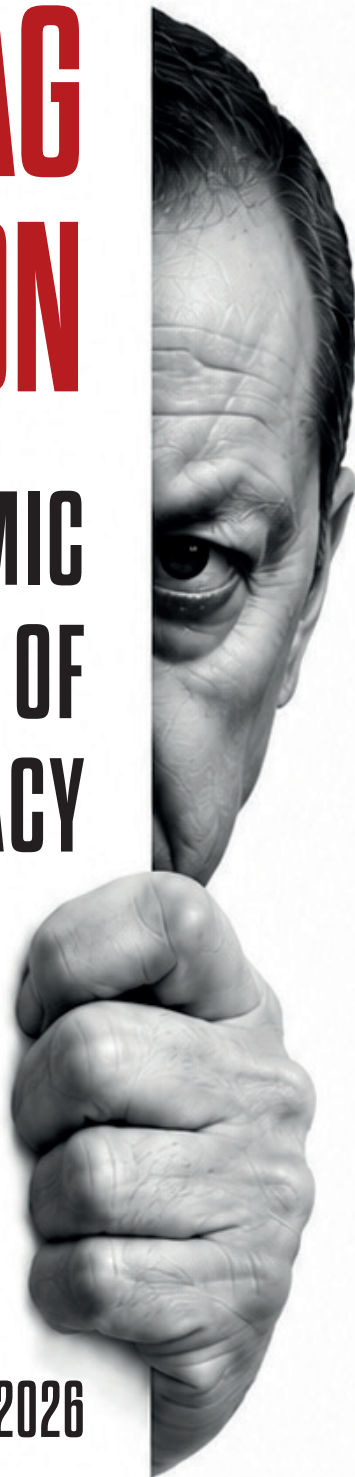




JULY 15: ERDOGAN'S FALSE FLAG OPERATION

**AND THE SYSTEMIC
DESTRUCTION OF
TURKISH DEMOCRACY**

July 2026





About the Alliance for Shared Values

The Alliance for Shared Values is an umbrella non-profit serving as a unified voice for several civic, culture and service organizations around the U.S dedicated to promoting community service, education and interfaith dialogue. The Alliance's local partners are founded by individuals who are participants in the Hizmet social initiative originated by Turkish Islamic scholar, preacher and social advocate Fethullah Gulen. The Alliance works with people and organizations of all backgrounds and faiths to promote greater mutual understanding, cooperate on meaningful projects, and build solidarity among all members of the human family.

About the Hizmet Movement

Beginning as a grassroots community in Türkiye in the 1960s, Hizmet today is a transnational social initiative that advocates for the ideals of human rights, equal opportunity, democracy, non-violence and the emphatic acceptance of religious and cultural diversity.

Hizmet's culturally and religiously diverse supporters are inspired by the life and works of Fethullah Gulen, one of the world's most influential Muslim figures for his decades-long commitment to empowerment through education, interreligious dialogue and altruism.

Hizmet participants bring to life these ideals by promoting philanthropy and community service, investing in education for cultivating virtuous individuals, and promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue for peaceful coexistence.

Disclaimer

This report is prepared by an institution rooted in the Hizmet movement. It speaks from the perspective of a community that was collectively criminalized after July 15. At the same time, its analysis is based on publicly available records, court documents, international legal findings, human rights reports, official statistics, witness statements, and comparative political analysis. The report will be updated as additional evidence is identified and evaluated.

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Executive Summary

On the night of July 15, 2016, Türkiye witnessed a violent and chaotic military mobilization. Tanks appeared on the streets of Istanbul. Fighter jets flew over Ankara. The parliament building and police facilities were attacked. More than 250 people lost their lives.

Blame without an Investigation: Within hours, the Erdoğan government had already characterized the event as a military coup attempt and assigned blame to Fethullah Gulen and the movement he inspired.

This report reaches a fundamentally different conclusion: July 15 was not a conventional coup attempt that President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and political leadership merely survived. It was a false flag operation that created the appearance of a military coup while producing the political conditions Erdoğan needed to make a systemic change to full authoritarianism.

Misleading Orders: This report reveals a pattern where most of the soldiers mobilized that night did not understand the broader operation. The available testimonies indicate that many soldiers, military students, pilots, and officers were deployed under misleading orders, including claims that they were responding to a terrorist threat, participating in a military exercise, or protecting strategic facilities. Many of these officers and soldiers were later prosecuted for carrying out orders issued through the formal chain of command, while the commanders who gave those orders were never questioned. The main responsibility lies not with these misled soldiers but with the top-level commanders who mobilized military units and the Erdoğan-centered governing structure with which they colluded.

Not a Singularity but the Next Stage in the Authoritarian Drift: July 15 did not begin Türkiye's authoritarian transformation. Erdoğan had already spent years building the political, economic, judicial, media, and security architecture that made such an operation possible. Loyalist business networks had been enriched through public tenders, state-backed financing, public guarantees, tax advantages, and regulatory protection. Major media organizations had been transferred to government-friendly owners. The judiciary had been progressively politicized, particularly after the December 2013 corruption investigations. Security and intelligence institutions had increasingly aligned themselves with Erdoğan's personal authority. Political opponents and independent social groups had been described as traitors, terrorists, viruses, and existential enemies.

Contradictions of the Official Narrative: The official account of the night contains major contradictions. Türkiye's intelligence service reportedly received a warning several hours before the mobilization began, yet no nationwide alert was issued. The Director of National Intelligence

neither informed or protected president Erdogan or prime minister Yildirim. Erdoğan claimed that he learned of the events from his brother-in-law rather than from the Intelligence Director or Chief of the General Staff. Although alerted several hours in advance, the Chief of General Staff neither informed nor protected the political leadership or his own office, nor did he take the necessary steps to suppress a possible mobilization.

The overwhelming majority of the armed forces neither joined the mobilization nor moved decisively to stop it. The alleged coup had no publicly identified leadership, no coherent command structure, no realistic political program, and no credible plan for taking control of the critical institutions.

The mobilization began during evening rush hour, produced highly visible scenes on the Bosphorus Bridge, mobilized military students and junior personnel, and involved actions that were operationally counterproductive for a genuine coup but politically useful for creating public fear, anger, and spectacle.

Key political leaders were not detained. Government-aligned media was not controlled and continued to broadcast. Communications infrastructure was not effectively seized.

Air Force General Akın Öztürk was claimed to be the military leader of the military mobilization, but he commanded no military units at the time. On July 21st, Chief of General Staff Akar published a message on the official website of the General Staff that confirmed that Ozturk was sent to Akinci Airbase to stop the mobilization on orders from Akar himself. This message, however, was removed shortly thereafter. Akar never answered questions about the reason for the removal of this message, which was essentially an official admission of Ozturk's innocence. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention later found his detention arbitrary and identified serious violations of international legal standards.

The treatment of military and police officers who protected Erdoğan also contradicts the official narrative. Pilots who reportedly escorted his aircraft and members of his security detail who defended him were later dismissed or detained over alleged links to the movement. If these individuals were part of a coordinated operation to remove Erdoğan, their conduct that night directly contradicts the government's account of the events.

The civilian deaths require a genuine and independent investigation. The Erdoğan regime has used the victims as a rhetorical shield against scrutiny while keeping critical autopsy, ballistic, and crime-scene material outside effective public examination. Evidence cited in the report raises questions about unidentified shooters, impossible firing angles, weapons that did not match those of the accused soldiers, deleted recordings, and deaths due to causes unrelated to military gunfire.

The Purge Lists were Ready the Next Day: The developments immediately after July 15 reinforce the conclusion that the event was connected to a pre-existing political project. Within

hours, thousands of judges and prosecutors were suspended or detained. Large lists of administrative purges were activated before any investigation could possibly have taken place. The numerical asymmetry is equally revealing. Only a small fraction of military personnel were convicted for direct participation in the events of July 15. Yet millions of people were subsequently investigated, hundreds of thousands were prosecuted or convicted, and more than 130,000 public servants were removed through emergency procedures. The enormous difference between the number of people mobilized during the night and the number of people subjected to punishment afterward demonstrates that investigations were not limited to coup participants. It was the political, institutional, social, and economic liquidation of a targeted community and anyone else who is perceived by Erdogan as a threat to his power.

State of Emergency to Justify the Crackdown: The state of emergency that was declared right after the incident transformed this objective into government policy. Emergency decrees replaced ordinary legislation. Judges, prosecutors, military personnel, police officers, teachers, academics, diplomats, doctors, journalists, and other public employees were removed without due process. Thousands of schools, universities, associations, foundations, dormitories, hospitals, media organizations, trade unions, and businesses were closed, confiscated, transferred, or placed under government-appointed trustees.

The principle of individual criminal responsibility was replaced by guilt by association. Previously lawful activities—including working at licensed institutions, holding an account at Bank Asya, subscribing to newspapers, joining authorized trade unions, participating in charities, attending particular schools, or using communication applications—were retroactively presented as evidence of membership in a terrorist organization.

The Purge of the Judiciary: The purge of the judiciary was central to this transformation. Thousands of judges and prosecutors were removed, while a much larger new judicial cadre loyal to Erdogan was appointed in their place. Courts continued to exist, but their institutional function changed. Rather than administering the law, the judiciary began to translate political decisions into legal outcomes. The judiciary was not merely weakened, rather it was fully transformed into a political instrument.

Systemic Human Rights Abuses: The human consequences extended far beyond prosecution and imprisonment. Allegations of torture, sexual abuse, beatings, deprivation of medical care, arbitrary disciplinary measures, solitary confinement, and degrading prison conditions became part of the post-July 15 order. At least 1,336 deaths include cases involving illness, suicide, prison conditions, dangerous escape routes, deaths in custody, and the denial of adequate healthcare.

Dismissed individuals lost salaries, professional licenses, passports, medical insurance, housing security, and access to employment. Families were stigmatized. Children carried the consequences of accusations directed against their parents. The purge created not only legal punishment but also social death.

Confiscation of Private Financial Assets: The economic dimension was equally important. Companies, schools, media organizations, foundations, hospitals, and other properties were confiscated or placed under government-appointed trustees. The estimated value of assets taken from individuals and institutions associated with the Hizmet movement is approximately \$50 billion. These measures transferred their financial assets and physical properties to Erdoğan's cronies.

Justification for Systemic Change: July 15 also supplied the political conditions for constitutional transformation. The 2017 referendum was held under the state of emergency, amid severe inequality of media coverage, institutional repression, and legal harassment. The parliamentary system was replaced by an executive presidency. The office of prime minister was abolished. Presidential influence over appointments, administration, security policy, budgets, decrees, and the judiciary expanded. Temporary emergency powers became permanent presidential power.

The 2024 local elections demonstrated that the opposition could defeat Erdoğan electorally. The response was not democratic adaptation but intensified judicial intervention. The regime applied the same oppressive methods to new targets. Kurdish politicians, journalists, civil society actors, elected mayors, businesspeople, and, finally, the leadership of the main opposition CHP were subjected to politically driven prosecutions.

This continuity is essential. The post-July 15 system was never designed solely to eliminate the Hizmet movement. It was designed to eliminate dissent. Hizmet was simply the first group against which it was applied at full scale.

Once established, the method became reusable: construct a threat, criminalize a social or political group, coordinate the media narrative, mobilize the judiciary, seize institutional resources, and narrow political competition through legal force.

Transnational Repression: The repression also crossed Türkiye's borders. Renditions, abductions, passport cancellations, INTERPOL misuse, intelligence surveillance, extradition pressure, intimidation, and the targeting of exiled journalists extended the purge abroad. Educational institutions linked to the movement were closed, confiscated, transferred, or restructured across numerous countries, often under Turkish diplomatic pressure.

Democracy watchdog Freedom House ranked Turkey in 2022 as the world's second most frequent perpetrator of direct, physical transnational repression, targeting journalists, exiles, and dissidents. Türkiye's own public statements reflected the scale of the campaign. According to Freedom House, the Turkish government claimed to have returned 116 people from 27 countries in connection with the Hizmet Movement.

Fethullah Gülen's Response: Fethullah Gülen condemned the military mobilization while it was still unfolding, denied involvement, and repeatedly called for an independent international investigation. Erdoğan never responded to these calls.

A government that is confident in its account would have published the parliamentary findings, released the relevant intelligence and military records, permitted senior officials to testify, opened an independent forensic examination of the civilian deaths, and welcomed an international inquiry. The Erdoğan regime did none of the above; instead, it suppressed any efforts to illuminate the incident.

International Response: The international response further exposes the evidentiary weakness of the official narrative. German intelligence, the British Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, American officials, international courts, and UN working groups did not accept the Erdogan regime's central claims. They repeatedly distinguished between the possible conduct of individual actors and the collective criminal responsibility imposed on an entire civil society movement.

The conclusion of this report is therefore clear. July 15 was a false flag operation planned and executed by the Intelligence Operation (MIT), the Chief of General Staff and the top brass under Erdogan's direction. July 15 was not the victory of Turkish democracy. It supplied the founding myth for its systemic destruction

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July 15: Erdoğan's False Flag Operation and the Systemic Destruction of Turkish Democracy

Türkiye Ten Years After July 15

In May 2026, Türkiye entered another troubling stage in its long democratic decline. Özgür Özel, the leader of the Republican People's Party, CHP, Türkiye's main opposition party, was removed from office by a controversial court decision. He was replaced by the party's former leader, a figure widely seen as less threatening to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. At the same time, commentators close to the government began spreading allegations of corruption and possible criminal investigations against Özel and those close to him.

This was not an isolated development.

Only two years earlier, in the 2024 local elections, the CHP had delivered Erdoğan's ruling AKP one of its most significant electoral defeats. The party retained Istanbul and Ankara, won new municipalities, and became the top voted party nationwide for the first time in decades. Ekrem İmamoğlu, the elected mayor of Istanbul and Erdoğan's most serious potential rival, was later prosecuted and jailed after being declared the CHP's presidential candidate for the next election. Polls had shown him ahead of Erdoğan.

Other opposition mayors, members of parliament, and local officials also came under pressure. Some faced investigations. Others switched to the ruling AKP after corruption allegations surfaced against them. Once again, the judiciary appeared not as an independent institution applying the law, but as a political instrument used to subdue democratic competition.

These developments are not separate from the tragic July 15 incident. They are part of the same story.

They show that the system built in the aftermath of July 15 did not stop with the purging of the sympathizers of the Hizmet movement (a.k.a. Gülen movement). It did not stop with the restructuring of the military, the judiciary, the bureaucracy or the media. Over time, it became Erdoğan's model of rule: identify or construct a "threat", criminalize it, mobilize the courts, coordinate the media narrative, and narrow the space for politics by legal force.

July 15, 2016 marks the tenth anniversary of one of the most consequential and controversial events in modern Turkish history. On the night of July 15, 2016, Türkiye witnessed a violent military mobilization that was officially presented as a failed coup attempt. More than 250 people were killed. A corner of the parliament building was bombed. Fighter jets flew low over Ankara. Tanks appeared on the streets of Istanbul. By morning, the attempt had collapsed.

But this report argues that July 15 was not a conventional coup attempt. It was not a genuine military rebellion that Erdoğan later exploited. It was a false flag operation.

The central political actor behind this operation was Erdoğan himself. The purpose of the mobilization was not to remove him from power, but to create the conditions under which he could consolidate it. July 15 gave Erdoğan the crisis he needed to purge the state, criminalize the movement, silence independent media, restructure the judiciary, redesign the military, eliminate dissent, and impose constitutional changes to bring in a system of executive presidency without meaningful checks and balances.

This does not mean that every soldier who appeared on the streets that night understood the broader design. Many were likely misled, abandoned, or sacrificed. But the political architecture of July 15 points in one direction: Erdoğan.

The immediate blaming of the Hizmet movement, the refusal to allow an independent investigation, the disappearance of the parliamentary commission report, the speed of the purge lists, the scale of the crackdown, and the direct constitutional benefits Erdoğan gained from the event all suggest something far more organized than a spontaneous response to an unexpected crisis.

Within hours, Erdoğan had assigned responsibility. Within days, a state of emergency was declared. Within months, tens of thousands of people were detained, dismissed, prosecuted, or imprisoned. Media outlets were closed. Businesses were seized. Judges, prosecutors, police officers, teachers, academics, soldiers, journalists, and civil servants were purged. Ordinary acts of association, such as working at certain institutions, holding bank accounts, subscribing to newspapers, using certain communication tools, or sending children to certain schools, were reinterpreted as evidence of terrorism.

The official narrative presented July 15 as the night Turkish democracy was saved from a military coup. But the political outcome was not democratic restoration. It was the birth of a new regime further undermining the already crippled democracy.

This report examines July 15 not as an isolated night of violence, but as a false flag operation led by Erdoğan within a longer authoritarian transformation. It asks three central questions.

First, what kind of political, institutional, media, and judicial system had Erdoğan built before July 15 that made such an operation possible?

Second, what actually happened on July 15, and why does the official narrative leave so many critical questions unanswered?

Third, what were the consequences of July 15 for Türkiye's state, society, judiciary, media, opposition politics, and rule of law?

The report is organized in three parts.

Part I looks at the years before July 15. It traces the gradual construction of Erdoğan's power system: loyalist business networks, captured media, a politicized judiciary, the dehumanization of dissent, and the creation of a political climate in which extraordinary repression could be justified as necessary.

Part II focuses on July 15 itself. It examines the sequence of events, the unusual military mobilization, the immediate attribution of responsibility, the unanswered questions, the missing investigation, and the gaps in the official account. It asks how a limited and chaotic military movement became the central legitimizing event of Erdoğan's new regime.

Part III turns to the consequences. It analyzes the state of emergency, mass purges, judicial restructuring, media closures, asset seizures, transnational repression, and Türkiye's broader transformation into a personalized authoritarian system.

July 15 did not simply change Türkiye overnight. It revealed the purpose of a system Erdoğan had already built. Ten years later, that system still shapes Turkish politics. Its targets have changed over time, from the Hizmet movement to Kurdish politicians, journalists, civil society actors, opposition mayors, and finally the leadership of the main opposition party itself. But the method has remained remarkably consistent: political threats are criminalized, courts are mobilized, media narratives are coordinated, and democratic competition is narrowed by force of law.

This report therefore argues that July 15 must be understood not only as a tragic event, but as a false flag operation led by Erdoğan and used as the decisive catalyst in his transformation of Türkiye from a flawed democracy into a personalized authoritarian regime.

PART I: Eight Stages of Power Consolidation Under Erdoğan

July 15, 2016, is often presented as a sudden rupture in Türkiye's recent history: one violent night, one failed military coup attempt, one dramatic turning point. But this framing obscures the longer process that made that night politically usable. July 15 did not start Türkiye's authoritarian transformation. Erdoğan had already built the system that would use that night.

By the time July 15 arrived, Türkiye had already gone through a prolonged process of institutional capture. Loyalist business networks had grown dependent on state favors. Media ownership had been reshaped through the loyalist businesses. The judiciary had been politicized. Security institutions had been reorganized around personal loyalty. Dissenting groups had been turned into internal enemies. Large parts of society had been prepared to accept extraordinary measures as necessary acts of national survival. The central actor in this transformation was Erdoğan himself.

The process cannot be adequately explained through references to an abstract "state," a generic ruling party, or a conventional "deep state" framework. While state institutions, AKP structures, security actors, loyalist business networks, pro-government media, and politicized judicial bodies all played important roles, these elements operated within a political project under Erdoğan's leadership.

Over time, Erdoğan transformed these institutions and networks into instruments of personal power consolidation. The ruling party provided the political vehicle; state institutions supplied administrative and coercive capacity; loyalist business groups provided economic support; captured media produced and amplified official narratives; and the judiciary increasingly translated political objectives into "legal" action.

In this sense, the relevant actor was an Erdoğan-centered governing structure in which political authority, state capacity, economic dependency, media control, and legal coercion became increasingly aligned around the consolidation of one leader's power.

The process unfolded gradually over two decades. It unfolded through stages: the enrichment of loyalist business networks, the capture of mass media, the politicization of the judiciary, the dehumanization of dissenting groups, the use of July 15 as a catalyst, mass purges, the executive presidency, and finally the engineering of a managed opposition¹. July 15 did not mark the start of

¹ [Turkey: Freedom in the World 2025 Country Report](#)

the story. It marked the point at which Erdoğan's carefully constructed machinery was deployed to advance the next stage of consolidating power.

First Stage: The Enrichment of Loyalist Business Networks

One of the foundations of Erdoğan's political consolidation was the creation of a business environment in which politically connected companies gained unprecedented access to state resources. Türkiye's economic reforms after the 2001 financial crisis created rapid growth, attracting foreign investment and enabling large infrastructure projects. Erdoğan's government oversaw major construction, transportation, and energy investments.

But over time, this economic expansion became more than a development strategy. It became the financial pillar of a new ruling order centered on Erdoğan.

Major infrastructure projects including highways, bridges, airports, urban redevelopment schemes, energy investments, and public-private partnerships, were frequently awarded to a relatively small group of conglomerates known for their close ties to the government².

Holding companies such as Cengiz, Limak, Kalyon, Çalık, Kolin, and Albayrak became central recipients of state contracts³⁴. These firms did not merely grow under Erdoğan. They became politically functional. They financed the ecosystem of loyalty. They acquired media assets. They benefited from public tenders. They depended on continued political protection. And in return, they helped sustain Erdoğan's dominance.

State banks such as Ziraat Bank, VakıfBank, and Halkbank regularly issued large loans to government-aligned holdings. Public guarantees, tax advantages, loan restructuring, and state-backed financing reduced business risk for loyalists while increasing their dependence on political power⁵.

The result was a mutually reinforcing relationship: businessmen benefited from state decisions, while Erdoğan gained a loyal economic class. This was not ordinary cronyism. It was the construction of a political economy of obedience. Turkey's standing in the corruption perception

² Buğra, A., & Savaşkan, O. (2014). *New capitalism in Turkey: The relationship between politics, religion and business*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

³ Gürakar, P. T. (2016). *Politics of favoritism in public procurement in Turkey: Re-allocating resources under the AKP*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴ Sönmez, M. (2015). *Akp Döneminde Türkiye Ekonomisi: Neoliberalizm, İnşaat Yağması ve Çöküş* [The Turkish Economy in the AKP Era: Neoliberalism, Construction Plunder, and Collapse]. Notabene Yayınları.

⁵ Bedirhanoglu, P., Çağlar, G., & Y Create, Y. (Eds.). (2022). *Privatization in Turkey: Power Bloc, Capital Accumulation and State*. Brill.

index prepared by Transparency International declined from the historic high of 50 (out of a maximum of 100) in 2012 to 31 in 2025, making the country 124th among 182 countries ranked⁶.

Second Stage: The Acquisition of Media Organizations

A second major pillar of Erdoğan's consolidation was the transformation of Türkiye's media environment. In the early 2000s, Türkiye had a diverse but politically influential media sector. Major newspapers and television networks were controlled by large business groups, many of which had their own political interests. Over time, regulatory institutions, tax authorities, public tenders, and financial pressure were used to reshape this landscape⁷. The objective was not simply to silence criticism. It was to manufacture public consent around Erdoğan's political project.

One of the most significant tools was the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund, TMSF. Originally created to manage failed banks, TMSF became a mechanism through which the state could take control of companies holding media organizations. Media assets were seized, transferred, sold, or pressured into changing hands.

The Uzan Group was one early example. Its media outlets, including Star TV and Star newspaper, were taken over after banking-related investigations. Later, mainstream outlets such as Sabah and ATV were seized by TMSF and sold to Turkuvaz Media Group, established by Çalık Holding, where Erdoğan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak served as CEO at the time. Turkuvaz was later acquired by the Kalyon family. Its leadership remained closely connected to the Erdoğan family network.

