

# Breaking News from Türkiye

## Gezi Onurumuzdur (Gezi Is Our Honor)

What began with a few tents grew into a mass uprising against authoritarianism, now a lasting symbol of democratic resistance in Türkiye.

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## How the AKP Uses Gezi to Jail Dissenters

More than a decade later, Erdoğan's regime continues to weaponize the legacy of Gezi—jailing activists, artists, and journalists to silence dissent and rewrite history.

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## İmamoğlu Silenced, Streets Speak Louder

As Erdoğan bans all images of the jailed Mayor İmamoğlu, a defiant public transforms his erasure into a nationwide symbol of resistance and democratic struggle.

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## Global Left Unites in Istanbul: "Free İmamoğlu"

At the Socialist International summit in Istanbul, world leaders held "Free İmamoğlu" signs and signed a joint declaration condemning his imprisonment as a blow to democracy.

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## On May 30th, Families Call for Justice: 'Be Their Voice'

Families of detained students spoke out in Istanbul, denouncing the unjust arrests and reported abuse ahead of their children's court date for protesting in support of İmamoğlu. Only 14 Students released at today's court hearing amid public outcry. 30 more still in jail.

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## Silence Met with Force on Gezi Anniversary

In a stark display of shrinking civic space, police arrested peaceful demonstrators in Taksim who stood in silence to commemorate the Gezi Park anniversary.

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Photo: BirGün

## Erdoğan's Push for a New Constitution Sparks Concern Across Türkiye

Erdoğan's push for a "civilian constitution" is widely seen as a backdoor attempt to extend his rule beyond 2028 and further consolidate power.

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## The Fourth Wave: A Judicial Siege on Istanbul's Opposition

With top officials jailed, the latest arrests at Istanbul's opposition-led municipality deepen what many see as a political siege, following the government's failure to convict İmamoğlu.

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## OP-ED

### Opinion | From Gezi to March 19: A Decade of Defiance

From the parks of 2013 to the courtrooms of 2025, Türkiye's fight for democracy continues. The arrest of İmamoğlu echoes the spirit of Gezi: peaceful dissent met with repression, and answered with resistance.

### Opinion | From Gezi to Today: Türkiye's Youth Resist

From the 2013 Gezi protests to 2025, Türkiye's youth have remained on the frontlines of the fight for democracy. Despite arrests, media censorship, and state repression, the spirit of resistance endures. The detention of Istanbul's elected mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, has only strengthened their resolve: "No salvation alone—either all of us together, or none of us."

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### Gezi Onurumuzdur (Gezi Is Our Honor)



Photo: Daniel Etter

The Gezi Protests began in late May 2013, when a small group of environmentalists set up camp in Istanbul’s Gezi Park to oppose its planned demolition for a commercial development project. On May 28–29, police launched violent raids to disperse the protesters, setting tents on fire and deploying tear gas. The images sparked widespread outrage, and by June 1, mass demonstrations had spread across Türkiye, including major cities like Ankara, İzmir, and Antalya. The protests quickly grew beyond environmental concerns. Protesters—students, workers, artists, feminists, LGBTQ+ activists, Kurdish groups, secularists, and even some conservative dissidents—demanded an end to police brutality, media censorship, authoritarianism, and restrictions on civil liberties. It was one of the most diverse coalitions Türkiye had seen in decades. Over the course of two months, an estimated 3.5 to 4 million people participated in protests across 79 provinces. The government’s response was harsh: according to the Turkish Medical Association, more than 8,000 were injured and at least 11 were killed due to police violence. By late August 2013, most demonstrations had been forcibly dispersed. Although the government survived the uprising, the Gezi movement left a lasting political and cultural legacy, symbolizing the collective will to resist authoritarianism and defend democracy in Türkiye.

### Gezi’s Angels: Berkin Elvan

Berkin Elvan was just 15 when a police-fired tear gas canister struck his head as he stepped out to buy bread during the Gezi protests. After 269 days in a coma, he died—becoming one of Gezi’s angels: a symbol of innocence lost and the brutal cost of state violence



Photo: rudaw.net

In 2021, officer Fatih Dalgali was sentenced to 16 years and 8 months in prison for the intentional killing of Berkin Elvan—but for many, the verdict came too little, too late. Deepening the wound, President Tayyip Erdoğan publicly labeled Berkin a “terrorist,” igniting national outrage.



Berkin’s name still echoes through Türkiye’s streets—a vow that the memory of Gezi’s angels will not fade, and that the demand for justice will endure.

