Turkey's coup attempt

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The Project on Middle East Political Science

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Late in the evening of July 15, a faction of the Turkish army blocked key bridges into Istanbul and occupied several locations throughout the country. The attempted coup failed before morning, but its consequences will reverberate far into the future.

The government's response was immediate and harsh: mass arrests and a purge of not only the military, but also civil servants, judges, academics, and political opponents. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned cleric Fethullah Gulen as the chief conspirator and demanded his extradition from self-imposed exile in the United States. Meanwhile, some opponents of Erdogan suggest that the government orchestrated the attempt as a "false flag" operation to consolidate power and crackdown on dissidents.

Turkey is not new to coups, but looking at previous conflicts and the political science literature on coups can tell us why this failed attempt is unique and what its repercussions will be in Turkey and the broader Middle East. The pieces in POMEPS Briefing 30 offer insightful and timely analysis from top scholars of the region published in the Monkey Cage blog on the Washington Post. Read the collection here.

Lauren Baker
POMEPS Coordinator
August 1, 2016

July coup analysis

How Erdogan's anti-democratic government made Turkey ripe for unrest

By Yüksel Sezgin, Syracuse University

On Friday, a part of the Turkish military attempted a coup — and it failed, at great cost. More than 100 members of the military are dead, along with approximately 190 police officers and soldiers loyal to the regime. Over 2,400 military personnel were arrested and 2,745 judges were also removed from their posts by the government. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, after calling his supporters into the streets to resist the coup, has reestablished control over the state.

Little is yet known about the exact motivations of the military leaders who attempted the takeover, but one thing is clear: This was not a coup attempt against a democratic regime. Neither the government nor the coup plotters were "true" democrats. This was an illegal attempt to topple a regime that was popularly elected but is stridently anti-democratic in its rule. Under Erdogan's rule, especially in the past three to four years, Turkish democracy has considerably declined. Academics and intellectuals have been arrested for signing petitions that called on the government to cease its military operations in the Kurdish-dominated South East Anatolia region. Erdogan recently amended the constitution to remove the immunity of about 140 members of the parliament — a move primarily intended to expel Kurdish MPs.

Developments in the aftermath of the June and November 2015 parliamentary elections convinced many Turks that it was no longer possible to change the government through democratic and peaceful means.

Erdogan would not recognize the results of June 2015 parliamentary elections in which his ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) lost its parliamentary majority and called for repeat elections in November 2015.

In the meantime, he destroyed the peace process with the Kurdish rebels that he started a few years earlier and launched a major military campaign in the Kurdish cities, which left thousands of people homeless, injured and dead.

The campaign of violence and fear orchestrated by the regime paid off and the ruling party regained its parliamentary majority in November. Since then, Turkish cities have been turned into battle grounds. The army has destroyed towns and villages in the nation's southeast, while the Islamic State and Democratic Union Party (PYD)/Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) carried out terrorist attacks in the major Turkish towns — killing hundreds of civilians, police and the military personnel.

For many commentators of Turkish politics, last night's events in Turkey were not a total surprise. The rise of terror, the inability to defeat Erdogan's AKP government through democratic means, Turkey's increasing international isolation and the effects of Syrian civil war all contributed to the increasing likelihood of a military takeover.

Despite these trends, it is striking that virtually the entire Turkish political class came together to oppose Friday's coup. Every major political party condemned it — and what remains of Turkish civil society came out forcefully against it. Despite their strong disapproval of Erdogan's repressive regime, opposition parties staunchly denounced the coup attempt in belief that military dictatorship was not a desirable alternative to Erdogan's authoritarian rule.

Erdogan is now more popular than ever. Rising polarization, violence and instability boost Erdogan's favorability and support among his constituents. It is most likely that the government will want to capitalize on its rising popularity and call for early elections in few months. It will not be a surprise if his party wins a supermajority in an early election that would allow Erdogan to move from amending the constitution to rewriting it — leverage this

failed coup as a way to turn Turkey into a full-blown civil dictatorship.

In the ensuing days, we can expect that the regime will become more repressive toward the opposition. The increasing militarization and authoritarianism of the government will further marginalize itself from the international community. The media, universities, intellectuals and political opposition will be penalized. This may also trigger a major exodus of foreign capital from Turkish markets.

Yüksel Sezgin is the director of the Middle Eastern Studies Program and a professor of political science at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

Why the Turkish military still attempts coups

Michael R. Kenwick, Pennsylvania State University

The Turkish coup attempt took many by surprise. Conventional wisdom among journalists, analysts and Turkish citizens suggested that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had successfully "defanged" the military as a credible force of political opposition. His growing consolidation of power was touted as seemingly irreversible. Although we now know the coup failed, its very occurrence suggests that Erdogan was not as well insulated as previously thought.

Why do analysts often underestimate the degree to which civilians control the military?

A cursory evaluation of Turkish politics under Erdogan suggests that one could be forgiven for underestimating the probability of a coup. Shortly after coming to office, Erdogan systematically purged the military of officers whom he suspected of disloyalty. These purges occurred with the aid of Fethullah Gulen, a prominent Islamist preacher leading a social movement with some support within the military. Fearing the growing political strength of the movement, Erdogan turned on his former ally and purged Gulen's loyalists in the military and police. Although Gulen's supporters are being blamed for the coup attempt, these purges previously appeared to have cemented Erdogan's control. For all appearances, the military was tamed.

Yet, scholarship on the relationship between civilian elites and the military would suggest caution before concluding that civilian control is established in Turkey. The core challenge faced by Erdogan, like many other leaders, is asserting control over an institution that typically has a virtual monopoly on the use of armed violence within the state.

Because the armed forces cannot be easily coerced, the core of civilian control often hinges on a norm of subjugation within the military – members of the armed forces do not intervene in politics because they believe doing so violates military ideals and will not be supported by their colleagues or society at large. Although sometimes given different labels, such norms have been central in our of civil-military relations.

My research argues that these norms of subjugation develop slowly, growing in strength as time passes since past instances of military intervention in politics. Turkey's

history suggests that norms of subjugation are not yet fully formed, either within the military or society at large. Turkey has experienced frequent military intervention in politics, with coup attempts occurring with relative frequency from the 1960s through the 1980s.

Most recently, the military intervened in 1997 to remove an Islamist prime minister from office. For much of its history, the military has considered itself the guardian of secular rule in Turkey, and this belief both undermines the norm of civilian control and legitimizes military intervention in politics.

How did this weakly held norm of subjugation to civilian rule influence the strategic calculations made by the coup plotters?

Military elites generally try to coordinate when planning and carrying out coups. To protect the well-being of their subordinates, military officers have a strong incentive to support whichever side of a coup they think will win. This is itself a function of both the beliefs individual military personnel and their beliefs about what their contemporaries and the citizenry at large think. If a sufficiently strong norm of civilian control has been achieved, citizens and military personnel will believe that coups are unlikely to succeed and therefore should not be pursued.

So why did the coup plotters miscalculate?

While the norm of subjugation was not firmly entrenched within the military or society at large, it was also not so weak that military factions could instigate a coup with the ease and legitimacy that seemed to characterize the frequent coups of previous decades. Without clear norms present to coordinate beliefs, the coup plotters had to generate what appear to be crude estimates about the degree of support they would receive. In this case, the indeterminate level of civilian control in Turkey lead the coup faction to overestimate the support it would receive from other elements of the military and underestimate the civilian opposition that would ultimately manifest on the streets of Ankara.

To determine whether this notion is borne out by data, I examine a measure of civilian control that I developed. I begin by gathering existing data on the degree to which military institutions affect political decision-making for all countries. Then, using a statistical measurement model, I generate estimates for how well civilian elites control the military within a particular country. The model also accounts for the accumulation of norms by allowing the estimates of civilian control to increase as time passes without military intervention in politics. At the one extreme, civilians hold no control when the military actively runs the country, and on the other strong norms of subjugation have been developed and military institutions are firmly subordinate to (or in rare cases even eliminated by) civilian elites.

As can be seen in this plot from 2010 — the most recent year for which data are available — Turkey is located roughly in the middle of the pack of countries, in terms of lowest to highest level of civilian control. This indeterminacy probably complicated the calculations made by the coup plotters. Analysts have been quick to label the attempted coup "amateurish" or "half-baked." Even Secretary of State John F. Kerry said the coup did "not appear to have been a very brilliantly planned or executed event." Although this may seem apparent now that the coup has failed, decisions were made in a difficult strategic environment lacking in norms that may have otherwise allowed the plotters to more precisely predict their success or failure. These difficulties may have been coupled with fears that future purges of the military were on the horizon.

In short, the coup appeared to defy conventional wisdom because appearances suggested that Erdogan's purges were successful. Digging deeper, however, suggests that a norm of subjugation in the military had not yet been fully accepted, leading a faction to believe it could succeed in toppling civilian rule. This calls for caution when evaluating countries with a similar history of civilian rule: Appearances can be deceiving and the path to civilian control is often slow and hard-fought.

What does this mean for Turkey moving forward?

Erdogan is likely to take solace in the fact that he maintained support among the police, Turkish intelligence and much of the military. Reliance on both military factions and non-military security organizations can be critical in preventing a coup's success. Ordinarily, building or strengthening these organizations to counterbalance the military risks retaliation from the armed forces.

