



# Turkey: The state of **Turkey's democracy**

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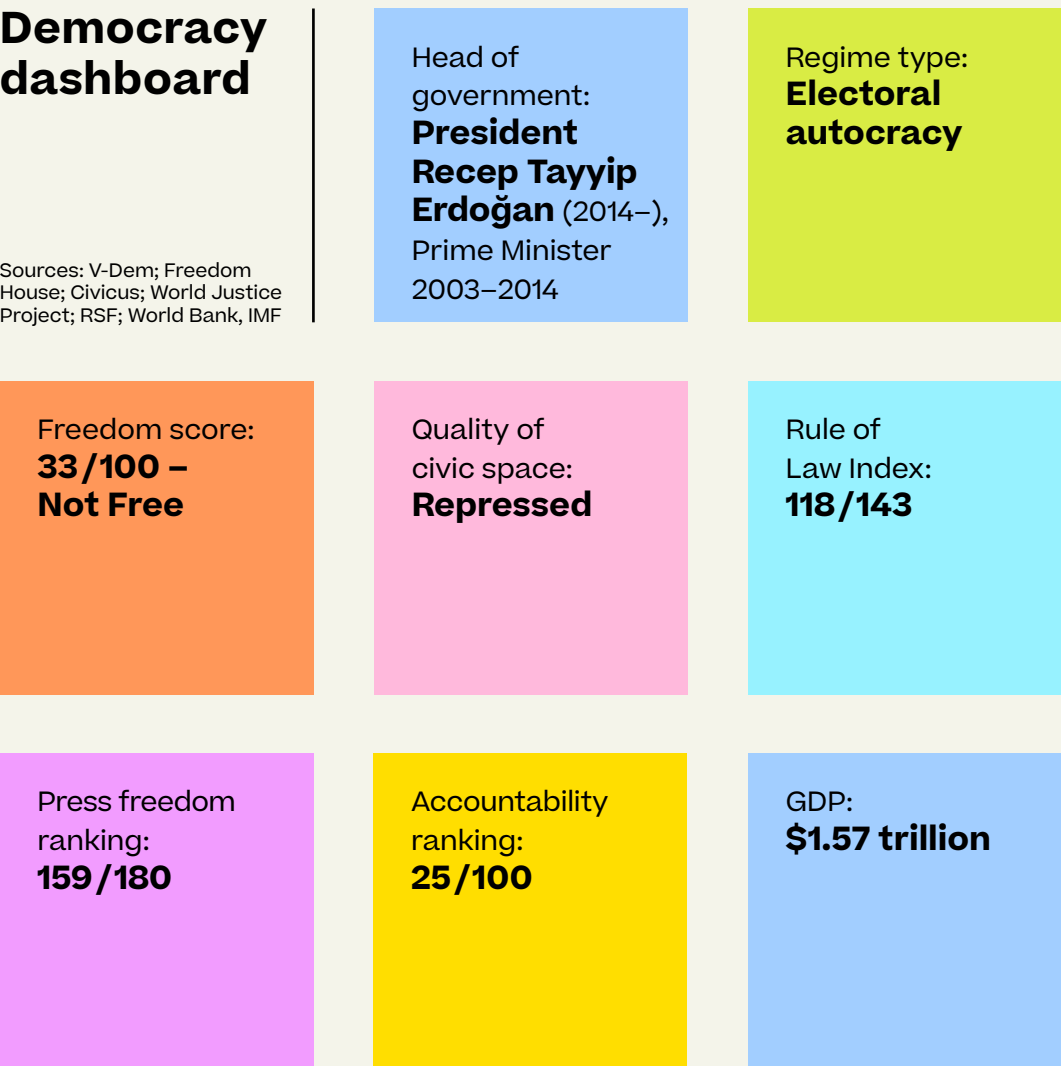
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# Why Turkey matters now

Bridging western Asia and south-eastern Europe, Turkey is a significant emerging regional power, with critical energy transit routes and strategic military importance due to its leading role in producing unmanned aircraft (drones). A secular state with a highly ethnically mixed and diverse population, it plays a key role in regional conflicts, has one of the largest refugee populations in the world, and is a major transit route for immigration to western Europe. Under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey has experienced significant democratic erosion. Yet the country remains a key ally of the European Union (EU) and the United States as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in which it has the second largest military force. It is a founding member of the G20. Its longstanding strategic role with Iran, in particular vis-à-vis Iran's nuclear programme, includes countering Iran's influence in the Middle East crisis.



