

**Against All Odds:
Elite Strategies of Survival And Autocratic Reversal And Resilience in Turkey**

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What explains the autocratic reversal and resilience in hybrid regimes? Our hypotheses are generated from an in-depth case analysis of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's rule in Turkey. The Turkish case demonstrates that autocratic reversal happens as a result of elite strategies to stay in power. Ruling elites in hybrid regimes endure by finding an equilibrium between the strategies of centralization, legitimation and repression. During 2002-2013, Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) were able to entrench their power by eliminating the veto players within the state, by building a well-organized apparatus for targeted repression, and by strategically co-opting large segments of the electorate to the regime. Since 2013, they changed their strategies of survival in response to emerging economic and security problems and the ensuing defections by some supporters, which rendered the original equilibrium unsustainable. The AKP elites intensified repression, further centralized power, and relied heavily on an ideological and polarizing rhetoric to delegitimize and splinter the opposition. Our in-depth analysis of elite strategies and their adaptability to changing exogenous economic and geostrategic conditions in the Turkish context can inform us about the resilience and vulnerability of hybrid regimes in general and where on the regime spectrum they eventually move.

Key words: *Elite strategies; autocratic reversal; autocratic resilience; hybrid regimes; Turkey; AKP*

On that dramatic night of July 15th 2016, as tanks blocked the traffic on the two bridges joining the Bosphorus and military jets zoomed through the sky over Istanbul and Ankara, millions of awestruck Turks watched the live coverage of the coup attempt, wondering if the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's rule was coming to an end. Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) have been in power since 2002 and dominated the Turkish political system, winning five general and three local elections. Within a matter of hours that night, it became clear that the coup attempt would be defeated and that the ruling elites would survive. This was certainly not the first threat against the regime, albeit being arguably the most serious one. In fact, starting with the Gezi movement in 2013, the AKP governments and Erdogan's leadership faced many challenges in a series of street protests, corruption probes, and economic downturn. Yet, despite each blow, the incumbents continued to win elections and entrench their executive power further.

What explains the resilience of Erdogan's AKP and the competitive authoritarian regime that emerged in Turkey since the mid 2000s? Most of the literature on authoritarian resilience focuses on various structural variables, such as economic growth, wealth distribution, rent-seeking, state capacity, opposition strength, domestic and external threats, historical legacies, and foreign linkages.¹ We believe that these factors, by themselves, cannot adequately explain how

¹ Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2002): 51-65, at 55-57; Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, "Postcommunist Ambiguities," *Journal of Democracy* 20(2009): 93-107, at 105-107; Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes" *World*

Erdogan's rule has solidified over the past fifteen years. Turkey has always been a fragile democracy, tested by spurts of military coups, ethnic violence and various human rights violations. Yet, when the AKP came to power in 2002, many believed that Turkey was a functioning electoral democracy.² By mid 2000s, economic growth was in full gear, ethnic tensions were subdued, the middle class had expanded and civil society had become relatively robust. The historically strong influence of the military on civilian politics was also curbed and the Turkish army seemed to be contained in the barracks. Furthermore, Turkey was aligned with the West via various international agreements, and the government was undertaking political and economic reforms to become a member of the European Union. By all accounts, most of the structural and external conditions necessary for the deepening of democracy were in place. Yet, starting in 2007 the ruling elites made an authoritarian turn and, especially by 2013, Turkey

Politics 62(2010): 43-86, at 82-85; Jay Ulfelder and Michael Lustik, "Modelling Transitions to and from Democracy." *Democratization* 14(2007): 351-387, at 355; Michael Lewin Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53(2001): 325-361, at 328; Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 36(2004): 139-157, at 140-141; Ellen Lust, "Competitive Clientelism in the Middle East," *Journal of Democracy* 20(2009): 122-135, at 124-125; Andrew J. Nathan, "Authoritarian Resilience" *Journal of Democracy* 14(2003): 6-17, at 6; Lise Rakner and Nicolas van de Walle, "Opposition Weakness in Africa," *Journal of Democracy* 20(2009): 108-121, at 120-121; Joseph Wright and Abel Escriba-Folch, "Authoritarian Institutions and Regime Survival: Transitions to Democracy and Subsequent Autocracy" *British Journal of Political Science* 42 (2012): 283-309, at 308-309.

² Ahmet Insel, "The AKP and Normalizing Democracy in Turkey," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102 (2003): 293-308, at 294; Ergun Ozbudun, "From Political Islam to Conservative Democracy: The Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey," *South European Society and Politics* 11 (2006): 543-557, at 556; Bora Kanra, "Democracy, Islam and Dialogue: The Case of Turkey" *Government and Opposition* 40 (2005): 515-539, at 530-532.

represented all the characteristics of a competitive authoritarian regime.³ Electoral institutions allowed for contestation for power, yet incumbents regularly violated the political rights and civil liberties of opposition groups, abused state resources, and manipulated electoral results.⁴ How can we explain this reversal and resilience of authoritarianism in Turkey? In this paper, we primarily focus on the strategic calculations and tactics of ruling elites in maintaining political control. The role of agency in democratic backsliding and authoritarian resilience is increasingly emphasized in the literature, particularly by those who focus on institutional design.⁵ For instance, some scholars argue that elections serve as a mechanism to co-opt the elites or other groups in society.⁶ Others focus on how legislatures and parties facilitate the survival of

³ Levitsky and Way, “Competitive Authoritarianism” (see note 1 above).

⁴ Ekim Arbatli, “Turkey’s New Path: The Rise of Electoral Authoritarianism,” *Center for Policy and Research on Turkey* 3 (2014): 76-92, at 77-79; Ziya Onis, “Monopolizing the Centre: The AKP and the Uncertain Path of Turkish Democracy,” *The International Spectator* 50 (2015): 22-41, at 40-41; Ergun Ozbudun, “Turkey’s Judiciary and the Drift Toward Competitive Authoritarianism,” *The International Spectator* 50 (2015): 42-55, at 44. Henri Barkey, “Turkish Democracy: Two Steps Forward, Two Steps Backward,” *Harvard International Review* 35 (2014): 75-81, at 76; Caroline Lancaster, “The Iron Law of Erdogan: The Decay from Intra-Party Democracy to Personalistic Rule,” *Third World Quarterly* 35 (2014): 1672-1690, at 1689-1690; Cem Toker, “Elections in Turkey: Fair or Fraud-Ridden?” *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 12 (2014): 115-123, at 116; Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, “Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey,” *Third World Quarterly* 37 (2016): 1581-1606, at 1603-1605.

⁵ Jennifer Gandhi, “Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization by Jason Brownlee,” *Perspectives on Politics* 6 (2008): 398-399, at 399; Jennifer Gandhi and Ellen Lust-Okar, “Elections under Authoritarianism,” *Annual Review of Political Science* (2009): 403-422, at 421.

⁶ Charles Boix and Milan Svobik, “The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions and Power-Sharing in Dictatorships,” *Journal of Politics* 75 (2008): 300-316, at 301; Gandhi, “Authoritarianism” (see note 5 above), at 399.

autocrats by incorporating potential opposition forces⁷ and providing a safety valve for regulating social discontent against their rule.⁸

Instead of specific institutional choices, we focus on three broad elite strategies of centralization, legitimation and repression, as well as their dynamic interplay with each other to explain autocratic reversal and resilience. We believe that the analysis of elite strategies is particularly fruitful, since it is applicable across different regime types⁹, given that political survival is the ultimate aim for any incumbent elite. For every hybrid regime, we expect the optimal combination of survival strategies to be different. We contend that the resulting equilibrium of survival depends on exogenous factors that make certain strategies more available than others at that particular time. These exogenous factors can include global economic conditions such as economic crises and spikes in commodity prices, and/or geopolitical challenges such as regional conflicts, wars, and immigration waves. For example, a government's response to a global economic crisis or a geostrategic conflict can shake people's

⁷ Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats," *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (2007): 1279-1301, at 1300-1301; Joseph Wright, "Do Authoritarian Institutions Constrain? How Legislatures Affect Economic Growth and Investment," *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (2008): 322-343, at 326.

⁸ Barbara Geddes, "Stages of Development in Authoritarian Regimes," in *World Order after Leninism*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu, Marc M. Howard and Rudra Sil (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 149-170, at 169; Jason Brownlee, "Portents of Pluralism: How Hybrid Regimes Affect Democratic Transitions," *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (2009): 515-532, at 529-531; Joseph Wright and Abel Escriba-Folch, "Authoritarian Institutions and Regime Survival: Transitions to Democracy and Subsequent Autocracy," *British Journal of Political Science* 42 (2011): 283-309, at 288.

⁹ Johannes Gerschewski, "The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression, and Co-optation in Autocratic Regimes," *Democratization* 20 (2013): 13-38, at 18.

confidence in the ruling elite and annul the social contract that makes political centralization acceptable. Such exogenous factors can also weaken the resources available to the ruling elites and make co-optation more difficult.

