

**TURKEY’S STRUGGLE WITH DEMOCRACY: EMERGENT
NON-DEMOCRATIC REGIME IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

by
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Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Sabancı University
August 2020

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ABSTRACT

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TURKISH STUDIES M.A. THESIS, AUGUST 2020

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Ersin Kalaycıoğlu

Keywords: autocratization, democracy, democratic backsliding, democratic breakdown,
Justice and Development Party (AKP), Neopatrimonial Sultanism, Turkey, Turkish
Politics

Turkey, under AKP’s incumbency, has gone through radical changes in the last 18 years. Initial attempts and hopes towards liberal democracy were faltered by means of the ever-growing power of incumbency. Considering Turkey’s struggle with democracy, this thesis has endeavored to answer several questions: Where does Turkey stand in the global democratic backslide? How did AKP ascend to power and sustain its governance? How has liberal democracy’s aims of Turkey gradually changed over time? How to classify Turkey, following the transition to the Executive Presidential system? By answering the aforementioned questions, this thesis aims to show the chronology of elimination of the democratic elements and the autocratization process that took place during AKP’s incumbency. This thesis concludes that under AKP’s incumbency, the Turkish political regime has reached a point that could be considered as a Neopatrimonial Sultanistic regime.

ÖZET

TÜRKİYE’NİN DEMOKRASİ İLE İMTİHANI: YİRMİBİRİNCİ YÜZYILDA BELİREN DEMOKRATİK OLMAYAN REJİM

BAŞAK YAĞMUR KARACA

TÜRKİYE ÇALIŞMALARI YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, AĞUSTOS 2020

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. ERSİN KALAYCIOĞLU

Anahtar Kelimeler: otokratikleşme, demokrasi, demokratik gerileme, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP), Neopatrimonyal Sultanlık, Türkiye, Türkiye Siyaseti

Türkiye, son 18 yıldaki AKP iktidarında, radikal değişiklikler yaşamıştır. Liberal demokrasiye yönelik umutlar ve beklentiler, iktidarın sürekli artan gücü karşısında sekteye uğramıştır. Bu tezde, Türkiye’nin demokrasi ile imtihanı dahilinde bazı sorulara yanıt arandı. Türkiye, küresel anlamda gerileyen demokrasinin (*global democratic backsliding*) neresinde durmaktadır? AKP, iktidara nasıl gelmiştir ve iktidarını nasıl sürdürdü? Türkiye’nin liberal demokrasiye yönelik hedefleri, zaman içinde nasıl değişti? Türkiye’deki siyasal rejim, “Cumhurbaşkanlığı Hükûmet Sistemi”ne geçişten sonra nasıl tanımlanabilir? yukarıda bahsi geçen soruları cevaplayarak, AKP iktidarı süresince demokratik unsurların tasfiyesi ve otokratikleşme sürecinin gerçekleşmesine yönelik kronolojinin gösterilmesi hedeflenmektedir. Bu tez, Türkiye siyasal rejiminin AKP iktidarı döneminde, Neopatrimonyal bir sultanlık rejimi haline geldiğini savunmaktadır.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Initially, I would like to express my heartfelt and sincere thank to my thesis advisor Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, for guiding me through this thesis with his advices and his endless patience. His detailed comments, and revisions were indeed very instructive. Without his suggestions and comments, this thesis would not have been possible.

I would like to thank to my professors, Deniz T. Erkmén and Yunus Sözen for opening up the doors of Political Science for me, six years ago at Özyeğin University. I consider myself lucky to have been their student.

I would like to thank to Nedim N. Nomer, his comments and advices motivated me to learn from my mistakes and work harder.

I would like express a special appreciation to Professor Sabri Sayarı, for letting me attend his “Politics of Authoritarian Regimes” class as a guest student. His lectures and in-class discussions were indeed very helpful for my thesis.

I am indebted to Yorgo and Yani, not only for their help but also for being there to listen when I needed an ear. I cannot express how grateful I am to my family, Ekin, Fatma, Zafer Karaca for their inestimable supports.



to Zafer, Fatma, Ekin

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xi
1. INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING DEMOCRATICALLY DIS- GUISED DICTATORSHIPS	1
1.1. Global Decline of Democracy	1
1.2. Turkey's Democratic Backslide	4
1.3. Scope of the Thesis	6
2. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND TURKEY'S STRUGGLE WITH DEMOCRACY	13
2.1. Semi-Parliamentary Period (1983-2007)	15
2.2. Semi-Presidential Period (2007-2017)	18
2.3. How to Classify the Aftermath of 2017?	19
3. DYNAMICS OF SEMI-PARLIAMENTARISM	22
3.1. Military's Return to The Barracks.....	22
3.2. 1991-2002, Re-emergence of Political Instabilities	26
3.3. Formation of Justice and Development Party	27
4. THE LONGEST DECADE	34
4.1. September 12, 2010 Referendum.....	36
4.2. The 2011 General Elections.....	38
4.3. The Gezi Park Protests.....	39
4.4. Corruption Scandals	42
4.5. The 2014 Local Elections and Presidential Elections	44
4.6. The 2015 General Elections.....	47
4.7. Coup Attempt of 2016	51

5. DOUBLE-FACETED REFERENDUM	54
5.1. April 16, 2017, Referendum	54
5.1.1. Parliamentarism in the Republican Era	55
5.1.2. Electoral Campaign	58
5.2. 2018 Presidential and General Elections	61
5.3. 2019 Local Elections	63
5.4. <i>Quo Vadis</i> Turkey?	66
6. EXCURSUS ON NEOPATRIMONIALISM	70
6.1. Low Institutionalization and Rule of Law	76
6.2. Existence of Pluralism	77
6.3. Lack of Opposition	79
6.4. Lack of Ideology	81
6.5. Low Degree of Mobilization	83
7. CONCLUSION	84
7.1. General Summary of the Thesis	85
7.2. Concluding Remarks	87
BIBLIOGRAPHY	91

LIST OF TABLES

Table 6.1. Access to State Business Opportunities	73
Table 6.2. Neopatrimonialism Index.....	74
Table 6.3. Bertelsmann Transformation Index	77
Table 6.4. Trustee Appointed Municipalities	80

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party, <i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>	6
ANAP	Motherland Party, <i>Anavatan Partisi</i>	24
AP	Justice Party, <i>Adalet Partisi</i>	25
ASALA	Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia	15
AYM	Constitutional Court, <i>Anayasa Mahkemesi</i>	16
BBP	Great Unity Party, <i>Büyük Birlik Partisi</i>	31
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party, <i>Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi</i>	37
CHP	Republican People's Party, <i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i>	14
CUP	Committee of Union and Progress, <i>İttihat ve Terakki Partisi</i>	55
DEVA	Democracy and Progress Party, <i>Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi</i>	82
DSP	Democratic Left Party, <i>Demokratik Sol Parti</i>	27
DYP	True Path Party, <i>Doğru Yol Partisi</i>	25
EU	European Union, <i>Avrupa Birliği</i>	5
FP	Virtue Party, <i>Fazilet Partisi</i>	27
HDP	Peoples'Democratic Party, <i>Halkların Demokratik Partisi</i>	10
HP	Populist Party, <i>Halkçı Parti</i>	24
MDP	Nationalist Democracy Party, <i>Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi</i>	24
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party, <i>Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi</i>	11
MSP	National Salvation Party, <i>Milli Selamet Partisi</i>	24

NSC Nationalist Security Council, <i>Milli Güvenlik Kurulu</i>	7
OHAL State of Emergency, <i>Olağanüstü Hal</i>	53
OSCE Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, <i>Avrupa Güvenlik ve İşbirliği Teşkilatı</i>	60
PKK Kurdistan Workers' Party, <i>Kürdistan İşçi Partisi</i>	18
RP Welfare Party, <i>Refah Partisi</i>	27
SHP Social Democratic Populist Party, <i>Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti</i>	25
SP Felicity Party, <i>Saadet Partisi</i>	27
TBMM Turkish Grand National Assembly, <i>Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi</i>	10
TGS Turkey's Journalists' Union, <i>Türkiye Gazeteciler Sendikası</i>	79
TKP Communist Party of Turkey, <i>Türkiye Komünist Partisi</i>	63
TRT Turkish Radio and Television Corporation, <i>Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu</i>	52
TSK Turkish Armed Force, <i>Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri</i>	52
YSK Supreme Electoral Council, <i>Yüksek Seçim Kurulu</i>	60

1. INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING DEMOCRATICALLY DISGUISED DICTATORSHIPS

1.1 Global Decline of Democracy

“Democracy is the only game in town” argued J. Linz and A. Stepan in 1996 to describe democracy’s consolidation. Starting in the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, there has been a trend over greater democratization globally. Huntington (1993), in his book on the waves of democracy, argues that following the movement toward democracy in Portugal in 1974-1975; political opening process in Brazil in 1973-1974; Spain’s liberalization path after Franco’s death; and the downfall of the military regime in Greece in 1974, constitute the beginning of the third wave of democracy. “During the following fifteen years [. . .] democratic wave became global in scope; about thirty countries shifted from authoritarianism to democracy, and [. . .] other countries were affected by the democratic wave,” he adds (Huntington 1993, 3). The end of communism in Eastern Europe was a remarkable sign of democratization. Considering the end of the military regimes in Latin America and the fall of the United Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), democracy was eventually accepted as the ideal form of governance worldwide. In recent years, there is a growing interest in measuring the quality of democracy in the political science literature, and there are various studies which examine the argument, whether the quality of democracy has changed or not.

As democracy has been a concept that is eloquently perceived as the right political system, the term “democracy” itself fell into what Sartori calls “conceptual stretching.” What was previously meant by the “quality of democracy” is indeed straightforward: countries do not abide by the rules of democracy, and eventually, they tend to project a *façade* of democracy. The end of military regimes in Latin America left a democratically vulnerable

political conjuncture, and many of them maintained democratic rule. Likewise, the end of the Soviet Union opened up new areas in the political conjuncture; the idea of democratization, and democracy spread around the newly emerged countries such as Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. However, same as in Latin American countries, these newly emerged countries as well, could not perform under a consolidated democracy. As can be understood, democratization is indeed not an easy process. Thus, it can be argued that democratization has an interchangeable nature. Yascha Mounk (2018), in his book “People vs. Democracy,” provides an attention-grabbing example to show the reader the interchangeable nature of modern democracies. “If I record the temperature at which water boils in New York, I will jot down 100 degrees Celsius on my notebook. [...] If I make another measurement [...] I will keep getting the same results [...] If I were to repeat my experiment atop Mont Blanc, the water would boil at about 85 degrees Celsius.” As can be understood from what Mounk (2019) says, there are different ways countries adjust to democratic elements. As Mounk (2019) emphasizes, having democratic credentials does not assure a liberal and a consolidated democracy. Various types of regimes such as monarchy and theocracy implemented throughout history, however, they were not considered ideal governance types. Considering such interchangeability, what can be claimed is that as democracy became accepted as the ideal governance type, countries put off their communist, authoritarian, or totalitarian masks and put on their democratic mask. Nonetheless, various countries affected by the democratization wave did not entirely turn out to be democratic in the long run. As such, countries did not move towards democracy. The future of these regimes created controversy among the political scientists; now, scholars wonder what is going to happen.

Schmitter and Karl define modern democracy as “a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable of their actions in the public realm by citizens acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected officials”(Philippe 1991, 76). Looking at this sentence helps to understand the pitfalls of the modern democracies. Looking at the definition, two properties come to the forefront: “rulers held accountable” and “citizens acting indirectly.” What these keywords emphasize is that there is an accountability relationship between voters and citizens. Citizens can hold the rulers accountable both vertically and horizontally, where rulers should be accountable to the citizens, and rulers should also be accountable to important political institutions. Another key term is “acting indirectly,” which takes place through the competition and cooperation of elected officials.

Long before Yascha Mounk, under different circumstances, Napoleon once remarked: “in politics, absurdity is not a handicap.” Looking at the Freedom House’s reports on the 21st

century, democracy celebrates its twelfth year of global decline. International norms on what constitutes a legitimate regime have changed, and there are no longer clearly defined definitions on regime classification such as; solely authoritarian regimes, or totalitarian regimes. Instead, there are what Collier and Levitsky refer to as “multifaceted, diminished subtypes of democracy” (Collier and Levitsky, 1997: 431). Such a trend is often defined as democratic backsliding. Erica Frantz explains democratic backsliding as “[democratic backsliding] refers to the changes in the formal political institutions and informal political practices that significantly reduce the capacity of citizens to make enforceable claims upon the government” (Frantz 2018, 92). She highlights democratic backslide as “erosion of democracy” (Frantz 2018, 92).

As the trend towards democratization could not be maintained, this period corresponded to a new scene in political science: a global decline in democratization. During this period, hybrid regimes started to emerge. With democracy considered as being the “only game in town”(Linz and Stepan 1996), having democratic governance became a liability mechanism for countries to conduct bilateral relations, and a country’s democratic standing gained importance for international organizations to sustain mutually trusted bonds. To ensure the sustainability of bilateral relations, and for the sake of the countries’ international standing, incumbents have started to pay more attention to their country’s international image even in light of and beyond their domestic politics. To promote specific standards to gain proper standing in the eyes of global political conjuncture, a democracy checklist agenda was set by various countries. However, this checklist in some cases constitutes nothing more than a *façade* of democratic governance.

Eventually, arbitration in power endures under nominally formed democratic standards. Once the democratically disguised non-democracies started to spread, questions emerged on how to classify these hybrid regimes. The increasing trend for *façade* of democratic credentials is embodied under what Carothers (2002) calls “grey zones.” Hybrid regime classifications and how to classify them have been much observed and analyzed by various political science scholars. When the massive scale of non-democratic regime literature and a variety of classifications are considered, the concept of hybrid regimes have overlapping features on agenda-setting. What differs is the way the incumbent chooses to retain power while preaching democracy. To put it simply, incumbency is the decision-maker on what Schedler (2002) puts as a “menu of manipulation.” Rulers can either use elections to secure their power, or they can eliminate the opposition entirely. Various classifications have been brought by political science scholars to classify hybrid regimes further, such as Deliberative Democracy, Competitive Authoritarianism, Electoral Authoritarianism, and so on.

1.2 Turkey's Democratic Backslide

Transition to democracy is indeed a complicated process that may require a long period and intense conflict. As Rustow (1959) puts it, when military coups started to spread in countries of The Near East, Asia, and Africa, Turkey managed to form a government under constitutional procedures (Rustow 1959). However, as Metin Heper claims, the Ottoman-Turkish state aimed at consolidating all power at the center (Heper 1994). Turkey's history with democracy and democratic ideals belongs back to the late Ottoman period following the Edict of Gülhane (*Gülhane-i Hattı Hümayun*) and First Constitutional Era (*Birinci Meşrutiyet*). Back then, the West took severe steps towards democratization, and eventually realizing its backwardness in terms of democracy, the Ottoman Empire initiated efforts, as mentioned above, to adopt Western sentiments. Although there were far-reaching reforms to adopt Western values, one can easily claim that Turkish democracy was not implemented under strong democratic norms. However, back in the Era of the Cultural Revolution of Turkey, Atatürk played an essential role in projecting democracy as the only way of a country to survive (Kalaycıoğlu 2005). As mentioned, the period following Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's passing away, Turkey entered the "National Chief" (*Millî Şef*) Era in Turkish politics.

The National Chief period ended with the first multiparty elections in 1946, and together with the transition to a multiparty system, democracy and Westernization once again were put back on the political agenda. Nevertheless, following the first multiparty elections, and a decade of multiparty politics, Turkish democracy was interrupted with coup *d'état* and a constitutional reform toward multiparty elections led to unstable coalition governments. More recently, looking at the years since 1999, Turkey has never been categorized as a "free" country. As an indication of the ongoing democratic backslide, in 2018, Turkey found itself as a "not-free" country in the Freedom House reports.

According to Rustow (1970), previous historical conflicts created trouble with an emergent Turkish democracy. Turkish democracy can be considered unique among the countries that had experienced a transition to democracy among what Huntington (1993) called Second Wave Democratization because the leader who had absolute power, who had complete control in the country, decided to change the political system and Turkey became a multiparty system. As Rustow emphasized, "in 1950, there was the first change of government as the result of a new electoral majority, but in the next decade there was drift back to authoritarian practices on the part of this newly elected party, and in 1960-1961

the democratic experiment was interrupted [...] these developments are not unconnected: Turkey paid the price in 1960 for having received its first democratic regime as a free gift...” (Rustow 1970, 363). As can be understood from what Rustow (1970) provided, Turkish society did not fight for democratic governance. Also, looking at the Varieties of Democracy (V-dem) data¹, there are several attention-grabbing factors. Over almost seventeen years, Turkey followed a downwards trend according to the liberal democracy index². According to the latest liberal democracy index, Turkey was placed under the eighth-most Neopatrimonial countries in the Middle East and North Africa, ranked after Bahrain first, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Palestine/Gaza, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Iran. Between 2010 and 2018, a rigid downwards trend was observed on liberal components, electoral democracy, and transparent elections. It is also important to note that such a downwards trend was applicable for the parameters mentioned above and equality before the law, independent liberty, legislative constraints on the executive, civil liberties and freedom of expression, and alternative sources of information.

The reason for the importance of Turkey’s democratic backslide is significant. The Turkish case offers a crucial example to monitor how the electoral process disrupted and played a crucial role on preaching democracy while practicing a certain degree of autocracy. Historically, Turkey had been a part of various international and bilateral agreements with countries that are now concerned about their partner’s democratic conditions. Currently as well, Turkey still preserves its alliance with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the negotiation process with European Union (EU), and many other regional cooperation and coordination agreements with Western countries. Thus, the country’s democratic stance holds importance for the country itself and Western countries, as countries such as members of the EU conduct democracy-oriented relations. Turkey’s stance in the process of democratization and democratic backsliding is indeed crucial for the future of bilateral relations. Considering a country with such a fluctuating past, several questions arise: Where does Turkey stand in the global democratic backslide? How did AKP ascend to power and sustain its governance? How has liberal democracy’s aims of Turkey gradually changed over time? How to classify Turkey, following the transition to the Executive Presidential system?

¹V-dem (Varieties of Democracy), 2019 Annual Report. “Democracy Facing Global Challenges”. https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/99/de/99dedd73-f8bc-484c-8b91-44ba601b6e6b/v-dem_democracy_report2019.pdf

²Ibid 12

1.3 Scope of the Thesis

This thesis will examine the transition the Turkish political regime went through from the early 2000s onwards, following Justice and Development Party's (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) ascent to office. As it will be elaborated in subsequent chapters, I consider the transition Turkey had been going through under AKP as Neopatrimonial Sultanistic regime transition, where the system occasionally developed Electoral and Competitive Authoritarian tendencies. There is a growing interest in the classification of the Turkish autocracy; there are many categories used to define the Turkish political regime. Much ink has been spilled on AKP's affiliation with non-democratic policies. However, attempts at making sense of the New Turkey, *Yeni Türkiye* established and further consolidated under AKP, over the past 17 years remain limited. Thus, my interest in writing this thesis stems from the intention of understanding the evolution of the political regime in Turkey since 2002 and observing the mechanisms which helped AKP to maintain its power. As explained in the following paragraphs, AKP's emergence as the one-man rule did not take place only through institutional changes, but AKP has also managed to appeal to the society with the democratic, pro-EU, pro-market economy and secular discourses.

To explain my research question, I will be leaning heavily on reports such as, Varieties of Freedom House (FH), Democracy (V-dem), The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), Electoral Integrity Index, Amnesty International, The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). Given the political analysis sites, the reports will be further explained to help the reader get a brief understanding of how non-democratic changes took place. I believe such reports would help me to show the erosion of democratic institutions in Turkey.

AKP's rule had many twists and turns since the end of 2002 when it first came to power. Turkey has had several constitutions: 1921³, 1924, 1961, 1982; and several constitutional amendments since 1982 to alter its political regime several times. Since the enactment of 1982 Constitution, Turkish political regime initially became a semi-parliamentary regime, then transformed to semi-Presidential system and finally evolved to an unaccountable absolutist presidency as will be discussed further. First of all, the period between 1983-2007 will be considered a "semi-parliamentary system", and the consecutively period between 2007-2017 will be considered a "semi-Presidential system." Further the Turkish political regime will be discussed in the aftermath of the 2017 Constitutional Referendum. While doing so, concepts discussed by the political scientists to categorize the Turkish political

³The 1921 Constitution was the first constitution of Modern Turkey

regime will be evaluated. As mentioned previously, Turkey's endeavor with democracy and democratization had been unsteady considering consistent democratic breakdowns. The frequent need for appealing to the public with referendums demonstrates how vulnerable democracy has become.

The first chapter will begin by contextual clarification. The chapter initially will survey various categorizations which I will further adjust to Turkey; semi-parliamentarism, semi-presidentialism, and Neopatrimonial Sultanistic regimes.

The second chapter will focus on the period between 1983 and 2007. Such periodization will give the reader a brief understanding of the political conjuncture in Turkey after the 1980 coup *d'état*. This periodization also focuses on the process where Turkey suffered from political and economic instabilities, failing coalition governments. I also endeavored to show that AKP was born as a consequence of the political and social instabilities. As the short-lived Welfare Party and True Path Party (*Refah Yol*) coalition is considered, this period is also crucial in unhindered political Islam becoming more active in politics. The imminent threat of Islam and violation of the secular credentials of the Republic eventually led to the National Security Council (NSC) decision of February 28, 1997. As the political instability cauldron was boiling, caused by the ideologically conservative and right-leaning incumbencies, it reached the tipping point following the "Al-Quds night,"⁴ organized by the Sincan municipality in Ankara.

Instead of giving a civilian government a break, the Military this time intensified pressure emphasizing the indisputable secular order of the Turkish Republic. As discussed in the upcoming chapters, consequences of February 28 further shaped the Turkish politics under the AKP's incumbency. Besides, the constant failure of coalition governments further led to economic and social instabilities. The aforementioned politically unstable period also corresponded to the period where bilateral relations improved between Turkey and the EU. The ability of Turkey to maintain relations with the EU revived hopes towards the EU accession process.

In addition to these, Westernization and the industrialization of Turkey had always been the aim of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founding father of modern Turkey, and those who followed his lead. Thus, from the first days of the European Commission (EC), Turkey put forth efforts to adjust itself to European credentials. Ever since the EC days, the maintenance of liberal democratic credentials has been the essential requirement of EU

⁴Tr. Kudüs Gecesi. Al-Quds night and February 28, 1997 decision have been a controversial topic for the Turkish politics. On February 4, 1997, people gathered under the initiation of the municipal of Sincan region in Ankara, in order to protest the Israel's occupation of Jerusalem. The avowedly used Islamic elements, further caused concerns throughout the military towards RefahYol coalition government.

membership. Thus, Turkey needed to fulfill the Copenhagen Criteria, along with various achievements. Considering the efforts for applying and promoting liberal democratic credentials, 1983-2007 was a crucial period for Turkey. In addition to explaining the political environment before AKP came to power, this chapter will observe the initiations towards liberal democracy. This chapter will also focus on the reason why the aim of liberal democracy has not been sustained under the AKP governance. Before going on to the details of the cultural and economic reconstruction, I will briefly observe the period where AKP had democratic and pro-EU discourses. AKP maintained the improving relations with the EU, putting the party's pro-EU and secular discourses up-front. Eventually, hard work paid off, and the Turkish economy and political conjuncture improved almost enough to reach EU standards. However, after 2004 pro-EU discourses were replaced with discourses avowedly blacklisting the EU. As the power consolidation of AKP grew ostensibly, Turkey started to break ties with the EU.

The third chapter, which I refer to as *The Longest Decade*, focuses on the cultural and political transformations that took place in Turkey between 2007 and 2017. The year 2007 marks the end of an era. Further, Turkey started to develop semi-presidential tendencies, where the head of the state was elected by popular vote, the president allowed a second term, and the president's term in office was reduced to five years. The military's role in politics as the protector of the Kemalist regime and the secular order had been a threat for the AKP ever since the party's establishment. The imminent threat of the military caused uneasiness among AKP officials. Facing threats (Ergenekon, Sledgehammer) of being toppled down, AKP officials wanted to end Turkey's military tutelage. Consequently, an extensive referendum was held on September 12, 2010. This idea of conducting an extensive referendum caused a bifurcation throughout the society because on the one hand it aimed to put an end to the military tutelage system in Turkey. However, on the other hand, amendments were also directed at the judiciary, and it was to bolster the power of AKP. By basically eliminating military tutelage, Erdoğan did not only conceal his party's hold on power but also managed to get votes from constituents who had suffered during the 1980 coup *d'état* (i.e., political prisoners). Kalaycıoğlu (2011), emphasizing the intensified *kulturkampf* following the referendum, claimed that it is not easy for Turkey to become a consolidated democracy, following the September 2010 elections.

