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“New Turkey”: Continuities With and Ruptures From the Past
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Understanding Turkey’s Political Transformation: Mechanisms, Actors, and Perceptions

Sinem Adar

AUTHOR’S NOTE

I would like to thank the authors of this Thematic Issue for their valuable contributions. I am also grateful to the Editorial Board of the EJTS for an efficient and collegial cooperation. The TI significantly benefited from the constructive feedback of anonymous reviewers as well as the participants of the workshop organized by the Editorial Board in June 2021 in order to discuss the first drafts of the articles. This introduction has been revised following the 2023 elections, which is not the case for the articles in this issue.

Introduction

1 This Thematic Issue (TI) explores Turkey’s gradual yet steady shift under the rule of Justice and Development Party (AKP thereafter) to autocratization. The TI has two objectives. Inspired by Sözen’s (2020: 232) call to “clarify mechanisms of autocratization and democratic collapse”, it, first and foremost, attempts to qualify the country’s political transformation, beyond its strikingly obvious characteristics such as the personalization of power and the increasingly blurred boundaries between the party and the state.

2 Thus far, scholars of contemporary Turkey have extensively explored the timing of the authoritarian shift¹ and certain characteristics of authoritarianism, e.g. “illiberal” (Öktem, Akkoyunlu 2016) “competitive” (Esen, Gümüşçü 2016), “populist” (Sözen 2019), “Muslim” (Yenigün 2021), and “neoliberal” (Bedirhanoğlu et al. 2020). There is an overwhelming consensus in the literature that the country’s ruling elites use the ballot
box as one of the, if not the most, essential instruments for holding onto power. Scholars also agree that populist visions (Sözen 2019: 291) and polarizing discourse (Sommer 2014) undergird the country's shift to a predominant party system (Sayarı 2016), and subsequently to an all-powerful executive presidential system. The opposition is systematically depicted as the enemy of the popular faction represented by the AKP and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The President’s legitimacy is heavily embedded in the claim of representing popular will ("yerli ve milli") against the backdrop of a mindset that equates majoritarianism with democracy.

Given that the AKP’s rule “makes one-fifth of the entire republican period and five years more than Atatürk’s term in power” (Aytürk 2021), it is almost inevitable that such a long period would impact politics and society. Still, not only the question of how much of the old is dead, but also that of what has replaced it remain unanswered given not only the pace of the change, but also the state of flux and crisis that has accompanied it. Even less clear is to what extent the new constellation of actors, institutions, and ideas is durable. Our knowledge of what the political and societal transformation of the last two decades entails, therefore, needs to be deepened.

More recent studies on Turkey’s political transformation have provided important insights about the instruments and mechanisms that have enabled democratic decline, such as "mobile emergency rule" (Arslanalp, Erkmen 2020), "patronage distribution of resources" (Esen, Gumuscu 2018), reconfiguration of power between capital and labor (Akçay 2021, Akbulut et al. 2020), "politics of domination” (Bedirhan et al. 2020) and "politics of coercion" (ibid., Yabancı 2019).

Building on the aforementioned body of work, this Thematic Issue traces Turkey’s political transformation in state-society relations. Following Erensü and Alemdaroğlu’s (2018) seminal article on the periodization of Turkish democracy under AKP rule, the authors approach the last two decades as one of simultaneous “reform and repression” and trace the changes in state-society relations by looking at courts and constitutional politics, clientelistic practices as a cornerstone of party politics, dynamics among state and non-state religious actors, co-optation and suppression of higher education institutions, and political-economic struggles.

In addition to qualifying Turkey’s autocratization, the Thematic Issue has a secondary but less central goal as well: Motivated by the caution of Yılmaz and Turner (2019: 693) against interpreting the political transformation of the last two decades as a definite break from the earlier periods, the Issue invites the reader to contemplate continuities and ruptures under AKP rule with previous periods. Indeed, recent studies of authoritarianism in Turkey have paid more attention to its origins and how some aspects of AKP rule go back to earlier periods. For instance, Sözen (2019: 290) argues that the gradual elimination of checks and balances in the last two decades has been possible thanks to “the interaction of the already-existing executive-centric institutional framework of Turkey’s 1982 constitution.” Bedirhanoğlu et al. (2020: 3) similarly underline a continuity since the 1980s in state-society relations concerning the country’s “neoliberal social transformation”.

In a similar vein, this Thematic Issue sheds light on similarities and differences, for example, about how the AKP instrumentalized the law to suppress dissidence (see Ayşegül Kars Kaynar’s article) or how the party and its leadership have deployed religion to mold the population according to their worldviews (see Salim Çevik’s article). The contributing articles also point to significant ruptures, for instance,
concerning how the law under AKP rule has become paradoxically predictable and unpredictable, expanding the scope of arbitrary and unconstitutional acts of the ruling elites against what and whom they consider rivals and enemies (e.g., Serdar Tekin’s article).

Before detailing each article on these two aspects – qualifying Turkey’s political transformation and pondering continuities and ruptures under AKP rule with the preceding periods, it should be noted that the Thematic Issue is not organized around a singular theoretical framework. Neither does it have a harmonized set of conceptual and methodological tools. This absence partially stems from Yaycıoğlu’s (2023) timely caution against rushing into attributing definite concepts to an ever-changing regime. It is also partially because contributing authors have different disciplinary backgrounds. The Thematic Issue’s interdisciplinary nature provides the reader with a wide array of perspectives, with the aim to deepen our understanding of Turkey's political regime change.

Qualifying Turkey’s political transformation

A first step in the AKP’s power consolidation was eliminating Turkey’s major veto players. Ayşeğül Kars Kaynar traces the changing balance of power in civil-military relations through a set of reforms in the organizational structure of the Turkish Armed Forces (first in the context of the EU accession framework and later following the failed coup attempt in 2016) and the simultaneous deployment of "judicialized repression" in order to disempower rivals. Her detailed comparison of court practices during the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials with those of the 15 July attempted coup trials highlights the centrality of courts under AKP rule to intra-state conflicts. Both trials are manifestations of the co-existence of legality and illegality, consent and coercion, and persuasion and harassment. Still, Kars Kaynar notes that the 15 July trials differ from the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials insofar that i) the ruling elites used them to give legitimacy to Erdoğan and the AKP as the sole representative of the “nation’s will”, and ii) the legality of actions were not judged ex-post but that judges themselves were an active part of the events on the night of the coup.

Political elites’ participation in the attempt to build a new regime is indeed striking. In a speech addressing district governors approximately six months before the coup attempt, Erdoğan asked them to “set aside law” [whenever required] and to implement their “own mental revolution [zihinsel inkılap]”, Serdar Tekin notes. After the June 2015 parliamentary elections, when the AKP, for the first time since its foundation, did not get enough votes to form a single-party government, Tekin highlights, the governors had indeed already been doing what they were later asked to do: they had unconstitutionally imposed curfews in many Kurdish cities even though “there was no officially declared emergency at the time”.

For Tekin, securitization and extensive abuse of emergency powers in the aftermath of the June 2015 elections constituted a crucial critical juncture (further accentuated between July 2016 and July 2018) for Turkey’s political transformation. Despite the incremental nature of change during which the AKP effectively used and abused the law to "criminalize or decriminalize its shifting allies and foes,” Tekin argues that the post-2015 period witnessed the formation of a “dual state”, borrowing from Ernst Fraenkel, that applies legal rules (i.e., normative state) and simultaneously violates
them as it sees fit (i.e., prerogative state). Such a state is characterized by the unpredictability in the law's application and validity.

Toygar Sinan Baykan and Murat Somer shift the attention from the law to changing clientelistic practices under AKP rule. Based on interview data, they argue that the AKP has changed patronage relations by replacing the already weakened local notables (due to structural factors such as urbanization and the neoliberal transformation of the economy) and created what they call a “national machine politics.” According to Baykan and Somer, the AKP's ability to build direct contact with the electorate through devoted and loyal party members played an important role in eliminating veto powers and its domination – even if fragile – of the party system. Unlike the previous periods, the AKP is less dependent on local notables; instead, it has created its own "notables" that are highly dependent on the party. The authors claim that the AKP's constituency see a direct association between the party and the state institutions and that this perception has led to "multiple dependencies" among different social groups, including businesses and civil society groups.

In his analysis of state-religion relations under AKP rule, Salim Çevik similarly highlights an entire network of old and new actors in the religious field that the party and its leader have aspired to control. The transformation of state-religion relations in the last two decades is quantitative and qualitative, Çevik notes. Quantitatively, Islam's expansion into social life has significantly increased. Qualitatively, the change in approaches to religion and religious actors includes three components: i) using state institutions and discourse to define and control the religious discourse and life, ii) incorporating religious communities and organizations into the party and state institutions, and iii) forming new religious organizations and communities through religious foundations controlled by Erdoğan's own family. As a result, Diyanet has become an apparatus of the party towards consolidating power and eliminating dissent, particularly since the 2010s. At the same time, religious brotherhoods have also been heavily subjected to co-optation by the party via strategies of alliance, divide-and-rule, and punishment.

Ayca Alemdaroğlu’s article on the higher education system also underlines patronage, co-optation, and suppression as the central mechanisms in the country's political transformation. Alemdaroğlu argues that the dual process of "democratization of access" and "autocratization of governance" in higher education has marked the AKP's approach to the university system. The number of public (and private) universities skyrocketed in the last two decades thanks to the government policy of "one university per city", turning universities into important vehicles in patronage politics. At the same time, universities have become central mediums of suppressing dissidence and controlling civil society. “Students’ imprisonment reached unprecedented levels under AKP rule,” Alemdaroğlu strikingly notes.

Last but not least, Ali Riza Güngen traces the origins of Turkey's political regime change in the crisis faced by the AKP's capital accumulation strategies and tools to maintain popular support. Building on a critical political economy approach, Güngen argues that since the early 2010s, the ruling elites have reached the limits of dependent financialization and, as a result, have found it increasingly difficult to strike a balance in addressing the demands of business groups with different strategies, scales, and sectoral concentrations. According to Güngen, the personalization of power was a
response to the crisis of the AKP’s “debt-led and domestic-demand-orientated” growth model.

Continuities and Ruptures

Yet, given the long history of political suppression, patronage, and intertwined relations between state and capital in Turkish history, to what extent does the political transformation under AKP rule constitute a complete rupture? Güngen, for instance, situates the AKP’s growth model in its first decade within the larger context of Turkey’s financial integration into the global economy in the 1980s and the 1990s. Although a new set of measures were more consistently implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, he cautiously notes that it is yet unclear whether or not the “new economic model”, defined by low interest rates and loose monetary policy favoring new and would-be exporters over internationalized capital constitutes a breaking point. In other words, for Güngen, it is yet unclear whether the capital accumulation strategies of AKP will experience a substantial change, creating the conditions for consolidating regime change and deconstitutionalization.

Alemdaroğlu similarly sees a continuity in suppressing dissidence via universities and using universities for developmental and ideological goals. She notes that the institutional autonomy and academic freedom level during AKP rule is comparable to that of the single-party period (1923-1945) and military rule between 1980-1983. Still, the intensity and continuity of suppression and universities' centrality to maintaining loyalty to the leader have set apart the last two decades from the earlier periods.

A similar situation can also be observed in state-religion relations. Çevik underlines the continued role of Islam in public life and political affairs through religious education and Diyanet as an institution of state control over what he calls "social Islam." While at the same time, he also sees a quantitative rupture regarding the resources allocated to Diyanet and non-state religious actors. The fusion of state and non-state religious actors towards establishing complete control (by the ruling elites) over the religious field constitutes the second important (and qualitative) breaking point.

Baykan and Somer observe a qualitative change in the AKP’s clientelistic practices insofar as they enabled the party leadership to position members of Turkey's popular sectors as the new local and national elites whose survival depends on the party's endurance. In turn, AKP has established itself as the fragile hegemon of the party system and deepened clientelism. Baykan and Somer also observe that AKP-era policies built upon existing populist, conservative, and nationalist authoritarian ideological trends.

Continuities are also visible in the deployment of courts in intra-state conflicts. Kars Kaynar, for instance, notes that the prosecution of military officers also occurred before the AKP's rise to power. Yet, the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer, and the 15 July coup trials differ from those of the earlier periods in three dimensions. Firstly, the prosecution of military officers during AKP rule has had long-lasting, structural implications for civil-military relations. Secondly, and relatedly, court cases against military officers during AKP rule were part of a systematic harassment process. Last but not least, the AKP era trials were held in regular courts, unlike previous trials that were dealt with by special courts.
For Tekin, such a distinction between regular and special courts is crucial in understanding what Turkey’s political regime entails. What distinguishes AKP rule from the earlier periods is the institutional cohabitation of prerogative law and normative law since 2015. That is, the same institutions can implement both prerogative and normative law, making the law unpredictable. Ruling elites arbitrarily decide when and against whom the law can be flexed. For Tekin, despite the continuity of emergency powers throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, the post-2015 era is unique as it lacks a “constitutional discipline”.

**In lieu of a conclusion after an historical election**

Given the total shared 50.3 percent vote of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Sinan Öğan, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s two contenders in the first round of the presidential election on May 14, the desire for change within Turkish society is undeniable. However, so too is the insistence on continuity. Even though Erdoğan finished the first round 4.2 percent ahead of Kılıçdaroğlu, he could not avoid a run-off on May 28 that he won, gaining 52 percent of the votes. And although the AKP’s vote share declined in almost every city across the country, the ruling People’s Alliance gained a majority in parliament with 322 seats.

Despite the devastating economic situation and the tragic earthquake that exposed the weaknesses of the country's institutions, the president has continued to appeal to voters living in a polarized society separated from one another by alternative realities. Partisan distribution of economic benefits, nationalist and misogynist identity politics, systematic manipulation of the election system, and continuous suppression of rivals have all together helped Erdoğan consolidate a voter coalition, and thus, remain in power for another five years.

This outcome underlines the necessity for further research on the question of authoritarianism’s durability in Turkey. Although the contributing articles to this Thematic Issue do not directly engage with this matter, one can still make some inferences. For instance, Baykan and Somer’s claim that the AKP “avoids de facto or de jure merger with state institutions” but instead has a “privileged position between state and society”, “representing poor local constituencies in encounters with local bureaucracy as well as persuading the local society to the unpopular measures of local state institutions” suggests that authoritarianism in Turkey has not resulted in a completely bureaucratized party-state. The AKP’s domination of the party system is fragile, as evident in the decreased vote share of the party. The party has also been facing challenges from within, despite the efforts to create leader loyalty. Even in the case of extensive co-optation of religious elites, opposition to the AKP remains, as demonstrated by Çevik in the case of Furkan Vakfı. The crisis-ridden character of Turkey’s political regime, as Güngen highlights in the case of the struggles among business elites, is another reason to suspect its endurance.

In addition to the question of regime durability, there is also a need for in-depth analyses on how AKP rule has shaped perceptions and mindsets in the last two decades. Erdoğan has indeed failed to mold the population according to an ideological promise, as the simple majority voting against the continuation of his rule in the recent elections suggests. Yet, he has effectively co-opted, strengthened, and further cemented decades-long religious (and nationalist) networks with deep roots into
society to consolidate his power over the years, as Salim Cevik demonstrates in this Thematic Issue. If the culture of loyalty is an essential case in point concerning perceptions and mindsets, so too is the lack of “constitutional discipline” that Tekin underlines. In the run-up to the elections, one manifestation of such absence was the criminalization of opposition actors as “terrorists”, “invaders”, and “collaborators of Western imperialism”. Similarly, the declining levels of intellectual autonomy and worsening academic freedom that Alemdaroğlu emphasizes is likely to have mid-to-long-term repercussions.

Overall, understanding the mechanisms of Turkey’s political transformation under AKP rule and “the impact of autocratization on politics and society” (Sözen 2020: 232) is not only an important scholarly endeavor, but also has practical implications for the future of democracy in Turkey. This TI has taken a modest step towards qualifying authoritarianism in Turkey. In doing so, it has also indirectly addressed contemporary consistencies and changes in today’s political regime.

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NOTES

1. In his enlightening survey of studies on Turkey’s political regime, Sözen (2020) demonstrates that earlier studies on the issue mostly engage with the question of timing. Adopting a culturalist lens to Turkish society and politics, he argues that the earlier scholarship approaches AKP era as one of democratization. This body of literature sees the AKP’s rise to power as "the rule of the periphery's authentic representation" or approaching the AKP-in-power "as a downtrodden anti-authoritarian actor." (ibid.:220-22) More recent studies, on the other hand, shift the attention from democracy and democratization to authoritarianism in their attempt at "naming and studying the decline into authoritarianism." (ibid.:226) According to Sözen, they share the view with the earlier scholarship that there is a clear turning point, around Gezi demonstrations but most certainly after the snap elections in 2015, in the country’s democratic backsliding.

2. Among others, see Akça and Balta-Peker (2013), Bayulgen et al. (2018), Taş (2015).
3. See Bargu (2018) and Türkyılmaz (2018) for the centrality of the failed coup attempt in 2016 for the formation of a new type of regime in Turkey that took its legitimacy directly from those who went to the streets on the night of the coup to defend “Turkish democracy” against the coup plotters.

4. A growing number of studies draw attention to the relationship between political regime change and emergency laws. See, for instance, Arslanalp and Erkmen (2020), Whiting and Kaya (2021), Yilmaz (2020). Arslanalp and Erkmen (2020: 961) define Turkey’s authoritarian turn as a “political shift from a military-dominated national security state to a new populist authoritarian regime with its own targets of repression, determined by the regime’s ideological imperative and coalitional dynamics.”

5. Also see Yabancı (2019) for the paradoxical effect of “containment and apprehension” policies targeting civil society actors in expanding civil society and diversifying civic engagement.

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The Last Two Decades of Civil-Military Relations in Turkey Under the Shadow of Courts

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Introduction

1 The relationship between civilian political actors and the armed forces has often been a part of the debate on Turkey’s political regime. For decades, military tutelage over civilian politicians has influenced the Turkish political system and has made it variably named as “tutelary democracy” (Caliskan 2017: 100), “military democracy” (Kamrava 2000: 68-69), “protected democracy” (Bardakçı 2013: 411) or “popular praetorian state” (Sarigil 2011: 269-270). The demise of military tutelage after the July 15, 2016 coup attempt concurrent to the establishment of civilian supremacy over Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri (Turkish Armed Forces; TAF) in organizational, professional, judicial, and educational matters, however, did not coincide with the rise of a more democratic regime. The contemporary ruling mode, which is somewhat referred to as “Erdoğanizm” (Yılmaz, Bashirov 2018), relies on personalized rule by the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi’s (Justice and Development Party; JDP) leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,1 establishing rule by expediency in place of the rule of law, and turns the elections into an approval of the leader (Yılmaz 2020: 275).

2 Sinan Erensü and Ayça Alemdaroğlu (2018: 20) incisively state that in this authoritarian transformation, more often than not, the state of emergency rule in the aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt is brought to the forefront to emphasize a process through which years-long rule of law order, and gradual reforms were abandoned for and replaced by repression. Against such a sequential depiction of questions of legality, reform, and/or repression, the authors assert that reform and repression were not mutually exclusive modes of governance under the JDP rule. The authors purport that Turkey’s authoritarian turn actually came as a result of an interplay between these two modes. While the series of legislative reforms were mechanisms in transforming
various aspects of bureaucracy, the coercive suppression of protests by the police and the prosecution of political opposition in the courts aided in persecuting the dissidents and lining up society behind the aforementioned leader.

3 This article addresses Erensü and Alemdaroğlu’s assertion and examines the concomitant and complementary nature of reform and repression in the transformation of civil-military relations under the JDP governments. Accordingly, in the last two decades, intermittent legal reforms scaled down the political power of military bureaucracy and brought it under the control of civilian administration. At the same time, the TAF was repressed through criminal prosecutions that affected scores of military personnel. These prosecutions started with the Ergenekon investigation, in which the former Chief of the General Staff İlker Başbuğ was accused of heading a terrorist organization. They continued with the coup plot investigations, the most known of which was the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) trial. Prosecution of military officers resumed after July 15, 2016 with coup attempt trials.

4 Judicialized repression had two facets, which manifested themselves in each prosecution in differing degrees and significance. First, the court cases involved intimidation of dismissal from the profession and incarceration; they directly interfered with military hierarchy and partly regulated the relation between civilians and the military. Second, terrorism accusations denigrated military officers, and as such, upset the balance of power in favor of the government by reshaping the public’s attitude negatively towards the army.

5 In sharp contrast to the abundance of analysis in the literature on legal reforms and their transformative effects, there is a limited number of scholarly studies on how the courts were used as a repressive instrument to recast the civil-military balance of power. On one hand, the Ergenekon, Sledgehammer and the July 15 attempted coup cases are well-recognized as political trials. Daniella Kuzmanovic (2012: 171) claims that the Ergenekon investigation was politicized from the onset. For the critics, both Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials were not judicial processes at all but judicial manipulations (Rodrik 2011: 108) or solely political actions, initiated against an opponent to avenge the closure of forerunners of the JDP, namely the Welfare Party (1998) and the Virtue Party (2001) (Balci, Jacoby 2012: 138). On the other hand, discussions on what these political actions stand for have been mostly neglected. Rather, studies predominantly scrutinize the impact of court cases on democratic consolidation (Gürsoy 2015) or foreign politics (Balci 2012). Similarly, Ali Balci and Tim Jacoby (2012: 141) state that pursuing a judicial process that has such flaws as conspiracy creates an “ethical dilemma”, yet they do not delve further into what this dilemma tells us about the relationship between the army and the government. The term “show trials” (Tisdall 2012) is also used to describe the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases and the July 15 attempted coup case is defined as a “sham trial” (Haliloglu 2017: 15). However, both analogies lack conceptual rigor and analytical depth.

6 In order to fill this void and avoid repeating the findings of the literature, the article lists the main reforms that undermined military bureaucracy and later focuses on the repressive side of the transformation of civil-military relations. To this end, the article uses court decisions, indictments, and official reports of state institutions apart from scholarly work. Details of the court cases and investigations are harvested from media sources.
The article discusses the prosecution of military officers in the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases as one group and the July 15 attempted coup case as another. The primary reason for this bisection is that the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases took place under the similar political and legal context of the rule of law and parliamentary democracy, and both concern allegations about intended or planned armed putsch. In contrast, the July 15 attempted coup case is embedded in the disparate political/legal context of an exceptional state of emergency rule and the transition period from a parliamentary rule to the Turkish style presidentialism, and involves an actual armed coup attempt.

In the Ergenekon case, the allegation was to establish a terror organization to generate chaos in society by attacking minority groups, bombing mosques, and assassinating public figures that would justify staging a coup by the TAF (Jenkins 2009a: 50; Balci, Jacoby 2012: 138). The first indictment of the Ergenekon case was filed in July 2008, the second in March 2009. Over time, 22 different indictments were combined in the Ergenekon case. The Sledgehammer coup plot investigation started in January 2010 and charged 365 suspects, including 89 generals and admirals. According to the indictment, a junta led by the then-Commander of the First Army Çetin Doğan prepared the plan envisaged in destabilizing the state by staging a series of terror attacks and provoking Greece to shoot down a Turkish airplane. These instances would provide the army with a pretext to perform a coup and remove the government from power (Ananicz, September 26, 2012).

The July 15 attempted coup trials were the other significant prosecution that concerned civil-military relations. Immediately after the July 15 instigation, 289 trials against coup perpetrators in 56 cities started. Among them, there were two main trials (aka roof cases), both of which were pending in Ankara. The Genelkurmay Çatı Davası (the General Staff Roof trial) focused on the planning of the coup, the organization of the plotters, and the occupation of the Headquarters of the General Staff. Whereby the Akinci Üssü Davası (Akinci Airbase trial) dealt with civil-military cooperation and how civilians, accused of being members of the Gülen Community, collaborated with military officials in the making of the coup (Akgün 2020: 16). The rest of the trials were based on crimes committed by the putschists separately.

In the July 15 attempted coup trials, the putschists were accused of being members of the Gülen Community. The Gülen Community is an Islamist group which is believed to have been in control of large portions of state administration before the JDP came to power, and allied with it afterward. The Gülenists carried out the Ergenekon case and coup plot trials for years, who were staffed within the judiciary and the police force. However, the alliance between the Community and the JDP started to break apart in February 2012, when a prosecutor issued an arrest warrant for the Undersecretary of the National Intelligence Organization Hakan Fidan, who was the right-hand man to then-Prime Minister Erdoğan in intelligence issues. Soon afterwards, the trials ended in December 2013, when Gülenist prosecutors launched a corruption probe against the JDP government. The JDP immediately responded by removing Gülenist police officers, prosecutors, and judges from their posts, and brought criminal charges against them. In a similar vein, the court boards of the Ergenekon case and coup plot trials were renewed through removals and dismissals. From thereon out, the Gülen Community claimed to be an armed terror organization and referred as Fethullahçlı Terör Örgütü (Fetullahist Terror Organization; FETÖ).
The article utilizes the framework of analysis developed by Jens Meierhenrich and Devin O. Pendas (2016) for political trials, and differentiates the “practices” of court cases at hand from their “purposes.” Practices of judicialized repression center around how the courts operate, and are composed of three mutually explanatory elements, which shape this operation in an intertwined way: power, procedure, and performance. The “purpose” dimension of the prosecutions, meanwhile, allows a focus on variations in the motivation behind trials. Accordingly, the trial can be a “decisive trial” that aims to settle a contentious legal question of political significance. Alternatively, a trial can be a “didactic trial,” which seeks to spread a political message. The last type of trials based on their purpose is “destructive trials” that aim at a symbolic or physical elimination of the enemy.6

After dissociating the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases and the July 15 attempted coup case into their components of power, procedure and performance, the article discusses whether and to what extent these cases are examples of decisive, didactic, or destructive trials. Although the destructive aspect is in the foreground in all three of the cases, the article ascertains that the elimination of the adversary is not the single political motivation behind the prosecutions. The Ergenekon case swung from punishment to acquittal, while the Sledgehammer case was reopened after acquittals, showing the absence of a foreordained decision for defendants either in the direction of penalizing or releasing them. Actually, the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases have played a significant role in designing military hierarchy in line with the government’s interests. The July 15 coup attempt trial, on the other hand, has only been a secondary tool after the presidential decrees in the restructuring of the TAF through purges and dismissals. Then, its political role can better be conceived within the context of state-society relations as it is highly circumscribed by the sociopolitical developments surrounding it. That being the case, the article suggests that the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer court cases are also decisive trials, and the didactic character of the July 15 attempted coup case is inevitable.

It was not unprecedented in the history of the Turkish Republic to see military officers in the dock.7 However, the prosecution of military officers under the JDP rule was distinctive, because the courts were employed as the central apparat of repressive mode of governance. First, the courts that handled the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases and the July 15 attempted coup case were regular parts of the criminal justice system, although they applied discriminatory legal codes and disregarded the defendants’ constitutional rights. In that sense, they normalized judicialized repression. Additionally, court cases against military officers under the JDP rule were parts of a long-term policy of harassment. Finally, they played an intervening transformative role in civil-military relations, and therefore, produced larger socio-political consequences.8

Legal Reforms and Trimming of Military Bureaucracy’s Authority

The first setback in the military’s political authority began within the EU accession process. In 1999, Turkey was officially acknowledged as a candidate country and in March 2001, the government announced its National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis. Accordingly, the number of civilian members of the National Security Council increased in October 2001, and the wording of Article 118 of the Constitution was
changed so that the National Security Council submitted its views to the Council of Ministers as advice only to be evaluated rather than primarily considered as previously.

After the JDP came to power in November 2002, legal reforms to curb the military's extensive political influence continued unabated. The government's efforts for civilianization were initially legitimized against the backdrop of an ideological cleavage between the secularism of the state and Islamism of the JDP. While the military presented itself as the guardian of constitutional order and secularism (Narli 2000: 117-118; Warhola, Bezci 2010: 428), the JDP was a party that evolved from the Islamist National Outlook Movement and was established by the leadership of the Welfare Party. The speeches of the top military personnel against the party during the initial years of JDP’s rule were coupled with the army’s interference in presidential elections via an e-memorandum on April 17, 2007, which was generally regarded as a soft coup and triggered early elections. Worried that the military would organize a more powerful putsch against the government at any time, as it did on February 28, 1997 against the Welfare Party government and led to its closure, the JDP needed to limit the military's power if it were to consolidate its rule.

Accordingly, the Secretary General of the National Security Council was made responsible to the prime minister following the acceptance of the seventh EU harmonization package in July 2003 as Law 4963. The Secretary-General also lost its authority to follow up the implementation of Council’s decisions and its right to access civilian public agencies or legal persons. After the reforms, the prime minister would nominate one of his/her deputy prime ministers to submit the Council’s decisions and opinions to the Council of Ministers, who would then secure their implementation in case they were approved. Lastly, the prime minister could nominate a civilian Secretary General who had until then only had been a military officer.

Having the EU's wind at its back, the JDP undermined the presence of military officers in the supreme regulatory boards. Representatives of the TAF were removed from Yüksek肇retim Kurulu (the Council of Higher Education) in 2004 and from Radyo Televizyon Üst Kurulu (the Supreme Board of Radio and Television) in 2005. Reforms decelerated in the aftermath of the rejection of the EU constitution first in France and then in the Netherlands in 2005, as the JDP perceived these rejections as objections to their membership. Legal steps that crippled the military’s reserved rights resumed only in June 2009 with the legislation of Law 5918, which amended the Turkish Code of Criminal Procedure 5271 and restricted the military jurisdiction to the time of war and martial law. Regardless of the nature of the offense, this amendment removed civilians from the jurisdiction of military courts. Furthermore, the amendment of Article 125 of the Constitution in the September 2010 referendum limited military’s organizational autonomy by subjecting Yüksek Askeri şura’s (Supreme Military Council) decisions concerning all kinds of leave – except for retirement due to shortages of cadres – to judicial review. This paved the way for the appeal of the Council’s decisions on reactionary (Islamist) activities.

These reforms curbed the military bureaucracy’s role as a veto power (Haugom 2016: 6). As a result, the army considerably stepped back from veering off politics. The excitement surrounding the reforms was immense given the overwhelming tendency to interpret them as steps towards solid civilianization and democratization. For instance, Ersel Aydını (2009: 591) claimed that reforms amounted to a paradigm shift and military power was at its political nadir. Toktaş and Kurt (2010: 401) argued that
the JDP’s reforms demonstrated civilianization in Turkish polity and the democratic consolidation of civil-military relations. Similarly, Metin Heper (2011: 250.) suggested that in the post-2002 period, the military’s relation with the civilian government had increasingly come to resemble the best practices in liberal democracies. In such an atmosphere, the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials were also mostly perceived as parts of civilianization for various reasons. According to their supporters and sympathizers, these prosecutions brought Turkey’s “deep state” on trial and opened the veil of obscurity on numerous assassinations, disappearances, provocations, and disinformation campaigns of past decades. Last, but not the least, the trials were also believed to have ended the army’s privilege based on unaccountability and impunity (Ertür 2016: 177-178).

Nevertheless, one had to wait until 2016 to see more sweeping changes. On July 15, 2016 a coup was attempted in Turkey, led mainly by a faction of the TAF to overthrow the government and establish military rule. In a single night, 250 people died, and 2735 were injured. Six days after the attempted coup, a state of emergency was declared. Under the conditions of state of emergency, Turkey’s political regime underwent a drastic transformation through a shift from century-old tradition of parliamentary democracy to a presidential system in April 2017 by a referendum. This state of emergency was only abolished on July 18, 2018 following the election of Erdoğan as the first executive president of the Republic on June 24, 2018.

Under the state of emergency rule, the government responded to the putsch by clamping down on the TAF in an unprecedented fashion with investigations, purges, and legal reforms. For example, immediately after the coup attempt, the general commands of the gendarmerie and coast guard were removed from the TAF and brought under the ministry of interior. The commanders of the army, navy, and air force were removed from the Chief of the General Staff and were subordinated to the ministry of national defense. The president and the prime minister were authorized to receive direct information from and give direct orders to the force commanders and their subordinates. The commanders and subordinates were to implement these orders without further approval of the Chief of the General Staff.

The composition of the Supreme Military Council was first changed in July 2016 in favor of the civilians, leaving the Chief of the General Staff the only military person in this Council. Nevertheless, Article 2 of Presidential Decree no.8, dated July 15, 2018, altered the composition of the Supreme Military Council once again. The Ministers of Treasury and Finance, the Minister of National Education, and all force commanders became members of the Council. The General Secretariat of the Council was separated from the Ministry of National Defense and instead attached to the Presidency. The Ministry of National Defense now had the authority to issue statements to the press about the Council’s meetings.

There was also a fundamental reform of military education. The war academies, military high schools and non-commissioned officer preparation schools were all closed on July 31, 2016. After the closing, war academies and non-commissioned officer preparation schools operated under the National Defense University, the head of which was a civilian appointed by the President. Decisions on the disciplines offered for study, the number and type of postgraduate institutes, and the type, duration, and curricula of study of these institutes would be determined solely by the ministry of national defense, sideling the force commanders and the Chief of the General Staff.
addition, promotion and appointment processes were brought under civilian domination. The appointment decisions would now be subject to approval by the ministry of national defense and the ministry of interior, instead of by force commanders. Additionally, the Ministry of National Defense, after consultation with the Chief of the General Staff, would determine the promotions of generals and admirals in the TAF as opposed to the single handed power of the Chief of the General Staff. In January 2017, the Military Court of Appeals, Military High Administrative Court, and military courts were abrogated. This would mean the end of the judicial autonomy of the military that had prevailed since 1963. Lastly, on July 15, 2018, the Chief of the General Staff, who had been accountable directly to the prime minister since 1961, came under the auspices of the Ministry of National Defence.

To sum up, the post-2016 restructuring has thoroughly bypassed the Chief of the General Staff in the promotion and extension of force commanders’ terms of office. Simultaneously, the control of the President and the Ministry of National Defense over retirements has increased. Removing force commanders from the General Staff has also reduced this post to that of a coordinator rather than the top commander of the TAF (Haugom 2016: 5). The Chief of the General Staff’s dominant role in military education policies has been similarly reduced. Commanders now have no authority in their own military schools (şahin 2018: 47). Therefore, post-coup restructuring of the civil-military relations is the final phase of a process that has brought the military’s 60-year old tutelary powers to an end.

Judicialized Repression and Criminal Prosecution of Military Officers

As previously mentioned in the introduction, the criminal investigations in the summer of 2007 against high-ranking military officers had an earth-shattering effect on civil-military relations amid the positive atmosphere created by the reforms. In June, the police investigations in the Ergenekon case began after the publication of the alleged diaries of a former commander in the weekly magazine Nokta, which exposed coup plans against the government (Grigoriadis, Özer 2010: 109). Shortly after, prominent individuals from different backgrounds were detained and arrested, including commanders of the armed forces such as the former Chief of the General Staff Başbuğ, heads of civil society organizations, journalists, and university rectors (Jenkins 2009a: 37, 41; Baran 2010: 81). Police investigations found four military coup plans codenamed Ayışığı, Sarkız, Yakamoz and Eldiven. In 2009, another coup plan, Kafes Eylem Planı, was discovered. Nevertheleass, the most well-known coup plan was codenamed Sledgehammer, which relied on news published in the daily Taraf, a liberal Turkish journal allegedly close to the Gülen Community. The accusations were based on a suitcase full of documents, tapes, and CDs submitted by an unknown person to one of the journal’s authors. The Sledgehammer trial almost solely relied on data in a single CD, supposedly recorded in March 2003, yet included references to events dated as late as 2008 (Rodrik, Doğan 2010: 24, 27) and later on was proven as forged.

In September 2012, the court made its verdict in the Sledgehammer case and sentenced 325 members of the TAF to imprisonment for 13 to 20 years (Ananicz, September 26, 2012). Doğan, the then-retired commander of the Air Forces Halil İbrahim Fırtına, and then-retired Commander of the Navy Özden Örnek received prison sentences of up to
20 years. In the Ergenekon case, the court handed down its judgment in August 2013. 17 defendants, including Başbuğ, were sentenced to life imprisonment and 194 were imprisoned for being members of the Ergenekon Terror Organization or for aiding it. However, these verdicts proved to be the first round in a long showdown between the government and military officers, as prosecutions turned upside down after 2014. In March 2014, the Constitutional Court overturned the decision of the first instance court in the Ergenekon case on the basis of the Constitutional Article 19. The underlying reason was the violation of the defendants’ personal liberty and security. As a result, all of the accused were released. The Constitutional Court reached another significant decision in June 2014 in the Sledgehammer trial by ruling the violation of the defendants’ right to fair trial on the basis of the Constitutional Article 36.

In March 2015, the first instance court in the Sledgehammer trial ruled that the digital data, on which the previous judgment relied on, was fraudulent. Consequently, 236 defendants were acquitted. In the Ergenekon case, the Court of Cassation ruled for a retrial in April 2016 on the basis of a lack of concrete evidence showing the existence of a terrorist organization. In July 2019, after a total of 11 years, all suspects were acquitted of terrorist charges. Yet recently, the public was once again baffled by the re-opening of the Sledgehammer investigation. In June 2021, the Court of Cassation overturned the acquittal of seven soldiers in the Sledgehammer trial, including Çetin Doğan. Arguing that the concrete evidence was sufficient, reliable, and auditable, the Court of Cassation also requested further analysis of digital evidence that the first instance court had considered fraud.

When it comes to the July 15 coup attempt trials, over 100,000 investigations were carried out (Akgün 2020: 26). Besides civilians, 4594 military personnel were arrested in the aftermath of the coup attempt. Yet, the prosecution of coup plotters was not deemed expedient as the trials neither started nor ended in a short period. The first hearings of the two main trials took place ten months after the coup bid at the earliest; more accurately on May 22, 2017 in the General Staff Roof trial and on August 1, 2017 in the Akıncı Airbase trial. Although most of the 289 trials were small in scale, the main trials had a high number of defendants and extended indictments. The General Staff Roof trial charged 224 defendants and the Akıncı Airbase trial charged 474. The indictments were as long as 2581 pages in the General Staff Roof trial and 4658 pages in the Akıncı Airbase trial. Similarly, the July 15 Martyrs Bridge trial, which pressed 34 charges of homicide, had 143 defendants and 1052-page-long indictment.

It is certain that July 15 was a military coup. According to the indictment of the General Staff Roof trial, the coup attempt was led by the Peace at Home Council (Yurtta Sulh Konseyi), which was composed of 38 military officers. In addition, more than 8000 military personnel were involved in the coup attempt, and 35 aircraft, 37 helicopters, 74 tanks, 246 armored vehicles, and 4000 small arms were used (Yargıtay Cumhuriyet Başsavcılığı 2018: 1). Nevertheless, the courts made an effort to separate the army from the attempted coup. They depicted the coup attempt not as an action of the TAF but as the latest attack from the Gülen Community, which had already been deemed a terrorist organization and named as FETÖ at the time of the coup attempt. Accordingly, the coup attempt was conducted by the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization’s militants of various ranks, which attempted to influence the TAF to change the constitutional order, abolish the Turkish Grand National Assembly, and the government, and assassinate President Erdogan.
Likewise, the indictment of the Akınıç Airbase trial stated that the addressees of this investigation were those affiliated with the Fetullah Gülen Terrorist Organization. Left outside of the scope of the investigation were the TAF personnel considered loyal to the state, nation, homeland, and flag.30 Yargıtay Cumhuriyet Başsavcılığı (Supreme Court of Appeals Prosecutor’s Office) embraced a similar attitude. Accordingly, the coup was attempted by “uniformed terrorists” affiliated with the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization, who acted on organizations’ aims, albeit being members of the TAF (2018: 2). As the putschists were portrayed not as military officers, nor even as proper members of the army, but as members of the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization, the July 15 incident was officially named the “Coup Attempt of Fetullahist Terrorist Organization/Parallel State Structure”.

