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THE RISE OF POPULIST ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIANISM IN TURKEY: A CASE OF CULTURALLY ROOTED RECIDIVISM

Turkey appears to be the “talk of the town” these days in many corners of the world for the “wrong” reasons. Many journalists are in jail allegedly for having taken part in terrorist activities. Many academics have lost their jobs for having signed a “peace petition”, an act also alleged to have been directed toward supporting a terrorist movement that challenges the territorial integrity of the country. School teachers, civil servants and military officers have lost their jobs, some are in jail as are a number of businessmen, for possible links with a religious grouping led by a cleric residing in Pennsylvania, who, by all indications, engineered an unsuccessful attempt at military takeover in mid-July 2016. While some of these allegations, particularly those pertaining to a coup plotting, may well turn out to be true, rules and procedures of due investigation have been broadly ignored in the implementation of security measures carried out under an emergency rule that is being regularly prolonged by a parliamentary majority that is exceptionally accommodating to the government. In addition, major constitutional changes have been approved by a small margin in a public referendum marked by irregularities, changing Turkey’s political system from parliamentary to presidential and, in the process, Turkey has done away with the checks and balances that are associated with liberal democratic rule.

Turkey was also the “talk of the town” after 2002 when the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) assumed power after a prolonged period, since 1991, of ineffective coalition governments. At the time, the new government, characterizing itself as being socially conservative, had promised more economic development and more democracy and it appeared to be working hard to deliver on its promises. The rate of economic growth was high, while

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a series of measures of democratization with a view to commencing accession negotiations with the European Union was introduced. Foreign direct investment was running high. In recognition of its efforts and achievements, Turkey was invited to begin accession negotiations in 2004 and they started at the beginning of 2005.

Turkey had, in fact, also been the “talk of the town” in 1950 when the country had made a peaceful transition from a modernizing single party rule to political competition. This development, coming soon after the Cold War had commenced, had been met with excitement and received warmly by the so-called “Free World” as an example of a successful transition to democratic politics in a developing society. Since both sides of the Cold War were out to impress the world that their system was not only desirable but also possible, the Turkish case was seized upon by the United States and its allies as a glowing example of the success of democracy.

Turkey enjoyed considerable economic growth under the Democratic Party administration that had won the elections in 1950 and then proceeded to win the two succeeding elections of 1954 and 1957, though experiencing significant electoral losses in the latter election. As regards consolidating its democracy, however, little distance was covered. Coming from a single party tradition, the Democrats behaved as if they were also a single party, but grew more authoritarian over time, particularly after they experienced a decline in their electoral fortunes after the elections of 1957. Rule by a popularly elected authoritarian government came to an abrupt end on May 27, 1960 by a military takeover led by a junta of lower ranking officers, to make Turkey once again the talk of the town.

How is it that a country that was perceived to be proceeding toward the expansion and consolidation of its democracy changes political course so abruptly and moves toward populist electoral authoritarianism (Schedler 2013: 21–53), a political system in which all institutions of a liberal democratic system exist but those in power use and abuse them so as to suppress the opposition and perpetuate their tenure, on two different occasions? What are the reasons behind the deterioration of the quality of Turkey’s democracy? What factors contribute to it or are responsible for it? Are these likely to continue or is the direction of change likely to be reversed in the future? This article proposes to analyze the two occasions when Turkey has fallen under the rule of popular electoral authoritarianism, hoping to offer some answers to the above questions.

■ Explaining political change in Turkey

THE INITIAL TRANSITION TO POLITICAL COMPETITION

Scholars interested in explaining political change pursue different avenues of exploration. In the specific case of Turkey's turn toward democratic governance, three different modes of explanation have been popular. The first views Turkey's transition to competitive politics as being a result of the socio-economic change the country had undergone during the early years of the republic and particularly during the Second World War. In this context, it is argued that the early republic while bringing peace and security to the country, employed a rather extractive posture toward society to finance the centralized state that implemented cultural modernization policies not all of which were popular with the masses. The extractive stance grew stronger during the Second World War owing to Turkey's having to maintain a fully mobilized military though it managed to keep out of the war. The war also produced a new provincial commercial class that had benefited from the high demand for Turkish agricultural products and raw materials in the wartime international markets. This group that wanted to enjoy a bigger say in national politics and restrain the government from pursuing extensive interventionism both in society and economy. It became supportive of an opposition movement that was born within the governing single Republican People's Party (CHP) that finally opened the way to a change of those in power through elections (Keyder 1987, Turan 2015: 61–65).

The same mode of analysis is often continued beyond the initial transition to democratic politics, focusing on the mechanization of agriculture, the construction of a comprehensive highway system, the expansion of the educational opportunities, the adoption of an import substitution oriented industrialization strategy for economic development that created the conditions that lent support to the continuation and expansion of a democratic system by building a national economy, expanding education, facilitating communications and facilitating the expansion of a middle class (Keyder 1987, Turan 2015: 145–154).

