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# HOW DEMOCRACY BACKSLIDES

## Tracing the Pathway in Turkey

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## **Abstract**

*Democratic backsliding is a gradual process that negatively affects the countries in terms of democracy. The different levels of democracies can face a number of challenges as a result of democratic backsliding and this is due to various factors. For this thesis, the main aim is to find the variables which affect the Turkish case. Turkey is a special case because once it was shown as an example of a modern and moderate Muslim state which combines secularism and constitution for the autocratic regional countries but its democracy turned to an electoral autocracy. In this thesis, the starting point will be the old autocratic regime in Turkey which was restrained by the new regime which was aiming for reforms as regards the EU accession process but this major change and it was expected by the democracy defenders in Turkey that reforms for the EU normally should evolve the country to a higher level of democratic accountability but the old authoritarian regime was eventually replaced by a new authoritarian one led by Erdogan and his ruling AKP party. In this thesis, to solve the reason behind this issue, process tracing is used. The main findings is that Erdogan's clientelist policies are influenced by the old authoritarian regime. Moreover, the new regime became autocratic as result of some complementary factors: politicization of the institutions, clientelism, patronage system and reform avoidance.*

**Keywords:** democratic backsliding, politicization, clientelism, patronage system, reform avoidance, authoritarian legacy.

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## **1. Introduction**

According to the V-Dem democracy report (V-Dem Institute, 2022: 6), there is a global decline in democratization and the third wave of autocratization accelerates. In the democracy report 2022 (V-Dem Institute, 2022: 45), 90 countries are ruled by autocratic regimes.

The question of what are the reasons behind democratic backsliding is a vivid scholarly debate. A research subject that seeks to understand the causes of democratic transitions, democratic breakdowns, authoritarian resilience, and democratic consolidation in the countries has quickly emerged in the third wave of autocratization and currently the reasons behind it are studied with different variables but remain unsolved (Waldner & Lust, 2018: 93). The health of global democracy is evaluated with the modifiers such as ‘illiberal’ or ‘delegative’ and third wave democracies are defined with the conceptual challenges, lack of theoretical background and uncommon measurements of democracy. With this study, I seek to fill out this gap and contribute to this evolving research area.

Democratic backsliding is discussed by the researchers and comparative case studies are made to see a common phenomenon in the process of backsliding. (Agestam, 2018) (Riaz & Rana, 2020) In addition to this, process tracing for a single case study is studied in some cases such as Chile (Linz Juan J., Alfred Stepan and Arturo Valenzuela, 1978). For this study, Turkey is the focus country to analyze the backsliding. The real contribution of the thesis is that it uses the path-dependence framework that Mahoney proposed for Latin America to analyze regime change in Turkey. Therefore, I will solve the puzzle of Turkish backsliding with Mahoney’s historical part-dependent approach and find complementary factors for the democratic backsliding in Turkey.

I believe that Turkish case is unique if you compare to other cases because once it was shown as an example of a modern and moderate Muslim state which combines secularism and constitution for the autocratic regional countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya after the Arab Spring (Kenyon, 2012) but its democracy turned to an electoral autocracy despite the reforms for the EU accession process which should evolve the country to better democracy.

The old authoritarian regime of Turkey was based on a certain state tradition. Kemalism as a state doctrine tried to exercise top-down modernization. ‘For the people regardless of the

people' as a slogan was defended. If it is explained more, the slogan was aiming to conduct modernization policies which directly affects the society's private life and this top to bottom policy tried to modernize the society with human right abuses. This modernization policy was executed by the ruling elites, authoritarian and insufficiently accountable institutions such as the armed forces, the Council of Higher Education, the Presidency of Religious Affairs and a particular set-up of state-society relationship was tried to be built by these authoritarian institutions. Despite its first multi-party free and fair elections in the 1950s, civil governments against the old authoritarian regime were removed by the armed forces with the military coups in 1960 and 1980. (Somer, 2016: 484) Therefore, restraining or abolishing the old authoritarian regime's institutions and actors such as the military was considered necessary to improve democracy in Turkey. (Heywood, 2013: 280).

Looking at 2000s Turkey under Erdogan and his party AKP, it can be observed that a series of reforms including institutional reforms were made under the accession process of the EU and democratization in Turkey gained momentum. A series of court cases were started within the context of this so-called democratization process to restrain the power of the old authoritarian regime's institutions and actors. All these court cases were supported by the local and international democracy defenders to improve democracy in Turkey. With these court cases, the power of the old elite who worked for the old authoritarian regime was restrained. Despite its so-called democratic policies to start these court cases, transition from autocracy to democracy could not be successful in Turkey. The EU accession talks which is considered a driving force for Turkish democracy's progress was halted in 2006 and Turkey's gradual decline in democracy was observed by Freedom House and V-dem. If we look into the figure in Appendix A, a gradual increase in democracy between 1983-2004 can be seen. However, the sharp decrease between 2005 -2022 led the country to democratic backsliding. The country was labeled as electoral democracy in 2007 and first time it was labeled as electoral autocracy in 2016 electoral autocracy by V-Dem (2017) and gradual decline in the democracy score continues. The country was labeled as electoral autocracy in the democracy report 2022 (V-Dem Institute, 2022: 45) and not free by Freedom House in 2022 (Freedom House, 2022). The purpose of this thesis is to explore the causes of democratic backsliding in relation to the restrained power of the old authoritarian regime's institutions and actors.

In this thesis, the main aim is to find the reasons behind the democratic backsliding in Turkey despite the old authoritarian regime's institutions and actors have been restrained by Erdogan and his party AKP since 2002. I selected 2002 because the old authoritarian regime's actors were removed from power in 2002 with the general election and Erdogan and his party were elected. Most importantly, I use Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach to achieve the main aim. Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach is used for the first time for the case of Turkish democratic backsliding to see the factors behind it. Mostly this theory was used for Latin American countries regime change and the adaptation of the theory for Turkey will be my contribution for the research. For better understanding of the Turkish case, I believe Mahoney's approach will be useful for the study.

If we look at the old authoritarian regime in Turkey, the regime was shown as the protagonist of the low level of the democracy in the country and with reforms for the EU accession process which was started by Erdogan and his party AKP, the old authoritarian regime would be restrained and Erdogan and his party AKP would evolve the country to better democracy. The gradual process of democratic backsliding is analyzed with the case of Turkey and I aim to identify a possible cause of an outcome. "Why does democracy backslide in Turkey despite institutions and actors of the old authoritarian regime have been restrained by Erdogan and his party?" is asked as the research question. The following questions will be asked to support the research question: Which actors or factors played a role in the democratic backsliding in Turkey? Is the current democratic backsliding in Turkey something new which critical junctures led to or just following the old patterns? I believe these questions are important to be asked to compare the old authoritarian regime and newly built authoritarian regime to see the gradual decline in democracy and to find the factors behind the democratic backsliding.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual debate is crucial to understand the key terms. Democratic backsliding as a phenomenon is discussed by the scholars with different terms such as democratic breakdown, democratic recession and autocratization. In this paper, to understand democratic backsliding, democracy should be defined and how some democracies can lose the minimum requirements of democracy can lead to democratic backsliding can be explained better.

Democracy shortly means the power of the people. By ancient Athenian standards, nowadays democracy is in fact oligarchy because we are ruled indirectly by a minority of the electorate who vote for our representatives but the meaning of democracy changed gradually or it started to cover some sort of values associated with democracy (Scott & Makres, 2019: 3-5).

Recent democratization processes in the world encouraged scholars to look into the definition and use of democracy as a concept. It is important to consider all kinds of definitions and attributes of democracy to evaluate, compare or classify democracies in the world. Within this framework, minimum democracy standards are summarized like this: fully contested elections with full suffrage and the absence of massive fraud, effective guarantees of civil liberties, freedom of speech, assembly and association (Collier, & Levitsky, 1997: 437).

For achieving differentiation and avoiding conceptual stretching, Sartori's strategy which can be understood in terms of a ladder of generality was applied to different kinds of studies. Broad comparison is difficult but the ladder of generality supports researchers on the task of comparison while analyzing a wider range of cases. (Collier, & Mahon, 1993: 846). Sartorian fashion that puts conditions to be coded democracy is used in in-kind/qualitative approaches but the number of necessary conditions or criterias that a regime must fulfill in order to be coded as a democracy or autocracy changes. Longstanding discussion continues whether democracy is best understood as a multidimensional, continuous, polychotomous or a dichotomous concept. (Lührmann, Tannenberg, & Lindberg, 2018: 2) Additionally, the differentiation between democracy and autocracy and existence of a grey zone appears in these discussions. Therefore, another approach occurred in the research that applies threshold on a continuous measure to distinguish between political regimes. This one is degree/quantitative approaches such as Freedom House and the Polity project. In these approaches, the clear difficulty arises where to draw the line between democracy and autocracies which leads to arbitrary decisions. (Lührmann, Tannenberg, & Lindberg, 2018: 3)

This study will be based on V-Dem data that classifies countries into four regime categories under the proposal of Regimes of the World (RoW): closed autocracy, electoral autocracy, electoral democracy and liberal democracy. To show the democratic backsliding, the classification is important. In this way, we can see the timeline of the democratic backsliding within the context of Turkey which was an electoral democracy later turned to electoral



autocracy. The Row typology covers past research and minimizes the differences between the researches. Also, it uses high-level indices (HLIs) such as the Electoral Democracy Index reflect both a family resemblance logic and the classical or Sartorian logic of necessary conditions (Coppedge, Gerring, Lindberg, Skaaning, & Teorell, 2017: 24; Collier, & Mahon, 1993: 848-851) and it is based on Dahl's theory of polyarchy which provides most comprehensive and most widely accepted theory to distinguish democracies in the world. (Coppedge, Gerring, Lindberg, Skaaning, & Teorell, 2017: 20) This conceptualization distinguishes democracies from autocracies with a short condition: In democracies rulers are de facto accountable to citizens through periodic elections and de facto multi-party, free and fair elections and Dahl's institutional prerequisites minimally fulfilled. (Lührmann, Tannenberg, & Lindberg, 2018: 4) This definition can be seen as an evolved democracy definition of Collier, & Levitsky and this thesis will use this definition.

