



***Turkey's Hybrid Competitive Authoritarian Regime;  
A Genuine Product of Anatolia's Middle Class***

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**Abstract**

*Few years since the 9/11 Attacks in New York and following its rise to power, the AKP has gradually established a so-called "competitive authoritarian regime," in order to consolidate and secure its political power. This regime is hybrid and it is based on liberal principles (absence of tutelary authorities, protection of civil liberties, universal suffrage, free elections etc..). The AKP also provides for a reasonably fair level of political competition between the party in power (government) and the opposition. At the same time, however, the system shows some undemocratic features (violation of civil liberties, unfair elections, and uneven political competition.) This hybrid regime is based on three pillars: the state, the party and a newly emerged middle class in Anatolia. Through this hybrid regime Anatolia's newly emerged middle class redefines its cultural and socio-economic relations.*

Keywords: Turkey, hybrid regime, competitive authoritarian, middle class

**Introduction: Three Important Years in Turkish Modern History; The Gradual Emergence of Turkey's Hybrid Regime**

From the year 2000 onwards, three dates have played a major role in modern Turkish politics and determined the course of events in Turkey: 2001, 2002 and 2007. The 9/11 attacks revealed the need for a moderate, conservative political movement in Turkey, open to dialogue and cooperation with the free-market economies and liberal societies of the Western World. Conservative cycles in Turkey accurately sensed this need and adjusted their views and ideas regarding world politics. In 2002, this reformed conservative movement (the Turkish Justice and Development Party, known by its acronym AKP) achieved an impressive electoral victory in parliamentary elections. Five years later, in 2007, the AKP's government managed to control all state structures in Turkey, thereby establishing a hybrid competitive authoritarian regime.

The 9/11 attacks showed the Western World and the USA the importance of a moderate Muslim conservative movement. In fact, immediately after the attacks, Washington and the Western World began to seek out Muslim organizations, liberal in thought, capable "to



retrieve Islam from the hijackers of the religion”<sup>1</sup>.

This Western quest came at a period of severe economic and political crisis in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> In 2001, the first year of this crisis, Turkish politics suffered heavily due to the deterioration of relations between the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister. The main reason for that was the fact that President Ahmet Necdet Sezer was constantly vetoing government’s decisions, while Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit believed that the President exceeded his constitutional powers. On February 19, 2001 for the very first time in the history of the Turkish National Security Council, the conflict between the President and the Prime Minister became public and led to an immediate negative reaction in the financial markets.<sup>3</sup>

The 9/11 attacks as well as the economic and political crisis in Turkey, left a group of center-right conservative politicians trying to build-up a political alliance. Between 2000 and 2001, politicians with Islamist and liberal background joined forces and found the Justice and Development Party (AKP.) Through the AKP, only five years since the military coup d’état that forced Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan to resign, his political comrades returned to mainstream politics. Erbakan’s old colleagues carefully reviewed internal and international politics and developments. In the post 9/11 era this new conservative movement was ready to cooperate with the USA and the Western World diplomatically, economically and in the war against terrorism.

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<sup>1</sup> “The radicals are a minority, but in many areas they hold the advantage because they have developed extensive networks spanning the Muslim world and sometimes reaching beyond it. Liberal and moderate Muslims, although a majority in almost all countries, have not created similar networks. Their voices are often fractured or silenced. The battle for Islam will require the creation of liberal groups to retrieve Islam from the hijackers of the religion. Creation of an international network is critical because such a network would provide a platform to amplify the message of moderates and also to provide them some protection. However, moderates do not have the resources to create this network themselves”. Rabasa, M., Angel (et al.) 2004. “The Muslim World After 9/11.” Rand Corporation,

[http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2004/RAND\\_MG246.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2004/RAND_MG246.pdf), page 22, Accessed 18 December 2014.

