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Turkey – from tutelary to delegative democracy

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Guillermo O'Donnell's influential work 'Delegative Democracy' set the discourse on a peculiar type of democracy. Lying between representative democracy and authoritarianism, the uniqueness of delegative democracy lies in its features, including an absence of horizontal accountability, strong centralised rule, individual leadership with unchecked powers, a cult figure embodying the nation and clientelist practices. While delegative democracies seem to arise out of presidential systems, Turkey, though a parliamentary system, has also displayed the distinctive features of delegative democracies. This paper identifies three characteristics of delegative democracy, which are responsible for the lack of democratic consolidation, if not the erosion of democracy itself: anti-institutionalism, an anti-political agenda and clientelism. Arguing that delegative democracy is the best concept with which to examine contemporary Turkey, the paper lays out how, post-2011, Turkey has demonstrated the three elements of delegative democracy. The final section discusses the implications of the Turkish case for scrutinising the very possibility of delegative democracy in parliamentary regimes.

Keywords: delegative democracy; Turkish democracy; Justice and Development Party (AKP); Gezi protests; Gülen Movement

The unstable coalition governments and economic crises of the 1990s helped pave the way for a new political actor in Turkey, the Justice and Development Party (AKP – Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi). Since its founding in 2001 the AKP has steadily increased in popularity. It claimed strong victories in three consecutive general elections (2002, 2007 and 2011) and, as of 2014, boasted roughly nine million registered party members.¹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the AKP leader and current president of Turkey, held the premiership for 12.5 years, the longest period of uninterrupted service in modern Turkish history. Such continuous electoral success demonstrated by an Islamist-origin party in secular Turkey polarised scholarly readings of the subject, resulting in two vastly disparate analyses.² For the first group the AKP is undoubtedly an Islamist party, with its pro-EU stance and calls for democracy representing little more than a façade

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and ‘dissimulation’ (*takiyye*) to serve its hidden agenda: undoing the Kemalist secular heritage and establishing an Islamist regime.³ For a second group of academics, however, the emergence of the AKP signalled the normalisation of Turkish democracy after decades of military-dominated intra-elite politics. Thanks to its clear rejection of ‘an Islamist world view which aims at Islamicizing society by using the coercive power of the state’, the AKP, according to William Hale and Ergun Özbudun, cannot be regarded as ‘an Islamist, or even as a “post-Islamist” party.’⁴

Contrary to the expectations of these two lines of thought, the unforeseen outcome has nothing to do with liberal democracy, let alone theocracy. In fact, Erdoğan’s party swept the general elections, oversaw notable economic growth, normalised civil–military relations and initiated the Turkish–Kurdish reconciliation process. Nevertheless, these successes did not alleviate criticism of Erdoğan’s rule as leaning towards authoritarianism. Such criticism cited his suppression of the opposition and attempts to extend government control over the judiciary and the media. Once hailed as ‘a “role model” for the post-dictatorship Arab world’,⁵ Erdoğan is now often ostracised by international media as being a dictator, sultan, Führer or Caesar.⁶

Given the continuous oscillation between democracy and military intervention that has marked Turkey’s history, the AKP’s rise has heralded a new period. It exhibits patterns of ‘delegative democracy’, which is marked by strong personalised rule and unchecked powers legitimised through a crisis-driven narrative and clientelism. Nevertheless, Turkey, a parliamentary regime with proportional representation, does not fit the generalisation that ‘delegative democracies are not very congenial to parliamentary systems’,⁷ characterised as these are by their strong systems of checks and balances. Delegative democracies are instead associated with presidentialism.⁸ In order to elaborate on what particular conditions foster the emergence of delegative democracy within a parliamentary system, this paper first outlines the basic tenets of delegative democracy. It then revisits the possibilities and dynamics for parliamentary systems through a detailed examination of the Turkish case.

Framing delegative democracy

The proliferation of new democracies in successive waves has driven scholars to formulate a vast number of alternative concepts. David Collier and Steven Levitsky have responded to the flawed nature of those systems by referring to them as ‘democracy with “adjectives”’.⁹ In 1994 Guillermo O’Donnell also offered the term ‘delegative democracy’ to describe one of those emerging systems. Delegative democracies (DD) are characterised by free and fair elections and, at least nominally, recognition of political freedom and rights, which allows for a degree of opposition. Nevertheless, in this unrestrained presidentialism, straddling representative democracy and authoritarianism, other representative bodies (eg the congress or the judiciary) are taken only as impediments to the executive. Thus, with presidents embodying the national will, DDs ‘rest on the premise that whoever wins election to the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office’.¹⁰ This level of consolidating power is made

possible both by the absence of established democratic institutions and by the inheritance of preceding authoritarian regimes, including social and economic crises.

While O'Donnell focused on Argentina, Brazil and Peru in his study,¹¹ the term has been applied more broadly to new contexts, from Russia to Central American countries.¹² However, the dearth of further theorisation and use of the term, even in contradictory ways,¹³ demonstrate the need to elaborate the concept of DD. While other terms for defective democracies, such as 'electoral democracy' or 'illiberal democracy' depict a similar phenomenon, DD deserves attention for addressing the reasons for stagnation between representative democracy and authoritarianism, as well as the lack of democratic consolidation. In line with O'Donnell's work, I identify and juxtapose three basic attributes and frame delegative democracy as an anti-institutional, anti-political and clientelist majoritarian democracy.

