POMED PROJECT ON MIDDLE EAST DEMOCRACY

After the June Elections: No Brakes on Turkey's Authoritarian Slide

Howard Eissenstat

August 2018

SNAPSHOT

SUMMARY

- Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, did not win the June 24, 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections in a landslide, but they did not need to do so. Erdoğan's relatively narrow victory cements his control for the foreseeable future.
- The election featured robust opposition campaigning and high turnout, but it was in no way free and fair. In recent years, Erdoğan has developed his own version of electoral authoritarianism.
- This system retains some democratic trappings and avoids the mass fraud or exclusion of rivals seen in places like Russia or Egypt, but elections are "rigged just enough" to ensure that Erdoğan prevails.
- The opposition is left with no attractive choices in reversing this trend. Continuing to participate in an unfair electoral system lends it legitimacy and perpetuates Erdoğan's control. More aggressive challenging of the system, however, could lead to a repressive backlash that would make life even harder for millions of Turks who oppose the country's slide toward authoritarianism.

INTRODUCTION

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, did not win Turkey's June 24, 2018 snap presidential and parliamentary elections by the overwhelming margin typical of autocrats. Erdoğan secured another presidential term by just 2.6 percent of the vote, and the AKP retained control of the Grand National

Assembly thanks only to its coalition with the nationalist-right MHP (Nationalist Action Party).[1] Given Turkey's sharp political divide, with roughly half the electorate deeply devoted to Erdoğan and the rest deeply opposed to him, these results are unsurprising and at first glance suggest a close race, hard won by the incumbents.

The reality is more complex. Erdoğan did not win in a landslide, but he did not need to do so; a close victory delivered him all the powers he required. Nor did his party engage in massive ballot stuffing or other obvious fraud. Instead, Erdoğan has crafted an electoral process that retains some democratic trappings, but is tilted toward the regime, making it very difficult, perhaps impossible, for the opposition to win.

Erdoğan did not win in a landslide, but he did not need to do so; a close victory delivered him all the powers he required.

Moreover, the repercussions of the June 24 vote are profound. With this election, Erdoğan's super-charged "executive presidency," narrowly approved in a controversial April 2017 constitutional referendum, comes fully into effect.[2] The outcome on June 24 dashed the hopes of the political opposition that it could prevail in this election and stop Turkey's authoritarian slide. The opposition is left with extremely limited—and perilous—options for challenging Erdoğan's rule going forward.

THE PRESIDENT'S SWEEPING NEW POWERS

In the new political system, Erdoğan rules alone; the position of prime minister has been abolished. Parliament's role has been circumscribed; with the president's party in power, it effectively serves as a rubber stamp. Erdoğan can establish or eliminate ministries at will and promulgate decrees with the force of law. He alone determines who will serve in the executive branch. Erdoğan also now chooses six of the 13 judges on the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors and 12 of the 15 judges on the Constitutional Court.[3] The judiciary—over which Erdoğan has worked hard for years to gain control—is completely bent to his will.[4] Between his new powers and the AKP's purge of thousands of judges and prosecutors (along with tens of thousands other government employees) in the wake of the failed coup attempt two years ago, Erdoğan has locked the gates on

1. In the presidential contest, Erdoğan improved upon his 2014 performance, in which he gained 51.8 percent of the vote. He won 52.6 percent in the first round, crushing the opposition's hopes that it could force him into a run-off. Muharrem İnce, the candidate of the main opposition party, the center-left, secularist CHP (Republican People's Party), received 30.64 percent, garnering support beyond his party's traditional base of about 25 percent of the electorate. Selahattin Demirtaş of the pro-Kurdish, liberal HDP, running from prison, received 8.4 percent. Meral Akşener, of the new center-right, nationalist İyi (Good) Party, a recent breakaway from the MHP, received a little more than 7 percent.

In the parliamentary race, the AKP got 42 percent of the vote, a decrease of nearly 7 percent and a loss of 21 seats (in an expanded parliament) from the 2015 vote. However, because the AKP and MHP formed an electoral coalition, the MHP's relative success—garnering 11 percent of the vote and surpassing the 10 percent threshold needed to enter parliament—enabled the AKP to retain control of the Grand National Assembly. The CHP joined with the İyi Party and Saadet, a small Islamist party, to form its own coalition; the CHP received 22.65 percent of the vote and its İyi Party coalition partners received almost 10 percent. The HDP, running outside of the opposition coalition, received 11.7 percent of the vote.

