

Turkey's Power Game to Control Home and Beyond

By

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The political climate in Turkey is reaching a boiling point with the [jailing](#) of Ekrem İmamoğlu, the mayor of Istanbul and a key challenger to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. İmamoğlu, a prominent figure in the opposition Republican People's Party ([CHP](#)), was widely seen as a serious contender for the presidency. His arrest marks yet another episode in Turkey's relentless struggle for power.

İmamoğlu was [charged](#) with “establishing and leading a criminal organisation, accepting bribes, misconduct in office, unlawfully recording personal data and bid rigging.” Prosecutors have even sought to charge him with “aiding an armed terrorist organisation,” a reference to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been engaged in a decades-long conflict with the Turkish state over its policies of oppression against the Kurds. While the court ruled that this particular charge was “not deemed necessary at this stage,” the broader strategy is clear: in Turkey, anyone who challenges the ruling system can easily be accused of terrorism to be sidelined from power.

What makes İmamoğlu's case particularly striking is the historical irony of his party, the CHP. Since the founding of modern Turkey in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), it was the CHP that institutionalized the denial of Kurdistan and suppression of Kurdish identity—a policy that has been carried forward by every ruling party since. Today, the very tools of repression once used against the Kurds are now being turned against the Kemalists themselves, exposing the cyclical nature of Turkey's political repression.

Turkey is classified as a [brown country](#) with both democratic and authoritarian features, but democracy, legality, and citizenship rights effectively disappear in southeastern Turkey, known by the local Kurds as Northern Kurdistan. Since the 1920s, successive governments have maintained a state of emergency under different guises, all of which are used to systematically suppress Kurdish rights.

Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party ([AKP](#)), backed by the ultranationalist Nationalist Movement Party ([MHP](#)), are pursuing a dual strategy: systematically [eliminating](#) political [rivals](#) while continuing Turkey's long-standing policy of denying Kurdish rights. This is [evident](#) in their approach to Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned PKK leader, and his call for [disarmament](#), which the MHP manipulates for political purposes. One of Erdoğan's latest moves is his attempt to co-opt the Kurdish *Newroz* (New Year)—a significant cultural and political event for Kurds.

Erdoğan [plans](#) to propose that Newroz be celebrated collectively by the “Turkic world” under the auspices of the “[Organization of Turkic States](#)” in May 2025. This is a calculated attempt to erase Kurdish identity from a festival that was once banned by the Turkish state until 1992.

A day after Erdoğan's speech on March 21, 2025, the desire to erase the Kurds as a separate people, became evident in the Kurdistan city of Urmîyeh (Urmia) in western Iran, where Kurds form the majority. Emboldened by Turkish and Azerbaijani-backed efforts, Azeri pan-nationalist mobs, with implicit support from the Iranian regime, gathered in Urmîyeh after a mass Kurdish [Newroz](#) celebration (marking the year 2725). The mobs called for [massacres](#) of the Kurds and a continuing denial of Kurdish identity.

To Erdoğan, Turkey's “[spiritual geography](#)” spans “from Syria to Gaza, from Aleppo to Tabriz [in Iran], from Mosul to Jerusalem.” It is expansive and does not brook any challenge to this view.

As protests erupted in Turkey against İmamoğlu's arrest, demonstrators [chanted](#) "rights, law, justice." These same voices, however, remain silent when it comes to the rights of Kurds, who continue to suffer under the very system their political fathers—Atatürk and the CHP—created. This selective outrage exposes a deeper truth, Turkey's political battle is not about justice but about control. In many respects, Kurds are viewed by the Turks similarly to how the Chinese view Uighurs. Turkish treatment is sometimes little better.

İmamoğlu is still awaiting trial, but history suggests that today's persecutors could become tomorrow's victims. The Kemalists who once labelled Kurds as "terrorists" now face similar accusations themselves, as Turkish power struggles turn inward. What is unfolding is not a fight for democracy but a conflict among Turks to dominate the state apparatus.

Despite their internal rivalry, both the CHP and AKP, along with their Nationalist Movement Party ([MHP](#)) ally, share one common reality—they need the Kurdish vote to win the next general election in 2028 and cement their grip on power. This places the Kurds and the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party ([DEM](#)) in a precarious position, as both factions seek to manipulate Kurdish political aspirations for their own gain. This exposes the so-called "peace" initiative they launched in October 2024 as [insincere](#) from the start. Neither the Kemalists nor Erdoğan's Islamists-nationalists offer true change for the Kurds.

In this high-stakes power struggle, the Kurds must be vigilant against being used as mere pawns in Turkey's internal conflicts. Americans must also pay attention to Turkish politics because Turkey, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, is also home to American nuclear weapons. Thus, Turkish treatment of Kurds serves as a signal for the direction of the Turkish state, which should matter to the United States.

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