# Need to know

- After a gradual decline in democracy, Turkey's government has transitioned over the last two decades from an electoral democracy towards one that entrenches centralised power. Though it is currently still classified as an electoral autocracy, observers warn of its slide towards becoming a closed autocracy, with the arrest of opposition leader Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu in March 2025 marking a pivotal escalation on this trajectory.
- Turkey’s democratic backsliding is stark: various democracy indices chart a democratic decline beginning in 2004 that has grown steep since 2015 Freedom House rates it as ‘Not Free’ due to severe limits on political rights and civil liberties.<sup>1</sup>
- The government has doubled down on its autocratic actions to counter the rise in popularity and the electoral success of opposition parties that stand for social democratic, secular, and republican values, and that advocate for civil rights and individual freedoms.
- Although under threat, civil society remains active. Legal action has been identified as a highly tractable tactic for protecting democracy and preserving the civic space in Turkey.

A note on our sources

- Our findings are based on desk research, literature reviews, and interviews with subject matter experts. Our assessments are based on indices from democracy observers of record:
- Varieties for Democracy (V-Dem): the V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) ranging from 0 (least democratic) to 1 (most democratic), and other indices.
  - Polity: the Polity Democracy Index ranging from -10 to +10 scale, with a -10 representing full autocracy and +10 full democracy.
  - We have also reviewed and cite the relevant scores and rankings from Freedom House, Civicus, and other organisations concerned with the monitoring of different aspects of democracy.
  - We have developed our own matrices for prioritisation of (1) countries; (2) democracy tactics within those countries; and (3) civil society organisations’ effectiveness.

Democracy snapshot

Although initially freedom and democratic processes increased following President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development party (AKP)’s electoral win in 2002, since 2004, Turkey has been systematically transformed. Despite the country’s formal status as a presidential, constitutional republic with a five-year election cycle, observers and analysts warn that it is moving closer towards a closed autocracy.

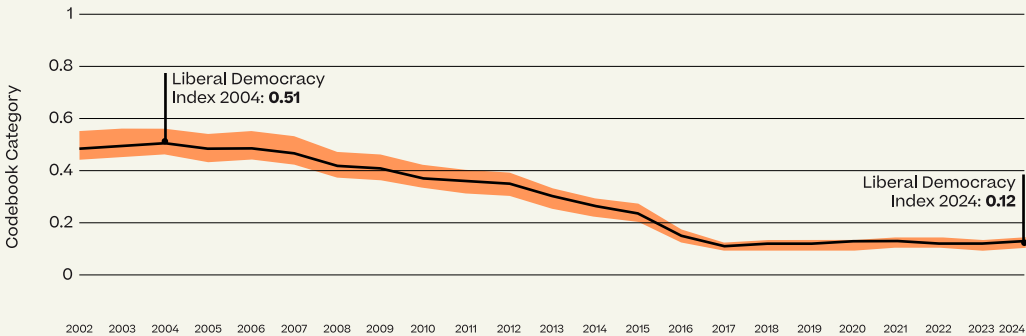
During a prolonged state of emergency (2016–2018)<sup>2</sup> imposed after a coup attempt, amendments to the constitution eliminated the prime minister’s office and granted sweeping powers to the president, entrenching executive dominance. Furthermore, political parties aligned with Erdoğan passed laws that undermined democratic institutions, delegitimised the opposition, and weakened independent state institutions and civil society.<sup>3</sup>



Independent media faces heavy restrictions in Turkey, including arrests, harassment, censorship, and internet regulation.  
Credit Image: picture alliance / Daniel Kalker

Turkey’s democratic backsliding is stark. Its score in V-Dem’s Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) dropped from 0.51 in 2004 to 0.12 in 2024, marking a steep decline on a scale of 1 (the highest level of democracy) to 0 (the lowest).<sup>4</sup> The LDI captures both the quality of the electoral features of democracy and the strength of liberal principles and institutions such as checks and balances, judicial independence, and civil liberties. Freedom House has rated the country ‘Not Free’ since 2018 due to severe limits on political rights and civil liberties.<sup>5</sup>

Turkey Liberal Democracy Index 2002–2024



Graph 1: Our World in Data. 2025. Liberal Democracy Index. Based on data from V-Dem (Coppedge et al., 2025)

In March 2025, Istanbul mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu – the Republican People’s Party’s (CHP) leading rival to President Erdoğan – was imprisoned following charges related to alleged irregularities in his university transfer from the early 1990s. Around the same time, Istanbul University annulled his degree on the grounds of procedural errors, a move critics called politically motivated. The annulment, if upheld, could bar him from standing in the next presidential election and signals Turkey’s further drift toward closed autocracy.



# Opposition’s electoral success

As of mid-2025, Turkey functions as an electoral autocracy, with more democratic features than a closed autocracy and regular elections, experts interviewed for this report said. However, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights’ report on the most recent general and presidential elections in May 2023 noted that the International Election Observation Mission documented several weaknesses in Turkey’s elections, falling short of international standards and obligations (see ‘Electoral repression’ section).<sup>6</sup> Despite this, opposition parties have secured significant victories in recent local elections.