The court gave its verdict at the General Staff Roof trial on June, 20 2019. A total of 126 defendants were sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment, and 33 were acquitted. The Court of Cassation’s decision in July 2022 to overturn four defendants’ life sentences and to approve the rest terminated the case. In the Akınıç Airbase trial, on November 26, 2020 the court handed down 29 sentences of aggravated life imprisonment, 46 sentences of life imprisonment, and 19 sentences of imprisonment ranging from 12 to 16 years (Miş et al. 2021: 308). The Court of Appeal approved the case in June 2022.31 In May 2022, all 289 of the July 15 attempted coup trials came to an end in the first instance courts. Among the 1,634 aggravated life sentences and 1,366 life sentences, 109 were former generals and 1,652 were former officers.32 The courts sentenced 1891 defendants to prison terms varying from two months to 20 years, while 2870 defendants were acquitted, and 964 received no sentence. Nevertheless, given the number of trials, the appeal process completed in the Court of Cassation in six years was 123 – less than half of the total. The finalization of all coup trials is not likely until the mid-2020s (Ergin, July 15, 2022).

Practices and Purposes: The Ergenekon/Sledgehammer Cases

Meierhenrich and Pendas (2016: 53-57) single out three components of practices that together construct the operation of courts. Among them, “power” means the ability to compel the adversary to go to the court and abide by the court’s decision. This concept revolves around state power. “Procedure” involves legal rules and steps that structure legal action in trials. They are necessary to reach a verdict in these cases. “Performance”, meanwhile, means various practices involved in staging and marketing the proceedings. This involves public participation and the ritual nature of trials. Regarding purposes, firstly, a trial can be a “decisive trial” that aims to settle a contentious legal question of political significance. Its raison d’etre is political regulation. Alternatively, a trial can be a “didactic trial,” which seeks to spread a political message. Raison d’etre of didactic trials is political communication. Lasty, a trial can be considered a “destructive trial.” The Raison d’etre of destructive trials is the elimination of the enemy. The nature of destruction can be symbolic or physical, yet its particularity is the decisively confrontational stance taken against the defendants. The authors (2016: 61-63) underline that regardless of whether or not the trials are decisive, didactic, or destructive, the peculiar dynamics of their contentious politics are mostly governed by the practices of the courts, and consequently by the interplay between its elements of power, procedure, and performance.
These three components of practices can be identified in the court cases at hand to different degrees. For instance, the power component is most prominent in the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases compared to the July 15 attempted coup case. The Ergenekon investigation probed into offenses committed by military personnel, some of which occurred on military premises. When the investigation first started in 2007, these offenses fell under the jurisdiction of military courts, and the legal basis for bringing soldiers before the judge in civil courts was unclear. In June 2009, a legal amendment put an end to this uncertainty, and military personnel became subject to the jurisdiction of civilian courts in peacetime for offenses regulated by the Code of Criminal Procedure, including staging coups and organized crimes, even if the offense was committed in military lieu. Nevertheless, this hastily made amendment violated constitutional provisions regulating the military courts. After the referendum of September 2010, this contradiction was resolved by amending Article 145 of the 1982 Constitution, and the military personnel prosecuted in the Ergenekon case and coup plot trials were put on trial in civilian courts.

The role of the police force in the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases also deserves mentioning. The military members were brought to the courts through intense and unsettling police raids (Jenkins 2009a: 36; Karaveli 2009), which from time to time turned into a display of power by the police over military officers. The police force's role in these cases went far beyond being a law enforcement body. They obtained evidence illegally, at times even fabricated it. For instance, it later became apparent that police officers had uploaded the telephone numbers of the members of Hizb ut-Tahrir terrorist organization to Mehmet Ali Çelebi’s (a helicopter pilot charged in the Ergenekon trial) mobile phone – when he handed his phone into the Istanbul Police Directorate.

Lurking underneath the power of civilian judges over the military officers was, in fact, the supremacy of the police's power over the army. The police-army encounter that took place in these court cases was part of a significant confrontation between these two institutions, reflecting a broader change in the preferred security apparatus of the state. Under the JDP rule, the authority of the police was extended with the amendment of the Anti-Terror Law in June 2006 and of the Law on the Powers and Duties of the Police in June 2007. The Domestic Security Package of March 2015, meanwhile, broadened the police’s right to use firearms, a right which would continue after the July 15 abated coup. As Ayfer Genç Yılmaz (2020: 146-149) argues, the police slowly emerged not as an assisting force, but as a competing force against the TAF as the balance between civilians and the military was distorted in the early 2000s.

Pertaining to procedures, in the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases the military officers were not prosecuted on the basis of regular criminal procedures, but were subjected to discriminatory practices. Until their abolishment in 2014, special assize courts pended the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases. Founded in June 2004, these penal courts were extensions of the infamous State Security Courts, which were authorized to try cases concerning national security; yet, in fact, they served in purging political opposition (Polat 2016: 95). While special assize courts had similar competencies with the State Security Courts, they were wholly composed of civilian judges. Moreover, special assize courts restricted the defense and denied the accused some of the rights concerning due process, which were constitutionally protected. Mainly, arrest periods were longer; keeping the suspects in pre-trial detention for years in the absence of concrete
evidence was routine. In addition the secrecy clause effectively obstructed the defense attorney's access to the case file. Additionally, the preparation of indictments lasted months. At the time of their submission to the courts, the indictments were thousands of pages long. For instance, the first indictment in the Ergenekon case was 2,455 pages long, with an additional 441 files of evidence. The second indictment was 1,909 pages long, with 248 additional files of evidence, and the third was 1,454 pages long (Jenkins 2009). This situation created the impression to defense attorneys that the lengthy indictments were intentional to discourage a close engagement with the evidence. In March 2014, the special assize courts were abolished and the case files in the Ergenekon case and coup plot trials were transferred to regular assize courts. However, the majority of the proceedings in the Ergenekon case would already be over by then.

The last component of practices is the performative character of trials. The court’s performance firstly attempted to show the public that the courts were working. Secondly, it attempted to convince the public of the suspects’ guilt (this aspect was particularly at the forefront in the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases). Authorities involved in the investigations and prosecutions leaked sensitive evidence to the pro-government media, thereby having the suspects already convicted in the court of public opinion (Polat 2016: 97). On TV channels, the public could also follow the police raids and searches on military premises by police. Nevertheless, the participation of the public was deterred in the Ergenekon case firstly by court decisions, and secondly due to the physical conditions of the case (inside the campus of Silivri Penal Institution located on the outskirts of Istanbul). One possible reason for this precaution was to avoid anti-government protests as widespread opposition was still lively at that time. There were indeed protests in front of the Silivri Penal Institution in Istanbul, as well as in Ankara and Izmir on the day that the court announced its verdict in the Ergenekon trial.

Additionally, terrorism discourse has played a critical performative role in the prosecutions. The Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases affected the public’s stance towards the military. The literature contributes the legitimacy for the military’s involvement in politics in the public’s trust to the military (Gürsoy 2015: 111). Bardakçı (2013: 412, 417) argues that the key to the TAF’s guardian role was its high esteem within society. The terrorism investigations undermined the dignity of military officers and discredited them in the public eye. The Ergenekon case highlighting the military’s involvement in many of the infamous crimes of the past not only unnerved the public, but also challenged the army’s positive image in the eye of the public. As Serdar Kaya (2012: 153) shows, the image of a “terrorist military chief” or a “murderous military” suggested to the people the necessity to question the place and meaning of the TAF as the nation’s hero. Moreover, in order to damage the reputation of military members, illegal wiretaps against those entangled in the Ergenekon case were leaked to pro-JDP and pro-Gülen media, including intimate details of their private lives such as marital infidelity (Cagaptay, February 25, 2010). As a result, there was a significant decrease in public confidence in the armed forces according to the public opinion surveys conducted after 2007. Yaprap Gürsoy (2015: 108) demonstrates that whereas the level of trust in the TAF was over 90 percent in 2005, it had diminished to 69 percent in 2010.

Regarding purpose, the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases are destructive trials. Accordingly, the government initiated the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases against the pro-secular groups in the TAF to decrease their power (Balci, Jacoby 2012: 138). Another
line of thought asserted that the target group was not only limited to the TAF members; the trials and the arrests also aimed to eliminate the secular opposition in society (Gürsoy 2015: 119). Detention of prominent secular critics of the government, along with possible legitimate criminals, was the fundamental reason behind this fear (Eligür 2010: 273). Therefore, the JDP government launched the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases to round up social dissidents in general by criminalizing dissidents as coup-plotters (Karaveli 2009).

Nevertheless, the course of the court cases implies that the elimination of the adversary may not have been the single political motivation behind the prosecutions. Firstly, the court cases lasted far too long to knock down a single adversary. Secondly, the Ergenekon case swung from punishment to acquittal, and the Sledgehammer case was reopened, showing the absence of a foreordained decision for defendants either in the direction of penalizing or releasing them. A closer look may detect other political motives behind the cases besides the destruction of an adversary. The Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases were used as an instrument to regulate and exert influence on civil-military relations. Besides the legal reforms against military bureaucracy, the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases directly intervened in the line of promotions and retirements, leading to a new design in the military hierarchy. With mass arrests and pre-trial detentions, military cadres were vacated and Gülenist officers filled the positions (Kardas, Balci 2019: 9). This explains why the courts in these cases made pre-trial detention almost a rule. In this context, the former Chief of the General Staff Işık Koşaner stated that he took every step in the direction to release military officers pending trial, yet negotiations with the government yielded no result. As such, the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases can be deemed as decisive trials.

The Ergenekon case led to the arrest of one-tenth of the TAF’s generals and admirals as of 2011 (Gürsoy 2012: 736). The Sledgehammer case negatively affected a total of 188 generals and staff officers in active duty, ending the careers of the overwhelming majority through retirements and dismissals. To practically see how the criminal prosecutions interfered with military administration, one can refer to the Supreme Military Council meetings, which took place annually. In 2010, 11 generals mentioned in the Sledgehammer investigation were not promoted, and the First Army Commander Hasan Iğsız, who was summoned to testify in coup plot investigations, was not appointed as the Commander of the Land Forces. In 2011, then-Chief of the General Staff Işık Koşaner and all the force commanders resigned shortly before the meeting of the Council. While commenting on his resignation, Koşaner explained that he did not want to be responsible for forcing his fellow soldiers to retire due to their involvement in Ergenekon or Sledgehammer investigations. Indeed, in 2012 the next Chief of the General Staff Necdet Özel pensioned off 40 generals and admirals who were in pre-trial detention. Similarly, the commander of Gendarmerie Bekir Kalyoncu, who was expected to become the commander of the land forces in 2013, retired due to his prosecution in the Ergenekon case. Retirements or dismissals did not end after the dissolution of the Gülen community-JDP alliance and the recognition of terrorism cases as conspiracies. Even after the Constitutional Court ruled for a retrial in the Sledgehammer case in June 2014, 12 generals and admirals on active duty, who were charged in the Sledgehammer and Ergenekon cases, retired in the Supreme Military Council meeting of August 2014. In 2015, only 3 of the 46 military officers, who were
standing in the Sledgehammer case no longer as defendants but as injured parties, were promoted.42

**Practices and Purposes: The July 15 Attempted Coup Case**

Concerning the power component of trials, the role of the police in bringing the suspects to court was also visible in the July 15 attempted coup case. In this case, the police staged large-scale anti-Fetullahist Terror Organization operations in the TAF immediately after the coup attempt, which continues to this day. Until November 15, 2019, 14,433 military members were taken into custody and suspended from duty; around 4,400 were later arrested (Akgün 2020: 14). The government’s backing of the police force vis-a-vis the army continued after the coup attempt. Capacity and effectiveness of the police were further reinforced with the establishment of the Auxiliary Task Force Police Unit, first in the capital in July 2018, then in Istanbul two years later. The most recent legislation of January 2021, meanwhile, gave the police force access to any military equipment in the stock of the TAF upon the demand of the minister of interior in times of social incidents deemed as a threat to national security, which solidified the police as a paramilitary organization.43

Regarding procedures, the July 15 attempted coup investigations were conducted during the state of emergency, and trials were held under the presidential system. On July 21, 2016 the government shelved the European Convention on Human Rights. It suspended the suspects’ and defendants’ constitutional rights in October 2016 by amending the Turkish Code of Criminal Procedure number 5271 and the Anti-Terror Law number 3713. Following these changes, prosecutions could include extended detention periods without judicial review: police officers were present during interviews between detainees and defense counsel, documents and records used during the interview could be seized, and the courts could read the summary of long indictments. Nevertheless, no extraordinary court was established; court proceedings were public, and retroactive law was not used.

In the July 15 attempted coup case, the performative act of the courts looms over the components of power and procedure. An overly dramatized prosecution process and the amplification of the propagandistic impact of trials intended to show not only that the courts were working, but also the guilt of the suspects. Excessive numbers of security personnel were present in the court halls, even though the suspects’ hands were already handcuffed, giving the image that they were tremendously dangerous people who could flee at any time. In the July 15 attempted coup case, scenes of torture and ill-treatment of the generals were also disseminated by all means of media. Terrorism discourse, meanwhile, mostly concerned the construction of deviance. The courts worked to show the public the otherness of those in the dock, particularly from the TAF and from the nation. As stated before, the courts distinguished the members of the army from the terrorists/traitors, who disguised themselves – according to the official discourse – in military uniforms to stage a coup. Such depictions precipitated an understanding of the events on July 15 as a military coup without military participation (Scen 2020: 59). As such, the July 15 attempted coup case and its representation provided the remaining cadres of the TAF with an exit from humiliation.

In fact, the official narrative about the coup attempt punctuates the otherness of those in the dock from the nation. Accordingly, the Fetullahist Terror Organization was
depicted as an instrument of western powers – primarily the USA – and its actions constituted an act of foreign invasion (Akkaya 2020: 195, 196). The narrative also emphasized that the coup attempt failed because of the popular resistance that followed the call by President Erdoğan, which was aired on live television, despite the evidence that the larger body of the TAF did not support the coup and actively resisted it (Siyaves 2016: 465). As stated in the Joint Declaration of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, the nation “[...] stood against and thwarted this bloody coup attempt” and “protected the Republic of Türkiye and its institutions at the cost of its life” (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi’nin Ortak Bildirisi 2016). Hence, citizens as natural born soldiers without a uniform faced terrorists/traitors with a military uniform, who took orders from foreign powers, and attacked the unity of state with its own people. The construction of “Cemetery of Traitors” by Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Kadir Topbaş for the killed putschists and the burial of the corpse of a lieutenant there ten days after the coup attempt was an example of this segregation.44

45 The July 15 attempted coup case was a continuation of this face-off between the nation as the savior of the homeland, and the defendants as the terrorists/traitors. Especially at the initial stages of the prosecutions, the courts created an image that they were merely servants of the gallant nation, who was implied to be the actual victor against the terrorists/traitors. According to this narrative, the nation’s desires would shape the courts’ decisions. In clear contrast to the Ergenekon case, gymnasiums were transformed into court halls or new court rooms were built close to city centers to facilitate the public’s participation in the court hearings. For instance, in Ankara, new courtrooms were constructed within the Sincan Prison compound so that multiple attempted coup trials with hundreds of defendants and spectators could be held simultaneously (Akgün 2020: 152). Crowds were allowed to gather outside the court halls and harass the defendants while they entered the buildings. Moreover, they voiced their demands concerning the courts’ judgments. One scene of public engagement was people chanting for the reenactment of the death penalty; another involved people holding posters before the courtrooms and demanding a specific dress code for coup plotters as a way to humiliate them (fig.1).45 State sponsorship of the gatherings before the court halls was noteworthy. Transportation to and from the court halls were provided mainly by municipalities free of charge. In the summer, municipalities pitched tents in front of the court halls to comfort the spectators while they waited outside, and procured food and beverage for them.
Similar to the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases, the primary purpose of the July 15 attempted coup case was the destruction of the opponent. This case constitutes a direct continuation of the government’s counter-terrorism campaign in order to destroy an old ally, Gülen Community, who had betrayed the JDP. Nevertheless, the rate of acquittals in the July 15 attempted coup case is as high as 32.8 percent, with those who received no sentence at 11.1 percent. This suggests that the courts did not sentence 44 percent of the defendants overall. Additionally, 40.5 percent of those acquitted were soldiers (Ergin, July 15, 2022). While it is assuredly injustice towards the suspects who were charged and put behind bars for months or years in pretrial detention for no reason, these numbers also hint that the case was also used for purposes other than eliminating those who came before the judges. A closer look may detect equally, if not more significantly, social and political motives behind the July 15 attempted coup case.

Undoubtedly, the July 15 attempted coup case interrupted the top-brass of the TAF. Among those who received life sentences, 1761 were former military officers, including 109 generals. However, the military hierarchy was reshaped mainly through purges based on decrees, not necessarily by criminal prosecutions. Against this backdrop, the political role of this case can best be seen within the context of state-society relations as it is highly circumscribed by the sociopolitical developments surrounding it. Accordingly, a didactic trial could also describe the July 15 attempted coup case. For decades, the Gülen Community had managed to weave a pronounced network of followers within the population (Şen 2020: 59). While branding the defendants as Gülenist terrorists/traitors, the July 15 attempted coup case undertook the task of scapegoating and ostracizing them as the guilty party. Hence, the court case gave the public and the state the chance to isolate themselves from the Gülen community. The ultimate aim was to restore social cohesion and unity between state and society around the JDP and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In that sense, scenes of public enthusiasm outside the court halls can be juxtaposed to that of the people convening in the Democracy and Martyrs Rallies or democracy watches. In the first instance, the people
were pushing for the terrorists/traitors to get what they deserved and in the second instance, pushing for national will and democracy.

48 The role of the courts in penning a narrative surrounding the abortive coup is worth mentioning. The indictments made an analogy between the May 27, 1960 coup and the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. The main claim was that these two instigations were alike in their form and structure: both were organized out of the military chain of command, and the military junta consisted of 38 individuals. Indeed, the indictment of the General Staff Roof trial stated that some of the putschists closely studied how the May 27 coup had been put into action, and then replicated it. Moreover, it was also claimed that the seeds of the Gülen community were planted after the 1960 coup, implying that the main perpetrators of the July 15 coup attempt originated in the post-1960 political environment.49 This comparison between the July 15 coup attempt and the May 27 coup has a clear political message. Throughout its rule, the JDP presented the ex-prime minister Adnan Menderes, who was executed by the 1960 military junta, as the main victim of the military coup and a “hero of democracy”. Against this background, the analogy and the alleged tie between the incidents of July 15 and May 27 were attempts to construct Erdoğan in the image of Menderes as the victim of the military coup attempt and as a devout defender of democracy.

Generals in the Courts of Constitutional State

49 Instrumentalization of courts to exert repression is powerfully conditioned by the politicojudicial context, also determining the power, procedure, and performance components of the practices of courts explained earlier. At one extreme, there are show trials. This is the common name of trials that solely aim at retribution of the regime’s opponents (Christenson 1991: xviii-xix). The most known examples are the French revolutionary tribunals (1792-95), the National Socialist Regime’s People’s Court (1934-45), and Stalin’s Moscow trials (1936-38). The functioning of courts varied depending on the national context. Yet, the main instances of show trials occurred out of the constitutional order, and they completely broke off their relation to legality. Therefore, for Judith N. Shklar (1964: 148), these were thoroughly political phenomena and should not be considered legal events. Similarly, after naming them “partisan trials” Ronald Christenson (1989: 10) states that they were fraudulent and utterly unsupported by law. First, they did not even comply with the minimum standards of a trial, including the procedural rules. Hence, they lacked any legal agenda and implemented no use of legalism. Second, the entire court spoke with one voice. The prosecutor and the judge acted in unison. Moreover, the defense counsel was either barred or he/she was appointed by and collaborated with the court.

50 The court cases that are at the center of analysis here suffer from numerous judicial flaws such as leaking of information to the pro-government press, the pre-dawn raids of the suspects’ homes, long and unreasoned pre-trial detentions, fabrication of evidence by the police, prosecutors’ ignorance of evidence in favor of the defendant, and last, but not the least, torture and ill-treatment of defendants, particularly in the case of the July 15 attempted coup trials. Nevertheless, they also differ from show trials because basic requirements of a trial were met. Evidence of violation of an existing law was presented to the court, witnesses were heard, and the right to choose the defense council and right to speak were guaranteed. In fact, an analysis of these court cases
manifest turgid procedural rules rather than absent ones. This portrays legality and the constitutional state as the key parameters in expounding the prosecution of military officers.

The Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases and the July 15 coup attempt trials took place under a constitutional state. The principle of legality in a constitutional state, meanwhile, demands a law, an act made criminal by law, and evidence supporting the assertion of personal fault (Posner 2005: 101). The fact that the July 15 coup attempt trials took place during the exceptional conditions of state of emergency did not shelve legality and the principle that the governments cannot criminalize citizens for political dissent. Instead, criminalization of dissent was still justified because he/she violated a law, not because he/she was an opponent of the government. This twist is exactly what the power, procedure, and performative components of the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases and those of the July 15 attempted coup trials aimed to accomplish: aligning harassment of political opponents with the constitution, expressing a political issue as a legal argument, subsuming political agenda under legal agenda, and all in all, constructing illegality as legality. In that respect, these court cases come close to what Anthony Pereira (2005: 13-14) describes. They were not mere charades that glossed over the legality of the regime’s repression. They were legal exercises conducted by judges who believed in the legitimacy and coherence of the law. Prosecutors and judges of these cases made careful efforts to examine national security laws and apply them to concrete instances, deciding what was or what was not subversive. Therefore, while the prosecution of military officers in these court cases involved politics, they also remained judicial events. The nature and function of trials as legal institutions continued, although their functioning produced injustice.

A significant factor that influences the practices of courts under a constitutional state is the magnitude of judiciary’s dependence on and cooperation with the political power in question. Cooperative judiciary is an endemic problem in the Turkish judiciary. It is traditionally conservative, pays disproportionate attention to the security of the state rather than individual rights and freedoms, and favors the ruling party of the day (Özsu, Ertekin 2013). The Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases and the July 15 attempted coup case reflect the blurred distinction between the judiciary and the executive branch as they heavily relied on judges siding with the government, so that the court boards in Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases had replaced the presumption of innocence with the presumption of guilt. That is, proving their innocence against terrorism allegations became the responsibility of defendants. For years, judiciary-executive cooperation was covert in the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases, and only after the July 15 coup attempt was it officially accepted that the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer prosecutions were conspiracies “[…] established on the basis of forged evidence” (Department of Corporate Communications of the Presidency 2016: 29).

Accordingly, the Ergenekon trial aimed to bring the military officers, who stood against the Gülen Community in the TAF, to heel and liquidate them. Lawsuits and investigations served the purpose of tainting them as guilty in public opinion, and causing them to lose their effectiveness. Similarly, Gülenists in judiciary, security, and intelligence services were said to produce false evidence in the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases, using law as a weapon through disciplinary investigations. Hence, criminal prosecutions strengthened the existence of the Gülen community within the state (Yargıvary Cumhuriyet Başsavcılığı 2018: 15). They prevented the promotion of
certain army commanders, bureaucrats, and police chiefs, led to their dismissal from their respected professions as retribution, and placed the members of these communities to vacant positions. What has become the official narrative of Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases is traceable in the court decisions of the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization prosecutions. Accordingly, the objective of the Sledgehammer trial was to seize the strategically important commands within the TAF by the Gülenists. In fact, the Sledgehammer trial provided the grounds for liquidating the existing commanders and for promoting the Gülenists to their positions.  

Contrary to the Ergenekon/Sledgehammer prosecutions, judiciary-executive cooperation was explicit from the beginning and admitted to in the July 15 attempted coup trials, prompted by the sociopolitical context of the state of emergency. The cooperative judiciary in the July 15 attempted coup trials did not judge the legality of actions ex-post but interfered in the coup attempt that night and became an actor that shaped the trajectory of events. Only two and a half hours after the initiation of the coup attempt, the first investigation was launched in Istanbul, with Küçükçekmece Chief Prosecutor Ali Doğan stating that pro-coup soldiers would be detained wherever they were found (Department of Corporate Communications of the Presidency et al 2018: 11). The Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office ordered the arrest of pro-coup soldiers around 4 o’clock in the morning while the coup attempt was still in progress and launched the investigation of coup activities at the Headquarters of the General Staff, shortly followed by the Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office in Gölbaşı (Department of Corporate Communications of the Presidency et al 2018: 15, 17). In line with the judiciary’s political activism, the defendants were presumed guilty in the July 15 attempted coup trials, which was reflected in the judges’ public speeches. For instance, the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor stated that trials were merely a procedure, and those involved in creating the coup would be handed aggravated life sentences.

Conclusion

Civil-military relations in Turkey since 2016 has been a projection of the authoritarian regime prevailing in the country. The President has the authority to give direct orders to commanders and their subordinates, and he is the sole power in giving promotions to the lower ranks of the TAF and in appointing generals. This article has discussed that the establishment of civilian supremacy and presidential control over the TAF in the last two decades has been a consequence of the combined use of reformative and repressive instruments. The JDP deployed these two forms of governance in the field of civil-military relations in a complementary way so that repression of military officers through criminal investigations and court cases has never disappeared, even at the height of reforms. Therefore, rather than treating legality and illegality, consent and coercion, and persuasion and harassment as mutually exclusive rationalities, they were instead blended into the recalibration of civil-military balance of power.

The significance of this combined deployment of two forms of governance during the JDP rule is the judicialization of repression rather than reliance on bare violence, torture, or extra-judicial killings. The examination of the practices of the Ergenekon/ Sledgehammer cases and the July 15 attempted coup trials showed that even during the state of emergency rule, legality was not used completely arbitrarily by the judges. This point solidifies the courtrooms as part of the analysis of the civil-military
transformation and urges the examination of the intricate ties between judiciary and executive powers as well as the legality and politics surrounding them. In this direction, the politics of prosecuting military officers does not only focus on the intended purposes of revenge or retribution of the opponent, but also to the very practice of this judicial activity in which these ideas are embedded. The ability of the government to set judicial mechanisms into motion against a particular group to strengthen its position and weaken that of the opponent is itself a politically significant phenomenon, because the presence of cooperative judiciary conditions it. Acquired capacity of the government with this cooperation, however, is probative of the fact that criminal justice can be used as a political weapon against dissent under a constitutional state.

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The Decision of the Constitutional Court dating March 6, 2014 on Mehmet Ilker Başbuğ’s application no 2014/912.

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The Decisions of the European Court of Human Rights on Bektaş vs Turkey, Application no 70026/10.

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NOTES

1. ‘Turkey’s New Presidential System’.
2. The main limitation of the article, which is itself a symptom of the authoritarian nature of Turkey’s political rule, is the difficulty in accessing adequate data, and thus, having to work with impartial information on these court cases. Until roughly 2014, the media’s interest and attendance of the public was high in the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases, which reflected in the fair number of scholarly studies on these prosecutions. However, this interest waned over time. Especially after acknowledgment of the cases as a conspiracy of the Gülen Community, it is challenging to come across much-needed scholarly analysis that would reexamine and reconstrue the cases from the outset on the basis of their conspirational nature. When it comes to the July 15 attempted coup case, silence prevails in the academia to a large extent and it is the
Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (Siyaset Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı) that publishes studies on the case and tracks the trials. As Behlül Özkan (2020: 227) underlines, this Foundation is a partisan institution and JDP’s apparatchik, which disseminates information only reflecting governing party’s point of view. Likewise, state institutions, including high courts and the official news agency of the state Anadolu Agency, in their reports and news, use vulgar discourse and act as propaganda apparatus of the governing party. This point limits the amount of reliable data that the article can consult.

3. ‘Ergenekon Davası’

4. General Staff Roof trial was pended by the Ankara Heavy Penal Court no 17 and Akinci Airbase trial by the Ankara Heavy Penal Court no 4.

5. Since then, it is still unclear with whom the governing party made a new alliance within the judiciary in the rehearing of these cases as well as in the July 15 attempted coup case. For some (Akkaya 2020: 193) it is the Kemalists; for others (Alemdar 2020: 207) the nationalists. As a matter of fact, the details of the new executive-judiciary cooperation in the aftermath of the dissolution of JDP-Gülen alliance are likely to remain ambiguous until a new crisis or a new rupture in the governing block will open up an opportunity for us to learn more about inter-state alliances between different interest groups. That being the case, the article is cautious about making wide-ranging interpretations about court decisions, attending actors, and establishing direct cause-and-effect relations in the analysis of these politicojudicial events.

6. The most recent studies on “enemy criminal law” by Turkish jurists and scholars involve Şanlı 2019; Değer, et al. 2020; Özkan 2019; Erkan 2020.

7. For instance, Mustafa Rüştü Erdelhun, the tenth Chief of the General Staff, was tried in Yassıada Courts for misfeasance in office after May 27, 1960 coup. Similarly, after the coup attempt of May 21, 1963, 151 active and retired officers, including leaders of the essaying Staff Colonel Talat Aydemir and Major Fethi Gürcan, and nearly 1500 cadets were arrested and tried in three separate military commissions (Mat 2014: 349).

8. In contrast to that, trials in the 60s were pended at extraordinary courts. They did not last very long because of their extraordinary status. The whole prosecution ended within 13 months in Erdelhun’s case and 14 months in the May 21 attempted coup case. Also, trials in the 60s did not aim at upsetting civil-military relations, which had already been upset by the military coup of May 27. For instance, then-Prime Minister İsmet İnönü did not consider the May 21 coup attempt as an issue that required alteration of civil-military relations and therefore did not initiate reforms that targeted military administration (Esen 2020: 11).

9. The term “deep state” refers to powers operating with impunity through and beyond the official state structure. It is considered to be a network of illegitimate alliances intersecting the military, the police force, the bureaucracy, the political establishment, the intelligence agency, and mafia organisations (Ertür 2016: 177).

10. Article 6 of the Decree in the Force of Law no 668.

11. Article 36 of the Decree in the Force of Law no 669.

12. Article 45 of the Decree in the Force of Law no 669.

13. Article 104 of the Decree in the Force of Law no 669.


15. Article 203 of the Decree in the Force of Law no 694.


17. Even though at the beginning each alleged coup plot had its own indictment, they were later on merged with that of the Ergenekon case.

18. ‘Balyoz Davasında Karar Açıklandi.’

19. ‘Ergenekon Davasında Generallere Müebbet.’

20. The Decision of the Constitutional Court dated March 6, 2014 on Mehmet İker Başbuğ’s application no 2014/912.
21. ‘Ergenekon Davasında Tahliyeler.’
22. The Decision of the Constitutional Court dating June 18, 2014 on Sencer Baştan and others’ application no 2013/7800.
23. ‘Balyoz Davası’nda Beraat Kararı.’
24. ‘Ergenekon Davasında Karar Açıklanıdır...’
25. ‘Balyoz Sanığı 7 Kişinin Beraatı Bozuldu.’
26. ‘15 Temmuz’un komuta merkezdi merkezdi...’
27. ‘15 Temmuz şehitler Köprüsü...’
28. The indictment of Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office dating March 03, 2017, no. 2017/7327. The case files of these 38 officers were separated and later merged with the Akıncı Airbase Case. See Miş et al. 2018: 294.
29. The indictment of İzmir Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office dated October 21, 2016, no. 2016/2090
31. ‘Turkish court upholds...’
32. ‘FETÖ’nün Darbe Girişimi Davalarının Tümü Tamamlandı.’
33. ‘Ergenekon Coup Plot Case.’
34. ‘Ergenekon Duraşmasını İzleyici Alınmayacak.’
35. ‘Ergenekon: Silivri’de Protesto Eylemi.’
36. ‘Eski Genelkurmay Başkani...’
37. ‘İşte Balyoz Davası’nın Bilançosu.’
38. ‘YAŞ Maratonunda Hükûmetin Dediği Oldu.’
39. ‘YAŞ’ta Emekli Edilenler...’
40. ‘YAŞ Kararları Açıklanıdı.’
41. ‘YAŞ Erken Bitti.’
42. ‘Atamalar Hayal Kırıklığı Yarattı.’
44. ‘Diyanet İtiraz Etti.’
45. On December 24, 2017, the necessary legal changes were made by the Decree in the Force of Law no 696, however; to this date, it is unclear whether the single dress code is practiced.
46. ‘FETÖ’nün Darbe Girişimi Davalarının Tümü Tamamlandı.’
47. Accordingly, during the state of emergency rule 15,021 military personnel were purged, and between the period since the end of the state of emergency on July 18, 2018 and June 2020, another 4,462 soldiers were purged. See ‘Bakan Akar Açıkladı.’
48. Democracy watches was a period of state sponsored social mobilisation between July 15 and August 10, 2016. In this period, citizens were invited by the state to take the streets to safeguard the national will and democracy. Watches started in the early evening hours, usually get crowded before midnight, with some citizens standing on watch until the sun rise. The Democracy and Martyrs Rally took place on August 7 and marked the high point of this period (Şen 2020: 60-61).
49. Indictment of Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office, dating March 03, 2017, no. 2017/7327
50. There have been decisions of the European Court of Human Rights regarding the Ergenekon and Sladgehammer trials condemning Turkey such as Bektaş vs. Turkey, application no 70026/10; Mengen and others vs. Turkey, application no 44012/09; Yüksel and others vs. Turkey, application no 55835/09; Sağdıç vs. Turkey, application no. 9142/16. Also see the reasoned decision no 2018/43 of the Istanbul Heavy Penal Court no 25, 142.
51. Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Araştırma Komisyonu Raporu (Turkish Grand National Assembly Research Commission) 2017: 227. After the report circulated in the media, the
President of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey made a statement saying that such a parliamentary investigation commission had been established, but a report on which the commission members had agreed upon, and which passed through the legal processes in accordance with the provisions of the internal regulations, was not submitted to the Presidency of the Grand National Assembly before the official deadline had expired. Therefore, the report was not officially recognized and is not accessible on the official page of the Grand National Assembly. See 'TBMM Başkanlığı Basın Açıklaması’

52. Indictment of Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office dating February 9, 2017, no. 2017/727, 56.
53. ‘Başsavcı 15 Temmuz’un Yıldönümünde Konuştu...’

ABSTRACTS

The article examines the establishment of civilian supremacy and presidential control over the Turkish Armed Forces in the last two decades. It purports that such control was possible due to the combined use of reformative and repressive instruments. Under the JDP governments, intermittent legal reforms trimmed the political power of military bureaucracy and subjected it to the supervision of civilian administration. At the same time, the military was repressed through criminal prosecutions that affected scores of military personnel. In that way, the article supports the claims that authoritarian transformation of Turkey does not follow a sequential process where years-long reforms were replaced by repression in the state of emergency rule that declared in the aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt. Rather, the JDP deployed reform and repression in a concomitant and complementary way. In fact, repression of military officers through criminal investigations and court cases had never disappeared, even at the height of reforms. In this regard, the article addresses the July 15 attempted coup case and the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases separately due to the disparate political/legal contexts surrounding these prosecutions. It also aims to provide an analytical frame for examining judicialized repression in the form of criminal prosecutions.

INDEX

Keywords: civil-military relations, Turkish Armed Forces, political trials, authoritarianism, Turkey

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The Dual State in Turkey

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AUTHOR’S NOTE

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1 For some time now, Turkey has been a textbook case in the rapidly growing political science literature on contemporary forms of authoritarianism. President Erdoğan is invariably included in the shortlist of “strongmen” along with, say, Vladimir Putin of Russia, Viktor Orbán of Hungary, and Narendra Modi of India, who are often cited en masse as a way of referring to the global rise of authoritarian politics in the hands of elected leaders. The phenomenon is multifaceted, and so is the literature. Drawing on analytical frameworks developed in different traditions of scholarship, political scientists explore current Turkish politics under various rubrics, including “competitive authoritarianism,” “authoritarian neoliberalism,” and “populism,” to name a few.

2 Admittedly, these labels and related approaches shed light on certain aspects of Turkey’s political transformation. Without denying their respective merits, however, I want to suggest that they do not sufficiently capture the constitutional matrix of the
change under consideration. By this, I do not simply refer to the constitutional amendments of 2017, which created a super-presidency or “Turkish style presidentialism,” as its defenders have sometimes coined it. Equally or perhaps more important, is the fact that the new regime was born as a “dual state” in the context of an unbridled state of emergency declared in July 2016.

This paper explores the recent (post-2015) phase in Turkey’s autocratization process through a conceptual perspective based on Ernst Fraenkel’s classical study, *The Dual State*. Originally published in 1941, Fraenkel’s work offers a penetrating analysis of the relationship between law and politics in the early years (1933-1938) of the Third Reich. More specifically, it analyzes the concurrent existence of a “normative state” (*Normenstaat*) that somehow observes its own laws and a “prerogative state” (*Maßnahmenstaat*) acting arbitrarily and ad hoc on political decisions unrestrained by any legal norm. Despite its immediate engagement with the historical context of the Third Reich, Fraenkel’s work contains a set of crucial insights regarding the institutional logic and patterns of permanent state(s) of emergency, which are of significance to the study of contemporary forms of authoritarianism in general, and the transformation of Turkey’s political regime in particular.

To make a preliminary case for the thesis that Turkey’s political regime has evolved into a dual state, I begin with a selective survey of the recent works considering contemporary forms of authoritarianism. The following section introduces Fraenkel’s original conception of the dual state, and offers an interpretive outline regarding its analytical value for contemporary studies of autocratization. Portraying the post-election period in 2015 as a critical juncture in the formation of the dual state in Turkey, I then explore how a sweeping wave of securitization, along with the extensive abuse of emergency powers created an extralegal sphere and fostered a comprehensive institutional transformation towards a dual state. The article’s final section discusses what contemporary transformations have occurred in the broader context of Turkish constitutional history.

**Situating Turkey’s authoritarian drift**

The contemporary rise of authoritarian politics could be perceived as so globally pervasive that it seems plausible to describe it as a “new wave of autocratization” (Lührmann, Lindberg 2019). The growing body of work sparked by the erosion of constitutional democracies and the rise of new authoritarian regimes seems to highlight three characteristic features of contemporary autocratization processes.

Firstly, the incremental modus operandi of autocratization has shown constitutional democracies’ gradual erosion at the hands of elected leaders instead of penultimate death through momentous events such as military coups (Urbinati 2014; Levitsky, Ziblatt 2018; Rodríguez-Garavito, Gomez 2018). Scholars already have at their disposal a rich and ever-expanding vocabulary of descriptive terms that draw attention to this incremental process of autocratization. Terms such as “backsliding,” “decline,” “setback,” “retreat,” “recession,” “de-democratization,” “autocratization,” et cetera, are widely in circulation, each with their own nuances (Cassani, Tomini 2020).

