

News

Turkish Opposition Party Files to Have Referendum Voided

Sunday vote gives sweeping new powers to the office of the president, effective in 2019

By **SUZAN FRASER and ZEYNEP BILGINSOY**
Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Turkey's prime minister on Tuesday called on the opposition to respect the result of a referendum that will give sweeping new powers to the office of the president, but the main opposition party formally requested to have the vote voided.

Sunday's vote gave President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's "yes" camp a narrow win for constitutional changes that will abolish the office of the prime minister and con-

mer. Turkey's parliament agreed Tuesday to extend for another three months the emergency powers allowing the government to rule by decree.

Bulent Tezcan, deputy chairman of the opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, said the party filed a formal request seeking the referendum's annulment due to voting irregularities. He said the party would use all legal paths to challenge the vote.

"We demand the cancellation of this referendum," Tezcan said.

The opposition has cit-

used to verify they are genuine, as required by Turkish law.

Monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, who also listed numerous irregularities, said the board's move undermined important election safeguards. The assessment drew a harsh rebuke from Erdogan and criticism from Prime Minister Binali Yildirim.

"Efforts to cast a shadow on the result of the vote by spreading rumors of fraud are futile and in vain," Yildirim said. "The will of the people was freely reflected



Hundreds of people queue in front of Turkey's Supreme Electoral Board in Ankara, Turkey, Tuesday, April 18, 2017. They submit petitions requesting that the electoral authority reverse a controversial decision during Sunday's referendum to accept ballots without official stamps. In their petitions Tuesday, the residents of Ankara said the decision and other reported irregularities were in open violation of the law

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vert Turkey's system of government from a parliamentary to a presidential one.

The referendum took place under a state of emergency that was declared following a failed military coup last sum-

ed several problems with how the vote was conducted. But it has been particularly outraged by an electoral board decision, announced as the polls closed Sunday, to accept ballots that didn't bear the official stamps

into the ballot boxes, and this business is over. Everyone and all sections — and the main opposition party in particular — must show respect. It is wrong to speak after the people have spoken.” Republican People's

Party leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu accused the electoral board of bias and of favoring the governing party.

"It is clear that the High Electoral Board is not receiving its power from the people, the law or the constitution, but rather from a specific center, a specific political authority," Kilicdaroglu told his party's lawmakers in Ankara Tuesday.

The board's decision to accept ballots without official stamps was like "changing the rules midgame," he said.

Hundreds of people lined up outside election board offices in Ankara and Istanbul to submit petitions requesting the board reverse its pronouncement.

In Ankara, Fatma Korur, 46, said she was exercising her constitutional right to object to "illegal" results. Another petitioner, Fusun Cicekoglu, 61, said, "I will not accept my 'no' vote be voided and I will not accept 'yes' ballots cast illegally."

The referendum allows Erdogan, who has ruled Turkey since he became prime minister in 2003 and then president in 2014, to fulfill his long-held ambition for a presidency with executive powers.

The referendum approves 18 constitutional amendments that allow the president to appoint ministers, senior government officials and to hold sway over who sits on Turkey's highest judicial body, as well as to issue decrees and to declare states of emergency.

The new system takes full effect at the next election, currently slated for November 2019. Other changes are to be implemented sooner, including scrapping a requirement that the president not be a member of any political party. This would allow Erdogan to rejoin the governing AKP he co-founded, or to lead it.

On Tuesday, Yildirim said Erdogan would be invited to join the party as soon as the official results are declared.

"We will invite our founding chairman to our party and we will feel a huge elation to see him among us," he said.

Election monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe were seen entering the High Electoral Board headquarters in Ankara. Tana de Zulueta, head of the observer mission, told reporters that the group had paid a courtesy call and held

a "cordial" meeting with electoral board members.

Asked to comment on Erdogan's rebuke, de Zulueta said: "I don't have an opinion. We are invited by the Turkish authorities to observe. We share our report and we completed our mandate."