<sup>2</sup> IMF was active in the management of the Turkish economy prior and after the economic crisis, and provided some \$ 20,6 billion as financial assistance between 1999 and 2002. For the Turkish economic crisis of this period see Yeldan, Erinç 2002. “Behind the 2000/2001 Turkish Crisis: Stability, Credibility and Governance, for Whom?” Bilkent University, [http://yeldane.bilkent.edu.tr/Chennai\\_Yeldan2002.pdf](http://yeldane.bilkent.edu.tr/Chennai_Yeldan2002.pdf), Accessed 19 December 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Hristov, Simeon 2001. “The Crisis in Turkey.” Institute For Regional and International Studies, <http://www.iris-bg.org/files/Turkey.pdf>, Accessed 19 December 2014.



With its center-right political agenda and liberal profile, AKP manage to win the 2002 parliamentary elections. By doing so it managed to end the rule of old political parties, while at the same time secured a significant majority in the parliament. This was a huge political earthquake that changed radically Turkish politics:

*The most important recent development in Turkish domestic politics is the rise of the AKP. In Turkey, political parties must achieve at least 10% of the vote to gain representation in parliament. The AKP first came to power in 2002 under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, winning 34% of the vote and 363 of 550 parliamentary seats. The Republican People's Party (CHP) won 19% of the vote and 178 seats. All the parties that held seats prior to the 2002 election were no longer represented in parliament. This dramatic shift was due in part to the financial crisis of 2001 and the collapse of the center-right coalition parties. AKP party leader Erdoğan was appointed Prime Minister of Turkey in 2003, and has retained his position to this day.<sup>4</sup>*

If 2002 was the starting point for the AKP's road to power, 2007 was certainly the year of power consolidation. In the 2007 presidential elections, the AKP resisted the "warnings" made by the military establishment and elected its own candidate for the presidency. After this success, the AKP began to build-up a competitive authoritarian regime.

## **2. The Regime: Free Elections and Uneven Competition**

### **2.1 Turkey's Liberal Face**

In the modern world, hybrid competitive authoritarian regimes look like a two-sided coin. On one side there are liberal characteristics like the absence of tutelary authorities, protection of civil liberties, universal suffrage, free elections and a reasonably fair level of political competition. On the other side, there are authoritarian characteristics like violation of civil liberties, unfair elections and uneven political competition.

According to Levitsky and Way, competitive authoritarian regimes are civil regimes in which democratic institutions are widely seen as means to gain power. Those who manage state institutions and public services have the advantage vis-à-vis their opponents. The government is quite competitive towards opposition, which uses existing democratic institutions to compete for power. However, political competition is uneven because the terms of competition favor the government. In other words, competition is real but unfair.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Çelik, Pekin, Aliye & Laura, Elizabeth, Çelik 2012. "Turkey: Current and Future Political, Economic and Security Trends." Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, <http://www.cdfai.org/PDF/Turkey%20Current%20and%20Future%20Political,%20Economic%20and%20Security%20Trends.pdf>, 5, Accessed 18 December 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Levitsky, Steven & Way, A., Lucan 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 5.



Turkey is not an exception. Modern Turkey's political scene is an amalgam of liberal principles and authoritarian characteristics. Like other hybrid regimes, Turkey is a two-sided coin, where liberal values coexist with practices that have nothing to do with modern liberal political systems.

According to Levitsky and Way, one important aspect of hybrid competitive authoritarian regimes is the absence of non-elected "tutelary" authorities (e.g., military establishment, monarchy or religious institutions,) which limit the powers exercised by the government.<sup>6</sup> This is exactly the case in Turkey since 2007.

Since its rise to power, the AKP's governments have sought to reduce the influence of the Turkish military establishment in politics. To do so, the AKP introduced a series of legal and institutional reforms.<sup>7</sup> From 2003 to 2007, due to EU-mandated reforms, the Turkish military has lost its formal (institutional) mechanisms, such as the National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Konseyi: MGK.) On the other hand, since 2007, as a result of the "Ergenekon" and "Balyoz" trials, the military also lost much of its informal (non-institutional) mechanisms, such as the ability to deliver public speeches and press conferences as a way to intervene in politics and dictate its wishes (this had been the case in the past.) At the same time, the military lost its powers to deal with internal threats, like Kurdish nationalism as expressed by PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan or Kurdish Workers Party.) Finally, the military lost much of its institutional power, due to 2010 Constitutional amendments, which limited even further the jurisdiction of military courts, abolished the military's right to conduct internal security operations without the consent of civil authorities, and increased auditing in military expenditures. Additionally, the government recently amended Article 35 of the Internal Service Law, which gave the armed forces the right to intervene in the face of internal threats.

