

The History We Live:

A Student's Perspective on the 21st Century



Picture 1

Türkiye

Chapter 1

Changes in Leadership and Politics



1)General Information About The Republic of Türkiye

Geography

Türkiye is located at a special point where the three continents -Asia, Africa and Europe -come closest together. It sits right where Europe and Asia meet, which almost works as a bridge between them. Because of its position, the land of Anatolia has always been valuable. Many great civilizations were born here, and it became a major center of trade with land routes connecting three continents and seas surrounding it on three sides. Türkiye is the 37th largest country in the world which gives it a diverse nature and climate as well as culture.



Picture 1.1



Picture 1.2

The Turkish Republic

The current system of government in Turkey is the result of a long and complicated historical journey. In the last years of the Ottoman Empire, the state faced military defeats, economic collapse, and political problems. These problems led the Empire to a point where it could no longer survive. After the First World War, in 1919 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk started The War of Independence to protect national integrity. This struggle was not only to stop the occupation, but also the beginning of a completely new political order.

In 1923, the Republic of Türkiye was officially founded. The old monarchy was abandoned, and a new state based on national reign took its place. The new Republic was full of major reforms in law, education, and politics. With the 1924 Constitution, Türkiye became a parliamentary republic.

Regulations like separation of powers, the rule of law, and secularism became elements of the new state. The jurisdiction was meant to be independent, and courts were able to make decisions unaffected by the politics.

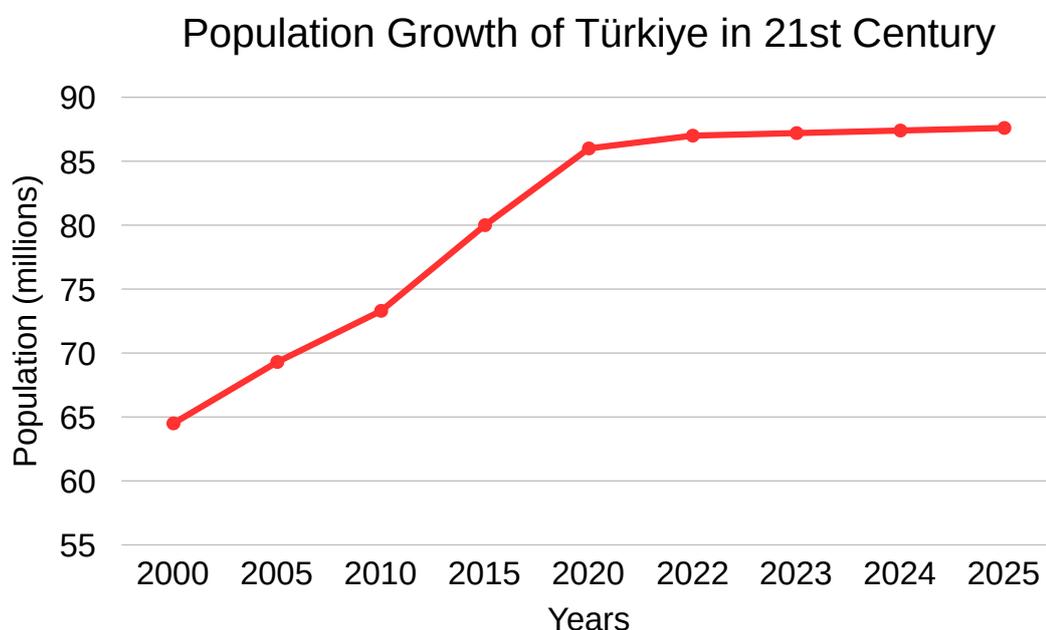
In 2017, a major turning point happened when a constitutional referendum changed Türkiye's political system. The parliamentary system was removed, and replaced with the Presidential System of Government. With this change, the office of the prime minister was completely removed. Executive power was in the hands of the, who became both the head of state and the head of government. The Parliament kept its law-making power, but the government no longer needed a vote of confidence from it.

Today, Türkiye's political system reflects all the layers of its past: the centralized tradition inherited from the Ottoman Empire and the democratic ideals shaped by the Republic.

Population

Türkiye's population has undergone significant changes in the 21st century, characterized by rapid growth that has begun to slow down considerably. The country's population is currently estimated to be around 85.8 million as of mid-2025, making it the 18th most populous country in the world.

Here's a graph showing population growth in Türkiye:



The Change of the Turkish Lira

Through the history the turkish lira has gone throuhout changes. When Turkey was founded in 1923, lira had more meaning then just being a currency it also represented the new state. In 1970s and 1980s, due to high inflation banknotes with many zeros became a part of life.

In 2005 things changed drastically when six zeros were removed and the New Turkish Lira took its place. This change was made for restoring economic confidence.