Another point that stands out in the extant scholarship is the use and abuse of law, increasingly constitutional law, as a key factor in contemporary processes of autocratization. More often than not, deforming changes that substantially
undermine constitutional democracies and serve to entrench autocratic modes of rule take place under legal disguise through seemingly constitutional means, including plebiscitary practices of constitution-making and constitutional amendment(s). On this register, too, there is a set of new concepts, such as “rule by law” (Ginsburg, Moustafa 2012), “abusive constitutionalism” (Landau 2013), “autocratic legalism” (Corrales 2015; Scheppele 2018), “populist constitutionalism” (Blokker 2018), and “strategic legalism” (Yılmaz 2020), each of which uniquely draws attention to the instrumentalization of legal and constitutional forms in the service of autocratic politics (see also Huq, Ginsburg 2018).

Lastly, there is also broad agreement regarding the hybridity of political forms fostered by contemporary autocratization processes. Such regimes blend a range of formal democratic institutions (most notably, elections) with practices of autocratic governance, thereby creating hybrid systems categorized as “competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky, Way 2010) or “electoral authoritarianism” (Schedler 2013), i. e. systems in which “elections are real but not fair,” and it becomes increasingly difficult to replace incumbents even though they are not immune to being challenged on a political sphere.

As various studies have shown, the Turkish case overlaps in many ways with the preceding threefold picture (Özbudun 2015; Akkoyunlu, Öktem 2016; Esen, Gümüşçü 2016; Somer 2016; Çalışkan 2018; Yılmaz 2020). Yet, it also displays certain traits that cannot necessarily be easily categorized. While Turkey’s autocratization process unfolded incrementally under the rule of AKP, it was also punctuated by a drastic state of emergency from July 2016 to July 2018, which served as a springboard for a rapidly imposed regime change. The new, so-called “presidential” system was born in the context of an unbridled emergency rule through the abuse of emergency powers, which are “dictatorial” powers in the classic sense of the term (Arato 2014; Schmitt 2014). Further, the aforementioned use and abuse of law have played a crucial role in Turkey’s autocratization process, but so has extralegality, to be discussed shortly. Law has not only been abused but also set aside when seemingly expedient to do so.

Harkening back to before the state of emergency, Turkey was in a process of “deconstitutionalization” fostered by President Erdoğan and the ruling AKP through deliberate and systematic breaches of the constitution (Kaboğlu 2013, Gözlü 2016). From 2015 onwards, the process of deconstitutionalization, interlocked with a sweeping wave of securitization, culminated in a nationwide state of emergency that institutionally regulated extralegality through executive decrees exempt from judicial review (Kaygusuz, Aydin 2020). Therefore, it is imperative to explore this type of institutional hybridity arising from Turkey’s autocratization from a constitutional point of view, paying due attention to the formation of a dual state.

**The dual state: what it is and why it matters**

In the 1974 Preface to the belated German edition of *The Dual State* (1941) Ernst Fraenkel reflects on what originally stimulated the main idea of the work:

Anyone who did not shut his or her eyes to the reality of the Hitler dictatorship’s administrative and judicial practices, must have been affected by the frivolous cynicism with which the state and the [Nazi] party called into question, for entire spheres of life, the validity of the legal order while, at the same time, applying, with
bureaucratic exactness, exactly the same legal provisions in situations that were said to be different. Based on the insights into the functioning of the Hitler regime that I gleaned from my legal practice, I believed to have found a key to understanding the National Socialist system of rule in the duality or concurrent existence of a “normative state” (Normenstaat) that generally respects its own laws, and a “prerogative state” (Maßnahmenstaat) that violates the very same laws. (Fraenkel 2017: xv)

12 The kind of duality that Fraenkel described in the above passage had for him a more personal – or one might even say, existential – edge to it. On the one hand, as a Jewish person and a socialist, he was among those who were directly targeted by the Nazi prerogative state. On the other hand, as a practicing lawyer, he was still entitled to sit at the defense table of the courtroom and joined the everyday functioning of the normative state, which allowed him to observe the metamorphosis of the law from within. Thus, extrapolating from his point-of-view of tangible courtroom cases, Fraenkel offered a penetrating analysis of law and its relation to politics in the early years of the Nazi dictatorship.

13 However, even though The Dual State was meant to analyze the immediate political context in which it was written, its lasting theoretical contribution tends to focus on the conceptualization of dual-system rule as an “ideal type,” one which sheds light on the “institutional logic” of permanent emergency (Meierhenrich 2018). This is also why perhaps Fraenkel himself subtitled the book as A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship, suggesting that the modern experience of dictatorship was tied to an apparent abuse of emergency powers to dismantle legal constraints on “the political” without necessarily abandoning the law.

14 Drawing on Fraenkel’s work by abstracting his insights from their immediate historical context, I underscore three aspects of the dual state taken as an ideal type: (1) The self-referential primacy of the prerogative state, (2) the normative state functioning only when the prerogative state remains silent, and (3) the normative and the prerogative halves of the dual state not corresponding to two separate bodies.

15 The self-referential primacy of the prerogative state could be defined as it alone deciding the scope of its own mandate. The prerogative state addresses itself exclusively to matters of national security, but what counts as a matter of national security is exclusively decided by the prerogative state (hence its essential relation to “securitization,” elaborated on further). Since its mandate is not subject to effective judicial control on the basis of foreseeable norms, the power of the prerogative state is limitless in principle. In effect, however, it acts within certain limits that bend at will, depending on the circumstances. In the dual state the limits of political power are not drawn by legal norms, but by the prerogative exercise of political power limiting the validity of legal norms. Or, in Fraenkel’s formulation, “the presumption of jurisdiction rests with the normative state,” whereas “the jurisdiction over jurisdiction rests with the prerogative state” (1941: 57).

16 The second aspect is that the normative state speaks so long as the prerogative state remains silent. In other words, the normative state keeps functioning in accordance with extant laws and regulations in cases and spheres of life which are not currently subject to prerogative intervention. Even though the prerogative state can interfere with anything and anytime does not mean that it will interfere; what is currently irrelevant to the prerogative state falls under the jurisdiction of the normative state. The latter has a regulative function that is indispensable to the integration of modern
complex societies. Hence, it is crucial for the regime’s societal legitimation. The normative state is productive in everyday life, thereby creating patterns of relative stability vital for the continuity of the dual state.

Thirdly, the normative and the prerogative halves of the dual state do not correspond to two separate bodies or institutionally differentiated structures within their own specific organs and agents. For instance, it is not that the courts are exclusive agents of the normative state, whereas the secret police are the agents of the prerogative state. Rather than the institutional differentiation of agents, the dual state refers to the institutional cohabitation of normative and prerogative functions. They are of two different operational modes inhabiting the same institutional setting and/or residing within the same institution(s). The same court may adjudicate ordinary disputes regarding property in accordance with extant legislation, while ruling in favor of arbitrary property seizure in the case of groups targeted by the prerogative state. In the dual state, most major institutions function in two tracks at once.

Based on these ideal-typical features, one could define the dual state as a form of autocratic rule in which law continues to matter. Yet, its application and sphere of validity are rendered systematically unpredictable due to the extensive use of prerogative power. Each component of this definition helps us differentiate the dual state from other political constellations.

- The dual state is a form of autocratic rule in the sense that it defies the basic tenets or the “historically valid nuclear meaning” (Sartori 1962: 860) of constitutionalism—most notably, limited government, rule of law, and the effective protection of rights—at a systemic level. On the other hand, or to put it the other way around, a political regime is not a dual state insofar as the constitution in effect not only organizes the exercise of political power, but also restrains it regularly enough to meet the minimal normative standards of constitutionalism.

- Even though constitutionalism is substantively undermined in the dual state, formal law continues to matter, at least in a functional sense, as a way of stabilizing social action. If formal law does not apply in a political system, a dual state does not exist, but rather a condition of pure arbitrariness. That is to say, “the dual state concept is not an illuminating and appropriate description of political regimes when the prerogative state rules with such an amount of arbitrariness and terror that law is either completely annihilated or rendered virtually insignificant” (Suntrup 2020: 16).

- While law continues to matter in the dual state, its application is systematically unpredictable due to the extensive use of prerogative power. There is a crucial difference between the predictable application of law even though its content is illiberal (which I call authoritarian legalism) and the unpredictable application or omission of legal norms, regardless of their content, depending on the changing expectations of the prerogative state (which I call dynamic uncertainty). The dual state is a regime of dynamic uncertainty rather than authoritarian legalism.²

This ideal typical backdrop makes Fraenkel’s work contemporarily relevant, especially regarding the use and abuse of emergency powers, the forms of hybridity fostered by autocratization processes, and the function of law under autocratic rule in general. The recent turn to Fraenkel from a contemporary angle (e.g. Sakwa 2010; Meierhenrich 2018; Tekin 2018; Köker 2020; Suntrup 2020) is therefore not unpredictable.
On January 26, 2016, President Erdoğan gathered district governors throughout Turkey in the new presidential palace for a public address. At one point during his speech, Erdoğan criticized Kurdish separatism, while at the same time emphasized that Turkey was a constitutional state genuinely committed to the rule of law, that the law of the land was binding for all citizens in the same way, and that all citizens, including himself, were equal before the law. Several minutes afterwards, however, he directly addressed the district governors, stating: “Here is what I ask you. Law may be this or that. Whenever required, set aside the law and put into effect your own mental revolution [zihinsel inkılap]. Say ‘I can do it anyway’ and do it. This is what it means to use the will.” These two statements, one confirming the rule of law, the other approving the legitimacy of setting aside the law, are contradictory. However, Erdoğan’s double utterance may also be taken as a statement of brute fact, i.e., a correct description of the country’s state at that moment. The law of the land was both valid and invalid, both applicable and negligible at the same time.

The context of the public address is also instructive. Erdoğan made the above-mentioned speech approximately six months before the coup attempt in July 2016, meaning there was no legally declared state of emergency in effect. Nonetheless, it was a turbulent time, and a lot had happened since the AKP had lost its parliamentary majority in June 2015 general elections. Negotiations for a peaceful solution to Turkey’s longstanding Kurdish question was brought to an abrupt end by the Erdoğan administration proceeding the elections, and violence resurfaced between Turkish security forces and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). As deadly armed clashes took place throughout the Kurdish provinces of Turkey, inter-party talks for a coalition government failed and the renewed elections in November 2015 resulted in the AKP’s regaining the parliamentary majority.

During the armed conflict in Kurdish cities, provincial and district governors systematically imposed curfews on the grounds that it was a necessary measure to enforce security and to track down armed militants. In the meantime, however, human rights organizations documented severe corporal crimes by security forces, including “excessive use of force, killings, enforced disappearances, torture, destruction of housing and cultural heritage, incitement to hatred, prevention of access to emergency medical care, food, water and livelihoods” (OHCHR 2017). A few days before Erdoğan’s aforementioned meeting with the district governors, the most severe and intense human rights violations reportedly occurred during curfew, especially over the five weeks from December 11, 2015 to January 21, 2016 (HRFT 2016).

When the officials in the meeting were told to set aside the law, they had already been doing so. Not only were the numerous violations against civilians illegal, but also all curfews enacted by governors in Kurdish provinces and districts were plainly unconstitutional. According to Turkish law, governors are authorized to impose a curfew only during a state of emergency, but there was no officially declared emergency at the time. What was in force was the prerogative state, acting outside of the law. Erdoğan’s double statement about the validity of law and the legitimacy of negating the law was in this sense a true proposition corresponding to brute reality.
I take the turbulent context of the post-election period in 2015 as a critical juncture in the formation of the dual state in Turkey. There is disagreement among scholars of Turkish politics regarding how to date the country’s authoritarian turn, with the search for turning points being criticized as a “fallacy” (Erensü, Alemdaroğlu 2018). In a sense, such disagreement is hardly surprising given the incremental nature of the autocratization process and the multiplicity of factors that have fostered it. To avoid misunderstanding, in pointing out the post-election period of 2015 as a critical juncture, I do not mean to feature it as the turning point in Turkey’s authoritarian trajectory in general. I agree that even the period of allegedly liberal reforms in the early years of AKP was imbued with repressive practices, especially at social and political margins, that the small-scale or capillary emergencies have been all too pervasive in the everyday life of discriminated groups, with police violence remaining a common occurrence. In addition, the instrumentalization of the judiciary for shifting political purposes has a well-recorded history over the entire AKP era. Large-scale political trials put on far before 2015 (especially those commonly known as “Ergenekon,” “Balyoz,” and “KCK” trials, which were handled by special courts under the political patronage of Erdoğan’s administration) attest to the fact that AKP has extensively used and abused law to criminalize or decriminalize its shifting foes and allies (Kaynar 2021). In short, some of the elements that make their way into the formation of the dual state, albeit in a new constellation, were already in place before 2015. What is it, then, that makes the post-election period in 2015 a critical juncture? In the post-election period, I argue processes of “deconstitutionalization” and “securitization” interlocked with one another in such a way as to foster a de facto regime best qualified as a dual state.

“Deconstitutionalization” – in Turkish anayasarsızlaştırma, a term coined after the Gezi protests (Kaboğlu 2013) – refers to a process in which the Constitution is stripped of its binding force as a result of deliberate and systematic breaches by constitutional organs refusing to comply with certain constitutional provisions as they see fit without facing legal consequences (Gözler 2016). This does not imply the abolishment of the Constitution as such, but the undermining of constitutionalism as a normative principle premised on the separation of powers and the protection of fundamental rights. In other words, the Constitution neither ceases to exist nor falls into complete desuetude in a process of deconstitutionalization, rather it loses its capacity to effectively restrain political power due to intense practices of “constitutional bad faith” (Pozen 2016).

It is hard to pinpoint when exactly deconstitutionalization begins because it is not an “event” such as a coup or a revolution but rather a “process.” The constitutional referendum in 2010, the inter-party negotiations for a new constitution from 2011 to 2013, the violent repression of Gezi protests in 2013, and Erdoğan’s presidency in August 2014, all contributed to Turkey’s deconstitutionalization in their own ways. The constitutional amendment in 2010 was a prime instance of “abusive constitutionalism” (Landau 2013) that facilitated deconstitutionalization by dismantling certain checks and balances and redesigning the judiciary for partisan purposes (Gözler 2017). The seemingly democratic inter-party negotiations for a new constitution from 2011 to 2013 also facilitated deconstitutionalization. Once the negotiations had failed, as they were meant to fail from the outset on account of unrealistic consensus requirements (Tombuş 2019), the existing constitution was politically delegitimized without being
replaced by another. The Erdoğan administration’s repressive response to Gezi protests in 2013 was a further step in the process of undermining “constitutional supremacy” (Kaboğlu 2013). In the face of extensive and extralegal police violence enabled by a “sovereign decision,” constitutional guarantees regarding the protection of rights had turned into parchment barriers. Having won the presidential election in 2014, Erdoğan persistently ignored the constitutional norms of the parliamentary system, urging that with a president directly elected by the people, Turkey’s system of government had now changed in practice; the constitution must conform to this fact, not vice versa (Hürriyet Daily News 2015). The process of deconstitutionalization was already underway when AKP lost its parliamentary majority in the June 2015 general elections.

While deconstitutionalization is often a necessary condition of the dual state formation, it is not necessarily a sufficient one. For the rise of a prerogative state exercising emergency powers outside the law, the political sphere must also fall under influence of securitization. On a rudimentary level, “securitization” refers to discursive and institutional practices by means of which certain issues are redefined as a matter of existential threat to national security and thereby taken out of the sphere of public debate and ordinary democratic politics (Buzan et al 1998; Balzacq 2011). When successful, it helps to justify the use of emergency powers in relation to the “securitized” issues and/or groups, and enables the “securitizing actor” to act in ways that would be otherwise impermissible both de jure and de facto. In the aftermath of the June 2015 elections, and with the end of peace talks, securitization in Turkish politics fully engaged (Özen et al. 2021), encompassing the entire public sphere, while at the same time firmly interlocking with the deconstitutionalization process that had already been underway.

The curfews were one instance, among others, where emergency powers were put into use without legal grounds, and the concurrent existence of two modalities of state action – one in accordance with the law, the other outside the law – came to be routinely visible. Another case in point is the internationally known “Peace Petition” released by Academics for Peace on January 11, 2016. The petition, endorsed by 2210 academics, publicly denounced the gross human rights violations committed by Turkish security forces during the curfews and urged the decision makers to resume peace negotiations. In a troubling response, President Erdoğan lashed out at Academics for Peace and accused them of supporting terrorism. Higher education authorities, most notably the Higher Education Council (YÖK) and the Inter-university Board (ÜAK), publicly stated that the petition was “irreconcilable with academic freedom,” that “supporting terrorism cannot be tolerated in any way,” and that “academic freedom cannot be abused to pose a threat to the existence, security and survival of the country” (HRFT 2019). University rectors retaliated against the petitioners by launching unlawful administrative investigations, issuing suspensions, and firing and/or blacklisting academics (Altıparmak, Akdeniz 2017, Tekin 2019). Some of the petitioners, especially those in small towns, were personally threatened by fascist groups and were forced to leave their respective towns for safety reasons. In one striking example, a threatened scholar who reached out to the police was denied protection (Bianet 2016a). This case was a textbook example of successful securitization, demonstrating the extent to which public authorities held legitimate dissent as detrimental to “national survival” and immediately identified it with “terrorism” (Baser et al 2017, Tekin 2019).
In the post-election period in 2015, deconstitutionalization and securitization entrenched one another, thereby generating a devastating cycle. The more the Constitution lost its capacity to restrain political power, the easier it became to criminalize opposition and to use counterterrorism measures against dissenting voices in civil and political society. In other words, deconstitutionalization facilitated the securitization of democratic politics. In turn, the effective or successful process of securitization provided decision makers and public authorities with a convenient pretext for “setting the law aside,” as President Erdoğan urged the district governors to do. Simply put, securitization legitimized deconstitutionalization. The outcome of this self-entrenching cycle was the formation of a dual state, in which constitutional norms were not altogether suspended but rather applied or omitted ad hoc, depending on political decisions and alleged necessities of national security. Turkey’s de facto dual state rapidly grew into a full-fledged institutional reality with the aforementioned abuse of emergency powers after the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016.

**State of emergency unleashed**

Turkey underwent a nationwide state of emergency from July 2016 to July 2018. The state of emergency was unbridled in a twofold sense. First, the executive branch went far beyond the limits of emergency powers provided in the Constitution, and usurped both legislative and judicial authority through emergency executive decrees. Second, sharply deviating from its former jurisprudence, the Constitutional Court refused to review whether or not the emergency decrees were in conformity with the Constitution, thus granting the executive branch with a *carte blanche* to do anything as long as the executive considers it as part of emergency measures.

During the state of emergency, executive decrees were the main instrument of the prerogative state. The first decree of its kind, Emergency Decree No. 667, declared on July 23, 2016, established a set of unprecedented procedures for the unconstitutional and extralegal practices to be enacted, thereby creating a “manual” that served as the “real constitution” of the prerogative state. For instance, it provided for the immediate dismissal of public employees who were “deemed” to be affiliated with “terror organizations or those structures, formations or groups which the National Security Council has decided as acting against the national security of the State” (Emergency Decree No. 667, Articles 3 and 4) without due process. However, Article 15 of the Constitution explicitly states that “no one shall be held guilty until so proven by a court ruling” and that this norm applies in all circumstances, including “war, mobilization, and state of emergency.” Thus, the Emergency Decree created an extralegal sphere in which the presumption of innocence, a non-derogable right protected by the Constitution, was no longer valid.

The executive branch systematically used emergency decrees for both “punitive” and “legislative” purposes (Altıparmak et al. 2018). On the punitive plane, a total of 125,678 public employees were dismissed from civil service for life, and more than 5,000 legal entities – including associations, foundations, media corporations, private schools and universities – faced other sanctions such as closure and seizure of property, all via emergency decrees bypassing due process and judiciary rulings. On the legislative plane, emergency decrees were widely instrumentalized for making permanent changes in the extant law, a practice that brought about more than a thousand
amendments in national legislation. A comprehensive survey of these amendments reveals that a majority "are in no way related to the reasons prompting the declaration of the state of emergency," and they "introduced changes in order to restructure state-society relations in such diverse areas as national defense, internal security, state personnel regime, economy and social security, administrative structure, education and health" (Akça et al. 2018: 7).

The grievances arising from emergency decrees were taken to the Constitutional Court, which ruled that it did not have the power to test emergency decrees on the ground of Article 148 (§1) of the Turkish Constitution, according to which “presidential decrees issued during a state of emergency or in time of war shall not be brought before the Constitutional Court alleging their unconstitutionality as to form or substance.” Notwithstanding Article 148, this was an obvious deviation from the previously established jurisprudence of the Court. Developed in the early 1990's, the former jurisprudence of the Court was premised on the opinion that Article 148 applied so far as emergency decrees were actually in accordance with the constitutional provisions regulating the purpose, location and time frame of the state of emergency. Göztepe (2018) offers a succinct summary of the normative framework developed in these decisions (parenthetical numbers are added):

1. In a constitutional state, the emergency regime is not an arbitrary, lawless regime. It is a rule of law regime, limited with the constitutional provisions and the law in general. It stands under the control of the legislative as well as the judicial power.
2. Its aim is to protect the ordinary law order with means of extraordinary measures, but always within the limits of law.
3. Emergency decrees of the executive power should not exceed the limits of the aim of the proclamation of the state of emergency. They are allowed only to regulate operative matters in terms of state of emergency.
4. The general laws cannot be amended with emergency decrees since they lose their validity after the end of the state of emergency. The executive may only act with measures, but not with general regulations.
5. Emergency decrees only prevail to the regions that state of emergency has been declared in, for the specified state of emergency period. The objective is to resolve the cause of the state of emergency.
6. Even though the Constitution excludes the emergency decrees from judicial control, the Constitutional Court is authorised to determine the characteristics of them, meaning if they are actually in the scope of the state of emergency. Otherwise an extralegal area could be established.
7. During the judicial control, not only the Articles 119 to 122 provisions, but the Constitutional provisions as a whole have to be taken into consideration.

In short, according to the former opinion of the Court, the executive could not issue emergency decrees for reasons unrelated to the declared purposes of emergency, nor could they be applied outside the emergency location, nor in such a way as to be valid after the emergency was over; otherwise, the Court emphatically urged, emergency decrees could be used to create an extralegal sphere and the constitutional regime of the state of emergency would degenerate into an arbitrary reign of executive power.

When the Court changed its opinion in October 2016, and ruled that Article 148 must apply unconditionally, this proves paramount to the abovementioned degeneration. The new jurisprudence of the Court confirmed the primacy of the prerogative state: regardless of how the Constitution limits the emergency regime as to time, location and purpose, an emergency decree became what the executive branch decreed it to be. Unsurprisingly, the executive branch made the most out of this open check. For instance, Emergency Decree No. 676, the first regulative decree released two weeks after the Court’s ruling amended the Higher Education Law, abolished rectoral
elections at public universities, and authorized President Erdoğan to appoint university rector as he saw fit. While there is no relationship between the official purpose of the emergency and the appointment procedures of university rectors, the opinion of the Constitutional Court nonetheless affirms that any proposal could be a matter of emergency and hence exempt from judicial review so long as the executive deems it an “emergency decree.”

**Institutional cohabitation and dynamic uncertainty**

36 The primacy of prerogative power over normative regulations is a key indicator of dual state formation. Having removed judicial review on emergency decrees, the Constitutional Court’s fateful decision endorsed this self-referential primacy, thereby paving the way for a two-track institutional reality in which public institutions function in two modes at once: one in accordance with extant legislation, the other in accordance with extralegal measures. I describe this as “institutional cohabitation” of normative and prerogative functions, i.e., the concurrent existence of two modalities of state action within the same institutional setting.

37 The political history of modern Turkey is not unfamiliar with extraordinary institutions performing prerogative functions. For example, the notorious State Security Courts (Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemeleri), first established in 1973 but abrogated by the Constitutional Court in 1976, were restored after the military coup of 1980 and incessantly operated until 2004. They functioned alongside the regular judicial system, had their own procedures, and addressed political and criminal offenses deemed to be detrimental to the security of the state. These courts were meant to perform prerogative functions, and they did so in a special capacity. They were separate institutions endowed with special powers. In that model of what might be called “institutional differentiation,” extraordinary adjudication was demarcated from the ordinary judicial system, and the latter remained relatively intact, thereby ensuring a predictable stability.

38 In contrast, “institutional cohabitation” alongside the model of a dual state refers to a new condition in which the prerogative and the normative states do not have their own separate and specified institutional channels, but rather reside in the same institutions, which simultaneously function in two different modes. Courts notwithstanding, the extensive abuse of emergency powers through executive decrees mobilized the range of public institutions in such a way as to “adjust” them (reminiscent of the German experience of Gleichschaltung from 1933 onwards) to the duality under consideration. To bolster this claim, I will now briefly focus on a single institutional setting, that of public universities.6

39 During the two-year state of emergency, 6,081 academics were dismissed and banned from academic employment and civil service for life (6,055 from public universities and 26 from private universities) through emergency decrees. Dismissals were based on arbitrary accusations of “affiliation with a terrorist organization,” which were not verified before a court of law. The number of academics dismissed from public universities amounted to 4.57 percent of all academic staff employed at Turkey’s public universities at the time. This figure is proportionally lower than but comparable to the academic purge in Nazi Germany, where the loss was estimated 14 to 16 percent (Hartshorne 1937: 87-95). What is more striking than the cumulative number of
dismissed academics, however, is the way in which this extralegal act of the prerogative state was institutionally regulated and the extent to which universities themselves were involved in it.

Following the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016, the Council of Higher Education (Yüksekokşretim Kurulu - YÖK), the supreme administrative body in charge of Turkey’s higher education institutions, convened all university rectors for an anomalistic meeting in Ankara. Proceeding the meeting, the Council asked all faculty deans at Turkish universities, both public and private, to resign from their administrative positions, and a total of 1,577 deans complied without exception (Bianet 2016b). The official statements of the Council stated that it assumed responsibility for “coordinating and orienting universities” in accordance with emergency measures in general, and for ensuring the “cooperation” of university administrators with “local governors, police forces and other judicial bodies” in particular (YÖK 2018: 16).

Despite its supervising and coordinating role, however, it was not the Council itself that prepared the particular purge lists. Rather, as several statements by higher education authorities, including university rectors, clearly confirmed (BBC Türkçe 2017a, 2017b), the university administrations decided who were to be stigmatized and dismissed without due process as “having affiliations with a terrorist organization”. One might ask, in this case, how many public universities actually took part in the academic purge as an institutional agent of the prerogative state. The short answer is all but two. When the state of emergency began, there were 108 active public universities in Turkey. Among them, only two institutions abstained from the academic purge and dismissed no one (Boğaziçi University and Social Sciences University of Ankara). The remaining 106 universities were actively involved in the process. The frequency of dismissals by each university reveals a wide range extending from one dismissal (Galatasaray University) to 271 dismissals (Süleyman Demirel University) in a single institution. The purge was more prolific in some institutions as opposed to others, but almost all public universities were engaged in performing prerogative functions. It was not an institutionally differentiated agent of the prerogative state that solely carried out the academic purge, but universities themselves.

A further manifestation of the dual state is represented in the systematic erosion of legal predictability. In a comprehensive study of Fraenkel’s work, Jens Meierhenrich argues that the very notion of the dual state is an “analytical shorthand for the institutional logic of a particular kind of rule” (2018: 182). At the center of this institutional logic is the dynamic division of labor between the prerogative and the normative states, based on the primacy of the former. The scope of the normative state is constantly drawn and redrawn, shrinks and extends, according to the prerogative state’s shifting priorities and ad hoc needs. The institutional logic of the dual state undermines legal predictability without abandoning law as such. Thus, it is important to distinguish between the predictable application of law even though its content is illiberal (authoritarian legalism) and the unpredictable application or omission of legal norms regardless of their content (dynamic uncertainty). As stated before, the concept of “authoritarian legalism” refers to the substantial content of the law being incompatible with or detrimental to liberal democratic rights. However, the principle of legality is nonetheless adhered to, i.e., the law is sufficiently general, public, prospective, coherent, clear, stable, and practicable (Fuller 1964). In contrast, the unpredictable application or omission of legal norms, regardless of their content, is
another issue. It creates a condition I deem “dynamic uncertainty” which undermines the very principle of legality itself. The institutional logic of the dual state fosters dynamic uncertainty rather than authoritarian legalism. This applies to the current condition in Turkey.

43 The demise of legalism in contemporary Turkey becomes ever more apparent in courtrooms, especially in legal cases against human rights defenders, dissident civil society actors, and political activists (namely those persons and groups targeted by the prerogative state). Examples of these instances of judicial harassment are well-known and internationally monitored – e.g. the show trials against Osman Kavala, a renowned civil society leader, and Selahattin Demirtaş, the former co-chair of the left-leaning and pro-Kurdish HDP (Halkların Demokrasi Partisi). Among the common grievances reported in detail by independent observers are the selective negations of concrete evidence, drastically biased applications, or even omission of procedural rules with deliberately vague legal reasoning. In addition, the judicial process often reverses the presumption of innocence and compels the defendant to prove their innocence.

Even more concerning in terms of the independence of the judiciary, there have been instances where there were serious concerns about judges being pressured to reverse their decisions, and where judges who issued decisions acquitting and/or ending the arbitrary detention of civil society actors and HRDs [human rights defenders] have been suspended from those cases and replaced with others. (OBS & İHD 2021: 23-24)

44 Unjustified administrative restrictions on civic freedoms is yet another compelling case in point. In a recent study on “protest bans” imposed by local governors, for instance, Arslanalp and Erkmen (2020) explore how the frequent use of this specific administrative measure creates a dynamic form of emergency-like suspension of rights across national territory, which they coin “mobile emergency rule.” The protest bans work, they argue, by producing ambiguity:

Despite all the talk of rule of law, these governmental practices violate its basic tenets like clarity, prospectiveness, generality, and stability. (...) Ambiguity manifests itself in the shifting terrain of what, how, where, when, and by whom the government allows protesting. What is permitted one month, might be banned in the next month. The kind of activities disallowed may expand or contract in a matter of few days. In some cases the wording of the ban is ambiguous, allowing the authorities to interpret it as it suits their intentions. Moreover, ambiguity also pervades the enforcement of the ban by the police forces. (Arslanalp, Erkmen 2020: 956)

45 The reports of human rights organizations confirm this argument with solid evidence, particularly with respect to the wide range of ad hoc restrictions on civic freedoms, including freedoms of expression, assembly, and association (HRFT 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; OBS & İHD 2020, 2021). The message arising from these reports is conclusive: emergency rule has become permanent in Turkey even though the state of emergency was officially lifted in July 2018.

Conclusion

46 The idea of a dual state offers an avenue to analyze the seemingly paradoxical category of “permanent emergency” in concrete institutional terms. One lingering question is whether or not permanent emergency along the model of a dual state is something new
in modern Turkey, a justified question, given the extensive use of emergency powers in Turkey’s political and legal history.

47 In an incisive discussion of Turkey’s “tradition of authoritarian constitutionalism,” Işık sel draws attention to the fact that, in addition to earlier episodes of martial law or states of siege, “the state of emergency declared in 1987 ostensibly to restore order in two Kurdish provinces was renewed a total of 46 times in up to 14 provinces, and lasted until the end of 2002” (2013: 718). She argues that the 1982 Constitution was imbued with a sense of emergency. Nonetheless, making these remarks before the drastic wave of deconstitutionalization in 2015, Işık sel also notes the extent to which the Constitution plays a binding role in the conduct of Turkey’s politics: “the contemporary Turkish political system, in spite of its pronounced authoritarian features, seems to operate within the bounds of its own constitutional order,” thereby displaying a considerable degree of “constitutional discipline” (2013: 704).

48 A twofold assessment of this sort, on one hand critically drawing attention to the deep-rooted authoritarian elements in Turkish constitutionalism, and on the other, soberly acknowledging its certain assets, is not unique in the literature. Bülent Tanör, a prominent constitutional scholar and a staunch critic of the 1982 Constitution, for example, made the following observation in early 1990’s in the context of his seminal study on Turkey’s “problem of human rights” (1994: 149).

Despite all deficiencies and arbitrary leanings, there exists [in Turkey] a notion of “constitutional government” along with its institutions and rules. The separation of powers and the parliamentary regime are factual realities. The 1982 Constitution did not abolish them. As for rule of law, judicial independence and judicial review (i.e., administrative courts and the Constitutional Court), even though there have been regressions, the extant assurances and resources are still of considerable degree.

49 In the present context, however, neither an established notion of “constitutional government” nor the “separation of powers” can be said to exist in reality. In the same vein, the type of “constitutional discipline” emphasizing by Işık sel has become antiquated. The process of deconstitutionalization, intertwined with nationwide securitization since 2015, culminating in the formation of a dual state in the context of an unbridled state of emergency, drastically changed Turkey’s constitutional reality. Echoing the foregoing distinction between “authoritarian legalism” and “dynamic uncertainty,” the Turkish government’s current condition would not necessarily qualify as constitutionalism with a strong authoritarian grasp, but rather as the demise of constitutionalism as such. Compared to the historical record of Turkish constitutionalism, therefore, Turkey has been experiencing something new.
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NOTES

1. In Fraenkel’s account, as he emphatically states at the outset, what makes the Third Reich a dual state is not the duality of state and party, or the co-existence of the state bureaucracy and the party bureaucracy: “Preoccupation with the superficial distinction between party and state tends to efface the more significant distinction between the Normative State and the Prerogative State” (1941: xv). Despite this clear warning, it is a common misunderstanding of Fraenkel’s work to take the dual state as reflecting the party/state duality. For an early example of this misunderstanding, see Arendt (1968: 395); for a more recent one see Paxton (2004: 121).

2. A conceptual and terminological clarification is in order. I use the term “authoritarian legalism” in a specific sense quite different from what Corrales (2015) and Schepppele (2018) call “autocratic legalism.” In an illuminating analysis of how Chávez consolidated his power in Venezuela, Corrales identified autocratic legalism with the “use, abuse and non-use” of law. While the “use” and “abuse” of law for autocratic purposes may indeed unfold in a legalistic
manner, I find it difficult to classify the “non-use” of law (i.e., the deliberate or selective omission of existing law) as an instance of legalism. Not applying the law when and where it should be applied is not “legalism” by definition. Corrales admits this much: “The third element of autocratic legalism [i.e., non-use of the law] is, paradoxically, reliance on illegality” (2015: 43, emphasis mine). The problem is that, conceptually speaking, “reliance on illegality” is not a paradoxical instance but an outright negation of legalism. Instead of misleadingly treating the instrumentalization (“use” and “abuse”) and negation (“non-use”) of law under the same heading, we should pay closer attention to the simultaneous presence of legality and illegality. By “authoritarian legalism,” therefore, I do not mean the strategic or selective use of legal forms but the kind of situation where the material content of law is incompatible with liberal democratic rights (hence the reason why it is “authoritarian”). Yet, the law is applied in a sufficiently coherent and predictable way without undermining the principle of legality itself (hence the reason why it is “legalism”). The distinction is important insofar as it allows us to identify two different ways in which autocratization proceeds in relation to law, i.e., by transforming the content of law in such a way as to dismantle the system of rights and by undermining the principle of legality itself.


6. The discussion below, including empirical data about the recent academic purge in Turkey, draws on my previous work (Tekin 2019).

7. See for instance the profiles of rights defenders at risk at: https://www.sessizkalma.org/en/. The judicial process of the Kavala case is available at: https://www.osmankavala.org/en/judicial-process. For an assessment of the Demirtaş case, see https://www.expressioninterrupted.com/analysis-demirtas-case-as-a-story-of-judicial-harassment/. Although I cannot undertake it here, a detailed analysis of these cases through the dual state perspective would further demonstrate the metamorphosis of law in contemporary Turkey.

ABSTRACTS

Exploring the post-2015 phase in Turkey’s autocratization process through a conceptual perspective based on Ernst Fraenkel’s The Dual State, this paper argues that Turkey’s political regime has evolved into a dual system of rule, characterized by the concurrent existence of a “normative state” that somehow observes its own laws and a “prerogative state” acting
arbitrarily beyond the law. The paper begins with a selective survey of the recent work on contemporary forms of authoritarianism. The following section introduces Fraenkel’s original conception of the dual state and offers an interpretive outline regarding its analytical value for contemporary studies of autocratization. Portraying the post-election period in 2015 as a critical juncture in the formation of the dual state in Turkey, I then explore how a sweeping wave of securitization along with the extensive abuse of emergency powers created an extralegal sphere and fostered a comprehensive institutional transformation towards dual state. The article’s final section discusses what is new about this transformation in the broader context of Turkish constitutional history.

INDEX

Keywords: dual state, Ernst Fraenkel, state of emergency, Turkish constitutionalism, autocratization, law and authoritarianism, securitization

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Introduction

1 How have the agents who distribute clientelistic benefits and those who receive them evolved in Turkish politics since the 1950s? How have political parties responded to socio-economic and spatial transformations and how have these adaptations influenced party organizations, problems of democratization, and Turkey’s political regime? How has the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – The Justice and Development Party) been different from other parties in terms of its management of party-voters, and later, party-voters-state linkages, and how has this shaped Turkey’s political regime and the internal functioning of the AKP itself?

2 To address these questions, we focus on the intersection of party politics, socio-economic changes, and the historical evolution of clientelistic politics from the 1950s through the AKP era, by drawing on our qualitative field research on comparative party
organizations in Turkey. Our resulting arguments acknowledge the important roles that agency plays in shaping political transformations. However, our main theses come together as a three-fold, multi-dimensional, and historically-structured explanation. We highlight the interactions among a) the progressive decline of state elites and assertive local notables in sustaining clientelistic state-party-society linkages as a result of socio-economic changes (most notably, increasing urbanization and the rise of neoliberalism), b) the rise of the AKP as a "national machine" filling the vacuum left by this transformation and c) the fall of military-bureaucratic elites as veto players as a consequence of these transformations. We argue that these factors prepared the ground for autocratization under civilian rule and should be part of an overarching explanatory framework that accounts for the current moves back and forth between autocracy and democracy in Turkish politics.

We derive theoretical and empirical insights regarding the links between socio-economic transformations, party organizations, especially concerning how party-voter linkages are built and managed, how local and central party elites relate to each other, and broader political-institutional changes at national and party system levels. Based on a large body of research, we observe that clientelism has been a major, constitutive component of how almost all Turkish political parties (except profoundly ideological minor parties) have been building and operating party-voter linkages. "Competitive clientelism", thus, has been a decisive mechanism of party competition and power dynamics in Turkey. We also observe that major parties other than the AKP (partially, and for different reasons, also the HDP-Halkları Demokratik Partisi - The People's Democratic Party) have heavily depended on a "politics of notables," i.e. a long-standing political class of local power holders to develop and maintain their ties with citizens, especially in the province.

