

Turkey's New State in the Making: Transformations in Legality, Economy, and Coercion

Pınar BEDİRHANOĞLU, Çağlar DÖLEK, Funda HÜLAGÜ and Özlem KAYGUSUZ (Editors)
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Turkey's political history has seen recurring shifts between democratic ideals and authoritarian tendencies, notably during the two decades of the Justice and Development Party's (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) rule. This transition marked a departure from a relatively democratic façade that emerged in response to the European Union (EU) accession process towards a more authoritarian regime characterized by increased government control and curtailment of civil liberties.¹ It is a shift accentuated after the 2013 Gezi protests which culminated in a significant regime change in 2018. This transformation was marked by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's consolidation of power through constitutional amendments, leading to the transition from a parliamentary democracy to a presidential system. To comprehend this transformation, it is imperative to examine the interplay between economic dynamics and the state within the neo-liberal capitalist system, aligning with Poulantzas' observations on global trends.² It can be argued that the accumulation and state crises, exacerbated by the 2008 global economic crisis, have contributed to Turkey's authoritarian shift in parallel with global developments.

Originating from a 2018 workshop at Middle East Technical University, Turkey's *New State in the Making: Transformations in Legality, Economy, and Coercion* provides a historical-sociological perspective on Turkey's state crises, serving as a vital resource for comprehending authoritarianism and class-state relations and offering an in-depth exploration of the AKP regime's transformation, presenting a continuum of its history rather than a rigid division between democratic and authoritarian phases.

The book is divided into four parts that offer valuable insights into the cyclical pattern of

1 See in detail, Şebnem Gümüşçü, "Democracy or Authoritarianism: Islamist Governments in Turkey, Egypt, and Tunisia," *Cambridge University Press*, 2023; Ümit Akçay, "Authoritarian consolidation Dynamics in Turkey," *Contemporary Politics*, 27(1),79-104.

2 See, Cemil Boyraz, "The Justice and Development Party in Turkish Politics: Islam, Democracy, and State," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2011, pp.149-164.

the AKP regime, oscillating between democracy, conjunctural ideology, and authoritarianism. It is an essential resource for those seeking a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

In the first part, “Social Constitution of the AKP’s Strong State Through Financialization: State in Crisis, or Crisis State?,” Pınar Bedirhanoğlu delves into how financialization transformed capital-labor relations and reproduction in Turkey during the 2010s. She employs an Open Marxist perspective and highlights the idea that “when exploitation takes the form of exchange, dictatorship tends to take the form of democracy” (p. 35). Bedirhanoğlu’s analysis, grounded in Poulantzian views, reveals the interplay of accumulation regime crises, state crises, and political crises, leading Turkey towards a more authoritarian state over the past decade.

In their chapter titled “In Deconstitutionalization and the state crisis in Turkey: The role of the Turkish Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights,” Özlem Kaygusuz and Oya Aydın identify three pivotal turning points that enabled Turkey’s shift towards authoritarianism: the enactment of the Internal Security Law in May 2015, the lifting of opposition MPs’ immunity in June 2016, and the declaration of a state of emergency in July 2016 (p. 43). Overall, the authors provide an insightful framework for understanding the erosion of democratic norms and the increasing concentration of power.

İlhan Uzgel’s in-depth analysis of the AKP regime’s evolution in “Turkey’s Double Movement,” offers a rich understanding of the party’s transition towards authoritarianism, connecting it to neoliberalism and conservatism. The continued ties with the West and the persistence of the EU accession process are thought-provoking, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of the AKP’s trajectory. Similarly, Çağlar Kurç’s exploration of the AKP’s S-400 procurement decision in “A Shift of Axis or Business as Usual?” provides a compelling look at Turkey’s complex relationships with its Western allies. The evidence presented challenges prevailing narratives, prompting readers to reconsider their understanding of Turkey’s foreign policy choices.

Each article in the second part examines the authoritarian nature of the Turkish regime within the context of capital accumulation crisis reproduction. In “Understanding the Recent Rise of Authoritarianism in Turkey in Terms of the Structural Contradictions of the Process of Capital Accumulation,” Fuat Ercan and Şebnem Oğuz collaboratively explore the inconsistencies in the AKP’s efforts to sustain capital accumulation and internationalization, positing that the capital accumulation crisis pushed Turkey toward an authoritarian structure. A crucial point in this work is the coercive measures taken, especially against disadvantaged groups, following the 2013 FED decisions to raise interest rates. Ali Rıza Güngen supports Ercan and Oğuz in “Turkey’s Financial Slide: Discipline by Credit in the Last Decade of the AKP’s Rule,” addressing different aspects of economic crisis, including credit expansion, indebtedness, and the 2018 currency crisis (p. 131).

