



## Turkish opposition candidate declared Istanbul mayor

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The candidate from Turkey's main opposition party has been declared Istanbul's new mayor, despite a pending appeal from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) to invalidate the vote and hold a rerun.

Nearly three weeks after the election, Ekrem Imamoglu of the Republican People's Party (CHP) received the mandate at the Istanbul electoral board offices on Wednesday afternoon after recounting in a number of districts in the city.

Footage showed a large crowd of cheering supporters outside the building in the Caglayan district.

Imamoglu then headed to the mayorship headquarters, where he took over the duty from incumbent Mevlut Uysal at around 6:30pm (15:30 GMT).

"We never gave up, we never gave up on our battle for democracy and rights," Imamoglu said in his remarks to supporters at the municipality building.

"We are aware there are ongoing processes ... We hope the relevant authorities will complete these processes in the most sensitive and just way," he added.

Initial results showed that Imamoglu won the race in Turkey's biggest city and economic hub by a small margin, ending 15 years of control by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's AK Party.

The AK Party had made several appeals for recounting, and on Tuesday it lodged an "extraordinary objection" and asked for a rerun of elections across the city. The country's top electoral body has yet to consider the request.

In the 16 days since the election, votes have been recounted in dozens of districts, multiple times in some of them.

The delayed announcement of the Istanbul results confirms the AK Party lost mayoral elections in the country's three largest cities - Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir.

"The government did not expect this result, but it happened. We expected them to respect the results. It happened, but late," Erdogan Toprak, an Istanbul MP from the CHP, told Al Jazeera via telephone.

"It is a great development for Turkish democracy, law and for the reliability of the electoral system in this country. And we are happy that it happened, despite it being late."

According to the final tally announced by the provincial election board, Imamoglu secured the mayoral seat with 4,169,765 votes, while the AK Party's Binali Yıldırım received 4,156,036 votes - a difference of 13,729 votes.

#### Opposite claims

In a press conference earlier on Wednesday, Ali Ihsan Yavuz, a deputy chairman of the AK Party, said that there were systematic irregularities in the polls.

"We have observed irregular and illegal actions in all 39 districts of Istanbul ... We are saying that organised fraud, unlawfulness and crimes were committed," he told reporters.

Shortly after Yavuz's remarks, CHP Deputy Chairman Muharrem Erkek said that the AK Party had "no concrete documents, information or evidence" in its appeal for the annulment of the polls.

"There is no legitimate reason at all," he said, adding that the move was damaging the will of the people of Istanbul.

According to Mustafa Akyol, a Turkish analyst and senior fellow at the Washington-based Cato Institute, the endless objections demonstrated the ruling party's tendency to cling on to power.

"People wonder, 'if they resisted so much just not to give Istanbul, what will happen if they lose a general elections?'," he told Al Jazeera.

He added: "On the other hand, the fact that the judicial apparatus did not fully comply with the ruling party, and ultimately gave the ticket to Ekrem Imamoglu shows that the rule of law has not disappeared in Turkey. The judges that monitor the elections, at least, have proven non-partisan, which is what makes elections still meaningful."

The election took place against the backdrop of an economic slowdown in Turkey, amid spiralling inflation, rising unemployment and a devalued currency. The Turkish economy entered recession for the first time in a decade last year.

If the AK Party's request for a rerun is approved by the Istanbul election board, which is legally still possible, the vote could be repeated on June 2.