Picture 1.3



Picture 1.4



To find out more about the Turkish Lira!



2) President and Prime Ministers

Atatürk: The Founder and The First President of the Turkish Republic



Picture 2.1

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was the founder of the Turkish Republic, an idealist visionary leader, and a great military genius. After World War I, Allied forces began to occupy Turkish lands. However with the determination of the brave Turkish people and the leadership of Atatürk, the Turkish War of Independence achieved a great victory against these forces. Atatürk founded the Republic of Türkiye in 1923 following the successful Turkish War of Independence, rebuilding the country from the ashes of

the Ottoman Empire. After founding the Republic, Atatürk became the first president serving until his death in 1938.

As the father of modern Türkiye, Atatürk's goal was to build a secular and independent nation. He implemented revolutionary reforms across society, law, and government, guided by the principles of republicanism, nationalism, populism, statism, secularism, and revolution—known as the Six Arrows. His key principle was that **"Sovereignty belongs unconditionally to the nation."** This became the main goal of the republic. To make this happen, Atatürk established a parliamentary system. The Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) was the most important body, representing the people. In this system, the President was a symbolic leader, while the Prime Minister was the head of the government and held the real power. The Assembly made the laws and oversaw the government. Türkiye used this parliamentary system for nearly a century, until major constitutional changes in the 21st century.

Uncover more insights into Atatürk, the visionary savior and founder of modern Turkey!



Süleyman Sami Demirel (1993-2000)



Picture 2.2

Süleyman Demirel was the first Turkish president to serve in the 21st century and the 9th president of Türkiye, from 1993 until May 2000. He was a civil engineer and had served seven terms as the prime minister before becoming president.

His leadership style was that of a pragmatic negotiator, often summarized by his famous phrase, "Yesterday is yesterday, today is today." His presidency capped a long and turbulent

political career that had seen multiple military interventions. As president, Demirel played a crucial role during a period of coalition governments. He resigned from the presidency at the end of his term in 2000.

Ahmet Necdet Sezer (2000-2007)



Picture 2.3

Ahmet Necdet Sezer brought a deeply secular and legalistic approach to the presidency. Before his presidency, he was the President of the Constitutional Court. His term was between 2000 and 2007.

His most famous incident was when he threw a constitutional book at the Prime Minister during a ceremony symbolizing his defense of the principles of secularism. This incident caused public panic and paved the way for the 2001 economic crisis,

one of Türkiye's most serious crises. This significant event during his term, also known as Black Wednesday, led to a massive devaluation of the Turkish lira. As president, he consistently used his authority to protect the constitution and secular principles, often vetoing laws he believed threatened these foundational values.

Abdullah Gül (2007-2014)



Picture 2.4

Abdullah Gül was the 11th president of Türkiye, an economist, and a former foreign minister. His election in 2007 was a landmark event, making him the first president with a background in political Islam. His candidacy triggered secularist protests and an e-memorandum from the military, leading the opposition to boycott the parliamentary vote.

Despite these challenges, he was elected president. As president, Gül sought to be a unifying figure, promising to be everyone's president. He also worked to advance Türkiye's bid to join the EU, although the process faced many difficulties and did not succeed during his term.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (2014-Present)



Picture 2.5

Erdoğan became the president in 2014, after being prime minister for over a decade. His presidency has been marked by a major transformation of Türkiye's government system. The most significant change was the 2017 constitutional referendum, which narrowly approved shifting from a parliamentary system to a presidential system. In 2018, Erdoğan became the first president elected under the new system by direct popular vote. He won the presidential election again in 2023, making him Türkiye's longest-serving president of the 21st century.

As president, Erdoğan has maintained a strong, hands-on, and centralist leadership style. While his supporters credit him with providing stable leadership, critics argue that his approach has deepened political polarization. His presidency continues to shape the direction of modern Türkiye.

2017 Constitutional Referendum

In 2017, Türkiye held a constitutional referendum that fundamentally changed its system of government. The referendum, held on April 16, proposed shifting from a parliamentary system to a presidential system. This change was narrowly approved, with 51.41% of voters from all over Türkiye supporting the "Yes" campaign.

The new system, which came into full effect after the 2018 elections, abolished the office of the prime minister and transferred executive powers directly to the president. Under this system, the president gained the authority to issue decrees, appoint ministers and vice presidents. Additionally, the president would be elected directly by the people for a five-year term, and the minimum age for parliamentary candidates was lowered to 18. These changes marked a significant shift in Türkiye's political structure, concentrating executive power in the presidency and reshaping the country's governance.

