CARNEGIE
ENDOWMENT FOR
INTERNATIONAL PEACE

JUNE 2026

The Dual Imperative in Turkish Foreign Policy: Right-Wing Populists and Their Opposition

Murat Somer

The Populist Turn in Middle Power Diplomacy

The Dual Imperative in Turkish Foreign Policy: Right-Wing Populists and Their Opposition

Murat Somer

June 2026

About the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

In a complex, changing, and increasingly contested world, the Carnegie Endowment generates strategic ideas, supports diplomacy, and trains the next generation of international scholar-practitioners to help countries and institutions take on the most difficult global problems and advance peace. With a global network of more than 200 scholars across twenty countries, Carnegie is renowned for its independent analysis of major global problems and understanding of regional contexts.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Publications Department
1779 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20036
P: + 1 202 483 7600
F: + 1 202 483 1840
CarnegieEndowment.org

This publication can be downloaded at no cost at CarnegieEndowment.org.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Author

Murat Somer is a professor of political science and international relations at Ozyegin University, Istanbul.

South Asia Program

The South Asia Program informs policy debates relating to the region's security, economy, and political development. From strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific to India's internal dynamics and U.S. engagement with the region, the program offers in-depth, rigorous research and analysis on South Asia's most critical challenges.

American Statecraft Program

The American Statecraft Program develops and advances ideas for a more disciplined U.S. foreign policy aligned with American values and cognizant of the limits of American power in a more competitive world.

Introduction

Türkiye offers a vivid example of how right-wing populists can reshape a country's foreign policy, while also revealing the limits of their ability to do so sustainably.

Over the last twenty-three years, Türkiye has been ruled by the governments of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (as prime minister in 2003–2014 and president since 2014) and his Justice and Development Party (AKP), elected to power in late 2002. During this period, their shifting policies and rhetoric have often puzzled domestic and international audiences about what the country's long-term motivations and allegiances are. In order to achieve more clarity, one needs to understand that Erdoğan and the AKP have been following a dual imperative. The first is shaped by a broad cross-party consensus on Türkiye's changing regional and global interests since the 1990s, and the second is formed by the AKP and Erdoğan's peculiar right-wing populist worldview. While the second imperative enables faster decision-making and flexibility, it undermines the long-term sustainability of Türkiye's foreign policy by feeding corruption, incoherence, and potential instability.

Turkish right-wing populists have been trying to advance the country's middle-power goals on the international stage based on widely shared perceptions of what these goals are among policymakers and the public, but they have been doing so in specific ways that reinforce their project of autocratic political consolidation at home. Interrogating how alternatives that are not right-wing populist would manage Türkiye's external relations differently helps to distinguish between these two imperatives. If the main opposition force, the center-left Republican People Party (CHP) came to power, it would likely continue many policies of Erdoğan and the AKP that are shaped by how broad segments of Turks perceive the country's national interests as a middle power.[1] But there would also be fundamental differences because the CHP would follow a modified dual imperative. It would advance Türkiye's middle power interests in ways that reverse democratic backsliding and support the consolidation of liberal and social democracy.[2] The implications for Türkiye's long-term alliances and its role in regional and global order would be significant: Its foreign policy would become more predictable, anchored in democratic values, treaty commitments, and law—replacing the AKP's transactional and destabilizing approach.

Various forms of populism and right-wing ideologies have dominated Turkish politics since the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1950.[3] However, the core vision and political strategy of Erdoğan and the AKP have represented the specific kind of populism that causes worry for many observers worldwide due to the severe threats it poses to democracy.[4] They have been populist and pernicious polarizers who sought and kept power by fostering a permanent and Manichean divide between people and elites, and by weaponizing a majoritarian and unchecked understanding of popular sovereignty.[5] Having said that, their expressed identity and dominant policies have not been constant. After coming to power by promising democratization and clean government to the electorate, the policies and rhetoric of Erdoğan and the AKP incrementally became less liberal and democratic, and more illiberal and

autocratic as they accumulated more power. Simultaneously, their right-wing discourse and policies became less "conservative-democratic" and more "Islamist-nationalist."[6] Since 2016, they have also operated in a de facto coalition with the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and formed electoral coalitions with various Islamist and nationalist fringe parties that share their right-wing populist ideology.[7]

> **The consequences for democracy over two decades of right-wing populist AKP rule have been severe.**

The consequences for democracy over two decades of right-wing populist AKP rule have been severe. The country backslid from being an established yet defective electoral democracy on the path to building liberal democracy in the early 2000s to being an electoral autocracy by the late 2010s.[8]

Foreign Policy Under Erdoğan

Turkish right-wing populists have transformed the country's foreign policy, yet the underlying long-term vision and goals are not immediately obvious—obscured by shifting (and often contradictory) policies, ideology, and rhetoric.

Pursuing Türkiye's Interests as a Middle Power

The first foreign policy imperative, which has remained constant underneath the shifting actions and motivations of Erdoğan and the AKP, has been the country's perceived middle-power interests in a changing global order. Türkiye is considered an emerging middle power alongside countries such as South Korea, Indonesia, and Mexico. While there is no fixed definition of middle powers, they are considered to lack the capabilities of great powers such as the United States and China but to have enough power to disrupt the international order.

In the 1990s, many political leaders across party lines realized that economic growth and changing incentives in the post–Cold War era required and enabled a more activist foreign policy.[9] Accordingly, Türkiye sought greater regional influence, more diverse relations from Africa to Asia, and a stronger voice in multilateral institutions. But these goals were paired with the goals of strengthening liberal democracy at home and greater integration with Western institutions, particularly the EU, of which Türkiye became a membership candidate in 1999. Thus, the country developed strategic autonomy but remained anchored to the West politically and institutionally. It had a "civilizational interest" in doing so, given its centuries-long policy of cultural-institutional Westernization while remaining West-skeptical—clear-eyed about how Western states have historically treated and will likely keep treating the rest of the world.[10]

Even though people may disagree over the policies through which Türkiye should pursue its middle-power interests, a cross-party consensus has been evolving on what these interests are. They stem from Türkiye's position as a growing, export-oriented, and energy-dependent economy with a large and upwardly mobile population; as a post-imperial power with a geostrategically central location between Asia, Europe, and Africa; and as a country with historical-cultural linkages to these regions. This has significantly influenced the foreign policy outlook of successive governments, particularly in periods, like the current one, that are marked by heightened flux in the global economic and security order. Foreign policy has also been influenced by Western allies and global economic and regional geopolitical developments, which have at different times expanded or reduced Türkiye's room for maneuver.

