



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...”

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

Government

Turkey is a Republic with a Grand National Assembly. The president [serves](#) a five year term, and can appoint vice presidents, cabinet ministers, state bureaucrats, and senior judges. He can propose budgets and issue decrees. There are 600 members of the assembly. In 2002, an [Islamist-based](#) Justice and Development Party (AKP) first won an election victory, and the party has continued to win elections – with one short exception – including the last one in 2018. Recep Erdogan, the leader of the AKP, served as Prime Minister from 2002-2014. In 2014, after changes were made to the constitution, Erdogan became President. In 2018, the Erdogan won the presidency and his party won the majority of the assembly in an alliance with a nationalist party.

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

Syrian Refugees

There are 3,500,000 Syrian refugees in Turkey. They are tolerated but not liked by the Turks.

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.” This denial was accompanied by massacres, killings, enforced disappearances, unlawful arrests and torture. The Kurds in Turkey have a [much greater](#) demographic growth rate than the Turks, which has [prompted](#) paranoia in Erdogan and others 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 resulted in more than 40,000 deaths. In the 90s, the PKK dropped its demand for independence and called for more autonomy. The PKK has been listed as [a terrorist organization](#) by the State Department since 1997. In 1999, the PKK’s leader, Abdullah Ocalan, was jailed. Erdogan signed a ceasefire with the PKK in 2013, but in 2015 [he](#)

[abrogated it](#). Turkey [continues](#) to target and terrorize the Kurds. Post-Coup, Turkey [arrested](#) the leaders of the country's pro-Kurdish party in a terrorism probe.

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. Since the U.S. placed sanctions and doubled tariffs on Turkey in 2018, the Turkish currency and stock market [have plunged](#).

Turkey's Troubling Trends on Human Rights

In January 2018, the annual Freedom in the World report, produced by Freedom House, [classified Turkey as “not free”](#) for the first time. 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...” Around a third of all marriages in Turkey are [between](#) an elder man and a child; there may be more than 180,000 child brides. Erdogan has [called](#) homosexuality “contrary” to Islam. “Hate crimes against LGBT individuals are [higher](#) in Turkey than in” Europe, and “at least 30 transgender individuals in Turkey were murdered between January 2008 and December 2012.” Since 2015, Turkey [has banned](#) the Istanbul pride march, sometimes using violence.

Turkey never had a strong record of protecting speech, and things [have gotten](#) worse under Erdogan. In 2017, the Committee to Protect Journalists [called Turkey “the world's worst jailer” of journalists](#) for the second year in a row, highlighting that more than 150 have been imprisoned in the aftermath of the failed 2016 coup against the Erdogan government. The government uses vague, broadly worded 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. And Turkey has sought to jail Knicks star Enes Kanter, a green card holder, [for insulting Erdogan's regime](#). As a result of all this this, Erdogan allies [control](#) more than 90 percent of Turkey's media. [Freedom House](#) reports, “The government has repeatedly suspended access to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp on national security grounds, while Wikipedia has been permanently blocked.”

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.

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. Since then, “[nearly](#) 160,000 people arrested during an 18-month state of emergency; 152,000 civil servants dismissed, many totally arbitrarily; teachers, judges and lawyers dismissed or prosecuted; journalists arrested, media outlets shut down and websites

blocked – clearly the successive states of emergency declared in Turkey have been used to severely and arbitrarily curtail the human rights of a very large number of people.” Some people [have been tortured, including children](#). 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 and has [closed down 150 media organizations](#), including tv & radio stations, news agencies, magazines and newspapers. [Almost](#) 100 media workers have been jailed, and access to [Wikipedia has been barred](#). 4,262 business companies [have been shut](#). Erdogan [restructured](#) the intelligence service to purge opponents. In October, another 13,000 police [were suspended](#). Post-his June 2018 re-election, Erdogan [dismissed](#) more than 18,000 state employees for alleged ties to terror groups, including nearly 9,000 police officers, over 6,000 military personnel, and about 1,000 employees from the justice ministry.

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. 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 [have been jailed](#). Another 1,500 officers were dishonorably discharged. One in four Turkish pilots [is in prison](#); many Turkish F-16s are grounded for lack of trained pilots. 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 did not provide evidence 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 [declared](#) a 3 month state of emergency and suspended the European Convention on Human Rights. This [finally ended](#) in 2018, although some of the powers were kept in place, including dismissals of civil servants. 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

U.S. national security adviser HR McMaster [condemned](#) Turkey for taking on a “new role” as a main sponsor of funding for Islamist ideology that targets western interests. Turkey assisted Iran in one of the biggest sanctions-evasion schemes in history, when a [Turkish bank](#) funneled up to \$100 billion into Iran’s coffers in 2013 and 2014, and [used](#) a ‘gas-for-gold’ sanctions-busting scheme to [enrich elites](#). It is [likely to do so again](#). Turkish banks [have been fined](#). Turkey’s [porous borders allowed IS to reinforce](#) 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, providing \$250 million a year. In 2010, Erdogan [provoked](#) the Mavi Marmara incident. Hamas terrorists [operate freely](#) from Turkish soil where they raise and launder money for Hamas.