Following the referendum in 2010, AKP's consolidation of power grew even more. By the end of 2015, three essential authoritarian milestones had taken place. The rest of this chapter will focus on the three milestones: the 2011 elections marking AKP's highest-ever share of the vote, the Gezi Park protests, and the corruption scandal of 2013. AKP governance entered a new phase in which unhindered instabilities of socio-economic changes

rose to the surface in 2013 through the Gezi Park protests. Together with the resistance in Gezi Park, demands towards liberal democracy and to end political corruption increased throughout the society. The Gezi Park protests, was the center of all the criticisms against AKP governance. Gezi Park protests also signify that AKP started to take an active role in suppressing the opposing voices throughout society. Soon after the Gezi Park protests, the tarnished image of the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan faced yet another obstacle. On the morning of December 17, 2013, a corruption operation was conducted under the order of public prosecutors Celal Kara and Mehmet Yüzgeç. The majority of the people who were charged were directly from the AKP and their prosecution constituted a threat to the authority of AKP. Rejecting the charges, the AKP government immediately denounced their affiliation with such an act of money laundering. The party further scapegoated Fethullah Gülen, who was accused of establishing a “parallel state.” Police officers, judges, and prosecutors were purged and were reassigned to new jobs or even lost their jobs. Through such acts, the party aimed to stop the corruption investigations, including those against Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his inner circle. However, the main consequence of the operation was the nullification of judicial independence. Such an unexpected blow from a soon-to-be-foe caused aggression in the AKP front. Such a blow further triggered the labeling of opposing ideas as acts of “terrorists” or “traitors,” where society’s pluralism seriously was undermined. What can be deduced from the judiciary changes is that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan considered this corruption scandal as a window of opportunity where he could further initiate changes in the judiciary. Society’s overall disruption continued and peaked, and over a decade, disjoint was created among the political elite and the society further shaped Turkish politics severely. This period also marked the term when Turkish political literature gained new metaphoric words referring to corruption, such as “tape” and “ayakkabı kutusu” (shoe-box). This period will be considered as a milestone for President Erdoğan and his inner circle, and the judiciary system that was orchestrated to vindicate AKP. Thus, by the end of this chapter, I aim to show how AKP organized to make changes throughout the political system on behalf of the party’s interest. While doing so, I will further explore why the aim of liberal democracy has not been sustained and why Turkey has moved away from becoming a fully liberal democracy. The maneuvers conducted by AKP on the grounds of social changes and the judiciary eventually paved the way for eliminating democratic credentials by creating a democratic *façade*. Throughout the period between 2017 and 2020, Turkey increased its presence in global politics.

The country’s non-democratic evolution was raising questions in many minds and critiques were often referring to Turkey as the Sultanistic regime, One-Man Rule, absolute type autocracy. Considering Erdoğan’s dominance in the party, it is essential to make

a distinction between the emergence of authoritarian regimes from authoritarian leaders and authoritarian regimes emerging from previously authoritarian periods. Erdoğan's power grew out of the limits that his current position required, and this eventually created disputes not only in the party but also among the opposition who were eligible to compete in the elections. Various attention-grabbing incidents will be further examined throughout the chapter, such as the 2015 general elections and 2016 coup attempt.

Following the 2015 elections, political instability increased gradually. The June 2015 elections went down in Turkish history as by far the largest electoral failure of AKP. This period will be elaborated under the era where the consolidation strained Erdoğan's power among the opposition and helped the Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP) pass the ten-percent electoral threshold. In the June 2015 elections, AKP lost its majority in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, TBMM). Although AKP lost its majority in the parliament and the opposition's victory revived hopes for coalition formation, the negotiations were not fruitful, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called for snap elections. As the new date set for the elections, Turkey entered a summer-long political instability. Considering the instabilities in the Kurdish-populated regions as leverage against the opposition, AKP suppressed the region's opposing voices. Throughout the summer, the state's coercive apparatus in the Kurdish regions caused overall exhaustion among the society, and such exhaustion eventually paved the way for AKP's victory with 49% of the votes in the November 2015 election. As Andreas Schedler emphasizes, elections are ambivalent tools for the ruling party as they are for the opposition parties. "They create opportunities for distributing patronage, settling disputes, and reinforcing the ruling coalition, but they also mobilize dissidence threats. Rulers have to take some key decisions regarding their strategic behavior in the electoral arena"(Schedler and Oxford University 2013, 45). As might be expected, emerging as the winner of the snap election, AKP implemented subversive measures to intimidate the opposition by increasing its control over media, surveillance, and monitoring. The *autogolpe* that took place in 2016 led the government to declare a state of emergency and carry out mass arrests and firings of civil servants, academics, journalists, opposition figures, and other potential foes (Freedom House, 2017). Crackdowns on the media increased the pressure on the electoral environment. Throughout the year, dozens of journalists were arrested and prosecuted for insulting the president and other government officials or for allegedly supporting of terrorist organizations. Numerous websites were also blocked. Ergun Özbudun, a constitutional law professor, explains this a period of total illegitimacy, since convictions included not only coup plotters but also members of the opposition as well (Özbudun, 2016). He also highlights how the judiciary was weakened in the aftermath of the military putsch.

The fourth chapter will shed light on the years of the continuing electoral success of the AKP, from 2017 to the present. Briefly looking at the period, the 2017 Constitutional Referendum, the 2018 presidential election and general election, and the 2019 municipal elections played a crucial role in the AKP's non-democratic evolution. The 2017 referendum was held to make constitutional changes to provide for a more efficient democratic governance. As Berk Esen and Şebnem Gümüşçü claimed, "AKP referendum campaign also rested on the delegitimization of the *No* vote. The AKP relied heavily on negative campaigning by discrediting and delegitimizing those who contested the proposed changes, evoking a deep polarity between *the people* (Yes) and its *enemies* (No)" (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017, 307). Thus, it can be interpreted that during the campaign period, an "us and them" division grew even more leading the way for naysaying's equalization with a terrorist act. In June 2018, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won another snap presidential election, and AKP, allying with the MHP, gained control over the parliament. Horizontally, there was no accountability between the executive systems and incumbency. Vertically, the media were deeply biased, opposition social media were under probation, and there were severe intimidation and harassment towards the opposition.

It should be emphasized that the AKP has managed to form a network of effective clientelist relations. Sayarı (2014) citing Gümüşçü, Gürleyen, and Aytaç (2014), highlighted that "AKP has achieved greater success than its main competitors by establishing an expansive clientelist machine which offers sustained provision of social goods to lower income households" (Sayarı 2014). Sayarı (2014) elaborates that AKP have provided stability and basic commodities in return for votes. Thus, beyond the corrupted electoral process, there is the support of the specific portion of the constituency who do not demand political accountability from the ruling elite. The strategy employed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was basically to endow the citizens as the "ultimate controlling power" (*milli irade*) over who can get to the top of the state. In short, he instituted the principle of popular consent, even while subverting it in practice. Thus, this part of the chapter will cover the years of growing capitalism and socio-economic changes brought by AKP. While doing so, the impact of the disrupting order and partisan charity in lieu of social welfare from 2011 onwards will be explained. The final part of the chapter will examine economic welfare support in exchange for legitimizing the AKP rule. As Sabri Sayarı claims, "coupled with the distribution of particularistic goods, through the party organization of the voters the new networks of clientelism established by the AKP have proved to be a potent formula for electoral success among the urban poor" (Sayarı, Musil, and Demirkol 2018).

In her book, Erica Frantz includes a quotation from Paul Lewis; where Lewis claims that the power possessed by the ruler does not matter in modern society, and it is not easy for autocratic rulers to rule alone (Ezrow and Frantz 2011). Regardless of the regime type countries have, clientelism and patronage have always been shorthand for the rulers. As it will be explained in the forthcoming paragraphs, a significant difference is that in democratically run countries, the clientelist ties are formed so that society benefits more than the incumbency does. Thus, it can be claimed that, instead of ruling alone, knowing that cliental ties would increase the chances their hold on to power, autocratic rulers increase the practice of clientelism within society. That being said, I aim to explain the effective clientelism between the government and AKP constituency. While doing so, I will be discussing the *quid pro quo* relationship between the AKP and constituencies in which people obtain service in return for their votes.

In a nutshell, I aim to take a few steps back and show the macro view of how the Turkish democratic backslide took place during the AKP incumbency by focusing on a period that provides the AKP's emergence, power consolidation, and democratic backsliding.

2. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND TURKEY’S STRUGGLE WITH DEMOCRACY

As previously mentioned, Turkey has had several constitutions: 1921, 1924, 1961, 1982; and several constitutional amendments since enactment of the 1982 Constitution. With the 1982 Constitution the Turkish political regime changed from the original parliamentary to semi-parliamentary, and then as of 2007, the regime became a semi-Presidential system. Eventually as of 2017, Turkish political regime evolved to the Turkish type of Presidential system (*Cumhurbaşkanlığı Hükümet Sistemi*) under unaccountable absolutist president. First of all, the period between 1983-2007 will be taken into consideration as a “semi-Parliamentary system”, and the period between 2007-2017 will be considered as a “semi-Presidential system”. Further, the democratic backsliding of the Turkish political regime will be examined in the aftermath of the 2017 Constitutional Referendum. While doing so, concepts discussed by political scientists to categorize the Turkish political regime will be evaluated. As previously mentioned in the introduction, Turkey’s endeavor with democracy and democratization had been unsteady with consistent democratic breakdowns, with a frequent need for appealing to the public with referendums, demonstrating how problematic Turkish democracy had become.

After the official proclamation of the formation of the Turkish Republic under the leading role of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a major reformation period took place under “Atatürk’s Principles and Reforms” (*Atatürk İlke ve İnkılapları*). During this period, important measures were taken to bring change to the social and political order of the newly proclaimed country. Kalaycıoglu (2005) states that “Atatürk played a major role in calculating, timing, and devising the daring steps of modernizing and secularizing cultural revolution, which lay the foundations of the Republican political system”(Kalaycıoglu 2005, 45). Thus, it can be understood that Atatürk had considered modernization as an effective way of rendering the political system of the country viable. Following the death of Atatürk in 1938, Turkey entered a new phase of the single-party regime under the reign of President İsmet İnönü. This period went down in history as the “National Chief” (*Milli Şef*) period. Rustow (1970) explains democratic transition under three major steps.

Initially there would be a prolonged struggle and politicians should reach an agreement for disagreement. Later there would be a phase of negotiation concerning a “compromise for the formulation of democratic rules, and a variety of organization men and their organizations for the task of habituation” (Rustow 1970, 361). Finally, a habituation of democratic procedure should follow. In the Turkish case, Turkey’s transition to a multiparty system was rather unique in the sense that, as Rustow (1970) points out, “Turkish commitment to democracy was made in the absence of prior overt conflict between major social groups or their leading elites” (Rustow 1970, 362). Having been victorious in the 1946 elections, CHP’s sole authority did not last long. In 1950, the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*) which was formed as a result of a breakaway from CHP, became victorious in the elections. That period is considered a major step for Turkish democratization, yet as Rustow (1970) discusses in his article on “Transition to Democracy”, holding multiparty elections may not be enough (Rustow, 1970). Rustow, in his transition to democracy model, claims that in order for a successful transition to democracy, three things must take place. First, he highlights the importance of national unity, further there must be an entrenched and serious conflict, and finally there must be a conscious adoption of democratic rules and both politicians and the electorate must be habituated to these rules (Rustow, 1970). As the Turkish case suffered the lack of entrenched and serious conflict and conscious adoption, as Rustow (1970) puts it, “democracy was a free gift¹” for Turkey. The performance of democratization and its failures in Turkey will be examined in the following pages.

In the years after the transition to a multiparty system, Turkish democracy faltered at various times. The 1980 coup *d’état*, marking the last military intervention in modern Turkey, can be considered as by far the most severe military intervention Turkey has experienced. Özbudun (2000) states, although the 1980 military intervention lasted for only a short time, “the military gained important exit guarantees that enhanced its role in the subsequent democratic regime” (Özbudun 2000, 105). The Constitution of 1961, throughout the time it prevailed, had been criticized by various rightist politicians (such as Süleyman Demirel) on the grounds of allowing uncontrollable freedoms (Özbudun 2017). In order to avoid radical political polarization, coup plotters urged the importance of having a new constitution. Soon after the popular adoption of the 1982 Constitution, the fact that it was curtailing democratic norms caused intense criticisms (Özbudun,

¹“Turkish commitment to democracy was made in the absence of prior conflict between major social groups or their leading elites. In 1950, there was the first change of government as the result of a new electoral majority but in the next decade there was a drift back into authoritarian practices on the part of this newly elected party and in 1960-1961 the democratic experiment was interrupted by a military coup. These developments are not unconnected: Turkey paid the price in 1960 for having received its first democratic regime as a free gift from the hands of a dictator...” (Rustow 1970, 357).

2017). However, thanks to the temporary articles of the constitution enacted during that period, the military government not only prevented possible charges against them, but also secured their place in politics by possessing exit guarantees and reserved domains.

In the aftermath of the 1980 coup *d'état*, the Turkish political system went through severe instability. Although the military intervention was over, the military's possession of exit guarantees enabled the military to keep an eye on governmental decisions. From the return to civilian rule until 2002, five general elections were held, and six coalition governments were formed². Kalaycıoğlu (1990) explains the political conjuncture of the post-coup *d'état* period as being governed under executive supremacy. Kalaycıoğlu (1990) adds that, the new brand of politicians that ascended to political power by the 1980s lacked sufficient experience. It could be said that this was at a time when society was seeking law and order and having political amateurs as their government representatives was a big question mark for society. In 2002 the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) came to power at the end of a crisis in the financial system, ushering in a period of governmental stability, as well as promoting liberal – democratic and conservative discourses, and also promising to end governmental instability and corruption.

2.1 Semi-Parliamentary Period (1983-2007)

On November 7, 1982, Turkish citizens went to polls to cast their votes on the newly composed constitution and simultaneously for the election of the President. The “Yes” vote not only meant an approval for the new constitution but also a “Yes” for the presidency of General Kenan Evren. On the way to the referendum, Kenan Evren visited various cities in Turkey in order to campaign against “No” voters by associating them with sympathizers of the ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) terrorist organization, communists, and traitors. By implying that the November 7, 1982 referendum was the only way out for Turkish democracy, Kenan Evren created a credible threat for voters who were planning to vote “No” for the referendum. Although, in his public speech, Kenan Evren highlighted the importance of free media, just before the referendum, on October 20, 1982 a new edict was enacted which prohibited any act of

²Neziroğlu, İrfan ve Tuncer Yılmaz. 2015. Koalisyon Hükümetleri, Koalisyon Protokolleri, Hükümet Programları ve Genel Kurul Görüşmeleri Cilt 2. Ankara: TBMM Basımevi.

criticism toward Evren's pro-new constitution discourses (Zürcher and Gönen 1999). The referendum ended with 91.4% "Yes" votes and the constitutional changes were approved. The 1982 Constitution created three tutelary institutions and, as will be discussed below, each of them eventually served the interests of the President of the Republic (Özbudun 2012). The first tutelary institution was the Presidency of the Republic. One of the most distinctive parts of the 1982 Constitution, was the institution of the Presidency, as it was granted extensive powers. The second tutelary institution was a strengthened National Security Council (NSC). As Özbudun (2012) puts it, "council's decisions should be given priority consideration by the council of ministers" (Özbudun 2012, 42). Thus, although the decisions of the council may not be legally binding, the council of ministers was expected to take them seriously into consideration and adopt and implement the decisions. The third tutelary institution was the Higher Education Council (*Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu*,). The major purpose of this institution was to prevent the kind of ideological polarization in universities that had taken place before the 1980 coup. In addition to these, Özbudun (2012) adds that the President of the Republic was also given the power to make decisions on the judiciary, such as appointing the members of the Constitutional Court (*Anayasa Mahkemesi*, AYM), the members of the Supreme Council of Judges and Public Prosecutors (*Hakimler ve Savcılar Yüksek Kurulu*, (HSYK) and the Chief Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Court (*Yargıtay Başsavcısı*) (Özbudun, 2012). Thus, it could be said that the president's tutelary powers extended over the judiciary as well. Kalaycıoğlu (2005), categorizes the Turkish political regime of the 1982 Constitution as a semi-parliamentary regime. Turkey had a parliamentary regime and the President was elected by the National Assembly for a single seven-year term. As Kalaycıoğlu (2005) explains, the constitution resembled very much that of a parliamentary regime. However, Turkey's president, as Kalaycıoğlu notes, was "devoid of any political and legal responsibility" yet given extensive authority to take an active role in administrative matters (Kalaycıoğlu 2005, 128). After the adoption of the 1982 Constitution, the Turkish political system started to lose its pure parliamentary characteristic due to having an unaccountable and non-symbolic president.

Looking at the articles of the constitution which increased the powers of the presidency, there are several points which deserve further attention. As Özbudun (2007) notes, it can be understood that there are three major problems of the constitution, which caused heated debates under international democratic norms. First of all, the 1982 Constitution was prepared under non-democratic circumstances and, as Özbudun puts it, "it reflected the authoritarian and statist values of its military founder" (Özbudun 2007, 179). Secondly, it allowed the military government to have extensive reserve domains and exit

guarantees³. Thirdly, the Constitution created a uniquely strong presidency for a parliamentary system. In addition, Kalaycıoğlu (1990) explains the enhanced powers of the executive as follows, “[1982 Constitution] bolstered the powers of the executive branch, [...] office of the president of the republic was endowed with a host of new realms of authority [...] changes in the legislature further enhanced the role and the power of the executive *vis-à-vis* the legislative branch of government” (Kalaycıoğlu, 1990: 43). Likewise, Ergüder claims that the Turkish political party system changed in a manner such that there were “two sets of party systems: the parliamentary party system, and the party system outside the parliament” (Ergüder 1988, 129). He goes on to add that “the military reformers had achieved their basic goal of creating one-party majority government with only two other parties in parliament” (Ergüder 1988, 129).

After the military’s stepping down from political power and the return to civilian rule, the consequences of the 1980 coup started to stand out in the political system. The 1983 elections as Kalaycıoğlu puts it, “were neither free nor fair since the military remained in power and dictated the procedures” (Kalaycıoğlu 2010, 119). As it was previously explained by Kalaycıoğlu (1990), due to the ban on the political party leaders, TBMM was composed of a huge majority of deputies with no experience of parliamentary procedures. Although Özbudun (2007) claims that amendment packages adopted in 1993, 1995, 1999, 2002 and 2004 led to significant improvements in the human rights record of the country and in civil-military relations, it can easily be seen that the referendum of 2007 paved the way for the establishment of a completely new regime of semi-presidentialism. Özbudun claims that the amendments that took place between 1993 and 2006, and especially those in 2001 and 2004 took place in a consensus of opinion in the TBMM. However, the amendments of 2007 and 2010 did not take place in harmony in the TBMM, not having the majority in the parliament to pass the bill, AKP needed to call for referendum.

³“ Article 118 of the 1982 Constitution reads as follows: The National Security Council shall submit to the Council of Ministers its views on taking decisions and ensuring necessary coordination with regard to the formulation, determination, and implementation of the national security policy of the State. The Council of Ministers shall give priority consideration to the decisions of the National Security Council concerning measures that it deems necessary for the preservation of the existence and independence of the state, the integrity and indivisibility of the country, and the peace and security of society”(Özbudun 2007, 198).

2.2 Semi-Presidential Period (2007-2017)

Unlike the parliamentary systems, in a semi-Presidential system as the head of the state is popularly elected s/he may no longer be a symbolic figure, and unlike in the Presidential system, the cabinet is held responsible to the legislature.

Kalaycıoğlu, notes that the “2007 amendments constitute an attempt at introducing sweeping changes in the procedures of the TBMM and the election of the President of the Republic, which is nothing less than changing the character of the political regime of the country from a semi-parliamentary to a semi-presidential regime” (Kalaycıoğlu 2011, 268). Thus, the 2007 referendum could be considered as a milestone that signifies the initial steps of enhancing the powers of the Presidency beyond the excessive administrative authority entrusted with the president in the 1982 Constitution.

Most AKP politicians had started their political careers in political Islamist and conservative parties and they were avowedly showing-off their religious (*mütedeyyin*) character in their public appeals. Yet they were also promoting the importance of conservative democracy. Nonetheless, AKP officials’ political background was creating concerns in the military, as they were not happy with the growing power of the AKP. In the aftermath of the 2007 elections, the AKP government faced a new challenge of terror attacks by the Kurdish Workers Party (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*, PKK) and further rumors began to surface that the closure of AKP would be demanded (Kalaycıoğlu 2012). Thus, it was not surprising that the AKP made a strategic move to eliminate the military’s role in politics.

On September 12, 2010, the Turkish electorate voted to approve the package of some new constitutional amendments. The 2010 referendum contributed to the consolidation of the AKP power in government in various ways. Briefly put, the 2010 referendum addressed the status and structures of the military and the judiciary, rather than directly increasing executive power right away. The core of the changes included a revision of the judiciary, as the President and parliament possessed greater say on Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (*Hakimler ve Savcılar Yüksek Kurulu*, HSYK) (Kalaycıoğlu, 2012). In terms of the military changes, as Kalaycıoğlu (2012) explains, “[the other] 24 articles included removal of the temporary articles of the 1982 Constitution that protected the coup leaders and their associates from litigation” (Kalaycıoğlu 2012, 5). Yet the changes eventually contributed to the elimination of the obstacles in the way of power consolidation of the executive. In the Presidential elections of 2014, the semi-Presidential system was put into

effect. For the first time, a President who was elected by popular vote acceded to power.

Although the political changes that took place during each period will be explained in the forthcoming chapters, it is important to grasp the basic understanding of the political incidents which led to the referendum of April 16, 2017, where the semi-presidential regime transformed into a type of autocracy. In the years 2007 to 2017, in addition to what has been mentioned so far, the political circumstances and the atmosphere changed dramatically. In 2013, the Gezi Park protests took place and created a division within society. Later same year, all of a sudden corruption scandals erupted and showed the advantaged position of the politicians and bureaucracy in contrast to the judiciary. Consequently, a public conflict took place in the aftermath of the electoral defeat of AKP in the June 7, 2015 elections, and finally, on July 15, 2016, as the former and very last Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım puts it a military “uprising (*kalkışma*)”⁴ took place. Consequently, the AKP improved its power in the eyes of the public as they managed to hold back and scupper rebels and coup plotters. Considering the premises brought in 2002 in terms of stability, AKP may have provided stability in terms of guaranteeing the party’s hold on to power, however, the drift away from democracy was as evident as daylight.

2.3 How to Classify the Aftermath of 2017?

Ten years after the first steps toward executive supremacy, 2017 introduced by far the largest move towards the consolidation of non-democratic rule. As the Turkish political regime veered towards non-democracy, it is important to remember former prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s previously given speeches. In 2003, Erdoğan assumed the role of the prime minister, in an interview, he claimed that it was his wish to have a semi-presidential or Presidential system ⁵. In the same interview, he also noted the lack of necessity of the Parliamentary system, by highlighting the importance of the American model of the Presidential system ⁶. During the referendum, with the open support of the Nationalist Action Party, (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), the AKP took a step to

⁴Bianet, “Binali Yıldırım: Bu Bir Kalkışma Girişimi.” May 2, 2020. <http://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/176757-binali-yildirim-bu-bir-kalkisma-girisimi>

⁵Hürriyet, Başkanlık ve yarı başkanlık sistemi benim siyasette arzumdur. Olmasını isterim, arzu ederim. April 20, 2003. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-baskanlik-sistemi-benim-arzumdur-141506>

⁶Hürriyet, Benim için tabii ideal olanı Amerikan modelidir. April 20, 2003. www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-baskanlik-sistemi-benim-arzumdur-141506

consolidate its power under their long-dreamed political system. As Esen and Gümüşçü avered, on April 16, 2017 Turkish voters once again went to the polls “... to vote on constitutional amendments aimed at replacing the existing parliamentary system with an executive presidency” (Esen and Gumuscu 2017, 304). Just like they emphasized, the referendum basically created a president with high executive jurisdiction.

In 2011, four parties in the National Assembly gathered under a constitutional commission. These parties continued to work until the dissolution of that commission in 2016 (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2017). Having no majority to amend the constitution, AKP found the long-sought support after the 2016 *autogolpe* from MHP to construct a majority in the TBMM. People who were against the amendments were demonized by the AKP – MHP coalition causing immense division and polarization throughout the society. As it was depicted in Freedom House’s “Freedom in the World” report “... constitutional revisions that concentrated power in the presidency were adopted in April referendum. [it] featured a grossly uneven playing field, and last-minute changes to the criteria for validating ballots—made in contravention of the law—undermined the legitimacy of the vote count.”⁷ Constitutional amendments were accepted with the 51.41% of the “Yes” votes in contrast to slightly lesser percentage of the “No” votes of 48.59%. The Constitutional Referendum put the Turkish political system at the center of attention in the foreign press. Popular journals such as The Economist and Foreign Affairs criticized Turkey for avowedly changing the political regime towards authoritarianism⁸. In addition to that, such publications often claimed that the electoral success in the referendum, was actually part of a bigger plan to consolidate and accumulate political power in one single political post or person.