The second mode of analysis takes the conditions prevailing in the international system as the driving force of domestic change toward democratization. According to this mode of analysis, as the world was being divided between the Communist and the Western Blocs after the Second World War, its security interests necessitated that Turkey join the Western Bloc to contain Soviet expansionism that might also target Turkey. In other words, rather than a socio-economic change being the driving force behind Turkey's move toward political competition, it was the country's search for closer affiliation

and integration with the emerging Western Bloc to meet its security needs. The proponents of this mode of analysis remind us that Turkey managed to become an integral part of the Western Bloc including becoming a member of NATO in 1952, shortly after its founding, and that these developments might not have taken place if Turkey had not changed its political system (Yılmaz 1977: 1–37).

A third mode moves to the political arena to emphasize that the westernizing orientation of the republican regime that replaced the Ottoman Empire did not preclude but rather implied that the country would move toward a politically competitive system at some stage of its political development since the countries that were taken as models, mainly England and France, possessed democratic systems. Furthermore, it is noted that the ruling single party, the CHP, had not developed an ideology that necessitated or legitimized its continuation as the sole holder of political power. Therefore, calls for democracy could not be easily rejected on credible grounds, particularly when the political leadership itself questioned its perpetuation. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the leader of the ruling party had a personal commitment to the advancement along the democratic path and did not yield to conservatives within his party who advocated the continuation of a single party rule (Özbudun 2000: 21–25).

While the evolution of Turkey in the direction of democratic governance may be explained in a number of ways, why it has failed to consolidate its democracy undergoing an electoral authoritarian experience during the 1950s and why it is moving toward electoral authoritarianism also today calls for an explanation. What I propose to do in the following pages is to focus on one major factor that, I feel, have contributed significantly to the erosion of democratic governance in Turkey and to the emergence of electoral authoritarianism: that is, the legacy of Turkey's modernization history and its problematical influence on the practice of liberal democracy. Let me emphasize that while the particular pattern of modernization that Turkey has undergone constitutes but one important component of Turkey's democratic experience factor. Certainly, other factors of importance may easily come to mind such as those relating to the political economy or to the personality traits of its leaders who turned authoritarian. Such factors will remain outside the scope of this paper although there is no question that they also deserve a close examination.

HISTORICAL LEGACY

Relying on the brief account of Turkey's two experiences with electoral authoritarianism, the reader should not get the impression that the interim between the two periods of electoral authoritarianism that I have chosen to examine meant a time of uninterrupted democratic development. True, the

country made slow progress in advancing its democracy, but the process was interrupted by direct and indirect military interventions. Even during the years when democratic politics seemed to prevail, the military exercised a critical political role as a veto power. What makes the two periods that I will focus on interesting is that the role of the military as a veto power was largely absent, allowing us to neglect it. Elected governments, in other words, were in a position to pursue policies without fear that they would be ousted by the military.

■ The Emergence of the State Elites as a Modernizing Force

The researchers of Turkey's modernization agree that the decision to modernize was stimulated by the Empire's persistent military defeats in conflicts with the Western powers. As defeats became more frequent, the ruling elite headed by the Sultan himself became convinced that further decline could only be averted by adopting the instruments, the technologies and the means used by the adversaries.² This approach that may be termed "innovation by mimesis" began in a highly selective way and grew more comprehensive over time as the adopted innovations usually proved useful but not enough to avert defeat. From the perspective of our analysis, it is important to note that change was led by the state and its intention was to strengthen the institutions of the state so as to prevent its demise. This path is very different from the experience of western societies that later came to be referred to as "modern" in which socio-economic change was driven by technological change, and where change in the political domain was brought about by demands emanating from the society.

The outcome of state led modernization of politics differed from society driven change in significant ways. In the former, change was to be achieved through training or educating cadres who came into the service of the state beginning with the military unlike in the latter where new social forces that challenged the existing political order had to be accommodated by incorporating them in the political processes through the devising of appropriate institutions and practices. As this limited "modernization program" proved insufficient, educational programs and institutions were expanded. The graduates of the educational institutions then began to work for new state institutions that had also been developed as a part of the modernization package. For example, the development of large armies using firearms led to many battlefield casualties necessitating the development of competent medical corps and hence the

² To this day, in my opinion, the most persuasive and detailed analysis of Ottoman modernization presenting arguments that are also briefly and partially presented here is Niyazi Berkes (1998). Another penetrating analysis is offered by Bernard Lewis (1961).

opening of a military medical school. Similarly, the use of a large number of animals for transportation constituted the grounds for the opening of a school of veterinary medicine. Financing the new institutions reinforced the need for state income, hence both a more efficient administration and a tax system that led, among others, to the founding of the Civil Service School that eventually became the famous Faculty of Political Science of Ankara University. In this way, over time, modernization programs and the network of modernizing institutions became more comprehensive and all-encompassing.

