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Freedom Status: Not Free

Aggregate Score: 32 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 5.5 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 5 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 6 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 79,500,000

Capital: Ankara

GDP/capita: \$10,985

Press Freedom Status: Not Free

Net Freedom Status: Not Free

OVERVIEW

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been the ruling party in Turkey since 2002. After initially passing some liberalizing reforms, the government has shown growing contempt for political rights and civil liberties in recent years, perpetrating serious abuses in areas including minority rights, free expression, associational rights, corruption, and the rule of law.

Status Change Explanation:

Turkey's status declined from Partly Free to Not Free, its political rights rating declined from 4 to 5, and its civil liberties rating declined from 5 to 6 due to a deeply flawed constitutional referendum that centralized power in the presidency, the mass replacement of elected mayors with government appointees, arbitrary prosecutions of rights activists and other perceived enemies of the state, and continued purges of state employees, all of which have left citizens hesitant to express their views on sensitive topics.

Key Developments in 2017:

- Constitutional revisions that concentrated power in the presidency were adopted in an April referendum. The campaign featured a grossly uneven playing field, and last-minute changes

to the criteria for validating ballots -- made in contravention of the law -- undermined the legitimacy of the vote count.

- A state of emergency first declared after the attempted coup of July 2016 was renewed every three months and remained in place at year's end, allowing the government to rule by decree and make decisions that dramatically undercut the rule of law.
- The government continued to take over opposition-controlled municipalities and expanded the practice to its own party by forcing independently elected AKP mayors to resign.
- In the context of a wider purge of the leadership's perceived enemies, authorities initiated prosecutions of key figures in Turkey's nongovernmental organization sector. The fear of arbitrary arrest stifled public discussion and weakened civil society.

Executive Summary:

The Turkish government's sprawling crackdown on its real and suspected opponents, touched off by a coup attempt in July 2016, continued throughout 2017.

Using emergency powers and vaguely worded terrorism laws, the authorities had suspended or dismissed more than 110,000 people from public-sector positions and arrested more than 60,000 people by year's end. Extensive use of pretrial detention meant that many suspects were held behind bars for long periods without due process. There was increasing evidence of extrajudicial "disappearances" and routine torture of political detainees. In June and July, officials arrested a number of leading human rights activists on terrorism charges. Osman Kavala, perhaps Turkey's most prominent civil society leader, was detained in October and eventually charged with attempting to overthrow the constitutional order. Since the attempted coup, at least 1,500 civil society organizations have been summarily closed and their property confiscated. The prosecution of journalists and closure of media outlets continues. Arrests based on messages shared via social media are common, leading to widespread self-censorship and a general chilling effect on political discourse.

In April 2017, a government-backed package of constitutional amendments was formally approved through a referendum. When fully implemented in 2019, the changes will radically increase the power of the presidency and reduce democratic checks and balances. The referendum was conducted on a manifestly uneven playing field, particularly in light of the ongoing state of emergency and related restrictions on the media, the opposition, and civil society. Moreover, the Supreme Electoral Council (YSK) intervened in ways that seemed to favor the government and cast serious doubt on the integrity of the tabulation process.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 16 / 40 (-2)

A: ELECTORAL PROCESS: 6 / 12 (-2)

A1. Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 2 / 4 (-1)

Erdoğan became the country's first popularly elected president in 2014, winning a once-renewable five-year term with 51.8 percent of the vote; presidents were previously chosen by the parliament. Some domestic and international observers, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), pointed to irregularities in the election campaign, including media bias and self-censorship, misuse of state resources to support Erdoğan, lack of transparency in campaign finances, and cases of voter fraud.

Under the formal constitutional structure in place during 2017, Turkey had a semipresidential system of government. The prime minister is the head of government and is meant to hold most executive authority. The president is the head of state and has a legislative veto as well as power to appoint judges and prosecutors. However, Erdoğan has retained a dominant role since moving from the premiership to the presidency in 2014, and under the constitutional revisions adopted through the April 2017 referendum, the prime minister's post will be eliminated in favor of a more powerful presidency after the 2019 election.

