

Purges and paranoia: Ella George on Erdogan's 'new' Turkey

[Lengthy, feature essay by Ella George, published in *London Review of Books*, print issue of May 24, 2018](#) (*Ella George studies Turkish politics.*)

Introduction by Roger Annis:

Presidential and legislative elections are scheduled to take place in NATO-member Turkey on June 24, 2018. They take place as Turkey continues its collaboration with the United States in occupying regions of northern Syria and as it continues to wage something resembling a domestic civil war against its Kurdish population and left-wing forces in general. A presidential election will be held to using a two-round system and a legislative election will elect 600 members of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on April 18 that the elections were being brought forward from their original date of November 3, 2018.

Two legislative elections were held in [June 2015](#) and [November 2015](#). President Erdogan called the November 2015 election after his AKP party failed to achieve a legislative majority in the June 2015 election. Between the two elections, Erdogan and the AKP commenced a virtual civil war against Turkey's Kurdish population and other left-wing forces. The civil war deepened following an attempted coup d'etat by military officers in July 2016.

The following article analyzes the evolution of the political situation in Turkey during the past several decades. It gives welcome attention to the rise of the People's Democratic Party (HDP). In this election, the HDP's presidential candidate is former co-leader Selahattin Demirtas. He has been in prison since November 2015 on charges of aiding and abetting terrorism.

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The elections due to be held on 24 June, 2018, brought forward abruptly from the end of 2019 by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, come after a period of repression and fear that represents the most serious rupture in the history of the Turkish republic. In the last two years more than 100,000 people have been detained, and tens of thousands are waiting for their lives to be upended by a knock on the door, or the publication of a new emergency decree. Tens of billions of assets have been seized and 150,000 people have been purged, losing not only their jobs but their passports (and those of their spouses); they are branded national security threats and become unemployable. Often, they lose their housing (tied to government employment) and their pensions. Turkey has experienced more than its share of state violence directed at civil society, but when military juntas imposed martial law at least there was always the hope that a return to civilian rule would bring a reprieve. Turkey today is a deeply traumatised society. The purges and detentions are a lottery: one signatory of a petition calling for peace with the Kurds is purged from higher education, another remains precariously employed; someone is detained for getting a mortgage from a now expropriated bank, someone else who held an account with the same bank is unaffected. Turks today confront the capriciousness of arbitrary power with no recourse to anything that resembles the rule of law.

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Even those whose relatives and friends haven't been designated national security threats have been affected by the repression. The newspapers they read have been shut down, the columnists they followed have been detained, the local medical clinic has had its assets seized, the school round the corner has been closed, the dozens of voluntary associations that formed the fabric of their community have gone, and the politicians they voted for – from municipal officials to provincial governors – have been forcibly replaced or fear they are about to be. The purges of prosecution lawyers and judges have reached such proportions that among the new appointees are recent graduates who do not know the rules of their own courtrooms. All judges are aware that any decision deemed adverse to the government may end their careers. The scale of the social transformation being wrought by these measures exceeds even the founding convulsions of the republic. To appreciate what has happened in Turkey requires historical perspective, not least because the government is bent on reinventing the republic in its image, and rewriting its history.

The story of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the Turkish republic has been ably told in these pages by Perry Anderson.* The founding of the republic in 1923 was a largely authoritarian affair, even if the declaration of popular sovereignty represented a break with the imperial past. Tightly controlled elections gave Mustafa Kemal the presidency of what by 1925 had become a one-party state. From that office, Kemal – who was given the surname Atatürk, or 'father of the Turks', by the Turkish parliament in 1934 – presided over a cultural revolution of astonishing proportions, transforming religious institutions, the language and alphabet, dress codes, the calendar and the legal system in less than a decade. There was little resistance, in part because this transformation was accomplished in the wake of imperial collapse and affected a population that had experienced decades of dislocation and traumatic violence, from the Balkan wars to the Armenian genocide and the First World War. The most serious opposition was from Turkey's Kurdish population, who objected to the ethnic and linguistic homogenising imperative behind Kemal's Kulturkampf. But resistance was brutally repressed. Indeed, any opposition to the one-party state – whether from Kurds, communists or religious groups – led to detention, assassination or exile. Given the scale and speed of the measures employed to transform religion, tradition and custom, less repression was required than might have been expected, but there was no broad-based backing for the revolution. Kemalism, as the secularising, Turkifying, state-centric ideology of the founding vanguard came to be known, was supported by the urban elites of the country's western cities, but elsewhere – in the Anatolian provinces and the south-east, the area closest to the Middle East – the reforms achieved at best a superficial penetration.

Nearly a century later, a new cultural revolution is underway, targeting what its leaders dismissively describe as the 'old Turkey'. What they mean by that is members of the socioeconomic elites identified with Kemalism. To some extent, like Atatürk's revolution, this counter-revolution borrows from and builds on what it seeks to replace. The republic's spectacular break with the language and traditions of the Ottoman Empire – with Arabic script replaced by Latin and loan words from Arabic and Persian replaced by Turkish equivalents – masked what were in some ways far more profound structural continuities. The state bureaucracy, the military corps and the basic social order were left intact, preserving status and

property for those ready to serve the new republic. Even the official commitment to secularism coexisted with the selective use of religion in the service of the state.

Today's cultural revolution borrows heavily from Kemalist strategy: it too is about consolidating one-party rule, dictating new traditions, purging and jailing opponents. Like Kemal, Erdoğan seeks to boost the power of the state while simultaneously transforming its institutions. But where Kemalism preserved much of the Ottoman social order, the 'new' Turkey, whose birth Erdoğan announced in a speech on 28 August 2014, represents a more fundamental break. One elite is being displaced by another: property is changing hands, new cadres are being groomed for the civil service, the universities are being emptied of one class of intellectuals to be replaced by more loyal alternatives, and regime-friendly capital is gaining access to state largesse, including the bounty resulting from asset seizures. The 'new' Turkey project is seen by its proponents as setting the clock back not to the moment of the republic's founding but a century earlier, before the modernising and Westernising reforms of the 19th century. It is an outright rejection not only of Kemalist elites but of their reformist Ottoman forebears. Where the Kemalist revolution lacked a social base, this project has support from pious and conservative constituencies among the urban lower middle classes, provincial businesspeople and the rural poor: they have been beneficiaries of Erdoğan's rule, thanks to improvements in their standard of living and the removal of restrictions on religious practices such as the wearing of headscarves. But if recent elections are any indication, this amounts at most to half of the country's population.

Turkey isn't yet a one-party state, and the leaders of its political parties are well known to the public. They make headlines and give speeches, offer political programmes and cultivate relationships. Their parties have existed in some form or other for decades: the republicans of the CHP (Republican People's Party), the ultra-nationalists of the MHP (the Nationalist Action Party) and the pro-Kurdish politicians of the HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party), which has a progressive platform. The wrangles within these parties are still the stuff of newspaper stories and public discussion: the creation of a new centre-right party, the İYİ (or 'Good') Party, which splintered from the MHP, has generated breathless headlines for months. Speculation about the parties' strategies in next month's elections dominates the news as it might have done before Erdoğan came into power. It's true that in ordinary times party leaders and MPs are not imprisoned by the dozen, as is currently happening to the HDP (at least one MP from the CHP is also in jail). But what is most jarring is that beneath the veneer of a multi-party system the truth is that not even the Justice and Development Party (the AKP), in government since 2002, has any power. The political life of the country has been reduced to the person of its leader, Erdoğan, and his entourage of relatives and cronies.