Concerns over the terminological ambiguity increased among political scientists. Already having been classified as a “not free” country in the Freedom House reports⁹, Turkey indeed broke ties with democracy and democratization as the Freedom House data showed a consecutive downward trend since 2017. An electoral *façade* was left as the sole feature of democracy in Turkey. Although elections were neither free, nor fairly competitive, multi-party elections continued to serve the role of legitimizing AKP’s power. Thus, it can be argued that, considering the constantly held multiparty elections, Turkey started to hide behind an electoral façade and gradually shifted away from the path of democra-

⁷Freedom House, “Freedom in the World Report, 2018.” 2018 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2020>

⁸“The Economist, “Erdoğan the Maleficent.” April 22, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/europe/2017/04/22/recep-tayyip-erdogan-gets-the-power-he-has-long-wanted-at-a-cost>

⁹Freedom House, Freedom in the World Report 2018, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2018>

tization. Such transition can be considered as a form of neo-patrimonialism as suggested by Weber (1978).



3. DYNAMICS OF SEMI-PARLIAMENTARISM

The period between 1983 and 2007 symbolizes a very significant timeline in terms of the evolution of political regime in Turkey. Briefly looking at the period, together with the military's stepping down in 1983, the Third Republic emerged out of new political actors who were approved by General Kenan Evren. In 1983, military leaders returned to their barracks, Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, ANAP) emerged in the political sphere under the leadership of Turgut Özal, who, after serving as prime minister for several years, eventually became head of state in 1989. Consequently, political instabilities re-emerged paving the way to the establishment of the AKP in 2001. The period after 1983 mostly focused on the re-shaping and empowering the parliamentary system in the country. However, the political environment once again became the victim of instability in the 1990s. This period consisted of unstable coalition governments and lack of trust in political parties. The era between 1991 and 2002 is also significant. The AKP came into existence in this environment proposing changes in the political system to create clean, stable and democratic governance.

3.1 Military's Return to The Barracks

During the period of coup *d'état*, as Üstün Ergüder puts it, the military government implemented three important measures to shape Turkish politics (Ergüder 1988). These measures were; firstly, the referendum and approval of the new constitution. Secondly, enactment of the Turkish Political Parties Act and the Election Act¹. Thirdly, the military's banning of all the political parties in 1982 and then establishing two political parties of

¹Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası'nın Yürürlükten Kaldırılmış Hükümleri. Geçici Madde 4 – (18/10/1982 tarih ve 2709 sayılı Kanunun hükmüdür.)

its own and permitting one other recently formed ANAP to enter the general elections in 1983 (Ergüder 1988). The 1961 Constitution was often announced as being the scapegoat of the political turmoil in the 1970s and in the beginning of 1980². Thus, before returning to the barracks, the military wanted to make sure that they had managed to suppress the imminent threat of the right and left conflict in society. The military government also wanted to prevent the participation of pre-1980 political actors and parties from causing another political deadlock in Turkey.

In 1982, Turkish voters went to the polls to decide on whether to change the constitution (along with accepting the presidency of Kenan Evren) or not. The major reason behind the referendum was to prevent the political insurgencies- as the military government often referred to as anarchy, *anarşi*. The 1982 Constitution was prepared by the advisory council complying to military junta. Compared with the 1961 Constitutional Referendum, the voter turnout was relatively high (61.5%). As a result of the referendum, the new constitution was approved by 91%, and Kenan Evren was elected as head of state. Becoming head of the state meant Kenan Evren resigned from forty-nine years of military duty and took off his military uniform.

Compared to the former constitution, the new constitution was indeed eye-catching in terms of the limitations brought to civil rights and liberties. As Özbudun (2017) emphasizes, the presidency created by the 1982 Constitution rather resembled military-bureaucratic and tutelary governance instead of striking a balance between democracy and constitutionalism. His argument was built on three major facts; the election of Kenan Evren, increased authority of the president in a manner that is unfit to the parliamentary systems, and increased authority of the National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Konseyi*, MGK) (Özbudun, 2017). In addition to what Özbudun (2017) noted, as Yazıcı (2012) claims, the 1982 Constitution ensured the state's protection against the individual³. The MGK took an active role in shaping the political scene in the emergence of the party system in order to prevent the entrance of the pre-military intervention parties from competing in the elections and further to prevent the instabilities of pre- 1980 to happen ever again (Turan 1988). Soon after the military take over, MGK made it clear that they do not intend to stay in power for a long time. They have also made it clear that, they do not intend to return to *statusquo ante* (Özbudun 1988). Although the military's stepping down from politics did not take a long time, the military's presence in politics

²Sabah, "Bu anayasa ile devlet idare edilemez." January 4, 2005.
https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/donat/2005/01/04/anayasa_tarihcesi

³"[1982 anayasası] bireye ve onun hürriyetlerine devlet karşısında koruma sağlamaktan çok, devleti birey karşısında korumaktadır" (Yazıcı 2012, 4).

was far from absent. Although military forces did return to their barracks, they continued to shape politics. The only three parties which eventually passed the MBK's filters were ANAP, Nationalist Democracy Party (*Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi*, MDP), Populist Party (*Halkçı Parti*, HP) and Independents who were competing in the elections. HP was formed under the leadership of Necdet Calp, and MDP was formed under the leadership of former General Turgut Sunalp. Both of the parties' leaders were encouraged by the military to enter politics. The significance of the parties was that, they formed to represent the center-left and center-right in the political spectrum (Turan, 1988). HP was representing the moderate center-left, and MDP was representing the moderate center-right. On the other hand, there was one major political party which was appealing to the largely divided electorate, ANAP. ANAP was formed under the leadership of Turgut Özal who was an important figure for formulating and implementing the economic stabilization program before the 1980 coup took place (Turan 1988). As a result of the elections, ANAP won the election obtaining 45% of the valid votes. HP got 30% of the votes whereas MDP received 23% of the votes.

As Zürcher (1999) avers, Turgut Özal was an influential character as he was both conservative-religious and economically liberal. Looking at Turgut Özal's and his wife Semra Özal's characteristics, what can be deduced is that they were putting emphasis on their presence in society. During these years it was a well-known fact that Özal had been affiliated with National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*, MSP) and the Naqshbandi religious order. Additionally, Özal also came to the forefront with his western attitudes such as drinking cognac. Likewise, Semra Özal hit the headlines with her consumption of whiskey and cigars openly. Such religious affiliation and the social standing of Turgut Özal and his surroundings, are all hints to understand the party's catchall characteristics. However, along with being a catchall party it should also be emphasized that, one of the major facts that led to Özal's success in elections was the Political Party Ban Act enacted by the military⁴.

As Zürcher (1999) notes, Turgut Özal wanted to prove that civilian politics was superior to that of military influence and hegemony. Thus, on October 6, 1987, the first constitutional amendment referendum held after the coup *d'état* focused on the return of politically banned politicians to politics (provisional article, 4 of the 1982 Constitution). As the opposition agreed on the fact that they wanted to change the provisional article, this process could have been solved in TBMM. However Prime Minister Turgut Özal did not want to change the provisional article. His main argument was simple; if political life was

⁴Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası'nın Yürürlükten Kaldırılmış Hükümleri. Geçici Madde 4 – (18/10/1982 tarih ve 2709 sayılı Kanunun hükmüdür.)

going to resemble the period before 1980 coup *d'état*, did the September 12, 1980 coup take place for nothing? This was the reason for holding a referendum, rather than voting in the TBMM. As a result of the referendum, the ban on the politicians was lifted with 50.16% of the votes demanding the reinstallation of the status of the former politicians. Following the referendum pre-1980 politicians such as Bülent Ecevit, Alparslan Türkeş, Süleyman Demirel and Necmettin Erbakan, were legally free to return to politics. In the aftermath of the 1987 referendum, on November 29, 1987 general elections were held. As a result of the elections, ANAP received 36.3% of the votes and became the winner of the elections. Erdal İnönü's (son of İsmet İnönü) Social Democratic Populist Party (*Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti*, SHP) received 24.74% of the votes and newly formed True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*, DYP) under the leadership of Süleyman Demirel received 19.10% of the votes.

The significant feature of the 1987 general elections was that, the electoral system changed just before the elections. As he started to lose power, Turgut Özal's approach started to adopt non-democratic features. The new electoral system was known as Özal's Model, *Özal Modeli* and it was basically a mixture of a majority system and *d'Hondt* with a national threshold. All in all, this system was basically favoring the larger parties. The notion of changing the electoral law, was indeed noteworthy in terms of democratic credentials. Turan (1988) claims that ANAP was the only party with unique characteristics whereas the rest of the parties were actually the reincarnation of previously banned political parties: "the Social Democrats identified with the Republican People's Party; the Democratic Left Party appeared to be a personality based party relying on the charisma of the former leader of the Republican People's Party; and the DYP claimed to be the reincarnation of the Justice Party, AP"(Turan 1988, 79). According to Turan (1988), prior to the elections of November 29, 1987, the political scene looked as if nothing had changed after the coup *d'état*. He claims that the "Turkish party system looked considerably different from that which had been devised by the military leadership" (Turan 1998, 79).

In 1989 Kenan Evren's presidency ended and he was replaced by Turgut Özal. The presidency of Turgut Özal, by means of a TBMM vote, was indeed a very significant move towards civilian democracy. The political scene was in fact freed from the ostentatious presence of the military as the head of the state was no longer a military officer nor a former general. One major importance of Turgut Özal was that he was the second civilian president of the Turkish Republic, after Celal Bayar (1950 – 1960). As Özal ascended to power, hope towards democratization increased. Once the military governance ended in countries such as Greece, Portugal and Spain, a transition to democracy took place in a

healthy way and looking at these countries today, all of them are considered consolidated democracies. Recalling what Rustow (1970) offered, it can be claimed that Turkey was now on the transition phase to democracy.

Turgut Özal becoming the head of the state in 1989, increased his participation in politics to a larger extent. He followed an unorthodox style of presidency. As it was previously mentioned, Özal had come to prominence occasionally with his Western cavalier attitudes and lifestyle along with his Naqshbandi affiliations. Recalling that he wore shorts when he was inspecting the military units, this shows that in his presidency he maintained such characteristics as well. Although a significant part of the society was content with his attitudes, there was also a part of society that could not get used to Turgut Özal's presidency⁵. Such moves include messages to change the formal, orthodox approach of the presidency in the country. His idiosyncratic attitudes can also be seen in his approach to the Presidential system. He was avowedly claiming that the head of state should be elected by the popular vote and he was in favor of an American type of Presidential system.

3.2 1991-2002, Re-emergence of Political Instabilities

According to Sabri Sayarı, governmental stability was not likely to be possible as there was fragmentation in the party system (Sayari 2007). Thus a “dominant party that could have either formed the government by itself or served as the core party of alternating coalitions” was required in order to provide political stability (Sayari 2007, 203). As Sayarı goes on to add, the “1991 elections marked the end of the multiparty system with a dominant party (ANAP) in Turkey and ushered in a decade of multipartyism without a dominant party” (Sayari 2007, 202). The period 1991 to 2002 has various commonalities with the pre-1980 political sphere. Together with ANAP's loss of the majority in the legislature, Turkey entered a period known as the “coalitions era”. Throughout this period, Turkey suffered from unstable coalition governments. Sayarı (2007) puts an emphasis on the failure of coalition governments as follows; “ten of the eleven governments that came to power during the period from 1983 to 2002, all governing parties lost votes in the election

⁵A young lieutenant Şeref M. Baba sent President Turgut Özal a telegraph, emphasizing the fact that he could not get used to Turgut Özal's presidency “ben sizin cumhurbaşkanlığınıza alışamadım”. “Özal'a alışamadıklarımı söylemişlerdi...” 22.02. 2001 Milliyet Gazetesi. The reason behind such telegraph was the religious affiliation of Turgut Özal.

following their term in office” (Sayari 2007, 207).

Before proceeding with the AKP government, it is important to see the similarities between ANAP, headed by Turgut Özal and AKP, headed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. ANAP was formed as a result of the chaotic political conjuncture of the pre-1980 era, as a newly formed, undamaged catchall party and ensured political stability until 1991. Likewise, in the period between 1991 and 2002, the political instabilities re-emerged and nineteen years after ANAP’s formation AKP became the party which ended the coalition government period of the 1990s. Both parties put an emphasis on the EU (European Union), democratization, liberalism and although both of them were catchall parties, their standing was liberal conservatism.

3.3 Formation of Justice and Development Party

In 1998 the Constitutional Court banned the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP), where upon Necmettin Erbakan formed the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*, FP). However, soon after the establishment of the party, the Constitutional Court banned FP in 2001 as well. This further led to a bifurcation in the party. In 2001, the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*, SP) was formed under the allegiance to Necmettin Erbakan whereas the AKP formed as “reformists” (*yenilikçiler*) (Sayari 2007). In 2001, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan along with the politicians who broke ties with the FP, the AKP was formed. In the 2002 elections, the AKP came to power with a relatively small plurality of the national vote. Nevertheless, it obtained a majority of seats in parliament, thanks to a 10% vote threshold on political parties. Sayari explains the catchall characteristics of the AKP as follows; “the perceived ideological moderation of AKP along with decisions of several former ANAP and DYP officials to join Erdoğan’s new party helped it to attract many voters who had previously supported the established centrist parties, including the center-left DSP”(Sayari 2007, 201).

Sabri Sayari explains the reasons behind the electoral success of AKP in several different ways (Sayari 2007). As he notes, “AKP was the main beneficiary of the diminishing popular appeal of its rivals in the 2002 parliamentary elections”(Sayari 2007, 201). Considering the fact that AKP was a newly formed political party, this increased its credibility in politics since it had neither been banned nor it had ever been faced with corruption

allegations. Additionally, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as former mayor of Istanbul had been active in politics for a long time and he was able to use populist discourses not only for appealing to society but also for gaining the trust of the people. As Sayarı puts it, “Erdoğan established a strong sense of identity with the common people, especially the urban poor, proved to be an important asset” (Sayari 2007, 202).

AKP was born and consolidated its power in a period of political and economic crises during which people lost their confidence in the political system. As Öniş (2010) puts it, following a pro-EU and pro-market economy agenda, the AKP managed to provide a progressive image of their party to society. The party’s discourses on the importance of EU membership was strategic for the AKP to form its electorate, receiving support from various voter blocs, such as liberal, democratic and conservative parts of the society. AKP as a party acceded to power to resolve the political and economic problems, and the EU accession process acted as a catalyst appeal to the masses.

In 2002, Turkey was promised full membership by the EU by the end of 2004 (Kalaycıoğlu, 2007). In return for this promise, the EU urged that the following conditions be aspired: the stability of institutions, guarantees of democracy, rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities; the existence of a functioning market economy, ability to cope with competitive pressure within member states (Kalaycıoğlu, 2007). In the Copenhagen summit of December 2002, the issue of Turkey’s candidacy was decided to be reviewed at the 2004 Summit. That summit would determine whether Turkey had fulfilled the conditions of the Copenhagen Criteria or not. By the end of 2004, Turkey managed to implement the political criteria successfully. In June 2005, Ali Babacan was appointed as the Chief Negotiator for EU accession negotiations. However, the process did not continue in a manner as had been expected. when Turkey signed the additional protocol, Turkish officials had clearly announced the fact that Turkey does not recognize the Greek government of Southern Cyprus, as the sole representative of those who lived on the island. On September 21, 2005, the EU, rejecting Turkey’s declaration, published a declaration against Turkey, urging the country to apply the protocol fully to all EU members. As AKP took a few steps back toward the issue of EU accession, such a move created a disconnect in the bilateral relations. Compared with the initial years in office, by 2007, the AKP government was no longer promoting the idea as actively as it used to.

AKP’s pro-EU agenda back in 2004, had caused concerns and disruptions among the opposition. They were accusing the AKP that it was ready to undermine secular characteristics of the republic for the sake of EU membership negotiations and for its own consolidation of power (Kalaycıoğlu 2011). As Kalaycıoğlu suggests, soon after the start of the accession negotiations with the EU, the Turkish government stopped promoting

an EU agenda. He further notes, "... the focus of government moved inwards and towards consolidating its power"(Kalaycıoğlu 2011, 274). By doing so the AKP leadership intended to gain full control over the autonomous state agencies including the Central Bank, Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), Higher Education Council (YÖK) and so on (Kalaycıoğlu 2011).

Looking at the articles presented in the Copenhagen Criteria - which Avcı (2011) claims to be the heart of Europeanization- it not only stipulates the conditions for liberal democracy but also it requires countries to possess consolidated liberal democratic credentials in order to be considered as full members. Avcı (2011) explains the process of EU membership with a simple example; as she puts it, "country does its homework and moves to the next step"(Avcı 2011, 411)

There were eight harmonization packages and between 2001 and 2004 two constitutional amendments took place. Through harmonization packages, changes in fundamental rights and liberties were targeted. However, rooted problems such as the Kurdish Issue and the Cyprus Issue could not have been prevented, even for the sake of the EU. Looking at the discourses of the AKP, it can be understood that when AKP assumed power in 2002, they were pro-EU, however, as AKP's and— specially as Erdoğan's clique grew richer—attitudes towards the EU started to change negatively.

Menderes Çınar, summarizes the Europeanization process of AKP as "... the EU project was a suitable instrument for the JDP to increase its internal and external credibility and political power regarding the establishment. [...] As the Europeanization proceeded, difficulties derived from within the EU and from the JDP government" (Çınar 2008, 123). What can be seen is that, once the relations with the EU improved, AKP's true standing on the issue of Westernization and liberal democracy started to reveal itself (Çınar 2008). Likewise, after the second electoral victory of AKP in 2007, the party became powerful enough to take the leading role and became less dependent on the EU (Aydın-Düzgit and Kaliber, 2016). As Avcı (2011) claims, "AKP engaged in some sort of two-level game: it uses and strives for accomplishment at the EU level to secure its position domestically. EU was an important incentive for the AKP to accomplish the necessary reforms for the EU" (Avcı 2011, 410). This approach of Avcı (2011), can also be identified as AKP's efforts to make itself accepted among society. From the first days in office, the AKP had to plan various maneuvers in order to gain the trust of society. While planning these maneuvers, it faced various challenges at home and abroad. At home, both society, armed forces and institutions were on tenterhooks when AKP first came to office. Abroad, the EU was hesitant to have a country under the leadership of a party with an openly Islamic attitude. Avcı (2011) complains that in the period

after 2005, with the AKP government “the record of EU reforms is scanty and no longer substantial” (Avcı 2011, 417).

According to Article 102 of the 1982 Constitution, the President of the Republic of Turkey was elected by receiving two-thirds of the total votes in TBMM⁶. Voting took place under secret ballot and an open counting procedure. In the case that the candidate did not obtain two-thirds of the votes for the first two rounds, the candidate receiving the absolute majority in the third round was elected as the President of the Republic⁷. The reason behind the application is to ensure the impartiality of the head of the state. During the election the qualified majority had been required to be obtained (Yazıcı, 2007). As such a majority is not easy to achieve, elections of the head of the state required the consensus of several parties on one candidate. Thus, this process would lead to the promotion of an impartial President.

Towards the end of President Ahmet Necdet Sezer’s term of office, the new presidential race started in the TBMM. AKP announced its former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül as the presidential candidate of the Republic. Once Gül received 357 votes in the National Assembly, CHP claimed that the election lacked a quorum of 367/550 deputies and appealed the Constitutional Court (AYM) claiming that the actual number of deputies who were present at the TBMM in the first round of elections was not sufficient for a quorum for the vote to take place. The Constitutional Court issued its decision regarding the appeal of CHP on the May 1, 2007 urging the presence of at least 367 deputies to be present in the TBMM to have a quorum and canceled the first round of elections. Meanwhile, on April 27, 2007, the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces (*Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri*, TSK) announced a press release on-line regarding the military’s concern over the secular order of the Republic⁸. This announcement, further known as the e-memorandum (*e-muhtıra*), promptly sparked tensions not only in the TBMM but also, in the media, the national and international press. Before the general elections of 2007, Sayarı (2007) offers a very important foresighted caveat in the case that AKP maintains

⁶“Cumhurbaşkanı, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi üye tamsayısının üçte iki çoğunluğu ile ve gizli oyla seçilir. Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi toplantı halinde değilse hemen toplantıya çağrılır” Constitution of Republic of Turkey, art. 102b, (1982).

⁷“En az üçer gün ara ile yapılacak oylamaların ilk ikisinde üye tamsayısının üçte iki çoğunluk oyu sağlanamazsa üçüncü oylamaya geçilir, üçüncü oylamada üye tam sayısının salt çoğunluğunu sağlayan aday Cumhurbaşkanı seçilmiş olur. Bu oylama da üye tamsayısının salt çoğunluğu sağlanamadığı takdirde üçüncü oylamada en çok oy almış bulunan iki aday arasında dördüncü oylama yapılır, bu oylamada da üye tamsayısının salt çoğunluğu ile Cumhurbaşkanı seçilemediği takdirde derhal Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi seçimleri yenilenir” Constitution of Republic of Turkey, art. 102b, (1982).

⁸Considering the AKP’s and party’s candidate’s Islamic leanings created a problem among the secular part of the society. The fact that, Abdullah Gül’s wife Hayrünisa Gül was wearing headscarf even increased the concerns throughout the society. Such notion reminds us the former “alışmadım” reaction of the lieutenant during Turgut Özal’s presidency.

its electoral successes in the 2007 elections and beyond. He claims that “Turkish party system may eventually acquire the characteristics of a predominant party system”(Sayari 2007, 176)

Following the deadlock on the election of the President, AKP announced the decision of snap elections on the June 22, 2007. This meant that constituents were required to go to polls twice, first in order to vote for the snap elections and second, in order to cast their votes for the referendum. The reason for holding a referendum was to prevent the eruption of any further crisis such as the 367 crisis. The AKP won the elections by receiving 47% of the votes. In the aftermath of the elections, MHP’s last-minute support of the Presidential candidate Gül helped to ease the deadlock in the TBMM and thus, opened the way for the election of Abdullah Gül as the 11th President of the Republic (Kalaycıoğlu 2015). This deadlock further became known as the “367 crisis” (*367 krizi*) in Turkish politics. As a result of the elections, eventually, AKP once again saw the imminent threat of the military and the opposition’s concerns over AKP’s incumbency. Considering the long effects of the crisis, the 367 crisis left an indelible stain on Turkish politics as it paved the way for the election of the president by popular vote.

During the 367 crisis, AKP put forward a constitutional amendment in order to be able to elect the President by popular vote. However, President Ahmet Necdet Sezer vetoed the bill. As Kalaycıoğlu (2011) explains, “the AKP called an early election on July 22, 2007 and also overrode the Presidential veto” (Kalaycıoğlu 2011, 3). According to Kalaycıoğlu (2015) the AKP was arguing that every presidential election in Turkey was causing a political crisis and “parliament demonstrated a lack of capacity to elect a president” (Kalaycıoğlu 2015, 159). As a result of AKP and ANAP cooperation in the parliament, the constitutional amendment bill was qualified to call a referendum (Kalaycıoğlu 2015). Such a move by the AKP meant that Ahmet Necdet Sezer needed to submit the constitutional amendments to a referendum (Kalaycıoğlu 2011). The decision of holding a referendum created tensions throughout the society and in the National Assembly. The main parties on the front against the referendum were CHP and MHP; whereas main actors of the “Yes” front included, along with AKP, SP (*Saadet Partisi*-Felicity Party) and BBP (*Büyük Birlik Partisi*-Great Unity Party). Deniz Baykal, former leader of CHP in a public speech, avowed that handing this much power to the presidency, would eventually create an “elected Sultan”, *Seçilmiş padişah*⁹. As a result of the referendum held on October 21, 2007, the “Yes” vote received 70% of the votes.

⁹Şenkal, Yağız. “Türkiye’nin Referandumları.” NTV arşivi. April 10, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0nT0ma2Ak4>

The 2007 referendum can be considered a pathway or initial steps of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's keen interest in the Presidential system. As it was previously mentioned, this thesis considers 2007 as a milestone of transition from a semi-parliamentary regime to a semi-presidential regime. Up until 2007, AKP conducted immaculate stability in politics by strategically planning each and every move of the party. Eventually, they have managed to actualize their promises on the grounds of the EU accession process and the liberal democratic moves required by the EU accession protocol. Additionally, AKP also managed to push its Islamic credentials into the background in order not to create concerns in the army and secular politicians. However, two obstacles emerged, first the EU accession process and then the 367 crisis, which eventually created concerns within society. Together with the articulation of these concerns by TSK Chief Yaşar Büyükanıt in a press release, AKP's fear came true.