2. Alan Makovsky, "Erdoğan's Proposal for an Empowered Presidency," Center for American Progress, March 22, 2017, https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2017/03/22/428908/erdogans-proposal-empowered-presidency/

3. The others are chosen by the parliament which, since it is controlled by Erdoğan's coalition, means that all of these positions will be filled by reliable loyalists.

4. In its most recent global rule of law index, the World Justice Project ranks Turkey at 101 out of 137 countries, the lowest of any country in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region. See World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2017–2018, June 2018, https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/WJP-ROLI-2018-June-Online-Edition_0.pdf

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan addresses the crowd during his inauguration at the Presidential Palace in Ankara, Turkey, July 9, 2018. Photo: *AK Party official website*

any return to judicial independence in the foreseeable future.

Under the executive presidency, Erdoğan, in power since 2003 (first as prime minister and since 2014 as president), can serve two additional consecutive terms of five years each. Barring unforeseen events or ill health, he is likely to remain in power until 2028. Alan Makovsky, an astute reader of the new constitution, has suggested that with a little creativity, the president could resign late in his second term, run again, and rule for a third five-year term, "potentially holding office until 2034."[5] And, of course, there is no reason that the constitution cannot be changed once again to allow for additional time in office. Assuming that Erdoğan does step down in 2028, however, his rule will have lasted for 25 years, just five years shy of Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak's nearly 30 years in power.

ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIANISM, ERDOĞAN-STYLE

In recent years political scientists have written about the phenomenon of "electoral authoritarianism," in which autocrats hold regular multiparty elections but set up the system to preclude any real chance of an opposition victory.[6] Electoral authoritarianism maintains the fiction of contested elections while actually enhancing regime control. Autocrats typically use such elections to mobilize the ruling party and to make a show of "the nation's backing" for the leader and his program.

Erdoğan's brand of electoral authoritarianism, however, differs from that found in places like Cambodia, Russia, or Egypt, where regimes tend to stuff ballot boxes on a wide scale or go to other obvious lengths to produce artificially large victories over a minuscule, or

5. Makovsky, "Erdoğan's Proposal for an Empowered Presidency."
6. For a brief review of this literature, see Yonatan L. Morse, "The Era of Electoral Authoritarianism," *World Politics* 64, no. 1 (January 2012): 161–198, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887111000281

fake, opposition. For example, in March 2018, Egypt's Abdel Fattah al-Sisi secured a second presidential term with a specious 97 percent of the vote. His sole "challenger" was an obscure regime lackey whom the regime drafted to run after it had jailed several credible rivals. Al-Sisi's re-election was so blatant a charade that to avoid an embarrassingly low turnout, the authorities resorted to various threats and pressures to compel voters to participate.

Turkey's June 24 election, by contrast, saw vigorous contestation by genuine opposition parties that boast millions of supporters, have a margin of freedom to organize, regularly win parliamentary seats, and control many municipalities. Turnout was an impressive 87 percent and there is every reason to believe that citizens went to the polls with the belief that their votes counted. There had even been considerable speculation among some foreign and Turkish analysts—and palpable enthusiasm among voters—that the opposition might actually beat Erdoğan.[7] The main opposition candidate Muharrem İnce of the CHP (Republican People's Party) proved to be an able campaigner. He seemed to match Erdoğan's skill at playing the role of tough-talking, charismatic patriarch and drew massive, enthusiastic crowds in CHP strongholds. In the parliamentary race, there was conjecture that the İyi Party led by Meral Akşener, who, like İnce, received a lot of warm coverage in the Western press, might be able to challenge the AKP from the right and perhaps even drive Erdoğan's allies in the MHP out of the Grand National Assembly altogether.[8]

Some observers acknowledged that the playing field was uneven, that one presidential candidate, Selahattin Demirtaş of the HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party), was forced to campaign from jail. But such concerns were seen as peripheral to the larger story of a vibrant electoral campaign that might be able to stop Erdoğan's authoritarian march. That overly optimistic narrative, as it turned out, focused too much on social media campaigns, speeches, and personalities, and too little on the ways in which the very structure of the electoral system had been transformed.

