

# The transition to democracy in turkey research paper examples

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [Introduction](#) \n \t
2. [Brief Political History](#) \n \t
3. [Constitutional Changes in Turkey](#) \n \t
4. [Major Political Institutions](#) \n \t
5. [Civil Freedoms in Turkey](#) \n \t
6. [Major Economic Sectors](#) \n \t
7. [References](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

## **Introduction**

Over the past four decades, many countries have faced many obstacles in their efforts to build and restore democracy. Turkey is one country that has seen a transition to democracy. When protests broke out in many Arab countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Syria, there have been comparisons that are been made with reference to Turkey. There have been questions such as; could these countries make a transition to democracy by applying the Turkish model? What this means is that Turkey is already considered as a model for democracy. While developed countries such as the United States, Western European Nations and Japan are considered as mature democracies that have highly developed political and economic systems, developed nations such as Turkey are considered as maturing democracies, both politically and economically.

Columnist Cetin (2011) observes that in the face of Arab uprisings, Muslim

Turkey was often cited as a model of the evolution of democracy. Of importance to note is that the development of civic-democratic societies is affected by many conditions which include historical conditions, economic development, corruption, the protectionist status quo, the role of media, the alignment of the elite, the military and the judiciary and the business community. This paper seeks to examine the transition to democracy in Turkey by exploring the country's political history, the major political institutions, the media in the country and the major economic sectors. While Turkey has developed as a democracy, measures and structures need to be put in place to ensure the development of a civic and democratic society that is founded on supremacy of the rule of law. Turkey is an indication that democratization is a process that is worth the efforts.

## **Brief Political History**

According to Yaprak & Senem (2008), the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in WWI led to the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The new republic was internationally recognized in the year 1923 by the Lausanne Treaty. The Republican People's Party (RPP) was the party that was responsible for the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, and it carried out several social, economic and political reforms that created a secular republic in a country that was predominantly Muslim. Until the Year 1946, Turkey was a one-party state with RPP being the single-party regime. The president was Kemal Ataturk, and his Kemalist ideology was that of a modern Turkish society that would be part of the socially and politically more advanced Western countries (Keyman & Aydin, 2004). While regular elections were conducted, only

candidates who had the approval of RPP were permitted to contest at the ballot.

The first multi-party elections were held in 1946 for the first time in Turkey. This is when a section of politicians backed by businessmen and elites split from the RPP and founded the center-right Democratic Party (DP). It was in 1950 that democracy was established in Turkey when RPP conceded after losing to DP in the country's national elections the same year. DP had the support of the Turkish Armed Forces, but in 1960, junior officers organized a coup that saw the DP party closed down and its 3 leaders executed (Cooper, 2002). The 1960s and the 1970s were characterized by military interventions in Turkey's politics. However, the military's involvement had two characteristics. One, the Turkish Armed Forces did not hold on to power for lengthy periods but were quick to hand over power to civilian governments. Two, the Turkish Armed forces had justifications for their involvements and interventions in democracy. For example, DP was ousted on accusations of infringing secularism and having dictatorial tendencies.

Following the withdrawal of the military from active politics in 1973, there was increased street violence and terrorism. The economic situation worsened with inflation rising from 6.7% in 1973 to 107.2% percent in 1980 and unemployment reaching 14.8%. These challenges are what led the military to take over in September 1980, with the military commanders rooting for the enactment of a new constitution. Keyman & Aydin (2004) observe that this military intervention was quite successful in restoring order back in Turkey. In 1983, the National Security Council was dissolved and the transition to democracy began (Ahmad, 1985). Despite promising adoption

of democratic processes, constitutional changes of reforms are not very notable in Turkey.

## **Constitutional Changes in Turkey**

Constitutional changes in Turkey can be largely attributed to military interventions. For example, Yaprak & Senem (2008) observe that when junior officers orchestrated a coup in 1960, the junta prepared a new constitution. Also, in 1971, military commanders threatened an intervention which led to the government enacting laws and changing the constitution in accordance with the wishes of the armed forces. The country's current constitution is the 1982 constitution which was a direct result of the military intervention in 1980. However, its adoption was through a constitutional referendum. With this constitution being labeled as authoritarian, there has been a reform process for a new constitution in turkey. However, it is this 1982 constitution that established the country's major political institutions that are still in place today.

