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# Did Secularism Fail? The Rise of Religion in Turkish Politics

Zeynep Taydas  
*Clemson University*

Yasemin Akbaba  
*Gettysburg College*

Minion K.C. Morrison  
*Mississippi State University*

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## **Abstract**

Religious movements have long been challenging the modernist and secularist ideas around the world. Within the last decade or so, pro-religious parties made significant electoral advances in various countries, including India, Sudan, Algeria, and the Palestinian territories. In this article, we focus on the rise of the pro-religious Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*- AKP) to power in the 2002 elections in Turkey. Using the Turkish experience with political Islam, we evaluate the explanatory value of Mark Juergensmeyer's rise of religious nationalism theory, with a special emphasis on the "failed secularism" argument. Our analysis indicates that the theoretical approach formulated by Juergensmeyer has a great deal of explanatory power; however, it does not provide a complete explanation for the success of the AKP. The rise of religion in Turkish politics is the result of a complex process over long years of encounter and confrontation between two frameworks of order, starting with the sudden imposition of secularism from above, when the republic was established. Hence, to understand the rise of religion in contemporary Turkish politics, an in-depth understanding of history, politics, and the sources of tension between secularists and Islamists is essential. The findings of this article have important implications for other countries, especially those that are experiencing a resurgence of religion in politics, and are struggling to integrate religious parties into a democratic system.

## **Keywords**

Turkey, Religion, Politics, pro-religious political parties, Justice and Development Party, failed secularism, religious nationalism

## **Disciplines**

New Religious Movements | Political Science | Political Theory | Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration | Religion

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Zeynep Taydas

*Clemson University*

Yasemin Akbaba

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Minion K. C. Morrison

*Mississippi State University*

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Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Zeynep Taydas, Department of Political Science, Clemson University, 232 Brackett Hall, Clemson, SC 29634. E-mail: ztaydas@clemson.edu; Yasemin Akbaba, Department of Political Science, Gettysburg College, 300 North Washington Street, Gettysburg, PA 17325. E-mail: yakbaba@gettysburg.edu; Minion K. C. Morrison, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Mississippi State University, P.O. Box PC, Mississippi State, MS 39762. E-mail: kcmorrison@pspa.msstate.edu

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 20th century, religious movements have been challenging modernist and secularist ideas around the world. Religious movements have become an important sociopolitical force in many societies; this trend has clearly manifested itself in the significant electoral advances made by pro-religious parties.<sup>1</sup> In India, the Bharatiya Janata Party gained momentum in the 1991 and 1998 elections. In Sudan, the National Islamic Front was the third largest party in the 1986 elections and became the dominant party following the military coup in 1989. Hamas managed to defeat the Palestine Liberation Organization and won the Palestinian Authority's general legislative elections in 2006. Similarly, the Islamic Salvation Front of Algeria, the Islamic Action Front of Jordan, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party of Bangladesh, and the United Malays National Organization of Malaysia, have obtained overwhelming electoral successes in the last decades. Turkey shares a similar experience. The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* — AKP) received 34.3% of the popular vote and formed a one-party dominant government in the November 2002 general elections. The AKP became the most important player in the Turkish political system and acquired more power than any previous pro-religious party had ever gained in modern Turkish history.

In this article, we focus on the Turkish experience with political Islam in the last decade. We examine the reasons for the rise of the pro-religious AKP in the 2002 elections and evaluate the explanatory value of Mark Juergensmeyer's religious revival theory, with a special emphasis on his "failed secularism" argument. To achieve these ends, first we identify some of the core elements in Juergensmeyer's theoretical approach and then apply it to Turkey to see if his approach can be extended to another case. Our findings reveal that the theoretical approach formulated by Juergensmeyer is instructive; more importantly, it has a great deal of explanatory power in accounting for the rise of the pro-religious AKP to power. Consistent with Juergensmeyer's expectations, the popular majority in Turkey has lost faith in secular parties and in recent general elections has aligned with political parties that privilege traditional

religious elements. The sociopolitical impact of the liberalization policies, economic breakdowns, and political instability contributed to the disenchantment of voters from secular centrist parties. The authoritarian and corrupt nature of centrist secular parties and lack of credible secular alternatives, at both ends of the political spectrum, also benefited the AKP.

However, Juergensmeyer's theory does not provide a complete explanation for the resurgence of religion in Turkish politics in general and the success of the AKP in particular. Our analysis identifies two other important factors that played critical roles in the rise of the AKP in the 2002 elections: The first one is related to the reaction of the secular establishment to the religious parties over the years (military coups, party closures, etc.). We argue that the harsh response of the secular establishment had a major influence on the evolution of the Islamists and their ideology. The second factor that contributed to the success of the AKP at the ballot box is the transformation (i.e., moderation) of Islamists. This subsequently led to the emergence of the AKP as a socially Muslim, democratic, pluralist, conservative center-right party, as opposed to its far right, radical religious predecessors. Although Juergensmeyer points to the possibility of accommodation of religious nationalists and/or coexistence of religion and the state, his theory does not explain the implications of moderation and more specifically its possible impact on the electoral prospects of the pro-religious parties.

Overall, our analysis reveals that the rise of religion in Turkish politics is a complex phenomenon and it is the result of long years of encounter and confrontation between two frameworks of order, starting with the sudden imposition of secularism from above, when the republic was established. There are many context-specific explanations engrained in Turkish history and politics, and to understand the complex reasons behind the rise of religion in politics, an in-depth understanding of Turkish history, politics, and the sources of tension between secularists and Islamists is essential. Given the intricate nature of the issue, we obviously do not claim to account for *all* the reasons behind the rise of the AKP. However our analysis accounts for some of the most important factors, which in turn, allow us to evaluate the explanatory capability of Juergensmeyer's theory.

This study's contribution to the literature is four-fold. First, it applies an important theory to a rather complicated case and hence contributes to theory testing and further theory development. Second, our study examines the reasons for the rise of the AKP in great detail and answers a theoretically important and interesting question. Third, comparative politics scholars have long been interested in understanding the conditions that

lead to moderation and integration of religious parties into democratic systems. Although moderation is far from being a universal and deterministic process, the Turkish case can offer important insights to other countries that are trying to integrate religiously based parties into their political systems. Finally, this study highlights unique circumstances that led to the electoral success of the AKP in Turkey, and develops connections between this case and the rise of religious nationalism in other parts of the world.