Another major case was Doğan Media Group. Once one of Türkiye's largest independent media organizations, Doğan faced a massive tax fine in 2009. The pressure lasted for years. In 2018, Demirören Holding, a government-friendly business group, acquired major Doğan outlets, including Hürriyet and CNN Türk. After the sale, these outlets became visibly more aligned with government narratives.

By the late 2010s, independent analysts estimated that the overwhelming majority of Türkiye's mainstream media was controlled either directly or indirectly by government-friendly owners⁸.

⁶ [Türkiye - Transparency.org](https://www.transparency.org/en/corruption/perceptions-of-corruption)

⁷ **Tunç, A. (2015).** Media ownership and finances in Turkey: Increasing concentration and clientelism. In *Media in Political Transition*.

⁸ **Christensen, C. (2007).** Concentration of ownership, the fall of unions, and government legislation in Turkey. *Global Media and Communication*, 3(2), 179–199.

This system became known in Türkiye as “havuz medyası” (the pool media)⁹. The term captures the structure more accurately than abstract phrases such as “media capture.” It describes a media empire financed, protected, coordinated, and politically mobilized in the service of Erdoğan’s rule.

The consequence was not merely a change in ownership. Media no longer functioned primarily as a space for verification. It became an instrument of political warfare. Government-aligned outlets ran defamation campaigns against targeted individuals and groups and minimized the space available for opposition voices. Prosecutorial claims were presented as facts. Anonymous intelligence leaks were amplified as evidence. Opposition voices were either marginalized, demonized, or forced into defensive silence.

This was not merely a decline in media pluralism. It was the organized destruction of the public’s ability to distinguish accusation from evidence. After 2018, this machinery became even more centralized with the growing role of the Presidency’s Directorate of Communications. The Directorate of Communications effectively functioned as a ministry of propaganda: coordinating official messaging, disciplining public language, shaping international narratives, and turning state communication into a centralized political weapon.

Through this structure, government language, media headlines, social media campaigns, and legal narratives increasingly moved in the same direction. Sometimes Erdogan loyalist media outlets would use the exact same headlines, framing and photos to describe an event. Multiple columnists would use the same talking points simultaneously in their commentary.

As a result of the domination of the media landscape by Erdogan cronies, Turkey’s ranking in the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters without borders declined from 99 in 2002, the year Erdogan’s AKP assumed power, to a historic low of 165th in 2023¹⁰ and it remains at 163rd in 2026¹¹.

Third Stage: The Politicization of the Judiciary

The 2010 constitutional referendum was a major milestone in Turkish politics. At the time, the amendments were presented as democratizing reforms. They reduced the old military tutelage, allowed military officers to be tried in civilian courts, and changed the composition of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors.

Many liberals, conservatives, democrats, and participants of the Hizmet movement supported the referendum because it appeared to weaken the old military-bureaucratic guardianship system.

⁹ The term “pool media” originated from the pool of funds contributed by Erdogan loyalist businesses under his direction to allow Kalyon holding to purchase Turkuvaz Media Group from another loyalist Calik holding as the second faced financial troubles and wanted to exit the media sector.

¹⁰ <https://rsf.org/en/country-turkiye>

¹¹ [Turkey Falls to 163rd in 2026 World Press Freedom Index: Inside the RSF Report](#)

But this is also where the later rupture must be understood. The disagreement between Erdoğan and the Hizmet movement was not simply about December 2013. It began earlier, around Erdoğan's demand for a presidential system without meaningful checks and balances and the Hizmet movement's refusal to support it.

After his third election victory in 2011, Erdoğan increasingly moved away from coalition-building and toward centralized personal rule. He began advocating an executive presidency that would allow the president to issue decrees with the force of law and bypass parliament.

Hizmet supporters had backed the 2010 referendum because they saw it as a step against military tutelage. But they did not support Erdoğan's later project of unchecked presidentialism. This refusal became one of the central reasons for the split.

Fethullah Gülen stated that he was not against a presidential system in principle, but that Erdoğan's proposed model lacked checks and balances. For Erdoğan, this was not a minor disagreement. It was a challenge to the architecture of personal rule he was building.

In 2014, prior to the elections for the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), the administrative and disciplinary body governing the Turkish judiciary, Erdoğan formed tactical alliances with groups which had previously opposed him, including neo-nationalist and Eurasianist (anti-west, anti-American, anti-NATO) Vatan Party. While the party never scored even 1% of the general vote, it nevertheless had a disproportionate number of sympathizers in the judiciary. The resulting alliance, called the "Unity in the Judiciary Platform" scored a big win. The result was the domination of Erdogan loyalists and allies in the higher judiciary. From this point Erdogan replaced his former allies such as democrats, liberals, Kurds, and Hizmet movement who supported his pro-European Union agenda with a new anti-democratic coalition, a marriage of convenience with ultranationalist and anti-EU, anti-west groups.

This was something more dangerous than the return of the old military-backed state elite: It was the fusion of the old state's authoritarian reflexes with Erdoğan's new personalized power project. In 2013, the powers of Türkiye's National Intelligence Organization, MİT, were expanded. Legal changes increased MİT's authority and made prosecution of intelligence personnel dependent on special permission, weakening judicial oversight. This gave Erdoğan another powerful tool to use against dissent.

The Gezi Park protests in May 2013 revealed the regime's intolerance for autonomous social mobilization. What began as a peaceful sit-in to protect one of Istanbul's few remaining green spaces became a nationwide protest movement after forceful police intervention. The state response: tear gas, water cannons, mass arrests, and political demonization, showed how quickly civic dissent could be reframed as a security threat.

Then came December 2013. A major corruption investigation involving ministers, businessmen, money transfers, gold trading, and Erdoğan's inner circle became public. Millions of dollars in cash were found in shoeboxes in the home of the director of state-owned Halkbank. Several ministers resigned. Recordings and documents circulated widely.

The Erdoğan government rejected the accusations and framed the investigation as a “judicial coup attempt” by members of the judiciary and police allegedly linked to Gülen. While Erdogan's claim was baseless, since the judiciary did not have the jurisdiction to indict cabinet ministers or Erdogan, he had the power of the media to portray the investigations as treason and the Hizmet movement as a national security threat.

The response was immediate and sweeping. Thousands of police officers, prosecutors, and judges were removed or reassigned. Judicial appointment structures were changed. Officials involved in the investigations were purged.

This was the decisive moment when the judiciary stopped functioning as a possible check on power and became an instrument for protecting power. In this case, it became an instrument for protecting Erdoğan and his power circle.

From that point forward, law was increasingly used not to investigate wrongdoing, but to eliminate those who exposed it.

Türkiye's rank in the Rule of Law Index published by World Justice Project declined 38 places from 80th in 2015 to 118th in 2025¹².

Fourth Stage: Scapegoating Vulnerable Groups

Scapegoating vulnerable groups is a common tactic of authoritarian leaders¹³. It is used to unify supporters against a common enemy¹⁴, divert attention from government failures, justify extraordinary powers, suppress dissent, legitimize discrimination and exclusion, justify purges of institutions, and generate a climate of fear¹⁵

After becoming president in 2014, Erdoğan increasingly used hate speech, defamation, and political dehumanization, primarily against the Hizmet movement. The movement was no longer described as a former ally, a social movement, or a political rival. It was redefined as an existential threat. Its members and sympathizers were called “traitors,” “terrorists,” “viruses,” “cancer cells,” and “enemies of the nation.”

¹² https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/Türkiye_0.pdf

¹³ [The Authoritarian Playbook - Protect Democracy](#)

¹⁴ Arendt, H. (1951). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt.

¹⁵ Snyder, T. (2017). *On tyranny: Twenty lessons from the twentieth century*. Tim Duggan Books.

This language was not sporadic. It was a sustained discursive strategy. It was not rhetorical excess. It was preparation. Dehumanization served a political function. It made future repression morally acceptable. Once a group is described as a disease, cleansing becomes thinkable. Once a social network is described as a conspiracy, ordinary association becomes suspicious. Once dissent is framed as treason, law becomes a weapon.

The state began to use counterterrorism laws to intimidate, silence, and imprison critics. Journalists, academics, civil servants, businesspeople, teachers, and activists were accused of terrorism based on association, criticism, or alleged ideological proximity. The Hizmet movement became the primary target. But the fear spread far beyond it. This was the political usefulness of the campaign: even people with no association to Hizmet understood that being accused of such an association could destroy their careers, families, passports, property, and freedom. This is how collective fear works. It does not require everyone to be arrested. It only requires everyone to know that they could be.

Ordinary activities such as working at certain institutions, sending children to certain schools, donating to charities, subscribing to newspapers, holding accounts at certain banks, or participating in professional networks, were gradually reinterpreted as indicators of criminality. The legal category expanded until ordinary activities of social life itself became evidence. This logic would later be criticized in major European Court of Human Rights judgments, including *Yalçınkaya v. Türkiye* (2023)¹⁶ and *Yasak v. Türkiye* (2026)¹⁷, where the Court objected to the use of ordinary, lawful activities as evidence of membership in an illegal organization.

Fifth Stage: July 15 as False Flag Military Mobilization

On July 15, 2016, a very small portion of the Turkish military was mobilized by commanders in an incident that Erdoğan immediately portrayed as a coup attempt against his government. The central question is not whether military units were mobilized that night. They were. The central question is who designed the conditions under which a limited, chaotic, self-defeating military mobilization could be transformed into the founding myth of a new regime. This is where the official narrative becomes deeply problematic.

If the Movement had allegedly infiltrated the state so extensively that more than 20,000 members of the armed forces and more than 33,000 members of the police force would later be dismissed from their jobs on alleged links to the movement¹⁸, why did only a tiny fraction of military personnel mobilize that night? Why did some of them try to stop it? Why was there no coherent

¹⁶ European Court of Human Rights. (2023, September 26). *Yüksel Yalçınkaya v. Türkiye* (Grand Chamber, Application No. 15669/20). <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-227940>

¹⁷ European Court of Human Rights. (2026, May 5). *Yasak v. Türkiye* (Grand Chamber, Application No. 17389/20). <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-242267>

¹⁸ Stockholm Center for Freedom, published October 5, 2020. Available online at: [20,312 military personnel summarily dismissed from Turkish Armed Forces over alleged Gülen links - Stockholm Center for Freedom](#)

command structure? Why were critical institutions and top political leaders left untouched? Why did the alleged coup lack a clear military leadership, a functioning communication strategy, and a realistic operational plan?

The incident looked less like a conventional military coup and more like a controlled military mobilization designed to fail and to create the political conditions for a massive purge.

While the mobilization was still unfolding, Erdoğan, who claimed he could not reach the chief of intelligence and learned of the event from his brother in law, blamed Gülen sympathizers in the military for the mobilization.

Gülen condemned the attempt while it was still in progress¹⁹ and denied any involvement²⁰. He called for an independent international investigation in his interviews with the international media in the following days and stated that he would return to Türkiye if such an investigation found him responsible²¹. The Journalists and Writers Foundation also petitioned the United Nations for an international inquiry.

Erdoğan never accepted these calls. Instead, the government moved quickly to consolidate a single narrative. The Turkish Parliament established an investigative commission, but the process was delayed and restricted. The final report disappeared after being seen in the hands of the commission chair²². Opposition members argued that sections addressing intelligence failures, institutional responsibility, and the political environment preceding the events were removed or suppressed.

Politicians, academics, and journalists who questioned the official narrative or raised important questions about its inconsistencies were imprisoned. One example is the leader of pro-Kurdish HDP Selahattin Demirtaş. On the parliament floor, Demirtaş challenged the official story of July 15 and stated that Erdoğan and his allies knew about the mobilization, instead of stopping it they weakened it and added dramatic elements for media consumption²³.

He characterized July 15 as "the bloodiest conspiracy in recent history." Shortly thereafter he was imprisoned and remains in prison as of this writing. Similarly, journalists such as

¹⁹ [Fethullah Gulen issued the following statement on recent developments in Turkey - AFSV](#)

²⁰ [Muslim Cleric Gulen Denies Involvement in Attempted Turkish Coup](#)

²¹ [Fethullah Gulen: I Condemn All Threats to Turkey's Democracy - The New York Times](#)

²² [Turkish cleric calls for international body to examine coup charges | Reuters](#)

²³ [Former coup commission chair says Turkey's July 15 report was delivered but never published - 15 Temmuz Gerçekleri](#)

²⁴ https://stockholmcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/15_July_Erdogans_Coup_13.07.2017.pdf

Ahmet Şık²⁵, Ece Sevim Öztürk²⁶, and Kazım Güleçyüz²⁷ were imprisoned because of their reporting and investigations that challenged the official account of the July 15 events.

A real investigation would have asked who benefited, who knew what in advance, why warnings were ignored, why the chain of command behaved so strangely, and why prepared purge lists appeared so quickly afterward. Erdoğan avoided precisely those questions.

This is why July 15 should not be treated only as a failed military coup attempt. It should be understood as a false flag military mobilization: a violent and tragic event in which a limited military movement was instrumentalized to justify the next stage of an ongoing project of authoritarian consolidation.

Sixth Stage: Mass Purges and the Systemic Change to Executive Presidency

Following July 15, Erdoğan declared a state of emergency. The government launched an unprecedented crackdown. More than 100,000 public employees were dismissed or suspended through emergency decrees. Thousands of judges, prosecutors, academics, teachers, police officers, and military personnel were removed. Universities were heavily affected. Many academics lost their positions, passports, and professional futures.

Media outlets were closed. Associations, schools, foundations, dormitories, businesses, and charities were seized or shut down. Asset confiscations became part of the punishment system. The purge did not merely remove individuals. It remade the state around Erdoğan's authority. The military was reorganized. The police and bureaucracy were filled with Erdoğan loyalists. The judiciary became more dependent on political approval. The state of emergency normalized government by decree.

In 2017, Erdoğan's government held a constitutional referendum that replaced Türkiye's parliamentary system with an executive presidency. The referendum passed by a narrow margin under highly controversial circumstances, including the acceptance of more than 1.5 million unstamped ballots²⁸.

Starting right after the 2011 elections, Erdoğan sought to transition Turkey to a presidential system but refrained from pursuing this objective because it lacked sufficient support, even within his own party. Following the events of July 15, however, he capitalized on the

²⁵ [ECtHR says Turkey violated rights of journalist Ahmet Şık - Stockholm Center for Freedom](#)

²⁶ [Turkish court rules for continuation of journalist Ece Sevim Öztürk's pretrial imprisonment - Stockholm Center for Freedom](#)

²⁷ [Kazım Güleçyüz - PEN America](#)

²⁸ [Turkey referendum: Key reactions - BBC News](#)

prevailing public mood and the state of emergency—during which constitutional safeguards were effectively suspended—to achieve this long-standing goal.

Under the former parliamentary system, executive authority was exercised by a prime minister and a cabinet accountable to parliament, which could remove the government through a vote of no confidence. The president served largely as a ceremonial head of state with limited constitutional powers. Under the executive presidency, however, the offices of head of state and head of government were merged, making the president the sole chief executive. The president now appoints and dismisses ministers, vice presidents, and many senior public officials without parliamentary approval, may issue presidential decrees with the power of law (KHKs) in areas of executive authority, and exercises significant influence over judicial appointments. Parliament no longer has the power to remove the government through a vote of no confidence, substantially reducing legislative oversight of the executive²⁹.

This was the constitutionalization of personal rule³⁰. With opposition candidates deprived of equal media coverage and public resources, Erdoğan won the first presidential election under the new system in 2018. July 15 had served its political purpose. A crisis became an excuse to reshape the constitution. A purge became a governing system. A night of violence became the founding myth of Erdoğan's executive presidency.

Seventh Stage: The Managed Opposition

After the Hizmet movement had been crushed, Erdoğan moved to the next stage: weakening the remaining political opposition.

Türkiye still had elections. Opposition parties still existed. Parliament still met. Courts still issued rulings. Newspapers are still published. But the function of these institutions had changed³¹. This is a pattern that is seen in several regimes following the authoritarian's playbook: opposition is allowed to exist, but not to win power. Elections are allowed, but not allowed to threaten the ruler. Courts are allowed to operate, but only within the boundaries drawn by the regime. "Justice" is applied selectively to opponents³².

²⁹ European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), *Opinion on the Amendments to the Constitution Adopted by the Grand National Assembly on 21 January 2017 and to be Submitted to a National Referendum on 16 April 2017*, CDL-AD(2017)005 (Venice: Council of Europe, 2017), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/cdl-ad-2017-005-e>

³⁰ Berk Esen and Şebnem Gümüşçü, "A Small Yes for Presidentialism: The Turkish Constitutional Referendum of April 2017," *South European Society and Politics* 22, no. 3 (2017): 303–326, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2017.1384341>

³¹ Global Investigative Journalism Network [Understanding the Authoritarian's Playbook: Tips for Journalists](#)

³² Thomas Carothers Brendan Hartnett (2024), Misunderstanding Democratic Backsliding, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 135, No 3, pp. 24-37. [Misunderstanding Democratic Backsliding | Journal of Democracy](#)

The judiciary, now transformed into an instrument of politics, was increasingly used against elected mayors, opposition leaders, journalists, party officials, and civil society actors. The main opposition CHP remained a significant electoral force. In the March 2024 local elections, CHP achieved a historic victory and became the top-voted party nationwide for the first time in decades. It retained major metropolitan municipalities and won new ones. Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu and Ankara Mayor Mansur Yavaş were re-elected.

This changed Erdoğan's calculations. For years, Erdoğan could tolerate what might be called "His Majesty's opposition": an opposition loud enough to preserve the appearance of democracy, but too weak, divided, or cautious to threaten real power. But the 2024 local elections showed that the opposition could win. That is when the pressure intensified.

İmamoğlu, widely seen as Erdoğan's strongest potential rival, was prosecuted and jailed after being declared CHP's presidential candidate for the next election. Other mayors and opposition figures faced investigations. Some local politicians changed parties after corruption allegations, pressure, or political threats. The state also intervened in CHP's internal dynamics. The 2023 leadership change had brought new energy to the party under Özgür Özel. After the party's 2024 success, legal pressure around CHP's congress and leadership structure became a new tool to fracture the opposition from within.

The strategy is clear: if the opposition cannot be defeated at the ballot box, it must be divided by courts, exhausted by investigations, deprived of leaders, and turned against itself. This is the engineering of controlled opposition.

Eighth Stage: From Competitive to Full Authoritarianism

Erdoğan's two-decade transformation of Türkiye shows how political power can be consolidated gradually through a multi-stage process. First, loyalist business networks were enriched. Then media organizations were transferred into friendly hands. Then the judiciary was politicized. Then dissenting groups, especially the Hizmet Movement, were dehumanized. Then July 15 was used as a catalyst to transform the government through a constitutional change. Then mass purges remade the state. Then the executive presidency legalized personal rule. Then the opposition itself became a target of judicial and administrative engineering.

The first decade of Erdoğan's rule included economic development, EU-oriented reforms, and the weakening of old military tutelage. It also elevated many conservative Muslims who had long been subjected to discriminatory treatment by state institutions. But the second decade moved in a very different direction. Türkiye transitioned from competitive democracy to competitive

authoritarianism, and from competitive authoritarianism toward personalized rule³³. The most important event in this transformation was July 15, 2016. Not because everything began that night. But because that night allowed Erdoğan to do openly what he had been preparing structurally for years.

July 15 was portrayed as a failed military coup attempt. But politically, it functioned as the founding crisis of Erdoğan's new regime. The next question, therefore, is not only what happened on July 15. The deeper question is this: How did Erdoğan build a system that was ready to use July 15 the moment it happened?

The answer cannot be reduced to institutional failure, bureaucratic drift, or a vague deep-state explanation. The evidence points to Erdoğan's deliberate consolidation of a governing structure in which party power, state capacity, loyalist capital, propaganda media, politicized courts, and security institutions were aligned around his personal rule. This is what made July 15 so consequential. It was not merely a tragic night. It was the trigger that allowed an already-built authoritarian architecture to fully reveal itself.

In Part II, the report will zoom in on July 15 itself: the sequence of events, the unusual military mobilization, the unanswered questions, the immediate attribution of responsibility, and the gaps in the official narrative. Part III will then examine the consequences: the state of emergency, mass purges, judicial restructuring, media closures, asset seizures, transnational repression, and the broader transformation of Türkiye into a personalized authoritarian syst

³³ Hürcan Aslı Aksoy, Salim Çevik (2025) Turkey's Authoritarian Drift Accelerates: Istanbul Mayor Faces Imprisonment, Point of View, 26.02.2025, German Institute for International and Security Affairs [Turkey's Authoritarian Drift Accelerates: Istanbul Mayor Faces Imprisonment - Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik](#)

ERDOĞAN'S POWER GRAB IN *8 Stages*

From loyalist business networks to personalized rule:
how Turkey's institutions were captured, restructured,
and turned into instruments of one-man power.

1 Loyalist Business Networks

**State contracts
created a dependent
economic elite.**

Erdoğan built a
loyal business class
through public tenders,
infrastructure projects,
state loans, guarantees,
and tax advantages.

2 Media Capture

**Ownership
changed; public
consent was
manufactured.**

Media outlets
were seized,
pressured,
transferred, or sold
to government-
friendly owners,
turning the media
into a political
weapon.

3 Politicized Judiciary

**Law became a shield for power and
a weapon against critics.**

After the 2013 corruption investigations, judges,
prosecutors, and police were removed or
reassigned, and the judiciary increasingly protected
Erdoğan's circle instead of checking power.

4 Scapegoating and Dehumanization

**Dissenting groups
were turned into
internal enemies.**

The Hizmet
movement and
other critics were
described as
"traitors," "terrorists,"
"viruses," and
"enemies," making
future repression
socially acceptable.

Managed Opposition

Elections remained, but real competition was narrowed.

After the opposition's 2024 local election success, pressure intensified against mayors, opposition figures, and CHP leadership structures. The strategy: divide, prosecute, exhaust, and control the opposition.



State of Emergency and Mass Purges

The state was emptied, rebuilt, and disciplined.

More than 100,000 public employees were dismissed or suspended; media, schools, associations, foundations, businesses, and charities were closed, seized, or shut down.



Executive Presidency

Personal rule was constitutionalized.

The 2017 referendum replaced the parliamentary system with an executive presidency, giving Erdoğan expanded powers over high judiciary, decrees with power of law, with no checks on his power.



July 15 as Catalyst

A violent night became the founding myth of a new regime.

The July 15 Operation: a limited and chaotic event used to justify the next stage of authoritarian consolidation.

The method remained constant:

- Create a threat.
- Criminalize it
- Mobilize the courts
- Coordinate the media, and
- Narrow politics by legal force.

PART II: Why was July 15 not a Coup?

July 15, 2026, marks the tenth anniversary of the tragic events of July 15, 2016. The Erdogan government and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) have consistently characterized it as a failed military coup attempt against their democratically elected government. Despite extensive efforts by the Turkish government to promote this narrative on the global stage, leveraging diplomatic channels, bilateral relations, and state-aligned media, the efforts have failed to convince international public opinion. This gap between the official narrative and global skepticism raises a critical analytical question: Why did the Turkish government, despite mobilizing extensive state resources, fail to persuade the international community fully?

