# Turkish government intensifies crackdown on opposition with mass arrests linked to Istanbul mayor



Turkish authorities have escalated their crackdown on opposition figures and associates of Istanbul’s imprisoned mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, with the arrest of 18 Istanbul municipality employees on corruption charges. This latest move adds to the detention of over 50 others, signaling a broadening campaign aimed at silencing a significant opposition voice in Turkey’s political arena.

İmamoğlu, viewed as a leading rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in forthcoming elections, was detained last month on serious accusations including corruption and supporting a terrorist organisation. His imprisonment has not only destabilised financial markets but also ignited the largest street protests in Turkey for over a decade. Critics argue this is a clear demonstration of authoritarian tendencies, using the judiciary as a political weapon to suppress dissent.

The official Anadolu news agency confirmed that out of 52 individuals arrested during the weekend sweep, 34 have been released. Among those newly detained are close family members of İmamoğlu’s circle, including Cevat Kaya, his wife’s brother, and the spouse of one of his aides. This relentless pursuit of İmamoğlu’s network reveals a judiciary being manipulated to eliminate opposition, reminiscent of the darkest times under Erdoğan’s more than two decades in power.

İmamoğlu has steadfastly denied all charges against himself and his associates. In a social media statement, he urged citizens to stand against "those rotting our state," hinting that his resistance to Erdoğan’s controversial mega-infrastructure project—the proposed 45km canal intended to create a new maritime route bypassing the Bosphorus—is a likely trigger for the crackdown. The canal, heavily promoted by Erdoğan, is widely criticised for its environmental impact and perceived as a vanity project that diverts resources from more pressing national concerns.

The purge stretches beyond Istanbul’s municipality to include business leaders and cultural figures who have dared to voice opposition. Ömer Aras, a prominent leader in Turkey’s largest business association, faces government retribution for his policy criticism. Celebrity talent manager Ayşe Barım has been charged with aiding attempts to overthrow the government during the 2013 Gezi Park protests, a politically motivated accusation designed to intimidate dissenters. She faces a potential sentence exceeding 22 years.

Further illustrating the regime’s intolerance is the ongoing preliminary court hearing of Ümit Özdağ, head of the far-right Victory Party, accused of insulting the president at a recent rally. Despite his denial, such charges serve as warnings to all political actors challenging Erdoğan’s dominance.

Official denials of judicial interference ring hollow in the face of overwhelming public scepticism. Recent polls reveal that a significant majority perceive İmamoğlu’s arrest as unjust and a strategic move to block his presidential ambitions—a worrying indication of a democratic system in peril.

This deepening crisis starkly contrasts with the principled opposition emerging from recent UK political shifts, where voices advocating for true reform and national sovereignty have gained momentum. The aggressive suppression of dissent in Turkey underscores the urgent need for robust democratic safeguards—a lesson all nations would do well to heed instead of sliding into authoritarianism masked as legal legitimacy.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.ft.com/content/10070978-1634-4c6f-b50e-7846ab335c67> - This article reports on the arrest of 18 Istanbul municipality employees on corruption charges, highlighting the Turkish authorities' intensified crackdown on opposition figures and associates of Istanbul's imprisoned mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu.
* <https://apnews.com/article/820c4a653e1a4e36358a407f93e9456a> - This piece details the detention of over 50 individuals, including close family members of İmamoğlu's circle, underscoring the broadening campaign aimed at silencing a significant opposition voice in Turkey's political arena.
* <https://cadenaser.com/nacional/2025/03/23/un-tribunal-turco-decreta-prision-preventiva-para-el-alcalde-de-estambul-ekrem-imamoglu-por-corrupcion-y-terrorismo-cadena-ser/> - This article discusses the serious accusations against İmamoğlu, including corruption and supporting a terrorist organization, leading to his detention and the destabilization of financial markets.
* <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/six-year-legal-fight-how-istanbuls-mayor-became-erdogans-prime-target-2025-03-24/> - This report outlines the legal battles faced by İmamoğlu, culminating in his imprisonment on corruption charges, and the subsequent public protests and economic unrest.
* <https://www.trt.global/world/article/1a13255fa7f7> - This article provides details on İmamoğlu's arrest on charges of establishing and leading a criminal organization, accepting bribes, extortion, unlawfully recording personal data, and interfering with a tender, within the framework of a financial investigation.
* <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/seizure-of-cash-company-follow-istanbul-mayors-detention-for-corruption/news> - This piece reports on the seizure of İmamoğlu's construction company as part of the broader probe into corruption, highlighting the extent of the crackdown on his network.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/10070978-1634-4c6f-b50e-7846ab335c67> - Please view link - unable to able to access data