

The Transition from Democracy to Autocratic Rule

^{1*}Abdullah Murat Tuncer

¹Ph.D. Student of Political Science, Conley University, Turkey

DOI: [10.55559/sjahss.v1i05.29](https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v1i05.29)

Received: 17.05.2022 | Accepted: 19.05.2022 | Published: 21.05.2022

Electronic reference (Cite this article):

Tuncer, A. (2022). The Transition from Democracy to Autocratic Rule. *Sprin Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(05), 275–281. <https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v1i05.29>

Copyright Notice:

© 2022 Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0 : <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

ABSTRACT

It is difficult to talk about real democracy in our history of the democratic system except for the first periods of the Democratic Party (DP) between 1950 and 1954. A few years after the 1960 Constitution was implemented and the first periods of Turgut Özal (Motherland Party -ANAP) between 1984 and 1989, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) period after 2002 until 2010.

Turkey has been controlled by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2002. After some reforms initially, the AKP government showed growing contempt for political rights and civil liberties. Following an attempted coup in 2016, the country's authoritarian nature was established entirely, prompting a harsh crackdown on perceived leadership opponents. In 2017, constitutional amendments concentrated power in the hands of the President.

As a result of the negativities experienced and the changes in the system, according to the 2021 Freedom House report, Turkey's new category is "not freedom."

While President exerts tremendous power in Turkish politics, hopefully, opposition victories in the 2019 municipal elections demonstrated that presidential authority was not unlimited.

There were several steps in Turkey's transition from democracy to autocratic rule. These stages should be well understood and analyzed in the countries where democracies declined, and necessary precautions should be taken.

Keywords: *Transition, Democracy, Autocratic Rule, Turkey*

Introduction

The first step in modern Turkey was taken by establishing the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) on April 23, 1920. Then the Republic was established on October 29, 1923, by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

There was a single-party period until 1946 when multi-party elections were held for the first time in the Turkish Republic's history (but open vote closed count). The first genuinely democratic election (closed voting, available count) took place in 1950.

The first of the military initiatives that caused a break in democracy was on May 27, 1960. Then, the military coup of September 12, 1980, was carried out. Apart from these coups, the army intervened in politics on March 12 1971, December 27 1979, February 28 1997, and April

27 2007. There were also failed military coup attempts on October 21, 1961, February 22, 1962, May 20, 1969, March 9, 1971, and July 15, 2016. The Jacobin secular vision of social and political order was the most crucial reason for military interventions (Heper 2016).

Turkey's Turkey's political system was based on separating the powers, legislature, executive and judiciary.

But It is difficult to talk about real democracy except for the first periods of the Democratic Party until 1954, the first periods of Turgut Özal (between 1984-1989) and the first years when the 1960 Constitution was implemented, and finally, the 2002-2010 period of Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The depoliticized way of regulating money, micro, and macroeconomic management was studied in parallel with introducing dependent financialization as the predominant capital accumulation regime until 2013. Since 2013, the governments have struggled with the combination of the crisis of control and the state, leading to two changes: the mode of regulation has been re-politicized, and the struggle within the power bloc has intensified. As a result, By switching from a parliamentary to a presidential system in 2017, the AKP launched more ambitious survival plans and increased authoritarianism. And further authoritarian and consolidation efforts in 2019 (Akçay 2020).

On July 15 2016, an attempt was a significant trauma for the country. The state of emergency declared after the coup attempt of July 15 was legalized after 2017 and converted to standard applications, weakening many elements such as the freedom to speak of a democratic regime and the right to protest and criticize.

The changes, among other things, eliminated the Prime Minister's Minister's role and made the President the head of state and government, essentially converting Turkey from a parliamentary to a presidential system.

The new system, which was accepted with a referendum in 2017, brought difficulties to real democracy, weakened the parliament, and took a severe step toward the one-person system. According to the Freedom House report 2021, Turkey is a "not free" country (<https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2022>). According to this study, the prosecution and harassment campaigns targeting opposition politicians, prominent civil society activists, independent journalists, and opponents of Turkey's Turkey's more assertive foreign policy persisted throughout the year. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) called for the immediate release of Selahattin Demirtaş, the leader of the Kurdish-oriented People's People's Democratic Party (HDP), who had been imprisoned since 2016 on politically motivated charges; however, the decision of the European Court of Human Rights was ignored. More arrests of HDP members and leaders were made during the year, adding to the hundreds of those jailed since 2016. Thousands of individuals have been detained on terrorism allegations without a proof (Tuncer 2022).

It would not be right to talk about an Islamic party until the (Justice and Development Party) AKP government. Parties established in the history of democracy in Turkey Virtue Party (FP), Welfare Party (RP), National Order Party (MNP), Islamic Democratic Party (İDP), Democratic Party (DP), Motherland Party (ANAP), Justice Party (AP) and Felicity Party (SP) were established by people who adhere to Islamic values. However, they were not parties aiming to change the administrative system in Turkey. Most of these parties are forced closed and not alive now.