First, DDs are anti-institutional. Institutionalised democracies hold elected politicians accountable, not only via elections (vertical accountability), but also via a network of autonomous institutions (horizontal accountability) such as the legislature, their political parties or the judiciary. In DDs elections are crucial but horizontal accountability is absent.¹⁴ Delegative democracies are majoritarian systems in which the separation of powers, checks and balances, and other autonomous regulatory bodies are subordinated to the political decisions of the president. Moreover, 'candidates compete for a chance to rule virtually free of all constraints save those imposed by naked, non-institutionalized power relations'.¹⁵ DDs are not only non-institutional, but also anti-institutional. They operate in the absence of strong check-and-balance mechanisms but, more importantly, they hinder the development of those democratic institutions because delegative presidents often consider them 'unnecessary encumbrances to their "mission"'.¹⁶ They instead rely on the consolidation of power at the executive level and on highly personalised rule.

Second, DDs are anti-political. Usually after severe social and economic crises delegative presidents appear as 'the embodiment of the nation and the main custodian and definer of its interests'.¹⁷ In order to save the country in the face of mounting problems, this paternal figure, caretaker of the nation, is entitled to govern the country according to whatever he or she thinks is best. The president, then, has the authority to define the national interest. However, the policies made while in office may not necessarily resemble those promised during election campaigns, as the president is now positioned above party politics and the interests thereof.¹⁸ Complementing the paternal image, delegative presidents may also employ an 'organicistic' discourse in which they are presented as the embodiment of the nation. As the producer of the "authentic" political expression' of the nation, the leader is expected 'to heal the nation by uniting its dispersed fragments into a harmonious whole'.¹⁹ This framing, which equates the political leader with the nation, implies that any political opposition to the leader is thus also an act of treason. In such a crisis-driven context, even debates on pluralism or human rights become fraught endeavours.

Third, DDs are clientelist. In DDs 'the place of well-functioning institutions is taken by other nonformalized, but strongly operative practices – clientelism, patrimonialism, and corruption'.²⁰ In a subsequent article, published in 1996,

O'Donnell does draw attention to the 'extremely influential, informal, and sometimes concealed institution: clientelism and, more generally, particularism', in contrast to the institutional and universalistic aspects of democracy.²¹ While clientelism mostly leads to crony capitalism, serving the close circle of the leader, it may include broader practices that leave the constituency dependent on the favours of the state.

These three interrelated elements form the basis of delegative democracy. It is clear that anti-political narratives and clientelism compensate for anti-institutionalism. Thus, while the popularly elected president acts beyond the reach of the checks in place, this high concentration of power is legitimised through the dissemination of narratives positing the need for a saviour and by providing material rewards. In the modern context the germ of '*L'état, c'est moi*' lies in '*La nation c'est moi*'.

Turkey as a delegative democracy

While presenting contemporary Turkey as a delegative democracy, this paper opposes the argument that the country has been one since its initial transition to democracy in 1946. In his 1996 article Ergun Özbudun, a leading scholar of Turkish politics, takes up Guillermo O'Donnell's concept of 'delegative democracy' and argues that Turkey occupies 'a secure place among the delegative democracies of the world'.²² This evaluation rests on the lack of strong political institutions and horizontal accountability, as well as on the personal character of political party leadership and wide use of decrees in Turkey. Eventually Özbudun claimed that, in Turkey's so-called delegative democracy, like others, 'there is little reason to fear that authoritarianism will return, but equally little reason to hope that democracy will soon become consolidated'.²³ Nevertheless, in 1997, just one year after Özbudun published this article, the military triggered the downfall of the Islamist-led government by intervening forcefully in the political process via the military-dominated National Security Council (MGK – Milli Güvenlik Kurulu).

More importantly, while delegative democracies attribute extensive power to the political leadership, Turkey's democracy, in contrast, has suffered from a lack of civilian supremacy over the military. Since the 1960 military intervention the Turkish military has enjoyed 'its ability to go above and beyond the constitutional authority of democratically elected governments, [which] can include not only direct but also indirect influences on the government'.²⁴ With the exception of the Adnan Menderes era (1950–60), it is more accurate to identify Turkey's multiparty period as one of 'tutelary democracy'. Adam Przeworski defines tutelary democracy as 'a regime which has competitive, formally democratic institutions, but in which the power apparatus, typically reduced by this time to the armed forces, retains the capacity to intervene to correct undesirable states of affairs'.²⁵ In the Turkish case the military's position as a supra-parliamentary power and veto player rested on its self-assigned role as guardian of the secular regime.

Özbudun's diagnosis points out the potential in the Turkish polity for a delegative democracy, which did emerge only 15 years later with the AKP's third term in power (2011–15), which has undoubtedly demonstrated the symptoms

of delegative democracy. Two regime-related debates signalled this situation. In 2013 the Gezi demonstrations, protesting against the perceived authoritarian leanings of the government, raised the question of whether or not holding elections is a sufficient indicator of democracy. According to Timur Kuran, Erdoğan ‘seems to have interpreted a 50% vote in 2011 as a mandate to refashion the country according to his own values’.²⁶ For the anti-government protestors Erdoğan’s electoral victory did not assign him the absolute right to define the national interest and negate dissent. While the then President Abdullah Gül, also shared this view and declared that ‘Election is not everything in democracy’,²⁷ Erdoğan hailed the national will as represented in elections only and invited the Gezi protestors to display their opposition through the ballot box rather than on the streets.

