



Authoritarianism in Crisis: Resistance in Turkey under Erdoğan

Duru Selimkan

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- *Correspondence:* Duru Selimkan, *İstanbul*.
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Introduction

In the following I will analyse the political context of widespread protests that have erupted in response to the arrest of Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Mayor of Istanbul (Girit et al. 2025). The unfolding political developments in Turkey cannot be seen in isolation but must be contextualized within the broader trajectory of Erdoğan's authoritarianism, the structural transformation of the Turkish state, and the ongoing suppression of political opposition.

As a 23-year-old Turkish woman who has lived her entire life under the rule of Erdoğan, I write this analysis not only as a political observer but also as someone whose generation has grown up under the weight of authoritarianism. Unlike other cohorts who witnessed earlier phases of Turkey's political evolution, my peers and I have never known a political reality beyond the centralized control of Erdoğan's regime. We are often accused of being apolitical, but this characterization fails to capture the frustrations that define our political experience. Many in my generation, far from being indifferent, deeply desire transformative change. However, the absence of a political identity or organizational structure that genuinely represents our aspirations leaves us in a state of political disorientation. This disconnection is not a symptom of apathy but a reflection of structural limits imposed by a political system that suppresses alternative voices and narrows the field of democratic participation. The arrest of İmamoğlu and the protests led by the young it ignited are symptomatic of a deeper crisis—one that touches not only institutions, but the political consciousness of a generation coming of age under repression.

The rise of political Islam as an ideological framework for state power in Turkey has been a defining characteristic of the Erdoğan and “Justice and Development Party” (AKP) era. However, political Islam under the AKP must be distinguished from both its traditional Islamist predecessors and from other regional manifestations of Islamism. Unlike earlier Turkish Islamist movements that sought a more direct challenge to the secular Kemalist order, which was based on nationalism and laicism, the AKP engaged in a process of gradualist institutional capture, embedding its ideological orientation within the structures of the state while outwardly maintaining the formal framework of parliamentary democracy. Initially, this strategy involved a tactical alliance with liberal reformists and pro-EU factions, presenting the AKP as a force for democratization. Over time, however, this façade was discarded in favor

of a model of governance that fused Islamist conservatism with neoliberal economic policies and authoritarian statecraft (Tugal 2016; White 2017, Bahozde 2025).

Political Islam in Turkey, particularly under Erdoğan, has functioned not merely as a religious or ideological movement but as a mechanism of hegemonic control, aimed at restructuring state institutions, society, and economic relations to serve the interests of a new ruling elite. This transformation has entailed the erosion of secular legal norms, the increased subjugation of the judiciary to executive power, and the instrumentalization of religious discourse to justify state repression. The shift toward authoritarianism has also been accompanied by a profound centralization of power, wherein Erdoğan himself has become the embodiment of the state, mirroring patterns observed in other cases of personalist rule (“the big leader”). As scholars of authoritarianism have argued, such regimes often rely on the strategic deployment of ideological tropes to consolidate power while maintaining a veneer of legitimacy (Brownlee 2007; Levitsky & Way 2010). In Turkey, political Islam has provided the discursive justification for this consolidation, framing dissent as a threat to national and religious unity while systematically dismantling democratic safeguards.

This process, however, has not unfolded in a linear or uncontested manner. Rather, it has been marked by periodic crises, moments of mass resistance, and shifts in the ruling bloc’s internal cohesion. The contradictions within Turkey’s Islamist-authoritarian model—particularly its need to maintain electoral legitimacy while suppressing opposition—have produced recurrent instability. The regime’s survival has thus depended not only on ideological control but also on coercion, patronage networks, and the strategic manipulation of legal and political institutions. Understanding this dynamic is essential for situating the repression of figures like Ekrem İmamoğlu within a broader trajectory of state transformation.

The arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu is not just another instance of political repression under Erdoğan’s increasingly authoritarian rule—it is a decisive moment that underscores the urgent need for a unified and organized resistance. Spontaneous protests and electoral victories alone are insufficient to counter the entrenched power of an authoritarian regime that has systematically dismantled democratic institutions, silenced opposition, and weaponized the state to maintain control. What is required is a broad-based, strategic movement that unites workers, students, intellectuals, and marginalized communities into

a cohesive political force capable of challenging the ruling class. Without an organized, class-conscious opposition, resistance remains fragmented, and the structures of capitalist and state oppression remain intact. As Marx famously argued, “The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves.” The struggle against Erdoğan’s rule must therefore move beyond reactive outrage, which in the current case have been proven more stable than before, and toward the building of a revolutionary alternative—one that does not merely resist oppression but looks forward to the future and lays the foundation for a truly egalitarian society.

Erdoğan’s regime represents a sharp turn away from the limited democratic structures that were once characteristic of Turkey’s political system. His rule relies heavily on the mechanisms of state repression to secure the hegemony of the ruling class, while dismantling the fragile democratic institutions that persist in a *supposedly liberal state* framework. The arrest, and the protests it has sparked, are both symptoms and reflections of the deeper crisis within Turkish bourgeois democracy. In this context, we have to inquire into the authoritarian turn in Turkey and the ongoing struggles against capitalist oppression. It is essential to understand these events not simply as isolated political incidents, but as part of a larger struggle against authoritarian capitalism and the necessity for a revolutionary alternative.

Authoritarian Parallels

The rise of *authoritarian populism* in Turkey cannot be analyzed in isolation from the broader global shift toward illiberal governance. Erdoğan’s political trajectory aligns with a wider trend of right-wing populist leaders who have sought to undermine democratic institutions, consolidate personal rule, and reconfigure state structures in ways that facilitate authoritarian governance while preserving a facade of electoral legitimacy. A striking example of this phenomenon can be observed in the concurrent rise of Donald Trump in the United States, which itself seems only following the model of former proto-fascist governments, as for example in Italy under Berlusconi.

On the very day of Trump’s inauguration, the Turkish state intensified its crackdown on opposition figures, including the detention of nationalist politician Ümit Özdağ (Altaylı 2025). While this may appear coincidental at first glance, it underscores a deeper political logic: the consolidation of right-wing authoritarian rule is often emboldened by global shifts in power (Chotiner 2025). This connection is also to be seen in the context of Turkey’s role in NATO. The election of Trump, who

espoused an anti-democratic, nationalist, and reactionary political vision, provided further ideological and geopolitical space for Erdoğan to escalate his own authoritarian project.

Both Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Donald Trump have placed authoritarian populist rhetoric at the core of their political strategies, using it to justify attacks on political opponents and democratic institutions. Both leaders have framed themselves as embattled figures fighting against internal enemies who allegedly undermine the true will of the people. In this context, they have portrayed judicial and electoral systems as corrupt obstacles that must be overcome to restore national sovereignty. For Erdoğan, these internal enemies include Gülenists, Kurdish movements, and secular elites, while Trump has targeted the so-called "deep state" and all kinds of "left" elements. By positioning themselves as the sole defenders of the people against these supposed threats, both leaders have sought to consolidate their base and expand executive power.

This form of authoritarian populism aligns with the theoretical framework of competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky & Way 2002), in which democratic institutions formally persist while their independence and functionality are systematically eroded. Both Erdoğan and Trump have maintained the appearance of elections, judicial oversight, and legislative processes, yet they have actively worked to weaken these mechanisms and transform them into tools of executive dominance.

In Erdoğan's case, particularly after the 2016 coup attempt, the judiciary was turned into an extension of the executive branch, with courts being used to suppress opposition. Elected politicians, journalists, and academics have been imprisoned under vague charges such as "terror propaganda" or "insulting the president," effectively shrinking the space for political dissent. The 2017 constitutional referendum further entrenched Erdoğan's authority by replacing Turkey's parliamentary system with an executive presidency, centralizing power in his hands while rendering checks and balances largely ineffective. Elections continue to be held, but the government's control over election boards, legal barriers imposed on opposition candidates, and media dominance have severely undermined the fairness of the electoral process.