According to Sayarı (2007) AKP's obvious religious credentials were very useful to increasing their credibility throughout society. He claims, "surveys conducted in the aftermath of the elections showed that religiosity topped all variables (such as education, gender, income) as the main predictor of voting behavior in 2002" (Sayarı 2007, 201) Serap Yazıcı notes that from 1987 onwards, the reason behind the increasing emphasis on the democratization and liberalism was rather triggered by the international emphasis on the importance of the democratic premises (Yazıcı, 2017). The main reason for the liberalization and democratization efforts along with constitutional amendments was due to the desire of Turkey to become an EU member.

In their book, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, claim that "many government efforts to subvert democracy are *legal* in the sense that they are approved by the legislature or accepted by the courts" (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 16). They go on to highlight that such regimes may be appreciated as improving the conditions of democracy such as making the judiciary more efficient (as will be elaborated in the next chapter), combating corruption or cleaning up the electoral process (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Since 2002 AKP basically took measures to improve the quality of democracy incentivized by the EU accession process and cleared up the electoral process by taking action against instability triggering incidents, such as the 367 crisis from ever happening again. Although such moves of the AKP were perceived as being democratic during the first years in office, AKP's strong emphasis on the EU accession process and democratic discourses were serving to consolidate its electorate.

Özbudun claims, the "1982 Constitution prepared under non-democratic conditions, reflected the authoritarian and statist values of its military founders [its] primary aim was to restore the authority of the state and to maintain public order rather than to protect the

rights and liberties of its citizens”(Özbudun 2007, 179). The 1982 Constitution further shaped and transformed the political sphere to a semi-parliamentary regime where the head of the state acts as the chief executive. Looking at the period between 1983 to 2007, Turkish politics evolved under the leadership of two important figures. ANAP, gaining the trust of the masses in the first general elections after the military intervention, had managed to use the semi-presidential feature of the political system in favor of increasing their activity in politics. Once ANAP’s power started to wane, they took measures to reap the fruits of their position by changing the electoral law and calling for snap elections. Just like ANAP brought a fresh start to politics following the military intervention, the AKP as well brought a fresh start to politics by ending the coalition governments era. However, as democratic transition requires a consolidation period and for the consolidation period to take place, the first step should be to change the constitution. In the Turkish case, the 1982 Constitution was a black stain for the democratization process. In 2002 AKP came to power, by constantly reminding the public about how undemocratic the constitution was and how important it was to restore relations with the EU for the democratization and liberalization of Turkey. However, assessing such democratic steps as a milestone is indeed difficult and deceptive.

4. THE LONGEST DECADE

Considering the dramatic changes that took place between 2007 and 2017 under AKP's incumbency, this decade can be referred to as the longest decade of the AKP. Briefly looking at this period, four general elections were held (including one snap election), three referendums were held, one major political unrest, one corruption scandal took place, and finally one military putsch attempted to topple down the AKP government. Considering such an eventful decade, describing the period as the longest decade would not be an exaggeration when talking about AKP's incumbency. The Longest Decade is significant for observing AKP's hidden agenda to come to light. Although it is possible to talk about a gradual increase in AKP's power, the above-mentioned period included important ruptures for Turkish politics.

This chapter aims to show the consecutive ruptures in Turkish politics, particularly the 2010 referendum, 2011 general elections, 2013 Gezi Park protests and corruption scandals, 2014 local and presidential elections, 2015 general elections, and the 2016 coup attempt. The major focus of this chapter is twofold. First and foremost, it aims to explain the process where AKP's semi-presidential change took place and evolved into an unaccountable, executive presidency after 2017. Secondly, this chapter aims to provide the measures taken by AKP to dismantle the opposition and exercise unbridled authority over the country.

Right after the election of the President of the Republic on August 28, 2007, Turkish voters went to the polls to cast their votes in the general election, as well as a referendum to change the system from semi-presidentialism to the popularly elected unaccountable, executive presidency. As Kalaycıoğlu (2011) explains, through its 2007 victories (constitutional referendum and general elections) AKP's leadership had started to gain confidence. By asking for the relaxation of the *türban* (headscarf) ban, AKP caused a wave of anger among CHP officials in the National Assembly. As a result of the AKP–MHP cooperation, the bill on the relaxation of the *türban* passed in the parliament. However, the CHP appealed to the Constitutional Court (*Anayasa Mahkemesi*, AYM) and on March

14, 2008, the chief public prosecutor of the court of cassation, Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya, appealed to the AYM demanding the closure of the Justice and Development Party. The reason for the appeal was that, AKP had become the focal point of activities against laicism, a crime according to the 1982 Constitution of Turkey (articles 68 and 69). The Constitutional Court ruled that AKP had violated the second article of the constitution and that the relaxation of the *türban* ban was unconstitutional (Kalaycıoğlu, 2011). However, the court did not ban the AKP.

Nevertheless, the closure case was not the only problem AKP was going to face. In 2007, a bagful of hand grenades was found in a house in one of the shantytowns in Istanbul. After immediate investigations, that the existence of an alleged terrorist organization called Ergenekon, which was targeting to topple the AKP government, was allegedly unearthed. The resulting court cases were further known as the “Ergenekon trials” in Turkish politics. Following the spread of the information about the Ergenekon case, “several waves of arrests . . . resulted in accusations against journalists, lawyers, businessmen, priests and academics [...] former and current defense security establishments” (Kalaycıoğlu 2011). During this period, a bifurcation started to emerge among the members of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (*Hakimler ve Savcılar Yüksek Kurulu*, HSYK) and the Supreme Court (*Yargıtay*) and the Council of State (*Danıştay*), the latter of which were criticized as being anti-AKP (Kalaycıoğlu 2011). Considering the ongoing developments on the case, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan publicly announced himself as the prosecutor of the Ergenekon trials. Such a notion of the Prime Minister further caused trials to be considered as “political trials” by the opposition (Kalaycıoğlu 2011). The opposition was considering AKP as being unfit to uphold the democratic and secular characteristics of the Republic, whereas the AKP was considering the opposition as being undemocratic, pro-military, and anti-AKP. The incidents described above, as Kalaycıoğlu (2011) highlights, had caused a division within the society by the 2009 local elections.

Toward the local elections of March 29, 2009, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan conducted a nationwide and effective election campaign. Throughout the campaign, his ambition went far beyond increasing the trustworthiness of AKP in the eyes of the people. It evolved to a notion of “buying” hearts and minds just like what cheesemanKlass2018 consider as “the art of bribery” (Cheeseman and Klaas 2018, 97). As a part of the election campaign, AKP provided constituents with such commodities as domestic appliance¹. Cheeseman and Klass (2018) argue that “distribution of largesse” or electoral bribery resembles clientelism in a much larger way. Political support of the constituents at the

¹“Dağıtılan Beyaz Eşya Seçim Yatırımı mı?”. CNN Türk. February 4, 2009.
<https://www.cnnturk.com/2009/turkiye/02/04/dagitilan.beyaz.esyalar.secim.yatirimi.mi/512057.0/index.html>

polls was expected in return for the goods and services. Cheeseman and Klass also claim vote buying to be a notion of manipulation and such manipulations are “most prevalent in [...] weak, compromised and neo-patrimonial ties facilitate and, in some cases, demand the giving of gifts” (Cheeseman and Klaas 2018, 25)

The 2009 local elections were the “first electoral test for the AKP following the 2007 general elections” (Çarkoğlu, 2009a: 295). As Çarkoğlu explains, the 2009 local elections were held to elect the village and city quarter (*mahalle*) headmen (*muhtar*), village elected councils (*ihitiyar heyeti*), municipal councils, mayors of cities, and mayors of the metropolitan municipalities (Çarkoğlu, 2009a). What can be understood from Çarkoğlu’s analysis is that, as a result of the elections, although the AKP lost some of its earlier support from the 2004 local elections and the 2007 general elections, it maintained its position as the winner of the elections. Various studies² revealed a common outcome from the elections, the consensus was highlighting that the coastal western region, Kurdish, Alevi minority regions in eastern and southeastern provinces provided the opposition parties their support at the polls. In the areas in between those regions of the country, the AKP maintained its dominance over the more conservative provinces along with the MHP (Çarkoğlu, 2009b).

4.1 September 12, 2010 Referendum

“What about the impacts of referendums on the quality of democracy?” asks Michael Gallagher (Gallagher 2014, 177). As Gallagher (2014) explains, referendums can have both improving and damaging consequences on the functioning of democracies. Using a referendum or plebiscite in the making of key decisions may indeed be a part of the democratic process. However, in authoritarian regimes, this notion of holding a referendum becomes crucial for the leaders to prove their popularity (Brooker 2013). Series of political crises and shocks have followed the period after the September 12, 2010 referendum. As it has been mentioned before, the 2010 referendum contributed to irreversible changes already taking place in Turkish politics.

Özbudun (2014) recalls a previous argument joined by William Hale as well, where they had claimed at the beginning of 2009 that “...AKP was at crossroads. It might either

²Gümüşçü and Sert (2010); Çarkoğlu (2010).

return to its old policy [...] pursuing the reformist path [...] or compromise with the state elite” (Hale and Özbudun 2009, 158). As they argue, it was not clear which way the cat would jump. As Özbudun further notes in 2014, in the period after 2009 new ways emerged in which the cat might jump. Together with the 2010 referendum, it was understood that each further scheduled election was serving a purpose, other than the officially declared content of the elections in question.

The September 12, 2010 referendum can be considered as the final exit before the non-democracy path of Turkey. AKP initially gained the trust of its electorate and further dismantled the biggest threat against its governance. On the September 12, 2010, Turkish voters cast their votes to accept or reject the constitutional amendments. Two important issues took place on the way of the 2010 referendum. On the one hand, the discontent towards AKP’s governance started to increase steeply, and the closure case against AKP triggered opposition even more. On the other hand, the military’s role in politics was significant and thus, this presence constituted a threat to the party’s hidden agenda. Following the 58% "Yes" votes³, AKP managed to dismantle the opposition and especially the military’s imminent threat against the party. The referendum served as a tool for preventing an impasse which had emerged during 2007 (Kalaycıoğlu 2011).

Looking at the electoral campaign of the referendum, unlike the previous referendums, apart from “Yes” and “No” voters, a new “not enough but Yes” voter emerged. The “No” campaign included CHP and MHP voters who were not content with AKP’s governance and that party’s increasing power. Following CHP leader Deniz Baykal’s resignation as head of the party, he was replaced by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. CHP under the leadership of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and MHP under the leadership of Devlet Bahçeli urged their constituents to vote for “No” in the referendum. The BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) boycotted the elections by encouraging their voters to abstain (Kalaycıoğlu 2011). The “Yes” campaign hosted a variety of actors from different socio-economic and ideological backgrounds. As the amendments were ensuring the trial of the coup plotters, and disqualification of the military’s presence over the politics a "not sufficient, but yes" (*yetmez ama evet*) campaign emerged for the sake of preaching democracy. Such parts of the society were not pro-AKP, nor were they content with the AKP’s governance. But because the military had long been dominating Turkish politics along with the inhumane atrocities committed by the coup plotters and leaders, people who were against the military’s involvement in politics gathered around the “not sufficient, but Yes” campaign. In addition to *yetmez ama evet* the population with conservative and right-leaning tenden-

³Sonuç tutanağı: İstatistiksel Grafik
<http://www.ysk.gov.tr/doc/dosyalar/docs/2010Referandum/KesinSonuc/SonucGrafik.pdf>

cies voted “Yes” as well. The CHP’s new leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, argued that it was AKP’s main intention to reconstruct AYM and HSYK (Kalaycıoğlu 2011). Through such reconstruction, AKP would have control over the judiciary (Kalaycıoğlu 2011). Briefly looking at the constitutional amendments, the referendum basically reduced the influence of the military over politics. Throughout the campaign, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan tried to stimulate the crowds by emphasizing the 1980 military coup and coup plotters of the period. Throughout the campaign Erdoğan equated the people voting against the referendum with saying “Yes” to the 1982 Constitution. All in all, the campaign of the Constitutional Referendum was based on providing a credible threat to the opposition by pointing to the non-democratic nature of the 1982 Constitution. As Özbudun (2014) claims, before the 2010 referendum, HSYK elections were being conducted by Yargıtay and Danıştay. Together with the referendum, TBMM possessed the right to have a say on who sits in the Yargıtay’s office and AYM. Thus, as Özbudun (2014) avers, actually such changes “made HSYK and AYM more representative and pluralistic [while the referendum] decreased the privileges and immunities of military” (Özbudun 2014, 2).

4.2 The 2011 General Elections

With consecutive electoral successes since 2002 and having made significant progress in diminishing the military’s role in the politics, AKP “entered the 2011 elections as the favorite party of the electorate...” (Aslan-Akman 2012, 78). The 2011 general election marks an important symbolic milestone for Turkish politics. After the approval of the constitutional amendments in 2010, the military’s and bureaucracy’s power were diminished. Thus, as the 2011 general election was the first election in the aftermath of the 2010 referendum, it was considered as being free of military and bureaucratic influence (SETA 2011). As Aslan-Akman (2012) notes, the efforts of AKP in that general election were aimed at securing the 367 parliamentary seats needed to change the constitution and create a new one. Following the 2010 referendum, AKP maintained its electoral success in the 2011 general elections as well by receiving 49.9% of the valid votes. CHP received 25.9% of the valid votes. Compared with the 2007 general elections, AKP following a trend, won a higher number of votes *per se*, but slightly fewer seats in the National Assembly (NA). As Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan avowedly explained his eagerness for the Presidential system, receiving fewer seat in the NA constituted an obstacle for

the AKP to materialize its plans (Aslan-Akman 2012). As addressed by various scholars⁴ together with the electoral success of the 2011 elections, AKP successfully fulfilled the criteria for Sartori's predominant party system. Although AKP could not get the desired majority to call for a referendum without the support of other parties, it did entrench its power in the society.

AKP's electoral success also projected to the party's social engineering efforts. As Özbudun (2014) highlights, "...Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan started to pursue more markedly conservative and the majoritarian line..." (Özbudun 2014, 3). As he exemplifies, Erdoğan's public speech to "raise pious generations", the introduction of the Islamic themes at school curricula and insults against alcohol consumption can be given as examples of the gradual increase of the government's involvement and regulation in public matters (Özbudun 2014, 3). AKP's naming-and-shaming strategy is referred to by İhsan Dağı as creating a "new society" (Dağı 2012). This notion of creating a new society over the years became not only the election slogan of AKP but also the governing motto of the AKP, "yeni Türkiye" (new Turkey). The aforementioned social engineering projects and AKP's increasingly changing us-and-them bifurcation started to mount towards 2013 which eventually came to prominence with the Gezi Park protests.

4.3 The Gezi Park Protests

As the electoral success of the AKP increased, so did its hidden agenda start to come into the limelight of politics. What is meant by the hidden agenda can be explained along the following path: Initially, AKP gained electoral strength by emphasizing the importance of democracy and freedoms. It had occasionally articulated the importance of freedom of expression to legitimize its Islamic tendencies (Çınar 2015). However, achieving a certain level of electoral success and receiving the support of the masses, the AKP started to dominate the political system for the benefit of its constituents, ignoring the opposition constituents.

Gezi Park protests were initiated as a peaceful demonstration against an urban management project (Göle 2013). This urban management project included demolishing the Gezi Park located at the center of the Taksim Square in Istanbul. The project was designed to

⁴Aslan-Akman (2012); Çarkoğlu (2011).

re-build the once present military barracks building, but this time as a shopping mall in the Gezi Park. The demolishing of the side walls of the Gezi Park by construction equipment on the morning of the May 28, precipitated the beginning of the Gezi Park protests. The attempt to demolish the park was recorded by individuals present in the park. The social media platform Twitter took a leading role in the spreading of videos shot in Gezi Park. Quickly dispersed throughout social media, such notion to destroy a park quickly created a social antagonism. Further, the excessive police forces used against people who were resisting against the demolishing of the park led the disturbances to grow quickly. Eventually, Gezi Park protests spread across Turkey evolving into an anti-government movement. Göle (2013) claims that the idea of building a mall in the Gezi Park was an attack on the public sphere. As she puts it, “the park signifies the physicality of the public sphere. It is the concrete space, open space for citizens to manifest themselves” (Göle 2013, 9). She goes on to add that “malls have started to ruin the urban fabric in the same way as commercial greed and consumerism [...] the project of constructing a shopping mall in the middle of Gezi Park is nothing more than the confiscation of public space by private capital” (Göle 2013, 9). Additionally, the Gezi Park protest was not only attention-grabbing because of its rapid spread across the country and the attack on the public sphere. It was also important in terms of the opposition’s organization and unification against the AKP government. The Gezi Park demonstrations had a positive impact on the organization of the opposition in Turkey such as radical left, anti-capitalist Muslims, environmentalists, football-team organizations⁵, LGBTQ groups (Arslanalp and Deniz Erkmen 2020). In particular, the support brought to Gezi Park protests by conservative intellectuals and young anti-capitalist Muslims was attention-grabbing as in further years, Erdoğan addressed such part of the society as a part of the Gülenist organization (Çarkoğlu, 2015).

According to a KONDA⁶ report⁷, 21.1% of the people who took part in the demonstrations, claimed to have political party affiliation or membership to a non-governmental organization. The protestors were mostly from the literate⁸ part of the society who were well-aware of the ongoing repression by the government and who were not content with the policies of the government.

⁵Kasapoğlu Çağrı. (2013). “Çarşı neden Gezi eylemlerine destek verdi?” BBC news Türkçe, June 14, 2013. https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2013/06/130614_carsi_gezi_cagil

⁶KONDA is a Turkey based research and consultancy company founded by Tarhan Erdem in 1986.

⁷Gezi Parkı raporu “Toplumun Gezi Parkı olayları algısı: Gezi Parkındakiler kimlerdi?” KONDA June 5, 2014. <https://docplayer.biz.tr/2255794-Konda-gezi-raporu-toplumun-gezi-parki-olaylari-algisi-gezi-parkindakiler-kimlerdi.html>

⁸Illiteracy rate reported as 0.3% in the Gezi Park. Gezi Parkı raporu “Toplumun Gezi Parkı olayları algısı: Gezi Parkındakiler kimlerdi?” KONDA June 5, 2014.

It should also be mentioned that the provocative and alienating discourses⁹ of the government triggered several groups from the pro-AKP part of the society to act. A group emerged called *palahılar*¹⁰ (wielders of long knives) who took to the streets, attacked the people who were running away from the police and tear gas.

The Gezi Park event, to a larger extent, had been a protest where the reaction of the society grew daringly. Particularly, store owners who provided help to the protestors who were severely hurt due to tear-gas, by pulling down their shutters, also took up a position against the government. In addition to the small-scale stores, Divan Hotel, which is located right behind the Gezi Park, opened its doors to the protestors and provided immediate aid to the people who were severely hurt by the tear gas and aggressive policing.

The Amnesty International Report provided documentation of the inhumane and excessive police force used in the Gezi Park. The report reveals the undemocratic stance of the government towards the demonstration. Various headlines need further attention, such as the targeting of gas capsules directly at demonstrators, police wearing helmets that had no helmet numbers, chemicals mixed with the pressurized water used by water canons. The government justified the repressive measures as reactions to a “coup attempt,” “terrorist organization facilities,” “actions against Turkey’s international power,” and so on¹¹.

Political scientists Frantz and Lindstaedt (2020) allude to high-intensity pressure and low-intensity repression to explain the repression of a non-democratic government. Throughout the Gezi Park protests, what Frantz and Lindstaedt (2020) call “low-intensity repression” gained momentum reaching the level of “high-intensity repression.” The Amnesty International Report notes that, as a result of the Gezi Park protests, nine people died, and approximately nine-thousand people were severely injured¹². Additionally, a Human Rights Watch (HRW) news report suggests that the firing of tear-gas canons was a form of high-intensity repression. As HRW notes, the police forces should have used the tear-gas canons as a warning and the firing angle should have been forty-five degrees. The firing of the canons horizontally to the body or head immediately changed the purpose

⁹“Erdoğan eylemcilere sert çıktı” Deutsche Welle, (July 9, 2013). “Yakan, yıkan, saldıranlara çapulcu denir” “Biz o birkaç çapulcunun yaptıklarını yapmayız. Onlar yakarlar, onlar yıkarlar çapulcunun tanımı budur zaten” “Erdoğan eylemcilere sert çıktı” Deutsche Welle, July 9, 2013. <https://www.dw.com/tr/erdo%C4%9Fan-eylemcilere-sert-%C3%A7%C4%B1kt%C4%B1/a-16869254>

¹⁰“Gezi Parkı eylemlerinin palalı saldırganı ayağından vuruldu” CNN Türk, October 21, 2017. <https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/gezi-parki-eylemlerinin-palali-saldirgani-ayagindan-vuruldu>

¹¹“Erdoğan eylemcilere sert çıktı” Deutsche Welle, July 9, 2013.

¹²“Turkey clashes after boy hurt at Istanbul protest dies”. BBC, March 3, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26526198>

of the tear gas canon to a deadly weapon¹³.

Gezi Park demonstrations overall did show the increasing reactions in the society against the AKP government, regardless of ethnicity, religion, and sociocultural differences. Esen and Gumuscu (2020) note that until the Gezi Park protests, Turkey under the AKP rule constituted a model of a democratizing country for the Middle East in the eyes of the European countries. Additionally, various scholars claim that the Gezi Park protests marked the beginning of a chaotic environment in the aftermath of the demonstrations¹⁴.

Throughout the protests, there was a dichotomy within the AKP government. In particular, the different approaches of Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Abdullah Gül were very striking. From the beginning of the protests, President Gül was in favor of settling the issue via negotiations. Additionally, Bülent Arınç, former deputy Prime Minister, publicly argued that the government should be apologizing for having taken excessive actions¹⁵. In contrast, as mentioned previously, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's approach towards the issue was rather provocative.

The Gezi Park protests can be considered as a democratization test in which Turkey failed. As a consequence of this period, Turkish democracy became acquainted with new words¹⁶, new kinds of false accusations¹⁷ and symbols¹⁸.

4.4 Corruption Scandals

The Fethullah Gülen network took an active role in the 2002 electoral campaign of AKP and AKP received the congregation's support on the way to political power. As can be

¹³"Turkey: end incorrect, unlawful use of teargas" Human Rights Watch, July 16, 2013. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/16/turkey-end-incorrect-unlawful-use-teargas>

¹⁴Esen, Gümüşcü (2020); Erişen (2018).

¹⁵"Arınç: Polisin aşırı tedbiri haklı olarak tepki aldı" BBC Türkçe, May 9, 2020. https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2013/06/130604_arinc_ciklama

¹⁶Çapulculuk (marauding)

¹⁷"Başörtülü bacılara saldırdılar" Diken, February 3, 2014. <http://www.diken.com.tr/kabatas-goruntulerinde-saldiri-yok/>

¹⁸Women in red dress and the loaf of bread carried by Berkin Elvan became two of the symbols of the Gezi Park protests among many others.

seen from the Freedom House Report¹⁹ the alliance between the Gülenist congregation and AKP started to change as a result of the AKP's negotiations with the PKK and the party's stance towards Israel. Thus, over time the relationship between AKP and the Gülenist congregation started to break down.

On the December 17, 2013, a money-laundering operation against persons at the highest levels of the government took place. An operation was conducted by the public prosecutor Celal Kara, during which 89 people, including various deputies and businessmen, were taken into custody. As Sayarı notes, “outbreak of a major corruption scandal in December 2013 that implicated the leader of the AKP and Prime Minister of Turkey as well as several of members of his cabinet showed that the legitimate use of party patronage could easily turn into illegitimate acts of political corruption” (Sayarı 2014, 665). As the corruption allegations were also including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, his son Bilal Erdoğan and four government ministers, the government took measures against the operation by applying systematic purges of the officials who were related to the operations (General Directorate of Security, *Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü*) and new prosecutors were appointed to the investigation. As Özbudun (2015) emphasizes, the changes in the HSYK, which took place right after the corruption scandals erupted, increased Erdoğan's influence on the judiciary dramatically.

The AKP government claimed that the Gülenist Community was behind all the alleged corruption cases. Much ink has been spilled on the corruption scandal and yet the issue does not seem to be illuminated. However, looking at the overall results of the scandal period, it can be claimed that the scandal created severe implications for Turkish democratization. First of all, as it has been mentioned previously, throughout this period a massive number of purges took place in state institutions. Secondly, as a result of the purges, AKP managed to increase its dominance in the judiciary. Thirdly, censorship of the media, press, and restrictions on freedom of expression grew even more.

Additionally, the impact of the political crisis directly affected the economy. As Çarkoğlu (2015) notes, considering the 11-year-old incumbency, it appeared as if AKP did not have the full control over governance and the bureaucracy to keep the economy on track, and such volatility happened as a result of the conflict between the Gülen movement and AKP (Çarkoğlu, 2015).

As Öniş (2019) puts it, “...a series of domestic shocks have accelerated the drift into authoritarianism that had already manifest itself in post-2011 juncture” (Öniş 2019, 209).