Structural manipulations that alter the terrain of competition just enough in a closely divided electorate are the core of Erdoğan's strategy for ensuring victory at the polls.

In Turkey, the ideal of electoral democracy has been institutionalized since the 1950s, and remains sacred for the vast majority of citizens, most of whom still believe strongly in contested multiparty elections. In this political culture, carrying out fraud on a mass scale could usher in a crisis; Erdoğan's brand of control, therefore, takes these realities into account. Rather than blocking opposition candidates from running or engaging in barefaced, wide-scale cheating, structural manipulations that alter the terrain of competition just enough in a closely divided electorate are the core of Erdoğan's strategy for ensuring victory at the polls. This approach keeps the main opposition politically neutered while giving elections an aura of democratic legitimacy.

While most Turks retain an overall faith in the electoral process, in recent years apparent electoral improprieties have tarnished the country's reputation for relatively clean, efficiently run elections. In the 2014 municipal elections, there were significant concerns over apparent vote manipulation in Ankara. In the 2015 parliamentary elections, after the HDP showed surprising strength and threatened

7. See Safak Pavey, "The Man Who Could Topple Erdoğan," *New York Times*, June 19, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/19/opinion/ince-erdogan-turkey-election.html

8. For example, see Carlotta Gall, "A Rival Steps Up to Challenge Turkey's President Erdogan," *New York Times*, January 5, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/05/world/europe/turkey-aksener-erdogan.html

CHP presidential candidate Muharrem İnce's final campaign rally, İstanbul, June 23, 2018. Photo: *Muharrem İnce official website*

to weaken the AKP's hold on power, the AKP stalled on the creation of a government, forcing a new election a few months later in which the ruling party regained its parliamentary majority. Taking advantage of the renewal of the conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, the AKP then initiated a crackdown on the HDP, jailing hundreds of its leading members and replacing scores of HDP-led municipalities with AKP "caretaker" governments. Shortly before the 2017 referendum, the government promulgated a decree stripping the Supreme Elections Board, or YSK, of its capacity to fine media outlets for biased electoral coverage. The referendum also saw the government use the state of emergency powers in place since the 2016 coup attempt to give the "yes" camp an unfair advantage and to harass "no" campaigners. On referendum day itself, the YSK, in contravention to the law, ruled that some 2.5 million unstamped ballots should be counted.[9] The move raised serious concerns among the opposition and international election observers, but the final arbiter of such decisions is the YSK itself. One cannot know whether all—or indeed any—of the unstamped ballots were falsified as "yes" votes, or even whether they affected the outcome, a narrow victory (51.4 percent) for the government. The bottom line is that the opposition had been invited to a contest in which the rules might be changed at any time.

AN ELECTION THAT WAS "RIGGED JUST ENOUGH"

For the June 2018 election, the government introduced yet more measures that greatly enhanced its ability to influence the process to ensure a favorable outcome. In March, about

9. Tuvan Gumrukcu and Gulsen Solakar, "Impossible to Know Scale of Unstamped Turkish Votes: Lawyer," Reuters, April 19, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-politics-lawyer/impossible-to-know-scale-of-unstamped-turkish-votes-lawyer-idUSKBN-17L1NJ

a month before the election was announced, the government introduced a far-reaching new electoral law.[10] Building on Erdoğan's earlier weakening of the YSK, the new law removed political party representatives from the electoral board, leaving its membership composed only of civil servants. Given the extent of the AKP's influence over the civil service, this change effectively guaranteed that the YSK would be reliable in a crisis. The importance of this cannot be overstated. The YSK is the final arbiter of any disputes about the election; not even the Supreme Court can challenge its rulings. Erdoğan has transformed the institution most responsible for ensuring a free and fair election into one that is loyal to the ruling party.

Opposition parties initially protested vociferously against the new electoral law and there were scuffles in parliament as it passed, but in the end, they accepted the changes and campaigned as if nothing had changed.

