estimates) must also have weighed, and part of the left-

wing electorate who had previously voted for the HDP returned to vote for the CHP and partly for the TIP. Finally, we know that especially within the Kurdish people, certain more conservative and nationalist sectors are opposed to alliances with the Turkish far left; this must also have had an effect on the results.

The results of the YSP, which are considered a failure by the party, have triggered debates and in particular severe criticism from Selahattin Demirtaş, whose relationship with the leadership had been strained for several years. Having played an important role during the campaign from his cell (through the daily visits of his lawyers and his Twitter account directed from outside according to his instructions), Demirtaş has declared his retirement from "active politics". The HDP is thus embarking on a process of internal debates which will culminate in its next congress.

In this nightmarish panorama a meagre (but significant) consolation is the result that the TIP obtained. For the first time since 1965, a socialist party defending the cause of the working class has managed to enter parliament with its own votes (and not by being elected under the list of another party). The TIP obtained 1.7 per cent with a million votes, only presenting itself in two-thirds of the territory, therefore probably above 2 per cent in total. It thus gained four deputies, three of whom were already in the previous parliament. The fourth, Can Atalay, who was elected as deputy for Hatay, is a renowned lawyer involved in all the struggles of the country and who has at present been in detention for a year and has been sentenced to 18 years in prison for having been one of the main spokespersons for the Gezi revolt in 2013. Can's case is being appealed; legally he should be able to be freed to take his place in parliament, but the regime refuses for the moment to release him.

Rebuilding class consciousness

If the conditions for carrying out the campaigns were completely unequal (control of the media by Erdogan, etc.) and many cases of fraud were observed, we must recognize that the regime triumphed despite everything. Neither the economic crisis nor the earthquakes of February, and even less the attacks on democracy have led the conservative and popular electorate to break with the regime. On the contrary, the discontent of the working classes was expressed within the reactionary bloc, but towards currents even more radical than the AKP.

The results of these elections show once again that to defeat the Erdogan regime the defence of democratic and secular values is not enough. If Erdogan's camp brings together different social classes, so does the opposing bloc. Once again we see that the right wing of the opposition, far from being a solution, further strengthens the regime and the dominant bourgeois, nationalist and Islamist ideology. It is necessary to build another polarization, in order to break the reactionary hegemony, but also that of the opposition bloc. A polarization that would allow the dissociation between the interests of the working class, the oppressed and those of the bosses, whether secular or Islamist. The fight against authoritarianism must be invested with a social, class content. And this goes through the reconstruction of the "subjective factor", of class consciousness, of the capacity for self-organization of the exploited, of women against patriarchal domination, of the unification of local and migrant workers, Turkish, Kurdish, Syrians and Afghans. This is the main challenge facing the radical left, from the HDP to the TIP and other currents of the revolutionary left. Certainly the situation is not easy. We recognize our defeat, but we refuse to bend and give up the fight. Being aware of the fact that freedom and equality will only be the work of the workers themselves, as we like to repeat here, we pour

ourselves a tea and get back to work...

1 June 2023

Uraz Aydin is the editor of Yeniyol, the review of the Turkish section of the [Fourth International](#), and one of many academics dismissed for having signed a petition in favour of peace with the Kurdish people, in the context of the state of emergency decreed after the attempted coup in 2016.

Originally published by International Viewpoint
<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8116>