Since its rise to power, the AKP tried to protect civil liberties (including freedom of speech, press, and association.)<sup>8</sup> Parallel to the dramatic decline in power for the military establishment, the decline of the traditional Kemalist bureaucracy, notably in the judiciary and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, paved the way for the emergence of the so-called "New Turkey," a state that is more democratic than its predecessors in terms of its ability to accommodate "difference" or "diversity" based on religious and ethnic characteristics.<sup>9</sup> The government implemented a number of important reforms for the recognition and

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>7</sup> Aknur, Müge 2013. "Civil-Military Relations During the AK Party Era: Major Developments and Challenges." *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 15 / No. 4 /2013, 131-150.

<sup>8</sup> Levitsky, Steven & Way, A., Lucan 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism...*, page 6.

<sup>9</sup> Öniş, Ziya 2013. "Sharing Power: Turkey's Democratization Challenge in the Age of the AKP Hegemony." *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 15 / No. 2 /2013, 103-122.



extension of minority rights. For example, there has been a significant expansion in the cultural and language rights for the Kurds, although significant problems remain in terms of materializing these rights in practice. Another major change is the representation of Kurdish groups, as separate political parties, in the parliament. Apart from the Kurds, other, mainly religious, groups in Turkish society have also been recognized under the AKP's rule.<sup>10</sup>

Levitsky and Way suggest that another important feature of the hybrid competitive authoritarian regimes is universal suffrage and free, fair, and competitive elections.<sup>11</sup> In Turkey the first experiments on free elections can be traced back in the years of the Ottoman Empire. Since the establishment of modern Turkey (1923,) all governments paid attention to elections. Even the military juntas gave power back to the politicians, after a short period of time, and declared elections.

The 67<sup>th</sup> Paragraph of the Turkish Constitution states that in conformity with the conditions set forth by the law, all Turkish citizens have the right to vote (elect,) be elected, participate in referendums, and engage in political activities independently or within the context of a political party.<sup>12</sup> According to the constitution, elections and referendums shall be held under the supervision of the judiciary, in accordance with the principles of free, equal, secret, direct, universal suffrage and public counting of the votes. All Turkish citizens, 18 years old and above (adults,) shall have the right to vote or participate in a referendum.

Modern Turkey seems to have another important competitive authoritarian future. The country seems to enjoy a reasonably fair level of political competition between the government and the opposition. The 2011 parliament elections and the 2014 presidential election are good examples of this argument. In the 2011 parliament elections, for the third time in a row, the AKP won the day with 49.8% share of the votes (2007 : 46.5%.) The second Republican People's Party (CHP) won 25.9% of the votes (2007 : 20.8%,) while the third Nationalist Action Party (MHP) received 13% of the votes (2007 : 14.3%.) In the new 550-seat parliament, the 36 independent MPs supported by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) had the opportunity to form a parliamentary group. The turnout was high (almost 87%,) higher than that of the previous election (2007.) Out of the 550 MPs, 78 are women (14.2% compared with the 9.2% of the 2007 election.) Of those 78 female MPs, 45 are AKP members, 19 are CHP members, 11 are BDP members and three are MHP

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Levitsky, Steven & Way, A., Lucan 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 5-6.