Turkey is selected as the case for this study for the following reasons: First of all, Turkey is not one of the cases tested by Juergensmeyer (1993a), despite his interest in the religious movements in the Middle East. It took approximately a decade after the publication of his book for an Islamist movement to form a single-party government in Turkey. Therefore, application of the theory to Turkey enables us to understand how well the framework travels. Furthermore, Turkey, which Huntington (1993, p. 42) calls “[t]he most obvious and prototypical torn country,”<sup>2</sup> is a textbook example of the consolidation of democracy in a predominantly Muslim country. The rise of the AKP and political Islam, despite the presence of rigid secular institutional structure and rules, makes Turkey an important and rather “tough” case for theory testing purposes.

The text will be divided as follows: first, the core arguments of Juergensmeyer’s theoretical approach are identified. Second, the origins, historical evolution, and ideological roots of the religious parties in Turkey are explained. Third, the explanatory value of his theory and a detailed analysis of the reasons for the rise of the AKP to power are elucidated. And, in the last section, the findings of the study are presented and conclusions are drawn.

## **JUERGENSMeyer’S THEORY**

The theoretical approach utilized in this article is drawn from Mark Juergensmeyer’s publications on religious challenges to the secular state from the early 1990s to mid 2000s. The specific emphasis is given to his seminal book, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Juergensmeyer 1993a), in which he identifies the key concepts and arguments in great detail. In order to offer a better account of his theory and to establish a degree of continuity, some of his other work on the same subject has been examined, as well. In his above

mentioned work, Juergensmeyer focuses on the rise of religious movements that have challenged the legitimacy of secular principles and institutions in the developing countries, especially since the Cold War, and identifies the reasons for the extraordinary global growth of religious nationalism. According to Juergensmeyer (2005), modern religious activists have long tried to reassert the role of traditional values and religion, although not all rejections of secularism have been the same. While some of the movements have been isolationist, hostile, violent and extreme (cf. Iran after 1979 and Afghanistan after 1995), others (like Hindu nationalists in India) had a more moderate outlook and demanded a greater role for religion in the public and political spheres, although not the establishment of a religious state.

In an attempt to understand the reasons for religious confrontations and to reveal some general trends, Juergensmeyer (1993a) provides examples from the Middle East, South Asia, and formerly communist countries in Central Asia and Eastern Europe and offers an overview of the historical, political, and cultural characteristics of the countries that have experienced serious conflict between secular and religious worldviews. According to Juergensmeyer, these cases are united by “disillusionment with secular nationalism,” and the “hope for the revival of religion in the public sphere” (Juergensmeyer 1993b).

According to Juergensmeyer, both secular and religious nationalists “claim to be the guarantor of orderliness within a society” and “the ultimate authority for social order” (1993a, p. 33). Secular nationalism is “based on the idea that the legitimacy of the state was rooted in the will of [the] people, divorced from any religious sanction” (Juergensmeyer 1993a). Hence, secularism has always been seen as a major rival to religion and whenever one framework shapes social order, the other is automatically pushed to the margins (Juergensmeyer 1993a, p. 33). Secularists assumed that secular nationalism could triumph over religion and become “a suprareligion of its own” because it was as compelling as a sacred faith. It was expected that through secularism, religion’s influence in politics would fade away (Juergensmeyer 1993a, p. 13). Despite the attempts of secular nationalists to keep religion outside of politics, religion has intruded into the political arena on many occasions, frequently in the form of religious nationalism.

Juergensmeyer defines religious nationalists as “individuals with both religious and political interests” who “see a deficiency in society that is both religious and political in character” (1993a, p. 6). They are, in fact, “political actors striving for new forms of national order based on religious

values” (Juergensmeyer 1995, p. 379) and mainly concerned with the perception of a secular contract as the “moral basis for politics” and the “source of loyalty to the state” (Juergensmeyer 1993a, p. 7). Contrary to the claims of the secularists, religious nationalists believe that religion is the “appropriate premise on which to build a nation—even a modern nation state” (Juergensmeyer 1993a, p. 40). They perceive secularism as neither natural nor universally applicable and claim the cultural dominance of such Western ideas is “dangerous because it lacks moral and spiritual values and undermines traditional religious constructs of society and the state” (Juergensmeyer 1993a, p. 20). What they oppose is the ideological justification for the state based on secular values and its separation from religion (Juergensmeyer, 1993a; 1993b; 1995).

The rivalry between the two ideologies of order created fault lines in the new nations of the third world, especially in the middle of the 20th century. Western academics, leaders, and urban-educated elites of newly independent countries believed that states should distance themselves from ethnic and religious identities of the past as much as possible especially because religious loyalties would create obstacles in realizing political goals, such as modernization. The fierce competition has generated citizen demands for the accommodation of religion; in many parts of the world, leaders have taken steps to co-opt religion without sacrificing the secular principles. Accommodation of religion, however, has been a rather difficult process (Juergensmeyer 1993a, pp. 36–39). Nasser and Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt, for example, tried to establish a politically secular, culturally Muslim modern state, following the revolution in 1952. Similar attempts were taken by the Nehru dynasty in India. However, these attempts were not particularly successful due to the competitive nature of the relationship between secularism and religion. This led to frustration from both spiritual and secular points of view, and eventually, those who make such compromises ended up being seen as traitors by both sides (Juergensmeyer 1993a; 1993b; 1995). Sadat’s assassination in 1981 by members of al-Jihad depicts how far implications of the label of traitor can go and how hard it is to accommodate and co-opt religion within secular state structures.

Perhaps the most important contribution of Juergensmeyer (1993a; 1993b; 1995) is his explanation with regard to the causes of resurgence of religion in the world, especially in the post-Cold War period. He perceives the surge of religious nationalism as a strong reaction to the “failure of secular nationalism” in meeting the demands of the people and in providing solutions to their problems. In other words, from Juergensmeyer’s point of view, people have lost their faith in secular



ideology because the secular framework has not lived up to its promises of “political freedom, economic prosperity, and social justice” (Juergensmeyer 1993a, p. 23). He states that at some point, people have come to the conclusion that secular ideas and institutions do not deserve loyalty because they have failed to perform their duties and brought nothing but economic difficulties, persistent social inequalities, corruption, political repression, and cultural degradation, *inter alia* (Juergensmeyer 1993a; 1995; 2005). More importantly, people started to perceive secular ideas as the real cause for the despair about the present condition of the society. The weakening of the nation-state and disillusionment with old forms of secular nationalism, in turn, produced the opportunity for alternative sources of loyalty. In the wake of a legitimacy crisis, religious, ethnic, and traditional values reappeared, offering an alternative form of social cohesion and new sources of national identity and loyalty (Juergensmeyer 2005).