First Step; Progress Without Determining Your Purpose by Populism

The aims of establishing the AKP were economic development, civil liberties, integration with the European Union, good relations with neighbouring countries, and democracy. In the first period between 2002 to 2010, much work was done for these purposes, especially for maintaining the democratic system and civil liberties (Azgin 2020).

Democracy and pluralism are essential for Muslim people to practice their faith freely. It is a severe contradiction in their beliefs that the parties defending Islam are oppressive when they are in power. However, they fiercely defend democracy and pluralism when they are in opposition.

Determining which types of belief differences will be accepted or rejected by those in power is contrary to the understanding of democracy and pluralism advocated by Islam (Sen 2020).

In 2008, populist policies began to dominate (Castaldo 2018).

Second Step; Get Stronger Financially and Capture the Media

Kleptocracy is the essential tool that gives a financial advantage to those in power. The corruption case involving some ministers and the children of ministers on 17-25 December 2013, the failure to open an investigation about this corruption, the obstruction of dismissal of ministers, the inability to open an investigation, and the prevention of studies have been the most critical breaking point in our democracy.

The financial framework of this corruption operation, which is claimed to be the initiative of the Fetullahist terrorist organization, is estimated to be billions of dollars.

Populism and increasing individual economic insecurity while increasing the economic crises and the adverse effects of financial globalization in the country, on the contrary, have a strengthening impact on those in power.

(Funke 2016).

The government has powerfully used the advertising sector as a “carrot and stick” tactic to control media by distributing official announcements and advertising by state-owned enterprises (Yanatma 2021).

For media operation, the regime and economic system are essential for explaining media capture in Turkey (Yanatma 2021). The systematic pressure encouraged the government to pressure the publishers, who then employed journalists and columnists overtly supportive of the ruling party.

New authoritarian nations have clearly noticed the forced change of the mass media as an institution (Coşkun 2020).

The transparency rank of government is 86 out of 180 countries which reflects high corruption (<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/tur>). The percentage of public service users who paid a bribe in the previous 12 months is 8% (<https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/turkey>).

Third Step; Capture and corrupt institutions, marginalize and intimidate all dissidents and opponents.

The election is only for show. Elections made by using media and state facilities in favor of the government do not show that there is democracy. As known very well, the election does not mean democracy alone without freedom for citizenship practices.

The regime system that changed with the 2017 referendum weakened the legislative and supervisory responsibilities of the parliament.

Consolidation of the executive in the hands of one man; The concentration of power in one man harmed debate and exchange of ideas and facilitated wrong decisions on both domestic and foreign policy, and loss of accountability occurred. Of the 46 thousand parliamentary questions the deputies addressed to the ministers in the last three years, 16 thousand were not answered. The person who was asked the most questions was Vice President. (<https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/bakanlar-16-bin-soru-onergesine-yanit-vermedi-haber-1527804> -February 2022).

Eight hundred eight law proposals were submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Six hundred sixty-two of the opposition proposals were not included in the plan. This picture indicates that the executive does not take the legislature into account. (<https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2021/gundem/muhalefetten-gelen-662-teklif-reddedildi-6217254>-February 2022).

Algorithms in important international and national decision mechanisms were excluded.

The Directorate of Communications was used as a propaganda ministry. The pressure was put on social media and other media outlets. The pro-government media was financially supported.

The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) tries to reduce the voices of the opposition by giving unlawful punishments to the opposition televisions. Between 1 January 2021 and 24 December 2021, RTÜK held 50 Supreme Board meetings. In these 50 Supreme Council meetings, RTÜK handed down 71 sentences against broadcasters criticizing the government, questioning the government when appropriate, and trying to broadcast freely (February 2022).

Political pressures on judges and prosecutors in the judicial system led to unlawful decisions. Unlawful arrests and criminal accusations were made. With his confession, tens of thousands of innocent people were tried with severe charges.

Police used as a paramilitary force against university students, lawyers, academicians, workers, villagers, environmental activists, feminist activists, and LGBT+ members.

Before 15 July 2016, the fetullahist terrorist organization in the army and the judiciary was tolerated. Then after the 15 July coup attempt, the replacement of thousands of officers expelled from the military with pro-government views weakened the army.

Political pressure was applied to the Central Bank. Instead of the rules of the economy, decisions were made with political stubbornness without knowledge. Four Central Bank governors and several Ministers of Finance have been replaced in the last two years.

In the Ministry of Education, religious education was supported instead of secular national education; it moved away from the secular education system and came under the influence of religious communities and sects.

Higher Education Council (YÖK), which should decide independently, has been made disqualified first and then rendered meaningless. The universities were put under pressure because of unqualified rector appointments, unlawful punishment of academics, and students who opposed this, and they were prevented from researching by reducing financial support.

Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) has started to provide unreliable information to the public about inflation and economic progress with untrustable data. Three presidents have been replaced in the last few years. While the Independent Inflation Research Group (ENAG) was %114.87, TUIK declared the inflation as %48 (<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/son-dakika--enag-enflasyon-verilerini-uc-haneli-acikladi-1904832-February2022>).

Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) was made the voice of political power, and contributing to the political discourse became its primary purpose. Religion and beliefs were used for political reasons.

By unlawfully exiting the Istanbul Contract (İstanbul Sözleşmesi), femicides and socially distorted understanding of gender understanding were tolerated (<https://kadincinayetlerinidurduracagiz.net/> February 2022).

Fourth Step; Do whatever you want, period

After 2016, we could consider the period of “do whatever you want” period. A new Jacobin perspective and view were built under the Jacobin mentality and vision.

In this period, everything seems permissible, such as influencing the law, ignoring the constitution, ignoring decisions of international human rights courts, publicly lying and slandering, giving dissenting opinions and unlawful punishments to journalists, using parsing language, exploiting religious and nationalistic feelings, turn a blind eye to corruption, wasting the country’s resources, nepotism, kleptocracy (Tziarras 2018).

Especially after establishing close cooperation with the ruling party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), every amendment except the constitutional amendment is made regardless of whether it is by the law or not. All kinds of bullying, pressure, discrimination, and insults have become normal behaviors.

Sustainable Poverty Policy

The scientists' study showed that the vote of populist parties in more than 39 countries rose by 6.33 percentage points on average between 2006 and 2018, significantly (Kroll 2020). Populist leaders are not bothered by the continuation of poverty in their countries to maintain their power. Poverty and inequality support the continuation of populist policies (Fukuyama 2008). In underdeveloped or developing countries with a low education level, development programs that will prevent poverty have a paradoxical effect that increases and perpetuates poverty and populist policies (Lewis 2008).

Inadequate minimum wage policies, the continuation of neediness, and the continuation of being dependent on politicians are unfortunately taken for granted (Sen 2020).

Constant neediness is the most critical restraint to exercising democratic and civic rights. The autocratic regime becomes entrenched with fear and the inhibitions of democratic rights (Azgın 2020).

Conclusion

The development of autocratic regimes can also come from democracies by the transition. Democratic countries, populist policies, the continuation of poverty in uneducated and illiberal societies in developing countries, the prevention and punishment of democratic citizenship rights, oppositional views, and the seizure of the media by the government cause a change toward autocratic regimes.

Populist policies and lack of education are severe threats to democracies. What will make democracies strong is that the society is educated and minded, knows about citizenship rights, and can react to anti-democratic practices.

Ruler party's pragmatism reformatted the system from 'globalist conservative democrat into 'defensive Islamic-nationalist,' and AKP could be considered the Pioneer of competitive authoritarianism.

The defensive Islamic-Nationalist coalition with Nationalist Party (MHP) remains very solid.

References

- Ümit Akçay** (2021) Authoritarian consolidation dynamics in Turkey, *Contemporary Politics*, 27:1, 79-104, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2020.1845920>
- Bilge Azgın** (2020) The progression and consolidation of erdoğanist authoritarianism in the New Turkey, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 20:2, 371-377, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2020.1764277>
- Antonino Castaldo** (2018) Populism and competitive authoritarianism in Turkey, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 18:4, 467-487, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2018.1550948>
- Coşkun, G.B.** Media capture strategies in new authoritarian states: the case of Turkey. *Publizistik* 65, 637–654 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-020-00600-9>
- Fukuyama, F.** (2008). Poverty, Inequality, and Democracy: The Latin American Experience. *Journal of Democracy* 19(4), 69-79. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.0.0035>
- Funke M, Schularck M, Trebesch C** (2016). Going to extremes: Politics after financial crises, *Eur Econ Rev* 88;227-260. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euroecorev.2016.03.006>
- Heper, M., Kazancigil, A., & Rockman, B.A.** (Eds.). (1997). *Institutions and Democratic Statecraft* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429499777>
- Heper, M., & Landau, J.M.** (Eds.). (1991). *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315628516>
- Kroll C, Zipperer V** (2020). Sustainable development and populism. *Ecological Economics* 176;1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2020.106723>
- Lewis P** (2008). Poverty, Inequality, and Democracy: Growth Without Prosperity in Africa. *Journal of Democracy*. 19;95-109. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.0.0041>
- Sen ET** (2020). The rise of hybrid political Islam in Turkey-origins and consolidation of the JDP. *British Journal of Middle Eastern*. 47:869-715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2020.1815163>
- Tziarras Z** (2018). Erdoğanist authoritarianism and the 'new 'Turkey. *Southeast and Black Sea Studies*. 18:593-98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2018.1540408>

Tuncer MA (2022). Is our democracy in peril. Script.

Yanatma S (2016). Media capture and advertising in Turkey; The impact of the state on news. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/Media%2520capture%2520and%2520advertising%2520in%2520Turkey..pdf> (February 2022)

Yanatma, S. (2021). Advertising and Media Capture in Turkey: How Does the State Emerge as the Largest Advertiser with the Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism? *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 26(4), 797–821. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211018610>

Yavuz H. (2009) *Secularism and Muslim. Democracy in Turkey*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, UK (February 2022) <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815089>