A second debate resulted from the AKP’s ambition to replace the parliamentary system with a presidential one, characteristic of delegative democracies. As early as April 2010 Erdoğan was conveying his eagerness for a presidential system – a wish common to all the powerful, centre-right party leaders in Turkey.²⁸ The discussion intensified in late 2012, when his party submitted a proposal to this effect to the Constitution Conciliation Commission, a parliamentary body for drafting the new constitution. Extending broad, unchecked powers to the president, this ‘presidential system à la turca’ was inclined towards ‘ultra-presidentialism’ and was the target of widespread criticism from political groups across the spectrum.²⁹ Nevertheless, during the 2014 presidential elections, Erdoğan openly declared his intention to establish a presidential system.

As another defining characteristic, Turkey went through *decretismo* in O’Donnell’s terms, a ‘decision-making frenzy’ involving unilateral executive orders and decrees that bypass the slow decision-making process in institutionalised democracies.³⁰ The AKP government did not issue its first decree (KHK – Kanun Hükmünde Kararname) until 2011. However, Authorization Act no. 6223, dated 6 April 2011, charged the Council of Ministers with issuing decrees for six months. During this period alone the AKP government signed 35 decrees,³¹ which not only reshaped the organisational structure and functioning of ministries, but also incorporated new institutions and mechanisms. Both in substance and style, this development only exacerbated the ‘over-centralisation’ of political power.³²

The following section examines how Turkey, especially after the 2011 general elections, demonstrated the anti-institutional, anti-political and clientelist features of delegative democracy.

Anti-institutionalism: libido dominandi

The AKP’s centralisation of power, to the detriment of checks and balances, involves three spheres: state, society and the party. When it came to power in 2002, it had a more basic concern: survival. In order to avoid the fate of its predecessor, the Welfare Party, which was shut down in 1998 by the Constitutional Court for anti-secular activities, the AKP refrained from open conflict on religious issues like the headscarf ban. Instead, it fostered economic development and promoted the EU membership process. In this way the party managed to survive the hostile environment, which crystallised with the 2008 closure case at the same court that again tried the AKP for serving as a hub of anti-secular activities.³³

In the absence of strong opposition, and with increasing self-confidence after his 2007 electoral victory, Erdoğan has become 'more outspoken' and aggressive against actors as diverse as domestic Kurdish activists to the State of Israel.³⁴ Nevertheless, to hold firmly onto power, Erdoğan has had to deal with both the military and the judiciary – vanguards of the secular order. In this regard the constitutional amendments to regulate civil–military relations along with the EU *acquis* helped to civilianise Turkish politics.³⁵ More importantly, the Ergenekon trials, which sent hundreds of active and retired military officers to prison for planning a coup against the government, helped the AKP undermine the political power of the military.

In the tug of war between the AKP and the secular establishment, the second step was taken shortly after the launch of the Ergenekon trials. In September 2010 a constitutional referendum that contained a major revision of the judiciary was passed, with 58% of voters supporting it. While expanding the size of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors, the legal package afforded the president and the parliament more power to appoint senior judges and prosecutors.³⁶ Holding both the presidency and a strong parliamentary majority, the AKP wielded overwhelming authority over the composition of judicial bodies and broke the long hold of the secularists over governmental decision making. In general these moves left the civil–military bureaucracy without any mechanism with which to challenge Erdoğan and the AKP. After the electoral victory in 2011, Erdoğan seemed to have firmly consolidated his political power, with wide support (47% of the popular vote) and no political opposition powerful enough to challenge him.

Erdoğan's attempts to consolidate power within his own party were just as significant as his centralisation of power within the apparatus of the state. When the AKP set off on its political venture in late 2001, it was led by the trio of Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç, each of whom had their own followers within the ranks of the party. This pluralistic and collegial atmosphere was further enriched by other political heavyweights, such as Abdüllatif Şener, Ali Coşkun and Abdülkadir Aksu, who later served in critical ministries. However, each of these individuals was gradually side-lined in favour of Erdoğan's burgeoning power. Abdullah Gül was, without a doubt, the most crucial among them. As expected, during his presidency Gül's ties were cut with the party to a considerable degree. When the constitutional amendment in late 2007 reduced the presidential term from seven to five years, it was unclear whether Gül, the incumbent, would serve according to the old or new law. While he had purged Abdullah Gül's supporters from the party cadre before the 2011 elections, Erdoğan did not make a move until 2012, when the parliament passed a law making Gül's re-election impossible in accordance with the old law. This attempt was defeated by the Constitutional Court's verdict that Gül would serve for seven years, but could be re-elected for a subsequent five-year term.³⁷ In order to prevent Gül's return to the party as leader, Erdoğan also called for an extraordinary party congress to convene on 27 August 2014, one day before Gül left the presidential post. Over time Bülent Arınç and other important figures were also side-lined in the party administration. With this diminishing intra-party democracy, the post-2011 AKP clearly represented one-man rule, with the party cadre cleansed of alternative voices and organised according to

perceived loyalty to the leader. Erdoğan 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 many ministers, as well as by appointing advisors to cabinet members as a means of keeping them in line with his own vision. The regular hierarchy of state bodies has thus been disrupted by the increasing autonomy and leverage of the advisors.