Similarly, Trump's tenure was marked by efforts to delegitimize democratic institutions, particularly through attacks on the judiciary and electoral integrity. His repeated claims of voter fraud, especially during the 2020 presidential election, sought to cast doubt on the legitimacy of

democratic outcomes. He routinely pressured judicial and law enforcement bodies to act in his political favor, most notably in attempts to overturn election results. The January 6th, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol was a direct manifestation of this authoritarian populist strategy, as Trump mobilized his supporters against the democratic process itself. While the institutional resilience of the United States prevented a full transition to autocracy, Trump's actions showcased the vulnerabilities of democratic systems when confronted with a leader willing to erode institutional norms from within.

Despite differences in their political contexts, Erdoğan and Trump demonstrate how authoritarian populists exploit democratic structures to entrench their own power. It should be noted that this resembles the situation of 100 years ago, i.e. not only the rise of Fascism in Italy but even more the Nazi strategy in Germany, maintaining the facade of democracy (especially in the beginning) while hollowing out its core, using a combination of legal manipulation, media control, ritualistic allegiance and nationalist rhetoric to weaken opposition. This was also the time of the consolidation of the modern Kemalist Turkish state as another outcome of the geopolitical changes induced by the World War connected with the purges of the Armenian population and the war with Greece. While the Turkish *national state* was stabilized Turkish *democracy* remained fragile. This bifurcation can be observed on a global scale. The recent cases of Turkey and the USA illustrate that competitive authoritarianism is not confined to traditionally or still unstable democracies but can emerge even within states with strong institutional legacies. Beyond discourse, Erdoğan and Trump also share key strategies in their consolidation of power: reliance on clientelistic networks, the delegitimization of independent media, and the use of executive authority to punish opposition figures (Shear 2025). While the Turkish case is more extreme in its outright suppression of dissent, the underlying logic of governance follows a similar trajectory. Recognizing these parallels allows for a more comprehensive understanding of Turkey's authoritarian turn, situating it within a global pattern of democratic erosion rather than viewing it as an isolated national phenomenon.

In a striking example of the global reach of authoritarian repression, Rümeyşa Öztürk, a Turkish PhD student, was recently arrested in the United States on charges that remain ambiguous (Donegan 2025). This event has drawn significant reactions within Turkey, including from supporters of the ruling AKP, who view the arrest as an unjust inter-

vention. The case raises concerns about the transnational nature of political suppression and the complicity of international powers in enabling repression. The arrest of Öztürk highlights the blurred lines between domestic authoritarianism and global authoritarian cooperation, a phenomenon that demands further scrutiny.

Notably, Öztürk's arrest drew significant reactions within Turkey, including from supporters of the ruling AKP. While the Turkish government often utilizes similar repressive measures against its own dissidents, the detention of a Turkish citizen by the United States triggered nationalist sentiments and widespread criticism. Many pro-government commentators, despite their alignment with Erdoğan's domestic authoritarianism, framed Öztürk's arrest as an example of Western hypocrisy and an attack on Turkish sovereignty. This paradoxical response highlights how anti-imperialist rhetoric is selectively employed by the AKP and its supporters—not as a principled opposition to authoritarianism, but as a tool to reinforce nationalist narratives. The case ultimately reveals the contradictions within Erdoğan's political base, which simultaneously upholds repression at home while objecting to similar tactics when applied by Western states.

Moreover, Erdoğan's administration operates with clear approval from the U.S., evident in his interactions with former President Donald Trump and continued diplomatic engagements under subsequent administrations. The phone conversations between Erdoğan and Trump, in which Erdoğan reportedly secured U.S. acquiescence on key domestic policies, reflect this dynamic. Additionally, the recent visit of Hakan Fidan, Turkey's intelligence chief, to Washington signals an ongoing relationship that bolsters Erdoğan's regime (Güldoğan 2025). These instances underscore the extent to which authoritarian governance is not merely a domestic phenomenon but one that is sustained through international alliances.