The factors that challenge the credibility and persuasiveness of the government's narrative can be broadly categorized into three main areas. The first category covers the actions of Türkiye's most senior military and intelligence figures in the hours immediately before and during the events. A pattern emerges from the available evidence that cuts against the government's official narrative: high-level meetings whose contents have never been disclosed, an intelligence warning that arrived several hours before the attempt began yet prompted no broad alert, special forces units dispatched on what they were told was a routine exercise, and a key piece of legislation that prepared military commanders to send units into residential areas on the premise of helping defend against terrorist attacks.

The sections that follow examine each of these threads in detail, and collectively they raise a question that the Turkish government has never answered: how much did those at the top know, and when did they know it?

The second category includes the sequence of events as they unfolded during the night of the so-called "attempted coup." Observers have pointed to inconsistencies, unusual military movements, timing irregularities, and questions surrounding the chain of command. These elements contributed to confusion and, in some cases, skepticism among international analysts and observers regarding the nature and execution of the events. Testimonies that have emerged over the past decade, particularly from military personnel during judicial proceedings, have further complicated the official narrative advanced by the Erdogan government. Statements from dismissed and subsequently imprisoned officers have introduced alternative perspectives and raised new questions about the conduct and coordination of the events. Selected examples from these testimonies to illustrate how they challenge or reinterpret key aspects of the night of July 15.

The third category encompasses the government's actions in the aftermath of the incident. This category includes large-scale purges across the military, judiciary, academia, and civil service; mass arrests of civilians; and months-long emergency decrees and martial laws. Critics argue that the scope and speed of these measures raised concerns about premeditation. Additionally, the

government's attribution of responsibility and its handling of evidence became points of contention in international discourse.

Developments Before July 15, 2016

Erdogan's Disappearance from Public View Four Days before July 15

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan effectively disappeared from public view starting on July 11, 2016, when he secretly departed Ankara for an unannounced five-day vacation at a resort hotel in the town of Marmaris in southwest Türkiye. Contrary to standard protocol, he did not have his military aide with him. Throughout July 12, 13, and 14, he held no public events, gave no television interviews, and issued no official press releases, keeping his exact coordinates restricted to a highly limited inner circle. He did not even attend a public Friday prayer on July 15 at a nearby mosque. This absolute media blackout and lack of public appearances created a multi-day void in leadership visibility that lasted until the late-night hours of July 15, when he finally resurfaced via a FaceTime call on CNN Türk to rally citizens against the developing military mobilization³⁴.

Wave of Terrorist Attacks During the 12 Months Before July 15

In the 12 months preceding the July 15 operation in 2016 (approximately July 2015–July 2016), Türkiye experienced one of the deadliest waves of terrorism in its modern history. The attacks were carried out primarily by the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) and by Kurdish militant organizations, particularly the Kurdistan Workers' Party and its splinter group, the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons. Among others, the Ankara peace rally bombing of 10 October 2015 claimed 103 lives; the Ankara military shuttle bombing on February 17th, 2016, claimed 29 lives; the Ankara Kizilay Square bombing on March 13th, 2016, claimed 37 lives; and the Ataturk Airport attack on June 28th, 2016, claimed 45 lives. Both the society and the military were sensitized around the possibility of deadly terrorist attacks. A critical piece of legislation paved the way to prepare the military to mobilize under the pretense of defending against such terrorist attacks.³⁵

The July 13–14, 2016 Security Legislation and the Expansion of Military Authority

Two days before the attempted coup of July 15, 2016, the Turkish Grand National Assembly approved amendments to the Turkish Armed Forces Personnel Law (Law No. 6722), which were signed into law by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on July 14, 2016. The amendments expanded the legal authority of military commanders to conduct domestic security operations against terrorism, allowing military units to participate more directly in internal security operations when

³⁴ The owner of the hotel where Erdoğan was staying on July 15 spoke out. [15 Temmuz'da Erdoğan'ın kaldığı otelin sahibi konuştu - Sözcü](#)

³⁵ [Turkey's terrorism attack timeline | Euronews](#), 2016.

civilian law enforcement was deemed insufficient. The law also granted impunity to the security forces for any damage and right violations committed during such operation.³⁶

The practical effect of the amendments was to restore several operational authorities previously associated with the EMASYA, the acronym for “Emniyet-Asayiş Yardımlaşma,” meaning “Security and Public Order Collaboration” system, regarding military involvement in maintaining internal security. EMASYA had been abolished by the Erdoğan government in 2010 because it was viewed as granting the military excessive autonomy in domestic affairs and paving the way for military coups.³⁷

The new law authorized the military to conduct security operations to fight against terror attacks without permission from the governor and organize search and seizure operations in terror-related incidents without prior authorization from a judge. The chief of staff would decide troop deployments, their size, and mobilization, and the military commander would be in charge of joint military-police operations. In short, the military was given new powers to operate as a law enforcement agency within residential areas. Instead of EMASYA, the new protocol was KOKTOD, short for “Kolluk Kuvvetlerini Toplumsal Olaylarda Destekleme,” or “Supporting Law Enforcement in Social Incidents.”

During court hearings, numerous military personnel testified that they had been deployed on July 15 in response to terror alerts. One piece of state propaganda claimed that coup plotters attacked a police headquarters. In reality, on July 15, a military unit commanded by Col. Yusuf Sarı entered the Bayrampaşa Riot Police headquarters, and a clash broke out between the soldiers and police.

When questioned about the events of July 15, Col. Sarı testified that he and his team had entered the police headquarters to help counter a terrorist attack. Other officers in his unit corroborated this, testifying that they had received orders from their commanders to respond to a terrorist threat.^{38 39} Col. Sarı stated that their entry into the Bayrampaşa Riot Police premises was carried out under KOKTOD, the protocol governing military support to law enforcement during public events. He added: “Those who planned the July 15 events wanted to pit the military against the police and the public.”⁴⁰

The timing of this legal change, precisely on July 14, was significant because without this law, the military commanders could resist sending their troops to residential areas. The wave of deadly terror attacks during the year preceding July 15 heightened the sensitivity of the military to such attacks and created an expectation that an attack could occur any time. This heightened awareness, combined with the new legislation allowing the military to operate within the cities

³⁶ Tas, Hakki, (2020) The New Turkey and its Nascent Security Regime, Giga Focus, Middle East, Number 6, November 2020, https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2044531/gf_nahost_2006_en.pdf

³⁷ EMASYA was abolished in Turkey – BBC News Turkish [Türkiye’de EMASYA yürürlükten kalktı - BBC News Türkçe](https://www.bbc.com/turkish/news-turkey-2010-10)

³⁸ The case of takeover of Bayrampaşa Riot Police Department, Hürriyet, 7 April 2017, [Bayrampaşa Çevik Kuvvet Şube Müdürlüğü’nü işgal girişimi davası \(2\) - Yerel Haberler](https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/bayrampasa-cevik-kuvvet-sube-mudurlugunu-iskal-girisimi-davasi-3-2-1778960/)

³⁹ <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2017/gundem/bayrampasa-cevik-kuvvet-sube-mudurlugunu-iskal-girisimi-davasi-3-2-1778960/>

⁴⁰ “Mahkeme Başkanından uyarı” [The warning from Presiding Judge], Cumhuriyet, 23 May 2017 http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/746683/Mahkeme_baskanindan_uyari_Sen_kendini_hala_albay_saniv_orsun_eski_albaysin_sen_ve_saniksin.html

with impunity, facilitated the swift mobilization of military units on the night of July 15 under the false pretense of defending against terrorist attacks.

National Intelligence Organization (MIT) was informed about the coup in the early afternoon

According to pro-government media reports, Army Aviation Major O.K., later revealed to be initials of Osman Kucukkaraca, approached the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) during the early afternoon of July 15 and provided information about unusual military activity. However, the subsequent treatment of the officer has raised questions about the official narrative. Rather than being publicly recognized for helping alert authorities, O.K. was reportedly dismissed from the military during the post-coup purges for his alleged affiliations with the Hizmet (a.k.a. Gulen) Movement, then reinstated and finally made a personnel of the intelligence service.⁴¹ More broadly, the intelligence warning itself has generated significant controversy. According to official statements, MIT received information hours before the July 15 operation began and relayed it to senior military officials. Questions arose about the adequacy of the National Intelligence Organization's response. It raises the question: why were broader warnings not issued to the President, the prime minister, other ministers, political leaders, opposition parties, parliamentarians, and military commanders across the country? Why were precautionary measures taken to help stop such a mobilization?

In interviews following the events of July 15, Erdoğan stated that he first learned of the “coup attempt” from his brother-in-law. According to his account, neither the Director of National Intelligence nor the Chief of the General Staff, both of whom reported directly to him, warned him of the unfolding events. Instead, the information allegedly reached him through a family member.⁴² This account raises a troubling dilemma. One possibility is that both the Chief of the General Staff and the Head of the Intelligence Service (MIT) withheld critical information from Erdoğan, anticipating that the coup could succeed. If so, their actions could be interpreted as tacit support for an effort to remove him from power. The alternative interpretation is that Erdoğan's exclusion was itself part of a carefully managed scenario, in which there was no need to inform him because the operation was under control and designed to unfold in a predetermined manner. Erdogan could deny pre-knowledge of the incident and hence evade responsibility for the likely loss of life. Another important question is, after receiving the intelligence, why were key strategic locations, such as the presidential palace or his location on that day, parliament, and main communication hubs, not secured in advance?

The case of O.K. also highlights a broader contradiction that critics identify in the government's narrative. The officer who warned the National Intelligence Organization was later dismissed based on the allegations that he was affiliated with the Hizmet Movement. If the officer who reportedly provided the warning was later dismissed because of alleged ties to the Hizmet (a.k.a. Gulen) movement helped expose or prevent the coup, should that action not also be acknowledged?

⁴¹Cumhuriyet, “Major Who Informed MIT of the Coup Was Dismissed,” August 5, 2016, [Darbeyi MIT'e haber veren binbaşı ihraç edildi](#)

⁴² Bianet. “Erdoğan: I Learned About the Coup Attempt from My Brother-in-Law.” July 20, 2016. [Erdoğan: Darbe Girişimini Eniştemden Öğrendim](#)

Meetings between the Chief of the General Staff, the Director of the National Intelligence Organization (MIT), and the Special Forces Commander on July 14.

The timing of and the secrecy surrounding the meetings between senior military and intelligence officials immediately before the “July 15 failed coup” harbors several signs that point at a false flag operation. On July 14, Chief of the General Staff Gen. Hulusi Akar, National Intelligence Organization (MIT) Director Hakan Fidan, and Special Forces Commander Gen. Zekai Aksakallı reportedly met at Special Forces Headquarters. According to various accounts, Aksakallı and Fidan subsequently held a separate private meeting, away from their aides.^{43 44} The contents of these discussions have never been fully disclosed to the public. Despite their roles, none of these individuals testified before the congressional committee investigating the attempt.

Questions have also been raised regarding Hakan Fidan's presence at the General Staff Headquarters on the night of July 15. According to testimonies presented during subsequent trials, Fidan remained in meetings with Gen. Hulusi Akar at the General Staff complex until approximately 10:00 p.m. Major Akdemir, who was attending a meeting with other officers in Çakmak Hall that evening, testified that when he was ordered by Department Chief Cemil Turan to leave the building around 10:00 p.m., he observed not only armed soldiers in the corridors but also Hakan Fidan and members of his staff moving through the complex and leaving without difficulty.⁴⁵

These accounts raise important questions. If the intelligence service had already received warnings of unusual military activity earlier that day, what information was discussed during these high-level meetings, and what actions were taken in response? Upon receiving a tip on the upcoming military mobilization, how did intelligence chief Fidan know that the chief of general staff was not involved? Why did he not alert President Erdogan, Prime Minister Yildirim, or the interior minister but instead head to the headquarters of the General Chief of Staff? The fact that the details of the July 14 meetings and the conversations between Chief of Staff Hulusi Akar and Intelligence Director Hakan Fidan on July 15 have never been fully disclosed has fueled continuing debate about the extent of prior knowledge among senior military and intelligence officials.

The controversy has been further intensified by the refusal of General Hulusi Akar, General Zekai Aksakallı, and Intelligence Director Hakan Fidan to appear before the parliamentary commission established to investigate the events of July 15. Rather than face public scrutiny, President Erdoğan subsequently rewarded all three with promotions. Hulusi Akar was appointed Minister of National Defense after serving as Chief of the General Staff. Zekai Aksakallı was promoted from Major General to Lieutenant General. Hakan Fidan, whom Erdoğan publicly described as his most trusted confidant, was later appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs.

⁴³T24, “Claim: Hulusi Akar and Hakan Fidan Met Privately for Six Hours One Day Before the Coup Attempt,” March 2, 2017, [“Hulusi Akar ile Hakan Fidan, darbe girişiminden bir gün önce 6 saat başbaşa görüştü” iddiası | T24](#)

⁴⁴ TR724, “Witness Soldiers Describe the Secret July 15 Meeting: Fidan Met First with Akar, Then with Aksakallı,” June 8, 2017, [15 Temmuz’un sır görüşmesini şahit askerler anlattı: Fidan önce Akar’la sonra Aksakallı ile buluşmuş - TR724](#)

⁴⁵ [Brig. General Caha says July 15 coup carried out under control of chief of general staff, MIT head](#)

The promotion of key figures who might otherwise have been expected to provide testimony and answer questions following a coup attempt raises serious concerns. The advancement of these officials suggests that the highest levels of the military, intelligence services, and political leadership may have had a deeper role in the events of July 15.

Special Forces Units Were Ordered to Participate in an “Unconventional Exercise”; preparations started four days before July 15.

In the days leading up to July 15, 2016, several Special Forces units reportedly received orders to participate in what was described as an "unconventional exercise." According to testimonies presented during subsequent trials, the stated purpose of the exercise was to prepare for the defense of military facilities, including the General Staff Headquarters, against a potential terrorist attack.⁴⁶ However, many of the officers and soldiers who carried out these orders on the night of July 15 were later arrested and prosecuted as participants in the events of July 15.

One of the most controversial aspects of the events concerns the role of Special Forces Commander Gen. Zekai Aksakallı. Col. Fırat Alakuş and other officers testified that they believed they were acting under orders originating from the chain of command and that the exercise had been approved by senior leadership. Several defendants stated that orders for the exercise had been transmitted through Col. Ümit Bak, who claimed that he was acting on instructions from Gen. Aksakallı.⁴⁷

Questions have also been raised about Gen. Semih Terzi's movements on the night of July 15. Testimonies from officers involved in the events suggest that Terzi's aircraft was permitted to fly despite restrictions reportedly imposed on military flights. Some officers further claimed that they were instructed to allow Gen. Terzi access to the Special Forces Headquarters. Upon arriving at the headquarters, Terzi was shot and killed by Sgt. Maj. Ömer Halisdemir, who stated that he had received orders from Gen. Aksakallı to kill Gen. Terzi.^{48 49}

Developments on July 15, 2016

An examination of the events on the night of July 15 reveals a recurring narrative pattern. According to this account, certain military units were mobilized under the pretext of responding to a significant terrorist threat, sometimes described as an imminent attack in major urban centers. Military personnel were instructed to move into position with the stated objective of securing key locations and neutralizing the perceived danger.

⁴⁶ “15 July Main Coup Indictment,” p. 773-774

https://stockholmcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/15_July_Erdogans_Coup_13.07.2017.pdf p. 23

⁴⁷ Col. Fırat Alakuş's testimony, July 15 Main Indictment, p. 773

https://stockholmcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/15_July_Erdogans_Coup_13.07.2017.pdf p.23

⁴⁸ Sönmezates: I got the order from Semih Terzi

[Sönmezates: Emri Semih Terzi'den aldım... - Son Dakika Haber](#)

⁴⁹ 18-Year Prison Sentence for Wife of General Semih Terzi, Killed by Ömer Halisdemir [Ömer Halisdemir'in öldürdüğü general Semih Terzi'nin eşine 18 yıl hapis - Diken](#)

Testimonies provided by officers from various units across Türkiye consistently reflect this narrative. Many reported that the orders they received originated within the formal chain of command, with superiors instructing them to prepare for deployment and to carry out assigned duties in response to the alleged threat. These accounts suggest that, at least at the operational level, participants believed they were acting under legitimate orders rather than engaging in an unlawful coup attempt.

The Turkish Government's narrative identifies certain civilians allegedly linked with the movement as the civilian organizers of the mobilization. However, no military mobilization can be traced to these or other civilians on the night of July 15. Officers from all military units mobilized on the night cite orders from their military superiors for their mobilization in their court testimonies. Officers testified that the "confessions" to the contrary that were used in government's propaganda materials were obtained from them under torture⁵⁰.

The list below summarizes key events and observations that, according to some interpretations, support the argument that July 15 may not have followed the conventional pattern of a coup attempt but instead involved actions that created the appearance of one.

July 15 does not match the Pattern of Previous Military Interventions in Türkiye

Military experts suggest that the actions on the night of July 15th do not fit the pattern of a military coup but rather a false-flag operation designed by an intelligence service. The July 15 event lacked crucial actions of a military coup and included counterproductive actions that did not make sense in the context of a real coup. Crucial missing pieces of a military coup included preparing public opinion, starting the action after midnight, securing key politicians first, then securing control of media outlets and communications centers, and ensuring the participation of land forces. In this case, the actions that happened don't make sense in a military coup, including starting the mobilization during rush hour, closing a busy bridge to traffic, bombing the parliament, bombing police headquarters, and targeting civilians.

⁵⁰ [Turkish police tortured a military officer to extract false statement against Gülen - Nordic Monitor](#)

1960 and 1980 MILITARY COUPS



Public opinion was prepared for an intervention.



Action started after midnight, during the early hours of the day.



The leader(s) of the coup were clear and they made public declarations.



Communications centers were secured.



Radio and TV stations were secured.



Lead politicians such as the Prime Minister and the Interior Minister were detained.



The military was careful to avoid civilian casualties.



The military did not target the parliament or the police.

JULY 15, 2016



Public opinion was not prepared.



Action started during rush hour at 9:30pm.



The leader(s) of the intervention was not clear. No person made a public declaration. A declaration by the "Peace at Home Committee" was aired on TRT without disclosing the members of the committee.



Communications centers were not secured. Political leaders were free to use the traditional communication channels and social media.



Except for a handful of soldiers sent to TRT and CNN-Turk, pro-Erdogan TV channels were not secured.



President Erdogan, PM Binali Yildirim and the Interior Minister were not detained.



Hundreds of civilians were killed. (Autopsy reports disclose that the bullets were not part of the military inventory. It appears that clandestine group targeted civilians to create chaos and plan anger among the public against the military)



Parliament and police headquarters were bombed.

Shutting Down Bridge Traffic during Rush Hour

One striking example was the closure of one side of the Bosphorus Bridge during rush hour. Hundreds of military personnel, including military academy cadets, and several tanks were deployed to block the bridge approximately five hours before any reported attempt to apprehend Erdoğan.

This raises an obvious question: What strategic purpose did closing the bridge serve in a coup operation? Blocking a major transportation artery with largely untrained cadets did little to advance any apparent military objective. Instead, it created chaos, attracted media attention, and produced dramatic images for public consumption. This situation leaves two possible conclusions: either the coup planners displayed an extraordinary level of incompetence, or the personnel involved were mobilized under a different pretext as part of a broader intelligence operation.⁵¹

Mobilizing Military Academy Cadets to Close the Bosphorus Bridge

The treatment of military students following July 15 remains one of the most striking and controversial aspects of the events. Approximately 900 military students, many of them Air Force Academy cadets, were mobilized that night after being ordered by their superiors to assemble and board buses.⁵²

Testimonies from students consistently state that they believed they were participating in a routine military exercise, security deployment, or anti-terror operation rather than a coup attempt.^{53 54} Many had been attending summer training camps, had their phones collected, and were largely isolated from outside information.⁵⁵ Students repeatedly stated that they did not know where they were being sent or why they were being deployed, only learning what had allegedly occurred after seeing news reports the following day.⁵⁶ Some were transported to locations such as the Bosphorus Bridge and Sabiha Gökçen Airport, while others remained behind, in certain cases simply because there was not enough room on the buses.⁵⁷

In the aftermath, hundreds of military students were arrested and prosecuted, several were killed during the events, many received severe prison sentences, military schools were closed, and

⁵¹ CNN Türk, "What Happened on the Bridge on the Night of the Coup, Minute by Minute: According to the Indictment," November 30, 2016, [Darbe gecesi köprüde yaşananlar dakika dakika iddianamede - Günün Haberleri CNN Türk](#)

⁵² "Hesabı görelim" [Let's settle the account]," Melih Aşık, Milliyet, 2 November 2016, [Hesabı görelim... - Melih Aşık](#)

⁵³ [Mavi Otobüs \(The Blue Bus\)](#), cadet testimonies.

⁵⁴ [Military cadets did not know a coup attempt was unfolding, top court says - Turkish Minute](#)

⁵⁵ [Mavi Otobüs \(The Blue Bus\)](#), cadet testimonies.

⁵⁶ Testimonies of Air Force Academy cadets in [Mavi Otobüs \(The Blue Bus\)](#); testimony of former cadet Salih Kunduz; and interviews published by [Euronews Türkiye](#), "Cezaevinden Mektuplar: Harbiyeli Üç Kadın Öğrenci..." (14 July 2019).

⁵⁷ [Mavi Otobüs \(The Blue Bus\)](#), cadet testimonies.

thousands of cadets lost their educational and military careers.^{58 59} The central question raised by these facts is why military students came to occupy such a prominent place in the official July 15 narrative. Military students are trainees, not commanders. They possess no command authority, have no personnel under their control, and occupy the lowest level of the military hierarchy.⁶⁰ Historically, military coups are organized and executed by officers who command troops, control strategic assets, and direct operations. Yet one of the largest groups prosecuted after July 15 consisted of military students who, according to numerous testimonies, were following orders, lacked knowledge of the broader situation, and had no operational authority.

The apparent randomness with which many students were deployed, sometimes determined by little more than available space on a bus, further undermines the claim that they were acting as conscious participants in a coordinated coup attempt. Witnesses reported that some students laid down their weapons when informed that a coup was allegedly underway. Multiple testimonies further state that many cadets were issued rifles without ammunition and that no students in their units fired their weapons.⁶¹ The imprisonment, life sentences, and collective punishment imposed on large numbers of military students therefore raise serious questions about whether these cadets were genuine coup participants or whether they became convenient instruments in a broader effort to attribute responsibility for July 15 to other actors and justify the subsequent purge of military educational institutions.

Mobilizing the military cadets raises a particularly noteworthy question given the government's later claim that tens of thousands of military personnel, including generals, admirals, officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted members, were allegedly affiliated with the Hizmet movement and subsequently dismissed from service. If such a vast network existed within the armed forces, it is reasonable to ask why those allegedly organizing the coup would rely so heavily on military students with limited field experience, minimal command authority, and restricted authorization to use force. Military high school students and academy cadets were still in training and did not possess the operational responsibilities normally associated with executing a complex military takeover.

The presence of large numbers of cadets and military students on the bridge has therefore remained one of the most debated aspects of the events of July 15. Their deployment is difficult to reconcile with the claim that the operation was planned and executed by a highly organized network embedded throughout the Turkish Armed Forces.

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has determined that the imprisonment of Akın Öztürk, the former commander of the Turkish Air Force who is serving a life sentence for his alleged role in the events of July 15, is arbitrary and violates international law, calling for his immediate release.⁶²

⁵⁸[Erdogan says to close military schools, rein in armed forces | Reuters](#)

⁵⁹[Turkey's top court upholds sentences given to 60 former cadets on coup charges - Turkish Minute](#)

⁶⁰ [Harp Okulları Kanunu \(Law No. 4566\)](#), adopted 11 May 2000, published in the Official Gazette (Resmî Gazete) No. 24052, 17 May 2000.