Erdoğan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak became an MP in 2015, by which time Erdoğan had complete control of the party lists. Albayrak is minister of energy but is widely understood to be part of the small group that governs the country along with Erdoğan's son Bilal and his daughter Sümeyye. The AKP provides the means for Erdoğan to manage parliament, mobilise voters and dispense favours in election campaigns, and develop cadres to fill the increasing number of vacancies in the state bureaucracy. But while he uses the party to achieve some of his goals, he isn't bound by it or dependent on it. Rather the reverse: the party depends on Erdoğan. He has long since sidelined or ousted the earlier generation of AKP leaders – some of them, like Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç, among the party's founding members. In the place of

government controlled by a party that spanned the centre right of the political spectrum, Erdoğan has developed a system of personal rule legitimated by increasingly choreographed elections.

Some liberals in Turkey and elsewhere worry that it was a mistake to support the AKP when it appeared on the political scene at the beginning of the new millennium. Their initial hope – that the party would be a vehicle for reforming the constitution, reducing the influence of the military and introducing a more pluralist conception of national belonging – has given way to self-flagellation. But the democratising potential of the AKP was uncertain from the start, and many who count themselves on the left never embraced it. The AKP shared with parties across the Turkish political spectrum, from Kemalists to right-wing ethnonationalists, a superficial commitment to democracy, yet like most political parties in Turkey, with the notable exception of the HDP, it was never internally democratic – a fact which later facilitated the sidelining of more pluralist voices within the party. Erdoğan joked in an interview while he was mayor of Istanbul as a member of the earlier pro-Islamist Welfare (Refah) Party in 1996 that ‘democracy is like a tram; you get off when you have reached your destination.’

The AKP emerged, however, at a time when civil society movements were increasingly calling for a reckoning with the country’s past – including the Armenian genocide – and a repudiation of the ongoing repression of the Kurds. There was also growing impatience with, and in some quarters even revulsion towards, the country’s history of military coups and suppression of political parties, particularly pro-Islamist parties. For all its conservative appeal, the AKP was able to make common cause with liberal critiques of the role of the army and the courts in constraining the country’s political horizons, even if it only did so because its own future depended on defanging the tutelary institutions of the state. In the end, reforms to place the military under civilian control and to restructure the senior judiciary were not sufficient to ensure that the country’s political trajectory would remain democratic. According to the essentialist narrative, the Turkish case demonstrates the incompatibility of democracy and Islam. This is an oversimplification. The AKP’s trajectory is better understood as providing a demonstration of the way the historical and structural features of a country’s political culture and institutions can bring about democratic reversal.

The AKP was founded in 2001, under the overall leadership of Erdoğan, to replace parties that had been shut down on account of their allegedly anti-secular character, among them Refah, which was subjected to constitutional closure in 1998. As a means of enforcing strict adherence to Kemalism, the constitutional court had a special interest in disbanding parties that were deemed pro-Islamist, pro-Kurdish or communist. In the early 2000s there was a growing concern among Turkish liberals that these party closures were disenfranchising a sizeable constituency. When the AKP appeared, running on a moderate religious platform with an avowedly pro-democratic and pro-business outlook, it seemed to be a version of political Islam designed to fit the constraints set by the constitutional court. More important for those who were not religiously observant, the party platform aimed to liberalise and modernise the country’s economy in the wake of a major financial crisis in 2000-1, when the government’s yawning deficit had caused an investment panic and stock market crash that ultimately required an IMF loan.

In the 2002 national election the AKP won 34 per cent of the vote, which translated into nearly two-thirds of the seats in parliament thanks to an electoral law left over from the days of the military junta that excluded from parliament any party that achieved less than 10 per cent of the

vote. In 2002 only two parties – the AKP and the CHP (with 19 per cent of the vote) – polled above the threshold and so the AKP was able to secure a majority of seats. Since the AKP's victory followed a period of minority and coalition governments that had lasted since 1991, the possibility of stable single-party rule seemed attractive to much of the electorate. Inside and outside the country, the AKP was flatteringly compared to the Christian Democratic parties of Europe. With a platform that appealed to the religiously observant majority but also promised to preserve the republic's secular character, the AKP offered to address religious grievances without embracing Islamism. Perhaps even more important, by apparently endorsing a civic rather than ethnic definition of citizenship, it looked like it might address the long-standing demands of the country's Kurdish citizens.

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None of this came to pass. Trying to comprehend the distance between 2002 and 2018, which feels to most Turks as if it should be described in decades, is a maddening exercise. That the AKP was not more democratic than any other Turkish political party should have been obvious from its failure to use its majority to repeal the 10 per cent electoral threshold despite its clearly anti-democratic effect. Its promises to represent the religiously observant, address the grievances of the Kurdish minority and commit itself to EU accession might have been democratising but in fact served to help consolidate its own rule. The best way to make sense of the party's trajectory is to identify the moments at which alternative paths were ignored in favour of another step towards authoritarianism. The honeymoon period for the AKP was its first term in office, between 2002 and 2007, as a single-party government facing no credible opposition. The financial crisis had destroyed the electoral prospects of the other centre-right parties – the centre right usually attracted a clear majority of the vote, though it was split between several parties – and this cleared the field for the AKP. One of the party's central ambitions at this point was for Turkey to join the EU, an ambition it shared with the country's Westernised elite. In its first term, the AKP's success in advancing Turkey's candidacy was widely popular.

The reforms it undertook to satisfy the EU's requirements included curtailing the role of the military in civilian governance and abolishing the state security courts that meted out summary justice in the south-east of Turkey, where much of the country's Kurdish population lives. Restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language were eased, the death penalty was abolished and the state of emergency in the Kurdish provinces ended. The AKP stuck to the economic policies established by an IMF stabilisation package after the financial crisis and pushed forward a programme of privatisation. An economic recovery followed that eventually became a boom. Looking at the list of public assets sold to business interests allied to the AKP, one can identify the origins of what would become a bonanza of corruption. But back in 2007 the improvement in the country's economic position, combined with investment in infrastructure – as well as health and education – had tangibly improved the lives of the poor and delivered clear benefits to the party's core constituency.

The AKP's margin of victory in the 2007 election marked a turning point. Turkey uses a party list system, which means that party leaders can choose who goes to the top of the list and gains a seat in parliament. The AKP's top-down structure allowed Erdoğan to place his loyalists high on the list. The party secured 47 per cent of the vote, increasing its vote share by a third; its newly purged ranks ensured that MPs would march in lockstep behind their leader. Its votes were more

evenly distributed across the country than in 2002, though it won fewer seats because a third party – the ultra-nationalist MHP – made it past the electoral threshold of 10 per cent behind the CHP, which came second, as it has in every election since 2002.

The size of the AKP's electoral victory meant it had enough parliamentary votes to ensure the appointment of its candidate for president, Abdullah Gül, a moderate Islamist whose candidature had previously been blocked by the opposition and had drawn pointed criticism from the army (which saw itself as tasked with defending secularism). This challenge to its candidate prompted the AKP to propose a constitutional amendment that would allow the president to be elected by a popular vote rather than a parliamentary one. Opposition politicians campaigned against the change, fearing that it would shift the balance of power in favour of the executive. Despite these concerns, it was passed in an October 2007 referendum with nearly 69 per cent support. The success of the referendum strategy laid the groundwork for several disturbing developments.