All this explains why Türkiye has sought to diversify its economic ties beyond the West, even as it has tried to expand its influence in Western-led global institutions. This also clarifies why the country challenges the liberal international order from within as what may be called a loyal and responsible participant.[11] Rather than rejecting the order's underlying legal and political principles, Türkiye challenges what it views as Western dominance in how multilateral institutions are managed and in how their rules are applied.[12] Long-standing frustration with the EU reflects this dynamic. Turkish leaders do not reject its principles outright; rather, they object to what they perceive as the EU's reluctance to accept their country as a full member, and, if it does, as culturally distinct, fully equal, and important, as opposed to peripheral.

Türkiye pursued its foreign-policy goals through institutional and professionalized policymaking, particularly in the Foreign Ministry and the military, as well as through a combination of soft and hard power. It significantly increased its soft power through the expansion of development aid, trade, and the opening of cultural centers in regions such as the Balkans, the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia. It also worked to reduce its dependence on military equipment from its NATO allies by developing its arms industry, and it supported NATO and UN peace missions by deploying troops in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Lebanon.[13]

Since coming to power, Erdoğan and the AKP have continued these policies whenever they also served their second imperative of autocratic power consolidation at home. Between 2003 and 2011, they relied predominantly on a discourse of Muslim democracy, which blended Islamic identity with the language of liberal democracy. They also pursued neoliberal economic policies, maintained the country's good standing in multilateral institutions such as NATO and the World Trade Organization, and projected soft power as a dynamic trading state committed to having what then foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu (2009–2014) called a "zero problems with neighbors" policy.[14]

All this made sense during the global monetary expansion of the 2000s, which saw capital pouring into Türkiye, and amid Western efforts to identify liberal Muslim allies during the global War on Terror. This approach also helped Erdoğan appropriate the image of his secular political rivals as pro-democracy, pro-EU, and pro-West politicians for domestic and foreign audiences. While making sure that Türkiye's Western commitments, including the

EU accession process, remained intact, he pursued closer cooperation with emerging powers and institutional alternatives to the Western-dominated global order. For example, he sought BRICS membership and joined with Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to negotiate a nuclear swap deal with Iran in 2010.[15]

Autocratic Hegemony and Islamist Populism

The second imperative that has guided governance and the transformation of Türkiye since the AKP and Erdoğan came to power has been their partisan motivations and regime goals. These have been described as "passive-revolutionary,"[16] populist, political Islamist,[17] Islamist-populist,[18] neo-Ottoman,[19] "state-conquering rather than state-democratizing,"[20] and guided by Islamic civilizational goals and affinities.[21]

Electoral victories in 2010 and 2011 strengthened the AKP government's domestic position. The resulting growth in authoritarianism was confronted by fierce popular opposition in the Gezi protests in 2013.[22] Erdoğan also fell out with his Islamist-nationalist Gülenist allies and faced major corruption allegations in 2014.[23]

Alongside these developments, Türkiye's foreign policy became more activist and overtly pro-Islamist. The tumultuous Arab Spring changes that swept through the Middle East and North Africa after 2010–11 may have encouraged an activist foreign policy, but not necessarily an Islamist one. Türkiye's engagement with Western allies within the EU and NATO became increasingly transactional. Erdoğan began seeking closer relations with autocratic regimes like the one in Russia and with Islamist transnational actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. This shift came with an increased willingness to rely on military force, such as by deploying the military or by using radical Islamist proxies, as in Syria. Many Turkish liberal observers have described this transformation as one from constructive or "restrained" middle-power behavior toward an "excessively activist" and "assertive" posture.[24]

The changes in foreign policy went in tandem with the AKP and Erdoğan incrementally constructing a neo-patrimonial executive.[25] This transformation has been sustained by the model of state capitalism and a welfare system that the AKP and Erdoğan have gradually constructed.[26] As they moved away from liberal democracy, they came into values-related conflicts with the governments and civil societies of democratic states.

This ideological transformation has also shaped the AKP and Erdoğan's power perceptions, rhetoric, and actions in foreign policy, where they saw other Islamist or authoritarian national and transnational actors as trustworthy allies and sources of information. For example, in early 2011, information circulating within Muslim Brotherhood networks appears to have led Erdoğan and Davutoğlu to anticipate the rapid collapse of the Assad regime in Syria, following similar developments in Tunisia and Egypt.[27] This expectation contributed to Türkiye's heavy backing of the Syrian opposition.

Ideological framing has also shaped domestic political discourse. When the CHP criticized Türkiye's Syria policy in the 2010s, for example, government officials dismissed this with rhetoric such as "The Syrian people are getting rid of their own CHP."[28]

Erdoğan's foreign policy became even more assertive and unilateral after he survived what appears to have been a failed military coup attempt in 2016.[29] This new shift came with a stronger ultra-nationalist and Eurasian bent as Türkiye sought closer relations with Russia and developed dialogues with institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.[30] Erdoğan's rhetoric and, partly, his policies grew more openly critical of the West and more explicitly Islamist. "Zero problems with neighbors" gave way to the notion of "precious loneliness,"[31] signaling a more coercive and self-reliant approach that privileged autonomy over diplomatic accommodation.[32] Türkiye purchased Russian S-400 missile batteries despite objections from NATO, leading to its "costly expulsion" from the U.S.-led F-35 program.[33]

Erdoğan and the AKP have continued to develop Türkiye's defense industry, albeit now with neo-patrimonial and state-capitalist means; that is, by relying on industries close to the government and the president's family. Efforts have included the development of armed drone platforms (such as the Bayraktar TB2 and Anka systems) that have helped position the country as a major drone producer, and have been used to promote techno-nationalism and bolster the regime's domestic legitimacy.

