MARCH
THE TURKEY OF TODAY

Background

In March, WAC discussed the history of Atatürk’s Turkey and its differences today. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk¹ is known as the father of the modern Turkish state; he founded Turkey as we know it today, with its modern, Western, secular institutions. The former general helped Turkey to rebuild and modernize after the losses suffered following the First World War. But as a staunch secularist, among his most lasting achievements were his policies against the manifestation of religion: he forbade head coverings, including hijabs on women and fezzes on men.

Religiosity in the public sphere was frowned upon and in some cases punished. In such a religious country as Turkey, these new policies against Islam were not entirely well received. Given that, Atatürk ruled like a dictator, and the

Copyright © 2017 WAC of Greater Houston
army ruled de facto after his death to uphold the reforms he had done during his life. On four occasions, the army has stepped into the political sphere to remove presidents and prime ministers who were, in their eyes, undoing Atatürk’s legacy.

It’s now 1994, and step up Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to the plate: Mayor of Istanbul, and member of the religious, right-wing Welfare Party. In 1998, he is arrested for reciting a religious poem as mayor. He was jailed and forbidden from holding public office again, but that didn’t stop him from getting elected to the National Assembly and becoming Prime Minister in 2003, a post which he held to 2014, when he was elected President, elected by the disgruntled rural conservative electorate of Turkey.

WAC also learned about and discussed Erdoğan’s reforms to Turkey. Despite the office of president largely having much less power than the Prime Minister, Erdoğan started a course for reform that would put the president with many authoritarian powers, so much so that the army attempted to overthrow him; an attempt that was quashed after Erdoğan called his supporters to resist via FaceTime. After the 2016 coup d’état attempt, Erdoğan began to more quickly push to solidify his hold on the Turkish government, beginning a wave of crackdowns against his opponents and political dissidents; Turkey today has the highest number of incarcerated journalists.

The same year, by referendum, Turkey approved a change in the political system that gave the president new political powers, including those to dissolve the parliament and rule by decree. This path to authoritarianism by what
some see as a religious demagogue has some in the West startled. Appealing to the conservative and religious electorate who have been “stifled” for years under strict secular rule, there is also some concern domestically that he may undo many of the modernizing, secular reforms of the Father of the Turks; already having lifted the ban on head coverings and allowing public expressions of faith like prayer in public. As international observers, we must consider what repercussions these actions will have on the Middle East, Europe, and the world abroad.

1Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) was a Turkish military leader during the First World War that rose to prominence after the man Empire; he helped modernize Turkey from its desperate post-war state, as well as promote ideals of secularism. Atatürk is a title bestowed upon him by the parliament meaning “Father of the Turks”.

2In the First World War, the precursor to Turkey, the Ottoman Empire, fought in the Central Powers; it was partitioned into multiple states and lost its Middle Eastern hegemony. In Anatolia, the Turkish Republic was founded to replace the Ottoman monarchy.

3In 1960, the first of four coups is launched by the army, stemming from what the army saw as growing dictatorial powers of the ten-year regime, resulting in the execution of top government officials. In 1971, the army steps in to replace a dysfunctional government that led them to an economic downturn. In 1980, partisan violence leads the army to intervene and replace the government. In 1997 the army threatens actions against the government, which resigns so a new government can be made.

4Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (born 1954) is the current President of Turkey, serving in that capacity since 2016. He was member of two extreme right parties before founding his current Justice and Development Party.

5The Welfare Party was a far-right Islamist party that was banned in 1998 after it was found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court as it violated the secularism requirements in the constitution.
The Prime Minister is the head of the Turkish government, and prior to the 2016 reforms, held political power over the National Assembly. The Prime Minister had his own cabinet and pushed for his legislation as a member of the Assembly.

On July 15, 2016, factions in the Turkish army attempted to overthrow the government for what they saw as removal of secularism, increasing totalitarianism and erosion of democracy under Erdoğan. The public went to the streets after a televised address by Erdoğan via FaceTime to resist the military.

LET’S THINK ABOUT IT

Your SWAC leader will prompt you with questions revolving around the same idea: as Erdoğan shifts Turkey in a new direction, what are repercussions you see arising in the political and social stability of the Middle Eastern region and abroad?

Express your thoughts and contribute to discussion with your fellow peers!

MY THOUGHTS ON ERDOĞAN AND TURKEY

(room to write thoughts)

This lesson plan is meant as an aid for the Faculty Sponsor, President or Vice-President to lead their respective SWAC chapter in the discussion of this two weeks’ focus: Erdoğan’s Turkey.
Kahoot! Introductory Quiz

Kahoot! is an online Quiz platform. This small ten-question quiz is to test the student’s prior knowledge of Turkey and introduce them to the discussion to come. The quiz does not require the proctor to have a Kahoot account in order to start. Students will use an electronic device in order to answer. The link is below; click START NOW and select Classic mode. After the Game PIN is generated, students will be able to join the session by accessing kahoot.it on their computer or mobile device. Begin the quiz once all students have joined! This activity shouldn’t take more than 15 minutes.

LINK: https://goo.gl/ZBWtwT

Lesson Handout

Now is when the handouts should be passed out to students. It is split into two sections, one which covers the history of the Turkish Presidency and a second that covers the rise of Erdoğan and what is means. It is recommended that the handout be read aloud as a group instead of individually. Take some time after the document has been read to cover the material with the students and make sure that its been generally understood. Ask questions to students; get them to summarize what they’ve read and make sure that the students are engaged and understanding. The reading shouldn’t take more than 10 minutes.
Video Resources

We have two video resources below that will go over in more detail the current event portion of the handout and expand upon it. Following each link we’ve included a description of the video and possible questions that you can ask students to see what they’ve taken away from watching the clips. The videos are 7 and 10 minutes; coupled with questions, this segment shouldn’t take more than 25 minutes.

TURKEY’S SECULAR POLITICAL SYSTEM AT CROSSROADS
LINK: https://goo.gl/r5BJ36
In this video, we are introduced to the secular political culture of Turkey and how Erdoğan is upsetting that.
› Can you draw any parallels between the rise of Erdoğan and Trump? Anything about the popular appeal?
› Do the concerns of secular Turks resonate with you? Do you trust the rights and wishes of the minorities to be respected under Erdoğan?

WHY THE WORLD IS WORRIED ABOUT TURKEY
LINK: https://goo.gl/GDwJDf
This segment by Vox covers the history behind the presidency and how the political legacy of Atatürk is being rewritten by Erdoğan.
› How do you see Erdoğan’s powergrab have any implications for Turkey’s political future?

Copyright © 2017 WAC of Greater Houston
DISCUSSION

As Erdoğan shifts Turkey in a new direction, what are repercussions you see arising in the political and social stability of the Middle Eastern region and abroad? Do you see this as Erdoğan taking Turkey a step forward or backwards? Why? How does one balance the religious culture of Turkey with modern secular values? What do Erdoğan’s ideology and policies mean for the Middle East? For Europe and the US? This shouldn’t take more than 10 minutes – total estimated meeting time: no more than 1 hour

BIBLIOGRAPHY


