



Turkey: Istanbul Set For Rerun Of Mayoral Vote

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Nearly three weeks after the mayoral election in Istanbul, Turkey, Republican People's Party (CHP) candidate Ekrem Imamoglu was declared the mayor of Istanbul. The CHP is the main opposition party to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK), which is lead by Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Imamoglu's victory broke the 15 year control President Erdogan's party had over Turkey's most populated city. Before the official result was even announced, the AK party filed an appeal for a mayoral rerun, and they were successful. Imamoglu spent only 18 days in office before Turkey's election board ordered a rerun in the country's largest city, citing "situations which affected the result and honesty" of the polls. The AK party claimed that illegal and fraudulent practices were used to secure CHP's Imamoglu's victory over the AK party candidate Binali Yildirim and that the vote was not fully representative of the city. Residents will return to the polls on June 23, about three months since the original mayoral election.

According to Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute, the mayoral rerun is a historic turning point in the country. Since Turkey became a multiparty democracy in 1950, the Supreme Electoral Council (YSK) has never reversed a major election outcome.

"This is the first time ... the loser did not accept the outcome, they challenged what they wanted and they got a revote," Cagaptay told [Al Jazeera](#).

"The board really couldn't stand under the weight of Erdogan's political personality and bowed to him."

Speaking on Sunday, Imamoglu called the rerun a "democracy fight."

"It is a challenge of democracy ... I am an elected metropolitan mayor ... [so this is] a challenge against who has claimed our rights," Imamoglu said.

Imamoglu secured the mayorship by 13,729 votes in a city of about 10 million voters, a margin the AK party believes to be too slim.

Ali Ihsan Yavuz, a deputy chairman of the AK Party, said that, "We have observed irregular and illegal actions in all 39 districts of Istanbul ... We are saying that organized fraud, unlawfulness and crimes were committed," he told reporters. He claims that there were systematic irregularities in the polls.

According to Mustafa Akyol, a Turkish analyst and senior fellow at the Washington-based Cato Institute, this shows the ruling party's unwillingness to give up power.

"People wonder, 'if they resisted so much just not to give Istanbul, what will happen if they lose [the] 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."

One voter told Al Jazeera that she is "tired of their [AK Party] lies" and that "they stole the power from Imamoglu and they're suppressing the media and [pressuring] everyone to think the way they do, always."

Another voter said that, "CHP cheated ... so another election that isn't rigged will be better."

Voter fraud, voter rights, and even the reliability of votes is a topic of contention in major democracies. Voting is the basis of democracy and vital to the survival of the people's trust in government. The mayoral rerun in Istanbul is a worrying point for the future of democracy. First, if a ruling party is unwilling to give up its power in an election, that threatens the power of a democracy. The AK Party's refusal and intense contention of the election results that led to Sunday's rerun may or may not swing in their favour and is an intense overstep of power. An unwillingness to listen to voters when the election did not turn out in their favour begs the question: will the AK Party listen to voters when they express their needs and concerns? Voters may feel that their vote does not matter if the losing party contests it and refuses to accept their ballot results. Second, if the fraud and cheating allegations against the CHP do prove to be true, that undermines voter confidence in a different way. Voters may feel that the practice and act of voting has no use if there are other players at hand controlling the outcome of the election.

Istanbul's mayoral rerun is a historic moment, not only for the city and Turkey but for democracy as well. The results of the election have the ability to affect Istanbul for years to come, but the basic existence of the mayoral rerun has the potential to send lasting shockwaves through Turkey's multiparty democracy.