The new electoral law also provided for parties to form coalitions and to campaign as blocs, signaling the formalization of the AKP-MHP alliance, which, as it would turn out, would be critical to the AKP's retaining an overall majority in parliament. In addition, the law made it easier for government officials to move polling station locations based on "security concerns" and for security personnel to access polling stations. These new rules made it harder for thousands of voters in eastern and southeastern Turkey to reach polling stations and facilitated voter intimidation by security forces. The new law also loosened controls on unstamped ballots, a particularly troubling move in light of what had occurred in the constitutional referendum. Taken as a whole, these changes shifted the electoral ground in the AKP's favor. At least some of them directly undermined important safeguards for the vote. Opposition parties initially protested vociferously against the new electoral law and there were scuffles in parliament as it passed, but in the end, they accepted the changes and campaigned as if nothing had changed.

The state of emergency afforded Erdoğan additional means to influence the process. The ongoing purge of political enemies since the coup attempt, the closing of some 1,800 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the expropriation of their property, the arrest of leading civil society figures carried out under its powers—all had an obvious chilling effect on the election environment.[11] In the weeks leading up to June 24, hundreds of HDP party members, including many of those planning to serve as poll-watchers, were detained. They joined much of the HDP leadership in prison, including its presidential candidate, Demirtaş, who has been jailed since November 2016.[12]

The AKP's direct or indirect control over nearly all of the media ensured that most heard only the government's narrative, particularly for those who relied on broadcast media. In a report highly critical of the integrity of the electoral process, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) noted the overwhelming support for the AKP and Erdoğan in both state-owned and private

10. Ayla Jean Yackley, "Turkey Changes Electoral Law in Boost for Ruling Party," *Al-Monitor*, March 15, 2018, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/03/turkey-changes-electoral-law-benefit-akp.html

11. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report on the Impact of the State of Emergency on Human Rights in Turkey, Including an Update on the South-East, January – December 2017*, (n.p.: March 2018), 3.

12. Diego Cupolo, "The Fate of Turkey's Democracy Lies with the Kurds," *The Atlantic*, June 13, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/turkey-erdogan-kurds-vote-hdp-akp/563573/

Screenshot of a prerecorded campaign speech by imprisoned presidential candidate of the HDP Selahattin Demirtaş, shown on state broadcaster TRT on June 17, 2018.

media.[13] The OSCE explained that "whenever [Demirtaş] was covered, it was either predominantly or exclusively [negative]."[14] In fact [state television] TRT1 dedicated so much negative news… to [the CHP's İnce] that he was covered more than all the other contestants, including the incumbent."[15]

The government also imposed significant limitations on campaigning. According to the OSCE, which conducted the largest international observation mission, bans in half a dozen provinces "restricted public meetings, demonstrations, and setting up political parties."[16] In Ankara, the HDP filed eight reports to the police regarding obstruction of its campaign activities; the party was forced to cancel a rally when "police were not able to guarantee the security of the rally due to the proximity of an AKP rally."[17] In 14 other provinces, campaign events were held only by permission of the governor. Eastern towns were subject to dramatic restrictions. The OSCE also reported that in Tunceli, there was "a complete ban on public events," while in Bitlis, one district remained under curfew for the entire campaign.[18] The Human Rights Association, a Turkish NGO, reported more than a hundred violent attacks against activists or candidates during the campaign, of which all but two were aimed at opposition parties.[19]

As was the case in the 2017 referendum, the opposition suffered various forms of

13. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe International Election Observation Mission (IEOM), *Republic of Turkey – Early Presidential and Parliamentary Elections – 24 June 2018: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions*, https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/385671?download=true
14. Ibid., 12.
15. Ibid., 12.
16. Ibid., 4.
17. Ibid., 9.
18. Ibid., 4.
19. "Seçim Süreci İhlalleri ve Oy Güvenlıgi Konusu" [Regarding Election Period Violations and Election Security], İnsan Hakları Derneği [Human Rights Association], June 22, 2018, http://www.ihd.org.tr/secim-sureci-ihlalleri-ve-oy-guvenligi-konusu/