By way of summary, then, transmitting new knowledge and values to students who were candidates for service to the state and then staffing the institutions of the state with them, constituted the critical means through which modernization was being implemented. This process produced a corps of military officers, bureaucrats, diplomats, teachers, and intellectuals that may be collectively referred to as “men of state” or “state elites” that occupied positions of power in society and were ready to use this power to transform society along modern, or more accurately, since modernization was understood as westernization, along western lines.³ The state elites viewed society as a target to be transformed in the direction of their pattern. They expected society to be passive and obedient and willing to change to conform to their societal designs. Reactions emanating from society in response to their modernization programs were usually viewed as manifestations of ignorance by people who failed to appreciate what was good for them. The flow of political communication in this relationship was understandably unidirectional, from the elite to the masses. The state elites, while claiming to be the masters of a popularly based regime, felt that their right to rule the society derived from their possession of higher knowledge and a superior set of values. They were “enlightened” people and their mission was to transmit the “light” to the rest of society using the instruments of the state.

■ The Problematical Prevalence of State Elites in Politics

Not surprisingly, the above described attitude of the state elites toward politics proved highly problematical once the question of political competition entered the national agenda. The men of state feared that competition introduced at a time when significant segments of society had not yet “modernized sufficiently,” the opposition would appeal to the masses to reverse the achievements of the

³ Frederick W. Frey, in his seminal work on Turkish legislators, entitled his third chapter “Education: Hallmark of the Elite”. The chapter analyzes the critical function education performed in the formation of the new republican elite. Cf. *The Turkish Political Elite* (1965: 29–72).

modern republican state (Turan 2015: 58–60). The president of the republic, in fact, allowed an opposition party to register in 1946 only after assurances from its founders that they would fully observe the secular nature of the republic (Loğoğlu 1998: 145). But, more broadly, the state elite, suspicious of the outcome of open political competition, tried to devise ways through which the basic characteristics of the modern republic could be preserved.

One way was to ensure that the key institutions of government would remain committed to paying proper attention to the “correct” socialization of the state elites of the modern republican state. The officer corps, for example, were admitted to military middle and high schools and then went on to military college, ensuring that they were dedicated to the traditions of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. If some failed to conform, they were weeded out at an earlier stage of their careers. The upper echelons of the Ministry of Interior as well as those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the other hand, came mainly from the Faculty of Political Science in Ankara and to a lesser extent from the Ankara and Istanbul Law Schools where the students were trained with the understanding that those who entered public service would be the guardians of the republic. Teachers’ colleges, on the other hand, were places where those responsible for socializing the new generations into modernity would be trained.

Following the military takeover of 1960, having in mind the experience of democratic politics between 1950 and 1960, the Constitution of 1961 (also the Constitution of 1982 after the 1980 military intervention) included provisions that would keep the key institutions of government from the intervention of elected politicians, i.e. the “political elites”. Some institutions were made autonomous and an impartial, non-partisan president was given the power to appoint officials of the key institutions of government such as the rectors of state universities, the state broadcasting company and the constitutional court (Cf. Özbudun 1988: 37–62). The promotions in the military were rendered into an exclusive military concern on which the government had almost nothing to say. The budget and the expenditures of the military were exempted from the ordinary procedures of parliamentary oversight. The military courts not only enjoyed great powers, but they also dealt with matters such as being a conscientious objector that would normally be taken up in civilian courts in democratic societies. The fact that in the following years, until 1989, the president, though elected by the parliament, came not from among elected politicians but high-ranking generals facilitated the functioning of this system as intended.

Keeping the scope of politics narrow was yet another way through which the state elites exercised tutelage over the political system. A clear manifestation of this were the limitations placed on the scope of political activity in the

constitution and the laws. For example, political parties that advocated the “establishment of domination of one class over another” (i.e. communist parties) and those that used religion for political purposes were banned. It is under such provisions that the string of antecedents of the currently ruling AKP, including the National Order Party, the National Salvation Party and Welfare Party were banned by the constitutional court.