To evaluate the health of the democracy, classification of the democracies and deciding criterias for democratic standards are important. A deterioration in the qualities of democracy can be defined as backsliding and a series of events and political factors can lead to democratic backsliding. (Waldner & Lust, 2018: 94)

### **3. Literature Review**

In the literature, the existing theories related to democratic breakdown are various. Academically, classification of the theories related to democratic backsliding is important. Waldner & Lust, divide theories into six families: political agency, political culture, political institutions, political economy, social structure and political coalitions, and international actors. (Waldner & Lust, 2018: 93) In this study, these different family examples are summarized below and relevant studies for Turkey are classified as well. The below studies are important for this study because the studies are plausibly relevant to explaining backsliding in Turkey. In addition to this, it can be argued that they can be considered alternative explanations, or complementary for the Turkish case. I think some of these factors can explain the Turkish case as well but on the basis of Turkey if we consider the events since 2002, we need complementary factors to understand the democratic backsliding in Turkey. All these factors in the previous literature can explain the unstable democracy in Turkey. My contribution to the thesis is to use Mahoney's path-dependent approach which was used by Mahoney for Latin American

countries but it can be adapted for the Turkish case. With this adaptation, Turkish cases can be understood better and further variables can be found out.

### **3.1. Agency-Based Theories**

Nancy Bermeo (2016) and Levitsky & Ziblatt (2018)'s studies look into the gradual decline in democracies. According to Bermeo (2016)'s 'On Democratic Backsliding' study, promissory coups, executive aggrandizement and strategic manipulation of elections are the ways of de-democratization. Levitsky, Steven & Ziblatt (2018)' three stage model of democratic backsliding is discussed in their book, *How Democracies Die?* and they argue that the erosion of democracy follows these steps: attacking referees, targeting opponents, and changing the rules of the game. It can be seen that mostly in these theories decisions of political actors affect the democratic conditions with the claims of power-seeking presidents. (Waldner & Lust, 2018: 98)

#### **3.1.1. Agency-Based Theory for Turkey**

Albertus & Menaldo (2018: 274) thinks that some democratic breakdowns are actually the breakdowns of elite-biased democracies which are created by elites and for elites and Turkey's backsliding in democracy is discussed under the same pattern. They argue that Erdogan has used both strongman bluster and constitutional reform to gut the check and balances. Furthermore he removed military vetoes. Previously these vetoes were a direct intervention to democracy. As a result, he consolidated power with the Turkish presidential system and accused civil politicians and pro-democracy parties as the workers of "corrupt" elites. He accused the old regime's institutions as "rigged" institutions. He argued that opposition parties and their politicians with their elite controlled bureaucracy was working for the elites but now he claimed he changed all these institutions in favor of the public. Like other opportunistic politicians, with an authoritarian bent he tried to agitate the masses in elite-biased democracy to do an end run around "corrupt" elites and "rigged" institutions. Elites and establishment are seen as the perfect scapegoats for populists, in this way they may themselves harbor authoritarian intentions which can be seen in the Turkish case. (Albertus & Menaldo, 2018: 274) I agree with the theory partially. The theory can be used to explain the Turkish case as well but it does not explain fully. Institutional change to get rid of elites or the establishment in Turkey did not result in meritocracy or transparent institutions which can be considered as an important element for better democracy. Erdogan and his party AKP abused the old regime's elite

supported actors and authoritarian and insufficiently accountable institutions to build a new regime. Later changes in the institutions such as hiring loyal officers in favor of Erdogan and his party and their corrupt acts such as using their position to jail oppositions cannot be explained with this theory.

### **3.2.Theories of Political Culture**

Culture theories claim that widely shared norms, values, rituals and practices can divide appropriate from the inappropriate one. Culture produces political outcomes with these attributes. For instance, Fish (2002) claims about the sources of the democratic deficit. He argues that Muslim majority countries score lower than other countries in Freedom House score.

Another culture argument was made by Inglehart and Welzel (2005). The authors argue that democracy requires the transition from traditional and survival oriented values to secular and self-expressive values.

#### **3.2.1. Theory of Political Culture for Turkey**

Toprak (2005: 167) takes into account the cultural perspective and she argues that liberal democracy is incompatible with a Muslim-majority country and lack of democracy in a Muslim-majority country is not due to public resistance to democratic forms of government. Actually, the legal secularization framework is an important prerequisite of democracy and rising political Islam in Turkey threatens democracy and turns the country into a non-democratic regime. If we consider the state-society relationship, this theory can partially explain the Turkish case however cultural perspective considers the society homogenic. For the majority of the society, this theory works but religion's impact on the rest of society is controversial. For the Turkish case, the religion has an impact on the society but other than conservative individuals, the society has also pro-secular individuals which think that the religion should not affect anything related to the state. So these individuals cannot be included in political culture studies. In addition to this, not just culture but also other relations between state and society such as clientelism should be considered to explain the Turkish case as well but the culture does not consider this factor.

### **3.3.Theories of Social Structure and Political Coalitions**

Theories of social structure and political coalitions conceptualize the formation of groups of citizens, the potential conflict among these groups and political results of the formation of the groups and intergroup conflicts. (Waldner & Lust, 2018: 103) This leads us to polarization. Haggard & Kaufman (2021: 29) analyze democratic backsliding in terms of three interrelated causal factors: social and political polarization, the capture of executive and legislative institutions by the autocrats, and the incremental subversion of democratic institutions. If we look at these studies, it can be seen that polarization is also shown as the factor and also a result of democratic backsliding. For the Turkish case, this is also a case as well. Polarization became a reason and the result for democratic backsliding. Therefore, these researches can be considered for the Turkish case as well but we need further explanation to understand the gradual process which brings us to the democratic backsliding other than polarization because it can be considered as a complementary factor for Turkey.

#### **3.3.1. Theory of Social Structure and Political Coalitions for Turkey**

Yunus Emre Orhan (2021) discusses democratic backsliding with polarization in his empirical analysis and he compares polarized countries and their democratic conditions. Aside from Haggard and Kaufmann, Orhan finds that increase in affective polarization has become a primary factor driving democratic backsliding. (Orhan, 2021: 15) Polarization in Turkey increased in recent years and Erdogan and his party AKP pursue the policy of polarization to increase its votes. I agree that polarization can be considered as a factor for democratic backsliding but it is one of the policies of Erdogan and his party AKP. It is a policy Erdogan and his party AKP is driving to consolidate vote bases and it is a complementary factor between other factors. In the Turkish case, it can be seen that Erdogan uses the polarizarization as a tool for political reasons and as a result of this tool, gradual decrease in democracy can be observed but this is one of the factors which can be considered complementary. For further explanation for the other perspectives, we need different complementary factors.

### **3.4.International Factors**

In this theory, scholars mostly argue that as a primary agent, an actor in the international system uses its instruments of change to catalyze cultural, institutional or economic change and diplomatic efforts are used to alter the countries' behavior. Levitsky & Way focuses on leverage and linkage. (Waldner & Lust, 2018: 105) The authors argue that external democratizing pressure creates a leverage for vulnerable authoritarian regimes and external pressure comes as a linkage such as economic, political, diplomatic and social ties along with cross-border flows of capital, information, goods, services, and people. When the linkage and leverage are high, democratization is inevitable.

Other than these, nation-building which was conducted in Germany, Japan and Iraq through wars and foreign aid are discussed under this theory. However, international factors are criticized because other theories mention international factors as complementary factors. For instance scholars who focus on agent-based theory may show international factors as complementary factors. Additionally, international influence does not generate the same impact country by country so we cannot generalize testable hypotheses to explain the distinctive outcome space of backsliding, which is incremental change within democratic regimes (Waldner & Lust, 2018: 109) Therefore, Waldner & Lust (2018: 106) argue that domestic-level factors should be the sources of backsliding not international factors.

#### **3.4.1. International Factors for Turkey**

International influences are discussed academically. For instance, Kirişçi & Sloat (2019: 2-7) discusses the fall of liberal democracy in Turkey with range of domestic and international factors such as increasing powers of the president, weak opposition, questionable elections, erosion of rule of law, cultural factors, botched European Union accession, destabilizing regional developments in Middle East and post-coup crackdown.

Democratic backsliding in the case of Turkey is discussed by San & Akca (2021) and they argue that Turkey became an autocratic country because the EU and the US declined their willingness to promote democracy in the world and Turkey deepened its relations with autocratic regimes.