The Erdoğan Regime and the Criminalization of Opposition

The arrest of Ekrem İmamoğlu, the mayor of Istanbul and leading opposition figure (designated presidential candidate of CHP), is not an isolated event but part of a calculated strategy by President Erdoğan to consolidate his personal power and eliminate any meaningful opposition to his rule. Erdoğan's transformation of the state apparatus has been one of the most striking features of his political career, characterized by a systematic dismantling of democratic institutions and the reshaping of state structures to serve his own authoritarian agenda. Over the past two decades, Erdoğan has presided over the creation of an executive-

centered political system, which has systematically subordinated the judiciary, the media, and the security apparatus to his personal control.

This process of state transformation has gradually eroded the political structures that once defined Turkey's political landscape, replacing them with mechanisms of authoritarian rule (Cevik-Compiegne 2022). Under Erdoğan, the judiciary has become an instrument of political repression rather than an independent arbiter of justice. The media, once a vital space for public debate, has been either co-opted or suppressed, and the security forces are now deployed against any opposition, regardless of the political or ideological background of the protesters. The arrest of İmamoğlu is merely the latest example of this process. The judicial system has been instrumentalized to neutralize political opponents and the law itself has become a tool for the survival of Erdoğan's power.

This pattern is not new to Turkey. Throughout its modern history, the Turkish state has relied on mechanisms of coercion and suppression to maintain the dominance of the ruling class. From military coups to judicial interventions, the Turkish state has often employed undemocratic means to quell political dissent and suppress opposition movements. However, under Erdoğan, this process has reached new heights, with the state functioning as an increasingly coercive apparatus designed to serve the interests of the ruling class and, in particular, Erdoğan's personal power.

As Cenk Saraçoğlu (2025) notes, "Erdoğan's consolidation of power does not rely solely on coercion; it is also a product of his active reengineering of the entire state apparatus into an extension of his personal authority." Rather than operating within the constraints of bourgeois democracy, Erdoğan's government has engaged in a systematic campaign of state-led repression to maintain his control. This is a classic example of what Marx described in *The Class Struggles in France*, where the state, with its vast bureaucratic and military machinery, becomes alien to the interests of the people, operating primarily to secure the dominance of the ruling class. Under Erdoğan, the state has become an instrument of political repression, primarily serving the interests of the political and economic elites that support his regime.

A crucial yet often underexplored dimension of Turkey's political landscape is the fluctuating relationship between the AKP and the Kurdish political movement, represented institutionally by the DEM Party (formerly the HDP). While the AKP has engaged in systematic repression of Kurdish political actors—imprisoning mayors, dismantling party

structures, and engaging in military operations in Kurdish-majority regions—it has also, at key moments, sought tacit or overt alliances with Kurdish political forces. This dual strategy reflects the regime’s pragmatic authoritarianism: repression is deployed when the Kurdish movement threatens the regime’s stability, while limited engagement is used when it serves Erdoğan’s electoral or geopolitical interests (Güneş 2020).

The de facto alliance between the AKP and the DEM Party, though seldom acknowledged explicitly in mainstream political discourse, reveals the contradictions within the Turkish political order (Hürriyet Daily News 2025). On the one hand, Erdoğan’s nationalist-Islamist base is deeply opposed to any concessions to the Kurdish movement, viewing it as an existential threat to the unitary state. On the other hand, Erdoğan has at times sought Kurdish political support to maintain his hold on power, as seen in past electoral strategies where AKP courted Kurdish votes in key constituencies. This unstable and opportunistic relationship highlights the broader instability of Erdoğan’s authoritarian model—it relies on contradictory alliances that can shift based on immediate political calculations rather than long-term ideological consistency.

İmamoğlu’s Arrest: A Coup Against the People’s Will

The arrest of İmamoğlu must not be viewed solely as a procedural legal matter; rather, it constitutes a direct movement to the democratic will of the electorate. Having progressively eroded the conditions for free and fair elections, Erdoğan has resorted to an authoritarian judicial system as a means of eliminating political threats. This pattern is not unprecedented in Turkish history. The ruling class, whether through military coups, judicial interventions, or emergency decrees, has consistently employed undemocratic mechanisms to suppress challenges to its authority. As Zürcher (2004) notes, Turkey’s modern political history is marked by cycles of authoritarian retrenchment, in which ruling elites—both civilian and military—have repeatedly curtailed democratic advances to maintain their grip on power. The current crackdown on opposition figures, including İmamoğlu, represents a continuation of this historical trend, albeit in a more personalized and centralized form under Erdoğan.