Now that Erdogan has emerged with widespread popular support, he probably will take this opportunity to weaken institutions that might otherwise constrain him. He already has arrested 6,000 members of the armed forces and judiciary and declared the coup a "gift from God" that will allow him to "cleanse" the army. Staving off future interventions by the military will be critical if Erdogan hopes to imbue a shared expectation of civilian rule. Whether he succeeds in these pursuits and what this means for democracy remain open questions.

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Why there are so many conspiracy theories about the Turkish coup

By Kristin Fabbe, Harvard Business School and Kimberly Guiler, University of Texas at Austin

As the dust settles on Turkey's failed midnight coup, critics and supporters of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan alike are considering the consequences of Friday's attempted takeover. Although little is known about the mystery officers who staged an attempt to overthrow the government in Ankara, the seeds of new conspiracy theories have already begun to take root.

War of words

On one side, government detractors are speculating that the attempted coup was a masterful, state-managed scheme to consolidate Erdogan's power. On the other side, the AKP government is placing the blame for the coup attempt on perpetrators — real and imagined. The government's list of villains ranges from bitter Erdogan rival Fethullah Gulen, a cleric who now lives in the United States, and other shadowy foreign "invaders" to supporters of Turkey's Ataturkist secular establishment and even the U.S. government. The skeptics are painting Erdogan as a megalomaniac tyrant bent on elected dictatorship; the believers are portraying him as a savior and victim.

Theories abound, but one thing is certain: The person currently winning the war of words is Erdogan. Analysts here in the Monkey Cage and elsewhere were struck by the unity of politicians and civilians from across the ideological spectrum in opposition to the coup. Despite the opposition's strong disapproval of Erdogan's repressive regime, every major political party denounced the coup attempt, believing Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian rule to be preferable to military dictatorship or a transitional unelected government.

Democracy and coups

Some have interpreted the fact that leaders from across the political spectrum are largely united in their denunciation

of Friday's coup attempt as evidence that democracy is on track. As Oral Calıslar opined in the pro-government mouthpiece Serbestiyet, a failed coup is evidence that Turkey "has passed a test" and that "now is time for a deepening of democracy, freedom, and human rights." In the same venue, Halil Berktay lamented that Western observers "fail to see, and accept, the crowds that rushed to defend democracy."

Failed coups, however, rarely prove to be the type of victory for democracy and individual freedom that Erdogan and his supporters are currently claiming. Recent research on coups suggests that regime change is unlikely after a failed coup, and when it does occur, the regime that emerges is more likely to be a dictatorship than a democracy. Perhaps most worryingly for Turkey — since regime change does not appear to be in the making — most coups, successful or failed, tend to be followed by greater repression against citizens.

More than 6,000 military and judicial personnel have been detained in Turkey. Many have suggested that the purges could go further,citing a report in Bir Gün that the head of YOK, Turkey's Council on Higher Education, is planning to convene an emergency meeting on Monday of all university rectors to discuss the steps necessary to "completely clean the academic community of this [parallel] structure (bu yapı)."

For its part, the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) Executive Council Co-Presidency has released a statement diametrically opposed to the failed-coup-equals-democracy logic. "Portraying Erdogan and the fascist AKP dictatorship as if they were democratic after this coup attempt is an approach even more dangerous than the coup attempt itself," read the KCK statement.

Although the majority of Turks may very well prefer a continuation of AKP rule to military dictatorship, the fact that such conflicting narratives of conspiracy and victimization immediately began to crystallize, even before the outcome of the putsch was known, does not bode well for Turkish democracy.

Conspiracy theories abound

During the early hours of the attempted takeover, an elaborate theory emerged suggesting the event was a "false flag" operation staged by Erdogan to tighten his grip on power. Government detractors took to social media, posting under the hashtags #TheaterNotCoup (#DarbeDeğilTiyatro), #FakeCoup (#SahteDarbe) and #ShamCoup (#ÇakmaDarbe). The staged-coup theory gained further momentum after Erdogan was broadcast referring to ongoing events as "a gift from God" that would allow the regime to "cleanse our army" of the Gulen "virus."

Commentators also pointed to the youthful appearance of many of the captured troops allegedly behind the coup, arguing that they looked like impressionable teenage conscripts who probably thought they were on a training exercise. Gulen responded to Erdogan's accusations by criticizing the president — adding fuel to the "false flag" conspiracy.

Casting leaders as victims

Both Erdogan and Gulen employ tropes casting themselves as current and past victims of repression, presumably to garner empathy from captivated onlookers. Erdogan highlighted his status as a democratically elected leader under attack by "parallel" (Gulenist) and secularist elements — failing, of course, to mention the 10-year-long partnership between Gulen and the AKP, which brought Turkey show trials galore.

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim similarly utilized the spotlight to frame the uprising as a dichotomy between "democratic" Turkish regime forces and the "parallel terrorist organization" (referring to Gulen and his supporters). At a mass funeral for victims of the failed coup, crowds shouted "Fethullah [Gulen] will come and pay" and "We want the death penalty."

Gulen also highlighted his victimhood as a political outsider and former political prisoner when he was interviewed during Friday's dramatic events. After

framing the coup attempt as the twisted brainchild of the Erdogan regime, Gulen spoke of his suffering: "I have been pressured and I have been imprisoned. I have been tried and faced various forms of harassment."

A new political weapon: The Diyanet

Turkey's self-avowed secularists also see themselves as victims — victims of a regime that is leveraging Islam, and especially the state-run presidency of religious affairs (Diyanet) and its imam/civil servants, to bolster its hold on power. Throughout the night of the failed uprising, mosques in several Turkish cities broadcast the call to prayer on repeat after Erdogan asked citizens to protest the overthrow attempt. The call was coupled with appeals for the people to protest the coup and remain steadfast in their support of the government.

Interestingly, the head of the Diyanet, Mehmet Gormez, also referenced past victimization in a rare public statement made from the Diyanet TV studio. Gormez condemned the betrayal by the Gulenist "parallel structure" and offered "praise to Allah for granting the calls to prayer that silenced the coup, after the [past] coups that have silenced calls to prayer." In 2015, Kristin Fabbe wrote, "Problems could arise if the AKP decides — and is able — to leverage the Diyanet as a political weapon against the Gulen Movement."

It seems that time has now come.

Research suggests that this ratcheting up of victimization rhetoric could have important attitudinal and electoral consequences. Kimberly Guiler, in a paper recently discussed at the Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) annual conference, finds that voters in Turkey are more likely to feel positively toward candidates who cite experiences of political suffering in their biographies. Specifically, exposure to information about a candidate's political imprisonment significantly improved respondents' ideological affinity with the candidate, regardless of party affiliation. In particular, respondents who perceived themselves as political victims or who exhibited low political knowledge were more likely to vote for the previously imprisoned candidate. Respondents who received information about a previously imprisoned candidate from the religiously conservative AKP also reported higher levels of trust, feelings of closeness and likelihood to vote for the candidate. This pattern holds for voters with low trust in AKP leadership and low levels of religiosity, demonstrating that using a history of sacrifice broadens support for candidates.

Turkey's reputation as a mainstay of stability in a rough neighborhood is crumbling. Developments in Turkey and empirical research show that emerging narratives matter immensely to people trying to make sense of violence and political uncertainty. The conflicting narratives of victimization and conspiracy that have flooded the media landscape in Turkey over the past few days, while hardly new, suggest a nation that could be further divided, rather than united, by recent events.

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How Erdogan may exploit Turkey's failed coup

By A.Kadir Yildirim, Rice University's Baker Institute

Turkey's July 15 coup attempt shocked the international community. However, the coup's failure does not mean that Turkish politics will soon return to normal. After such failed attempts to remove them from power, populist leaders such as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan typically respond with heightened repression and a paranoid style of politics that bodes ill for a return to normal democratic life. Even worse, all indications suggest that post-coup Turkey will be at the more intense end of the spectrum of backlash.

Leaders who survive coup attempts often exploit the crisis to concentrate power in their own hands and it is extremely rare that they reduce repression. This is especially the case for leaders who had already been moving in an autocratic direction prior to the attempted coup. For example, in April 11, 2002, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez was removed from office for less than two days in a coup attempt. Once he re-assumed power, Chavez blamed the United States for the coup attempt, increased suppression of the press, weakened the opposition and rode the resulting popular support for years to come. After an assassination attempt on former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1954, his popularity soared, and he successfully cracked down on opposition factions, minimizing societal dissent. The botched coup attempt will therefore probably usher in a major tectonic shift in Turkish politics as well.

Leaders who survive plots can harness popular sympathy to their advantage, as President Erdogan has already quickly done. In the past several years, Erdogan's popularity has been steadily declining despite successive electoral victories. But after the failed coup attempt, he has become the new hero of democracy. In a remarkable act of defiance, many Turkish citizens flocked to the streets to challenge soldiers. Likewise, all major political and civil society organizations and political parties condemned the attempted coup early on, depriving the attempt of a critical source of legitimacy. This episode illustrates a decided embrace of procedural democratic governance by all sectors of the Turkish society.

This is not a trivial point; populist leaders thrive on popular mass support. As political scientist Kurt Weyland argues, populist leaders appeal to a "heterogeneous mass of followers who feel left out" and can do this in a "direct, quasi-personal manner that bypasses established intermediary organizations." The societal reaction to the coup attempt created such an outflow of support for Erdogan especially with his direct appeal to masses in order to mobilize them via, Facetime, text messages and calls to prayer from mosques throughout the night.

This popular rejection of the coup attempt in Turkey highlights one of the common threads of why coups fail. Coup attempts such as those in Germany in 1920, Japan in 1936 and Algeria in 1961 have all failed due to "civil resistance" and non-cooperation by the general public. As Adam Roberts once noted, especially in conscript-based militaries, vulnerability to "pressures from the civilian population and from civil institutions" for coup plotters is great.