### How the AKP Uses Gezi to Jail Dissenters



More than a decade after the 2013 Gezi Park protests, Türkiye’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) continues to use Gezi as a political weapon to silence dissent. What began as a peaceful mass uprising for democracy, civil rights, and environmental protection has been reframed by President Erdoğan’s government as a foreign-backed coup attempt — a narrative that fuels ongoing political persecution. The most symbolic victim remains Osman Kavala, sentenced to life in prison in 2022 for allegedly “organizing” Gezi. Alongside him, civil society figures such as Can Atalay, Mücella Yapıcı, Tayfun Kahraman, Çiğdem Mater, Mine Özerden, Hakan Altınay, and Yiğit Aksakoğlu received 18-year sentences solely for their roles in civil society and protest organizing.

But the government’s Gezi-related repression didn’t stop there. Recently, Ayşe Barım, a prominent talent manager, was arrested on charges of attempting to overthrow the government due to her alleged involvement in the Gezi Park protests. Barım denied the charges, stating that she did not coordinate with the actors she worked with or request that they support the protests.



Actor Rıza Kocaoğlu (L), celebrity manager Ayşe Barım, actor Halit Ergenç  
Photo: TurkishMinute

Prominent actors, including Halit Ergenç and Rıza Kocaoğlu, were summoned to testify in the case of Barım. Both actors received suspended prison sentences for allegedly giving false testimony related to the 2013 Gezi Park protests.

Journalist Ismail Saymaz was also detained and placed under house arrest in March 2025, accused of aiding an attempt to overthrow the government during the Gezi Park protests. Saymaz denied the allegations, stating that he was being silenced for his journalistic work.

Critics argue that the AKP continues to weaponize Gezi not only to jail activists but also to intimidate artists, journalists, and anyone seen as part of the opposition. The Gezi trials stand as a symbol of Türkiye’s deepening democratic erosion, where peaceful protest is criminalized, and the memory of Gezi is manipulated to crush today’s dissent.



## İmamoğlu Silenced, Streets Speak Louder



Photo: StockholmCF

In a dramatic escalation of political repression, Turkish authorities have banned all public displays of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu's image, videos, and voice recordings—a move widely condemned as an attempt to erase the jailed opposition leader from public life. The sweeping order mandated the removal of his photos from public transportation, billboards, and social media, and even led to the blocking of his official X (formerly Twitter) account within Türkiye.

Yet the ban has sparked a wave of defiant protest.

Opposition lawmakers from the Republican People's Party (CHP) unfurled a massive "Free İmamoğlu" banner across Istanbul's iconic Bosphorus Bridge, drawing national attention—and swift retaliation. Turkish prosecutors launched a criminal investigation into the lawmakers, accusing them of unauthorized political propaganda.

Protests have since spilled into the streets. Thousands across Türkiye have rallied, waving banned images of İmamoğlu and chanting for his release. Human rights groups and international observers have denounced the crackdown, warning that it signals a deepening assault on democratic freedoms ahead of the 2028 elections.

While Erdoğan's government works to erase İmamoğlu's image, his supporters are ensuring that his presence remains impossible to ignore.

The struggle now transcends a single politician. It has become a battle for the future of democracy in Türkiye.

### Gezi's Angels: Ali İsmail Korkmaz

Ali İsmail Korkmaz was just 19—a university student—when plainclothes police and civilians brutally beat him during a Gezi protest in Eskişehir. He fell into a coma and died 38 days later in the hospital, becoming one of Gezi's most tragic martyrs.



Photo: bianet.org



In the trial that followed, four of Ali İsmail's attackers were sentenced to prison, but many believed the punishments were far too lenient for such a brutal killing. His death became a rallying cry for justice, for youth, and for the right to protest without fear.

Even today, Ali İsmail's name lives on in Türkiye's collective memory—a solemn promise that we will never forget the young lives stolen, and that we will continue to fight for the justice they were denied.



## Global Left Unites in Istanbul: "Free İmamoğlu"

The Socialist International convened in Istanbul with an urgent message: release Ekrem İmamoğlu. The Istanbul mayor and 2028 presidential hopeful has been jailed since March 19 on charges widely condemned as politically motivated. His arrest ignited the largest wave of protests Türkiye has seen in decades.

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, chairing the summit, stood alongside other global socialist leaders holding "Free İmamoğlu" banners. Sánchez declared solidarity with imprisoned comrades in TuTürkiyeBelarus, Venezuela, and Niger.

CHP leader Özgür Özel, closing the summit, did not mince words: "Türkiye is undergoing a civilian coup." He called İmamoğlu's detention a direct assault on democracy and pledged unwavering support for his party's jailed candidate.