In the local elections of 2019 and 2024, the opposition gained control of the key cities of Istanbul and Ankara, along with other municipalities. The 2024 election marked the largest defeat of Erdoğan’s AKP party in decades.<sup>7</sup> This has led to further entrenchment of authoritarianism, but it has simultaneously created a pro-democracy opening.

Erdoğan’s AKP party has responded to the CHP lead in national polls with coordinated actions targeting opposition leaders, elected mayors, and independent media in what democracy observers considered to be a deliberate strategy to eliminate electoral competition through legal and administrative repression and undermine democratic institutions and systems. As of October 2025, the Erdoğan administration is using the courts to remove opposition mayors and challenge the leadership of the opposition CHP, replacing them with court-appointed politicians who are less critical of the government and can exacerbate tensions between factions within the party.

The party has faced a nearly year-long legal onslaught, with hundreds of its members arrested. His aim is to replace current CHP chair Özgür Özel with a handpicked candidate. This campaign was expected to annul the party’s 2023 congress and unseat its leader, which would have set precedent for using the judiciary to overturn internal elections and impose trustees in place of elected officials, further obstructing the opposition’s electoral.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, on 24 October 2025, the court dismissed the lawsuit, ruling that there was no legal basis to remove the current leadership.

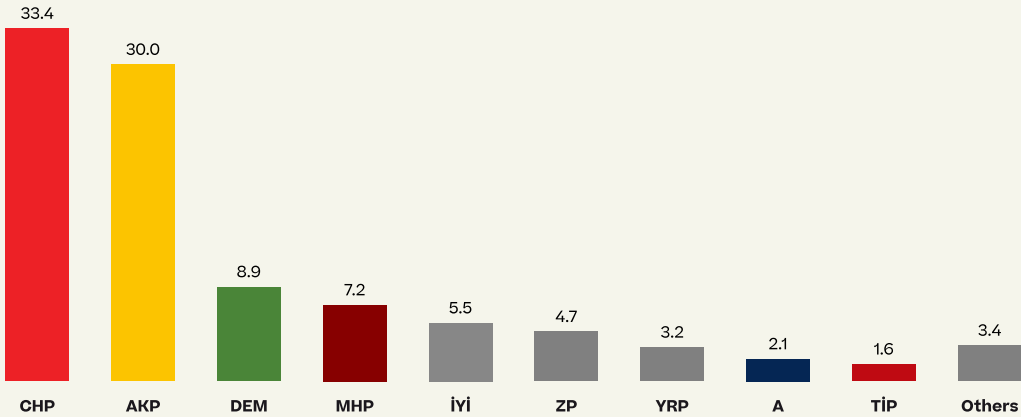


15 October 2025: A ‘Freedom for Imamoğlu’ rally in Istanbul calling for the release of political prisoners, including imprisoned Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor and CHP’s presidential candidate Ekrem Imamoğlu, was held by CHP under heavy police presence.

Credit Image: picture alliance / ZUMAPRESS.com | Abdullah Tepeli



Current election trend for Turkey



<https://politpro.eu/en/turkey/polls>, Status: October 2025

These developments have already triggered massive CHP-led protests across Turkey. Sparked by İmamoğlu’s detention, a burgeoning protest movement that is seeing the rise of a new generation of youth protesters has gained momentum. This has been met with further authoritarian backlash through mass detentions and a wave of arrests sweeping up students, journalists, and opposition party members. The disproportionate use of police force during peaceful protests is making social mobilisation less likely to effect change and counter the democratic decline.

Turkey’s authoritarian trajectory could be further intensified; speculation grows that Erdoğan would seek to stay in power beyond 2028 despite existing presidential term limits. Moreover, some observers say that the renewed peace process with pro-Kurdish political actors – though welcome in ending a longstanding conflict – is a strategic move by Erdoğan to secure Kurdish support for the constitutional changes and Kurdish MPs’ votes for early parliamentary elections.<sup>9</sup>

This moment presents a critical juncture as pro-democracy actors in Turkey mobilise to resist further authoritarian entrenchment.