In her work, “The AKP’s Move From Depoliticization to Repoliticization in Economic Management,” Melahat Kutun analyzes the economic management and institutional transformations in Turkey, focusing on the government pressure on the Central Bank of

the Republic of Turkey (TCMB) and other financial crisis management measures. In “The AKP’s Income-Differentiated Housing Strategies Under the Pressure of Resistance and Debt,” Özlem Çelik examines how the AKP’s housing policies underwent a shift in response to the economic crisis, resulting in forced displacements through slum-clearance projects (p. 152). Çelik provides a detailed explanation of slum-clearance processes that has had varying effects on homeowners and tenants including, homelessness due to forced displacement, as well as actions by municipalities like cutting off electricity and water services.

In Part 3, Zana Çıtak’s chapter, “The Transformation of the State-Religion Relationship Under the AKP: The Case of the Diyanet,” provides a lens to examine Turkey’s authoritarian tendencies through the context of the Diyanet (Directorate of Religious Affairs). Applying a historical-sociological perspective, Çıtak traces the changing role of the Diyanet since its establishment in 1924. One notable aspect of Çıtak’s work is the discussion of the “spiritual counseling” units found in university dormitories, youth centers, and prisons, which has become a topic of contention, particularly considering investigations into youth suicides and deaths within these facilities.

Ahmet Akkaya examines the concept of military tutelage and its role in Turkey’s authoritarianism in “From Military Tutelage to Nowhere.” While the AKP was initially celebrated for ending military tutelage in 2011 (p. 187), Akkaya rightly argues that it was replaced by civilian tutelage as the AKP increased its authoritative measures. Rather than providing solutions, Akkaya offers a reconsideration to be made regarding the conceptual framework of the military tutelage regime analysis, which would rightly provide a better understanding of the current regime and future politics in Turkey.

In “Courtrooms as Solidarity Spaces and Trials as Sentences,” Zeynep Alemdar highlights how the judicial system in Turkey has become a tool for the AKP regime’s path to authoritarianism. Alemdar also notes that the AKP government aims to de-intellectualize the state as part of its state transformation, aligning with points discussed in Behlül Özkan’s article, “SETA: From the AKP’s Organic Intellectuals to AK-Paratchiks,” which examines Turkey’s Foundation for Political, Economic, and Social Research (SETA). He humorously illustrates how SETA has become a regime apparatus serving AKP policies, departing from its traditional role as genuine intellectuals engaged in persuasion and knowledge production.

In the final section of the book, three articles provide valuable insights into various aspects of Turkey’s political landscape. Funda Hülügü’s examination of the impact of the Gezi protests on politically active women in “Domesticating Politics, De-Gendering Women” sheds light on the regime’s use of gender complementarity to restrict women to certain roles, revealing the pressures faced by those who challenge these norms. Zeynep Gönen’s “The War on Drugs” highlights the role of the state’s war against illicit drugs in expanding authoritarian state construction in Turkey, particularly through the increased state capacity, growing prisoner numbers, and aggressive policing methods. Gönen’s discussion of the “Area Control Project” and its implications for random investigations adds depth to the understanding of this issue.

Çağlar Dölek, in the final article “The Law of the City?: Social War, Urban Warfare and Dispossession on the Margin,” delves into the transformation of urban peripheries, emphasizing the interplay between urban warfare and social war. He asserts that the phenomenon being discussed marks a significant paradigm shift in Turkey’s urban periphery for two primary reasons. Firstly, it symbolizes the intertwining of urban warfare, shaping the state’s presence in marginalized communities, and a growing social war characterizing the lives of the working class in these areas. Secondly, it reinforces the argument regarding the police force’s role in reshaping the state, as tactics developed during these parallel struggles on the periphery have become more widely applied. This transformation is closely tied to the concept of neoliberal urbanism, reflecting a profound change in urban life over the past four decades of neoliberal policies.

Analyzing the multifaceted evolution of the AKP regime, especially amid the turbulence of the last decade, is undoubtedly a challenging endeavor. This complexity requires a comprehensive and overarching hypothesis to make sense of the various developments, and in this regard, the book excels. Pınar Bedirhanoglu and her colleagues offer a multidimensional analysis of the transformation of the Turkish Republic, shedding light on the subject matter from various angles, making it a commendable resource for readers seeking a deeper understanding. The book’s most significant contribution to the literature lies in its framing of the AKP’s journey within a historical-sociological context, with a strong emphasis on the impact of neoliberal financial policies and the concept of “civilian tutelage.” This concept, which has a history spanning over four decades having its roots in the 1980 coup d’état as Bedirhanoglu, et.al. rightly mention, plays a pivotal role in the development of a new state structure. For these reasons, I highly recommend this book for scholars delving into Turkish politics. It is also an excellent resource for students exploring the complexities of state dynamics, authoritarianism, and the interplay of domestic and global factors.