Finally, it became an established practice after the coup d'état in 1960 that the military constituted a veto group, imposing limits on governmental action (Hale 1994, Turan 2015: 110–140). A variety of means were employed to achieve this end. The most forceful one was no less than staging a temporary military intervention. But more typically, lesser means were employed. Public statements by the Chief of Staff and other commanders expressing dissatisfaction with what the government was doing and/or announcing expectations were an example. There was also a mechanism provided in the constitutional arrangement after 1961 introducing an institutional way through which the tutelage could be exercised: the National Security Council (NSC). Bringing some key cabinet ministers and the top commanders together, the NSC provided a mechanism through which the expectations of the latter could be communicated to the former with the understanding that they would be implemented. After the 1980 intervention that led to the adoption of the 1982 Constitution, the NSC, whose powers had now been enhanced, began to appoint representatives to other agencies such as the Council on Higher Education and the TRT (State Broadcasting Company) so as to communicate their preferences to them and also to be “briefed” by them (Özbudun 1988: 25–28).

Although the military was the most prominent component of it, the state elites incorporated the cadres of other institutions. The foreign ministry and the constitutional court continued to be a part of the state elite coalition until the political clout of the military crumbled through a set of trials accusing top commanders of planning coups after 2010. Other government agencies had slowly adjusted to coming under the control of the elected politicians but always contained some cadres that were committed to a modernizing orientation. A number of quasi-official organizations like the Bar, the Chamber of Physicians and the Chamber of Engineers and Architects were dominated by leaders who shared the values of the modernizing state and might be looked upon as constituting a segment of the state elites.

■ The roots and practice of electoral authoritarianism

As we have seen, the coming of electoral competition had posed a critical problem for the state elites since elections brought to power a political elite that did not fully share their values and their vision for the future of the society. Frequently referred to as “cultural bifurcation”⁴, the problem has plagued Turkey’s democracy continually, after it first became manifest following the 1950 elections that marked a unique peaceful transfer of power through elections. As argued above, the state elites believed that they possessed a superior set of values and a societal vision and they were intent on limiting the arena within which elected politicians could operate. That segment of elected politicians constituting a parliamentary majority, on the other hand, felt that the state elites constrained them unreasonably. In order to counter the latter’s and to legitimize its own claims to power, the ruling party developed the argument that only they represented the national will. Turning to this rather imprecise concept and interpreting it to mean that only the party in power represented it, neglecting in the process that there was also an elected opposition whose views were more in line with those of the state elites, the winning Democrat Party (DP) introduced to democratic politics a problematical tendency, more commonly referred to as electoral majoritarianism, that continues to influence contemporary Turkish politics. Specifically, one of the critical cleavages that has marked Turkish politics is a split between the modernizing elites that claim that they have the right to rule the society because they know what is “right” for society and elected officials who have claimed their political will should prevail because they represent the people and they know what the “people” want (Turan 2015: 195–196, Kalaycıoğlu 2017: 10–15). This cleavage may bring to mind the evolution of socialist and social-democratic parties against the aristocrats and the capitalists in Europe where the working classes challenged the nobility’s and the wealthy’s right to rule by relying on their numbers.

■ Politics of populist electoral authoritarianism – the DP period, 1950–1960

To repeat my thesis, the leadership of the DP believed that since their party had obtained the majority of the votes, only they represented the national will. In this conceptual framework, the legitimacy of those in opposition was in question. The DP leaders believed that the victory at the polls entitled them to exercise unrestricted political power. They expected the opposition to be

⁴ The expression was initially used by Daniel Lerner (1958: 130 et passim).

accommodating to the wishes of the government, judging that the activities of the opposition could be restricted and its voice muzzled. They also felt that government agencies were at their disposal to use for partisan purposes. This was particularly important because, owing to low level of organization and relatively poor communications, politics followed the path of clientelism, easily excluding all that were, one way or another, connected with the opposition parties. Shortly after the elections of 1954, as disaffection with the DP began to gain ground and the opposition improved its electoral position, the DP leadership, continuing to believe that only they represented the national will, started to suspect that the opposition was becoming subversive, tricking voters to come to their side. In the events leading to the military takeover in 1960, the DP government grew increasingly authoritarian, which reduced the commitment of the opposition to protect the system which contained the institutions of democracy.⁵ The system continued to maintain a democratic façade but, as the following account will testify, had acquired the characteristics of an electoral authoritarian system.

From the very beginning of its tenure, the DP was concerned that the bureaucracy and the military, as constituent elements of the state elites, were closely attached to the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and were open to collusion with it. Its fears were confounded by the fact that CHP's leader İsmet İnönü was a hero of the national war of liberation and a founding father of the republic who enjoyed great respect among the state elites and could presumably easily mobilize them against the government. The strategy the DP chose in facing the challenge of the opposition was suppression. Some of the measures the DP adopted were in the legal domain. Over time a number of laws was changed to reduce the effectiveness of the opposition. For example, changes were introduced to the Standing Order of the parliament that rendered more severe the penalties for infractions of discipline and eased the conditions for the removal of immunity of the MPs. These provisions were, almost exclusively, applied to the members of the opposition. Another measure was banning the use of radio (a government monopoly on broadcasting at the time) by political parties, thus depriving the opposition from using the only instrument through which the entire country could be reached, while the majority party as well as the government had access to radio broadcasting. When mass rallies by the opposition proved popular, the government amended the laws limiting the holding of mass rallies only to election campaigns. But by far the most