But ironically, this popular enthusiasm for democratic governance and rejection of the military's intervention may not prevent Turkish democracy from deteriorating further. The society's overwhelming repudiation of the coup attempt provides Erdogan carte blanche to redesign government institutions and consolidate power on a scale largely unprecedented since Turkey's first democratic elections in 1946. Despite some early calls for less societal polarization following the coup attempt, all signals from the Turkish government suggest renewed repression of dissent. Historically, such large-scale repressive state response to coups has been fairly common – though certainly not universal – as the cases of Kenya in 1982, Nigeria in 1990 and Venezuela in 1992 illustrate.

Increased media suppression is currently eliminating an already thin lineup of non-loyalist media outlets. The government has blocked access to several news portals that host opposition views, including Meydascope, Karsi Gazete,

Gazeteport and Rotahaber. In his first address after the coup attempt, President Erdogan referred to the attempt as a "gift from God" that would allow a popularly backed purge of dissident voices in the military and beyond.

One long-standing desire of Erdogan and the ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) is to introduce an executive presidency to enable Erdogan to "centralize" and "tighten his grip" on power. In part due to the pro-Kurdish HDP's success in parliamentary elections, the AKP failed to garner the parliamentary majority to secure this constitutional change. The failed coup attempt provides a golden opportunity to recast the executive presidency as a panacea to Turkey's many problems and to rectify civilian-military relations.

The aftermath of the failed coup attempt will probably entrench certain Turkish domestic and foreign policy trajectories for years to come. Non-loyalists within the bureaucracy will be quickly eliminated under the guise of eradicating the Gulenist "parallel state." The judiciary and the military have been the primary targets of this cleansing effort. The morning of the coup attempt, the first order of business for the government was to dismiss, and later detain, more than 2,700 judges and prosecutors. Many of these officials are reported to be staunch secularists or Alevis – read, non-Erdogan loyalists. The aftershocks of the coup attempt continue unfolding in purges in higher education, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, the ministry of education and the police force. However, these actions do not amount to Turkey's "Iran 1979 Moment." Erdogan's primary concern remains the creation of a personalistic authoritarian regime, muting societal dissent.

In terms of foreign policy, the Turkish government stands to lose a valuable source of policy insight by a state agency with considerable autonomy. The Turkish military has provided a constant balancing act, often mitigating the government's desired course of policy in Iraq, Syria and the broader region. Generals have been able to minimize the extent of adventurism in Turkish foreign policy, pushing for a line closer to broader Western strategy in the region. The absence of the military's critical voice may change Turkey's regional calculations and policies.

In particular, the Turkish government's insistence on Fethullah Gulen's extradition to Turkey on charges of terrorism carries the seeds of further strain in the already tenuous Turkish-American relations. One of the rare leverages at the Turkish government's disposal is American use of the Incirlik Air Base. While short-term suspensions of the base's use are unlikely to severely undermine the U.S. offensive against Islamic State forces, extended disruptions might hamper sustained efforts in Syria and Iraq.

If the United States does not grant Gulen's extradition request, Turkey may pursue greater independence in foreign decision-making, potentially undermining U.S. regional policy. Just as Turkey continues to move away from European Union membership, it may continue to loosen U.S. ties. Improved relations with Russia and Israel in recent weeks will also probably affect the Turkish government's calculations on this front. After 2002, Hugo Chávez was emboldened to defy the United States. Some early accusations of U.S. involvement in the coup attempt hint at a possible fallout between Turkey and the United States.

The failed coup attempt in Turkey appears to contain elements of sensationalism with a televised and social media-heavy turn of events and will certainly have its quirks along the way. Yet history and scholarly research suggest that, at its core, it seems to be following the pattern of other failed coups. While coups are typically an elite affair, popular opposition has the potential to disrupt successful plots. However, civil resistance does not engender greater democracy; instead, political leaders who survive the attempt seek widespread retribution to ensure dissent is minimized and the opposition is highly disciplined and restricted. In cases where other countries are deemed to have collaborated with coup plotters, a marked shift in foreign-policy orientation is likely to ensue.

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The dark side of the popular mobilization that stopped Turkey's coup

By Lisel Hintz, Cornell University

Within hours of Turkey's coup attempt, tens of thousands of arrests, suspensions and forced resignations — from military and judiciary members to civil servants and university deans — demonstrated President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's resolve to make coup plotters "pay the heavy price of treason to the homeland." These top-down purges, reminiscent of the routing of leftists following the country's 1980 coup, will enable the increasingly authoritarian president to stack the institutional deck even further in his favor.

As concerned as observers of Turkey's struggles with democracy are about the national state of emergency declared Wednesday, the counter-coup unfolding at the societal level bodes equally ominous for Turkey's future.

Initially mobilized as a tool of popular resistance against military forces, civilians are now demonstrating a form of vigilante vengeance against anyone they deem to be traitorous to the nation. The lasting consequences of this form of tactical polarization may prove the greatest obstacle to a stable, democratic Turkey.

Speaking via FaceTime on a live news broadcast from an undisclosed location during the coup attempt, Erdogan urged his supporters to defy the curfew declared by the military and take to the streets to "give [the traitors] their answer." Shortly after, on orders from Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), calls issued from minarets instructed listeners to take responsibility for the protection of their homeland "for the love of Allah and Muhammad." The head of the Diyanet also invoked Islam in his condemnation of the coup as "the greatest betrayal of our exalted religion."

Vigilante vengeance

Effectively deputized by the president and goaded by religious authorities, groups that coalesced in the early hours of the coup were fueled by a combination of perceived moral duty and desire for revenge. With many chants of "Ya allah bismillah allahu ekber" ("In the name of Allah, Allah is great"), sprawling crowds of pro-government Turks confronted armed soldiers en masse, aiding in the rapid vanquishing of coup efforts. Civilian mobs lynched military officers despite some police efforts to protect them; one soldier was reportedly beheaded on the Bosphorus Bridge. In the province of Malatya, crowds stormed and then set fire to a bookstore, again invoking Allah.

The night after the coup attempt, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim declared to masses gathered at the Turkish parliament that their "work was not yet done" and thus their "democracy vigil" would continue. In response, the crowd shouted slogans supporting sharia law as they marched to occupy Kizilay Square in the heart of the capital of Ankara.

Taking back the streets

The takeover of Kizilay by pro-government masses was symbolic, as it had been closed to demonstrations since the anti-government Gezi protests of 2013. Unlike Gezi, initially motivated by environmental concerns that later swelled into overwhelmingly peaceful civil-society mobilization that united previously divided groups, Yildirim's rally played on Turkish societal divisions, exacerbating polarization. In taking back the streets from the supposedly irreverent and immoral "hooligans" of Gezi, pro-government demonstrators avenge not only the coup attempt but the perils of opposition writ large, sealing off one of the remaining outlets for dissent in Turkey while asserting their own morality over public space.

On Twitter, users appropriated the hashtag #nobetteyiz, roughly meaning "we are on vigil," and used in 2013 to

demonstrate solidarity with those camped out to protect Gezi Park. These tweets included photos of prayer gatherings in parks and videos of groups chanting slogans in the name of Allah. Government supporters — the "50 percent" that Erdogan claimed he was struggling to hold back from the streets during Gezi — now occupied these streets with a vengeance. Placards displayed slogans such as "we want the death penalty" and "death to traitors."

War of words

Spurred by government claims that Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen was behind the coup, a banner covering the Ataturk Cultural Center in Istanbul's Taksim Square addressed Gulen directly: "Dog of Satan, we will hang you and your dogs [supporters] by your own leashes." Targeting a wider swath of society, participants at rally in Adana on Tuesday shouted "Hell for secularists!" The use of fiery, "other"-izing language to spur a wave of counter-coup mobilization got the job done for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) government but has left roiling social tensions in its wake.

The AKP is well-versed in wielding this kind of polarizing rhetoric to de-legitimize opposition, as I've written elsewhere. In literally adding insult to injury during Gezi, the government used vilifying language to justify crackdowns on demonstrators, branding them as terrorists and immoral infidels deserving of such treatment. The danger of this narrative is that it not only explains away violent behavior by officials but also galvanizes those on the street to take punitive action against anyone seen as deviant. With a Turkish presidential adviser suggesting the day after the coup attempt that restrictions on licensed weapons be lifted, those hell-bent on revenge may not wait to see whether the death penalty is reinstated.

Turkey's dark side of civil society

As has largely been the case thus far in Turkey, unchecked vigilantism can generate the kinds of atrocious outcomes scholars call the "dark side" of civil society. We've seen similar examples of aggressive popular mobilization in Turkey during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in recent years. Seemingly self-appointed patrol groups with fundamentalist interpretations of Islam have physically attacked people who don't fast during the day. Many non-fasting Turks I've spoken with during Ramadan conceal their food and water consumption from public view — not just out of deference to Islamic custom but out of fear of reprisal. This year, vigilantes assaulted a Korean record-shop owner and his customers for playing a new Radiohead album and serving beer. The attackers reportedly smashed beer bottles over their victims' heads while yelling, "We'll set you on fire!"

