

Turkish President Erdoğan Faces Uncertain Future

JUNE 18, 2015 • TURKISH
BY DAVID SEMITH

0
Comments



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan received a rapturous reception in his early days in power, but a series of political errors has sullied his public image and undermined his power.

Since his Justice and Development Party (AKP) attained power in 2002, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has dominated Turkish politics. However, discontent about his erratic leadership is intensifying. There is a widespread perception that power has gone to his head and his political decisions are now more about aggrandizing his ego than doing the best for Turkey.

Erdoğan's wounds have largely been self-inflicted. They include a succession of corruption scandals, an egomaniacal plan to turn Turkey into a presidential democracy and endless feuds with former allies.

The damage to his public image was reflected in this month's general election result, when the AKP's share of the vote fell from nearly 50% in 2011 to 40.6%. The AKP's tally of 276 seats fell 19 short of a majority and it has to seek a coalition partner. The main beneficiaries of the distrust of Erdoğan were the People's Democratic Party (HDP). Ostensibly, a left wing Kurdish Party, the HDP managed to attract support from a number of social groupings and achieved an unprecedented 13% of the vote, giving it 81 seats.



Garde d'animaux à domicile

Garde d'animaux en famille ou à domicile à partir de 15€

[Trouver 1 petsitter >](#)



francoisesaget.com

Spécialiste Du Linge De Maison!

[More information >](#)



Tout pour la maison !

Nouveautés, bons plans, inspiration, tendances...

[Je découvre >](#)

TRG AD

"For so long Erdoğan and the AKP hit the sweet spot of Turkish politics," said Professor Jenny White, an anthropologist at Boston University and the author of *Muslim Nationalists and the New Turks*. "It has always been centre-right, but with an additional element of respect for the pious which had often been missing in other parties. Erdoğan used to have the respect of the vast majority of Turks and his leadership was seen as a model in the Middle East. However, in recent years he has gone around changing institutions and undercutting the balance of power. He has lost a lot of credibility."

When he came to power, Erdoğan was fortunate to be able to build on the successes of his predecessor Turgut Özal and his Motherland Party. Turkey was beset by economic crises and political coups in the 1970s and 1980s, but Özal had opened up the economy to world markets and shown respect for the pious. One highly symbolic decision was to reverse the ban on women attending university wearing headscarves.

At this point Erdoğan and the AKP emerged, presenting themselves as a centre-right party with respect for religion, but not an Islamic party. "They claimed to be a secular party that just happened to be run by Muslims. They said they didn't base their politics on Islam," said Professor White. "This was essential as the previous government had closed down more than 20 parties for being too religious."



Garde d'animaux à domicile

Garde d'animaux en famille ou à domicile à partir de 15€

[Trouver 1 petsitter >](#)



francoisesaget.com

Spécialiste Du Linge De Maison!

[More information >](#)



Tout pour la maison !

Nouveautés, bons plans, inspiration, tendances...

[Je découvre >](#)

TRG AD

The appeal to the pious was vital, however, in popularising the AKP. After the party was elected in 2002, Prime Minister Erdoğan found a way to balance his liberal economic agenda with socially conservative policies. "He built on the global dimension of Özal's politics. Every time he flew to Africa, or South America, or Russia, or Asia, or a country in Europe, he took a planeload of 500 businessmen. He took care of the politics and they signed the business deals," said Professor White. "Erdoğan also brought in massive infrastructure improvements. There is a fantastic subway system in Istanbul that no other party would have had the guts to build. New train lines and roads were also built. A third thing Erdoğan did was revive the EU succession process which meant putting the military under civilian control."

The underhand methods Erdoğan used to diminish the army's power showcased his ruthlessness. "There was a series of court cases and hundreds of generals and higher army officials were jailed. Nevertheless, it was sleazily done and a lot of the evidence was fabricated. Erdoğan managed to sweep the higher echelons away and the army's entire top command ended up in 2011 as a protest against the trials," Professor White said.