I think international factors are related with this study because the EU and the US 's impact on democracy cannot be considered as a sole factor for the Turkish case but it can be counted as

one of the complementary factors which explains democratic backsliding. However, I can argue that the EU and the US promote democracy in Turkey but democracy solely did not become a decisive factor in the relations. The political discourse in the press releases was built on democracy and human rights by the EU and the US but the relations within the context of trade, military cooperation and other collaborations were not affected negatively just because of the high or low level of democracy. Promoting democracy but how is the real question should be answered but not the topic of this study.

### **3.5. Political Institutions**

The institutional roots of democratic backsliding is discussed by the scholars and they argue three broad types of effect. Vertical accountability, horizontal accountability and level of governmental efficaciousness and performance can be affected by the institutions.

Lijphart (1977) offers democratic stability and electoral systems in the study and argues that consociational institutions induce elite moderation and guarantee government office to represent all major socio-cultural groups. This leads to cooperation and democratic survival. Reynolds (2010) argues that power-sharing systems based on proportional representation can deter democratic breakdown. Cheibub (2007) finds that presidential systems are preferred in the countries which democracies are established after military dictatorships and they are less likely to survive if they are compared with the parliamentary system which is preferred by the countries which have previously civilian dictatorships.

#### **3.5.1. Political Institutions for Turkey**

The institutional roots of democratic backsliding is discussed by Haggard and Kaufman (2016: 354) and they claim that ‘weak democracy syndrome’ countries such as Turkey, Hungary, Thailand, Venezuela and Russia are vulnerable to backsliding. They emphasize political and economic challenges which lead to democratic backsliding: the threat of military praetorianism, the challenge of strengthening weak political institutions, and the effect of the government’s management of the economy. Especially military praetorianism has been a core component of weak democracy syndrome. Military officers challenge civilian authority and greater success to launch a coup. So mostly the study focuses on the military institution and shows the coup trap.

However, studies of political institutions have a methodological problem because institutions structure political processes and outcomes and powerful political actors have a strong impact on the institutions to their favor which can be a case for the politicization. Additionally, they can also be incentivized to act in certain ways as a result of how the institutions work. There is a degree of path dependency as well. So the institution itself may not exercise any causal influence.

This can be discussed with the Turkish case as well. Institutions cannot be considered as the only factor for democratic backsliding. I think that political actors fundamentally affect how policies will be implemented and how the state will apply democratic requirements. As a result, political actors have an impact on democracy via institutions. Therefore, political actor's decisions on the institutions should be discussed more.

### **3.6.Theories of Political Economy**

Lipset (1969: 52) argues that democratic survival depends on effective performance and key parameters such as welfare policies (health, education and social security), law and order and economic growth can be counted for the effective performance. Mostly, this argument is defended by other researchers as well. Masses and elites prefer high economic growth. In case of an economic crisis, they support autocratic alternatives and this leads to democratic breakdown.

However, backsliding directly related to the political economy needs extra attention. According to Waldner & Lust (2018: 103), low levels of development or high levels of inequality are associated with backsliding but a broader canvas of relevant explanatory variables should be considered.

For instance, economic crisis assumption as a theoretical argument is challenged by Cornell, Møller, & Skaaning (2020: 94-113) The study studies interwar democratic breakdowns and argues that long-term historical factors that brought about democratic legacies and decided the character of the associational landscape have an impact on democracies and short-term factors such as economic crisis are not conducive to democratic breakdown. To reassess the relationship between democratic breakdown and economic crisis, Cox proportional hazards survival models, backed up by logit models, were used in the study. In conclusion, the study finds that the effects of the economic crisis on the interwar pattern of democratic breakdown have been exaggerated in the literature. In addition to this, the authors argue that the economic

crisis does not have a substantial or for that matter a robust negative effect. Also the author emphasizes Zimmermann's argument: what mattered were the domestic responses to the crisis, not the crisis itself. So the economic crisis cannot be defended as a sole variable to explain the democratic breakdown. Beyond that structural background conditions, democratic legacy and associational landscape are the main factors in this study to examine the democratic breakdown.

### **3.6.1. Theories of Political Economy for Turkey**

For instance, Esen & Gumuscu (2021) offer a political economy account instead of ideological and institutional factors. They argue that partisan redistribution of resources to coalition partners in a corrupt manner leads to democratic breakdown. They argue that the redistributive model of democratic collapse in Turkey created a social cleavage which is named as winners of democratic politics and this new group undermines democracy, not losers, for they fear the loss of their privileges once the government changes hands. (Esen & Gumuscu, 2021: 2)

Houle (2009: 590) argues that inequality harms consolidation but has no net effect on democratization. When we look at Houle's research, the democratization process cannot be harmed by the political economy and if we think about the Turkish case, the analysis will be accurate because the economic factor did not change the democratic stability in the country when the inequality gradually increased when the reforms started in 2002. However, the theory of Esen & Gumuscu for the fear of losing the privilege in case of a governmental change can be considered as a part of politicization within the context of the patronage system. So this factor cannot be considered as a factor for democratic backsliding for the Turkish case but they can be improved in this thesis in another context to find the complementary factors for Turkish democratic backsliding.

## **4. Research Gap and The Contribution**

Mostly, the theories above are discussed in the comparative case studies (Agestam, 2018) (Riaz & Rana, 2020) to check the applicability and reliability of these steps to see whether there is a common pattern of democratic backsliding or not. Some of them have not specified the causal links that explain how democracy backslides in a country. In the studies above, it can be seen that democratic backsliding in Turkey can be analyzed by different theories and their independent impact can be argued. In this study, I attempt to shed light on the democratic backsliding and try to fill this gap by deeply analyzing the Turkish case with causal links. I



think we need further explanation if we consider the events that have happened since 2002. Not just the old authoritarian regime but also the transition process which was first aiming to make the country more democratic later turned to a way to restrain the old regime and imposing new policies to improve the power for the new authoritarian regime. I fill the research gap with my thesis and I use Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach to achieve this purpose. Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach is used in a study for the first time for the case of Turkish democratic backsliding to see the factors behind it. Mostly this theory was used for Latin American countries regime change and the adaptation of the theory for Turkey will be my contribution for the research. For better understanding of the Turkish case, I believe Mahoney's approach will be useful for the study.

The case of Turkey is important to analyze because once it was shown as an example of democracy for the autocratic regional countries like Tunisia, Egypt and Libya after the Arab Spring (Kenyon, 2012) but later autocratic tendencies in the countries increased and the shift from democracy to autocracy was completed in a short-time. The reason behind it is discussed in other studies with different variables. It can be seen in the literature review that the Turkish case can be explained with different theories but to find different factors which have an impact on this Turkish case following the events since 2002, this research is important. I research the variables with Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach and follow the events which happened in the country since 2002. Mahoney's framework can help us to see critical events since 2002 which trigger democratic backsliding. With the adaptation of Mahoney's approach for the Turkish case, I try to contribute to the research.

I think if we consider the events which have happened since 2002, the Turkish case is a puzzle to be solved because the autocratic authoritarian regime was restrained with reforms but the new regime turned the country to a new authoritarian regime so the political process should be traced to find the complementary factors for the democratic backsliding. The real contribution of the thesis is that it uses the path-dependence framework that Mahoney proposed for Latin America to analyze regime change in Turkey.

## **5. Theoretical Framework**

### **5.1. Mahoney's Historical Path-Dependent Approach**

The case study is based on Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach as a theoretical framework. The research contains the institutional and political context and to establish causal relationship a historical path-dependent approach is needed. In this research Turkish democracy will be analyzed and a timeline will be constructed with some political events. According to Mahoney (2001: 111), identifying certain events or particular trajectories of development is required for adequate explanation. In this research, the research question will be analyzed with certain events and developments such as elections, court cases, certain reforms, political decisions and policy changes to explain it adequately.

Mahoney argues that "path dependence occurs when the choices of key actors at critical juncture points lead to the formation of institutions" as mediatory units between structure and agency. (Mahoney, 2001: 111) Institutions are considered important in the research because they cause political development or the creation of major regime outcomes. (Mahoney, 2001: 112) Also Mahoney mentions that "key actor choices during critical junctures set into motion more deterministic causal processes that drive processes of political development." (Mahoney, 2001: 112)

The concept of path dependence has a series of sequential stages below as they can be seen in Figure 1. In the first stage antecedent historical conditions define a range of options or alternatives for the actors. Secondly "at this key choice point or critical juncture, a particular option is selected from among two or more alternatives." Thirdly, structural persistence stage occurs and institutions are formed and fourthly "institutional persistence triggers a reactive sequence in which actors respond to prevailing arrangements through a series of predictable responses and country responses." At the end, the final outcome represents a resolution to the conflicts marking reactive sequences. (Mahoney, 2001: 112-113)

### Analytical Structure of Path-Dependent Approach

Antecedent Conditions	Critical Juncture	Structural Persistence	Reactive Consequence	Outcome
Theoretical factors that define available options and shape selection	Selection of a particular option (e.g. policy option) from among multiple alternatives	Production and reproduction of institution or structural pattern	Reactions and counter-reactions to institutions or structural pattern	Resolution of conflict generated by reaction and counter reactions

Figure 1: Mahoney (2001) “Path-Dependent Explanations of Regime Change: Central America in Comparative Perspective”. p.113

### 5.2. Old Authoritarianism vs. New Authoritarianism

The analysis starts with the old authoritarian regime’s features and shows the transition from the old authoritarian regime to the new authoritarian regime. Therefore, the theoretical background of this old vs. new typology is important to be considered for the analysis. In this way, which factors lead to democratic backsliding and which new methods the new regime used or copied from the old regime can be seen.