Juergensmeyer (1995, p. 389) also points out that the encounter of religion and secularist ideas has “offered possibilities for accommodation” of the nation-state by religious nationalists and given birth “to a synthesis, in which religion has become the new ally of the nation-state.” He illustrates this idea using the Bharatiya Janata Party of India, noting that during election campaigns, Hindu nationalists repeatedly stated that “the specific framework and policies of the state matter little” and they did not intend to run a Hindu government, as long as the state has a moral purpose and a strong sense of national identity (Juergensmeyer 1995, p. 388). Juergensmeyer concludes that while a certain synthesis between religious nationalism and the structure of the nation-state is possible, it is not plausible to expect a true convergence between religious and secular political ideologies. He states that the best that can be hoped for is the possibility of mutual coexistence and continuous respect between the two (Juergensmeyer 1993a; 1993b; 1995). In the next section, we provide an overview of the Turkish political system and the historical evolution of the religious parties in Turkey in order to set the stage for the application of Juergensmeyer’s theory to Turkey.

## **ISLAM AND POLITICS IN TURKEY: THE POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM AND THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGIOUS PARTIES**

Although the democratic process of Turkey has been interrupted fourtimes (1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997), the country has remained committed to a democratic regime and competitive elections for more than 60 years.

Since the introduction of the multiparty system in 1945, numerous parties have existed and competed within an environment that was shaped by democracy. There have been a total of 17 parliamentary elections, in Turkey between 1946 and 2011. While Islamic political parties have taken part in the Turkish political system since the 1960s, they remained on the margins of the electoral competition until the mid 1990s (Tezcür 2009). The first party to explicitly espouse an Islamist political philosophy, the National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi* — MNP), was established in 1970 by Necmettin Erbakan. It offered a politicized understanding of Islam and demanded establishment of a new society based on Islamic traditional order. When the party was closed down after the 1971 coup on the grounds that it violated the constitutional principles of secularism, its supporters formed another party, the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi* — MSP). The MSP was banned after the coup in 1980 and it reemerged as the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* — RP) in 1983 (Kalaycıoğlu 1997).

By the 1990s, political pluralism in Turkey reached a level that rendered Islam a legitimate political force. In the 1995 general elections, the RP secured 21.4% of the votes and formed a government with a center-right secular True Path Party (*Doğruyol Partisi* — DYP) in 1996. The rise of RP triggered a strong reaction from the secular establishment and when the Constitutional Court outlawed the RP on the grounds that it had become a center of anti-secular activity, a new Islamist party, the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi* — FP), was formed under the leadership of Recai Kutan in December 1997. This party was also closed down by the Constitutional Court in June 2001, on account that it had become a hub for anti-secular activities and posed an existential threat to the state.<sup>3</sup> This time, however, the closure divided the Islamists into two groups: the first, the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi* — SP), was established by “traditionalists” and was a direct continuation of the RP tradition. The second party, AKP, was established by “reformists” under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. This group quickly distinguished itself from the SP by lowering the party’s Islamic profile and adopting a less confrontational strategy toward secularists. In 2002, 15 months after its establishment, the AKP received approximately one-third of the votes (34.3%) and two-thirds of the seats (363) in the parliament. It was a major turning point in Turkish politics — for the first time, a party with ostensible Islamic leanings managed to establish a majority government by a large margin and gained enough votes to rule the country without a

center left or right secular partner. Despite a drop in the number of the seats in the parliament, the AKP increased its votes to 46.6% and 49.8% in 2007 and 2011 general elections, respectively.

## **APPLICATION OF JUERGENSMEYER'S THEORETICAL APPROACH TO TURKEY**

### **Secular Nationalism: Faith and Control**

Similar to other secular nationalists discussed by Juergensmeyer (1993a), such as Nehru and Nasser, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, considered secularism the ultimate authority for social order. As a result, after independence, Atatürk and other republican elites wanted to transform Turkey into a modern, secular, and western-style state; and, tried to establish a homogenous Turkish national identity detached from ethnic and religious affiliations. Perceiving Islam as an obstacle in achieving these goals, secularization was imposed directly from above: the French model of *laicism* was adopted, and a series of radical social and political reforms — including the abolition of the caliphate, the banning of religious clothing and the obliteration of *Sharia* (Islamic law) courts — were instituted. The goal was to eliminate religion from the public sphere and simply relegate it to the private sphere.<sup>4</sup>

In an attempt to decrease the hold and power of religion on the masses, the state established multiple control mechanisms over religion starting from the early years of the republic. For example, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) was established to regulate, control, and oversee all religious activity in the country. This entity was, and still is, responsible for the administration and organization of religious institutions, as well as for providing religious education in schools. Similarly, religious discourse in politics has been strictly controlled by the secular establishment. The constitution requires statutes, programs, and activities of political parties to be in-line with the principles of the democratic and secular Republic (Article 68); and the Constitutional Court is authorized to dissolve a party if it becomes the focus of unconstitutional activities (Article 69). Another strong control mechanism over religion has been the military. In addition to protecting the territorial integrity of the country, the military is responsible for the preservation of the unitary, secular, and democratic character of the country.<sup>5</sup> When a serious threat to Kemalist principles is identified, either internally or

externally, the military establishment can take direct or indirect actions and intervene in politics, as happened in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997. Due to its unique characteristics, scholars define the situation in Turkey as “a state of controlled secularity” and refer to Turkish secularism as “peculiar,” “unorthodox,” “a religion on its own,” and “anti-religious” (Gülalp 2003; İbrahim 2006; Jenkins 2003; Tank 2005).

### **Confrontation of Two Ideologies of Order, and Secularists’ Attempts to Accommodate Religion**

As Juergensmeyer indicates, secular elites perceive secularism as a universal and desirable phenomenon, independent of time and place, and the ultimate path to modernization. In the Turkish case, the secular elite emphasize the unitary nature of the republic and try to limit the institutionalization of different identities, including Kurdish and Islamic. Meanwhile, Islamist movements perceive religion to be the appropriate premise of the modern nation state and portray this official state ideology and secular nationalism as an alien (i.e., western), rigid, ill-fitting, and divisive ideology. They claim that the Kemalist marginalization of religion creates “alienation from ‘authentic’ Turkish culture (read Islam), denying the country its rightful place at the helm of the Muslim world” (Onar 2007, p. 276).<sup>6</sup> Religious nationalists accept the importance of Turkishness as the source of identity, but their understanding of national identity is ethno-religious and society-centric, rather than state-centric, meaning that the central place is given to religion in conceptualizing the “nation” (Yavuz 2003).