In our analysis, we also emphasize the dynamic interplay and reciprocal reinforcement among these three elite strategies. We expect changes in one strategy to trigger a change in the others. For instance, an increase in centralization may lead to a perception of power abuse, alienate some supporters, causing the ruling elites to react by intensifying repression and using a more exclusionary rhetoric. However, using widespread repression weakens legitimacy further, as groups that were only conditionally tied to the regime see that it can no longer guarantee their physical security. When the threat of physical harm trumps expected economic benefits, those groups can no longer accept the centralization project. We argue that the dynamic interaction of elite strategies with each other, as well as with exogenous factors, demonstrate that autocratic reversal in hybrid regimes takes place as a result of defensive and reactive elite behavior, as opposed to being a goal in and of itself.

The Turkish case proves to be particularly interesting, since most of the structural explanations cited in the literature fail to account for its regime trajectory in the past decade. First, the recent autocratic reversal in Turkey contradicts the thesis that wealthy democracies are more likely to survive.¹⁰ Despite an economic downturn in recent years, Turkish economy has been growing consistently (with a GDP per capita of \$ 14,071 in 2016) and has cultivated a large

¹⁰ Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, "Modernization: Theories and Facts," *World Politics* 49 (1997): 155-183, at 156.

middle class over time. Second, the country has no sizeable natural resources as a potential barrier to the democratic progression.¹¹ Furthermore, despite major urban protests, a massive ongoing purge, and intermittent terrorist attacks in recent years, Turkey still enjoys high state capacity, which defies the “state collapse” thesis.¹² Finally, Turkey has been closely-linked to the West with trade partnerships, diplomatic relations and most importantly, its EU candidacy. Hence, international linkage and leverage theories¹³ also seem to fall short of explaining the authoritarian turn. For all of these reasons, Turkey stands as an unlikely case of autocratic reversal and presents an important puzzle.

We believe that the Turkish case is instrumental in generating hypotheses on authoritarian resiliency at a time when the world is witnessing a resurgence of authoritarianism.¹⁴ In the democratization literature as well as popular media, there is increasing interest in understanding the ways authoritarianism endures in seemingly democratic states. We argue that in an unlikely place like Turkey, authoritarianism endures because of elite strategies of survival. The recent crises in Turkey make this case especially informative because it allows us to observe the changes in elite strategies over time in response to direct challenges to their rule. Our in-depth study provides a much-needed, dynamic explanation of how elites in hybrid regimes endure in the face of changing external conditions by finding an equilibrium between the

¹¹ Ross, “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” (see note 1 above).

¹² Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), at 5-6.

¹³ Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “International Linkage and Democratization,” *Journal of Democracy* 15 (2005): 20-34, at 23.

¹⁴ Marc F. Plattner, “Is Democracy in Decline?” *Journal of Democracy* 26 (2015): 5-10, at 5.

strategies of centralization, legitimation and repression.

In the next section, we discuss in detail each of the strategies used by the AKP elites as they built their control over the Turkish political system and endured many regime-threatening challenges in recent years. Through a detailed examination of evidence from expert analyses, independent agency reports, and newspaper articles, we outline the interplay of these strategies in two time periods (see Table 1). From 2002- 2013, we argue that the AKP elites first built broad-based legitimacy by realizing large-scale economic and political reforms, easing tensions with the Kurdish population, and building friendly relationships with neighboring countries. By 2007, the centralization project started as the regime systematically weakened the military, secular judiciary and intra-party opposition and ensured the election of a partisan president to minimize the challenges to AKP's legislative hegemony. This period also witnessed low but targeted repression against the media, societal opposition forces, and especially against the military elites. The electoral successes of AKP in 2007 and 2011 were achieved by this balancing act between increased centralization, transactional legitimation, and selective repression.

[Table 1 here]

Since 2013, ruling elites changed their strategies of survival in response to emerging economic and security problems which rendered the old equilibrium unsustainable. Since transactional legitimation could no longer be maintained against a backdrop of global economic slowdown and geopolitical instability, the new mix of strategies relied more heavily on

increasing centralization and repression. The main centralization effort focused on changing the constitutional system from parliamentarism to super-presidentialism. It was also marked by a more intensive and widespread use of repression against all wings of opposition. Finally, during this period, elites used a more polarizing rhetoric towards opponents and resorted to high doses of nationalist and Islamic discourse to strengthen their ideological base. We argue that this new equilibrium of high centralization, ideological legitimation and widespread repression has allowed the ruling elites to withstand serious challenges, while at the same weakening the competitive and democratic elements of the regime significantly.

Building of Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey (2002-2013)

Strategy 1: Transactional, Broad Legitimation

Contrary to the classical authoritarian playbook, elites in hybrid regimes realize that repression is a costly and risky option to sustain the regime in the long run.¹⁵ Securing the loyalty of elites and masses is preferable to coercion, and it also creates the illusion of political liberalization. Legitimation is a process of achieving “active consent, compliance with the rules, passive obedience, or mere toleration within the population.”¹⁶ It does not only arise from a normative commitment to the regime; it can also include situations where the citizens are accepting of

¹⁵ Eva Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring,” *Comparative Politics* 44 (2012): 127-149, at 129.

¹⁶ Gerschewski, “The Three Pillars of Stability” (see note 9 above).

authority even when they do not believe in the inherent principles of the regime. As such, we distinguish between two types of legitimacy. Ideological legitimacy refers to acceptance based on a belief in the charismatic leader, ideology, traditional, religious or nationalistic claims of the regime. This type of legitimacy is more inherent (or automatic), less conditional, and less questioned by the electorate.

Transactional legitimacy, on the other hand, refers to the acceptance of the regime for the specific, tangible improvements it provides for the nation as well as individuals. This performance-based legitimacy can be derived from an amelioration in the overall national conditions. If a regime is perceived to be improving the socioeconomic conditions, providing a certain level of political stability, and/or ensuring internal order and security for everyone, its transactional legitimacy increases. Even people who do not support the ideology of the regime can believe in its legitimacy if they perceive overall conditions to be improving.

Another method for achieving transactional legitimacy is to provide specific benefits to key groups and individuals in society. The rulers can co-opt potential opposition groups and elites and tie them to the regime by offering them specific public services, kickbacks, rents, or political office. Patronage and clientelism can be powerful tools in persuading actors to refrain from obstructing the regime. However, it should be noted that these tools are not sufficient to automatically achieve or sustain transactional legitimacy. While it is possible to co-opt some social groups to the regime by the distribution of material benefits, other groups will prioritize non-material improvements such as domestic stability, improved investment climate, and the provision of the rule of law. Hence, transactional legitimacy is more tenuous and precarious than

ideological legitimacy because acceptance is conditional on the sustained performance by the incumbents on multiple fronts. In essence, transactional legitimacy indicates the existence of a social contract, a tacit agreement between the rulers and the people for political acquiescence in exchange for government performance. Thus, it encompasses a much more rational and utilitarian type of political support.

The legitimation of the regime is the most fragile and difficult elite strategy, since it heavily relies on exogenous factors such as a favorable global economic environment and/or stable regional geopolitics. For instance, patronage networks depend on the ability to collect and distribute rents to large segments of the society. This hinges, generally, on the parameters of the global economy such as the availability of foreign markets, the abundance of foreign investment, and the absence of big commodity price shocks. Similarly, foreign relations and the international standing of a country can have a considerable effect on the regime's legitimacy, since the leader is expected to successfully mitigate the impact of external shocks like war, diplomatic crisis, or large immigration waves.

During their first term in office between 2002-2007, the AKP elites strategically aimed at gaining the support of large swaths of the population and building a coalition of constituents much broader than their core ideological base. According to some, the motive for AKP, a conservative political party with clear Islamic orientation, was basic survival.¹⁷ Its predecessor, the Welfare Party, was shut down by the Constitutional Court in 1998 for anti-secular activities

¹⁷ Hakki Tas, "Turkey - from Tutelary to Delegative Democracy," *Third World Quarterly* 36(2015): 776-791, at 780.

and historically Turkish military intervened in civilian politics in the name of safeguarding the secular principles of the Republic.¹⁸

It is plausible to argue that AKP came to power already with a certain level of legitimacy, as 34% of the voters in 2002 believed in their promise of a transformative agenda. In the beginning of the 2000s, Turkish military's successive interventions and its tacit alliance with the secularist parties for decades had disenchanted the bulk of the electorate from political establishment.¹⁹ The military era violations of civil liberties and political rights left very little voice for different religious and ethnic groups, and increased their resentment towards the regime.²⁰ A series of governments failed to resolve the chronic security problem in the southeastern Turkey in the 1990s caused by the PKK-led separatist Kurdish movement. This incapacity culminated in the military's intervention into civilian politics by a 'post-modern coup' in 1997.²¹ Moreover, consecutive coalition governments fell into gridlock and failed to pass the necessary reforms to provide economic stability and growth. Elites also lost credibility because of numerous corruption scandals. By 2001, the financial sector had collapsed and Turkey found herself in a drastic economic recession. All these factors generated a popular demand for a new

¹⁸ Metin Heper, "Civil Military Relations in Turkey: Toward a Liberal Model?" *Turkish Studies* 12 (2011): 241-252, at 243-244.