One of the keys to Erdoğan's success was his partnership with the Hizmet movement, an international religious and social organisation run by the Turkish Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen. Opponents of Hizmet

claim it is a cult, but Gülen professes to want to create a golden generation of young Turks with a solid training in both science and Islamic ethics. The Hizmet ethos is somewhat akin to the Masonic order. It is about empowering the "right people" who have solid ethics and an elite education. Like the Masons, the Gülen-ists are a shadowy presence. However, what is not in doubt is their infiltration of the higher echelons of Turkish society, including the business community, the army and the police.

"Erdoğan and the Gülen-ists worked closely together. Erdoğan took care of the politics and the Hizmet movement took care of the economics and education through their networks of elite private schools. Most of the plane loads of businessmen were Gülen-ists," said Professor White. "The partnership worked well until 2011 when it soured and a bitter feud developed. The split with Hizmet was the start of a lot of Erdoğan's heavy-handed politics."

The disagreement came over Erdoğan's decision to end the near 40-year war between the state and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) over self-determination for Kurds in Turkey. The nationalists in Hizmet were opposed to negotiating with what they saw as a terrorist organisation. Erdoğan's main motivation in pursuing the peace process was to smooth the AKP's deal with Kurdistan to bring oil and gas across the border.

Matters came to a head when Erdoğan sent the head of the National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) to Paris to talk to a PKK representative. What happened next says much about the complex nature of Turkish society. "The police tried to arrest the head of MIT for treason when he returned to Turkey and it became clear that the police were Hizmet people and they were taking power into their hands," said Professor White. "To solve the problem, the AKP pushed a new law through parliament saying that the head of MIT could not be arrested if the Prime Minister sent him abroad on a task. That's how the feud began and it explains most things about modern Turkish politics."

The AKP further undermined Hizmet's power base by shutting down its private schools all over Turkey. These were huge moneymakers and first-rate academic institutions. Hizmet were not about to concede defeat and they used their control of much of the judiciary to hit back at the Government in spectacular style. Prosecutors organised an investigation into corruption at the highest levels of power.

At the end of 2013, the police arrested the sons of 3 cabinet ministers and at least 34 others in orchestrated raids. It was a calculated assault on Erdoğan's authority, but worse was to follow. Incriminating recordings of phone-tapped conversations between Erdoğan and his 33-year-old son, Bilal, were uploaded onto YouTube, and then spread around Facebook and Twitter. "These amazing tapes were obtained as part of the judicial investigation. You could hear Erdoğan calling his son at 7am and telling him to get rid of the money. His son says he only has a few pence and Erdoğan says 'how much?' He says 20 million euros. At that point, you can hear someone gulp on the tape. It's someone listening in," said Professor White.

Erdoğan retaliated to the humiliating act by closing down all social media. He suppressed the corruption investigations by enacting a new law saying that all the prosecutors on the higher judicial boards had to be chosen by the Government. "But the scandal has not gone away and after the elections it could be revisited," said Professor White.

Parallel to the feud with Hizmet there was a series of political mishaps that revealed to the public how paranoid and power-crazy Erdoğan had become. The first came after he won a large majority in the 2011 election and opted to surround himself with a set of incompetent yes-men who would not challenge his authority.

"There were some total air-heads, His chief advisor was called Yiğit Bulut, which means 'cloud' in Turkey and perhaps describes his mental capacity," said Professor White. "When there were protests against the Government, Bulut said there was a giant telekinetic attack by dark forces on Erdoğan. By this stage, Erdoğan was too isolated from what was going on and believed his own publicity. A cult of power surrounded him. On TV talk shows, people would say: 'I would sacrifice myself and my entire family for you', or 'you are a honey-like man'."

More embarrassment followed the deaths of around 300 miners in an explosion at a mine in Soma, in 2014.

First Erdoğan caused furore by telling a crowd of protestors that deaths in mining were “ordinary occurrences”. He even had the temerity to give examples of mining accidents from 19th century Britain. “The crowd followed him chanting abuse and he fled into a supermarket,” said Professor White. “Later film uploaded on to YouTube showed him punching one of the mourners. Footage also showed his aide Yusuf Yerkel kicking one of the protesters on the ground. The miners are his core constituency. Not only has he not improved their economic situation, but he was also disrespecting them.”

During last year’s run up to the 2015 general election, Erdoğan’s capacity to self-destruct was also evident when he had the Koran translated into Kurdish. “He managed to alienate a lot of his Kurdish voters. He was going around everywhere waving a badly translated copy of the Koran when everyone knows that once it’s translated out of Arabic the Koran is no longer the ‘word of God’.”