The arrest is not simply a matter of political rivalry. It represents a movement to the millions of voters who cast their ballots in favor of opposition candidates like İmamoğlu. For many, İmamoğlu’s victory in Istanbul symbolized the possibility of an alternative to Erdoğan’s authoritarian rule, a hope for a more democratic and just society. The arrest

is, therefore, not only an attack on İmamoğlu but on the very idea of democratic representation. This is one of the reasons motivating the widespread and heterogeneous resistance. Erdoğan's actions send a clear message: those who challenge his power will be punished, and the democratic process is no longer a legitimate avenue for opposition.

It signals a shift away from the already limited democratic practices that existed in Turkey and a further entrenchment of Erdoğan's authoritarian rule. In this context, electoral politics has become an increasingly untenable path for opposition forces. As the regime escalates its repression, the opposition faces a stark choice: either submit to Erdoğan's authoritarianism or escalate the struggle beyond the confines of electoral politics. This crisis presents a moment of rupture in the political system, one that will require a fundamental rethinking of how opposition forces can organize and resist.

Protests and Popular Resistance: The Emerging Class Struggle

In the wake of İmamoğlu's arrest, a wave of protests has erupted across Turkey. The protests, which have been particularly widespread in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and more than 50 cities, have involved a broad cross-section of Turkish society, including workers, students, intellectuals, and activists. Demonstrations have also spread to university campuses, including Istanbul University and Middle East Technical University (METU), where students have played a leading role in resisting state repression.

The scale of the protests reflects the deepening crisis of the Turkish state and the growing discontent with Erdoğan's rule. Millions of people have taken to the streets, chanting slogans such as "Hükümet İstifa!" ("Government Resign!") and "Faşizme Karşı Omuz Omuza" ("Shoulder to Shoulder Against Fascism"). These protests are not simply a reaction to the arrest of İmamoğlu but are part of a broader resistance to the authoritarian turn in Turkish politics. A central demand of the demonstrators is the end to politically motivated trials and the decriminalization of opposition figures, which have become commonplace under Erdoğan's regime.

The Turkish state has responded to these protests with violent repression. Riot police have been deployed to disperse crowds, and protesters have faced the use of tear gas, water cannons, and other forms of state violence. The brutality of the state's response to these protests highlights the increasing authoritarianism of Erdoğan's rule and the lengths to which the regime is willing to go to maintain its power. Reports indicate that police brutality has escalated, particularly against

student demonstrators, who have faced disproportionate violence. This repression serves to underscore the political stakes of the current moment and the urgent need for a united resistance movement to challenge the regime.

These mobilizations draw clear parallels to the 2013 Gezi Resistance, which saw millions of people take to the streets to resist Erdoğan's authoritarianism and demand greater democratic freedoms. "Gezi was a moment of rupture in Turkish political consciousness, forcing even previously depoliticized sectors of society to recognize the necessity of resistance" (Saraçoğlu 2025). The current protests, while different in many respects, share a similar spirit of defiance against state repression and authoritarianism.

The Gezi protests, initially sparked by opposition to urban redevelopment in Istanbul's Gezi Park, quickly escalated into a nationwide movement against state repression and authoritarian governance. The social composition of the Gezi movement—encompassing students, workers, leftist organizations, and disillusioned members of the urban middle class—demonstrated the potential for cross-class, cross-ideological resistance to Erdoğan's rule (Özkırımlı 2014).

The state's response to Gezi was characterized by extreme police violence, mass arrests, and the expansion of repressive legal measures. However, while the regime succeeded in suppressing the movement in the short term, the political consciousness it generated has had lasting effects. The emergence of new waves of protest in subsequent years, including the demonstrations following İmamoğlu's arrest, suggests that the underlying contradictions exposed by Gezi have not been resolved (Karakaş 2025). Instead, each successive crackdown has intensified the regime's legitimacy crisis, creating conditions for future mobilizations.