As a result, we note that, under the appearance of all-powerful leaders who dominate party organizations, these parties have had partially decentralized organizational structures and have depended on the personalities and social and economic resources of local notables in order to be able to function at local levels. While major structural changes have been perceptually undermining the power of local notables at least since the 1980s, we argue that the parties’ dependence on local personage (and, relatedly, mayors) has remained intact for the central administrations of parties like the CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - The Republican People's Party). In addition to these parties' own cultural and organizational legacies, the fact that they remained in the opposition throughout the 2000s has also contributed to this dependence. Party centers, thus, lacked national government resources to distribute to local organizations and this enhanced their reliance on local elites.

By comparison, the AKP partially drew its cadres from a more recently developed “political class” with less local recognition and resources. Hence, the party was able to manage clientelism based on a highly centralized and bureaucratic “national machine politics” where party officials think and work as party functionaries rather than local power holders. This organizational model helped the AKP gain the upper hand in the politics of competitive clientelism and pacify military-bureaucratic tutelage. It also contributed to the party gaining predominant party status in Turkish politics overall, which the party then used to create an uneven playing field for its rivals (for opposition parties as well as powerful non-party elites embedded in military, state bureaucracy and media) and to generate unfair advantages for itself and for its supporters (most
notably for its voters and party members but also for a large cluster of supportive business people).

6 In the background of these developments lie two-way and non-deterministic causal connections between broader socio-economic transformations, party organizations, and politics. The rapid industrialization, urbanization and rural-urban migration that Turkey has been experiencing since the 1960s have restricted the opportunities and effectiveness of the politics of notables. At the same time, it has generated opportunities for new types of clientelistic politics since the 1970s, through the rise of “well-educated brokers” in urban and newly urbanizing settings (Ayata 2010; Sayarı 2014; Unbehaun 2005). Yet, we would like to highlight that the reflections of these changes on political parties have not occurred automatically. Presumably, national machine politics was not the only possible product of these transformations. We first see the mobilization of political Islamist mass parties in the 1990s, and, then, the emergence of a splinter party at least partially as a by-product of authoritarian interventions by pro-secular veto players in elected party politics (Somer 2014). This new party, the AKP, appears to have tapped into long-occurring socio-economic transformations by developing the “national machine politics,” which in turn helped the party build a more capable organization in mobilizing its supporters and distributing clientelistic benefits effectively. Thus, the AKP strategically outcompeted the opposition parties who could not regenerate and compete with it.

7 What have been the consequences of this highly centralized and bureaucratized organization on internal party democracy and Turkey’s political regime and state-society relations? In tandem with the party’s increasing domination by Erdoğan’s persona, national machine politics stifled internal dissent6 within the AKP and produced a potential for growing authoritarianism. While the AKP turned increasingly authoritarian and eroded Turkish democracy by engaging first in stealth and nuanced authoritarian policies, then explicitly democracy-eroding ones; it also transformed itself into a major interface and intermediary between the state and citizens, who became grateful and captive audiences for the party. As the cumulative result of democratic backsliding that had started much earlier, by 2018, major political regime indices in the world no longer classified Turkey as an electoral democracy but categorized it as an “open autocracy” or “competitive authoritarian” regime (Esen, Gümüşçü 2016; Lührmann, Lindberg 2019; Somer 2016; Sözen 2019a; 2020).

8 Hence, the AKP’s dominance of state institutions such as the judiciary branch and other parts of bureaucracy increasingly resembled a “party-state.” However, in general, we argue and discuss that the AKP developed a more nuanced role vis-à-vis state-citizen relations: what we call a “popular broker-state.” In turn, we observe that the CHP and the İYİ Parti (The Good Party) mainly preserved the politics of notables. At the same time, the İYİ complemented this with new recruits from urban professional classes due to reasons explained below. Finally, the HDP stands out as a distinctly ideological mass party, which, however, is by no means immune from clientelism.

9 We also note that in recent years the AKP organization has been losing its competitive edge and spirit. The highly personalistic fashion in which the AKP built its national machine politics by concentrating powers in the hands of Erdoğan in the absence of meaningful mechanisms of accountability within the party might have gradually resulted in over-reliance on particularistic incentives for mobilization while collective incentives largely diminished. Such transformations have gone together with high-
profile exits (e.g. the splits of Babacan and Davutoğlu factions) from the party. These factions recently turned into new parties and threatened the AKP by becoming alternative platforms for office seeking conservative elites. Yet another major development weakening the AKP organization has been the creation of an authoritarian “hyper-presidential system” in 2017 (Özsoy-Boyunsuz 2016; Sözen 2019a). This shifted power from the party to Erdoğan’s presidential administration. Meanwhile, opposition parties such as the CHP and İYİ Parti have been trying to renew themselves through alliance-building, discursively, and, partially, organizationally, thereby posing greater electoral challenges to the AKP. However, we do not find that these parties have yet shed their reliance on the politics of notables.

In the following second section, we explore the historical contours of party-voter linkages in Turkey before the AKP. Following this, we analyze the AKP era. We conclude with a summary of our findings, arguments, and their theoretical implications to the topic at hand.

Party-voter linkages in Turkey before the AKP

Since the transition to the multi-party system, material exchanges among parties, their members, and supporters have been “usual business” underlying inter and intra-party competition. Beginning with the pioneering works of Sayarı (1975; 1976), Sunar (1985) and Ayata (2010) based on field research conducted in the 1970s, studies on Turkish parties have regularly referred to patronage politics as an integral part of party competition. More recently, quantitative research by a younger generation of scholars has demonstrated that clientelistic party-voter linkages continue to prevail in contemporary politics (Çarkoğlu, Aytaç 2015; Çeviker-Gürakar 2016; Çınar 2016; Kemahlıoğlu 2012; Marschall et al. 2016).

The politics of Notables

The predominant state-society dichotomy in the analysis of Turkish politics usually led researchers of Turkish party politics to focus on top leadership groups of political parties, national discourses, and ideologies. To a great extent, this tendency has inhibited a thorough understanding of the local sources of national party politics and its ills. These conventional analyses shaped by the center-periphery approach (Mardin 1973) or “state-society dichotomy” (Turam 2012) have, until recently, defined the ways in which we interpret the early Republican period and the following multi-party era. The idea of an almighty center and state in contradistinction with the segmented, heterogeneous, passive periphery and society has long dominated the works on Turkish politics until the rise of various critical theoretical approaches in the 2000s (Açikel 2006; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Turam 2012; Massicard, Watts 2013; Somer 2014; Aymes et al. 2015).

In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, a specific cluster of scholarship on Turkish local politics had already presented a picture of party politics in the periphery that was remarkably different from the “strong center-weak periphery” frame (Akarlı, Ben-Dor 1975; Çiçoğlu 1989; Schüler 1999; Varol 1989). More contemporary works have complemented these studies by demonstrating the widespread clientelistic and other practices in Turkish local politics that escape the control of central rational-legal bureaucratic authorities.
An important account in this regard is Michael Meeker’s seminal work (2001), A Nation of Empire, which is an excellent historical demonstration of local power structures in an Eastern Black Sea town. Contrary to narratives exaggerating the power of the Early Republican regime, Meeker’s account demonstrates how local social oligarchies have kept dominating the town of Of (Trabzon) even after the founding of the Republic. While at times these local power-holders fought against the pressures exerted upon them, they usually sought compromises and agreements with the center and its forces. In return, local power holders have been transformed into agents of the center while retaining a considerable degree of local autonomy that they defended against the center whenever they deemed necessary. In the multi-party era, these local power holders found an even larger room to manoeuvre since there were now more parties with whom they could negotiate. In another excellent historical and ethnographic study, Unbehaun (2005) reveals the considerable degree of local autonomy that Tuhfezâdeler enjoyed in Datça from the late Ottoman period until at least the 1970s.

Even in the 1970s, well after Turkey started its rapid industrialization and urbanization in the 1960s, works by Sayarı (1975; 1976), Kiray (2006: 272-302) and Ayata (2002; 2010), reveal the importance to party politics of powerful local figures across Anatolia. Sayarı (1976), for example, demonstrates how it was futile to search for party organizations in distant towns of eastern Turkey. Instead, specific personalities with traditional symbolic and economic resources dominated the parties and local party politics. As a result, parties in these settings were mostly extensions of local power struggles. Ayata (2010), in her comparison of an industrializing town and a more rural local setting towards the end of 1970s observed similar patterns.

The rise of well-educated brokers in the 1970s

Ayata’s (2010) seminal work on the CHP, however, reveals an important transformation of party-voter linkages in the 1970s. The socio-economic changes started to undermine the power of traditional notables, even in small towns, and paved the way for the rise of a new type of local elite that depended more on parties for their power, particularly in industrializing localities. This took place in the context of an import substitution economy, a highly fragmented party system, and shifting coalition governments, which together provided parties with more national resources to distribute to their clientele via loyal local party organizations and brokers. Compared to the dominant local elites who had access to considerable economic and symbolic resources of their own, these new distributors relied on their expertise and brokerage skills for political prominence. They had mainly become ideologically loyal representatives of the CHP, which had embarked on a more programmatic path at that time (Ayata 2010).

But socioeconomic and sociocultural transformations of Turkey were far from complete compared to advanced capitalist societies. Turkey was still remarkably rural in the 1970s. In 1975, only %41.8 of the population lived in provincial and sub-provincial urban settings (Tekeli, Gülöksüz 1983: 1232). As Mubeccel Kiray’s classical study demonstrates (2006: 272-302), while rural Turkey, especially suburban towns, was increasingly being incorporated into industrial urban centers and traditional local notables (such as aghas) were losing ground, a new type of still autonomous local
notables kept dominating the politics of rural Turkey. Urbanization was still a new process, and rural and local power structures were still able to reproduce themselves in urban politics and in urban peripheries in such metropolitan areas as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir.

From a broader point of view of regime dynamics, one important consequence of the “politics of notables” in Turkey had been powerful veto players embedded in the state apparatuses such as the army and the judiciary, who found a large room for political influence and interference in governance. “Politics of notables” and the rifts and shifting loyalties these created within and between the parties sustained a highly fragmented political class and party system that were vulnerable against the interventions of (ideologically and organizationally) relatively more unified establishment elites (military, judiciary, academia and high-bureaucracy). This continued until the consolidation of the AKP’s domination of the political system in the 2010s. Until this moment, Turkey’s regime was an “electoral democracy” (Schedler 2002; Lührmann, Lindberg 2019) with free and fair elections, but also contained powerful and politicized bureaucratic veto players whose role kept Turkey from consolidating liberal, full democracy.

The social changes since the 1980s and their consequences for party organizations

In the 1980s, urbanization accelerated, and in the mid-1990s, the rural-urban balance in Turkey changed in favour of urban areas. In 1990, 56% of the entire population lived in urban areas (İşik 1996: 785). According to the World Bank development indicators, the percentage of the urban population in Turkey increased from 65% in 2001 to 75% in 2019.9 It is unsurprising that this social transformation had profound implications for party-voter linkages, party organizations, and the regime type. The politics of traditional local notables became increasingly anachronistic. But reliance on the new politics of powerful local brokerage highlighted by Ayata was not necessarily conducive to building party-voter linkages in such a way that, for example, strong programmatic parties could establish full democracy free from military-bureaucratic tutelage either. Nor did such politics enable political parties to respond to the changing societal needs successfully. In the 1980s and ‘90s, significant portions of an urbanized society with improving indicators in areas such as education levels faced insecurity, inequality, and impoverishment due to neoliberal economic policies.

Local patrons struggled handling the poverty generated by neoliberal, consumerist cities. Urban poor’s expectations exceeded far beyond a squatter house and informal employment without being subject to harassment (“başını sokacak bir ev ve ekmek”). They now included expectations such as better health services, education, infrastructure, and decent accommodation. Further, local patrons and educated brokers – lacking the backing of a strong government and lavish public spending – progressively lost ground themselves. They increasingly lost touch with local constituencies in an economy based on service-cum-construction sector and the alienating/anonymizing impacts of life in neoliberal cities (increasing individualization of even the urban poor, deterioration of the traditional neighbourhood community in which face-to-face relations supported the survival of urban poor). Even in a city such as Diyarbakır where local, individual and non-partisan resources of candidates are seen as vital, the trend in the mid-2000s
was towards the weakening of the impact of local and personal resources of Diyarbakır political elite and an increasing role for “partisan state machinery” (Dorronsoro 2005: §56).

While these transformations paved the way for a new party such as the AKP with a new clientelistic strategy, this certainly was not the only possible outcome. The other parties – including new parties that had been founded – do not appear to have adapted to the changing environmental conditions the way that the AKP did. One factor that led these parties to continue their reliance on old methods of organization and increasingly weakened notables even in the 1990s might have been the party system’s high degree of fragmentation and volatility. These were often reinforced by personal rivalries among major political actors such as that between the center-right Doğru Yol Partisi (DYP-The True Path Party) of Tansu Çiller and Anavatan Partisi (ANAP-The Motherland Party) of Mesut Yılmaz as well as the rivalry between the center-left CHP and the Demokratik Sol Parti (The Democratic Left Party) of Ecevit. This suggests that many causal mechanisms and intervening variables such as political agency, ideology, organizational incentives, and party system formation lie between socioeconomic changes and their consequences on party organizations.

National machine politics was only one of many possible strategies for constructing party-voter linkages that a new political party like the AKP could pursue through adaptation or innovation in this new era. The possible responses to socio-economic dislocations and transformations could have been more, less, or differently clientelistic. Among potential responses were a reinvented Fazilet Partisi (The Virtue Party), the rise of a more programmatic center-right party than the clientelistic AKP or, in a markedly different scenario, the rise of a social democratic programmatic party. Addressing the counterfactual questions of why these collective actors did not or could not pursue these alternatives and how and why the founding elite of the AKP developed “national machine politics” is certainly pertinent. Yet, such an endeavour reaches beyond the pointed scope of this paper.

The rise of a political Islamist mass party and regime troubles in the 1990s

As discussed above, the politics of clientelism in the 1960s and 1970s had also empowered bureaucratic veto players in the military and judiciary who were deprived of local resources but endowed with expertise and bureaucratic power. Insofar as they could maintain some level of ideological unity and coordinate their actions, they remained strong vis-à-vis existing political parties and elected officials. Adding insult to injury, the organizational characteristics of the parties of 1960s and ’70s did not allow their elites to mobilize the masses against bureaucratic elites when bureaucratic veto players trespassed and interfered with the realm of democratic politics. They had not built direct linkages with their constituencies based on the party centers’ ideology, identity, and program (–i.e., autonomous from local elites and brokers).

In the 1990s, two deviations from these organizational structures emerged with the introduction of new and professional political marketing techniques and the rise of the Islamist Refah Partisi (RP - The Welfare Party), a dynamic mass party-like entity (Özbudun 2001). At this point, immigration already became a decade-old phenomenon and had already made traditional rural patronage structures hard to reproduce. Still,
however, new parties –most of which were actually refurbished versions of parties in the 1970s-- were far from grasping these transformations in organizational and strategic terms and kept mobilizing their supporters through powerful local intermediaries in urban and rural contexts. Only the RP, the predecessor of the AKP, was busy constructing a tightly controlled massive grassroots membership organization consisting of ideologically devoted members (Özbudun 2001; White 2002; Eligür 2010; Delibaş 2015). In the middle of the 1990s, the ideological “mass party” model (Özbudun 2001) that the RP embraced which bypassed the powerful local intermediaries whenever possible, proved to be a winning strategy.

Hence, the RP threatened the electoral democracy under military-bureaucratic tutelage not only because of its ideology, i.e., passive-revolutionary political Islamism oriented toward state conquest (Tuğal 2009; Somer 2016). As a mass party able to form different and tighter links with its base than its center-right and center-left counterparts, the RP was also challenging the power of the military-bureaucratic veto players with its unprecedented mobilization capacity. Yet, the latter considered themselves as defenders of the Republic and saw the veto powers they enjoyed against elected politicians as sine qua non for maintaining the unitary and secular characteristics of the state.

The rise of “national machine politics” and the AKP as “the popular broker-state”: the bases of the new authoritarianism

The AKP, to a great extent, embraced the fundamentals of the RP’s organizational strategies. But, the AKP also renovated these strategies in congruence with an increasingly mediated political climate. Public opinion researchers and professional advertisers (Baykan 2018) as well as recruits from center-right parties at both local and national levels (Ocáks 2015) increasingly became part and parcel of the AKP politics. In addition, links with, and later grip on, media and business, and the increasing concentration of power in top leadership, most notably Erdoğan, complemented the conventional methods inherited from the RP. This model helped the AKP keep its core, devout and largely low-income constituency, together with relatively wealthier median voters. While a massive grassroots organization mainly targeted the core, median voters were targeted via more professional techniques including a partisan media. Combining direct contact with the electorate through devoted and loyal party members and new methods of political marketing (Baykan 2018), this model was a successful electoral adaptation to Turkey’s social and economic transformations – especially when the other parties failed to adapt to their new environment. Nevertheless, it became, in a decade, the primary vehicle of an increasingly authoritarian regime. This organizational evolution was also a drift away from the old politics of notables towards a new strategy of clientelistic politics for the AKP: the national machine politics.

In our fieldwork on party organizations in Turkey, we met various AKP activists and members in different contexts. Their backgrounds reflected a mixture of national machine politics and vestiges of the politics of notables, but the former clearly represented the dominant, if not constitutive, element within the party. In addition, we also observed that figures within the AKP with a proclivity to autonomous behaviour
and a type of old-fashioned personal patronage had to conform with the general scheme of organizational behaviour in the AKP. As a youth branch chair of the party in a metropolitan sub-province (ilçe) of İstanbul asserts “no one can become a party executive in the AKP by donating big sums to the sub-provincial organization”. It should also be noted that widespread acceptance of interventions by the AKP elite in the AKP activist base has always existed. This acceptance has resulted from a combination of selective (access to state resources) and collective incentives (trust in the leadership and devotion to the populist-conservative cause) (Ayan-Musil 2010) as well as specific organizational arrangements (Baykan 2018).

The following two interviewees are similar to many others representing remarkably different characters and positions within the party. The first example, Sebahattin Bey (a pseudonym), is a well-educated elite coming from a wealthy, provincial notable family, – one of the founders of a local AKP organization. He represents older notable politics which quickly failed within the ranks of the AKP. In turn, the second, also a male interlocutor, is a neighbourhood representative coming from a financially underprivileged family without a graduate degree who worked on the administrative board of an AKP local organization and then as a neighbourhood representative in the city center. He represents the logic of “national machine politics” embraced by the AKP as the “popular broker-state”. The rather more predominant profile in the AKP is the latter since the party tasked talented and submissive brokers in local contexts with mediating the distribution of municipal and/or national government resources to supporters instead of local elites who deploy their own resources. But as the following Profile 1 reveals, this does not mean that the AKP excludes local elites with personal resources as long as they remain submissive to the role assigned by the party.
Profile 1: A failed notable/patron in the context of AKP’s national machine politics: Sebahattin Bey (1C5).

Sebahattin Bey, a wealthy man well over his middle age, received us in his private office, which initially gives the impression as if were a public office belonging to a high up politician or bureaucrat. He hails from a provincial notable family involved in politics for generations in a small provincial town in the Aegean region, which turned into a popular tourist destination in the 1970s (pseudonym “Seyidiye”). Sebahattin Bey entered politics in the 1970s through the youth branch of the Adalet Partisi (The Justice Party). Afterwards, he was close to center-right parties in power in the 1980s and 1990s and became a candidate for the parliament from the lists of the center-right DYP. He was also a founder of the AKP branch in a sub-province of Istanbul. Although Sebahattin Bey was from Seyidiye, after graduating from a prestigious university in Istanbul he started living in Istanbul.

Sebahattin Bey compared the AKP era with the previous decades and argued that local politicians and candidates had more say over party decisions then. But in the AKP era, “everything is in between the leader’s lips”. There is no doubt that Sebahattin Bey was a figure created by the “politics of notables” who prevailed in the decades before the AKP. When comparing these different periods, it was evident from his mood, wording, and narrative that he had some nostalgia for this previous way of “doing politics” and was a bit reproachful toward the new ways.

Later, it became clear that Sebahattin Bey invested a considerable amount of his wealth in his hometown. He told us that they, as a family, had investments worth 25-30 million Turkish Liras in a halal, non-alcoholic touristic facility in Seyidiye, and he helped many people in his hometown. Thus, although he migrated to Istanbul, Sebahattin Bey was still employing and engaging through other patronage practices that helped his stature in his hometown. But such contributions did not enable Sebahattin Bey to rise into prominence within the ranks of the AKP. Overall, the profile of Sebahattin Bey manifests an ambitious local patron who was sidelined within the AKP machine politics.
Profile 2: A loyal functionary of “the popular broker-state”: a neighbourhood representative in an Eastern Black Sea city (7C5).

This interview demonstrated to us the multi-dimensional relationships between state institutions, local party organizations, voters, and the AKP HQ. Muhammet Bey (a pseudonym) was born in 1975 in this Eastern Black Sea city as the child of a low-income, remarkably devout family with many siblings. His father provided the livelihood of this large family as a lorry/bus driver. Under economic difficulties, Muhammet Bey started to work and got involved in petty commerce already in his childhood. As he could not make it into the university, his commercial activities intensified. He also gained experience in various paid positions as a street vendor, pharmacist assistant, and jewellery and leatherwork salesperson in a touristic city on the Mediterranean coast. But “the lifestyle and culture that was far from spirituality” (maneviyyattan uzak yaşam biçimi ve kültür) in that city led him back to his hometown after he fulfilled his mandatory military service.

In 2013, Muhammet Bey met people from the sub-provincial (ilçe) administration board of the AKP. As their relationship developed, he got closer to the party. In the first sub-provincial convention, after he established personal connections with the local party elites, he was invited to take part in the party’s executive committee in the central sub-province of his hometown. Nevertheless, Muhammet Bey noted, some contentious relations within this particular party administration that led the AKP HQ to demand the withdrawal of the administration board. Muhammet Bey told us that most of the board members, including himself, found it legitimate and followed this demand by the people who previously selected them as members of the board in the first place: “What I saw in politics is this: it is very hierarchical. This is, of course, not blind obedience, but it is futile to try to hold on to some positions.”

When he was in the sub-provincial executive board Muhammet Bey was the sub-provincial vice-chair responsible for “social affairs” (sosyal işler başkanlığı), which is one of the key positions within the party’s local organization for connecting the party to the poorer segments of its constituency: “for one and a half, two years, by relying on the state’s power, I helped many people and received many prayers in return. We were content when we were poor but I know very well the difficulties of being in need” (Biz mutlu yoksullardık ancak muhtıça durumunun zorluklarını da çok iyi bitirim). According to Muhammet Bey the mediation of the party is necessary, in specific cases, for “solving the problems of citizens”.

Nevertheless, Muhammet Bey added that people could abuse the party’s “brokerage/mediation” function. In our interview, he gave an example of such a situation, which perfectly demonstrated the two-dimensional function of the AKP’s local organizations between local society and local institutions of the central state. Muhammet Bey related the story of a citizen in detail whose disabled son’s social aid from the state was cancelled. Muhammet Bey took this “uncle” (amca) to the local directorate of social services: “When the director saw the uncle, he smiled. I did not have power, of course. I was there with the power of the party, I had the backing of the party’s power. Therefore, since I went there as a party representative, the director had to be interested in the problem. Many types of income in [city removed] are not officially registered. The director of social policy examined the uncle’s case and found that he registered all of his tea fields on to his daughter (bütün çaylarnın kazını üstüne yapmış). So, I told the uncle that ‘uncle, if you want this money take it but this is another person’s right/benefit (başkasının hakkıdır); if but you want it, if you digest this (icine sinersede) I kindly ask (rica edeyim) the mister director and you take this money’. According to Muhammet Bey’s narrative this “uncle” got embarrassed after this encounter and withdrew his request.

One of the points that should be emphasized regarding this incident is that Muhammet Bey was well aware of the fact that the power that he deployed in this particular encounter was by no means stemming from his own resources but entirely the outcome of his position within the party. He also had a sharp awareness of the leverage of the party vis-à-vis local state institutions. Muhammet Bey was almost sure that his “kind request” in this particular encounter as one of the AKP sub-provincial executives would be taken seriously, almost as if it was an “order”. But, with a remarkably bureaucratic attitude, Muhammet Bey refrained from “kindly asking” this favour and respected the director’s expertise and bureaucratic records.
As our interviewee, Muhammet Bey, and other research participants represented, the AKP fulfilled a two-way role between citizens and the state. On the one hand, the party exerts tight, comprehensive control over the local state bureaucracy and brings problems of social sectors—no doubt those close to the party—to bureaucracy. Yet, on the other hand, the party organization, which recruits its “loyal personnel” mostly from popular sectors, supports and legitimizes bureaucracy by informing local society—mostly poor constituencies—about bureaucratic restrictions and functions and convincing people to respect them. In other words, party officials fulfilled a double representational function by representing citizens in their encounters with state institutions and vice versa. Therefore, describing the Turkish state under the AKP as a “party-state” is too simplistic, if not simply wrong. Instead, the AKP should be seen as a “popular broker-state”—largely separate from the state bureaucracy—which locates itself in a privileged position between state institutions and societal sectors in localities.

While Sebahattin and Muhammet Beys exemplify two distinct typologies—local notables type and loyal and submissive party brokers type—the two types of party elite can in practice sometimes overlap when some notables accept to function as loyal brokers. The dominance of the second type of elites, namely the loyal broker, within the AKP seems necessary to sustain the party’s country-wide, centralized and pervasive clientelistic operations, i.e. “national machine politics”. Hence, the party’s power and hegemonic impact might rather stem from a liminal position resulting from its double representation function based on loyal functionaries. A de facto or de jure merger of the party with the state institutions would undermine its credibility and hegemonic position. By contrast, the capacity to simultaneously act as if the AKP were an oppositional force by representing unorganized social sectors in local and national level state institutions and generating consent to the decisions of state institutions among the citizenry, while exerting tight control over the functioning of these very institutions helps the party to maintain credibility and good relations with both state institutions and society.

National Machine Politics, Tutelary Elites, and Political Regime

The AKP also struggled with powerful elite groups occupying entrenched positions in state apparatuses immediately after it came to power. After defeating these elite contenders based on electoral victories and democracy-eroding methods such as state-capturing, executive aggrandizement, creeping authoritarianism, and political lawsuits (in alliance with Gülen Community), the party started to more skilfully exploit and control public resources in local and national contexts. Thus, we observe an even more effective employment of national machine politics and the beginning of the internal transformations of this political structure itself.

The party not only distributes in kind (such as food packages and coal) or cash benefits to its clientele, but also establishes these clientelistic linkages in localities in a remarkably impersonal way by distributing “market cards” for example. These “impersonal” instruments of clientelistic exchange such as “market vouchers/cards” carrying party or other insignia sustain the “national machine politics” and inhibit the association of benefits with specific figures in local branches. The party collects CVs in its local branches and records them to a city-wide “pool” in Istanbul, for example.
party also provides its clientele with other benefits such as mediating their relationship with state institutions including social service directorates and hospitals. Wherever “people in need” (“ihtiyaç sahipleri”) visit an AKP branch, there are always people to provide them with information and guidance. Thus, in the eyes of the party’s clientele, it is the party that provides benefits. In other words, in the AKP’s machine politics, the sole patron is “the party” (“parti”) and Erdoğan. It should be also highlighted that such “impersonal mediation” between party branches, local constituencies, and local state institutions creates “multiple dependencies” among various social groups, including economic elites in retail and construction sectors, and some pro-AKP civil society organizations as well. As a result, the entire clientelistic arrangement becomes highly durable.

When the party consolidated its power at the beginning of 2010s (Sözen 2019a), this party of “loyal servants” (who were recruited from popular sectors and mostly with modest roots) became what we call the “popular broker-state”. It tightly controls state apparatuses and resources, locates itself in between citizens and bureaucracy, and distributes state offices and resources around a centralistic clientelistic logic in favour of the party (not necessarily in favour of local party actors and functionaries). The “popular broker-state” could be defined as a type of populist and clientelistic party that recruits its “broker elite” primarily from among the popular sectors and occupies a privileged position between state institutions and society by undertaking a centrally tightly controlled clientelistic function. We, however, also argue that national machine politics became a double-edged sword for democracy. With the rise of the AKP, the power asymmetry between a fragmented political party system based on internally contentious parties including many powerful figures and ideologically and organizationally more coherent veto players gradually dissolved. When this happened, this created greater opportunities for the AKP’s ongoing tendency toward authoritarianism.

Once again, this was not a moot outcome. The changing power relationship between bureaucratic and incumbent party elites also generated an alternative path Turkey could have followed, had the AKP leaders chosen to utilize a potential for democratization that was unleashed through the empowerment of elites subject to electoral accountability vis-à-vis technocratic elites. On paper, this political power could be employed to build a more democratic social and political “center,” had the AKP had the political will and ideational repertoire to do so (Somer 2014). However, it is now clear that a cluster of predominant AKP leaders lacked a categorically pro-democratic and pluralist ideology that informed and shaped their policies. Moreover, factors such as confrontations with social and political opposition such as the Gezi protests, the fall out with the Gülenists followed by the coup attempt in 2016, and the geopolitical turmoil that resulted from the Arab Spring might have only deepened the AKP elite’s antidemocratic proclivities. Arguably, a government with fully democratic intentions might have responded to all of these domestic and international challenges without becoming authoritarian, in fact, by perhaps strengthening the democracy. Thus, already existing powerful populist, conservative, and nationalist authoritarian ideological trends (Sözen 2019b) fully unfolded throughout this process. Hence, the AKP embarked Turkey on a very different path. This also enabled the AKP to erode electoral democracy by the erasure of institutional checks and balances and to develop open autocracy through the creation of a popular broker-state. The popular broker-state has a double function: at times, it instrumentalizes state bureaucracy on behalf of its clientele, and at other times, it coerces its clientele to obey the undesirable decisions.
of the bureaucracy (as demonstrated in Profile 2). But ultimately, as the popular broker-state, the party does not consolidate a relatively autonomous state bureaucracy, a *sine qua non* for liberal democracy, but a highly dependent one submissive to the party.

**The Roles of Other Parties**

Which roles did the other parties play – if largely unintendedly – in consolidating the AKP-led autocracy? Despite their good intentions and, from time to time, tactical victories, these parties’ organizational and strategic culture were not appropriate for effectively challenging the AKP’s predominance in “competitive clientelism” (Lust 2009).27 As we have outlined previously, while the Islamist RP was investing in building a massive membership organization in the 1990s, other parties in the Turkish party system were blending old habits of Turkish party politics with political marketing techniques. Nevertheless, in organizational terms, these “old habits” inherited from the period preceding the 1980s were decisive in shaping organizations of center-right parties as well as the CHP.

**CHP**

Internal conflicts and publicly visible factionalism have always characterized the CHP organization.28 Powerful local and national figures in the CHP frequently challenged the party leadership. News regarding these internal rifts have been frequently publicized in national and local media. Indeed, we observed during our fieldwork this “contentious” intraparty relationship within the CHP. In two sub-provinces of İstanbul, for example, we witnessed verbal quarrels of local party elites in front of our eyes, and, many times, we heard critical stories from our interviewees regarding other party members in the same branch.

In an extreme example in a small Thracian town, we witnessed how a powerful local boss divided the party’s local branch organization in the central sub-province and was elected as an independent mayor (who returned to the party later on). In another example from a central, wealthy district in İstanbul, we heard the story of a previous CHP mayor who dominated this central sub-province for four consecutive terms (almost twenty years). The crucial point here is that he dominated the party branch in this district and effectively challenged the party HQ by relying on municipal resources.29 At some point, he constructed his loyal grassroots organization in this district alongside – and occasionally in competition with – CHP neighbourhood organizations and created an independent power base of his own depending on municipal resources. Hence, this mayor, who quickly turned into a local boss within the overall structure of the CHP organization, created internal rifts within the local party branch. While, at the national level, these internal rifts have usually been presented as ideological factionalism (for example factionalism between *ulusalcilar* and social democrats), in fact, particularly at the local level, these rifts are usually more about personal conflicts regarding status and power than profound ideological disagreements.

The contentious nature of the intraparty organizational life in the CHP may have some ideological and historical-institutional roots related to the CHP’s being the country’s oldest surviving party. In fact, the party is the founding party of the secular Turkish republic (Sözen 2010; Esen 2014). Further, among the reasons might be the internal
rules regulating the formation of local administrative bodies of the party, most notably “the system of neighbourhood delegates” (“mahalle delegeliği sistemi”), which fuels internal conflicts in the formation of sub-provincial administrative bodies of the party across Turkey.30

But an arguably important reason behind this contentious intraparty politics, which usually inhibits the party from effectively mobilizing its supporter base in elections and present the party as a united front to local and national constituencies, might be the scarcity of resources that could be extracted from the office due to the lack of control over national government and restrictive impact of competitive authoritarianism.31 In the absence of vast national-level resources that could back a more potent party center, keeping contentious politics at the local level under check becomes remarkably harder for the CHP HQ. The main consequence of these circumstances is the culmination of deeply contentious intraparty relations in general as well as the predominance of powerful local bosses within the party, most notably the mayors (Açikel, Balci 2009), in the command of only available external resources to the party, in particular. These factors together diminish the party’s capacity to run effective campaigns and challenge the AKP hegemony.32 Finally, as a positive indication, one should also note the widespread presence in the CHP of people from professional classes such as medical doctors, lawyers and academics, and recent attempts by figures such as chair of CHP Istanbul provincial organization, Canan Kaftancıoğlu, to strengthen the party’s grassroots basis and ties with the poor and the young.

The minor contenders: İYİ Parti and the HDP

Apart from the CHP, there are two effective minor contenders in the hegemonic party system created by the AKP: the right-wing İYİ Parti (The Good Party) and the left-wing, pro-Kurdish HDP (Halkların Demokratik Partisi – The Peoples’ Democratic Party). While the former has a considerable degree of pragmatic, centrist inclination, the HDP, as we observed in the fieldwork, is an ideologically oriented party mainly relying on a restricted but a highly motivated and devoted body of membership and activists.33 While this helps the HDP survive under heavy political pressure, it diminishes the party’s appeal beyond its core constituency. Here İYİ Parti is the more remarkable case in the domain of minor contenders. As we observed in our fieldwork, on one hand, organizationally, the party tends to reproduce the old habits of Turkish party politics by incorporating some ambitious, influential local figures.34 But, on the other hand, alongside these influential local figures with their own personal resources, the authoritarian and clientelistic nature of the AKP predominance in Turkey led the İYİ Parti to recruit its elite from among the private sector executives and well-educated professionals instead of local business class that need municipal and central public bids for their trade, particularly in large and medium-sized cities. This, in turn, provided the İYİ Parti with managerial effectiveness, which we observed in our interviews with İYİ Parti chairs across Turkey in various provinces and sub-provinces. But, again, lack of any extensive local or national resources in the hands of these parties under the conditions of “competitive clientelism” and uneven playing field for opposition parties diminishes their appeal to a broad audience.
“Competitive clientelism”\textsuperscript{35} and a fragile hegemonic party autocracy

The rising centrality of clientelistic practices deployed by the AKP led other parties, to a certain extent including the HDP, to further strengthen the clientelistic links with their supporters. In our interviews with chairs and members of opposition parties, we learned how it was frequent for these local activists to have demands from local constituencies regarding jobs and aids in kind and cash. In various visits to these parties for conducting interviews we saw piles of CVs on tables in party offices. And almost every effective opposition party, including the HDP, has tried to accommodate these requests. As our interviewees argue, while the AKP is engaging extensively in such practices, it has become difficult for other parties to avoid clientelism because “the citizens got used to this kind of relationship with parties during the AKP era” (4A1). Hence, the national machine politics embraced by the AKP has caused a kind of “clientelistic contagion” that deepened and widened the existing clientelistic proclivities of the Turkish party system.\textsuperscript{36}

But one problem in a system of “competitive clientelism”, which, at the same time, operates in an electoral-authoritarian political system is that clientelistic practices drawing on unequal resources and different appropriation routes and strategies create remarkably different outcomes for these parties. The competition in this “clientelistic authoritarian system” is like a sword fight in which one party fights with multiple real swords it owns and the others with daggers they borrowed from somebody else. In other words, while the hegemonic center in this “competitive clientelism” enjoys extensive central and local resources it skilfully distributes as a “clientelistic national machine” or as the “popular broker-state”, contenders either required to rely on resources controlled by powerful mayors (like the CHP), or extremely restricted resources stemming from party members’ and party elites’ limited private wealth (the \c{I}Y\i Parti and the HDP), grassroots volunteerism, and official aid. These conditions foster a fragile hegemonic party autocracy (Magaloni 2006; Greene 2007). Clients become more dependent on one party rather than comparing and choosing between different party elites who compete for the clients’ loyalty.\textsuperscript{37}

Finally, the evidence amounts that systematic and centralized modes of clientelism combined with polarizing politics, authoritarian party hegemony and the hyper-presidential system have been changing the membership profile and weakening the AKP from within, as recent revelations of high-level corruption, complaints by senior party founders, and splits from the party testify (Somer 2019). In our interviews, however, we encountered silence and only a few tangential references to such complaints and problems by AKP members. This could be contrasted with rather open criticisms of CHP members of their own party, and suggest that a kind of party discipline built into the national machine politics was still intact within the AKP.

Concluding discussion: the relationship between party-voter linkages, organizations, and regime types

As the extensive literature on this dimension of Turkish politics attests to, patronage and clientelism has been part and parcel of Turkish party politics since the transition to multi-party politics. Powerful local patronage networks and national elites that these networks generated dominated most parties from the 1950s to the 1990s. This
“politics of notables” in a largely rural developing country created a deficient electoral democracy with powerful veto players. But as Turkey got more urbanized under the impact of neoliberalism during the 1980s and 1990s, local patronage networks gradually but persistently deteriorated. This created a party system crisis in the 1990s and prepared convenient conditions for the rise of, what we call in this paper, “national machine politics”, an extremely centralized way of clientelism that depends on a loyal, bureaucratic, and highly routinized organization. The AKP, which successfully built its party organization based on this model, dominated Turkey’s party politics and political regime in the 2000s and 2010s.

It would be misleading to describe this organization, which began to functions as a “popular broke-state” after the AKP consolidated its power, as a party-state. The party organization plays a major role in representing poor local constituencies in encounters with local bureaucracy and persuading the local society to the unpopular measures of local state institutions. In these encounters, the AKP enjoys a privileged liminal position between state and society. Despite evident authoritarian inclinations, the party carefully avoids a de facto or de jure merger with state institutions. Doing so fits with its populist worldview and praxis, which promises responsiveness and immediacy to unprivileged supporters. Acting otherwise would conflict with the image it carefully crafted over years in the eyes of its supporters as the antithesis of an authoritarian-bureaucratic arrangement distant to citizens.