¹⁹ Barkey, "Turkish Democracy" (see note 4 above).

²⁰ Ergun Ozbudun, "Turkey: How Far from Consolidation?" *Journal of Democracy* 7 (1996): 123-138, at 125; Metin Heper and Aylin Guney, "Transformation of the Turkish Military and the Path to Democracy," *Armed Forces and Society* 43 (2007): 357-388, at 358.

²¹ Heper, "Civil Military Relations in Turkey" (see note 18 above).

regime and a stable ruling party led by a strong charismatic leader.²²

This demand for a new type of leader and party also coincided with a turnaround in the global economy by 2002. Turkey benefited from a global environment of high liquidity and managed to attract unprecedented levels of FDI during AKP's first years.²³ These positive exogenous conditions, together with the neoliberal reforms that AKP pursued initially, translated into high levels of growth and increased living standards for the middle and lower classes, which largely contributed to the soaring popularity of Erdogan's AKP (see Table 2). Ensuing macroeconomic stability marked by low inflation, low budget deficits, and stable exchange rates created a favorable investment environment for the growth of businesses, which over time expanded AKP's core support to middle classes and large segments of this new economic elite.

[Table 2 here]

In addition to its commitment to neoliberal policies and successful economic management, AKP's emphasis on 'service to the people' and populist reforms in health care, education, and cheap housing helped significantly in building patronage ties with different constituents. For example, a major housing project led by TOKI, the housing agency under the direct supervision of Erdogan, has built more than 500,000 apartments for low-income families

²² Tas, "Turkey - from Tutelary to Delegative Democracy" (see note 17 above).

²³ Ziya Onis and Mustafa Kutlay, "Rising Powers in a Changing Global Order: The Political Economy of Turkey in the Age of BRICs," *Third World Quarterly* 34 (2013): 1409-1426, at 1411-1412.

who constitute a large part of Erdogan's electoral constituency.²⁴ The TOKI projects are empirically shown to be a strong predictor of the party's durability and success in the last three mayoral elections.²⁵ AKP-governed municipalities also reached out to the urban poor by distributing goods including coal, food, clothing, as well as providing direct income assistance.²⁶

Although clientelism is a historical feature of Turkish politics partly due to weak party institutionalization,²⁷ clientelistic policies have reached unprecedented levels under the AKP rule. The Democratic Accountability and Citizen-Politician Linkages dataset²⁸ ranks the AKP as the most clientelistic party among a global sample of 506 parties. A recent paper using the list experiment technique to study 2011 elections finds that the percentage of voters approached for vote buying by AKP may be as high as 35% of the population.²⁹

AKP has also built strong patronage ties through its investment projects. Erdogan

²⁴ John L. Esposito and Emad Shahin, *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁵ Melissa Marschall, Abdullah Aydoğan, Alper Bulut, "Does Housing Create Votes? Explaining the Electoral Success of the AKP in Turkey," *Electoral Studies* 42 (2016): 201-212, at 210-212.

²⁶ Aziz Celik, "Muhafazakar Sosyal Politika Yönelimi: Hak Yerine Yardım Yükümlülük Yerine Hayırseverlik," *İstanbul Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi* 42 (2010): 63-82, at 65-66.

²⁷ Sabri Sayari, "Non-electoral Sources of Party System Change in Turkey," in *Essays in Honor of Ergun Özbudun*, eds. Yazıcı, Serap and Gözler, Kemal and Keyman, Fuat (Ankara: Yetkin, 2008), 399-418, at 340; Alper Bulut, "Measuring Political Agenda Setting and Representation in Turkey: Introducing a New Approach and Data Set," *Party Politics* (2016). Available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1354068815625232> (accessed 25 March 2017).

²⁸ Herbert Kitschelt, "Dataset of the Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project (DALP)," (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2013) available at <https://web.duke.edu/democracy/index.html> (accessed 25 March 2017).

²⁹ Ali Çarkoğlu, S. Erdem Aytaç, "Who gets targeted for vote-buying? Evidence from an augmented list experiment in Turkey," *European Political Science Review* 7(2015): 547-566, at 564-565.

personally sought to control every major economic activity in the country, including the procurement bids, privatization of public commodities, and public land sales through the party's micro-management networks, both at the local and central government levels. Municipalities played a key role in distributing construction permits and contracts to many businesses that became loyal supporters of AKP over time.³⁰ The much-publicized 'mega projects'³¹ of the government also provided an effective avenue for building patronage networks. These ostentatious projects also served to fulfill Erdogan's promises of a 'new and powerful Turkey' reminiscent of the golden days of the Ottoman imperial era.

On the political front, AKP was also broadly applauded for its initial reforms. The earlier AKP governments, in no uncertain terms, expressed their commitment to moving Turkey closer to an EU membership and undertook major changes in 2004 and then again in 2010 to liberalize the country's laws in line with the EU's 'Copenhagen Criteria'. The most prominent of these was the radical reordering of civil-military relations by the removal of military tutelage on elected civilian governments.³² The reform package stipulated by the EU accession criteria included abolishing military courts, the removal of the preponderant military composition of National Security Council (NSC), increasing civilian control over High Military Council, and full

³⁰ Sebnem Gumuscu, "The Emerging Predominant Party System in Turkey," *Government and Opposition* 48(2013): 223-244, at 230-232.

³¹ Invest In Turkey, "Turkey's 'Mega Projects' propel the country towards 2023 targets," News From Turkey, 18 August 2015, <http://www.invest.gov.tr/en-US/infocenter/news/Pages/180815-turkey-mega-projects-2023-vision.aspx> (accessed 26 March, 2017).

³² Metin Heper and Aylin Guney, "Transformation of the Turkish Military" (see note 20 above).

parliamentary oversight on the military budgets.³³

In addition to a civilianization of politics, the EU harmonization laws also brought much-applauded protection of minority rights, especially a recognition of Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights at the time. Furthermore, the AKP under Erdogan initiated a peace process in order to bring an end to the decades-long bloody conflict between the Turkish military and the Kurdish insurgents. This Turkish-Kurdish reconciliation as well as AKP government's foreign policy initiative of 'zero problems' with neighbors brought a significant level of security and order that many Turks appreciated. Onis rightly calls this period a 'golden age' for the AKP government as it has created an unlikely coalition of supporters among conservatives and liberals.³⁴

It is important to note here the strategic calculations of Erdogan and AKP elites to downplay their Islamic conservative ambitions during their first years in office. They often avoided open conflict on religious issues and backed away from controversial measures, fearing that it would provoke a reaction from the military. For instance, as Jenkins argues, "in 2004 he shelved a package of educational reforms designed to enhance the status of Islamic schools in the face of opposition from the ostentatiously secularist Turkish military."³⁵ According to Gumuscu, the party initially spent a lot of effort to convince the center-right voters that it was not an

³³ Ilter Turan, "Unstable Stability: Turkish Politics at the Crossroads?" *International Affairs* 83 (2007): 319-338, at 321.

³⁴ Ziya Onis, "Turkey's Two Elections: The AKP Comes Back," *Journal of Democracy* 27(2016): 141-154, at 145.

³⁵ Gareth Jenkins, "The Politics of Personality: Erdogan's Irascible Authoritarianism," *Turkey Analyst* 2 (2009), at 2.

Islamist party and that it would govern pragmatically from the center.³⁶

Yet, Erdogan was also able to expand his coalition of support by effectively identifying himself with the ‘victimized silent majority’ and appealing to conservative values. As Onis notes, “significant elements of the population from the rising Anatolian hinterland saw the AKP as their primary vehicle for social and economic mobility and for overcoming their underdog status in a society previously dominated by the secular economic and political elites.”³⁷ Additionally, the successful recruitment of the local elite at the regional level, coupled with AKP’s organizational cohesiveness, helped to cement these opinions and gain non-core voters into the constituency.³⁸

Strategy 2: Increased Centralization

Having built a broad coalition of supporters, AKP increased its vote share from 34% to 47% in the 2007 parliamentary elections. 2007 is also the year many scholars point out to a turn to authoritarianism in Turkey with clear signs of centralization of power. This strategy refers to a process by ruling elites to weaken or eliminate alternative sources of power in the state, also known as veto players. Veto players are defined by Tsebelis as “individual or collective actors whose agreement is necessary for a change of the status quo.”³⁹ In the process of moving from

³⁶ Gumuscu, “The Emerging Predominant Party System in Turkey” (see note 30 above).