⁵ There are two excellent historical analyses of the DP period in which the summary of events outlined here are described in a greater detail. They helped to briefly recapitulate this story in this section. Cf. Cem Eroğul (1970) and Tanel Demirel (2011).

problematical change of laws came about when the DP leadership proposed and its parliamentary majority enacted a law depicting the establishment of a parliamentary committee comprised exclusively of the members of the governing party and equipped with judicial powers to investigate the subversive activities of the opposition. Particularly, as the electoral support of the DP declined as shown by the 1957 elections and its aftermath, the party leadership became more and more convinced that this was but the result of subversive activities by the opposition CHP allegedly deceiving the voters.

The strategy of suppression also covered narrowing down the freedom of the press. Measures of deprivation as well as sanctions were employed, often simultaneously. Opposition newspapers, for example, were not supplied with sufficient quantities of printing paper, then a government monopoly. Similarly, they were not given public announcements, a critical part of newspapers' income at that time. Laws were amended to penalize the authors of writings that criticized the political and financial integrity of the state, usually interpreted as undermining the government. Many journalists received jail sentences as the DP administration moved along its tenure of ten years.

Distrusting bureaucracy, the judiciary and other pillars of the modern republican state like the universities, the DP government challenged the limiting role they exercised on its power. Measures in this area included the forceful retirement of officials who had completed thirty years of service irrespective of their age and wish. Later the years of service qualification was repealed and all civil servants could be dismissed by government at will. Judges who rendered decisions unfavorable to the government were sent away to less desirable posts as a form of demotion. Finally, university administrators who expressed critical remarks about the government were removed from their positions.

As its base of electoral support eroded, the DP tried to suppress the opposition by actually physically coercing the CHP voters and sympathizers who attended opposition rallies as well as threatening the safety of the opposition leaders. Actions included throwing stones at those who were taking part in the rallies, physically or morally attacking the CHP leader İnönü and using law enforcement measures to prevent people from going to rallies. The opposition party supporters were not alone in being the targets of physical harassment. University students who demonstrated against the government constituted the target of police brutality. One student actually died during the demonstrations. By the time the military intervened, the opposition had judged that while the institutional features of a democratic system continued to exist, they were being used in such a way that replacing the government by electoral means appeared nearly impossible and would become even more so in the future.

Interestingly, the likelihood of a military intervention was never seriously taken into account by the government. There had been a couple of incidents when plans for a coup were reported, but the government had not considered such plans to be particularly serious. The top commanders were loyal to the government and they assured Prime Minister Menderes that there was nothing to worry about. Although the military along with the bureaucracy and others mentioned above constituted the pillars of the modern elites, at the time, it was not perceived as a veto group that could assume a more active political role in the face of domestic political developments. The military takeover was not expected by the government. Those arrested after the coup included the military's top brass.

To recoup the story, the anti-establishment popular movement to oust the ruling elite from power had been successful under the DP's leadership. The DP cadres did not want limitations that a constitutional system imposed on their power and demonstrated a proclivity to authoritarianism. When they sensed that they were beginning to lose power, they intensified their use of authoritarian means. They suppressed the opposition by subverting the rules of the democratic game using both legislation and coercion. They also tried to polarize the electorate by accusing the opposition of subversion. Such policies paved the way of political change through military intervention, an outcome the masters of the regime failed to anticipate.

■ **The politics of populist electoral authoritarianism. The AKP period**

The AKP came to power as a revolt against two types of establishments. The first was what we may call the "national establishment" comprised of a variety of secular parties that had learned to live with the tenets and the forces of the Kemalist republic extending from the various government agencies with the military in the lead and including the courts and secularist civil society organizations. The parties within that grouping had held an ambivalent stance toward the religious parties out of which the AKP was born. Interestingly, these parties had cooperated with religious partners in coalition governments, but they had not done anything to prevent the latter's ban by the Constitutional Court or the frequent reprimands they received from the military leadership. Simultaneously, the AKP also represented a revolt against the leadership of the Felicity Party, the last in a line of religious parties banned by the Constitutional Court for having used religion for political ends (Cf. Hale, Özbudun 2010: 3–19).

In contrast to the DP whose leadership came from among the CHP, the founding party of the republic, and was not concerned about a military intervention, the AKP was born in an environment where its predecessors had been resisted by the bureaucratic-military establishment and banned by the Constitutional Court. AKP's electoral victory in 2002, giving it an electoral majority and therefore the government, had incensed the state elites. The initial problem of the party was to assure everybody that it was a different party from its predecessors, that while its voters and political cadres might be socially conservative, they were committed democrats with no intention of transforming the political system of the country to a religion inspired autocracy.