Such threats may be empty, but the punishment of perceived immoral or heretical behavior has a precedent. Turkey recently witnessed the 23rd anniversary of the Sivas massacre, arguably the most heinous example of vigilantism in the country's history. Seeking revenge on writer Aziz Nesin for translating Salman Rushdie's controversial "The Satanic Verses" into Turkish, Sunni extremists in 1993 torched a hotel filled with Alevi (non-Sunni, largely leftist) intellectuals and artists gathered for a festival. A mob erected barricades outside the hotel so those trapped inside couldn't escape, chanting slogans in support of sharia law and damning secularism. While Nesin survived, 37 Alevis and hotel workers perished.

The militant rhetoric used by AKP leaders in the aftermath of last week's coup did not call explicitly for that level of violence. It did, however, paint with a very broad brush numerous enemies of the state and encourage action against them. Extinguishing the vigilante mentality that formed and metastasized in response will prove a herculean task, one unlikely to be undertaken by the government that stoked and benefited from it.

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Theorizing on coups

Tweeting Turkey, or how social media may have fundamentally changed the future of coups

By Joshua Tucker, New York University

On Friday, I received an alert on my phone that a coup attempt was underway in Turkey. Rather than turn on the TV — or even open the app of the newspaper that sent me the alert — I went directly to Twitter.

What I found was an incredible source of real-time information on the coup as it unfolded. I had access to multiple news sources, statements from elites in both Turkey and outside, on-the-ground commentary from academics I didn't even know were in Turkey and, of course, individual Turkish citizens. This, in turn, led to live streaming on Twitter's Periscope and Facebook Live.

Will coups ever be the same again? Has social media fundamentally altered yet another aspect of the political arena?

In the days to come, we will undoubtedly see sophisticated and detailed analysis of the different ways in which social media played a role in Friday night's events in Turkey. Among the more iconic (and, let's face it, ironic) moments was Turkish president Recep Erdogan — he who once declared "social media is the worst menace to society" — taking to Twitter and FaceTime to rally support against the coup. Another was watching announcements of the impending military takeover of a news stations as soldiers were entering the building.

But beyond simply providing an enhanced form of viewing the news, why might we suspect that social media could have a profound impact on the way coups will unfold in the modern Web 2.0 era? To answer this question, we need to begin with a couple of pertinent facts about coups.

Let's think about coups — what they are and what makes them successful

The term coup can be used to encompass a variety of different events, but at its essence it refers to an attempt by a small number of people to overthrow a government. Often, but not always, coups originate in the military.

Crucially coups, unlike elections, almost by definition involve small numbers of people. If too many people know about a coup plot ahead of time, it will probably be discovered by the government and put down before it ever begins. Thus the need for secrecy — hence "coupplotters" — guarantees that at its initial stages, coups will have small numbers of participants.

Precisely because there's a limited number of participants involved in the early stage of a coup, whether the coup ultimately succeeds or fails will depend on whether others choose to side with the coup plotters or with the current government once the coup attempt starts. As the political scientist Naunihal Singh has argued, this leads to a situation where projecting that success is inevitable turns to be very important for a coup attempt to actually be successful.

The more people who come to believe that the coup is going to be successful, the more people will support it — out of desire not to be on the losing side — and, therefore, the more likely that the coup will turn out to be successful. Thus control of information is paramount.

That's why social media could change coups in a fundamental way

Here's where social media could be a game changer. The political scientist Timur Kuran has argued that protest participation is a function of individuals having a threshold at which they are willing to join a protest. This "threshold" is based on how many other people are participating in a protest. So some people might protest if only a few other people are out on the street, while others will protest if hundreds are participating, and still others may need hundreds of thousands of people to join in the protest

before they choose to do so.

Now let's suppose that supporting a coup works in a similar way. Some actors — let's say those who severely dislike the current government or believe they are about to be lose positions of power and/or their jobs in the immediate future — will join the coup as soon as they find out about it. Let's call these *low-threshold joiners*. Others, however, may require some initial signs of early success before they throw their support to the coup — we'll call these the *medium-threshold joiners*. Still others may require signals that the government has no chance of resisting before they are willing to throw their support behind the coup plotters; these are the *high-threshold joiners*.

Let's then assume that the likelihood of a coup succeeding increases as more actors support it. That is, a coup supported by both medium- and low-threshold joiners has a better chance of succeeding than one supported by only low-threshold supporters. And a coup supported by high-, medium- and low-threshold joiners has a better chance of succeeding than one supported by just low-threshold joiners.

Note that while I'm using three groups here in this example, the logic holds for any number of groups with different thresholds for supporting the coup.

As mentioned previously, coups by their nature begin with small numbers of supporters. Thus there is always some point in time when the medium- and high-threshold supporters are not likely to throw their support behind the coup plotters because they have not yet seen enough evidence that the coup is likely succeed.

If the coup plotters can limit access to information during this initial stage, it can give them time to take enough steps to project an image of strength and inevitability — and/or prevent the government from doing so.

Does social media foil coup plotters' ability to project inevitable success?

So the question is, has the existence of social media fundamentally altered the ability of coup plotters to "keep things quiet" during the initial stages of a coup — to make enough progress so that the medium- and high-threshold participants will join in?

There are good reasons to think it might have. As we saw in Turkey, government leaders now have new ways to reach large audiences, included Twitter, text messages and, improbably, FaceTime.

Perhaps just as important, citizens have new — and incredibly fast — tools for both gaining real-time information about political developments and for coordinating action to oppose a coup, should they choose to do so.

Furthermore, the very actors who have to make the choice of whether to join the coup can observe the actions of both the government and mass public on social media as well. One of the newer social media developments in Turkey was the widespread use of Twitter's Periscope and Facebook Live to stream responses to the coup.

How will this shift affect future potential coups?

So let's assume that social media has made it harder for coup leaders to maintain control of the information environment in the early moments of an attempted coup. What then would be the implications of such a development? Four propositions seem reasonable:

1. More coup attempts will fail than previously.

2. Coup attempts that do succeed will need to have a larger number of committed participants before the coup starts than previously.

3. As potential coup plotters become aware of new realities, we will see fewer coup attempts than previously.

4. Points 1-3 will be more likely as social media usage in a population increases.

Combining points 2 and 3 suggests that one long-term effect of social media will be to reduce the number of coup

attempts — but to make those few more likely to succeed. In other words, coup attempts like the one on Friday in Turkey should be increasingly less likely to take place.

Time will tell whether these propositions are correct. It is also possible that coup attempts in countries without democratically elected governments — where the government may have less support among the population — will take on a different dynamic.

Of course, one important lesson of the social media era is that both sides can learn from the past: the next set of coup plotters may well include a social media team as well.

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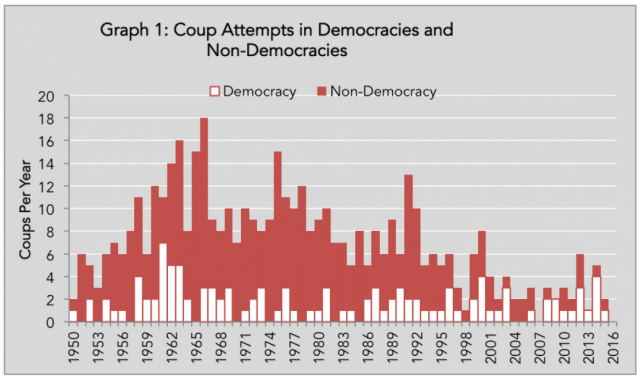
Turkey's coup attempt was unusual, but not for the reasons you might expect

By Curtis Bell, One Earth Future Foundation and Jonathan Powell, University of Central Florida

Last Friday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan avoided being ousted in an attempted coup d'etat. The attempt shocked most regional experts and coup researchers, though not for the reasons you might expect. Coups against democracies are actually not uncommon. What made this coup so surprising was the specific context in which it occurred.

Most recent coups have targeted democracies

Had the coup attempt been successful, Turkey would have joined more than a dozen democracies that have witnessed leadership change by coup since 2000. Established and transitional democracies that have fallen to coups over the last decade include countries as diverse as Egypt (2013), Thailand (2014), Honduras (2009) and Fiji (2006). Nearly two-thirds of the world leaders removed by coups since 2000 were leaders of democratic countries.

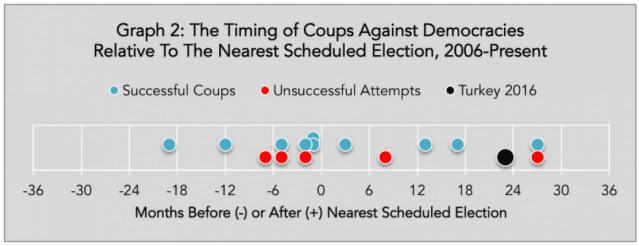


Graph 1 shows that while the number of coup attempts has dropped since the Cold War, this decline has been caused by the sharp decrease in coup activity in non-democratic countries. The American think tank Freedom House, best known for producing its annual Freedom in the World report, recently concluded that the world's overall level of democracy has dropped for a record 10th straight year. Coups among democracies are a chief reason for this troubling trend. What makes the coup attempt in Turkey so unusual is how it failed to meet a few specific conditions that usually prompt coups against democracies.

The timing was unlike that in most coups in democracies

One of these conditions is an upcoming or recent election for the country's highest office. Coups often happen when military elites anticipate a worrisome election result or disapprove of an incumbent's efforts to tamper with an upcoming election — even in dictatorships.

Graph 2 illustrates that about half of the coups attempted against democracies in the last 10 years occurred within six months of the nearest election. Turkey's coup attempt was further from the nearest presidential election — August of 2014 — than all but two of the 16 coups against democracies during this period. This is potentially one reason the public did not support the coup attempt. Erdogan has been in power as either president or prime minister since 2003, and the 2019 election is too far off to create any concern or sense of urgency. This common catalyst for coups against democracies was missing.



