

# Is Our Democracy in Peril?

Abdullah Murat Tuncer

Ph. D. Student in Political Science, Conley American University, Honolulu, USA

**Abstract:** Democracies are in crisis (Sarsar 2020, Grayling 2018, [economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/02/global-democracy-has-a-very-bad-year](https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/02/global-democracy-has-a-very-bad-year), January 2022, Ercan 2014). Today, when we set eyes on the last 20 years, we see that a theatrical democracy has been exhibited rather than a real one. The democracies that got stronger in the 1990s are getting weaker and weaker, then, leaving their place to a sort of democratic tyrannies. Our democracy, strengthened by European Union integration efforts and judicial reforms between 2002 and 2010, experienced its first breaking point with the incident of 17-25 December 2013. The first important damage is that the government did not grant permission for investigation of the ministers involved in corruption during the mentioned above-mentioned period. Then, the coup attempt of 15 July 2016 and the incidents afterward caused a serious break in our democracy. A repression regime was established, which is far beyond that of the military coups seen in our history. The referendum on the new constitution and the presidential form of government in 2017 was an approach to democratically ending our democracy. As if our democracy has committed suicide by politically neutralizing itself. The question of today: is our democracy in danger?

**Keywords:** Democracy, democracy in peril, anocracy, human rights, freedom, populism

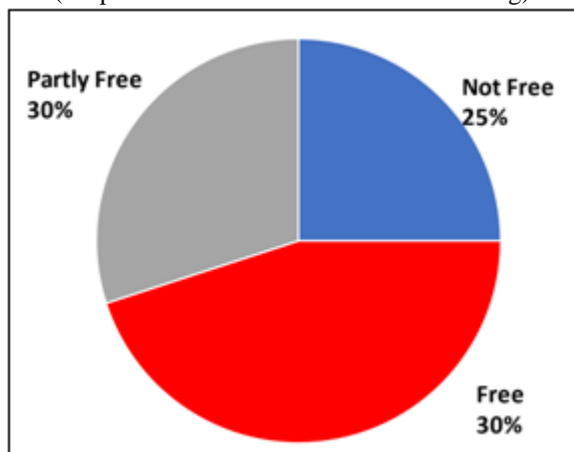
## 1. Introduction

Democracy originates from the Greek words demos (people) and kratos (power). ‘Democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people’ is said by Abraham Lincoln. To have the right to vote is not enough to have democracy. There are many types of democracy that we can list here the particular ones, such as liberal, constitutional, monarchic, feminist, radical, representative, deliberative democracies (Gagnon 2014). And, it is necessary to ask where the real democracy is.

Robert Dahl argued that it is wrong to regard democracy as consisting only of elections that participation and criticism should be active, and that democracy is a process and used the term polyarchy instead of democracy (Dahl, 1997).

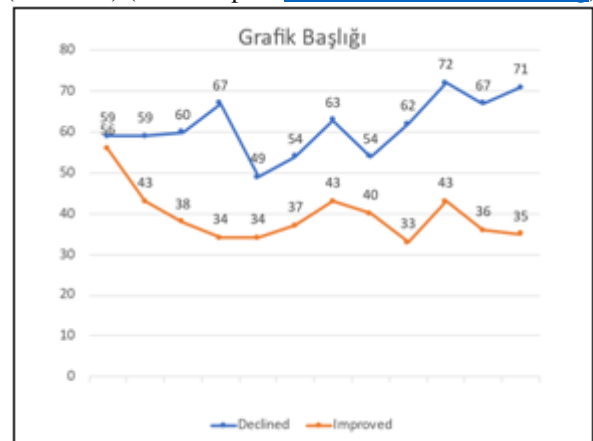
Democracies are in crisis and declining (Sarsar 2020, Grayling 2018, [economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/02/global-democracy-has-a-very-bad-year](https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/02/global-democracy-has-a-very-bad-year), January 2022, Ercan 2014). The 2020 report of the Varieties of Democracy Institute found that the global share of democracies declined from 54% in 2009 to 49% in 2019 and that a greater share of the global population lived in autocratizing countries (6% in 2009, 34% in 2019) (freedom house. org, January 2022) (Table 1 and 2)

**Table 1:** Freedom in the world 2018. Status by country (adapted from [www.freedomintheworld.org](http://www.freedomintheworld.org))



According to the Freedom House Report Political rights and civil liberties around the world deteriorated their lowest point in 2018 (freedom house. org/report/freedom-world/2018, January 2022) (Table 3)

**Table 3:** 12 years of decline democracies 2006- 2017 (countries) (from adapted [www.freedomintheworld.org](http://www.freedomintheworld.org))



## Democracy in the World

America is the oldest democracy in the world with 219 years; Switzerland follows her with 171 years (weforum.org, January 2022).

How many countries experience a real democracy, when we set apart the Constitutional Monarchies? Among the first 10 oldest democratic countries, only three have democracies (weforum.org, January 2022).