This concentration of power in the hands of the state and party, as well as the blurring of boundaries between both, gave rise to the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of the government. Combined with a conservative, neoliberal agenda and polarising discourse, it nurtured fissures and discontent among various groups. The ban on using Taksim Square for May Day demonstrations, urban transformation projects that ignored cultural and environmental concerns, increasing police brutality, the then prime minister's constant declarations on restricting abortion and caesarean sections, as well as urging women to have at least three (and later four) children, and the prohibition of the sale of alcohol after 10 pm are just some of the policies that alienated various constituencies.³⁸ The government's commercial plan for Gezi Park, the only green space in Taksim Square, was the spark that lit the fire. In no time demonstrations spread to other cities across the country. Though too diverse in their political commitments to form a united political party, the Gezi protestors have formed a critical bloc, united by their anti-government stance and by opposition to Erdoğan's political arrogance.

Prime Minister Erdoğan's cohort reacted to the Gezi protests with a heavy-handed crackdown on the protests and by organising counter-demonstrations. In the summer of 2013 TOMAs (police tanks), scorpions (armed police jeeps) and gas bombs became integral to urban life in Istanbul and other major Turkish cities. The brutal repression left several dead and thousands injured in a matter of weeks following the first clashes. Erdoğan blamed outside forces trying to halt Turkey's rise and labelled the demonstrators extremist and terrorist.³⁹ Some of these demonstrators would later stand trial for attempting to overthrow the government.⁴⁰ In an effort to ostracise and marginalise the protests, Erdoğan also organised counter-rallies, called 'Respect to National Will', under the theme 'Let's spoil the big game and write history'.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the Gezi protests gained momentum and had amounted to gatherings of two million people in 53 cities by March 2014.⁴²

The end of 2013 also witnessed increased tension between Erdoğan and the Gülen Movement. Fethullah Gülen, the leader of the Islamic movement, has undertaken a self-imposed exile since 1997 military intervention. The movement was Erdoğan's erstwhile ally in supporting the AKP in its conflict with the secularist state elite. However, especially after 2010, the movement's stance began diverging from that of the AKP on many issues, ranging from Turkey's rapprochement with Iran to its contentious foreign policy towards Israel. Although the AKP expected a completely subservient ally in the Gülen Movement, being in possession of a vast global network of finance and education, the movement instead tended to follow an autonomous position 'rather than just adopting a servant's role'.⁴³ The AKP's anti-Gülenist purge has a long history;⁴⁴ however, the recent attack began in November 2013, when news broke of the government's plan to implement a bill ending the *dershane*, private preparatory schools that

were instrumental in recruiting new followers for the movement. Such a move was strategically chosen on the assumption that it would sever the Gülen Movement's umbilical cord. This, in turn, appears to have prompted the launch of a corruption probe on 17 and 25 December 2013, which implicated key cabinet members and even Erdoğan's own family.

Rather than promote transparency or the independence of the judiciary, Erdoğan responded to each subsequent crisis with further authoritarian measures in an effort to strengthen his grip on the state. This was similarly the case with the corruption probe. Instead of investigating the allegations, Erdoğan characterised the probe as a judicial coup perpetrated by the so-called 'parallel state', a reference to the Gülenists within the state that Erdoğan had placed in circulation. He responded by removing or rotating thousands of police officers and prosecutors who were allegedly linked to the Gülen movement. To further show his determination, Erdoğan stated, 'If that is called a witch hunt, then, yes, we will perform that witch-hunt'.⁴⁵ The government also drafted new legislation that put the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK – Hakimler ve Savcılar Yüksek Kurulu) under stricter control of the Ministry of Justice and expanded the government's ability to appoint judges and prosecutors, a move that overturned the same government's legislative reform passed in the 2010 national referendum.⁴⁶ In addition, a system of 'super judges', with extensive powers, was instituted to investigate the authorities behind the corruption probes.⁴⁷

During this time access to social media, such as Twitter and YouTube, was curtailed when voice recordings that purportedly revealed corruption within Erdoğan's close circle were leaked. Moreover, with the bill tightening control over the internet, the authorities were able to block webpages within hours and without prior court approval.⁴⁸ With regard to Turkish media in general, 'whether spontaneous or planned, Erdoğan's outbursts against journalists and media owners became commonplace, and a form of self-censorship rapidly descended over the media'.⁴⁹ In its annual press freedom report released on 1 May 2014, Freedom House, a non-profit organisation monitoring democratic violations in countries, downgraded Turkey from 'partly free' to 'not free'.⁵⁰