Many elected executive officials at the municipal level have been replaced with government appointees since the 2016 coup attempt. Most were removed under an emergency decree issued in September 2016, which allowed appointed provincial authorities to take control of cities and towns whose elected leaders were suspected of supporting terrorism -- a broadly defined term that is now commonly applied to Kurdish politicians. By March 2017, the mayors of 82 out of 103 municipalities controlled by an affiliate of the pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) had been replaced. However, some mayors from other opposition parties have been removed as well. In December 2017, for instance, the government took control of an Istanbul municipality held by the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), citing corruption allegations. In addition, the central government successfully pressured several directly elected mayors from the ruling AKP to resign during the year, including those leading major population centers like Ankara and Istanbul; they were replaced through votes by AKP-controlled city councils.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 due to the central government's mass replacement of elected mayors with appointed officials or other preferred substitutes.

A2. Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 3 / 4

The unicameral parliament, the 550-seat Grand National Assembly, is elected by proportional representation for a four-year term. The most recent elections were in November 2015. They were called by President Erdoğan after no party won a majority in June 2015 elections and a coalition government could not be formed. In the November vote, the AKP won 49 percent of the ballots and 317 seats, giving it a clear parliamentary majority. The CHP won 134 seats with 25 percent of the vote, while the HDP and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) won 59 and 40 seats, respectively.

Many reports cited irregularities in the 2015 electoral process. Erdoğan campaigned for the AKP in the June elections, in violation of the president's formally nonpartisan status at the time. Opponents of the government also alleged media bias and censorship, noting that the state-owned TRT television station provided extensive coverage of the AKP's campaign while giving far less time to opposition parties and rejecting some of their advertisements. The HDP suffered from terrorist attacks, arrests, and mob violence in the context of renewed fighting between security forces and Kurdish militants. The OSCE, while acknowledging that Turkish voters had a choice among parties and that the vote count was transparent, concluded that media restrictions and violence severely hindered the campaign.

A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 1 / 4 (-1)

Judges on the YSK oversee voting procedures. In June 2016, the parliament passed a judicial reform bill that allowed AKP-dominated judicial bodies to replace most YSK judges that September. In the April 2017 constitutional referendum, the new degree of AKP control apparently contributed to a series of YSK decisions that favored the "yes" campaign.

As detailed in the OSCE report on the referendum, voters lacked access to impartial information, individuals associated with the opposition "no" campaign were harassed and arrested, the government-controlled media strongly supported the "yes" campaign, and voting conditions were affected by the state of emergency and security operations in the largely Kurdish southeast, where hundreds of thousands of people had been displaced. The OSCE noted a number of serious problems with the tabulation process. For example, late on the day of the vote, the YSK "significantly changed the ballot validity criteria, undermining an important safeguard and contradicting the law." Specifically, it instructed electoral boards to accept as valid an unknown number of ballots that were improperly stamped by ballot box committees or had no committee control stamp at all.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because a referendum on constitutional revisions to increase the power of the presidency was carried out under deeply flawed conditions that ensured the outcome sought by the government.

B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION: 7 / 16

B1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 2 / 4

Turkey has a competitive multiparty system, with four parties represented in parliament. However, the rise of new parties is inhibited by the 10 percent vote threshold for parliamentary representation -- an unusually high bar by global standards. Parties can be disbanded for endorsing policies that are not in agreement with constitutional parameters, and this rule has been applied in the past to Islamist and Kurdish-oriented parties. After a cease-fire with the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) collapsed in 2015, the government accused the HDP of being a proxy for the group. A 2016 constitutional amendment facilitated the removal of parliamentary immunity, and many of the HDP's leaders have since been jailed on terrorism charges; at the end of 2017, a total of nine HDP lawmakers were behind bars, as were much larger numbers of municipal officials from the HDP's regional affiliate party.

B2. Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 1 / 4

Since coming to power in 2002, the ruling AKP has asserted partisan control over the YSK, the judiciary, the police, and the media, severely limiting the capacity of the opposition to build support among voters and gain power through elections. The AKP has aggressively used these institutional tools to weaken or co-opt political rivals in recent years. In 2016, for example, rulings by the YSK and the courts helped to quash an attempted leadership challenge within the MHP, effectively ensuring that longtime chairman Devlet Bahçeli remained in control. Bahçeli then endorsed a "yes" vote in the April 2017 constitutional referendum, drawing accusations of a quid pro quo.

