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The democratic history of the Republic of Turkey has lasted for over 60 years, since the peaceful transfer of power from President İsmet İnönü of the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) to Adnan Menderes, the leader of the Democratic Party, following Menderes's victory in Turkey's second multiparty election. However, Turkish democracy has been interrupted by several military coups d'état, ostensibly to protect the secular character of the Turkish political system. The latest, on July 15, 2016, was a resounding failure as the Turkish people rallied around President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to protect democratic values.

Yet Erdoğan is no friend to democracy. The leader of the Justice and Development Party
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Though the people of Turkey resisted the 2016 attempted coup in hopes of preserving the nation's democratic institutions, Erdoğan exploited the coup to consolidate the authoritarian power of the Turkish presidency. He has controlled the narrative both during and following the coup to justify a state of emergency allowing him to crack down on his political opponents, particularly those supporting the religious leader Fethullah Gülen and his *Hizmet* movement. This crackdown has expanded widely, becoming a mass purge of civil society. Erdoğan also held a referendum on constitutional amendments in 2017, during the state of emergency, when it was easier for him to suppress opposition media. Still not satisfied with the 2017 amendments, Erdoğan is now pursuing a fresh constitution, one that he is branding as what would be Turkey's first non-military constitution.

This paper focuses on the 2016 coup as a point of transition from democracy to authoritarianism, though certainly this process began well before the coup. Chapter one gives a background into Turkish politics before the rise of the AKP and Erdoğan. There is a particular focus on the struggle between secularist and Islamist leaders seeking to impose their respective ideological frameworks on Turkish politics. Chapter two looks at Erdoğan's political career prior to the 2016 coup. During this period, he gained the public's trust through economic reforms and a commitment to preserving democracy in Turkey. This is followed by a third chapter detailing the events of the coup itself. This is important for understanding Erdoğan's actions following the coup, which is explored in the fourth and final chapter. This latter chapter includes the details of Erdoğan's post-coup actions, and an analysis of the impact of his shift toward an authoritarian Turkey.

Islamism is a central theme in Erdoğan's ideology, therefore it is worth examining what that means. Islamism, or political Islam, is difficult to define, particularly as there is no scholarly consensus. Nazih N. Ayubi describes Islamism as a "movement which contends that Islam possesses a theory of politics and the State".² Graham E. Fuller calls it "a body of faith [that] has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim World and who sees to implement this idea in some fashion".³ Mehdi Mozaffari defines it more exclusively, requiring a movement to involve violence and a goal of "global conquest" for a movement to meet the criteria.⁴ However, that would exclude movements such as

notes that *Daily Sabah* was established following Erdoğan's falling out with Fethullah Gülen, the religious leader of the moderate Islamist *Hizmet* movement accused by Erdoğan of being responsible for the failed coup. FP describes the *Daily Sabah* as both "composed of thinly-veiled government press releases" and "conspiratorial", but also calls it "an English language window into the AKP's thinking".⁶ Similarly, *Yeni Afaak* is another nominally independent news media outlet that supports the government, Erdoğan in particular.⁷ The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (*Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu*, TRT) has been the state media body since the Corporation's founding in 1964.⁸ Its main English-language news media is called TRTWorld, and despite claims of autonomy, it is heavily biased toward the government.

⁶ William Armstrong, "Army of Spin", *Foreign Policy Magazine*, December 9, 2014. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/09/army-of-spin-turkey-media-erdogan/>

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Balkans.¹² One of the major elements of the Tanzimat was increasing secularization of the government. The 1876 ratification of a constitution was reversed in 1878 when Sultan Abdulhamid II suspended the constitution. He sought to re-embodiment the Sultan's dual role as the Caliph, or global Islamic leader and legitimate successor to the Prophet Muhammed, thereby using Islam to legitimize his authoritarian rule. This lasted until 1908 when the clandestine group known as the Young Turks forced the restoration of the 1876 constitution, which lasted until the end of World War I.

The Empire lost the war, and in 1920 the victorious powers imposed the Treaty of Sèvres, which carved up what remained of the Empire into various nation-states and imperially-administered regions, leaving the Empire with a small part of Anatolia. Even Constantinople, capital of the Empire, and the Bosphorus Strait, both critical to the Ottoman economy, came under foreign administration. The other economic center of the Empire, Smyrna, and its surrounding area were also under foreign administration.

