



Primary school children in Fethiye participate in educational games that raise awareness of heritage conservation.

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Emergency rule and democracy in Turkey

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Emergency rule is a tool of last resort that can preserve the democratic state in the face of an extreme threat. When facing an emergency, such as war, insurgency or catastrophic recession, ordinary legislative channels may be too slow or too cumbersome to respond adequately, causing damage to the democratic system itself. During these times, it may become necessary to empower a government or for a president to bypass parliament or the courts so it can take quick action and defend democracy. This typically entails giving a prime minister or president similar powers to those of a dictator for a fixed period of time before returning to business as usual once the emergency has passed.

The trouble is that emergency rule can be exploited by leaders to hoard unchecked power in their own hands. Emergency rule creates a legal grey area whereby leaders can claim to be obeying the democratic constitution even while passing emergency decrees that erode democracy. Emergency rule dovetails with new forms of democratic erosion observable around the world, where today's threats to democracy are more likely to come from elected leaders manipulating the political system than from coups or ballot stuffing.

Clearly there is a link between emergency rule and autocratisation, but we do not know precisely when emergency rule leads to autocratisation and when it does not. This project examined what political conditions need to be in place for emergency rule to be misused to enable autocratisation.

We used Turkey as a 'pathway' case to answer this question and explore the precise causal pathways underpinning the links between emergency rule and the erosion of democracy. Turkey was selected because of its history as a 'hybrid' democracy and its extensive experience of emergency rule. Since its foundation in 1923, emergency rule has been declared and ratified by the Grand National Assembly on 12 occasions, for a total of almost 28 years since 1923. Not all of

these episodes covered the whole country, with the large cities of Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir, and the Kurdish-majority southeast, targeted more often than other parts of the country.

We examined in depth six of these instances of emergency rule in a structured and focused comparison. We were particularly interested in cases of emergency rule declared by incumbent governments (as opposed to those declared by the military after a coup), and in those declarations made while Turkey was a multi-party regime (as opposed to those declared during the one-party era). The six instances we looked at were emergency rule in response to Istanbul Pogroms (1955), the failed coup (1963), the Workers' Rebellion (1970), the Cyprus Operation (1974), the Maraş Massacre (1978) and the failed coup (2016).

We undertook extensive archival research, reviews of the official record of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, and historical newspaper reviews. We found that whether emergency rule led to autocratisation or not depended on a combination of the leader's view of democracy and whether they had the power to overcome constraints on the misuse of emergency rule. The power to overcome constraints, in turn, was determined by whether the government could by-pass potential veto players who might block their actions, whether the government's security narrative justifying the need for emergency rule was convincing, and the degree of political polarisation at the time.

Overall, the picture of emergency rule in Turkey is a bleak one. Too often governments use emergency rule to help them gain control of the political system and advance their own interests rather than using it to protect democracy. The recent erosion of democracy under emergency rule between 2016 and 2018 is nothing new to Turkey, and the precedent goes back at least to the 1950s. What is more, this is not a problem unique to Turkey, with a global rise in the use of emergency rule and a decline of democracy since the end of the Cold War. We hope our findings help to shed light on this trend.