Through each of these crises Erdoğan has managed to transform any manifestation of opposition into a matter of national security, as well as to undermine the rule of law and separation of powers. When the Constitutional Court lifted the government's ban on Twitter as 'a serious intervention in the freedom of expression', Erdoğan found this decision against the national interest and responded by saying that the government would abide by the court ruling, but that this did not translate into respect for it.⁵¹ In early 2014, when the Ankara Fifth Administrative Court ordered the suspension of all construction on the now-complete presidential palace, Erdoğan attacked with a similar harsh attitude and said: 'If they have the power, let them destroy it'.⁵² On yet another occasion, during the local elections of March 2014, the High Elections Board banned a broadcast of the AKP's ad because of its use of the Turkish flag, prohibited according to the Election Law. With Erdoğan's declaration 'We will ban the ban', the ad continued to be played.⁵³ This belligerence persisted during the August 2014 presidential elections, with tactics ranging from deliberately using prohibited imagery in campaign advertisements to ignoring restrictions on

publishing polls 10 days before the election. In general the ruling AKP's undemocratic moves – from curtailing social media to manipulating judicial bodies and processes – were justified as measures taken for the transition to the 'new Turkey'. According to Etyen Mahcupyan, Advisor to Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey is passing through a revolution, so political concerns outweigh legal ones.⁵⁴

As a final aspect of the centralisation of power in contemporary Turkey, one should also note that, while the military was the main source of power up to the 2000s, Erdoğan has contributed to the de-militarisation of Turkish politics and then ironically relied on the expanding reach of the National Intelligence Agency (MIT). In the 'Law Amending the Law on State Intelligence Services and the National Intelligence Agency', approved in parliament on 17 April 2014, MIT acquired greater authority and legal immunity for its head. The law has several undemocratic implications, such as unrestricted access to private data, intervention in the freedom of the press, and immunity for the extensive intelligence powers.⁵⁵

The anti-political stance

In delegative democracies the political ruler is projected as 'the embodiment and interpreter of the high interests of the nation'.⁵⁶ Any opposition to the ruler, then, is apt to be interpreted as treason. Treated as a saviour, the ruler can summon all the political powers at his disposal to relieve society from economic and political turmoil.

In the Turkish case it all began with a dream: 'The new Turkey'. In Ahmet İnel's terms the AKP has pursued 'the neo-nationalism of greatness' that transfers pride and self-confidence from the glorious Ottoman past and defines Turks as 'the children of the Ottomans', who no longer beg at the IMF's door and pull their weight as a regional actor.⁵⁷ This was not only a degradation of Republican and Kemalist values, but also a longing for an Ottoman imperial history that nurtures the can-do spirit for Turkey's future as a regional leader dominating the *Pax Ottomana*. Similarly, 'a great nation, a great power' was the AKP's motto during its fourth general congress and a goal set for 2023, the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Turkish Republic.⁵⁸

This dream, however, turned into a nightmare when Erdoğan faced the two greatest challenges to his rule: the Gezi protests and the 17 December graft probe. He painted a picture of an evil alliance plotting to bring him down and putting a stop to the rise of the new Turkey. 'There are extremely dirty alliances in this set-up, dark alliances that can't tolerate the new Turkey, the big Turkey', Erdoğan stated during a campaign event.⁵⁹ Yiğit Bulut, financial commentator and then chief economic advisor to Prime Minister Erdoğan, propagated that the Gezi Park protests were engineered by an 'interest rate lobby' to bring down the Turkish economy. Bulut also implied that the protestors were organised and compensated by unnamed foreign agents. In this conspiratorial mind-set the graft probe was also part of an international plot. The Gülen Movement was considered complicit in organising this assault at the behest of the Western and Jewish world. Erdoğan openly threatened the then US ambassador to Turkey, Francis Ricciardone, implying his involvement in the probe: 'These recent days, very strangely, ambassadors get involved in some provocative acts. I am calling

on them: Do your job [...] We don't have to keep you in our country.'⁶⁰ In December 2013, portraying the country as surrounded by enemies, Erdoğan declared that Turkey was in the throes of a liberation war. This also became the theme during AKP's 2014 local election campaign with Erdoğan presented as 'New Turkey's leader in its Liberation War'.⁶¹

As a reflection of AKP's majoritarian populist discourse, the national will (*milli irade*) is held above all else and in the hands of the AKP, as it records the highest share of votes in national elections. Positing his party as the genuine representative of the people, Erdoğan celebrated his electoral victory in 2011, stating that 'the nation has won'.⁶² This conception of the Turkish nation ostracises anti-government groups. Erdoğan's counter-demonstrations against the Gezi protests were called 'Respect for the National Will' (*Milli İradeye Saygı*). In one of those events Erdoğan stated: 'This nation is not the one you [Gezi protestors] presented to the world. This nation is genuine, not those who throw Molotov cocktails at the police, loot and vandalize'.⁶³ The anti-government groups all got their share from what Ümit Cizre calls Erdoğan's 'recrimination package'.⁶⁴ Erdoğan deemed the Gezi protestors to be anarchists and vandals,⁶⁵ painted Kurds as terrorists, and Gülen's followers as 'blood-sucking vampires'.⁶⁶ In Erdoğan's discourse all opposition figures are dehumanised, demonised and excluded from the Turkish nation.

As the leader of the New Turkey and liberation war, Erdoğan has been transformed into a cult personality. As framed in the AKP's election jingle for the 2014 local elections, Erdoğan was presented as 'a man of the people', 'lover of God' and 'light of hope for the millions'. Since Erdoğan embodies the nation, any accusation against him is then an assault against the nation. Referring to the corruption probe targeting Erdoğan's close circle, he retorted 'Turkey has never been subjected to such an immoral attack',⁶⁷ and he portrayed the investigation as one against the nation as a whole. In this reckoning the faith of the country depends on Erdoğan's political success. Accordingly, 'if Erdoğan falls, Turkey will fall'.⁶⁸

Clientelism

While clientelism has been an indelible feature of Turkish politics, the AKP emerged in 2001 on the political scene with a claim that it would remain transparent, in contrast to other political parties tainted by corruption scandals and financial crises. This is also the reason for the party's incorporation of the Turkish acronym 'AK' as part of its name, meaning 'pure white.' However, no structural transformation in the relationship between the state and the economy took place – only the actors changed.

