

Erdogan's AKP Loses Elections: "Turkey faces a Terrorist Threat East of the Euphrates from the Kurds and the US."

Interview with Aydin Sezer

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*Sunday's nationwide elections in Turkey were surprising. Turkish **President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's** ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost its majority to the main opposition, the Republican People's Party (CHP) for the first time since 2001.*

The left-leaning CHP emerged as the leading party in Turkey for the first time since 1977.

The AKP's overall vote share fell 2% below that of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), which secured 37.74% of the vote nationwide.

The CHP won landslide victories in the largest cities, including in Ankara and Istanbul, and also captured 16 cities and provinces that were formerly controlled by the AKP or its allied parties.

Turkey's rampant inflation fuelled the fire which brought the CHP up and over the AKP after food prices skyrocketed, hitting a whopping 78%.

Voter turnout was another significant factor in the election. Many AKP supporters did not vote, as a form of protest, or apathy, since feeling their leaders are responsible for the rapidly decreasing purchasing power of the Turkish lira.

Voter turnout dropped to 78.6%, roughly 7% lower than the May general elections last year and 6% lower than the 2019 local polls.

Steven Sahiounie, of MidEastDiscourse, interviewed Aydin Sezer to gain a better understanding of what this election means to Turkey, and neighboring Syria, where there has been a Turkish supported conflict since 2011.

Steven Sahiounie (SS): Recent elections in Turkey saw President Erdogan's AKP party lose. In your view, what does this mean for the direction of the country?

Aydin Sezer (AS): In the recent elections in Turkey, clearly, Erdoğan and the AKP failed. This is readily apparent. Nonetheless, the nation's overall governance remains unaffected by these local elections. Indeed, the Republican People's Party chairman and election victor, Ozgur Ozel, has declared that the party has no intention of calling early elections.

The protracted economic crisis that has hit Turkey is well-known. Already, local elections have been impacted negatively by inflation and the cost of living. Erdoğan will face significant challenges over the next four years. Will he ensure the continuity of national governance through 2028? The core question stands as such. Erdoğan's position will be further complicated by the election results and mounting public pressure, which leads me to believe that Turkey will conduct early general elections in the coming years, as do many other analysts.

SS: Ekrem İmamoğlu won as Mayor of Istanbul again. How do you see his agenda for the city?

AS: Ekrem İmamoğlu is the strongest candidate for the 2028 presidential elections. He portrays Erdogan's alternative. Imamoğlu is particularly interested in not only Istanbul's governance, but also Turkey's overall concerns. To that purpose, he is crafting policies through think tanks and institutes with a large staff movement.

In terms of governance in Istanbul, the public have rated his work over the last five years as successful. In particular, we find that his social support to low-income groups has gained popularity. In his initial phase of governance, it appears Imamoğlu will likely focus on Turkey rather than Istanbul alone.

SS: Turkey has three million Syrian refugees. In your opinion, what is the current view on the Syrians, and will they be sent home?

AS: Not just Syrians, but refugees from many other nations also reside in Turkey. Regarding their costs and their contribution to economic life, there are tense discussions. Radical nationalist movements contend that returning foreigners is necessary. These groups' voting rates have now surpassed all but insignificant thresholds. Numerous social and cultural issues are brought about by asylum seekers. To be frank, Turkey's major parties view this issue from diverse angles. Although sending them all home is not physically possible, there are increasing worries that this issue may worsen in the years to come.

SS: Some experts have said that Erdogan wants to get rid of Muhamed al-Julani and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Idlib. In your opinion, what is President Erdogan's strategy for Idlib?

AS: Erdogan, in my opinion, has no a clear departure plan from Idlib. Erdogan is watching to see what time the procedure will begin. He is attempting to formulate a policy in light of the events. As a result, he is handing the authority to Russian President Putin in regards to Assad and HTS ties. Russia is known to have communicated different plans to Turkey and

Syria. But, I think that Assad and Erdogan reaching a peace agreement should be the first requirement. In the near future, this won't be possible; therefore, it doesn't appear that Erdogan will be able to agree to Assad's demands.

SS: The Turkish military and their mercenaries have established a military occupation north of Aleppo on the border region. In your opinion, what are the chances of a Turkish withdrawal?

AS: This question is a continuation of the one above. Assad proposes two requirements: Turkey's troops will be withdrawn from Syria, and Turkey's backing for HTS will cease. These are unacceptable for Erdogan. As a result, his Syria policy is regarded a dead end. To make matters worse, we know that Turkey faces security challenges east of the Euphrates with both the Kurds and the US; there is a terrorist threat there. Therefore, unfortunately, there does not appear to be a solution to Syria's multi-factor and multi-actor difficulties in the immediate future.

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