

# THE TRIUMPH OF AN ISLAMIC PARTY IN TURKEY: EFFECTS OF THE DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS ON THE RISE OF THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (AKP)

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## *Abstract*

*The triumph of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has an absolute majority in Turkish Parliament, is not a sudden incidence. It is worth exploring the roots of this triumph within the democratisation process of the country. During the Turkish democratisation process, several breakdowns and restorations have occurred and military regimes have attempted to change the Turkish party and election system in accordance with their expectations. However, many of these interventions, which were imposed by the military regimes, have had positive affects on the recent rise of the Justice and Development Party.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, the international system has promoted the establishment and maintenance of formal democratic systems. Therefore, Western democratic countries have insisted on supporting so called second and third wave democratic countries, which have tried to establish or maintain democratic regimes.

By the late twentieth century, many more transitions from non democratic to democratic regimes have occurred. In this context, Samuel Huntington defines three waves of democratisation: the first wave had its roots in the American and French revolutions; the second wave is a short wave, which started in the Second World War; and finally the starting point of the third wave is the end of the Portuguese dictatorship in 1974, which has led to transitions to democratic regimes in approximately thirty countries (Huntington, 1991:15-21). In spite of their transition efforts, in some second wave countries and in many third wave countries the democratisation process has been problematic. Turkey is one of these countries, which still has problems consolidating its democracy.

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Although Huntington classifies Turkey as one of the second wave democracies, it is not still accepted as a liberal democratic country by academic and political circles. Diamond and Myers (2001:3) classify Turkey as a non-liberal electoral democracy.

According to Ozbudun (2000:1), *“Turkey is an interesting test case for many recent theories on democratisation.”* This is mainly because Turkish democracy has experienced several democratic breakdowns and restorations because of military interventions, and Turkey is still far from having reached the level of a consolidated democracy. At the same time there are anti-democratic cases which have occurred in Turkey, for example some political parties have been closed and some party leaders have been banned. Moreover, Turkey is the only democratic and secular country in the Islamic world. Especially after the last election which resulted in the triumph of an Islamic party, the question of compatibility of Islam and democracy has been another reason for why Turkey is an interesting case for democratisation theories.

Following Turkey’s general election on November 3, 2002, for the first time in fifteen years one party has an absolute majority. Despite hindrances - the leader of the Party, Tayyip Erdogan, was banned from participating in elections - the Justice and Development Party (AKP) won an overall majority within the Turkish Parliament. Since the most debatable characteristic of the leading party (AKP) is its Islamic roots, the sort of thing that the secularist armed forces would not normally tolerate, the major question for academic and political circles is: *“Can Islam and democracy live together without military intervention?”*

As a result of the fragility of the new political situation in Turkey, within the context of the democratisation process, it is worth examining *how the democratisation process in Turkey, with its party system and electoral behaviour, has affected the recent rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP).*

This article will attempt to explain the effects of the democratisation process on the rise of Islamic parties. In this context, conjuncture of the party system and electoral behaviour will be analysed as major angles of the Turkish democracy.

In order to explore the effects of the Turkish democratisation process on the rise of the AKP, Joseph Schumpeter’s and David Held’s well-known definitions of democracy will be presented. In addition to these definitions, a “western model of liberal democracy” will be discussed and compared with a “non-liberal electoral democracy model”. Moreover, the phases of the democratisation

process and characteristics of the consolidation period will be briefly touched upon. In the second section of the article the Turkish case of democratisation will be explored and analysed.

## **DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATISATION**

Virtually, every country may define itself to be a democracy. On the one hand, most military regimes which seize power without legitimacy claim that they came to power in order to restore a democratic regime. On the other hand many non-democratic governments create some strange formulations for their regimes such as “guided democracy”, “people’s democracy”, or the “people’s democratic dictatorship” as the Chinese People’s Republic officially terms itself in the Preamble to its constitution (Parry & Moran 1994:2). If every government can define its own democracy with different aspects, how can democracy be defined?