Erdoğan gradually managed to create his own cohort of wealthy loyalists. AKP rule has been marked by the emergence of 'politically created business actors who enjoyed favors defined by the new mechanisms of government intervention and deployed within networks that draw on cultural resources informed by religious identity'.⁶⁹ Rent distribution was made possible through nepotistic practices in the marketisation of health and education, as well as the privatisation of state enterprises.⁷⁰ To this end, the Public Procurement Law, part of the economic reform process after the 2001 Turkish financial crisis, was amended

32 times between 2003 and 2013, covering 135 amendments to its sub-items, curbing its power significantly.⁷¹ AKP municipalities and agencies worked more closely with the affiliated bourgeoisie and facilitated the transfer of resources to this new economic class, the so-called Islamic capital, instead of to the secular big capital's class, as had been the case in the past.⁷² In return, the favoured entrepreneurs and associations used their economic capacity and leverage to support the ruling party.⁷³ In contrast, unaffiliated and disloyal groups were sanctioned in economic terms. For example, 'companies with media outlets critical of the government have been targets of tax investigations, forced to pay large fines, and likely disadvantaged in public tenders'.⁷⁴ Doğan Media Group, Turkey's largest media group, did not fully submit to Erdoğan in its editorial policy and was fined US\$3 billion after two investigations in 2009.⁷⁵ Similarly, in the first half of 2014, 60% of the television advertising budget of the public sector went to pro-government channels, whereas critical outlets received virtually no funding.⁷⁶

On 17 December 2013 a police operation brought a series of allegations against Erdoğan, his family and senior government officials, accusing them of corruption and other improprieties. Police arrested 52 people, including the sons of government ministers and the former general manager of the state-run Halkbank. Millions of dollars, allegedly used in bribery, fraud and the smuggling of gold, were confiscated.⁷⁷ The ministers implicated in the investigation were forced to resign, while Prime Minister Erdoğan reshuffled half his cabinet on 25 December. The government took control of the investigation by removing or rotating its prosecutors and police officers. Nonetheless, before the March 2014 local elections, documents and voice recordings delivered from prosecution files were posted on Twitter. While Erdoğan slammed the recordings of his conversations as fabricated montage, the content of the wiretaps made headlines and stirred anti-government demonstrations.

In addition to alleged corrupt practices and political leverage used against businesses, one should also note the broader spectrum of clientelism that continues to function in the AKP period. In Turkey mainstream political parties favour some interest groups and meet particular demands in exchange for their support in elections. Instead of empowering the democratic capacity of Turkish citizens and alleviating the structural problems that plague state–society relations, the AKP patronises select communities and creates a situation in which the latter's survival depends upon the party's presence in office.⁷⁸ Erdoğan's government provided several religious brotherhoods and communities with material rewards in the form of land for their dorms and schools in exchange for their electoral support. This paternalistic relationship was further evident during the prep school quarrel with the Gülenists, when Prime Minister Erdoğan asked: 'What did they ask for that we refused?'⁷⁹

Lastly, there is an ever higher level of clientelism in the form of direct social assistance. In 2013 alone more than three million citizens received over 20 billion Turkish lira – more than the total provided over the past decade – in social assistance thanks to the populist distributive politics of the AKP government.⁸⁰ While such practices alleviate the harsh effects of economic crises, they may also help the government appeal to the voting preferences of the disadvantaged groups who are left dependent on the favours of the state.

The vicious cycle of delegative democracy

Initially calls for further democratisation and human rights were part and parcel of the AKP's survival strategy, with the EU providing a safe haven in the years following Kemalist suppression of the Islamists. Compared with its predecessors, the 'National Outlook' parties, the AKP has certainly tempered its political orientation by supporting efforts at acquiring EU membership and pursuing neoliberal policies. Nevertheless, whether 'tactical' or 'ideological',⁸¹ moderation does not necessarily imply democratisation. Considering the authoritarian leanings of the government, the outcome of what initially was celebrated as a form of 'Muslim democracy' has been neither totally Islamic nor democratic. Therefore the literature on the AKP, focusing on whether it has grown increasingly moderate or adopted some form of secular ideology, is misplaced and does not adequately explain its recent manifestations.

Obviously democratisation needs time to adequately establish the procedures and processes through which elected civilians can be held accountable, but also restricted by a system of checks and balances. During its first democratic transition in 1945 Turkey was ensnared by a delegative democracy in which the civilian government, under Adnan Menderes, attempted to seize power. The military then ousted the government in the 1960 *coup d'état* and drafted the 1961 constitution, which codified military tutelage by protecting its autonomy and establishing new institutions, such as the National Security Council, to influence national politics. With civilianising reforms directed by the campaign for EU membership in the 2000s and, very crucially, the Ergenekon trials (2008–13), the AKP government was able to reduce military autonomy to a great degree. Since 2010 the AKP has ensured civilian supremacy, necessary for any democracy. Yet, when civilians again obtained unchecked political power in the absence of established democratic institutions, Turkey was pulled into delegative democracy once again. Whether tutelary or delegative, each democracy shows a defective pattern.