> **Since 2019, Erdoğan has sought to repair relations with Western allies such as the United States and the EU as well as with regional powers such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel.**

Partisan interests have also undermined the ability of Erdoğan and the AKP to achieve peace with the Kurds. Like previous governments, they have opposed Kurdish separatism. However, unlike previous governments, they framed initiatives to resolve the issue primarily through a narrative of Islamic fraternity, conditional upon the Kurds accepting the neo-patrimonial autocratic rule in Ankara. Erdoğan and the AKP have viewed U.S.-backed Kurdish military advances in Syria with suspicion, as most Turkish governments would. But they further complicated the issue by backing Islamist factions and missing opportunities to win the Kurds' trust by refusing to protect them against jihadi violence at critical junctures—developments critics link to ideological preferences and transnational alignments.[34]

Since 2019, as a troubled economy and a more competitive opposition have threatened his rule, Erdoğan has recalibrated once again. He has largely maintained his jingoistic rhetoric but scaled back some overreaching policies. As he has sought to repair relations with Western allies such as the United States and the EU as well as with regional powers such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel, he has also begun to curb engagement with the Muslim Brotherhood. Türkiye joined Trump's Board of Peace and took a visibly restrained

position during the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran—with Erdoğan staying silent on the United States and muted on Israel. This seems to contrast with the government's fierce rhetorical condemnation of Israel's war on Gaza and an official trade embargo—while allegedly allowing trade to continue through backchannels.[35]

Erdoğan and the CHP Alternative

Table 1 illustrates how, in the pursuit of Türkiye's perceived middle-power goals and interests, the foreign policy vision of Erdoğan and the AKP and that of the CHP compare with the cross-party consensus. This sheds light on the contrasting logics that underpin the dual imperative in foreign policy under the current regime, while suggesting how it would continue and differ under a CHP-led government.

For example, a more activist foreign policy seeking greater autonomy from the West was rational for Türkiye in terms of the cross-party perception of middle-power interests and in light of the diminished flow of Western capital after the 2008 financial crisis and the 2011 Arab Spring. However, the government's pro-Islamist activism and rapprochement with autocratic regimes resulted from its partisan ideological and political goals.

Table 1. Contrasting Logics of Türkiye's Middle-Power Foreign Policy

Issue	Cross-Party Consensus	Erdoğan and the AKP	Main Opposition Party, CHP
Liberal International Order	Remain a constructive member without being subject to identity-based double standards. Economic benefits. Quest for equal say in decisionmaking and flexible rules suitable for a rising economy. Principled challenges to Western domination.	Semi-loyal member willing to level identity-based criticism toward liberal institutions and seek alternative alliances with illiberal actors.	Support the order's rules-based universalism and liberal-democratic values but demand their equal application. Criticize neoliberal bias and demand social-market principles.
Rules-Based Multilateral International Order	Uphold international rules and norms. Support rules-based institutions that provide security and predictability for middle powers, even when knowing that all states bend rules to protect their interests. Work toward making institutions such as the UN Security Council more inclusive and representative. Activism in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.	Instrumentalize anti-West rhetoric to discredit westernization and liberal-democratic norms at home, from gender equality to secularism and the rule of law.	Reform multilateral institutions from within, based on principled criticism.
Issue	**Cross-Party Consensus**	**Erdoğan and the AKP**	**Main Opposition Party, CHP**

Use of Hard Power	Support a strong deterrent military with domestically produced technology. Remain in military alliances such as NATO but diversify engagement to further specific geopolitical interests. Maintain a selective military presence abroad to protect economic interests such as supply chains, sea routes, economic markets, and energy lines. Readiness to use force as a deterrent and last resort.	Readiness to use force on a case-by-case basis to amplify regional clout, enjoy domestic political benefits, and serve interest groups that are clients of the government. Readiness to use non-state actors such as Islamist/jihadi groups as proxies, based on ideological linkages.	Maximum respect for other countries' sovereignty as a major constraining principle. Avoid use of non-state actors such as rebel groups as proxies. Use of hard power through formal and institutional channels.
Use of Soft Power	Project Türkiye as a Muslim society that is modern and culturally accessible for non-Western societies, has achieved equality with the West, and engages with the non-Western world. Project Türkiye as a country that can be trusted and mediate between foes such as Russia and Ukraine and Israelis and Palestinians.	Reliance on Türkiye's Islamic and neo-Ottoman identities, and Erdoğan's image as a strong, personalist leader ("leader of the century") and "patron" of the nation. Support popular culture and globally popular television dramas reflecting neo-Ottoman, consumer-oriented Muslim identity and normalizing neo-patrimonial rule.	Bolster Türkiye's identity as a secular democracy, a member of Western institutions, a westernizing power committed to protecting the interests of non-Western people, and a country rooted in Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's legacy and progressive vision, particularly with respect to gender equality. Support popular culture and television dramas highlighting Türkiye's Muslim as well as secular, democratic, and westernizing face.
Geopolitical and Geo-economic Position	Remain anchored in Western institutions but remain flexible to protect interests in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. In the Global South, differentiate Türkiye from Western competitors by projecting a sense of "partnership of equals" and through "win-win" projects, humanitarian assistance, and social developmental projects. Development of an independent defense industry. Further energy security through the TurkStream gas pipeline and the Akkuyu nuclear power plant in collaboration with Russia. Protect security interests in Cyprus, Azerbaijan, Syria, and Iraq. Deepen relations with and expand market share in Africa. Protect interests in disputes over Eastern Mediterranean maritime lines and energy sources. Maintain close relations with Azerbaijan. Oppose discriminatory treatment by Western allies, such as the EU's unwillingness to accept Türkiye as a member with its own identity.	Build organic and extra-institutional relations with specific business sectors to develop state capitalism and a neo-patrimonial welfare state at home. Use disputes such as in the Eastern Mediterranean to stoke nationalism and opposition-bashing at home.	Formal and rights-based social welfare state and social-market economy. More formal and institutional relations with the private sector. Remain open to multilateral conflict-resolution in disputes such as those in the Eastern Mediterranean.
Issue	**Cross-Party Consensus**	**Erdoğan and the AKP**	**Main Opposition Party, CHP**

Civilizational Goals	Achieving "highest level of contemporary civilization"—the motto underlying Atatürk's developmental vision.	Reviving Türkiye's Islamic and Ottoman roots. Promoting a neo-patrimonial and neoliberal state-society relationship. Treating citizens more as customers, clients, and subjects.	Westernizing while remaining West-skeptical. View relations with the EU less as transactional and more as a long-term project aimed at advancing civilizational goals such as social and cultural development, the rule of law, and human rights. Republican vision of a state-society relationship based on dignified citizens, a representative state, and strong political community.
Regime Goals	Democratization and political development.	Use activist foreign policy to generate domestic support for autocratic rule. Facilitate backsliding in democracy, secularism, and the rights-based social welfare state. Nationalist, religious-nationalist, neo-Ottoman, and West-bashing foreign policy discourse and jingoism.	Consolidation of a secular, liberal- and social-democratic regime.
State Political Unity and Territorial Integrity	Oppose Kurdish separatism and irredentism. Resolve the Kurdish conflict democratically by maintaining political and territorial integrity as well as a strong, shared national identity.	Resolve the Kurdish conflict on the condition that Kurds accept a neo-patrimonial authoritarian regime, based on Islamic and Ottoman unity. Promotion of identity politics.	View the Kurdish conflict as a social conflict and a democratic deficit to be resolved through principled reforms.