⁶¹ Testimonies of Air Force Academy cadets in [Mavi Otobüs \(The Blue Bus\)](#); testimony of former military personnel and academy staff in [Son Ders - Kara Harp Okulu Belgeseli](#).

⁶² <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/208/07/pdf/g2420807.pdf>

The Portrayal of Gen. Akın Öztürk as the Alleged Coup Leader

The Turkish government has consistently portrayed former Air Force Commander General Akın Öztürk as the principal military leader of the July 15 ‘‘coup attempt’’. However, testimony from former military officers, court proceedings, and subsequent legal findings raise the question of whether this portrayal accurately reflects Öztürk's role on the night of July 15.

Several former colleagues argue that Öztürk had already become politically marginalized before the events, citing tensions surrounding his departure as Air Force Commander in 2015 and alleged disagreements over military involvement in Syria.⁶³ According to retired Brigadier General Mehmet Yalınalp and former aide Major Dr. İbrahim Kocaman, Öztürk was no longer a central figure within the military hierarchy by July 2016.⁶⁴ More significantly, witnesses claim that Öztürk's presence at Akıncı Air Base on the night of July 15 resulted from requests made by senior commanders as the crisis unfolded.⁶⁵ Yalınalp states that Air Force Commander Abidin Ünal asked Öztürk to go to Akıncı in order to stop unauthorized flights, while later communications reportedly involved Chief of the General Staff Hulusi Akar as well.⁶⁶

Most remarkably, on July 21st, Chief of General Staff Akar published a message on the official website of the General Staff that confirmed that Öztürk was sent to Akıncı airbase to stop the mobilization on orders from Akar himself. This message, however, was removed shortly thereafter. Akar never answered questions about the reason for the removal of this message, which was essentially an official admission of Öztürk's innocence.

**TÜRK SİLAHLI KUVVETLERİ
GENELKURMAY BAŞKANLIĞI**

ANASAYFA GENELKURMAY BAŞKANI TSK HAKKINDA BASIN YAYIN FAALİYETLERİ OLAYLAR İNSAN KAYNAKLARI GENEL BİLGİLER

BASIN AÇIKLAMASI

TARİH: 21 Temmuz 2016
SAAT : 14:55

1. Daha önce açıklandığı üzere; 15 Temmuz 2016 Cuma günü saat 16:00 sularında Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı tarafından verilen bilgi, Genelkurmay Karargâhında; Genelkurmay Başkanı, Kara Kuvvetleri Komutanı ve Gnkur. İlinci Başkanı'nın katılımıyla değerlendirilmiştir. Bu değerlendirilmeye bağlı olarak;

a. Genelkurmay Başkanı tarafından;

(1) Silahlı Kuvvetler Komuta Harekât Merkezi telefonla aranarak, Türk hava sahasında ikinci bir emre kadar hiçbir askeri hava aracının (uçak, helikopter vb.) havalandırılması, havada bulunanların derhal üslerine dönmesi,

(2) Kara Havaçılık Komutanlığına gidilerek orada bulunan personel konulan ve hava araçlarının uçmaması dahil gereken her türlü tedbir alınması,

(3) Etimesgut'taki Zırhlı Birlikler Okulu ve Eğt.Tüm. Komutanlığına gidilerek tank ve zırhlı araçlar başta olmak üzere tüm araçların hareketlerinin durdurulması ve hiçbir şekilde dışarı çıkmamaları yönünde gereken tedbirlerin alınması emirleri ilgili personele verilmiştir.

b. Gnkur.İlinci Başkanı tarafından da; Gnkur.Bşk'nın emriyle Hava Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı Harekat Merkezi aranmış ve Türk Hava Kuvvetlerine ait tüm hava araçlarının uçuşlarının durdurulması talimatı verilmiştir.

2. Bu kapsamda;

a. Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin ayrılmaz bir parçası olan ve milleti için var olan Hava Kuvvetlerine sızmış olan illegal çete mensubu terörist hainlerin (FETÖ) girişimlerine yönelik olarak Genelkurmay Başkanı Orgeneral Hulusi AKAR'ın talimatları doğrultusunda büyük çoğunlukta ki mensupları ile mücadele edilmiş ve durum kontrol altına alınmıştır.

b. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı'nın, uçuşların durdurulması ve havadaki görevli uçakların indirilmesine ilişkin talimatı Hava Kuvvetleri Harekat Merkezine iletilmiş, bu direktif Eskişehir'deki Hava Harekât Merkezi tarafından tüm birliklere tebliğ edilmiş, uçuşların durdurulmasına ilişkin işlemler saat 19:26 itibarıyla tamamlanmıştır. Direktif, 19:56 ve 20:31 itibarıyla tüm birliklere teyiden tekrar iletilmiştir.

⁶³ [Spoiler: The Epaulette Curtain documentary](#) (Mehmet Yalınalp; Dr. İbrahim Kocaman, 4:23-15:09).

⁶⁴ [Spoiler documentary](#)

⁶⁵ [Spoiler documentary](#)

⁶⁶ [Spoiler documentary](#) (32:37-33:31)

Öztürk himself has consistently denied directing military operations and, according to testimony presented during the trials, maintained that he spent the night conveying Hulusi Akar's instructions to personnel at the base rather than exercising independent command.⁶⁷

These accounts raise important questions about how Akın Öztürk came to be identified as the alleged leader of the ‘‘coup attempt’’. Several witnesses argue that senior officials and military personnel were already attributing responsibility to Öztürk and the Gülen movement while events were still unfolding, suggesting that the framework of the official narrative may have been prepared before the incident.⁶⁸

Witness testimonies state that some senior officers initially described him as assisting efforts to control the crisis⁶⁹ and corroborate the July 21 official message posted by the Chief of General Staff mentioned above. This also raises questions about the logic of the alleged "Peace at Home Council" appointment list, which assigned Öztürk the position of Deputy Chief of the General Staff rather than the top military post, despite his alleged role as the coup's leader.⁷⁰ Concerns surrounding the case were amplified by findings of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which concluded that Öztürk's detention was arbitrary and that serious due process violations had occurred during the proceedings.⁷¹

On the basis of the available record, the claim that Akın Öztürk served as the central architect of the so-called coup attempt is not substantiated. There is a clear absence of credible evidence linking him to the planning, command, or execution of the events attributed to him.

Actions of the Air Force Commanders and Pilots

Perhaps the most significant challenges to the official narrative emerge from the cases of individuals who played a role in protecting President Erdoğan on the night of July 15 but were later accused of involvement in the coup because of their alleged ties to the Hizmet movement. The experiences of several military pilots and members of Erdoğan's immediate security detail reveal striking contradictions that continue to raise questions about the government's account of the events and the criteria used to identify those responsible.

These contradictions become even more significant when Erdoğan's closest military security personnel are considered. **Following the coup attempt, it was reported that four of the five officers assigned to his immediate protection, together with all five reserve members of his presidential security detail, were accused of links to the Hizmet movement. According to the**

⁶⁷ [Spoiler documentary](#) (34:52-35:32).

⁶⁸ [Spoiler documentary](#) (23:45-24:30; 34:12)

⁶⁹ [Spoiler documentary](#) (35:50)

⁷⁰ [Spoiler documentary](#) (36:47-37:16).

⁷¹ United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 33/2024 (Türkiye) concerning Akın Öztürk: [A/HRC/WGAD/2024/33 Advance edited version](#)

government's own allegations, therefore, almost the entire military team positioned closest to Erdoğan was connected to the movement accused of organizing the coup.⁷²

Yet none of these individuals appears to have carried out even a minor operational task in an alleged attempt to overthrow, capture, or kill the president they were responsible for protecting. If the Hizmet movement had truly planned and coordinated the operation, it is difficult to explain why the individuals closest to Erdoğan—and therefore best positioned to act against him or facilitate access to him—were assigned no meaningful role whatsoever.

The official narrative thus requires the public to accept that a movement supposedly capable of organizing a nationwide military operation had numerous alleged members within Erdoğan's immediate security circle, but made no operational use of any of them. Unless this fundamental contradiction is convincingly explained, the claim that the operation was centrally planned and directed by the Hizmet movement remains internally inconsistent and unsupported by the conduct of the very individuals who were closest to the president.

Hundreds of Air Force Commanders Jailed; Any of them could have taken down Erdoğan's Plane

In the Erdoğan government's narrative, the Turkish Air Force was portrayed as one of the principal actors behind the July 15 operation. In the aftermath, the commanders of all major air force bases were arrested and accused of involvement in the plot. These commanders had hundreds of fighter jets under their command. Yet, despite the government's claims that Erdoğan was a primary target of the coup, none of these aircraft attempted to intercept or harm the plane carrying Erdoğan from Dalaman Airport to Istanbul Airport.

The government later asserted that pro-coup F-16s had tracked and harassed Erdoğan's aircraft, while other pilots loyal to the government protected it.⁷³ However, this account was challenged by the Greek Air Force, which reportedly disputed claims that Erdoğan's plane had been pursued in the manner described by Turkish officials.

F-16 Pilots who escorted Erdogan on July 15 Dismissed for Ties to Hizmet

Another controversial aspect of the July 15 events concerns the military officers and security personnel who were later accused of ties to the Hizmet movement despite having played roles in protecting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during the July 15 operation.

According to official accounts, Erdoğan was vacationing at a hotel in Marmaris on the night of July 15, 2016. After learning of the unfolding events, he secretly traveled by helicopter to Dalaman and then flew safely to Istanbul. In the aftermath of July 15, however, the F-16 pilot who reportedly escorted Erdoğan's aircraft that night was arrested, along with his brother, on allegations of affiliation with the Hizmet movement.⁷⁴

⁷² Diken, "From the Indictment: Erdoğan's Five Prospective Aides-de-Camp Were Also Allegedly Linked to 'FETÖ,'" July 20, 2017, [İddianameden: Erdoğan'in beş yedek yaveri de 'FETÖ'yle bağlantılıymış - Diken](http://iddianameden.com/Erdoğan'in-beş-yedek-yaveri-de-'FETÖ'-yle-bağlantılıymış-Diken)

⁷³ The New York Times, "After the Coup Attempt, Erdoğan Sees an Opportunity to Assume Atatürk's Place in History," August 8, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/08/world/europe/turkey-erdogan-coup-ataturk.html>

⁷⁴ [Turkish F-16 pilot who escorted Erdoğan's plane in wake of coup bid arrested over Gülen links - Stockholm Center for Freedom](http://www.stockholmcenterforfreedom.org/turkish-f-16-pilot-who-escorted-erdogan-s-plane-in-wake-of-coup-bid-arrested-over-gulen-links)

This raises an obvious question. If the pilot escorting Erdoğan's plane was indeed participating in a coup aimed at removing the president from power, why did he not use the fighter jet under his control to intercept or disable Erdoğan's aircraft? The fact that Erdoğan was able to travel safely from Dalaman to Istanbul appears difficult to reconcile with the claim that those responsible for protecting him were simultaneously part of a coordinated effort to overthrow him.

Erdoğan's Personal Guards Dismissed for their Ties to Hizmet

A similar contradiction emerges regarding Erdoğan's security detail. While he was staying at the Marmaris hotel, an unidentified helicopter reportedly opened fire on members of his security team. Several police officers who risked their lives defending Erdoğan were later dismissed from their positions and arrested on allegations of links to the Hizmet movement.⁷⁵

These circumstances raise further questions. If the military was conducting a coup against Erdoğan, and if members of his security detail were also allegedly part of the same network accused of organizing it, why did they protect him rather than secure his capture? If removing Erdoğan from power was the objective, his security personnel would have been in a uniquely advantageous position to facilitate such an outcome.

These apparent contradictions point to a broader unresolved issue. Either the individuals accused of involvement in the coup were not, in fact, participants in a coordinated effort to overthrow the government, or the events of July 15 were far more complex than the official account suggests. In either case, the arrests and dismissals of individuals who appear to have contributed to Erdoğan's safety continue to fuel debate about the true nature of the events and the extent of the Hizmet movement's involvement.

The Accounts of the Military Unit that was Supposed to take Erdogan into Custody

Anyone familiar with military coups would recognize that their primary objective is to catch political leaders by surprise. Secrecy, speed, surprise, and meticulous planning are therefore essential elements of any successful coup attempt. Yet the events of July 15 appeared to lack all of these characteristics. From beginning to end, many actions seemed designed not to neutralize political leaders but rather to maximize public visibility, generate fear and confusion, and provoke public anger, conditions that ultimately benefited President Erdoğan politically.

Brigadier General Gökhan Şahin Sönmezateş, who commanded the team dispatched to Marmaris on the night of July 15, testified in court that his unit received its orders from the Office of the Chief of General Staff, but was then deliberately kept waiting for four hours at Çiğli airport. The order to move was only given after Erdoğan had already safely left the hotel. Sönmezateş testified that his team did not even know Erdoğan's precise location before setting out. Taken together, these facts point to a troubling conclusion: someone with knowledge of both Erdoğan's movements and the General's team was ensuring that the two would not intersect. His team was sent into motion only once the president was out of reach.

⁷⁵ [15 Temmuz gecesi Erdoğan'ı koruyan polislerden bir kısmı FETÖ'den tutuklanmış](#)

This choreography, Sönmezates argued, directly contradicts the government's claim that his operation was an assassination attempt. The mission's objective, he maintained, was to detain Erdoğan, not to kill him, and the indictment fundamentally misrepresented both the nature and intent of the operation. The delay at Çiğli, he suggested, was not a logistical mishap but a deliberate trap. In his own words: "While the whole world knew the president had gone to Istanbul, we were sent there, into a trap. I am trying to find an answer to the question of who deceived us and kept us waiting for four hours." The existence of a separate, unidentified team that carried out the actual attack on Erdoğan's location remains unexplained and uninvestigated.⁷⁶

Upon finally arriving in Marmaris, his team came under heavy fire and retreated rather than engage the police, a decision he presented not as flight, but as restraint. When the night was over, Sönmezates chose to surrender despite having the opportunity to escape, and immediately attempted to re-establish contact with senior commanders. These are not the actions, he argued, of a man who had just led an assassination plot. He concluded that the court had failed to properly examine the events in Marmaris, and that he had been wrongfully convicted as a result.

Civilian Deaths

The Turkish government has weaponized the deaths of 250 civilians to silence anyone calling for a genuine investigation into the events of July 15. This is no accident. The deliberate targeting of civilians during a coup is unprecedented in Turkish military history, which makes the questions surrounding these deaths all the more urgent.

Erdoğan's regime has turned civilian casualties into a rhetorical shield. Raise any challenge to the official narrative, and the response is always the same: "*But 250 civilians died.*"

- **Question the violation of basic human rights?** Response: *250 civilians died.*
- **Ask why the elderly, the sick, and children are held in prison without due process?** Response: *250 civilians died.*
- **Ask how military cadets could have orchestrated a coup?** Response: *250 civilians died.*
- **Raise the issue of corruption?** Response: *250 civilians died.*
- **Ask why Erdoğan learned of the coup from his brother-in-law rather than the head of intelligence?** Response: *250 civilians died.*
- **Ask why Fidan, Akar, and Aksakallı refused to testify.** Response: *250 civilians died.*

This answer is not a response. It is a deflection, one designed to make accountability feel indecent. That is why the deaths of those 250 civilians deserve further scrutiny.

Although the Turkish government claims that the soldiers, police, doctors, nurses, teachers, sick, and elderly deserve the harsh treatments that amount to crimes against humanity, the autopsy reports of the deceased on the night of July 15 have not been released. Government institutions do everything in their power to keep it out of the public eye.

⁷⁶ Sönmezates: I got the order from Semih Terzi, Hürriyet, 25 May 2017, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/sonmezates-emri-semih-terziden-aldim-40469865>

There is a confidentiality ruling on the autopsy and ballistics reports. More importantly, although the parliamentary commission investigating July 15 prepared a report, the details of the autopsy data were not publicly disclosed in that report.

A detailed forensic report concludes that the 251 civilians who died on the night of July 15-16, 2016, and in the days that followed were not killed by the accused soldiers. Ballistic evidence and swab analysis from 72 firearm-related deaths show that none of the bullets matched the defendants' weapons. The accused also lacked night-vision equipment necessary for accurate shooting in the dark. Camera footage and witness testimony further confirm that gunfire came from multiple directions simultaneously, and that unidentified armed individuals were present at the scenes. Several victims died not from gunfire at all, but from traffic accidents, natural causes, or unknown circumstances. Thirteen victims have no legal case filed on their behalf whatsoever.

Reading the soldiers' defense arguments during court hearings and considering witness accounts, a general pattern emerges from the stories surrounding the deaths of civilians. Several victims who took to the streets in response to President Erdoğan's televised call were killed by gunfire from unknown persons. Rather than a single line of fire from the accused soldiers, evidence consistently points to shots originating from unidentified sources. Camera recordings and witness accounts corroborate this pattern across multiple locations, raising serious questions about who was actually firing into the crowds that night.

We will share a few incidents that show the inconsistencies in the official narrative.⁷⁷

Abdullah Tayyip Olçok Shot from Behind: Abdullah Tayyip Olçok was killed on the Bosphorus Bridge alongside his father. Though the prosecution attributed his death to the accused soldiers, ballistic analysis of the 7.62mm bullet recovered from his body confirmed it did not come from any of their weapons. Witness statements and scene reconstruction show the shots came from the direction of Nakkaştepe, behind the victim, not from the soldiers standing in front of him. Critically, his mother, Nihal Olçok publicly stated that snipers were present at the scene but also revealed that witnesses had been advised not to mention those snipers in court. She declined to identify who gave that instruction.

Erol Olçok Killed with Fire from Impossible Angle: Erol Olçok, father of Abdullah Tayyip Olçok, was also shot and killed on the Bosphorus Bridge with a long-barreled firearm.⁷⁸ The autopsy and ballistic findings show the bullet traveled at a 45-degree downward angle, entering the upper left chest and exiting the lower right rear, a trajectory that was physically impossible given the position of the accused soldiers at the scene. The angle of the shot indicates a marksman firing from an elevated position, entirely inconsistent with the charges laid against the defendants.

Erkan Er Shot from the Opposite Direction: Erkan Er was killed outside the Beştepe Gendarmerie General Command Headquarters. Although media reports blamed the accused military personnel, camera footage and technical analysis told a different story:

⁷⁷ The Reality Of 251 Deaths <https://media.dogruaci.com/8928528d-03fa-4809-b7cb-28e23b26854a.pdf>

⁷⁸ Ned Levin, "Erdogan Ally Died in Bosphorus Bridge Confrontation," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 19, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/erdogan-ally-died-in-bosphorus-bridge-confrontation1468949276>

the bullet came from the exact opposite direction of the headquarters. The autopsy confirmed the bullet entered the right chest and exited near the right shoulder blade. The 5.56mm caliber of the round is consistent with professional sniper rifles, not standard-issue military small arms held by the accused at that location.

Şener Dursun Death by Natural Causes: Şener Dursun died in Ankara on the night of July 15, 2016, not from gunfire but from a heart attack brought on by the stress of the unfolding events. He was taken to hospital but could not be saved. Both official investigations and the autopsy report confirm he was not the victim of any assault or firearm injury. His inclusion in the broader narrative of civilian deaths attributed to the coup therefore has no factual basis.

Hasan Gülhan Shot from a long distance: Forensic and technical evidence confirms that Hasan Gülhan was shot from a long distance. Claims that he was executed or shot at close range are directly contradicted by the physical evidence. Compounding this, surveillance footage from the scene was deleted, and physical evidence was absent, raising a credible possibility that the scene was deliberately manipulated before investigators could document it.

Crime Scene Tampering: In at least one case, autopsy findings confirmed that the fatal bullet was fired from a long distance, striking the victim in the forehead. Despite this, ballistic evidence was insufficient and inconclusive. Witnesses alleged that the crime scene was cleaned under the supervision of special operations police before it could be properly documented. The casings and bullets recovered did not match the weapon of the accused soldier, Erkan Öktem, and signs of unauthorized tampering at the scene were noted in the official record.

Ümit Çoban Killed by A Non-Military Weapon: The bullet recovered from Çoban's body was from a weapon that is not used by the military, immediately casting doubt on the accusation against the soldiers. No ballistic match was established, and no perpetrator was identified. Critical investigative steps were never completed: HTS phone records that could have shed light on who was present at the scene were not obtained, and outstanding ballistic requests went unfulfilled, leaving the case without a credible chain of evidence.

Şenol Sağman and Şeyhmus Demir - the weapon did not have the range: Ballistic analysis directly contradicts the charge that a soldier was responsible for these deaths. The weapon attributed to the accused simply did not have the range required to have fired the fatal shots from the position where the soldier was located. The forensic evidence points to a shooter elsewhere: unidentified and uninvestigated.

Sedat Kaplan Shot from an Impossible Angle: Both camera footage and autopsy findings indicate that Kaplan was not shot by the accused soldiers. The evidence suggests the shot came from a sniper position, yet the court made no effort to investigate the angle of fire or identify an alternative perpetrator. This failure to pursue the most basic lines of inquiry left the true circumstances of Kaplan's death unexamined.

Samet Cantürk Killed from behind: The autopsy reveals that Cantürk was struck by a single bullet that entered from the back of the head, a detail with significant implications given that the incident occurred within a military formation. Despite this, the court failed to pursue sniper analysis or distance calculations that could have identified the shooter's

position and ruled the accused soldiers in or out. These requests were submitted but never examined, leaving a critical question unanswered.

Özkan Özendi - Died of a heart attack: Özendi's death presents a direct contradiction between the official prosecution narrative and the government's own records. While he has been listed among those killed by soldiers during the so-called coup attempt, the official government website states plainly that he died of a heart attack, not by gunshot. No credible evidence of a shooting has been presented, and the inclusion of his death in the civilian casualty count attributed to the military appears to have no factual basis.

Onur Ensar Ayanağlu – weapon lacked the range: As with several other cases in this report, ballistic analysis rules out the accused soldier as the shooter. The weapon attributed to the defendant lacked the range necessary to have fired the fatal shot from his position. The evidence points to an unidentified shooter, yet no investigation into alternative perpetrators was conducted.

Onur Kılıç – the weapon lacked the range: The findings here mirror those of Ayanağlu's case. Ballistic evidence confirms that the shot could not have come from the accused soldier's weapon, which was incapable of reaching the victim from the soldier's known position. Despite this, the question of who actually fired the fatal shot was not pursued by the court.

Some of the deaths might have been a result of the actions of panicked soldiers. The above accounts suggest that the government is not allowing a full investigation into the deaths of civilians.⁷⁹ Eyewitness accounts confirm that the military personnel did not target the civilians. Some eyewitnesses said that paramilitary units, possibly belonging to the SADAT international defense consulting organization started by Erdogan, were responsible for some of the civilian deaths.^{80 81}

An individual who appears like a radical religious figure can be seen in a video claiming that he is ready to play his role with his weapon. The government's refusal to investigate the sniper on the Bosphorus bridge, who allegedly shot civilians, was also suspicious, as the regular units that were sent to the bridge that night normally do not include a sniper.

While using the civilian deaths as a crucial component of their messaging around the attempt, the Erdogan government made little effort to actually illuminate the specifics of those deaths.