What can explain a parliamentary regime's move to delegative democracy, something typically associated with presidentialism? O'Donnell acknowledges the following possibility: 'If delegative propensities are strong in a given country, the workings of a parliamentary system could be rather easily subverted or lead to impasses even worse'.⁸² Although this paper cannot explain every shortcoming of Turkish democracy, Özbudun helps elucidate some of the features of the Turkish political system, such as 'strong party discipline' and 'the absence of intraparty democracy', which lead Özbudun to the conclusion that 'even a parliamentary regime is not entirely immune to delegative democracy'.⁸³ Several other alternative explanations, such as the lack of an impartial judiciary, political fragmentation and polarisation, and the undemocratic inheritance left by the successive military interventions account for this slide to delegative democracy as well. Nevertheless, given the pertinence of these factors, what marks the past decade is the dominant party system in which a political party wins consecutive elections without any foreseen possibility of future defeat.

Thanks to its electoral hegemony, the AKP has stayed in power long enough to restructure the state in the absence of established democratic institutions. The party came to power after the 2002 'tsunami' election, which erased many of the prominent political parties in Turkey's fragmented context through 'the 10 percent

national threshold – one of the world’s highest’.⁸⁴ Since then, consecutive victories in general elections (34% of the votes in 2002, 47% in 2007, and 50% in 2011) and local elections (42% in 2004, 39% in 2009, and 43% in 2014) have positioned the AKP as a ‘dominant party’. This level of electoral support has been maintained through ‘a cycle of dominance that included initial mobilization, expansion of core support through material benefits, delegitimization of the opposition and selective use of ideological rigidity and flexibility’.⁸⁵ Consequently the party strengthened its hold in both the government and the parliament and ruled the country using the ‘dominant party + dominant leader formula’.⁸⁶ With this clear electoral hegemony Erdoğan could also play with the composition of the checking mechanisms, like the judiciary, as well as penetrate the arteries of the state. In such a context the potential drawback in O’Donnell’s terms is that ‘the generalized lack of control enables old authoritarian practices to reassert themselves’.⁸⁷

Delegative democracy is not just another type of defect democracy. It erodes the democratic texture of the regime by destroying institutional mechanisms (anti-institutional), eliminating political competition (anti-political), and instead establishing an informal rent-distributing system that ensures loyalty (clientelism). In general the curse of delegative democracy lies in its lack of institutionalisation as a vicious cycle, ie the absence of democratic institutions operates as both the cause and effect of delegative democracy and contributes to the persistence of the system.

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Notes

1. “Paralele inat dev katılım” [Huge participation just to spite the parallel (state)], *Akşam*, March 23, 2014.
2. For a substantial analysis of the literature, see Çınar, “The Justice and Development Party.”
3. Eligür, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey*, 11.
4. Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism*, 22, 29.
5. Fisk, “Has Recep Tayyip Erdogan?”
6. Ibid; Nonnenmacher, “Erdogans Cäsarenwahn”; and Kaminski, “Turkey’s ‘Good Dictator’.”
7. Linz, “Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy,” 29.
8. O’Donnell, “Delegative Democracy,” 69.
9. Collier and Levitsky, “Democracy with Adjectives,” 430.
10. O’Donnell, “Delegative Democracy,” 60.
11. Critics of O’Donnell argue that the delegative nature of those Latin American countries was a temporary phenomenon, while his analysis ignores the positive developments towards constitutionalism. See Walker, “Delegative Democratic Attitudes,” 85; Peruzzotti, “The Nature of the New Argentine Democracy,” 133; and Panizza, “Beyond ‘Delegative Democracy,’” 738.