In general, democracy might be defined as a form of government in which the people rule. In spite of the existence of this simple definition, the concrete way in which the government should be organised and the question of which conditions and preconditions it requires have been debated for several centuries (Sørensen 1998:3).

One of the widely accepted definitions of democracy has been formulated by Joseph Schumpeter. He defines democracy as a mechanism for choosing political leadership:

*“The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote”.*

(Schumpeter cf. Sørensen, 1998:10)

In contrast to Schumpeter’s narrow definition, David Held’s definition of democracy is very comprehensive, and mainly focuses on democratic autonomy. According to Held, democratic autonomy requires both a high degree of accountability of the state and a democratic existence of civil society:

*“Individuals should be free and equal in the determination of the conditions of their own lives; that is, they should enjoy equal rights (and, accordingly, equal obligations) in the specification of the framework which generates and limits the opportunities available to*

*them, so long as they don't deploy this framework to negate the rights of others."*

(Held cf. Sørensen 1998:10)

Schumpeter's and Held's definitions are two different sides of the debate about what democracy is and what it ought to be. As democracy is a dynamic entity, this leads to emphasising different aspects of democracy in framing different understandings of the concept (Sørensen 1998:10).

In practise, for new democratising countries, the "western model of liberal democracy" has been accepted as a reference point of view for their democratisation processes. Liberal democracy might seem a safe alternative for those countries since it has been tried and tested by the Western world. In addition to this, within the context of international political economy, institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and the committee of the G7 countries have a tendency towards encouraging conformity to liberal democratic practises with the economic policies of these countries (Parry & Moran 1994:7).

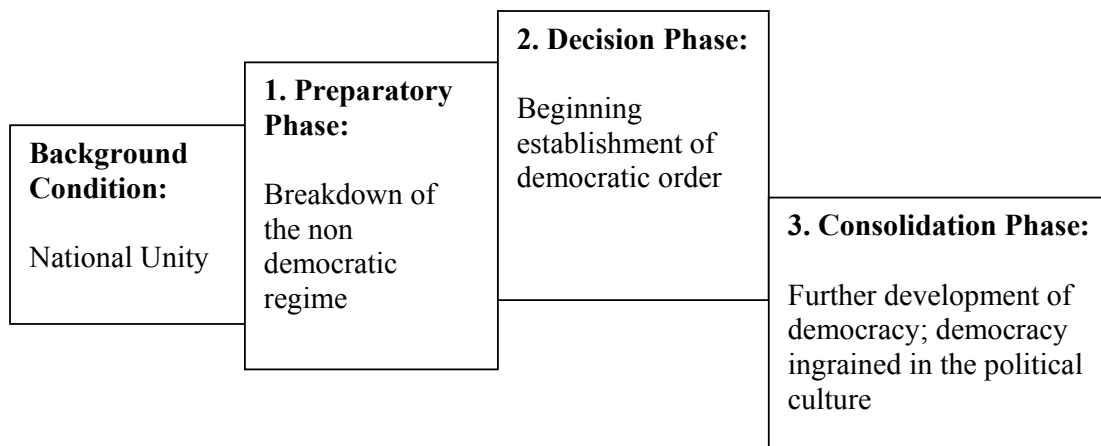
Since the Western model of liberal democracy has been overwhelmingly accepted as a reference point, for democratising countries, the democratisation level of countries is evaluated within the definition of liberal democracy. As a result, it is necessary to define the characteristics of liberal democracy and its differences with other regime forms. In this context, four types of regimes are defined by Diamond and Myers: liberal democratic regimes, non-liberal electoral democratic regimes, pseudo democratic regimes and authoritarian regimes. For our purpose, only liberal democratic regimes and non-liberal electoral democratic regimes will be explained here.