Another important fact is that in Turkish political culture, state building has taken priority over democratic consolidation. The democratization and secularization processes have been achieved mostly through a top-down approach, with periodic interruptions of civilian politics by the Turkish military. This has had a profound impact on Turkish party politics and political culture. Statist and authoritarian tendencies have created major rivalry between secular, nationalist, urban-state elites at the center (the Kemalists) and those in the periphery (religious, traditional, and agricultural) (Secor 2001). As secularists restricted the expression of Islam in politics and further marginalized the conservative religious segments of the society, the competition and confrontation between the two ideologies have escalated (Yeşilada 2002a; 2002b). During the 1980s and 1990s, polarization intensified, especially between those who defended

secularism and who wished to expand the influence of Islam in Turkish politics and society. More importantly, the disruptions in Turkish democracy — especially the military interventions — led to abrupt realignments that weakened and fragmented the established parties (Kalaycıoğlu 1997; 2008). This, in turn, provided an opportunity for fringe parties, including Islamists, to become significant players in politics. One particularly important example of this is the military coup in 1980.

The 1980 coup was a major indirect contributor to the rise of Islam in Turkish politics. First of all, the policies of the military led to a major social and political restructuring in Turkey. After the coup, military elites aimed to prevent the conditions that led to extreme polarization and the breakdown of democracy in 1980. To achieve this goal, all pre-existing parties were disbanded and their leaders were banned from political activity for up to 10 years (Özbudun 1990). In addition, a 10% electoral threshold for representation in the parliament was introduced and a new law to exclude fringe parties from future parliaments was enacted. This meant that in the next elections, which took place in 1983, only newly-established parties with new leaders would be on the ballot.<sup>7</sup> The decision to ban the parties backfired, however, because their supporters established new parties following their same old ideology. As a result, when the ban was lifted in 1987, the renamed parties reentered political life and reestablished their old organizations; the consequence was fragmentation of the political system.<sup>8</sup> In short, the weakening of traditional party identification and the destruction of partisan alignments created an environment conducive to Islamic and nationalistic movements (Akgün 2001; Çarkoğlu 2008; Kalaycıoğlu 1994; Sayarı 2002).

As secularists realized the scope of the rising Islamist sentiments, meager attempts at accommodation occurred. As in Egypt and India, however, these attempts had limited success. The secular establishment became sponsors of a new ideology — a nationalistic view of Islam — called “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” (*Türk İslam Sentezi*). It refers to unification of two mainstream ideologies, ethnic nationalism with Islamism (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2009). Secular establishment took important steps such as introduction of compulsory religious courses and opening of new Quran schools (*Kuran kursları*). For the first time, Islam was given a central place in the definition of the national culture and in state ideology. By evoking the loyalty of all citizens and bringing the shared cultural values to the forefront, military leaders hoped to create a less political, more homogenous Islamic society; and, make the political system immune to political and economic chaos (Yavuz 1997). However, this

opening went beyond its initial goal. From the second half of the 1980s onwards, Islam became politicized and Turkish nationalism became Islamized. In this period, “Islam started to be seen in every aspect of life, beginning to create a real alternative to the existing system and redefined modernization” (Altunışık and Tür 2005, p. 43).

The so-called “February 28 process” and the subsequent closure of the RP by the Constitutional Court are other important events that reveal the extent of the confrontation between secularists and the religious movement in the Turkish setting. As mentioned earlier, the 1995 elections were the first indication of a major political change in Turkey. In June 1996, the RP formed a collation government with the DYP and for the first time in history, a person with an Islamist political philosophy became the prime minister. More importantly, it signaled the beginning of a period in which Islam became more visible in public life and religious symbols were heavily utilized, thus raising tensions between the secularist establishment and Islamic parties. Prime Minister Erbakan’s strong stance against Kemalism generated significant discontent in secular circles. However, the “direct” confrontation between the military and Islamists — and the downfall of the government — took place when the RP-controlled Sincan municipality of Ankara organized a gathering. In this event, the Iranian ambassador delivered an inflammatory, anti-secularist, and anti-regime speech under posters of Hamas and Hezbollah and called for *Sharia* rule in Turkey. The National Security Council directed the government to struggle against the Islamization of the country and to strengthen its secular character. To this end, it presented Erbakan with a list of recommendations to curb anti-secular activity in the country on February 28, 1997. When Erbakan shied away from implementing the recommendations, the military rallied the secular establishment and forced Erbakan to resign, in what is called a “post-modern coup” (Rabasa and Larrabee 2008; Kieser 2006). The Erbakan government resigned in June 1997 and a more centrist minority coalition government was established under the DYP leader, Mesut Yilmaz.<sup>9</sup> In 1998, the Constitutional Court shut down the RP and banned party leader Erbakan and a number of his associates from politics (Altunışık and Tür 2005; Tachau 2002).

The abrupt ending of the Erbakan-led coalition government and the party’s closure deepened the resentment of the conservative segments of Turkish society toward military and secular establishment. Yavuz (2003, p. 256) interprets the rise of the AKP to power as “a popular repudiation of the authoritarian establishment” and “a restoration of an Islamic

movement that was forced out of power in the 1997 coup.” It also served as a “catalyst for the split in Islamic politics and for the proliferation of self questioning attitudes of Islamic actors” (Çayır 2008, p. 75).

### **The Loss of Faith in Secular Ideals and the Weakening of Secular Centrist Parties**

Juergensmeyer’s theory places special emphasis on the reaction of the people to the failure of secular nationalism in explaining the rise of religious nationalism. He argues that the failure of secular governments in performing their duties, and finding solutions to the problems of the people, lead to a legitimacy crisis (Juergensmeyer 1993a; 1996; 2005). In times of turbulence and political confusion, people search for a new anchor and religion is perceived by many “as the only stable point in a swirl of economic and political indirection” (Juergensmeyer 1993a, p. 194). A closer look at Turkey’s past reveals a great deal of support for Juergensmeyer’s failed secularism argument. The failure of successive Turkish governments to (1) find solutions to the most enduring problems of the country, and (2) meet the expectations of the constituency has led to serious disillusionment. Many have felt that secular nationalism lost its relevance and vision for the future and they therefore started searching for a new anchor. This played a prominent role in the electoral success of AKP.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Economic Instability*

Economic changes that took place in Turkey since the military coup in 1980 moved the country toward an urban service and industrial-sector dominant economy at an unusually fast pace. During this time, Turkish people have suffered from chronic double-digit (and at times, triple) inflation, high unemployment rates, and numerous economic and financial crises. We argue that the social cost of the liberalization policies of the 1980s and recurring economic breakdowns in the 1990s and early 2000s, coupled with disillusionment with the mainstream parties as well as the prevalence of corruption, created a fertile ground for the revival of religious sentiments and conservatism (Salt 1995; Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2009; Tezcür 2009).