<sup>12</sup> For the relevant paragraphs of the Turkish constitution see "The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey." <http://www.hri.org/docs/turkey/con2d.html>. Accessed 18 December 2014.



members.<sup>13</sup> Three years later, in 2014, the AKP's leader and Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, became Turkey's first directly elected President of the Republic. He won 51.79% of the votes, so no run-off was needed. Former General Secretary of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, who ran as the joint candidate of 13 opposition parties, including CHP and MHP, received 38.44% of the votes, while the co-leader of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP,) Selahattin Demirtaş, who was supported by eight left-wing parties, came third with 9.76% of the votes. The last two elections illustrate the existence of a reasonably fair level of political competition between the government and the opposition in modern Turkey.

## 2.2 The Other Side: Turkey's Authoritarian Face

The absence of non-elected tutelary authority, the important initiatives taken for the democratization and protection of liberties, free elections and the reasonably fair level of political competition constitute only one side of Turkey. The AKP's government prefer to ignore the other side of the coin, which is associated with violation of civil liberties, irregularities in the electoral process and uneven political competition.

In the field of civil liberties, according to the Human Rights Watch Organization, 12 years since its first electoral success, the AKP has started to demonstrate a growing intolerance of political opposition, public protest and critical media:

*In 2013, police violently dispersed campaigners staging a peaceful sit-in protest against a plan to build a shopping mall on Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park. In repeatedly and harshly clamping down on protests, the government failed to uphold human rights. In 2014, the Government has kept the same tough stance on peaceful demonstrations by Kurds following the crisis in northern Syria. The Human Rights Watch Report underlines that the government's response to the protests in Istanbul and anti-government protests in other cities demonstrated its intolerance of the right to peaceful assembly and free expression. The authorities charged hundreds of individuals involved in the protests—mostly in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir—with participating in unauthorized demonstrations, resisting the police, and damaging public property. Several dozen people face additional terrorism charges in connection with the protests. Around 50 protesters remained in pretrial detention at time of writing. A criminal investigation into the organizers of Taksim Solidarity, a platform of 128 nongovernmental organizations supporting the Gezi Park campaign and sit-in was ongoing. The mute or biased coverage of the Taksim Gezi protests in much of Turkey's media highlighted the reluctance of many media companies to report news*

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<sup>13</sup> 2011. "The Turkish Election. Result and Next Steps." Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, <http://www.fesdc.org/pdf/The%20Turkish%20Election%20June%202011.pdf>, Accessed 18 December 2014.





*impartially when it conflicts with government interests. In the same period, Turkey continued to prosecute journalists in 2013, and several dozen remain in jail. Also, the government continued efforts to amend some laws that are used to limit free speech.<sup>14</sup>*

Violation of civil liberties is not the only feature of the so-called “dark” side of Turkey’s politics. Today, Turkey faces serious problems in its electoral processes. Even though elections in Turkey are generally considered “free and fair,” there are procedures that cast shadows of doubt on the ostensible fairness of the process.

According to the Turkish Constitution, Turkish parties have to cross a 10% threshold in order to gain parliamentary participation (seats.) Also, political parties are prohibited from maintaining ties of any kind, sort or form with associations, unions, foundations, corporations or professional organizations. During the last few years, the AKP and the opposition made clear their disagreement with these un-democratic constitutional provisions. Despite agreement, until today, the AKP’s government has not taken any kind of initiative to change this constitutional provision. Moreover, some initiatives taken by the Supreme Election Board (YSK,) which is comprised of senior judges whose verdicts over elections cannot be appealed to any other legal body including the Constitutional Court, create serious concerns and doubts about the results of the last elections. Toker explains:

*According to the official numbers of the YSK, the number of registered voters went up by 1.02 percent between 2002-7. It is surprising that the total number of voters between 2007-14 increased by 29 percent. More surprising is that the population of Turkey increased by less than 10 percent in this latter period. As the figure below demonstrates, although Turkey’s population has grown steadily, the number of registered voters reflects inexplicably sharp fluctuations. The YSK justifies the decline in the number of registered voters by nearly 2 million between 2004-7—despite population growth of nearly 3 million—with the “elimination of duplicate entries from the voter records,” without providing any official proof. On the other hand, the sudden increase of nearly 5.5 million voters between 2007-10—an increase of over 10 million voters in just four years—is explained by the YSK by pointing to the switch from a “voluntary registration system” to an “address-based voter system” in 2008. According to this system, introduced prior to the 2009 local elections, every Turkish citizen was supposedly registered by the government based on the physical address at which he or she resided. The YSK used this database to update its voter registry. However, there were large numbers of press reports and citizen complaints throughout the country of voter registries of people living on the fifth or sixth floors of a three-story building, and of multiple families shown as residing in the same flat. In a controversial and*