Following the 2007 election, the pace of liberalising reforms slowed as EU accession talks stalled. When the new EU constitution was put to referendums across Europe in 2005, its rejection by voters in France and the Netherlands was ascribed in part to opposition to Turkey's joining the union. The fear-mongering about Turkish accession by political figures in powerful European countries led the Turkish public to turn away from Europe and embrace nationalism themselves. And as accession became increasingly unlikely the ability of the EU to serve as a lever in favour of liberalising reforms waned. Erdoğan instead used the AKP's second term to loosen the grip of key state institutions that sought to block his party's consolidation of power. The three most significant elements in this strategy were a second constitutional referendum, this one aimed at restructuring the judiciary; a sustained campaign against the media conglomerate Doğan Holding, which provided a blueprint that the party would later use to destroy press freedom; and the Ergenekon trials, which unleashed the full force of the prosecutorial system on a number of people accused of plotting to bring down the government.

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Ergenekon, named for the valley in a Turkic origin myth, was claimed to be a clandestine organisation whose members, retired secularist military officers, were planning a coup. There may have been some truth to the claims that some former military personnel were considering it. In 2007, the liberal magazine *Nokta* published what it billed as 'coup diaries' written by Özden Örnek, the former head of the Turkish navy, detailing plans – drawn up with former commanders of the air force and the army – for a potential coup in 2004. The initial allegations against Ergenekon therefore seemed plausible enough, and in 2007 an investigation into its supposed activities was launched. The first indictments against 86 defendants were detailed in a document nearly 2500 pages long in July 2008. This was the AKP's first large-scale attempt to use prosecutorial powers to purge its opponents. Military officers, journalists, opposition politicians and public intellectuals were rounded up, charged with involvement in a plot, and spent long periods in pre-trial detention. Between 2008, when the first indictments were submitted, and 2011, more than five hundred defendants were detained. Another alleged coup plot (known as the Balyoz – or Sledgehammer – plan), resulted in more than three hundred suspects being sentenced to imprisonment in 2012. A massive new courtroom with a capacity of more than seven hundred was set up in Silivri prison to allow mass trials to take place. As the cases dragged on, some of Turkey's best-known investigative journalists, including Ahmet Şık and Nedim

Şener, were arrested on the grounds that they had supported the conspiracies. The charges were occasioned by Şener's reporting of official complicity in the murder of a Turkish-Armenian journalist called Hrant Dink, and Şık's reporting on the infiltration of the police by members of the Gülen movement – a religious group, led by the exiled cleric Fethullah Gülen, with which the AKP was at that time closely allied. In short, Ergenekon and associated trials became a vehicle for silencing dissent and covering up evidence of misconduct by the AKP.

Those who had been convicted were finally released in 2016, after the court of appeal overturned all the guilty verdicts for lack of evidence. But this reversal was possible only because it now suited Erdoğan to align himself with the defendants who had served years in prison as a result of his machinations. He now claimed that the trials had been brought by police officers, prosecutors and judges who belonged to the Gülen movement, no longer in favour: it was the Gülenists who he now claimed were plotting a coup against him. Silivri prison and its massive courtroom would soon be filled with new defendants. Much of the Turkish press dutifully reported Erdoğan's claim without mentioning his years of vocal support for these same prosecutors and judges.

Turkish civil society was profoundly altered by the Ergenekon trials. As those who questioned the prosecutions became defendants themselves, it soon became clear that prosecutors had been empowered to hold mass trials of the government's opponents. More significantly, the erstwhile guardians of the republic – the military and appeal court judges – not only failed to prevent the trials but were among their chief targets. Of course, political trials, manufactured evidence and reliance on hearsay were not new to the Turkish justice system: the country's Kurdish citizens had long been subject to summary justice and violations of procedural rights. But this was the first time that members of the urban, secular, ethnically Turkish elite had been dealt with in this way. Several of the military leaders put on trial had been architects of the Turkish army's counterinsurgency campaign in the Kurdish south-east in the 1990s, which destroyed thousands of Kurdish villages, displaced up to two million Kurdish citizens and resulted in thousands of civilian deaths. Long after it became clear that the evidence presented in the Ergenekon trials was fraudulent, the prosecutions remained popular in some circles because they served to curb the military.

After the Ergenekon trials began, Erdoğan's focus shifted from reducing the power of the military to bringing the appeal courts under his party's control. In 2010 the AKP unveiled a new set of constitutional amendments that were sold to the public as being designed to limit the military's ability to influence the government, once again calling a referendum on their plans. The Turkish military's record – direct and indirect intervention in 1960, 1971, 1980, 1997 and 2007, when it issued a memorandum challenging Gül's presidential candidacy – meant that many Turks were sympathetic. In fact, while some of the proposed amendments did place limits on the jurisdiction of military courts and curb the role of the military in government, the most important changes concerned the composition of the judiciary. The appellate courts in Turkey had long served, together with the army, as guardians of Kemalist ideology. During the AKP's first term, the courts had acted as a check on the party's legislative agenda and the Constitutional Court even entertained a bid to shut down the ruling party because it engaged in anti-secular activities.

Combining structural changes to the judiciary with several liberalising changes enabled the party to present the package of amendments as a democratisation initiative. The judicial reforms could be portrayed as a response to the EU position that the control the highest echelons of the Turkish

judiciary exerted on all judicial appointments and promotions was a problem. The amendments would allow more members of the judiciary to have their say, but there were widespread fears that the AKP's real intent was to manipulate the new appointments system in such a way as to install and promote its own loyalists. Despite this, 58 per cent of the electorate voted in favour of the proposals. Within a month, opposition fears were realised as a slate of AKP nominees for election to the body in charge of judicial appointments and promotions took control. Over the next year, they appointed 160 new judges to the Court of Cassation and 51 to the Council of State. Four years later, the next elections to the judicial board saw overt manipulation as the AKP launched a high-profile bid to purge its erstwhile allies from the courts, publicly asserting its control over the judiciary.

The final move towards authoritarianism in the AKP's second term was a showdown between Erdoğan and a group of newspapers and TV stations partly owned by Aydın Doğan, a businessman and a prominent critic of the government. The financial crisis that had paved the way for the AKP's first electoral victory had also thinned the ranks of media ownership in Turkey. The collapse of twenty Turkish banks, many of which had print and television holdings, resulted in the government Savings Deposit Insurance Fund putting many media outlets into receivership. Over time, they were repackaged and put up for sale and several were sold to AKP-affiliated holding groups. The newspaper *Sabah*, for example, which had a circulation of more than four hundred thousand at the time, was sold to Ahmet Çalık's firm, which was managed by Berat Albayrak, Erdoğan's son-in-law. Çalık received financing from a state-owned bank to support his bid.

Doğan Holding – which owned the TV station CNN Turk, along with two other TV channels, and two of the country's largest circulation newspapers, *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet*, as well as six smaller ones – had emerged as the most powerful anti-AKP media group. Several of Doğan's newspapers and TV channels carried claims that the AKP was engaged in anti-secular activities, a charge that led Erdoğan to call publicly for a boycott of Doğan newspapers. During the 2007 elections, Doğan Holding supported the opposition. Afterwards, the AKP took its revenge: a \$2.5 billion tax fine against Doğan Yayın (the media subsidiary owned by Doğan Holding) was announced in 2009. The fine – justified as the result of a reinterpretation of tax rules on share transactions – was widely seen as politicised: the amount came to nearly 80 per cent of the value of the parent company's holdings. Doğan Yayın was forced to sell two of its newspapers – *Milliyet* and *Vatan* – and one TV station, in addition to paying a reduced fine. The group then attempted a difficult balancing act, with their flagship *Hürriyet* newspaper retaining its oppositional stance while taking a softer editorial line and avoiding stories that would anger the government. When Albayrak's emails were hacked in 2016, they revealed that senior members of the Doğan group had had exchanges with the government about journalists and editors working at the paper. In March this year Doğan sold its remaining media assets, including *Hürriyet*, to a government-aligned business group, Demirören Holding.