Supported by rather favorable economic conditions due to a successful economic recovery program developed and implemented by the previous government, the AKP managed to present itself as a democratizing force which inevitably involved reducing the power of the state elites, particularly the military. To that end, the government turned to actively pursuing membership in the European Union which required much attention to civilian control of the military. In 2004 Turkey was invited to open accession negotiations for membership and the negotiations commenced in 2005. As Turkey worked to remove the initial barriers in order to start accession talks and then as it tried hard to comply with EU requirements, many changes affected the constitution and the laws that reduced considerably the institutionalized role the military had carved for itself in politics (Cf. Turan, Gürsoy 2014: 132–140).

An unanticipated opportunity arose in 2007 when the military and its parliamentary allies led by the CHP tried to prevent the election of Abdullah Gül, a former prime minister and foreign minister of moderate disposition, as president of the republic because his wife covered her head. While initially they succeeded through questionable interpretations of the voting procedures in the parliament, they failed after early elections were called, in which those parties who had stood in the way of Mr. Gül's election suffered significant losses. Mr. Gül was then easily elected to the presidency. But, in efforts to surmount the difficulties of electing a president by the parliament, the AKP's parliamentary majority had adopted a constitutional amendment that needed ratification by public referendum, moving the president's election from a parliamentary to a national vote. The referendum was held after Mr. Gül had already been elected president. An overwhelming majority approved it. In retrospect, this change appears to have been critical in the resumption of majoritarian arguments and of the authoritarian recidivism that the country is currently undergoing.⁶

⁶ For the developments connected with the election of Mr. Gül as the president and the constitutional changes, see İler Turan (2017).

If we return for a moment to the developments producing a decline in the role of the military, we must add that late in 2008, public prosecutors initiated an investigation into the military, alleging that some top generals were involved in the planning of a coup. Later investigations presumably revealed other plans in which other generals some on duty, others already in retirement, were involved. They were taken into custody, tried and imprisoned. After a period of six years, the political clout of the military was totally gone. During the trials, it became apparent that much of the evidence was flimsy, some of it seemed doctored, much of it unreliable. The logic the prosecutors employed was often circumstantial. Complaints regarding the maladministration of justice, however, were dismissed by the government, insisting that justice should run its course. After 2013, when the same judiciary alleged that some cabinet ministers had been involved in a corruption scandal, however, the stance of the government changed. Maladministration of justice allegations began now to be taken seriously; higher courts annulled the decision of the lower courts, in some cases calling for retrial and in other for acquittal. The trials also revealed major differences among the military leadership as regards the relation of armed forces to politics, undermining the image of the military as a highly unified political actor. Nearly all the commanders were set free, but the military could no longer act as a veto group in Turkish politics (Turan 2015: 135–137).

The corruption charges against some cabinet ministers in 2013 constituted the background against which the government began to turn to a clearly authoritarian direction. The prime minister alleged that there was a conspiracy against him and his government organized by Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish cleric who lives in Pennsylvania. The organizations established by his followers were identified as terrorist organizations. A campaign was started to identify those with Gülenist connections in public service and the judiciary and to weed them out. A network of high schools and university admission preparatory programs established by Gülen connected foundations was closed. Businessmen who were thought to make major contributions to Gülenist activities were asked to terminate their links. It may well have been the case and later events have provided evidence that Gülenist related groups have engaged in conspiratorial activity to either establish control over the government or to bring it down. The point, however, is that the response of the government to meet the challenge did not remain within the confines of the rule of law and the ordinary administrative and legal instruments, but included mobilization of government agencies and use of their power in arbitrary ways to bring under control a movement that the prime minister had judged to be dangerous.

In 2014, elections for president were held under the new system. The Prime Minister, R. Tayyip Erdoğan, offered his candidacy and won by a small margin

over fifty percent in the first round. Upon taking office, he made use of the then familiar argument that he had the “national will” behind him and recognized that the role defined for the president in the constitution did not match current political realities and should therefore be changed. The constitution assumed an above party politics president with significant powers of appointment to agencies that carried out “state” as opposed to “political” functions; i.e. he had no policy making powers. He appointed the foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu as the new prime minister. This government served for nearly two years; but relations between the president and the prime minister, i.e. the head of government, were continually marked by tensions and conflict, resulting from the highly interventionist approach of the president to the policy domain which Mr. Davutoğlu thought properly belonged to him. In the end, he was forced to resign against his will and a more accommodating person and an old time ally and friend of the President, Binali Yıldırım, was “made” the prime minister.