Photo: TurkishMinute

Özel emphasized that Istanbul's 16 million residents had re-elected İmamoğlu by a wide margin, only to see their democratic will overturned. He accused the ruling AKP of launching a preemptive strike against the opposition's future leadership.

As İmamoğlu remains behind bars, the global left is watching—and organizing. The message from Istanbul is clear: democracy is under siege, and the fight is far from over.

### Gezi's Angels: Ethem Sarısülük

Ethem Sarısülük was 26 when he was shot in the head by police officer Ahmet Şahbaz during a Gezi protest in Ankara. He died after 14 days in a coma, becoming one of the most haunting symbols of state violence.



Photo: duvarenglish.com



Although Ahmet Şahbaz was initially sentenced to just over seven years in prison, the sentence was later reduced to a judicial fine, allowing him to walk free. The decision outraged Ethem's family and human rights advocates. Adding insult to injury, Türkiye's Constitutional Court ruled that Ethem's right to life had not been violated, prompting widespread condemnation.

Today, Ethem's name endures as one of Gezi's angels—a reminder that we will never forget those whose lives were stolen, and that we will continue to demand the justice they were denied.



## On May 30th, Families Call for Justice: 'Be Their Voice'



Photo: 12Punto

On May 29, the Parents' Solidarity Network held a press conference in Istanbul, urging public support for their children, university students detained during the Saraçhane protests following the annulment of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu's diploma. The students are scheduled to appear in court on May 30.

Candan Doğan, mother of 19-year-old Toprak Doğan, shared that her son has been in custody for 66 days and is experiencing severe psychological distress. "He was preparing for university entrance exams to become an aircraft technician, but his detention had derailed his plans," she stated.

Emine Çepniler, mother of 22-year-old Yiğitcan Çepniler, expressed confusion over the charges against her son. "Initially accused of resisting police, but that charge was dropped. Now, he's facing allegations of insulting the president, despite no evidence in audio or video recordings," she explained.

Tülay Yıldız recounted the traumatic arrest of her 18-year-old son, Burak Yıldız, and 19-year-old brother, Mahsuni Kahraman, during a night raid on March 24. "They were subjected to psychological torture—denied bathroom access and given spoiled food," she revealed.

The families are calling on the public to join them at Silivri Prison on May 30 to support the detained students and demand justice. According to the "Parents' Solidarity Network" 's last-minute announcement, 14 students were released at today's court hearing in Silivri amid public outcry. 30 more students are reported to be still in jail.

## Gezi's Angels: Mehmet Ayvalıtaş

Mehmet Ayvalıtaş was just 20 when he became the first confirmed fatality of the 2013 Gezi Park protests. On June 2, during a demonstration on Istanbul's TEM highway in Ümraniye, a car drove into the crowd, fatally striking Ayvalıtaş and injuring several others. He was a member of the Socialist Solidarity Platform (SODAP) and had joined the protest to stand against government repression.



Photo: Diken

The subsequent trial spanned over six years. Despite eyewitness accounts and contested expert reports, the court acquitted both defendants, citing a lack of negligence on their part. The verdict was met with outrage from Ayvalıtaş's family and human rights advocates, who viewed it as emblematic of the broader impunity surrounding state violence during the Gezi protests.

Today, Mehmet Ayvalıtaş is remembered as one of Gezi's angels—a symbol of youth resistance and the enduring demand for justice in Türkiye.



## Silence Met with Force on Gezi Anniversary

On May 28, Turkish police detained 18 individuals in Istanbul's Taksim Square during a silent "standing man" protest commemorating the 12th anniversary of the 2013 Gezi Park demonstrations. Participants stood silently without banners or chants, emulating performance artist Erdem Gündüz's iconic 2013 protest. Despite the peaceful nature of the demonstration, authorities arrested the protesters within 10 minutes, citing violations of Law No. 2911 on Meetings and Demonstrations.

Kerim Bütün, representing the Voice of the Lawyer Initiative, criticized the swift police response, highlighting the government's intolerance toward public gatherings in symbolic spaces like Taksim Square. He emphasized that in a democratic society, authorities should not dictate where individuals can stand or walk.



Photo: TurkishMinute

The protest also served as a call for the release of prominent figures imprisoned in connection with the Gezi movement, including Osman Kavala and Can Atalay. Opposition leader Özgür Özel described the Gezi protests as "the most peaceful and most widely participated in civil movement in our history," urging the immediate release of those still incarcerated.

This event underscores the ongoing tensions between civil society and the Turkish government over freedom of assembly and expression.

## Gezi's Angels: Mehmet İstif

Mehmet İstif, who was exposed to tear gas sprayed directly into his mouth during the 2013 Gezi protests in Mersin, Turkey, later developed tongue base cancer and has passed away in Mersin University Medical Faculty Hospital.



