

Download Ahval App



<http://ahval.co/en-130614>



The unmatched scale of Erdoğan's crackdown - Ümit Cizre

Nov 05 2021 01:48 Gmt+3

Last Updated On: Nov 06 2021 11:51 Gmt+3

In the first in a series of four articles on the nature of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's regime, Ümit Cizre looks at the crackdown that followed the 2016 failed coup attempt

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is riding a global wave of strongmen who have shifted the political agenda throughout the world.

An indispensable trait of these regimes is blending authoritarian values with populist rhetoric, fusing free-market institutions with nationalism, racism and religion. Three of the four largest electoral democracies - India, Brazil and the United States - have endured such strongmen in recent years. And at first sight, Erdoğan simply seems to reflect this international trend.



However, there are a number of significant qualities that set the Turkish régime apart from other authoritarian governments across the world. The most prominent is the scale of the crackdown that followed the 2016 failed coup, “unmatched anywhere else in the West in recent years”, according to the New York Times.

Since 2016, Turkey has been sucked into a whirlpool in the name of staving off a security threat coming, in particular, from “FETÖ”, the catchall phrase used by the government to describe the conservative-religious transnational network named after Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen, which is accused of instigating the coup attempt.

This zero-sum war has targeted any and all members of the Gülen community, including those who had inadvertent contact with the movement, such as sending their children to the community's schools, having an account in a Gülen affiliated bank, visiting Gülen websites too often, working in Gülenist owned hospitals or media groups linked to the community.

Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu, a hawkish Erdoğan supporter, said last November that “some 292,000 people have been detained over alleged links to Gülen, nearly 100,000 of them jailed pending a trial.”

According to Soylu, some 150,000 public employees have been sacked or suspended since July 2016, with 20,000 expelled from the military, including almost half of the country's generals and admirals. The interior minister goes on to say there have been 42,000 expulsions from his own ministry, half of which are believed to be police officers and administrators.

On top of this, other ‘enemies of the state’ have been targeted, including liberal intellectuals, students, journalists, elected representatives of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), and anyone considered to have links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

Download Ahval App

The government has also fired 7,316 academics without due process, using dubious allegations of links to terrorism or the July 2016 coup, according to Human Rights Watch.

The scale of injustice suffered by hundreds of thousands in Turkey cannot be fully captured by itemised empirical accounts, figures, and statistics alone. New measures are being found to circumvent the rule of law and institutionalise injustice, such as imprisoning under six-year-olds with their mothers convicted of membership in an armed terrorist organization. Last month, courts refused to postpone a prison sentence against Ayşe Özdoğan, a stage 4 cancer patient with severe health problems certified by doctors.

Other methods used by Erdoğan's regime are reminiscent of the 'forced disappearances' deployed by security forces in predominantly Kurdish areas during the 1980s and 1990s. In a recent annual report, the U.N. Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances urged Ankara "to prevent and terminate" the practice, which had reemerged since 2016.

"Dozens of enforced disappearances have been reported in Turkey since the abortive putsch, with more than 20 of the victims reporting, after they were found, that they were subjected to torture during the time they were missing," the U.N. said.

The report also raised concerns about the Turkish government's use of "extraterritorial abductions and forced returns" under the pretext of combating terrorism and protecting national security, a measure often sued against alleged members of the Gülen movement.

Turkish officials have proven resourceful at using international policing organisations to target exiled opponents, including filing tens of thousands of notifications to Interpol's Stolen and Lost

Download Ahval App

Travel Documents Database (SLTD) against critics who, in many instances, were not even aware their passports had been invalidated.

Few cases better illustrate the manipulation of the judicial system under Erdoğan than that of philanthropist Osman Kavala. Kavala has been imprisoned for more than four years without ever being convicted of a crime. Originally detained in 2017 on accusations of organising the 2013 Gezi Park protests against the government, he was acquitted last year before being immediately charged with attempting to overthrow the government through the 2016 coup.

In a landmark finding, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in December 2019 that Kavala's continued detention had "an ulterior purpose, namely to reduce him to silence... and violates his right to liberty and security of the person".

Examined from a different angle, the Kavala case epitomises a zero-sum conception of politics between 'us and them', the alleged instigators of the coup attempt and the regime with no room for compromise.



The opinions expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Ahval.

This block is broken or missing. You may be missing content or you might need to enable the original module.

Related Articles

Download Ahval App



Six Turkish opposition parties to sign deal to restore parliamentary democracy



Turkey seeks to advance ties, boost trade with Turkmenistan to \$5 billion

Other Articles Suggested by Editor