The question that arises, however, is how these protests can move beyond spontaneous outrage and into a more organized, revolutionary movement capable of challenging the structures of capitalist and in particular *state* oppression, which by definition has the monopoly on violence to *defend* democracy, even while effectively suppressing it. Spontaneous uprisings, like the protests that erupted in Turkey following the arrest of Ekrem İmamoğlu, are a powerful expression of widespread discontent, but they tend to remain short-lived if they lack organizational cohesion and a concrete political program. While these movements highlight the growing resistance to Erdoğan's authoritarianism, they also reveal a deeper issue: the opposition's fragmentation and its inability to

forge a unified strategy that can truly challenge the ruling power structure and the legitimated political system. Without a clear program of action rooted in class politics, the protests risk being contained or co-opted by the existing political structures that ultimately uphold the capitalist nation state. This brings us to the crucial question of how the opposition can transition from mere resistance to actual revolutionary action. In view of the above mentioned paradox of a formally democratic state suppressing democratic representation there seems to be no other way forward.¹

A significant part of the challenge lies in the role of the opposition parties, particularly the “Republican People’s Party” (CHP), which remains the primary opposition force to Erdoğan’s regime. However, the CHP’s political position within Turkey’s existing bourgeois framework is a key obstacle. Historically, the CHP has been a party of the establishment, which has long aligned itself with the capitalist class and the state apparatus. While the CHP presents itself as a bulwark against Erdoğan’s authoritarianism, it lacks a revolutionary class politics and continues to operate within the boundaries of the capitalist state. This is critical because simply replacing Erdoğan with a new elite, even if it is from the CHP, does not address the structural oppression embedded within Turkey’s state institutions. As Marx argued in *The Civil War in France*, “The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes” (Marx 1871). In other words, merely taking control of the state machinery does not lead to liberation. Instead, the existing state apparatus must be dismantled and reconstituted by the people for the purpose of their own emancipation.

In Turkey’s case, the state apparatus has been systematically restructured by Erdoğan’s regime, deeply entangling the judiciary, the me-

1. This situation, by the way, illustrates the Kantian “paradox” of revolution, which might be rather read as a call for action, even though this action seemingly lacks a formal legal or electoral basis. The conflicted argument of Kant’s “right of revolution” (Beck 1971) becomes clear in a situation when state power legitimizes itself fusing juridical and discursive control as well as legislative and executive registers to suppress opposition and freedom of speech. In this situation, we ask: where is the immanent corrective of a state order which acts against its very function of securing democracy? When does a state order lose its legitimacy? In other words, Kant made visible the possible contradiction between state legislation and more universal rights, as well as the risks revolutionary action faces—a fact which is crucial to understand, since it is one of the reasons for many people’s reluctance to join revolutionary action (framing it as undemocratic, illegal or just too dangerous), not the least because of the advanced possibilities of state control nowadays and thus it has to be taken into account. I thank the editors for the hint to Kant’s paradox.

dia, and security forces with his authoritarian agenda. Erdoğan has effectively neutralized any independent power that might challenge his rule, consolidating the state as an instrument of his personal and party's dominance. Given this, the CHP's assumption that it can simply take control of this very state apparatus and use it to implement progressive change is naive. The reality is that the state, as currently constituted, is a tool of capitalist control, and without addressing its fundamental nature, no meaningful shift in power can occur.

The class nature of the Turkish state must therefore be central to any opposition strategy. The opposition cannot afford to rely solely on the state's reformability under a new administration. Instead, it must work toward the dismantling of the state's repressive institutions and the creation of a new political order, one that is genuinely democratic and serves the interests of the working class. The movement must not only resist Erdoğan's authoritarianism but also confront the capitalist structures that undergird the entire political system. This means rejecting the *false promises* of reformist politics and understanding that the political struggle in Turkey today is ultimately a class struggle, with the working class at the heart of any effort to create a just society.