Non-liberal electoral democratic regimes exemplify the narrow conception of Schumpeter. In non-liberal electoral democratic regimes, the legislative and chief executive offices are filled through regular, competitive, multiparty elections with universal suffrage. In some of these non-liberal electoral democratic countries, the rule of free and fair election is followed. In these cases, in spite of democratic elections, the political system suffers some democratic defects. For instance, extensive violations of human rights, suppression of minority group rights, abuses of state power, hidden domination by the military or other centres of power, and serious constraints on the ability of various interests to organise. Today, more than 30 states hold regular, competitive and relatively free, fair and meaningful elections but their citizens have considerably less freedom than in liberal democracies. On the other hand, in addition to the elements of electoral democracies, liberal democracy

constrains executive power and upholds constitutional rule with extensive individual and group freedoms and a strong rule of law (Diamond & Myers 2001:2-3).

Transition to democracy is a complex process, which involves several phases (see Figure 1). In a typical case, the beginning of the process is marked by crises within the non-democratic regime. But generally, the new regime which comes after the breakdown of the former non-democratic regime will often be a restricted democracy. Therefore, several phases of “democratic deepening” may be necessary for consolidation of the democratic regime (Sørensen 1998:39).

**FIGURE 1. TRANSITIONS TOWARD DEMOCRACY: A MODEL**



*Source: Georg Sørensen (1998, 40)*

Consolidation of the democracy is the most problematic phase in the democratisation process. During the consolidation process, crises and breakdowns may occur. The typical pattern for new democratising countries has been a see-sawing between authoritarianism and frail democracy. The full process of consolidated democracy may take several decades. For instance, in Great Britain the full process took more than two hundred years (Ibid.:39). If Great Britain, USA and France are accepted as examples of consolidated democracy, how can “full consolidated democracy” be defined? According to Juan Linz, consolidated democracy is:

*“one in which none of the major political actors, parties, or organized interests, forces, or institutions consider that there is any alternative to democratic processes to gain power, and that no political institution or group has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision makers. This does not mean that there are no minorities ready to challenge and question the legitimacy of the*

*democratic process by non-democratic means. It means, however, that the major actors do not turn to them and they remain politically isolated. To put it simply, democracy must be seen as the “only game in town.”*

(Juan Linz cf. Sørensen 1998:44)

Consolidation is not a purely political process but also demands some economic and social changes, and at the final phase of consolidation, democratic institutions and practices become an indispensable part of the political culture. Not only political leaders but also the majority of political actors and the majority of the population should see democratic practises as part of their social life (Sørensen 1998:44-45).

In conclusion, the democratisation process is not an easy and linear process. There is no historical law which defines the transition process, since, all countries have their own unique characteristics. As mentioned before, the common case in many democratising countries seems to be a see-saw between authoritarianism and frail democracy. Today there are few countries, which can be considered as consolidated democracies. Many of the second wave and third wave countries including Turkey have serious problems in consolidating their democratic regimes.

## **THE DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS IN TURKEY**

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF DEMOCRATISATION IN TURKEY**

The first parliament in Turkish history was founded in 1876 during an imperial period. This was a short experience. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk led the way to establishing a constitutional parliamentary system in 1923. With respect to universal suffrage, Turkey has had a better record compared with many contemporary consolidated democracies. For instance, Turkish women were granted the right to vote in 1930 and only four years later they had the right to stand for elections; while French women had to wait for ten, Greek women eighteen and Canadian women twenty-six more years to have their unrestricted political rights (Esmer 2002:1).

The first multi-party election was held in 1946. It was not absolutely free and fair, and, four years later, the government changed democratically through popular election. In this election, the opposition party (Democrat Party - DP) won 83.6% majority. For observers of Turkish politics, this was an unexpected

outcome, which also exceeded the hopes of the Democrat Party itself. The DP governed Turkey for more than ten years and its rule ended with a military intervention on May 27, 1960. This was the first breakdown of democracy. In this period electoral politics were revised with a new constitution, and an election law based on proportional representation was introduced. Since the introduction of proportional representation, coalition governments have been the rule and one-party governments have rarely been realised (Esmer 2002:1).