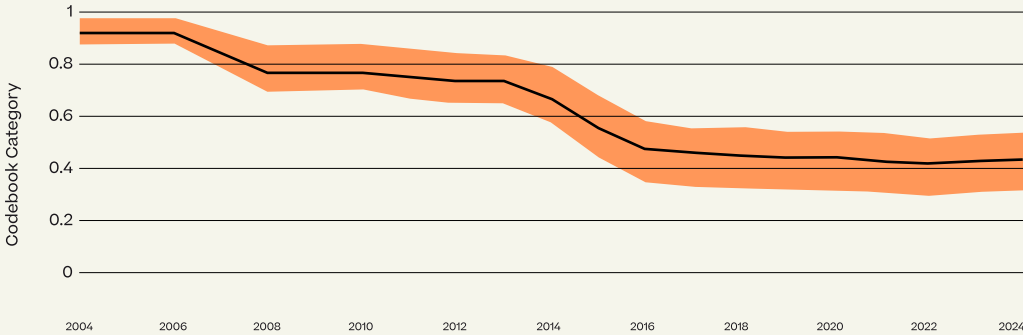
Threats to democracy

The three main threats to Turkey’s democracy are: **(1) electoral repression**, including legal barriers against opposition figures and heavily biased media coverage of opposition figures despite accurate vote counts; **(2) the erosion of checks and balances**, as a politicised judiciary enables the expansion of presidential power; and **(3) media suppression**, marked by widespread harassment of journalists, internet censorship, and restrictions on independent reporting.

Electoral repression

In the electoral arena, strategies to limit political competition – such as the arrest of opposition figures – signal a shift from electoral autocracy towards closed autocracy. While vote counts are noted as relatively accurate, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Clean Elections Index indicates a continued decline. According to V-Dem, ‘the Clean Elections Index measures to what extent elections are free and fair, understood as absence of registration fraud, systematic irregularities, government intimidation of the opposition, vote buying, and election violence.’

Clean Elections Index Turkey 2004–2024

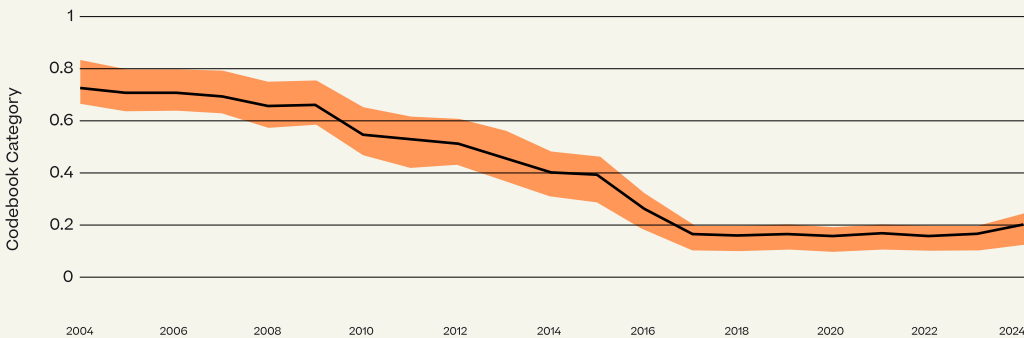


The V-Dem Clean Elections Index ranges from 0 (least democratic) to 1 (most democratic). [https://v-dem.net/data\\_analysis/CountryGraph](https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/CountryGraph), Status: October 2025

Past elections<sup>10</sup> have also been characterised by irregularities, according to the Complexity Science Hub (CSH),<sup>11</sup> and by institutional and media advantages for the ruling party, according to OSCE.<sup>12</sup> In 2023, the OSCE electoral observation mission evaluated the election free yet with several infrastructural imbalances and biases favouring the party in power. Electoral law amendments adopted in March 2022, including changes to the election threshold and campaign rules, raised concerns about electoral integrity.

Expansion of executive powers

Rule of Law Index  
Turkey 2004–2024

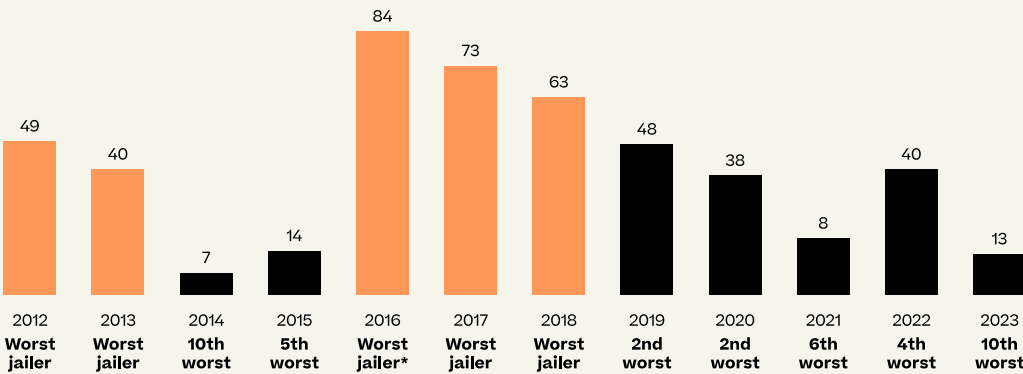


The V-Dem Rule of Law Index ranges from 0 (least democratic) to 1 (most democratic). [https://v-dem.net/data\\_analysis/CountryGraph](https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/CountryGraph), Status: October 2025

The judiciary in Turkey is highly politicised and its independence is significantly compromised. In 2024, Turkey scored just 0.18 out of 1 on V-Dem’s Rule of Law Index (RLI), which considers expert estimates on court independence, transparent laws, and accessible justice, among other things. Under Erdoğan’s administration, the judiciary has been systematically ‘captured’ through partisan appointments, removing a key check on executive power and enabling the dismantling of democratic institutions in support of a dominant presidential system.<sup>13</sup> Judicial independence continues to erode, with the judiciary increasingly used as a tool of the executive and politically motivated prosecutions targeting opposition figures.