Erdogan was power-hungry but not massively unpopular

What President Erdogan shares with other targeted democratic leaders is a clear desire to consolidate power and erode his country's checks on executive authority. Since he has been in office, Erdogan has increased the power of the president at the expense of the prime minister and the legislature. In 2007, Erdogan, then the prime minister, persuaded voters to approve a referendum measure allowing direct presidential elections. Until that point, Turkey's president had been appointed by the legislature and could not compete for the popular vote. This transition to a strong presidential system advanced again in May when Erdogan pressured the country's prime minister to resign.

However, these kinds of reforms typically destabilize democracies only when leaders are already very unpopular. Egypt had seen mass protests against President Mohamed Morsi before his removal. Just prior to its failed 2015 coup, Burundi was inching toward a renewed civil war as President Pierre Nkurunziza sought a controversial third term in defiance of the constitution. After trying for a similar term extension, Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was removed in 2009, but only after repeated protests by the judiciary, civilians and even the armed forces. Protesters literally asked for a coup before the Thai military's 2014 seizure of power.

To the contrary, Erdogan's hawkish stances toward foreign policy and domestic insurgents have arguably made him more popular than ever. His ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) scored a conclusive win in November's snap parliamentary elections. Though his administration has become increasingly repressive, it has managed to do so while maintaining strong public support. Erdogan does not resemble the highly unpopular leaders typically challenged in coup attempts against democracies.

Turkey's coup attempt was unusual and widely unexpected, but not because Erdogan is the elected leader of an established democracy. What is exceptional about this coup attempt is the context. Recent history suggests that coup attempts in democracies are more likely than not to succeed. In Turkey, the coup plotters did not wait for a contentious election or a wave of popular discontent. Perhaps more patient and strategic organizers would have fared better.

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How do you forecast a coup? Don't forget on-the-ground sources.

By Richard Gowan, Center on International Cooperation | New York University

The coup attempt in Turkey came as a surprise to most observers. Turkey did not fit the statistical profile of a country at risk of a military takeover developed by quantitative analysts. The economy and national institutions seemed in reasonable shape, at least in comparison with those of more fragile states where coups typically take place. Indeed, data gathered by political scientist Jay Ulfelder indicated that Turkey had only a 2.5 percent chance of a coup.

What warning signs matter? The International Crisis Group — a conflict prevention organization that has been doing field-based early-warning work for two decades — recently carried out an analysis of its predictive and analytical efforts. The results bring out some key forecasting lessons from its reporting on trouble spots, from Yemen and Mali to the South China Sea. The report highlights four recurrent areas where close-up research can help identify future threats — and that are arguably applicable to Turkey.

Leaders grasping for power

While strong institutions can help stabilize countries, the calculations and strategies of individual leaders and other political actors can still be decisive in unleashing or avoiding violence. Crisis Group correctly warned, for example, that the polarizing sectarian tactics of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the overarching desire of Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza to hold on to power would push their respective countries to the point of collapse. In Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's efforts to consolidate his personal power set the stage for this month's coup attempt. Political analysis must also go beyond leaders to examine how mid-level officials and local power brokers may aim to secure their positions and undercut their opponents. At every level, it is necessary to grasp the interests and tactics of the individuals involved.

The dance between military and police

This sort of intricate political analysis needs to be applied to militaries and security services as well. The Crisis Group report highlights that "in many states, relations between uniformed and civilian authorities are a matter of constant maneuver." The internal dynamics of both ostensibly strong militaries (such as Turkey's and Egypt's) and weak ones (such as Mali's) are recurrent drivers of political tensions and violence, although outside observers often struggle to see inside security forces' power games and the risks they create.

Volatile peripheral regions

It is necessary to grasp not only trends in a country's capital and major cities — which suck up most of a diplomat's time — but also to see how violence in peripheral regions could destabilize an entire nation. This is true in cases from the Central African Republic, where an uprising by a "heterogeneous consortium of malcontents" in the remote north of the country ultimately led to state collapse, to the Kurdish regions of Iraq.

The Turkish coup attempt took place against the backdrop of Ankara's escalation of operations against Kurdish rebels. Studies including the 2011 World Development Report have highlighted the need to address economic imbalances in peripheral regions to reduce the risks of conflict. A lot of grubby fieldwork is required to understand the political and security dynamics of these regions: A Crisis Group analyst recently traveled the line of separation between government and secessionist territory in Ukraine, for example, painting a picture of angry soldiers and alcohol abuse.

Troublesome neighbors

Finally, it is necessary to marry this sort of local political analysis with a sense of the external dynamics that are

likely to stoke disorder. As the Uppsala Conflict Data Program has emphasized, a growing number of civil wars are internationalized (13 of 39 in 2014) with foreign forces openly involved. The percentage would be even higher if covert operations and proxy forces were included. Conflicts such as those in Syria, South Sudan and Ukraine have been fueled by neighbors' interventions — ironically often posing as peacemakers — reshaping political and military calculations. Efforts to predict a state's vulnerability to internal strife must therefore take into account outside actors' plans.

None of these findings are unprecedented. Organizations such as the Early Warning Project have attempted to factor elite politics into their models of fragility, and scholars have long highlighted the regional dimensions of conflicts in cases such as Central Africa.

It is also worth admitting that deep knowledge of political players and dynamics in a fragile country does not necessarily offer a clear idea about when a conflict will escalate. As Crisis Group's Joost Hiltermann observes, "What precipitates a conflict may be a sudden, unforeseen event: an accident, a misreading or miscalculation, or a temperamental leader's flash of hubris."

Nonetheless, politically focused analysis and fieldwork can at least flag subtle signs of dangerous rifts and tensions that bigger-picture quantitative studies may miss, help identify which actors will be central to an emerging conflict, and sketch out how a crisis, once unleashed, will unfold. While building up a detailed picture of a country's national, local and regional political dynamics is a painstaking business, it is also the first step to reacting effectively when things fall apart.

Richard Gowan was the lead contributor to "Seizing The Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action," and is a consultant with the International Crisis Group. He is also a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations and is affiliated with both Columbia University and New York University.

Will Turkey's coup attempt prompt others nearby?

Curtis Bell, One Earth Future Foundation and Jonathan Powell, University of Central Florida

Just two days after Turkey's failed coup attempt, dissidents in neighboring Armenia seized police headquarters, took several hostages, demanded the release of a popular opposition leader and called for President Serzh Sargsyan to resign immediately. The hostage-takers never presented a credible threat to political elites and there was no evidence of a broader conspiracy to oust the government, but observers were quick to call it an unfolding coup nonetheless. The government reaction was both swift and disproportionate, as the regime blocked social media, suspended news broadcasts and arrested political opponents throughout the country.

These events highlight an overlooked consequence of coup attempts. They can drive vulnerable leaders in nearby countries to repress their rivals as they work to quickly "coup-proof" their own governments. The failed coup in Turkey altered the lens through which Armenians and the international media viewed the hostage crisis. A recently published dataset on coup-related repression shows this is not rare. Unsubstantiated accusations of coup plotting are especially likely soon after coup attempts in other countries.

Repression spreads with coup fears

Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa, the world's most coup-prone region, shows how coup attempts motivate coup-proofing repression in nearby countries. We examined whether recent coup attempts in the region affected the most explicit form of coup-proofing: instances in which leaders – usually without presenting any evidence whatsoever – justified political purges and arrests by claiming they had uncovered a secret coup conspiracy. These events are common in sub-Saharan Africa, having happened nearly 250 times between 1960 and 2012. A recent example is Uganda's June purge of some 30 military elites.

We found that the number of coup attempts around sub-Saharan Africa in the previous three months was a very strong predictor of this type of coup-related repression. When there had not been any recent coup attempts, sub-Saharan Africa averaged 1.43 coup-related arrests over the subsequent three months. One recent coup attempt did not meaningfully change this average (1.38), but multiple coup attempts sharply increased the number of coup-related arrests in nearby countries. At times when sub-Saharan Africa had suffered three or more coup attempts during the previous three months, the region averaged 1.91 coup-related arrests over the next three months. This equates to a 35 percent increase in this type of repression.

An example of this coup-proofing contagion occurred in the spring of 2009. Shortly after a successful coup in Madagascar, leaders around the region began accusing their rivals of plotting their own coups, usually without presenting any evidence of a conspiracy. Over the next five weeks, public announcements of foiled coup plots were used as a pretense for preemptive arrests in Cameroon, Togo, Lesotho, Guinea, Ethiopia and Kenya. Before this spree, there had been no similar accusations in sub-Saharan Africa for six months.

Coup-related repression spreads, but coup attempts do not

Coup-related repression spreads around regions because leaders fear coup attempts can also cross borders. This fear is evident in the statements of world leaders and early scholarship on coup activity. Turkish President Recep Erdogan recently likened his post-coup crackdown to stamping out a virus, an analogy that reflects the common belief that coups can be contagious. Scholars like Samuel Huntington and Ruth First observed waves of coup attempts sweeping Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa in the 1960s and similarly warned of international coup contagion.

Yet more recent research offers little reason for leaders to aggressively coup-proof when coup attempts happen in other countries. The most comprehensive and rigorous study on this topic is a newly published paper by Michael K. Miller, Michael Joseph and Dorothy Ohl. They find no evidence that coups act as a virus, either globally or regionally. This does not mean coups are never inspired by events in other countries, only that it does not hold as a general trend.

