

Politics

## Turkey Passes New Law to Cull Street Dogs Despite Protests



A dog with a banner reading, "Withdraw the law" during a protest in Istanbul, on July 23. *Photographer: Yasin Akgul/AFP/Getty Images*

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Turkey approved a controversial bill that paves the way for the culling of millions of stray dogs, sparking protests in the likes of Istanbul and Ankara famous for their abundance of street canines.

Unclaimed dogs that pose a threat to human life or health, whose behavior can't be controlled or have an incurable disease can be killed under new legislation passed Tuesday. The main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, called the plan a "law of animal massacre" and Chairman Ozgur Ozel said it would appeal to the Constitutional Court to seek a reversal.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the main proponent of the bill, has argued that stray dogs are a public-health hazard and attack people and other animals.

“This is a law for adoption, not massacre,” Agriculture and Forestry Minister Ibrahim Yumakli said in televised comments.

Municipal offices are now required to collect and look after dogs until they’re adopted, while improving or setting up new shelters within the next four years. They will need to allocate a certain amount of resources to the initiative and officials could face prison time if they don’t comply.

The law has sparked protests across Turkey and online. Critics say the law could be used arbitrarily and lead to the killing of non-aggressive animals.

Nilgun Padir, a retired teacher and animal-rights activist who’s been looking after stray dogs for a decade, said the bill overlooked other problematic areas.

If “those who breed animals and sell them don’t face punitive measures, you can kill all the animals but won’t be able to get results,” she said, instead calling for mass vaccination and sterilization. Dogs in villages are regularly left unspayed, she added.

– *With assistance from Inci Ozbek and Gina Turner*

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