Without such public gaffes, Erdoğan might have got away with spending an outrageous amount of money on the colossal new presidential palace in the Beştepe neighbourhood of Ankara. Although the courts declared the construction illegal, it continued anyway. The extravagant construction is due to cost half a billion Turkish liras and has been compared to Romanian Dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu’s People’s Palace. Although it was planned as the Prime Ministerial dwelling, the palace has become the Presidential home since Erdoğan switched from Prime Minister to President in 2014.

The principle beneficiary of the ridicule aimed at Erdoğan is the HDP whose support has grown to 5.8 million votes from 2.8 million in 2011. The party has 81 MPs compared to the 36 it sent to Parliament in 2011, when its candidates ran as independents rather than members of a single party. The HDP leader Selahattin Demirtaş has weaved together an unlikely coalition of interests, including Kurdish nationalists, left-wingers, gays, Christian minorities and environmentalists. However, research suggests it was mainly the decision of pious Kurds to desert the AKP in favour of the HDP that accounted for the party’s change in fortunes.

Great claims have been made about HDP’s potential to change Turkish politics. Gencer Özcan, Professor of International Relations at Bilgi University in Istanbul, told the Guardian that it spelled the end of identity politics. He said, “Emotional and identity barriers have been breached. This is a golden opportunity for the HDP. Voters in Turkey have endorsed democracy in Turkey across identity boundaries,” he said.

Professor White says that the HDP, which has a policy of appointing as many women as men, could change the nature of parliamentary debate. “The HDP is a unique party. There will be 96 women in Parliament and representatives of minorities such as Armenians, Assyrians and Roma, as well as gay people. There will now be discussion about integrating minorities and women’s place in society. All that has to make a difference to Parliament,” she said.

As for Erdoğan, his future is open for debate. In all probability, the AKP will form a coalition with the rightwing MHP and Erdoğan will run the party from the presidential palace with a puppet Prime Minister in place. “But if there’s an existential threat to his leadership, such as the chance of his son going to jail, we could see him lash out. He controls MIT and they’ve not been averse to throwing bombs and assassinating undesirables in the past.”

See Also: [Will Turkey Ever Join The EU?](#)



News Desk

- ▶ Australia in Danger of Credit Downgrade
- ▶ Initial U.S. Job Data Strengthens
- ▶ Russian Economy Shows Little Sign of Improvement
- ▶ Is Chinese Push for Innovation Just a New Economic Bubble?
- ▶ Trade Balance Expands as Fed Turns Soft
- ▶ Indian Prime Minister Visits Mozambique

[More](#)

Newsletter Signup

S U B M I T

Contributors



An English journalist who, when he's not exploring the social consequences of political actions, likes to write about cricket for some light relief.

DAVID SMITH,
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST

- ▶ British Brexit was a Victory for Far Right Politics
- ▶ Hillary Plays Dangerous Game with Bill's Legacy
- ▶ Betting Markets 'Trump' the Polls when it comes to Presidential Forecasting

[View all contributors](#)

Call for Contributors

Got something to say about the economy? We want to hear from you. Submit your article contributions and participate in the world's largest independent online economics community today!

C O N T A C T U S

E C O N O M I C S

▶ E C O N O M I C C O N D I T I O N ▶ S G L O B A L C H A O L R L G E A N N G I E Z S A T I O N ▶ S I N T E R N A T I O N A L
▶ M O N E T A R Y P O L I C Y

M A R K E T S

▶ U N I T E D S T A T E S ▶ C A N A D A ▶ E M E R G I N G ▶ M A R K E T S / M I D D L E E A S

INVESTING

▶ INVESTMENT ▶ MARKET ▶ ECONOMY ▶ STOCKS ▶ BONDS ▶ COMMODITIES

PERSONAL FINANCE

▶ CREDIT CARDS ▶ BANKING

INDUSTRIES

▶ HEALTH ▶ ENERGY ▶ INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Copyright © Economywatch.com. All Rights Reserved

[Terms of Service](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

up

SITE UPTIME

100%

LAST 30 DAYS