

What Does the Snap Elections Hold for Turkey's Kurds?

Turkey's snap elections to be held on June 24 will be a turning point. The new system that is going to be tested for the first time is hybrid whereby decisions are going to be able to be made faster, and domestic/foreign policy will be implemented much easier. The nation will be voting on two aspects; firstly for the president, and secondly for the MPs to represent their political parties. The new Turkish presidential system has made MP votes more important than ever, as a strong presidency will require a majority of votes for parliamentary elections, and for this reason, Kurdish votes have become a matter of utter importance.

The Kurdish population in Southeast Turkey has been cornered between tribal rivalry and terrorism for over forty years. The PKK, a Kurdish third-wave leftist terrorist organization has killed thousands of civilians in the region, and injured even more since its initiation in 1978. A 2015 report shows the organization killing 7 thousand civilians from 1984 onwards in addition to Turkish security personnel.

The PKK caused havoc, killing civilians, Kurdish intellectuals, and politicians. The PKK's finances were supplied by illegal taxes the PKK used to collect. Every month, militants would go to locally owned businesses and extort money from them. In addition, drug smuggling has also been a key source of income for the PKK. Drugs grown in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq would be processed, and sent to European countries where it would be distributed by PKK handlers.

Recruitment of underage children has also been a severe problem for the region. Children as young as 11 years of age are forcefully recruited to the terror group according to human rights organizations. Children are indoctrinated, brainwashed, and used in suicide missions and terrorist attacks.

Furthermore, the PKK has been capitalizing on local votes for its affiliated HDP party in the last two elections. The modus operandi used by the organization is of brutal violence. Militants 'coming down from the mountains' would force locals to vote for the HDP, or face penalties such as kidnapping or murder. Those not voting would be 'set as an example' for others who don't vote, psychologically priming locals to vote for the HDP.

The HDP would aid the PKK in its metropolitan inner city activities by providing logistical support for the organization. Trenches have been dug underground, connecting houses together and forming an underground logistical network for arms transfer between different locations. In addition to underground tunnels and trenches, construction equipment in HDP municipalities was also used by PKK militants to plant improvised explosive devices (IEDs) underneath roads present in the HDP municipalities. Explosives planted in advance with the HDP's prior knowledge would be used in attacks against Turkish security forces and the local population.

As a result of IEDs used by the organization, the cities of Sur and Cizre have suffered dearly. Historical monuments have been destroyed, and many locals have been forced to evacuate their homes, causing internal displacement. Locals have had to rebuild their homes in other nearby cities to escape the PKK's grip because of their beliefs, practices, and ideologies. Counter-terrorism operations initiated in 2015 have given room to breathe for locals ever since.

Even with its ups and downs; the region is in better shape than ever before. Trustees appointed by the government have upgraded infrastructure, and renovated historical monuments destroyed by the PKK and provided hope for the locals. People in the region are now able to express their views without the 'hammer above their heads'. Voting has indeed become a form of expression in the region.

The snap elections will be a factor of continuity for the region. There seems to be a lack of alternatives as most opposition parties are using nationalistic rhetoric or have ties with terrorist organizations. The South-east, which has been deprived of investments, economic progress, and the opportunity to express their opinions, is currently on its way to becoming better. Unemployment while still existing is improving slowly but surely. Education levels are also increasing to new positive heights as universities are being established, and within primary education institutions the student/teacher ratio is decreasing for greater

one-on-one communication between students and teachers.

All in all, the votes of Turkey's Kurds will be a decisive factor for all political parties and the nation's future. The Kurdish population who has suffered torment and torture for over forty years is now given a space to breathe and express their views and opinions. The region still needs time to mend its wounds. In this respect, if the right representation of MPs is present, locals will most likely vote for continuity of the region's advancement and fruitful collaboration with government-appointed trustees.