There were three transition periods from military rule in Turkey: 1960-1961, 1971-1973, and 1980-1983. These three periods corresponded to three military interruptions of the democratic process (Ozbudun 2000:24). During the 1980s' military rule, a 10% national threshold system was introduced in order to eliminate the more ideological minor parties and to transform the system into a more manageable two or three party system (Ibid.:75-76).

As a result of these military interventions,

*“despite a history of fourteen multiparty elections, parliamentary rule, and most important, a peaceful change of governments through elections a number of times, Turkey has had a difficult time being accepted as a democracy by international academic and political circles ”*

(Esmer 2002:2)

## **PARTY SYSTEM AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR IN TURKEY**

Commenting on Turkish politics in the 1950s, Frederick Frey argued that:

*“Turkish politics are party politics...Within the power structure of Turkish society, the political party is the main unofficial link between the government and the larger, extra governmental groups of people...”*

(Frederick Frey cf. Ozbudun 2000:73)

However after the 1950s, the Turkish party system has changed dramatically. Since the 1950s, the pattern of Turkish party politics has passed through most types of party systems, which is defined by Giovanni Sartori as: predominant party, two partism, moderate multi partism and atomised multi partism (Sartori 1976:283). According to Sabri Sayari, the Turkish party system:

*“...changed from bi-partism (1950-1960) to moderate multi-partism (1961-1980) to moderate multi-partism with a dominant party (1983-1991) and to extreme multi-partism with no dominant party (1991-2002)”*

(Sayari cf. Esmer 2002:4)

Especially after the 1970s, parties and the party system have been decaying with *growing fragmentation, ideological polarisation and declining public support and identification with individual parties* (Ozbudun 2000:73). During this period, the two parties' dominance has eroded and centrist parties have been weakened. In their place, extremist Islamic and extremist right wing parties have risen as a major force in electoral and parliamentary politics (Sayari 2002:9).

In 1990, two-party rule was replaced by a coalition of minority governments. It was a system based on a highly fractionalised parliament in which there were three-to-five relatively equal parties. Governments could only be formed through coalition arrangements (Ibid.:10). The major characteristic of the parliaments between 1990 and 2002 was a high level of fragmentation. The proportion of votes going to the largest parties declined, along with their number of seats in the parliament, as shown in Table 1 (Tachau 2002:42). As a result, these fragmented coalition governments were unable to produce effective economic and social policies, and dissatisfaction among voters increased. This period, which is characterised by highly fragmented coalition governments, ended with the last general election, held on November 3, 2002.

**Table 1.** Party Fragmentation, 1961 - 1999

<b>Year</b>	<b>Percentage of Vote Won by Two Strongest Party</b>	<b>Percentage of Seats Won by Two Strongest Party</b>	<b>Number of Parties Winning Seats</b>
1961	71.5	73.5	4
1965	81.5	83.1	6
1969	74.0	88.6	8
1973	63.1	74.2	7
1977	78.3	89.3	6
1983	75.6	82.2	3
1987	61.0	87.9	3
1991	51.1	65.1	5
1995	41.1	53.2	5
1999	40.0	47.2	5

*Source: Tachau (2002:42)*



One of the general characteristics of the Turkish party system which leads to the formation of highly fractionalised parliaments is *volatility*, that is, sudden and significant changes in party votes from one election to the next (Ozbudun 2000:74). Nearly one-fifth of the electorate transferred their votes from one party to another in the elections during the decade following the 1960 military intervention. Besides the volatility the Turkish electorate has tended to divide its votes among a number of parties (Carkoglu and Avci 2002:115). Rising volatility and the lack of stable partisan support has hindered the stabilisation of the party system (Sayari 2002:10). Ali Carkoglu estimates that average volatility for the 1954-1995 period was 21.1% (Ali Carkoglu cf. Sayari 2002:22). In comparison with the established democracies of Western Europe, party loyalty is lower in Turkey. On the other hand:

