



Turkey Fact Sheet

“Turkey has its supporters in this country, on Capitol Hill, but it is largely due to the past track record not the current activity...There is the Turkey we have long relied upon up until the rise of the AKP (the Islamist party that has ruled Turkey since 2003) and now there is a different kind of Turkey. Unfortunately, one we think is going down the wrong path and needs to be engaged and reformed.”

[Jonathan Schanzer, FDD Vice President, 11/06/14](#)

Government

Turkey is a democratic Republic with a parliamentary body named the Grand National Assembly. The parliament has 550 seats, and its members are directly elected in multi-seat constituencies by proportional representation to serve 4-year terms. The head of government is the president, who serves a 5 year term, is eligible for a second term. Historically, the prime minister, who was appointed by the president, held real power. Turkey is not known for the smooth functioning of its democracy, and has suffered military coups.

In 2002, an [Islamist-based](#) Justice and Development Party (AKP) won an election victory, and the party continued to win elections until finally losing in June 7, 2015. However, after the June election, when no party was able to organize a government, another election was subsequently held on November 4, 2015, with the AKP grabbing back a narrow majority. Recep Erdogan, the leader of the AKP, served as Prime Minister from 2002-2014. In 2014, after changes were made to the constitution to directly elect the President, and to boost his powers, Erdogan became President.

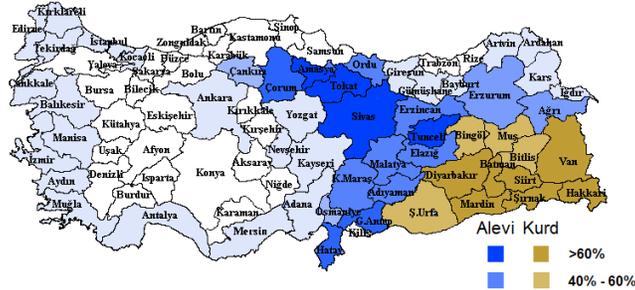
On April 16, 2017, Turkish voters ([may](#)) have [endorsed](#) a new constitutional order that grants Erdogan unchecked powers in a “Turkish-style” executive presidency. He can now appoint vice presidents, cabinet ministers, state bureaucrats, and senior judges. He can propose budgets and issue government decrees.

The Stolen Election

Turkish expert David Goldman: “Erdogan [effectively](#) stole the national elections...It was pointed out that the results were announced two hours after the polls were closed even though Turkey is entirely a paper ballot system and it typically takes 24 hours to count the votes. Evidently, it wasn’t necessary to count the votes on November 1st because the result was known in advance. The AKP party came out with 49% vote total at an absolute majority at parliament at the expense of the Kurdish party and other opposition parties. An apparent triumph for Erdogan, but it was a triumph achieved ... by outright, ballot box stuffing... (of) about 5%, including phony ballots, dead people voting and so forth... (AND) the totalitarian campaign of intimidation against opponents of the regime. Many Kurdish towns were effectively under siege, [and] dozens of journalists, bloggers, [and] opposition figures were detained... ”

Ethnic & Religious Divisions

Turkey has 81 million people. The ethnic group breakdown is roughly Turkish 70-75%, Kurdish 20%, other minorities 5-10%. Religious divisions are 99.8% Muslim, with between 25-30% Alevi Muslims, 3% Shia Muslim, and the rest Sunni Muslims. There are continuing tensions between the Turks and the Kurds.



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/2/2c/Turkey_Alevi_and_Kurd.png

The Kurdish Insurgency

The Kurdish population has long been discriminated and oppressed by the Turkish government. The Kurds [do not](#) have any national rights, autonomy, or even primary schools where they can be educated in the Kurdish language. Turkey’s founders claimed that when the Turkish republic was established, there were no Kurds – just “mountain Turks,” and that Kurdish is not a “real” language. This denial was accompanied by massacres, killings, enforced disappearances, unlawful arrests and torture. The Kurds in Turkey currently have a [much greater](#) demographic growth rate than the Turks, which has [prompted](#) some paranoia in President Erdogan and other officials in the Turkish government.

Since 1984, the [Kurdistan Workers’ Party \(PKK\)](#), originally a Marxist guerrilla movement – but now a more moderate, leftist and non-religious movement – has fought a war against Turkey which has resulted in the deaths of more than 40,000 people. In the 90s, the PKK dropped its demand for independence and called instead for more autonomy for the Kurds. The PKK has been listed as [a terrorist organization](#) by the State Department since 1997. In 1999, the PKK’s leader, Abdullah Ocalan, was arrested and jailed for treason by Turkey. Erdogan signed a ceasefire with the PKK in 2013, but in 2015 [he eventually abrogated it](#).

Turkey [continues](#) to push a campaign to target and terrorize the Kurds. Post-Coup, Turkey [arrested](#) the leaders of the country’s pro-Kurdish party in a terrorism probe, drawing European and UN condemnation.