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<sup>14</sup> 2014. “Human Rights Watch Report for Turkey 2014.” Human Rights Watch Organisation, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/turkey>, Accessed 18 December 2014.



*unprecedented decision, the Turkish Statistics Institution (TUIK) decided on 20 November 2008 to destroy all records used for “address-based voter registry”—less than a year after it was made public. Despite objections from political parties and opinion leaders, the agency destroyed all data.<sup>15</sup>*

As mentioned above, Levitsky and Way define competitive authoritarian regimes as civil ones in which democratic institutions do exist, but are widely regarded as means to gain power. Those who manage state institutions and public services have the advantage vis-à-vis their opponents:

*We consider the playing field uneven when (1) state institutions are widely abused for partisan ends, (2) incumbents are systematically favored at the expense of the opposition, and (3) the opposition’s ability to organize and compete in elections is seriously handicapped. Three aspects of an uneven playing field are of particular importance: access to resources, media, and the law.<sup>16</sup>*

The 2014 presidential election is a good case-study, which illustrates the uneven political competition that exists in Turkish politics. Before the 2014 presidential election, the opposition accused the AKP of using its powers to deny equal political time, while promoting Erdoğan. The Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) seems to agree with this argument. In its interim report, OSCE’s office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) for the period between July 9 and July 28, mentions two serious issues. The report stressed that the “campaign activities of the Prime Minister are large-scale events, often combined with official government events,” and underlines that the public promotion of the other candidates had been limited. The report also points to the legal restrictions on freedom of expression, including Internet, and expresses concerns that interferences by media owners and other political actors have resulted in reduced media independence. The report argues that this course of action resulted in limited criticism against the AKP and Erdoğan. The report also underlines the fact that there is no legal framework, which safeguards a broadcaster’s impartiality during the electoral campaign. This was the case for Erdoğan’s rivals, especially in relation to the state-owned TRT.<sup>17</sup>

Idiz suggests that OSCE is not the only international organization in which Turkey participates that has criticized the unfair advantages enjoyed by Erdoğan during his

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<sup>15</sup> Toker, Cem 2014. “Elections In Turkey: Fair Or Fraud-Ridden?” Turkish Policy Quarterly, Winter 2014, [http://www.turkishpolicy.com/dosyalar/files/vol\\_12-no\\_4-toker.pdf](http://www.turkishpolicy.com/dosyalar/files/vol_12-no_4-toker.pdf), Accessed 18 December 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Levitsky, Steven & Way, A., Lucan 2010., 5-10.

<sup>17</sup> Idiz, Semih 2014. “Erdoğan’s presidential rivals fight for airtime.” Al Monitor, 5 August 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/08/idiz-presidential-elections-erdogan-fair-equal-trt-osce-akp.html#>, Accessed 18 December 2014.





presidential campaign. Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) visited Turkey (July 21-22,) accepting an invitation of its non-AKP members, in order to investigate this issue. In a statement issued after their visit, PACE members warned Turkey's Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTUK) that TRT should make a clear distinction between Erdogan's official speeches as prime minister, and those in which he addresses audiences in his capacity as presidential candidate.<sup>18</sup>

The 2014 presidential election is an example which shows that in modern Turkey opposition parties use democratic institutions to compete for power; yet this competition heavily favors the AKP's government. In other words competition exists, but it is unfair. With its excessive and unique access to resources, the media and the law, the AKP was actually in a position to "declare" victory before the beginning of the electoral process.