Old authoritarian regime consists of semi-democratic or undemocratic political system and mostly the products of military coups or of civil wars. (Wiatr, 2017: 174). Military-bureaucratic tutelage is visible in politics and elites are not the actors who will be a driven force for democratization. The ruling elites are unwilling or unable to seek consensus with rival elites in opposition and they act to protect the status quo for their interests. As an authoritarian regime, liberal democracy principles and conditions are lacking. The old authoritarianism almost never held open and fair elections. The power is exercised via a series of intrusive-authoritarian and insufficiently accountable institutions. Armed forces as an institution can be said as an example of these institutions include numerous other institutions which reproduce old authoritarianism such as bureaucracy and judiciary.

The third wave of democratization brought the concerns about the stability of democracies in the newborn democracies. A third reverse wave was outlined by Samuel Huntington (1993: 292-293) and he listed the new various forms of authoritarianism: authoritarian nationalism, religious fundamentalism, oligarchic authoritarianism, populist dictatorships and communal dictatorships. (Wiatr, 2017: 169) New authoritarian regime's features are outlined by Wiatr (2017: 169) For example, new authoritarian regimes come to power in democratic elections. Manipulation of the election is not possible for the first election so popular support is genuine for the new authoritarian regimes. New regime's crucial problem is how to consolidate the new system. Mostly they justify the new system with exclusive terms like the government of the people. The power is reached with free expressed public will so new regime representatives present their regime as an actual democracy which is not. The authoritarian leaders in this regime consolidate their hold on state power by legal or extralegal means. The politicization of the institutions, political control of the judiciary and media are their first choices to consolidate power. Populist social and economic strategies of redistribution which were neglected by the old regimes for the social cleavages can be seen in the regime. Patronage system and clientelistic policies to reward the supporters in the politicized institutions can be seen in this new authoritarian regime. The erosion of the institutional checks on the executive power, the weakening of the distinctions between state and party, government restrictions of civic freedoms and the skewing of the electoral playing field in favor of the incumbent party are the further steps the new regime follows. (Somers: 2016: 482)

### **5.3.Reforms**

In 1991, Adam Przeworski (1991) shared Huntington's concern and argued that the radical economic reforms might result in massive social problems and it can undermine the newly established democratic governments. Not just in these countries but also in formerly communist states of East and Central Europe were more vulnerable since they faced economic and political transformation.

New authoritarian regimes construct their policies based on the old regime's problems and they collect mass support while building new incentives and reforms for the society. The lack of democratic tradition and authoritarian tendencies of the incumbent party changes the main aim of the reforms and turn them into the first steps of new authoritarianism.

In addition to this, the populist rejection of rule by elites in the newly established democracies is clear and fertile ground against democracy which is seen as the system of privileged groups becomes clear and new authoritarian regimes manipulate this and consolidate power in the name of the society but instead break the principles of democracy. (Wiatr, 2017: 170)

#### **5.4. The Politicization of the Institutions, Patronage System and Clientelism**

Politicization is directly related with the relation between political and administrative power. The institutions can be politicized by politicians for some reasons. For example, politicization happens when the public sector grows and its regulation of private matters increases. (Ståhlberg, 1987: 365) Another reason is to give more autonomy to the bureaucracy but in this version, the degree of the administrative autonomy is decided by the politicians and the administrative power is delegated by politicians. (Ståhlberg, 1987: 365) Another reason is that bureaucracy is politicized to meet the popular demand which requests reflection of the composition of society in bureaucracy. (Ståhlberg, 1987:366) The most specific version of the politicization is also related with this research as well. In this politicization, it is mostly considered as a synonym of patronage. (Ståhlberg, 1987: 366). The Weberian distinction in the institutions can be used to understand the role of the institutions in the state. The Weberian distinction between politicized and meritocratic institutions refers to the recruitment and administration style of the institutions. In the politicized institutions, public employees in the critical positions are hired or appointed by the elected officials and in the meritocratic institutions, employees are hired by merit-based procedures. (Cornell & Lapuente, 2014: 1288) In this version, patronage is seen as an external element which deteriorates merit recruitments.

Cornell and Grimes (2015: 216) argue that political control of the bureaucracy exhibits a relationship with clientelism, independent of other institutional, political and economic factors. But for this study, the result is very important to be considered for generating the theory because it directly finds some linkages between the variables which this study focuses on. It is pointed out that political elites in the form of elected incumbents can exert control over the bureaucracy in a country, and in particular through appointing civil servants, is associated with the extent to which parties and candidates opt for clientelistic linkage strategies. (Cornell, & Grimes, 2015: 220) Furthermore, the organization bureaucracy is discussed by Lapuente and Rothstein (2014)

and the importance of a Weberian bureaucracy is emphasized to preserve the rule of law. In this bureaucracy, the separation of the professional careers of elected politicians and administrators is achieved. The winning party cannot politicize the administrative agencies with party supporters and they cannot use the power of the state as an indiscriminate weapon. (Lapuente, & Rothstein, 2014: 1420) For this thesis, it is worth mentioning this result: A meritocratic autonomous bureaucracy is needed for democratization and the bureaucrats should be both unaccountable to and inactive in democratic politics. (Lapuente, & Rothstein, 2014: 1422) In addition to these, Cornell, & Lapuente (2014: 1286-1304) argue that countries with meritocratic bureaucracies have greater prospects for democratic stability but in a politicized administration, the government officials depend directly upon which party wins the election so electoral defeat is tantamount to a loss of their livelihood. Since policy implementation will be in the hands of political loyalists thanks to the patronage system, a politicized administration will increase the opportunities to implement policies in a partial manner.

### **5.5. The Conflict between Old and New Regime**

The new regime's actors can be driven away from politics with political ban or party closure. The old regime can use its political actors and institutions to stop the new regime with political maneuvering to create political stalemate.

If the new regime is in a powerful position to get rid of the old regime's actors and institutions, soft power can turn into hard power. The old regime is mostly the products of military coups or of civil wars so military interventions to the politics and civil war is possible in this conflict. The new regime rarely uses coercive measures such as limitation or suspension of certain rights or state of emergency but in conditions of acute crisis such as the conflict to get rid of the old regime, the new regime does not hesitate to do that. (Wiatr, 2017: 173)

### **5.6. Combining Theories**

In this paper, the theoretical base of this study will be guided also from the studies above. While using Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach as a guide, another relevant theory for this study is important to enrich the result. I guide my thesis from the studies I mention as well.

In this thesis, the theory is constructed on the critical junctures at the micro level by applying Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach to establish causal relationship. Despite getting rid of the old authoritarian regime, the new regime does not direct the country to the road of democracy because in the road certain events and developments such as hiring partisan officers (can be shown as an example of clientelism and patronage system) leads to authoritarianism and breaks the principles of democracy. I combined Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach with the studies above. To show causal links between the events, Mahoney's approach will be helpful for the study. I use Mahoney's approach as a framework and I will use the theories above with Mahoney's approach to find out the complementary factors. I think historical events since 2002 affected the democratic backsliding and it can be followed with the causal links and that can be framed with Mahoney's approach. In addition to this, I will use the differences between the old and new regime to show which methods were transferred from the old regime and the conflict between them to reach the final result abolishing the old regime and creation of the new regime. The events that happened in the transition period between the old and new regime can be evaluated with theories such as the politicization of the institutions, clientelism and patronage system. I will also combine this with Mahoney as a framework to observe the events.

## **6. Research Design and Methodology**

Process tracing is considered a fundamental tool of qualitative study (Collier, 2011: 823) and this research is carried out with this method. George and Bennett claims that this method as an essential form of within-case study and they describe the method as “the use of “histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesizes or implies in a case is, in fact, evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variables in that case” (George and Bennett, 2005: 6).

In addition to this, the method can be outlined as “the process-tracing method attempts to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable [or variables] and the outcome of the dependent variable” (Bennet and Checkel, 2015:6). The method of process tracing is often used with historical explanation which is ‘the identification of causes of outcomes that have already occurred.’ (Mahoney, 2015 :202) In this paper, the study is constructed on Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach and

the causal chain and causal mechanism is outlined above. Therefore, process tracing is suitable for this paper.

The reason to stick to this method is that the events that lie temporally and/or spatially between the independent variable and dependent variable are not fully determined by the specified independent variables and these events do have independent effects on the nature, timing or magnitude of the dependent variable. (Bennet and Checkel, 2015:7) In addition to this, the deductive theory-testing side of process tracing examines the observable implications of hypothesized causal mechanisms within a case to test whether a theory on these mechanism explains the case (Bennet and Checkel, 2015:7-8).

For this research, it is a useful method because the process tracing focuses on the incentives generated by the institutional, organizational, and societal context. Analyzing these incentives means deploying case-specific knowledge of formal and informal institutional structures, patterns of political competition, economic and social conditions, and details of the substantive issue at hand. (Bennet and Checkel, 2015:72)

Based on the information above, it can be said that the research question I focus on in the thesis can be studied with this method. Moreover, the method allows us to trace how a country was seen as the model democratic country which combines secularism, Islam and constitution for the countries in the region such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya but eventually turned into an autocratic regime by getting tools of the old authoritarian regime and re-organizing the institutions in favor of the new regime. I operationalize the process tracing method like this: First I will follow the important events since 2002 and show how each of them triggered undemocratic events one to another and led to democratic backsliding at the end. I selected 2002 because the old authoritarian regime's actors were removed from power in 2002 with the general election and Erdogan and his party were elected. I will relate them with the complementary factors I thought are important for this study and in conclusion I will reach my point and fill the gap in the research.