³⁷ Onis, “Monopolizing the Centre,” 35 (see note 4 above).

³⁸ Feryaz Ocakli, “Notable Networks Elite Recruitment, Organizational Cohesiveness, and Islamist Electoral Success in Turkey,” *Politics and Society* 43 (2015): 385-413, at 412-413.

³⁹ George Tsebelis, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), at 19.

low to high levels of centralization, executive constraints are weakened, legislative and judicial branches of the government become subservient to the executive, oppositional parties are significantly debilitated, and intra-party democracy is undermined.

There are many studies in the regime literature that emphasize the importance of centralization of power. For instance, Haggard and Kaufman argue that authoritarian regimes best suited for managing crises are those in which power is centralized.⁴⁰ Others contend that consolidation of authority is easier where the design of political institutions bolsters the executive and where longer terms in office give leaders increasing control over media, elections, public spaces, etc.⁴¹ There are also a number of scholars who demonstrate that regimes where power is concentrated under a single dominant party prove to be more resilient than other types of authoritarian regimes.⁴²

We argue that the increasing centralization of power in Turkey starting from 2007 could partly be explained as a result of the success of the first strategy of legitimacy building. In other words, having built a broad base of support and won a significant electoral victory with a majority command of the legislature, the AKP government and Erdogan felt empowered to dominate the political system and rule the country unconstrained in line with their ideological

⁴⁰ Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), at 28-29.

⁴¹ Bunce and Wolchik, "Postcommunist Ambiguities" (see note 1 above).

⁴² Axel Hadenius and Jan Teorell, "Pathways from Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 18(2007): 143-157, at 155-156; Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), at 8; Levitsky and Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism" (see note 1 above).

vision. This view assumes that the initial liberalization policies were tactical, a means to an end of amassing more power. While it is hard to gauge the exact intent of the leaders, some of their earlier statements on democracy can be illuminating. For example, Cornell explains that as a young, firebrand Islamist, Erdogan has showed scathing disdain for Turkey's secular order and remarked that 'sovereignty belongs unconditionally to Allah, not the people' and that 'democracy is like a streetcar, one gets on it to go wherever he needs to and then gets off.'⁴³

If one believes in the political evolution of leaders and assumes that initial liberalizing reforms were carried out with democratic intent, then it is possible to interpret the increased centralization strategy as merely a defensive reaction to the attempts by the last bastions of secular Kemalist regime (the military, the judiciary, and the presidency) to reign in on AKP's electoral dominance in a series of ways during this period. For example, in April 2007 the army had issued an electronic memorandum in a veiled threat to AKP, pledging to be an absolute defender of secularism. In March 2008, a state prosecutor applied to the Constitutional Court to ban the AKP for attempting to undermine secularism, to which the court responded by censuring the AKP but narrowly allowing it to remain open. Finally, during his tenure (2000-2007), the President Ahmet Necdet Sezer vetoed a total of 62 pieces of legislation put forth by the AKP government, referred some for annulment by the Constitutional Court, and blocked 447 executive appointments by the AKP government.⁴⁴ The AKP leaders, as well as some liberal

⁴³ Svante E. Cornell, "Erdogan's Looming Downfall: Turkey at the Crossroads," *Middle East Quarterly* 21(2014), at 4-5.

⁴⁴ Jenkins, "The Politics of Personality" (see note 35 above).

elites, were expressing at the time that these institutions have become too politicized and have overstepped their constitutional mandates and needed to be reigned in.⁴⁵

Whatever the exact motivation was, the evidence shows a sharp turn to a centralization strategy since 2007, whereby Erdogan and the AKP leadership engaged in a deliberate attempt to curtail the power of the veto players in the state, represented by the president, the military, and the judicial branch. One of the first acts was the election of an AKP leader, Abdullah Gul, to the post of Presidency to replace Ahmet Necdet Sezer. In 2007, AKP government also called for a referendum on a constitutional amendment to elect the Turkish president through a popular vote. According to Kalaycioglu, this paved the way for avoiding any negotiation with the opposition in electing a president and undermining the ‘neutrality’ condition of this post. It also set the stage for Erdogan to practically appoint himself when Gul’s tenure was over.⁴⁶

The second attempt at centralization was aimed at the military establishment. The army has historically been a *de facto* veto player in the Turkish political system. As stated above, Erdogan started to change the civilian-military relations early on in his first term, as part of the EU harmonization reforms. But by 2008, the AKP used the judicial branch to contain the army’s influence on politics via a series of political trials, including the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer (*Balyoz*) coup plot trials, targeting the military and secularist elite. During these trials, some 400

⁴⁵ Sinan Ciddi, "Turkey's September 12, 2010, Referendum," *MERIA Journal* 15 (2011): 1-11, at 3-4.

⁴⁶ Ersin Kalaycioglu, "Turkish Popular Presidential Elections: Deepening Legitimacy Issues and Looming Regime Change," *South European Society and Politics* 20(2015): 157-169, at 161.

serving officers, including 37 generals and admirals were arrested.⁴⁷ In the beginning of 2013, more than 10 percent of all the generals and admirals were in prison with charges of attempting to overthrow the government by force. While the initial overhaul in Turkish civil-military relations may have been perceived as a democratizing move,⁴⁸ the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials raised serious concerns about the due process and fundamental human rights and were interpreted as an attempt to eliminate a historically powerful group from the center of political power altogether.⁴⁹

A third strike was against the judiciary, which Erdogan and AKP elites regarded as one of the final strongholds of the Kemalist establishment. Since assuming power in 2002, AKP's clashes with the judiciary branch have been the most intense. The higher courts have struck down key legislative initiatives by AKP, such as the headscarf ban and higher education reforms, in addition to trying to shut the party down and oust Erdogan from politics.⁵⁰ The decisive blow was dealt in the 2010 constitutional amendment, which among other things, aimed at restructuring the higher courts and Supreme Council of Public Prosecutors and Judges. Supported by 58% of the voters in the 2010 referendum, these amendments gave the president

⁴⁷ Kadri Gursel, "Turkey's Failed Coup Reveals Army within Army," *Al Monitor* July 22, 2016 available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/07/turkey-coup-attempt-shows-army-within-army.html> (accessed 26 March, 2017).

⁴⁸ Metin Heper, "Civil Military Relations in Turkey" (see note 18 above).

⁴⁹ Hakki Tas, "Turkey's Ergenekon Imbroglio and Academia's Apathy," *Insight Turkey* 16(2014): 163-179, at, 79 ; Arzu Güler and Cemal Alpgiray Bölücek, "Motives for reforms on civil–military relations in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 17(2016): 251-271, at 2567-268.

⁵⁰ Ciddi, "Turkey's September 12" (see note 45 above).

and parliament greater say over the appointments of senior judges and prosecutors.

Weakening the powers of the judicial branch and installing a partisan president gave the AKP government significant powers in designing and implementing its policies largely unchecked. Since AKP commanded a majority of the seats in the parliament, the latter functioned as an institution rubber-stamping the executive decisions. Opposition parties had very little control in the commissions and had very limited effect on policy outcomes. Legislative politics became increasingly executive-centered and majoritarian over time. The party organization also became more subservient to Erdogan and functioned as a mere instrument to drive through his legislative agenda. For example, party group meetings in the Assembly became a stage for Erdogan to convey his rhetoric and scold opposition parties, rather than a platform for intra-party deliberation. The same 'leader-and-disciples' pattern also emerged in the cabinet meetings.⁵¹

Lancaster chronicles this change from intra-party democracy to personalistic rule in AKP over time.⁵² She points out that AKP's original bylaws stated democracy as the primary method for carrying out internal party affairs, and AKP's internal operations were initially characterized by several pluralistic elements such as primary elections, transparent decision-making and extensive debate on policy formation.⁵³ It was also clear that Erdogan was sharing power with three other leaders: Abdullah Gul, Bulent Arinc and Abdullatif Sener. Yet, soon after the 2007

⁵¹ Turkey Analyst, "Erdogan's Towering Role in the AKP," March 12, 2008, available at <http://turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/115> (accessed March 29, 2017).

⁵² Lancaster, "The Iron Law of Erdogan," (see note 4 above), at 1678

⁵³ Lancaster, "The Iron Law of Erdogan" (see note 4 above), at 1680.

elections, intra-party democracy gave way to increased centralization of power around Erdogan. He co-opted and sidelined his potential competitors and acquired a full control over the party by 2008. “AKP clearly represented one-man rule, with the party cadre cleansed of alternative voices and organized according to perceived loyalty to the leader. Erdogan also assured his ascendancy in both the party administration and in government by hiring numerous advisors, some of whom are considered to be more powerful than ministers.”⁵⁴

Winning the 2011 parliamentary elections with 50% of the vote consolidated Erdogan’s power even further. Unilateral executive orders and decrees that bypass the legislative process became commonplace. In six months alone, the AKP government signed 35 decrees.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Erdogan initiated a new constitutional debate to replace the parliamentary regime with a presidential one. In 2012, AKP submitted a proposal to the Constitutional Conciliation Commission, tasked with drafting a new constitution. Erdogan envisioned a presidential system that would be unique to Turkey, with significantly expanded powers for the president and fewer checks and balances on executive authority.