Combined with what proved to be AKP governments’ dubious commitment to pluralistic democracy and rule of law, the replacement of contentious “politics of notables” with the “popular broker-state” facilitated the transformation of Turkey’s electoral democracy to a competitive or “new authoritarian” regime that drew on a new model of state-society relationship (Somer 2016). The politics of notables and contentious politics within Turkey’s ruling right-wing and left-wing parties before the AKP era were opening room for the interventions of powerful and ideologically coherent elite veto players and kept the system in check against the predominance of a political party. By comparison, centralized clientelism run by a coherent bureaucratic party structure progressively diminished the role of these veto players. In their place, the AKP implanted “the popular broker-state” recruiting members from Turkey’s popular sectors and uplifted these members with limited resources as local and national elites within a tightly controlled bureaucratic organization. They began to tightly control the public bureaucracy and locate themselves in between public services/resources and citizens. The ultimate consequence was a fragile hegemonic party autocracy that mainly relied on public resources, which contrasted with models of bureaucratic authoritarianism that rely on state elite or of electoral democracy that relies on dispersed local patronage networks and is vulnerable to the coherence of state elites.

One of the implications of our research is that focusing on national-level power structures and struggles is inadequate for understanding the current authoritarian turn in Turkish politics. The changing clientelistic structures and local politics, and the asymmetrical response of the AKP and other parties to these developments during the last several decades comprise a fundamental factor that facilitated the current authoritarian predominance of the AKP. The broader theoretical implications of this analysis are as follows: there are strong causal links between social change, party-voter linkages, party organizational change, and regime change. Party organizations can be
seen as a function of the party-voter linkages (Kılıçdaroğlu 2019). From the viewpoint of organization theory, party organizations should be seen as “open” systems sensitive to outside resources (Scott 2003) with internal conflicts (Pfeffer, Salancik 2003; Massicard, Watts 2013).

Party-voter linkages are always sensitive to social change, but, as we show in this article, parties are not able to equally or homologously respond and adjust to change. The relative internal coherence or incoherence of parties in Turkey partly reflects how they arrange clientelistic relations in localities. Under the diminishing impact of local bosses/patrons in a rapidly urbanizing society, the AKP elite had the best organizational/strategic proclivity to respond to such an environment. This competitive advantage, nevertheless, gradually turned into authoritarian predominance, where contending parties remained under the burden of their historical legacy and old habits. Hence, there is a strong bond between how clientelistic practices are arranged and the way democratic backsliding emerged, as recent accounts highlighted (Çınar 2019, White 2017). With such party structures and strategic predispositions, it might be difficult for the CHP (or any other opposition coalition) to manage clientelistic aspects of electoral competition in Turkey, even if the CHP (or a coalition led by CHP) were to win national elections in future electoral contests.

Despite their disadvantages in competitive clientelism in a context of autocratization under a fragile hegemonic party rule, Turkish opposition parties may still be able to defeat the AKP electorally through alliances struck by party leaders and new discourses, as the 2019 local election victories demonstrate. Our analysis here suggests that it may take more than electoral wins to lead sustainable democratization afterwards. Current opposition parties need to reduce their dependence on clientelism and the politics of notables by developing new forms of programmatic politics, recruiting new cadres at national and local levels, and cultivating different organizational dynamics. If non-AKP parties were to win the presidency, the executive resources at their disposal can be expected to strengthen their party centers, but this would not suffice to secure successful rebuilding of democracy.

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NOTES

1. We acknowledge that this research was funded by TÜBİTAK (Turkish Scientific and Technical Research Council, project no: 118K279). The field research started in December 2018 and focuses on party-voter linkages, local and national party systems, and intraparty operations of four parties represented in the parliament: AKP, CHP, İYİ Parti, and the HDP (The MHP did not provide the permissions required by TÜBİTAK). We have so far visited eight different local contexts (socioeconomically and socioculturally different four sub-provinces of Istanbul and four provinces across Turkey) and conducted 206 in-depth interviews (involving more than 270 people), mostly local party activists and members, but also other relevant actors of the local political fields such as journalists and representatives of non-governmental organizations. Besides socio-economic and socio-cultural variation, the local contexts that we chose for field research reflect variance in the electoral success of parties under investigation in this research. We conducted field research in four different districts of Istanbul and four different provinces across Turkey, each representing a stronghold for individual parties under examination. Thus, we had a chance to observe every party covered in this research in their strongholds in two different local contexts. Our interviews were based on open-ended questions and usually conducted in party offices. They lasted around 45 to 60 minutes, but at times we had interviews that were longer than three hours. This provided us with invaluable opportunities for on-site observations of local functioning and activism in Turkey’s political parties. Hence, we tried to conduct the entire research process with “ethnographic sensibility”, as Schatz (2009) termed it.

2. We explain, and to a certain extent reinterpret, this term proposed by Ellen Lust (2009) in the relevant section below.

3. In this paper, we use the term “notable” in a loose fashion for referring to powerful political figures with considerable economic and symbolic resources at their disposal, which, when necessary, renders these figures capable of embracing defiant positions against the leadership of parties and other central authorities for protecting their autonomy. Our concept combines two forms of powerful networks of local politics. First, “traditional notable politics” that depends on traditional social elites (such as landlords/ağa lar, notable families/eşraf aileleri, sheikhs and tribal chiefs/aşiret reisleri) and their symbolic and rural economic resources. Second, a more modern “machine politics” (Scott 1969) depending on groups of “new man,” who are combining political
brokerage with their recently acquired economic resources in rural and urban contexts. See Machado (1974) and Sidel (1997) for these two types of notable politics that can be seen in the Philippines. In Turkey, too, traditional notable politics increasingly turned into “rural and urban machine politics” after the 1970s. See Ayata (2010) for a comparative analysis of the transformations of the CHP which demonstrates increasing reliance of the party in the 1970s on clientelistic brokerage run by new well-educated figures instead of patronage politics under the control of traditional local social elites. Kray’s (2006) classic study of changing patronage structures in rural Turkey, too, vividly demonstrates the demise of the traditional notable politics in Taşköprü and the rise of a new stratum of local notables in this particular local setting relying on their recently acquired economic resources and their connections with commercial urban centers.

4. By this term we refer to the most dedicated and active elite core of party political activity including local elites at the lower ranks of party politics. Although this term is inspired by the approach of elite theorists, and most notably Gaetano Mosca (1939), we use it here in a specific way to describe particular layers of political elite profoundly –and, in most cases officially-engaged with party politics. On the one hand, the term “political elite” has a broader connotation than “political class” including traditional power holders, non-party professionals with relevant skills such as media and marketing experts as well as politicized state elites. On the other hand, the term “party elite”, in its conventional uses, may sound too restrictive by excluding lower rank local political elites, such as the examples we discuss in this paper. This is why we refrained from using both terms. Also see Von Beyme (1996) for a similar take on the concept of “political class”.

5. Here, we would like to draw attention to a classic study by James C. Scott in which he describes a “machine” as a “non-ideological organization interested less in political principle than in securing and holding office for its leaders and distributing income to those who run it and work for it. It relies on what it accomplishes in a concrete way for its supporters, not on what it stands for. A machine may in fact be likened to a business in which all members are stockholders and dividends are paid in accordance with what has been invested” (1969: 1144). Yet, we also would like to differentiate what we call “national machine” from what Scott describes as “urban political machines” run by powerful local bosses/brokers. “National machine” is much more centralized than “urban political machine”. It is a form of “mass clientelistic party” (Hopkin 2004: 632) that is highly coherent and well-coordinated. An example of a classic “machine” may be what is observed in the Philippines during the 1970s, just after the fall from political significance of rural landholding elites due to economic and social modernization: it is a powerful local network of clientelistic relations built around powerful “new men” who gained control over economic resources through their political cunning. Although “machine politics” is less autonomous than “traditional notable politics” since it relies on coalitions with national party elites, “broker-patrons” in the middle of classical machine politics have much larger room than a broker in, what we call, a “national machine”. See Machado (1974) and Sidel (1997) for personalized –and relatively more autonomous- forms of local political dominance in the Philippines.

6. Having said that and to contextualize this point, we also note that “dissent” has a distinct internal understanding among AKP members different from the understanding especially within the CHP, whose members interpret “dissent” quite differently in terms of what constitutes it and what are its normative consequences.

7. For the power of local elites in the late Ottoman Empire see Yaycıoğlu (2016).

8. One should also note, however, that the Republic with its greater coercive capacity diminished the region’s local autonomy to some extent (Meeker 2001).


10. We would like to thank Elise Massicard for drawing our attention to this important factor.

11. Zügürt Ağä, a brilliant Turkish comedy movie by director Nesli Çölgeçen, first screened in 1985, narrates the tragicomic story of a traditional landlord (toprak ağası) who migrates to Istanbul and loses his authority and wealth under the circumstances of a neoliberal urban context. The movie is emblematic of the gradual and partial fall of traditional notable politics in Turkey in the 1980s.

12. See interview 4C7.

13. In our field research, we encountered many similar figures among the AKP local elites who came from very modest backgrounds and owed their recently gained power and influence almost entirely to the party. See interviews 1C1, 2C2, 2C4, 2C5, 2C7, 2C8, 3C1, 3C2, 3C3, 4C6, 6C5, 7C1, 7C2, 7C3, 8C4, 9C4.

14. Two other interviewees -from the party’s executive board in two remarkably different provincial cities- also mentioned incidents of party members embracing dominant attitudes towards bureaucrats where higher party officials intervened in favour of the bureaucrats. Interviewees 6C3, 7C1. This also implies that such problems are not rare and may not always be easy to resolve.

15. Certainly, this may also have something to do with “in-group trust” in Islamic organizations. See Avital Livny (2020). Also see Ayan-Musil (2010).

16. In Turkish, using the second person plural (siz) is the proper and polite way to formally address someone one does not know well – particularly in an interaction with a person who occupies a position of perceived prestige and status. The second person singular (sen) is generally used either for a person one knows well or for persons with an inferior status.


18. Ceren Ark-Yıldırım drew our attention to this point. Even people with the capacity to act as local notables become subordinate in the AKP’s organizational arrangements. This is not only because the exit cost is usually too high, but the party can also always find positions in other localities for its “loyal functionaries” like a large institutionalized corporation moving its personnel to different local branches. This is especially valid in a city like Istanbul.

19. See interview 1C2. This particular interviewee gave us details on how the AKP manages clientelistic relations when it comes to providing party clientele with public or private sector jobs. It seems that there is an established system – and perhaps an online system – in the AKP for managing such relations, in a surprisingly impersonal way. It is important to note that this interview occurred in a sub-province in Istanbul controlled by a CHP municipality. Nevertheless, the AKP branch in this sub-province was very busy during our visits that took place before the March 2019 local elections, and apparently, the AKP’s higher level of coordination was used to channel the resources provided by AKP municipalities in other sub-provinces of the city to the party clientele in this particular sub-province, which was a CHP stronghold.

20. These people could be “warden administration board members” (“nöbetçi yönetim kurulu üyelerleri”) or in large peripheral sub-provinces the AKP keep an entire “solution room” (“çözüm odası”), staffed with two to three party workers, open for responding particularistic demands.

21. Here we should also note that our observations in the field in eight different local contexts across Turkey are in congruence with a series of work on the clientelistic functioning of Turkish parties, and most notably the AKP, in specific neighbourhoods, mostly in Istanbul. See Arıkan-Akdağ (2014); Ark-Yıldırım (2017); Arslantaş, Arslantaş (2020) and Yıldırım (2020). All of these
studies confirm the centralized and bureaucratic arrangements behind the clientelistic operations of the AKP.

22. Because the AKP distributes market cards to its clientele that could be used only in certain big retailers.

23. As Arslantaş, Arslantaş (2020) relates, construction businesses close to the party recruit workers referred by the party.

24. See Lord (2018) for the clientelistic linkages between the AKP, pro-AKP religious civil society organizations and poor constituencies.

25. Again we would like to thank Ceren Ark-Yıldırım for drawing our attention to this important point.

26. It is difficult to define the sequence between the rise of the popular broker-state and the fall of the traditional veto players (in army, judiciary and bureaucracy) in Turkey. But it is safe to argue that the AKP had this proclivity to turn into a national clientelistic machine from the very beginning. Such proclivity was further corroborated by the destruction of Kemalist establishment elites during the period between 2007 and 2011 through dubious methods deployed by the alliance between the AKP and the Gülen Community. Afterwards, the popular broker-state started to unfold fully.

27. We return to this theme of “competitive clientelism” in the section below.

28. For an important analysis of factionalism in a provincial CHP organization, see Massicard (2013).

29. In contrast, see Kemahlıoğlu, Özdemir (2018) for how the AKP center exerts a tight grip over AKP municipalities and mayors. Also see Savaşkan (2019) for the tight AKP grip on municipalities and mayors.

30. A similar observation regarding the divisive role of competitive formation of local ruling bodies in the CHP was made by Şahmaz (2022).

31. Ayan-Musil (2010) underlines the lack of resources – that may be extracted from national office – in the hands of the central executive elite as one of the fundamental determinants of an oligarchic type of authoritarianism in the CHP.

32. For a detailed qualitative and quantitative historical analysis of the CHP combined with a local ethnography around candidate selection struggles, see Kocağa (2019).

33. Most of the party chairs we interviewed from the HDP had experiences of custody and imprisonment and, at some point, we had this impression that such experiences are “symbolic resources” that pave the “road of honour” to ruling positions within the HDP.

34. This was evident in our field work in a South Eastern province where the İYİ Parti branch fell under the personal influence of a powerful notable family. See interview 9A1.

35. This paper uses the term “competitive clientelism” in a markedly broader way than Lust (2009). She deploys this term to explain the survival of overwhelmingly authoritarian systems with internal consensus or collusion between ruling parties and loyal oppositions in the Middle East. In our case, the semi-democratic legacy and competitive dimension of authoritarianism are much more pronounced, and, as a consequence, resources of distribution are remarkably different.

36. Our older interviewees with knowledge of party politics in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s usually contended that the volume of such transactional relations between parties and voters dramatically increased in the AKP era. See interview 3A3 and 4A1. An expert interview with a senior colleague with fieldwork experience on political parties in the 1970s also approved that the volume and diversity of clientelistic exchange between parties and voters today is stunning compared to previous eras. See interview F7. Also see Çeviker-Gürakar’s (2016) important work that compellingly demonstrates the increase in the volume of non-competitive public procurements benefitting AKP supporters. This could be considered a reliable proxy indicator demonstrating the increasing volume of clientelism in the AKP era.
37. While there is a consensus on the authoritarian aspects of the AKP-led system in Turkey, at least since the coup d’état in 2016, its precise nature has been a point of heated debate. Turkey is evidently not a full-scale autocracy but at times throughout the last decade of AKP rule, the political system in Turkey -at certain moments and localities- could be less competitive than a “competitive authoritarian regime”, as formulated by Levitsky, Way (2002). However, this authoritarian system has never been as stable as an ideal typical “hegemonic party regime”, examples of which are demonstrated by scholars like Sartori (2005), Magaloni (2006) and Greene (2007). Thus, here we identify the political system created by the AKP as a “fragile hegemonic party autocracy” in which the authoritarian incumbent could lose critical local offices and had to rely on a minor nationalist party to sustain its hegemonic position. Alternatively, the system in Turkey could be seen as an “indecisive state” instead of a clearly discernible and consolidated kind of an autocratic “regime” (Somer 2021). Although we do not want to delve into this discussion regarding the precise nature of the political system in Turkey, we do think that some conceptual generalizations (democracy, autocracy, electoral democracy, competitive authoritarianism etc.) are sine qua non for comparative macro-political analysis as long as researchers are aware of such concepts’ restricted analytical function and the irreducible gap between complexities of the empirical reality and the theoretical-conceptual generalizations.


39. Here it is important to note that “bureaucratic modes of authoritarianism” in the 20th century, as O'Donnell (1973) reveals in a now classic work, is anathema to populism.

ABSTRACTS

This article reviews the existing body of scholarship and draws on original qualitative research that compares the party organizations of four major Turkish parties. By doing so, it highlights the causal relationships -mediated by political agency- between socioeconomic structures and party politics. Clientelism remained part and parcel of Turkish party politics and state-society relations since the transition to multi-party system in mid-20th century through AKP governments. However, important changes occurred in terms of who effectively supplied it, how, and to whom on the basis of broader socioeconomic transformations of Turkey. Political parties did not equally or homologously adjust and respond to social change. The AKP’s successful organizational responses to socioeconomic transformations had important implications for Turkey’s political regime. In pre-AKP clientelism, the state and powerful local notables within parties were key to the supply and distribution of clientelistic benefits. We argue that this contributed to the emergence of electoral democracy under tutelage of military-bureaucratic state actors who faced weak resistance from a fragmented civilian political class. In turn, during AKP governments, the locus of patronage shifted from state to party and from local notables to the AKP party machine: national machine politics. This helped the party to pacify military-bureaucratic tutelage and achieve dominance in party politics, but, the lack of a categorically pro-democratic party ideology and the paradoxes of national machine politics together led the party to transform Turkey to an electoral autocracy instead of developing democracy. Further, the AKP reshaped the Turkish state, which on the surface began to look like a party-state. By revising and providing nuance to this observation, we discuss the emergence of a popular broker-state mediating between national and local state institutions and local communities through its control over resources. We maintain that all these changes facilitated also the party’s internal
decay. This generates important opportunities for opposition parties, who however continue to rely heavily on pre-AKP forms of clientelistic politics. Without refashioning their party organizations and party-voter linkages, they may not be able to defeat the AKP electorally, and even if they are, they may not be able to secure successful democratization. They also face difficulties of altering how they form clientelistic linkages with society without controlling state resources at national level.

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**Keywords**: Party organizations, clientelism, socio-economic change, AKP, CHP, İYİ Parti, HDP, politics of notables, national machine politics, popular broker state, authoritarianism

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New Turkey and Management of the Religious Realm: Continuities and Ruptures

Salim Çevik

AUTHOR’S NOTE

This article is a much expanded and developed version of my previous SWP Comment; “Erdoğan’s Comprehensive Religious Policy: Management of the Religious Realm in Turkey” (Çevik 2019).

Introduction

There is a consensus that a fundamental aspect of AKP’s claim of a New Turkey is the changing relationship between religion and state/politics. Religion has played a more central role in the public and political affairs under the AKP regime. Indeed, the AKP leadership has made it clear on several occasions that they aspire for a more pious generation (Eroler 2019). But exactly what is novel about the AKP period in terms of religion and state interactions? The current literature focuses on the expansion of the power, status and resources of the Diyanet (Presidency of Religious Affairs) (Karakaş 2021; Çitak 2020; Lord 2018), the increased prominence of religious instruction in the public education system (Yılmaz 2018; Lüküslü 2016; Kandiyoti, Emanet 2017) particularly focused on increasing numbers of Imam and Preacher Schools (Imam Hatip Okulları, hereafter IHOs) (Buyruk 2021), increased visibility and power of tarikats (religious orders) and cemaats (religious communities) in social and political life (Atay 2017) and increased resorting to religious values and norms in political discourse (Yılmaz 2021). While these are valid observations, it is not clear whether these features would be sufficient to point to a significant rupture from the earlier instances of religion and state interaction.
When analysed separately, the AKP has not created these institutions or mechanisms. If Republican history is analysed comprehensively, the current increased role of religion in public life and political affairs can also be seen as the culmination of a century-long process. For instance, the Diyanet, which was established in 1924, has experienced continuous waves of expansion in its scope of duties and resources. Following a censure of religious education in the early Republic, religious instruction by the state had almost continuously expanded, the only setback being experienced in the 1990s. Despite being outlawed, tarikats and cemaats have survived the repression of the early Republican period eventually becoming important actors in public and political life. An important feature of electoral politics ever since its introduction in 1946 has been politicians’ resort to religious discourse.

Considering all of these factors, one can address a continuity as well as a rupture of the relation between religion and politics. This article claims that there is a qualitative shift in the relation between religion and state under the current AKP regime. Accordingly, policies, with regard to religion during the AKP era, is not necessarily the final culmination of increasing resort to religion. Instead, in certain ways this era represents a rupture from Republican history. Thus, it is not only that the AKP devoted more resources to the religious field (continuity and quantitative changes), but also it did so in a novel way (amounting to a rupture and qualitative change).

The rupture in state religion affairs during the AKP era relies on two points. First, the AKP era policies on religion are comprehensive, and unlike previous governments the AKP does not rely on a distinction between “state Islam” which is organised and propagated by state institutions and “social Islam”, which refers to religious organisations and movements that are not created nor controlled by the state’s bureaucratic apparatuses. Second, despite the widespread resources allocated to support religious movements and organisations, a significant aspect of AKP policies is that they narrow the autonomy of these organisations and movements. Combined with the earlier policy of removing the dichotomy of state and social Islam, this means that the AKP has perhaps aimed for total control of the entire Sunni-Islamic religious realm (hereafter used as religious realm).

In order to demonstrate the rupture happened during the AKP era, I will first depict the state religious interaction prior to the AKP. In the following sections, I will analyse the general contours of AKP’s management of the religious realm both with regard to AKP’s relation with state institutions (Diyanet) and with social Islam (cemaats and tarikats). Finally, I will discuss the continuities and ruptures from the earlier Republican era.

Throughout the article, I rely on formal sources in the analysis of the state institutions’ policies. These include state decrees and laws pertaining to the regulation of the religious realm throughout the Republican period, including the AKP era, as well as statistics with regard to budget and resources, revealed by the relevant state institutions such as the Ministry of Education and the Diyanet. In contrast, the analysis on social Islam, particularly its transformation during the AKP era, refers to news outlets, mostly from the opposition media in Turkey. These news outlets will be scrutinised as they are often biased against such religious organisations. However, formal data is almost non-existent and the academic literature on the topic is still growing. I turn to the available ethnographic works conducted on religious communities and expert opinions when they are available.
Although “assertive secularism” (Kuru 2009) was integral to the official state ideology and secularism became a constitutional principle in 1937, religion paradoxically maintained an important role in the formation of the national identity and culture in Turkey even during the early Republican period. Accordingly, despite its modernist and anti-religious inclinations, the Kemalist regime used the influence of religion over Turkish society by controlling religious institutions. Moreover, the regime also aimed to create a modernised version of Islam that would be firmly under state control. Thus, Turkish secularism can be considered different from other examples of assertive secularisms such as the French model in the state’s attempt to not only limit the impact and visibility of religion in public life but also to control and shape the religion (Stepan 2010: 9-11).

The early Republican regime tried to control and shape religion by replacing social religious organisations such as tarikats and cemaats with state-controlled religious institutions. The madrasas (religious schools) were closed and waqfs (religious communal properties) were confiscated in 1924. Dervish lodges and sufi shrines were declared illegal in the following year. In 1924 the Diyanet was established as a new state institution aiming to fill the void emerging from the repression and outlawing of existing religious structures. Simultaneously during the creation of the Diyanet, all mosques became state property and all prayer leaders became state employees. Thus, despite its rhetoric on secularism, Turkey has been a state in which religion and the state are intertwined almost since the country’s foundation, to the extent that all the mosques and all their imams are controlled by the state. This has provided an apparent apparatus for the state to control and shape religious discourse, even at the local level.

Since its foundation in 1924, the scope of duties and resources of the Diyanet have been constantly growing. The founding Act no 492 defined the duties of the Diyanet as “all provisions concerning faith and worship aspects of the religion of Islam and the administration of religious institutions.” (Gözaydın 2008: 220) While the initial duties of the Diyanet were carefully limited to administration, these were expanded at two significant points, the first in 1965 and the second in 1982. According to Act no. 633 enacted in 1965 the Diyanet was entrusted “to carry out affairs related to the beliefs, worship and moral foundations of Islam and to enlighten Turkish society about religion and to manage places of worship.” Article 136 of the 1982 constitution prepared by the military regime further entrusts the Diyanet with helping national unity and solidarity. Thus, throughout the Republican period, even before the AKP came to power, the duties of the Diyanet had expanded in several waves. Expansion of duties inevitably brought about the expansion of resources.

The Diyanet remained an arm of the secular republic even through its constant expansion of duties and resources (Gözaydın 2006). The authority and scope of the Diyanet expanded under the supervision of Kemalist military and was perceived as an antidote to the influence of social Islam on society (Öztürk 2019: 86). For instance, the Diyanet was assigned the duty to prepare and disseminate standardised Friday sermons throughout the country in order to provide “a unity in the text” in the aftermath of the 1980 coup (Kara 2019: 70). This need for the Diyanet-produced sermons resurfaced during the 28 February process of the late 1990s, pointing that the Diyanet is perceived as a useful institution to counter the impact of social Islam by the Kemalist state.
A second dimension of state control over religious life pertains to religious education. The closure of madrasas in 1924 was the first major move to limit religious education. Religious education was not included among the duties of the simultaneously established Diyanet and was assigned to the Ministry of National Education. However, starting from 1927, religious instruction in state schools progressively declined and ceased to exist by 1932, even though in some cases, particularly in rural areas, this instruction continued unofficially (Clayer 2015). Several attempts to provide religious education throughout the early Republican era had been all short-lived. In 1948, state investment in religious education recommenced with the formation of vocational courses to train religious personnel. Three years later, under the centre-right Democratic Party, these courses were transformed into secondary schools (IHOs). The number of these schools rapidly expanded under the more conservative governments of the 1970s and 1980s and became major sites for religious training. Unlike the Diyanet, however, IHOs soon became contentious entities. Fearing that these schools were not controlled, the Kemalist establishment intervened beginning in 1997 during the so-called 28 February Process. A coefficient system was introduced for university entrance exams, which was ostensibly enforced by the secular military, to make it almost impossible for IHO graduates to enter university departments other than theology. According to this system, exam results of IHO graduates were multiplied by a lower coefficient if they chose any department other than theology. This was a huge blow to IHOs; student enrollment and the number of schools rapidly declined (Gür 2016). However, the Kemalist establishment in general, and the military in particular, had not been categorically opposed to religious education in state schools. It was during the military regime in 1982 that elective religious courses in schools were made mandatory. While the military targeted IHOs during the 28 February Process, compulsory religious education in other state schools remained untouched.

Overall, one could claim that the Turkish state’s involvement in religion was marked by complexities and inconsistencies throughout the Republican era. A combination of an assertive secularism that aims to limit the influence of religion at all levels, and state’s increased involvement with religion required the state to create a double discourse where the state effectively would make a distinction between good Islam and bad Islam. This discursive duality also led to the emergence of a double structure in which good Islam is represented by the official Islam promoted by state institutions and bad Islam is equated with the unofficial Islam of religious communities and is oppressed by the state (Cizre-Sakallioğlu 1996). Furthermore, the state elite’s involvement with religion and the resources they had allocated to the control and shaping of the religious sphere continuously increased. According to Öztürk (2019), this increase was due to two reasons: first, to the persistence of religious practices against the expectations of the positivist first generation of Kemalism and second, to the introduction of electoral politics.

The AKP and State Institutions

Hence, when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) makes extensive use of state resources for its declared goal of raising a pious generation (dindar nesil), it is building on a historical and institutional legacy. The Diyanet and IHOs play a central role, which
can be observed through the increased visibility of the Diyanet in public life and the increased importance of IHOs in the education system.

After the AKP’s ascension to government in 2002, even more so after the party became confident of its power, it started to take steps to revitalise the IHOs. To this end, in 2011 the AKP once again changed the rules for university entrance exams and annulled the coefficient system introduced during the 28 February process. This change by itself was enough to revitalise the IHOs, pointing to a certain demand by the public for this type of school. However, in the following years, several technical changes followed to ensure a growing student enrolment at IHOs, while several regular schools were also converted to IHOs. As of 2018, IHO students comprised of 12 percent of the entire secondary school population, demonstrating a considerable increase from 8.6 percent in 1997 prior to the military’s intervention. However, this increase was more a result of the deliberate efforts of the government rather than the popularity of IHOs. During the initial round of student placements for secondary schools in 2017, IHOs only reached a 52 percent occupancy rate, compared to 95 percent for regular high schools; i.e non-vocational high schools. While the government attempted to attract more students to IHOs by changing the rules for student enrolment and registration, non-pro-government media outlets were routinely filled with complaints from families whose children had to be registered in IHOs against their will. Moreover, in 2012 three additional elective courses (“Basic Religious Knowledge”, “The Life of the Prophet” and “Qur’an”) were included in the curriculum of middle and high schools other than IHOs, in order to enable further religious training for the entire student body.

Along with religious instruction provided by formal education institutions, the Diyanet is the most important state institution related to religious life in Turkey. The Diyanet’s growing importance in public life can be observed through the continuous increase in the institution’s personnel and budget numbers. According to the 2019 budget, the Diyanet’s cadres exceeded 140,000 employees, and its annual budget, according to the exchange rate at the time, was approximately €1.7 billion, comprising 1.2 percent of the total budget. This means that both the number of personnel as well as the Diyanet’s share in the total budget had doubled since the AKP came to power in 2002 (Mutluer 2014). An important dimension of the Diyanet’s personnel expansion involves the considerable increase in the number of women employed as religious personnel by the Diyanet. Most of these female personnel function as vaize (preacher). Female preachers significantly expand the Diyanet’s outreach and impact at the social level. Moreover, the increased budget and personnel was accompanied by increased levels of visibility and prestige. In the new state protocol list, which was updated in 2012, the head of the Diyanet was elevated from being 53rd in line to 10th. Moreover, the head of the Diyanet has become increasingly visible, and he often accompanies President Erdoğan at public events. Even the uniform for the head of the Diyanet was changed from a modest black cloak to an eye-catching and lustrous white one.

Yet, the increased importance of the Diyanet is not limited to these factors. The duties of the Diyanet have been reorganised again with Law No. 6002 enacted in 2010, requiring the Diyanet to “expand its activities outside the mosque”. Accordingly, the Diyanet is now entrusted with, among others, of ‘enlightening people in religious matters, via radio and TV’, ‘developing educational programmes, planning and implementation through cooperation with relevant government agencies and institutions, organising and monitoring activities’, and ‘enlightening and guiding
various sections of society, such as family, women, youth and others, in religious matters’. These changes align with the former director Ali Bardakoğlu’s earlier declarations that the Diyanet would no longer be confined to mosques (Çitak 2020: 174).

In line with this, the Diyanet is now working in cooperation with other state institutions such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Family, and the Ministry of Youth (Karakaş 2021: 71-125, 171-205). As a result of such cooperation, the Diyanet is now active in various spheres of social life, such as celebrating religious nights at university dormitories, officiating marriages (which previously was exclusively regulated by the municipalities), providing educational support in elementary and high schools, providing social and psychological counselling at hospitals, marriage counselling, etc.

As Sevgi Adak (2021: 201) argues, “the expansion of the Diyanet under the AKP rule is not only unparalleled because of its scale, but also is qualitatively different from the previous phases of its expansion because of the new roles the Diyanet has assumed”. The Diyanet’s cooperation with various state organisations constitutes only one part of this process of expansion. In a more radical way, the Diyanet has also cooperated with non-state organisations, i.e religious communities, in its activities through several signed protocols around the concept of Değerler Eğitimi (Values Education), thus undermining the previous distinction between state and social Islam.

Furthermore, the Diyanet’s activities started to increasingly resemble those of the religious communities. The Diyanet no longer passively caters to the religious demands of society. It is expected to pursue proselytising activities that have been typically conducted by religious communities. In a similar vein, these activities primarily target youths. These activities are organised around “youth centres” that are established mainly on university campuses but also at other locations as well. The first youth centre was opened in 2018 on Uludağ University campus. Within one year, the numbers of such centres reached 250 with 1796 coordinators that have taken active duty within these centres. (Karakaş 2021:179-180) These youth centres facilitate religious activities at student dormitories due to protocols signed between the Diyanet and the Ministry of Youth, which controls all public student dormitories.

Moreover, the Diyanet has opened its own dormitories and even student houses that resembles the organisation of religious communities. Also, the Diyanet started a new project entitled Gençliğe Değer (Worth the Youth), in which every Diyanet official should contact 10 youngsters and provide them with religious supervision and counselling. Moreover, the Mufti office expects each Diyanet official to fill a form that includes the basic information of the supervised youth, such as their name, address and age. Actively seeking youngsters to provide religious supervision is the hallmark of religious communities (cemaats), yet the Diyanet now appropriates this method. As of 2019, 22,710 Diyanet officials have been watching 410,640 youngsters (Karakaş 2021:183).

Thus, although the AKP’s instrumentalisation of the Diyanet to shape religious life around the country is not unprecedented, the scope of the Diyanet’s activities and resources invested in these activities create a new and distinctive circumstance. Moreover, this investment in the Diyanet is particularly intriguing given that political Islamists in Turkey have a long history of distrust towards the Diyanet, considering, with certain insight, that the institution was initially created to transform religion so as to remain in line with Kemalist expectations.
However, in a significant departure from the Kemalist legacy, the AKP’s investment in the Diyanet does not aim to replace religious communities with the Diyanet. Instead, the Diyanet is only one pillar of a more comprehensive effort to shape religious life in the country, and acts in explicit cooperation with the religious communities that are loyal to Erdoğan. Moreover, in the process of this, the activities of the Diyanet have increasingly resembled that of the religious communities. This “tarikatisation” or “cemaatisation” of the Diyanet is also supplanted with the etatisation of cemaats and tarikats discussed later in this article. In combination, this symbiosis aims for the homogenisation of the religious field under Erdoğan’s personal control.

Another important dimension of the changing relationship between the Diyanet and the state pertains to the autonomy of the Diyanet. Contrary to common knowledge, Ceren Lord’s (2018) detailed study of the history of the Diyanet reveals that the Diyanet had preserved its institutional autonomy throughout the Republican history for its own means. While it is not uncommon for the heads of the Diyanet to face political pressure, they have maintained a semi-autonomous status vis-a-vis political power. Ali Bardakoğlu, the first head of the Diyanet appointed by the AKP government also preserved this line carefully (Çitak 2020:179-180). However, starting with Mehmet Görmez’s presidency in 2010, the Diyanet experienced a complete loss of this autonomy. Görmez openly involved himself in various public discussions, most of which had no direct religious dimension and rather sided with the AKP government. In fact, no previous head of the Diyanet had ever intervened in politics as such (Arat, Pamuk 2019: 125). For instance, during the Gezi protests, Görmez aligned himself with the government narrative that protestors looted the mosques and that the Diyanet had video footage of this, even though such footage never appeared. He also denounced Twitter and YouTube when Erdoğan briefly shut them down during the Gezi protests (Arat, Pamuk 2019: 125). Later, when the AKP- Gülen movement conflict started towards the end of 2013, Görmez immediately aligned the Diyanet with the government. Yet, despite all such attempts, he was abruptly dismissed from office in 2017 and was replaced by Ali Erbaş, who took an even more extreme loyalist position towards the government, taking an important step backwards concerning the autonomy of the Diyanet.

Thus, the expansion of activities and resources did not automatically bring institutional empowerment. On the contrary, starting from 2010 onwards, the Diyanet has lost whatever autonomy it previously had. This process of expansion of power and resources and simultaneous loss of autonomy is also one of the defining features of AKP era religious movements and organisations.

Incorporating Social Islam

“Social Islam” refers to all religious organisations such as religious orders or foundations that are not created nor controlled by the state’s bureaucratic apparatus. Despite repression by the Kemalist regime of religious orders and religious communities, these organisations have survived and have become influential actors in social life. Although differing from each other in their totality, they constitute the bulk of the religious scene in Turkey (Mardin 2005; Yavuz 2003). Thus, while technically still illegal, their existence and impact are known to most, and they have been involved with political actors for a long time (Çakır 1990). Aside from these more traditional
religious organisations, several Islamic organisations were founded throughout the Republican period in the form of foundations and associations. Although these foundations and associations have relied on a better-educated constituency, they have formed a much smaller portion of Turkey’s social Islam in comparison to the more traditional tarikats and cemaats and their social influence have traditionally remained limited. However, this seems to be changing under the AKP government and these foundations and associations have both multiplied in number and significantly have extended their influence. This transformation is analysed further below, but first the article will address the AKP’s “cemaat policy”.

26 In relation to social Islam, the AKP demonstrates characteristics similar to its relation to state Islam. On one hand, the AKP have empowered religious organisations, while on the other hand, it has also strictly undermined the organisations’ autonomy. While the AKP, in line with the historical tradition of right wing-conservative parties, has developed good relations with most of these religious organisations, it has also developed a more comprehensive policy that goes beyond the patron client/transactional relationship that has characterised the political party-religious organisations relationship ever since the 1950s (Çakır 1990).

27 The AKP’s comprehensive “cemaat policy” is based on a policy of reward and punishment. Accordingly, the AKP makes state resources available to some religious communities in exchange for their electoral support. One typical aspect of such government support is providing land and direct financial support for formal institutions bolstered by religious organisations. These include a wide range of institutions, including schools, universities, dormitories, Quran schools, and media organisations. A second type of support involves the informal opening of state cadres exclusively to certain religious organisations. Initially, the Gülen movement – with a better-educated constituency – made use of the bulk of these spaces. Yet, even during the heyday of the AKP-Gülen movement alliance, other religious movements also received their share of state cadres. A well-known example of this is the grouping of the Menzil community in the Health Ministry. Particularly after the fallout with the Gülen movement and the subsequent purge of Gülenists from the state, new cadres were opened to be filled by other religious organisations. Some of the financial assets and institutions that had been confiscated from the followers of the Gülen movement have been distributed to other religious organisations as a bounty. Thus, the government has many benefits to offer religious organisations in exchange for their loyalty.

28 If the AKP fails to receive the support it expects, then it could resort to dividing the communities. The selective use of reward and punishment is once again this strategy’s main instrument. It is fair to say that, in the current religious scene in Turkey, intra-group divisions are almost as fundamental and significant as inter-group rivalry. As discussed below, several religious groups are divided on the axis of being either pro-Erdoğan or anti-Erdoğan.

29 In religious communities that have detached themselves from the alliance, the AKP has tried to forge alliances with dissenting figures and support them in order to either take over the community or, at least, limit its influence by creating intra-community conflicts. To this end, AKP governments have supported figures in the past such as Mehmet Denizolgun from the Süleymançılı community and Kemalettin Özdemir from the Gülen movement. These individuals had their own claims to leadership in these
communities. By supporting them and their leadership claims, the AKP aimed to control these groups as well. Yet the most significant divide is the one between the Çarşamba and Beykoz sub-branches of the Ismailağa Cemaati. Ismailağa Cemaati is an important branch of the Naqshbandiyya order, and is currently divided into two sub-branches, each taking their names from the neighbourhoods of Istanbul where their institutional-legal centres (İsmailağa Vakfı and Marifet Derneği, respectively) are located. Whereas the Çarşamba branch is in full accord with the AKP’s rule, the Beykoz branch is trying to protect and preserve its autonomy without openly challenging the AKP government. However, this attempt of preserving its distance has come with a cost, as was observed most symbolically in 2016, when a Quran seminary built in Istanbul by the Marifet Derneği was demolished by the Istanbul Municipality without any court decision. To wit, the Ismailağa Vakfı have received all the benefits of a full accord with the government, as state institutions and resources have all been opened up for the group in the last few years.