¹⁹“Democracy in Crisis: Corruption, Media and Power in Turkey” Freedom House 2013.
https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/SR_Corruption_Media_Power_Turkey_DF.pdf

He goes on to aver that the political shocks; Gezi Park protests, corruption scandal, the government's breaking ties with the once-allied Gülenist movement, all constituted major turning points for the AKP and the Turkish political system.

Eventually, following the Gezi Park protests and the corruption scandal, Erdoğan accused the opposition of being traitors. As Çarkoğlu (2015) notes "...Erdoğan argued that the Gezi protests and the corruption allegations were created and supported by the same *circles of treason* [...] graft allegations and the initial operations targeting the four ministers, their families and the business network surrounding them were all allegedly related to the religious and social Gülen movement..." (Çarkoğlu, 2015: 175). In this regard, Erdoğan also expressed AKP's mistake committed in the 2010 referendum; according to him, they should not have strengthened the HSYK's autonomy to the extent of questioning AKP's authority. On December 21, 2013 the "Regulation of the Judicial Police" is changed. As Özbudun (2015) notes "the changes obliged the members of the police force involved in criminal investigations under the authority of public prosecutors to inform the relevant administrative authorities immediately of the ongoing investigation (amended Article 5c)" (Özbudun 2015, 46). As he goes on to add, "[such change] enabled the government to be informed immediately of any ongoing (secret) investigations and to take necessary measures" (Özbudun 2015, 46). Thus the judiciary's power is weakened. In the following period, to regain the trust of the masses Erdoğan avowedly drew a "...clear distinction between the protestors and their conservative counterparts..." (Çarkoğlu, 2015: 171). Moreover, the corruption scandal brought to a head the fierce power struggle between the AKP and its one-time ally, the Gülen movement, for control over Turkey's key political institutions, including the judiciary and the police force.

4.5 The 2014 Local Elections and Presidential Elections

Although there are various versions of parliamentary rule, one of the most distinctive features of the parliamentary regime is that the head of the government is the "chief executive decision-maker in the country" and the head of the state is symbolic (Sodero, 2008: 196). Thus, the role of prime minister is comparably more active and influential than the president. As it has previously been mentioned, the 1982 Constitution created a powerful presidency. Nonetheless, as it will be explained in the upcoming chapters, following the 2014 presidential elections, the Turkish executive presidency took an even

more powerful role.

Recalling the political turmoil following the Gezi Park protests and The September 17-December 25 corruption scandals, there were mixed reactions throughout Turkish society. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's insulting discourse while addressing the opposition increased the political polarization towards the elections. The aforementioned political milieu revived hopes for the opposition and changes in the voter behavior was expected. However, AKP emerged as the victor of the elections not only in local elections held in March 2014 but also in the presidential elections of August 2014. As a matter of fact, the 2014 local elections marked the highest voter turnout since the 1994 local elections (Çarkoğlu, 2015).

Looking at the local elections of March 2014, and considering the unexpected success of AKP in the local elections, Çarkoğlu (2015) claims that the 2004 local elections constituted an unsolved puzzle. As a result of the elections, AKP won 18 out of 30 metropolitan cities (Aygül 2016). The CHP lost Antalya, Mersin, and Artvin whereas BDP-HDP increased its vote share and number of municipalities. Thus, for CHP, elections were unfavorable. However, as BDP-HDP was both standing against AKP and CHP it can be claimed that elections were successful for BDP-HDP. Thus, as Çarkoğlu emphasizes, "...Turkish public did not change its party preferences drastically in 2014 local elections..." (Çarkoğlu, 2015: 187).

In August 2014, as a result of the elections, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became the first popularly elected president of the Republic of Turkey after "Erdoğan practically appointed himself" as a candidate (Kalaycıoğlu 2015, 161). Additionally, CHP and MHP supported a joint presidential candidate, Professor Dr. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu. As Kalaycıoğlu (2015) puts it, İhsanoğlu represented a broader number of parties. In total 14 political parties supported his presidency (Kalaycıoğlu 2015). Selahattin Demirtaş became the presidential candidate of the pro-Kurdish HDP. Looking at the presidential candidates, Prof. İhsanoğlu who served as the general secretary of the Islamic Conference Organization is a professor of history of science. With his profession and affiliations with Islamic culture, Prof. İhsanoğlu constituted a competitive candidate for Erdoğan (Kalaycıoğlu 2015). However, as Kalaycıoğlu (2015) puts it, eventually İhsanoğlu created disincentives among the CHP and MHP deputies. For CHP deputies, the reason behind such discontent for CHP deputies' was İhsanoğlu's Islamic affiliations as he was born and raised in pious surroundings and maintained his pious character. Whereas MHP voters were not entirely satisfied with İhsanoğlu's standing towards MHP's cause on Turkish nationalism. Thus, as Kalaycıoğlu (2015) notes, "...the cantankerous stance of some deputies and sympathizers of the opposition parties towards İhsanoğlu seems to have acted as a

disincentive to the CHP and MHP local party organizations' participation in İhsanoğlu's campaign. . . " (Kalaycıoğlu 2015, 163).

Selahattin Demirtaş, former co-leader of BDP (Peace and Democracy Party- *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*) and its successor HDP was an influential figure for both the secular voters, the non-Sunni Muslim community, and for even the CHP constituents to a certain extent. Although his background included Kurdish politics, he was articulating that HDP was the people's party, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliations of the voters.

As a result of the elections, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected as the new President of the Republic with 51.79% of the valid votes in the first-round of the double round of elections, when Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu (38.44%) and Selahattin Demirtaş (9.76%) obtained much fewer votes. All in all, voters' preferences for Erdoğan had not changed whereas Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu did not attract the expected support at the polls.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's presidency increased concerns among the opposition regarding the downgrading of the country's democratic credentials. Recalling the unfair election campaign, concerns over unclarified corruption allegations grew stronger after the elections. Soon after the elections President Erdoğan openly declared his willingness to act as if he were still the prime minister (Kalaycıoğlu 2015). According to the Article 101 of the constitution²⁰, the new president's ties with his former party were required to be nullified immediately, in the name of the impartiality premise of the presidency (Kalaycıoğlu 2015). In violation of the 1982 Constitution, the newly elected President kept his party membership until he was sworn into his new role.

Freedom House's 2014 report indicated that Turkey continued to be in the "partially free" category. However, it received a downward arrow, symbolizing a decreasing trend in terms of freedom in the country. AKP's attitude towards the opposition and protestors during the Gezi Park protests was considered to be the reason behind this decline (Özbudun 2017). As Özbudun (2017) highlights, in the Freedom House's report, Turkey's categorization as "modern authoritarianism" and association with Zimbabwe, Ecuador, and Putin's Russia was indeed crucial to see where Turkey was standing on the democratization scale. The Report also highlighted the maneuvers used by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to annihilate the opposition against himself, such as making Turkey the leading country in the number of imprisoned journalists (Özbudun 2017).

As it is depicted in the Bertelsmann Foundation's Transformation Atlas, Turkey had been

²⁰"Cumhurbaşkanı seçilen milletvekilinin Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi üyeliği sona erer". Excerpted from <https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/tr/mevzuat/anayasa/>

listed under the “Defective Democracies” until 2014. By the end of 2014, the position of Turkey moved further down to the category of “Highly Defective Democracies”²¹.

4.6 The 2015 General Elections

Just as in 2014, 2015 saw two consecutive elections in Turkey. This time, during the June 7, 2015 general elections, the AKP lost the majority of seats in the National Assembly and the need to form a coalition government once again emerged in Turkish politics. The efforts at negotiating a coalition government failed, as Turkey went through a summer-long terror campaign and insurgencies. By November 2015, AKP consolidated its power by claiming that it was AKP’s presence in politics that stabilized the country (Sayarı 2016). In the aftermath of the November 2015 elections, AKP basically bypassed its first failure in the last 13 years and managed to continue its incumbency. As Kerem Öktem and Karabekir Akkoyunlu argue, the repeated elections in November 2015, marked Turkey’s exit from democracy (Öktem and Akkoyunlu 2016).

As mentioned before, the electoral success of AKP in the aftermath of the Gezi Protest and corruption scandals was unexpected for the opposition. Not only did AKP maintain its electoral success but also Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected President outright in the first round (Kemahloğlu 2015). Sabri Sayarı claims that “. . . the AKP had escaped largely unscathed from the two major political crises that it faced a year earlier: the Gezi Park events [. . .] and the eruption of a huge political corruption scandal in December, involving several cabinet members including the Prime Minister Erdoğan himself. . .” (Sayarı 2016, 264). As 2014 elections did not show decrease in the power of AKP, long-expected power loss came with the June 2015 elections.

Soon after the consecutive electoral victories of the AKP, the June 7, 2015, elections marked the party’s first electoral defeat. Following the 2015 elections, ongoing changes in the political environment took an even more daring and radical form. Throughout the electoral campaign, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan tried to explain to the people that he was seeking to gain 60% of the parliamentary seats so that he could call a referendum on constitutional amendments to create a stronger presidency. However, AKP not only

²¹Bertelmann Index. 2014. “Transformation Atlas.” Accessed June 3, 2020.
https://atlas.bti-project.org/1*2020*CV:CTC:SELTUR*CAT*TUR*REG:TAB

failed to achieve a simple majority but also witnessed HDP's success in passing the 10% threshold.

Before the June 2015 elections, the ongoing Resolution Process between AKP and the Kurdish ethnic nationalists came to a dead end without any consensus. Such a process is known as *Dolmabahçe Mütabakatı*, (Dolmabahçe Concord) however, as a result of the intervention by the President, the Kurdish Resolution Process seemed to have reached a dead end (Kalaycıoğlu 2017). As a result of the June 2015 elections AKP received 40.8% of the votes, CHP received 24.95%, MHP received 16.29% whereas HDP received 13.12% of the votes bypassing the electoral threshold. AKP basically remained short of a simple majority.

The June 2015 election also marked a very specific example of the opposition's consolidation to form a stronger front against the AKP incumbency. With the help of CHP votes, HDP managed to pass the 10% threshold. Such loss for AKP signified that AKP was no longer able to form a government alone. On election night, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was expected to give his first bitter speech. Instead, former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu gave a speech emphasizing the importance of AKP for the wellbeing of Turkey²². As Kalaycıoğlu explains "... a clear opportunity for a coalition government had emerged when no party obtained the majority of the seats on June 7, 2015..." (Kalaycıoğlu 2017, 21). However, MHP rejected the idea to enter a negotiation with pro-Kurdish HDP, and the opposition urged AKP to consider investigating corruption allegations (Kalaycıoğlu 2017).

Such loss was expected to take place in the aftermath of the Gezi Protests and corruption scandals. The June 2015 elections once again created controversy in the minds of the society. Kemahloğlu (2015) addresses the unexpected outcome of the election as "...although AKP seems to have suffered some loss of votes in the local elections compared with the 2011 parliamentary election, the presidential poll was a success for the party's former leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan..." (Kemahloğlu 2015, 446). She goes on to add that "...AKP's major loss of support in June 2015 cannot be explained simply in terms of a linear declining trend in an incumbent party's popularity over time..." (Kemahloğlu 2015, 446).

When it comes to the possible reasons why AKP lost in the June 2015 elections, it was Ioannis Grigoriadis who provided one explanation. As Grigoriadis (2016) explains, "...[HDP's] success in crossing the ten percent threshold on June 7, became a milestone

²²Başbakan Ahmet Davutoğlu'ndan balkon konuşması "AKP bu ülkenin bel kemiğidir." June 8, 2015. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/basbakan-ahmet-davutoglundan-balkon-konusmasi-29224961>

in the history of the pro-Kurdish and left-wing political movements in Turkey and was one of the main reasons for the failure of the AKP...” (Grigoriadis 2016). He goes on to add that Selahattin Demirtaş’s political standing brought a new charismatic leader to Turkish politics (Grigoriadis 2016). Throughout the electoral campaign, HDP followed an effective strategy, where the party managed to appeal to the masses. As Grigoriadis (2016) explains, first of all “...conservative voters of Kurdish ethnic descent, who in the past backed mainstream conservative Turkish political parties and had been core supporters of the AKP since its meteoric rise to power in 2002...” (Grigoriadis 2016, 42). Secondly, Kurdish people who had moved to the big cities such as Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, and normally voted for mainstream parties, voted for HDP. Thirdly, people who identify themselves as *Türkiyeli* (from Turkey, regardless of cultural background), with strong secular and liberal views, also voted for HDP (Grigoriadis 2016). In addition to Grigoriadis (2015), Sayarı (2016) provides a more general and concrete answer to the question of why AKP lost during June 2015 elections. According to Sayarı (2016), the answer is straightforward; “the failure of the opposition parties to coordinate their strategies and President Erdoğan’s determined pursuit of a new election that, he believed, would reinstate the AKP’s majority in the parliament” (Sayarı (2016, 265).

According to the constitution, if the government cannot be established within 45 days after the general elections, the President can call for early elections (Kalaycıoğlu 2017). As a matter of fact, this was the aim of Erdoğan as he argued that Turkey needed a repeat election (Kalaycıoğlu 2017). As the quest for negotiations to form a coalition failed as well, on the August 26, new elections were scheduled for November 1, 2015. As Andreas Schedler emphasizes, elections are ambivalent tools as much for the ruling party as for the opposition parties. “They create opportunities for distributing patronage, settling disputes, and reinforcing the ruling coalition; but they also mobilize threats of dissidence. Rulers have to take some key decisions regarding their strategic behavior in the electoral arena...” (Schedler and Oxford University 2013, 389). Thus, what Schedler seems to argue is that rulers have to decide how to mix electoral manipulation and electoral persuasion to keep winning elections. It was already clear that AKP would not be open to the coalition idea yet.

Summer 2015 marked one of the most violent periods ever since AKP came to power. The summer-long conflicts in the east and the failure to form a coalition government brought another political crisis. As has previously been mentioned, governments use high and low-intensity repressions to control the political insurgencies (Frantz 2018, 107). The high-level repression continued throughout summer 2015 and eventually evolved into a street fight where urban districts were becoming battlefields and thousands of people were

internally displaced. It can be claimed that the opposition growing against the AKP was a well-known fact. HDP and CHP's cooperation for the sake of increasing the number of opposition deputies in the parliament, as well as MHP and CHP's cooperation to elucidate the corruption allegations against the AKP, left that party and Erdoğan in a tight corner. Regarding the aftermath of the elections, there is an important comment to make. As Grigoriadis (2016) claims, "public opinion did not consider the government responsible for negligence in tracking such terrorist activities [...] many backed the government's call for stability and strong rule." (Grigoriadis 2016, 44). AKP acted as if it was the party that struck the balance between Kurdish and Turkish nationalisms. After the summer-long instability and chaos in the eastern part of Turkey, the party successfully concluded that, without their presence in the politics, there is a state of nature.

The 2015 summer created a massive discontent in Turkish society. To raise the voice of the civil society, various NGO's²³ gathered under a peace rally named, *barış mitingi*. On the October 10, 2015, Turkey lived through the deadliest terrorist attack in Republican history with the death toll reaching approximately 100 people (Sayarı 2016). The common goal of the rally was to draw attention to the government's attitudes during the 2015 summer. As the assassin at the rally remains unknown, the question of who organized the bombings also remains a mystery.

Meanwhile, AKP's presence in the media increased dramatically towards the elections in November. According to the Supreme Council for Radio and Television, state-run TV channels presented Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for 29 hours, CHP and MHP for 5 hours and 70 minutes; whereas HDP received only 18 minutes of media coverage²⁴.

Under the light of the increasing non-democratic tendencies, Erdoğan's efforts for long-dreamed Presidential system increased the tensions in the political environment (Sayarı 2016). Both 2015 elections took place in a politically polarized environment. However, one major difference was that the June 2015 elections did not involve violence (Kemahloğlu 2015; Sayarı 2016). The elections of November 2015 took place in a very tense political environment. Thus, public mood was subdued as well as the mood of the political parties. CHP campaign lacked enthusiasm, MHP's campaign similarly lacked excitement and Selahattin Demirtaş's charismatic standing was damaged along with his party, HDP (Sayarı 2016). As a result of the elections, it appears that AKP pulled itself

²³DİSK (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey), TMMOB (Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects), KESK (Confederation of Public Workers' Union), TTB (Turkish Medical Association), along with various other organizations and parties such as EMEP (Labor Party), HDP and SGDF (Socialist Youth Associations Federation).

²⁴"Voting to the sound of explosions" The Economist, October 29, 2015.
<https://www.economist.com/europe/2015/10/29/voting-to-the-sound-of-explosions>

together and received 49.9% of the votes; CHP received 25% of the votes. Although passing the electoral threshold, HDP's votes decreased to 10.76% and MHP received 11.90% of the votes. It appeared that HDP lost votes as a result of the instabilities that took place throughout the summer. Looking at the elections, the tendency of the society came down on the side of stability. Despite the decrease in the HDP's votes, HDP passed the electoral threshold and made itself among the political parties in Turkey as the fourth political party with center-left standing (Grigoriadis 2016).

In a nutshell, consecutive elections in 2015 once again showed that governmental stability was the citizens' foremost priority. As Sayarı (2016) claims, "the voters' verdict showed that they valued governmental stability and continuity, especially at a time when Turkey was experiencing an unprecedented rise in terrorism and political violence" (Sayarı 2016, 227). Sayarı (2016) goes on to note that eventually, governmental instability and increasing political violence served as a benefit for AKP's power consolidation (Sayarı 2016).

In the early career of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, he once claimed "that the democracy is like a train", he said; "you get off once you have reached your destination."²⁵ Coming back to 2015, it can be claimed that Erdoğan would regret articulating such words. Until 2015 AKP maintained its electoral success and once the party's influence started to decrease, they literally got off from the train of democracy.

4.7 Coup Attempt of 2016

It can be claimed that AKP got away with the corruption charges by announcing the Gülen movement as the driving force behind the scandals. With the Gülen movement becoming the scapegoat for the corruption scandals, a major purge wave in the state institutions took place. Eventually, AKP's hindered corruption allegations foreshadowed under the rush of local elections and presidential elections. However, on the night of the July 15, 2016, a coup attempt took place in Turkey.

The 2016 coup attempt, marking the final major incident of this chapter is indeed important to understand the power consolidation of AKP and the suppression of the opposition to the AKP rule with a vengeance. Questions such as, "who exactly organized the coup?",

²⁵"Getting off the train" The Economist, February 4, 2016,
<https://www.economist.com/special-report/2016/02/04/getting-off-the-train>

“was there any information received before the attempt?”, “was the 2016 coup attempt an *autogolpe*?” or “did the coup attempt take place deliberately?” remain mysteries and yet seeking answers to those questions remain outside the scope of this thesis. Rather, it is indeed important to look at what really happened in the aftermath of the coup *d'état*, and how the AKP incumbency turned this crisis into their benefit by using the coup *d'état* attempt as leverage to their power consolidation.

On the July 15, Thursday evening, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) officially announced the seizure of power by the Turkish Armed Forces. Soon after the enacting of a curfew and martial law, the Turkish Grand National Assembly was bombed, and high-ranking army officials were kidnapped. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, surviving an alleged assassination attempt, connected to the CNN broadcasting via FaceTime and encouraged citizens to go out to the streets in the name of defending their democracy. Furthermore, mosques took an active role in mobilizing the masses by calling people out to the streets. As a result of the night-long conflict, the coup attempt failed, leaving more than 300 deaths behind. Esen and Gümüşçü explain that “...The coup failed because the putschists first lost the media battle and then decisively lost the momentum once people took to the streets en masse...” (Esen and Gumuscu 2017, 63). The night of the coup attempt can be considered as a war of all against all. On the one hand, the crowds did not only include coup plotters but also low-ranking soldiers who were present on the day of the coup attempt for the sake of their duty. On the other hand, some civilians were romanticized by Erdoğan’s call to resist the coup plotters. As the AKP government maintains, during the night of July 15, history was written, *15 Temmuz Demokrasi Destanı*, against the evil Gülen movement. However, by the end of the long night, dozens of low-ranking military officers who were present there without knowing anything about the coup attempt were killed and their bodies were explicitly shown to the media.

Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue that “...crises allow autocrats to expand their room to maneuver and protect themselves from perceived enemies...” They go on to add that “...but the question remains: are democratic institutions so easily swept away?” (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 157). As for the first part of their argument, Erdoğan used this coup attempt to expand his rule and suppress any kind of opposition. As for the second part of their argument, democratic institutions, indeed were swept away easily. In the aftermath of the coup attempt, major purges and evacuations took place in the state institutions. The people who are directly or indirectly affiliated with the Gülen movement, now declared as a terror organization (FETÖ) were blacklisted and imprisoned. As the Bertelsmann Report underlines, “...tens of thousands of state employees have been sacked

and extensive purges of the judiciary, military, police, media, and academia carried out. The judiciary – which formerly could be said to be independent – has been weakened by pressure from the AKP government...”²⁶ Thus, for the Turkish case, it can be claimed that institutions were indeed swept away easily in a short period of time. After the failure of the coup *d'état*, a state of emergency rule (*Olağanüstü Hal*, OHAL) was declared and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emerged as an omnipotent President. Together with the omnibus laws enacted under severe arbitration, Turkey entered a new phase of reign of fear wherein everyone with opposing ideas were treated as being equal with the Gülenist movement, called a terror organization (FETÖ) afterwards, under the draconian OHAL regime. The putsch also created an impasse with the parties. CHP and HDP found themselves in a situation where they stood in the same line with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as they were against the coup (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017).

According to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, compared with its 2014 index scores, as of 2020, Turkey’s democracy status decreased from 7.6 to 7.3 points. The main indicator behind such decline appears to be the “Rule of Law” parameter which has decreased radically from 7.3 to 6.3. As the 2016 Transformation Index Report argued “...in recent years the government has frequently exerted considerable pressure on the judiciary, particularly in cases dealing with charges of corruption...”²⁷

Starting off and continuing with a democratic looking referendum (2007 and 2010), democracy’s credentials are severely harmed throughout The Longest Decade. Taking a few steps back and seeing the macro view can provide one with insights into the political transformations that took place in Turkey for over ten years. Along this period, AKP emerged as a powerful party and consolidated its power.

²⁶Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2018 Country Report — Turkey. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018. https://www.bti-project.org/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report2018TUR.pdf

²⁷Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2016 — Turkey Country Report. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016. https://www.bti-project.org/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report2016TUR.pdf

5. DOUBLE-FACETED REFERENDUM

This chapter will focus on the changes the Turkish political regime has been going through following the 2017 referendum. Turkey, initially being a semi-parliamentary regime, eventually evolved into a semi-presidential one, and ultimately completely veered toward a severely non-democratic regime after the 2017 referendum. This chapter presents a study of the changes and the processes by which the regime of Turkey drifted away from democratization towards a form of autocratic rule by means of the 2017 referendum, and the 2018 general and presidential elections. Further, it will focus on the 2019 local elections and their importance for Turkish politics, in particular for the possibilities it might offer for returning to the path of democratization.

5.1 April 16, 2017, Referendum

The 2017 referendum can be considered a historic moment for Turkish politics where the political system in Turkey veered towards a form of presidentialism. Before going into details of the 2017 referendum, it is important to recall briefly Turkey's parliamentary tradition.

Historically Turkey had been a parliamentary system ever since 1876, the start of the First Constitutional Monarchy Era (*Birinci Meşrutiyet*). As Celep (2017) argues, “a representative body of deputies was formed as part of a system of Constitutional Monarchy” before the formation of the Turkish Republic (Celep 2017, 68). Although the First Constitutional Era failed after the suspension of the parliament by Sultan Abdulhamid II roughly two years after its establishment, this short-lived parliamentary experiment corresponded to the years where two elections were held after the formation of General Council, *Meclis-i Umumi* (Celep 2017). Constitutionalization continued after the pro-

mulgation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy Era (*İkinci Meşrutiyet*) in 1908 (Celeb 2017). Although creating a tyranny of the majority under the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Partisi*, CUP) in the 1910s, Turkish parliamentary tradition essentially belongs to the late 19th century and early 20th century. In the War of Liberation, the Turkish Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, TBMM) was formed to represent the nation and function as the state-in-exile under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The legislative body remained a parliamentary system since the later days of the Ottoman Empire (Celeb 2017). Ever since the First Constitutional Monarchy Era, and foundation of the modern Turkish Republic, the parliamentary system continued to shape politics.