Prime Ministers

Prime Minister	PM's Term	Political Contest
Bülent Ecevit	1999-2002	Served during economic crisis
Abdullah Gül	2002-2003	First AK Party PM
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	2003-2014	Longest-serving AK Party PM
Ahmet Davutoğlu	2014-2015	Former Foreign Minister
Binali Yıldırım	2015-2018	Last PM before system abolition

Interesting Facts About Türkiye

- 1-Türkiye is the only country that's located both in Asia and Europe.
- 2-After the London underground, "Tünel" which is the second oldest underground system in the world is in Istanbul.
- 3-Göbekli Tepe in Southeastern Türkiye is the World's oldest known temple, dating back to 9600 BCE. It has created a surprising breakthrough in the line of development that humanity is said to have followed until its discovery.
- 4-Hagia Sophia, built in 537 CE, has served as a church, mosque, museum, and is now a mosque again.
- 5-Mount Ararat, Türkiye's highest peak, is traditionally believed to be the resting place of Noah's Ark.
- 6-Saint Nicholas (Santa Claus) was born in Patara, Turkey.
- 7-Cappadocia is famous for fairy chimneys and hot-air balloon rides over surreal landscapes.
- 8-Istanbul's Grand Bazaar is one of the largest and oldest covered markets in the world, with over 4,000 shops.
- 9-Islam is the predominant religion, with over 99% of the population identifying as Muslim.
- 10-Pamukkale's white travertine terraces are formed by mineral-rich thermal waters.
- 11-Turkish coffee is recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- 12-Though Istanbul is the biggest and the most popular, Ankara is the official capital of Turkey.
- 13-Tulips, often associated with the Netherlands, actually originated in Turkey.



Quiz

Political Scandals

1) Deniz Feneri Charity Scandal (2007–2011)

The Deniz Feneri case began with accusations that donations collected in Germany were not used for their original purpose. The German court sentenced several charity leaders, which made the issue even more controversial in Turkey.

The scandal raised major questions about transparency in international aid organizations.

In Turkey, the investigation moved more slowly and became heavily politicized. Different groups argued over the reliability of the evidence and the real flow of the donation money.

This long and confusing legal process weakened public trust in charities. Today, the Deniz Feneri scandal is seen as an example of why nonprofit organizations need strong auditing and clear financial rules.

2) The 15 July Coup Attempt & State of Emergency Debates (2016–2018)

The coup attempt was one of the most traumatic events in modern Turkish history. On the night of 15 July 2016, some soldiers tried to take control of Turkey by blocking bridges, bombing government buildings, and announcing martial law on TV. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called people to go into the streets, and thousands of citizens resisted the coup. By the next morning, the attempt had failed. During the attempted coup, a total of approximately 251 people (excluding coup plotters) were killed. These victims, often referred to as "martyrs" in Turkey, included civilians and loyalist security forces. Soon after, the government declared a state of emergency (OHAL) that lasted two years.

During this period, authorities suspended certain constitutional rights, issued decrees without parliamentary approval, and carried out widespread arrests and dismissals of alleged coup supporters, particularly those accused of links to the Gülen movement. Media closures and institutional restructuring changed the political climate. Even today, the OHAL period is studied as a key moment that reshaped the relationship between the state, society and the justice system.

15 July is remembered as *Democracy and National Unity Day*, showing the power of citizens to defend democracy. However, the use of emergency decrees (KHKS) led to intense debates about human rights, individual freedoms and fair trials.

3) Thodex Cryptocurrency Collapse (2021)

It was founded in 2017 as Koineks, later rebranded as Thodex in 2020. Thodex became one of Turkey's biggest crypto exchanges, attracting users with promotions like free Dogecoin giveaways. The founder and CEO of the platform Faruk Fatih Özer, who was only 27 years old at the time of the collapse.

Many Turkish people turned to crypto as the lira weakened, hoping to protect savings from inflation. Thodex, one of Turkey's largest crypto exchanges, suddenly shut down and its CEO fled the country.

Thousands of investors lost their savings, creating a national financial shock. The platform had 391,000 active users at the time, and losses were estimated at \$2 billion, making it the largest crypto-related crime of 2021 worldwide according to Chainalysis.

The event highlighted the lack of strong laws for cryptocurrency markets. Many people questioned why the state did not regulate these platforms earlier.

Thodex became the most important example of digital-finance risks in Turkey and pushed the government to work on new crypto regulations.

4) Ergenekon Trials (2007–2019)

The Ergenekon process began after explosives were found in a house in Istanbul. The investigation expanded rapidly, accusing a wide range of people including generals, journalists academics and opposition politicians.

The trials were among the most controversial in modern Turkish history, dividing society between those who believed in a hidden "deep state" and those who saw the charges as fabricated.

Long detentions, secret witnesses and digital evidence caused intense controversy. After 2016, most decisions were overturned and many suspects were released. The case is still debated today, and many see it as a major political and judicial crisis.

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