The next elections, in 2011, represented the high-water mark of the AKP. The party entered its third term with a vote share of 49.8 per cent, an increase of nearly 3 per cent. This was Erdoğan's last opportunity to stand in a parliamentary election: AKP rules impose a three-term limit on members. The two other parties represented in the 2007 parliament were also returned, though the MHP lost ground to the AKP, and a slate of independents representing a coalition of Kurdish

politicians and left-wing candidates from 17 parties and NGOs including the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) won 35 seats.

Up to this point, the AKP's strategy in dealing with the Kurdish electorate had been two-pronged. The party cultivated relations with Kurdish businessmen and conservative political figures, encouraging them to run on the AKP ticket, even appointing some Kurdish MPs to cabinet positions. It was also responsible for a relative liberalisation in the state's approach to Kurdish cultural rights, offering modest support for a Kurdish television station and allowing the Kurdish language to be taught in schools. Ultimately, though, the strategy was just a sophisticated version of the traditional Turkish technique of rewarding Kurds who support the government and repressing those who do not. But rather than pushing assimilationist ethnic policies, as the Kemalists did, the party was seeking support from Kurds willing to embrace its religious platform. At the same time, any independent civil or political organising that threatened to reduce the AKP vote was harshly treated.

The pattern of detentions between 2009 and 2010 in the Kurdish provinces tells its own story. After the BDP did well in local elections in 2009 some 1800 Kurdish citizens were arrested in counterterrorism operations, with trade unionists, human rights activists and elected officials charged with belonging to a terrorist organisation. The detentions aimed at suppressing the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), an umbrella group for various political factions with ties to Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The long-standing designation of the PKK as a terrorist organisation served as the excuse. On a single day in December 2009, eighty people were arrested, including eight BDP mayors. Among them was Osman Baydemir, the popular mayor of Diyarbakır, the unofficial Kurdish capital of Turkey, who was threatened with a 36-year prison sentence. The KCK prosecutions shared all of the procedural and evidential defects of the Ergenekon trials and by 2011 had resulted in nearly ten times as many arrests, with more than 7700 suspects held, nearly half of them in pre-trial detention. That the abuses of the Ergenekon trials attracted so much attention while the KCK prosecutions were rarely discussed reflects the continuing second-class citizenship of the country's Kurdish population.

The success of the BDP-led slate in the 2011 elections led to a new political coalition in Kurdish politics, attracting representatives from smaller left-wing parties, as well as the Alevi and Armenian communities, women's organisations and LGBT activists. In 2012 this coalition founded the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), a successor to earlier left-wing, pro-Kurdish parties but with a considerably broader political platform. The HDP intended to represent historically marginalised communities across the country; gender equality, in particular, was built into its internal structures, with male and female leaders at every level.

The HDP's leftist credentials ensured that it was well placed to capitalise on the wave of protests that hit Turkey in the summer of 2013. The first protests were against the replacement of Gezi Park in Istanbul with a new shopping mall designed as a replica of an Ottoman artillery barracks. The loss of one of the few remaining green spaces in the city to make way for a neo-Ottoman commercial venture sited next to Taksim Square, with its Monument to the Republic, encapsulated what protesters viewed as the worst aspects of the AKP's agenda. When the initial demonstration was met with disproportionate force by the police, images of the violence went viral, galvanising thousands more to rally in Taksim Square. The demonstrators, many of them

students, proclaimed their opposition to the AKP's authoritarian neoliberalism. The closure of Gezi Park was just one example among thousands of government-driven projects that brought global investors and private developers into partnership with AKP-run state entities, whether to undertake mega-infrastructure or mass housing projects, or to develop new business districts or satellite cities. All these projects ignored urban planning and environmental regulations, and the social fabric of the existing city. New laws facilitated the eviction of tenants in areas slated for redevelopment. The government transformed the public housing authority into the primary vehicle for its construction frenzy, enabling it to act as urban planner, regulator, owner and in many instances contractor – subcontracting, in turn, to pro-government developers, all of this producing huge profits while displacing the urban poor.

The sudden and conspicuous wealth acquired by senior AKP officials during the party's first decade in office is widely seen as a direct result of such public-private partnerships and the kickbacks that came with them. (Erdoğan was an early developer, in every sense – 18 corruption charges were filed against him during his time as mayor of Istanbul in the 1990s.) The displacement of long-term renters to make way for high-end construction in historic urban districts fuelled widespread anger. The Gezi protests ignited a nationwide campaign with demonstrations held in 78 of the country's 81 provinces. Privatisation and deregulation also affected a wide range of other industries. A year after the Gezi protests, more than three hundred miners were killed in an accident in a privatised coalmine run by the AKP-aligned Soma Holding company, best known for helping the party distribute free bags of coal in the run-up to elections. The mine failed to meet the most basic safety requirements.

The Gezi demonstrators were also protesting against the government's encroachment on secularism, which was gathering pace. Erdoğan repeatedly asserted that the government would 'raise a religious generation', called on women to have more children, sought to tighten access to abortion, imposed new regulations on the sale of alcohol, even attempted to prohibit public displays of affection. Fears that the republic's secular character was under attack were accompanied by concerns that restrictions on press freedom and freedom of assembly were limiting the potential for effective opposition. The protests themselves revealed the extent of self-censorship – in addition to government censorship – among Turkey's mainstream media, most of which downplayed or failed to cover the initial protests for fear of government reprisals. Doğan Media's CNN Turk aired a documentary about penguins rather than cover the battles between protesters and riot police in the centre of Istanbul. Earlier in 2013 the AKP municipal government in Istanbul had imposed a ban on public assembly to prevent May Day protests in Taksim Square. The Gezi protests were a rare example of public defiance and the fierce police response, with widespread use of tear gas and water cannon, was a revelation to the largely middle-class demonstrators. Anywhere between three and five million people took to the streets in more than five thousand demonstrations over a month-long period. Many of them had never taken part in a protest before, and they became newly aware of the extent of censorship and police brutality, as well as the possibility of acting in solidarity with the more traditional activists who led the protests: environmentalists, feminists, LGBT activists, human rights workers and leftists, particularly from the Alevi community. As a result, new political aspirations were created among many who had grown up after the 1980 military coup and had never expected to lead political lives. While Kurdish participation was limited, Sırrı Süreyya Önder, an HDP parliamentarian, joined the protests.

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The first major opportunity to test the national impact of the Gezi protests was the August 2014 presidential election, the first to be decided by popular vote after the AKP's constitutional amendment of 2007. Since party rules meant he couldn't stand again for parliament, Erdoğan had set his sights on the presidency. Soon after the 2011 elections, he began campaigning for a third set of constitutional amendments, this time to shift the structure of government from a parliamentary to a presidential system. The Gezi protests suggested real resistance to the change – the move was widely seen as a power grab. Until now the presidency had been a largely ceremonial office, but the popular mandate possessed by a directly elected president would inevitably mean that the executive would gain more power. There was little doubt that Erdoğan would win – the only question was whether he would get an outright majority in the first round of voting.