⁷⁹ "Erdogan prepares for a bloodbath," Michael Rubin, American Enterprise Institute, 31 October 2016, [Erdogan Prepares for a Bloodbath | American Enterprise Institute - AEI](https://www.aei.org/publication/erdogan-prepares-for-a-bloodbath/)

⁸⁰ A lawyer who escaped from Türkiye after the incident shared the story of a resident of Cengelkoy district in Istanbul. According to this resident civilians were killed in their district by bearded, armed men on motorcycles. This description fits the description of members of SADAT, what is in effect President Erdogan's personal army.

⁸¹ Sözcü, "What Are Armed Civilians Doing on the Streets?," July 20, 2016, <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/gundem/silahli-sivillerin-sokakta-ne-isi-var-1317315/>

Ironically, it was the accused military officers who asked for forensic examination of the firearms and bullets used by the soldiers under their command along with the autopsies of the killed civilians. These requests were not welcome by the plaintiffs or judges.⁸²

Aerial Bombing of the Parliament and Police Headquarters

The damage that the parliament building sustained allegedly due to aerial bombing was one of the primary elements of the government's media campaign to justify the subsequent purges. In the early morning hours of July 16, military jets dropped bombs at the garden and an unoccupied corner of the parliament building, and at the front yard of the presidential palace. Although the parliament building was damaged, there were no casualties, and there was no harm done to Erdogan's presidential palace.

Bombing the parliament is unprecedented in Türkiye's history of coups. It is also not clear why the pilots, if they were truly acting as part of a coup, might have missed Erdogan's enormous palace. One of the pilots who was accused of bombing the parliament building claimed that he was called from his home under the pretense of defending against a terrorist attack. When he found out that his bombing targets included residential areas, he initially attempted to evade the order by jamming the fighter jet's systems, but he was coerced into carrying out the order by being threatened at gunpoint with harm to his family.^{83 84}

There are other problems with the government's narrative about the bombing of the parliament. Government officials claimed that the parliament building was hit by two-stage penetrating bombs dropped from F-16s. Observers, who claim to be purged NATO officers, disputed this claim and pointed out that the video images and the impact of the explosions at the parliament building match the pattern of an internally placed bomb rather than a penetrating bomb dropped from a fighter jet.⁸⁵

When combined with the pilots' testimonies that they were threatened to bomb the parliament, it is possible that the internally placed bombs were detonated to ensure that the building would be sufficiently damaged in case the pilots refused to target the parliament directly.⁸⁶

Bombing the police headquarters is counterproductive from a military coup perspective. In previous military coups in Turkish history the police did not intervene to try to stop the attempt. While strong, the police force is no match for the military when it comes to sheer numbers or weaponry. Bombing police headquarters has the effect of antagonizing an actor that is likely to remain dormant during a military coup to take action against it.

Another reason for the irrationality of the bombing of police headquarters is that between 2016 and 2018 the Erdogan government dismissed and jailed over 20,000 police officers on alleged

⁸² Milliyet, "Second Interlocutory Ruling in the TÜRKSAT Trial," May 29, 2017

<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/turksat-davasinda-ikinci-ara-karar-gundem-2458915/>

⁸³ https://stockholmcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/15_July_Erdogans_Coup_13.07.2017.pdf

⁸⁴ TRT Haber, "Coup Pilot's Defense: 'I Flew Under Threat,'" February 26, 2018,

<https://www.trthaber.com/haber/turkiye/darbeci-pilottan-tehdit-edilerek-uctum-savunmasi-352799.html>

⁸⁵ *Meclis Bombalandı mı?* Video

⁸⁶ <https://purgednato.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/a-search-for-truth1.pdf>

links to the movement. If these allegations are true, military officers allegedly affiliated with the movement would be bombing police officers also affiliated with the movement.

The Inaction of the Commanders Supposedly Loyal to the Government

On the night of July 15, several commanders who publicly expressed their loyalty to the elected government or simply did not join the attempt nevertheless took no military action to help foil the supposed coup attempt while it was in progress⁸⁷.

The most famous example is Gen. Ümit Dündar, the commander of the First Army headquartered only a few miles away from the famous Bosphorus Bridge which was partially blocked by military units. Such a blocking action was counterproductive in a real military coup and the units that were sent to the bridge had no idea why they were there. Gen. Dündar appeared on public television to express his loyalty to Erdogan but took no action to remove the units blocking the bridge, or to save the military officers, who were simply following orders, from being lynched by angry mobs in the morning hours of July 16. Commanders of the 2nd Army, 3rd Army, and the 4th Army (a.k.a Aegean Army) who also did not join the mobilization took no measures to stop it.

Retired military judge Ahmet Zeki Üçok drew attention to the fact that the vast majority of the Turkish Armed Forces did nothing to stop the supposed coup attempt. He criticized the Turkish Armed Forces' (TSK) statement which said that only about 1.5 percent of the Turkish Armed Forces... "participated in, supported, or were used in carrying out this disgrace and humiliation inflicted upon our country." Speaking on the Akşam Raporu (The Evening Report) program on Habertürk TV, Üçok stated, "The Turkish Armed Forces' weakest subject is mathematics. That 1.5 percent almost succeeded in carrying out the coup. So what was your remaining 98.5 percent doing? Had they gone out to buy Çokoprens [a popular chocolate biscuit]?...

While 35 aircraft were bombing this country, what were our remaining 400 aircraft doing? Where were they? In this coup, first, there were the coup plotters. Second, there were those who did nothing and, by their inaction, implicitly supported the coup. Third, there were those who waited to see whether the coup plotters would prevail so they could join them and position themselves accordingly if they won. Fourth, there was the group of cowards who stayed at home watching television and did not even dare go outside. Fifth, there was the group of heroic soldiers who fought against the coup within their own units. Why didn't these people intervene? We keep talking about 35 aircraft. There were air bases in Balıkesir, Bandırma, Merzifon, and Diyarbakır. Couldn't you launch even a single aircraft from any of these bases? And if you couldn't, why couldn't you? They say that either 27 or 37 helicopters participated in the coup. Türkiye has 300 to 400 helicopters. While helicopters were landing in front of police headquarters and firing

⁸⁷ Other commanders who expressed support for the elected government while taking no action until after the incident include Metin Temel, the commander of the Second Army, İsmail Metin, the Commander of the Gendarmerie Security Corps, Yılmaz Uyar the Commander of the 8th Corps, İbrahim Yılmaz, the Commander of the 7th Corps and Osman Erbaş the Commander of 6th Mechanized Infantry Division.

machine guns at people gathered there, where were our other 300 helicopters? Until these questions are answered, no one should say, 'This coup is over.'"⁸⁸

The inaction of the army and army corps commanders that night can be explained by one of the following reasonings: During the months leading to July 15, the chief of general staff Akar expressed his frustration with the direction of the country and Erdogan's dismantling of the Ataturk's republic so many times that many commanders were under the impression that he could lead a military coup. They would not want to oppose an actual military coup and end up in military court afterwards. This appears to be the case for the commanders of second, third and fourth armies. Since no news emerged as to whether chief of general staff Akar was actually leading the attempt on July 15, they chose to wait and see.

Another possibility is that some commanders, such as first army commander Dunder, knew that this was a false flag operation and they willingly let it unfold. Neither of these possibilities align with the government's narrative on the July 15 incident. If it were indeed a military mobilization organized by a small junta, it could easily be stopped by the remaining 98.5% of the Turkish Armed Forces. The fact that the rest of the military did not mobilize to stop the event that night indicates that the government's narrative does not reflect the true nature of the event.

Developments after July 15, 2016

The developments immediately after July 15 carry strong elements that challenge the government's official narrative.

Within hours of the attempt, before a single investigation had been opened or a single piece of evidence examined, the machinery of mass punishment was already in motion. Prepared lists of military officers, judges, prosecutors, academics, teachers, and civil servants were activated with a speed that no genuine emergency response could explain.

Independent experts across the political spectrum reached the same conclusion: lists of this scale and specificity could not have been compiled in response to a coup.

They had been compiled in advance. What unfolded in the weeks and months that followed was not a proper response, within the framework of the rule of law, against those who threatened the state, but rather a systematic purge that had been waiting for its moment.

The four issues examined below: the suppression of the parliamentary report, the overnight arrest of the judiciary, the vast disproportion between those accused and those actually linked to the events, and the mass application of terrorism charges to ordinary citizens. Each of these components tells the same story: July 15 was not just exploited as an opportunity. For those who

⁸⁸T24, "Retired Military Judge: 'Just 1.5 Percent of the Turkish Armed Forces Nearly Succeeded in Carrying Out the Coup—Did the Rest Go Out to Buy Chocolate?'" July 28, 2016, https://t24.com.tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/emekli-askeri-hakim-tskda-yuzde-15-neredeyse-darbeyi-basariyordun-digerleri-cokoprens-almaya-mi-gitti.352383?_t=1783354556817#google_vignette

benefited most from its aftermath, it may have been the opportunity they were waiting for, or in Erdogan's own words, it was "a gift from God."

The Suppressed Parliamentary Report

Following the events of July 15, the Turkish Grand National Assembly established a parliamentary commission to investigate the coup attempt. A thorough, independent inquiry would have been the most natural and necessary step toward establishing what happened and who was responsible. Instead, the commission's findings were never released to the public. The suppression of this report is not a minor procedural matter. It is one of the most telling indicators that the official narrative could not withstand independent scrutiny.

In October 2016, a parliamentary commission was established to investigate the events of July 15, drawing members from all parties represented in the Grand National Assembly. The seventeen-member commission reflected the parliamentary balance of the time: nine members from the ruling AKP, six from the CHP, one from the MHP, and one from the HDP. What followed, however, was not a transparent inquiry but a process marked by contested procedures, unauthorized alterations, and a final report that was neither published nor contested.^{89 90}

Three distinct versions of the report emerged over the course of the commission's work. The first, a 936-page preliminary draft, was leaked to the press on December 22, 2016. A second version of 639 pages was submitted to commission members on May 25, 2017, for the preparation of dissenting opinions, and it was at this stage that CHP members raised the alarm. They alleged that significant sections present in the original draft had been quietly removed. Then came a third and final version: a 1,097-page report submitted to the presidency of the Grand National Assembly on July 12, 2017, nearly double the length of the draft the commission members had reviewed. CHP parliamentarians alleged that entire sections had been added to this final version without the knowledge or approval of the commission, representing an unauthorized alteration of the body's collective work.

The fate of the report compounded the controversy. Commission chair Reşat Petek, the AKP member of parliament, confirmed that the report had been completed, submitted to Parliament Speaker İsmail Kahraman, and published by the Grand National Assembly in two volumes. Yet despite being formally submitted, the report was never brought before the General Assembly for debate.⁹¹

In a genuine democracy responding to a genuine coup attempt, the findings of a parliamentary investigation would be made public as a matter of urgency. The decision to bury the report, combined with the refusal of the three most senior figures, General Akar, General Aksakallı, and

⁸⁹Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, "OFG TV Episode 359: On the 10th Anniversary of July 15—The Debate over the Missing Report: Why Was the Parliamentary Report Never Published?," July 2026, <https://www.omerfarukgergerlioglu.com/basin/ofg-tv/ofg-tv-359-bolum-15-temmuzun-10-yilinda-kayip-rapor-tartismasi-meclis-raporu-neden-yayinlanmadi/39654/>

⁹⁰ soL, "The Coup Report Disappeared in the Turkish Parliament: No One Knows Where It Is," September 25, 2019, <https://haber.sol.org.tr/turkiye/darbe-raporu-tbmmde-kayboldu-kimse-nerede-oldugunu-bilmiyor-271104>

⁹¹Bianet, "Tanrıkulu: The AKP Terminated the Coup Commission's Work," July 15, 2019, <https://bianet.org/haber/tanrikulu-darbe-komisyonu-calismalarini-akp-sonlandirdi-210456>

Intelligence Director Fidan, to even appear before the commission, suggests that transparency was never the objective. What the commission found and why it was kept from the public remain among the central unanswered questions of July 15.⁹²

The Arrest of Judges and Prosecutors on the Next Day

Within hours of the July 15 operation, before any investigation had begun and before dawn had broken, lists of judges and prosecutors were already in hand. Approximately 2,700 members of the judiciary were suspended and detained in the immediate aftermath, a figure so large, and a process so instant that it defies any innocent explanation.⁹³

Compiling such a list requires time, surveillance, legal preparation, and institutional coordination. None of that could have taken place in the hours between the tanks rolling and the arrests beginning. Independent legal experts were unanimous: these lists were prepared in advance and held in readiness.

The judiciary, whose independence is the cornerstone of any rule of law, was effectively decapitated overnight. Far from being a response to a coup, the purge of judges and prosecutors had the hallmarks of a long-planned operation waiting for a triggering event, one that arrived, with remarkable convenience, on the night of July 15.

The Numbers Don't Add Up: Asymmetry between those mobilized on July 15 and the numbers of people arrested with alleged involvement

The Turkish government's own statistics are the strongest evidence against its own account of July 15. In the months that followed, more than 150,000 military personnel and civil servants were dismissed, and tens of thousands more were arrested, with some 150,000 civil servants sacked or suspended and roughly 20,000 expelled from the military. Yet the number of people whose actual, evidence-based participation in the night's events was ever established in court is a small fraction of that total, and the gap between the two numbers is where the government's case collapses.⁹⁴

The military trials: According to the government's own figures, 109 generals and admirals, 1,652 officers (second lieutenant through colonel), and 1,187 non-commissioned officers and specialist sergeants were tried and sentenced for involvement in the July 15 operation; a combined total of 2,948 military personnel.

One pattern recurs across these trials: officers repeatedly asked the court to subpoena HTS phone records documenting communications with their commanders, and to compel senior commanders to testify and explain why units were mobilized that night. Turkish courts consistently declined these requests. Then-Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar, the Commander of the Special Forces Zekai Aksakalli, Intelligence Chief Hakan Fidan, and the commanders of Land, Navy, and Air

⁹²Diken, "Speaker of Parliament: Officially, There Is No July 15 Report," July 18, 2022, <https://www.diken.com.tr/meclis-baskanligi-resmi-olarak-15-temmuz-raporu-yok/>

⁹³ Human Rights Watch, "Turkey: Judges and Prosecutors Unjustly Jailed," August 8, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/tr/news/2016/08/08/292770>

⁹⁴ [Turkey jails hundreds for life over 2016 failed coup attempt](#)

Force never testified to the parliamentary committee, nor did they appear before the courts during the coup trials, an absence that is itself part of the record.

Separately, 8,706 non-commissioned officers, 8,775 commissioned officers, 1,773 lieutenants, and 161 generals and admirals; 19,415 personnel across the Land Forces, Air Force, Navy, and Gendarmerie were dismissed from the military for alleged ties to the Hizmet movement, without ever being tried.⁹⁵

This produces the first problem with the government's account: if close to 20,000 ranking officers were tied to the movement it blames for the coup, why did the overwhelming majority never mobilize, never participate, and never face conviction?

Scale of the purge: The second problem is one of scale. The purge did not stop at the military. According to the Interior Ministry, 705,172 legal investigations were opened on terrorism charges, of which 125,456 ended in prison sentences.⁹⁶

If the courts themselves found that only around 2,948 soldiers participated in the alleged coup, the mismatch is stark: 2,948 set against 705,172 investigations is roughly 0.4% — well under half a percent. Set against the 125,456 who were sentenced, it's closer to 2.3%. Either way, the ratio of coup-connected convictions to the total number of people prosecuted and imprisoned is small enough to make clear that the "coup" was not the operation being punished.

One conclusion emerges from these inconsistencies: it was not a coup but a false-flag operation that gave the impression of one. As Erdogan called it, it was “a gift from God”⁹⁷, which allowed the government, using emergency powers, to systematically eliminate a civil society movement, redesign the military with loyalists, and weaponize the government institutions against perceived opponents.

⁹⁵ The Scope of Dismissals and Legal Process <https://turkeyrightsmonitor.com/en/dismissals>

⁹⁶ Statements by the Official Authorities of the Republic of Türkiye
<https://turkeyrightsmonitor.com/en/official-statements>

⁹⁷ [Turkey detains 6,000 over coup attempt as Erdoğan vows to 'clean state of virus'](#)

The Extent

OF POST-JULY 15

PURGE

BY NUMBERS

Selected indicators of the crackdown targeting the Hizmet movement in Turkey and abroad since 2016.



Human Dimension

- Documented Deaths: **1,336**
- Prison Rights Violations: **10,031**
- Torture Victims: **821**



Criminalization

- Individuals Investigated: **2,678,773**
- Individuals Prosecuted: **720,000+**
- Individuals Convicted: **300,000+**
- Convicted under the Age of 18: **3,763**
- Total Detentions: **705,172**



Closures and Confiscations

- Media Outlets Shut Down: **156+**
- Institutions Closed: **3,942**
- Schools Closed: **1,034**
- Universities Closed: **15**
- Hospitals and Clinics Closed: **47**
- Companies Taken Over: **784**
- Estimated Value of Confiscated Assets: **~\$50 billion**



Purges

- Total Dismissals: **134,258**
- Police Officers Dismissed: **32,093**
- Teachers Dismissed: **34,063**
- Military Personnel Dismissed: **17,306**
- Judges Dismissed: **4,261**



Transnational Repression

- Cancelled Passports: **230,000+**
- Illegal Kidnappings and Deportations: **116+**
- Names Submitted to INTERPOL (estimated): **60,000+**
- Confiscated Schools Abroad: **162**
- Educational Personnel Left Jobless Abroad: **7,800**

What began after July 15 became a campaign of mass criminalization, institutional destruction, confiscation, and transnational repression.

Note: Figures are cumulative and compiled from multiple datasets including Turkish Department of Justice, Turkey Rights Monitor, Amnesty International, etc. Categories are not mutually exclusive.

PART III: The Construction Of The Post-July 15 Order

After July 15, a total of 2.678.773 investigations were conducted, 720.000 people have been sued, and more than 300.000 people have been convicted. 3.763 of those convicted are under the age of 18.

More than 130,000 public servants were dismissed by emergency decrees; thousands of institutions were closed, seized, transferred, or placed under trusteeship; and the total value of affected assets has been estimated in the tens of billions of dollars. These figures show that the process cannot be reduced to isolated legal measures. It was a mass political, social, and economic transformation.

From False Flag Operation to Regime Architecture

Political crises do not only disrupt existing systems. Under certain conditions, they become instruments for rebuilding them.

July 15, 2016, marked such a turning point in Türkiye. Officially framed as a failed coup attempt, it functioned in practice as the founding crisis of a new political order. Its long-term significance lies not only in what happened that night, but in what the Erdoğan regime was able to construct afterward: emergency rule, mass purges, institutional restructuring, criminal prosecutions, property seizures, media control, constitutional redesign, and the consolidation of presidential power.

This report treats July 15 as a politically instrumentalized false flag operation: an event whose unresolved contradictions, operational anomalies, and immediate political consequences indicate that it was used and, in critical respects, enabled, to transform the Turkish state. Whether through direct orchestration, controlled escalation, or deliberate exploitation, July 15 provided the Erdoğan regime with the decisive opening to implement a project of regime consolidation that had already been developing before 2016.

The post-July 15 transformation did not begin from zero. By 2016, Türkiye had already experienced serious deterioration in judicial independence, media pluralism, bureaucratic neutrality, civil society autonomy, and the separation of powers. The political system had been moving steadily toward executive dominance. July 15 did not create this trajectory; it accelerated, legitimized, and institutionalized it.

The decisive feature of the post-July 15 period was the conversion of emergency politics into a durable governing model. Measures initially presented as temporary responses to an extraordinary threat became mechanisms of permanent institutional change. Emergency decrees reshaped public administration. Purges reconfigured the bureaucracy, judiciary, military, education sector, and security institutions. Criminal law was expanded through association-based suspicion. Assets were seized or transferred. Civil society and media were narrowed. Constitutional change concentrated executive authority in the presidency.

This process also transformed the symbolic structure of politics. July 15 was elevated from a contested and suspicious event into a founding narrative of the new regime. Erdoğan was presented not merely as an elected leader, but as the figure who saved the nation from destruction. Loyalty to Erdoğan was increasingly merged with loyalty to the state, while opposition to him could be framed as sympathy for the coup, terrorism, or foreign conspiracy.

This narrative had a clear disciplinary function. It produced a political binary in which citizens, institutions, parties, journalists, judges, academics, and civil servants were pressured to align with the official interpretation of events. To question the state's narrative, demand an independent investigation, criticize collective punishment, or defend due process could itself be treated as moral or political complicity.

The unresolved contradictions surrounding July 15 are therefore not peripheral to this analysis. They are central. The false flag character of July 15 lies not only in the suspicion that the event was manipulated, but also in its political function: it created the appearance of an existential emergency while enabling the systematic dismantling of democratic safeguards.

Regardless of how one interprets every operational detail of the night itself, its political consequences are clear. July 15 became the foundational reference point through which the Erdoğan regime reorganized law, state institutions, political legitimacy, public memory, and social belonging.

The transformation that followed was not limited to executive centralization. That term is too narrow and administratively neutral. What emerged was a personalized regime architecture in which political authority, legal interpretation, institutional survival, and public legitimacy increasingly revolved around Erdoğan's leadership. Formal institutions continued to exist, but their capacity to constrain executive power was progressively weakened.

This chapter examines how that transformation took place.

It analyzes the State of Emergency, emergency decrees, purges, criminalization by association, constitutional change, the rise of the national security state, pressure on civil society and media, property seizures, memory politics, human consequences, and the internationalization of Türkiye's post-July 15 crisis.

The central issue is not only what happened on the night of July 15, but what became possible after it.

State of Emergency: The Institutionalization of Exception

The Immediate Response

On July 20, 2016, only five days after July 15, the Turkish government declared a nationwide State of Emergency for an initial period of three months.

The official justification was clear: extraordinary measures were deemed necessary to eliminate those responsible for July 15, restore public order, and protect democratic institutions. Emergency powers are not inherently incompatible with democratic governance. International human rights law recognizes that states may temporarily derogate from certain obligations during periods of exceptional crisis. However, such measures are expected to remain temporary, proportionate, and subject to effective oversight.

The Venice Commission provides the clearest legal frame for evaluating Türkiye's emergency regime. It acknowledged that the declaration of a state of emergency may be justified in the face of a serious armed conspiracy, but stressed that emergency powers must remain within constitutional and international-law limits. It concluded that the Turkish government interpreted its extraordinary powers too extensively and adopted measures that went beyond what was permitted by the Turkish Constitution and international law.

The Turkish case therefore moved beyond the conventional parameters of emergency governance. The first victim of the whole process was the rule of law, because its suspension enabled almost every other measure that followed: dismissals without individualized reasoning, confiscations without effective remedy, prosecutions based on association, and the collapse of meaningful defense in both courts and public space.

The initial three-month emergency was extended repeatedly and remained in force for two years. During this period, governance increasingly shifted from ordinary legislative procedures toward executive decrees carrying the force of law.

Governing Through Emergency Decrees

Between 2016 and 2018, Türkiye's emergency decree regime became one of the central instruments through which the post-July 15 state of emergency was translated into lasting institutional change.

Although formally justified as a response to July 15, the decrees extended far beyond narrowly defined security measures. They reshaped public administration, the judiciary, education, the

media, civil society, private enterprise, and the security sector. In practice, they enabled the executive to legislate directly, with limited parliamentary scrutiny and without effective judicial oversight at the point of implementation.

The measures were not confined to individuals against whom concrete criminal responsibility had been established. Entire institutions were permanently closed; associations, foundations, schools, universities, hospitals, and media organizations were dissolved; professional licenses were revoked; assets were transferred or confiscated; and large numbers of public employees were dismissed through administrative lists attached to emergency decrees.