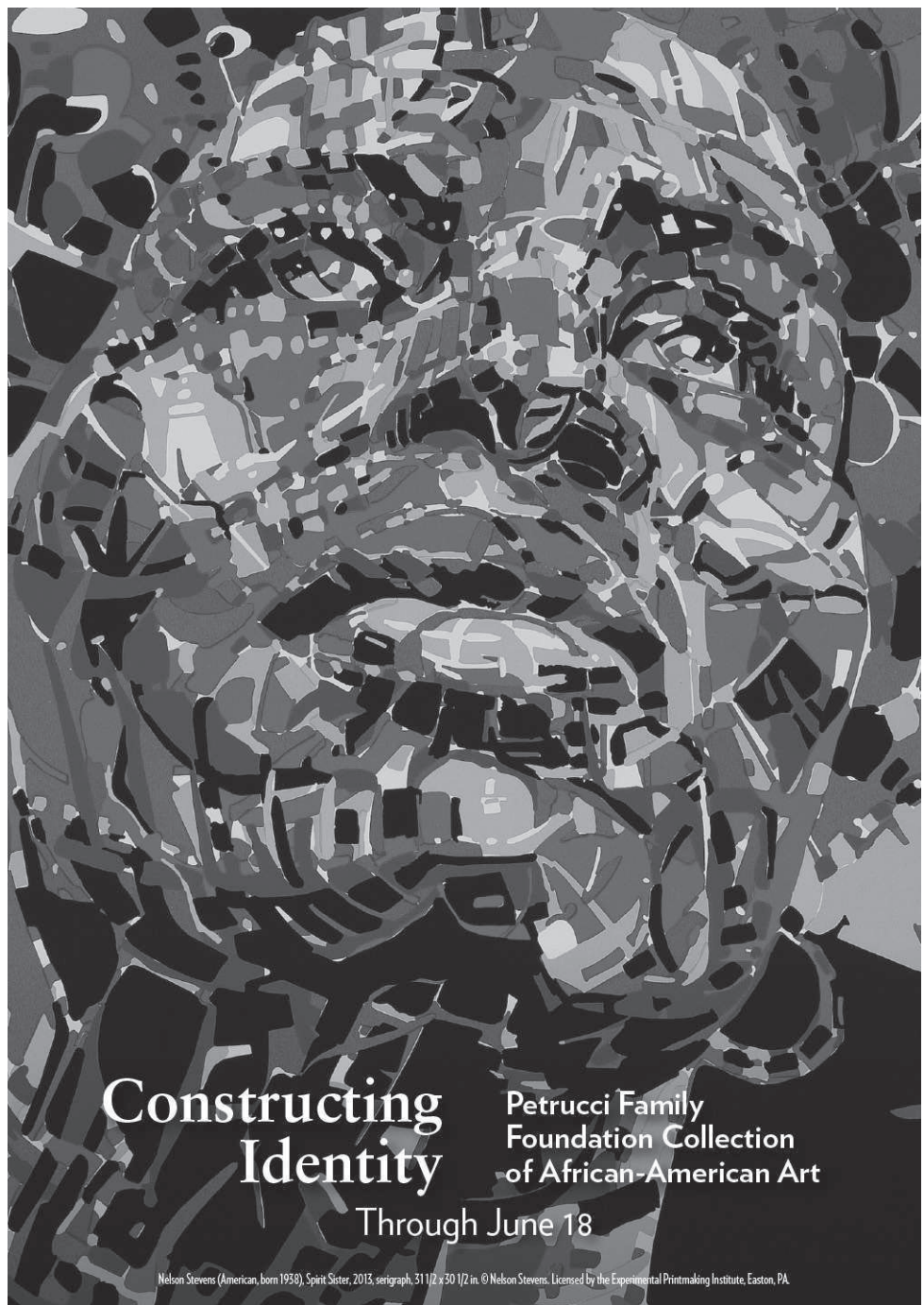
In Istanbul, thousands of "no" supporters continued their demonstrations Tuesday, carrying banners that said "Don't give in" and chanting "Thief, Murderer, Erdogan!"

Protesters were fewer in number in Ankara, where they were outnumbered by police officers.

"We are here today for the sake of Turkey, to live together, to take a stand for our votes," protester Tezcan Karakus Candan said.

U.S. President Donald Trump, meanwhile, ignored the concerns about voting irregularities and congratulated Erdogan on his referendum victory.

The two leaders also discussed Turkey's support for the U.S. response to a Syrian chemical weapons attack and efforts to counter the Islamic State group, according to a White House summary of their phone call Monday.



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