Strategy 3: Low and Selective Repression

Centralization of power is a necessary but not sufficient strategy to ensure autocratic regime survival: a certain level of repression is also an indispensable tool.⁵⁶ Borrowing from Davenport

⁵⁴ Tas, “Turkey - from Tutelary to Delegative Democracy,” (see note 17 above), at 782.

⁵⁵ Tas, “Turkey - from Tutelary to Delegative Democracy,” (see note 17 above), at 780.

⁵⁶ Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (see note 42 above); Levitsky and Way, *Competitive*

(2007), we define repression as the “actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities.”⁵⁷ Repression exists to a certain extent in all hybrid regimes; but it varies significantly in its intensity, target and form. To operationalize this variable, we use the distinction made by Levitsky and Way between widespread versus selective repression.⁵⁸ Widespread (high intensity) repression is coercion against a large number of people or key groups, and involves violent suppression of oppositional activity. Selective (low intensity) repression, on the other hand, is more subtle as in harassment and intimidation of selected individuals or denial of certain civil rights and political freedoms to some oppositional groups.

The use of repression remained relatively low and selective in Turkey until 2013. The selected targets of repression during this period were the media, the Kemalist elite, the Kurdish activists, and the far-left opposition. First off, Erdogan established control over the media by forging strong informal links with the mainstream media. According to Akser and Baybars-Hawks, AKP-led government pressure on the media conglomerates dates back to 2007 with the crackdown on media baron (and later politician) Cem Uzan.⁵⁹ Increasingly, the media became

Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War (see note 1 above).

⁵⁷ Christian Davenport, “State Repression and Political Order,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 10(2007):1-23, at 2.

⁵⁸ Levitsky and Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism” (see note 1 above).

⁵⁹ Murat Akser and Banu Baybars-Hawks, “Media and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Model of Neoliberal Media Autocracy,” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 5 (2012): 302-321, at 304-305.

concentrated in the hands of a few powerful conglomerates, whose business contracts were sealed by the AKP government.⁶⁰ Close friends and associates of Erdogan acquired large shares in the national television networks and print press.⁶¹ The opposition outlets experienced various forms of coercion including judicial suppression, online banishment, surveillance defamation, and accreditation discrimination.⁶² Erdogan became increasingly critical of journalists and media owners. These developments also led to large-scale self-censorship within the media. An increasing number of media workers and former journalists stated that the political pressure came directly from the government, and that most of the valuable information never reached the public.⁶³

Erdogan regime has also used the politicization of the law and judiciary to restrict political competition and to weaken dissenting groups. The attack on the political opposition intensified over time in a series of political trials starting around 2008 and culminating to their highest point in 2012. Political trials such as *Ergenekon*, *Sledgehammer*, *KCK*, and *Devrimci Karargah* targeted military officers, the former Kemalist elite, Kurdish politicians, activists and socialists on allegations of conspiring to overthrow the elected AKP government. These trials,

⁶⁰ Stratfor Country Report, “How Turkish Politics Are Built,” 28 March, 2014, available at <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/how-turkish-politics-are-built> (accessed 26 March, 2017).

⁶¹ Orucoglu, Berivan, “How President Erdogan Mastered the Media,” *Foreign Policy Magazine*, August 12, 2015, available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/12/how-president-erdogan-mastered-the-media/> (accessed 27 March, 2017).

⁶² Akser and Baybars-Hawks, “Media and Democracy in Turkey” (see note 59 above), at 311-313.

⁶³ For a well-rounded discussion of the news-making process during the AKP rule, see Mustafa A. Dagistanli, *5N1Kim* (Istanbul: Postaci Yayinlari, 2014).

although selectively targeted, still took a large toll on the opposition. According to the report released by the Turkish Ministry of Justice, between 2009 and 2012 alone, a total of 32,279 people were tried for being leaders or members of an ‘armed organization’, and 19,635 people were convicted on these charges.⁶⁴

Threats to the Regime and Changing Equilibrium

The equilibrium point between 2002 and 2013 was achieved at the intersection of high centralization, transactional legitimacy, and selective repression. Many groups in society, as well as elites, accepted the gradual power-grab by the regime, as long as they perceived the regime to be fulfilling the 'contract.' This type of acceptance also helped the regime achieve high centralization without resorting to heavy doses of repression. Yet, the dramatic events that took place since 2013 reveal that this initial equilibrium struck by the ruling elites was tenuous and unsustainable. As Erdogan and AKP centralized more power in themselves and weakened the opposition, they were emboldened to take more arbitrary and radical measures excluding and alienating groups that initially bought into the regime. Opposition kept growing against the domestic policy-making style of the AKP administration, and particularly against Erdogan. As Cornell aptly put it, the main fault line in Turkish politics moved from the traditional Islamic-

⁶⁴ Turkish Ministry of Justice provided the data for the terrorism charges and trials spanning from 2009 to 2012 in response to the motion submitted by Kurdish HDP Party MP Pervin Buldan, available at <http://www2.tbmm.gov.tr/d24/7/7-18919sgc.pdf> (accessed 28 March, 2017).

secularist divide to a struggle between the advocates and opponents of one-man rule.⁶⁵

The first challenge to the regime came in the summer of 2013, initially in the form of a small sit-in and protest against the government's plans to demolish the Gezi park to construct a shopping mall. Faced with explicit police brutality, the protests soon spread all over the country.⁶⁶ Hundreds of thousands of people from all backgrounds came out to protest the government's single-handed decisions in the organization of public spaces, urban gentrification policies, ideological interference in individual lifestyles, and most importantly, the increasingly authoritarian and intolerant tone of Erdogan.⁶⁷

The second significant challenge to the regime came within six months of the Gezi protests, in December 2013, from the Islamist movement itself.⁶⁸ Despite some of their ideological differences, the Gulen movement (*Cemaat*), comprised of the followers of Imam Fethullah Gulen, and the AKP elites following the Islamic National Outlook (*Milli Gorus*)

⁶⁵ Cornell, "Erdogan's Looming Downfall" (see note 43 above).

⁶⁶ For a detailed discussion of 'repression backfire' during Gezi protests, see Alexei Anisin, "Repression, spontaneity, and collective action: the 2013 Turkish Gezi protests," *Journal of Civil Society* 12(2016): 411-429, at 428.

⁶⁷ Arbatli, "Turkey's New Path" (see note 4 above); Mehmet Baris Kuymulu, "Reclaiming the right to the city: Reflections on the urban uprisings in Turkey," *City* 17(2013): 274-278, at 277-278. Umut. Ozkirimli, ed., *The Making of a Protest Movement in Turkey: #Occupygezi*. (London: Springer, 2014); Efe C. Gurcan and Efe Peker. *Challenging Neoliberalism at Turkey's Gezi Park: From Private Discontent to Collective Class Action* (London: Springer, 2015).

⁶⁸ For more detailed analyses of the AKP-Gulen movement conflict see Ergun Ozbudun, "AKP at the crossroads: Erdogan's majoritarian drift," *South European Society and Politics* 19(2014): 155-167, at 156-157. Seda Demiralp, "The Breaking Up of Turkey's Islamic Alliance: The AKP-Gulen Conflict and Implications for Middle East Studies," *Middle East Review of International Affairs Online* 20(2016), at 1.

movement were initially in a tactical alliance in the early years of AKP's rule. Yet by 2010, they were clashing on a number of issues, including AKP's contentious foreign policy towards Israel following the 2010 Gaza flotilla incident, AKP's rapprochement with Iran, and Erdogan's Kurdish peace talks. But perhaps even more important than disagreements on security policy, Gulenists' growing influence in judicial institutions as well as other parts of the government bureaucracy started to constitute a threat to Erdogan, who in turn purged Gulen supporters from the party list ahead of the June 2011 election and excluded Gulen-aligned businesses from various state contracts.

The last straw that broke the camel's back was the law passed by the AKP government in November 2013 that closed the private preparatory schools (*dershane*). These schools were operated mostly by the Gulen movement and were providing it with significant economic benefits and recruitment opportunities. In response to Erdogan's attempts to weaken the influence of the movement, Gulenist prosecutors started a corruption probe into Erdogan, his family, and his closest allies in December 2013, leading to the arrest and consequent resignation of four cabinet members. The unfolding debacle of corruption allegations, counterclaims, and large-scale public reaction constituted the second major political crisis threatening Erdogan's regime. The grand coalition that AKP formed in the early 2000s was crumbling and being replaced by a narrower and uncompromising constituency.