In the early 1980s, the Turkish economy experienced a major shift from import-substitution industrialization to an export-oriented economy. Export-oriented growth strategies produced impressive results in their

initial stages. While the gross national product (GNP) growth rate was around 1.2% in 1978 (Özbudun 1990), the growth rate increased to 7.1% in 1984. Average annual inflation rate dropped to 30.4% in 1983.<sup>11</sup> However, the initial success of the reforms could not be sustained in the long run and the liberalization process spawned several problems in the second half of the 1980s.

First of all, the liberalization and deregulation policies led to major increases in government spending. According to Buğra (2003), the budget deficit that was around 1.8% of GNP in 1981 reached 5% by the end of the decade. Similarly, total foreign debt as the ratio of GNP increased from 29.6% to 46.1% in 1987.<sup>12</sup> Second, market reforms negatively affected the agricultural sector. The share of agriculture in income distribution dropped from 23.8% in 1980 to 14% in 1988 (Altunışık and Tür 2005). In addition, the reform process left very little room for redistribution and social security provisions. These factors led to dissolution of the countryside and the migration of rural people to urban areas. The percentage of people living in urban areas dramatically increased from 44% in 1980 to 74% in 1999 (Buğra 2003). More importantly, due to the rapid population growth, high economic growth did not lead to much improvement in the material conditions of the poor. On top of severe budgetary constraints, the high population growth limited the state's ability to provide welfare for the underprivileged who were suffering from high inflation, which increased from 30.4% in 1983 to 70.5% in 1988.<sup>13</sup> The purchasing power parity sharply declined and real wages in proportion to national income dropped from 33% in 1979 to 18% in 1985/1986 (Altunışık and Tür 2005). By the mid-1980s, the leading center-right party, ANAP (Anavatan Partisi), started to lose its appeal, especially in the periphery, due to the negative repercussions of liberalization policies on living conditions.

The liberalization of financial markets and the opening of the economy to short-term foreign capital transactions resulted in a major economic crisis in the beginning of 1994, which led to the devaluation of the Turkish Lira.<sup>14</sup> As the economy became dependent on speculative capital, interest rates and the value of the currency increased in the late 1980s and early 1990s. High interest rates were successful in limiting outward money transfers. However, this posed challenges to the state, as the government borrowed more short-term money from other financial institutions. This led to significant increases in public debt, and interest payments became a serious problem for the governments. In the 1990s, 75% of the tax revenues were used for interest payment on domestic



debt, compared to around 20% by the end of 1980s (Altunışık and Tür 2005). In 1994, Turkey experienced a negative growth rate (-6.1%), and the inflation rose to triple digit levels (120.7%).<sup>15</sup> Decreases in the incomes of wage earners and high unemployment levels worsened preexisting social inequalities.<sup>16</sup>

The coalition government under the leadership of Çiller (DYP) responded to the economic crisis by initiating an International Monetary Fund (IMF)-backed economic stabilization program.<sup>17</sup> It had a positive impact and the economy started to show some signs of recovery and stability. From 1994 to 1999, the country experienced positive growth rates; but the government delayed the implementation of the structural measures of the stabilization program, which led to further deterioration of the economy. In 1999, a coalition government under the leadership of Ecevit implemented another disinflation program with the help of the IMF to decrease the high interest rates and the public debt.<sup>18</sup> However, this attempt was not particularly successful, either. The drastic decline in interest rates led to outward money transfers, which created a severe liquidity problem and banking crisis in late 2000.

Finally, in February 2001, following a political dispute between Prime Minister Ecevit and President Sezer, another economic crisis took place. The 2001 economic crisis was, indeed, the worst financial collapse in post Second World War Turkish history. Nineteen out of 86 banks declared bankruptcy and around 20% of GNP disappeared with this financial crisis (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2009). The financial markets collapsed and the value of the Lira decreased 40% overnight. Many companies and businesses collapsed; the economy contracted by 9.5%, and average inflation rose to 61.6% in 2001.<sup>19</sup> It precipitated a very high level of unemployment, especially among the urban white-collar workers. Unemployment which stood around 14% (8% unemployed and 6% underemployed) was a serious problem because it led to a decline in purchasing power (Altunışık and Tür 2005). Public sector borrowing jumped to 16.4% of GNP, compared to 7.9% during an earlier financial crisis in 1994. The dire economic circumstances forced another IMF-backed economic austerity and stabilization program.

Although liberal political policies contributed to the revival of civil society and increased social and economic pluralism, they did not enjoy unconditional support from masses. As the new era of economic entrepreneurship benefited the big corporations, propertied classes, and “self-centered and amoral few who were ready to go up the social ladder in a Machiavellian ride,” many perceived neoliberal policies of the government as unfair and

unjust. Citizens blamed the secular centrist parties that governed the country in the 1980s and early 1990s (ANAP government between 1983 and 1991, SHP (Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti)-DYP government between 1991 and 1995). Their market driven economic policies were seen as the cause of rising gap between poor and rich, political corruption, scandals, cheating and an immoral order (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2009, p. 24).

### *Political Instability*

At the time when the Turkish people were experiencing severe economic difficulties, there was also a great deal of political instability in the country. The 1991 elections ended the period of multipartism, which was characterized by durable majority governments under the strong leadership of Özal. Thereafter began a decade of short minority or coalition governments formed mostly by center left and center right parties. From the end of the 48th government (ANAP) in 1991 to the establishment of the 58th government (AKP) in 2002, there were nine successive governments. Four were established by the center-right DYP between 1991 and 1996; two were established by ANAP (1996 and 1997 to 1999); and two were the center-left Democratic Left Party (DSP) (from 1999 to 2002). In other words, throughout the 1990s most coalition governments included at least one center-right or center-left party.<sup>20</sup> Centrist parties not only had their shot at governance more than once, they dominated the political agenda during the 1990s. By the early 2000s, all center parties had served in the government. However, none of these governments managed to bring long-term stability or provide a cure for economic problems (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2009). During this period, Turkey experienced two major financial crises.