If these strategies do not work and a community remains as a whole against the AKP, then outright oppression could commence. Although the fate of the once strong Gülen movement is well known, the repression of the Furkan Vakfı remains an often unnoticed, yet revealing, case. the Furkan Vakfı is a small and highly conservative religious group with headquarters based in the southern city of Adana. The group's founder and leader, Alparslan Kuytul, is a graduate of Al Azhar and follows a religious-political line that is highly inspired by the Egyptian Muslim Borthederhood. Moreover, as a movement that is highly critical of the Gülenists, the Furkan Vakfı partially sided with the government during the feud between the AKP and the Gülen movement. As such, it is an unlikely candidate for government repression, but its leader, Alparslan Kuytul, is also a persistent critic of the AKP government. As a result, the Furkan Vakfı has been subject to increased pressure in the last few years. When Kuytul continued criticising, he was eventually arrested along with dozens of followers on 30 January 2018 and remained in prison for almost two years. The activities of his community have been banned, as his vakıf has also been abolished. Police violence against the followers of Kuytul have become systemic and routine.

Novelty of the AKP’s Approach

Taken together, it is possible to claim that the AKP’s “cemaat policy” has been built upon three strategies: the first and main strategy is to create an alliance with religious communities, and only if that fails are the second and third strategies (divide-and-rule tactics or outright oppression) are enforced. Forging alliances with religious groups is certainly not a new phenomenon in Turkish politics. Creating such transactional relationships with religious communities has a long tradition in Turkish political history, particularly for right-leaning parties. However, this detailed and three-layered strategy and involvement into intra cemaat affairs has been unprecedented. More importantly, the simultaneous use of alliance or punishment has created a unique context in which religious communities both enjoy political patronage and access to state resources shadowed by a constant fear of oppression. Furthermore, the alliance between the AKP and religious organisations differs in significant aspects from previous alliances observed in Turkish politics.
Firstly, the AKP invests incomparably greater amounts of resources into these alliances. Rewards offered by the AKP have created a new context in terms of financial resources and state cadres that are vast compared to previous support political parties have offered religious communities. This is still, however, a quantitative change well-observed both academically and journalistically. The resources that the AKP makes available for religious communities are not limited to financial means; they have increasingly enabled mergers between state institutions and religious organisations, pointing to a qualitative change as well.

The introduction of a programme called Değerler Eğitimi is a case in point. Through this programme, the AKP offers these religious organisations access to state institutions and schools and gives them a certain role in the governance of religious education. This is a major departure from previous policies as the state had always been protective of its right to provide religious education. The first such protocol was signed between the Ministry of Education and Ensar Foundation in 2017. Later this protocol was abrogated by the State Council on the grounds that education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and cannot be transferred to other institutions. This ruling has either been ignored by the Ministry or circumvented by protocols between local branches of the ministry and various religious communities. For example, the Ensar Foundation has conducted such an education programme thanks to the protocol signed with the Niğde branch of Ministry of Education, whereas the Hayrat Foundation of the Nurcu community signed a protocol with the Ministry of Education as well as the Ministry of Family that has enabled the Foundation to provide religious education to students. Through these protocols, religious communities have had access to state schools and have provided religious courses and activities such as conferences and social and cultural activities.

Religious organisations also have acquired a more prominent role in the activities of the Diyanet through similar protocols conducted through the Diyanet. These protocols between the Diyanet and religious organisations is a two-way street. While expanding the Diyanet into the realm of social Islam is part of the strategy, it also enables social Islamic movements (cemaats) to expand into the realm of state Islam. On one hand, the Diyanet increasingly has acted as a religious community with its youth organisations, grassroots movements and even student houses. On the other hand, religious communities have overtaken, or at least have shared the burden/authority/right to teach the true Islam. Thus, religious communities have the approval of state authority through these collaborations.

Although in the past the distinction between state and social Islam has been largely preserved – the former more Kemalist-oriented and representing the political centre, and the latter allying with peripheral forces – the AKP has created a fusion of these formerly separate religious organisations.

Beyond Transactional Alliances

Although the benefits of such an alliance with the AKP may be obvious for religious organisations, it is clear that the AKP has the upper hand. The extent and terms of the alliance are not always decided by the religious organisations, but are sometimes forced upon them. Official declarations of support from several religious organisations to a wavering AKP government in the wake of the elections on 24 June 2018 are a case
in point. Several experts with insider knowledge of these religious communities indicated that such declarations of support were abnormal and have resulted in the politicisation of religious communities to an unprecedented extent (Çakır 2018). Moreover, the impetus for this initiative did not originate with the organisations, but with the government. These movements were not generally enthusiastic about declaring their support, but rather were forced to make such declarations. Moreover, this specific case is not an isolated event, and at several other critical junctures the AKP has demanded such declarations of support. What is more surprising is that such declarations have few short-term benefits for the AKP. Given that Erdoğan already enjoys a large degree of support among religious, and that the only other religiously oriented party, Saadet Partisi (the Felicity Party) consistently polls around one percent in national elections, these declarations have little electoral impact. However, they are more crucial for assimilating these religious organisations into the AKP government and making them subordinate to political will. Such an alliance has long-term implications. The more such alliances become visible, the more the lines separating the government and religious organisations blur.

37 This is a fundamental change compared to the former alliances between religious communities and right-wing political parties. The alliances built between centre-right parties and religious communities had been transactional. The political parties provided protection and patronage to the communities in exchange for their voter support. Group identities remained distinctly separate, and the support of religious communities was conditional upon the benefits it accrued through this patronage, but it was in no way guaranteed (Çakır 1990). Although certain alliances, such as the alliance between most Nurcu communities and former Prime Minister and President Süleyman Demirel, had been quite stable and long-term, the religious communities often shifted their support among different parties, creating new alliances before each election. This is the point in which the AKP’s policy on religious communities has differed the most significantly. The AKP is no longer satisfied with the passive support of religious communities. Instead, it demands active participation in the political framework designed by Erdoğan. The distinctive identities of the political party and the religious communities have been dissolved, and support for Erdoğan and the AKP forms the collective identity.

38 Tayfun Atay (2017: 177-181), an anthropologist who specialises in Turkish religious communities defines this process as Erdoganism (Tayyibilik) becoming a tarikat by itself and Erdoğan representing the post of meşihat (head of clergy). Indeed, this high level of integration between the political party, its leader, and the religious communities has resulted in a transcension of the political leader into a “somewhat supreme leader” (Öztürk 2019: 93). Thus, Erdoğan sacralises the habitual and combines the political and religious authority within himself. He is no more merely a political leader but is also a religious leader. In fact, according to a survey conducted by You Gov in 2017, Erdoğan appears as the foremost religious authority in Turkey despite being a layman in regards to religion (Sarfati 2019).

39 This sacralisation also partly explains Erdoğan’s brutality against non-obedient religious communities. While the history of Islam in Turkey has witnessed rivalries and struggles between religious communities and political parties such as the rivalry between Erbakan-led Refah Partisi and Esad Coşan-led Iskenderpaşa community throughout the 80s and 90s (Çakır 1990: 24-55), it has never become as brutal and
oppressive as the AKP-Gülen fight. One reason for this severity of conflict is the vast resources both groups have commanded. On another level, it is Erdoğan’s transgression from a political leader into a “supreme leader” that has perhaps transformed the nature of these rivalries. Thus, neither the Gülenists nor the followers of Kuytul are simply political rivals or critics; they have become religious outliers and even heretics by virtue of their non-obedience to Erdoğan. Yet the oppression against these groups, particularly with the once powerful Gülenists, also function as a warning for other religious movements (Atay 2017: 156; Öztürk 2019: 93). Atay’s (2017: 177-181) interlocutors from various religious communities have underlined this fear and have further pointed out that while Erdoğan rules, the tarikats and cemaats will not have a significant impact on political life.

Thus, ironically the AKP era represents both the politicisation of religious communities to an unprecedented extent and the decline of their impact over politics. Similarly, the expansion of religious communities’ resources go hand in hand with a severe fear of repression becoming prevalent among these communities. Thus, the overall result of Erdoğan’s “cemaat policy” has resulted in the expansion of power and resources of religious communities while diminishing their autonomy, a process that can be observed with regard to the Diyanet as well.

Furthermore, this policy has tied together the future of religious organisations to the AKP, leaving the religious organisations no other option than to provide full support for the party. Whereas in the past these movements did not provoke the retaliation of the state and the government, largely due to their civil and independent character, this is now changing. Several of these organisations even survived military interventions with little to no damage in the past. However, their newly formed organic relationship with the AKP government means that they could suffer a serious setback if the AKP government falls. This not only enmeshes these movements and their voting irrevocably for the AKP, it also eliminates the possibility of a major form of opposition: religiously inspired opposition. This is particularly significant given that, in an authoritarian context where civil society and all forms of organisations are severely oppressed, the religious realm has the potential to become the main venue for the dissemination and organisation of dissent. The crucial importance of controlling and erasing the autonomy of the religious realm is therefore pertinent to an authoritarian regime that wishes to control all spheres of life.

New Religious Organisations

The expansion of state resources and the incorporation of social Islam with state institutions and the party are complemented by the formation of a group of entirely new religious organisations funded and ruled by Erdoğan’s immediate circle, often including members of his own family. Two institutions, TÜGVA (The Service for Youth and Education Foundation of Turkey) and TÜRGEV (Turkish Foundation to Serve the Youth and Education), are two typical and prominent examples of such organisations. Although Erdoğan’s son, Bilal, played a crucial role during the expansion of TÜRGEV, today the Erdoğan family is represented by Esra Albayrak, Erdoğan’s daughter (who is on the executive board of TÜRGEV). Bilal Erdoğan is on the executive board of TÜGVA and other similar but smaller-scale organisations, such as Yeni Türkiye Eğitim Vakfı, Kartal Eğitim Vakfı and İnsan ve İrfan Vakfı. Erdoğan himself frequently appears at
events organised by these foundations and openly declares his support for their activities. For instance, at one of these events in 2015, he stated that TÜRGEV and other similar foundations are central to upbringing a pious generation.36

Similar to other religious organisations, these two organisations focus on educational institutions, particularly student dormitories, with the professed aim of raising a pious generation. TÜRGEV has 26 dormitories, of which 3 are allocated to high school students and the rest to university students. There is a gendered dimension as well, a division of labour among the dormitories established by the two foundations: TÜRGEV exclusively focusing on female students, and the 39 TÜGVA dormitories appropriated to male students.37 Hence, Erdoğan’s daughter is in the executive board of the former, while his son controls the others.

The activities of neither foundation are limited to student dormitories. TÜRGEV also operates several kindergartens, primary and higher-level schools, as well as one university. For its part, TÜGVA holds a wide range of educational and cultural programmes organised all around the country facilitated by city and district representatives. These programmes point to vast financial resources. It is not uncommon for TÜGVA programmes to end with an international trip to Spain (Andalusia), Central Asia or the holy cities in Saudi Arabia outside the month of pilgrimage. Needless to say, all these programmes are free of charge. In both TÜRGEV and TÜGVA, all the lavish activities and the exponential growth of the foundations are financed by unidentified donors. Yet, TÜRGEV is known to have received a $100 million donation between 2008 and 2012 from Gulf countries through Bilal Erdoğan, broadcasted for the first time in 2013 during the corruption scandal that involved the Iranian businessman Reza Zarrab, who pleaded guilty in New York to charges of money laundering (Alemdaroğlu 2018).

Distinctiveness of New Religious Organisations

Although activities of these organisations resemble those of other social religious organisations, they differ from a typical religious organisation through their lack of a central religious leader and religious teachings. Their mission statements consist of vague verbiage such as “cultivat(ing) generations that would restore and rebuild our civilisation” and “to cultivate youth who know their history, identity, and goal(s)”. Bilge Yabancı’s (2021) extensive field work with these organisations reveals that the primary focus of these organisations is not instilling a particular religious value or even a religious practice, but rather obedience to the state and, by extension, to Erdoğan.

Although the AKP has largely succeeded in its attempts to incorporate most of the religious movements into the party and state, the loyalty of these movements could not be guaranteed. As mentioned earlier, these movements have experienced intra-group tensions over demonstrating loyalty to Erdoğan and preserving their autonomy, even though most of them eventually have preferred to be co-opted by Erdoğan. Keeping these groups under thumb requires Erdoğan’s constant supervision, while the new religious foundations governed by his own family and close circle would not have this burden.

The history of these foundations also highlights the centrality of loyalty to Erdoğan for these organisations. Although the history of TÜRGEV dates back to Erdoğan’s
mayorship of Istanbul in the mid-1990s, its resources and activities started to multiply during the third Erdoğan government (2011-2014), and from 2012 onwards it has become a nationwide organisation. TÜGVA was founded in 2013. Since then, several other small-scale organisations have followed. Thus, since 2012 the third pillar of Erdoğan’s policy in the religious realm has been activated along with the deployment of state institutions and incorporation of religious communities. This also roughly corresponds to the dates in which Erdogan broke with the Gülen movement, implying that loyalty issues were the primary motivation in the attempts to create new loyal religious movements. The impact of the fallout with the Gülen movement during the sudden growth of these foundations is also acknowledged by the executives of these foundations. The lack of clear religious teachings or a clear ideology – other than loyalty to Erdoğan – in the programmes of these organisations also confirms this hypothesis.

As the loyalty of these new organisations surpass the traditional religious communities (tarikat and cemaat), the new organisations have been prioritised when receiving state support and political patronage. While traditional religious communities also benefit from state resources, their activities are financed through their grassroots organisations, too. In contrast, the activities of TÜRGEV and TÜGVA and their rapid expansion almost completely rely on direct and indirect state funding. These two organisations are also prioritised in the Değerler Eğitimi and they manage to enact many more protocols than other religious organisations.

It is yet to be seen whether extensive state support in the form of financial resources and political patronage would enable these new organisations to solidify their base as more organic religious communities have done. However, even in its current embryonic form, this is an unprecedented move in Turkish political history. Although religion and politics have interacted with one another in various ways, no political leader in Turkish history has ever attempted to create entirely new religious organisations and movements. Moreover, the enormous amount of resources and effort channeled into raising religious youth loyal to Erdoğan also implies Erdoğan’s long-term power projections. These efforts, which would come to fruition in no less than a decade, imply Erdoğan’s desire to remain active in politics for the foreseeable future, potentially transferring this loyalty to his offspring. By creating new religious organisations organically linked to the party, the AKP constitutes a global exception as well. Although several Islamic organisations around the world have discussed the separation of religious organisations from political parties, the most prominent example being the Tunisian Ennahda which arguably announced this separation in its 2016 party congress, Turkey’s AKP seems to be deviating from this trend. Erdoğan, who previously ruled over the AKP with an iron fist but was hindered by lack of religious background and religious organisational backing, now intends to create a community through any means necessary. However, this religious community seems to be defined by a personal allegiance to Erdoğan above anything else. To this extent, this could be argued as more of a political move than a religious one.

**Conclusion: A Comprehensive Policy**

When considered together, the three elements pointed out in this paper, namely, i) using state institutions and resources to define and control the religious discourse and
life, ii) incorporating religious communities and organisations into the party and state institutions, and iii) forming new religious organisations and communities through family-controlled religious foundations (vakıf), comprise a comprehensive and multi-faceted policy for controlling and regulating the religious realm in Turkey. While employing the Diyanet as the true representative of Islam and/or forging alliances with religious communities have strong historical precedents, there are certain ruptures in these otherwise typical moves. First, the amount of resources allocated to the Diyanet and religious communities is significantly greater compared to earlier periods. Second, these institutions are not being developed as alternatives to each other but as layers of a more complementary strategy. The Diyanet, cemaats, and newly emerging religious organisations are not deployed as rivals but as allies in the formation of a new religious generation. In this process, the historical distinction between state Islam and social Islam has blurred and lost its significance. As religious communities have been integrated into the state apparatus, the activities of the Diyanet have increasingly come to resemble those of religious communities. Last, but certainly not least, these various institutions and communities are now merging with the AKP and losing their autonomy. By co-opting these institutions and organisations, Erdoğan has direct and/or indirect control over most of the religious realm in Turkey. This has enabled Erdoğan to control a critical realm of civil society, which is crucial in sustaining an authoritarian system. Moreover, if one dimension of Turkish secularism is a desire to maintain state control over all religious activity, ironically, it is Erdoğan who has come closest to achieving this feat.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

1. Technically, tarikat refers to a traditional religious community following a Sufi mystical lineage, while cemaat refers to a relatively new religious community organised around a charismatic religious personality but not affiliated with a Sufi lineage. In practice, however, both words are used interchangeably.

2. For instance, based on similar observations, Sinem Adar (2021) points to a continuity in governing through religion rather than a rupture.

3. The focus in this article is exclusively over Sunni Islam which constitutes the bulk of the religious scene in Turkey. The AKP’s interaction with religious minorities, including the Alevi community, is based on an entirely different set of political considerations and follows a different path that this article deliberately excludes.


6. Previously the Diyanet prepared sermons and published them in book formats, but did not prepare weekly standardised sermons and did not enforce these sermons. For a more detailed analysis, see Yaşaroğlu 2016.

7. An exception is village schools, where religious courses remained in the curriculum until 1939. For a comprehensive outline of the history of religious education in Turkey, see Gündüz 1998.

8. A growing body of literature aims to address these inconsistencies by pointing out to the limitations of state power in projecting its modernisation ideals as well as to the society’s resistance and the inevitable bargaining and compromise between state and society. See in particular, Lord 2018; Bein 2011; Clayer 2015. Grounded in a “state in society” approach (Migdal 2001), these analyses are particularly valuable in depicting the discrepancies between the policy formulations and their implementation as well as pointing out to the internal tensions within state institutions. However, I would like to point out that even without a societal resistance to secularist policies, Turkish state’s double policy of secularism and controlling the religious sphere creates an inevitable contradiction that could only be overcome with a double discourse of good Islam (state Islam) and bad Islam (social Islam).

9. In February 2012, Erdoğan stated for the first time that AKP aims to raise a pious generation. Over the years, on many different occasions he repeated his position. See, https://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/711672-dindar-bir-genclik-yetistirmek-istiyoruz (accessed on 31.01.2023)


15. As of 2018, 2773 students were living at the 387 student houses that are operated by the Diyanet (Karakaş 2021:193)

16. For instance, Ali Bulac, the leading intellectual of Islamism in Turkey had defined the Diyanet as an institution established to tame the religion and secularize the society. Among numerous such articles of him, see, https://www.haber7.com/yazarlar/ali-bulac/361735-aleviler-devlet-ve-diyanet (accessed on 28.12.2022)


20. There are two excellent articles to consult for a detailed analysis and a chronology of how the AKP-Gülen Movement alliance turned into a rivalry and later open fight between the two groups. See (Taş 2018) and (Demiralp 2016).

21. Abdülmetin Balkanlioğlu, a leading cleric from the İsmailağa community declared that all the belongings of Gülenists can be taken as a booty (ganimet). There are plenty of anecdotal evidence that this became a widespread though non-systematic practice. On the other hand, schools and dormitories confiscated have been systematically distributed to other religious communities and organisations. See, https://www.evrensel.net/haber/327881/chpli-komisyon-uyeleri-aladag-raporuna-serh-kooydu (accessed on 30.12.2022)
27. Even the IHOs as state schools received a heavy blow once they were considered to be going out of state control. Necmettin Erbakan’s declaration that IHOs had become a backyard of his National View Movement (Milli Görsel), was one of the triggers of state’s action against these schools.
33. There are also certain foundations whose existence pre-dates AKP but are completely co-opted by Erdoğan and his immediate circle. Most prominent of them are İlim Yayına Vakfı and Ensar Vakfı. These two organisations can be considered on par with TÜRGEV and TÜGVA with regard to the state support they receive and their organic connection and loyalty to Erdoğan (Yabancı 2021: 476).
35. There are also certain foundations whose existence pre-dates AKP but are completely co-opted by Erdoğan and his immediate circle. Most prominent of them are İlim Yayına Vakfı and Ensar Vakfı. These two organisations can be considered on par with TÜRGEV and TÜGVA with regard to the state support they receive and their organic connection and loyalty to Erdoğan (Yabancı 2021: 476).
39. This dependency is best demonstrated by the downsizing of their activities following the opposition victory in the Istanbul municipal elections as Istanbul municipality served as one of the main channels for transferring state resources to these organisations. For instance, both institutions operated much more dormitories until 2019; 67 for TÜRGEV and 58 for TÜGVA. See, https://t24.com.tr/haber/turaga-ve-turgev-tercih-sonra-44-ogrenci-yurdununa-kapadı,950786 (accessed on 31.03.2022)
ABSTRACTS

This article analyses the relationship between religion and the state in the AKP era and discusses whether AKP policies represent a rupture with the republican era or a continuity. The AKP developed a multi-faceted and comprehensive policy for controlling the religious realm in Turkey. Employing the Diyanet as the true representative of Islam and forging alliances with cemaats have strong historical precedents, yet the amount of resources the AKP invested are significantly greater. Moreover, it is not only that AKP devoted more resources to the religious field (quantitative change), but also that it did this in novel ways (that amount to a qualitative change). First, these institutions are not being developed as alternatives to each other but as parts or layers of a more complementary strategy. Second, these various institutions and communities are merging with the AKP and losing their autonomy. By co-opting all these institutions and organisations, Erdoğan controls most of the religious realm in Turkey. If one of the unique dimensions of Turkish secularism is the state’s desire to maintain control over all religious activity, ironically, it is Erdoğan who has come closest to achieve this.

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Keywords: AKP, Islam, Diyanet, cemaat, değerler eğitimi

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Introduction

The expansion of higher education is often associated with increasing democratic potential and seen as a threat to authoritarianism in liberal theory. Accordingly, societies with a higher level of university-educated populations tend to be less prone to authoritarian politics (Carnevale et al. 2020; Dražanová 2017; Glaeser et. al 2007). Therefore, the liberal assumption suggests that authoritarian leaders would be wary of expanding university access to prevent the spread of democratic demands (de Mesquita, Downs 2005). Turkey presents a divergent case. The expansion and intensification of authoritarian rule under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) overlapped with the impressive growth of higher education. In 2002, Turkey had a total of seventy-six universities (53 public and 23 private). By 2020, the number of universities had increased to 206 (130 public and 76 private) (see Figure 1). The student population also rose from 1.7 million to 8 million in the same period. This over-300 percent growth in the university student population against an only 26 percent population growth led to a doubling of the university-educated young adult population (25-34), bringing Turkey closer to the OECD average within two decades.¹
However, this impressive expansion of university access occurred alongside authoritarian consolidation in Turkey (Esen, Gümüşçü 2016; Erensü, Alemdaroğlu 2018; Akçay 2021). Although Turkey’s current constitution, promulgated under military rule in 1982, has framed both state and government systems in an authoritarian way, the concentration of power reached new heights under President Erdoğan (Akça, 2014). In the last two decades, Turkey has witnessed a significant transformation of its legal and governmental structures, allowing the ruling party to pack the courts, control the media, and criminalize and eliminate opposition factions within the state and military. In 2013, the AKP government brutally suppressed nationwide protests to prevent the fate autocrat leaders in the Middle Eastern who had been toppled by large-scale demonstrations a few years prior. The crackdown on peaceful protests marked a new level of political repression in Turkey, culminating in the establishment of a full-fledged authoritarian regime following the coup attempt on July 15th, 2016.

President Erdoğan capitalized on the coup attempt to declare a state of emergency, suspended human rights and procedural protections, purged over a hundred thousand civil servants, shutdown or confiscate nearly 200 media outlets, jailed numerous of political activists, journalists, academics, opposition politicians, including elected mayors and members of parliament. Furthermore, a near-total ban on freedom of assembly was implemented, with the exception of the rallies organized by the ruling party. The state of emergency renewed six times between 2016 and 2018, allowed Erdoğan to replace Turkey’s parliamentary government system with an executive presidency through the 2017 Constitutional Referendum, which undermined the separation of powers, removing checks and balances on the President, apart from periodic and increasingly manipulated elections.

The process of autocratization of Turkey’s government system had a profound impact on the country’s universities. Although the AKP’s political control of higher education manifests similarities with earlier periods in Turkey, it differs in scope and intensity.

Figure 1. The change in the number of universities under the AKP.
Source: Compiled by the author based on TUBITAK numbers.
Given the conditions for expanding higher education overlap with a relapse to authoritarianism, I examine the university’s entanglements with the authoritarian regime in light of the historical evolution of the university and its politics. To conduct this analysis, I rely on two types of data: 1) news reports, research reports, official statistics, court cases, secondary literature; and 2) interviews conducted with 15 academics and three imprisoned students. An exhaustive survey of the university expansion exceeds the scope of this paper. Likewise, delving into the history of higher education policy falls outside the purview of this paper. Instead, the goal here is to provide an analytical framework to understand the relationship between universities and authoritarianism, with a focus on the latter’s most recent and intense iteration (which the collective issue examines). Therefore, this paper aims to provide to shed light on the role of universities in the formation and sustenance of authoritarian regimes. I argue that in addition to reflecting the overall decline of democracy, universities have also become integral building blocks for the new authoritarian regime, primarily by expanding and entrenching political patronage, control, and coercion. The following section will explain the theoretical insights that underpin this research, followed by an analysis of conditions in which higher education is utilized in the authoritarian consolidation of the AKP regime.

The university: a vehicle for democracy or authoritarianism?

Since its early European conceptions, liberal theory paradigm presume a strong positive correlation, if not always causation, between education and democracy. The premise rests on the role of education in fostering citizens with an awareness of rights and obligations – a sine a qua non of a functioning democracy. This idea was extensively discussed in John Dewey’s Democracy and Education, where he theorized about the purpose and methods of education in cultivating what he called ‘organized intelligence’ to achieve participatory democracy (Dewey 1922). Similarly, the modernization school posits that underdevelopment is a direct consequence of psychological and cultural traits within society and can be remedied by increasing education levels. Despite studies highlighting county-specific factors that can either facilitate or impede democracy, even after a certain level of development has been attained (Acemoglu et al. 2005), scholars, policymakers, and international organizations largely adhere to the positive role of education in fostering prosperity, participation, and democracy (Lipset 1959; Barro 1999; Przeworski et al. 2000).

Scholars have also argued that higher education has a “taming” effect on authoritarian encroachment. Individuals with a university education are less likely to exhibit authoritarian preferences and attitudes compared to their peers with lower levels of education (Glaeser et al. 2007). Carnevale et al. (2020), based on an analysis of World Values Survey Data across 51 countries between 2010-2014, have similarly argued that while authoritarian tendencies such as intolerance of others, can exist across all levels of educational attainment and may be influenced by material and physical insecurity, university graduates are less prone to expressing authoritarian preferences and attitudes compared to those with lower educational attainment. The data from Turkey in specific also supports this point. For example, researchers found that university graduates demonstrated higher levels of political tolerance and embraced more
Moreover, throughout history, universities have served as significant hubs of collective action in the fight for rights, freedoms, and autonomy. From the events of 1968 in France to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the 1989 Tiananmen protests in China, and the turn of the century revolutions in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, university campuses and students have played a crucial part in mobilizations against the autocratic and oligarchic rulers.

However, although universities have historically played a crucial role in democratic development and fostering global connections, they were also instrumental to generating anti-democratic and anti-pluralist dynamics within society. Elite and class reproduction have been central to this role, as has nationalist politics (Bourdieu, 1964, Stevens 2009, Douglass 2021). The recent surge of neo-nationalist and right-wing reactionary politics certainly poses new challenges to the democratic potential of universities. As one observer aptly observes: “In a prevailing era of reactionary right-wing politics, the very mission of public higher education as a site for academic freedom, innovative thinking, and production of new knowledge is being severely challenged on a global scale (Darian-Smith (2020: 3).” The assault on higher education takes various forms, ranging from relatively moderate restrictions imposed by nationalist-leaning governments, such as revised curricula, to the coercion of academics and students who express dissenting views.

Increasing evidence highlights authoritarian regimes’ efforts to constrain higher education to curtail democratic demands. According to de Mesquita and Downs (2005), the relationship between development and democratization is not always straightforward. Based on their study of 150 countries between 1970 and 1999, the authors argue that autocratic leaders delay democratization even when economic development reaches sufficient levels, by limiting access to “coordination goods” such as human rights, press freedom and higher education. Since universities provide individuals with the means to form critical ideas, express dissent and organize opposition, they pose a threat to authoritarian regimes. As a result, autocratic leaders limit access to universities as a means to hinder the progress of democratization.

However, the contemporary authoritarian regimes contradict de Mesquita and Downs argument (Perry 2020). The remarkable increase in access to higher education in countries such as Turkey and China indicate that autocrats have no qualms about expanding access to higher education while simultaneously tightening their grip on power. So how does one explain authoritarian regimes' expansion of higher education? Evidence from various countries indicates that the democratization of access to higher education goes hand in hand with the autocratization of governance within these institutions. Therefore, while there may be efforts to broaden opportunities for individuals to pursue higher education, there is a simultaneous tightening of control over the governance and administration of universities.

This autocratization of governance manifests in multiple ways, such as increased state intervention, ideological indoctrination, restricted academic freedoms, and the imposition of regulations aimed at stifling dissenting voices. By exerting control over the internal workings of universities, authoritarian leaders aim to shape the educational landscape in line with their own political objectives, ensuring that higher
education serves as a tool for reinforcing their authority rather than fostering critical thinking, open debate, and democratic values.

In order to suppress the democratic potential of universities, authoritarian regimes often resort to implementing various reward and punishment measures (Forrat 2016; Furstenberg et al. 2020; Hanson, Sokhey 2021; Nguyen 2022; Perry 2020). These measures are designed to exert control over academic institutions and deter individuals from engaging in activities that challenge or question the regime’s authority, while rewarding those who conform or actively support its policies. For example, Forrat (2016) argues that the Russian federal state, under President Putin increased higher education funding and allocated funds to incentivize universities to discourage anti-regime protests on campus. By employing these reward and punishment mechanisms, authoritarian governments seek to curtail higher education’s democratic influence, thereby solidifying their own power and stifling potential threats to their rule. Therefore, the expansion of access to higher education in authoritarian contexts should be understood within the broader framework of autocratic governance, where control over institutions becomes instrumental in perpetuating and consolidating authoritarian rule.

China provides a case in point. Despite the significant expansion of higher education in recent times in China, university campuses have remained remarkably free from protests, except the state-organized nationalist rallies that target foreign powers (Weiss 2014; Perry 2020). This peace on campus, Perry (2020) observed, was odd given the historical pattern of student mobilization in mainland China. This was odd also because there has been protests by other groups in society such as rural villagers, laborers, and the new middle class as well as large-scale student protests in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Perry argues that the main reason for the passivity of students in mainland universities has been the Communist Party’s policies that aim to keep universities under control following the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. These policies devised to reinforce existing political controls while employing new techniques to domesticate campuses includes peer surveillance, political and ideological guidance by politically reliable counselors, and social media monitoring. Additionally, the Party provides generous funding to major universities, where faculty and staff face increased government scrutiny as they are pressured to comply with state directives. Consequently, the massification of higher education in China has been accompanied by heightened control, leading to what Perry (2020) called “educated acquiescence.”

This double process of the democratization of access and the autocratization of governance in higher education, which Perry observes in China, characterizes the role of universities in the making of the authoritarian regime in Turkey. Explaining the university’s role in autocratization, however, requires going beyond country comparisons and considering the mechanics of authoritarian durability. Slater and Fenner’s (2011) argue that authoritarian durability is rooted in the control of state institutions, which cannot be explained solely by examining parties and elections as in conventional political science approaches. In addressing the durability question, Slater and Fenner distinguish between the regime and the state. They argue that regime durability primarily depends on the state’s infrastructural power (Mann 1984) or the regime’s “staying power” - the mechanisms through which authoritarian regimes stabilize and maintain their hold on power. These mechanisms include a) extracting revenues, which provides authoritarian regimes with resources to preempt crises and
facilitate the implementation of challenging economic policies and timely distribution of patronage; b) cultivating dependence by strategically distributing resources, enabling the regime to bolster its clientelistic power; c) registering citizens, which enhances the state’s monitoring capacity, making population legible and coercion feasible, and d) repressing rivals to neutralize any threats to regime durability.

Drawing on above conceptualization and the analysis of the Turkish case, this paper departs from the conventional view that sees universities solely as educational institutions and proposes to view them as institutions that perform infrastructural functions for the authoritarian regime. I focus on two dimensions of universities that crystallize in the recent expansion and transformation of higher education in Turkey. First, the economic development dimension of universities, which cultivates and extends dependence and political patronage, exemplified by Erdoğan’s policy of creating a university in every city. Second, universities’ role in monitoring, controlling students, and coercing dissent. Through these two avenues, the university expansion has served as a building block of the AKP’s political economy and authoritarian regime. The subsequent sections will elaborate on this argument in detail. However, first, I would like contextualize the relationship between the state and the university in Turkey by briefly examining the pre-AKP period.

The university as a state infrastructure: the pre-AKP period

In Turkey, universities have historically been intertwined with the state’s developmental, ideological, and coercive infrastructure. The two significant aspects of higher education policy have been addressing the growing demand for higher education, and ensuring universities’ political compliance. During the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic, the university known as Darülfünn (established in 1846) was initially excluded from the new Republican state’s efforts to establish its ideological infrastructure. The nationalist ideology of the new Republic found expression through institutions such as the Turkish History Association and the Turkish Language Institutions, which were operated outside the university. It was not until 1933, a decade after the proclamation of the Republic, that the state turned to Darülfünn, but only to close it down and abolish Darülfünn by the institution’s failure to acknowledge and support the new regime’s vision and efforts in building a new nation-state (Mazici 1995; Tekeli 2019).

With the transition to the multi-party system in 1946 and the introduction of democratic elections, the state granted some institutional autonomy to universities and implemented elections for rectors and deans (Law 4936). However, this autonomy did not necessarily guarantee freedom of research. Additionally, in the backdrop of the Cold War, universities became a breeding ground for rising socialist and social democratic movements, which further heightened government concerns and led to crackdowns on leftist activism. In the decades following World War II, Turkey experienced increasing economic and infrastructure development, population growth, rural-to-urban migration, and higher levels of education. These factors created a growing demand for higher education. In response, new universities (Ege, Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi, Ortadoğu Teknik Üniversitesi, and Atatürk Üniversitesi) and trade schools were established in the 1950s. Simultaneously, the government under Adnan
Menderes, Turkey’s first democratically elected Prime Minister, targeted universities and faculty members for their criticism of its policies.

The 1960 military coup against the Menderes government marked a significant turning point for Turkey and its universities. The coup resulted in the execution of Menderes and two of his ministers, ushering a new era. While the coup led to the dismissal of 147 faculty members, including prominent public intellectuals such as Sabahattin Eyüboğlu, Haldun Taner, and Yavuz Abadan, it also brought about a new constitution, which expanded universities’ institutional autonomy in 1961 (Article 120). This period also witnessed changes in economic planning. The State Planning Agency, established by the new constitution, guided research-based policymaking that was attuned to demographic changes and labor market requirements in the country. The first five-year plan stipulated TUBITAK (Turkey Scientific and Technological Research Council) as a state institution to develop, regulate and coordinate scientific research and development activities aligned with the country’s economic priorities. However, during the ten-year period between 1960 and 1970, only one new university, Hacettepe, was established, leading to a significant shortfall in the capacity of higher education to meet the growing demand.

In the context of the rights and freedoms expanded by the 1961 Constitution and the global student mobilization peaking in 1968, Turkey’s universities experienced a rise in student political activism and call higher education reforms. The state responded to these demands through a variety of tactics including inciting rivalry among student groups, provocation, and violence. The 1971 military intervention eventually aimed to suppress political mobilization within universities. Following the intervention, Martial Law Courts were established to arrest and prosecute leftist faculty members in charges of promoting communism. Measures such as the implementation of a national university entrance exam and correspondence education were instituted to meet the increasing demand. Furthermore, several new universities, including Çukurova, Diyarbakır, Anadolu, Cumhuriyet, Firat, Bursa (Uludağ), and On Dokuz Mayis, were established, bringing the number of universities to 18 in the 1970s. New faculties and departments were also opened in existing universities to accommodate the growing demand. Despite this significant expansion, the capacity of higher education remained still short of the demand and addressing the challenges of higher education (Tekeli 2019).

The 1980 military coup had a devastating impact on university autonomy and academic freedoms (Tekeli 2010). Following the coup, the military regime established the Board of Higher Education (YÖK) in 1981 and its role was enshrined in the new authoritarian constitution of 1982 (Article 131). The introduction of the YÖK law resulted in the abolishment of universities’ administrative and scientific autonomy. It led to a significant shift in power, transferring authority from university rectors, deans, and the faculty to the President and the YÖK. Although universities continued to hold elections, the ultimate decision-making power rested with the central authority, which could appoint, or veto the names chosen through faculty votes. The board also implemented control mechanisms for decisions that fell outside of its direct purview.

While the constitution acknowledged the concept of scientific autonomy, its limits were readily written into laws and regulations related to “state security,” which resulted in the suppression faculty and student dissent during and after the military rule (1980-1983). The YÖK helped draw boundaries of freedom of expression and
research; as well as monitoring and penalizing academics who crossed these boundaries. For instance, researching or teaching topics deemed contrary to national unity and state interests such as ethnic and religious minorities, state violence and class inequality could lead to disciplinary actions.

Preventing political mobilization and oppositional politics became a significant focus of higher education restructuring in the aftermath of the 1980 coup. The military regime's aim to discipline universities was evident in the dismissal of about 150 academics by the State Emergency Law (no.1402). To cultivate a politically compliant student body, the military regime installed compulsory religious education in schools and national(ist) history courses at universities. In this new order, especially leftists, Kurdish and Alevi youth were suppressed into submission within schools, universities, and neighborhoods. The state's systematic practice of targeting of dissident youth found its most brutal expressions in the execution of leftist student leaders following the 1971 military intervention and the destruction of the lives of many others in military courts and prisons following the 1980 coup.

During the 1990s, the state maintained its control and exerted coercion over student mobilization, especially in response to austerity and privatization policies guided by the IMF. An illustrative example is the case of “kalemli cete” (the gang with a pen), a group of seven university students, who displayed a banner “No to fees” in protest against the 400 percent tuition hike during the 1995-1996 academic year. As a result, they were arrested, subjected to torture, and sentenced to a total of 75 years of prison on charges of ‘forming an unarmed terrorist organization’ (Uysal 2001; Tahincioğlu, Göktaş 2013).

This historical context highlights the intricate relationship between the state and universities in Turkey. Universities have played a crucial role in the state’s developmental, ideological, and coercive apparatus. On the one hand, the state has established new universities and faculties to address the country’s economic development goals and societies’ growing demand for higher education. On the other hand, it has implemented measures to regulate and restrict freedom of thought, expression, and research within these institutions, ensuring that that faculty and students do not challenge the established ideological and political order.

In the following sections, I will examine how the AKP aligned itself with this framework and spearheaded an extensive expansion of the university system, amidst neoliberal transformation of the Turkish economy. I will argue that this expansion not only increased the access to higher education but also expanded the state, creating new venues for political patronage, control and coercion.