## **Major Political Institutions**

According to VanderLippe (2005), the Turkish Republic is a democratic, social and secular state that is governed by the rule of law. The Turkish Republic's constitutional order has its basis on the principle of separation of powers. The three equal powers are the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. The Council of Ministers exercises the executive power while legislative powers rest on the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Turkey boasts of an independent Judiciary, meaning that is independent of the legislature and the executive. Turkey can be described as a democratic country that has

been able to hold free and fair elections. For example, Dagi (1996) observes that the parliamentary elections of 1987 and 1991 demonstrated the country's commitment to peaceful power transfer and pluralist policies. In 1993, Turkey had its first woman prime minister. These are all indications that Turkey is maturing as a democracy and is comparable to developed democratic societies. While the separation of powers indicates aspects such as an independent judiciary and transparent systems, Turkey scores relatively on civil liberties and freedoms.

### **Civil Freedoms in Turkey**

In Turkey, the media industry is vibrant. There are thousands of national and local radio stations, hundreds of TV channels, a rapid growth of broadband internet use and several dozen newspapers. However, Alpay (2012) observes that though the media is not state-run, about 70% is owned by few cross-media groups which have vested interests. Due to this fact, the media landscape is extremely nationalistic and biased. As such, any attempts of practicing independent journalism are extremely dangerous. Columnist Alpay (2012) observes that the media is not capable of fulfilling its functions in a democratic setting. Unlike the freedom of press that is enjoyed in many of the developed democracies such as the United States and Britain, this freedom is not guaranteed in Turkey. Alpay (2012) observes that several journalists lose their jobs due to their political opinions, and there is a spread of self-censorship among opinion writers opposing the government. In an article carried by the New York Times in 2011, Arsu (2011) observed that many people marched in Istanbul protesting a crackdown on the press in

Turkey. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been blamed for arrests and detentions of journalists, a move that is termed as an effort to silence critics of the governing party.

In terms of civil rights and liberties, the constitution guarantees fundamental freedoms and rights such as the right to property, right to life, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of association and freedom of assembly. By entering into various human rights commitments, Turkey has demonstrated its commitment to guaranteeing civil liberties. The issue of contention regarding civil liberties has been minority rights, especially for Kurdish people and women. Turkey is home to a number of ethnic groups namely Kurds, Turks and Armenians. However, the status of the Kurdish people in Turkey is one that has been characterized by several human rights violations. AKP, the political power that is currently in power, has introduced reforms that have seen minority rights for non-Muslims and Kurds a priority (Turam, 2012).

However, the limited political space for ethnic minorities especially the Kurds has led to increased violence in the predominant Kurdish southeast. Despite these efforts, a report by Human Rights Watch (2013) concludes that although the AKP government has scored highly in economic growth, it has scored a low in addressing the human rights record in the country. The human rights watchdog observes that the government uses terror laws to incarcerate many Kurdish political activists, journalists, human rights defenders. In addition, free media and speech remain restricted, with fair trial rights being violated. These human rights concerns are hindering the country's efforts to join the European Union as a full member. Despite a bad

record of upholding civil freedoms and liberties, Turkey's economy has continued to perform better.

## **Major Economic Sectors**

Turkey's economy has enjoyed relative growth. For example, the economic growth was at an average rate of 7.5% between the years 2002 and 2011. According to Siegel (2012), figures indicate that the GDP of Turkey grew by 8.5 percent in 2011. In the wake of the global financial crisis, Turkey's economy managed to post positive growth. This economic growth is fueled by the country's major sectors that include the industrial sector, the agricultural sector, the service sector, and the construction and the contracting sectors. The services sector accounts for 64.7% of the country's GDP, the industrial sector accounts for 25.9% and the agricultural sector accounts for about 9.4% of the total GDP.

The country's economic growth has been largely attributed to radical economic reforms which included the adoption of a free market policy with reduced government intervention, liberalization of import regulations, implementation of flexible policy for exchange rates, deregulation of financial markets, establishment of free trade zones, decentralization of government activities and privatization of state economic enterprises (Taspinar, 2012). For example, the country has managed to attract lots of foreign direct investment especially due to the privatization efforts. Turkey is an emerging economy that offers many opportunities both to local and foreign investors, and has been often labeled as a model Muslim democracy.

Conclusion



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