## **7. Case Selection**

This thesis is a single-case study and it is defined as an analysis of systems that are studied with a comprehensive view by either one or several methods. (Gustafsson, 2017: 1) The resulting



findings can be difficult to validate and the scientific thoroughness can be difficult to prove. (Gustafsson, 2017: 4) Single case studies are often criticized in not to be sufficient scientific, since they not develop testable generalizations (Gustafsson, 2017: 5) but analysis in a case study will improve the scientific knowledge about the subject and similar researches can use to get the required generalizations. A causal case study is organized around a central argument about a change in X that generates a change in Y (Gerring, & Cojocaru, 2016: 397).

In this study, Turkey is selected as the single case study and it is a causal exploratory or hypothesis-generating case. I aim to identify a possible cause of an outcome which is democratic backsliding in Turkey.

## **8. Data Collection**

The data is collected through mostly secondary sources. Secondary sources such as the existing literature on democratization and autocratization and some studies which focus on the Turkish case and political history in Turkey are mostly used. Scholarly articles are used to trace the democratic backsliding. Scholarly articles are mainly used from a variety of journals, dedicated to study of democracy and Turkish politics and they publish many articles about them. For instance, Turkish Policy Quarterly, Middle Eastern Studies and Journal of Democracy. Also some news reports were taken into account but if it is compared to secondary sources, they are relatively less. For instance, New York Times, Foreign Affairs and the Times and some Turkish newspapers such as Cumhuriyet.

Mostly scholarly articles as secondary sources were used in the thesis. However, some of the news reports and media coverage materials can be considered biased because democratic backsliding can be evaluated with a predetermined perspective and they can canalize the readers to that perspective. This weakness of the thesis was overcome with a multitude of sources instead of using one source for an event. There are some criterias were used to evaluate these sources. First, if the source is close to the event, that is more credible. For example, for the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer court cases, Cumhuriyet newspaper were investigating the court cases and directly interviewing the actors in these court cases so this newspaper is used to collect data. Secondly, if the non-dependent sources say the same things, it is credible. For

example, not just the local newspapers but also international newspapers such as New York Times and Foreign Affairs mention the same events and actors which are related with the events in the coup. Therefore, data collection meets these criterias.

## **9. Analytical Framework**

In this paper, Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach will be used and this theory will be combined with the theories which were mentioned in the theoretical framework section. Before the empirical analysis, how Mahoney's approach will be used and how other theories will be combined will be explained. In this way, the analysis section can be mapped.

Mahoney (2001: 113) argues that critical periods or critical junctures which are explained as relatively small or contingent events have profound influence on subsequent events and patterns of change. So set cases on particular trajectories of development may explain the path-dependent processes and its result at the end. In this article, I explore the application of path-dependence to the study of democratic backsliding which leads to unusual change in the countries from democracy to autocracy. In this discussion, I agree with Mahoney and argue that key actor choices during critical junctures determine the process of political development. Mahoney's approach is useful for the study in the selection of the events which happened since 2002 in Turkey. With this approach, we can determine the events which trigger democratic backsliding.

To understand the analysis, how critical junctures were selected will be explained here as well. In theory, it is explained that there are choice points among two or more alternatives and when one of them is selected by actors, it becomes progressively more difficult to return to the initial point. So that choice becomes a critical juncture. (Mahoney, 2001: 113) Therefore to explain the path-dependency, we should look into the critical junctures which may contain small events, human agency or historical peculiarities. In this study, analysis considers critical junctures which leads to democratic backsliding. Critical junctures increase the probability of the particular paths of developments which countries follow. They have this effect because they lead to formation of institutions and cannot be easily transformed. Also these institutions trigger a chain of causally linked events and this can culminate in an outcome that is far removed from

original critical juncture. These chain of reactions and counter reactions give way to final outcomes. (Mahoney, 2001: 115)

In the analysis part, this approach will be used and all the political events such as reforms, elections, politically motivated court cases, appointments and formation of new institutions will be explained within the context of these arguments. Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach will be used to see the gradual progress of democratic backsliding while following the events. First the antecedent condition which is the old authoritarian regime will be explained and how the events which occurred in the old authoritarian regime triggered the actors who want change will be explained. Later the events in the transition period which are directly related with the factors of politicization of the institutions, clientelism and patronage system will be showed and how these events' results which are the formation of institutions and later the causally linked events in the institutions such as the conflict between the old and the new regime to abolish the old one will be explained. In this part, Mahoney's path-dependency approach will be the map to follow the events and other theories will support us to reach the final result which is democratic backsliding and a new authoritarian regime. However, it should be noted that Mahoney's approach cannot explain all the individual cases and events that happened in the cases but as a general statement, it can show how to explain recurring patterns. I operationalize Mahoney's path-dependent approach based on this principle. As it mentioned above, I use Mahoney's framework as a guide to identify the critical moments.

### **10. Analysis**

Analysis part will be based on the adaptation of Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach for the Turkish case with the theories mentioned in the theory section. Mahoney's approach as a guide allows us to determine the critical events or critical junctures and trace their results in the road of democratic backsliding. In this part how the country was driven to authoritarianism will be outlined and the causal relationship of the events will be shown and complementary variables for the Turkish case will be found out.

In this part, to understand the Turkish case, historical background will be outlined and how the old regime triggered its destruction and led to the establishment of the new regime will be

explained with some political events. The transition period from the old regime to the new regime, which can be shown as the time when institutions and actors of the old authoritarian regime have been restrained by Erdogan and his party AKP, will be analyzed and elections, politically motivated court cases, political decisions and reforms or policy changes will be used as evidence to the transition. Later fundamental changes in the institutions which can be summarized with the term of the politicization of the institutions and the new regime's tools such as patronage system while hiring its cadres to the institutions and presenting the patronage system to the public as a part of its clientelistic policies will be outlined with actors and factors. At the last part, the emergence of the new authoritarian regime and how democratic backsliding resulted with new authoritarianism will be explained and the variables which lead to democratic backsliding will be presented.

### **10.1. The Old Authoritarian Regime in Turkey**

Since the founder of the country, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established the Republic of Turkey, westernization was a political aim for Turkish democracy. If we look into Turkish foreign policy, we can see its signs. Turkey participated in the NATO alliance and the country cooperated with Europe through the European Union. Economic, political, social, cultural and military cooperation brought the country to the candidacy of the EU but never achieved because of several problems including the democratic conditions in Turkey. (Güney, & Karatekelioğlu, 2005: 440)

First we will look into the antecedent condition which is the old authoritarian regime's actors and institutions or the old authoritarian regime in Turkey to understand the democratic conditions before the AKP and Erdogan. The old authoritarian regime was managed by the ruling state elites or Kemalists and the military. State institutions were controlled by the bureaucrats who worked for the Kemalists. The patronage system in the old authoritarian regime was based on the clientelist strategy to obtain votes to protect status-quo. (Heper, & Keyman, 1998: 259) Kemalists and the military were important actors which control internal and external affairs of the state in Turkish politics. Because of the legacy which can be seen in the Ottoman Empire as well, the military was seen as the driving force for the progression and preservation of the state. (Amraoui, & Edroos, 2018). Therefore, civil politics in Turkey was

working under the shadow of the military and the democratic transition to the civilians was interrupted by the military coups of 1960 and 1980 and memorandums to warn the civilian governments in 1971 and 1997.

The old regime was building its core values on national sovereignty and secularism in their own ways. As a result of these policies, the regime was perpetrating human right abuses on mostly Kurdish and Islamist conservative society. The logic of the regime was to westernize or modernize the society while exercising the top-down power and applying the policy of ‘for the people regardless of the people’. (Somers, 2016: 484). For instance, speaking Kurdish language was forbidden because of national sovereignty (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012: 108) and wearing a headscarf in the institutions was not allowed because of the secularism excuses. (Toprak, & Uslu, 2009: 63). The regime was trying to continue the state tradition based on the military and top-down state-society relationship. Numerous authoritarian and non-transparent institutions were supporting the regime such as the Council of Higher Education, Radio and Television Supreme Council and the Presidency of Religious Affairs. (Stepan, 2010: 10) Therefore, there was no popular consensus for this regime and the elite was representing the minority at the expense of the others. In the light of these conditions, we cannot argue a democratic transition but the regime was also defending division of the power and electoral democracy in their own ways. Despite multi-party, free and fair elections, Kurdish politicians and party were forbidden by the Supreme Committee of Elections and Islamist-right parties were closed by the Supreme Court (Celep, 2014: 386) and the governments which are seen against the regime were removed from the power by the coups. Military was legalizing its veto power in politics and institutionalizing its influence by the constitutions which were prepared by coup plotters after the coups.