One of the important reasons for these failures is the nature of coalition governments. The lack of a dominant party and fighting between and within parties prevented the establishment of effective and stable governments. The average tenure of these coalitions between 1991 and 2002 was less than a year; the longest coalition government was the 57th under the leadership of Ecevit (with ANAP and ultranationalist MHP-Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi), which lasted nearly three years (Sayarı 2007).<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, most secular parties that took part in the governing coalitions in Turkey failed to show a commitment to a desperately needed reform process and fiscal discipline with which to curb government deficits (Akgün 2001). Instead, they opted for populist economic policies.

Not surprisingly, in the 2002 elections, while the newly established AKP emerged as the leading party, all three members of the coalition were heavily penalized by the voters. None of the three secular parties ruling the country at the time of the crisis could pass the 10% threshold to gain representation in the parliament. Their vote share decreased from 53.4% in 1999 to 14.6% in 2002, and the DSP suffered the heaviest loss in terms of electoral support.<sup>22</sup> While the electoral support for the centrist parties was around 89% in 1987, it decreased to about 56% in 1999, and 35% in 2002. The results of the election clearly indicate that people “lost faith in the mainstream parties, who had not only failed to deliver on their promises but became palpably riddled with corruption and nepotism” (Jenkins 2003, p. 49). Citizens seemed willing to give a chance to a new and untested political party that promised accountability and honesty.<sup>23</sup> At the end, more than 40% of the votes were cast for the nationalist and religious parties, as shown in Figures 1a and 1b (online supplemental material).

Another factor that contributed to the rise of the AKP was erosion of centrist parties and fragmentation of the political party system (Çarkoğlu 1998; 2002; Öniş 1997; Şekercioglu and Arıkan 2008). Despite the existence of a number of centrist parties on the right and left of the political spectrum, “no single party emerged to stand for the values and interests of the center” (Özbudun 2000, p. 81). Instead, the center-right and center-left formed two ideologically similar parties. While Republican People’s Party (CHP) and DSP occupied the center-left, ANAP and DYP represented the center-right. Constant factionalism prevented any mergers and emergence of a strong centrist party.

In addition to intra-party power struggles, at this time, center-right and left parties suffered from other problems including organizational ineffectiveness, hierarchical power structure, elitism, internal party feuds, and lack of internal democracy. The organizational decline of the centrist parties and their ineffectiveness in communicating with the voters led to a significant decrease in the electoral support they received, especially from the poor in the country’s major cities. On the other hand, pro-religious parties, including RP and the AKP, developed strong organizational networks and intimate relationship with the voters. They incorporated hybrid populations and built on local community networks. Party members (especially females within the party) canvassed the neighborhoods engaging in face-to-face interaction with the voters. In short, the adoption of an informal and personal approach played a critical role in the creation of a self-sustaining political movement (White 2002).

At this time, the leaders of all four centrist parties, CHP, DSP, ANAP, and DYP, remained in total control of the parties and they “acted with impunity in personalizing the exercise of power and party leadership” (Sayarı 2002, p. 25). According to Sayarı, “[p]olitical parties have, for all practical purposes, turned into the personal fiefdoms of prominent politicians” (Sayarı 2002, p. 25) and neither electoral loss nor corruption appeared to be a reason for the fall of powerful leaders (Rubin 2002; Somer 2007). As a result, public confidence and trust in highly centralized and oligarchic centrist political parties reached its lowest points in the history and the gravity of the public opinion has shifted away from the center, to the right of the political spectrum (Kınıklıoğlu 2002; Rubin 2002; Sayarı 2002).

### *The AKP's Attempt to Accommodate the Nation-state: Moderation of the Religious Discourse*

As explained earlier, according to Juergensmeyer, while a true convergence between religious and secular political frameworks is not possible, mutual coexistence of the two can be achieved. This however, is possible only if religious nationalists refrain from rejecting the structure of the modern nation-state and basic principles of the state (Juergensmeyer 1993a; 1995). Although Juergensmeyer suggests the possibility of accommodation of nation-state by religious nationalists, he does not clearly identify under which specific circumstances this happens and what the consequences might be. More importantly, he does not establish a linkage between how accommodation might influence the future prospects of religious nationalists. In our opinion, this connection was quite obvious in Turkish politics. Realizing the gradual shift in Turkish voters' preferences to the political right, the young generation of pragmatic Turkish Islamists challenged the leadership of the old guard and split from the radical Islamist movement in 2001. They established their own political party and reshaped the ideology of the Islamic political movement by abandoning Islam as a political program. The party acquired a more cooperative political style and repeatedly stated its intention to work with the secularist establishment. The emergence of the AKP with a more moderate discourse strengthened party's legitimacy and credibility with voters, and allowed the construction of a cross-class alliance for broad electoral support.

There is no doubt about that AKP is a continuation of the political Islamist tradition: most of the members and founders of the party

came from the National Outlook (*Milli Görüş*) tradition. AKP calls for a greater role for Islamic principles and traditional values (local traditions, social norms, moral, and cultural principles) in society; however as opposed to its predecessors, it does not reject secular politics and the political apparatus of the modern nation-state and pledges commitment to the unity and integrity of the Republic of Turkey (Tezcür 2009). When reformists established the AKP in 2001, the group presented itself as a conservative democratic party, much like the Christian Democratic Parties of Europe. They tried to disassociate the AKP from former Islamic parties that were associated with the National Outlook movement, such as MNP, MSP, RP, FP, and SP. These parties were perceived by many as reactionary and anti-system forces in so far as they refused to internalize the values of the existing political order and disliked the secular character of the country. Although religion informs the political views and decisions of the members of the party, leaders of the party stated that the AKP had taken off the national outlook “shirt” and does not aspire to be a religious, anti-regime party (Somer 2007). Leaders of the party also emphasized that the AKP has no intentions of using religion for political purposes. The party program states that secularism is an important component of democracy, and that the primary goal of the AKP is to enhance individual rights, consolidate democracy, and restore economic stability. The party does not display strong hostility to modernity, liberal economic policies, and free market capitalism; and, it emphasizes the importance of respect for individual beliefs and freedoms (Hale 2005; Kalaycıoğlu 2002).

It is important to note that the experience of the RP, which was the predecessor of the AKP, provided lessons for the latter. In the first general election after the closure of the RP, the pro-religious party’s votes decreased from 21.4% to 14.8% and the party finished third behind the MHP and DSP. This incident demonstrated to the AKP that rhetoric is not sufficient by itself; a positive change in the lives of citizens is needed to keep the levels of support high. Second, the “reformers” have come to the realization that even though religion plays a significant role in the lives of the people, the population is also strongly attached to democracy and secularism. Therefore, under present conditions, radical Islam has very little chance to rule Turkey. The only way to become a mass party with a broad base of support is to move toward the center of the political spectrum (Öniş 2006; Taşkın 2008).