A voter casts her ballot in a polling station in Ankara during presidential and parliamentary elections on June 24, 2018. Photo: *OSCE/Thomas Rymer*

harassment. Deadly violence broke out between local HDP supporters and the bodyguards of an AKP politician in Suruç, and in a district of Erzurum, in northeastern Turkey, an official from the İyi Party was murdered on election day. The larger story was less deadly, but likely had a greater impact on the election. In eastern and southeastern Turkey, where Kurdish opposition to Erdoğan is strong and the HDP has wide support, the AKP apparently hoped that voter suppression would help keep the HDP beneath the threshold of ten percent required to enter parliament. In a leaked video, Erdoğan told AKP officials to "take the voter lists" and "conduct special work," presumably indicating that they were to apply pressure to HDP voters.[20] Although HDP support did indeed get pushed down in the party's traditional strongholds, it appears that some CHP tactical voting for HDP candidates elsewhere helped it win 11.7 percent and to remain in parliament.

The gross irregularities of the 2017 referendum vote count were not present on June 24, but that is a very low bar indeed for measuring an election. In presenting the OSCE report, the delegation head expressed the deep unfairness well, saying, "Voters had a genuine choice, but it was difficult for them to exercise all their rights….Against all odds, despite difficulties and intimidation, contestants did their best to reach out to voters. The ruling party and the incumbent still enjoyed an undue advantage."[21]

The opposition initially seemed poised to challenge the results, but in the end did not do so. It may be that this was a strategic decision to avoid a confrontation that Erdoğan was likely to win and that the opposition might not survive. It may have simply been due to the difficulty of producing clear evidence of the sort of massive vote rigging that would mobilize public opinion and meaningfully test Erdoğan's control of institutions. Trying to explain his decision not

20. Cupulo, "The Fate of Turkey's Democracy Lies with the Kurds."

21. Comments by Dame Audrey Glover, OSCE International Election Observation Mission press conference, June 25, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBY9T4WQEuw

to contest the election at a press conference on June 25, İnce said, "Did they steal votes? Yes, they did. But did they steal 10 million votes? No."[22] But massive fraud is not necessary in a tight election. Out of 51.2 million valid votes, Erdoğan won the presidency by about 1.3 million votes; the AKP-MHP coalition won a majority in parliament by about 1.5 million votes. A little more than one million votes were either invalid or blank.[23]

Some analysts have pointed to unexpected shifts in the vote away from the HDP in favor of the MHP, particularly in the southeast, as evidence of possible ballot-rigging. In the primarily Kurdish regions, the jump in the MHP's strength was indeed striking, and unexpected. In Van, for example, its vote rose from 6,348 in 2015 to 16,240 in 2018.[24] Pre-election polls had predicted that the party risked falling below the parliamentary threshold. The MHP had, after all, suffered an ugly split in 2016, and its longtime leader, Devlet Bahçeli, retained his position only through the timely intervention of the courts, presumably at Erdoğan's behest. The MHP rebels went on to create the İyi, or Good Party, and Bahçeli became ever more closely aligned to the AKP. Bahçeli held only a few campaign rallies and other MHP campaigning was virtually non-existent. A number of explanations have been proffered for the MHP's relatively strong showing, including that it attracted "protest votes" from AKP voters who wanted to retain Erdoğan as president while expressing their frustration with him by not voting for AKP parliamentary candidates. Some analysts have simply pointed to the increased presence of security forces in the southeast. Nonetheless, as Abdullah Aydoğan has written, aberrations in the vote in that region were striking:

> Across the country, an average of 2.4 percent of the total votes were rendered invalid. But those districts where the pro-Kurdish opposition party had won more than 60 percent of the votes in 2015 had an average of 3.6 percent invalid votes. Pro-Kurdish party officials claim that this outcome is due to the ballot-box officials' systematic bias against their party and systematic pressure against their ballot-box representatives.
>
> But in the 457 ballot boxes in the east where Erdoğan received more than 99 percent of the valid votes, the percentage of invalid votes turned out to be a record low: 0.5 percent. More than half of these boxes were in Sanliurfa province, where the ballot-stuffing allegations were at their peak.[25]

These issues, however, have not received broad attention; the Turkish media have given them almost no coverage. The experience of voters in most of the country, after all, was efficient and familiar. The structural changes described above, once implemented, were camouflaged behind the reassuring institutions and practices of the past. Turkey's elections were, in effect, "rigged just enough" through a succession of changes in electoral oversight, state intimidation of the opposition, and control of institutions and media to ensure Erdoğan's continued hold on power.