5.1.1 Parliamentarism in the Republican Era

In the Republican Era, democracy was suspended at various times when military governments took over the reins of government. The reasons behind the military takeovers were due to stability related issues. Such instabilities either took place as a result of ideological fragmentations (before the 1960 and 1980 coups) or coalition governments (before the 1980 coup). The debates on Presidential system and semi-Presidential system first emerged in a conference organized by Tercüman newspaper in March 1980 (Yazıcı, 2017). Subsequently the discussions started to spread among scholars. Under the initiation of the military government, a commission formed for the preparation of a new constitution. The commission drafted the 1982 Constitution, finally deciding that the parliamentary system with extended executive powers of the president would be the best fit for Turkish politics (Yazıcı, 2017). By 2000, several political leaders including Turgut Özal, Süleyman Demirel, Necmettin Erbakan, and Alparslan Türkeş had complained about the parliamentary system and the political deadlocks created by the system. Unlike Özal, Erbakan, and Türkeş, Süleyman Demirel did not express his openness towards the U.S. version of Presidential system, but he claimed that the French version of semi-presidentialism would help to solve the deadlocks constantly created by the parliamentary system (Celeb 2017). However, none of those leaders and their parties had managed to reach the strength of AKP (Celeb 2017). Eventually, AKP officials argued that, coalition governments tended to slow down the decision-making procedure, thus standing in the way of better governance. Ever since the first years of AKP's incumbency, there were two major issues which Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had been bringing up repeatedly in his speeches: the undemo-

cratic nature of the 1982 Constitution¹ and later his desire for a Presidential system². This ongoing desire grew stronger after MHP's support of the Presidential system.

As Svoblik (2012) argues, autocratic leaders, consolidate their power by forming what he calls a "ruling coalition" (Svoblik 2012, 5). In the Turkish case, MHP and especially its leader, Devlet Bahçeli, can be considered as a part of the AKP's ruling coalition. As Celep (2017) argues, MHP's hesitant attitudes towards AKP have rapidly changed after the June 2015 elections where MHP received the second highest vote in its history (Celep 2017). In the November 2015 repeat elections, falling behind the HDP, MHP lost half of its seats. Celep (2017) goes on to argue that "as Bahçeli's hold on power slipped away, he made a surprising u-turn on presidentialism" (Celep 2017, 71). Additionally, MHP, especially Devlet Bahçeli, criticized Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for acting as the sole authority, pushing the limits of the presidency indicated by the constitution. Thus, he came to believe that such an unchecked notion of power was due to the anomaly created by the 1982 Constitution. Hence, Bahçeli stood up for constitutional change. In the meantime, the nationalist front faced a separation. Under the slogan of "Turkish nationalists say No" (*Türkiye milliyetçileri hayır diyor*) a group of nationalists separated from the MHP and thus MHP received another blow. As a result of the negotiations between AKP and MHP, on the January 21, 2017, holding a referendum for the constitutional revision package was approved in the parliament with 339 "Yes" votes, in contrast to 142 "No" votes (Celep 2017). The system was named "Partisan Presidency System" (*Partili Cumhurbaşkanlığı Sistemi*) by the MHP and AKP officials. (Celep 2017).

Grigoriadis (2018) argues that "... The constitutional draft submitted to the parliament in January 2017 and to a referendum in April 2017 boosted majoritarian elements to an unprecedented degree" (Grigoriadis 2018, 53). As Sayarı (2016) quotes from Lindberg and Jones (2010), "... by providing continuity in government, they can, in fact, contribute to political stability and economic progress..." (Sayarı 2016, 277). However, Sayarı (2016) goes on to add that, "... when a predominant party system is established under a party that adopts an authoritarian style of governance it may seriously undermine democratic processes and representative institutions" (Sayarı 2016, 277)

Much ink has been spilled on the discussion of the Presidential system versus the parliamentary system. Presidential versus parliamentary regime debate would extend the coverage of this thesis yet several points need to be highlighted.

¹"Erdoğan: Artık Darbe Anayasası ile Bu İş Gitmez" November 26, 2015. <https://www.haberler.com/erdogan-artik-darbe-anayasasi-ile-bu-is-gitmez-7913314-haberi/>

²"Erdoğan: Türkiye'de Sistem Fiilen Değişti". August 14, 2015. BBC Türkçe. https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/08/150814_erdogan_sistem

Linz argues that the countries on the phase of transition to democracy should pay more attention to the diversity within the society (Linz 2015). Considering that the Presidential system creates a “winner takes all” system under fixed terms, Presidential systems set a clear boundary between the incumbency and the opposition. The “winner takes all” system, and fixed terms would eventually contribute to the creation of personalized power (personalismo) in the long run (Linz 2015). Linz also argues that the Parliamentary system is more prone to democracy if the country has deep political cleavages. Thus, what can be understood is that democratizing countries should not act based on knocking out the opposition, however, the Presidential system in diversified countries would bring non-democratic outcomes.

Likewise, as (Sayari 2015) notes, parliamentary regimes have been less prone to breakdown. An investigation conducted between 1973 and 1989 among 53 non-OECD countries indicated that the parliamentary regimes proved to be more stable than the Presidential system. The study noted that 40% of democracies under the Presidential system were toppled by military coups whereas 18% of the parliamentary democracies broke down.

Ergüder (2015) avers, the Presidential system in Turkey embodies various obscure features. First of all, he claims that Turkey is already a country with non-democratic leanings where the central authority is very powerful, and the opposition is marginalized. Secondly, the arguments for the Presidential system are generally based on providing better governance and extolling political leaders. As Ergüder (2015) argues, it is difficult to consider the system that the 1982 Constitution created as a parliamentary democracy. Ergüder (2015) claims that calls for a Presidential system arose in the 1990s because of the constantly failing coalition governments. However, under AKP’s term, Presidentialism was considered as being a way of consolidating power in one hand. As he notes, during the 1990s, Turkey was suffering from yet another wave of an unstable coalition governments. Thus, politicians back in the 1990s had extolled the idea of the Presidential system as a way of preventing coalition governments. However, in the case of the AKP, as Ergüder (2015) notes, seeking a presidential system was a consequence of paradigm change. The sole aim behind demands towards the Presidential system was to consolidate the AKP’s power under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. As Ergüder (2015) notes, AKP incumbency since 2002 provided stable governance for the country. They had managed to control inflation and increased the GDP per capita as well for a while. In addition to the positive consequences, they have also managed to control the media and press as well. In other words, they have managed to consolidate their power under the parliamentary system. Considering this, what can be argued is that, together with the Presidential system, AKP wanted to possess more power and consolidate its power more.

Last but not least, Kim Lane Scheppele in 2018 came up with the term “autocratic legalism” in order to provide a comprehensible approach to see how a leader actually manipulates the electoral system (Scheppele 2018). As Scheppele (2018) argues, “the new autocrats have learned to govern by appealing to electoral legitimacy while using the tools of law to consolidate power in a few hands” (Scheppele 2018, 581). It should also be added that the 2017 referendum is indeed important in terms of seeing the autocratic legalism in Turkey. As a consequence of the referendum, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan basically legitimized his non-democratic rule. Scheppele (2018) also adds that charismatic leaders in non-democratic regimes legitimize their actions by relying on plebiscite (Scheppele 2018). Scheppele (2018) goes on to argue that, “plebiscitary acclimation of charismatic leaders now masquerading as democracy” (Scheppele 2018, 548)

5.1.2 Electoral Campaign

The referendum campaign took place in a tense environment where the post-traumatic effects of the suicide bombings and military putsch were still present throughout society. In the aftermath of the political crisis such as the corruption scandals and military putsch, a wave of purges took place in the state institutions and academia. As there was a state of emergency during the referendum campaign, any constituent with opposing ideas behaved timidly for fear of being considered a terrorist. Thus, constituencies and political parties did not have the chance to freely express their exact standing in terms of the referendum.

What worried the “No” campaign the most was the transformation of the semi-Presidential system to an executive presidency where the president was to be barely held accountable for his/her actions and where there would be a lack of checks and balances (Koplow 2017). Under the tense political environment, CHP was standing against the one-man rule, whereas HDP was highlighting the importance of the parliamentary system for human rights and pluralism (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017) (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017). The MHP dissidents also stood against the executive presidency.

Briefly looking at the proposed system, the sine qua non of the system appears to be the power given to the president. Under the possession of such power, the president will be able to bypass the National Assembly and he or she will have the right to govern the country with presidential decrees. Such possession of power by the president can be considered as being familiar with the Ottoman roots of Turkey. In the period following 1876, the First Constitutional Era, the Sultan himself continued to possess the right

to abolish parliament and dismiss the authorities. Likewise, the proposed changes were ensuring the divinity of the Sultan. The check on the president's power is the parliament, currently dominated by the AKP. Looking at the amended article 105, in the proposed system, the president can be impeached yet the procedure appears to be rather long and difficult:

“Parliamentary investigation may be requested claiming that the President of the Republic commits a crime through a motion tabled by an absolute majority of the total number of members of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. The Assembly shall debate this request within one month at the latest and may decide to open an investigation a three-fifths majority in secret ballot³. Where a decision to launch an investigation is made, the investigation shall be conducted by a committee of fifteen members, chosen by lot, for each political party in the Assembly, separately from among three times candidates nominated for each seat reserved to party groups in proportion to their number of seats. The committee shall submit its report on the result of the investigation to the Office of the Speaker of the Assembly within two months [...] Grand National Assembly of Turkey may decide to refer the case to the Supreme Court within two-thirds majority of the total number of members through secret ballot.”

As Sözen (2020) argues, “... this system stipulated a very strong presidency, even without consideration of the political regime factors that already enhanced the rulers' de facto powers...” (Sözen, 2020: 7).

The “Yes” campaign included AKP, MHP cooperation and a few fringe parties such as BBP (*Büyük Birlik Partisi* - Great Unity Party) and Hürda-Par (*Hür-Dava Partisi* – Free Cause Party) (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017). The “No” campaign included CHP, HDP, and independents. Additionally, the “No” campaign also included the SP (Felicity Party) and the group of MHP members who recently had broken their ties with that party.

The “Yes” campaign conducted a well-organized and powerful campaign, while the “No” campaign constantly suffered from harassment and limited access to media and public space (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017). Additionally, any unwelcoming opposition activity was considered as being an act of terrorism. As Esen and Gümüşçü (2017) argue, there are

³Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Excepted from www.judiciaryofturkey.gov.tr.

incidents where “individuals hanging posters and banners opposing the Presidential system were given fines for vandalism” they go on to add that “...naysayers were physically attacked during campaigning by pro-government vigilantes, especially in AKP-dominated areas...” (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017, 314)

Throughout the referendum campaign, OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) observed serious harms on the democratic procedure. As it was reported, OSCE was concerned whether this referendum took place abiding by the rules of the International Referendum Observation Mission or not. Such as the active role of President Erdoğan during the campaign, conducting a referendum under the state of emergency, unequal media coverage shares of the “Yes” and “No” campaign. As it was indicated in the report, “The Supreme Board of Elections (SBE) did not fully exercise its authority to regulate the process and provide a coherent legal framework adequate for holding a genuinely democratic referendum” (OSCE, 2017: 1). Additionally, the state emergency restricted fundamental human rights immensely. The ongoing security operations in the east of Turkey was causing huge numbers to flee their houses and under such movable condition, increased concerns about the true timing of the referendum (OSCE 2017). The report also indicated that equal access to media was indeed problematic as most of the share was given to the “Yes” campaign (OSCE 2017). Last but not least, OSCE argued that the Supreme Board of Elections (*Yüksek Seçim Kurulu, YSK*) failed to act unbiased and favored the "Yes" campaign. What is more, on the election day, YSK made a change in the vote-counting procedures by announcing the validity of the unstamped ballots (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017). Esen and Gumuscu (2017) argue that such decision was made upon the request of AKP and as they put it “...rendered the entire process vulnerable to fraud by lifting a critical safeguard...” (Esen and Gumuscu 2017, 314)

The referendum was held on April 16, 2017. The Constitutional Revision Package was approved by 51.3% of the votes; the naysayers received 48.7%. Given the small margin, it is indeed important to analyze the referendum results. “Yes,” campaign might be the winner of the referendum, however, the fact remains that almost half of the population did not approve the Presidential system. Esen and Gümüşçü (2017) argue that AKP’s success should be considered a Pyrrhic victory and they put an emphasis on the success of the “No” campaign. It can be argued that the heavily skewed level playing field in favor of the "Yes" campaign did not stop naysayers to receive almost half of the votes.

As a result of the referendum, AKP emerged as the victor, though being victorious was not equal with success. However, being upset about the results did not change the fact that Turkish politics entered a phase under a brand-new type of regime with highly

neo-patrimonial tendencies.

As of 2017, Turkey entered a new phase of a regime which was resembling a patchwork of democracy and non-democracy. Erdoğan himself, actually mentioned the ubiquitous ideal system of AKP⁴, back in 2015, by emphasizing the “leadership” aspect of the Presidential system. Such an explanation of the ideal system perhaps can be considered as a hint for the application of the system in the upcoming years.

The only thing that can be considered democratic in the regime, is the presence of the elections. Apart from holding free and competitive elections, the system actually is set to reap the fruits of democratic legitimacy to serve personal or party-based interests.

5.2 2018 Presidential and General Elections

The 2018 elections are the first held after the 2017 Constitutional Referendum whereby the Turkish political regime was transformed from a semi-presidential regime to a presidential regime. General elections were held on the same day of the first round of the presidential elections. Elections were supposed to take place on the November 3, 2019, however, as a result of the reconciliation between MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, elections took place in 2018. Through the joint action of the MHP and AKP, which among them had the quorum in the National Assembly, the state of emergency was agreed to be extended for three more months. Therefore, elections which supposedly aimed to serve the consolidation of democracy in Turkey took place under a state of emergency. 2018 also marks the highest voter turnout since 1991 (Sözen 2019)

Before the referendum, a radical change took place in the electoral law, as a result of the AKP and MHP consensus in the National Assembly. The proposed changes included articles which further caused serious criticisms by the opposition and scholars of constitutional law. Briefly looking at the proposed changes, first of all, the electoral law formerly forbidding election alliances changed. According to the proposed change, political parties were able to form an electoral alliance. Secondly, the ballots without the stamp of the balloting committee were rendered valid. Thus, there was a direct intervention of the

⁴"ABD'nin demokrasisi ileri mi ileri, ekonomi ileri mi, ileri hangi sistem var Başkanlık sistemi. Biz illa onu almak durumunda değiliz. Bir arı gibi her çiçekten nasibimizi alırız ondan sonra da kendi başkanlık sistemimizi yaparız" "Erdoğan'dan Abdullah Gül'e dolaylı cevap" Cumhuriyet, February 20, 2015. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/erdogandan-abdullah-gule-dolayli-cevap-218119>

extra-political methods to the sanctity of the electoral process. Additionally, considering the dominance of the AKP in the National Assembly, none of these actions took place under sufficient deliberation.

In 2017, MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli offered an alliance to AKP in the upcoming elections and as a result, the “Yes” campaign formed for the Constitutional Referendum of 2017, emerged as the People’s Alliance (*Cumhur İttifakı*) in the upcoming 2018 elections. MHP also declared its allegiance to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as their presidential candidate. The “No” campaign in the 2017 referendum, forged the Nation Alliance (*Millet İttifakı*) including Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, İyi Parti, and Saadet Partisi.

On the June 24, 2018, the presidential election and the legislative election took place simultaneously. June 2018 general elections marked the first competitive elections under the newly declared Presidential system (Sözen, 2020). Looking at the candidates of the presidential race, there was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on the behalf of the People’s Alliance, Muharrem İnce (CHP), Selahattin Demirtaş (HDP), Meral Akşener (İyi Parti) and Temel Karamollaoğlu (SP). As a result of the presidential elections, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan received 52.6% of the votes in the first round against his archrival Muharrem İnce, who received 30.6% of the votes (Sözen 2019)

In the general elections, AKP could not muster the majority of the votes, receiving 295 out of 600 seats with 42.6% of votes. However, with the help of MHP, the People’s Alliance managed to acquire 53.7% of the votes and 344 seats in the National Assembly (Sözen 2019). Compared with the 2014 popular presidential elections, a fluctuation can be observed in the votes (Sözen 2019). In 2014, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had received 51.8% and became victorious against Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu who was the joint candidate of the CHP and MHP. However, in 2018, Erdoğan increased his votes only 0.8% under the support of MHP (Sözen 2019). Taking nascent non-democratic tendencies into consideration, Sözen (2019) claims that the results of the election indicated the continuation of “precarious authoritarianism” (Sözen 2019, 14).

The Nation Alliance worked assiduously during the electoral campaign to appeal to more people. Throughout the presidential campaign, the opposition gathered under Muharrem İnce’s candidacy, who was referred to as a wretch (*gariban*) by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. İnce was indeed an influential figure of the opposition, as he appealed to the masses as one single entity: opponents of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Although the freedom of media was immensely curtailed, İnce managed to conduct a vibrant and energetic campaign against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Several strategic moves helped İnce to consolidate his power among all opposition. Such as, he visited the other presidential candidate,

Selahattin Demirtas in prison. Additionally, he often used a unifying language instead of emphasizing one single party or an ideology (Esen and Yardimci-Geyikçi 2019).

However, none of those efforts worked and Erdoğan, struggling his way through an absolutist regime, became the first leader of the new Presidential system⁵. Eventually, slow-paced erosion of democratic credentials in the society caused fast track implementation of the non-democratic regime.

5.3 2019 Local Elections

Huntington (1991), came up with the term “stunning elections” phenomenon. The definition itself stands for the situation where, suddenly mobilized opposition inflicts a surprising defeat of a non-democratic regime. Turkish politics, for the first time over almost two decades, encountered a “stunning election.” The 2019 local elections basically showed two important facts about the recent state of Turkish politics: the severity of the non-democratic drift, consolidation of the opposition which is driven by the frustration in the opposition. Likewise, Celeb (2019) considers the 2019 local administration elections as an “earthquake” for the incumbency and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Celep 2019, 138). The 2019 local elections also showed that AKP could lose elections, no matter how skewed the playing field (Esen and Gumuscu 2019)

Following the electoral system change enacted in 2018, prior to the elections, political party alliance formation was promulgated. In the 2019 local elections, the electoral alliance formed during the 2018 elections, continuing as the Nation Alliance, nominated separate candidates for the presidential race (Esen and Gümüşgü 2019). As a result of the vigilant electoral campaign, the Nation Alliance managed to obtain most of the votes in İstanbul and Ankara, knocking out AKP’s dominance over the municipalities for the first time since 2004. The Nation Alliance also won in many of the most populated cities in Turkey such as Adana, Antalya, and Mersin while maintaining its presence in İzmir.

Surprisingly, the Turkish Communist Party (TKP), managed to win the municipality of Tunceli, for the first time. HDP’s electoral campaign compulsorily resembled a defense

⁵“Türkiye yüzde 90'lara yaklaşan seçimlere katılım oranıyla tüm dünyaya demokrasi dersi vermiştir” BBC Türkçe, June 25, 2018.
<https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-44597179>

game against AKP due to constant attacks by government and biased media coverage (Esen and Gümüşçü 2019). Although the recent electoral success of opposition revived hopes for the presence of the electoral competition, Turkish politics received yet another shock when the YSK canceled the election results in Istanbul due to the objection raised by AKP and MHP. As the new date for the mayoral re-run was set, a new electoral campaign period was initiated, where the efforts for discrediting the opposition grew ostensibly. Esen and Gumuscu (2020) claim that AKP refused to concede defeat in Istanbul and explain the invalidation of the Istanbul election as “[AKP and MHP] pressured the electoral commission to cancel the elections and secured a rerun on flimsy legal ground” (Esen and Gumuscu 2020, 3). Eventually, Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Nation Alliance candidate, received the highest vote, increasing his vote share by almost 6% against Binali Yıldırım who experienced almost a 4% decrease in his vote share, from 48.55% to 44.99%.

Looking at the results of the local elections in a more detailed manner, Ankara and İstanbul were strategically important for AKP. Ankara being the capital of Turkey, had been a fortress of AKP ever since 1994, under mayor Melih Gökçek. Likewise, Istanbul is indeed strategic as it constitutes a milestone for the political career of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was first elected its mayor in 1994. Additionally, Istanbul can be considered the economic heart of Turkey, and thus AKP’s loss in Istanbul was indeed groundbreaking for Turkish politics (Esen and Gümüşçü 2020). In tandem, since 2004, Istanbul had been a fortress of AKP in every mayoral election. For the municipal race, CHP’s candidate was Ekrem İmamoğlu who was the running against AKP’s candidate, Binali Yıldırım. In Ankara, Mansur Yavaş was nominated by the CHP against the former Kayseri metropolitan mayor Mehmet Özhasseki (AKP). As Celeb (2019) maintains the CHP’s electoral breakthrough would not have been possible without the support provided by the Good Party (İYİP) and the Kurdish-left Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) (Celeb 2019).

When 2019 local elections are compared with the previous 2014 local elections, not only did AKP’s vote share decrease but also, as Esen and Gümüşçü (2020) argue, “. . . many local governments in the economic center of the country changed hands from AKP to CHP. . . ” (Esen and Gümüşçü 2020, 329). Esen and Gümüşçü (2020) also highlight that in 2014 local elections AKP did not have an ally during the elections, but in 2019 AKP had MHP as its ally. Considering the decrease in the vote share, AKP’s decline appears to be more noteworthy (Esen and Gümüşçü 2020).

There were several disruptions in the electoral process. First of all, on the night of the initial 2019 elections, the official state news agency Anadolu Agency (AA) stopped the announcements of results for over ten hours. Thus, people’s access to knowledge about

the conduct of the counting process was hampered. Secondly, before the announcements of the final result of the elections in Istanbul, the balcony speech of self-proclaimed mayor Binali Yıldırım of Istanbul, caused serious criticisms in the society. This further caused a legitimacy crisis among the constituents. Thirdly, soon after the winning of Ekrem İmamoğlu, the mayoral elections were nullified on the grounds of corruption scandals. According to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Devlet Bahçeli, an alleged scandal took place during voting. As a result of the mayoral rerun, AKP received a fatal blow in Istanbul, as Ekrem İmamoğlu received more votes in the re-run than the previously held elections.

The irregularities were not limited to the electoral process, there were also various problems in the conduct of the result tally in general. For example, very soon after the elections, YSK adjudicated that elected mayors who have been relieved from their duties under the KHK (Decree in Law, *Kanun Hükmünde Kararname*) investigations would not be able to receive their election documents and thus be considered as having won their mayoral seats⁶.

The electoral campaign of the 2019 elections resembled a general election campaign due to dramatically increased political polarization. Celeb argues that the ever-increasing political polarization in the last decade affected elections, and even local elections as well (Celeb 2019). This was the case for Erdoğan because during the electoral campaign Erdoğan's polarizing discourse became more antagonizing, eventually overshadowed actual candidates such as Binali Yıldırım in Istanbul (Celeb 2019).

As Celeb (2019) argues, the March 31, 2019, election was serving far-reaching aims of maintaining the newly created system. "Erdoğan and Bahçeli contextualized the municipal elections within the framework of the *survival (beka)* of the new Presidential system and ultimately, of the Turkish state..." (Celeb 2019, 141).

The 2019 local elections showed that the opposition and political competition were not just a *façade*. Throughout the elections, the opposition mobilized against one common opponent and their cooperation further caused the common opponent's setback. In addition, the KONDA⁷ report also highlights that regardless of different levels of education, religious-ethnic identity, or political ideology, society's concerns were overlapping in the political and economic situation of the country. The KONDA report also touches upon an important factor in the results of the elections. The report claims that the "morale

⁶"YSK: KHK'lı başkanlar mazbata alamayacak" Cumhuriyet, April 10, 2019.
<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/ysk-khkli-baskanlar-mazbata-alamayacak-1339571>

⁷Gezi Parkı raporu "Toplumun Gezi Parkı olayları algısı: Gezi Parkındakiler kimlerdi?" KONDA June 5, 2014.
https://konda.com.tr/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/KONDA_GeziRaporu2014.pdf

superiority” (*moral üstünlük*) for the first time was on the side of the opposition Nation Alliance parties.

5.4 *Quo Vadis* Turkey?

In the preceding chapters, much of the discussion hinged upon the slow-paced non-democratic transition under three major breakthroughs. Chapters attempted to show the steps taken by the incumbency to consolidate its power and to maintain the party’s influence over the government.

Turkey, although being far from a democracy, does not fit the definition of full-fledged authoritarianism. Following the 2017 elections a new political regime emerged. A number of studies indicate that Turkey’s transformation resembled Competitive Authoritarianism (Özbudun 2015; Esen and Gümüşçü, 2016, 2018, 2019; Çalışkan 2018). However, there are also other scholars who claim that such transition resembles an electoral authoritarian regime (Somer 2016; Turan 2017; Sözen 2019).

As mentioned previously, there is a thin line in terms of the differences between hybrid regimes. This thesis considers that in Turkey the period between 1983-2007 saw a semi-parliamentary regime; while 2007-2017 saw a form of semi-presidentialism. Since 2017, Turkey has gone through various substantial changes in the nature of its political regime.