The rhetoric of the old national outlook was quite successful in receiving the votes of devout Muslims, who resented the tight state control over

religion. However, over the years, Erdoğan realized the necessity of augmenting “ideological” with “practical” support to build a large enough constituency to sustain power and this necessitated gaining the support of the business sector and urban poor, both of whom felt marginalized since the 1980s (Öniş 2006; Yeşilada 2002a; 2002b). The country’s growing Islamist business sector (Anatolian tigers) — who benefited immensely from Özal’s liberalization policies in the 1980s and were anxious to assert their traditional identity — joined the pro-Islamist MUSIAD (The Association of the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen) and provided substantial financial support for the AKP. Similarly, the AKP took advantage of the rapid social mobilization and urbanization of the poor. Gross imbalances caused by economic policies during the 1970s and 1980s increased migration from rural areas to cities. While 90% of the country was rural in 1923, it dropped to 60% by 1995. In 1997, 61% of the inhabitants of Istanbul were born in villages (Kalaycıoğlu 1997). Migrants felt excluded and embraced Islam and traditional values for dealing with issues of social injustice and equality (Tachau 2002; Yavuz 2003).

In integrating the periphery into the political system and securing the support of poor and excluded segments of the society, AKP’s strong organization, dedicated grassroots cadres, and old-style door-to-door canvassing played significant roles in engaging this group. The AKP used the slogan of “Everything for Turkey” before the 2002 elections and tried to convince voters that it would perform better than the traditional centrist parties and bring stability and certainty to their lives. It promised to be a service-based party, rather than one based only on ideology/rhetoric; and it promised to deal quickly and effectively with the urgent problems, including poverty, unemployment, inflation, inequality, and corruption (Öniş and Keyman 2003). It offered social services to the needy and managed to utilize traditional solidarity networks effectively. In sum, with its emphasis on fairness and social justice, the AKP was more capable of connecting with the urban poor than other parties.

Last, but not the least, the RP’s head-on confrontation with the military and the secularist establishment, after coming to power in 1995, alienated some of its supporters. The instability that ensued made it obvious that in order to function within the Turkish political system, Islamists had to respect the constitution and secular principles, and avoid constant confrontation. This development is in line with Juergensmeyer’s expectations: long period of confrontation, party closures, and constant pressure from the state and military establishment assimilated Islamists into the modern nation-state system and moderate Islamists stopped fighting with

the basic principles of the secular state. This not only ensured their survival in the Turkish political system but also increased the party's appeal among Turkish voters.

Despite the moderate and centrist political agenda of the AKP, the secular elite continue to be suspicious about the intentions of the AKP. Some believe that moderation of Islamists was a carefully planned move, rather than a sincere change in identity. This is largely because they have not forgotten earlier statements of Tayyip Erdoğan, who described democracy as "a vehicle which you ride as far as you want to go and then get off" when he was a member of the Welfare Party in 1993. He also stated that "there is no room for Kemalism or any other official ideology in Turkey's future," "praise be to God, we support *Sharia* law," and "parliament should be opened with prayers" (Jenkins 2003, p. 52). In 1998, he was convicted for inciting religious hatred under Article 312 of the Turkish penal code and was sentenced to 10 months in prison. A decade or so later, this time as the leader of the AKP, Erdoğan called democracy as the "perfect arrangement invented by humankind." He stated that his mentality has changed and everybody should forget about his past. He frequently noted that the AKP was built from "zero" and it has no connections or attachments to previous Islamic movements (Yıldırım, Inac, and Özler 2007, p. 17). While the issue of sincerity is beyond the purpose of this article, we argue that the AKP is an example of the moderation of political Islam, and that the transformation of the party has played a critical role in reaching a broader electorate.

## CONCLUSION

Since the 1980s religious movements have made significant advances and become important sociopolitical forces in many countries. In this article, we focused on the Turkish experience with political Islam. We examined the reasons behind the rise of the pro-religious AKP to power in 2002 elections and assessed the explanatory value of Juergensmeyer's theory. To accomplish these goals, we identified the core elements in his theory and discussed the reasons for the increasing salience of religion in Turkish politics in recent years. We highlighted some of the major historical turning points and complexities in Turkish history that seem to be critical in evaluating Juergensmeyer's arguments.

Juergensmeyer (2001, p. 66) states that "if it can be said that the modernist ideology of the post-Enlightenment West effectively separated

religion from public life, then what has happened in recent years — since the watershed Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 — is religion's revenge.” Hence, from his point of view, it was the failure of secular nationalism that created opportunities for this revenge. Our analysis demonstrates that the theoretical approach formulated by Juergensmeyer offers keen insights and has a great deal of explanatory power in accounting for the rise of the pro-religious AKP to power. After decades of political and economic instability and uncertainty, the Turkish masses were tired of the impotent coalition governments. As citizens' faith in secular centrist parties declined, the search for a credible alternative intensified. “Turkish society and politics rallied around traditions and religious conservatism” and voters decided to give the AKP a chance at governing in 2002 elections (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2009, p. 16). The fragmented nature of the political system, the undemocratic nature of political parties, as well as the lack of credible secular alternatives all contributed to the Islamist movement's upsurge.

It is important to note, however, that Juergensmeyer's theory offers only a partial explanation for the rise of religious nationalism in general and the success of the AKP in particular. One cannot offer a complete explanation for the resurgence of religion in politics in recent years simply by attaching it to the disillusionment of the masses or to any other single factor. Our analysis indicates that in accounting for the rise of the AKP, the response of the secular establishment to the religious parties over the years (military coups, party closures etc.) has played a critical role. Military interventions artificially changed the rules of the game and led to polarization of the political system in Turkey, and that by itself became a source of frustration among various groups. Furthermore, moderation of the AKP leaders and uncoupling of the party from an overt pan-Islamism have been critical for its success. The adoption of a less confrontational strategy toward the secular establishment before the election has increased the appeal of the AKP in the eyes of voters. We come to the conclusion that the reasons for the rise of the moderate Islamist AKP in Turkey, are complex, numerous, and intertwined. It is the result of long years of encounter and confrontation between two frameworks of order, starting with the sudden imposition of secularism from above, when the republic was established. Hence to understand the rise of religion in politics, an in-depth understanding of Turkish history, politics, and the sources of tension between secularists and religious movements such as what we offer is essential.