In the run-up to the election, Erdoğan was widely accused of financing his campaign with public funds and engaging in classic vote-buying schemes, such as distributing free coal and handing out food and clothes. In the end, he did win in the first round, receiving 51.8 per cent of the vote, against 38.4 per cent for Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, a moderate Islamist, the candidate of the main opposition parties. The more surprising result was that the HDP candidate, Selahattin Demirtaş, a human rights lawyer, got nearly 10 per cent of the vote.

The emergence of Demirtaş as a significant figure may have played a role in ending the AKP's support for the Kurdish 'solution process'. Between 2009 and 2011, the AKP had taken part in talks with Kurdish rebels in an attempt to end the thirty-year conflict with the PKK, which sought to establish an independent Kurdish state, a demand later reduced to autonomy. Erdoğan acknowledged for the first time in December 2012 that the government had been negotiating with the Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK's jailed leader. By March 2013 talks had progressed sufficiently that a letter from Öcalan announcing a ceasefire and the PKK's withdrawal from Turkey was published and widely disseminated. After the withdrawal of PKK forces into northern Iraq the following month, the government declared an end to the conflict and convened a commission to build popular support for the 'solution process'.

This met with enormous public enthusiasm – a poll conducted in May 2013 put support at 81 per cent in the south-east. Erdoğan, with his eye on the 2014 presidential elections, hoped to translate this enthusiasm into votes. But the peace process soon unravelled as a result of two major developments. First, the Syrian civil war gave Syrian Kurds the opportunity to form a de facto autonomous region, known as Rojava. Turkey had initially adopted a strong anti-Assad line, and allowed its border with Syria to be used as a conduit for supplies and funds to Syrian opposition forces, as well as a route for Syrian refugees fleeing the conflict. But the existence of a Kurdish-controlled territory, within a few miles of its south-eastern towns and cities, unnerved both the AKP and the Turkish army, which was wary of international support for PKK-affiliated Syrian Kurdish militias just across the porous border, and of their military prowess. As a result, during the siege of the Syrian Kurdish town of Kobani by Islamic State in the autumn of 2014, Erdoğan blocked international and local efforts to shore up Kurdish defences.

Perhaps the more important development from Erdoğan's perspective, however, was the rising popularity of the HDP both in the south-east and nationally. He won the presidency in 2014

easily enough, but the party was not polling at its usual levels in the lead-up to the June 2015 parliamentary elections. In the spring of 2015 Erdoğan complained that the AKP was bearing the burden of the peace process while the HDP was reaping its rewards. Having imagined himself as the architect of a new Turkey that would bring peace to the south-east and replace an ethnic conception of citizenship with a religious one, Erdoğan found it intolerable that a peaceful, pluralistic country might have to endure a system of shared governance. Demirtaş campaigned against Erdoğan's plans for a new presidential system of government and developed an electoral platform that would appeal not only to Kurdish constituencies but also Alevis, liberals, women, workers and young people. As the HDP gained ground, Erdoğan broke off talks with Öcalan in April 2015 and began courting Turkish nationalists. Öcalan was returned to solitary confinement and visitors were again forbidden to visit him. The election realised Erdoğan's worst fears, with the AKP's vote share falling by 9 per cent to just over 40 per cent. The HDP won 80 seats in parliament, with more than 13 per cent of the vote, becoming the first pro-Kurdish party to exceed the electoral threshold. The combination of the AKP's weaker showing and a fourth party taking seats in parliament meant Erdoğan no longer had an absolute majority, leaving the AKP unable to form a single-party government for the first time in more than a decade. Worse still, the HDP had denied Erdoğan a clear majority for the proposed constitutional amendments necessary to create a presidential system.

Erdoğan responded to this setback with the most ruthless gamble of his career. He began a new military campaign against the Kurdish rebels and pursued an alliance with the right-wing nationalist MHP. Over the summer of 2015, Islamic State fighters stepped up attacks on Kurdish targets in Turkey, including a particularly vicious bombing in the town of Suruç which killed 33 Kurdish youth activists who were preparing for a humanitarian mission to Kobani. Many Kurds blamed the government for failing to prevent this and other terrorist attacks. Days after the bombing, two Turkish counterterrorism police officers were found dead. The PKK claimed responsibility as revenge for Suruç. Erdoğan seized on these killings as an excuse to declare an end to the peace process. Turkey had joined the American-led anti-IS coalition that summer, allowing coalition airstrikes to be launched from its airbases. The pattern of Turkish airstrikes made clear, however, that the true target of Turkey's efforts was the PKK: fire was focused on the Qandil mountains of northern Iraq, where the PKK leadership was based. These strikes led to massive protests in the cities of the south-east; soon, the Turkish military was targeting those cities. In April 2015, Diyarbakır had welcomed delegations of diaspora Armenians marking the centenary of the genocide. By the end of the year, much of its old town, together with other Kurdish centres like Cizre and Nusaybin, had been reduced to rubble by the Turkish army. This ferocious military campaign was in some ways more intense than the low-grade civil war of the 1990s. By March 2017 the United Nations issued a report which used satellite imagery to show the scale of the destruction and detailed serious human rights violations. The military onslaught displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians and resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths. It also represented a profiteering opportunity: in 2016, it emerged that the Turkish state had agreed to pay more than \$36 million for the purchase of drones from a company owned by the family of another of Erdoğan's sons-in-law, Selçuk Bayraktar.

The significance of Syria in Erdoğan's about-face on the Kurds pointed to changes in Turkey's foreign policy. During its first two terms, the AKP had shifted Turkey from an exclusive focus on Washington and Brussels to a broader regional engagement. Initially, this meant deepening trade ties with the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East, and in 2010 Turkey announced

plans for a free trade zone with Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, while its then foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, outlined a vision for co-operation with the Arab world. After the 2011 uprisings, the AKP presented the country as a model to be emulated in the Middle East. Erdoğan called on Assad to liberalise, and within months he had allowed opposition groups to set up headquarters on Turkish territory. South-eastern cities like Gaziantep were soon awash in Gulf financiers and arms dealers meeting with various Syrian opposition factions, while Turkey absorbed millions of Syrian refugees fleeing the fighting. But after the rise of Islamic State in 2014, as the US began to carry out military operations in partnership with Syrian Kurdish militias, Turkey found itself facing the prospect of Nato arms and funds going to PKK-affiliated groups. As a result, its objectives shifted from the overthrow of Assad to countering the advance of Kurdish militias and limiting Syrian Kurdish control of a region on the Turkish border. Erdoğan's military campaign against Kurdish targets inside Turkey was both an extension of his Syria policy and an effort to court the ethnonationalist vote.

Following the June 2015 election, Erdoğan – acting as de facto leader of the AKP despite the constitutional requirement for the president to renounce party affiliation – blocked the formation of a coalition government; as president, he declared a hung parliament and called for a snap election to be held in November. The period before the new election saw a ratcheting up of violence in the Kurdish south-east and suppression of Kurdish political organising nationwide. The message of the pro-government press – which, by this time, meant the vast majority of the media – was that only an AKP government could save the country from terrorism and chaos. The AKP cast itself as the only party capable of ending the violence while framing the HDP as a party of terrorists. By November, the military campaign in the south-east had made it difficult for the region's electorate to get to the polls, depressing the HDP vote; it also drew ultra-nationalists away from the MHP. Erdoğan's gamble paid off handsomely: the AKP got 49.5 per cent of the vote and a comfortable majority. The MHP lost almost half of its votes to the AKP, but still made it past the electoral threshold, as did the HDP.