*“when examining electoral volatility through aggregate data, it is important to note that the support given to party families on the right and the left has not changed significantly over the years. Centre-right and far-right parties have consistently received about two-thirds of the total votes in the eight parliamentary elections between 1961 and 1999. During the same period, approximately one-third of the Turkish voters have supported the centre-left and extreme-left parties.”*

(Sayari 2002:23)

When we examine the recent election results, vote distribution between the rightist and the leftist parties is almost the same as the proportions given by Sayari (see Table 2).

Another characteristic of the party system since 1990 is the broad ideological spectrum of the system (Sayari 2002:10). Since 1991, extremist parties are getting more powerful than before. During the last elections, which were held on November 3, 2002, two openly Islamic parties and an ethnically based pro-Kurdish party participated in the elections.

*“Since 1991, the country has witnessed the burgeoning of an Islamic party to the point where its leader was able to become prime minister. The party emerged from the 1995 election with more votes and seats than any other party, roughly twice the highest proportion it had achieved in the past. The extreme rightist Nationalist Action Party (MHP) emerged as the second largest in 1999 and joined in coalition with Democratic Left Party (DSP) and Motherland Party (ANAP).”*

(Tachau 2002:43)

**Table 2.** Share of the Vote, % \* in the November 3, 2002 Election

<b>Party/ Party Leader</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>1999</b>
Justice and Development Party <i>Recep Tayyip Erdogan</i>	34.3	-
Republican People's Party <i>Deniz Baykal</i>	19.4	8.7
True Path <i>Tansu Ciller</i>	9.6	12
Nationalist Action Party <i>Devlet Bahceli</i>	8.3	18
Young Party <i>Cem Uzan</i>	7.3	-
Democratic People's Party <i>Mehmet Abbasoglu</i>	6.2	4.8
Motherland <i>Mesut Yilmaz</i>	5.1	13.2
Felicity <i>Recai Kutan</i>	2.5	15.4 **
New Turkey Party <i>Ismail Cem</i>	1.2	-
Democratic Left <i>Bulent Ecevit</i>	1.1	22.2
Others	5	6

Source: *The Economist*, 9 – 15 November 2002

Non-electoral forces (i.e. policies of the military and bureaucratic elites, electoral laws, and the actions of party elites) have been equally important in shaping the party system in Turkey as well as mass electoral behaviour. The efforts of the military and bureaucratic elites have shaped the system from above by banning some parties, removing their leaders from political activity, and altering the constitutional context of party activities. In this respect, the Turkish experience is totally different from the Western European experience (Sayari 2002:25). In Western European democracies, forces come from below rather than the actions of the state elites from above. Social cleavages have played a major role in political party and voting behaviour in Europe (Lipset and Rokkan 1967:14-21). On the other hand:

*“there is ‘a de facto dual-track government’ in contemporary Turkey in which the elected political leaders are constrained to operate within parameters maintained by the military”*

(Lowry 2000 cf. Tachau 2002:50)

The military exercises power through the National Security Council, a constitutional body which consists of civilians and officers (Tachau 2002:50).

### **EFFECTS OF THE DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS ON THE RISE OF THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (AKP)**

Turkey, one of the second wave democratising countries, is accepted as a non-liberal electoral democratic country by academic circles. From its characteristics, Turkish democracy reflects Schumpeter's definition of democracy but is still far from both Held's and Linz's definitions.