It is important to note that these developments took place in the context of changing economic and security conditions. First and foremost, the economic parameters entered a steady decline with the effects of the global financial crisis of 2008. In the 2008-2012 period,

unemployment rates soared, growth stagnated and the external debt burden became alarming for many investors (see Table 2). Indeed, scholars note that the over-reliance of the AKP administration on foreign capital and debt-driven growth rendered the economy especially vulnerable in the wake of the global crisis.⁶⁹ Since a stable and healthy economy constituted one of the main pillars of AKP's program, the reversal of economic fortunes reduced the regime's transactional legitimacy significantly.

The second important problem was the geopolitical instability surrounding Turkey after the Arab Spring and the onset of the Syrian civil war. Although the regional events that left the Middle East in turmoil were mostly exogenous, the AKP government's foreign policy vision also fell short of effectively resolving the crises with the country's neighbors.⁷⁰ As a result, the country was caught between the Syrian refugee crisis and the war against ISIS, "twin crises creating seismic impacts and consequences."⁷¹ Coupled with the economic downturn, these factors had a profound effect on public opinion towards the government.⁷²

In this setting, June 2015 general elections resulted in an unexpected drawback for Erdogan. AKP obtained 40.8 percent of the votes but failed to secure parliamentary majority.

⁶⁹ Dani Rodrik, "The Turkish Economy After the Global Financial Crisis," *Ekonomi Tek* 1 (2012): 41-61; Erinc A. Yeldan and Burcu Unuvar, "An Assessment of the Turkish Economy in the AKP Era," *Research and Policy on Turkey* 1 (2015): 11-28, at 27-28.

⁷⁰ Svante E. Cornell, "What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy?" *Middle East Quarterly* 19 (2012): 13-24, at 23.

⁷¹ Fuat E. Keyman, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Arab Spring Era: From Proactive to Buffer State," *Third World Quarterly* 37 (2016): 1-14, at 1.

⁷² The German Marshall Fund of the United States, "Turkish Perceptions Survey 2015," available at http://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/TurkeySurvey_2015_web1.pdf (accessed March 28, 2017).

The snap elections of November 2015 restored AKP's majority in the parliament with 49.5% of the national vote, but Erdogan's regime faced yet another crisis only seven months later with the military coup attempt. Many uncertainties concerning the coup attempt notwithstanding, AKP leaders blamed a clique within the Turkish armed forces, mainly low-ranking officers affiliated with the Gulen movement, for orchestrating the coup. The tug-of-war between the Gulenists and the AKP reached its peak with this violent coup attempt, which claimed 265 lives and left over 2000 individuals wounded.⁷³

Regime Responses to Threats: A New Equilibrium (2013-2017)

The visible defiance of former allies and grassroots challenges to the regime, in turn, made Erdogan and AKP leaders more defensive. As a response to each crisis, they intensified repression, further centralized power, and relied more and more on an ideological and polarizing rhetoric to delegitimize the opposition and entrench the allegiance of their core constituents. The current regime since 2013 survives under a new equilibrium, using a different mix of the aforementioned strategies: ideological legitimation, widespread repression, and further centralization of power.

Strategy 1: High and widespread repression

Erdogan and AKP responded to the twin crises of 2013 with increased repression to contain any

⁷³ Reuters, "Death Toll Rises to 265 in Failed Turkey Coup: Official," July 16, 2016, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-casualties-idUSKCN0ZW132> (accessed March 30, 2017).

kind of opposition activity. The Gezi Park protests were quelled with massive police brutality, leading to 7 deaths and thousands of injuries.⁷⁴ After the protests, more than 5,500 people were charged in 95 trials.⁷⁵ Additionally, Erdogan broke a record in Turkish political history in utilizing civil lawsuits as punitive tools, with a total of 110 defamation cases against him filed by February 2015.⁷⁶

Similarly, in response to the December 2013 corruption probe, Erdogan unleashed the full force of the coercive apparatus of the state. The regime removed or rotated hundreds of police officers and prosecutors who were linked to the Gulen movement.⁷⁷ The crackdown on the Gulenists deepened in the wake of November 2015 elections. Viewing its former ally as a major threat to Turkey's stability, in December 2015, the government officially designated the movement as a terrorist organization. In May 2016, it silenced Gulen's broadcasting stations and closed down Turkey's largest newspaper, Zaman (with a daily circulation of 650,000), pointing to its links with the movement.

Meanwhile, the AKP government increased its pressure on media conglomerates to censor a wide array of news and to sack journalists who challenge the government or Erdogan's

⁷⁴ Gurcan and Peker. "Challenging Neoliberalism at Turkey's Gezi Park", (see note 67 above), at 29.

⁷⁵ The numbers are provided by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TIHV), available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR44/010/2014/tr/d1c43556-74c6-4c48-930a-0832994a37fa/eur440102014tr.pdf> (accessed March 27, 2017).

⁷⁶ A general questioning submitted to the parliament by CHP (Republican People's Party), available at <http://www2.tbmm.gov.tr/d24/7/7-61742s.pdf> (accessed March 28, 2017).

⁷⁷ Demiralp, "The Breaking Up of Turkey's Islamic Alliance", (see note 68 above), at 5.

rhetoric.⁷⁸ The *Committee to Protect Journalists* report shows that Turkey was the world's top jailer of journalists in 2016 with 81 people in prison.⁷⁹ Moreover, the 2014 Internet bill provided the state with sweeping powers to monitor and censor the Internet with minimal third-party oversight. Turkey's Internet-regulating body, the Presidency of Telecommunication and Communication (TIB) was granted sole authority to demand that service providers block any content deemed illegal by the state authorities.

Furthermore, in 2014, Erdogan expanded the powers of the Turkish Intelligence Agency (MIT) and granted additional budget for its activities while shielding it from prosecution and jailing journalists reporting on MIT activities. The bill, signed into law by President Gul in 2014, gave the MIT the mandate to undertake any kind of operation in the name of national security. The amendment enables the agency to conduct wiretapping of phone calls, and grants it the authority to have access to any data or information held by public and/or private institutions without parliamentary oversight.

In between the June and November 2015 elections, the interim government under Davutoglu continued to increase repression and escalate the violent conflict with PKK in southeastern Turkey, including heavy attacks against the Kurdish opposition party, HDP, under the auspices of combatting terrorism.⁸⁰ The HDP campaign offices were targeted and a high

⁷⁸ Barkey, "Turkish Democracy" (see note 4 above).

⁷⁹ For full report on the current situation of journalists in Turkey, see CPJ report available at: <https://www.cpj.org/europe/turkey> (accessed March 20, 2017).

⁸⁰ Burak B. Ozpek, "Once Upon a Time in Anatolia: Turkish Politics from June 7th to November 1st," *Center for Policy and Research on Turkey* 9 (2015): 39-48, at 46-47.

number of their members were taken into custody. According to the OSCE election observation report, overall the period of electoral campaign was “tarnished by violence.”⁸¹

Finally, in the aftermath of the coup attempt and the declaration of the state of emergency, the level of repression reached unprecedented levels. 134, 194 people were laid off; 95,458 were detained and 47,685 were arrested on terrorism charges; 149 media outlets, 1284 private schools, 15 universities, and 1704 civil society organizations were shut down in AKP’s post-coup purges as of April 2017.⁸² Not only the coup planners and those with ties to the Gulen movement were targeted; these sweeping purges since July 2016 have affected all segments of society and every level of state bureaucracy, shrinking significantly any room left for opposition and creating an atmosphere of fear across the population. The statistics from various international databases on political terror, civil liberties, and press freedom clearly demonstrate the increase in overall repression in Turkey since 2013 (see table 3).

[Table 3 here]

Strategy 2: More Centralization

In addition to widespread repression, the consolidation of Erdogan’s power reached a new height with his election to the Presidency in August 2014. In an attempt to avoid a looming succession

⁸¹ OSCE, “International Election Observation Mission: Republic of Turkey Early Parliamentary Elections,” at 8-15 December, 2015, available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/196351?download=true> (accessed April 2, 2017).

⁸² For a systematic data collection effort on the post-coup purges, see Turkey Purge website, available at <http://turkeypurge.com/> (accessed April 2, 2017).

crisis, Erdogan took multiple measures. First, for the Prime Minister post he appointed a longtime loyalist, Ahmet Davutoglu. Second, ignoring the formerly symbolic constitutional status of the office of the Presidency, Erdogan transformed it into an active executive post overseeing the prime minister, the cabinet, and the ruling party simultaneously.