It may be the case that coup attempts are not spreading like a virus because leaders learn from events in other countries and successfully undermine coup plots before they can occur. Sean Yom offers this kind of transnational learning as a reason that Arab monarchies like Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were more stable during the 2010-11 Arab Spring than non-monarchies like Yemen, Libya, Egypt and Syria. Unfortunately, what leaders tend to learn from foreign coup attempts is that they need to identify and remove potential coup plotters before they face a similar challenge.

All of this suggests Turkey's coup attempt may have worse consequences for vocal dissidents in other countries than it will for other world leaders. Though coup attempts rarely occur in regional waves, coup fears spread with pernicious consequences. Erdogan's aggressive post-coup purge is more likely to be emulated than the poorly conceived plot that sparked Turkey's latest crisis.

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Are coups good for democracy?

By Joseph Wright, Barbara Geddes, Erica Frantz and George Derpanopoulos

When Egyptian troops overthrew President Mohamed Morsi on July 3, 2013, a number of observers proposed that the coup might be just what Egyptian democracy needed. After all, many Egyptians supported the military's actions, the Islamist elected government had shown little respect for minority rights, and the military-led interim government announced a clear timetable for a return to democratic rule just a few days after seizing power. Despite initial optimism, less than a year later, the military's own Gen. Abdel Fatah al-Sissi won 97 percent of the vote, in a race that none of the major opposition parties contested.

Though the Egyptian coup did not usher in democracy, "good coups" — or those against dictatorships that lead to democratization — appear to have dramatically increased in number since the end of the Cold War, at least partially because of the incentives created by international pressures for democratization. Examples include coups in Mali in 1991, Guinea Bissau in 2003, and Niger in 1999 and 2010.

This trend has generated arguments that coups — traditionally seen as a sign of democratic breakdown — may actually be a tool to usher in democracy. By creating a shock to the political system, the argument goes, coups can generate opportunities for political liberalization that would otherwise be absent. As Paul Collier wrote in 2009 for the New Humanist, "coups and the threat of coups can be a significant weapon in fostering democracy."

Can coups really foster democracy? In a recent study, we weigh in on this question. We look at the political systems that follow coups against autocrats, as well as the ensuing levels of repression.

We emphasize that though the most basic goal of coups is to bring about changes in leadership, coup plotters often seek more-significant political change. Successful coups against autocrats can therefore lead to three distinct outcomes: no regime change (such as when the Nigerian military replaced Gen. Yakubu Gowon with Brigadier Murtala Muhammad in 1975, without changing the identity of the group in power or the rules for governing), ouster of the incumbent dictatorship and establishment of a new one (such as when Gen. Idi Amin toppled Milton Obote's dictatorship in Uganda in 1971), and ouster of the dictatorship followed by democratization (such as the two "good coups" in Niger in 1999 and 2010).

We find that since the end of the Cold War, regime change of some sort increasingly follows successful coups (68 percent pre-1990 compared with 90 percent afterward, with the rest simply reshuffling the leadership). Though more of these changes now end in democratization, the most common outcome is still the replacement of one dictatorship by a different group of autocrats. As Figure 1 shows, about half of all coups — 56 percent during the Cold War and 50 percent since the end of it — install new autocratic regimes. On the contrary, only 12 percent of coups during the Cold War installed democracies; that increased to 40 percent post-Cold War. Finally, 32 percent of Cold War coups and 10 percent of post-Cold War coups merely reshuffled the regime's leadership (no regime change). In short, more often than not, coups in dictatorships simply install new dictatorships.

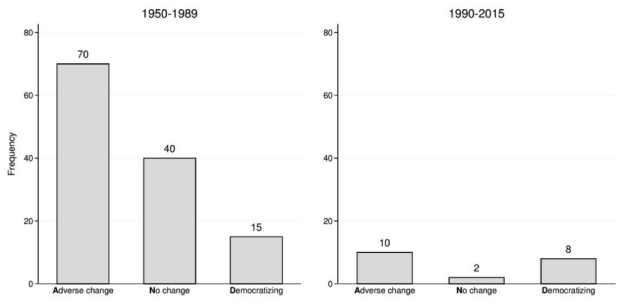

Figure 1: Outcomes of successful coups, pre-vs-post Cold War

A bevy of statistical tests that take into account a host of potentially confounding factors unearth a similar message:

Coups increase the chance of a new dictatorship but do not exert a noticeable effect on the chance of democratization.

The same is true when we incorporate failed coups in our analysis. Though some have argued that coup attempts — whether successful or not — can create opportunities for democratization, our study indicates that this, too, is an unlikely outcome (see Figure 2).

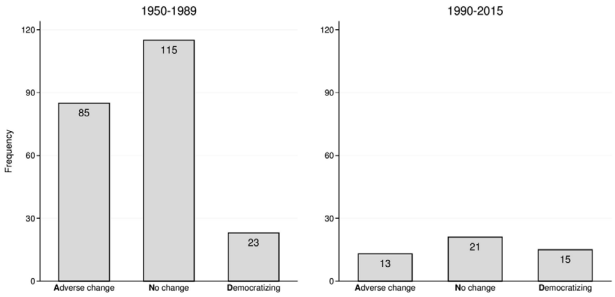

Figure 2: Outcomes of coup attempts, pre-vs-post Cold War

"Good coups" may grab our attention, but the data indicate that they are not the norm. For example, though Nigerien coups in 1999 and 2010 imposed democracy, coups in 1974 and 1996 led to the establishment of new dictatorships.

The bad news does not end there. Using annual data on repression, we find that coups that launch new dictatorships lead to higher levels of repression in the year that follows than existed in the year leading to the coup. Moreover, in daily event data for the 49 coup attempts that have occurred since 1989, we find that there is only one case of a coup followed by a drop in state-caused civilian deaths during the subsequent 12 months.

Figure 3 summarizes our analysis of the 49 coup attempts. The dark lines in the boxes display the median change in state-sanctioned deaths in the 12 months after the coup, versus the 12 months before the coup. The width of the boxes reflects the spread in the distributions. Though we cannot be statistically confident that repression increases after coups — even for reshuffling coups — two things should be noted. First, there is only one case of a (failed) coup followed by a drop in deadly repression. Second, post-coup increases in state violence are common.

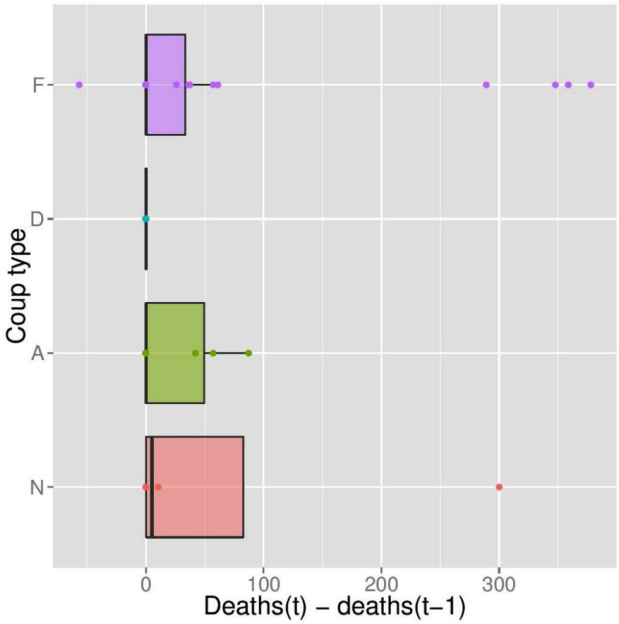

Figure 3: Coups and state-sanctioned civilian deaths

The experience of Guinea illustrates the typical pattern. After the death of longtime dictator Lansana Conté, Cpt. Dadis Camara staged a coup on Dec. 23, 2008. Citizens initially welcomed the coup as a chance for greater freedom, but the new government began a campaign of repression soon after. State violence peaked in September 2009, when security forces killed scores of citizens participating in anti-government protests. Rather than opening the door for democracy, the 2008 coup instead brought a new dictatorship to power and plenty of bloodshed.

Though democracies are occasionally established in the wake of coups, our research indicates that more often coups initiate new dictatorships and more human rights violations.

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Context on Turkey

Why Turkey's authoritarian descent shakes up democratic theory

Jason Brownlee, University of Texas at Austin

Wealthy democracies don't become dictatorships. For a generation that adage has provided one of the firmest laws of modern democratization, the equivalent for comparativists of the democratic peace among international relations scholars. Like any big claim, the link between economic wealth and democratic durability has provoked debate. Political scientists have parsed the data, questioned the mechanisms involved and pursued new projects that validate the proposition even as they refine it. They have explored whether wealth not only sustains democracy but also produces it, and whether the distribution and forms of assets matter more than their raw amount.

Even while students build new and more nuanced links between development and democracy, they have not severed the connection established by political scientists Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi in their agenda-setting 1997 article "Modernization: Theories and Facts." Building on seminal work by Seymour Martin Lipset, the authors determined that countries at all levels of material prosperity had become democratic (i.e., shifted from dictatorship to democracy). However, countries had not become authoritarian (shifted from democracy to dictatorship) when their non-oil GDP per capita exceeded $8,043 (in 2005 constant prices adjusted for purchasing power parity).

Why $8,043? That was the level of development Argentina had reached in 1975 before a junta toppled President Isabel Péron (40 years ago this week). Her government ranks as the most affluent democracy to fall in Przeworski and Limongi's study. Democracies with higher GDP per capita were self-sustaining.