There had been times in the AKP's first terms in office when both ethnically Kurdish and ethnically Turkish citizens could imagine a conflict-free future. But Erdoğan's AKP was at best an accidental vehicle for these hopes. The HDP is now the only political party that supports reconciliation, but as a result of a stepped-up campaign of Kurdish repression after the November 2015 election, most of its leadership is behind bars. Demirtaş, the party's co-leader, Figen Yüksekdağ, and ten other HDP members of parliament have been detained on terrorism-related charges. Prosecutors are seeking a 142-year prison sentence for Demirtaş. Many Kurdish media outlets have been shut down and dozens of pro-Kurdish mayors removed, replaced by AKP-appointed 'trustees'.

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The AKP's fourth term, Erdoğan's first as president, has been far and away the most repressive. Since 2015, the country has been dragged into a war and experienced an attempted coup; it has been ruled under a state of emergency for 21 months and counting. The AKP can be charged with crushing the country's secularist opposition, eroding the separation of powers, waging war and embracing a hyper-chauvinist nationalism. Yet the damage caused by a schism within the AKP's own coalition may be worse than all that.

The AKP came into office intending to break the secularists' 75-year stranglehold on the state bureaucracy and courts. This was a goal shared by the movement led by Fethullah Gülen from self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania (where he was driven in 1999 by the AKP's predecessor in government, a coalition led by the Democratic Left Party, which had charged him with treason). The community to which Gülen was attached followed the same Sunni Hanafi tradition as the majority of Turks, including Erdoğan. But whereas the AKP grew out of Islamist political parties affiliated with the *Milli Görüş* (or 'national view') tradition, the Gülen movement emerged from a more apolitical current of thought, influenced by the Islamic scholar Said Nursi, that emphasised culture, education and morality along with a strong commitment to Turkish ethnonationalism. Despite this supposed apolitical position, during the political violence of the 1970s, when clashes between ultra-nationalist groups and leftists resulted in thousands of casualties, Gülen set out to empower religiously observant young people in the Anatolian provinces to form a bulwark against the left. A system of scholarships was created to prepare a generation of religious students for national university examinations and civil service entry. In this way, young people were given a path out of their villages and provinces, an opportunity to become something other than factory or farm workers. At the same time, by preparing them for civil service exams, Gülenists were seeking to alter the composition of the state bureaucracy, gradually filling positions with religious cadres. Because the state enforced adherence to Kemalism among its bureaucrats, the Gülenists were careful not to spell this out. Instead, their efforts were presented as merely promoting social mobility.

By the early 2000s, graduates of Gülen preparatory programmes were increasingly well represented in the state bureaucracy. When the AKP came to power and began to challenge the secular dominance of key government positions, Gülen was a natural ally. Indeed, the Gülen graduates were the only group capable of providing alternative candidates to replace the Kemalists. Many commentators now believe that the AKP-Gülen alliance replaced one 'deep state' with another. By the end of the AKP's second term, the battle against the secularists had largely been won and Gülenists were filling key civil service positions. Either because the AKP no longer felt it needed to rely on Gülen followers or because Erdoğan felt threatened by their dual allegiance – or perhaps because Gülen sympathisers were wary of Erdoğan's growing authoritarianism and his overtures to the Kurds – there was a series of public disagreements. When Gülen-affiliated prosecutors questioned Erdoğan's ally, the head of the national intelligence agency, Hakan Fidan, in an investigation that disclosed for the first time that secret talks had taken place between senior AKP officials and the PKK in 2012, it started to become clear that the presence of Gülenists in senior positions might pose a risk to the AKP.

During the Gezi protests, prominent AKP members who were rumoured to have links with Gülen – including the party's then president, Abdullah Gül – were clearly uncomfortable with the crackdown. While Erdoğan dismissed the protesters as 'looters', several AKP officials took a softer line. Gül himself commented that democracy cannot be reduced to elections alone, and senior ministers expressed respect for the right of non-violent protest. The Gülen movement's newspaper *Zaman* published criticisms of excessive police violence. In November 2013, Erdoğan announced new regulations that would result in the closure of the schools set up by the Gülenists to prepare their supporters for college and civil service entry. It was the opening salvo in an all-out war between Erdoğan and Gülen.

A month later, in the early morning of 17 December, the properties of more than fifty AKP members and businessmen with connections to the party were raided. Police emerged with shoeboxes stuffed with cash, reportedly confiscating as much as \$17 million. The raids were the result of a year-long investigation, allegedly conducted outside the chain of command in the Ministry of Justice, into allegations of rigged state tenders and bribery. Among those detained were the construction tycoon Ali Ağaoğlu, whose mega-projects made him the most prominent figure associated with AKP-backed urban redevelopment; the head of the state-owned Halkbank, Süleyman Aslan; and the Iranian-Turkish businessman Reza Zarrab, who was accused of operating a money-laundering scheme in an attempt to bypass American sanctions against Iran. Prosecutors charged more than a dozen people with fraud, bribery, money laundering and gold smuggling. A separate investigation into rigged bidding for the *Sabah* newspaper implicated Erdoğan's son Bilal, his son-in-law Berat Albayrak and Binali Yıldırım, then minister of transport. A recording in which Erdoğan allegedly told Bilal to move tens of millions of dollars, quickly, was leaked to the press. Erdoğan insisted that the recording was fake and that the enormous volume of incriminating evidence made public by the prosecutors was all forged. In the face of mounting public outrage, four AKP ministers resigned.

The prosecutor leading the investigation was Zekeriya Öz, chief prosecutor in the Ergenekon cases and, many believed, a Gülenist. The corruption allegations would of course be tried by members of a judicial branch restructured after the 2010 constitutional referendum called by the AKP. With local and presidential elections due in 2014, and with his own son and members of his immediate circle implicated, Erdoğan had to find a way to quash the investigation.

On the defensive, Erdoğan claimed that the graft allegations amounted to an attempted 'judicial coup'. The Gülenists carrying out the investigation were, he said, part of a 'parallel state' which had infiltrated the police, prosecutors and judiciary. The AKP-supporting media went into overdrive. To prevent evidence from the investigation emerging, the government tightened restrictions on social media platforms and authorised the destruction of wiretap recordings. Erdoğan also borrowed from Öz's strategy in the Ergenekon cases, describing all Gülen followers as members of a treasonous organised conspiracy. Öz himself, lionised by the AKP during the Ergenekon trials, was now vilified.

In January 2014, the AKP carried out the biggest purge of the judiciary in Turkish history. Within weeks, prosecutors affiliated with the case had been replaced with new appointees willing to wind down the investigation. By the end of the month, a hundred judges had been removed from their posts, and at least two thousand police and prosecutors had been fired or reassigned. Many of those who were sacked had also been involved in the Ergenekon cases, and the government now withdrew its backing of those trials. Erdoğan was prepared to free the Ergenekon defendants and even to strike an alliance with some of his secularist former rivals if that was the price of ridding himself of the Gülenist threat. One of the main defendants in the Ergenekon trials, Doğu Perinçek, was released in March 2014 (having been given a life sentence to be served in solitary confinement) and promptly became one of Erdoğan's closest advisers. The government introduced a bill to give the executive even greater control of judicial appointments, triggering objections from the EU. Two other new laws strengthened Erdoğan's hand, one allowing the government greater control over the internet and the other increasing the powers of the intelligence services. The new internet regulations enabled the government to

block YouTube and Twitter without a court order, limiting, on national security grounds, public access to evidence leaked online.