The right to vote, which is the basic element of democracy, was granted to women rather late, even in some modern Western countries, and it is impossible to talk about real democracy in a country where this right does not exist. The first country, where women gained the right to vote in Europe, was Finland where the world's first female MPs were elected in the 1907 parliamentary elections. Norway followed Finland in 1913. This right was granted to women in Russia under the Provisional Government in 1917. On 5 December 1934 (in all kinds of voting and completely),

women in Turkey were granted the right to vote and to be elected. In France, on October 4, 1944, women were given the right to vote and to be elected, with the law amendment. In Switzerland, which is one of the oldest democracies in the world, women's right to vote and to be elected took place on February 7, 1971, while in the canton of Appenzell, which is connected to Switzerland, it took place in 1990 (womenpoliticalleaders.org, January 2022). In 2020, nearly 75 percent of the world's population lived in a country that faced a democratic decline (ipu.org/event/democracy-really-in-crisis, January 2022) (Table2).

**How do democracies transform to anocracies?**

To democracy through anocracy is a common way for democratization. But the interestingly weird thing and uncommon way are to anocracy through democracy.

There are three ways to change to democracy from anocracy; these are, "partial opening" from autocracy to anocracy, "complete opening" from anocracy to democracy, and "transition" from autocracy to democracy, and also three ways in the reverse direction: "partial closing" from democracy to anocracy, "complete closing" from anocracy to autocracy, and "breakdown" from democracy to autocracy (Colomer 2016).

Populist leaders, uneducated and uninformed community, enmity against intellectuals, illiberalism, seized media, use of state forces as an element of pressure, intolerance of opposition, nepotism, discriminatory language, and threats are the most important factors on the way to move away from democracy.

During the July 15 coup attempt, 251 people lost their lives and 2.194 people were injured. The state of emergency (OHAL) declared on 21 July 2016 ended as of 18 July 2018. The state of emergency was extended 7 times in total and lasted for 2 years. After that, the conditions of the state of emergency continued by the enactment of OHAL's legislation.

After July the 15th coup attempt, the number of people dismissed from their jobs using the decree-laws is 125.678. When the numbers of those whose schools were closed, whose graduations were deemed invalid, who were victims

of military schools, police school students, and those who were victimized by the decrees in other public and private institutions, exceeded 250.000, by adding up the numbers above.

According to the State of Emergency (OHAL) Report, the number of secondary victims, who are relatives of the OHAL/KHK (decree-law) victims, approached 1 million 500 thousand (ohalkomisyonu.tccb.gov.tr, January 2022). These unfortunately show us a truly stupefying state paranoia.

During the state of emergency, 204 media organizations were closed, in total. The closure decision was revoked for 25 afterward. Among the other 179 media organizations, there are 53 newspapers, 37 radio stations, 34 television stations, 29 publishing houses, 20 magazines, and 6newsagencies.

Passports of many academics that have been retained by police during the coup attempt in 2016 have not yet been returned, despite their acquittal on all trials

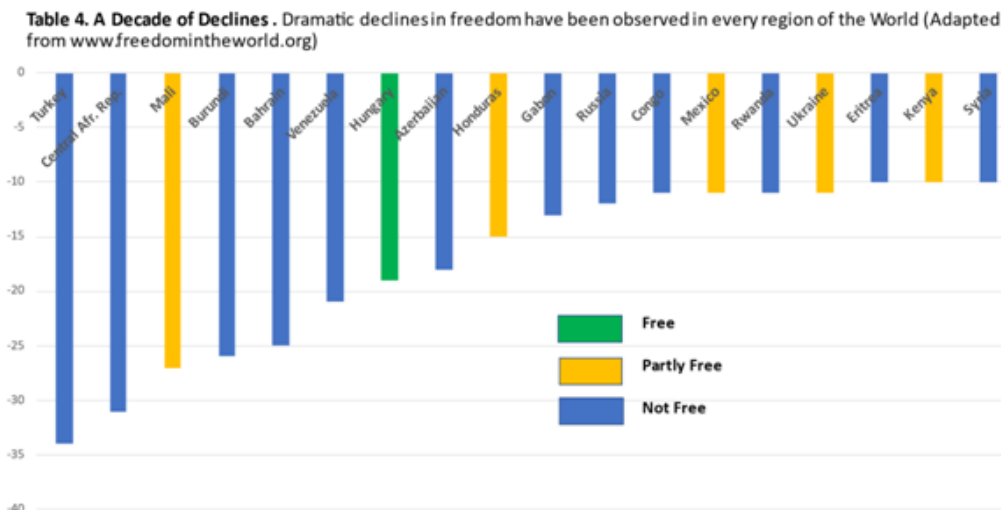
Legislative, executive, and judicial organs were rendered unable to function independently.

Basic institutions, such as law and education, were damaged after 2017.