One of the main goals of the CHP was to secularize Turkish society. The Caliphate was

By the end of WWII, domestic and international pressures mounted for democratic reform.

In 1946 the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, DP), led by Adnan Menderes and composed mainly of former CHP members, became the CHP's first opposition party. An election soon

intervened to restore order.²⁸ Many senior DP officials were arrested, and Menderes was executed. A new constitution was established in 1961, which added new government institutions to balance out the TBMM. These included the Senate (*Cumhuriyet Senatosu*), Constitutional Court (*Anayasa Mahkemesi*, AYM), and most significantly, National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*, MGK).²⁹ Composed of the president, prime minister, some senior ministers from the TBMM, and several high ranking military officers,³⁰ the MGK became the primary vehicle for the TSK to involve itself politically, and could give “opinions” to the TBMM.³¹ This marked the beginning of Turkey’s “tutelary” political framework, in which the MGK allowed the military to play a paternalistic political role. Under this context, democratic politics resumed shortly after ratifying the constitution, with an election held in October 1961.³² However, this political era was unstable. Kalaycıo"

issued a communiqué to the government demanding that order be restored. Instead, seeing the writing on the wall, Demirel resigned, and his position was replaced by CHP member Nihat Erim in a new military government that would last for two years.³⁵ This event is now referred to as the “coup by memorandum”.³⁶

The 1971 coup failed to resolve the problems of previous decades. Instead, the instability got worse, as there were mass shortages of basic necessities. Extremist politics reached new heights, causing street violence as each group endeavored to shut down its opponents by force, leading to several thousand deaths.³⁷ The military stepped in once again in September 1980. Initially reluctant to do so, the military banned several mainstream political parties after they opposed the military régime. A new constitution was drafted, which was ratified in 1982.³⁸

The 1982 constitution remains in force today, with various amendments made over the years. The constitution preserved most of the institutions established from 1924 and 1961, though it abolished the Senate.³⁹ However, while keeping the parliamentary system, it also strengthened both the MGK’s tutelary role, and the dominance of the military within the MGK. The MGK was now able to set policy which the TBMM would be expected to abide by and implement, while four ministers were replaced with additional military officers.⁴⁰

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Born on February 6, 1956, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan grew up in Kasımpaşa, a rough neighborhood in the heart of İstanbul.⁴⁶ Kasımpaşa sat on the side of a hill which overlooked the Golden Horn, at the top of which sat Nişantaşı, one of the richest neighborhoods in the entire city. He grew up in a conservative religious family with an authoritarian father. His high piety relative to his peers earned him a placement at a local İmam Hatip school, where he studied until late adolescence.⁴⁷ At the İmam Hatip school, he joined the National Turkish Student Union (*Milli Türk Talebe Birliği*, MTTB) where he was exposed to Islamism and Turkish nationalism.⁴⁸

Erdoğan has two main ideological influences. The first is Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, whose work he discovered while studying at the İmam Hatip school. The other was Necmettin Erbakan, whom he met early in his political career. Kısakürek was an Islamist thinker and poet whose career spanned from the founding of the Republic to his death in 1983. Through his career, Erbakan had been the leader of three Islamist parties, the National Outlook Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi*, MNP), and the previously mentioned MSP and RP parties.⁴⁹

Born in 1904 in İstanbul, Kısakürek was Western-educated, though he did not complete a

of debauchery. He felt alienated by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which was compounded by the hardline secularism of the new Republican state.⁵⁰ Then by the mid-1930s, he connected with several Nak#ibendi theologians and abandoned his decadent ways.⁵¹ From then on, his politics could be described as nationalist, anti-semitic, anti-Western, anti-democratic, totalitarian

identity that would center Islam as the primary unifying characteristic.⁵⁵ It focused on combatting secularism and seeking to impose an Islamic moral system while working within the existing democratic system.⁵⁶ It was also deeply anti-semitic.⁵⁷

Erbakan peppered his speeches with Ottoman nostalgia, invoking its historical place as a world power. He looked to Sultan Abdulhamid II as his ideological role model. He mobilized conservative youth, referring to them as *akıncılar* (“raiders”), referencing historical Ottoman frontier soldiers. Ottoman identity was wrapped up in Islamic identity, and vice versa.⁵⁸ Erdoğan took this neo-Ottomanism to heart, and it heavily influenced his politics.