Many countries have experienced resurgence of religion in politics, however, “it is not so clear what, if anything, we can or should do



about it" (Juergensmeyer 1993a, 195). The increasing appeal of religious parties and continuous attempts of religious activists to infuse public life with religious symbols, old traditions, and moral values have generated some serious concerns among secular elites across the globe. The Turkish case provides important insights to other countries that are struggling to integrate religious parties into the political system. Our analysis also contributes to the growing literature on the impact of religion on the consolidation of democracy, especially in the Muslim world. Some scholars have argued that religion, especially Islam, and democracy are not compatible, and that the increasing electoral strength of religious parties can threaten the continuous performance of democracy and lead to political instability and a crisis of legitimacy (Almond, Dalton, and Powell Jr, 1999; Kedourie 1997; Sartori 1976). Similar to Tessler's (2002) findings, our evaluation indicates that developments in Turkey have so far shown that religious parties can operate within the law, and that Islam is not inherently hostile to democratic principles. Indeed, the existence of religious parties might be a positive influence for democratic consolidation, if countries manage to broaden the boundaries of participation by opening up public spaces for religious voices in politics. This kind of opening can lead to moderation of the religious parties' discourses and the softening of political demands of Islamic sectors, as happened in Turkey (Yavuz 1997). Political inclusion can lead to internalization of democratic principles. It can also bring fair competition to politics by increasing the pressure on secular nationalists and encouraging them to meet the needs of the broadest elements in a society.

Did Turkey find the solution to the problem of radical Islamism? If so, can this be exported to the other countries experiencing similar kind of challenges? Since the 1990s, political pluralism in Turkey had made sufficient inroads to render Islamism a legitimate political force. Although the ideas of the AKP have been assimilated into the framework of the existing political system to some extent, the history of the Republic of Turkey shows that the political fit into the framework of the existing political system has never "been a comfortable one" (Juergensmeyer 1993a, p. 198). Consolidation of democracy is a long process, and Turkey seems to be taking important steps. Yet, one needs to be cautious and refrain from premature conclusions.

The AKP's economic performance since the 2002 elections have been more impressive than many other secular parties that governed the country since the 1980s. Strict government adherence to fiscal discipline led to a significant decrease in inflation rate and an increase in GNP per capita

(from \$2,169 in 2009 to \$4,172 in 2004). Although the relative success of the AKP in restoring economic stability increased the party's legitimacy in the eyes of citizens, it does not seem to be doing any better than secular parties, when it comes to achieving more democratic forms of representation and broader public participation in politics. It suffers from the same old problems such as lack of intraparty democracy and pluralism, hierarchical power structure, favoritism, and patronage distribution (Tezcür 2009). This is a major obstacle to democratic consolidation in Turkey. Besides, there is no guarantee that the AKP will be committed to democratic and secular principles and keep religion apart from political discourse in the future.

## NOTES

1. Religious parties are "political actors who rely on appeals that incorporate and appropriate religious symbols and rituals" (Kalyvas 2000, p. 393).

2. Huntington (1993, p. 42) defines torn countries as countries that "have a fair degree of cultural homogeneity but are divided over whether their society belongs to one civilization or another."

3. Note that the constitutional court closed the party because it was a center of Islamic and anti-secular activities that undermined the secular government. The court, however, did not rule that FP was a continuation of the RP (Yeşilada 2002b).

4. Article 24 of the constitution prohibits exploitation or abuse religion or religious feelings, or things held sacred by religion. Turkish laws also prohibit incitement to religious or racial hatred. See Articles 14, 24, 68, 69 of the Constitution.

5. See Article 35 of internal service law of the Turkish armed forces.

6. RP's discourse glorified the Ottoman past and called for a system that is based on Islamic "just order" (*Adil Düzen*), which emphasizes social equity, justice, religious freedom, and solidarity. The RP opposed pro-western foreign policy and called for closer relationship with Islamic countries.

7. These were the Motherland Party, the Populist Party and Nationalist Democratic Party.

8. For example, when the CHP was closed down along with other parties by the 1980 military coup, a major split took place among social democrats and two parties with very similar platforms, namely SHP and DSP ended up representing the center left.

9. The 55th Yılmaz government lasted from June 30, 1997 to January 1, 1999.

10. Survey results of Kalaycıoğlu (2007; 2008) and Çarkoğlu (2008) indicate that in the determination of the partisan affiliations towards the AKP, the most important factor is government's economic performance and the prospects for economic improvement.

11. Whole sale price index is reported. Source: State Institute of Statistics (SIS).

12. Source: SPO (State Planning Organization), Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey.

13. Whole sale price index is reported. Source: SIS.

14. The exchange rate (against the US dollar) depreciated by more than half in the first three months of the year.

15. Wholesale price inflation is reported. Statistics are taken from Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, and SIS.

16. The Gini coefficient reached 0.50 in 1994 (Önis, 1997).

17. Tansu Çiller, served as the prime minister of Turkey from June 1993 to March 1996 (50th, 51st, and 53rd governments). Following the withdrawal of CHP from the coalition in 1995, she formed a minority government, but it did not receive a vote of confidence in the Grand National Assembly. After this incidence, she agreed to form another cabinet with the CHP and went for general elections.

18. Ecevit served as the prime minister of Turkey from January 1999 to November 2002 (56th and 57th Turkish governments). While 56th government was a minority government, the 57th was a coalition government, including DSP, MHP, and ANAP.

19. Wholesale price inflation is reported. Statistics are taken from Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, SIS.

20. Only once the prime minister of the country did not come from a center-right or left party, from mid-1996 to mid-1997 (DYP-RP coalition).

21. Although there are many examples of successful coalition and minority governments in the world, in the 1990s this was not the case in Turkey. Many coalitions were weak from the beginning and not surprisingly they did not even last a year. For example the 51st government under the leadership of Çiller (DYP) lasted only 25 days. The 52nd Çiller, 53rd Yılmaz and 56th Ecevit governments lasted around five months. Instability and ideological differences between parties as well as bickering between the party leaders prevented governments not only from staying in power for a long time period, but also from bringing stability to the country and solving problems of the citizens.

22. While the DSP received around 22% of the votes in 1999, in 2002 elections its votes shrunk down to 1.2%. Similarly, MHP lost 9.6 and the ANAP lost 12.9 percentage points.

23. The AKP has greatly benefited from the reputation of Welfare party's pro-Islamic mayors who were elected in 1994 elections. They improved public services, reduced corruption in their municipalities, and appeared more efficient and professional than their predecessors (Yavuz 1997).

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