12. Kubicek, "Delegative Democracy in Russia"; Croissant, "Legislative Powers"; and Walker, "Delegative Democratic Attitudes."
13. For instance, see Ford, "Delegative Democracy."
14. O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," 61.
15. *Ibid.*, 60.
16. *Ibid.*, 61–62.
17. *Ibid.*, 60.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," 59.
21. O'Donnell, "Illusions about Consolidation," 40.
22. Özbudun, "Turkey," 137.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Cizre Sakallıoğlu, "The Anatomy of the Turkish Military," 153.
25. Przeworski, "Democracy as a Contingent Outcome," 61.
26. Kuran, "Turkey's Electoral Dictatorship."
27. "Gül'den Gezi Parkı açıklaması: Demokrasi sadece seçim değildir mesaj alınmıştır" [Gül's declaration on the Gezi Park: Election is not everything in democracy, message received], *Akşam*, June 3, 2013.
28. Cornell, "Erdoğan's looming Downfall."
29. "Ergun Özbudun: Milli irade kavramı tedavülden kalktı" [Ergun Özbudun: The concept of the national will be taken out of circulation], *Bugün*, June 29, 2014.
30. O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," 66–67.
31. Dik, "643 sayılı KHK," 121.
32. Keyman, "Türkiye'de Demokrasinin Sorunları," 36.
33. According to the Constitutional Court's decision on July 30, 2008, the party was not banned, but was still found guilty of violating constitutional prohibitions and saw a partial reduction in its state funding. Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism*, 75.
34. Jenkins, "The Politics of Personality."
35. For a list of these reforms, see Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism*, 61–62.
36. Ciddi, "Turkey's September 12, 2010 Referendum."
37. Cornell, "Erdoğan's looming Downfall."
38. Erdoğan expressed his rationale behind such interferences: 'I am the country's prime minister. Every issue is my concern.' Cornell, "Erdoğan's looming Downfall."
39. "Başbakan: Gezi'yi ve Taksim'i İşgalcilerden Temizledik" [Prime Minister: We have cleansed Gezi and Taksim of occupiers], *Yurt*, June 18, 2013.
40. "35 kişi hakkında yeni 'Gezi' iddianamesi" [The new 'Gezi' indictment against 35 people], *Hürriyet*, September 8, 2014.
41. "'Milli İradeye Saygı Mitingi' Hazırlığı" [Getting Prepared for the 'Respect for National Will' Demonstration], *Sabah*, June 16, 2013.
42. Gürhanlı, "Turkey's Local Elections."
43. Çarkoğlu, *Turkey goes to the Ballot Box*, 9.
44. "AK Partili Babuşçu'dan itiraf: Kamuda tasfiye, 17 Aralık'tan çok önce başladı" [Confession from AKP member Babuşçu: Elimination in the public bodies began long before December 17], *Zaman*, February 3, 2014.
45. "Cadı avıysa cadı avı" [Witch hunt, if it is so], *Hürriyet*, May 12, 2014.
46. "HSYK için yeni düzenleme" [New legislation for HSYK], *Sabah*, May 23, 2014.
47. "Süper hakimler geliyor" [Super-judges are coming], *Vatan*, June 28, 2014.
48. Corke et al., *Democracy in Crisis*, 1.
49. Cornell, "Erdoğan's looming Downfall."
50. For the full report, see Corke et al., *Democracy in Crisis*.
51. "Erdoğan: Anayasa Mahkemesi kararına saygı duymuyorum" [Erdoğan: I do not respect the verdict of the Constitutional Court], *Radikal*, April 4, 2014.
52. Vedat Denizli, "Minister admits 'Ak Saray' ruling not overturned," *Today's Zaman*, November 27, 2014.
53. "PM Erdoğan vows 'to ban ban' on AKP election ad," *Hurriyet Daily News*, March 19, 2014.
54. Etyen Mahcupyan, "İkilemler 6: İhtilal ve Hukuk" [Dilemmas 6: Revolution and Law], *Aksam*, November 1, 2014.
55. Human Rights Watch, "Turkey: Spy Agency Law opens door to Abuse," press release, April 29, 2014.
56. O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," 60.
57. İnsel, "Becoming a World Economic Power," 187.
58. Fradkin and Libby, "Erdogan's Grand Vision," 41.
59. "Turkey's Erdoğan says 'dark alliances' behind graft inquiry," Reuters, December 13, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/21/turkey-corruption-idUSL6N0K002S20131221>.
60. Taş, "Anti-Westernism in Turkey."
61. *Ibid.*
62. "Millet kazandı vesayet kaybetti" [The nation has won, tutelage lost], *Yeni Şafak*, June 13, 2011.

63. Gürhanlı, "Turkey's Local Elections."
64. Cizre "Understanding Erdoğan's Toxic Recrimination."
65. "Başbakan."
66. Gürbüz, "The Long Winter," 10.
67. Taş, "Anti-Westernism in Turkey."
68. "If Erdogan falls, Turkey will Fall," *Yeni Şafak English*, June 6, 2014.
69. Buğra and Savaşkan, *New Capitalism in Turkey*, 19.
70. Bedirhanoğlu, "The Neoliberal Discourse," 1247.
71. Buğra, "The Truth behind the Turkish Model"; and "Kanun 11 yılda 113 kez değiştirildi" [Law altered 113 times in 11 years], *Odatv*, August 24, 2014. <http://odatv.com/n.php?n=kanun-11-yilda-113-kez-degis-tirildi-2408141200>.
72. Özsel et al., "A Decade of Erdoğan's JDP," 562.
73. Buğra and Savaşkan, *New Capitalism in Turkey*, 12.
74. Corke et al., *Democracy in Crisis*, 1–2.
75. "Dogan v. Erdogan: The Travails of Turkey's Dogan Yayın," *The Economist*, September 10, 2009.
76. "Destekle AKP'yi doldur keseyi" [Support AKP, fill the purse], *Taraf*, July 20, 2014.
77. Çarikoğlu, *Turkey goes to the Ballot Box*, 1.
78. Çınar, "Anti-vesayetçiliğin ötesinde," 14.
79. "Cemaat 15 kat büyüdü" [The Gülen community has grown 15-fold], *Sözcü*, January 11, 2014.
80. "İşte AK Parti'nin 'sosyal yardım' gerçeği" [Here is the truth about the AK Party's 'social assistance'], *Radikal*, December 29, 2014.
81. Karakaya and Yildirim, "Islamist Moderation," 1324.
82. O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," 69.
83. Özbudun, "Turkey," 136.
84. Müftüler Baç and Keyman, "The Era of Dominant-party Politics," 87–88.
85. Gümüşçü, "The Emerging Predominant Party System," 225.
86. Keyman, "The AK Party," 25.
87. O'Donnell, "Illusions about Consolidation," 45.

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