The government intensified the purge of Gülenists in 2015, targeting the state bureaucracy as well as the private sector, seizing corporate and media assets and imposing court-appointed trustees to run expropriated businesses – a lucrative new way of rewarding loyalists in the run-up to the parliamentary election called by Erdoğan in November 2015. By the end of that year, the government was presenting its anti-Kurdish military campaign, the purges of Gülenists and the fight against Islamic State as part of a unified effort to combat a ‘cocktail of terrorism’.

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In June 2016 the government officially declared the Gülen movement a terrorist organisation. A month later, on 15 July, there was an attempted coup against Erdoğan’s government. Nearly two years on, much is still unknown about the events of that day. We do know that 249 Turkish citizens were killed in a night of unprecedented violence on the streets of Istanbul and Ankara, as land forces in army trucks and tanks took up position on Istanbul’s main bridges and F-16s conducted supersonic passes over Ankara, before attacking the parliament, the prime minister’s residence and the presidential palace. Most accounts suggest that a tip-off about the coup reached the head of intelligence, Hakan Fidan, and the chief of general staff, Hulusi Akar, early in the afternoon. Transcripts of a WhatsApp conversation between the plotters in Istanbul shows that they began to mobilise units six or more hours after this. We don’t have much information about what happened in between. A parliamentary commission attempting to investigate the events leading up to the coup was denied access to those involved and their requests to interview Fidan and Akar were rejected.

Questions about when officials first learned of the plot and what they then did remain unanswered, with opposition politicians accusing the AKP of a cover-up. Few in Turkey think the attempted coup was a false-flag operation by the AKP, but some believe the government may have bargained with the plotters, cutting a deal to shield some of those involved and frame the attempt as directed entirely by Gülenists. The fact that several of the officers who admit their involvement deny any links to Gülen raises the possibility that the coup was the product of an alliance between different factions in the military concerned about AKP rule. The ‘Peace at Home’ Council, as the leadership of the coup called itself, claimed, in a statement read on air during its brief takeover of the state broadcaster, that it was intervening to re-establish a secular and democratic state governed by the rule of law. The references to Kemalist principles were unmistakable. The government’s unwillingness to allow investigation of the run-up to the coup suggests that it wants to stick to the official line – that there was a violent Gülenist conspiracy – rather than allow a more complicated picture to emerge.

When the coup collapsed, in the early hours of 16 July, Erdoğan, who had been on holiday in Marmaris, gave a press conference at Istanbul airport, where he had landed after an apparently close encounter with a putschist F-16. He apologised to the Turkish people for his alliance with the Gülen movement. ‘We were deceived,’ he said. For a long time, ‘we couldn’t see and failed to see’ their hidden agenda, believing ‘we had values in common.’ Fortunately, he went on, their true nature became apparent through the attempted ‘judicial coup’ of December 2013 and the work of eliminating them began. He described the attempted coup as a ‘gift from God’, and in

the following months it became clear that it had provided him with an opportunity to realise his most ambitious goals. Within days a state of emergency was declared. It was renewed for a seventh time this April, minutes after the government announced that snap parliamentary and presidential elections would be held on 24 June, 18 months earlier than expected. These elections will be conducted under emergency rule, a form of government which, according to Erdoğan, has been good for the economy because it protects the country from terrorism and prevents workers from going on strike.

Since the coup attempt, Turkey's geostrategic position has shifted. While there were already tensions with Nato over Syria policy and an increasingly acrimonious relationship with the EU, Turkey's relations with its erstwhile Western partners have worsened sharply. Erdoğan complains that the EU and the US were slow to condemn the attempted coup and argues that the continued failure to extradite Fethullah Gülen from the US to Turkey is evidence of American complicity in the plot. The spike in anti-Americanism across Turkey shows that many people give some weight to Erdoğan's conspiracy theories, as well as making clear the extent of public anger at the US strategy of arming Syrian Kurdish forces. But Trump has now stated his intention to withdraw American forces from Syria, which would make it possible for the Turkish military to crush Kurdish forces. While other bilateral problems – notably Gülen's extradition – would remain, Trump's apparent willingness to drop support for the Kurds and his lack of interest in human rights bode well for Erdoğan. The strained relationship with Nato looks less easy to repair: many of the senior military personnel purged after the coup attempt had been involved in Nato operations, feeding suspicion among some Turks of Nato involvement in the planning, and a number of officers who were overseas at the time have sought asylum in the countries where they were stationed. Putin, meanwhile, is widely praised for being among the first to condemn the coup attempt and is even credited in some reports with having furnished the intelligence that allowed Erdoğan to evade capture. Erdoğan's first trip abroad after the coup attempt was to Russia, where he publicly thanked Putin for his support and pledged closer ties between the two countries. Today, Turkey appears closer to Russia than to Nato, purchasing Russian missiles despite American and Nato objections and co-ordinating Syria policy with Putin and the Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, at a summit in Ankara to which Washington was not invited. Erdoğan has suggested that Turkey should consider joining the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation – a regional security bloc comprised of China, Russia, four Central Asian nations, India and Pakistan – rather than the EU. The most recent report by the EU Commission on Turkey, published this spring, noted serious regression on fundamental rights and stated that there would be no new accession negotiations. But most Turks don't feel the EU is in a position to lecture their country about human rights violations, given its treatment of refugees.

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The hollowing out of the state caused by Erdoğan's purges raises questions about governance capacity in everything from education to the judicial system to security. The purges are complicated by the fact that the AKP itself encouraged the Gülenist infiltration of the bureaucracy and that the party probably still includes followers of the movement. One viral video purports to show a panel of judges addressing a Gülenist defendant, asking whether he attended a Gülen meeting on a particular date. When the accused says he did, a panel member asks who else was present, prompting the defendant to identify the judges themselves. But the impact of the purges extends far beyond Gülenists. With citizens encouraged to provide

anonymous tip-offs and senior bureaucrats given incentives to weed out the Gülenists in their departments, petty grievances, rivalries and grudges can easily result in denunciations. Ahmet Şık, the reporter jailed during the Ergenekon trials for investigating Gülenists, has now been detained once again on trumped-up charges of being a Gülenist himself. Senior members of the AKP rumoured to have links with Gülen have mostly been spared so far, though many feel that a reckoning is coming. Turkey has become a society of informants in which no one is safe.

Able to rule by decree, without the inconvenience of having to have legislation passed by parliament, Erdoğan has exploited his advantage to the hilt. Squares and bridges have been renamed after the ‘martyrs’ of 15 July and new history textbooks describe the heroism with which the coup attempt was defeated. Kemalist holidays commemorating milestones in the war of independence have been quietly retired, while Erdoğan maintains that he is presiding over a new war of independence, freeing the country from the grip of internal enemies conspiring with foreign powers. The anniversary of the coup attempt has been declared Democracy and National Unity Day, a new holiday to mark Erdoğan’s ‘historic victory’. He has also spent money on *grands projets*, including a thousand-room presidential palace and the giant Çamlica mosque, intended to rival and exceed the Ottoman architect Sinan’s masterpieces. Over the last five years dress codes have been altered, with prohibitions on the wearing of headscarves lifted in universities, the civil service, the police and the military. It’s now being reported that workplaces are increasingly requiring headscarves to be worn. Like Kemal, he is remaking the nation in his own image.