Turkey's elections were, in effect, "rigged just enough"... to ensure Erdoğan's continued hold on power.

22. "CHP's Presidential Candidate İnce Accepts Defeat, Vows to Keep Fighting," *Hürriyet Daily News*, June 25, 2018, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/main-opposition-chp-candidate-ince-concedes-election-defeat-refuting-rumors-he-was-threatened-133752
23. Yüsek Seçim Kurumu [Supreme Election Board], Sandık Sonuçları [Election Results], https://sonuc.ysk.gov.tr/module/GirisEkrani.jsf
24. Ibid.
25. Abdullah Aydoğan, "Why the Results of Turkey's Election Are Surprising," *Washington Post*, July 31, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/07/31/why-the-results-of-turkeys-election-are-surprising/

Could Erdoğan, with his control over the main levers of power, including the courts, security agencies, and the YSK, have engaged in blatant fraud? In a pinch, probably. But such a step could dramatically undermine his legitimacy and put tremendous strain on his control of these institutions. It would run in the face of widely held assumptions among Turkey's citizens about the country's status as a democracy. Instead, Erdoğan, who views the institutions and norms of liberal democracy with a deep and abiding cynicism but nonetheless embraces the language and legitimacy of electoral victory, has created an electoral system that maintains the superficial appearance of contested democracy but has drained it of its content.[26] In this, one might note, the June elections are just one example of what has gone on throughout Turkish society over the past decade: the media, the judiciary, the police, and many other institutions retain some formal features of independence, but through purges and clientelism, have become merely extensions of the ruling party's power and authority.

WHAT IS NEXT FOR THE OPPOSITION?

Those who hoped that Erdoğan will be magnanimous in victory and relax his repression may point to the government's announcement, a few weeks after the election, that it was ending the state of emergency. But there is less to this news than meets the eye, and there will be no return to normalcy in Turkish politics for the foreseeable future. All the repressive decrees issued under the state of emergency powers retain their force in law. The media outlets that have been closed, the NGOs that have been shuttered, the state workers who have been purged, will receive no more redress than before. In fact, since the election, the purge of accused "FETÖ" members (the government's term for the followers of religious scholar Fethullah Gülen, whom it holds responsible for the 2016 coup attempt and has branded terrorists) has intensified. Hundreds more have been arrested, including civilians, government workers, and a considerable number of police and military personnel.[27] It is not clear why these people are being targeted now, having avoided prosecution for the past two years, but the government promises to continue the purge. The opposition continues to be targeted for vilification and occasional imprisonment as "terrorists." Even minor acts of dissent, such as holding up a banner critical of the president at a university graduation, are subject to prosecution. The consolidation of political control over the media and the courts, the growing capacity to repress dissent, and the expansion of executive power all suggest that Turkey's authoritarian turn is here for the long term.

With the right candidate, the right organization, the right message, the right moment, the opposition told itself, an election could dislodge Erdoğan.

For Turkey's opposition, the reality is clear and it is bleak. For years, it has taken solace in the AKP's narrow margins of victory. With the right candidate, the right organization, the right message, the right moment, the opposition told itself, an election could dislodge Erdoğan. Five years ago, this might have been possible. Since then, Erdoğan's dominance has become insurmountable.

26. In understanding this element of Erdoğan's worldview, his interview with the German news magazine *Der Zeit* is extremely instructive. See Giovanni di Lorenzo, "They Should Look Up What Dictator Means!" *Zeit On-Line*, July 5, 2017, https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2017-07/recep-tayyip-erdogan-g20-summit-interview-english

27. Muhammad Enes Can and Omer Sur, "Turkey Issues Arrest Warrants for 346 FETO Suspects," Anadolu Agency, July 7, 2018, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-issues-arrest-warrants-for-346-feto-suspects/1196148