Economic Problems

“Erdogan [has run](#) a debt bubble in Turkey in order to hand out an enormous amount of goodies to people and that has been a major part of his political success,” according to Goldman. From 2010 to the present, Turkey has increased its foreign debt from about \$250 billion to \$400 billion. Its running a current account deficit of about 8% GDP per year. Turkey’s GDP is about \$1 trillion USD. This requires the import of net \$80 billion worth of goods, causing Turkey to increase its debt each year by that amount. The Turkish short fall is made up by funding from the oil rich Sunni Arab Gulf States. These states fund Turkey [because](#) it is a Sunni power which has the largest, and one of the most powerful, Sunni army in the region.

Post-Coup, Turkey’s security clampdown [has had economic repercussions](#), with agencies downgrading the country’s debt to “junk” and the lira weakening. Turkey’s gross domestic product in July through September of 2016 [shrank](#) by 1.8%.

Turkey’s Troubling Trends on Human Rights

Under the AKP, Turkey’s human rights record has been increasingly poor. Women’s rights have [declined](#) under Erdogan, who has been [quoted](#) as saying that: “You cannot bring women and men into equal positions; that is against nature because their nature is different...” The number of murdered women [reached](#) 237 in the first nine months of 2016. Around a third of all marriages in Turkey are [between](#) an elder man and a child, and there may be more than 180,000 child brides.

“Hate crimes against LGBT individuals are [higher](#) in Turkey than in any other member of the Council of Europe ...” according to advocacy groups, and “at least 30 transgender individuals in Turkey were murdered

between January 2008 and December 2012, according to 'Transgender Europe.'" Erdogan has [called](#) homosexuality "contrary" to Islam. In 2015, Turkish police [fired](#) pepper spray and rubber pellets at marchers in the gay pride parade, even though the parade had never before - in 13 years - been violent.

Turkey never had a strong record of protecting speech and press, and things [have gotten](#) worse under Erdogan. In its 2016 [report](#), Turkey was ranked 151 out of 180 countries in its World Press Freedom Index, down two points since 2015. Turkey [was](#) the world's top jailer of journalists in 2012 and 2013. Things improved somewhat in 2014 and 2015 but probably went down further in 2016. The government uses vague, broadly worded anti-terror laws, such as bringing charges under Article 299 of the [Turkish penal code](#), which says that anyone who [insults the president](#) can face 4 or more years in prison; replaces the management of opposition media outlets and fires their staff; and routinely imposes bans on the reporting of sensitive stories.

Turkish citizens can face imprisonment, fines, job losses, and/or other punishments for their speech. Turkey [made news](#) after one Turk lost his government job and [another](#) Turk lost custody of his children for Facebook posts comparing President Erdogan to the character of Gollum from *The Lord of the Rings*. Even children [have been](#) prosecuted and/or imprisoned for their criticism of Erdogan. In 2016, a former Turkish beauty queen [was convicted](#) of insulting Erdogan by sharing a poem on social media. Erdogan's problem with free speech is not only limited to Turkey. In 2016, Erdogan [sought and won](#) -- from Germany -- the prosecution of comedian, who recited a crude poem about Erdogan on German television.

Erdogan and Turkish leaders continue to deny the [Armenian](#) and [other Christian](#) genocides. Erdogan is an [avowed](#) anti-Semite; a 2015 ADL [survey](#) has shown that 71% of the population harbor anti-Semitic attitudes.

Gezi Protests

In 2013 hundreds of thousands took to the streets in Turkey [to contest](#) the proposed demolition of the Gezi park to make way for a shopping center, a project pushed personally by Erdogan. "The government's uncompromising stance and a heavy-handed police crackdown on protesters led to the protests quickly spreading all over Turkey, turning an initial environmental movement into a revolt against the increased authoritarianism of the country's leader," *The Guardian* [reported](#). The Gezi protests resulted in the death of 8 people, of which at least 4 were a result of police violence, with about 8,000 injured.

2016 Coup

On July 15-17, 2016, elements of the Turkish military attempted a coup against Erdogan. This coup failed, with [about](#) 250 Turks killed and another 2000 plus wounded. It has been [claimed](#) that Russia warned Erdogan hours before the coup started, forcing the coup plotters to advance their plans, and [leading](#) to the plotter's failure to grab Erdogan or other senior officials and [not take](#) complete control over the media. Erdogan [has said](#) "This uprising is a gift from God to us because this will be a reason to cleanse our army."

Since the attempted coup, President Erdogan has jailed [41,000 Turks](#), some of whom [have been tortured](#), and [including children](#). So many people have been jailed that criminals [have had](#) to be released. Erdogan has [aggressively purged](#) more than [130,000](#) civil servants and military personnel, including judges and prosecutors - also two members of the Constitutional Court - police, scientists and teachers. Almost 4000 members of the judiciary [have been](#) sacked. [More than 11,000 Kurdish teachers](#) were suspended for suspected links with the PKK. More than 2,250 social, educational or health-care institutions and facilities [have been](#) seized. Turkey has [issued](#) a ban on professional travel for all academics. Turkey has [closed down 150 media organizations](#), including tv & radio stations, news agencies, magazines and newspapers. [Almost](#) 100 media workers have been jailed. 4,262 business companies [have been shut](#). Erdogan has started to [restructure](#) the intelligence service to purge opponents. In October, another 13,000 police [were suspended](#).