As of 2017, a new political system was created which resembled a democracy patchwork. The main democratic credential of this patchwork appears to be the multiparty elections. However, as it will be elaborated in the following paragraphs, the post-2017 elections were neither free nor competitive. Such patchwork can be identified with what Andreas Schedler calls Electoral Authoritarianism (Schedler, 2002; Schedler 2013). Nonetheless, together with the victory of local elections in Istanbul and Ankara, in 2019 the Electoral Authoritarian tendencies evolved into a regime that Levitsky and Way refer to as “Competitive Authoritarianism”. Such a significant change for the regime further revived hopes for the existence of competition and credibility of the opposition to win.

Electoral Authoritarianism, as a regime type was proposed by Schedler and Oxford University (2013). Essentially, it emphasizes three characteristics. First, opposition in such regimes often suffers from an uneven playing field, elections are neither free nor fair,

and civil liberties are curtailed systematically. More precisely, it can be understood that the opposition's role in such regimes basically consists of a legal cloak to legitimize the authoritarian system.

Additionally, lack of competition in such regimes can be explained in two ways: the opposition party's existence may be eliminated as a result of intimidation and/or opposition parties may compete, however, the incumbency's approach toward constituents may be exhausting and manipulative. Schedler provides a spectrum of regimes in order to define where Electoral Authoritarianism (EA) stands among the types of regimes he classifies. There are liberal democracies, electoral democracies, electoral authoritarian regimes, and close-authoritarian regimes. He explains the reason for using the name of Electoral Authoritarianism as "the emphasis on authoritarianism serves to distinguish them from electoral democracies, the emphasis on elections to set them apart from the *closed* autocracies" (Schedler 2013, 78). He goes on to explain the scale he provides. According to Schedler, "...in the democratic neighborhood of electoral authoritarian regimes lie electoral democracies [which] lack some attributes of liberal democracies" (Schedler 2013, 78). What lacks in electoral democracies is considered to be checks and balances, impartial judiciary and bureaucratic integrity. Besides, as he highlights, electoral democracies may have free, fair elections, whereas electoral authoritarianism does not.

Considering what has been argued previously; Turkey resembles EA for various reasons. As Schedler notes, Electoral Authoritarian regimes often "practice authoritarianism behind the institutional façade of representational democracy" (Schedler 2013, 1). What can be understood from İlder Turan's influential article on Electoral Authoritarianism in Turkey is that the referendum of 2017 can tell a lot about the EA tendencies in Turkey (Turan 2017). As he puts, "...[electoral frauds] 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..." (Turan 2017, 99). What can be deduced from Turan (2017) is actually what Schedler emphasizes in Electoral Autocracies; the electoral system was fraudulent, and incumbency was claiming to be on the side the people. In 2019, for the first time AKP lost dominance over the largest cities in Turkey in the local elections. As it was highlighted by Schedler, in EA regimes the opposition does not possess the power to overthrow the incumbent or challenge the power possessed by the incumbent. The 2019 local elections challenged the authority of AKP while causing the ruling party the loss of major cities in Turkey.

AKP's delegitimization of the elections in Istanbul through the voicing of corruption

allegations, actually signifies a very important factor of Electoral Authoritarian regimes. In EA regimes, the opposition often remains as a *façade*, they do exist however, the opportunity of the opposition to win the elections is indeed very low. In that case, the delegitimization of the elections can be considered as the best possible outcome for incumbency. Nevertheless, when the election was delegitimized in Istanbul and a new date for elections was announced, such a move actually initiated a decrease in the EA tendencies of the political regime. The re-run of the mayoral elections and loss of the major cities in the first run rather increased the Competitive Authoritarian perspectives in the system. In the following paragraphs, the concept and phenomenon of Competitive Authoritarianism will be briefly explained and the ways it resembles the political regime in Turkey will be discussed.

The concept of “Competitive Authoritarianism” (CA) employed by Levitsky and Way (2010) is defined as “. . . civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power. . .” (Levitsky and Way 2010, 5). However, they go on to say that “incumbents’ abuse of the state, places them at a significant advantage *vis-à-vis* their opponents” (Levitsky and Way 2010, 5). Levitsky and Way characterize three defining attributes of democracy to explain how competitive authoritarian systems are run by adjusting three parameters of democracy: elections, civil liberties, and uneven playing fields.

Briefly looking at their parameters, elections in such regimes are competitive; opposition parties are often allowed to compete. However, due to a heavily skewed playing field, elections are mostly unfree and almost unfair. Civil liberties are not as repressed as to ban opposition groups and to eliminate independent media agencies, yet civil liberties are still threatened. As mentioned above, opposition parties are free to run in the elections. However, the incumbency’s advantage is higher, thus the incumbent is favored at the expense of the opposition.

Turkish Competitive Authoritarianism is primarily discussed by Esen and Gumuscu (2016). Esen and Gümüşçü (2016) claim that Turkey fits in the Competitive Authoritarianism category mostly because there is a lack of democratic consolidation and authoritarian retreat. Competitive Authoritarianism depicts the nature of political contestation in Turkey where elections function as a key political institution and the empirical reality in Turkey compared with subtypes.

Returning back what was mentioned in the previous page, following the local elections in 2019, Turkey shifted toward Competitive Authoritarianism rather than Electoral Authoritarianism. Recalling what Schedler (2013) notes, leaders in the Electoral Authoritarian

regimes, play the multiparty election game, yet the results are often predicted. With the opposition, gathered under a single aim of weakening the incumbency, being able to compete and run in the elections, consolidation among the opposition, demonstrates a significant element of CA regimes. Although municipalities of the People's Alliance continued to possess the larger percentage of the municipalities where a minority of the electorate live, the loss of major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Antalya, Adana qualify as a major push back for the power of AKP.

Soon after the local elections, trustees (kayyım) were appointed to various Eastern cities replacing the elected mayors, canceling out both the morale of the opposition and small steps taken towards democracy, yet the major cities secured the opposition's success. Cities that have appointed trustees are noteworthy, as all of them are cities with Kurdish majority: Erzincan, Diyarbakır, Van, Mardin. As a party that has the capacity and power to win the elections, AKP eventually accepted the results. However, considering Turkey's past with electoral frauds, the success of opposition in local elections left unanswered questions in political scientists' minds as to whether AKP was moving towards a form of authoritarianism or whether the results demonstrated a slight move towards what Guillermo O'Donnell calls as "Delegative Democracy". The final and forthcoming chapter will examine this question.

6. EXCURSUS ON NEOPATRIMONIALISM

As previously mentioned, the electoral success of the opposition in Turkey in the local elections of 2019, revived hopes towards remaining in shades of democracy. However, several political incidents in the last months of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 jeopardized hopes towards democracy. The incumbency's efforts to increase their power over society reached a more severe level.

This chapter will begin by recalling the notions of democratic backsliding throughout the AKP's incumbency. In general, the focus will be on discussing Turkey's political regime after the 2019 local elections, examining whether Turkey is moving towards a type of autocratic regime or some form of flawed democracy. Therefore, this chapter will focus on defining the Turkish political regime under the guidance of the previously identified characteristics of the Turkish political system.

As it is elucidated in the previous chapters, over AKP's eighteen-year reign, significant regression has been detected in the rule of law, particularly an increasing disregard for the 1982 Constitution culminating in a practice of constitutional hypocrisy, personalization of the power, erosion in governmental and state institutions, and evolution of market capitalism to a form of crony capitalism. Looking at the eighteen years, it appears that the most significant transformation is the gradual personalization of political rule and power. Through the process of personalization of political rule, political de-institutionalization, disregard for the 1982 Constitution, and the transformation of the economy in a manner to serve a relatively close partisan network and its leader materialized.

In 2020 the institutional erosion and personalization of particularly the central political power reached its climax. Roots of the intensification of institutional erosion and personalization can be traced to the 2007 referendum, which had caused serious uneasiness in the society. Several criticisms claimed that the 2007 referendum was going to open up the way for a Weberian understanding of sultanate in the guise ¹ presidentialism. The

¹"Bunlar yarım padişahlığı da getireceğiz derler" October 20, 2007. Hürriyet.

first concrete step towards the personalization of power and erosion of institutions took place during the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer (*Balyoz*) trials. As previously mentioned, Erdoğan introduced himself as the prosecutor of the Ergenekon trials². Against the alleged coup attempts, AKP took the initiative to consolidate its power (Çağaptay 2017). In the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials more than 300 military officers were detained, arrested, and sentenced (Çağaptay 2017). As a result of the 2010 referendum, AKP took bold steps for Turkish politics to remove what it alleged to have been the political tutelage of the military over the elected government. As a result of the referendum, constitutional amendments were approved with 58% of “Yes” votes. Also, as a result of the referendum, AKP’s governance received positive comments for the conduct of democracy in Turkey³. Such positive comments often reflected the significance of removing the influence of the military’s presence over the country’s democratization.

The second most significant attempt to pacify the governmental and constitutionally established institutions occurred in the aftermath of the 2013 corruption scandal. Throughout the 2013 corruption scandal, dozens of public prosecutors, judges, and police were removed from their posts. Also, a wave of purges and closure cases took place in the media outlets allegedly affiliated with the Gülenist movement, such as Zaman, as well the English-language Daily Zaman, which had maintained a more liberal perspective (Çağaptay 2017).

Becoming president in 2014, Erdoğan started to push the limits of the rights accorded to the presidency by the 1982 constitution (Doğanay, Şanlı, and Taştan 2017). Continuously articulating a Manichean view of politics as “us” and “them,” he moved to campaign unconstitutionally in the June 7, 2015, general elections. Erdoğan argued that the votes cast for HDP, MHP⁴ and CHP constituted votes for the terrorists⁵ (Doğanay, Şanlı, and Taştan 2017). While doing so, the personalization of power grew higher, as Erdoğan avowedly asked for votes to receive the constitutionally required majority in the National

<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/bunlar-yarin-padisahligi-da-getirecegiz-derler-7525186>

²“Erdoğan’ın Hukukun Üstünlüğüne Aykırı Açıklamaları” March 7, 2018. Bağımsız İletişim Ağı, Bianet. <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/194933-erdogan-in-hukukun-ustunlugune-aykiri-aciklamalari>

³“Turkey’s referendum: thwarting the specter of coup d’etat”. September 15, 2010. Foreign Policy.

⁴As previously mentioned, the MHP-AKP relations started to improve after 2015. Both parties declared their alliance for the 2018 elections.

⁵Erdoğan, often highlighted the importance of the “New Turkey” (Yeni Türkiye). Asserting that any vote casted for other parties but AKP, are votes casted for “Old Turkey” (Eski Türkiye). “Kardeşlerim şunu unutmayın CHP, MHP, diğer ulusalcı, ırkçı, ayırımçı partilere verilecek her oy eski Türkiye’ye gidecektir” (July 26, 2014, Diyarbakır). (Doğanay, 2015: 132).

Assembly to amend the constitution to install a Presidential system⁶.

According to the Bertelsmann Index, 2015, early elections are claimed to be unnecessary according to the constitution. Calling early elections also was said to be serving AKP for receiving better electoral results. Despite the operations that took place in the judiciary, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2018, considered the cooperation and coexistence of the fundamental democratic institutions as valid until the July 15, 2016, military putsch to instigate a coup. Looking at the Varieties of Democracy's (V-dem), "judiciary purges" index, there were two peak point of the judiciary purges throughout the AKP governance. The first one took place in 2014, soon after the corruption scandal, and the second one took place in 2017, shortly after the military coup attempt⁷. The military putsch created a common trauma for the first time, and the opposition rallied behind Erdoğan⁸(Çağaptay 2017). However, according to V-dem's 2018 report, in the aftermath of the 2016 military putsch, Turkey's institutionalized democracy score was set to zero and started to be classified under certain degrees of institutionalized autocracy⁹. As Çağaptay (2017) argues, "[in the aftermath of failed coup Freedom House reported that] Erdogan's Turkey joined Putin's Russia in being designated *not free* in terms of internet freedom for the first time, as a result of, among other things, ... network shutdowns, social media blocking, lengthy prison sentences, and nationwide cyber-attacks" (Çağaptay 2017, 49).

A significant contributor to the personalization of political power, as mentioned earlier, erosion of governmental and constitutionally ordained institutions amounted to the constitutional hypocrisy of the political system.

As highlighted by Brownlee (2002), constitutional hypocrisy is the "use of plebiscitarian institutions to cloak dictatorship under a veneer of popular legitimacy" (Brownlee, 2002: 484). As it was extensively discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, referendums were very important for the AKP's power consolidation.

Efforts to become a consolidated democracy were interrupted several times because of military tutelage throughout modern Turkey's history. By ending the military tutelage

⁶Election rallies of May 11, 2015, Rize; May 14, 2015, Van; May 2, 2015, Batman (Doğanay, 2017).

⁷According to the "judicial purges" index, Turkey ranked as 1.66 in 2013. The ranking decreased to 1.02 in 2014. In 2015 Turkey ranked as 0.84, and in 2017 the ranking of Turkey decreased to 0.11. Variable responses read as follow: 0: There was a massive, arbitrary purge of the judiciary - 4: Judges were not removed from their posts. <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/MapGraph/>

⁸Çağaptay argues; "In a vindication of Turkey's democratic future, TUSIAD, NGOs, major media outlets, liberal pundits, and the leaders of the CHP and the HDP (all persecuted or demonized by Erdogan) came out against the putsch and, indirectly, in favor of Erdogan" (Çağaptay, 2017: 412).

⁹"Institutionalized autocracy" <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/MapGraph/>

Table 6.1 Access to State Business Opportunities

Year	Access Rate
2019	0.81
2018	0.92
2017	0.92
2016	0.92
2015	0.99
2014	1.08
2013	1.50

Note 1: 0: Extreme. Because of their political group affiliation, 75 percent or more of the population, even if qualified, lack access to state jobs.

4: Equal. Because of their political group affiliation, less than 5 percent of the population, even if qualified, lack access to state jobs. *Source:* <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/MapGraph/>

in Turkey, the AKP government took a bold step towards liberal democracy. According to the V-dem's liberal democracy indicator, throughout the AKP's incumbency, Turkey's liberal democracy ranking decreased from 0.55 in 2006 to 0.1 in 2019 (where "1" indicates the existence of liberal democracy while "0" indicates no liberal democracy at all). Likewise, the market economy was constantly faced with state intervention throughout the Republican Era. Turgut Özal had made serious initiations to implement free-market economic policies. Unlike previous Islamist political parties, AKP came to power, emphasizing the importance of free market economy; however, over time the economic policies and practices of the AKP governments turned out to resemble crony capitalism, as government-owned or government-funded firms engaged in crony capitalism, in an increasing manner¹⁰.

The table above provides the changes in access to state business opportunities by political groups within years. It can be claimed that over the years, businesses forming a close relationship with the government received more opportunities, whereas a certain amount of the population lacked access to the prospects. Initial steps of crony capitalism can be observed in the media sector. As can be seen from the Media Ownership Monitor report, media outlets have close government relations. According to the report, 45% of the viewers watch television channels of the capital owners who possess close ties with the government. Such owners include first and foremost Turkuvaz and Demirören Media groups. Such media groups also engage in the oil industry and the construction industry¹¹.

¹⁰According to the Cambridge, crony capitalism reads as follow: "an economic system in which family members and friends of government officials and business leaders are given unfair advantages in the form of jobs, loans, etc." <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/crony-capitalism>

¹¹According to the Media Ownership Monitor report, Zirve Holding, the sole shareholder of the Turkuvaz Media Outlet, apart from Turkey, operates constructions in Qatar, Russia, UAE (United Arab Emirates),

Table 6.2 Neopatrimonialism Index

Year	Neopatrimonialism Score
2019	0.75
2018	0.83
2017	0.84
2016	0.49

Note 1: Table is prepared by the student according to the changes in the v-dem neopatrimonialism indicator. *Source:* <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/MapGraph/>

Note 2: Lower scores indicate normatively better situation (more democratic), higher scores indicate normatively worse situation (less democratic).

As reported by Reporters without Borders in cooperation with Bianet, "...most media companies operate under large business groups [which] operate in various other business sectors [such as] energy, transportation..."¹² In Turkey, Kimya (2019) argues that "...the political party [...] comes to the fore as an entity" and he goes on to add that "...it increases its influence on business groups by providing security of property and contract rights and rent-seeking opportunities..." (Kimya 2019, 17). Kimya (2018) argues that this crony capitalism is realized through institutional ambiguity, which is "caused by the unregulated nature of political party" (Kimya 2019, 17). Esen and Gümüşçü (2018) explained the pursuit of capital accumulation as a "system of rewards and punishments" (Esen and Gumuscu 2018, 362)

The point Turkey reached in terms of the regime type had been subject to many investigations. Since this thesis refers to the Turkish current political regime as Neopatrimonial rule, the term neopatrimonialism will be elaborated on the grounds mentioned earlier in this chapter. Table 2 shows that Turkey's Neopatrimonial tendencies showed an increasing trend over time. As of 2019, Turkey placed among countries such as Ukraine, Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia.

Weber (1978) defines patrimonialism as "patrimonialism, in the extreme case, sultanism tend to arise whenever traditional domination develops an administration and military force which are purely personal instruments of the master [...] only then the group members treated as subjects" (Weber, 1978: 231). Such support of patrimonial power is provided by slaves, coloni, conscripted subjects, mercenary bodyguards, and armies (Weber 1978). He adds that with the help of these instruments, rulers can increase his/her authority over their subjects (Weber 1978). The fact that Sultanism as an extreme form

Saudi Arabia and Iraq. In Turkey, holding took the initiatives such as infrastructural facilities of the Taksim Square Pedestrianization project.

¹²Media Ownership Monitor, Turkey. <http://turkey.mom-rsf.org/en/owners/companies/>

of patrimonialism can be traced in Weber's words as "...where domination primarily traditional even though it is exercised by virtue of ruler's personal autonomy it will be called patrimonial authority; where it indeed operates primarily on the basis of discretion it will be called Sultanism..." (Weber 1978, 232).

Based upon the Weberian definition of Sultanism as an extreme form of patrimonialism, Linz and Stepan (1996) suggested that Sultanism is a "generic style of domination and rulership" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 52). There are five defining features of the Sultanistic regimes. Initially, the Sultanistic leader possesses control over the polity, and there exist low institutionalization and the rule of law. Secondly, there is indeed pluralism in society; however, considering the leader's potential intervention, pluralism appears to be a *façade*. Thirdly, there is no opposition, and as Linz and Stepan (1996) put "no space for regime moderates who might negotiate with democratic moderates [...] there is no part of the economy and society which is not subject to despotic exercise of the Sultan's will" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 53). Considering such consolidated power of the leader, they claim that regime transition in these regimes is not likely (Linz and Stepan 1996). Fourthly, Sultanistic systems tend to lack macro ideology, and their actions are most likely to be inconsistent with their alleged ideological standing. Instead of ideology, Sultanistic regimes are rather distinguished with their extreme glorification of the leader (Linz and Stepan 1996). Finally, Linz and Stepan (1996) argue that in Sultanistic regimes, there is low-degree of mobilization because, as they put it, the Sultan may "use para-state groups linked to the sultan to wield violence and terror against anyone who opposes the ruler's will..." (Linz and Stepan 1996, 53). Authors argue that existing mobilization and organization often manipulate organizations by clientelistic methods.

Looking at the features mentioned earlier of the Sultanistic regimes, there are various comments to make. In a society where the Sultanistic regime reigns supreme, clientelist relations do have significant importance for governance. In light of the Sultanistic regimes' features and the commentary given above, under the AKP government, Turkey embodies several attributes of the patrimonial system. This part of the chapter will focus the lenses to the Turkish case of Neopatrimonialism. The overlapping features of the neopatrimonialism offered by Weber (1978), Linz and Stepan (1996), and the Turkish political regime will be discussed under the above parameters.

6.1 Low Institutionalization and Rule of Law

The institutionalization and rule of Sultanistic regimes are low and open to the leader's continuous manipulation (Linz and Stepan 1996; Chehabi and Linz 1998). The scope of institutionalization and the rule of law includes the independence of state institutions and the judicial system's supremacy. Chehabi and Linz (1998) argue that in Sultanistic regimes, "the distinction between the state and the regime is blurred" (Chehabi, Chehabi, and Linz 1998, 10). Such a blur means that the ruler and his/her associates possess the right to intervene, and the leader's decisions continuously manipulate the state. Thus, due to the constant manipulation by the leader, state institutions no longer work for the good of the public realm, but rather, they directly work for the ruler, and eventually, they become "less serviceable" (Chehabi and Linz 1998, 10). Sultanistic regimes often create "constitutional hypocrisy" to legitimize their power. (Chehabi and Linz 1998). Chehabi and Linz (1998) argue that "Sultanistic regimes, lacking an ideological basis for their institutions, often govern with constitutions inherited from a previous democratic regime or enacted to give a legitimate appearance to their rule" (Chehabi and Linz 1998, 18). This constitutional hypocrisy is frequently created through a plebiscite or by paying lip service to constitutions.

The Turkish case of de-institutionalization and the erosion of the rule of law appears to coincide with the premises of Sultanism. Turkey has been using the 1982 Constitution, which has come to fore with its non-democratic nature for the last thirty-eight years. Over the years, the constitution has been amended dozens of times. Together with the 2017 referendum, the Turkish political regime changed to the Presidential system; however, no legal arrangements took place to change the 1982 Constitution.

Recalling the September 2010 referendum, radical changes took place in the judiciary. Although the amendments appear to possess democratic features at first glance, eventually, changes approved in 2010 increased the AKP's power over the judiciary. Democratically disguised features of the 2010 referendum can be seen in the Bertelsmann Report until 2014. As can be seen from Table 3, the rule of law and the democratic institutions' stability followed a radical decrease after 2014. The judiciary's increased control grew even deeper following the money laundering scandal in 2013, when corruption charges were directed at Prime Minister Erdoğan and his inner circle. To get away with the corruption charges, AKP-led purges took place in the judiciary, which eventually undermined the judiciary's independence and neutrality.

Table 6.3 Bertelsmann Transformation Index

Year	Political and Social Integration	Stability of Democratic Institutions	Rule of Law	Political Participation	Democracy Score
2020	5.3	3.0	3.5	5.8	4.9
2018	5.8	5.0	4.3	6.0	5.6
2016	7.0	8.0	6.3	7.3	7.3
2014	7.0	8.0	7.3	7.8	7.6
2012	7.3	8.0	7.5	7.8	7.7
2010	7.3	8.0	7.3	7.8	7.7
2008	6.8	7.0	6.8	7.0	7.1

Source: <https://www.bti-project.org/en/meta/downloads.html&content=country&country=TUR>

Note 1: Table is prepared by the student, according to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index of Turkey between 2008 & 2020. Only the parameters which are coinciding to Sultanistic regime characteristics of Linz and Stepan (1996) were used.

Note 2: In 2018, Turkey's position as "Defective Democracy" changed to "Highly Defective Democracy". In 2020, Turkey is addressed as "Moderate Autocracy".

Control over the judiciary started to resemble domination over the judiciary after the military putsch of 2016. The security dilemma President Erdoğan faced soon caused another extensive purge throughout the society, where new appointments took place in the judiciary. After the military putsch, a state of emergency (*OHAL*) was declared, and with the help of Presidential decrees with the force of law, AKP's central authority was once again consolidated. The most important consequence of this period in the judiciary was that a massive number of civil servants with alleged FETÖ affiliations, were detained. The radical change in the standards of the rule of law in Turkey eventually began to be observed by researchers. Looking at Table 3, the Rule of Law score of Turkey was calculated as 7.3 in 2014. As the changes above took place, the Rule of Law score radically decreased to 3.5 in 2020.

6.2 Existence of Pluralism

As Chehabi and Linz (1998) argue in Sultanistic Regimes, there are disparate social and political groups within the society (Chehabi and Linz 1998). However, the leader's imminent efforts to control or suppress political pluralism eventually pacifies society's diversity.

There are currently five political parties represented in the National Assembly, each serving differing ideological standing and different parts of society. However, the electoral threshold of Turkey is high when it is compared with international standards (Freedom House, 2017; Bertelsmann Report, 2020). Through this procedure, the idea is to limit the radical parties' entrance to the National Assembly. The 10% threshold has been hindering the representativeness since the 1980 military coup. In its first years in office, AKP often emphasized the importance of pluralism. As can be seen from reports such as Bertelsmann Stiftung and Freedom House, the party was indeed dedicated to promoting political pluralism. However, throughout their time in office, their sensitivity toward pluralism started to change. By 2013, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's discourses on the necessity of regulating the pluralism, increased¹³. As the non-democratic polity of AKP gained strength, the opposition against AKP and Erdoğan mounted. However, the response of the government to the opposing voices became stigmatizing and increasingly oppressive (Çağaptay 2017). As Çağaptay (2017) argues, "most of the nationalist, Islamist, and conservative half of Turkey [was] coalesce[ed] around him while the country's liberal, secular, and leftist forces were received the brutal end of his oppressive policies" (Çağaptay 2017, 323).