In addition to the prosecution of HDP politicians on terrorism charges, the government has used law enforcement agencies to attack the country's largest opposition party, the CHP. Enis Berberoğlu, a CHP member of parliament, was on trial at the end of 2017 for allegedly leaking state secrets to journalists; he was sentenced to 25 years in prison in June, but an appellate court ordered a retrial. Prosecutors opened investigations into dozens of other CHP figures during the year, including party leader Kemal Kiliçdaroğlu, who was accused of insulting the president.

B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group that is not democratically accountable? 3 / 4

The civilian leadership in recent years has asserted its control over the military, which has a history of intervening in political affairs. This greater control was a factor behind the failure of the 2016 coup attempt, and the government has since purged thousands of military personnel suspected of disloyalty. However, the AKP's institutional dominance threatens to make the state itself an extension of the party that can be used to change political outcomes.

B4. Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 1 / 4

Critics charge that the AKP has a religious agenda favoring Sunni Muslims, evidenced by the expansion of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and the alleged use of this institution for political patronage and to deliver government-friendly sermons in mosques. Secular Turkish citizens are alienated by the government's expansion of religious schools and use of religious rhetoric, among other actions. The non-Sunni Alevi minority as well as non-Muslim religious communities have long faced political discrimination, though Alevis enjoy some political representation -- largely through the CHP -- and a small number of Christian and Yazidi politicians won seats in the parliament in 2015.

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT: 3 / 12

C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 2 / 4

Formally, Turkey will retain its mixed presidential-parliamentary system of government until all of the constitutional changes approved in the April 2017 referendum are implemented after the 2019 elections. In practice, however, President Erdoğan and his inner circle make all meaningful political decisions. One constitutional revision that took immediate effect, the removal of a rule requiring presidents to be politically neutral, allowed Erdoğan to rejoin the AKP, but he had effectively led the party without interruption since moving to the presidency. His dominance was illustrated again in 2017 by the forced resignations of key AKP mayors. The state of emergency in place since 2016 grants additional powers to the president, including the authority to suspend civil liberties and issue decrees without oversight from the Constitutional Court.

C2. Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

Corruption -- including money laundering, bribery, and collusion in the allocation of government contracts -- remains a major problem. The purge carried out since the 2016 coup attempt has greatly increased opportunities for corruption given the mass expropriation of targeted businesses and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Billions of dollars in seized assets are managed by government-appointed trustees, further augmenting the intimate ties between the government and friendly businesses.

C3. Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 0 / 4

The political and legal environment created by the government's purge and state of emergency has made ordinary democratic oversight efforts all but impossible. In 2016 the Council of Europe criticized the state of emergency for bestowing "almost unlimited discretionary powers" on the government, which in practice arbitrarily withholds information on the activities of state officials

and institutions. External monitors like civil society groups and independent journalists are subject to arrest and prosecution if they attempt to expose government wrongdoing.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 16 / 60 (-4)

D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF: 5 / 16 (-1)

D1. Are there free and independent media? 1 / 4

Although some independent newspapers and websites continue to operate, they face tremendous political pressure and are routinely targeted for prosecution. More than 150 media outlets were closed in the months after the attempted coup in 2016. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, a total of 73 journalists were behind bars as of December 2017, making Turkey the world's worst jailer of journalists for the second year in a row. Many more faced criminal charges. Government attempts to block news sites and other online information sources continued in 2017, most notably with a nationwide block on Wikipedia beginning in late April. The mainstream media, especially television, reflect government positions and routinely carry identical headlines.

D2. Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 2 / 4

Although the constitution guarantees freedom of religion, increasingly the public sphere is dominated by Sunni Islam. Alevi places of worship are not recognized as such by the government, meaning they cannot access the subsidies available to Sunni mosques. The number of religious schools that promote Sunni Islam has increased under the AKP, and Turkish public education includes compulsory religious education courses that non-Muslims are generally exempted from but Alevis and nonbelievers have difficulty opting out of. Three non-Muslim religious groups -- Jews, Orthodox Christians, and Armenian Christians -- are officially recognized. However, disputes over property and prohibitions on training of clergy remain problems for these communities, and the rights of unrecognized religious minorities are more limited.