The Turkish military has been largely "[broken](#)" by the attempted coup. Prior to it, the military had a budget of \$20 billion a year and 500,000 soldiers. Turkish officials have claimed that 8,600 soldiers participated in the coup attempt, although it was not clear how many willingly took part. Nearly half of Turkey's top

generals and admirals have been jailed or dismissed and thousands of soldiers charged; a number of the U.S. military's closest allies in the Turkish military [have been jailed](#). Another 1,500 officers were dishonorably discharged. This has weakened Turkey's participation in the war [against ISIS](#).

Erdogan demanded that the U.S. extradite Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish Islamist whose Gulen Movement was originally allied with him. Erdogan claims that Gülen was behind the coup, although he has [not provided](#) evidence of that charge to the U.S. Erdogan [claimed](#) that "his people" believe the U.S. was behind the failed coup, and has [accused](#) the U.S. of standing by the plotters for its refusal to extradite Gülen. Turkish officials have [filed](#) a criminal complaint against 3 U.S. military officials for conspiring with the plotters.

Erdogan also [declared](#) a 3 month state of emergency and suspended the European Convention on Human Rights. This was [renewed twice](#). The state of emergency grants the president increased powers such as the ability to bypass parliament in enacting new laws and allows them to limit or suspend rights and freedoms. The education curriculum has also [been revised](#) to be more religious and more pro-Erdogan.

Incirlik Air Base

The U.S. has an air base at Incirlik in Southern Turkey, where NATO has nuclear weapons. After initial hesitancy, in 2015 Turkey [allowed](#) the U.S. to use it against ISIS, although [it has threatened](#) to kick the U.S. out for backing the Syrian Kurds. Post-2016 coup, to [pressure](#) the U.S., power was cut off for 6 days. Later, Turkish troops [surrounded](#) it. Turkey [has given](#) Russia the go-ahead to use Incirlik for operations in Syria.

Turkey's Support for Armed Radical Islamists

Turkey has become a "hub" Islamist groups, [as acknowledged](#) by a leaked confidential German document. The AKP [used](#) a massive 'gas-for-gold' sanctions-busting scheme to [line](#) the pockets of AKP elites, and it also delivered 'neighboring Iran some \$13 billion in Turkish gold between 2012 and 2013.'" Turkey's [porous borders have allowed IS to reinforce](#) depleted supplies and manpower. "Turkey has also [played](#) a key role in facilitating the life-blood of ISIS' expansion: black market oil sales... Turkey has facilitated over \$1 billion worth." Turkey is a [leading](#) financier of Hamas, sending up to \$250 million a year to Hamas in Gaza. Turkey also [supports](#) Hamas politically. In 2010, Erdogan [provoked](#) the Mavi Marmara incident, in which a flotilla with pro-Palestinian activists aboard sailed to Gaza to break Israel's naval blockade. Hamas [figure Saleh al-Aruri](#) operated out of Turkey "with the backing of the Turkish government," from 2012 until 2015.

Turkey as a Western Ally

Turkey is a problematic ally of the West. Anti-American sentiment [runs high](#), with a 2014 [Pew Center](#) poll showing only 19% of Turks have a favorable view of the U.S., and 73% of Turks dislike NATO. Both the government and the population often see the U.S. [behind](#) every crisis. Turkey is also [holding](#) an American pastor on dubious charges. Turkey [has threatened](#) Europe with migrants. Turkey [occupies](#) part of Cyprus and has [threatened](#) fellow NATO member Greece. Turkey is [developing](#) long-range ballistic missiles too.

Turkey's Imperial Designs, & the Invasions of Syria & Iraq

In late-2016, President Erdogan [expressed](#) his disapproval of the loss of Ottoman territories post-WWI.

- [Thousands](#) of Turkish troops, along with tanks and aircraft, and a [force of thousands](#) of mostly Islamist fighters formerly from the Free Syrian Army occupied an area inside Syria. This was done [largely](#) to prevent Syrian Kurds from securing the region between Assad controlled Syria and Turkey, although a lesser goal was to attack the IS. The Turks and Kurds [have clashed](#). Turkey [did not](#) coordinate with the U.S. regarding its initial attack. The U.S. is [providing](#) air support for the Turks. Turkey [has conquered](#) al-Bab, and wants to lead the attack on Raqqa. Their forces [have not](#) been very effective.
- Turkey also [has 2000 troops](#) in northern Iraq, along with [several thousand](#) mostly Sunni Arabs from Mosul, where they are helping to train Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga and Sunni fighters. Iraq [has objected](#) to their presence. The Turks have also threatened Kurds from the PKK that [are currently stationed](#) in Iraq. The Turks also [seek to block](#) Christians or Shia Muslims from living in the area.

For more information please contact: EMET/ 202.601.7422/ Info@emetonline.org/ www.emetonline.org