Media repression

Turkey’s long history as one of the world’s worst jailers of journalists



\*set a new global record on number of journalists jailed, CPJ’s annual prison census/Charlie Spicer

The media faces heavy restrictions, with harassment of independent journalists, censorship, and internet regulation. Many face terrorism-related charges, while pro-government conglomerates dominate ownership, limiting editorial independence. Turkey ranks among the world’s highest countries for jailing journalists. In 2023, Turkey was the world’s tenth-worst jailer of journalists, according to data compiled by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ); more notably, it has taken first place on this list five times since 2012.<sup>14</sup> Freedom House’s Freedom in the World report for Turkey updated for 2024 highlights harsh penalties for online speech, including prison sentences, access blocks, and content removal.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, government control over digital platforms – through censorship and blocking of social media accounts – poses a growing threat to freedom of expression and public discourse. As protests intensify, these trends risk further arbitrary use of legal power. Independent watchdogs including Freedom House, Article 19, and Human Rights Watch, have raised concerns about these developments.

Sustaining legal support and independent reporting in the media sector is essential to resisting further authoritarian consolidation.





President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (r) meets US President Donald Trump at the Gaza Summit in Egypt.

Credit Image: picture alliance/dpa | Michael Kappeler

## Geopolitical importance

With its G20-level economy, a population of 85 million, and critical energy transit routes, Turkey remains an important authoritarian middle power. It maintains broad international affiliations, including membership in the UN, NATO, and the EU Customs Union; in 2024, it attained 'partner' status in BRICS, a bloc of major emerging economies. The country also invests significantly in humanitarian and development aid and has a growing military presence in parts of North Africa to project strategic and economic influence.<sup>16</sup>

Turkey's democratic backsliding contests liberal international norms and strains relations with the EU. But its role as a NATO member amid ongoing conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine and tensions in the Middle East, reinforces its value to both the EU and the United States.<sup>17</sup>

## Regional and global influence

Turkey's influence, especially in security via NATO, is evident in its veto power on decisions such as membership accessions. In one prominent example, for internal political reasons, it delayed approval of Finland's and Sweden's NATO membership following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Its autocratic trajectory threatens international organisations that rely on liberal democratic institutions and shared values, such as the Council of Europe.<sup>18</sup> Turkey's EU membership bid has stalled, with accession talks frozen since 2018 due to setbacks in rule of law, judicial independence, and fundamental rights. The European Parliament stressed in May 2025 that Turkey's internal trajectory affects its own future, the EU's credibility, and regional stability.<sup>19</sup>



Recent developments in Syria have increased Turkey’s strategic importance. Following the Assad regime’s collapse and Iran’s expulsion from key areas, alongside intensified Iran-Israel conflict, Turkey has enhanced its diplomatic and geopolitical leverage. The country’s cooperation in stabilising the region, its alignment with NATO, and countering of Iran’s influence in the broader Middle East security framework, amongst other strategic diplomacy and foreign policy moves, has positioned it as an important actor and ally to the Euro-Atlantic bloc.

The relationship between President Erdoğan and US President Donald Trump further signals Turkey’s growing geopolitical importance.<sup>20</sup>

**Geopolitical, economic, and cultural factors**

Turkey invests substantially in humanitarian and development projects through organisations such as Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the Organization of Turkic States (formerly Turkic Council cooperation). Using soft power diplomacy and promoting narratives aligned with the political ideology of the current regime,<sup>21</sup> Turkey aims to gain geopolitical leverage, often supporting authoritarian countries like Azerbaijan when interests align.

*Turkey hosts the second largest population of refugees and displaced people – 2.8 million in 2025*

Turkey is also a key transit country for refugees and displaced people, hosting 2.8 million in September 2025 – the second largest such population globally.<sup>22</sup> It has become essential to the EU’s migration policy, leveraging its role as a migration buffer and ‘backstop’ to secure financial and political concessions, notably through the 2016 EU-Turkey deal.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, Turkey acts as a regional and global power broker on behalf of the Muslim world<sup>24</sup> and exerts political, cultural, and military influence in North Africa.<sup>25</sup>

**Countering democratic decline**

Despite growing authoritarianism and declining civil liberties in the country, Turkey has an active civil society that continues to push back against the regime. Power for Democracies conducted expert interviews in 2025; these highlighted the key role played by civil society organisations, many of which now lead the most active pro-democracy efforts in Turkey. From May Day marches and LGBTQ+ pride parades to demonstrations against inflation and political arrests, public protest is still a regular feature of civic life.<sup>26</sup>

*‘Legal protection for pro-democracy actors has emerged as a vital tool’*

Legal protection for pro-democracy actors such as journalists, activists, and political candidates has emerged as a vital tool of democratic engagement through civil society. This legal support operates on two levels. First, it involves direct legal representation in individual cases – for example, defending activists, journalists, or protesters – to reduce harm and protect their immediate rights.