### **3. The Three Pillars: State, Party and a Common Identity**

#### **3.1 The State in AKP's Service**

The question is how did the AKP manage to establish this hybrid competitive authoritarian regime in Turkey? What factors played their part in the establishment of this particular political system? The answer is the total control of state institution and services by the AKP, the strong organization of the ruling party and the shared identity (political and economic) of the new ruling elites.

Beginning in 2002, the AKP managed to develop constructive relations and ties with several state institutions, including the military establishment. Between 2002 and 2014, with a series of initiatives and reforms, the AKP managed to gain control over state institutions and services. The starting point was MGK's reform law, passed in July 2003. According to the new law, MGK is transformed into an advisory institution on national security policy issues. It communicates its views in order to promote the necessary coordination of efforts. The law also changed the role of MGK's Secretary General, who lost almost all of its executive powers.<sup>19</sup>

MGK's reform was accompanied by some limitations on military's autonomy, and it was followed by a judiciary reform that had always been the spearhead of the AKP's reform agenda. Indeed, in December 2007, the government passed the Law of Judges and Prosecutors. Previously judges and prosecutors were obliged to attend an interview, if successful in written exams. The 2007 reform assigned this duty (interviews) to the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Kaynar, Kars, Aysegül 2014. "Interaction of the AKP With the Constitutional State in Turkey: AKP's Political Justice." Doctoral Thesis, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Middle East Technical University, <http://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12617635/index.pdf>, 175, Accessed 19 December 2014.



Ministry of Justice. In other words, the final decision on who will be judge or prosecutor lays with the Ministry of Justice, i.e. the government. The government also has the power to affect the balance of power or influence in the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors.<sup>20</sup>

In the September 2010 Constitutional Amendments, the AKP changed the Constitutional Court fundamentally. The AKP's reform deprived the Constitutional Court of its right to nominate its own candidates for Constitutional Court membership. Instead, the President of the Republic now has this right. Therefore, the will of the majority within these institutions is largely ignored. To understand the difference, according to 1982 settlement the President could appoint 11 regular and four substitute members. Since 2010 the President can appoint 14 out of 17 regular members. So, in practice the 2010 amendment increased presidential influence in the Constitutional Court.<sup>21</sup>

During the last two years, the judicial powers of the state have been reformed four times (collectively known as "judicial reform packages".) The first reform was passed on March 31, 2011 (Law No 6217,) which was an omnibus bill. This omnibus bill amended 16 laws including Criminal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Law of Military Service. A second reform was passed on August 26, 2011 (Decree No 650.)<sup>22</sup>

With these laws the government gradually established the AKP's control over all important state structures. From 2002 until 2014, under the cover of the so-called democratization process, the AKP managed to establish its control over the military and the judiciary system. However, we must point out that, contrary to the belief that the MGK's role came to an end, in reality the AKP's reforms strengthened its decision-making status. Membership of the Minister of Justice and the Deputy Prime Minister in the MGK means that the presence of the Council of Ministers is strengthened. Hence, the MGK's decisions are becoming more and more the decisions of the Council of Ministers. Consequently, the binding force behind them is also enhanced. By reforming the MGK, the AKP sought to achieve a degree of cooperation or reconciliation with the military establishment in terms of executive decision-making. At the same time the AKP managed to control the process of judicial enforcement of legal norms by re-structuring the judicial community through the appointment of prosecutors. In other words, the AKP has the power to decide who will be judge and prosecutor through the examination mechanism applied by the Ministry of Justice and the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors. Also, the AKP's government is now able to affect the balance of power or influence within the Constitutional Court.

### **3.2 AKP, Clientalism and Patronage**

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 189.