Erdoğan’s political career got a big break when in 1994, he was elected mayor of Istanbul. At the time, the city was undergoing growing pains from rapid urbanization. This was

The AKP ran in the 2002 general election, minus Erdoğan. The campaign was led by the party's official leader, Abdullah Gül. The AKP won, making Gül prime minister.⁶⁷ Erdoğan's political ban was then lifted in March 2003 after the TBMM, now dominated by the AKP, made a constitutional amendment overriding the ban.⁶⁸ A by-election was held for Erdoğan, and upon winning, Gül stepped down, allowing Erdoğan to officially lead the party and the country.⁶⁹

The early political policy of the AKP was two-faced. The party could not, for fear of running into trouble with the AYM like its predecessors, pursue an overt Islamist agenda. It needed a strategy that would conceal its Islamist designs while reforming Turkey's political institutions to remove such barriers. During his first term as prime minister, Erdoğan focused on building political consensus. He achieved this by pursuing neoliberal economic policies and an apparent Western-oriented foreign policy, the latter leading to a re-emphasis on seeking membership in the European Union (EU). This was the strongest such attempt since Özal's.⁷⁰ However, despite using the accession process to push Turkey toward democratic and human

continued Özal's transition to a free market economy, while increasing access to credit and social services, focusing on health care and education. He also stabilized the Turkish lira, bringing inflation from above 50% to under 10%, before converting Turkey's currency in 2005 to a new lira equal to one million old lira. This boosted foreign trade as investors grew more confident in the Turkish economy. Domestic purchasing power increased as well.⁷³

The AKP's economic policies, as with its efforts at democratization, were largely motivated by the prospect of joining the EU. However, by the late 2000s, it became increasingly apparent to most Turks that the EU was not going to accept Turkey's membership.⁷⁴ At this point the AKP looked elsewhere for allies, seeking to boost relations with former Ottoman successor states in the Middle East instead. It was hoped that Turkey could exert its soft power through economic and cultural ties with its Asian neighbors. This became known as then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's "zero problems with neighbors" policy. However, the spread of the Arab Spring led to a civil war, in turn leading to the ris 55.2(A)] TJ ET Q EMC /P 41x9.1(1) 0.2 (ooke) co

In May 2013, Erdoğan announced plans to demolish Gezi Park, a large green space in Istanbul next to Taksim Square. Built in 1940, it replaced the late Ottoman-era Taksim Military Barracks. Erdoğan wished to rebuild the barracks in its historical location, and turn it into a shopping mall.⁷⁷ The first resistance to the project came from environmentalists opposed to the destruction of the park, who occupied the space on May 27. The protest escalated as police intervened harshly, drawing even more protesters to the park, with a broader range of political interests. Some of the newer protesters took their anger out on nearby businesses and residential buildings. Others held peaceful demonstrations.⁷⁸

It escalated into general criticism of Erdoğan, particularly his movement toward authoritarianism. People demanded his resignation. While other party members, including President Abdullah Gül and Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, aimed to negotiate with the protesters, radicals provoked Erdoğan into retaliation by insulting his family. Erdoğan appealed to conservatives to counterprotest in “Respect for the National Will” rallies, painting the protesters as undemocratic.⁷⁹

This marked a turning point for Erdoğan. Aside from his previous responses, he also escalated his rhetoric, including accusing the “interest rate lobby”, a Turkish right wing dogwhistle for Jews, of orchestrating the protests.⁸¹ Erdoğan also grew paranoid, and began seeking to suppress his opposition. Further protests were met with violence. He even attacked his allies within the AKP who had attempted to de-escalate the protests. A rift between Erdoğan and Gül formed, and a simmering conflict between Erdoğan and members of the *Hizmet* movement, a previous ally, escalated.⁸²

In the mid-1960s, a new Islamic movement had emerged (12 0 0 10 0 1 99 5)] TJ 0.2 3A

It was at this point that the AKP and Gülen became allies. Gülen's popularity was helped by the al-Qaida terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. With Islamic extremism in the Western media spotlight, Gülen provided an alternative message, perceived by the West as "moderate". Sociologist Jonathan Lacey writes that Gülen gained popularity due to his movement being seen as "good Islam".