The centrality of the working class is key to any revolutionary movement.² Marx's insight—that the emancipation of the working class must be achieved by the working class itself—remains as relevant as ever. It is the working class, as the most oppressed and exploited group within the current system, that must lead the charge in dismantling the structures of capitalist oppression. However, the class consciousness of this group is particularly weak nowadays. The protests and uprisings, while important expressions of popular anger, must become part of a broader, organized movement that can mobilize the working class, intellectuals, students, and marginalized groups to challenge the entire capitalist system. A revolution in Turkey cannot simply be about changing the people in power; it must be about changing the very systems of power that enable oppression.

2. An important point is to understand this constellation in our times and in the local context. Thanks again to the editors, in this case for pointing to the footnote that Engels felt compelled to make to the *Communist Manifesto* in 1888: "By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live." (Marx/Engels 1848 / 1969).

In short, the political crisis in Turkey, exacerbated by Erdoğan's authoritarian turn, provides hopes for a critical opportunity for a revolutionary transformation. However, this opportunity will not be seized unless there is a shift in how the opposition conceptualizes its struggle. Rather than focusing on electoral victories or superficial reforms, the opposition must aim to dismantle the structures of state power that have been co-opted by Erdoğan's regime. It must take up the challenge of a new state order. This requires a revolutionary approach that recognizes the limitations of the current state apparatus and the need for its complete reorganization. Only through such a transformation can the opposition hope to build a truly democratic society—one that serves the needs of the working class and all oppressed peoples.

Navigating a Complex Political Terrain

The role of the Republican People's Party (CHP) in the current political landscape is a complex and contentious issue. Historically, the CHP has been the party of the Turkish bourgeois state, upholding the interests of the capitalist class and the imperialist-oriented foreign policy of the Turkish elite. However, in recent years, the CHP has also become a crucial space for organizing opposition to Erdoğan's regime. The party's role as a key opposition force is now more critical than ever, especially as Erdoğan's repression has intensified.

“While the CHP's class character remains bourgeois, its role as the de facto space for oppositional politics means that even leftist organizations must engage with its mobilizations critically rather than dismiss them outright.”
(Saraçoğlu 2025)

This is particularly important in a political environment where the repression of political Islam has become a regime in itself, and where the CHP has increasingly become a site of struggle for democratic freedoms and political space.

This shift in the CHP's political position must be understood in the context of the broader political dynamics in Turkey. The dominance of political Islam, especially under Erdoğan's leadership, has reshaped the political terrain in such a way that even bourgeois parties like the CHP are now seen as key players in the resistance to authoritarianism. While the CHP remains fundamentally aligned with the capitalist class, it has become a crucial actor in the struggle for democracy in Turkey. This reality complicates any simple critique of the CHP, as leftist movements must now navigate the contradictions inherent in engaging with a bourgeois party in a time of escalating repression.

Organizing the Resistance

The protests in response to İmamoğlu's arrest reflect widespread dissatisfaction with Erdoğan's authoritarian rule, but they also highlight the need for a more organized and strategic resistance movement. The question that arises is: Who will organize the resistance, and what form will it take? As Marxists, we understand that the struggle against oppression cannot be reduced to spontaneous protests or isolated actions. Rather, it requires the creation of an organized, revolutionary movement capable of confronting the state and challenging the structures of capitalist power. We, the youth, are calling upon the elders to help with that.

This movement must unite various sectors of society that are resisting oppression, including workers, students, intellectuals, and marginalized communities such as the Kurdish movement. These diverse forces must be brought together into a cohesive political bloc capable of challenging the ruling class. This bloc must not only resist the authoritarianism of Erdoğan's regime but also work toward a more just and egalitarian society.

The arrest of İmamoğlu is not simply an attack on one politician; it is an attack on the democratic aspirations of the Turkish people. This is a critical moment in Turkey's political history. Workers (incl. employees), students, intellectuals, and activists must unite to confront Erdoğan's authoritarianism and demand democratic freedoms. The struggle cannot be confined to electoral politics; it must expand into a broader movement that challenges the very foundations of capitalist oppression. The task is given and clear, the solution less so. The youth is calling for change.

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