The AKP's strong organization is the second pillar of Turkey's competitive authoritarian regime. According to Levitsky and Way, strong parties are particularly important in competitive authoritarian regimes because, unlike other authoritarian regimes, government must retain and exercise power through democratic institutions, and strong parties normally win elections, which under competitive authoritarian regimes are quite often hard-fought battles.<sup>23</sup>

In the last 12 years, this is exactly the case in Turkey. Based on its strong mass organization, the AKP has won important victories in all elections. The party won a major victory in 2002 parliamentary election, winning some two-thirds of the 550 parliamentary seats. In an early general election held in 2007, the AKP increased its share of votes (47%) but its parliamentary seats fell to 341. In 2011 parliamentary elections, the AKP further increased its share of votes (49.8%,) but gained 327 seats in the parliament. Nevertheless it was able to form its third consecutive government. During electoral campaigns, local AKP organizations conducted frequent face-to-face meeting with party members (mostly females) and their neighbors who live in the same neighborhood. Unlike the vertical clientistic-type ties, these kinds of meetings were horizontal-type of relationships, based on the notion of "imece" (mutual help,) a strong tradition in Turkish society. Coupled with the free distribution of specific goods by the party to the people (voters,) this new clientistic relationship established by the AKP proved highly effective.<sup>24</sup>

Between 2007 and 2014, with its strong ties in Turkish society and its mass organization, the AKP managed to repel all attacks made by the military establishment, the secular opposition and the huge demonstrations that took place all around Turkey. At the same time, the AKP's top leadership retained its cohesion and its commitment to Erdoğan. It is true that under Erdoğan's leadership the AKP managed to combine successfully the state and the party strength in a single, simple, and victorious, political strategy.

### **3.3 Anatolia's Newly Emerged Middle Class**

As mentioned above, the third pillar of Turkey's competitive authoritarian regime is a shared political and socio-economic identity of the AKP's members and supporters. The AKP's main force of success is the will and the momentum of Anatolia's newly emerged middle class. With its conservative attitude, its "thirst" for capitalism (free-market economy) and its desire to actively participate in the globalization process of the twenty-

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<sup>23</sup> Levitsky, Steven & Way, A., Lucan 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 63.

<sup>24</sup> Sayarı, Sabri 2011. "Clientalism And Patronage in Turkish Politics and Society." In Toprak, Binnaz and Birtek, Faruk, (eds.) "The Post Modern Abyss and the New Politics of Islam: Assabiyah Revisited Essays in Honor of Şerif Mardin." Istanbul Bilgi University Press, Istanbul, [http://research.sabanciuniv.edu/16988/1/Mardin\\_Volume.pdf](http://research.sabanciuniv.edu/16988/1/Mardin_Volume.pdf), 13, Accessed 19 December 2014.



first century, Anatolia's middle class is the main contributor to Turkey's competitive authoritarian regime.

As Somer underlines, this new religious and conservative elite challenges the status of the older secular elite. This religious and conservative elite rose to power by challenging the old-style Islamists, represented by Erbakan, and the conservative, but secular, Muslim, represented by Demirel. It must be noted that Economic competition occurs and is harsh between the secular business elite and the newly emerged Islamic-conservative business elite. After all, the AKP took power when both centers of power in Turkey (political and economic) collapsed in 2001:

*[...] More than an elite struggle, the current battle is occurring in the socio-cultural realm between two middle classes: the secularist middle class and the new religious – conservative middle class. The former is skeptical of Islamism of all sorts and the latter is drawn to a moderate and pro-modern sort of Islamism. Interestingly moderate Islam may produce different implications for the secularist Turkish middle class and the world. Followers of Turkish politics and the AKP in the world include Islamists seeking recognition in order to participate in democratic politics, Arab democrats and autocrats concerned that transition to democracy may bring Islamists to power, the EU, trying to gauge who the true democrats and Europhiles are in Turkey, and people throughout the world concerned about Islamic extremism and the lack of democracy in Muslim countries. For many of these actors a moderate party like the AKP can create a positive example by showing the world how Islam can coexist with secular, multiparty democracy.<sup>25</sup>*

Unlike other parties in Turkey, the AKP's predecessor, the Welfare Party was an institutional expression of a modern social movement that tried to redefine its cultural and socio-economic relations through political action. During the 1980s and 1990s, this social movement was based on a new form of consciousness created by mass education, the increasing impact of Islamist print media and the rise of Anatolia's middle class.<sup>26</sup>