Terrorist Organization (*Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü*, FETÖ). The last label gained wide acceptance after the July 15 coup failed.⁹⁹

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Social media was the primary medium through which people learned that the coup was underway. Twitter and Facebook feeds informed the public faster than news outlets. Images and video of the blockades in Istanbul and the helicopter firing on people in Ankara flooded the Internet, as did reports of soldiers imposing a curfew. These events were initially met with much confusion and disbelief. Some people thought the military was responding to a terrorist threat. As reports of military activity in multiple cities and locations appeared, the reality that a coup was in progress began to set in.¹⁰³

moving too fast to fully understand what was happening”.¹⁰⁶ The NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg gave his support too, calling Turkey a “valued NATO ally.”¹⁰⁷

Communications became the next military target. Various social media sites were reported by the media watchdog Turkey Blocks as down or restricted, including Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube.¹⁰⁸ These restrictions lasted for approximately two hours.¹⁰⁹ Turkish news media were also military targets. TRT Radio in Istanbul was the first to be occupied.¹¹⁰

The coup was not supported by the entire military. Behind the scenes, the highest ranking officers in the TSK were initially unaware of the actions their subordinates had taken. These top generals became targets for detainment. According to exchanges from the WhatsApp group, their top priority was First Army Commander Ümit Dündar, though several other generals were also pursued.¹¹¹ The putschists were not always successful in restraining their targets (Dündar for example, was not captured), though they were successful with many others, most notably including taking hostage the Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar.

Around 1:30 AM on the 16th, coup soldiers entered the TRT1 news studio. Anchor Tijen Kara# was on the air at the time. She was instructed, at gunpoint, to read a statement by the soldiers.¹¹³ The six minute statement played on a loop afterward.¹¹⁴

The statement opened with a claim that the rule of law had broken down, that “all institutions of the state have come to be designed with ideological principles”, and that these institutions “cannot perform their duty.”¹¹⁵ Furthermore, it said that the government had removed the checks and balances, particularly from the Judiciary, which protected Turkey’s constitutional system. Without naming specific instances, the statement asserted that the AKP, and Erdo"an in particular, committed human rights abuses, undermined democracy, and ended state secularism. The statement uses the archaic Turkish words *gavlet* (negligence), *dalalet* (heresy), and *hıyanet* (treason) to describe the crimes Erdo"an has committed, deliberately invoking the words used in a 1927 speech from Atatürk. As depicted by the statement, the AKP had chosen to prioritize consolidation of executive power over fighting corruption and terrorism.¹¹⁶

Then the statement declared that the TSK was invoking its right to intervene as the “guardian of the republic” to protect the Kemalist state. The army was ready to enforce the principle of *yurtta sulh, cihanda sulh*. The goal of this coup was to “reestablish the constitutional order”. To this end, the TSK was overthrowing, or “put[ting] a hand to” the AKP government.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Yuhas, et al., *As It Happened*, 17.

¹¹⁴ Tijen Kara# & The Peace At Home Council. “Coup in Turkey: Putschists Statement (TRT Broadcast)” *Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu*, July 16, 2016. Posted on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjSgDNAZyaE) by RogueStatesMedia. Translated and annotated by netcap001. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjSgDNAZyaE>

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

The statement then named the new administration, the *Yurttā Sulh Konseyi* (“Peace at Home Council”), saying that the current government has lost its legitimacy. A curfew was declared, as was the closure of borders, major ports and airports. Finally, it promised to maintain human rights and freedoms and to create a new constitution guaranteeing these rights “with no

protesting in the streets, many of whom were displaying Turkish flags, appeared on social media. The protests in Taksim Square received particular attention in the international media, though there were protests across the country. The protests generally were focused at locations that the military had secured during the coup. These weren't simply passive demonstrations opposing the coup, however. Protesters actively resisted the military. Photos of civilians standing on tanks and soldiers trapped in large crowds were spread over the Internet, leading to further confidence in the protesters. While both the coup soldiers and the government claimed to be protecting democracy, the Turkish public overwhelmingly backed the latter.¹²⁷

However, the coup did not remain entirely peaceful. Though the military aimed to avoid attacking civilians, they were unsuccessful. Weapons fire was reported in both Istanbul and Ankara. Protesters on both the intercontinental bridges in Istanbul were shot.¹²⁸ Later, around 3:30 AM the TBMM was bombed in Ankara.¹²⁹ In all, 265 people died during the coup, including both protesters and soldiers.¹³⁰