The Venice Commission identified precisely this problem. It noted that the government took permanent measures that went beyond a temporary state of emergency: civil servants were dismissed rather than merely suspended, organizations were dissolved, property was confiscated rather than temporarily controlled, and structural legislative changes were introduced through emergency decrees instead of ordinary legislative procedure.

What began as an anti-coup measure evolved into a broader framework for political and institutional reordering. The emergency decrees allowed temporary exceptional powers to produce permanent effects, contributing to a structural transformation of the Turkish state after 2016.

The decisive institutional feature of the KHK regime was not only its scope, but its method: executive power displaced ordinary lawmaking, administrative lists replaced individualized legal reasoning, and irreversible sanctions were imposed before effective remedies existed.

The Logic of the Permanent Exception

Emergency measures were repeatedly justified as temporary necessities. Yet many of the powers introduced during the State of Emergency survived its formal termination. When the state of emergency officially ended in July 2018, a significant portion of its provisions was transferred into ordinary legislation. As a result, the legal distinction between emergency governance and ordinary governance became increasingly blurred.

The extraordinary became ordinary. The temporary became permanent. The exception became institutionalized. Most importantly, it established the political and legal foundations upon which the subsequent purges, prosecutions, property seizures, and constitutional changes would be built.

In this sense, the State of Emergency was not an interruption in Türkiye's political development. It was the bridge through which Erdoğan's personalized rule moved from political dominance to institutional domination.⁹⁸

The Purges: Reshaping the State and Society

The Scale of the Purges

The post-July 15 purge cannot be understood only as the dismissal of public servants. Its scale was far broader. It combined administrative removals, criminal investigations, mass detentions, institutional closures, property seizures, prison repression, and long-term social exclusion. According to official figures, more than 130,000 public servants were dismissed through emergency decrees during the State of Emergency period. Those affected included judges and prosecutors, military personnel, police officers, teachers, academics, diplomats, civil servants, local government employees, and staff working in public institutions.

Yet dismissals were only one dimension of the purge. Officially announced figures compiled from statements by Turkish authorities show hundreds of thousands of detentions and arrests, as well as hundreds of thousands of people processed in operations targeting the Hizmet movement. The official-statements dataset presented in the source material lists 705,172 total detentions, 91,610 arrests, 693,162 people processed, and 11,640 currently convicted, sentenced, or detained persons..⁹⁹

Earlier figures already showed the same pattern. By December 2017, official statements cited by the Stockholm Center for Freedom reported 169,013 people subjected to legal proceedings on coup-related charges and 55,665 arrests. The same source reported that 111,240 public officials had been dismissed by emergency decrees, while 32,180 officials had been struck off through other procedures. It also listed the closure of 47 private health institutions, 881 private educational

⁹⁸ [venice.coe.intTURKEY OPINION ON EMERGENCY DECREE LAWS NOS ...16. August 2017 – CDL-AD\(2016\)037. - 2 - TABLE OF CONTENTS. I. INTRODUCTION. 4. II ... The Venice Commission notes that the declaration of a state of emergency of 20 July 2016.](https://www.venice.coe.int/turkey-opinion-on-emergency-decree-laws-nos-16-august-2017-cdl-ad(2016)037-2-table-of-contents-i-introduction-4-ii-the-venice-commission-notes-that-the-declaration-of-a-state-of-emergency-of-20-july-2016-read-more)[Read more](https://www.venice.coe.int/turkey-venice-commission-of-the-council-of-europe9-oct-2017-in-its-2016-opinion-on-the-emergency-decree-laws-the-commission-concluded-however-that-the-government-had-interpreted-its-extraordinary-read-more)

[Turkey: Normalizing the State of Emergency | Human Rights Watch](#)

[Country policy and information note: Gülenist movement, Turkey, August 2025 \(accessible\) - GOV.UK](#)

[No end in sight: Purged public sector workers denied a future in Turkey - Amnesty International](#)

⁹⁹ <https://www.turkeyrightsmonitor.com/en/mass-detentions>

institutions, 108 student dormitories, 104 foundations, 1,409 associations, 19 trade unions, 15 private universities, and numerous media outlets.¹⁰⁰

These numbers show that the post-July 15 purge was not a conventional security operation. It was a mass restructuring of state and society. The objective was not limited to removing individuals allegedly involved in July 15. Entire professional groups, institutional networks, educational ecosystems, media structures, civil society organizations, families, and economic circles were brought under suspicion.

Administrative Lists and the Collapse of Individualized Justice

The breadth of the dismissals reveals a defining characteristic of the post-July 15 response: the purge did not target a single institution or a clearly defined group of proven perpetrators. It targeted the institutional ecosystem itself.

Entire sectors of public administration were affected simultaneously, often through administrative lists attached to emergency decrees. In many cases, dismissal decisions were implemented without individualized reasoning, judicial review, or prior disciplinary proceedings. The Venice Commission treated this lack of individualized reasoning as a central rule-of-law defect. It noted that dismissals were implemented either through administrative decisions or through lists appended to emergency decree laws, and that the decree laws did not establish an evidentiary standard requiring final assessments to be reasoned and evidence-based.¹⁰¹ The practical effect was the removal of large segments of the professional bureaucracy through executive action.

This was not only a personnel policy. It was a redefinition of the state. Professional neutrality, legal tenure, institutional memory, and bureaucratic continuity were subordinated to the political imperative of loyalty to the new order.

From Purge to Carceral Repression

The scale of the purge was not limited to employment and institutional exclusion. It also produced a vast carceral system. Detention, arrest, prosecution, imprisonment, and penal-execution practices became central instruments of the post-July 15 order. The purge removed people from jobs, but it also moved large numbers of people into police custody, courtrooms, prisons, and probation/parole systems. Allegations of torture and ill-treatment became part of this wider picture. In the immediate aftermath of the July 15 operation, Amnesty International reported

¹⁰⁰United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 33/2024 (Türkiye) concerning Akın Öztürk: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session100/a-hrc-wgad-2024-33-turkiye.pdf>

¹⁰¹[venice.coe.int/turkey - Venice Commission of the Council of Europe](#) 9 Oct 2017 — In its 2016 Opinion on the Emergency Decree Laws, the Commission concluded, however, that the Government had interpreted its extraordinary ... [Read more](#)

allegations of severe beatings, denial of food and water, stress positions, and sexual torture against detainees.

The pattern did not disappear after the emergency period. The 2025 human rights report uploaded here records that allegations of torture and ill-treatment continued throughout 2025, with human rights organizations documenting 184 cases involving police custody, prison conditions, transfers, and hospital visits. It also notes that accountability remained limited and investigations into abuse were often ineffective.

Prison conditions became another dimension of the purge. By the end of 2025, Türkiye's prison population exceeded 430,000 inmates, far above official capacity, while persistent allegations of torture, ill-treatment, and denial of medical care continued to be documented. The prison-violation data in the source material shows the scale of this problem: 313 prisons, 33 categories of rights violations, and 10,031 recorded rights violations. The most common categories included violations of the right to health, ill-treatment, assault, arbitrary disciplinary practices, solitary confinement, arbitrary transfers, communication restrictions, and inadequate food.¹⁰²

These figures are essential. They show that the purge did not end when people were dismissed, detained, or convicted. It continued inside prisons through overcrowding, discriminatory treatment, denial of healthcare, disciplinary pressure, and the unequal execution of sentences.

Deaths, Social Destruction, and Social Death

The human cost of the purge was not incidental. It was part of the structure of repression. At least 1,336 deaths of people with links to the Hizmet Movement since 2016 are documented. The data shows that these deaths link to a range of causes, including illness, prison conditions, suicide, work accidents after dismissal, deaths while fleeing, deaths in custody, suspicious deaths, and deaths connected to lack of access to healthcare.

This reveals the broader logic of the purge. The aim was not simply to prosecute alleged offenders. It was to make an entire social category unlivable within ordinary legal, economic, and civic life.

Dismissed individuals lost jobs, licenses, passports, social insurance, access to public services, and often the possibility of employment in the private sector. Families were stigmatized. Children were affected through school, housing, social pressure, and exile. Prisoners were exposed to overcrowding, health risks, and unequal treatment. Those who fled faced dangerous escape routes and long-term displacement.

The Question of Speed

One of the most debated aspects of the post-coup purges concerns their remarkable speed.

¹⁰² <https://www.turkeyrightsmonitor.com/en/prison-rights-violations>

Within hours of the operation, lists containing thousands of names began to circulate. Within days, thousands of judges and prosecutors had been suspended, large numbers of military personnel had been detained, and administrative investigations had been launched across multiple institutions.

This rapid implementation generated serious institutional questions. Such a vast process could not have been produced through individualized investigation in a matter of hours or days. The speed of the operation strongly indicates that large-scale lists, categories, and institutional assumptions were already available before the emergency measures were formally implemented.

Regardless of when the lists were prepared, their immediate deployment converted a moment of crisis into an opportunity for pre-structured administrative cleansing.

The post-July 15 purge was therefore not only reactive. It was also infrastructural. The state did not simply respond to a coup attempt; it activated a pre-existing logic of classification, exclusion, and replacement.

Judicial Independence and the Recomposition of the Judiciary

The judiciary was one of the central institutions reshaped after July 15. This transformation cannot be understood merely as a personnel change. It represented a structural weakening of judicial independence and impartiality.

Judicial independence requires that courts remain free from external pressure, especially from the executive and legislature. Judicial impartiality requires that judges decide cases without political, ideological, or personal bias. Without these two safeguards, courts cannot function as effective protectors of rights, legality, and constitutional order. A judiciary that is dependent on political power may still issue judgments, but it no longer performs the democratic function of justice. Before July 15, 2016, Türkiye had 14,729 judges and prosecutors. Following July 15, 4,384 of them were dismissed by decisions of the Council of Judges and Prosecutors without meaningful opportunity to defend themselves within 24 hours. By the end of 2023, the total number of judges and prosecutors had risen to 23,923. This means that, after July 15, approximately 14,000 judges and prosecutors were appointed into the system.¹⁰³

Within hours of the July 15 operation, before any investigation had begun and before dawn had broken, lists of judges and prosecutors were already in hand. Approximately 2,700 members of the judiciary were suspended and detained in the immediate aftermath, a figure so large, and a process so instant that it defies any innocent explanation.

The scale of this replacement is crucial. It was not ordinary institutional renewal. It amounted to a recomposition of the judiciary. A substantial part of the pre-existing judicial corps was removed, while a new judicial cadre was rapidly inserted into the system. Serious concerns were raised that

¹⁰³ <https://www.turkeyrightsmonitor.com/en/judicial-independence>

many appointments were shaped less by merit and professional independence than by political loyalty, ideological alignment, or proximity to the ruling party.

This process weakened the judiciary in two ways. First, it removed thousands of experienced judges and prosecutors through emergency procedures. Second, it created a new professional environment in which career security increasingly depended on conformity with the political expectations of the executive. As a result, judicial independence became not only legally fragile but institutionally hollow. Courts continued to operate. Trials continued to be held. Judgments continued to be issued. Yet the judiciary's capacity to act as an autonomous check on executive power was severely reduced.

The erosion of judicial independence did not begin on July 15. The judiciary had already been under growing political pressure since at least 2014, through executive interventions, legislative changes, HSK decisions, mass reassignments, public criticism of court rulings by political leaders, and public statements by judges and prosecutors displaying alignment with the government.

The judiciary was not simply weakened after July 15. It was restructured. Its personnel base, institutional culture, career incentives, and relationship to political power were transformed. In this sense, the judiciary became a central mechanism of regime consolidation rather than an independent guardian of the rule of law.

Purges and Democratic Theory

Modern bureaucracies serve as stabilizing forces within democratic systems. Their legitimacy depends on professional competence, political neutrality, legal continuity, and institutional memory.

Large-scale purges destroy these safeguards. When public employment becomes associated with political loyalty rather than institutional independence, the distinction between state and government begins to erode. When criminal law is used to discipline social groups, the distinction between justice and political punishment collapses. When prisons become extensions of political exclusion, the purge continues long after dismissal or conviction.

The Turkish experience after July 15 illustrates this transformation with exceptional clarity. The post-July 15 purges fundamentally altered the composition, structure, and functioning of the Turkish state. But they also did more than that. They reorganized the relationship between the state and society. The long-term consequence was the weakening of the distinction between public service and regime service. Once institutional survival became tied to political conformity, the state ceased to function as an autonomous framework and increasingly became an extension of presidential power.

The purges were not a temporary emergency measure. They were a mechanism of regime reconstruction. Through dismissals, prosecutions, institutional closures, torture, prison repression, economic exclusion, and social stigmatization, the Erdoğan regime transformed the state apparatus and disciplined society at the same time.

Criminalization by Association: From Individual Responsibility to Collective Guilt

The Erosion of Individual Criminal Responsibility

Individual criminal responsibility is a core principle of modern criminal law. In democratic legal systems, liability must be based on specific acts committed by specific individuals. Membership in a social group, professional network, religious community, or civil society environment cannot, by itself, constitute grounds for criminal punishment.

After July 15, this principle was progressively weakened in Türkiye. The distinction between individual conduct and collective identity became increasingly blurred. Rather than focusing on demonstrable involvement in the coup attempt or other specific unlawful acts, legal and administrative measures frequently relied on indicators of association. Ordinary social, educational, financial, professional, and religious relationships were recast as potential evidence of criminal affiliation. This produced a new logic of suspicion. Individuals were assessed less by what they had done than by whom they were believed to know, support, work with, study with, or resemble.

In practice, even alternative interpretations of the targeted movement became politically and legally suspect. Questioning the official narrative, demanding due process, or humanizing the accused could be portrayed as moral or political complicity. This shift marked a move away from individual responsibility and toward collective attribution.

Association as Evidence

In post-July 15 investigations, a broad range of previously lawful activities were retroactively treated as indicators of criminal suspicion. These included holding an account at Bank Asya, membership in legally established trade unions, employment at licensed educational institutions, subscriptions to newspapers, participation in civil society organizations, attendance at certain schools or universities, and alleged use of communication applications such as ByLock.

Most of these activities were lawful when they occurred. In many cases, they took place years before the institutions concerned were closed, criminalized, or publicly designated as linked to an unlawful structure. Their later use as incriminating evidence therefore raised serious concerns

regarding legality, foreseeability, individual criminal responsibility, and the presumption of innocence.

The central problem was not merely weak evidence. It was the systematic replacement of individualized proof with collective attribution. Social, professional, financial, educational, or associational links were treated as substitutes for direct evidence of criminal conduct. This amounted to guilt by association. Individuals were not primarily prosecuted, dismissed, or stigmatized because of proven participation in violent acts or unlawful activity. They were targeted because they were perceived as belonging to, sympathizing with, or being socially connected to a category that the state had decided to criminalize.

As a result, legal responsibility expanded beyond conduct and entered the realm of attributed identity. People were punished not for what they had demonstrably done, but for who they were presumed to be connected to. This process was reinforced by political delegitimization and social stigmatization. Through official rhetoric and pro-government media narratives, members of the targeted group were framed not as citizens entitled to rights, due process, and individualized justice, but as a suspect population to be excluded from public life.

The consequence was a profound erosion of the rule of law. Lawful civic, professional, educational, financial, and religious associations were retroactively transformed into evidence of criminality. In doing so, the post-July 15 legal order blurred the line between justice and collective punishment.

The Expansion of Uncertainty

One of the most consequential effects of this approach was the spread of uncertainty across society. When ordinary activities can later be reinterpreted as evidence of criminal affiliation, the boundaries of lawful and acceptable conduct become unstable.

Professional relationships, civic engagement, educational choices, financial transactions, media consumption, and social connections all become potential sources of risk. Individuals begin to ask not only whether their actions are legal, but how those actions may be interpreted in the future by a politicized state apparatus.

This uncertainty produces a chilling effect. Self-censorship often emerges long before direct repression becomes necessary. People modify their behavior not because they have committed wrongdoing, but because they seek to avoid suspicion. In this way, state power extends beyond formal sanctions. It shapes everyday life. It narrows the emotional and moral space of society. Neighbours stop asking what happened. Colleagues stop defending one another. Families learn that empathy itself may become dangerous.

Collective Guilt and Democratic Norms

The transition from individual responsibility to collective attribution represents one of the most significant normative challenges of the post-July 15 period. International human rights law is built on the premise that criminal liability is personal. The principles of legality, the presumption of innocence, the right to a fair trial, and the prohibition of collective punishment all depend on this foundation.

When guilt becomes attached to identity, affiliation, or social proximity, these safeguards begin to collapse. In Türkiye's post-July 15 framework, this collapse was not only legal but also discursive. The official narrative became compulsory, while alternative interpretations were treated as security threats. A complex field of social, religious, educational, professional, and media experiences was reduced to a single state-approved interpretation. Nuance disappeared. Distinctions between direct involvement, sympathy, proximity, routine contact, and entirely lawful association were systematically weakened.

The implications extend beyond individual cases. They affect the relationship between citizens and the legal order itself. Trust in institutions depends on predictability. Predictability depends on clear legal standards. When association becomes evidence, legal certainty becomes impossible to maintain.

The post-July 15 experience therefore raises broader questions about emergency governance, the protection of individual rights, and the resilience of rule-of-law principles during political crises. Many individuals were not given a meaningful opportunity to defend themselves neither in courts operating under emergency pressure nor in a public sphere already shaped by hostile media language.

International Legal Challenges to the Post-July 15 Framework

The legal architecture that emerged after July 15 did not remain confined to Turkish courts. As prosecutions expanded and hundreds of thousands of people became subject to administrative, criminal, and financial sanctions, international judicial and human rights institutions increasingly examined whether these measures were compatible with international law.

Over time, decisions from European and United Nations mechanisms raised serious questions about the evidentiary standards, legal reasoning, and due process guarantees that shaped many post-July 15 prosecutions.

The ECtHR's *Yalçınkaya* Judgment

The most significant international legal development came on 26 September 2023, when the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights delivered its landmark judgment in *Yalçınkaya v. Türkiye*.

The case concerned a former teacher convicted of membership in a terrorist organization largely on the basis of three elements: alleged use of the ByLock messaging application, membership in a trade union, and participation in lawful civil society activities. The Court found violations of fundamental protections under the European Convention on Human Rights, including Article 6 on the right to a fair trial, Article 7 on no punishment without law, and Article 11 on freedom of association. The judgment was especially important because it challenged the automatic assumption that lawful activities could later be reinterpreted as evidence of criminal intent. The Court's reasoning went beyond the individual applicant. Since tens of thousands of prosecutions relied on similar evidentiary patterns, the judgment called into question the broader prosecution model constructed after July 15.

For many observers, *Yalçınkaya* represented the first major international judicial assessment of the post-July 15 legal framework itself, rather than a narrow finding on isolated procedural defects. Subsequent ECtHR cases, including *Yasak v. Türkiye*, should be understood within this broader legal debate over foreseeability, legality, evidentiary standards, and the criminalization of lawful association.

The ECtHR's *Yasak* Judgment

The judgment in *Yasak v. Türkiye* reinforced and further developed the principles established in *Yüksel Yalçınkaya v. Türkiye*. While *Yalçınkaya* addressed serious problems in the use and assessment of evidence, *Yasak* focused more directly on the principle of legality under Article 7 of the Convention. The Court made clear that a person cannot be convicted of membership in an armed terrorist organization merely because they participated in activities later associated with that organization. Prosecutors and courts must establish that the accused knowingly intended to contribute to the organization's unlawful aims. Lawful employment, voluntary educational activities, banking transactions, communications, or participation in civil society cannot be retrospectively treated as proof of terrorist membership.

The wider significance of *Yasak* lies in its challenge to a central method used in many post-July 15 prosecutions: inferring criminal intent from lawful social, professional, educational, or financial associations. The judgment requires courts to examine each person's conduct, knowledge, intentions, and circumstances separately and in relation to what was legally foreseeable at the relevant time. Taken together, *Yalçınkaya* and *Yasak* reject the construction of

collective guilt through association and reinforce the principle that criminal responsibility must always be based on proven individual conduct and intent.

United Nations Findings

Concerns about post-July 15 prosecutions were also raised within the United Nations system. In several opinions, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that detentions linked to post-July 15 investigations were incompatible with international legal standards.

One particularly notable opinion concerned Akin Öztürk, whom Turkish authorities portrayed as one of the leading figures of the alleged coup attempt. The Working Group identified serious due process concerns and characterized his detention as arbitrary under international law.¹⁰⁴

The significance of this finding extended beyond the individual case. If international human rights mechanisms found serious legal deficiencies even in proceedings involving one of the most prominent alleged coup figures, this inevitably raises wider questions about thousands of less visible cases processed under the same emergency conditions.

A Growing Gap Between Domestic and International Legal Interpretations

Over time, a widening gap emerged between the legal narrative advanced by Turkish authorities and the assessments of international judicial and human rights bodies. Domestically, broad patterns of association were often treated as indicators of organizational membership. Internationally, courts and human rights mechanisms repeatedly emphasized individual criminal responsibility, foreseeability, legality, fair trial guarantees, and due process. This divergence transformed July 15 from a domestic criminal justice matter into an international rule-of-law question. At the center of this debate lies a fundamental issue: whether a state may retroactively criminalize lawful social, professional, educational, financial, or religious associations in order to construct collective guilt.

The post-July 15 framework demonstrates how emergency rule can be used not only to prosecute alleged crimes, but to redefine entire social categories as suspect. This is the core danger of criminalization by association. Once legal responsibility is detached from individual conduct, the justice system ceases to function as a mechanism of accountability and becomes an instrument of political exclusion.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 33/2024 (Türkiye) concerning Akin Öztürk: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session100/a-hrc-wgad-2024-33-turkiye.pdf>

Constitutional Transformation: From Parliamentary Democracy to Presidential Rule

The Long Road to Personalised Executive Power

The institutional transformations that followed July 15 were not limited to emergency governance, purges, or criminal investigations. The most profound change occurred at the constitutional level. Less than one year after July 15, Türkiye adopted a new constitutional framework that fundamentally altered the structure of the state.

The constitutional referendum of April 16, 2017, marked the end of the parliamentary system that had defined Turkish politics for nearly a century and introduced a presidential system characterized by an unprecedented concentration of executive authority. **More precisely, it marked the constitutional normalization of personalised rule: state authority was increasingly organized around Erdoğan's political will, image, and claim to historical indispensability.**

While debates concerning presidentialism had existed long before July 15, the political environment created by the false flag operation significantly accelerated the process. The emergency atmosphere, the dominance of security concerns, and the marginalization of opposition voices created conditions under which constitutional change became politically feasible.

In this sense, July 15 did not directly cause constitutional transformation. It created the environment in which constitutional transformation became possible: The referendum of 2017 took place while the State of Emergency remained in force. This context generated substantial controversy both domestically and internationally. According to media monitors, airtime allocated to political leaders ahead of the vote was starkly unequal: Erdoğan received 53 hours of media coverage, the leader of the main opposition party received 17 hours, and the leader of the Kurdish opposition party (HDP) received just 33 minutes.¹⁰⁵

The referendum ultimately produced a narrow result. However, its consequences extended far beyond electoral arithmetic.

¹⁰⁵ Bianet, "Allocation of Broadcast Time on TV: Erdoğan 53 Hours, CHP 17 Hours, HDP 33 Minutes," March 23, 2017, <https://bianet.org/haber/tv-de-referandum-dagilimi-erdogan-53-saat-chp-17-saat-hdp-33-dakika-184761>

For the first time in the history of the Republic, executive authority became concentrated within a single office to a degree previously unseen. The constitutional architecture of Türkiye was fundamentally redesigned.