Second, it includes strategic litigation aimed at setting legal precedents. Such cases can establish reference points in case law, for instance, court rulings that government travel bans or censorship measures violate freedom of expression. Even when autocratic courts ignore these precedents, the judgments can serve as a foundation for future legal challenges.

Strategic litigation also extends to supporting high-profile political candidates in domestic courts and at the ECtHR. These cases can draw public attention to government abuses, highlight unfairness, and mobilise people around rule of law issues, even when legal victories are often not enforced.



Experts also emphasised the importance of supporting independent journalists and fact-checkers, who persist under police repression and legal constraints. Despite legal harassment, media outlet shutdowns, and financial barriers, a network of digital media actors and investigative reporters continue to document abuses and counter disinformation.

These independent platforms serve as informal mechanisms of justice and public scrutiny in the absence of institutional checks and balances through exposing abuses and the flaws of the government, informing the public, and sustaining spaces for dissent.

The reporting of civil society resistance and the developments of legal cases complements legal action by documenting arrests, providing evidence for lawyers and advocacy groups, and publicly covering court proceedings and legal victories. This amplifies the impact of legal support and strategic litigation through wider visibility.

## Risks to civil society

While in 2019, the German Marshall Fund praised Turkish civil society as ‘a vital source of ideas, inspiration, and alternative thinking’ and noted its ‘remarkable resilience to evolve’, its capacity has since been severely weakened, experts said.<sup>27</sup> Disproportionate use of police force during peaceful protests showcases the increasing need for legal support for political activists while also making the tractability of social mobilisation more difficult.

As the 2023 US Department of State report on human rights documented, civil society in Turkey, particularly those organisations critical of the government, frequently face audits, fines, and administrative sanctions from the Ministry of Interior under the pretext of counterterrorism financing laws.<sup>28</sup> Independent NGOs encounter discriminatory barriers, such as blocked registration, exclusion from policymaking, and threats of shutdown, while pro-government groups operate with relative ease and state support.



The Antalya Law Court in Antalya, Turkey. Legal protection for pro-democracy actors has emerged as a vital tool to counter democratic decline.  
Credit Image: picture-alliance / dpa | epa Tolga Bozoglu



Similar conclusions were drawn by the European Commission’s 2024 report on enlargement.<sup>29</sup> Prominent civil society leaders in Turkey, including those from the Human Rights Association (İHD) and Amnesty International,<sup>30</sup> have faced smear campaigns and politically motivated prosecutions, often based on unfounded accusations linking them to terrorism or foreign agendas. Nevertheless, the arrest of Imamoğlu has unexpectedly united Turkey’s long-divided social and political opposition, triggering a wave of mobilisation and strategic innovation that could evolve into a lasting democratic movement.<sup>31</sup> However, the initial momentum has begun to fade, with mass demonstrations subsiding and the CHP’s polling lead ahead of AKP narrowing, lending weight to Erdoğan’s belief that time may be his strongest ally against the opposition.<sup>32</sup>

Barriers to democracy aid and foreign funding

Although foreign funding to civil society organisations is not formally prohibited in Turkey, the regulatory environment remains restrictive, with burdensome fundraising rules, government surveillance, and the persistent risk of punitive measures.<sup>33</sup> The proposed ‘agents of influence’ law aimed to criminalise activities perceived as aligned with foreign interests, using broad and ambiguous terms that could threaten legitimate civil society work, independent media, and academic freedom.<sup>34</sup> After intense pushback from civil society and the international community, the bill was withdrawn in late 2024, but its potential reintroduction continues to raise alarm among rights groups.<sup>35</sup>

Opportunity for change

Turkey stands at a crossroads between intensified authoritarianism and potential democratic renewal.<sup>36</sup> This creates both a need and an opportunity to bolster civil society by providing legal protection and defending independent media for democratic resilience.



Caption: 7 September 2025: Police officers block the street during a demonstration against a crackdown on the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) in Istanbul.  
Credit Image: picture alliance / Sipa USA | SOPA Images

Democratic openings

The wave of nationwide protests following Imamoğlu’s arrest in March 2025 created a need and opportunity for democratic intervention by civil society groups offering protection for activists and protesters as authorities escalated repression by detaining nearly 2,000 protesters and journalists. Social media platforms like X blocked opposition accounts to comply with Turkish court rulings and courts increased pressure on independent journalists.