Source: Author's analysis drawing on party programs and discourse, policy record, academic writing, and relevant op-eds.

On balance, the AKP and Erdoğan's foreign policy broadly mirrors that of other authoritarian middle powers—subordinating foreign policy to authoritarian regime survival at home.[36] A CHP government, by contrast, would likely pursue what Finland's President Alexander Stubb calls "values-based realism"[37]—advancing Turkish interests alongside liberal and social democracy at home and rule-based external relations. [38]

Populist Foreign Policymaking: Centralization and Transactionalism

Türkiye's foreign policy under Erdoğan and the AKP has evolved in tandem with their efforts to centralize decisionmaking in the presidency and make it less anchored in other established bureaucracies, first through what Erdoğan called a "de facto presidential system"

in 2014 and then through the adoption of an executive presidency in 2018. This reflects the pattern associated with right-wing populist governments: executive centralization, de-institutionalization and personalization of policymaking, non-diplomatic and combative discourse, predilection for dealmaking, transactionalism, and direct leader-to-leader diplomacy.[39]

The more centralized and personalized, and thus less constrained, approach allows flexibility and rapid adjustments. It also makes it easier to deploy non-state actors—such as independent or "government-organized" nongovernmental organizations, business networks, religious communities, and even armed groups—to achieve foreign policy objectives.

However, the use of personalized and extra-institutional channels also increases the risks of corruption, erosion of meritocracy, and the blurring of state policy with private gain. In Transparency International's global corruption ranking, Türkiye ranked 124 out of 182 countries in 2025, a big fall from fifty-four in 2012 and sixty-five (out of 102) in 2002.[40] Since Hakan Fidan, the long-time head of the National Intelligence Organization, became foreign minister in 2023, the ministry's operational style has come to resemble that of the intelligence service: discreet, security-centered, and oriented toward strategic leverage rather than traditional diplomatic processes.

> **To stay in power, Erdoğan and the AKP do not only rely on populist votes; they also draw on a business community that is, in general, quite docile.**

The political economy of gaining and maintaining domestic dominance is central to understanding the foreign policy style of Erdoğan and the AKP. To stay in power, they do not only rely on populist votes; they also draw on a business community that is, in general, quite docile. The corporate-owned pro-government media is instrumental in maintaining their image of being far superior to any alternative. Close ties between the state and firms also help to shore up economic conditions and finance political campaigns and social transfers in the run-up to elections.[41] The government has strong incentives to sustain its excessively activist middle-power policy in places like Syria and Africa because this rests on a quid pro quo: firms support the government and, in return, the government facilitates their access to favorable investment opportunities in these regions.

The 2016 agreement with the EU provides a stark example of Erdoğan-era transactionalism. Türkiye agreed to staunch the flow of migrants to Europe, which led to an increase in their number in the country. Erdoğan could have used the considerable leverage from the EU's dependence on Ankara to stem migration to secure substantial gains for Turkish citizens, such as revitalizing the country's stalled accession process or modernizing the outdated Customs Union Agreement.[42] Instead, he secured around €6 billion (approximately $6.75 billion) of EU funding in exchange for the immense social, economic, and political costs of hosting around 4 million forcibly displaced people, 2–3 million of them from Syria, allowing the strategic relationship to sidestep the accession process.[43] Promised benefits such as visa-free

travel to the EU for Turkish citizens never materialized, largely due to disagreements over Ankara's anti-terror legislation. However, Erdoğan came out of this with a major partisan benefit: He was able to use fears about migration as leverage in disputes with the EU and as a means of muting EU criticism of Türkiye's democratic backsliding.[44]

All in all, the EU's reliance on Erdoğan regarding the Syrian war, migration, and instability in Türkiye's southern and eastern neighborhoods has deepened its preference for transactional stability and "stabilitocracy over support for democracy."[45] European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen merely issued "a carefully worded expression of 'deep concern'" in response to the arrest and imprisonment of Erdoğan's main presidential rival, Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, and Erdoğan's crackdown on the CHP, since March 2025.[46] The recent strains in transatlantic relations and concerns over the future of NATO may reinforce this trend by augmenting the importance of Türkiye for European security.

Transnational Linkages

Erdoğan and the AKP have built a wide range of transnational ties. These include leader-centric networks; party and parliamentary alliances; networks rooted in shared faith, ideology, and narratives; ties with think tanks and nongovernmental organizations; and opportunistic alignments with other right-wing populist and authoritarian actors. As democratic backsliding continued, these alliances increasingly reflected the regime's autocratic priorities.

Party-to-Party Interactions

The AKP was a member of the European Conservatives and Reformists Party between 2013 and 2018. The AKP left in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt, as the party tightened its grip on power and moved further from the European party's pro-democracy position. The AKP has also maintained informal but close cooperative relations with illiberal parties such as the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, Fidesz in Hungary, and the Serbian Progressive Party. These alignments with other populist or authoritarian actors are grounded in a shared foreign policymaking style and view of how power works.

Transnational Movement Infrastructure

Over time, these transnational linkages have expanded and deepened. The most significant has been the relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. The AKP traces its roots to the Islamist National Outlook movement, which has maintained ideological affinities and organizational linkages with the Muslim Brotherhood since the 1960s.[47] Under Erdoğan, these ties have been strengthened, and Türkiye has provided significant support to

Brotherhood-affiliated groups, including material resources, political and military training, and sanctuary.[48] In the wake of various geopolitical setbacks for the organization, particularly the military coup against its short-lived government in Egypt in 2013, Istanbul was a primary hub for its activities, hosting its foundations, organizations, and television channels.