Przeworski and Limongi's data stopped in 1990, but their principal finding has held for a quarter-century. Democratic experiments have fizzled in Africa (as in Mali after the 2012 coup), in post-communist states (witness Russia under Vladimir Putin) — and even in Latin America (thanks to pseudodemocrats like Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega). But non-oil wealth in these circumstances was below the Argentina 1975 level.

Meanwhile, medium-income and richer democracies have remained dictator-proof — until now. The example of Turkey under premier-then-president Recep Tayyip Erdogan presents a potentially theory-busting specimen of a highly developed democracy going authoritarian. Despite recent market uncertainty, Turkey is now significantly more affluent than Argentina was 40 years ago and its political trajectory carries global implications. The more Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) pull their economically vibrant country toward autocracy, the bleaker the outlook for democracy in similar or less favorable circumstances.

To be clear, Turkey's democratization has never been seamless and Erdogan has not yet become a full-blown despot like Putin. After the ruling Republican People's Party lost elections and peacefully passed power to the opposition in 1950, Turkey joined the political science canon as a multi-party Muslim-majority state — with periodic military interventions. In 1960, 1971 and 1980, the army pushed aside insufficiently secular governments, and then returned to the barracks. These interregnums disrupted democracy but conformed to Przeworski and Limongi's pattern. At the time of the three coups, GDP per capita was approximately $3,200, $4,500, and $5,300, still significantly below the threshold at which development seals democracy.

Erdogan's current drive, toward a super-powered presidency, is subtler than Turkey's prior authoritarian periods. Rather than cancelling elections, Erdogan has employed the ballot box to quell his critics. Further, if electoral authoritarianism means only opposition parties lose on Election Day, then Turkey skirts the line. Last June,

the electorate denied AKP parliamentarians the majority they had enjoyed since 2002. When neither the AKP nor any other party had formed a government by August, Erdogan called snap elections for that November.

Meanwhile state security forces aggressively battled the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and menaced the AKP's electoral rival, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). As fear spiked, media coverage and campaigning withered. A climate of insecurity probably helped the AKP rebound, winning half the votes and 58 percent of the seats. Nonetheless, Freedom House considered Turkey an electoral democracy in 2015. If the state keeps attacking judges, journalists and professors between voting cycles, Turkey may soon lose that designation (not that the country's president would apparently mind).

If Erdogan ultimately confirms analyses that he is building a "competitive authoritarian" regime, his actions will be less novel than the context in which he acted. The country's generals (briefly) led Turkey when it was relatively poor (and hence more prone to authoritarian reversals). Erdogan, though, has operated in socioeconomic conditions that should keep power dispersed. In 2003, when Erdogan became prime minister, GDP per capita reached $8,300. Since that time the economy has grown rapidly, adding more than six million jobs in recent years while reducing the "extreme poverty rate" from 13 percent to 4.5 percent.

Turkey's middle class — historically a bulwark of democracy — has doubled in size. As Turks became better off, they ought to have become more effective at holding their leaders accountable. Instead, the opposite has occurred: Erdogan, buoyed by a cross-class alliance between the poor and the bourgeoisie, has combined economic advancement with political regression.

Authoritarianism in Turkey would not only upend Przeworski and Limongi's findings, it would cast a pall over other high-income countries where democracy seems assured. A recent series of coups and autogolpes has raised concerns about an "authoritarian resurgence." Yet most of the incidents in question, while troubling, are not iconoclastic. Among the countries Stanford University professor Larry Diamond listed in a 2015 essay on the topic, only one (Turkey) had reached the level of non-oil wealth per capita of Argentina in 1975 (see Table). Few people are happy when democracy teeters in locales as varied as Honduras, Niger and Sri Lanka. Nonetheless, anti-democratic currents are common in such developing economies. By contrast, Turkey in 2010 (the latest year of comparable data) belonged to a significantly more industrialized cohort, with a GDP per capita more than a quarter greater than Argentina's in 1975. (Turkey was more affluent still in 2014, the year Diamond dates the breakdown of its democracy.)

TABLE–DEMOCRATIC BREAKDOWN AND WEALTH

Year of breakdown	Country	Non-oil GDP/capita (2005 $ PPP)
1975	*Argentina*	*8,043*
2000	Fiji	4,227
2000	Russia	6,811
2001	Central African Republic	596
2002	Guinea-Bissau	768
2002	Nepal	908
2004	Venezuela	5,521
2005	Thailand	6,839
2006	Solomon Islands	1,561
2007	Bangladesh	1,167
2007	The Philippines	2,980
2007	Kenya	1,204
2008	Georgia	4,912
2009	Honduras	3,554
2009	Madagascar	700
2009	Niger	1,685
2010	Burundi	396
2010	Sri Lanka	4,063
2010	**Turkey**	**10,421**

Figure 1

SOURCES: Larry Diamond, "Facing up to the Democratic Recession," (January 2015); Alan Heston, Robert Summers and Bettina Aten, Penn World Table 7.1; World Bank, World Development Indicators. Note Argentina 1975 is included as a baseline. Economic data for Turkey come from the most recent year suitable for comparison.

Skeptics that development shapes regime type may see these figures as one more reason to reject the theory outright. For students who do believe wealth has historically preserved democracy, Turkey turning autocratic would shift expectations. Specifically, it would signal that in democracies with greater than $8,043 GDP per capita, the "hazard rate" (the probability that a democracy will become authoritarian in a given year) has risen above zero. Hence, current democracies with GDP per capita similar to Turkey's—for example Bulgaria ($10,600), Romania ($9,400), or Brazil ($8,100) — would not be out of the woods. Authoritarianism returning in such developed places has seemed impossible, but Erdogan's tenure suggests otherwise. Further, if Turkey's experience invites vigilance in medium-to-high income states, then it implies added concern for significantly less developed democracies — like Albania ($6,600), Tunisia ($6,100), and Paraguay ($4,100) — that have not even reached the level of Argentina 1975.

It is too soon to know whether Turkey under Erdogan will be an outlier or a bellwether. Already, however, Turkey's experience suggests that the economic forces that previously bolstered democracy appear to be weakening, perhaps dramatically. The causes of this shift — and whether it can be offset by stronger opposition parties and tighter constraints on executive power — remain to be determined.

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How violence helped both Erdogan and his Kurdish opponents in Turkey's elections

By Aysegul Aydin and Cem Emrence

In Turkey's June 2015 election, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost its majority in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, and the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) won seats as an independent political party for the first time. This victory initially generated enormous hope for change in Turkish politics. Instead, the AKP refused to form a coalition government with other political parties, forcing a snap election in November, which the AKP won decisively. Since then, the broad crackdown on the media, civil society and academia has become a major threat to Turkish democracy itself.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) relaunched its insurgency in between the two elections. The AKP's refusal to bring Kurdish demands into the Grand Assembly for legislation convinced the PKK that the AKP government was not seriously interested in peace negotiations. The HDP's new political direction also failed to match up with insurgent objectives. In the wake of growing insurgent activity, the Turkish security forces retaliated with extreme force, launching counterinsurgency operations that have led to hundreds of civilian deaths and displaced thousands. Anti-HDP discourse has resurfaced amid the violence.

Many Turkey analysts claimed that the resurgence of insurgent violence propelled the AKP to victory. After all, between the June and November elections, the AKP increased its vote share by 9 percent while support for the HDP eroded across the country. But, as our new research demonstrates, this isn't exactly right. The HDP did not directly lose support as a consequence of the violence. Meanwhile, the incumbent AKP enjoyed the growing support of civilians who didn't want to see violence return to their home towns. Put differently, while civilians' exposure to sustained violence benefited the pro-insurgent party at the ballot box, the unrealized threats of violence by the PKK consolidated incumbent loyalties.

A new dataset, available from authors, allows us to test the effect of this violence on voting patterns. It includes all insurgent attacks between the two elections in 113 districts of 13 provinces in southeastern Anatolia, which were previously under emergency rule (1987 to 2002). These districts experienced 397 attacks, which correspond to 86 percent of all incidents in the country. The region's residents are overwhelmingly Kurdish, co-ethnics of the insurgents, but have divided loyalties between pro-insurgent and incumbent parties. We compiled the data set from the online version of the leading national newspaper in Turkey, Hürriyet. Election results for urban areas are drawn from the websites of Turkish Institute of Statistics and Supreme Electoral Board (YSK).

Our findings suggest that sustained violence did shape civilians' political preferences in the November election. Without taking violence into account, the AKP victory seems straightforward: The incumbent increased its urban vote share by 9.4 percent on average, whereas its pro-insurgent rival lost almost 7 percent of its support from June to November election. Inserting violence into the equation by looking at the precise location of attacks and their targets tells a different story. As civilians' exposure to sustained violence grows, the AKP gains disappear and the HDP makes up most of its losses. The best illustration of this trend comes from districts that received urban attacks with security casualties. In these settings, the change in electoral support for both parties were extremely close, falling within the 2 percent range.