Freedom House shows Turkey as a not-free country with a score of 32/100 in the evaluation made according to the following criteria (freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/democracy-crisis, January 2022)

- a) Political rights,
- b) Political Pluralism and Participation
- c) Functioning of Government
- d) Civil Liberties/Freedom of Expression and Belief
- e) Associational and Organizational Rights
- f) Rule of Law
- g) Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

Unfortunately, Turkey is one of the leading countries in which the democracy index has fallen the fastest (Table 4).



Journalists, academicians, members, and leaders of opposition parties are under pressure and threats.

Mexico ranks first in murders of journalists, and Turkey ranks first in the number of journalists in prison (IFJ, January 2022).

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) and European Commission reported serious violations regarding Turkey in his application to the European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations due to human rights violations). Turkey is among the top 3 countries with the most human rights violation files and the continuing deterioration of human and fundamental rights. (ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/country, January 2022).

Between 2015 and 2020, the total number of formal investigations launched for the crime of 'Insulting the President' is 159.487; the number of people on trial was 38.476. The number of convictions in the cases that were concluded reached 12.841 (https://www.dogrulukpayi.com/bulten/2018-yilinda-cumhurbaskanina-hakaretten-kac-kisi-sanik-oldu, January 2022)

Number of lawsuits filed for insulting the President (last 6 President of Turkish Republic) (gazeteduvar, January 2022);

Kenan Evren	340
Turgut Özal	207
Süleyman Demirel	158
Ahmet Necdet Sezer	163
Abdullah Gül	848
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	38.581 (more than 1000 is under age 18).

As if our democracy has committed suicide by itself.

## 2. Conclusion

Turkey is one of most important geopolitical region, not only for European but also for Asia and Africa. From this point of view, the importance of a democratic Turkey for the world can be easily understood.

In 2019, it has world's worst jailer of professional journalists. Many others, including writers, civil society activists, artists, political figures, leaders from marginalized communities, digital rights activists, and every day citizens face wide spread persecution for criticizing the government. Freedom House works to strengthen respect for freedom of expression in Turkey in partnership with a local organization, the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA). These joint efforts seek to bolster the number of qualified, practicing lawyers who can defend citizens' fundamental rights to free expression, produce research and policy analysis, and raise greater awareness among the international community on the crisis facing free speech in Turkey (freedom house. org/country/turkey, January 2022).

Another risk for our democracy is close relations with the two countries spreading their anti-democratic activities. China and Russia expand their antidemocratic influences (McFaul2021).

Is our democracy in peril? For democracy to be in danger, it must be alive with all its institutions. Since anocracy or hybrid regimes cannot be considered real democracies, there is no danger. However still, we are not the worst of the worst.

## References

- [1] Colomer JM, Benerjea D, De Mello FB (2016). To democracy through anocracy. *Democracy and Society* (Georgetown University/A Publication of the Center of the Democracy and Civil Society) 13; 19-25.
- [2] Dahl R. *Poliarchy* (1997). Participation and opposition. Yale University Press. USA.
- [3] https://www.dogrulukpayi.com/bulten/2018-yilinda-cumhurbaskanina-hakaretten-kac-kisi-sanik-oldu (January 2022)
- [4] https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/02/global-democracy-has-a-very-bad-year. (January 2022)
- [5] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/country\_20\_1791 (January 2022).
- [6] Ercan SA, Gagnon JP. (2014) The Crisis of Democracy Which Crisis? Which Democracy? *Democratic Theory* 1; 1-10.
- [7] https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/democracy-crisis (January 2022).
- [8] https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey (January 2022).
- [9] https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2021 (January 2022)
- [10] Gagnon, Jean-Paul.2014. *Democratic Theorists in Conversation: Turns in Contemporary Thought*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [11] Grayling AC. *Democracy and Its Crisis*. One world Publications. UK, 2018.
- [12] https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/cumhurbaskanina-hakaret-alti-yilda-128-bin-872-sorusturma-9-bin-556-mahkumiyet-haber-1507370 (January 2022).
- [13] https://www.ifj.org (January 2022)
- [14] https://www.ipu.org/event/democracy-really-in-crisis. (January 2022)
- [15] Levinsky S, Ziblatt D. (2018) *How democracies die*. Penguin Random House, UK.
- [16] https://ohalkomisyonu.tccb.gov.tr (January 2022).
- [17] https://www.ohchr.org/documents/countries/tr/ohchr\_south-east\_turkeyreport\_10march2017.pdf (January 2022).
- [18] McFaul F (2021) Putin, Putinism, and domestic determinants of Russian foreign Policy. *International Security*.45; 95-139.
- [19] Sarsar S, Datta R. (2020) *Democracy in Crisis around the World*. Lexington Book. Minneapolis, USA.
- [20] (https://www.womenpoliticalleaders.org, (January 2022)
- [21] https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/08/countries-are-the-worlds-oldest-democracies (January 2022).