A second major transnational linkage, also grounded in shared faith and ideology, was the partnership between the AKP and the Gülenist movement, which collapsed due to in-fighting between 2012 and 2016. The movement is rooted in Naqshibendi-Nurcu Sufi religious orders in Türkiye, and it has members, informal networks, schools, companies, and professional associations in places ranging from Central Asia to the Balkans, Africa, and the United States. Gülenist-affiliated networks were highly influential in shaping foreign policy during the AKP's first decade in power, providing the government with information, contacts, and institutional capacity.[49]

Religious orders have also provided important cross-border networks that inform and enable Erdoğan's foreign policy. The Naqshibendi-Nurcu Sufi order, for example, has extensive influence in Türkiye and Iraq, and Erdoğan's governments used it to build a cooperative relationship with Iraqi Kurds.

These ties are informal and nonexclusive; they do not constitute formal alliances. The state is the ultimate decisionmaker and dominant partner, and it often seeks to bring religious networks under its control. At the same time, these actors significantly inform and enable foreign policy.

Institutional and State-Adjacent Networks

Türkiye has long-standing engagement with non-state actors, especially in the religious sphere. For example, it has long used cultural and religious diplomacy as instruments of soft power, through state, semi-state, and private sector organizations. These include the Directorate (now Presidency) of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which has developed into a vast organization that runs mosques, employs preachers, and provides humanitarian assistance across Europe, North America, Africa, and Central Asia.[50]

Party and regime interests have reshaped such engagement. Before Erdoğan came to power, Diyanet promoted a form of Islamic teaching that was careful to respect constitutional secularism, to avoid organic relations with religious orders, and to exclude religious extremism. Under him, it has become a vehicle of democratic backsliding and Sunni-Muslim social engineering.[51] Moreover, Diyanet has deepened its relations with religious orders, blurring the boundaries between the formal and informal and the national and transnational. In addition to being an instrument of soft power, religious ideology can be mobilized to bolster the regime's support among religious voters.

Implications and Takeaways

The record of the first half of the twentieth century offers a sobering reminder of the risks inherent in an international system in which great and middle powers seek to maximize their interests, unconstrained by democracy and rule of law at home or by international rules and norms abroad. The models of statecraft adopted by right-wing populist actors are not reflected well in history. However forcefully they critique existing institutions, they struggle to offer a convincing alternative to a rules-based order.

The developments in Türkiye have important parallels with those in the United States and elsewhere. Since Trump's return to office and his rapid reshaping of domestic institutions and aspects of the "post-national" liberal international order,[52] several patterns have become clear. First, the international system is entering a period of heightened uncertainty, driven by the interaction between domestic political changes and broader geopolitical shifts. Second, populist leaders have often been quicker than their rivals to recognize and exploit these transformations. Third, liberal-democratic actors have struggled to adapt, finding themselves in a largely reactive posture.

Erdoğan and the AKP can be seen as having been early responders to shifting global conditions. They pursued Türkiye's interests as a middle power accordingly, but they did so with a populist-Islamist worldview. While this resulted in some rational policies in line with the existing cross-party consensus, it has also produced many policies that are "semi-loyal,"[53] not only to the liberal international order led by the West, but also to a rules- and institutions-based global order. This has produced many adverse consequences for the country. These include opaque transnational linkages, strained relations with the EU and the United States, the decline of soft power as a Muslim and secular democracy, unfettered immigration, environmental degradation, democratic backsliding, and recurring economic instability.

As a middle power whose growing economy is deeply integrated with global supply chains and dependent on capital inflows, export markets, and oil and gas imports, Türkiye benefits from the peace, predictability, and stability that are provided by a rules- and institutions-based global order. Hence, it can be expected to support these orders based on principle. Under AKP and Erdoğan, however, Türkiye is still embedded in global institutions, but appears to support them out of necessity or for their material benefits alone. It charges these multilateral institutions with ulterior motives and ethnic-religious biases without proposing viable paths to make them more inclusive and just. And, while keeping one foot in the liberal international order, Türkiye has cultivated ties with illiberal regimes and actors.

Erdoğan's dual imperative in foreign policy may not be sustainable: Domestic autocratization and state de-institutionalization undermine rational policymaking based on national interest. Turkish foreign policy echoes that of other authoritarian middle powers—which are inherently "more self-serving . . . and volatile than their democratic

counterparts"[54]—limiting Türkiye's ability to reliably contribute to European and democratic security. And should autocratization—most recently the deposing of CHP leadership—destabilize the country, the risks would extend well beyond Türkiye.[55] The contest between Erdoğan's governing coalition and opposition actors like the CHP is both ideological and geopolitical. For Türkiye, dueling visions of politics at home map onto competing orientations abroad. One vision privileges personalized power and selective defiance, while the other emphasizes institutionalized decisionmaking, democracy, and alignment with a rules-based international order. The outcome of this contest will determine whether Türkiye aligns more closely with democratic or authoritarian powers in global politics.

Notes

1 On May 21, 2026, an Ankara appeals court—acting beyond its constitutional authority—annulled the CHP's 2023 congress, removed Özgür Özel and the elected leadership, and reinstated Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, in what critics widely regard as a government attempt to neutralize the opposition. Özel and his supporters have denounced the ruling as illegitimate. Throughout this paper, references to the CHP mean its elected leadership and cadres. Julia Hahn, "Why Europe Stays Silent in Turkey's Opposition Crisis," DW, June 11, 2026. https://www.dw.com/en/why-europe-stays-silent-in-turkeys-opposition-crisis/video-77478121; Human Rights Watch, "Türkiye: Court Removes Leadership of Main Opposition Party," May 22, 2026. https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/05/22/turkiye-court-removes-leadership-of-main-opposition-party. See also Alper Coşkun, "Turkiye's Middle Power Aspirations," GIS Reports, April 23, 2026, https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/turkiye-middle-power-aspirations/.

2 Murat Somer, "A Long Battle: Turkey's Backsliding and Resistance Through Trench Warfare," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 712, no. 1 (2024): 77–92, https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162251318839.

3 Toygar Sinan Baykan and Murat Somer, "Politics of Notables versus National Machine: Social, Political and State Transformations, Party Organizations and Clientelism during AKP Governments," *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, no. 34 (June 2022), https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.8111.

4 Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); S. Erdem Aytaç and Ezgi Elçi, "Populism in Turkey," in *Populism Around the World* (2019); Sandra Destradi, Johannes Plagemann, and Hakkı Taş, "Populism and the Politicisation of Foreign Policy," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 24, no. 3 (2022): 475–92, https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481221075944. Also see Yannis Stavrakakis, *Populist Discourse* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024).

