

# From Ataturk to Erdogan: Reshaping Turkey

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## Like Ataturk, Erdogan has a vision and controls all levers of power. Time will tell how far he is able to shape Turkey in his conservative design.

As the Ottoman Empire vanished after World War I, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk created a new Turkey in the mold of Europe. Controlling all levers of power, including the military, Ataturk implemented his vision by mandating a separation between religion, public policy and government, and by telling his compatriots to consider themselves intuitively Western.

It took a century and a democratic revolution invoked by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) -- a coalition of conservatives, reformed Islamists and Islamists that came to power in 2002 -- for Turkey's "Kemalist Occident," or dalliance with the West, to end. With the mass resignation of Turkey's military leadership last month, the last standing Kemalist institution, the army, has succumbed to the AKP's decade-long political tsunami.

This political bookend for Kemalism suggests that AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan is Turkey's "new" Ataturk. He doesn't have the cachet of being Turkey's liberator, but he enjoys as much power as Ataturk once had.

Simply put, the Kemalists had it coming. When Turkey became a multi-party democracy in 1950, various parties sought for decades to maintain Ataturk's legacy, while the military guarded the system.

Eventually, however, lethargy took hold. Far from remaining the progressive, forward-looking movement of the early 20th century, Kemalism stagnated and then shifted into an ideology for protecting the past. To those of us growing up in Turkey in recent decades, the most visible sign of this process was the emergence of mass-produced Ataturk statues, on almost every town square, after the 1980 coup that ended anarchy on the streets but also gave the country its highly restrictive and military-written constitution.

By turning Ataturk into a cult, the generals also ensured Kemalism's demise.

Even after Turkey became a democracy in 1982, this process would not be reversed: The governing parties, mostly from the center-right, failed to produce ideas for change. The nascent Islamist parties sensed an opportunity and began building grass-roots networks and incubating a forward-looking vision for Turkey, one that cultivated permeable walls between religion, public policy and government, and that embraced the country's Islamic identity in foreign policy.

When the dominant center-right parties collapsed after a debilitating economic crisis in 2000 and 2001, the Islamists used a platform of moderation to attract voters. Once in power, the AKP garnered popular support for change, succeeding in part because of the decade of stable economic growth the party has provided. A buoyant AKP established itself as Turkey's new elite, gradually replacing Kemalist power centers in the media, business, academia, civil society, unions and, after amendments to the constitution last year, the high courts.

The military was the final institution of Kemalism. Since 2007, a court case known as Ergenekon, which alleged that the army was plotting a coup against the government, has crippled the military's power. The army has been criticized for allegedly planning a vicious takeover bid and accused of planning to bomb Istanbul's historic mosques to precipitate a political crisis. Although the assertions remain unproven, the effects are clear: the military's status as the country's most trusted institution is plummeting. In 1996, 94 percent of Turkish respondents to the World Values Survey said they trusted their military, while in 2011 the same poll found that barely 75 percent do.

Recognizing this and the AKP's dominance, the military leadership threw in the towel on July 28.

Now, the AKP, as the dominant elite, can repeat the cycle of a powerful force shaping the country.

Just as Ataturk molded Turkey in his rigidly secular and Western image because he could, Erdogan will remake Turkey to match his image of rigid social conservatism and Islamic identity.

Domestically, this means a blend of government-imposed social conservatism and popular will. An example of this occurred days after the AKP's victory in the

June national assembly elections; officials of the AKP-run Istanbul city government raided downtown drinking establishments and banned outdoor tables (and, hence, publicly serving alcohol). The change prevents potential "sins" in the public eye.

Overnight, drinking disappeared from parts of downtown Istanbul.

In Erdoganist Turkey, the line between public morality and religious values will blur, and the government's popular power will make opposition impossible.

In foreign policy, a Turkey satisfied with its Islamic identity would stop considering itself intuitively Western, especially given the resonance of the notion of a politically defined "Muslim world" since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. This means an increasingly tense relationship between Turkey and NATO, the symbol of all Western institutions. It also means that Turkey will be open to all sorts of non-Western dalliances. An AKP decision to buy Russian weapons, say, or invite the Chinese to a joint naval exercise in the Mediterranean would be applauded by Turks, including the military.

For a century, the Turks emulated Ataturk because his political descendants controlled all power. Now, it is Erdogan's turn. He has a vision and controls all levers of power. Time will tell how far he is able to shape Turkey in his conservative design.

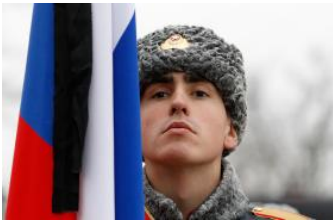
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