The parliamentary elections of Spring 2015 gave the president an opportunity to shape a parliamentary party fully loyal to him.⁷ Though, he was technically an executive equidistant to all parties, he intervened actively in the selection of candidates of the AKP. His job was facilitated by the statute of his “former” party which depicted that an AKP member could not serve for more than three consecutive terms in the parliament. The rule led to the elimination, from both the parliamentary party and from key positions in the party hierarchy, of almost all of the party’s founding leaders possessing independent electoral bases. The elections, however, did not quite turn out as the president had intended. The AKP experienced electoral losses and failed to get a parliamentary majority. Mr. Erdoğan did not encourage the parties in the parliament to search for coalition possibilities. Instead, he waited for the constitutionally defined period without government to lapse so that he could dissolve the parliament and call for new elections, reminding the voters that coalition governments were not a good idea. In the second elections in late Fall 2015 in which the AKP employed all the means of the state available to the government with the president interjecting himself into the race, and in which the opposition was starved for funds because they had used state aid to parties in the Spring election and no provision was allowed by the governing party to get additional aid for the Fall election, the AKP won a majority comprised of loyalists to the president.

Once the elections were behind, the president began to work to change the constitution in order to transform the system from parliamentary to

⁷ For a comprehensive statistical report and political analysis of the November 2015 elections, see Erol Tuncer and Bülent Tuncer (2016).

presidential. The AKP's parliamentary majority was not large enough to change the constitution, therefore he started to search for an ally which he found in the Nationalist Action Party (MHP). Earlier, Mr. Erdoğan had hoped that People's Democracy Party (HDP), usually identified as an ethnic Kurdish party, might have been the partner. He had initiated a peace process to bring an end to terrorism conducted by the Kurdistan Workers' Party, known by its acronym PKK, in Turkey's southeastern countryside. The strong linkages between the HDP and the PKK, he thought, constituted a mechanism through which negotiations might be conducted. But, when the head of the HDP proclaimed that his party would not support president Erdoğan's bid to reshape the Turkey's parliamentary system into presidential, he changed strategy and reintroduced the policy of fighting the PKK until it was "fully defeated". He found a new ally in MHP whose ethnic nationalism was highly supportive of the government's now changed Kurdish policy. The PKK response was to escalate acts of terrorism and to try to establish political control of towns. This gave the government not only an opportunity to declare a state of emergency which in Turkish practice gives the government extensive unchecked powers but also the possibility to ask for a temporary suspension of the immunities of parliamentary deputies so that they could be prosecuted. He also called for the nation to rally behind him in order to meet a challenge to the territorial integrity of Turkey. The unchecked powers have been used mainly to suppress the freedom of the press and to weed out the bureaucracy. The removal of parliamentary immunity of deputies, on the other hand, have landed some of the HDP deputies and an CHP deputy in jail for a variety of crimes allegedly connected with extending support to terrorism.

The alliance he forged with the MHP enabled Mr. Erdoğan to prepare a set of constitutional changes to render Turkey's parliamentary system into presidential with the chief executive acquiring extensive powers and hardly any means to check and balance them. The change was defended by attacking the separation of powers, which the proponents of change argued as constituting a major impediment to effective government, not surprisingly including fighting the PKK, a topic on which the MHP was very sensitive. The proposed changes, taken together, created a presidency equipped even with powers of issuing decrees having the force of law, with powers of appointment to all important positions in the government and the judicial system, and with no effective means to check the actions of the president.

As the constitutional changes were being debated, on July 15, 2016, there occurred an attempted military takeover, carried out for the most part by Gülenist officers whose numbers and the ranks they had achieved took the public fully by surprise. While the attempt was foiled, many lives were lost

and many officers put in jail. The government found in the development an opportunity to impress upon the public that Turkey's democracy was under threat and the only way to fight it was to adopt a presidential system. Following the failed attempt, sweeping arrests of Gülenists were made, many bureaucrats were taken into custody as were university professors, businessmen and journalists. The government without hesitation declared that all types of opposition were in fact interlinked, all serving the interests of the Gülenist conspiracy that was presumably being manipulated by external powers. The end result has been an unusual number of journalists in jail for "having supported terrorism", a significant number of "Gülenist" businessmen whose businesses have been taken over by the government and sold to others without sufficient consideration of the due process, a large number of academic staff fired for having signed a peace petition criticizing the way the government has approached the "Kurdish" problem, and an army of bureaucrats, judges and prosecutors who are alleged to have Gülenist connections.

In the meantime, the campaign to have the constitutional changes ratified in a public referendum proceeded with ferocity on the part of the government and the president. All means available to the public were used to mobilize voters. The state and many private broadcasting firms carried only pro-change news and discussions. Government employees, teachers, workers in public institutions were all encouraged and often required to attend pro-constitutional change rallies. Municipalities run by AKP mayors offered free bus service, food and beverage to those who wanted to go to the rallies. In short, the campaign was heavily balanced in favor of the government position.