5 Murat Somer, "Turkey: The Slippery Slope from Reformist to Revolutionary Polarization and Democratic Breakdown," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, no. 1 (2019): 42–61, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716218818056; Selim Erdem Aytaç, Seda Irmak, and Büşra Söylemez-Karakoç, "The Polarised Electorate: Affective Polarisation and Electoral Loyalty in Turkey's 2023 Critical Election," *South European Society and Politics* (2025): 1–27, doi:10.1080/13608746.2025.2597287; Emre Erdoğan and Pınar Uyan-Semerci, "Othering in Politics: How Affective Polarization Undermines Democratic Philia?," *Frontiers in Political Science* 7 (2025), doi:10.3389/fpos.2025.1553889.

6 Sebnem Gumuscu, "The AKP and Stealth Islamization in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 25, no. 3 (2024): 371–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2024.2320725; Ahmet T. Kuru, "Secularism, Islamism, and the Future of Turkey," *Journal of Democracy* 36, no. 3 (2025): 92–105; Murat Somer, "Conquering versus Democratizing the State: Political Islamists and Fourth Wave Democratization in Turkey and Tunisia," *Democratization* 24, no. 6 (2017): 6, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2016.1259216; Murat Somer, "Whither with Secularism or Just Undemocratic Laiklik? The Evolution and Future of Secularism under the AKP," in *The Uncertain Path of the 'New Turkey,'* ed. Valeria Talbot (Milan: ISPI, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 2015).

7 Fatih Çağatay Cengiz, "Resistance to Change: The Ideological Immoderation of the Nationalist Action Party in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 22, no. 3 (2021): 462–88; Ali Çarkoğlu, "The Unlikely Survival of Erdoğan in Turkey's May 2023 Elections," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 62 (September 2024): 162–73, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13655. There are other small right-wing parties on the political scene. These include far-right and right-wing Islamist and nationalist ones, such as offshoots of the AKP and MHP. These parties do not yet have well-established political identities so it is unclear how right-wing populist they would be if they ever came to power. There are also small left-wing populist and one major pro-Kurdish left-wing party, which is currently involved in peace negotiations with the government. Karabekir Akkoyunlu and Yusuf Sarfati, "Blood Gambit: How Autocratizing Populists Fuel Ethnic Conflict to Reverse Election Setbacks – Evidence from Turkey and Israel," *Democratization* 32, no. 2 (2025): 1–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2024.2381686.

8 Murat Somer, "A Long Battle: Turkey's Backsliding and Resistance Through Trench Warfare," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 712, no. 1 (2024): 77–92, https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162251318839.

9 İsmail Cem, "Turkey: Setting Sail to the 21st Century," *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs* 2, no. 3 (1997); Ozan Örmeci, "A Turkish Social Democrat: İsmail Cem," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 1 (2011): 101–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2011.563504.

10 For historical background and contemporary assessment, see Ayşe Zarakol, *Before the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Ayse Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

11 Senem Aydın-Düzgit, Mustafa Kutlay, and E. Fuat Keyman, "Strategic Autonomy in Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Multipolarity: Lineages and Contradictions of an Idea," *International Politics*, ahead of print, January 17, 2025, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-024-00638-w; H. Tarık Oğuzlu, "Turkey as a Restrained Middle Power," *Turkish Studies* 24, no. 3–4 (2023): 673–90, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2023.2171870.

12 George Lawson and Ayşe Zarakol, "Recognizing Injustice: The 'Hypocrisy Charge' and the Future of the Liberal International Order," *International Affairs* 99, no. 1 (2023): 201–17, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiac258.

13 In 1998, Türkiye demonstrated its willingness to use hard power for coercion when it forced Syria to expel the Kurdish insurgent leader Abdullah Öcalan by massing troops along their border and threatening military intervention.

14 Kemal Kirişçi, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40 (April 2009): 29–56, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600005203; Görkem Altınörs and Ümit Akçay, "Authoritarian Neoliberalism, Crisis, and Consolidation: The Political Economy of Regime Change in Turkey," *Globalizations* 19, no. 7 (2022): 1029–53, https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2021.2025290.

15 Gönül Tol, "The Turkey-Brazil-Iran Nuclear Deal: Another Missed Opportunity?," Middle East Institute, 2010, https://mei.edu/publication/turkey-brazil-iran-nuclear-deal-another-missed-opportunity/.

16 Cihan Tuğal, *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Cihan Tuğal, *The Fall of the Turkish Model: How the Arab Uprisings Brought Down Islamic Liberalism* (London: Verso Books, 2016).

17 Behlül Ozkan, "Turkey, Davutoglu and the Idea of Pan-Islamism," *Survival* 56, no. 4 (2014): 119–40, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2014.941570; Murat Somer, "Conquering versus Democratizing the State: Political Islamists and Fourth Wave Democratization in Turkey and Tunisia," *Democratization* 24, no. 6 (2017): 6, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2016.1259216; Senem Aydın-Düzgit and Evren Balta, *Turkey after the July 15th Coup Attempt: When Elites Polarize over Polarization* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, 2017); Birol Başkan and Ömer Taşpınar, *The Nation or the Ummah: Islamism and Turkish Foreign Policy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2022); Banu Eligür, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Sebnem Gumuscu, "The AKP and Stealth Islamization in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 25, no. 3 (2024): 371–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2024.2320725.

18 Ihsan Yilmaz and Nicholas Morieson, "Civilizational Populism in Domestic and Foreign Policy: The Case of Turkey," *Religions* 14, no. 5 (2023): 631, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050631.

19 Marwan M. Kraidy and Omar Al-Ghazzi, "Neo-Ottoman Cool: Turkish Popular Culture in the Arab Public Sphere," *Popular Communication* 11, no. 1 (2013): 17–29, https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2013.747940; Senem B. Çevik, "Turkish Historical Television Series: Public Broadcasting of Neo-Ottoman Illusions," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19, no. 2 (2019): 227–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2019.1622288.

20 Murat Somer, "Conquering versus Democratizing the State: Political Islamists and Fourth Wave Democratization in Turkey and Tunisia," *Democratization* 24, no. 6 (2017): 6, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2016.1259216.