Date	Event	Democratic opportunity
2028 or earlier	<b>Presidential elections</b> Pay attention to whether Erdoğan runs despite term limit.	Civil society advocacy and opposition coalition mobilisation around electoral legitimacy.
2025 onwards	<b>Protests and pro-democracy action</b> Triggered by the imprisonment of Imamoğlu.	Emerging coalitions between protesters, civil society, and local municipalities.
2025 onwards	<b>Youth-led protest movements</b> Political mobilisation by students and young activists.	Rise of a new generation of political actors. Investing in youth engagement may strengthen democracy.

## Top areas for engagement

Research, including expert interviews conducted by Power for Democracies on the civil society landscape in Turkey, revealed two relevant entry points for democratic engagement:

**(1) funding for organisations** working on legal action, including targeted legal support for political candidates, journalists, and activists, alongside strategic litigation aimed at setting legal norms and precedents and **(2) supporting independent journalism networks**.

The two areas are interrelated: strategic litigation often involves the legal protection of journalists, while independent journalism is essential for documenting unlawful arrests, reporting on legal proceedings, and amplifying the impact of litigation by informing the public and shaping narratives.

Another area identified by interviewees as a top concern was electoral repression, with experts recommending support for grassroots election monitoring by civil society organisations.

However, due to the uncertain timing of the next elections, there is a high risk of being too late. Support for legal action, meanwhile, is less time-sensitive and therefore more viable in this context. The scope of this report will focus on legal action, leaving the potential open for future research on supporting independent journalism.



21 March 2025: Police in Izmir, Turkey stand opposite students protesting the detention of Istanbul mayor and CHP presidential candidate Ekrem Imamoğlu.  
Credit Image: picture alliance / Middle East Images | Berkcan Zengin

## Recommended action: Legal action in Turkey

Our research suggests that legal action involving direct representation and strategic litigation is an effective tactic for defending a shrinking civic space in Turkey – making it a significant tool for creating conditions for future democratic openings in the country. Although the judiciary has become increasingly captured, organisations offering legal support act as a final line of defence by challenging rights violations and keeping them on the public agenda.

Pursuing strategic litigation that challenges civil rights violations at Turkey’s Constitutional Court and at the ECtHR was described by an expert interviewed for this report as the ‘last wall of defence.’ Turkey has become the country with the highest number of pending cases at the ECtHR, with approximately 21,600 at the end of 2024.<sup>37</sup>

While international court rulings are often denied by Erdoğan’s government, past victories indicate a dynamic cooperation between NGOs, social activists, and the ECtHR. This litigation-mobilisation dynamic, and the legal efforts set precedents. They empower civil society, keep the norm of rule of law and democracy alive, while also ensuring human rights violations stay on the international agenda. This is demonstrated by the recent call by EU member states at a UN session condemning the Erdoğan government’s record. In the recent mass arrests by the Erdoğan government of opponents including political candidates, this pro-democracy action is especially important.