The Emergence of Hyper-Presidentialism

Under the new system, the office of Prime Minister was abolished. Executive power became concentrated in the Presidency. The President acquired extensive decree powers. Control over senior bureaucratic appointments expanded significantly. Influence over judicial appointments increased. Parliamentary oversight mechanisms weakened. The result was the emergence of what many scholars describe as a form of hyper-presidentialism.

Unlike traditional parliamentary systems, where executive authority is distributed across multiple institutions, the new structure centralized political power within a single executive center. **Yet “centralized” is still too mild. The new structure personalized political authority and made the presidency not merely an office, but the symbolic and operational core of the regime.** Supporters argued that this model would produce stability, efficiency, and decisiveness.

Critics argued that it weakened checks and balances and reduced institutional accountability. **The deeper consequence was the erosion of institutional authority : courts, parliament, bureaucracy, media, and oversight bodies continued to exist, but increasingly lost the capacity to restrain the person at the centre of power.**

Regardless of normative assessment, one conclusion is difficult to dispute: The post-July 15 period produced the most extensive redistribution of political power in the history of modern Türkiye.

The 2017 constitutional redesign did not abolish Türkiye’s formal institutions. Parliament continued to exist, courts continued to operate, elections continued to take place, and administrative bodies remained in place. The central change was more subtle but more consequential: these institutions increasingly lost their capacity to constrain executive authority.

Democratic systems depend not only on electoral competition but also on institutional restraint. Independent courts, parliamentary oversight, autonomous regulatory bodies, a pluralistic media environment, and a professional bureaucracy are designed to limit the concentration of power. Their function is to create accountability, delay arbitrary decisions, and force executive authority to operate within legal and constitutional boundaries.

After July 15, this institutional balance was progressively weakened. Emergency rule reduced parliamentary scrutiny. Decree-based governance expanded executive discretion. Judicial restructuring weakened the autonomy of the courts. Media pressure narrowed public scrutiny. Bureaucratic purges replaced professional continuity with political loyalty.

This pattern is consistent with contemporary models of democratic backsliding. Modern authoritarian transformations rarely begin by abolishing parliaments, courts, or elections. Instead, institutions are preserved in form while their internal function changes. They become instruments for implementing executive priorities rather than mechanisms for limiting executive power.

The Turkish experience after July 15 closely reflects this pattern. The constitutional order retained the appearance of institutional continuity, but the practical logic of governance shifted toward executive dominance. Checks and balances were not formally eliminated; they were hollowed out.

Constitutional Change and Regime Transformation

The significance of the 2017 referendum extends beyond the adoption of a presidential system. It marked the constitutional consolidation of a political transformation already underway before July 15 and rapidly accelerated afterward.

Before the constitutional amendments, political authority in Türkiye was formally distributed across several institutional centers: parliament, the prime ministry, the presidency, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, and oversight mechanisms. After the referendum, power increasingly converged around the presidency.

This transformation affected nearly every major sphere of governance. Lawmaking became more dependent on presidential initiative. Senior bureaucratic appointments became more centralized. Judicial appointments and career incentives became more vulnerable to executive influence. Parliamentary oversight weakened. Public administration became more directly tied to presidential authority. Security policy became increasingly organized around executive discretion.

The constitutional redesign also changed the political meaning of loyalty. Loyalty to Erdoğan was increasingly presented as loyalty to the state, while criticism of Erdoğan could be framed as hostility to national survival. This fusion of leader, state, and nation became one of the defining features of the post-July 15 order.

The result was not merely a technical change from parliamentarism to presidentialism. It was a shift in regime logic. Institutional balance gave way to executive primacy. Legal accountability gave way to political loyalty. Constitutional government increasingly became a framework for presidential rule rather than a constraint upon it.

Civil Society and Media Under Pressure

Autonomous Institutions as Democratic Infrastructure

Democratic systems depend not only on elections, parties, and parliaments, but also on autonomous institutions that operate outside direct state control. Civil society organizations, professional associations, universities, trade unions, human rights organizations, independent media, and educational institutions perform a critical intermediary function between the individual and the state.

These institutions generate alternative sources of information, representation, expertise, and social organization. They enable citizens to monitor power, articulate interests, challenge official narratives, and organize collectively. Their existence limits the concentration of political authority. Their weakening increases it.

One of the defining features of the post-July 15 order was the systematic weakening of these intermediary structures. The result was not merely the closure of individual organizations. It was the contraction of the institutional space through which society could organize independently from the state.

Emergency Rule and the Contraction of Civic Space

The state of emergency created the legal framework for a large-scale restructuring of organized civic life. Under the first emergency decree alone, the government ordered the closure of **35 private health institutions, 1,043 private schools and dormitories, 1,229 foundations and associations, 15 private universities, and 19 trade unions, federations, and confederations** on the grounds of alleged links to structures deemed a threat to national security.¹⁰⁶

The official State of Emergency Commission later recorded **131,922 measures**, including **125,678 dismissals from public service** and **2,761 closed institutions and organizations**.¹⁰⁷

The government presented these measures as necessary security actions. However, critics argued that many closures were carried out through broad administrative categories rather than individualized evidence, and that effective legal remedies were limited, delayed, or structurally inadequate.

The scale of the closures transformed Türkiye's civic landscape. Associations, foundations, schools, universities, dormitories, trade unions, health institutions, media outlets, and professional networks disappeared or were placed under severe pressure. Many organizations that remained

¹⁰⁶ [Turkey: Rights Protections Missing From Emergency Decree | Human Rights Watch](#)

¹⁰⁷ [Turkey: 78% of appeals on state of emergency concluded](#)

open adapted to a new environment of legal uncertainty, self-censorship, and administrative vulnerability.

The cumulative effect was a sharp narrowing of civic space. Independent organization became riskier. Alternative social networks became more fragile. Public life became increasingly dependent on state-approved institutions and narratives.

Civil Society as a Target of Regime Consolidation

Civil society does not only provide services. It produces social trust, professional autonomy, local initiative, public criticism, and alternative forms of belonging. For this reason, autonomous civil society can become threatening to authoritarian projects of political centralization.

In the post-July 15 period, the weakening of civil society served a broader regime-consolidation function. It reduced the number of institutions capable of documenting abuses, defending victims, organizing collective responses, or challenging official narratives. This was particularly significant in relation to the Hizmet movement and other targeted communities, whose social existence became almost impossible to discuss outside the state's security framework.

The contraction of civic space therefore had consequences beyond the organizations directly closed. It reshaped the wider public sphere. It signaled that association itself could become incriminating, and that institutional independence could be reclassified as a security threat.

Media Closure, Ownership Concentration, and Editorial Control

The media sector underwent a parallel transformation. In the immediate aftermath of July 15, media outlets were closed by decree, journalists were detained or prosecuted, and large numbers of media workers lost their jobs. Amnesty International reported that at least **156 media outlets** were shut down after the false flag operation and that an estimated **2,500 journalists and media workers** lost employment.¹⁰⁸

Over time, direct repression was reinforced by structural media capture. Ownership became increasingly concentrated among conglomerates dependent on public tenders or closely connected to the government. The Reuters Institute describes Türkiye's media environment as highly concentrated, with major television and print outlets largely controlled by business groups close to the government, while independent media operate with limited financial and regulatory support.¹⁰⁹

This transformation did not eliminate all critical journalism. Independent outlets, digital platforms, and exiled media continued to operate. However, the balance of visibility shifted decisively. Pro-government media gained structural dominance, while independent journalism

¹⁰⁸ [Turkey: 250,000 demand release of jailed journalists - Amnesty International](#)

¹⁰⁹ [Turkey | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism](#)

faced prosecution risk, advertising pressure, regulatory sanctions, online blocking, and economic fragility.

Freedom House’s 2026 assessment shows that these pressures remain ongoing: in 2025, at least **30 journalists were assaulted** and **58 detained**, while Türkiye blocked access to more than **311,000 web addresses** in 2024, including over **5,700 news articles**.¹¹⁰

The result was not only polarization. It was the managed centralization of information. A once-fragmented media landscape, containing ideological, religious, liberal, conservative, Kurdish, secular, civic, and oppositional perspectives, was increasingly flattened into one dominant regime language.

Platform Authoritarianism and Digital Erasure

The transformation of Türkiye’s media environment did not stop with the closure of newspapers, television channels, and publishing houses. Over time, the logic of control extended into the digital sphere. This development may be described as platform authoritarianism: the use of digital platforms, legal takedown mechanisms, algorithmic opacity, and corporate compliance to restrict independent journalism and political expression.

In Türkiye’s case, this model developed through a combination of domestic law, administrative pressure, court orders, platform cooperation, and opaque content moderation. Law No. 5651, especially Article 8/A, enabled rapid access blocking and content removal on broad grounds such as national security, public order, crime prevention, and public health. The 2022 “disinformation law” further expanded the legal environment in which criticism, reporting, and public-interest journalism could be framed as threats to public order.

The IJA notes that more than **700 accounts** were blocked in early 2025 under Law No. 5651, with restrictions increasingly targeting identities rather than specific content. It also reports an approximately **80 percent decline in YouTube visibility** for some investigative journalists after the 2023 presidential elections, and the deletion of **256 investigative videos** from Cevheri Güven’s YouTube channel in March 2025.

The same report records the scale of digital restriction more broadly: in 2024, around **270,000 domains**, **17,000 X accounts**, and tens of thousands of pieces of platform content were reportedly affected. For January-September 2025, it identifies **21,214 domains** and **103,685 pieces of content** affected across platforms including X, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ [Turkey: Freedom in the World 2026 Country Report](#)

¹¹¹ <https://internationaljournalists.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/POLICY-REPORT-ON-PLATFORM-AUTHORITARIANISM.pdf>

These figures show that censorship increasingly operates through digital infrastructure. The state does not need to close every outlet physically if it can reduce visibility, block access, restrict accounts, remove archives, or make independent journalism algorithmically invisible.

This has particular importance for exiled journalists. Many journalists who left Türkiye after July 15 continued reporting from Europe or North America. Yet their work remained vulnerable to Turkish court orders, platform compliance, geo-blocking, demonetization, and content removal. In this sense, digital repression became a form of transnational repression. Exile no longer guaranteed communicative safety.

The consequences are significant. Independent journalism loses reach. Public-interest archives disappear. Audiences inside Türkiye are deprived of alternative reporting. Journalists and sources self-censor. Platforms become not neutral intermediaries, but gatekeepers whose compliance decisions can determine whether critical voices remain visible.

This development adds a new layer to the post-July 15 order. Control over information was no longer exercised only through ownership, prosecution, licensing, or closure. It was also exercised through platform governance, algorithmic visibility, and cross-border digital enforcement.

Platform authoritarianism therefore deepened the decline of media pluralism. It allowed the regime to project domestic censorship into digital spaces and, in some cases, into democratic jurisdictions where exiled journalists had sought protection.

The Decline of Epistemic Pluralism

Democratic accountability depends on epistemic pluralism: the existence of multiple institutions capable of producing, testing, contesting, and circulating knowledge. Citizens need access to competing interpretations of political events. Official narratives must be open to scrutiny. Facts must be publicly testable.

The post-July 15 contraction of civil society and media weakened this pluralism. In relation to the targeted movement, the effect was especially severe. Alternative accounts of its social reality, educational work, internal diversity, victimhood, or legal claims could barely enter public debate without being coded as terrorist propaganda.

This had broader political consequences. When independent media weaken, public scrutiny declines. When civil society contracts, documentation becomes harder. When universities and professional associations lose autonomy, expertise becomes more dependent on political permission. When public debate is shaped by fear, society's ability to evaluate state action independently is reduced. The issue is therefore not only freedom of expression. It is the capacity of society to produce and verify knowledge outside the state.

Civil Society, Media, and the Post-July 15 Order

Emergency decrees reshaped the legal environment. Purges reshaped the bureaucracy. Constitutional reforms reshaped executive authority. At the same time, closures, prosecutions, ownership concentration, regulatory pressure, and online censorship reshaped the public sphere.

These processes were mutually reinforcing. A weaker civil society generated fewer organized challenges to official narratives. A captured media environment reduced public scrutiny. Reduced scrutiny increased the regime's capacity to carry out further institutional restructuring.

This transformation helps explain how the post-July 15 order became durable. The Erdoğan regime did not merely centralize executive power. It also weakened the social and informational institutions through which that power could be questioned.

Property Seizures and Economic Transformation: The Economic Dimension of the Post-July 15 Order

From Political Purge to Economic Reallocation

The post-July 15 order did not only transform Türkiye's judiciary, bureaucracy, media environment, and civil society. It also produced a major economic transformation through the closure, seizure, transfer, liquidation, and repurposing of institutions and assets.

This process affected schools, universities, dormitories, associations, foundations, health institutions, media outlets, publishing houses, trade unions, companies, conglomerates, and private properties.

The economic dimension is therefore central to understanding the post-July 15 order. The purge was not limited to removing individuals from public life. It also dismantled the material infrastructure of an entire social ecosystem and transferred large parts of its institutional and economic base to state control or regime-aligned management.

The Scale of Institutional Closure

The scale of closures was extraordinary. According to Turkey Rights Monitor, at least **3,942 institutions** operating across all 81 provinces were closed through 11 emergency decrees. These included **1,410 associations, 1,034 private schools, 835 student dormitories, 301 tutoring centers, 109 foundations, 47 health institutions, 53 newspapers, 29 publishing houses, 22 radio stations, 20 magazines, 19 television channels, 19 unions, 19 federations, and 15 universities.**¹¹²

¹¹² <https://www.turkeyrightsmonitor.com/html/2025/en.html>

Institution Type	Number of Closed Institutions
Association	1410
Private school	1034
Student hostel	835
Prep. school	301
Foundation	109
Newspaper	53
Health facility	47
Publishing house	29
Radio station	22
Magazine	20
TV Channels	19
Syndicate	19
Federation	19
University	15
News agency	6
Confederation	4

Source: <https://www.turkeyrightsmonitor.com/en/closed-institutions>

These figures show that the post-coup measures were not narrowly directed at alleged perpetrators of the coup attempt. They targeted a much wider institutional landscape associated, or alleged to be associated, with the Hizmet movement.

The consequences extended beyond the legal entities themselves. Students lost schools. Patients lost hospitals. Employees lost jobs. Readers lost newspapers. Civil society lost associations and foundations. Communities lost institutional spaces through which they had organized education, charity, media, business, and social life.

The Role of TMSF and Government-Appointed Trustees

A second major mechanism was the appointment of trustees and the transfer of companies to the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF). Private companies alleged to be linked to the Hizmet movement were first placed under court-appointed trustees. Later, emergency decrees expanded the authority of TMSF, allowing it to assume control, manage, sell, liquidate, or transfer these companies.

According to official Anadolu Agency reporting, TMSF was managing **784 companies** linked to post-July 15 investigations. Their asset size was **42.3 billion Turkish lira** at the time of takeover and had reportedly reached **70.3 billion Turkish lira** by 2021.¹¹³ The legal problem was not merely that the state intervened in private property. States may, under strict conditions, regulate, freeze, or seize assets connected to criminal activity. The problem was the breadth, speed, collective character, and political context of the measures.

In many cases, institutions and companies were closed or seized on the basis of alleged affiliation, connection, or proximity rather than individualized findings of institutional criminal conduct. This raises serious concerns under both domestic and international law. Article 35 of the Turkish Constitution protects the right to property. Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights protects the peaceful enjoyment of possessions.

The post-July 15 confiscation regime weakened these safeguards. Property was seized before final judicial determination. Companies were transferred to trustees. Assets were placed under TMSF control. Owners often had limited access to effective remedies. In many cases, the economic sanction preceded or exceeded the legal finding. The result was a form of **economic punishment by association**.

From Confiscation to Redistribution

The process did not end with closure or seizure. Many confiscated institutions were later repurposed. Former schools, university buildings, dormitories, media headquarters, and other facilities were reportedly converted into courthouses, police facilities, imam hatip schools, public offices, or allocated to government-linked actors. The headquarters of Zaman newspaper, for example, was turned into an annex of the Bakırköy Courthouse; other educational buildings were reassigned to state or political uses.¹¹⁴ This repurposing matters analytically. It shows that the objective was not only neutralization. It was also redistribution.

¹¹³ Anadolu Agency, “Assets of Companies Transferred to the SDIF Following the Coup Attempt Reached 70.3 Billion Turkish Lira,” June 14, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/fetonun-darbe-girisiminin-ardindan-tmsfye-devredilen-sirketlerin-aktif-buyuklugu-70-3-milyar-liraya-ulasti/2272942>

¹¹⁴ <https://turkeyrightsmonitor.com/en/closed-institutions>

The physical infrastructure of a targeted social movement was removed from its original owners and communities, transferred to the state or state-aligned actors, and incorporated into the symbolic and administrative architecture of the new order.

The Continuity of Economic Seizures After the State of Emergency

Although the formal state of emergency ended in 2018, the economic logic of the post-July 15 order continued.

TMSF has continued to manage, sell, and liquidate companies seized over alleged Gülen links. In 2025, for example, TMSF announced auction plans for major seized businesses including RHG Enerjitürk, HES Kablo, İstikbal Mobilya, and Aydınli Giyim Grubu, with a reported total estimated value of **64 billion Turkish lira**.¹¹⁵

This demonstrates that the economic consequences of the purge remain active years after the emergency decree period. The post-July 15 order did not merely seize assets during a moment of crisis. It created a durable confiscation regime whose effects continue through sales, transfers, liquidation, and long-term exclusion from ownership.

Case Study: Maydonoz Döner and the Continuity of the Confiscation Model

The Maydonoz Döner case illustrates that the economic logic of the post-July 15 order did not end with the formal lifting of the state of emergency. It continued as a reusable mechanism through which successful private companies could be brought under state control through terrorism-related allegations.

Maydonoz Döner had grown into one of Türkiye's major fast-food chains, with hundreds of branches across the country and international expansion. In February 2025, a terrorism-financing investigation was launched against the company. According to the case report, the operation targeted **353 employees**, while TMSF was appointed as trustee to **21 affiliated companies**. Public reporting also confirmed that TMSF was appointed trustee to 21 companies operating under the Maydonoz Döner brand.¹¹⁶

The significance of the case lies in the legal and political pattern it reveals. The investigation did not merely target specific individuals accused of wrongdoing. It resulted in the transfer of corporate control to TMSF, affecting the company's management, employees, franchise network, business partners, and economic future.

¹¹⁵[Turkey's TMSF to auction off companies seized over alleged Gülen links, sparking property rights concerns - Turkish Minute](#)

¹¹⁶ https://solidaritywithothers.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Madonoz-doner-Case_Final.pdf

In this sense, Maydonoz Döner represents a later-stage example of the same confiscation model previously applied to larger conglomerates such as Boydak Holding, Koza İpek Group, Kaynak Holding, Dumankaya, and Aydınli Group. The pattern is consistent: allegations of Gülen affiliation or terrorism financing are used to justify trustee appointment, followed by state control, potential liquidation, sale, or redistribution.

The case is especially important because it shows that confiscation became institutionalized beyond the immediate period after 15 July. By 2025, the emergency decree environment had formally ended, yet the legal architecture of seizure remained active.

Economic Transformation as Regime Consolidation

The economic dimension of the post-July 15 order served several functions. **First**, it destroyed the material base of autonomous institutions associated with the Hizmet movement. **Second**, it weakened independent media, education, business, charity, and civil society networks. **Third**, it transferred major assets into state-controlled or regime-aligned management. **Fourth**, it sent a deterrent message to other social and economic actors: political disloyalty, or even perceived proximity to a targeted group, could result not only in prosecution but in economic elimination. This transformed property into an instrument of political discipline.

The post-July 15 order therefore cannot be understood only as a security response or legal purge. It was also an economic project. Through emergency decrees, trusteeship, TMSF control, asset seizures, and institutional repurposing, the Erdoğan regime dismantled an independent social and economic ecosystem and redistributed its material foundations.

Property seizures were one of the central pillars of the post-July 15 order. They connected law, economy, security, and political power. They converted accusations of affiliation into institutional closure. They turned emergency governance into asset transfer. They transformed private property into a field of regime consolidation.

The result was not only the punishment of individuals or the closure of institutions. It was the economic liquidation of a targeted community's social infrastructure. The total estimated value of assets confiscated from individuals, companies, and institutions associated with the Hizmet movement is approximately **\$50 billion**¹¹⁷.

The post-July 15 transformation was not only political, judicial, or cultural. It was also profoundly economic.

¹¹⁷[PERSECUTORY CONFISCATION AMOUNTING TO CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY: CASE OF THE GÜLEN GROUP](#)

July 15 and the Internationalization of Türkiye's Political Crisis

Beyond a Domestic Event

For much of modern Turkish history, political crises largely remained domestic affairs. Coups, military interventions, constitutional disputes, and periods of political instability primarily affected Türkiye's internal institutions and political actors.

The aftermath of July 15 followed a different trajectory. What began as a false flag operation rapidly evolved into an issue with profound international implications. Legal disputes reached international courts. Diplomatic tensions emerged across multiple continents.

Educational institutions became subjects of international negotiations. Exile communities expanded throughout Europe and North America. Human rights organizations, intelligence agencies, international courts, and United Nations bodies became increasingly involved in assessing the consequences of the post-July 15 response.

As a result, July 15 gradually transformed from a Turkish political crisis into an international legal, diplomatic, and human rights issue. Its consequences crossed borders. Its controversies became global. Its legacy extended far beyond Türkiye itself.

Foreign Government and Intelligence Assessments

The Turkish government's attribution of institutional responsibility to the Hizmet movement and personal responsibility to Fethullah Gülen was not accepted as an established fact by several of Türkiye's principal Western allies. Although these governments condemned the violence of July 15 and supported Türkiye's constitutional order, their intelligence, diplomatic, and legal assessments repeatedly pointed to a substantial evidentiary gap between Ankara's allegations and the material made available for independent scrutiny.

In March 2017, Bruno Kahl, then President of Germany's Federal Intelligence Service, BND, publicly stated that the Turkish government had attempted to convince German authorities at every level that Fethullah Gülen was responsible for the events, but had failed to do so. Kahl said that the BND had seen no convincing indication that Gülen had directed the military mobilization. He also rejected Ankara's characterization of the movement as an Islamist-terrorist organization, describing it instead as a civilian association concerned with religious and secular education.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Der Spiegel, "According to the Head of Germany's BND, the Coup Attempt Was Likely Merely a Pretext for Erdoğan's Radical Course," March 18, 2017, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/tuerkei-putschversuch-laut-bnd-chef-wohl-nur-vorwand-fuer-radikalen-kurs-erdogans-a-1139271.html?sara_ref=re-xx-cp-sh

The significance of Kahl's statement should not be understated. It came from the head of the intelligence service of one of Türkiye's closest NATO allies, after Ankara had had months to provide intelligence, documents, testimonies, and other material supporting its allegations. The BND assessment did not determine who organized July 15, but it directly contradicted the Turkish government's claim that Gülen's personal command had been conclusively established.

The United States adopted a similarly cautious position.¹¹⁹ Successive American officials refused to treat Ankara's allegations as sufficient in themselves and repeatedly emphasized that any extradition request had to satisfy established evidentiary and judicial standards. Shortly after July 15, Secretary of State John Kerry called on Türkiye to submit "legitimate evidence that withstands scrutiny." Officials in the Obama administration were also reported to be skeptical of Ankara's immediate attribution of responsibility, while leaving open the possibility that individuals associated with the movement may have participated.¹²⁰

Despite Türkiye's repeated diplomatic demands and the submission of extensive files, the American legal process did not result in Gülen's extradition. This did not constitute a judicial declaration of innocence, since an extradition proceeding is not a trial on the underlying allegations. It nevertheless demonstrated that Ankara's political assertions could not substitute for evidence meeting the requirements of an independent legal system¹²¹.

