



THE PEOPLES' DEMOCRATIC PARTY: PRIORITIES AND HISTORY

The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) is Turkey's third largest political party, earning nearly six million votes in the country's most recent parliamentary election despite facing targeted repression. We advocate for Kurdish rights, pluralism, democracy, religious freedom, women's equality, and human rights, and envision a prosperous, free, and secure Middle East.



Turkey Today: Democracy in Decline

Under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), Turkey is sliding further and further into autocracy.

Erdogan has granted himself vast new powers after a rigged constitutional referendum. Entire Kurdish cities have been placed under curfews, stripped of their elected representatives, and razed to the ground. Islamism is promoted at home and abroad— at the expense of the rights of women and religious minorities. Hundreds of thousands of academics, journalists, students, dissidents, and others have been jailed simply for exercising their right to free expression.

In Freedom House's 2018 Freedom in the World report, Turkey's status declined from "partly free" to "not free", citing "contempt for political rights and civil liberties" and "serious abuses in areas including minority rights, free expression, associational rights, corruption, and the rule of law."

In a stark example of these abuses, former HDP co-chair and 2018 presidential candidate, Selahattin Demirtas, sits in jail charged with "terror propaganda"— simply because he is a Kurdish politician who speaks out for the rights of all citizens.

In its foreign policy, Turkey under the AKP has joined a growing axis of global authoritarian powers— purchasing S-400 missiles from Russia, voicing support for the government of Venezuela, and working with Iran to circumvent U.S. sanctions. It has also become a worldwide hub for Islamist fighters, who travel freely through the country to join extremist groups in Syria.

Consequences for the United States

Erdogan's disregard for the rule of law and anti-Kurdish policy both inside and outside of his borders have not only destabilized the region— but also put Turkish policy directly at odds with American interests in Syria and endangered American citizens. Andrew Brunson faced the same spurious "terror" charges as hundreds of thousands of Turkish citizens do for voicing their peaceful opposition to the government. Erdogan's military incursions into Syria and support for Islamist groups are both a humanitarian disaster and a threat to the US-led Coalition's fight against ISIS.

These developments show that appeasement isn't working. They have also put the interests of the United States in line with the HDP's goal of democracy, stability, and justice in Turkey.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve these goals, we have three key policy recommendations to lay the foundation for constructive American engagement on peace and democracy in Turkey.

Speak up for HDP political prisoners.

A strong American call for the freedom of unjustly imprisoned HDP MPs will urge Turkey to comply with its international obligations and make it clear that attacks on political pluralism and democratic opposition are unacceptable.

Oppose Erdogan's destabilizing foreign policy.

The United States must make it clear that Erdogan's rapprochement with Russia and support for radical Islamists across the region will have real consequences.

Support a real peace process.

The United States can use its unique leverage with both sides to support a peace process between Turkey and the PKK, ensuring that promises are kept, key demands are met, and politicians and civil society actors are not criminalized for supporting talks.