Consensus-based changes in politics were rare and short-lived. Excluding the majority of the society can be observed in this sense. So since the 1980s, the gradual democratization was visible but it did not meet minimum democracy standards: fully contested elections with full suffrage and the absence of massive fraud, effective guarantees of civil liberties, freedom of speech, assembly and association (Collier, & Levitsky, 1997: 437). Elections were happening in the country but against the ideology of the old authoritarian regime and any threat to the existence of the regime was absorbed by the hard power which was leading to human right abuses and less democratization. However, it can be argued that before 2002, Turkey cannot be

considered an authoritarian regime because of the gradual increase within the context of democracy level if we look into Appendix A. But before 2002 it can be argued that the old authoritarian regime's actors or Kemalists and their institutions such as military and bureaucracy were powerful in the state and they were shaping the politics for their favor and the examples discussed above show the evidence of their power. So before 2002 as an antecedent condition is called the old authoritarian regime for the Turkish case in this study.

## **10.2. Transition Period**

The ruling party AKP and its leader Erdogan has been in the government since 2002 and if we look into the election results, it can be seen that the party and the leader are popular in the society. Turkish democracy was a parliamentary system but later it was transformed to a presidential system which gives the president political dominance and control over the institutions through various means. ("Why did Turkey", 2017) However, Turkish democracy did not turn its democracy to autocracy one day. Gradually, democratic backsliding was observed.

Erdogan's popularity and his successful political career are built on his victimhood because he read poetry which has religious motives. He was imprisoned for four months for inciting religious hatred because of this poetry in 1997 by the old authoritarian regime which defends pro-secularism and prohibited religious motives in the state. As a result of imprisonment, he was banned from political office. Later, the political ban was annulled by the parliament but he claimed that the Kemalists which is defender of the founding ideology of Turkey and the establishment in justice and bureaucracy discriminated against him because he is a conservative politician. His later anti-establishment and anti-elitist statements are mostly based on this victimhood. (Yesil, 2020: 339)

He exploited conservative voters' victimhood. Kemalists banned headscarves in public institutions for the protection of secularity and the voters which felt their religious rights were violated by the Kemalists voted for Erdogan. Erdogan's populism references the past and the problems of the pre-AKP period and mainly rests on anti-elitism and nativism. (Yesil, 2020: 336) He blames pro-western and pro-secular elites for past problems.

The transition period between the old authoritarian regime and the new authoritarian regime started with 2002 elections. The first critical juncture which can be outlined as removing old regime's actors by certain events such as elections and economic crisis can be seen in the Turkish case. After the economic crisis in Turkey, the society was looking for major changes in the politics and Erdogan and his party AKP was defending liberal policies such as joining the EU and institutional reforms to get rid of the establishment which were organizing coups and eventually leading to the anti-democratization. (Patton, 2007: 342) When the AKP was elected most of the mainstream parties were removed from the politics by election. This new atmosphere in politics was showing its reflections in democracy as well. In 2005, official talks to join the EU started. The reforms which were implemented to change the country's course to liberal democracy were following Copenhagen criteria to join the EU. Turkey's democracy was improving. Freedom of expression, improvements in the minority rights, especially for Kurds and reforms of the judicial system started in this period. But the progress was slow and the EU's Turkish policy approach for further enlargement was not positive between some EU leaders and citizens. Also, Kemalists who view EU membership as a modernization project were against the execution of the reforms which was conducted by the AKP who tried to diminish the power of the centralized state which eventually will curb Kemalist legacy from the institutions. (Patton, 2007: 349) Eventually, the Western support waned and the goal to join the EU lost its impact in politics and the momentum was lost. So, reform in democracy could not continue because Erdogan and his party AKP aimed to abolish the old authoritarian regime not just with reforms but also other methods as well. The methods and the conflict in the transition period is outlined below.

In the struggle for power within the state between Kemalists and the AKP, the reforms in the institutions and the judiciary have negative impacts for the old regime's cadres. The old regime was losing its impact on the state institutions and the survival instinct of the old regime could be observed in this process. For example, the most likely candidate for the president to succeed the 10th president was the AKP candidate Abdullah Gül but the candidate's wife was wearing a headscarf. His candidacy was presented by the old regime as an opposition to the secular system of the country and the constitutional court annulled the first round of the election to avoid the election of the candidate Gül by excusing a quorum of two-thirds in the parliament. Same day the military released an e-memorandum charging the AKP for having an Islamic

agenda (Umit, 2015: 1). However, both attempts in the judiciary and military could not succeed and the victory of the AKP and its candidate Gül in the 2007 elections forced the military to step back because conducting a coup would not get any support internally and externally. Also it would be destructive for the EU accession process.

The judicial investigations of Ergenekon in 2008 and Sledgehammer cases in 2010 have become a symbol of the AKP and Erdogan's victory over the old authoritarian regime. Highly politicized court cases against the senior military members, journalists and politicians for alleged coups attempts. The prosecutors were claiming that the Ergenekon group as the core representative of the deep state was very effective in military, bureaucracy and academia and plotting coups against the government between 2003-2004. (Lord, 2018: 269) The group was represented as the barrier of the democratic progress in Turkey by the AKP.

Another reverse attempt by the judiciary happened in 2008. The closure of the ruling party AKP and banning the 71 members of the party from politics include the President Abdullah Gül and the Prime Minister Erdogan with the claim that the AKP had become a center for anti-secular activities led to a court case. The Supreme Court rejected the closure but led to a loss of state funding for the party.

With these court cases, the necessity to change to the constitution was argued by Erdogan and the AKP and for constitutional amendments of the 2010 referendum, the authorizations of the Supreme Military Council which decides on promotion, dismissals, benefits, retirement and disciplinary measures were gotten under the control of the civilian authorities. Additionally, The size of the High Council of Judges and Public Prosecutors (HSYK) which appoints, transfers, promotes and dismiss judges and public prosecutors was increased from 7 to 22 members. Also nomination to this council was amended and the president and parliament, both controlled by the AKP, can appoint the members to HSYK.

In the transition period, it can be seen that the old authoritarian regime was trying to protect its status-quo and abusing the system's instruments against Erdogan and his party AKP. However, the conflict between the old regime actors and the AKP did not result positively for the old regime. The old regime was stepping back because there was a popular support by the public to Erdogan and his party AKP through elections. As a result, the regime was losing its all impact



in the core institutions one by one. In this process, the AKP was filling out to empty cadres with the loyalists not just in the military as a result of Ergenekon and Balyoz court cases, lots of generals were sacked and the AKP loyalists mostly FETO members were hired to these positions, but also in the judiciary not just with the constitutional amendments which was changing the hiring procedures or increasing the number of the members in the Judiciary.

If we look into the transition period, the period can be evaluated as a series of the critical junctures. After the 2002 election, certain reforms to get rid of the old authoritarian regime under the EU reforms were done by Erdogan and his party AKP but with the execution of these reforms, the old authoritarian regime's actors and institutions started to lose power and reacted to that with a coup plan. As a counter-reaction, with Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases, Erdogan and his party restrained the old regime's actors and the process of hiring new officers and policy changes in the institutions with constitutional amendments to politicize the institutions started.

### **10.3. Transferring Powers to the Loyalists**

The constitutional amendments of the 2010 referendum changed the judiciary system in Turkey. As it mentioned above, the size of the judicial body HSYK was increased and the AKP controlled the president and parliament appointed members to HSYK. The power was transferred to the loyalists of the AKP and mostly the Gulen movement members, Gulenists or later it will be called FETO members were appointed to the critical positions in the Judiciary. (Lord, 2018: 270)

The Gulen movement is an Islamist movement led by Fethullah Gulen, a Muslim clergyman, who lives in self-imposed exile in the USA. The organization had private schools in Turkey and people who were educated in these schools were working for the Gulen movement in their professional life as well. Later it was proved that the exam questions and answer keys of the Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS) were stolen by Gulenists in 2010. The high score members of the movement were appointed to the critical positions in the state institutions. (Kızılkoyun, & Benli, 2015) Therefore, appointed officers to the institutions from the Gulen movement were loyal to the organization and the organization were ordering the officers to

work in favor of the organization and the government. This can be evaluated as a critical juncture as well with the adaptation of Mahoney's approach. Additionally, the Gulen media outlets such as Taraf, Zaman, Samanyolu TV channel, Cihan New Agency were pro-governmental and were supporting Erdogan and his party AKP in the media. With this fruitful cooperation, the government was purging the old authoritarian regime's actors and hiring loyal officers to the government from the Gulenists. (Nocera, 2015: 72).

The organization is associated with the mostly Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials. In these court cases, the Gulenist media were shaping the public opinion against the old regime actors or Kemalists (Nocera, 2015: 67) and claiming that military officers, parliamentarians and journalists were plotting a coup. While the old regime actors were sacked from the different institutions such as bureaucracy, police, military and the judiciary through these court cases, Gulenists were hired to these institutions. (Rodrik, 2011: 108) In the trial period, there was a disagreement between the different sides of the society for the main purpose of these trials and its reflection was in the newspapers as well. For instance, pro-government newspapers such as Sabah, Akit, Yeni Şafak, Akşam and Star argued that in these trials coup plotters were jailed but Cumhuriyet and Birgün which are seen opposition newspapers defended that these trials are completed with fabricated evidences and Cumhuriyet made the headline like this: "POLITICAL REVENGE BY THE HANDS OF JUSTICE" (Alan, 2016) Later it was proved that these court cases were based on fabricated evidence and Gulenist police officers were producing these pieces of evidence. (Rodrik, 2011: 99-109)

If we look into this period, it can be seen that the institutions were politicized with constitutional amendments and loyal officers were hired to the institutions with a clientelist policy which creates a patronage system in the country. With the adaptation of Mahoney's approach, it can be argued that the constitutional amendments of the 2010 referendum can be evaluated with the structural persistence section which is production and reproduction of institution or structural pattern.