As a result of the military putsch of 2016, thousands of military personnel, civil servants, and academics were also convicted due to their alleged affiliation with the FETÖ. People were purged and their passports were confiscated. According to the Bertelsmann 2018 country report, together with July 15, 2016, military putsch, "judicial independence has been gravely impaired" (BTI Report, 2018: 10).

Consequently, removal of the deputies' immunity was approved in a constitutional amendment. As noted in the Freedom House reports, "over 150 lawmakers mostly from HDP and CHP had their parliamentary immunity lifted" due to alleged terrorism charges (Freedom House, 2016). Subsequently, HDP's co-chairs Figen Yüksekdağ and Selahattin Demirtaş were imprisoned on the grounds of terrorism charges. As examined in the previous chapter, the Constitutional Referendum taking place in 2017 paved the way for the emergence of Turkey's Presidential system, which created an unaccountable president. Beyond all, given negative aspects of pluralism, the score of political pluralism in the Freedom House's 2020 report increased from 1 to 2¹⁴, due to the success of the opposition in the 2019 local elections.

¹³On the excessive police force during Gezi Park protests: "Polise talimatı kim verdi diye soruyorlar. Polise talimatı ben verdim. İşgal kuvvetlerini mi izleyecektik?" March 7, 2018. Bianet. <http://bianet.org/bianet/print/147876-basbakan-polise-mudahale-talimatini-ben-verdim>

¹⁴Freedom House indicators are between 1 (worst)- 10 (best).

All in all, AKP has been emphasizing the importance of pluralism since the first days of their incumbency. AKP even argued that the tutelary system in Turkey was the most significant obstacle to pluralism. Nonetheless, incumbency highlighting the importance of pluralism, over time, legitimized their actions under the pluralism discourses. The pluralism understanding of the AKP over time transformed into an understanding where opposing ideas became alienated¹⁵. The most recent and significant example of such alienation can be observed in the 2019 local elections. As can be seen from Table 4, the mayors who were elected by the popular vote were replaced with trustees appointed by the central government.

6.3 Lack of Opposition

As Linz and Stepan argued in sultanistic regimes, there is no effective opposition. They also argue that regime transformation is impossible due to a lack of opposition (Linz and Stepan 1996).

Opposition's existence in Turkey is indeed far from unknown. Although there is opposition, the Sultanistic approach of the leader and his government constantly harass and oppress the opposition. Looking at a few examples, there are various police investigation reports prepared for the deputies of CHP. Several of them were imprisoned, such as Enis Berberoğlu and Eren Erdem who were imprisoned on the grounds of act of terrorism. HDP as well suffered from the oppressive measures of the government, as the party's co-chairs were imprisoned due to the alleged terrorist propaganda.

In addition to institutions and organizations, news agencies, social media, and press as well have been suppressed. The mainstream media and the press became controlled increasingly by the government and its cronies. Turkey's Journalists Union's (TGS), Freedom of the Press report of 2019-2020 shows that 85 journalists were in prison as of April 2020. Additionally, according to the report, 80.8% of the journalists argue that there is severe censorship in the media, whereas 78.7% are self-censoring¹⁶.

¹⁵Erdoğan regularly refers to RABIA's theme in his public speeches. He explains this theme with the slogan of "one nation," "one flag," "one motherland" and "one state" (Doğanay, Şanlı, Taştan, 2017)

¹⁶TGS Basın Özgürlüğü Raporu, May 2, 2020.
<https://tgs.org.tr/tgs-basin-ozgurlugu-raporu-2019-2020/>

Table 6.4 Trustee Appointed Municipalities

Municipality	Percentage of Votes
Adana Pozantı	43.43
Ağrı Diyadin	56.82
Batman Belediyesi	66.03
Batman Beşiri İki Köprü	51.45
Batman Gercüş	49.01
Diyarbakır Büyükşehir	62.93
Diyarbakır Bismil	71.43
Diyarbakır Hazro	52.61
Diyarbakır Kayapınar	66.35
Diyarbakır Kocaköy	61.67
Diyarbakır Kulp	49.97
Diyarbakır Silvan	75.69
Diyarbakır Sur	60.76
Diyarbakır Yenişehir	62.32
Erzurum Aşkale	62.87
Erzurum Karayazı	61.83
Erzurum Hınıs	54.14
Giresun Çamoluk	65.36
Hakkari Büyükşehir	59.97
Hakkari Yüksekova	66.18
İğdır Tuzluca	28.70
Konya Ilgın	54.13
Mardin Büyükşehir	56.24
Mardin Dargeçit	50.59
Mardin Derik	69.34
Mardin Mazıdağı	56.40
Mardin Nusaybin	77.42
Muş Bulanık	55.06
Siirt Eruh	64.76
Şanlıurfa Suruç	59.36
Şırnak Cizre	76.99
Şırnak İdil	73.84
Şırnak Silopi	73.16
Van Büyükşehir	53.83
Van Edremit	53.81
Van Erciş	49.71
Van İpekyolu	54.47
Van Özalp	75.04

Sources: <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/secim2019/>
<https://www.imarhaber.com/kayyum-atanan-belediyelerin-tam-listesi/>

Following 2017 AKP's leader President Erdoğan, consolidated his power to a great extent by changing Turkey's political regime to an unchecked and uncontrolled Presidential system to the detriment of the opposition, media, the press and civil society (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017).

6.4 Lack of Ideology

According to Linz and Stepan (1996) sultanistic regimes often lack a dominant macro ideology. There seems to be a guiding idea; however, it often suffers from inconsistencies (Linz and Stepan 1996). Such regimes are formed under the guidance of a specific micro ideology. However, Sultanistic leaders do not play by their guiding ideology rules throughout their time in office. In Sultanism, "...the leaders often make a point of extolling democracy in their country while redefining it..." (Chehabi and Linz 1998, 18).

Sultanistic leaders often brace up by the help of their victorious past and ideology often exalts the nation's ancient glories and draws on an "invented tradition" (Chehabi and Linz 1998, 14). Chehabi and Linz (1998) also add that "the purer a regime's sultanism, the more its ideology is likely to be mere window dressing" (Chehabi and Linz, 1998, 14). Additionally, Sultanistic leaders often crave to legitimize their regime ideologically. Chehabi and Linz (1998) exemplify such practices in the Iranian example, where the Shah published a book named The White Revolution, which had further been taught as a subject in Iranian high schools.

Ideological inconsistencies can easily be seen in the Turkish case under the presidency of Erdoğan. In the first years of the incumbency (unlike their predecessors, FP, RP) party members and the party elites did not feature their Islamic identity and, instead, they highlighted the importance of democracy. As a matter of fact, the AKP officials declared that they would be putting their religious affiliations into the background of governance¹⁷.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's character as a devout Muslim, and his affiliation with the pre-

¹⁷"Biz parti olarak, din üzerinden siyaset yapılmasını doğru bulmuyoruz [...] Biz AK Parti olarak 'muhafazakâr demokrasi' anlayışına önem atfediyoruz. Çünkü bu çabanın, siyasetin yenilenmesi ve güçlenmesi açısından ne anlam ifade ettiğini çok iyi biliyoruz." January 10, 2004. Hürriyet. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-din-uzerinden-siyasete-karsiyiz-38556005>

viously banned Islamic parties, helped him consolidate his Muslim voter base. After becoming the mayor of Istanbul in 1994, Erdoğan introduced himself to the crowds as imam of the city¹⁸ and he highlighted that imam in Islam is not only the person who leads the prayers; rather, in the Muslim societies, the imam has the authority over the society (Heper and Toktaş 2003)

Over eighteen years, AKP's Islamic identity continued to shape politics. The importance of conservatism in society grew ostensibly. However, the ideological standing of the party instead started to face inconsistencies. AKP officials, once bringing up the importance of religious freedom under democracy, began to define democracy with religious discourses. As Doğanay (2017) argues, especially during the electoral campaigns,¹⁹ Erdoğan often touched upon democracy's importance, but especially when it comes to Istanbul, he asserted the importance of Istanbul for Islamic civilization (Doğanay, Şanlı, and Taştan 2017). Doğanay, Şanlı, and Taştan (2017) go on to highlight the use of religious discourses throughout the electoral campaign. Additionally, AKP's governing ideology started to veer away from conservative democracy toward a non-democratic regime.

The epic history writing approach of Chehabi and Linz (1998), can also be observed in Turkey. As the power of Erdoğan and ideological inconsistencies increased, the efforts to redefine democracy intensified as well. The failed July 15, 2016, military putsch is identified as the Victory of Democracy (*Demokrasi Zaferi*) by AKP officials and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In the aftermath of the putsch, serious changes took place throughout the society. To name a few, July 15 was officially announced as a national holiday; the name of the Bosphorus bridge changed to "July 15 Martyrs Bridge" (*15 Temmuz Şehitler Köprüsü*); July 15, Victory of Democracy added to the curriculum of the civics courses in primary and high schools.

In terms of ideological inconsistency, Erdoğan started to receive various criticisms, as of 2020. Recently on July 2020, Ali Babacan, the leader of the newly formed DEVA party, openly criticized Recep Tayyip Erdoğan over his and his party's ideological inconsistency on opening of the Hagia Sophia mosque to worshipping²⁰.

¹⁸"Ben bu şehrin aynı zamanda imamıyım." May 28, 2018. BBC Türkçe. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-44061258>

¹⁹"Maşallah, barekallah, inşaallah," "Allahın izniyle, milletin dualarıyla," "Allah sizden razı olsun," "Kalplerin sahibi Allah'tır" (Doğanay, 2017).

²⁰"Yöneticilerin içerideki ve dışarıdaki yansımalarını, sonuçlarını hesap ederek bu kararı aldıklarını ümit ediyorum." July 11, 2020. Sputnik Türkiye. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/202007111042436880-babacandan-ayasofya-yorumu-sonuclarini-hesap-ederek-bu-karari-aldiklarini-umit-ediyorum/>

6.5 Low Degree of Mobilization

As mentioned previously, the political mobilization and organization of the opposition stay low due to the para-state groups that act as “personal instruments of the master” (Linz and Stepan 1996, 53). As Chehabi and Linz (1998) argue, sultanistic regimes’ mobilization occurs unevenly and sporadically (Chehabi and Linz 1998). In Turkey, there is indeed mobilization and organization of the opposition groups. However, as Chehabi and Linz (1998) argue, the level of organization of opposition groups is constantly challenged by the government because of the state’s constant suppression.

The AKP incumbency had emphasized the importance of the political mobilization often during its first years in office. However, the importance of AKP attributed to mobilization started to change over time. Organization and mobilization were eventually affected by the suppressive attitudes of the AKP. The first serious obstacle for the mobilization took place in the Gezi Park protests, 2013. The counteractions taken by the government wounded thousands of people and killed nine. Additionally, the group unofficially named *palahılar* took action during the protests and jeopardized the protests by attacking the protesters. However, the *palahılar* group does not entirely fit the para-state groups definition of Linz and Stepan (1996). The group was encouraged by the provocative discourses of Erdoğan. In the aftermath of July 15 putsch, the state initiated a witch-hunt to pull the opposition’s strings and prevent any kind of mobilization against the government.

In a nutshell, this chapter narrowed lenses to the emergent Sultanistic Neopatrimonial regime in Turkey. The chapter initially focused on the parameters in which non-democratic tendencies of Turkey can be observed. Such tendencies observed through personalization of power, institutional erosion, constitutional hypocrisy, and crony capitalism. Through these, similarities of the Turkish political regime with the Sultanistic Neopatrimonial system came to light.

Subsequently, the chapter provided a definition of Sultanistic Neopatrimonialism and focused on five defining attributes of the Sultanistic Neopatrimonial regime. Last but not least, the chapter focused on the similarities between the Turkish political regime and five parameters offered by Linz and Stepan (1996).

7. CONCLUSION

The year 2019 marked the 13th consecutive year of global democratic backsliding (Mounk 2019). Soon after World War II, a short wave of democratization took place around the world, and in the late 1940 and early 1950s, Turkey was listed among various countries moving towards democracy (Huntington 1993). In 1946, Turkey transformed from “CHP dominated state” to a democratizing multiparty system (Kalaycioglu 2005, 52). The first steps towards democratization were promising. However, such an attempt faltered by 1959 and ended with the 1960 military intervention. As Kalaycioglu (2005) argues, “... Turkish political system failed to cope with the challenges of democratization, and rapid mobilization [and] first attempt to multiparty democracy came to an end by means of a military coup” (Kalaycioglu 2005, 9). The re-establishment of democracy faced yet another obstacle on March 12, 1971, in the form of a military memorandum that eventually paved the way for the 1980 military intervention.

The 1982 Constitution, which was approved on November 7, 1982, referendum, created a strong presidency. Kalaycioglu (2005) puts it, “... [the president] is devoid of any political and legal responsibility for his or her actions, except for treason, yet is entrusted with the enormous authority to act in all matters political, legal, economic, and so on (art. 105)...” (Kalaycioglu 2005, 128). Although amended various times, the 1982 Constitution has been influencing Turkish politics since its enactment. The AKP came to power in 2002 with a strong emphasis on the importance of democracy, freedom of expression, and plurality, and the discourses of party officials were often targeting military tutelage as the backbone of the political problems of the country.

In the context of the evolution of non-democratic elements, Turkey under AKP’s incumbency went through radical changes over 18 years. Initial attempts and hopes towards liberal democracy faltered by means of the ever-growing power of incumbency. The power of incumbency changed gradually over 18 years through legitimately disguised non-democratic changes.

In this thesis, I have endeavored to show the chronology of elimination of the democratic

elements, and the autocratization process that took place during AKP's incumbency. Furthermore, in this research, the goal was to analyze Turkey's non-democratization pattern under AKP's incumbency.

I have derived the evidence for regime changes from the accounts and reports of organizations that monitor regularly global changes in the dynamics, such as Freedom House, The Bertelsmann Transition Index (BTI), Varieties of Democracy (v-dem), Transparency International, Reporters without Borders (RSF), Amnesty International, and the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). I have also employed speeches by the political elite found in the press in order to trace the changing approaches of political leaders towards democracy and governance.

7.1 General Summary of the Thesis

This study has focused on three milestones of Turkey's transformation towards a non-democratic. These milestones are the political conjuncture in which AKP emerged (1983-2007), the 2007 referendum, and the 2017 referendum. An observation pertaining to the period covered in this thesis is the growth of AKP's power in the aftermath of each referendum.

The first milestone (chapter 2), where I showed the dynamics of the unstable political atmosphere, and the establishment of AKP, focused on the period between 1983 and 2007. After providing a brief background, the chapter endeavored to show the steps taken towards liberal democratic regime as required by the EU accession process. I also summarized AKP's discourses on the importance of EU accession, pluralism, and freedom of expression. The significance of the 2007 referendum was the approval of the popular election of the presidency. Together with the 2007 referendum, Abdullah Gül became the last president of the semi-parliamentary regime in Turkey.

The second milestone (chapter 3) demonstrated the semi-presidential regime's evolution, which occurred between 2007 and 2017. Chapter 3 analyzed the major political and social incidents leading up to the 2017 referendum, the changing power dynamics, and their consequences. Within this period, there were one referenda (September 2010), three general elections (June 2011, June 2015, November 2015), one presidential election (August 2014), and three sociopolitical crises (2013 Gezi Park protests and corruption

scandal, 2016 failed coup attempt). By focusing on each incident, I accentuated the mechanisms AKP used to extend its time of incumbency.

The AKP often responded to the opposition's mobilization with disproportionate use of power and in a manner contrary to democratic principles. On the one hand, such disproportionate use of power included the use of police force. As the analysis of Gezi Park protests showed, there was extensive use of tear gas and pressurized water. On the other hand, disproportionate use of power also included systematic purges in state institutions and academia, dismantling the opposition by constant intervention into social media platforms and news channels. AKP came to power with persuasive discourses on the importance of democracy and plurality. However, as the chapter showed, within the period I referred to as "The Longest Decade", AKP's attitudes towards democracy, freedom of expression, and plurality changed radically. Thus, the detailed analysis of the incidents between 2007 and 2017 helped us see the increasing power of AKP and the responses of AKP to the opposition. I have observed that each incident contributed to an increase of incumbent power and decreased incumbency's accountability.

The third milestone (chapter 4), which I referred to as "Double Faceted Referendums," focused on 2017 and 2020. The chapter began by highlighting the role of referendums as a double agent between democracy and autocracy. In this chapter, I have provided a particular response to the question of how to categorize Turkey's political regime. Together with the 2017 referendum, the Turkish political regime officially changed to a presidential regime of a kind. This newly emerged regime is called the "Turkish type of Presidentialism." As a result of the proposed system's approval, AKP and especially Recep Tayyip Erdoğan accomplished his long-sought dream of the Presidential system. Following the presidential elections, Erdoğan became the first president of the newly formed Presidential system in Turkey. In the light of the budding autocratic elements, the approval of the referendum and the election of President Erdoğan in 2018, lead to concerns throughout the opposition.

A burgeoning literature emerged on the question of how to categorize the Turkish type of Presidential system. Based on the years 2017 and 2018, I have argued that the Turkish political regime started to resemble an Electoral Autocracy (Schedler, 2002). The main reason for providing such a diagnosis was based on the fact that AKP's political regime often practices autocracy behind the institutional façade of democracy. Yet elections were fair and competitive. However, as a stunning election phenomenon, AKP's authority was shaken in 2019, as a result of local elections. The 2019 local election is essential for us to see that political competition still mattered for the Turkish electorate. Unexpectedly, the opposition won the mayoralities in Istanbul, and Ankara and results revived hopes of

moves toward democratic elements.

The final chapter of the thesis (chapter 5), which I have referred to as “Excursus on Neopatrimonialism” examined the overarching discussion of how to categorize the newly created Presidential system “*Cumhurbaşkanlığı Hükümet Sistemi*.” In this chapter, I have endeavored to take a few steps back and see the macro view of the changes in the areas of personalization of the power, institutional erosion, engagement with crony capitalism, and the constitutional hypocrisy during AKP’s governance. The analysis of the changes in the areas mentioned above helped us form the connection between the Neo-patrimonial Sultanistic regime and Turkey’s political regime. Subsequently, the chapter provided the definition of Sultanistic regimes and listed five parameters that serve to distinguish such regimes from autocratic regime classifications. Further, I construed that five defining attributes of Sultanism overlapped with the Turkish political regime’s evolution.

7.2 Concluding Remarks

There is a plethora of studies observing the recent situation of the Turkish political regime. Such studies categorize Turkey under various hybrid regime types such as Electoral Authoritarianism, Competitive Authoritarianism, One-Man Rule, and so on.

Looking at the multiparty system established in the Republican Era; one can observe that there have always been non-democratic elements that were disrupting the democratic process. These elements often took place, particularly by means of military interventions. Military interventions eventually brought down the democratic process. The major indelible mark against the democratization process was the 1980 coup and the 1982 Constitution enacted in the aftermath of the coup. The most significant aspect of the 1982 Constitution was the formation of the strong presidential institution. The 1982 Constitution, instead of putting an end to democracy’s problems, eventually caused the re-emergence of political instabilities. Such political instabilities included re-emergence of unsuccessful coalition governments and ideological disputes. In 2002, the newly established AKP won parliamentary majority as a result of strong promises made to end the political turmoil that the Turkish democracy was suffering for a long time. This study focused on AKP’s incumbency under three crossroads. These crossroads included, first and foremost, the political environment in which AKP was established, it came to power

and it maintained success under the semi-parliamentary regime. The second milestone focused on the period between 2007 and 2017, where the *de facto* Presidential system was exercised. The final milestone observed the period between 2017 and 2020, where the *de facto* Presidential system officially became a *de jure* presidential system. By the end of the last milestone, I argued that the Presidential system in Turkey has similar features with the Neo-patrimonial Sultanistic regime. At this point, the sources in which Weber (1978), Linz and Stepan (1996), Chehabi and Linz (1998) analyze the Sultanistic regimes are indeed essential to understanding the last and major point that this thesis addressed. Such resources have been the backbone of the categorization of the Neo-patrimonial and Sultanistic regimes around the globe. However, when it comes to the categorization of the Turkish regime, Neo-patrimonial Sultanistic regime categorization remains limited. By referring to such resources, I have endeavored to adjust the Turkish political regime to the Neo-patrimonial Sultanism concept.

It has been 75 years since the transition to a multiparty system. Since then, Turkey's efforts toward liberal democracy and democratic consolidation have faltered. The detailed analysis conducted throughout the thesis helps us see the logic behind the reports addressing Turkey as a "moderate autocracy" and a "not-free" country. As mentioned throughout the thesis, when AKP came to power, Turkey was still a country with a certain degree of democracy. Over the course of years, AKP and Erdoğan used the strong presidency created by the 1982 Constitution as a leverage to increase their grip on power. Turkey's exercise of *de facto* presidentialism and Erdoğan's unaccountable *de facto* powers were legitimized during the 2017 referendum. Together with the newly created regime, the boundaries between state and incumbency became blurry, and institutions became more subservient to the leader.

Let us recall what Linz and Stepan argued about the Sultanistic regimes' ideology: "...Sultanistic ruler has no elaborate and guiding ideology. There may be highly personalistic statements with pretensions of being an ideology [however, this ideology] is subject to extreme manipulation" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 53). It can be understood that ideology in these regimes changes according to the political conjuncture. This situation can indeed be observed over the 18 years of AKP governance. Erdoğan, at every turn, tried to push the limits of his position and tried to consolidate his power. While doing so, he often legitimized himself with a legal cloak at the turn of every political crisis. Up until 2020, AKP and Erdoğan eliminated every obstacle against his power by a strong emphasis on interchangeable democratic, Islamic, egalitarian, and nationalistic discourses.

The process explained throughout the thesis brings us to the question: how to make sense out of this system? Under the light of the detailed analysis provided in the previ-

ous chapters, I have argued that reason seems to lie in Neo-patrimonial Sultanism. Just like Linz and Stepan argued, it is indeed difficult to define these regimes under a particular typology (Linz and Stepan 1996). As I have previously engaged, in chapter 5, the political system in Turkey evolved to a system where institutions became subservient to the incumbency, the economy became the victim of the cronyism, and the constitution became the legal cloak of the arbitrary rule of leaders.

Looking at the political regime's current condition, one can clearly see that Turkey does not stand anywhere close to democracy, and yet there are multiple and competitive elections. In this sense, 2019 municipal elections functioned as general elections. In the light of the crackdown on media and freedom of expression, purges in the state institutions, and staved enemies; the outcome was point-blank surprising. However, it would be too easy to jump into the argument that 2019 local elections unfolded the long-missing pieces of democracy in Turkey. The cancellation of the Metropolitan Municipality Elections in Istanbul by the Supreme Election Council marked the initial steps to demonize the opposition's consolidation after the local elections. Recalling the aftermath of the local elections, the Ministry of Interior (Süleyman Soylu) has appointed trustees to HDP municipalities. Another recent event also confirms that efforts to thwart opposition were not limited to HDP municipalities. The CHP municipalities emerged as the new target of AKP. At the time of writing this study, Corona Virus Pandemic (COVID-19) erupted. As the political leaders around the globe were struggling their way through easing down the spread of the virus, Turkey too, introduced restrictions and precautions. On the local level, mayors of Istanbul and Ankara launched aid campaigns for the citizens who are in need. However, fundraising at the local level further associated with the act of terrorism by President Erdoğan and Süleyman Soylu. A tentative conclusion that this thesis makes is that the future of Neo-patrimonial Sultanistic regime appears to depend on a well-organized opposition that will propose solutions to the attempts to silence and intimidate politicians of opposing parties.

Although recent 2019 municipal elections resuscitated anticipation for democracy, such development does not change the elements of the Neo-patrimonial Sultanistic regime. Recently, Turkey is going through a period where the incumbency is bypassing official and civilian institutions, and the opposition is being harnessed. As we have seen during the 2019 local elections, the electoral system appears to be the sole remaining element of democracy. As I have elaborated in chapter 5, institutions in Sultanistic regimes are often subservient to the ruling party. Likewise, in Turkey, the weakness of institutions and constant manipulation on the democratic credentials eventually make consolidation of opposition very difficult. Although there are competitive elections, it is indeed uncertain

whether the opposition can have the power or possibility to challenge Erdoğan's power. More precisely, it is uncertain whether Erdoğan will maintain his efforts to pacify or keep the opposition divided. Recent developments in the political system suggest that there is no intention to liberalize the regime and that Erdoğan is willing to dominate the political scene more than ever.

While I feel uncomfortable to finalize this thesis with a pessimistic remark on the future of democracy in Turkey, I would like to highlight that there is no mechanism to overhaul the power that the executive branch and within it the Presidency possess. The President is an unaccountable political figure who possesses the right to intervene all key nominations of the state institutions. The channels of opposition parties in Turkey for the arbitration in power are clogged. Yet the chances for the liberalization of the regime undoubtedly depend on the strength of the opposition parties in the country and their ability to present a serious challenge to the incumbent.

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