Turkey clearly has many of the characteristics of a non-liberal electoral democratic regime. On the one hand, it has a history of more than fifteen multiparty elections, decades of parliamentary rule and universal suffrage. On the other hand, the political system does have some defects. One of the most visible examples of this is the hidden domination of the military. Compared to first wave countries of the democratisation process, the Turkish democratisation process has been forced down from state elites, and has been always exposed to the open or hidden effects of the military, which defines itself as the main protector of:

*“the existence and independence of the state, the unity and indivisibility of the country, and the peace and security of society”*

(Constitution of the Republic of Turkey 1982 cf. Tachau 2002:50)

Introduction of proportional representation in 1961, 10% national threshold system, and the laws which led to the weakening of the local party organisations are all major examples of the military interventions on the democratisation process which have given way to the rise of the AKP.

According to the election results, only two parties have seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly: the AKP (Justice and Development Party) with 363 seats and the CHP (Republican People's Party) with 178 seats. In addition to these two parties, there are nine independents. None of the parties in the former coalition government won the minimum 10% of the national vote needed to have seats. This triumph of the AKP is not a coincidence. The characteristics of the Turkish party system and related electoral behaviour since the 1970's positively affected the rise of the AKP. As previously mentioned, especially after the 1970's, parties and the party system have been decaying with *growing fragmentation, ideological polarisation and high volatility* (Ozbudun 2000:73).

In the last election, former governments were punished severely by Turkish voters, the majority of whom have accepted the AKP as a “clean party” - the Turkish initials, “A” and “K” (AK), mean white or clean in the Turkish language. The elections results show the fact that the majority of the volatile votes have gone to the AKP as protest votes. Protest voting, which is the typical basis for extremist movements, is a danger signal for the system. Therefore, it reflects dissatisfaction and disillusionment with politics and often the political system itself (Tachau 2002:33). As is evident in this election, protest votes supported the Islamic party instead of other moderate alternatives which entered Turkish politics as new alternatives to the old centrist-right and social democratic parties just before the last elections.

In the Turkish case, the major reasons for these protest votes are the ineffective policies of the fragmented coalition governments and increasing political corruption. As previously mentioned, since 1961 coalition governments have been dominant in Turkish politics because of the proportional representation system. In addition, the high level of fragmentation and ideological polarisation within the parliament has also led to a coalition of minority governments that have lacked the tools of effective governance. These fragmented coalition governments were far from producing constructive solutions to the social and economic problems of Turkish society. As a result, dissatisfaction among voters has increased. Moreover, a dramatic rise in political corruption, resulting from the colonization of state owned banks and industries by parties, threatens the legitimacy of the political regime on behalf of the voters (Sayari 2002:10). Increasing political corruption and the deprivation effects of the economic crisis led to the volatile votes being cast as protest votes to the AKP. All centrist parties have been pushed out of the parliament so that the AKP now holds absolute majority within the parliament.

Another important reason for the rise of the AKP is the weakening of the local party organisations of the centrist parties, due to the effects of the laws imposed by the 1980s’ military rule. The main beneficiaries of this weakening are the extremist parties, which had a small portion of the electorates, but which have become key players in Turkish politics since the beginning of the 1990s. In contrast to the weakening of the party organisations of the centrist parties, Islamic parties’ organisations, which became actively involved in Turkish politics after the 1990s, are getting stronger. Islamic Parties’ staff have worked as missionaries, particularly in ghettos of the big cities and in rural areas, where they have targeted people suffering from socio-economic problems which could not be solved by centrist parties’ policies. As a result of these strong organisations, they have had an enormous number of supporters from ghettos and rural areas.

As I have attempted to explain, the triumph of the AKP is not a coincidence. The rise of the party has its roots in the democratisation process of the country which began in the 1960s. The party system and election laws, which are mainly imposed by the military, have positively affected the rise of the AKP. Turkish democracy is still in the consolidation phase, and the country is far from being a consolidated democratic country because of *the de facto dual-track government*. Turkey is now at a crossroads. The political future of the country cannot clearly be predicted, due to the hidden clash between the Islamic roots of the leading party and the Turkish military which still stands as the main protector of the unity and indivisibility of the country.

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