A comparable conclusion was reached by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the British House of Commons in 2017. After examining submissions from the Turkish government, British officials, independent experts, and representatives associated with the Hizmet movement, the Committee found a "relative lack of hard, publicly available evidence" proving that the movement as an organization was responsible for July 15. It concluded that evidence concerning the involvement of individual Gülen sympathizers was largely anecdotal or circumstantial and remained inconclusive regarding the movement as a whole or its leadership.¹²²

The British Committee also distinguished between the possible participation of particular individuals and the much broader claim that an entire transnational civil society movement had collectively organized the operation. It further stated that the British government did not possess evidence sufficient to designate the movement as a terrorist organization.

These assessments did not establish a single alternative explanation for July 15, nor did they rule out the involvement of particular individuals who may have had real or alleged links to the

¹¹⁹ Jared Malsin, "Turkey Clamps Down After Attempted Coup," *TIME*, July 16, 2016, <https://time.com/4409333/turkey-clamps-down-after-attempted-coup/>

¹²⁰ [How John Kerry Handled Turkey's Coup](#)

¹²¹ Dexter Filkins, "Turkey's Thirty-Year Coup," *The New Yorker*, October 10, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/17/turkeys-thirty-year-coup?>

¹²² House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *The UK's Relations with Turkey*, Tenth Report of Session 2016–17, HC 615 (London: House of Commons, March 25, 2017), <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfa/615/61507.htm>

movement. Their significance lies elsewhere. Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom did not accept the central propositions of Ankara's narrative as proven: that the Hizmet movement acted as a unified institutional perpetrator, that Fethullah Gülen personally directed the operation, and that ordinary affiliation with the movement could therefore be treated as evidence of complicity.

The distinction between individual participation and collective organizational responsibility is fundamental. The Erdoğan government erased that distinction within hours of July 15. Foreign intelligence services, governments, parliamentary bodies, and courts repeatedly refused to do the same. Their assessments expose the central evidentiary weakness of the post-July 15 order: an allegation that remained contested internationally was transformed inside Türkiye into an unquestionable state truth and used to criminalize an entire social community

Western reactions therefore did not simply “misunderstand” Türkiye; they reflected a persistent evidentiary gap between Ankara's sweeping claims and what independent actors were able or willing to verify.

The result was the emergence of two parallel interpretations: One interpretation, dominant within Türkiye, **enforced through courts, media, bureaucracy, and memory politics**. Another, characterized by continuing uncertainty and calls for further investigation abroad. **This is why the language of neutral distance can become misleading: the domestic narrative was not merely one interpretation among others; it was a coercive truth regime.**

This divergence continues to shape international discussions nearly a decade later.

Gülen's Response and Calls for Independent Investigation

One of the most significant yet often overlooked aspects of the international debate concerns the reaction of Fethullah Gülen himself. Within hours of the false flag operation staged as a coup attempt, Gülen publicly condemned the events and rejected military intervention as a means of political change.

In multiple public statements issued during the days that followed, he denied any involvement and called for an independent international investigation into the events of July 15. Such calls were unusual. Individuals accused of orchestrating coups rarely request external scrutiny of the allegations directed against them.

Supporters of Gülen frequently pointed to these statements as evidence of confidence in independent fact-finding mechanisms. Critics argued that public denials could not by themselves establish innocence.

Regardless of interpretation, the repeated demand for an international inquiry became a recurring feature of the international debate surrounding July 15. To this day, no independent international commission has been established to investigate the full sequence of events.

As a result, many questions continue to be debated rather than conclusively resolved. **This unresolved evidentiary landscape is precisely why the report should not fake objectivity by treating the official narrative and the victims' experience as equally neutral discourses. The post-July 15 order was built on an allegation that became a state truth before it was independently tested.**

Transnational Repression and Extraterritorial Reach

The internationalization of the post-July 15 order was not limited to courts, extradition files, or diplomatic disputes. It also became a security campaign beyond Türkiye's borders.

After July 15, the Erdoğan regime did not simply seek the return of individuals accused of links to the Hizmet movement. It attempted to extend the logic of the domestic purge into foreign jurisdictions. The objective was clear: exile should not become a space of safety, political expression, or institutional survival.

Freedom House described Türkiye's transnational repression campaign as remarkable for its intensity, geographic reach, and rapid escalation after July 15. It found that, since July 2016, the Turkish state had pursued perceived enemies in at least 31 countries across the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, and documented 58 renditions since 2014 which is the highest number attributed to any perpetrator state in the period covered by its study.

The campaign primarily targeted individuals affiliated, or alleged to be affiliated, with the Hizmet movement, but later expanded to Kurdish and leftist opponents. As Freedom House noted, Türkiye's shift toward consolidated authoritarianism under Erdoğan was accompanied by a more extreme practice of transnational repression.

The methods were not limited to formal extradition. They included forced renditions, irregular transfers, passport cancellations, mobility restrictions, surveillance, intimidation, misuse of international law-enforcement mechanisms, pressure on families remaining in Türkiye, and direct targeting of journalists and activists abroad.

Freedom House characterized the post-coup campaign as a "global purge" mirroring the domestic crackdown and operating on the same basis of guilt by association: individuals were condemned for real or alleged links to the Hizmet movement, often without any individualized connection to the July 15 operation itself.

Türkiye's own public statements reflected the scale of the campaign. According to Freedom House, the Turkish government claimed to have returned 116 people from 27 countries in

connection with the Hizmet Movement. UN experts referred to at least 100 individuals subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearance, and torture.¹²³

Several operations involving the transfer of individuals from countries such as Kosovo, Moldova, Pakistan, Malaysia, Gabon, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Kenya attracted international criticism and generated legal disputes concerning due process and international law. In some cases, individuals were effectively handed over to Turkish custody with only a thin appearance of legal procedure. Freedom House noted that such operations often relied on the co-optation of host-country institutions, including local police or intelligence services.

The campaign also relied on mobility controls. Turkish authorities cancelled more than 230,000 passports after the July 15 operation, limiting the movement of suspected opponents inside Türkiye and creating legal vulnerability for those already abroad. Freedom House further reported that Ankara allegedly attempted to upload around 60,000 names to INTERPOL's notification system, prompting public criticism from German Chancellor Angela Merkel over Türkiye's misuse of INTERPOL mechanisms.¹²⁴

The case of Orhan İnandı shows the extreme end of this policy. İnandı, a Turkish-born Kyrgyz citizen and founder of the Sapat school network, disappeared in Bishkek on 31 May 2021. Weeks later, he appeared in Turkish custody. Erdoğan publicly announced that Turkish intelligence had brought him to Türkiye. He was abducted, secretly detained, tortured, and forcibly transferred to Türkiye.

The significance of this case is clear. Turkish transnational repression was not limited to extradition requests or legal pressure. It included passport cancellations, INTERPOL abuse, surveillance, intimidation, abduction, secret detention, torture, and forced transfer into Türkiye's post-July 15 prosecution system.

Germany became one of the central arenas of this extraterritorial pressure. The German **Annual Report on the Protection of the Constitution** 2025 should be read in this context: Turkish state-linked surveillance and intimidation of regime critics in Germany is not merely a bilateral political issue, but a domestic security concern for German authorities. The post-July 15 order followed Turkish citizens, former citizens, journalists, activists, and dissidents into German public life.

The targeting of journalists shows the coercive logic of this campaign particularly clearly. Exiled journalists were not only prosecuted in absentia or named in Turkish arrest warrants. They were publicly exposed, threatened, physically attacked, placed under surveillance, and turned into targets through pro-government media campaigns. In some cases, private information and residential locations were published or circulated in ways that increased their vulnerability.

¹²³ FreedomHouse [Turkey: Transnational Repression Origin Country Case Study](#)

¹²⁴ [Merkel attacks Turkey's 'misuse' of Interpol warrants | Reuters](#)

It is documented that Cevheri Güven, Can Dündar and several other Turkish journalists in Germany received protection from German authorities after threats. It also noted that Türkiye's transnational repression widened beyond Gülen-linked individuals to include secular and leftist figures.

Recent monitoring confirms that this pattern has continued. Turkish authorities have pursued perceived opponents abroad through extradition requests, surveillance, legal pressure, politically motivated proceedings, and attempts to monitor or intimidate communities in exile. Foreign courts have increasingly scrutinized Turkish extradition requests, in some cases rejecting them because of concerns that the requested individuals could face unfair trials or politically motivated prosecution if returned to Türkiye.

The result was a major expansion of the post-July 15 security framework beyond Türkiye's territorial borders. The crisis became transnational not by accident, but by design.

The Erdoğan regime sought to ensure that political displacement would not end vulnerability. Exile did not remove individuals from the reach of the post-July 15 order; it merely shifted the methods used against them. Inside Türkiye, the tools were emergency decrees, prosecutions, dismissals, imprisonment, and confiscation. Abroad, they became renditions, extradition pressure, intelligence monitoring, passport restrictions, media targeting, and intimidation.

This is why transnational repression must be treated as a central pillar of the post-July 15 order. It demonstrates that the regime's objective was not limited to punishing alleged perpetrators of a coup attempt. It sought to dismantle an entire social, institutional, journalistic, and political ecosystem wherever it survived.¹²⁵

¹²⁵Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), *2025 Report on the Protection of the Constitution* (Cologne: Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, June 30, 2026), [Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz - Publikationen - Verfassungsschutzbericht 2025](#)

[Nate Schenkkan and Isabel Linzer, "Turkey: Transnational Repression Origin Country Case Study," in *Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach: The Global Scale and Scope of Transnational Repression* \(Washington, DC: Freedom House, February 2021\)](#)

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[2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkey \(Türkiye\)](#)

Global Asset Transfers and Institutional Dismantling

The international dimension of the post-July 15 order also included a coordinated campaign to dismantle educational and civil society institutions associated, or alleged to be associated, with the Hizmet movement outside Türkiye.

A central instrument in this process was the **Turkish Maarif Foundation**. Established by Law No. 6721 in June 2016, less than one month before July 15, the Foundation was formally created as a non-profit educational body. In practice, however, its legal mandate, governance structure, public funding model, and operational role placed it close to the Turkish state apparatus. It became the key vehicle through which Ankara sought to replace Hizmet-linked schools abroad with institutions operating under Turkish state influence.

The scale of this campaign was significant. According to the attached report, at least **162 educational institutions in 29 countries** were affected by closure, confiscation, transfer, or restructuring processes after 2016. Of these, **131 institutions were transferred to the Turkish Maarif Foundation**, while **31 others were closed, confiscated, or otherwise restructured without direct transfer**. Approximately **7,800 educational personnel**, including teachers and administrative staff, were affected. This was not a series of isolated national decisions.¹²⁶

The report identifies recurring mechanisms across different jurisdictions: diplomatic pressure by Turkish officials, executive decisions by host governments, administrative licence revocations, negotiated handovers, court-ordered transfers, security-service involvement, deportations of personnel, and the reassignment of schools to Maarif or other Ankara-supported structures.

In several cases, the process took place without transparent legal procedures, effective judicial remedies, or adequate compensation. School owners, managers, teachers, parents, and students were often excluded from meaningful decision-making. The measures were generally justified through broad allegations of affiliation rather than individualized findings of wrongdoing.

The geographical scope of the campaign is also important. Cases documented in the report cover Africa, Central Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and parts of Europe. Countries such as Mali, Niger, Chad, Afghanistan, Venezuela, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Senegal, Jordan, Zambia, Liberia, Congo-Brazzaville, and Rwanda illustrate different versions of the same pattern: Turkish diplomatic pressure followed by local administrative or security action against Gülen-linked educational institutions.

The Turkish Maarif Foundation's own official statements point to the scale of Ankara's ambition. According to the report, Foundation leadership stated that it had made official contact with **104**

¹²⁶ [Turkish Maarif Foundation and the Global Attack on Gülen Schools - Solidarity with OTHERS](#)

countries, taken over 234 schools in 20 countries, and opened 172 schools in 29 countries. These official figures use a broader counting method, but they confirm the strategic objective: the global replacement of Gülen-linked educational networks with a state-backed Turkish education infrastructure.¹²⁷

This campaign therefore represented one of the most extensive attempts by a modern state to reorganize a transnational civil society and education network beyond its own jurisdiction. Its significance goes beyond education policy. Schools were not targeted simply as schools. They were treated as institutional extensions of a political enemy. Their closure, transfer, or restructuring became part of a wider strategy to erase the Hizmet movement's global social presence.

The process also raises serious rule-of-law concerns. The affected institutions involved property rights, employment rights, access to education, freedom of association, and due process. In some countries, teachers and administrators faced deportation, movement restrictions, or legal uncertainty. In others, assets were transferred or institutions were placed under new control without meaningful judicial oversight.

In this sense, the overseas school campaign functioned as a form of **transnational institutional dismantling**. It exported the domestic logic of the post-July 15 purge into foreign jurisdictions. Inside Türkiye, emergency decrees closed schools, universities, dormitories, associations, foundations, and media outlets. Abroad, similar objectives were pursued through diplomacy, bilateral pressure, administrative action, and the Turkish Maarif Foundation.

The campaign demonstrated that the post-July 15 order was not confined to Türkiye's territory. It sought to eliminate the movement's institutional existence wherever Ankara could generate sufficient diplomatic, legal, economic, or security pressure.

The result was the internationalization of the purge: a domestic campaign of institutional destruction transformed into a global policy of educational takeover, asset transfer, and civil society replacement.

The Emergence of a Global Community Shaped by Political Displacement

One of the most visible international consequences of July 15 has been the emergence of a global community shaped by political displacement. Tens of thousands of individuals left Türkiye in the years following the July 15 operation. Many sought asylum. Others relocated through family

¹²⁷ [Turkish Maarif Foundation](#)

reunification, employment opportunities, educational pathways, or humanitarian protection mechanisms.

The result was the formation of substantial communities in exile across Europe, North America, and other regions. For many, displacement became not a temporary interruption, but a long-term condition. Families were divided. Professional identities had to be rebuilt. Children grew up speaking different languages, attending schools far from the country of their birth, and carrying the consequences of a political crisis they did not choose.

Nearly a decade later, the social consequences of this displacement continue to unfold. This global community is therefore not only a humanitarian consequence of the post-July 15 order. It is also a political archive of that order: a dispersed population carrying the evidence of dismissals, confiscations, prosecutions, prison sentences, family separations, and forced reinvention.

An Unfinished International Debate

The significance of July 15 can no longer be understood solely through the lens of Turkish domestic politics. Its consequences have been examined by international courts, human rights institutions, foreign governments, intelligence agencies, academic researchers, and diaspora communities across the world.

The debates surrounding responsibility for the “coup attempt” remain unresolved. Yet the consequences of the post-July 15 response are clearly visible. They can be seen in international court judgments. In United Nations opinions. In transnational repression cases. In property disputes stretching across continents. In schools that changed ownership. In families living in exile. And in continuing disputes over memory, accountability, and historical truth. Nearly a decade later, July 15 remains more than a historical event. It remains an ongoing international political, legal, and human rights question. Its immediate consequences lasted hours. Its global consequences continue to unfold.

July 15 became the foundational instrument through which the Erdoğan regime reorganized law, state institutions, property, memory, media, security, and citizenship around presidential power. The judiciary was not merely weakened in this process; it was fully instrumentalized. Criminal law became a language of political elimination, administrative law became a mechanism of exclusion, and emergency governance became the operating system of regime consolidation.

Conclusion: July 15 and the Systemic Destruction of Turkish Democracy

Ten years after July 15, the central question is no longer whether the Erdoğan government benefited from the events of that night. The political benefit is undeniable.

Erdoğan used July 15 as a justification to declare a state of emergency, purge the public administration, stack the military command and the judiciary with political loyalists and collaborators, confiscate billions of dollars' worth of private property, criminalize the Hizmet movement, silence independent media organizations, weaken civil society, establish a presidential system without meaningful checks and balances, and reshape the political opposition.

The central question is this: Were these consequences the product of a process that developed naturally after July 15, or were the events themselves, from the outset, a pre-planned component of the one-man rule project whose path they opened? The evidence examined in this report points to the second conclusion.

July 15 was not, as portrayed in the Erdoğan government's official narrative, a coherent military coup that failed because of popular resistance or the institutions' commitment to the democratic order. It was a limited, chaotic military operation designed from the outset to fail, whose structure was inconsistent with the basic operational logic of a genuine coup.

The July 15 operation had no visible leadership. It lacked a viable plan to bring the country's political leaders under its control. It did not secure communications infrastructure. It allowed government-aligned media organizations to continue broadcasting largely uninterrupted. It mobilized military students and junior personnel who possessed neither command authority nor knowledge of the military mobilization's so-called aim. It began during evening rush hour and was filled with scenes that contributed nothing to the strategic objectives of a military coup but maximized public visibility and reaction.

Although senior military and intelligence officials had received advance intelligence warning, they took no measures to prevent the mobilization. They later avoided questioning before the parliamentary commission and the courts; on the contrary, they were promoted or otherwise rewarded.

The official narrative demands that all these contradictions be treated as coincidences. They are not.

The officers and soldiers who testified that they had been ordered to respond to terrorist threats cannot all be disregarded without examination. The military students who believed they were participating in exercises cannot reasonably be portrayed as strategic coup planners. The pilots and security officers who protected Erdoğan cannot simultaneously be treated as participants in an operation attempting to stage a "coup" against him.

The fact that the team prepared to arrest Erdoğan was ordered to move to Marmaris only after

Erdoğan had safely left cannot be explained as a coincidence. Nor can the government's conduct after July 15 be explained as a standard emergency response.

While the events were still unfolding, previously prepared purge lists were announced and put into effect. Thousands of judges and prosecutors were removed before any investigations could have been conducted. The parliamentary report was shelved and hidden from public scrutiny. Requests by defendants and opposition members of parliament to examine communications records, summon commanders, investigate ballistic evidence, and clarify the deaths of civilians were repeatedly obstructed or rejected.

The Erdoğan regime never had any intention of uncovering the truth about July 15. On the contrary, it imposed its own narrative on everyone, sought to obscure evidence that contradicted it, and silenced dissenting voices.

The official narrative remained the only permissible account not because it had been independently proven, but because the institutions capable of critically examining it were dismantled and alternative narratives were criminalized. Courts converted accusations into judgments. Government-aligned media portrayed prosecutorial claims as established facts. The Erdoğan regime dismissed more than 130,000 people from public institutions through emergency decrees on the allegation that they were connected to Hizmet.

This replacement of individual responsibility with guilt through alleged affiliation was the most significant legal transformation of the post-July 15 order. Bank accounts, the use of a communications application, newspaper or magazine subscriptions, sending a child to a school, supporting a charitable organization, or belonging to a trade union were used as evidence of criminality. Activities that had been lawful before July 15 were retrospectively treated as evidence of membership in a terrorist organization. The European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly ruled that this approach violated several provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The scale of the punishment confirms the political objective. There is an inexplicable disparity between the number of people investigated, prosecuted, dismissed, imprisoned, or socially excluded on grounds of alleged affiliation with Hizmet and the number convicted of directly participating in the military mobilization. While approximately 5,000 soldiers and police officers were convicted for allegedly participating in the July 15 events, two million people were subjected to "terrorism" investigations.

Its purpose was not simply to punish alleged coup participants. It was to eliminate an autonomous civil society group, remove independent cadres from the state, redistribute economic resources, produce a new loyalist bureaucracy, and establish fear as an instrument of governance for controlling social and political life.

The Hizmet movement was the first and most extensively targeted group. Its members, institutions, and alleged sympathizers were collectively deprived of their most basic constitutional rights. Their families were stigmatized. Their professional and social existence was made increasingly impossible. Their children also bore the consequences of these practices.

The resulting condition can only be described as leaving these people to "civil and social death."

The persecution did not end at Türkiye's borders. The Erdoğan regime pursued - and continues to pursue- people alleged to be members of the Hizmet movement abroad through unlawful renditions, abductions, passport restrictions, extradition requests, surveillance, intimidation, and diplomatic pressure. Schools and educational institutions were seized by the regime or forced to close under pressure across multiple continents.

This transnational repression campaign demonstrates that the objective was never limited to holding the perpetrators of one night accountable. On the contrary, its objective was to eliminate the continued existence of an entire civil society group.

The same set of oppressive methods was later extended to others. A threat was identified or constructed. The government-aligned media created the necessary climate of fear and hatred. Prosecutors opened investigations. Courts converted the regime's political instructions into legal judgments. Kurdish politicians, journalists, human rights defenders, civil society actors, elected mayors, businesspeople, and opposition politicians were subjected to the similar repression, albeit not at the same scale as the Hizmet movement.

For this reason, the persecution carried out during this process cannot be understood simply as Erdoğan's stance toward the Hizmet movement. The process served as a testing ground in which the institutions and methods of Türkiye's present authoritarian order were developed. The pressure directed at opposition parties is not separate from July 15. It is the continuation of the order established through July 15.

The 2017 constitutional referendum gave this order its permanent form. Conducted under emergency conditions and profound media inequality, it abolished Türkiye's parliamentary system, concentrated executive authority in the presidency, and rendered democratic institutions dysfunctional.

Türkiye did not move from democracy to dictatorship in a single night. July 15 was the decisive catalyst. Although the parliament, the courts, and elections continued to exist formally, these institutions' capacity to restrain the government and guarantee free political competition was destroyed.

This fusion of leader, state, and nation is the defining characteristic of one-man rule. Loyalty to Erdoğan became loyalty to the state. Criticism of Erdoğan became hostility to the nation. Demands for evidence became support for terrorism.

The report therefore argues that what followed July 15 cannot be explained as a "temporary but disproportionate response to a genuine security crisis."

The emergency rule was not temporary. The institutional changes were not proportionate. The punishment was not individualized. The principle of individual criminal responsibility was disregarded. Judicial independence was destroyed. The confiscations were not narrowly connected to proven criminal conduct.

The historical judgment is therefore clear: July 15 did not restore democracy after an attempted military takeover. It completed Türkiye's transition from a flawed democracy into a personalized authoritarian regime.

Ten years later, the unanswered questions must be addressed within the framework of internationally verifiable standards of accountability. The actions of the political leadership, the intelligence service, the Office of the Chief of the General Staff, senior commanders, and all individuals and institutions that possessed prior knowledge of the events or the authority to intervene must be investigated by independent international institutions or an investigative commission.

All records and the final report of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission must be published. Intelligence warnings, military communications, flight records, security camera footage, autopsy reports, and ballistic findings must be examined by independent experts. The lives lost on July 15 cannot be used as a reason to obstruct an investigation. On the contrary, those lost lives make an independent investigation imperative.

The injustices arising after July 15 must be remedied through the implementation of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, and Türkiye's judicial system must be brought into line with universal legal standards.

Arbitrarily detained individuals must be released immediately. Public servants who were wrongfully dismissed must receive effective redress. Confiscated property must be returned, and the resulting losses must be compensated. Allegations of torture, enforced disappearance, sexual violence, and deaths in custody, as well as transnational repression operations, must stop and be independently investigated.

The final judgment of this report is clear:

July 15 was Erdoğan's false flag operation and the founding crisis of his one-man regime. The purpose of this operation was to create the political conditions under which democracy could be systematically dismantled. Until the truth is independently established and those responsible are held accountable before the courts, July 15 will remain one of the principal foundations used to legitimize the dismantling of Türkiye's democratic order.

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