D3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 1 / 4

The tradition of academic freedom was never very strong in Turkey, and the effects of the purge have weakened it further. Schools affiliated with the movement of exiled Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen -- which the government has declared a terrorist organization and blamed for the 2016 coup attempt -- have been closed, and teachers have been summarily dismissed for perceived leftist, Gülenist, or PKK sympathies. Fifteen universities have been closed, and more than 5,000 academics had lost their positions by early 2017. Many scholars are seeking positions overseas, but some have had their passports confiscated as they remain under investigation.

In July 2017, the government announced a new school curriculum that excluded the theory of evolution and included lessons on "jihad," which it described in patriotic terms. The curriculum continued a trend of increasing religious and ideological content that matched the views of the AKP.

D4. Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 1 / 4 (-1)

Many Turkish citizens continue to voice their opinions openly with friends and relations, but more now exercise caution about what they post online or say in public. Not every utterance that is critical of the government will be punished, but the arbitrariness of prosecutions, which often

result in pretrial detention and carry the risk of lengthy prison terms, is increasingly creating an atmosphere of self-censorship.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to increased levels of self-censorship among ordinary people in the context of an ongoing government crackdown on perceived opponents.

E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS: 3 / 12

E1. Is there freedom of assembly? 1 / 4

Although freedom of assembly is theoretically guaranteed in Turkish law, authorities have routinely disallowed gatherings by government critics on security grounds in recent years, while progovernment rallies are allowed to proceed. Restrictions have been imposed on May Day celebrations by leftist and labor groups, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) events, protests by purge victims, and opposition party meetings. Police use force to break up unapproved protests. Authorities in Ankara imposed a blanket ban on demonstrations in late September 2017 that was later extended and remained in place at year's end. Despite such obstacles, the CHP leadership organized a protest march from Ankara to Istanbul that ended with a large demonstration in July.

E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 1 / 4

The government has cracked down on NGOs since the coup attempt, summarily shutting down at least 1,500 foundations and associations and seizing their assets. The targeted groups worked on issues including torture, domestic violence, and aid to refugees and internally displaced persons. In June 2017, the chair of Amnesty International's Turkey branch was arrested on terrorism charges, and he remained in detention at year's end. In July, a raid on a routine training session for human rights defenders resulted in the arrest of eight representatives from Turkey's major rights organizations, along with two foreign trainers. They were eventually released pending trial. Osman Kavala, perhaps Turkey's most prominent civil society leader and philanthropist, was detained in October. He was formally arrested in November and remained in pretrial detention.

E3. Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 1 / 4

Union activity, including the right to strike, is limited by law and in practice; antiunion activities by employers are common, and legal protections are poorly enforced. A system of representation threshold requirements make it difficult for unions to secure collective-bargaining rights. Trade unions and professional organizations have suffered from mass arrests and dismissals associated with the state of emergency and the general breakdown in freedoms of expression, assembly, and association.

F. RULE OF LAW: 2 / 16 (-2)

F1. Is there an independent judiciary? 1 / 4

Although judges still occasionally rule against the government, the appointment of thousands of new, loyalist judges in recent years, the potential professional costs of ruling against the executive in a major case, and the effects of the ongoing purge have all severely weakened judicial independence in Turkey. This process was well under way before the July 2016 coup attempt, but by late 2017, more than 4,000 judges and prosecutors had been removed. Judges and trials in high-profile cases are transferred to ensure that the government's arguments are presented before a sympathetic court.

F2. Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 0 / 4 (-1)

A long-term erosion of due process guarantees has accelerated under the state of emergency. Antiterrorism charges brought since the coup attempt often rely on the weakest of circumstantial evidence, secret testimony, or an ever-expanding guilt by association. A decree issued in December 2017 apparently removed requirements that defendants hear all the evidence brought against them and have a defense attorney present during trial. In many cases, lawyers defending those accused of terrorism offenses have been arrested themselves. Lengthy pretrial detention has become routine. An October report by Human Rights Watch detailed evidence that security forces were carrying out disappearances and using secret detention sites. Under emergency rules, suspects can be held for up to 14 days without judicial review, down from 30 in the initial aftermath of the coup attempt. Authorities can also detain individuals for up to 24 hours without access to a lawyer, though police have reportedly breached this limit in practice.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 due to the lack of basic due process protections for the growing number of people detained or charged with terrorism offenses during the state of emergency.