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 [holding three Americans on dubious charges](#) – [one it later freed](#) – and [has arrested or threatened](#) Turks working in the U.S. Embassy. An Erdogan ally has [put a bounty](#) on American critics. 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. Turkey has [threatened](#) to attack U.S. forces in Syria for their willingness to work with the Kurds in the SDF. Turkey [has conducted](#) joint military exercises with Syria and China. During Erdogan visits to the U.S., Turkish guards [have attacked](#) Americans who were peacefully protesting him. In [one case](#), in DC, eight people were injured, and in reaction, several U.S. Congressmen denounced the attack. Reports suggested that Erdogan may have personally ordered the attacks and then watched the violence. The [State Department officially summoned Turkey's ambassador](#) in Washington to protest, and in turn Turkey's government summoned the U.S. ambassador to the Foreign Ministry to protest the "aggressive" action taken against the guards. Eventually, the Turkish guards [were charged](#) with their assaults. Turkey [has divulged](#) the locations of 10 U.S. military bases and outposts in Syria where the U.S. is leading an operation to destroy the Islamic State in Raqqa. It has also [purchased](#) Russia's S-400 missile defense system, without asking for the assent of the rest of NATO, which is [required](#). Erdogan has also [proposed](#) that Turkey and Russia jointly produce the S-500 system. If Turkey takes possession of both the F-35's it has purchased from the U.S. and the S-400 system, the data [collected](#) by the S-400 system from the jet could help expose the fighter's vulnerabilities to Russia. Turkey also [has signed](#) a deal with Russia to build nuclear plants.

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

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

- [Over a thousand](#) Turkish troops and possibly [25,000 – 60,000](#) allied Syrian fighters occupy an area inside Syria. Most of the Syrian fighters have radical backgrounds [with ISIS](#) or [other groups](#). This was done [largely](#) to prevent Syrian Kurds from securing the region. Turkey [conquered](#) Afrin, killing at least 10,000 Kurds, and driving out 180,000 more, and replacing them with Sunni Arabs and [Turkmen](#) from Syria. Turkey, has [effectively annexed](#) large portions of Northern Syria – it [controls](#) more than 4,000 square kilometers (1,500 square miles). It is enforcing economic and cultural integration with Turkey in this area. Around 600,000 people live in the enclave, most of them displaced from elsewhere in Syria, and at the expense of local Syrian Kurds. Also, [2–3 million](#) people live in Idlib, the a rebel-held province, where Turkey "[has gained a major say](#)." Turkey maintains [a military presence in Idlib](#), and also [has paid](#) the wages, provided logistical support, and provided weapons to the fighters in Idlib. It [has vowed](#) to stay in Syria until free Syrian elections are held. In Idlib, the Turks [helped form](#) the Jaish al-Watani (National Front for Liberation), which brings together a number of groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. They claim a total strength close to 100,000. It [routinely threatens](#) Syrian Kurds/SDF.
- Turkey [has 2000 troops](#) in northern Iraq, along with [several thousand](#) mostly Sunni Arabs from Mosul. Iraq [has objected](#) to their presence. The Turks have also threatened Kurds from the PKK that [are stationed](#) in Iraq, and they have [attacked them](#). The Turks [seek to block](#) Christians or Shia Muslims from living in the area. Turkey [opposed](#) their referendum on Kurdish independence, and [threatened war](#).

Turkey 2018 Elections

On June 24th, Turkish citizens voted for both President and Parliament, while abolishing the position of Prime Minister, giving Erdogan sweeping executive powers. He will continue to rule Turkey until 2023. As predicted, Erdogan [won](#) the elections to be President, again with 52.5% of the votes. Erdogan's AKP won 42% in parliament and holds a majority after aligning with the ultra-nationalist MHP party. The observer mission of the Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe [described](#) the elections as unfair. The AKP and its allies controlled the media and prevented the opposition from gaining much attention and relocated ballot boxes. There were also occasional complaints of [fraud](#) and/or [violence](#).

Sanctions

The U.S. [has doubled](#) metals tariffs and put sanctions on two members of the Turkish cabinet. In retaliation, Turkey responded by imposing duties on U.S. goods including coal and paper, and made a criminal complaint against U.S. officers at Incirlik for "[having connections](#) to the FETO group allegedly run by Gulen and trying to "destroy the constitutional order" of Turkey."

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