Meanwhile, though Erdogan had appeared on CNN Türk, his whereabouts were still unknown. He had called from an undisclosed location. That turned out to be Marmaris, a resort town on the southern Aegean coastline where he and his family had been on vacation. According to TRT World, after learning of the coup in progress, he attempted to hold a press conference, which failed due to technical problems, leading to his call to CNN Türk. Then, he and his family

Yugas, et. al., *As It Happens*

sight of a large crowd of protesters returning Atatürk Airport to civilian control, along with Erdoğan's public appearance at the airport, was the moment it was clear that the coup had failed. It wasn't long before Çelebioğlu

Significantly though, both for the government and the coup as a whole, Erdoğan's FaceTime call proved the most critical moment. The powerful visual of a grainy video of the President's face on a news anchor's phone, being held up close to a camera, addressing the

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cemented after Gülen himself denied any involvement and publicly condemned the officers involved.¹⁴⁶ As shown by Twitter searches using the keywords “kemalist” and “gülenist”, users largely doubted Gülen’s involvement, believing instead that a dwindling and increasingly desperate Kemalist faction of the military was behind the coup. However, it is worth noting that this opinion appears more prevalent among commenters outside Turkey.¹⁴⁷

The Kemalist theory lost popularity following the collapse of the coup. The debate shifted toward the possibility of an AKP-backed false flag operation. However, a Gülenist coup became the most popular theory. Pundits like Murat Yetkin from *Hürriyet Daily News*, for example, focused on the evidence for Gülen, while providing evidence against an Erdoğan conspiracy, but did not mention any possible involvement of Kemalists, either for or against.¹⁴⁸ Outside of Turkey the Kemalist hypothesis lost credibility, as well. For example, a short report written almost immediately after the coup by University of Cambridge political scientist Ayşe Zarakol, entitled “The Failed Attempt in Turkey: What We Know So Far”, only presented the Gülenist and Erdoğan hypotheses as possibilities, referring to the latter as “Erdoğan’s Reichstag Fire”.¹⁴⁹ The Kemalist hypothesis remains unpopular, to the point where in M. Hakan Yavuz’s 2021 book *Erdoğan: The Making of an Autocrat*, out of five different hypotheses, only one considers any

¹⁴⁶ Stephanie Saul, “An Exiled Cleric Denies Playing a Leading Role in Coup Attempt” *New York Times*, July 16, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/17/us/fethullah-gulen-turkey-coup-attempt.html>

¹⁴⁷ Twitter. “Twitter search: #turkeycoup gulen since:2016-07-15 until:2016-07-16”. https://twitter.com/search?q=%23TurkeyCoup%20gulenist%20until%3A2016-07-16%20since%3A2016-07-15&src=typed_query&f=top; Twitter. “Twitter search: #turkeycoup kemalist since:2016-07-15 until:2016-07-16”. https://twitter.com/search?q=%23TurkeyCoup%20kemalist%20until%3A2016-07-16%20since%3A2016-07-15&src=typed_query&f=top

¹⁴⁸ Murat Yetkin, “Who did it? Why now? And other questions about the coup attempt in Turkey”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, July 18, 2016.

Kemalist involvement, and even then, only as one of several factions in a Gülenist-dominated coalition.¹⁵⁰

Erdo"an's call for solidarity did not stop with the end of the coup. Even as soldiers surrendered, protesters were asked to remain where they were.¹⁵¹ The next night, they were asked to remain out in the squares to "defend democracy".¹⁵² Such rallies were continuously pushed by the government, culminating in the "Democracy and Martyr's Rally" in Istanbul on August 7. This rally was hosted by the AKP at Yenikapı Square, and included speakers from both the CHP

Erdo"an's focus on Gülen and FETÖ as the central coup plotters also brought Turkish-US

investigation into the actions of Flynn.¹⁶¹ Two colleagues of Flynn were later charged for planning an attempt at an extraordinary rendition of Gülen back to Turkey.¹⁶²

On July 20, 2016, Erdoğan announced a three month state of emergency.¹⁶³ It invoked Article 120 of the constitution, “In the event of serious indications of widespread acts of violence aimed at the destruction of the free democratic order”, which allows for emergencies up to six months.¹⁶⁴ Erdoğan stated that it was “in order to eliminate the terror organization which attempted to make a coup, swiftly and completely”, referring to FETÖ.¹⁶⁵ Both Erdoğan and Yıldırım reassured that this would not impede on civil liberties. In the TBMM, it met approval only from the AKP and MHP. The CHP agreed there was legal justification for it, but ultimately deemed it unnecessary for pursuing FETÖ. The HDP opposed it, accusing the AKP of planning to abuse the declaration.¹⁶⁶