F3. Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 0 / 4

Torture has become increasingly common, according to human rights organizations, and an emergency decree issued in December 2017 appears to grant legal immunity to any person, including civilians, who takes action against terrorists or others associated with the 2016 coup attempt.

More than 3,000 people have been killed in fighting between security forces and the PKK since the end of a cease-fire in July 2015. The conflict, which has included bombings and assassinations, is concentrated in the rural southeast, though until the second half of 2016 there was also significant urban fighting. Turkey faces a separate terrorist threat from the Islamic State (IS) militant group. A gunman linked to IS attacked an Istanbul nightclub in January 2017, killing 39 people.

F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 1 / 4 (-1)

Although Turkish law guarantees equal treatment, women as well as ethnic and religious minority groups suffer varying degrees of discrimination. For example, Alevi and non-Muslims reportedly face discrimination in employment, particularly in senior public-sector positions, and gender inequality in the workplace is common.

While expression of Kurdish identity has been better tolerated in recent years than it was in the 1990s, the resurgence of the conflict with the PKK has been used to justify a crackdown on Kurdish political parties, media outlets, and civil society organizations, which has intensified under the state of emergency. In addition to carrying out arrests, dismissals, and closures, appointed state authorities have in some cases reversed Kurdish municipal officials' efforts to promote Kurdish language and culture.

Turkey has accepted more than 3.4 million Syrian refugees. While the government attempts to provide them with basic services, a large minority of refugee children lack access to education, and few adults are able to obtain formal employment. Local hostility toward Syrians was on the rise in 2017, according to the International Crisis Group, with at least 35 people killed in intercommunal violence.

Same-sex sexual activity is legally permitted, but LGBT people are subject to widespread discrimination, police harassment, and occasional violence. There is no legislation to protect people from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT-related public events have increasingly been banned since 2015; police used force to disperse activists who defied a ban on Istanbul's pride march in June 2017.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to an escalation in repressive measures affecting the Kurdish population since the 2016 coup attempt.

G. PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS: 6 / 16 (-1)

G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 1 / 4 (-1)

The conflict with the PKK has resulted in the forced relocation of hundreds of thousands of people, and there is evidence that the government is using curfews and cuts to utilities to push residents out of some areas.

Freedom of movement has also been affected by the expansion of purges in the civil service and higher education. Those who are suspended or dismissed have no effective avenue for appeal. Moreover, many are not able to find new employment in the private sector due an atmosphere of guilt by association, and they frequently have their passports confiscated, meaning they cannot seek employment abroad.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to the expansion of purges in the public sector and higher education that restrict affected individuals' access to alternative employment and international travel.

G2. Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 1 / 4

There is a right to private property, but since 2013 many critics of the government have been subjected to intrusive tax and regulatory inspections. Companies associated with the Gülen movement have been confiscated, particularly since the 2016 coup attempt, and individuals have also had their private assets seized. In December 2017, for example, the Turkish assets of U.S.-based Turkey analyst and former CHP lawmaker Aykan Erdemir were confiscated. By mid-2017, authorities had seized a total of more than \$11 billion in property and companies ranging from corner stores to huge conglomerates. Assets of closed NGOs have also been turned over to the state.

G3. Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 2 / 4

The government has shown increasing disinterest in protecting vulnerable individuals from forced marriage and domestic violence. Underage marriages are believed to be a widespread problem, with many formed through unofficial religious ceremonies; there is strong evidence of child marriages that victimize Syrian refugees. In November 2017, the parliament adopted a law allowing Muslim clerics to conduct civil marriages, which critics said could lead to more underage marriages. Despite legal protections, rates of domestic violence remain high; police are often unwilling to intervene in domestic disputes, and shelter space is both extremely limited and often geographically inaccessible.

G4. Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 2 / 4

The weakness of labor unions and the growing political pressures on Turkish society have undermined equality of opportunity and protection from economic exploitation. Workplace accidents are frequent, and laborers have little recourse if injured. Refugee communities have provided a ready source of cheap, exploitable labor, including child labor, resulting in significant abuses.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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