

# Turkey: Academics for Peace

For years, Turkey's ruling party, the AKP, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has been transforming the country into an increasingly authoritarian state. Along with severe restrictions on press and freedom of expression, the country's academic system has also been heavily impacted by government interference. Today, Turkey ranks 164th out of 179 countries on the Academic Freedom Index. As a result, many scholars have left the country, leading to a "brain drain" that has serious consequences for Turkey's academic and economic systems. Other researchers avoid critical topics, such as human rights violations, minority rights, or the "Kurdish question," and resort to self-censorship.

The government's repression of critical voices became very clear in the case of the "Academics for Peace." This group of Turkish scholars spoke out for peace after violence with Kurdish groups in southeastern Turkey started again in 2015. They signed a "Peace Petition" asking the government to stop the violence and start peace talks again. President Erdoğan called this petition "terrorist propaganda" and fired those who signed it from their jobs at universities. These

measures were further intensified after the attempted coup in July 2016, when parts of the Turkish military tried to take over the government. In response, the government declared a state of emergency and carried out sweeping political purges, dismissing thousands of civil servants and university staff, shutting down private universities, and replacing rectors at state universities. Even years later, many affected individuals are still labeled as enemies of the state and struggle to find new employment. Since 2018, the president has held the exclusive power to appoint university rectors.

One scholar who personally experienced these consequences is media studies researcher Eylem Camuroglu Cig. After signing the "Peace Petition" online in 2016 as part of the "Academics for Peace," she lost her position at her university and fled to Germany in 2017. The Turkish government revoked her passport and many of her fundamental rights, making it impossible for her to return home. Despite this, she remains committed to advocating for academic freedom and critical thinking while in exile.



Listen to the podcast at  
[www.fragile-freiheit.de](http://www.fragile-freiheit.de)

As of: January 2025

## Tasks

Use the QR code to access the podcast "Fragile Freedom". Listen to the interview with Eylem Camuroglu Cig and answer the following questions:

- 1) Who are the Academics for Peace?
- 2) Why was Eylem Camuroglu Cig accused of terrorist propaganda?
- 3) How does the Turkish government restrict academic freedom?
- 4) What parallels does Eylem see between developments in Turkey and those in other countries?

### Sources and Further Reading:

- <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/izpb/tuerkei-356/541898/gesellschaft/>
- <https://www.forschung-und-lehre.de/politik/wahl-und-wissenschaftsfreiheit-in-der-tuerkei-5663>
- <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/akademiker-unter-druck-laehmende-angst-an-tuerkischen-100.html>

# Fragile Freedom: Academic Freedom at Risk

## What is academic freedom?

Academic freedom means that teachers, researchers, and students can explore ideas, teach, and share their thoughts without the fear of being punished or silenced by the authorities. It allows them to study and discuss any topic freely. This freedom helps to make learning and teaching more open and encourages the discovery of new knowledge, even if it puts the current government in question.

In Germany, the freedom to research and teach is protected by the constitution and an independent judiciary and researchers themselves have a major influence on which research projects are funded. But especially in countries that are under authoritarian rule, this is not the case. Scientists that do not align with state agency are being silenced, threatened and persecuted in many parts of the world. Today, around 3.6 billion people live in countries where academic freedom is completely restricted. This is the result of the Academic Freedom Index, in which researchers assess the de facto levels of academic freedom across the world.

Academic freedom is at risk for various reasons. Often, governments or political parties want to secure their power and maintain ideological control by restricting and instrumentalizing science and education. Religious beliefs and economic interests can also lead to the censoring of scholars that oppose the

ruling powers. The restriction of academic freedom is often a gradual process – which can ultimately have fatal consequences for scholars and societies as a whole.

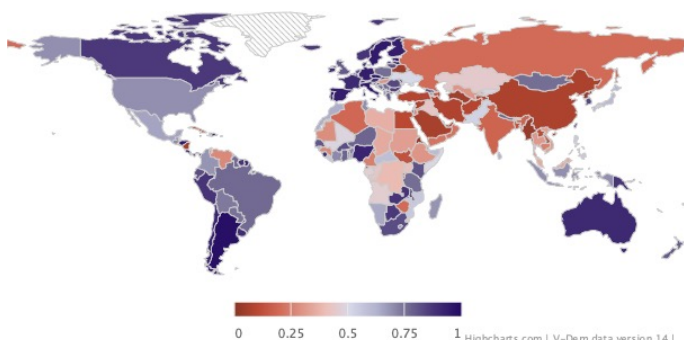
However: Even in democratic countries academic freedom is not absolute and always comes with certain responsibilities. Scholars must adhere to ethical standards, maintain academic integrity, and respect the rights of others. Additionally, while academic freedom protects scholars from undue interference, it does not shield them from criticism or debate. And of course, it is often politicians that decide on allocating funding to certain research programs.

The importance of academic freedom goes beyond schools and universities. It helps create knowledgeable and informed citizens, advances science and technology, and supports healthy democracies. By allowing free exchange and examination of ideas, academic freedom helps us search for truth and improve society.

## Discuss in groups:

- 1) How could science be restricted or misused for political purposes? Imagine and discuss a specific scenario. This can be a fictional scenario, a historical or recent example.
- 2) Can you imagine situations, where it would be good for society to regulate and even restrict scientific research?
- 3) Optional question: How is academic freedom and the education protected by political influences in Germany?

Academic Freedom Index (2023)



### Quelle Abbildung:

Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Michael Bernhard et al. 2024. "V-Dem Dataset v14" Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. <https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemds24>.

Spannagel, J., & Kinzelbach, K. (2023). The Academic Freedom Index and its indicators: Introduction to new global time-series V-Dem data. *Quality & Quantity*, 57: 3969–3989. doi:10.1007/s11135-022-01544-0