21 Ihsan Yilmaz and Nicholas Morieson, "Civilizational Populism in Domestic and Foreign Policy: The Case of Turkey," *Religions* 14, no. 5 (2023): 631, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050631.

22 Erdem Yörük, "The Long Summer of Turkey: The Gezi Uprising and Its Historical Roots," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113, no. 2 (2014): 419–26, https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2644203; Cihan Tuğal, "'Resistance Everywhere': The Gezi Revolt in Global Perspective," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 49 (October 2013): 157–72, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600002077. Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2017).

23 Murat Somer, "Turkey's Way Out," *Foreign Policy*, January 16, 2014, https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/01/16/turkeys-way-out/; Seda Demiralp, "The Breaking up of Turkey's Islamic Alliance: The AKP-Gulen Conflict and Implications for Middle East Studies," *MERIA* 20, no. 1 (2016): 1-7.

24 Senem Aydın-Düzgit, Mustafa Kutlay, and E. Fuat Keyman, "How Erdoğan Rules Through Crisis," *Journal of Democracy* 34, no. 4 (2023): 80–93; Senem Aydın-Düzgit, Mustafa Kutlay, and E. Fuat Keyman, "Strategic Autonomy in Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Multipolarity: Lineages and Contradictions of an Idea," *International Politics*, ahead of print, January 17, 2025, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-024-00638-w; Mustafa Kutlay and Ziya Öniş, "Understanding Oscillations in Turkish Foreign Policy: Pathways to Unusual Middle Power Activism," *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 12 (2021): 3051–69, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1985449; Ziya Öniş and Mustafa Kutlay, "The New Age of Hybridity and Clash of Norms: China, BRICS, and Challenges of

Global Governance in a Postliberal International Order," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 45, no. 3 (2020): 123–42, https://doi.org/10.1177/0304375420921086; H. Tarık Oğuzlu, "Turkey as a Restrained Middle Power," *Turkish Studies* 24, no. 3–4 (2023): 673–90, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2023.2171870; Digdem Soyaltin-Colella and Tolga Demiryol, "Unusual Middle Power Activism and Regime Survival: Turkey's Drone Warfare and Its Regime-Boosting Effects," *Third World Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2023): 724–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2158080; Hakkı Taş, "Continuity through Change: Populism and Foreign Policy in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly* 43, no. 12 (2022): 2869–87, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2108392; Hakkı Taş, "Erdoğan and the Muslim Brotherhood: An Outside-in Approach to Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East," *Turkish Studies* 23, no. 5 (2022): 722–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2022.2085096; Gönül Tol, *Erdoğan's War: A Strongman's Struggle at Home and in Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

25 Fatih Çağatay Cengiz, "Proliferation of Neopatrimonial Domination in Turkey," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 4 (2020): 507–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2018.1509693; Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, "A Hundred Years of Flux: Turkish Political Regimes from 1921 to 2023," *Turkish Studies* 24, no. 3–4 (2023): 412–34, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2022.2161374; Murat Somer, "Understanding Turkey's Democratic Breakdown: Old vs. New and Indigenous vs. Global Authoritarianism," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 4, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2016.1246548; Branko Milanovic, "The Return of 'Patrimonial Capitalism': A Review of Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*," *Journal of Economic Literature* 52, no. 2 (2014): 519–34, https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.52.2.519.

26 Ziya Öniş, "Turkey under the Challenge of State Capitalism: The Political Economy of the Late AKP Era," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19, no. 2 (2019): 201–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2019.1594856; Toygar Sinan Baykan, *The Justice and Development Party in Turkey: Populism, Personalism, Organization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

27 Tol, *Erdoğan's War*, 127.

28 Tol, *Erdoğan's War*: 132-133.

29 Halil Ibrahim Yenigun, "The New Antinomies of the Islamic Movement in Post-Gezi Turkey: Islamism vs. Muslimism," *Turkish Studies* 18, no. 2 (2016): 229–50, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2016.1262768; Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, "Turkey: How the Coup Failed," *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 1 (2017): 59-73, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0006; M. Hakan Yavuz and Bayram Balcı, *Turkey's July 15th Coup: What Happened and Why* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2018); Aydın-Düzgit and Balta, *Turkey after the July 15th Coup Attempt*.

30 Şener Aktürk, "The Fourth Style of Politics: Eurasianism as a Pro-Russian Rethinking of Turkey's Geopolitical Identity," *Turkish Studies* 16, no. 1 (2015): 54–79, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2015.1021246.

31 In Turkish, "onurlu yalnızlık" (honorable loneliness).

32 Özlem Tür, "Turkey's Role in Middle East and Gulf Security," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 13, no. 4 (2019): 592–603, https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2019.1682305; Behlül Ozkan, "Turkey, Davutoglu and the Idea of Pan-Islamism," *Survival* 56, no. 4 (2014): 119–40, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2014.941570.

33 Lisel Hintz and David E. Banks, "Symbolic Amplification and Suboptimal Weapons Procurement: Explaining Turkey's S-400 Program," *Security Studies* 31, no. 5 (2022): 826–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2022.2153733.

34 Murat Somer, *Return to Point Zero: The Turkish-Kurdish Question and How Politics and Ideas (Re)Make Empires, Nations, and States* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2022); Tol, *Erdoğan's War*. Also see Asli Aydintasbas, "Syria Must Protect Its Minorities," *New York Times*, January 31, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/31/opinion/syria-kurds-turkey-pkk.html.

35 Irfan Kovankaya, "Israeli official website blocked in Turkey after revealing continued trade despite sanctions," *bianet*, March 31, 2026, https://bianet.org/haber/israeli-official-website-blocked-in-turkey-after-revealing-continued-trade-despite-sanctions-318208.

36 Marie-Eve Desrosiers and Nic Cheeseman, *The Rise of Authoritarian Middle Powers and What It Means for World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2026).

37 DRM News, "'This Is Our 1945 Moment' — Finland's President Stubb Warns World Order Is Breaking | AC1G," YouTube video, January 22, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wV-TrfDJscU.