Meanwhile, the parliament passed a controversial bill on February 15th, 2014, allowing the president to redesign the nation's judicial system. The new legislation placed the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors under stricter control of the Ministry of Justice and expanded the government's ability to appoint judges and prosecutors. In addition, a system of super judges with extensive powers was created to investigate those who initiated the corruption probes.⁸³

After the June 2015 election, when AKP obtained 40.8 percent of the votes and failed to secure a parliamentary majority, Prime Minister Davutoglu sought to form a coalition government with the opposition parties. Yet, the coalition talks between AKP and its long-time rivals fell flat. To many, this was preordained, since from the outset President Erdogan openly expressed his reluctance to have AKP share power with the opposition. He used all the power at his disposal to delay coalition talks and formation of a new government.⁸⁴ Defying the constitutional tradition, he refused to offer the leader of the main opposition party, CHP, the responsibility to try to form a coalitional government. Instead, he called for snap elections in November and allowed the AKP to form an interim government.

Meanwhile, Erdogan restarted the discussions to overhaul the constitution to create a

⁸³ Tas, "Turkey - from Tutelary to Delegative Democracy," (see note 17 above), at 783-784.

⁸⁴ Onis, "Turkey's Two Elections" (see note 34 above).

more centralized executive system under a strong presidency. Yet, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu was less enthusiastic than Erdogan in removing any remaining authority of the prime minister's office, which is the most powerful executive position under the Turkish Constitution. This divergence between the top two executive leaders and once pivotal allies resulted in an involuntary resignation of Davutoglu. He was replaced with a more vocal Erdogan supporter, Binali Yildirim. Davutoglu's forced resignation was another indicator of Erdogan's ambitions to solidify his executive powers in the run-up to the strong presidency, even at the expense of an intra-elite crisis.

In the aftermath of the coup attempt, the parliament passed a state of emergency law (still in effect at the time of this writing), which concentrated even more power in the executive and reinitiated the discussions to institute a presidential system. AKP and Erdogan have been doubling down on the importance of centralized power in dealing with the security and political crises facing Turkey. In the parliament, AKP was able to get enough votes needed to send the constitutional amendment to a referendum, which took place on April 16th 2017. Despite claims of irregularities at the ballot box by international observers and an appeal by the opposition to annul the referendum, Erdogan claimed a narrow victory (51.4%) and established *de jure* the concentration of power in the Presidency.

Strategy 3: Ideological Legitimation

It is also interesting to look at the legitimation strategy employed by the regime in response to the four crises that took place between June 2013 and July 2016. Erdogan increasingly embraced

a vitriolic and ideological tone to curb any public criticism. This change in rhetoric can be observed during the period prior to 2013 but it clearly intensified with each regime-threatening crisis since 2013. His exclusionary rhetoric generally targeted particular ethnic or religious minorities such as the Kurds, Alevis, Armenians, Jews, socialists, and the secularist electorate. Unlike his first years in office when he was trying to avoid open conflict on Islamic issues, Erdogan began to make strong Islamist public pronouncements, such as vowing to raise pious generations, urging women to have at least three children, making statements about outlawing abortion, caesarean sections, and prohibitions on the sale of alcohol.⁸⁵ Increased religious conservatism caused rampant social polarization within the Turkish electorate.⁸⁶

Erdogan also started using a more nationalistic and conspiratorial rhetoric to delegitimize his opponents. He clearly pursued a more assertive foreign policy to gain more domestic legitimacy. Over time, he increased anti-Western and ‘siege mentality’ rhetoric and used foreign policy events (such as negotiations with the IMF, Israel’s invasions of Gaza, Nabucco pipeline negotiations with the EU, and the Syrian civil war) as instruments of the rally-around-the-flag effect. Especially his harsh criticisms of the Israeli government in his speeches turned into a big political asset for him. Experts note that all this neo-Ottoman foreign policy vision stems from the nostalgia of a lost empire, which glorifies the imperial legacies of the nation.⁸⁷ This symbolic

⁸⁵ Cornell, “Erdogan’s Looming Downfall” (see note 43 above).

⁸⁶ Sultan Tepe, “The Perils of Polarization and Religious Parties: The Democratic Challenges of Political Fragmentation in Israel and Turkey,” *Democratization* 20(2013): 831-856, at 834-835. Fuat Keyman, “The AK Party: Dominant Party, New Turkey and Polarization,” *Insight Turkey* 16(2014): 19-31, at 19-20.

⁸⁷ Omer Taspinar, “The Three Strategic Visions of Turkey,” *Brookings Institute US-Europe Analysis Series* 50

representation of the ‘new Ottomans’ resonated well with many segments of the population. It also served to cement the ideological bond with the party’s conservative supporters by giving them a rediscovered sense of historical pride.

Especially in the aftermath of the Gezi protests and the December corruption probe, Erdogan frequently talked about an evil alliance, engineered by an ‘interest rate lobby’ to bring him down and bring an end to the dream of a ‘New Turkey’. For instance, he openly threatened the US ambassador at the time for being complicit in the corruption investigation.⁸⁸ Moreover, declaring Turkey in the throes of a liberation war, he announced his electoral victories as a triumph for the nation and any manifestation of opposition as a matter of national security.⁸⁹ Part of his legitimation project was projecting himself and AKP as the embodiment of the national will. This strategy also necessitated delegitimizing the opposition as extremists and terrorists. As Tas aptly puts it, “in Erdogan’s discourse, all opposition figures are dehumanized, demonised, and excluded from the Turkish nation.”⁹⁰

When faced with a setback in the June 2015 election, Erdogan and AKP elites made use of the regional geopolitical developments and took an active role in the fight against ISIS. They also used this opportunity to attack the Kurdish terrorist group, PKK, which consequently led to the collapse of the ceasefire with the Kurds. The spiraling violence in the Southeast, the deadly ISIS attacks in major cities right before the elections, as well as the deteriorating economic

(2011): 1-5.

⁸⁸ Jenkins, "The Politics of Personality," (see note 35 above), at 2-3.

⁸⁹ Tas, “Turkey - from Tutelary to Delegative Democracy,” (see note 17 above), at 783.

⁹⁰ Tas, “Turkey - from Tutelary to Delegative Democracy,” (see note 17 above), at 785.

situation created an atmosphere of fear that benefitted the ruling elites. AKP and Erdogan framed the instability and chaos spreading in the country as a reason to vote for AKP and to restore the unity of the nation. The electoral victory of AKP in the November elections was an indication that the socially polarizing rhetoric of the AKP, coupled with increased repression especially targeted at the Kurdish population, has consolidated the conservative and nationalist voter base around the party.

Finally, since the July coup attempt, the regime was able to use the national media and extensive mobilization of supporters in ‘democracy vigils’ to increase legitimacy.⁹¹ Since all three major opposition parties sided with the government and denounced the coup vehemently in defense of democratic principles, AKP and Erdogan were able to appeal to broader segments of Turkish society. Moreover, they were able to cast those who questioned the legitimacy of the government as anti-democratic and unpatriotic. As Erdogan himself put it, the coup turned out to be a “gift from God,”⁹² in further cementing the regime by making the use of repression, centralization of power and ideological rhetoric justifiable and acceptable.

Conclusion

Political developments in Turkey in the past 15 years, with the many crises that have unfolded in

⁹¹ Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, “Turkey: How the Coup Failed,” *Journal of Democracy* 28(2017): 59-73, at 70.

⁹² David Dolan and Gulsen Solaker, “Turkey Rounds Up Plot Suspects after Thwarting Coup against Erdogan,” July 16, 2016, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-primeminister-idUSKCN0ZV2HK> (accessed March 28, 2017).

recent years, provide an important opportunity to study the phenomenon of autocratic reversal and resilience in hybrid regimes. When Erdogan and AKP came to power in 2002, Turkey was a typical example of a hybrid regime, with a lot of potential to become more democratic. Defying all theories in the literature, it has, however, turned visibly autocratic over time and persisted despite attempts to reverse the trajectory. In order to explain this puzzle, we focused on the interplay and changing equilibria between three elite survival strategies: centralization, repression and legitimation.

It is important to stress that elite survival strategies that bring about and entrench authoritarianism do not take place in a vacuum. The shifts in equilibrium and the optimal balance of these strategies are highly dependent on external conditions. As described above, favorable economic and geopolitical conditions in early 2000s made it possible for Erdogan to consolidate power while enjoying broad legitimacy and without the need to use widespread repression. The economic crisis in 2008, geopolitical instability after the Arab Spring and the onset of the Syrian war changed the economic and security conditions underpinning elites' survival strategies. By that same logic, one can argue that the current regional situation, whereby Turkey plays a critical role in the offensive against Syria and the management of mass refugee and migrant flows, is providing a favorable space for Erdogan to sustain the new equilibrium. On the other hand, the economy may prove to be the Achilles heel for Erdogan's rule. It is yet to be seen if the deteriorating economic conditions in the country will overshadow other concerns by the electorate and lead them to withdraw their support for Erdogan and the AKP. The cost of sustaining the current equilibrium may possibly increase against the backdrop of accumulating

economic and geopolitical problems.