Government and Expansion of Universities under the AKP

Neither the authoritarian control of universities nor the neoliberal transformation of higher education began with the AKP in Turkey. The state control over higher education institutionalized after the 1980 coup, with the establishment of the Board of Higher Education (YÖK) in 1981. The coup and the military regime established afterwards facilitated Turkey’s adoption of neoliberal transformation in line with the Washington Consensus by quelling labor resistance to economic liberalization.
This neoliberal transformation in Turkey was in line with the fundamental changes in the functions and organization of universities. During the last few decades of the twentieth century, higher education came to be viewed as an economic enterprise governed and organized by principles of profitability, accountability, and efficiency. As Patricia Gumport (2000: 67) observed, “the dominant legitimating idea of public higher education has changed from higher education as a social institution to higher education as an industry.” Scholars have coined the term “academic capitalism” to describe this new paradigm, wherein knowledge shifted from being a public good, produced and used for social benefit to a commodity traded for profit ((Slaughter, Leslie 1997; Slaughter, Rhoades 2004; Alemdaroğlu 2016). The commodification has had adverse effects on institutional autonomy, the objectivity of research, and the social ideal of universities, as extensively studied by scholars (Readings 1996; Kirp 2003; Bok 2004; İnal, Akkaymak 2012; Değirmencioğlu, İnal 2015).

The neoliberal restructuring in Turkey occurred simultaneously with the repressive transformation of the higher education system following the 1980 coup. One of my interviewees, who works at a prominent public university in Ankara, reflects on the legacy of this earlier transformation on the current situation in the following way.

Before the recent authoritarian drift, the university had already lost its progressive position. University-industry convergence, techno-cities, the emphasis on project-based revenue-generating research (projecilik), indicate that the profit motive has become a significant driver in the functioning of the university. This transformation, in my opinion, had already undermined the university's connection with society. Authoritarianism exploited the already damaged state of the university, which had been transformed by neoliberal policies and further exacerbated the situation by treating scholars as mere technicians focused on securing project grants.

The AKP's two-decade rule deepened the neoliberal commodification of higher education but an even more significant change was the growth of public higher education. In line with the World Bank's policy recommendations, the party pushed for further privatization to meet the demand at all levels of education. The number of private or foundation universities has more than tripled in two decades, increasing from 23 to 76. Additionally, the public universities were also pressured to further commodify their research and teaching activities to generate their own financial resources. However, in contrast to the increasing push for privatization, the AKP's most significant policy intervention was the expansion of public universities from 53 to 130 in twenty years. This growth not only represented a larger percentage of increase than in the number of private institutions, but it also corresponded to a much more significant rise in the number of students. Presently, only about 8 percent of Turkey's 8 million university students are enrolled in foundation universities. While this is not a negligible number, it pales in comparison to the rise in the number of public university students. This statist expansion has provided the AKP with a new organizational base for political patronage and control. Therefore, the enlargement of public universities played a crucial role in the AKP's authoritarian build-up.

The AKP came to power with an agenda to radically transform higher education and the Council of Higher Education. Prime Minister Abdullah Gül stated: “We will not allow the status quo to continue in Turkey. Universities will be at the forefront of the institutions, saying no to the status quo...There need to be big changes in universities... We will eliminate injustices of the university entrance system... YÖK will coordinate
universities. It will not be an institution that interferes with everything in universities or controls them." However, the AKP’s initial attempts to rewrite the YÖK law to allow decentralization in its first years in power were unsuccessful. When the party appointed a pro-government figure, Yusuf Ziya Özcan, to the Presidency of the Board in 2007, the plan to decentralize the university system was no longer pursued. After gaining control over the Council, the AKP utilized the Board’s powers to reshape the higher education landscape by significantly increasing the number of universities and expanding its control over university administrations.

The great public university expansion began with 15 universities in 2006 (Law no. 5467), followed by 17 in 2007 (Law no. 5662), and 9 in 2008 (Figure 2). In just three years, 41 cities became home to public universities (see Table 1). Among these cities, 32 have populations under 100,000 people. Even smaller Anatolian cities such as Ardahan and Artvin, each with a population of around 20,000, have their own public universities. By 2011, when the AKP sought a third term in power, which many analysts consider as the beginning of Turkey’s shift towards authoritarianism, the goal of “a university per each city” had already been largely achieved.

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**Figure 2. The Great Expansion aka “A University per Province 2006-2008.”**
Source: Compiled by the author.

Starting from 2010, the AKP extended its efforts beyond the university-per-city project and multiplied the number of public universities in medium-sized cities like Konya, Bursa, Adana, Erzurum, and Kayseri, as well as in metropolitan cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir. A mere 45 days prior to the June 2015 elections, Alanya, Bandırma and İskenderun, districts of three medium size cities, each a population of approximately two hundred thousand, received their share from the AKP’s pre-electoral favors and were granted universities of their own. The establishment of new universities entailed new projects, procurement contracts and public services for infrastructure development including roads, bridges, public transportation, and garbage collection.
Both the AKP politicians and the enthusiastic local elite saw new universities as a means to boost economic activity and development. Universities would stimulate urban and regional development, generate business opportunities, and create employment in small Anatolian cities (Parlak, Kaynar 2005). With thousands of students, and dozens of faculty members, in need of housing, goods, restaurants, and transportation, there would be a surge in demand for these amenities. Moreover, the university itself would generate employment opportunities for locals in administrative, maintenance and academic positions. For example, Bingöl University, founded in 2007, has flourished into a large institution with 16,000 people and has become a major employer in this eastern city of about 250,000 residents. Reflecting on the university’s growth, Cevdet Yılmaz, the AKP’s vice chair and former minister of development, and a deputy from Bingöl, stated:

We don’t view the university solely as an educational institution. It is, of course, an educational institution, but it also acts as a development agency. We believe that our university will greatly contribute to the development of our province and region through the projects it undertakes and the ideas it supports... Today, we envision Bingöl as a university city; this is how we plan for its future. According to international standards, a city with more than 10 percent of its population consisting of university students is considered a university city. Bingöl has now become one.

In the 2000s, when more established public higher education institutions such as Ankara and Istanbul Universities were less receptive to the AKP government, the new universities have provided the party an opportunity to establish influence in higher education through the recruitment of newly academic and administrative staff. Consequently, these new universities not only acted as agents of growth in higher education, but also served as vehicles for expanding the state infrastructure and capacity under the AKP’s rule and serving as building blocks for the party’s consolidation. They allowed the party to extend its influence as new venues for patronage and political control. A study conducted by the Education and Science Workers’ Union in 2014 not only highlighted the intensification of coercive measures that hold of universities after 2016 but also documented the role of universities in making of the authoritarian regime. The study identified the top three rights violations in universities as arbitrary and non-merit-based recruitment, political cronyism and favoritism in construction tenders and allocating income-generating activities ( Eğitimsen 2014).

Long-established universities have also expanded their degree programs by offering evening classes and additional programs, often resulting in heavier teaching loads for faculty members. Teaching extra courses has become a means for faculty to make ends meet, and for university administrators, it serves as a tool to distribute rewards and penalties. One of the interviewees, an assistant professor, explained this phenomenon as follows:

The course load is overwhelming. I teach six courses, three undergraduate courses twice, during the day and at night, a master’s course, a doctorate course, and a graduation thesis course. Teaching more courses means earning more money. For instance, you receive your regular salary and get an additional 50% percent of your salary for doing extra teaching. Faculty course assignments function as a reward system because you are paid per course. If you teach a lot, you earn a substantial amount. However, it becomes challenging to teach well when you have such a heavy workload. That’s why people end up teaching for just 20 minutes. Universities have become nothing more than high schools. It was not like this when
I first started. There was no secondary education. The quantitative growth has been ahead of everything else.

36 A faculty member from another public university explained how instructors are assigned courses in his department:

Often, the people, who have close connection to the administration and who do not create issues are the ones are given extra course assignments. The practice of course sharing, and student sharing, especially at the doctoral level, comes with material advantages. Salaries for social scientists are particularly low in Turkey, and as a result, some faculty members opt out to teach courses outside their own departments in order to earn additional income. They may teach in secondary education or non-thesis master’s programs or provide counseling to as many students as possible. I see this as a compensation mechanism. Instead of demanding better salaries through organized means, academics try to make ends meet by taking additional responsibilities.

37 Partisan and nepotistic recruitment of faculty is widespread in newly established institutions. While there is a lack of quantitative data, interviews with academics and news reports strongly indicate that appointments are often informed by political connections and personal loyalties. One of my interviewees provided valuable insights into the academic recruitment process, he said:

No one ever asks us. New academic positions are opened up for certain individuals. The system looks like this: After completing your doctorate, you approach to the rector’s office, and if they are interested, they create a position for you. Sometimes we, academics, come to know about new positions opened at our university on the Internet, just like everyone else. And then they hire someone, and when you inquire about this person, and you do some investigation and discover that she is the daughter of a local wealthy company owner or something like that.

38 These recruitment practices have significant implications for both accountability and academic quality. They indicate how decision-making processes often exclude faculty members especially those who hold critical perspectives on government and university policies. The following account is as an example of how faculty members are marginalized as top university administrators increasingly rely on and conform to the government’s directives.

The university administration is only accountable to the government. The rector or vice-rectors want to appear legitimate only to the government. Even as department administrators, we are not consulted about much. The main concern is not to upset the government. For instance, there was a scandalous hiring case where a university’s top administrator recruited his relative instead of one of the candidates who scored highest in the exam. He, then resigned, not because he was embarrassed by what he did, but because he did not want to be seen as a troublemaker to the government that brought him to that position in the first place.

39 The recent changes in the Higher Education Law (No. 2547) allowed universities to include additional eligibility conditions in academic position descriptions with permission from the Board of Higher Education. While this change was initially intended to provide universities with flexibility to tailor academic positions according to their needs, it also resulted in increased arbitrariness and nepotism in academic staffing. Unfortunately, the public becomes aware of these malpractices only when they are publicized in news sources, as university administrators’ often overlook them. An example of such oversight occurred at Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University in Rize where administrators accidentally announced new positions with notes specifying the
individuals to be recruited (GIT Türkiye, Akademide Hak İhlalleri Dosyası III, İstanbul, March 2016). Several other examples highlight the lack of transparency and accountability in recruitment, which has significant repercussions for the quality of research and teaching (Eğitimsen 2014).

The expansion of higher education has had a negative impact on the quality of higher education as evidenced by various indicators. One such indicator, the student-faculty ratio, has significantly deteriorated over the past decade. The Board of Higher Education had previously set target to reduce the student-staff ratio from 32 in 2005 to 21 in 2020 and eventually to 17 in 2025. However, this ratio has instead worsened, with 45 students per instructor in 2020 (See Figure 3). These statistics highlight the challenges in achieving a better standard of education amidst the expansion of higher education especially when there is a significant shortage of trained academics in the country.

Figure 3. Student-faculty ratio between 2002 and 2020.
Source: Compiled by the author based on the numbers of the Council of Higher Education.

There has also been a significant decline in research output amidst the rapid expansion of higher education. A study published in 2020 by Turkey’s Academy of Sciences revealed a notable slowdown in scientific publications since 2006, contrasting with the earlier period between 2000 and 2006 (Akçigit, Özcan-Tok 2020: 24). The study highlighted that while the increase in the number of universities led to a rise in the number of faculty members, this growth was overshadowed by larger rise in the student population. As a consequence, faculty members faced heavier teaching loads, further reducing their limited time for research. The study also found that the new universities demonstrated lower research productivity compared to older public and private institutions. This indicates that the expansion of higher education has not been accompanied by a proportional increase in research output.

Furthermore, the expansion also correlated with a decline in the merits of academic administrators. A study conducted in 2019 revealed a significant number of rectors lacked international publication. Out of 196 rectors surveyed 68 (44 public and 24 private “non-profit”) have no international publication. Additionally, 71 rectors had
never been cited by a scientific publication, suggesting a lack of scholarly impact. Only eight rectors had a single international publication, while just 49 rectors had more than one publication or received at least one citation. These findings raise concerns about the academic leadership in Turkish higher education.

Even though the link between expansion and quality needs further investigation, one can argue that the core functions of universities as institutions of higher learning and research have taken a back seat to the government’s “a university per city” drive. A study conducted by Parlak and Kaynar (2005), which examined the earlier 1992 wave of university expansion, when 23 public universities were founded overnight (Law no. 3837) found that this previous period of expansion also resulted in poor outcomes in education and research quality, primarily due to inadequate physical infrastructure and a shortage of number of faculty members in Turkey. These findings highlight the potential challenges and shortcomings associated with rapid university expansion.

In summary, when the AKP came to power in 2002, it pledged to decentralize control over universities and dismantle the Board of Higher Education. However, as the party consolidated its power, it chose to retain the Board and instead utilized it carry out a large-scale expansion of universities. While this expansion increased access to higher education, it also grew the state resources, which the AKP would utilize to create loyalties and control. Furthermore, the democratization of access to universities has been accompanied by further autocratization of university governance. Subsequently, academic freedoms declined, and coercion within Turkish higher education increased. The following section will provide a more comprehensive exploration of these trends.

Control and coercion of students under the AKP

As early as 2010, when analysts still regarded Turkey as a democratic model for the rest of the Middle East, and the AKP as its agent of democratization, there were increasing concerns in the country’s universities about coercion. The government’s efforts to control academic freedom and suppress dissent have resulted in numerous incidents of intimidation and censorship on campuses. Both students and professors who are critical of the government have faced disciplinary action, dismissals, and even imprisonment. This has had a chilling effect on free speech and academic inquiry, leading many scholars to fear expressing their opinions or to engaging in critical research.

Under the AKP, the imprisonment of students reached unprecedented levels. The Anti-Terror Law (no. 3713), after its amendment in 2006, became a comprehensive tool to prosecute and punish student dissent. Particularly, from 2010 onwards, the government’s suppression of student opposition has intensified. This intensification ironically occurred against a background of the AKP’s ongoing democratic reforms and the peace process with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party after a thirty-year armed conflict. Being a member of a student union or a legal organization, or a political party critical of government policies, became a reason for prosecution under anti-terror laws. Kurdish and Alevi students were particularly targeted. Consequently, thousands of students faced criminal trials and pre-trial detention, spending months or years behind bars. Reports also suggest that incarcerated students are subjected to a series of human rights violations and arbitrary restrictions affecting their right to continue their education.
The government’s escalation of punitive policies became evident in 2012 during then Prime Minister Erdoğan’s visit to the Middle East Technical University (METU). Thousands of police officers, dozens of armored vehicles, water cannons, and tear gas were deployed to disperse the students who had gathered to protest government policies. Many students were detained as a result. Following these events, METU’s rector expressed his disapproval of the police’s use of violence and gas bombs against students on campus. In response, Erdoğan targeted the rector and academics at METU, accusing them of failing to control the students and maintain order on campus. Erdoğan’s statement regarding METU students and administration was as follows:

We don’t have any problem with METU students. The problem is with this (METU) administration’s crippled mentality. There is a weakness here, and you have to accept it. If some students impose fascist pressure on other students, if some students terrorize the school, the university administration should use many disciplinary tools in its hand against these students. Suspend them for a week; if they do it again, suspend them for two weeks. They used to do this to others... to students with headscarves... (Tahincioğlu, Göktaş 2013: 150)

The response of METU rector in support of students was a rare occurrence. In contrast, the rectors of 14 universities including prominent universities such as Hacettepe University, Mimar Sinan University, Marmara University, and Istanbul Technical University, condemned student protestors, suggesting an increasing conformity of university administrators to coercion. The police intervention and brutality during the 2012 METU protests, as well as the subsequent targeting of the METU rector and students highlighted the government’s increasing pressure on university administrations, police and courts to criminalize students.

In the following years, university administrations became pivotal in the suppression of dissident students. Disciplinary investigations and procedures became the primary mechanisms of control and coercion within universities (Molu et al. 2013). Activities that are typically protected under constitutional rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and academic freedoms became subjects of investigations by university administrators and resulted in suspension or/and expulsion from the university and, in some cases, even led to criminal investigations, trials, and imprisonment of students.

During the first decade of the AKP rule, often referred to as the party’s golden years in economy and democracy, the number of disciplinary investigations at universities increased from 2,601 in 2000 to 6,001 in 2010 and 5,871 in 2011. The reasons for these investigations included organizing or participating in meetings and demonstrations, demanding courses in the Kurdish language, hanging printed material without permission, protesting the YÖK, insulting Erdoğan, and membership or propaganda of terrorist or criminal organizations (Tahincioğlu, Göktaş, 2013).

Following the Gezi Protests in 2013, the government specifically targeted student organizations, portraying them as potential terrorist groups. Any form of organized political event, including peaceful demonstrations, was used as evidence of terrorism. The advent of social media platforms provided students a means to share information, voice their complaints, and organize protests, thereby expanding the scope of government surveillance beyond the physical confines of campuses and into the virtual world. However, certain groups of youth such as the Kurdish and Alevi youth were particularly vulnerable to police violence and criminal prosecution (Yonucu 2022). For instance, the testimony of a senior Law School student, who was detained in 2018 sheds
light on the ethnic dimensions of the disciplinary logic, and highlights the role played by the police and media in the criminalization of students.

I was at a friend’s place when I learned that my parent’s homes had been raided at dawn. When I checked the news on pro-government media channels, it stated that there was a “terrorism operation in Istanbul, and that they have apprehended and detained terrorists who were allegedly preparing for a riot on May 1st. The following day, on May 1, while I was preparing to meet with my lawyer friends and go testify, I was detained. I was shocked; I was just an ordinary university student. Why would the police arrive at before my parents’ house early in the morning with long-barreled guns? It did not take long for me to find an answer. Because I had expressed my dissent publicly. One police officer said to me, “You are from Edirne, what are you doing in the protests? We weren't initially planning to take you in, but I noticed that you’ve been very active on social media lately, so I decided to bring you as well. Don’t worry, you will get out after six months, and you won’t involve yourself in these things again. Alternatively, you can organize from within (implying joining leftist organizations in prison), and we will come and pick you up again.” Statements like these made me realize that there is no legal process in this place (interview 11/29/2021)

Students were subjected to trials in courts with hastily constructed indictments relied not on evidence but on suspicions, allegations, and vague facts. The European Court of Human Rights’ decisions against Turkey have consistently indicated the frequent violation of defendants’ right to a fair trial by Turkish courts. As an example, in 2016, four years after the METU protests, forty-five students were sentenced to 10 months in prison for violating laws on assembly and demonstrations, as well as obstructing state officials from performing their duties.

The persecution of students only worsened in the following years. In 2017, the Ministry of Justice announced that there were seventy-thousand students in prison. However, this number was later contested as it also included people who had begun open university education while already in prison, leading to an overrepresenting the student-age population in the prison system. A subsequent report confirmed that over 8,000 youth were imprisoned while still attending school (Akyüz 2021). Reports indicate that incarcerated students are subjected to human rights violations, including strip searches and arbitrary restrictions imposed by prison administrators on their right to continue their education (Kural 2021). Lastly, the recent court decision, which sentenced 14 Boğaziçi students to one year in prison for protesting the President’s appointment of a new rector indicate that students’ struggle against the authoritarian rule persists so does the governments’ coercion.

The dire state of academic freedoms: the perennial “red lines” and the great university purge

Scholars in Turkey have faced an uphill battle in their pursuit of academic freedoms. Many academics have devoted their research and teaching to fostering peaceful resolutions to Turkey’s historical conflicts and advocating for human rights. Unfortunately, they have encountered numerous obstacles and even persecution in their endeavors. The challenges have become particularly pronounced during the past decade, as academic freedoms have faced growing restrictions. This has significantly hindered scholars’ ability to freely express their ideas and engage in critical academic research concerning government policies.
When the AKP came to power, in addition to its promise to liberalize the higher education policy, by eradicating the Higher Education Council (YÖK), it also made commitments to lift the red lines of the Turkish state that had led to the persecution of scholars who challenge the state’s nationalist purview. As part of the European Union membership negotiations, the party introduced democratic reforms in the legal and institutional domains. In 2009, for instance, the YÖK authorized the establishment of the first academic program offering a degree in the Kurdish language at Mardin Artuklu University (MAU), which was hailed as a significant step forward.

However, the initial optimism surrounding the reforms proved short-lived, as efforts to foster a pluralistic research and teaching environment at universities fell below expectations. An academic associated with MAU described the AKP’s reforms in the following way: “while seeking to create a liberal image by launching the program, the government found ways to curtail and undermine it by controlling the scholars and students who work in and with Kurdish” (Özok-Gündoğan 2020). The party’s loss of parliamentary majority in the 2015 June elections marked the end of this uncertain liberalization and completely abandoned the Kurdish Peace Process and reverted to previous state policies that criminalized the Kurdish opposition.

The election defeat and the termination of the Peace Process had significant implications for academics. The persecution of Peace Academics, who signed a petition calling for an end to violence against civilians in the eastern part of Turkey, marked a crucial moment for academic freedoms. The government’s response to the petition was harsh, with President Erdoğan labeling the signatories as “traitors.” Shortly thereafter, Yekta Saraç, the President of the Higher Education Council (YÖK), sent a letter to university rectors, further reinforcing the government’s stance. The letter expressed concern and urged rectors to take action against the staff who signed the declaration, without specifying the exact measures to be taken (Tekin 2019b; Davas, Tekin 2021). Consequently, many universities swiftly implemented punitive measures against faculty members who had signed the petition, resulting in the expulsion of a significant number of signatories from their academic positions (Tekin 2019a). Furthermore, the judiciary responded to President Erdoğan’s provocative speech by initiating a criminal investigation, accusing the petitioners of engaging in terrorist propaganda under Article 7 of the Anti-Terror Law. In March 2016, four academics who organized a press conference in solidarity with the signatories were arrested and held in pre-trial detention.

The government’s crackdown on academics escalated following the failed coup attempt in 2016. The subsequent declaration of a state of emergency provided the opportunity for a more intense witch hunt (Doğan, Selenica 2022). More than six thousand academic staff members were dismissed from their university positions and faced criminal prosecution, with some even receiving prison sentences on terror-related charges (Tekin 2019b). The consequences of the purge have been far-reaching, impacting individual lives, teaching and research activities, and the overall academic culture in Turkey (Özdemir Taştan, Ördek 2019). One notable outcome has been the significant decline in academic research. According to a report, research output has decreased by 28% since 2016 (Akçığit, Özcan-Tok 2020).

However, more significantly, the purges led to the removal of a considerable number of critical voices from universities, creating an atmosphere of fear and constant threat of persecution for faculty members. The introduction of government tools like CIMER, a

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hotline allowing citizens to directly communicate complaints and demands to the President’s office, contributed to an environment of fear within universities. This system made students, faculty members and other staff potential participants in an emerging “informant society” and police state on campuses. Many academics faced administrative investigations as a result of student complaints, and in certain universities, administrators actively collaborated with ultra-nationalist and pro-AKP student groups to exert control over faculty and students. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these youth groups have gained significant influence and power on campuses, thanks to university pro-government administrations. As one professor explained it:

The appointed rectors and deans refer to the AKP and MHP youth as “our children” (bizim çocuklar) and utilize them as a tool of control on campus. While faculty members face difficulty in communicating with the rector, these youth can easily secure an appointment with top administrators. For example, once they filed a complaint against a professor who discussed Marx during a lecture on political economy. Of course, the professor is innocence, but it is unnecessary trouble for him. The university became a distressing environment. These students have been strategically used in areas where they can infiltrate. Through these methods, paranoid student groups were created. These students are ready to file complaints if they hear any criticism about Erdoğan or the government. Moreover, administrators would also gather information to gain favor from the government, going to the extent of monitoring the online activities of graduate students and pressuring their advisors to take action against them. The authoritarianism really intensified.

The President has consistently criticized higher education for generating “alienation from national values and interests.” The conservative ideology of the regime has resulted in pressure on university administrations to shut down research programs on human rights and gender studies and to the censor specific topics and approaches, such as feminism, in grant applications and research reports (Doğanay, Değer 2019). Universities that remained relatively protected from government intrusion are particularly targetted. President Erdoğan’s recent rector appointments to Boğaziçi University and the prison sentences given to students who protested his decision aims to undermine the faculty’s autonomy in decision-making, abuses the power of law enforcement and the judiciary to suppress student dissent and fosters a climate of fear and intimidation (Alemdaroğlu, Babül 2021; Gambetti, Gökarişiksel 2022). The President’s unwavering determination to subsume Boğaziçi against the strong opposition among faculty members, students and the wider society indicates a final stride in the expansion and intensification of authoritarianism in Turkey.

Finally, the Academic Freedom Index (AFI), introduced in 2020, which offers a comparative and historical perspective on academic freedom worldwide, demonstrates the historical processes and recent transformations discussed above. The AFI assesses four key criteria related to academic freedoms and autonomy, effectively capturing the ebbs and flows experienced by academia in Turkey and elsewhere (Kinzelbach et al. 2022). A compelling illustration of this can be seen in Figure 4, which highlights the close correlation between military interventions, authoritarian regimes, and the erosion of research, expression, and institutional autonomy within Turkish universities. It is intriguing to observe that the current state of universities is comparable, if not worse than, previous episodes of authoritarian rule during the single-party period (1923-1945) and the military regime between 1980-1983. What is striking about the recent decline in academic freedoms, as depicted in Figure 5, is that
it began around 2008, a period often hailed in the literature as the peak of democratization under the AKP. Notably, while academic freedoms have experienced varying degrees of decline or stagnation in numerous countries over the past decade, the intensifying coercion faced by faculty and students under the AKP has positioned Turkey at the bottom rungs of academic freedoms globally. In fact, Figure 6 reveals that Turkey now shares this dubious distinction with countries like China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. The duration of Turkey’s position among the lowest ranks of academic freedoms in the world will undoubtedly hinge upon the resilience of the authoritarian regime. The insights provided by the AFI compel us to examine the challenges confronting academia in Turkey in relation to the political regime and to strive for the protection of academic freedoms, not only for the advancement of education but also for the democratization of the country as a whole.

Figure 4. The historical change of academic freedoms in Turkey.
Conclusion

In conclusion, the remarkable growth of higher education in Turkey has occurred alongside the ascent of authoritarianism, challenging the prevailing liberal notion that universities serve as drivers of democratization. The preceding analysis has delved into the intricate interplay between universities and authoritarianism, with a particular emphasis on the disconcerting erosion of autonomy within Turkish academic institutions. It posits that the recent regressive developments not only mirror the characteristics of the authoritarian regime but also actively contribute to its establishment.

The study of universities suggests understanding authoritarian regimes requires more than just studying party politics, elections, and political leaders as commonly done in political science literature. Examining how such regimes acquire and maintain power in society and within public institutions such as universities is fundamental to understanding their durability. Over the last two decades, the AKP has acquired what Slater and Fenner described as “staying power,” by successfully utilizing strategies of
resource extraction, political patronage, and the punishment of rivals. The establishment of new public universities played an important role in expanding state’s capacity as well as the AKP’s power. While gradually establishing influence over existing universities, the party capitalized on the opportunity presented by this significant university expansion to establish loyal institutions from scratch, thereby forging local patronage networks through location decisions, construction and procurement tenders, and staffing.

Long before analysts began questioning Erdoğan's commitment to democracy or characterizing him as a leading figure in the global authoritarian wave, his higher education policies foreshadowed that was to follow. Instead of limiting the Board’s authority to coordination as initially proposed, the AKP expanded and leveraged the Board's executive power for authoritarian rule. University administrations, courts, and the police were instrumental in subduing relatively autonomous public universities, leading to investigation, criminalization, and imprisonment of thousands of students, thereby violating their fundamental rights. In addition to the persecution of dissenting students, thousands of academic staff have been unjustly dismissed on terrorism charges. The purge effectively eliminated academics who posed a challenge to the government's pursuit of hegemony, thereby further stifling free speech and academic inquiry.

In summary, this paper highlights the intricate relationship between universities and authoritarianism in Turkey. While universities have been idealized as agents of democratization in liberal democratic theory, the historical evidence from Turkey indicates that they have never fully played that role, particularly due to their alignment with the state’s efforts to suppress democratic demands. However, what sets the current era apart is the unprecedented level of government control and domination. The significant expansion of higher education, coupled with pervasive cronyism, academic purges, and the erosion of intellectual autonomy and academic freedoms over the last two decades, has inflicted severe damage on Turkey’s universities. Reversing these detrimental trends will undoubtedly require significant time and concerted efforts. President Erdoğan’s victory in the 2023 elections raises further concerns about the future of academic freedoms and diminishes the hopes for democratization in Turkey’s universities in the short run.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

1. Only 11% of 55-64 years old has a tertiary education in Turkey, compared to 40% of the 25-34-year-old population. However, Turkey is still below the OECD average of 47% among the latter age group. See: https://data.oecd.org/eduatt/population-with-tertiary-education.htm

2. In 1924, shortly after the establishment of the Republic, John Dewey was invited to Turkey, where he spent three months, observing the school system, and making recommendations for reform (Turhan, 2000).

3. The military regime purged over 4800 public employees, and many had to resign for reasons related to the coup regime. The number of purged academics is unclear because unlike the
ABSTRACTS

Increasing access to higher education is often perceived as a threat to authoritarian regimes because, as liberal theory suggests, universities would cultivate critical citizenry and oppositional politics. However, Turkey, under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, contradicts this assumption and necessitates rethinking of the relationship between the university and democracy. Although, university educated sections of the society are generally more embrace of democratic values, universities have also played an important role in nationalist indoctrination, elite reproduction, and class inequality. Moreover, emerging evidence indicates the role of universities in authoritarian regimes. This paper focuses on the double processes of the remarkable growth of access to universities associated with democratization in liberal theory and the simultaneous intensification and consolidation of authoritarian rule in Turkey. It argues that the changes in higher education have not only been a reflection of Erdoğan’s autocratic rule but also serve as one of its building blocks. Universities fulfill this
function by extending political patronage to new clientele, and by fortifying control and coercion among students and academics, who have historically been at the center to democratic politics in the country.

INDEX

**Keywords:** higher education, university, authoritarianism, Turkey

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The Authoritarian State Form, Reconfiguration of Power Bloc, and the Growth Model in Turkey in the 21st century

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Introduction

1 In recent years, political scientists have become more interested in the characteristics of the Turkish state and the changing forms of state intervention in processes of capital accumulation. Since 2015, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) government has called for several elections and a referendum. The constitution was suspended, and the ruling party and the President completed the transition to a new political regime, which they referred to as the Presidential Government System. Parliament’s already limited powers were further diminished to make it an adjunct of the super-presidency under the new regime, officially completed following the 2018 elections.

2 The new regime is generally agreed to be an electorally victorious, strong, one-person, authoritarian government based on nationalist-populist rhetoric (Bedirhanoğlu et al. 2020). However, there is disagreement regarding when the alleged authoritarian turn occurred. More specifically, despite the agreement among political scientists on the growing discretionary character of the JDP governments in the 2010s and the Erdogan administration, both the mechanisms and the outcomes of this transformation have been discussed using different terms. Moreover, because of the disciplinary boundaries of academic studies, political scientists' discussion of Turkish authoritarianism is
mainly confined to a description of changing institutional configurations among the branches of government and how authoritarian populism erodes political representation mechanisms.

In contrast, an interdisciplinary approach can provide more comprehensive and convincing explanations regarding how authoritarianism reproduced itself in Turkey for the last couple of decades and what stimulated the emergence of a new period within an authoritarian state form in the previous decade. In this paper, I explain the basic contours of a critical political economy approach to the state restructuring and periodization of Turkish authoritarianism in the 21st century. Using the analytical tools provided by critical state theory and research on financialization and growth models, I argue that the variegated reproduction of authoritarianism in Turkish politics and the political regime change against the background of deconstitutionalization in the 2010s should be related to crisis management strategies.

This argument relies on a reinterpretation of conceptual frameworks, such as the form of state and form of regime. Nicos Poulantzas (1975) described state forms in the capitalist mode of production as differentiated arrangements of the capitalist state type. Forms of state correspond to particular configurations of power bloc and the state’s position vis-à-vis social classes simultaneously. However, forms of regime explain the representation mechanisms and concrete functioning of the political level. The concept of the power bloc, in Poulantzian terminology, denotes the unity of different fractions of capital and social groups, whereby some class fractions impose their leadership on others. The hegemonic fraction(s)’ strategies of accumulation determine the “unstable equilibrium of compromise” (Poulantzas 1975) within the power bloc, and its modification might result in a change in the form of state.

In this paper, I use modified versions of Poulantzas’ concepts. Form of state symbolizes both the state-citizen nexus (how their relations are shaped via macroeconomic and social policies) and the state-capital nexus (how the state supports capital accumulation). A form of regime represents the institutional configuration of the state apparatus regarding the branches of government and representation mechanisms. Although the concept resembles the ‘forms of government’ or ‘political regime’ used in mainstream political science studies, the form of regime here operates within the form of a state matrix. Therefore, it also problematizes party systems and representations concerning the classes. Despite the revisions made in the definitions, I do agree with Poulantzas on the different rhythms of regime and state forms (Poulantzas 1975, see also Davies et al. 1976 for the use of these concepts for periodization). This means that a state form might maintain its basic characteristics, despite changing form of regime. Nevertheless, a form of regime change is not an isolated event and has repercussions that might ultimately contribute to modifying the form of state. I also insist on conceiving the deterioration of the leadership of the hegemonic fraction within a power bloc as a reconfiguration of the bloc, which does not necessarily extend to a change in the state form.

I argue that there has been a reconfiguration of the power bloc in Turkey in the 2010s, which symbolized the search for an alternative compared to the debt-led and domestic-demand-oriented growth pattern of the 2000s, also implying limits of dependent financialization of the previous period. However, until the Covid-19 pandemic, the state’s mechanisms to incorporate large social groups and tools to support capital accumulation mainly remained the same, revealing attempts to maintain the unity of
power bloc amid economic turbulence. For these reasons, it is not viable to suggest a change in the state form in Turkey in the late 2010s. Nevertheless, the Turkish case remains interesting for critical state theory-inspired research, as the period after 2013-2014 witnessed intensified struggles among different capital fractions, deconstitutionalization, and a political regime change. Whether a change in the state form will follow the change in the form of regime is unclear and cannot be predetermined beforehand.

This study elaborates on and explains this argument in eight sections. Following this introduction, I demonstrate in broad strokes the different camps in the academic debate on Turkish authoritarianism in the 2010s. The third section further clarifies the perspectives employed in this study. I then explain the state form in Turkey in the 21st century. The fifth section presents data on the political-economic background of the recent shift within the growth model in the 2010s, and the sixth section discusses the power bloc reconfiguration. The seventh section revisits the form of regime in Turkey. Finally, the conclusion stresses the main arguments given and notes a caveat in research based on critical state theory.

Two Broad Camps of the Debate on Recent Turkish Authoritarianism

By the mid-to-late 2010s, as a discretionary form of authoritarianism prevailed in Turkish politics, more research was conducted regarding the elements of this new politics and the transition to a new political regime. Although the JDP program and discourse in the early 21st century heavily emphasized the rule of law and human rights, it was possible, from a critical point of view, to characterize the 2000s as the continuation of the authoritarian form of state due to the suppression of labour. During this period, however, the EU candidacy and the possibility of elite consensus guarded the strength of scholarly expectations for democratization (see Özbudun 2006). Because of this expectation, as the hopes for democratic consolidation vanished and the first signs of deconstitutionalization became evident, many institutionalist and liberal political science analyses pointed out that the Turkish trajectory in the mid-2010s amounted to an authoritarian turn.

For the purposes of this paper, these studies can be categorized as composing the first broad camp in the recent authoritarianism debate. Describing the drastic events of 2010s Turkey with an attempt to classify the regime, studies in this camp emphasized the changes in representation mechanisms, the political-institutional configuration, and discursive shifts more than the capital accumulation modalities and conflicts between various classes and class fractions. Accordingly, the early to mid-2010s led to a new Turkish political regime reliant on crony capitalism. From this perspective, the mid-2010s were a turning point in the collapse of already troubled Turkish democracy and symbolized the rise of competitive authoritarianism (Özbudun 2015; Esen, Gümüşçü, 2016). Scholars embracing this approach who aim to integrate analyses of the political-economic transformation emphasize the persistent weakness of consensus-based policy-making and the legacy of patronage mechanisms. This body of literature also attributes the transition to a “new authoritarianism” (Somer 2016, see also Cengiz 2020) to deep-seated favouritism and cronyism under successive JDP governments.
Support for this perspective also comes from a loosely related line of international political economy approach regarding the EU’s limited transformative capacity (Öniş, Kutlay 2019). In its most elaborate form, the authoritarian turn argument is demonstrated via a framework that considers transformations in global capitalism as integral to the shift in Turkey’s foreign policy. The weakening of regulatory institutions has then been conceived as a facet of the emergence of state capitalism (Öniş 2019). Finally, new contributions to this stance tie the outcomes of cronyism with the emergence of new developmentalist ambitions and relate the ideational shift of Turkey’s ruling elite to the challenges presented to the liberal international order by state capitalisms, to which President Erdoğan aspires (Kutlay 2020).

As summarized above, the authoritarian turn argument does not entirely ignore the troubles of the Turkish political regime in the early 21st century. The central focal point in these analyses was the shift to an overtly authoritarian form in the last decade by emphasizing the change in the political regime. Accordingly, further strengthening of the executive branch, the ineffectiveness of the legislature, and the complete erosion of judicial supervision are documented with efforts to classify the new regime of the mid-to-late 2010s. More often than not, this is complemented through analyses of the political authority and documentation of critical junctures, but does not necessarily relate to factors changing other than the developments in the political sphere.

It should also be noted that though the scholarly expectations for democratization predominated political analyses in the early 21st century, critical analyses have stressed authoritarian continuity. Discussing the Europeanization and democratization expectations in the early 21st century, Bedirhanoğlu and Yalman (2009), for instance, remind us that the JDP (AKP, if we use the Turkish abbreviation) had no intention of assuming a democratizing mission. On the contrary, against the backdrop of the global financial crisis, they expected that the neoliberal policy programme would decrease the possibility of progressive change and “the AKP represents more continuity than radical change in terms of the authoritarian form of state” (2009: 122). Similar interdisciplinary studies critiqued scholars highlighting possible democratization scenarios under the JDP rule. Analyses that conceived social policy reforms and local networks of cronyism in the first years of the JDP as vehicles for deriving support while maintaining the weakness of labour (Yıldırım 2009) stressed that despite the prevalence of procedural democracy, the political-economic decisions supported the strengthening of authoritarianism, as they actively suppressed labour organizations.