Once the state of emergency was in place, what is now called the “Turkey Purge” grew exponentially. *New York Times* correspondent Suzy Hansen writes, “In the A.K. Party’s view, anyone devoted to Gulen... is assumed to do whatever he says, and so all Gulenists, even teachers and tradesmen who couldn’t possibly have been involved, can also legally be considered terrorists, or members of FETO”.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ Ron Wyden, “United States Senate Committee on Finance, letter to Attorney General William Barr and FBI Director Christopher A. Wray”, December 2, 2020.

Within nine months, the government invalidated 140,000 passports to prevent suspected Gülenists from leaving the country. Over 100,000 people were official suspects, some for evidence as weak as having an account with Gülenist-owned Bank Asya. Another 100,000 were imprisoned, many without charge. Of those still free, 50,000 public service workers, including military officers, academics, police, and judges were fired. The government shut down hundreds of institutions like universities, news media companies, publishers, and primary and secondary schools. Not all those affected were suspected of being Gülen supporters, either. Kurdish groups were targeted too, as were leftists later.¹⁶⁸

After his election to President in 2014, Erdoğan talked about changing the constitution to transform the Turkish government from a parliamentary system, which it had been since the Republic's founding constitution in 1924, to an executive presidential system. The president (*cumhurbaşkanı*) currently had few powers and could often be described as “ceremonial”. It was the prime minister (*başbakanı*) who governed the nation with the support of parliament.¹⁶⁹

There were several key changes that would shift that balance of power away from parliament. First, the president, already head of state, would become the head of government as well. This role would replace the prime minister, whose post would disappear. The president would be able to appoint their own cabinet and propose budgets. They would be immune to parliamentary review except in the case of impeachment, which would require a two thirds majority vote in the TBMM. States of emergency could only be declared by the president, who could also dismiss parliament. Finally, current constitutional law required that a president belong

¹⁶⁸ Hansen, *Inside Turkey's Purge*.

¹⁶⁹ BBC News, “Erdogan urges Turkey's new parliament to address constitution”, November 4, 2015. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34720067>

to no political party—if they did, they must resign upon election to the post. Such political neutrality would no longer be necessary to hold the position anymore.

ineligible to vote, as were those banned from civil service, these classes making up the bulk of

Furthermore, Erdoğan pursued insult charges against Muharram İnce, the CHP candidate, in response to İnce's saying that Gülen directly instructed Erdoğan's political activities. Meanwhile, Erdoğan once again portrayed his opponents as "supporters of terrorism".¹⁸³ OSCE election observers noted, however, that there was "genuine choice despite the lack of conditions for contestants to compete on an equal basis."¹⁸⁴

The election was dominated by two major party coalitions. The People's Alliance consisted of the AKP and MHP, while the Nation Alliance was between the CHP and İyi ("Good") Party. The HDP stood alone. Erdoğan was re-elected president with 52.6% of the vote, while the CHP candidate, Muharram İnce, received 30.6%. Despite his detention and lack of access to media, Demirtaş received 8.4%, which was not much less than his result in the 2014 election. The four opposition parties did better in the parliamentary elections. The AKP still came in first with 42.6%, and the CHP finished second with 22.6%. The MHP received 11.1%. İyi got 10.0%, just enough to gain their first parliamentary seats. The HDP result was 11.7%. The geographic distribution of votes was similar in both the presidential and parliamentary elections, and roughly reflected that of the previous year's referendum as well, though this time İstanbul and Ankara both favored Erdoğan and the AKP. Turnout was 84.3% and 86.23% in the presidential and parliamentary elections respectively.¹⁸⁵

The state of emergency finally came to an end almost exactly two years after the coup that prompted it. After being renewed seven times, it was allowed to expire on July 18th, 2018—less than a month following the election. At this point, the purges had been extensive: 100,000