#### **10.4. The Power Conflict**

As it mentioned above, the amendment in the 2010 referendum which gave the power to the Gulenists in the important institutions. Gulenists were appointed to the critical positions and started to work in favor of the ruling party AKP as loyalists. However, the cooperation between the Gulen movement and the AKP did not continue so long. An investigation for several AKP ministers and their sons for corruption was started by the Gulenist police officers in 2013. Audio of the corruption was released in the media and ministers resigned. In this process, the cooperation between the Gulen movement and the AKP was broken. Erdogan directly accused the Gulen movement about the ‘plot.’ (Kızılboga & Delin, 2014)

The police officers and the prosecutor were later charged for plotting a coup to remove the AKP from power. To avoid future corruption scandals, first police officers were forced to report their investigations to administrative authorities. Most importantly, the referendum changes in the judiciary were changed in favor of the government and Gulenists' impact was decreased in the institutions. The permanent member of HSYK, the Minister of Justice, received power to appoint, dismiss and transfer public judges and prosecutors. Also, the minister has a right to change positions in HSYK. A purge started in the Turkish Judiciary. Judges and prosecutors who do not make decisions for the favor of the AKP government were relocated or fired. (Agestam, 2018: 52)

In 2014, the Association of Judicial Unity, which aims to work with the government in harmony, proposed a pro-government list and won a majority of seats in the HSYK. With these decisions, the judiciary was taken under the control of the government and with the AKP loyal judges, the check and balance system was destroyed. (Uludag, 2014)

In 2016, the power conflict between Gulenists and the AKP was visible in politics. The Gulenist media was directly targeting Erdogan and his party and Erdogan was blaming them to be a parallel state in the rallies. (‘Erdogan: Halk, Paralel’’, 2014) A group of officers comprising Gulenists, Kemalists, opponents of the AKP and opportunists started the coup on July 15th, 2016. A secret report written by Intcen, the EU intelligence center, claimed that, before the failed coup attempt, President Erdogan was planning a purge of suspected dissidents in the armed forces so the decision to launch the coup resulted from the fears of an incoming purge.

(Waterfield, 2017). The coup attempt failed and a state of emergency was declared in the country. More than 150,000 people have faced legal action including purges from the institutions and 50,000 – including academics, journalists, rights activists and opposition MPs have been jailed. (Cagatay & Aktas, 2017). As a result of the purges after the coup, the old regime's actors were jailed or restrained. In addition to this, The coup also changed the media in Turkey. Gulenist media outlets were closed and its journalists were arrested. Mainstream media including the official state channel, TRT, became pro-government and media independence was lost. (The New York Times, 2018) In this way, another check and balance pillar in the democracy which is the media was silenced and turned into a propaganda machine for the survival of the new authoritarian regime. If we look into Mahoney's approach, the reactive sequence which is reactions and counter-reactions to institutions or structural pattern can be observed in the Turkish case with the events above.

### **10.5. Consolidating the Power and the New Authoritarianism**

After the coup, Erdogan and his party AKP strengthened the president's authorities with the constitutional referendum in 2017. Before, the president's power was symbolic and the position was politically neutral. The president was elected by parliament. With the referendum, the constitutional amendment changed the position of the president. The prime minister was removed and its powers were transferred to the president. Furthermore, the president is elected by the popular vote and the president has gained certain powers such as veto power or appointing judicial positions. With the referendum, the parliamentary system was changed to the presidential system. The power of the parliament was minimized and the appointed ministers and aides of the president became independent from the parliament. The president can appoint high level state officials. The president will also have the authority to appoint 6 members of the judicial body HSYK and the parliament will elect the rest 7 members. The majority will be the same party in the parliament so it is unlikely to elect a non-approved candidate by the president for the HSYK. So the HSYK is politicized and only a party or a man

gains all control in the judiciary which must be independent and another pillar to provide check and balance.

With the expanded authorities of the president, the new authoritarian regime was institutionalized and legislative and judiciary independence was removed. The principle of separation of the power was lost with the referendum. Erdogan and his party AKP took control of the independent institutions with loyal cadres first later the independence of these institutions was abolished with the constitutional referendum and all the institutions which could be a problem for the new regime's survival were restrained and taken under the control by Erdogan and his party AKP.

The electoral monitor body YSK, which is appointed by the AKP controlled judiciary, started to work in favor of the AKP. To ensure political dominance, YSK did not control election campaigns of the ruling party and Erdogan. State television, TRT, which should cover all parties' campaigns at an equal time covered Erdogan and the ruling party's campaign more and YSK did not interfere with it. Another example of the politicization in YSK can be seen in the 2019 mayoral elections. When the opposition candidate was elected for the Istanbul municipality, YSK canceled the election. (Gall, 2019)

Another example of politicization in the judiciary can be seen in the court cases. The constitutional court accepts the opposition Kurdish Party HDP closure indictment. Also, the party's leader Selahattin Demirtaş was arrested with a politically motivated prosecution and since 2016 he has stayed in prison despite the European Court of Human Rights ruled Demirtaş should be released from the pre-trial detention in 2018 and 2020. (Cinar, 2021: 25)

If we look into the last stage which is outlined as an outcome in Mahoney's approach like this: resolution of conflict generated by reaction and counter reactions. For the Turkish case the outcome became a new regime which was established with the 2017 Turkish constitutional referendum and a new type of authoritarianism was built. As a result of all these events, democratic backsliding can be observed in the country.

## 10.6. Results

The below figure 2 is the summary of the analysis and it shows the causal links between the events.

Antecedent condition	Critical Juncture	Structural persistence	Reactive Sequence	Outcome
The old authoritarian regime.	1- Removing mainstream parties and the victory of the AKP in 2002 elections  2-Negotiations for full membership with the EU started. The institutional reforms were conducted.  3-EU freezes talks on Turkey membership.  4-2007 Turkish presidential election.  5- The Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases.  6-The public personnel selection examination (KPSS) were stolen by Gulenists.	1-2010 Turkish Constitutional Referandum	1-Disagreement between FETO and the AKP led to the 2013 corruption scandal.  2-The pro-government list won the majority of seats in HSYK.  3-The 15 July 2016 coup attempt.  4-2017 Turkish constitutional referendum	A new regime was established.  A new type of authoritarianism/ Democratic Backsliding.

Figure 2: Adaptation of Mahoney's (2001) path-dependent explanations of regime change for this study. p.113

In conclusion, it can be seen that in Turkey the old authoritarian regime was providing its status-quo while conducting human rights abuses and non-democratic events such as the closure of Kurdish and Islamist parties and prohibiting Kurdish language and wearing hijab. Later, with the

election of 2002, Erdogan and the AKP conducted some reforms for the EU accession process. However, Erdogan and the AKP were also focusing on removing the old regime's actors and institutions. With politically motivated Ergenekon and Sledgehammer court cases, the old actors were jailed and purged from the institutions with fabricated evidence and critical positions in the state were filled out with loyal officers from FETO organization. Later with the power conflict between FETO and the AKP over the corruption scandal, FETO cadres were purged from the judiciary and the military. The coup in 2016 was the brutal conflict between FETO and the AKP but also the old authoritarian regime's Kemalist officers and opportunists participated in the coup attempt but they could not be successful. After the coup, the state of emergency was declared and not just FETO members but also opposition actors were purged from the state institutions and jailed. Under the state of emergency rules, a referendum to change the political system was held and Turkey's new authoritarian regime was institutionalized. The figure 3 or the timeline show the events within the context of Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach.

