

THE TURKISH NATIONAL ELECTION

A Little Something for Everyone

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Turkey's June 12 election gave Prime Minister Erdoğan's party just short of fifty percent of the votes, returning his justice and Development, known as AKP, to power for the third time. It was an impressive achievement and marked Erdoğan as one of the most popular politicians in Turkey's democratic history. The voting map shows the extent of the AKP landslide, but also the extent of Turkey's fractured electorate. AKP won most of Anatolia, with the important exception of the Kurdish southeast, which overwhelmingly elected independent candidates who ran as such to get around Turkey's 10 percent national barrier and will reconstitute themselves in the parliament as a voting bloc. The CHP maintained its hold on Turkey's western coastal areas and European Turkey, except for Istanbul itself. MHP came in first only in eastern Iğdır, on the border with Armenia and Azerbaijan. The province of Tunceli, home to Zaza speaking Shia Kurds, and the province with Turkey's highest literacy rate remained a stalwart of the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP).

The CHP gained seats nationwide, upping its proportion of votes to 25.9 percent under the leadership of Kemal Kilicdaroglu. His predecessor Deniz Baykal regained his safe seat from Antalya and will also be in the parliament. Strong criticism has begun from within the party over its showing in the Izmir region where it went from holding 28 of 30 municipalities to only 19. Local CHP members, including parliamentarians displaced from the party's election list, have made their unhappiness apparent. A surprise winner in the election was the National Action Party, MHP, which got 13.2 percent of the vote nationwide in spite of being rocked by sex tape scandals that some have claimed had their origins in U.S. based supporters of Fethullah Gülen. There was widespread fear that MHP would fail to meet the barrier and its votes would mainly go to the AKP.

As a result of the way Turkey's election laws work, AKP will actually have fewer seats in the parliament than it did last time, down to 326. This is very significant, as it means that Erdoğan's avowed plans to change the constitution will need help in parliament and a national referendum to take place. Given Erdoğan's growing authoritarianism and the nature of Turkey's party list electoral system, some checks on governmental power are a relief to the more than fifty percent of Turks who do not support AKP's roughhouse rule. Fears of increasing environmental deprivation, further inroads into the secular nature of the state, alarm over declining free media and

wholesale arrests in the ongoing one-size-fits-all Ergenekon trial make many Turks rather nervous.

Erdoğan appears to have got the message. In his first public statement, he claimed to take the results as an approval of his regime and his plans to revamp the constitution, but said he realized it had to be done “by compromise.” It remains to be seen how much compromise actually takes place, but Erdoğan has proven himself to be a canny politician who can respond to the public will. The fact that more than half of the electorate voted against AKP in spite of Turkey’s booming economy and regional political influence indicate domestic concerns about AKP actions and intents that have also been reflected in international reactions to the Turkish elections. It seems that everyone is wondering where Turkey is going.

The parliament will contain 78 female representatives, a higher proportion than in many other countries, including the United States. MHP will have 54 members, there will be 35 independents and CHP will have 135 seats. The numbers reflect the voting in each province, where parliamentary seats are distributed according to party lists on the basis of percentage share of the votes in that province..

The Turkish election gave each party something to feel happy about. One can expect an even livelier debate to continue in the Turkish parliament, where each group will feel enfranchised to have its voice be loudly heard. The fun has just begun!