Erdoğan has also been able, finally, to push through the constitutional changes that allow the move to a presidential system. Poll after poll had shown that the proposed change was unpopular, even with AKP supporters. But the post-coup environment was propitious; with the HDP MPs who had vowed to block the move detained and press freedom largely eliminated, there was almost no opposition to the proposals. By the time the referendum was called, the government was carrying out regular internet and social media blackouts and nearly two hundred media outlets had been closed, including all Kurdish language outlets; many authors and journalists were in prison and the editor-in-chief and several columnists of one of the two remaining opposition newspapers – *Cumhuriyet*, with a circulation of less than 100,000 – were on trial. (The other opposition paper – *Sözcü*, with the third highest circulation in the country at around 300,000 – was later targeted on counterterrorism grounds, with arrest warrants issued against its owner, who remains abroad, and three others.)

Despite all this, the results of the constitutional referendum on 16 April 2017 demonstrated the resilience and depth of the opposition to Erdoğan’s rule. Needless to say, none of the conditions for a fair vote pertained. Those who campaigned against the amendments risked detention and there was no media coverage of their rallies. Erdoğan’s speeches were broadcast live and then seemed to be replayed on a perpetual loop on multiple channels. The country was covered in ‘Yes’ billboards and posters, with almost no trace of opposition advertising. Even so, clever viral social media campaigns by the ‘No’ campaign gained attention and emboldened those opposed to Erdoğan’s rule. On the day of the vote, the ballots didn’t contain any information about what was being voted on, though the vote would lead to the most significant constitutional changes in the republic’s history, with 18 amendments that undercut the separation of powers by removing most checks on the executive, weakening the legislature, enhancing political control of the judiciary and concentrating power – including the authority to pass executive decrees without

parliamentary consent – in the office of the presidency. For most Turks, who'd had no access to independent analysis of the amendments, the vote was a referendum on Erdoğan's rule. Remarkably, he nearly lost, saved only by a decision made after voting had begun to allow unstamped ballots to be counted, making it virtually impossible to determine whether or not there had been ballot stuffing. That the party had to resort to vote-rigging was stunning. Even more so was the narrow margin of the purported victory; only 51 per cent voted in favour. The country's three largest cities – Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir – and much of the Kurdish south-east voted 'No'. Areas of the country that account for more than 60 per cent of Turkey's GDP voted against. It's possible that the social base on which Erdoğan's cultural revolution relies is fracturing. The shift to a presidential system may be best understood as a means for him to guarantee his own position should the AKP begin to falter. Even if the party's vote drops again in the coming election, Erdoğan (assuming he's re-elected) would still maintain his grip on power.

Perhaps this is the reason that many people have been heartened by the emergence of a new party after a split in the MHP. The Good Party, led by the charismatic centre-right politician Meral Akşener, was formed in late October 2017. Akşener has vowed to run against Erdoğan for the presidency – and many believe the only way to challenge the AKP is from the right. That said, it is hard to feel optimistic about her, or her prospects. The snap elections are intended to capitalise on a surge in nationalist feeling as a result of the military campaign that took the Syrian city of Afrin from Kurdish militants in March. Erdoğan is also aware that the country's debt-fuelled economic growth is slowing and despite election-related debt relief measures and cash payments to retirees, the party's base is feeling the pressure of rampant inflation and shrinking productivity. Holding the elections late next year would have been terribly risky. Campaign rallies boast of the 7 per cent growth rate that Turkey posted for 2017, but most voters see the daily toll of economic mismanagement and widespread corruption. The victory in Afrin may energise some in the AKP's base of rural, religious and ultranationalist voters but its effect will have faded by the time the election comes.

For these reasons, Erdoğan has taken steps to cement the AKP's advantage should the party fall short of the votes required to form a government. The rules permitting unstamped ballots to be counted will again apply, as will a new system that allows parties which don't exceed the 10 per cent threshold to take seats in parliament so long as they are part of a larger electoral alliance. The change was designed to allow the AKP to form a coalition government with the MHP, should it prove necessary, but this version of proportional representation may well backfire on the AKP since there are now two formal alliances pitted against each other: 'The Republic', consisting of the AKP and the MHP; and 'The Nation', including the CHP, the Good Party and two others which would never have won seats under the old system. It's worth noting that neither alliance includes any Kurdish parties, a circumstance which the AKP may be tolerating to prevent the HDP from surpassing the electoral threshold. Meanwhile, there is now a social media campaign under the hashtag #tamam (in this context, roughly 'enough is enough') to mobilise opposition to Erdoğan. It began quite suddenly in response to a throwaway remark Erdoğan made in a speech on 8 May – the AKP would only step aside, he declared, if the nation said 'enough' – but it has energised Twitter, attracting millions, and for a while it was the top trending hashtag worldwide, displacing hashtags like #IranDeal despite Trump's announcement. The mood is similar to that during the Gezi protests or before the June 2015 election: there is a

tide against the AKP, which means that Erdoğan will have to resort to more carrots and sticks over the coming weeks.

And then there is the question of the presidency. Those disaffected centre-right voters who dislike the AKP's authoritarian turn may vote for Akşener. But she is unlikely to make inroads among Kurdish electors given her long-term membership of the ethnonationalist MHP. Mindful of the need to attract Kurdish and religious voters, and feeling that Akşener would not have much appeal to either group, the CHP courted the former president Abdullah Gül. Sidelined in the AKP since leaving office in 2014 and seen as a critic of Erdoğan's consolidation of power, Gül's candidacy might have led to a real split in the AKP's base. After days of feverish speculation, reports emerged that the army chief of general staff, Hulusi Akar, had flown to visit Gül at Erdoğan's request. Shortly afterwards Gül announced that he would not run. The CHP has now announced a party insider, Muharrem İnce, as its presidential candidate, though he is likely to poll less well than Akşener. If the election goes to a second round with Akşener as the top vote-getter among the opposition, she may be able to win support from centre-right and CHP voters, but she can't win without a proportion of the Kurdish vote. All the same, it's clear that there is limited appetite for Erdoğan's vision of a 'new' Turkey.

Erdoğan is an increasingly lonely figure; the shine long ago came off his international reputation. At home he presides over a state that is in many ways a reflection of his own paranoia. Fear of internal enemies means the highest echelons of state have been emptied out, leaving him to rule with his son, his son-in-law and a few trusted loyalists. What built the AKP's original base was its effectiveness at daily governance and economic management, but the purges have limited the state's ability to deliver basic services. Growth in the economy is unsustainable, driven primarily by residential construction and large infrastructure projects funded through government stimulus, and corruption is rampant. And Erdoğan's assault on the rule of law and his flirtation with a Eurasian foreign policy risks driving away Western investors on a scale that can't be compensated for by financing from the Arabian Gulf. While Erdoğan appears at times to project himself as the second coming of the nation's founding statesman, his fascination with the Ottomans points to an earlier model. According to Erdoğan, Abdul Hamid II, the last sultan who had real control over the Ottoman Empire, was a far-sighted reformer who would have modernised the state in ways consistent with indigenous Turkish traditions had he not been undermined by a Westernising clique. But Erdoğan's Hamidian myths sanitise history. Abdul Hamid was responsible for a period of unprecedented repression, suspending the constitution and dissolving parliament. He established a network of informants and adopted a paranoid style of government that made him deeply unpopular. That dark chapter of late Ottoman history, known as the *istibdat* ('tyranny') period, forms a close parallel to Erdoğan's first term as president. The *istibdat* period ended with the Young Turk revolution of 1908, which restored the constitution, brought back parliamentary rule and eventually deposed Abdul Hamid, after the failure of a counter-coup by conservative Islamists. Against the grim backdrop of Turkey's contemporary descent into authoritarianism, the history of Abdul Hamid provides a reminder that Erdoğan's project has its precedents.