Succeeding the Welfare Party and successfully combining state and party strength, the AKP contributed to the rise of Anatolia's middle class. According to Yılmaz, this process opened the door for the re-interpretation of religious teachings and the principles of nationalism in order to make them more congruent with the realities and the requirements of a higher social, economic and cultural status. Yılmaz argues that this situation roughly corresponds

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<sup>25</sup> Somer, Murat 2007. *Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey: Implications for the World, Muslims and Secular Democracy*. Third World Quarterly, Vol. 28, No. 7, 2007, 1271-89.

<sup>26</sup> Yavuz, M., Hakan 2003. *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 217.



to what some authors have defined as the emergence of the “non-Western forms of modernity”, which can be observed in countries like Malaysia, Iran, Morocco, in some Turkish cities, and in some western European cities with sizeable Muslim immigrants. In Turkey’s competitive authoritarian regime, the “non-Western forms of modernity” notion divides lives and minds, while emphasizing the consumption aspects and technical sides of modernization.<sup>27</sup>

### **Conclusion: Anatolia’s Middle Class Hybrid Competitive Authoritarian Regime**

Few years since the 9/11 attacks in New York and its rise to power, the AKP gradually established a so-called competitive authoritarian regime, in order to consolidate and secure its political power. This competitive authoritarian regime is hybrid and it is based on liberal principles, such as absence of tutelary authorities, protection of civil liberties, full suffrage and free elections. It also provides a reasonably fair level of political competition between the party in power (government) and the opposition. At the same time, however, the system has shown some undemocratic features such as violation of civil liberties, unfair elections and uneven political competition.

As mentioned earlier, Turkey’s modern political establishment is an amalgam of liberal principles and authoritarian characteristics. In other words, liberal values coexist with practices that have nothing to do with modern political values.

Turkey’s hybrid competitive authoritarian regime is based on three pillars. During the last 12 years, the AKP gradually but steadily managed to control all major state institutions. It also managed to impose its reforms to the military and judiciary establishments. By doing so the AKP reorganized the Turkish state in way compatible with its own political needs and desires. Today, Turkey, as a state, actually serves the AKP’s initiatives, thereby securing (for the AKP) a huge political advantage, a “weapon” that allows the party to participate in elections from a favorable position.

The second pillar is strong party organization. Organizing frequent face-to-face meeting with potential voters and distributing free goods is indeed a new type of clientistic relationship that has helped the AKP win election after election during the last 12 years.

This paper explained how Anatolia’s middle class, with its conservative attitude, its “thirst” for capitalism and its desire to participate in the globalization process of the twenty-first century, is the main contributor to the establishment of this competitive authoritarian regime in Turkey.

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<sup>27</sup> Yilmaz, Hakan. *Conservatism in Turkey*.

[http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi\\_turkey\\_tpq\\_vol7\\_no1\\_HakanYilmaz.pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_vol7_no1_HakanYilmaz.pdf). Accessed 19 December 2014.



Exploiting state institutions and Turkey's clientistic political system, Anatolia's middle class has contributed to the creation of an unfair system of political competition. Back in 2002, the AKP inherited a political system designed by the military establishment. It was based on the undemocratic constitution of 1982. The AKP and its government reorganized this political establishment in accordance with its own needs and priorities. The Turkish middle class transformed the undemocratic political framework of Turkey to a hybrid competitive authoritarian regime, which is based on the notion that this kind of system better serves its interests. In other words, the limited democratization of the previous undemocratic regime was the necessary precondition, which led to the evolution of Turkey's middle class to a new ruling elite. As mentioned before, the key for success was the control of state institutions coupled with a strong and effective party organization.

This hybrid competitive authoritarian regime helps the Turkish middle class redefine cultural and socio-economic relations using politics. At the same time it paves the way for the continuation of this process of redefinition via the continuation of political power held by the middle class.

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