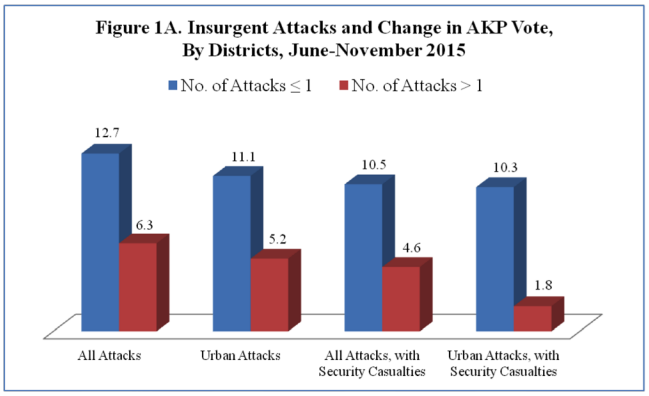

Figure 1a

The lack of violence helped the AKP to increase its vote share. Peaceful districts, most of which were already AKP strongholds, delivered major dividends for the incumbent party. The AKP received 5 percent more votes (12.8 percent in total) from districts that received no attacks compared to those that did. The other contributing factor was swing voters in settings characterized by fluid political loyalties. Contested districts, where the AKP or HDP received 25 to 49 percent of the vote, defected from the HDP in large numbers and flocked to the incumbent.

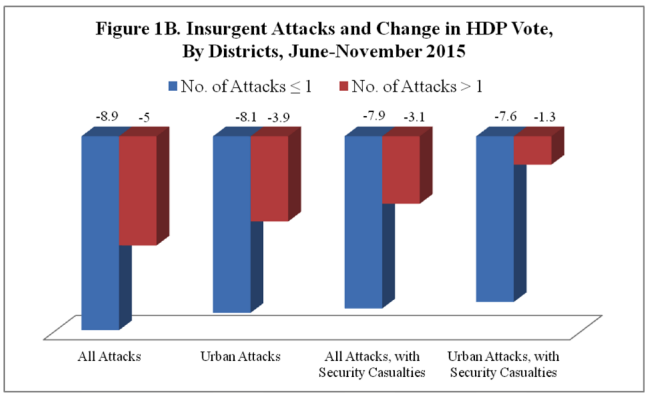

Figure 1B

The HDP losses were 3.3 percent lower in districts that experienced multiple PKK attacks compared to ones that received none. This figure is striking given the fact that the overall decrease in HDP vote was only 6.9 percent from the previous election. Furthermore, violence became an important difference maker in HDP strongholds, where the pro-insurgent party received at least 50 percent of the vote in June election. Districts experiencing multiple attacks recorded the fewest losses for the HDP, demonstrating

the strong and positive impact of violence on political preferences.

The political effects of violence were mediated through two mechanisms. Civilians' access to information about violent events was instrumental in delivering major benefits to the pro-insurgent HDP. In particular, urban voters who lived in close-knit neighborhoods, had cross-cutting ties, and followed media outlets closely reacted strongly and positively to violence in their districts. Meanwhile, the increase in turnout worked to the benefit of the incumbent. The AKP's rhetoric of insurgent fear further mobilized voters in incumbent strongholds despite the fact that these districts rarely experienced violence between the two elections. In sum, PKK violence shaped the November election in ways favorable to the AKP without necessarily hurting the HDP at the ballot box.

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The heinous consequences of Turkey's polarization

Lisel Hintz, Cornell University

Enough. Enough already. Yeter artık. This is one of the phrases uttered most frequently by those horror-stricken and violence-weary in the aftermath of Saturday's twin suicide bombings at a "Labor, Peace, and Democracy" rally in Ankara, including the father of 17-year-old victim Dicle Deli. Dicle became a social media focal point when a selfie she took with a bus full of smiling activists and tagged with caption "We are going to Ankara to bring PEACE!" went viral among millions grieving for the nearly 100 victims, who ranged from elderly women to 9-year-old Veysel Deniz Atılgan. Speaking to the press at his daughter's funeral, Faik Deli, who was meters away from Dicle when the explosions took place, begged for someone to finally "hear our cries for peace."

As simple and straightforward as this plea may seem, in the Gordian knot that is Turkish politics, it is the idea of "our" that is the toughest sticking point. Identity differences that lend to the richness of Turkey's society but can also constitute sources of conflict – Turkish-Kurdish, Alevi-Sunni, pious-secular – have been polarized in recent years to the extent that being different is dangerous. For some.

The massacre in the heart of Turkey's capital was the third terrorist attack in recent months targeting assemblies of Kurds, (non-Sunni) Alevis, leftists and other opposition activists. These are all groups that the Sunni Islamist-based Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has increasingly excluded from those it seeks to represent and, crucially, protect. A bomb attack at a rally for the Kurdish-based Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) just before the June parliamentary elections killed two and wounded over 100. In July, a suicide bomber with links to the Islamic State killed more than 30 activists in Suruc who were preparing to travel to and rebuild the Syrian Kurdish town of Kobani.

With a government that can keep tabs on whether unmarried men and women are living together and censure them for it, and that employs extremely strict, wide-sweeping security measures for pro-government

rallies, many are now demanding to know how these attacks against Turkey's citizens were able to take place on the government's watch.

Security forces reportedly failed to act against some Islamic State-affiliated targets identified by Turkish intelligence prior to the Suruc bombing. Similarly, authorities believe the Ankara attack was carried out by the brother of the Suruc bomber, who was supposedly under surveillance, and a man whose father reported him to the police numerous times for a suspected Islamic State affiliation. Further, the heavy police presence that accompanies all rallies in Turkey was conspicuously absent on Saturday. According to eyewitnesses, police swarmed in only after the bombing, using the water cannons and tear gas they became infamous for during the 2013 Gezi Park protests to disperse those trying to aid the wounded, while also blocking ambulance access to the bomb site.

When a reporter asked whether the interior minister considered resigning based on security flaws, the justice minister seated next to him added insult to injury by smirking as though the question of responsibility was absurd. HDP co-chair Selahattin Demirtas made the gaping disparity in the provision of security for government supporters and their opposition as plain as can be: "We die. You don't."

The division of Turkey's citizens into "us" and "them" categories – each worthy of security to a different degree – as expressed by Demirtaş reflects the not just the political, but also the societal polarization that has become pervasive under AKP rule. Throughout its history Turkey has experienced struggles along multiple identity lines such as those mentioned above; however, the violent attacks on journalists, activists, and others critical of the government demonstrate a visceral hatred observers fear may now rend the country apart. In a pro-AKP speech the day before the Ankara attacks, a well-known ultra-nationalist mob boss ominously declared that "barrels and barrels of blood will flow," referring to Kurds.

Following a two-year détente in which the AKP initiated a Kurdish peace process and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) declared a ceasefire, anti-Kurdish sentiments have skyrocketed since the June 7 election in which the HDP surpassed the 10 percent electoral threshold to enter parliament. In the eyes of the AKP and its de facto leader President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, this success robbed the party of the parliamentary majority it has benefited from for 12 years. Although the PKK broke the ceasefire first by killing two Turkish policemen as a reprisal against security forces it believed were complicit in the Suruc bombing, government forces launched an all-out campaign against PKK forces that has wreaked havoc on Kurdish civilians as well.

Erdogan has also stepped up his nationalist rhetoric in spades. At a rally heralded as "Millions of Breaths as One Voice against [PKK] Terror," Turkey's president proclaimed that he wanted "local" and "national" representatives to be chosen in the Nov. 1 snap election, a less than subtle intimation of "non-Kurdish."

In seeking the sources of this perilously polarized environment we must focus on the top of the political chain, which means Erdogan himself. Although as president the constitution dictates that he must be non-partisan, his influence over the party and its governance is profound. Supporters refer to him as their "forefather," "righteous caliph" and "indefinite and eternal leader of Turkey." As my research argues, this entails that the divisive language Erdogan uses sets powerful norms of appropriate behavior for supporters, while also delineating who belongs to "us" and who is relegated to "them."

Prior to his newfound enmity for the Kurds following the HDP's electoral achievements, Erdogan regularly marginalized and demonized numerous other groups. A rallying tactic at party meetings was to remind the crowd that opposition party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is an Alevi, and then wait for the crowd to boo. He has referred to Armenians and LGBTs as "representatives of sedition" and used anti-Semitic epithets as everyday insults; demonstrators at Gezi Park were "delinquents" and, according to his EU minister, terrorists.

Far from being empty words, this repeated othering behavior by a leading figure cultivates an atmosphere in which animosity is the norm and violence is not only tolerated, but actually rewarded. Calls for Hitler to return and eliminate the Jews following Israel's 2014 bombing of Gaza went unsanctioned, while police brutality in Gezi – from which nearly all who died were Alevi – was lauded as "legendary heroism."

Now over 130 of Turkey's citizens have been killed in three terrorist attacks, and there are some in Turkey who are satisfied. What was supposed to be a moment of silence for the victims before a national soccer match on Tuesday was filled instead with loud, jeering whistles and shouts of "Allahu Akbar" ("God is great"). Because those who lost their lives were Kurdish or Alevi or not pious or part of the opposition, so this "oh olsun" thinking goes, they were automatically radical, deviant others who had it coming.

This is the heinous consequence of a politics of polarization. Turkish media sources quick to claim that Dicle Deli's coffin was covered with a PKK flag immediately delegitimize her participation in a rally for peace. A television reporter's admonition that the Ankara bombing victims can't all be considered the same because "maybe there were some innocent people there too" implicitly blames peaceful demonstrators for their own deaths. While theories abound as to who is ultimately behind Turkey's terrorist attacks in Ankara and elsewhere, the responsibility of the AKP government in pursuing a politics of fear and hatred of Turkey's many "others" – a politics that creates a climate in which such reactions are not only possible but commonplace – is clear.

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The Project on Middle East Political Science

The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network that aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Henry Luce Foundation. For more information, see http://www.pomeps.org.

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