¹⁸³ OSCE, *Elections*, 8-9.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁸⁵ Daily Sabah, *Elections 2018*, June 25, 2018. <https://www.dailysabah.com/election/june-24-2018-election-results>

criminal investigations, with a third of them leading to arrests, 130,000 professionals and public sector workers fired, and 1700 private organizations shut down, including 200 media companies. Furthermore, over a hundred laws were amended via thirty-five emergency decrees. The opposition has alleged that the AKP used the state of emergency beyond its scope, to political purpose too, in order to suppress dissent.¹⁸⁶

However, the AKP also proposed a new law which would allow the government to retain many of the emergency conditions.¹⁸⁷ On July 24th, four articles from the proposed law were approved. These would allow officials to restrict a person's movement, permit the retrial of suspects with convictions overturned by European Court of Human Rights rulings, and give local governments the authority to override freedom of assembly. These restrictions were hotly contested by opposition parties, resulting at one point in violence between parliamentarians from the AKP and HDP.¹⁸⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Turkey on March 11, 2020. Turkey had already closed its border with Iran on March 3, which was one of the earliest countries to suffer an outbreak of the new virus.¹⁸⁹ By the 20th, Turkey's Health Minister Fahrettin Koca responded with a proposal for an "individual state of emergency" in which people in Turkey would be expected to self-isolate to prevent the virus's spread, but no government mandate was issued to require such

¹⁸⁶ Hürriyet Daily News, "State of emergency ends amid proposal of new anti-terror law", July 18, 2018. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/state-of-emergency-ends-amid-proposal-of-new-anti-terror-law-134715>

action.¹⁹⁰ Erdoğan spoke up a week later condemning the closing of international borders, which he referred to as “protectionism”, and insisted that trade links should be maintained throughout the pandemic.¹⁹¹

The AKP was skeptical about legal restrictions being effective for preventing the spread of COVID-19. Nevertheless, the strained health care system made it clear that some restrictions

necessitating more lockdowns—including Turkey's first universal restrictions of the pandemic, which lasted through the first half of May.¹⁹⁴ Meanwhile, vaccines had become available by mid-January 2021. The first wave of vaccinations came from Sinovac, a Chinese drug company, followed by the German BioNTech. Vaccines were kept voluntary.¹⁹⁵ By the end of January 2022, Turkey had also developed its own vaccine, Turkovac, which was used as a booster shot for those who had already received two doses of the BioNTech vaccine. At this point, over half the population had already received two vaccine doses.¹⁹⁶

The lack of a new state of emergency does not mean that Erdoğan had softened his authoritarian rule, however. The 2017 constitutional changes already gave him an enormous amount of power. A state of emergency just wasn't necessary for Erdoğan. Instead, he used the existing legal system to increase his control over social media within Turkey. While focused on buoying the economy, he added provisions within amendments to existing laws to impose censorship on social media companies doing business in the country. The result was the ability to control the public narrative as it concerned the pandemic.¹⁹⁷ That narrative was one of paternalistic benevolence.

¹⁹⁴ Hamsici, Mahmut. "Covid: Turkey enters first full lockdown", April 29, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56912668>

¹⁹⁵ Hürriyet Daily News, "Turkey rolls out mass COVID-19 vaccination", January 14, 2021. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-approves-chinas-sinovac-jab-starts-vaccinations-with-health-care-staff-161617>

¹⁹⁶ Hürriyet Daily News, "Turkey starts giving Turkovac as booster shot to BioNTech recipients", January 25, 2021. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-starts-giving-turkovac-as-booster-shot-to-biontech-recipients-171001>

¹⁹⁷ Orla Guerin. "Coronavirus: Is pandemic being used for power grab in Europe? Turkey: 'Moment of Opportunity' for Erdoğan" *BBC News*, April 18, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52308002>

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President Erdoğan has, over the course of two decades, gone from being banned from politics altogether, to being Turkey's most powerful head of state since Atatürk. In that time he has transformed the political landscape in his image. The balance of power tips heavily toward the presidency, allowing Erdoğan to make his New Turkey a reality. Yet still, he is not satisfied. On February 1, 2021, Erdoğan announced plans to replace the current constitution.¹⁹⁸ If he succeeds, it will be the first republican constitution for Turkey that won't be imposed on the nation by the military.