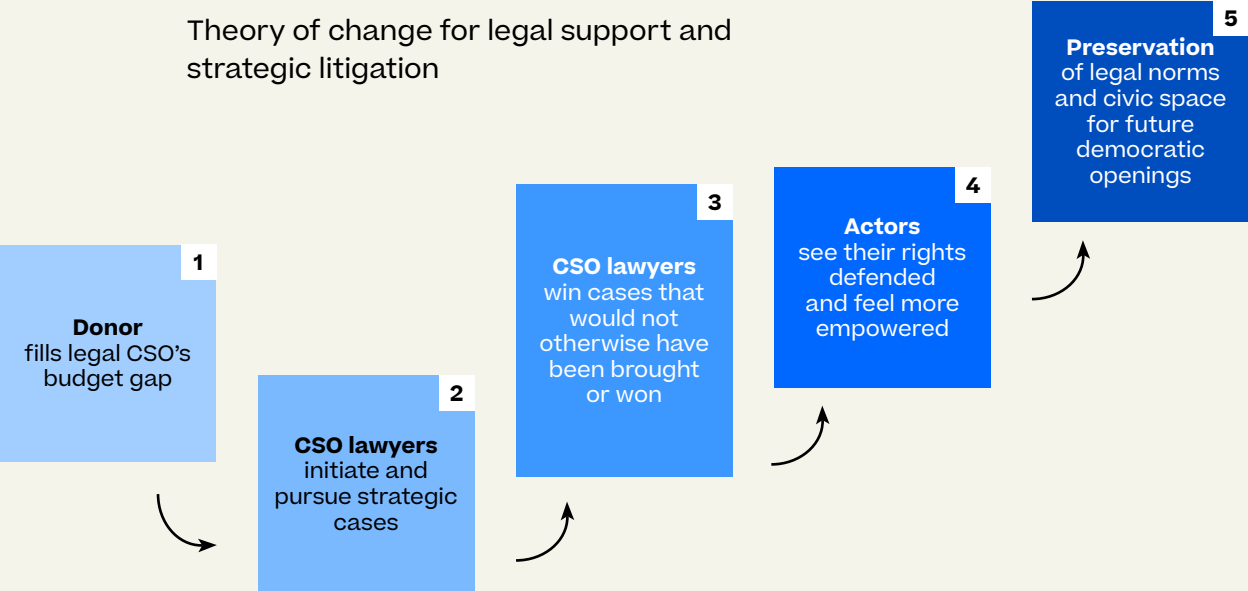


# Theory of change

Our primary Theory of change (ToC) as outlined below proposes that targeted funding to support civil society organisations which provide legal action would offer immediate protection while also empowering broader civic resistance, helping to mitigate harassment and repression.

**Strengthening legal defence infrastructure for democratic resilience.**

Theory of change for legal support and strategic litigation



Targeted legal support and strategic litigation involves a combination of direct legal representation for democratic actors (such as journalists, campaigners, and political candidates) and carefully selected cases aimed at setting legal norms and precedents. These efforts include, but are not limited to, the following actions:

Initiating legal proceedings in cases of unlawful arrests of (high-profile) political candidates, activists, and journalists

Reducing harm in individual cases and offering a sense of protection for civil society

Providing legal assistance, lawyers, trainings, and research resources in ongoing cases

Pursuing strategic cases at the Constitutional Court or, in case of repeal, at the ECtHR

## Evidence of effectiveness

The effects of strategic litigation are highly contextual, depending on aspects such as the state of the judiciary, the cases themselves, and the public's interest in them. Existing evidence does not therefore provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of strategic litigation per se, but rather a preliminary evaluation and documentation of specific cases and study findings.

The following findings give insights into the impacts that the strategic litigation democracy tactic might have in Turkey, and on how the effectiveness of this tactic might be enhanced.

In Turkey, court cases involving high-profile political candidates and journalists have long attracted international attention. For example, ECtHR rulings on the unlawful detention of former People's Democratic Party (HDP\*) MP Selahattin Demirtaş raised awareness of the limits of freedom of speech and political pluralism, thanks to the strategic litigation led by human rights civil society organisations.

Domestically, a Constitutional Court decision allowed HDP's Faruk Gergerlioğlu to return to Parliament from prison. A 2018 study by Open Society Justice Initiative shows moreover that ECtHR rulings against Turkey for police torture led to Erdoğan's 2003 'zero tolerance for torture' policy, indicating strategic litigation can achieve policy changes.<sup>38</sup> However, Erdoğan's commitment was eroded after the 2016 coup, when reports of ill-treatment and torture resurfaced.

Lack of judicial independence remains a major inhibitor to the effectiveness of strategic litigation. Nonetheless, effectiveness should be measured not just by court victories or releases from detention, but also by the broader norm-setting impact.

There is persuasive global evidence of the effects of legal actions on mobilisation: in South Africa, for example, civil society mobilised successfully through legal actions against state capture, generating high-profile publicity for a case.<sup>39</sup>

The Open Society Justice Initiative study highlights the mutually reinforcing relationship between strategic litigation and social movements. It shows that, in several earlier documented contexts, litigation has not only been driven by mobilised communities but has also catalysed further political engagement, as torture survivors and relatives involved in legal proceedings became political actors and human rights advocates in countries such as Argentina, Kenya, and Turkey.<sup>40</sup>

The report further highlighted a dynamic relationship between social movements and strategic litigation. This showed that under certain conditions, social movements can drive litigation efforts, while litigation can, in turn, amplify social movements.

Another advantage of litigation, according to the legal scholar, Lynette Chua, is that it can mobilise minorities and attract the attention of transnational organisations that may provide resources, advice, and publicity.<sup>41</sup>

Importantly, mobilisation is not only a consequence of litigation but can also be a driving force behind it. Case studies from Uganda illustrate this: legal strategies employed by media organisations have helped defend journalists and challenge bans in court. In some instances, extensive media coverage and collective action by journalists contributed to successful litigation outcomes.<sup>42</sup>

## Relevance to the current moment

As of mid-2025, news reports indicate that 50 people were arrested due to the ban on Pride, five opposition mayors were suspended from duty, and further mass arrests targeted the opposition party in Izmir affecting 109 municipal officials. The crackdown triggered mobilisation and these developments underscore the urgent need to provide legal protection and strategic litigation for those affected.

\*The party formerly known as HDP is now the DEM Party (Democracy and Emancipation Party).



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