38 Ekrem İmamoğlu, "What the Iran Crisis Means for Middle Powers," Project Syndicate, March 19, 2026, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/how-middle-powers-can-build-a-new-global-order-by-ekrem-imamoglu-2026-03; Özgür Özel, "How We Restore Turkey's Democracy," *Journal of Democracy*, 2026, https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/how-we-restore-turkeys-democracy/; Alper Coşkun, *Turkiye's Middle Power Aspirations*, GIS Reports, April 23, 2026, https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/turkiye-middle-power-aspirations/; Namık Tan, "Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset ve Türkiye'ye Dersler: Carney, Sanchez, Takaichi (Three Political Styles

and Lessons for Turkey)," T24, 2026, https://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/namik-tan/uc-tarz-i-siyaset-ve-turkiyeye-dersler-carney-sanchez-takaichi,54344.

39 Mustafa Aydın, *Türkiye at Crossroads amid Geopolitical Shifts - Lessons for Europe and Türkiye* (Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation for Freedom Türkiye, 2026); Marc Pierini, "Erdoğan and Trump: Affinity over Discord," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2025, https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2025/10/erdogan-and-trump-affinity-over-discord; "Foreign Ministry acting as ideological arm of AKP, says former spokesperson," Duvar English, January 20, 2022, https://www.duvarenglish.com/foreign-ministry-acting-as-ideological-arm-of-akp-says-former-spokesperson-namik-tan-news-60186.

40 Transparency International, "Türkiye," *Transparency.org*, accessed June 1, 2026, https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/t%C3%BCrkiye.

41 Senem Aydın-Düzgit, Mustafa Kutlay, and E. Fuat Keyman, "How Erdoğan Rules Through Crisis," *Journal of Democracy* 34, no. 4 (2023): 80–93.

42 Mehmet Demirbaş, Ali Arslan, and Mustafa Enes Esen, *Modernizing the Turkey–EU Customs Union: Issues and Prospects* (InstituteDE, 2025), https://www.institude.org/report/modernizing-the-turkey-eu-customs-union-issues-and-prospects.

43 Kyilah Terry, "The EU-Turkey Deal, Five Years On: A Frayed and Controversial but Enduring Blueprint," Migration Policy Institute, April 8, 2021, accessed June 9, 2026, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/eu-turkey-deal-five-years-on. Also see Digdem Soyaltin-Colella and Deniz Sert, *Reconstructing Syria: What the EU's Refugee Facility in Turkey Can Teach Us* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2025), http://collections.fes.de/publikationen/1970537; UNHCR Turkey, "Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Türkiye," accessed May 12, 2026, https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/kime-yardim-ediyoruz/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-tuerkiye. Figures include estimated unregistered migrants.

44 Orçun Ulusoy, "Financing Externalisation: The Role That EU Funds Play in Shaping the Turkish Asylum and Migration Policies," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 23, no. 1 (2025): 91–103, https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2024.2407156; Beken Saatçioğlu, "The European Union's Refugee Crisis and Rising Functionalism in EU-Turkey Relations," *Turkish Studies* 21, no. 2 (2020): 169–87, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2019.1586542.

45 Florian Bieber and Cengiz Günay, "The Stabilitocracy Trap. How the EU Enables Autocratization in Its Neighborhood," *European Politics and Society* (2026), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23745118.2026.2658578. Also see Riccardo Gasco, Seren Selvin Korkmaz, and Edgar Şar, "Managed Pragmatism: EU-Türkiye Relations Without a Shared Vision — Insights from Brussels," Istanbul Political Research Institute, 2025. https://istanpol.org/en/post-managed-pragmatism-eu-turkiye-relations-without-a-shared-vision-insights-from-brussels .

46 Seda Gurkan, "Inaction from Brussels over the Arrest of an Opposition Leader in Turkey May Be a Strategic Mistake," The Conversation, April 8, 2025, https://doi.org/10.64628/AB.jpnqxkady; Ekrem Imamoglu, "I Am the Turkish President's Main Challenger. I Was Arrested," *New York Times*, March 28, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/28/opinion/mayor-imamoglu-arrested-erdogan.html; Ekrem İmamoğlu, "Why Turkey's Democratic Future Matters for the World," *Financial Times*, April 15, 2025.

47 Banu Eligür, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

48 Hakkı Taş, "Erdoğan and the Muslim Brotherhood: An Outside-in Approach to Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East," *Turkish Studies* 23, no. 5 (2022): 722–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2022.2085096.

49 Bayram Balci, "The Gülen Movement and Turkish Soft Power." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 4, 2014, accessed on June 10, 2026: https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2014/02/the-gulen-movement-and-turkish-soft-power; Seda Demiralp, "The Breaking up of Turkey's Islamic Alliance: The AKP-Gulen Conflict and Implications for Middle East Studies," *MERIA* 20, no. 1 (2016): 1–7; Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, "Turkey: How the Coup Failed," *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 1: 59–73; İştar Gözaydın, "Religion and Turkey's International Relations," in *Handbook on Religion and International Relations*, Jeffrey Haynes, ed., pp. 331–47; Gönül Tol, *Erdoğan's War: A Strongman's Struggle at Home and in Syria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

50 Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, "Turkey's Diyanet under AKP Rule: From Protector to Imposer of State Ideology?," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 4, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2016.1233663; Ahmet Erdi Öztürk and Bahar Baser, "The Transnational Politics of Religion: Turkey's Diyanet, Islamic Communities and Beyond," *Turkish Studies* 23, no. 5 (2022): 701–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2022.2068414.

51 Sevgi Adak, "Expansion of the Diyanet and the Politics of Family in Turkey under AKP Rule," *Turkish Studies* 22, no. 2 (2021): 200–221, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2020.1813579; Zana Çıtak, "The Transformation of the State-Religion Relationship under the AKP: The Case of the Diyanet," in *Turkey's New State in the Making: Transformations in Legality, Economy and Coercion*, ed. Pınar Bedirhanoğlu, Çağlar Dölek, Funda Hülagu, and Özlem Kaygusuz (London: Zed Books, 2020).

52 Tanja A. Börzel and Michael Zürn, "Contestations of the Liberal International Order: From Liberal Multilateralism to Postnational Liberalism," *International Organization* 75, no. 2 (2021): 282–305, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000570.

53 Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

54 Marie-Eve Desrosiers and Nic Cheeseman, *The Rise of Authoritarian Middle Powers and What It Means for World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2026): 3.

55 Özgür Özel, "Turkey's Democratic Crisis Is Becoming a Security Crisis," Opinion, *Newsweek*, June 1, 2026.

CARNEGIE
ENDOWMENT FOR
INTERNATIONAL PEACE

1779 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20036
CarnegieEndowment.org