### TIMELINE OF TURKISH DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

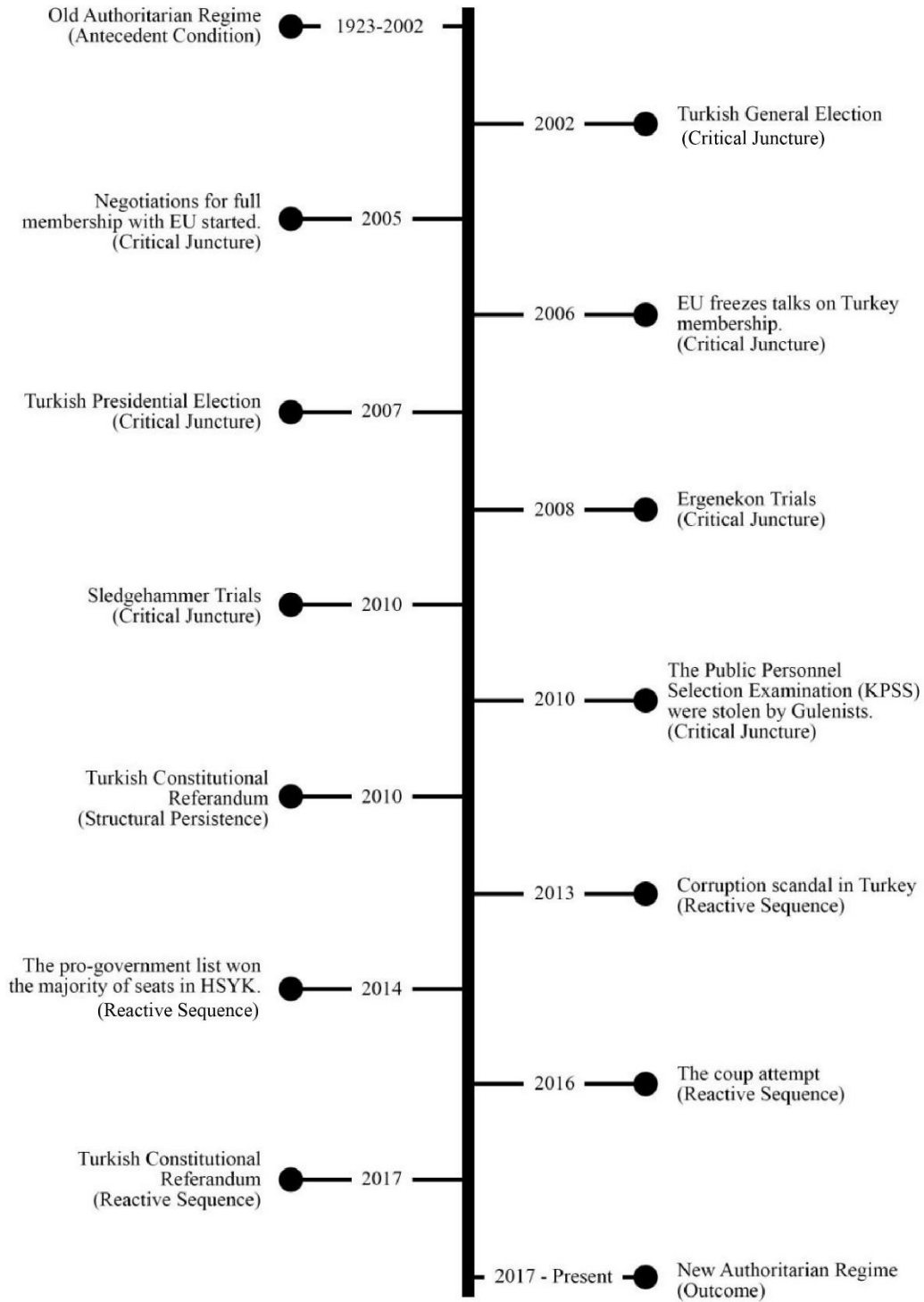


Figure 3: Timeline of Turkish Democratic Backsliding.



Consequently, it can be seen that the causal links between the events brought the country to the new authoritarian regime. In addition to this, politicized institutions with the constitutional amendments such as in HYSK and patronage system in the state institutions directly negatively affected the democratic conditions in the country and independent institutions were taken under the control of the party. The loyal officers is appointed by the party and as a clientelist policy, the appointed officers vote for Erdogan and the party. As mentioned above, this patronage system was institutionalized with the presidential system with the new powers of the president such as appointing a high level of officers to the institution. In this way, the new regime continues and it is re-elected despite the bad democratic conditions. The same patronage system with clientelistic policies and the politicization of the institutions were visible in the old authoritarian regime as well so it can be argued that the old regime's instruments to stay in power are used by the new regime as well.

Therefore, it can be concluded that if we look into Erdogan's clientelist policies and appointments for the institutions we can see that the old autocratic regime had the same tools such as the patronage system for the survival of the regime. Additionally, closure of the parties such as the closure of Kurdish party HDP and imprisonment of its leader together with opposition figures can be seen in the old authoritarian regime as well. So it can be said that Erdogan's policies are influenced from the old authoritarian regime policies. Most importantly, if we look into the events which triggered one to another, the politicization of the institutions, clientelism together with the patronage system and reform avoidance for the EU are the contributor variables which lead to democratic backsliding in Turkey. Before the constitutional amendments and the politically motivated court cases, there was a gradual increase in the democracy but when Erdogan and the AKP started to politicize the institutions with constitutional changes and hiring loyal officers, the power conflict between Kemalists and the AKP intensified and state institutions were politicized more by the Erdogan and the AKP. Military, police, judiciary and state media were sided with the ruling government so the variables I mentioned above became complementary variables for the democratic backsliding.

## 11. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be seen that democratic backsliding in Turkey is a unique case and different factors should be counted to evaluate the current democratic situation in the country. As a single case study, we can learn from the Turkish case that in the road of democratic backsliding the process should be traced and critical junctures or important events should be evaluated to find out the reasons for the democratic backsliding.

My contribution is to find out the timeline of democratic backsliding and how the events triggered the democratic backsliding in Turkey. Within the context of the analysis, I argue that the real contribution of the thesis is that it uses Mahoney's historical path-dependent approach, which was used for Latin America but in this thesis it was adapted for the Turkish case, and the theoretical background mentioned above. I argue that some of these events are directly related with politicization of the institutions, clientelism and patronage system at the end. In addition to this, while distinguishing the old authoritarian regime and new authoritarian regime, I find out the similarities and the differences between them and I claim that some policies of Erdogan are influenced from the old authoritarian regime. From another perspective, this can be concluded like this: there is a path-dependency in politicization. In the effort to get rid of the old regime, only the people or political actors changed but the establishment as a whole stayed. Erdogan and his party AKP changed the political system while restraining the old authoritarian regime's actors.

As a case study, the findings within the context of the case should be applied to other cases as well. The focus of this study is to find the complementary variables for the Turkish case but the findings could be generalized since politicization of the institutions, clientelism, patronage system and reform avoidance are the variables which can be seen in other countries as well because these variables directly related with the democratic backsliding and as a complementary variables I would argue that some of the events identified here cannot be seen in the other countries which have democratic backsliding but the deterioration in the institutions can be evaluated with these variables. Although, these findings could be only tested through further studies in other contexts. A potential future researcher would be able to focus on this

aspect and the applicability of the factors in other countries with the other complementary factors from the other perspectives such as political economy can be studied as well.

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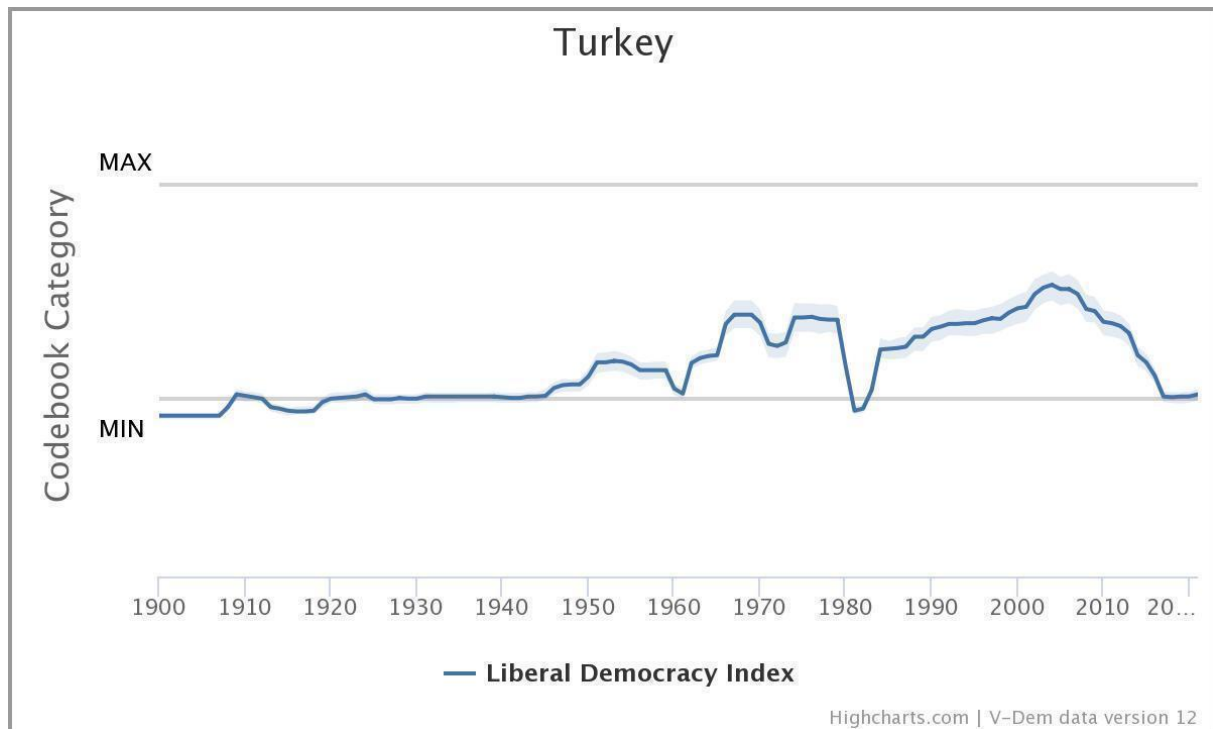


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### 13. Appendix

#### Appendix A

Turkey V-Dem Country Graph between 1900-2022.



Note: Liberal democracy index from V-Dem Institution is an important graphic to be considered. In the graphic, it can be seen that democratic backsliding in Turkey started after 2006. The year also matches with the political events which I mentioned above. I claim that these events triggered democratic backsliding in Turkey. The graphic is based on the explanation below:

”The liberal principle of democracy emphasizes the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority. The liberal model takes a ~negative~ view of political power insofar as it judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government. This is achieved by constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power. To make this a measure of liberal democracy, the index also takes the level of electoral democracy into account.” (Teorell, 2022).