The two most obvious pathways for the opposition are deeply unattractive, each in its own way. One path would be to continue to contest elections as it has done, hoping for the best, and waiting for some contingency, some shift that would shatter Erdoğan's lock on power. It is possible that the mere practice of participating in regular elections, even under increasingly unfair and repressive conditions, could have a basic benefit in retaining democratic norms. This pathway has lower risks for opposition parties. By retaining seats in parliament, the opposition parties continue to receive public funding; they would presumably be starved of these funds if they walked out or boycotted elections. Continuing to participate in the political system affords them continued control over some municipalities, keeping a small foothold in the system, and providing experience in (and the control of revenues from) local governance in the hope that these might prove useful in some future democratic opening. It might also—and this is not a minor consideration—help prevent them from being targeted by Erdoğan as "terrorists" and imprisoned in the way that so many in the HDP were targeted as part of Turkey's conflict with the PKK. Such a strategy of grudging participation might help protect those municipalities under CHP or İyi Party control from being taken over in the sort of AKP "trusteeship" that has been imposed on many HDP municipalities.

The alternative for the opposition is to withdraw from the political game, walk out of parliament, and boycott elections in favor of public rallies calling attention to the degradation of the electoral process. This strategy recognizes the failure of the opposition's strategy thus far, acknowledging that its very willingness to play this game served to reinforce Erdoğan's control; that, in effect, the opposition has served as a prop within Erdoğan's own narrative of himself as a democrat. He can point to their participation in elections, to their presence in parliament and municipal government, and to their vehement, yet ineffective, disdain for him as evidence that his followers represent the true nation that, despite a broad gutting of institutions and civil society, remains a democracy in which he has been elected again and again. Yet such a strategy would require a unified opposition—and despite some cooperation during the June election, the opposition remains divided. It also may be too late; this approach would have been best undertaken years ago, perhaps when the AKP first began jailing the HDP leadership. It might have been a reasonable response to the improprieties of the 2017 referendum. It is far riskier now and far less likely to succeed. Such a strategy would likely precipitate a draconian response from Erdoğan, especially given his long history of prosecuting dissent as terrorism and his ability to use the judiciary, security agencies, and media for that end. Erdoğan allows the opposition to survive now because they do not threaten him, but the limited freedom the opposition currently enjoys could easily be erased.

Finding a third road will require courage, creativity, and more than a little luck. It will also require some hard realism about the nature of Erdoğan's rule. The June 2018 election highlighted that hard reality, both in the consolidation of power that was delivered to Erdoğan and in the way in which he has undermined and manipulated institutions and reframed the political landscape to achieve victory. For the time being, there are no brakes remaining to halt Turkey's authoritarian slide.

HOWARD EISSENSTAT is Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Project on Middle East Democracy and Associate Professor of Middle East history at St. Lawrence University. Eissenstat writes on twentieth-century Turkish history as well as on contemporary Turkish politics and foreign policy. He has lectured at the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. Department of State and the Canadian Foreign Service Institute. Eissenstat received his PhD in Modern Middle East History from UCLA in 2007 and was a postdoctoral fellow at the Crown Center for Middle East Studies at Brandeis University in 2008-2009. His previous publications for POMED were *Uneasy Rests the Crown: Erdoğan and 'Revolutionary Security' in Turkey* (December 2017), *Erdoğan as Autocrat: A Very Turkish Tragedy* (April 2017), *Stunted Democracy: Erdoğan, the AKP, and Turkey's Slide into Authoritarianism* (January 2015), and *The Gezi Park Protests: Time for a New U.S. Approach to Turkey* (June 2013). He is on Twitter as @heissenstat.

THE PROJECT ON MIDDLE EAST DEMOCRACY (POMED) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC, that is dedicated to examining how genuine democracies can develop in the Middle East and how the United States can best support that process. Through dialogue, research, and advocacy, POMED works to strengthen the constituency for U.S. policies that peacefully support reform in the Middle East. POMED research publications offer in-depth, original expert analysis of political developments in the Middle East as they relate to the prospects for genuine democracy in the region and to U.S. policy on democracy and human rights. The views expressed in POMED Snapshots and other publications are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of POMED or its Board of Directors. For more information, please contact the series editor Amy Hawthorne at amy.hawthorne@pomed.org.

@POMED facebook.com/POMED.Wire

Cover photo: *President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan addresses the crowd during his inauguration at the Presidential Palace in Ankara, Turkey, July 9, 2018.* Photo: *AK Party official website*