Three months later, a completed draft constitution was presented by Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the the MHP, the junior party in the government's People's Alliance. Symbolically, it has exactly 100 articles, and is intended to be ratified in 2023, the centennial of the founding of the republic. Erdoğan has made lofty claims about what he envisions for the fourth republic: a new liberal democracy. He promises that all parties can come to the table to contribute to the constitution.

is based on the current presidential system, and replaces the AYM with a new judiciary body.²⁰⁰ Kemal Kılıçdaro"lu, leader of the opposition CHP, won't budge though unless the new constitution were to restore the parliamentary system: "Erdo"an does not need a constitutional amendment. Everything he says is becoming law anyway."²⁰¹

Ratifying a brand new constitution is not Erdo"an's only challenge, though. The lira is going through very high inflation in the wake of the pandemic. Official reports in November 2022 place the inflation rate at 85.5%, higher than at any other time during AKP rule, though the rate may actually be significantly higher. This problem is being compounded by Erdo"an's insisting on lowering interest rates, the opposite strategy of other countries, and counter to current economic wisdom.²⁰² Erdo"an claims he is resisting the "interest rate lobby" by doing so.²⁰³

The real challenge for Erdo"an comes at the next general election, on June 18, 2023. In addition to the three major opposition parties the AKP has already contested in past elections, there is a new party founded by one of Erdo"

Nation Alliance with the CHP, HDP and İyi parties. They are united by one goal—restore the parliamentary system.²⁰⁵ Meral Akşener, leader of İyi, has even declared her refusal to run for president, intending to seek the prime ministership once the position is re-established.²⁰⁶

The AKP has also been slipping steadily in the polls since they peaked in 2018, though they have regained approximately twelve points since August 2022, likely due to Erdoğan's mediation in the Russo-Ukrainian War to agree on a grain export deal, and his opposition to Russian annexation of Ukrainian territory despite otherwise expressing a neutral foreign policy.²⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the combined popularity of the People's Alliance (AKP and MHP) only reaches 39.6%.²⁰⁸ A united Nation Alliance stands a very good chance of defeating Erdoğan in 2023. If they do, Erdoğan's authoritarian system could meet a sudden end. As a leader who has ruthlessly suppressed his opposition, including Gülenists and Kurds, he will not likely respond well to an electoral defeat.

Like the 2013 Gezi Park protests before it, the July 15, 2016 attempted coup d'état marks a watershed moment in twenty-first century Turkish history. If 2013 was the beginning of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's path to authoritarianism, the July 15 coup was the event which secured it. Erdoğan exploited the coup in a way that exceeded the personal capacities of any past Turkish

²⁰⁵ Hürriyet Daily News, "Opposition puts first signature to system change", February 28, 2022. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opposition-puts-first-signature-to-system-change-171874>

²⁰⁶ Hürriyet Daily News, "İYİ Party's Akşener says she will run for prime minister not president", September 26, 2021. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/iyi-partys-aksener-says-she-will-run-for-prime-minister-not-president-168160>

²⁰⁷ Judy Woodruff, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "Turkey President Erdoğan on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the future of NATO—Transcript", *PBS News Hour*, September 19, 2022. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/turkey-president-erdogan-on-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-and-the-future-of-nato>

leader. The coups of 1960, 1971 and 1980 could be seen as stabilizing moments. In each case, the Kemalist TSK responded to elevated civil unrest, and restored order.

However, each coup was followed by the restoration of democracy. In contrast, by 2016 Erdoğan and his AKP formed a highly successful, long-running stable government, facing far less political violence than previous leaders. They gained popularity due to their successful economic policies in the 2000s, improving the lives of millions. The TSK were no longer dominated by Kemalists, either. Gülenists successfully infiltrated the military and public service. Erdoğan had already been transforming Turkish political institutions, such as the MGK and judiciary, to suit his purposes well before the coup.

Then, when a faction of the military attempted to overthrow the government, Erdoğan seized control of the national narrative, using it to consolidate his authoritarian vision, yet projecting it onto the public as a model of democracy. The image of his face on a phone held up to a television camera got people to go out into the streets to resist the putschists. From that moment, the coup was all but over. However, Erdoğan didn't stop when the coup ended. He exploited the coup to justify a massive purge of civil society in the name of protecting the institution he was set on destroying. The state of emergency that followed lasted two years, and in that time, both a constitutional referendum and an election were held under circumstances that were anything but free and fair. He consolidated power within the presidency, which he continues to occupy today. The narrative that the July 15 coup created—and Erdoğan exploited

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