Although a comprehensive discussion of the relations between different branches of the government in the early 21st century goes beyond the scope of the paper, various studies published before the authoritarianism debate of the late 2010s discussed how the JDP’s populism impacted the strengthening of the executive branch. For instance, Sözen (2011) pointed out that overcoming barriers that stood against the will of the people in Turkey during the JDP rule meant marginalizing any opposition to the ruling circles. In this perspective, neo-conservative populism and neoliberalism work together in deepening the gap between the ruled and the rulers inherent in representative democracy. While marginalizing Kemalist elites, the JDP’s populism in its first two terms paved the way for the aggrandizement of the executive branch and authoritarianism. In other words, Sözen (2011) reminds us that a political regime discussion focusing mainly on institutions and political discourse also detected the authoritarianism of the JDP rule.
Critical political economy analyses focus on the class-based nature of the state and emphasize the continuity of the authoritarian state form as much as the changes in the style of authoritarianism. In contrast to the first camp, the second denies that the mid-2010s mark a decisive break from the previous political phase. Instead, they claim that the authoritarian mode of governance dominated throughout the early 21st century. If the temporal division suggested by the first group can be considered, it is merely to locate these periods (the 2000s and 2010s) along a continuum, to trace the mechanisms underlying the increasingly re-politicized and discretionary interventions of the 2010s (Tansel 2018; Bozkurt-Güngen 2018; Akçay 2021). In short, for many critical scholars, JDP not only inherited an authoritarian regime but also kept its essential features. Thus, rather than a departure, there has been a continuation of the authoritarian neoliberal state form.3

Critical political economy studies of Turkish politics suggest a transformation in state-society relations, mainly through intensified authoritarianism (Table 1). Despite changes in specific measures under the JDP rule, some argue that they should be conceived as alterations symbolizing new couplings of coercion and consent manufacturing4 (Adaman, Akbulut 2021). Most studies conclude that changing global financial conditions and credit-led growth strategies since 2013 have triggered cyclical crises (Akçay, Güngen 2022). These have paralyzed JDP, intensified coercion, and provoked new authoritarian measures to contain the contradictions (Bedirhanoğlu 2021b). Most scholars in this group agree that JDP’s political battle in the early 21st century against the old elites did not lead to democratic reform of the authoritarian state (Akça 2014; Özdén et al. 2017), which instead was the product of a historic transformation in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see also Yalman 2009).

Table 1: Sub-periods of the authoritarian state form in Turkey in the 21st century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuity in the state form and change in the form of regime from a critical political economy perspective</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The authoritarianism of the 2000s</td>
<td>The authoritarianism of the 2010s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technocratic governance</td>
<td>discretionary and overtly coercive forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>depoliticized policy-making</td>
<td>repoliticization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>security state</td>
<td>deconstitutionalization / istibdat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(violence and coercion integral)</td>
<td>(emergent fascism)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the emphasis on continuity, it is also clear that there has been a critical rupture in the 2010s, i.e., the political regime changed, and a presidential system was established. Accordingly, for critical scholars, it remains necessary to explain the shift towards more discretionary measures in the 2010s and why a change in the form of regime emerged. Put simply, the exclusion of large social groups from meaningful participation in the policy-making process and the suppression of fundamental human rights continued throughout the first decade of the JDP rule. However, the state’s internal structure changed drastically in the second decade amid deconstitutionalization, intensified political pressure, and a state of emergency (Kaygusu, Aydın 2020).

In that sense, critical political economy studies might require a level of abstraction that enables the discussion of regime change while retaining the emphasis on authoritarian continuity. Revisiting Poulantzian concepts of form of state and form of regime, and
deriving insights from critical state theory, help explain the authoritarian continuity and the political regime change, and how this inquiry is related to the accumulation modalities within a social formation.

Form of State and Form of Regime

18 Critical scholars contributing to the state theory have attempted to characterize growing state control over socioeconomic life and the adjustment of internal state structures to global transformations in the last quarter of the 20th century. Criticizing structuralism and economic determinism, various scholars have pointed out the need to analyze the state and market as different forms of social relations of production (Bonefeld 2008). The state derivation debate of the 1970s (Holloway, Picciotto 1978) and its ramifications led to a class-struggle-prominent perspective, which its proponents called open Marxism (see Bonefeld et al. 1995). Other scholars have conducted more refined analyses of state restructurings with attention to political and institutional modes as determinate forms. This second line synthesizes state derivation insights with regulationist concepts (Hirsch 1995; Jessop 2007). The latter benefits from Nicos Poulantzas’ insights, while the former stresses “the crisis-ridden autonomization of capital from its substance” (Bonefeld 1995).

19 The critical state debate of the late 20th century can be regarded as a search for a class-based analysis of historically specific forms of capital relation. I argue that two main theoretical insights from the state debate remain crucial: 1) A non-reductionist and relational approach to state refutes the ontological distinction between structure and struggle (Clarke 1991). 2) The state can be seen as a form assumed by class struggle, which develops on the basis of contradictory social relations of production. These insights remain in stark contrast with the structuralist terminology of early Poulantzas. Still, it should be taken into account that the later works of Poulantzas did already move in that direction, defining the state as the condensation of the balance of class forces (Poulantzas 1978).

20 In his last book, Poulantzas (1978) also highlighted the strengthening of repressive state apparatuses and the concentration of power within the executive branch, and used ‘authoritarian statism’ to denote the decline of the democratic state form. According to him, authoritarian statism is characterized by a symbiosis between the erosion of standard representative mechanisms and the emergence of exceptional structures, in which the ruling political party, rather than playing an active role in the hegemonic struggle, starts to depict an ideological instrument and immerses itself in the state. The authoritarian state was becoming the new norm. As Poulantzas (1978: 208-9) states, authoritarian statism is “neither the new form of a genuine exceptional State nor, in itself, a transitional form on the road to such a State: it rather represents the new ‘democratic’ form of the bourgeois republic in the current phase of capitalism.”

21 These insights suggest that further strengthening of the executive branch in some political geographies in the 21st century may have resulted from struggles and reconfigurations within an already authoritarian state form. In other words, while explicit political forms of authoritarianism in some geographies had been fostered in neoliberal democracies during the late 20th century and the early 21st century, authoritarian states of the same era may have already nurtured new forms of fascism.
or yielded hybrid forms in the same period. Poulantzas’ contribution suggests that this nurturing should be understood by analyzing the reconfiguration of power blocs. The state debate’s insights, however, are needed for a more open-ended analysis. Power bloc analysis requires an elaboration of the accumulation strategies. A dynamic account should always emphasize the contradictory nature of the social relations of production and how different forms are determined by class struggles, while deciding the course of those struggles simultaneously (see Bonefeld et al. 1995).

As the “official resumé of the society” (Marx 1972 [1846]), the state does not represent a monolithic bloc. The capitalist state not only embodies the outcomes of social struggles, but also provides the terrain on which contradictions appear and fusions are created. Each fusion and transformation suggests new investigations, which explains the use of various concepts to describe variegated constellations. Nevertheless, understanding the state form and its inner workings is no mere intellectual exercise because “the state represents a compromise that makes the antagonistic classes carry out their conflicts in a particular way” (Demirovic 2011). That is, analysis of state forms remains crucial in studying societies.

After revisiting Poulantzas via critical state debate, the state form can be described as having two main pillars: its institutionalized tools and perspectives that mold relations between the state and its citizens and its institutionalized means to support capital accumulation processes, which creates specific state interventions and strategies. An analysis of the form of state, therefore, relies on a discussion of the power bloc and how state intervention in capital accumulation developed from the political economy of the studied case. In this vein, the strategies adopted by the dominant classes and class factions shape the terrain upon which the struggles within the established compromise occur.

Power blocs are prone to changes over time. For example, many power blocs in the global South have embraced export-oriented and investment-based growth strategies promoted in the late 20th century to remedy the weaknesses of their economies. These growth models are crystallizations of accumulation strategies reflected in macroeconomic priorities and the contribution to the economic growth of components like demand, export, and investment (see Schedelik et al. 2021). However, there was a shift in some emerging economies at the turn of the century. Global financial circumstances and lower interest rates in the global North enabled major emerging countries to accumulate reserves while their domestic currencies appreciated. This shift was not uniform because capital fractions benefited differently from the global commodity boom, existing manufacturing capacity, and/or their positions within global value chains. Nevertheless, the upswing in the global financial cycle in the early 2000s stimulated both portfolio and foreign direct investment into the contemporary major economies of the global South. This enabled the consolidation of a demand-oriented and consumption-based growth model in some economies. A transition similar in significance can be observed in the aftermath of the international financial crisis of 2007-09 (Akçay et al. 2022; Mertens et al. 2022). Against the backdrop of changing global financial circumstances, internal displacements within the ruling blocs occurred in various countries and new forms of state intervention were foregrounded. In other words, the national and international crises in the last two decades have been significant determinants of power bloc reconfigurations. To what extent these configurations denote a change in a form of state depends on the case being analyzed.
A form of regime signifies the class representation on the party-political level as much as the configuration among the branches of government. Despite the possible dissonance between changes in the form of state and the form of regime, a modification of hegemony might lead to displacements in state apparatus (Poulantzas 1973). Put briefly, the changing form of state might lead to a change in political regime. Through this lens, it is also possible to suggest that the form of regime changes might dramatically impact the struggles between various fractions in the power bloc and could contribute to the forthcoming change in state form. Therefore, this relation between forms of state and forms of regime is non-mechanistic and will depend on the concrete manifestation of power relations, which might be concealed by institutional configurations (Poulantzas 1973). It is not viable to suggest a correlation between regime change and change in the form of state, as such terminology confines the open-ended nature of political and class-based struggles to linearly related moves among variables. To clarify this point, a form of regime operates within a state matrix. For example, an authoritarian form of state is incompatible with a form of regime that narrows the gap between the ruled and the ruling elite by promoting direct democracy or by creating alternative means of political participation and a comprehensive system of checks and balances. However, a rupture in the regime form remains possible without any significant shifts in the state-citizen and state-capital nexuses. The strategies of political groups striving to change mechanisms of class representation and the relations between government branches will eventually reflect on the nexuses of the state form and might trigger new tensions and conflicts.

The State Form in Turkey in the First Decade of the JDP Rule

This section sets out to explain the specific state form in Turkey in the 21st century. Following capital account liberalization in 1989, Turkey experienced a debt and currency crisis in 1994. The mix of a neoliberal policy orientation with short-term measures exacerbated high inflation. The country’s short-lived recovery ended amid the East Asian crisis and its financial contagion in the late 1990s. However, one of the most significant blows in the neoliberal period was the 2001 financial crisis. Though the banking sector restructuring started in 1997, it imposed a tremendous cost on the state budget after the crisis, reaching 25 percent of the annual GDP. Despite the economic bottleneck, global financial conditions allowed the government to reduce interest rates, which led to a quick recovery after 2003.

Financial deepening in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s did not result in a favourable shift for fixed capital formation (Yalman 2019). As in other global South countries, Turkish capital groups in the 1990s could not increase relative surplus production (Ercan, Oğuz 2020). The reform agenda of the 2000s was shaped in line with the post-Washington Consensus, hoping to attract more foreign investment to increase the economy’s competitiveness. Turkey’s economy recorded high growth rates from 2003 to 2008, enabling the newly elected JDP government to consolidate its support. At the same time, it also allowed the government to postpone tensions between large-scale internationalized capital groups benefiting disproportionately from its economic policy framework, on one hand, and newly internationalizing and medium-scale domestic-oriented capital groups organically related to the ruling circles, on the other.
While the setback in Turkey’s economic growth during the 2008-2009 international financial crisis raised concerns, renewed foreign flows resulted in record growth rates in 2010 and 2011. The expansion of domestic demand was integrally linked with new credit opportunities for households in the 2000s (Karaçimen 2015). Although interest rates remained higher than in global North countries, household consumption, despite stagnating real wages, became easier and increased (Güngen 2018, 2021a).

Turkey’s market-oriented development strategy was labeled as finance capitalism by researchers such as Marois (2012) to stress that the interests of financial capital were being fused into the state. The significance of restructuring the banking sector in the early 21st century resulted in the state having “developed unprecedented capacity to supervise and regulate financial capital while being able to socialize financial risks if and when necessary” (Marias 2012: 196). More important to our concern was the opportunity to address citizens’ demands via financial inclusion and increased social spending. The global financial conditions in the early 21st century, the newly restructured banking sector, and the state’s financial apparatus helped the JDP form a specific state-citizen nexus in this period. This nexus can be described as the “individualised incorporation of the labouring classes” (Bozkurt-Güngen 2018). Codiﬁng citizens as social assistance recipients and consumers has been an integral element of the JDP’s approach and this coding became a symbol of the technocratic tools and depoliticized perspective of authoritarianism in the ﬁrst decade of the 21st century (Bozkurt-Güngen 2018).

A second aspect complemented the above-mentioned ﬁrst pillar of state form: The state’s institutionalized tools to support capital accumulation in the 2000s were based on adopting international best practices in monetary and ﬁscal policy to serve ﬁnancial deepening (Güngen 2019a). During these years of reform and deepening, the monetary policies have followed an orthodox route to make ﬁnancial assets denominated in the domestic currency more attractive. Currency appreciation has encouraged non-ﬁnancial corporations and internationalizing capital groups to continue the foreign exchange borrowing spree. This inevitably has beneﬁted competitive capital groups, which have occupied the hegemonic position within the power bloc.

Various scholars have also portrayed this strategy as speculation-led growth (Orhangazi, Yeldan 2021) and ﬁnancialization (Yalman et al. 2019). Financialization is the growing signiﬁcance of ﬁnancial transactions in capital accumulation (Epstein 2005). The rapid development of market-based ﬁnance in the global South during the early 21st century has been a symptom of global ﬁnancialization, reintegrating these economies in a position that leaves them more vulnerable to changes in global ﬁnancial circumstances. This also forms the background against which state restructurings occur. The dominant accumulation strategy in Turkey remained dependent on the inflow of foreign capital and external debt accumulation. Subordinating the tempo of capital accumulation to global ﬁnancial circumstances, this economic policy preference resulted in the rapid transformation of some macroeconomic indicators; this transformation was also characterized as dependent ﬁnancialization (Akçay, Güngen 2022).

Dependent ﬁnancialization refers to market-based transformations in the global South that have enabled ﬁnancial deepening. The global South countries are integrated into the “hierarchical and structured capitalist system” (Isaacs, Kaltenbrunner 2018: 442) on unequal terms (Becker et al. 2010; Bonizzi et al. 2020). The fact that emerging economies
have structurally higher interest rates than core capitalist countries reflects international monetary hierarchies (fritz et al. 2018). Dependent financialization provides advantages to internationalized and internationalizing capital groups and finance capital. This can also be accepted (though not so enthusiastically) as a strategy by subordinate capital fractions producing for the domestic market. Since demand expansion followed the currency’s appreciation, sectors mainly selling their goods to the domestic market could adapt to this market, while asking for more state support and guarantees. Because this often leads to a booming economy against the background of heavy foreign investment and expansion of domestic demand, dependent financialization can work for various capital fractions so long as global financial circumstances remain loose (Akçay, Güngen 2022; cf. Deniz 2019).

The primary elements of this strategy provide clues to grasping the power bloc configuration in Turkey in the first decade of the JDP rule. The power bloc in Turkey during this period was comprised of both internationalized and domestic-oriented capital groups as well as larger and smaller-scale producers. The dominant groups were internationalized capital groups and finance capital.

Crisis and Continuity in the State Form

Turkey experienced a severe crisis in 2018-19, followed by the economic collapse during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. Still, the fragilities already had become evident in the mid-2010s, pushing the economic policymakers to search for alternatives. Dependent financialization faced its limits and slowly drifted into a crisis in the mid-to-late 2010s. Nevertheless, the institutionalized tools that molded state-citizen nexus and the mechanisms used to support capital accumulation remained similar to the first decade of the JDP rule, with growing room for crisis management manoeuvres up until the 2020-21 changes in the macroeconomic policy framework.

Table 2 presents a periodization of dependent financialization in Turkey based on a few stylized facts. The financial market depth and financial market capitalization ratio clearly indicate that dependent financialization reached its limits after 2013. The end of the expansionary phase of the global financial cycle and domestic currency depreciation during the post-2014 period made it harder for the private sector to roll over its accumulated debt. Nevertheless, the ratio of non-financial corporation debt to GDP continued to increase until 2018. In the most recent phase of dependent financialization (2014-19), the ratio of foreign financial flows to GDP continued to increase due to the rising importance of portfolio investment.

Table 2: Selected Macroeconomic Indicators of Financialization in Turkey (1989-2019).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Averages in phases</td>
<td>Foreign Financial Inflows</td>
<td>Financial market capitalization</td>
<td>NFC financialization</td>
<td>Household financialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First year available-2002</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2003-2008 59.1 27.2 24.6 7.1 0.27
2009-2013 69.2 30.9 43.4 17.0 0.33
2014-2019 73.6 22.5 64.9 16.8 0.33

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator: Stock of foreign liabilities (portfolio investment, FDI and other financial inflows, % of GDP)</th>
<th>Stock market value traded (% of GDP)</th>
<th>Non-financial corporations' debt (% of GDP)</th>
<th>Household debt (% of GDP)</th>
<th>Financial Depth Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: CBRT and WB World Bank BIS IMF

Indicators adapted from Karwowski, Stockhammer, 2017. See Akçay, Güngen, 2022

35 The technocratic policy-making framework suffered its first blow during the 2008-2009 international financial crisis. The government’s primary response was to use the state’s public financial capacity to lend countercyclically. Accordingly, Turkish corporations borrowed heavily in foreign exchange from 2009 onwards, with Turkish banks serving as intermediary institutions (Becker 2016; Orhangazi, Yeldan 2021). In addition, mega infrastructure projects and comprehensive support for the construction sector were also short-run responses in order to boost capital accumulation in the following years.

36 During the late 2010s, JDP governments frequently resorted to credit expansion to replicate the expansion in demand from the early 2000s. However, the lower yields of Turkish financial assets due to falling interest rates triggered capital flight. Therefore, policy-makers had to increase interest rates significantly in early 2014, late 2016, 2018, and 2020 to limit the depreciation of the Turkish lira. The resulting fluctuations in interest rates symbolized the difficulties of maintaining high growth rates amid increasing pressure from worsening global financial circumstances. Nevertheless, during this period, the expansion of state-sponsored credit mitigated the decline in annual growth rates. Even in 2017, for example, during the final stage of the slow drift towards the 2018-19 crisis, the GDP growth was still a remarkable 7.4 %, which showed the partial success of initiatives in boosting private demand.

37 Table 3 below follows a similar periodization and summarizes the contributions to growth under the JDP rule. The data shows that private consumption has been the most significant driver of economic growth since the early 2000s. From a growth model perspective, Turkey’s growth has been demand-oriented (see Akçay et al. 2022). Since household indebtedness increased dramatically during the first two sub-periods while
real wages stagnated in the 2000s and early 2010s, the model is also debt-led. Historic foreign direct investment levels in the early 2000s and the post-2001 domestic recovery turned investment into a significant part of the growth story from 2003 to 2008. However, its contribution declined rapidly in the second sub-period (presented in Table 3). In the last sub-period, the share of private consumption reflects the effectiveness of credit campaigns and renewed attempts to reduce interest rates.

Table 3: Relative contributions to GDP growth in Turkey (2003-2019).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private consumption</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public consumption</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net exports (-)</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank Database, GDP in 2010 USD. I used gross capital formation data to calculate the contribution of investment. Data were extracted on May 24, 2021.

Regarding its contribution to the growth, the retreat of investment in the final sub-period was partly compensated for by the growing contribution of exports. While the currency depreciation of the last sub-period certainly advantaged exporting industries, the rising contribution of exports to the GDP (despite a negative contribution in some turbulent months) reflects the continuity of export credits and state support to new exporters. Net exports as a percentage of the GDP increased from -1.5 percent (i.e., reducing growth) in 2014 to 4.1 percent in 2019 (World Bank Database). This substantial jump indicates that growth in the last sub-period was domestic-demand-based, with a weak but growing export contribution.

The data presented in Table 3 should be approached after considering the limits of dependent financialization and the crisis in the Turkish economy (2018-19). This is suggestive of the institutionalized means to support capital accumulation changing only slightly between 2003 and 2019. In the last sub-period, the attempts to limit the interest rate increases and hardwiring public banks to credit expansion reflected the desire to stimulate domestic demand and renew growth cycles. These interventions and the insistence on demand stimulation in a situation of tightening global financial conditions trapped the economy in boom-bust cycles for several years, creating insurmountable dilemmas for the power bloc. It pushed state managers to search for new combinations and pursue off-balance-sheet policy-making (Güngen 2021c). Successive JDP governments and the Erdoğan presidential administration have all used new discretionary forms of policy-making while also repeatedly reversing policies to maintain the unity of the power bloc during cyclical crises.

Concerning the two main pillars of the state form, it is possible to suggest that the state form remained the same, despite the preparations for a new macroeconomic policy framework, increased state activism, and discretionary policy interventions. The state continued to address its citizens as credit consumers. At the same time, the limits of dependent financialization and the struggles within the power bloc forced a transition
to a different macroeconomic policy framework, which was finally implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reconfiguration of the Power Bloc in Turkey

Internationalized capital groups were the predominant fraction of the power bloc in Turkey during the early 21st century (see Deniz 2019 for a ruling elite discussion). In line with Hoşgör (2016) I refrain from clustering capital groups based on geographic origin and ideological avenues and suggest, instead, that analytical demarcations can be drawn by citing strategies, scales, and sectoral concentration. The dominant fraction of the early 21st century, which is mostly organized through the Turkish Industry and Business Organization (TÜSİAD), has partnerships in key sectors and state tenders with internationalizing and national (domestic-oriented) capital groups, yet remains relatively concentrated in finance and manufacturing sectors with large-scale enterprises. Internationalizing capital groups are late-comers, which has increased their shares in the export volume in recent decades but are still concentrated in relatively more labour-intensive sectors. Many of these late-comers have benefited from the booming demand and form of integration concerning the world economy starting from the late 20th century, but has also profited from the heavy exploitation of labour and state incentives under the JDP governments. These groups also have invested in tourism, construction and retail sectors. The Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association provided the main venue for the organization of these groups (even though some successful internationalizing companies are now becoming members of TÜSİAD).

The unstable equilibrium of compromise between those groups was disrupted beginning in the early 2010s. Various erratic measures in the late 2010s and during the first waves of the Covid-19 pandemic were indeed organically related to the need to handle the crisis and search for a new policy framework and accumulation strategy. The Turkish state has implemented new incentive programmes since the mid-2010s onwards. The aim was to increase the tempo of the transition to high value-added and high-tech production. These interventions have not been part of a developmental plan, disciplining capital groups and re-orienting their investment under the state guidance in the late 2010s. The growth contribution ratios reveal that Turkey’s erratic developmentalist interventions have not changed the growth model of the 2014-19 period but have led to increased exports.

Economic governance continued in crisis mode almost without interruption from 2018 to 2022. This was due to the 2018-19 crisis, followed by the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, characterized by similar capital outflows from the global South to the 2008-2009 crisis (Güngen 2021b). Even though the responses to both the 2018-2019 crisis and the 2020 slump aimed to lock the economy into dependent financialization, the growth model was not tenable, and the dead-end faced by the Erdoğan administration strengthened the search for a new growth model.

The roots of the new policy framework adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic can be traced back to the search for alternatives in the 2010s and reflected itself in the monetary policy shift (ultimately determining exchange rate) and the state’s primary tools to support capital accumulation in the mid-to-late 2010s. These transformations can also be grasped as reflecting the reconfiguration of the power bloc, which remained
shy of a change in the form of state in the 2010s. Higher interest rates (compared to 2009-2013) undermined the political alliance and the unity of the ruling elite in the mid-to-late 2010s. In particular, capital groups with more capital-intensive production and accumulated foreign exchange debt requested an orthodox response, whereas domestic-oriented capital groups and representatives of sectors like construction opposed a conventional macroeconomic program. Although higher interest rates and the resulting austerity would have produced stability, it would also wipe out some smaller-scale producers with more labour-intensive production. It would also encourage rapid concentration of capital among the subcontractors of large-scale capital groups.

In short, high growth was the fundamental pillar of the early 2000s power bloc. However, in the mid-to-late 2010s, this pillar gradually collapsed: core supporters of Erdoğan and the JDP government needed lower interest rates and a loose monetary policy, whereas big business groups favoured price stability and orthodox policies. Turkey’s dependent financialization provided large-scale capital groups with opportunities for ‘differential accumulation’ (see Nitzan, Bichler 2009). During the reconfiguration of the power bloc in the 2014-2019 sub-period, however, state managers prioritized the demands of new and would-be exporters, JDP-connected capital groups that feed on state resources and the capital groups in labour-intensive sectors. This orientation has not revealed a consistent character until the 2020-21 transition to the macroeconomic framework, promoted as the ‘new economic model’.

Table 4 summarizes Turkey’s growth pattern and the power bloc reconfiguration in the 21st century. The controversial contemporary macroeconomic policies and the more discretionary form of policy-making (such as the state of emergency and decisions taken under the new presidential regime after the 2018 transition) do not by themselves reveal a transition to a new growth model in the late 2010s. It seems viable to suggest that tensions between the different capital fractions of the power bloc were not yet resolved during these time frames. Nevertheless, the capital groups that benefited from domestic credit channels and incentives gradually gained more ground over the last sub-period (2014-19).

<p>| Table 4: The Growth Regimes and Power Bloc in Turkey in the 21st century. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>21st Century</th>
<th>post-2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Growth regime</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic demand-led growth regime (until 2008-09) and debt-led private demand and growth regime (from 2009 onwards, but there is a search for a new growth model after 2014)</td>
<td>Export-led growth strategy emergent in the last sub-period, unsystematic attempts to move onto a new growth regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power bloc</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprising internationalized large-scale capital and domestic-oriented small and medium scale capital</td>
<td>Reconfiguration of power bloc, groups that feed on state resources, new and would-be exporters gaining ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in global financial circumstances, bust episodes and crises brewing tensions</td>
<td>Crisis-management, contradictory macroeconomic policy to maintain the widest bloc possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The new strategies of accumulation, which took on a more consistent character during the Covid-19 pandemic (especially after late 2021) emerged from several factors. Newly employed Syrian refugees boosted labour-intensive sectors in some parts of Turkey. At the same time, the loss of its reserves further eroded the CB’s interventional capacity to prevent or at least to slow currency depreciation. While there has been a return to export orientation due to economic turbulence and the advance of newly internationalizing groups, this strategy has several contradictions and causes further tensions: The capital owners of corporations producing food products, beverages, and manufacturing textiles, wearing apparel, leather products, and furniture might be more advantageous with a depreciated domestic currency. In contrast, because of the accumulated foreign exchange debt, manufacturers of metal products, other non-metallic products and chemicals, and chemical products (sectors dominated by already internationalized large-scale capital groups) have been negatively affected by currency depreciation (see Ugurlu 2021).

If the reconfiguration of the power bloc finally results in a shift of the state-citizen and state-capital nexuses, the signs of which crystallized in the aftermath of the 2018-19 crisis and, more particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, the authoritarian neoliberal state form will have transformed into a new state form. As implied by critical state theory, this process is ridden with contradictions and is not predetermined. Still, the new macroeconomic policy framework meeting the demands of strengthening capital fractions points to the growing possibility of a change in the Turkish state form.

The Form of Regime Revisited

Despite the reconfiguration of the power bloc and economic turbulence paving the way for crisis management interventions, a scholarly attempt to periodize the state form must emphasize its continuity in Turkey in the 2010s due to the similarity between the state-citizen nexus and state-capital nexus during the 2010s and the early 21st century. There was, however, a significant rupture on a political level, which further diminished the role of the legislative branch and altered the notion of representation. This modification has taken place in the form of regime. The institutional configuration of the government branches changed in the mid-to-late 2010s resulting in a transition to a regime referred to as a Presidential Government System by official circles.

The Presidential Government System attempts to legitimize the recent deconstitutionalization of Turkish politics, which can be traced back to 2014 when the newly elected President Erdoğan did not resign from the party membership for 13 days despite the constitutional requirement. The curfews in the months following the electoral limbo of 2015, the lift of parliamentary immunity of some opposition (primarily Kurdish) MPs through a provisional amendment in 2016, and the state of emergency rule in 2016-2018 with emergency decrees, which violated the constitution, were among the significant steps of deconstitutionalization in Turkey (Kaygusuz, Aydin 2020). Given that dissidents have been subject to judicial investigations ordered by the
executive branch, while citizens lacked fundamental human rights, many scholars who use authoritarian statism and authoritarian neoliberalism point out a change in the state form, suggesting the emergence of an "exceptional state." form (ibid., see also Karahanoğulları, Türk 2018).

51 The proponents of this argument find supporting evidence from the byzantine structure of the new regime, which places the presidency at the center. Still, some of the features cited in these studies mainly refer to the form of regime, not the form of state. The new regime can be characterized by the total subordination of the judiciary to the executive, yet this is purposefully done to strengthen the President’s supreme power. What differentiates such a political regime from a fascist one is that the political party (previously the ruling party) has been relegated (Yılmaz 2020). At the same time, a disorganized opposition continues to exist. President Erdogan claims to symbolize and embody the state. Meanwhile, legitimizing political repression requires frequent plebiscites and the erosion of intermediary groups from political life (Yılmaz 2020).

52 The decretismo of the state of emergency is maintained through presidential decrees, which have predominantly focused on executive affairs since 2018 (in line with Article 104 of the revised 1982 Constitution). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the exercise of fundamental rights has been regulated and constrained by directives reminiscent of unconstitutional decrees during the state of emergency that were overextended to breach fundamental human rights and ordinary regulations unrelated to the state of emergency (see Akça et al. 2018). This legal-political complex, in which emergency practices appear normal, has blurred the boundaries between the ordinary and the exceptional.

53 In short, the organic crisis of the Turkish state in the 2010s has increased the likelihood of a change in the state form more than in the last four decades, and yet has resulted in a regime change (from restricted parliamentarism to the super presidential regime in 2018). Not only the JDP circles', but also President Erdoğan’s political survival depended on further centralization of political power using deconstitutionalization as leverage. Erdoğan’s call for a new constitution in his opening presidential speech to parliament in 2021, including various symbols suggesting the President’s powers will go beyond overt coercion into dictatorial might be read as moves towards a different form of state. Whether the change in the form of regime will have contributed to a change in the state form is not clear and cannot be predetermined beforehand. Still, the Presidential Government System in its current structure might fit into a new form of state incorporating citizens via new mechanisms, and could support capital accumulation via new tools.

54 The conflation of the form of regime and the form of state in some critical political economy studies stems from the conspicuous absence of an analysis of growth models, accumulation strategies, and the position of labor in those scholarly endeavours. The loss of support for the struggling growth model in recent years has indicated a possible strong shift away from neoliberalism. It has triggered moves towards a new form of authoritarianism or perhaps quasi-fascism. However, the emergence of a new state form depends on which steps will be taken in the interests of the power bloc (or specific capital fractions) regarding the state’s incorporation of large groups and state policies to support capital accumulation. The recent deconstitutionalization or political regime change might or might not contribute to such a transformation. This depends on class struggles and the foregrounded strategies. For example, the insistence by the
dominant fractions in the power bloc on a model that prioritizes the competitiveness of exporting firms may encourage further suppression of labor and deterioration of real wages on the one hand, and provision of new loans to and direct intervention in allegedly strategic sectors on the other. If such policies gain a systematic presence and rely on a new macroeconomic framework (such as the one implemented from late 2021 onwards), this specific state-capital nexus will be different from the one in the early 21st century. It is too soon to tell whether the change in the form of regime will contribute to such a change or whether it will culminate in reinforcing the style of authoritarianism similar to the early 21st century after the 2023 plebiscite (officially entitled the presidential and parliamentary elections).

Conclusion

While regime changes, the level of state activism, and crises in growth models do not by themselves determine the state form, they do affect the likelihood of change by dramatically altering the manoeuvres of political actors and capital fractions. While regime modifications can indicate looming changes in authoritarian statecraft, they are not automatic extensions or precedents of the implementation of a new state form. Similarly, in the Turkish case, the crisis of the demand-oriented growth model did not bring about an entirely new growth model (until the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic).

In this paper, I have discussed the form of state, the forms of regime, and the power bloc in Turkey in the 21st century. I have emphasized that, in the early 21st century, dependent financialization assumed a new form in which financial institutions targeted household revenues, while currency appreciation benefited international and internationalizing capital groups that were heavily importing intermediary goods. The new form of dependent financialization also yielded demand-oriented growth, easing tensions within the power bloc. However, the limits of financialization became evident in the 2010s due to changing global financial circumstances. Moreover, this period coincided with the attempts of previously subordinated capital fractions of the power bloc to avoid returning to orthodox macroeconomic policies (see footnote 9). Therefore, some scholars of Turkish politics see the political-economic developments of the last decade as a move away from neoliberalism or even an emergence of a version of state capitalism.

However, data on the major growth components and their contribution to GDP do not support a narrative of radical transformation until the late 2010s and the Covid-19 pandemic. Instead, the data and the macroeconomic policy framework suggest a gradual transformation, with an erratic style and more discretionary forms coming to the foreground in the mid-to-late 2010s. This has been directly related to the slow drift of the Turkish economy into crisis while the JDP attempted to maintain the unity of the power bloc. Studies of state form have helped emphasize the continuities within an economic geography despite short-term political upheavals and changes. I have argued that, through a non-deterministic reading, it is possible to explain discretionary economic policymaking and increased state activism as reflecting the struggles within the power bloc. However, the developmental interventions in this period have been unsystematic, so a new growth model only started to emerge during the Covid-19 pandemic. Describing the state form in Turkey in the 2010s as authoritarian and
neoliberal does not avoid the discussion of tensions within the power bloc and possible emerging shifts in the growth model and accumulation strategies. On the contrary, it helps to explain why the growth benefits of the Turkish economy have not been fairly distributed and why coercion (both overt and disguised) against political dissidents is an integral part of the unstable equilibrium of compromise within the power bloc and between capital fractions and the large groups within the society.

The move towards a new growth model in Turkey in 2020-21 may create favourable conditions for consolidating regime change and deconstitutionalization, leading to a change in the state form if it further alters the means to support capital accumulation. Yet, it might also be followed by a reversal in economic policies and/or deepening tensions among the power bloc components. This uncertainty also hints at the limits of critical state theory and research on power blocs. Avoiding politicism and overcoming disciplinary boundaries require analyses of the patterns of state intervention concerning the crystallization of interests and pursued strategies. However, the recurrent international financial volatility, wars, disasters such as the climate crisis, and health crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic continue to push state managers more and more toward short-term pragmatism and unsystematic measures across the globe, making periodization more complex. Still, even if akin to looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack, an interdisciplinary approach should continue benefiting from other fields of inquiry to deepen relational and critical research on state restructurings and regime changes.

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NOTES

1. In mainstream political science research, the term crony capitalism refers to the system in which “politically connected actors manage to extract economic advantage to their firms, and the consequences of these privileges on economic growth and job creation” (Malik et al. 2019: 6)

2. Tuğal (2022) critiques the state capitalism label as an overstatement of the move away from neoliberalism in Turkey and suggests ‘neoliberal statism’ instead. I consider this term an early attempt to describe the emergent state-capital nexus in the country, but more illuminating than state capitalism.

3. For many researchers, divisive political discourse and rising authoritarianism in the global North signal the emergence of a new state form, authoritarian neoliberalism, since the 2007-2009 international financial crisis. Many analyses associate the displacement of technocratic policymaking and the consequences of further political alienation of the masses with a reactionary response to crises within neoliberalism (see Boffo et al. 2019, also Bruff 2014). From that perspective, the analytical value of the concept of authoritarian neoliberalism resides in its portrayal of the shift in the 2010s in the global North towards a personalistic, ultra-nationalist and misogynist political discourse benefitting from mass disengagement in Europe and the United States. In more specific uses, however, authoritarian neoliberalism denotes the further insulation of economic policymaking from large societal segments (Wigger 2019), prompting further curtailment of political democracy. Attempts to unpack the repertoires of authoritarian neoliberalism in other political geographies have shown that the practices and tools of neoliberal governments were eroding democratic politics long before the recent rise of authoritarianism in the 2010s, though not all processes of neoliberalization are supported by authoritarian state power (see Tansel 2017).

4. Other studies have stressed the change in the state form in the late 2010s. For example, Oğuz (2016) suggests that these transformations should be seen as the emergence of an exceptional form, specifically a fascist state, while Savran (2016) describes the protracted formation of a new repressive structure as proto-fascist or rabist.

5. Poulantzas distinguishes between normal and exceptional state forms depending on the position and strength of institutionalized popular representation mechanisms. His framework also differentiates between regime configurations in terms of the dominant state apparatus (for a
short interpretation of normal states and exceptional regimes, see Jessop 2015). I do not delve into scholarly reinterpretations of Poulantzian concepts as this goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, the paper takes a more open-ended approach to Poulantzian concepts to avoid politicism and structuralism.

6. Avcı (2021) maintains that the capitalist classes in Turkey can be divided into three fractions: national, internationally oriented, and transnational. In this study, I describe companies that produce in different geographies, sell their products to various countries, and borrow easily in international financial markets as internationalized capital rather than transnational.

7. Examples of off-balance-sheet policy making in Turkey used to socialize financial risks include the Credit Guarantee Fund in the 2010s and the duty losses mechanism. Here, the ultimate intervention costs depend on the severity of the crisis and future events. The foreign exchange interventions and money swaps that added US dollars to the CB’s international reserves, albeit temporarily in 2019-2020, were also instances of similar risk-snowballing, which postponed the cost. In off-balance-sheet policy-making, the objectives of economic intervention are not debated in democratic bodies and the policies are not implemented accountably. Weeks or months after the materialization of costs, scholars can access data, and the public learns about these interventions’ failures and successes.

8. In the Turkish context, an orthodox macroeconomic response refers tight monetary policy pursued by the Central Bank and lower levels of public expenditure accompanied by market-friendly structural reforms and expectations for higher levels of foreign direct investment. For the orthodox policies in the early 21st century and further financial deepening in Turkey, see Yalman et al. 2019.

9. For a discussion of crony practices under the JDP rule and Erdoğan administration, see Bedirhanoğlu 2021a. For a discussion on how JDP-connected capital groups benefit from the political economy perspective dominant among JDP cadres in recent years, see Tuğal 2022.

10. Poulantzas’ conceptualization creates new problems from pinpointing bourgeois representative forms as the ‘normal’ form of the capitalist state. In his last years, however, he also described authoritarian statism as the new normal. He was also among those scholars who highlighted the duplication of the state, which allowed supposedly normal representative mechanisms and exceptional structures to form a symbiotic relationship. Given that this formation is the core of authoritarian statism, this state form includes the elements of other exceptional state forms like fascism.

11. The term “organic crisis” was used by Antonio Gramsci to separate structural crises from cyclical ones. In organic crises, structural factors (arising from the form of integration into the world economy) are accompanied by crises of legitimacy and hegemony (Candeias 2011; Robinson 2005). Organic crises cannot be overcome by minor changes. Discontent among the masses grows and struggles within the power bloc are joined by searches for new accumulation strategies. Organic crises create an environment prone to change in the state form.

12. I read Balaban’s (2021) call to incorporate social class and industrial relations into Turkish politics analyses as a reminder pointing out the same problem.

ABSTRACTS

This article analyzes the continuities and changes in state form, forms of regime, power bloc, and growth model of Turkey in the 21st century, using the analytical tools provided by critical state
theory and research on financialization and growth models. I argue that there has been a reconfiguration of the power bloc in the 2010s, which symbolized the search for an alternative compared to the debt-led and domestic-demand-oriented growth pattern of the 2000s. However, these macroeconomic measures were unsystematic until the Covid-19 pandemic, and the state’s mechanisms to incorporate large social groups and tools to support capital accumulation mainly remained the same in the 2010s. Despite the reconfiguration of the power bloc and the search for a new growth model in the mid-to-late 2010s, I stress the continuation of the authoritarian state form in Turkey until the Covid-19 pandemic and conceive the transition to a new regime in the 2010s as a change in the form of regime.

INDEX

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