We do not claim that the Turkish case represents *all* competitive authoritarian regimes, although it is confirmed by many studies that Turkey has indeed been a typical competitive authoritarian regime for a while now. As stated above, we are not studying regime distinctions. Instead, we are interested in strategies of survival by ruling elites and we believe the patterns that are observed in Turkey can be generalized to other hybrid cases, irrespective of the exact regime differences.

For example, despite Russia's different historical experience with democracy, Putin used a comparable playbook to entrench his power in the context of democratic institutions. He has systematically weakened alternative sources of power in the state and society, controlled the media, used repression at carefully selected targets, regularly made nationalistic and populist appeals to broaden his base, and engaged in a confrontational, anti-Western foreign policy to re-establish Russian 'greatness' and a sense of pride in his regime. His reaction to a number of mass street protests (akin to Gezi protests) has similarly involved increased centralization, repression and a more vitriolic polarizing rhetoric.

In addition to Russia, one can extend this analysis to other hybrid regimes. For example, observers have raised red flags when Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his followers on the Supreme court seized power from the National Assembly and effectively dissolved the elected legislature in March 2017, which is an epitome of centralization in the Venezuelan

context.⁹³ Similar authoritarian tendencies can also arguably be observed in Brazil and India. In Brazil, after bargaining a deal with the Brazilian President Michel Temer in violation of the constitution, the President of the Senate, Renan Calheiros, received a legislative immunity and defied a major individual ruling by a Supreme Court of Justice to shield him from pressing corruption charges in December 2016 which resulted in a major political scandal. Scholars described this controversy as a “disastrous moment for Brazilian institutional democracy.”⁹⁴ Likewise, many observers viewed Narendra Modi’s rise in Indian politics and his recent iron-fist policies as a victory for “authoritarian populism” in the world’s largest democracy.⁹⁵

These examples demonstrate the dangerous undertow of hybrid regimes and caution us against manipulation of democratic institutions by elites whose ultimate goal is to stay in power. As many in the literature point out, the ‘halfway house’ between democracy and authoritarianism possesses many inherent weaknesses and vulnerabilities.⁹⁶ The strategies elites use to stay in

⁹³ The New York Times, “Venezuela Muzzles Legislature, Moving Closer to One-Man Rule,” March 30, 2017, available at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/30/world/americas/venezuelas-supreme-court-takes-power-from-legislature.html?_r=1 (accessed July 15, 2017).

⁹⁴ Plus55: News from Brazil, “A New Authoritarianism in Brazil,” December 11, 2016 by Joao Carlos Magalhaes, available at <http://plus55.com/brazil-opinion/2016/12/authoritarianism-brazil-rule-law> (accessed July 16, 2017).

⁹⁵ Foreign Affairs, “Authoritarian India: The State of the World’s Largest Democracy” June 16, 2016 by Kanchan Chandra, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/india/2016-06-16/authoritarian-india> (accessed July 13, 2017).

⁹⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Levitsky and Way, “Competitive Authoritarianism” (see note 1 above); Brownlee, “Portents of Pluralism” (see note 8 above).

power may in the long run erode any remnants of competitiveness. They can also endanger the stability and longevity of the regime. A brazen centralization project accompanied by an excessive use of force erodes legitimacy and makes it extremely difficult to sustain broad popular support that is needed for electoral victories. These types of defensive strategies also threaten the intra-elite alliance and weaken the cooptation mechanisms necessary to ensure the survival of incumbents. Regime transitions literature would greatly benefit from in-depth comparisons of elite survival strategies across hybrid regimes.

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TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF ELITE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES (2002-2017)

	2002-2013	2013-2017
Legitimation	<p><i>Transactional legitimacy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● commitment to neoliberal economic reforms and successful economic management ● populist reforms in healthcare, education, and housing ● clientelism and patronage ● EU reform packages and civilianization of politics ● improvements in minority rights ● ‘zero-problems with neighbors’ 	<p><i>Ideological legitimacy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● vitriolic, exclusionary and polarizing rhetoric ● increased emphasis on conservatism and Islamic values ● use of neo-Ottoman symbols ● nationalistic and aggressive foreign policy ● conspiratorial view of the world ● presenting AKP and Erdogan as the embodiment of national will and democracy
Centralization	<p><i>Gradually increasing centralization</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2007 election of an AKP leader (Gul) to the Presidency and the constitutional amendment ● elimination of the army as a political actor with political trials starting in 2008 ● 2010 constitutional referendum and the restructuring of the judiciary branch ● executive-centered, majoritarian legislature ● gradual weakening of intra-party democracy in AKP ● unilateral executive orders ● constitutional debate on presidentialism 	<p><i>High centralization</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Erdogan’s election to presidency in 2014 and the transformation of the presidential post ● weakening of the judicial branch ● refusal to form a coalition after June 2015 election ● elimination of all potential intra-party rivals and the ‘appointment’ of a loyal Prime Minister ● rule by decree after the state of emergency in July 2016 ● April 2016 referendum for the new constitution and superpresidentialism
Repression	<p><i>Selective, low, targeted repression</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● creation of media conglomerates with close links to Erdogan ● media censorship and coercion ● politically motivated trials against the Kemalist and military elite (<i>Ergenekon</i> and <i>Sledgehammer</i>), Kurdish politicians (<i>KCK</i>), left-wing activists 	<p><i>Widespread, high repression</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● massive police brutality during Gezi protests and political trials ● political crackdown on the Gulen movement ● increased pressure and censorship of media and internet ● increased powers to the Intelligence Agency ● end of ceasefire with PKK and escalating violence ● massive post-coup purges ● extended state of emergency

TABLE 2. ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE UNDER AKP

	GDP per capita	Unemployment rate	Foreign Direct Investment
	<i>Annual growth rate</i> %	<i>% of total labor force</i>	<i>% of GDP</i>
2000	5.2	6.5	0.4
2001	-7.1	8.4	1.7
2002	4.6	10.3	0.5
2003	3.8	10.5	0.6
2004	7.9	10.8	0.7
2005	7.0	10.6	2.1
2006	5.6	8.7	3.8
2007	3.4	8.9	3.4
2008	-0.5	9.7	2.7
2009	-6.1	12.6	1.4
2010	7.6	10.7	1.2
2011	7.0	8.8	2.1
2012	0.3	8.1	1.7
2013	2.3	8.7	1.5
2014	1.3	9.9	1.6
2015	2.5	NA	2.4

Source: All the data comes from World Development Indicators collected by the World Bank. Available at: <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators>

TABLE 3. THE QUANTITATIVE CHANGE IN COUNTRY SCORES OVER TIME

	REPRESSION				CENTRALIZATION	
	Political Terror Scale ^a	Civil Liberties ^b	Press Freedom ^c	Press Freedom ^d	Executive Constraints ^e	Clean elections ^f
	1 (secure) - 5 (high terror)	1 (free) - 7 (not free)	0 (best) - 100 (worst)	world ranking	1 (unlimited) - 7 (constrained)	0 (worst) - 1(best)
2002	4	4	58	99 / 134	7	0.90
2003	3	4	55	115 / 158	7	0.88
2004	3	3	52	113 / 157	7	0.88
2005	4	3	48	98 / 160	7	0.88
2006	3	3	48	98 / 160	7	0.88
2007	4	3	49	101 / 163	7	0.86
2008	4	3	51	102 / 167	7	0.84
2009	4	3	50	122 / 169	7	0.84
2010	3	3	51	138 / 172	7	0.84
2011	3	3	54	NA	7	0.82
2012	3	4	55	154 / 177	7	0.80
2013	4	4	56	154 / 177	7	0.78
2014	4	4	62	154 / 179	5	0.65
2015	4	4	65	149 / 179	5	0.59
2016	NA	4	71	151 / 181	NA	NA
2017	NA	5	NA	NA	NA	NA

Sources:

^a The data from Political Terror Scale project. The figures from the U.S. State Department are reported, since they give the most complete coverage for the period. Available at <http://www.politicalerrorscale.org/Data/>

^b Freedom House, Freedom in the World annual country reports, Civil Liberties scores. Available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/turkey>

^c Freedom House, Freedom of the Press annual reports, Press Freedom scores. Available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/turkey>

^d Reporters Without Borders, World Press Freedom Index rankings. Available at <https://rsf.org/en/turkey>

^e Polity IV index, "EXconst" variable evaluating the constraints on the executive branch. Marshall, M. G., Jaggers, K., & Gurr, T. R. (2002). *Polity IV project*. Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland College Park. Available at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>

^f The 'clean elections' index from V-Dem dataset, evaluating whether elections are free and fair. Coppedge, Michael, et al. "Varieties of Democracy: Dataset v 6.2." *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project* (2015). Available at <https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data-version-6-2/>