The referendum was held on 16 April, 2017. Polls indicated that the vote would result in a stand-off. The yes votes won by a small margin (51.4% vs 48.6%) ended under allegations of electoral fraud.⁸ These included the nearly impossible 100 percent turnout in a substantial number of remote villages in Eastern Turkey accompanied by allegations that some votes had been cast by voters who were proven to be away in another part of the country when the voting took place, But by far the most flagrant violation was counting the votes' cast in envelopes not stamped by the electoral board. This was an act prohibited by law, but as the voting was progressing, a government friendly High Board of Elections ruled that such vote was valid. This decision has been offered as evidence of the extent the judiciary has come under the influence of political authority.

⁸ A statistical study by Peter Klimek, Raul Jimenez, Abraham Hinteregger, Stefan Thurner entitled *Election forensic analysis of the Turkish Constitutional Referendum 2017*, lends some credence to these charges. See <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1706.09839.pdf> visited July 5, 2017.

The government, rather than hesitating about the uncertainty of the outcome, has proceeded to implement the changes. President Erdoğan has returned to his party and resumed its leadership in a ceremony with much pomp and circumstance. He has continued to argue, with growing determination, that varieties of opposition are in fact different manifestations of the same movement whose intention is to destroy the country in cooperation with external enemies that have been disturbed by Turkey's rising star, simultaneously reminding voters that if his government were to go, the bureaucrats who looked down on the citizens and did not respect them, would come back. He has invited the courts to do their jobs with vigilance in the fight against terrorism. Nearly two hundred members of the press are under arrest for what they have written, but the government argues that they are being tried for having assisted terrorist movements and that the charges against them have nothing to do with the freedom of the press. University faculty continue to lose their jobs for having signed a peace petition.

■ Conclusion

Has democratic government come to an end in Turkey? Rather than respond affirmatively as the above account of events would suggest, I would say that the system could best be described as one of electoral authoritarianism since all outward institutions of democratic governance exist, but they operate in ways that allow those who govern not to abide by the rules of the game and carry out their policies without the constraints that a system of checks and balances would impose on a government in a functioning liberal democracy. The reappearance of a populist electoral authoritarianism after nearly sixty years of democratic governance, albeit with interruptions, just at the time when Turkey appeared to be headed toward the consolidation of democracy, may indicate the powerful influence that cultural factors would play in shaping the way the democratic system operates and how it evolves in time.

If major political cleavages are culturally defined, if different "camps" of the electorate entertain different visions of a good society, if either camp finds government by the other side highly undesirable even if not wholly unacceptable, the conditions may favor the deterioration of democratic governance since both sides might be open to transgressing rules of democracy that undermine their domination in politics. In the Turkish case, the state elites that represented westernised version of modernization relied on maintaining powerful institutions of state that kept the elected politicians in check. When those institutions failed, the path was open for populist electoral authoritarianism pursued by political movements that claim to represent the national will.

An interesting question still remains, however. Will socio-economic change eventually render the cultural bifurcation less important as a determinant of politics and reduce its role as a problem for democratic development? To the extent economic considerations have become important in shaping the politics of all societies that have evolved into market economies, there is no reason to think that Turkey will constitute an exception. The prevalence of economic concerns over other factors would favor democratic development and consolidation since the political debate moves into the domain of negotiables while rival visions of society become less important. Yet, the overall rise of populism throughout the world, including countries that have been traditionally identified as bastions of liberal democracy, manifesting itself as a rebellion against the political establishment and legitimizing itself by appealing to ideologies that were thought to have been buried in history, calls for caution. Cultural arguments, as evidenced by anti-immigration sentiments in Europe and the United States, have a powerful appeal to discontented voters. There is no reason to think of Turkey as an exception and Turkish voters are not susceptible to populist calls based on this or that source of dissatisfaction, concern or fear. The critical question is whether the institutions that constitute building blocks of a liberal democracy will display enough resilience in the Turkish case so that a restoration of a liberal democratic system will be possible. Only time will tell.

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THE RISE OF POPULIST ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIANISM IN TURKEY: A CASE OF CULTURALLY ROOTED RECIDIVISM

The trend in Turkey's politics toward "electoral authoritarianism" is rooted in the long history of modernization. Tensions between traditional society and modernizing elites (with strong links to the military) resulted in the series of military coups in the 20th century and weak civilian regimes. The originality of the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) since its coming to power in 2002 is that it has been able to consolidate the support of less privileged strata and to establish full control over the state. How durable is this system remains an open question.

Key words: Turkey, electoral authoritarianism, state elites, AKP, military, modernization