Photo: T24

In June 2013, Mehmet İstif was exposed to tear gas at close range during a Gezi protest. He developed mouth and throat symptoms that were initially misdiagnosed, but later identified as tongue base cancer. Despite surgery and cancer treatment, his condition worsened. Part of his tongue was removed, and he faced severe pain, infections, and difficulty speaking and eating before dying in intensive care.

Before his death, he described being directly targeted by police and delaying medical care out of fear of arrest.



## Erdoğan's Push for a New Constitution Sparks Concern Across Türkiye

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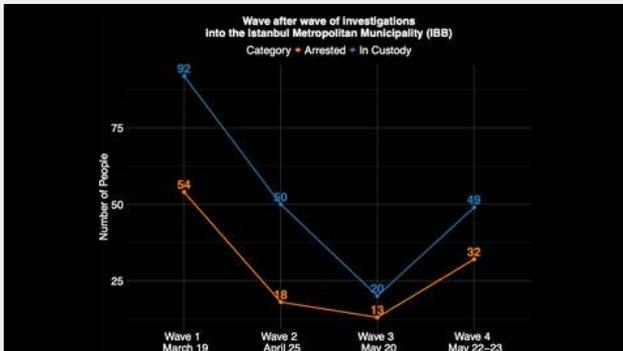
President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has appointed a ten-member committee to draft a brand-new constitution for Türkiye, declaring it a long-overdue break from the 1980 military coup-era charter. He claims the goal is to build an entirely "civilian constitution" that guarantees freedoms and rights.

But critics warn this is more about Erdoğan's grip on power. Under the current constitution, Erdoğan cannot run again in 2028 unless early elections are called or the rules are rewritten — a change many suspect this process aims to achieve.

What's more, the constitution Erdoğan calls "shameful" has already been amended multiple times by his ruling AKP during their 23 years in power. Key changes over the years strengthened the executive branch, reduced parliamentary oversight, and moved Türkiye toward a presidential system.

Erdoğan has accused the main opposition CHP of aligning with past coup plotters and says the new constitution will reinforce national sovereignty. However, his AKP and allies lack the parliamentary numbers to push it through alone, sparking speculation they might reach out to pro-Kurdish parties or cut political deals to secure support.

This push comes amid a climate of democratic backsliding, with opposition figures like Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu imprisoned and protests erupting across the country. For many, Erdoğan's constitutional overhaul looks less like reform and more like a power play.



Since **March 19**, a series of operations have targeted the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB). Among those detained or arrested are high-ranking officials, bureaucrats, and staff, notably including Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu and his close associates. At least **210 individuals have been taken into custody, with over 100 formally arrested**. Additional legal measures such as judicial supervision, house arrest, and travel restrictions have been imposed on numerous others.

## The Fourth Wave: A Judicial Siege on Istanbul's Opposition



In the fourth wave of politically driven operations against the opposition-led Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB), 25 out of 46 officials brought before the court were imprisoned. At the same time, 21 were released under judicial control. Among those detained are high-ranking officials, including İmamoğlu's Chief of Staff Kadriye Kasapoğlu, Head of Security Mustafa Akin, Deputy Secretary General Arif Gürkan Alpay, KIPTAŞ Chairperson Ali Kurt, and İSTAÇ Chairperson Ziya Gökmen Togay.

The charges include "destroying criminal evidence," "membership in a criminal organization," "bribery," and "rigging public tenders." Critics argue that these accusations are politically motivated and part of an escalating effort to dismantle the İBB's opposition infrastructure ahead of the 2028 elections.



Photo: bianet.org

The operation comes on the heels of a series of prior crackdowns, notably the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu on March 19. Many observers believe the repeated waves stem from the government's failure to uncover any serious wrongdoing that could justify keeping İmamoğlu behind bars, prompting further, more desperate legal offensives. Since March 19, the scope and intensity of such operations have increased, suggesting a systemic strategy to criminalize opposition governance through judicial means. The use of mass detentions and vague charges underscores deep concerns over the rule of law, judicial independence, and democratic backsliding in Türkiye.

This latest development reflects not just a legal campaign, but a political siege on one of the most prominent symbols of democratic resistance in the country.

### Which President of the Republic of Türkiye filed how many defamation lawsuits? (August 2021 data)

- Süleyman Demirel: 158
- Ahmet Necdet Sezer: 163
- Turgut Özal: 202
- Kenan Evren: 340
- Abdullah Gül: 848
- **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan :38581**

Source: Barış Pehlivan

