

## Erdoğan's war on the opposition

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*Publication date: 19 July 2025*

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The intention of Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan must be apparent. The process that began on March 19 with the detention and later arrest of Istanbul's mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu has developed into a full-scale war with the intent of dismantling Turkey's secular opposition, the CHP (Republican People's Party), founded by Atatürk.

İmamoğlu was prevented from running in the 2023 presidential elections because he [remarked](#) that those who cancelled the 2019 mayoral elections in Istanbul were fools. However, in a re-run İmamoğlu trounced the AKP opposition and again in the 2024 mayoral elections.

A popular and unifying figure, İmamoğlu is seen as the key rival to Erdoğan and [the latest move](#), sentencing him to a year and eight months in prison for insulting and threatening a prosecutor, is a patent attempt to stop him running in the 2028 presidential elections.

This is how it is perceived by most Turks, who regard the cases against İmamoğlu, including one for corruption, as [politically motivated](#).

For the first time since Erdoğan's AKP (Justice and Development Party) came to power in November 2002, last year in the March local elections it experienced [an overall defeat](#), gaining 35 percent of the vote against the CHP's 37 percent. The CHP also noted a victory in 35 of Turkey of Turkey's 81 provinces, against the AKP's 24.

An apparent paradigm shift has taken place in Turkey, based on widespread discontent over the AKP's handling of the economy and the ravaging inflation.

Smarting from the defeat, Erdoğan has now launched [a campaign](#) set on dismantling the CHP, claiming it is [a corrupt network](#) like "an octopus whose arms stretch to other parts of Turkey and abroad". Hundreds of CHP officials have been detained or jailed, [including](#) 16 mayors and one under house arrest.

In addition, targeting the leader of the CHP, Özgür Özel, [a case has been opened](#) against the CHP, alleging that the election of Özel as the party's leader in November 2023, after the CHP's defeat

in the May's presidential elections, was illegal. The court's decision has been adjourned until September due to an issue of jurisdiction.

Surprisingly, the AKP's representative in the Supreme Election Council (YSK) [has objected](#) to the issue being handled by a court, stating, "It would be very, very wrong if it did." In April, the YSK [rejected an appeal](#) to annul an extraordinary CHP congress, which had resulted in Özel's re-election.

The intention is either to replace Özel with the party's former leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, or with a state-appointed trustee, which is what the government has done with [several legally elected pro-Kurdish mayors](#). In effect, this would put an end to competitive politics in Turkey.

[A move](#) has also been made to remove the parliamentary immunity of 61 CHP deputies, almost half the number of the CHP's 135-member parliamentary group.

On July 11 at a ceremony in Sulaymaniyah in Iraq 30 fighters from the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) symbolically surrendered their arms. Although the terms of the surrender are unclear, Erdogan [hailed this](#) as the dawn of "a terror-free Turkey".

Turkish journalist and editor Yavuz Baydar has a different take, when [he argues](#) this is Erdogan's highest stakes gamble ever and political engineering of the highest magnitude. According to Baydar, Erdogan's aim is to guarantee lifetime rule, following a playbook of Putin or Aliyev.

Baydar writes that Erdogan and his close ally, Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party), have agreed on a roadmap that would reshape the constitution and ensure their continued rule. For this they would need 400 out of the Turkish parliament's 600 seats to pass a new constitution without a referendum, but they are 25 seats short.

The aim is to co-opt the pro-Kurdish DEM (Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party), the successor to Selahattin Demirtaş's HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party). Demirtaş has been in prison since November 2016 on terror-related charges for his refusal to support Erdogan's presidential ambitions. The peace process, which was initiated by Bahçeli, would be the bait.

As far as the CHP is concerned, the plan is to coerce the opposition into submission, by removing its key leaders, including the mayor of Ankara, Mansur Yavaş, replacing them with government trustees, and undermining their financial control.

Baydar believes it is highly likely this dual strategy to secure full authoritarian control will work. But failure is also possible, as for most Turks the overriding concern is the economy, which is [perilously close](#) to collapse. In [a recent Metropoll survey](#) almost 72 percent said they were unhappy about its management.

What is dismaying, as Baydar points out, is that all this seems to be happening with Trump's blessing and quiet dismissal by the EU. "The mind-boggling part is seeing how all the democratic allies of Turkey seem to have bought into this idea."