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Existential insecurity and the making of a weak authoritarian regime in Turkey

Karabekir Akkoyunlu and Kerem Öktem 

Centre for Southeast European Studies, University of Graz, Graz, Austria

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explain Turkey's rapid de-democratization from the conceptual perspective of existential insecurity, which accounts for the unwillingness of incumbents to share or relinquish power. The Kemalist era, the multi-party period and the early AKP era have all shown elements of the radicalizing effects of political insecurity and the weak institutions which stem from them. The concurrence of a revisionist Islamist project and geopolitical and ideological crises in Turkey's overlapping neighbourhoods, however, have driven existential angst and insecurity among the incumbents to novel proportions. Under the conditions of this aggravated insecurity, the consolidation of a stable authoritarian regime appears unlikely, reducing the possible scenarios for Turkey's immediate future to a weak and contested authoritarian arrangement or further escalation of conflict and instability.

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Democracy, Przeworski (2000) wrote, is a system in which 'incumbents lose elections and leave if they do'. When do incumbents refuse to relinquish power? They may find the perks of being in government too attractive to let go. They may think of themselves as the best ones to do the job or be anxious to pursue unfinished projects at all costs. Or having made too many enemies and broken the law too many times, they may fear for their own safety once out of power. Hegemonic ambitions and insecurity, in other words, are the two sides of the same undemocratic coin, instilling in politics an 'all or nothing' logic that is inimical to the principles of compromise and consensus-seeking. This paper examines the relationship between heightened or 'existential insecurity' – the fear and suspicion of political and physical annihilation – and Turkey's 'exit from democracy'. We argue that existential insecurity, emanating from a confluence of already existing 'ontological insecurities' and subnational 'tribalisms' on one side, and recently emerging systemic crises at both the domestic and regional levels on the other, has informed actor discourses and behaviour, and played a causal role in Turkey's transition from a weak and constrained democracy into a weak yet increasingly pervasive authoritarian regime under the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) government.

Schedler (2013, 25) notes that 'the politics of uncertainty transcends the boundaries between democratic and authoritarian regimes' and 'weak democracies can be just as fragile

as weak autocracies.' By 'weak' or 'fragile', we imply those regimes that are unconsolidated as democratic or authoritarian, and whose fundamental characteristics are being intensely, sometimes violently, contested through hegemonic struggles to wrest control of institutions and reshape them. Much of Turkey's political transformation since the late 2000s has occurred in this grey zone of fragility. Correspondingly, a growing list of scholars recently engaged in an effort to categorize Turkey's new regime: is it a 'delegative democracy' (Taş 2015), 'illiberal democracy' (Türkmen-Derrişođlu 2015), 'competitive authoritarianism' (Özbudun 2015; Esen and Gümüşçü 2016) or 'rising neo-fascism' (Tuđal 2016)?

Part of the difficulty in pinpointing the exact nature of the new Turkish regime lies in its fluid and fast evolving nature. Snapshots of the country's political and institutional environment would yield different results if taken before or after the AKP's third general election victory in 2011, the Gezi protests of the summer of 2013, the intra-Islamist split between the AKP and the Gülen movement in late 2013, the presidential election of 2014, the twin elections of June and November 2015 or the failed coup attempt of July 2016. While it was still possible to label Turkey a flawed or illiberal democracy before mid-2015, the developments since the June 2015 election and the July 2016 coup attempt have led more observers to opt for sub-categories of authoritarianism instead.

Our purpose in this paper is not to engage in this taxonomical debate, but to emphasize that, taken together, these turning points portray a clear trajectory, at least since 2011, towards the personalization of executive power, weakening of democratic checks and balances, less free and fair electoral competition, the imposition of stricter constraints on freedom of expression and civil liberties and the growing use of the state's coercive capacity to suppress various forms of non-violent, as well as violent, dissent. This is the trajectory of an increasingly authoritarian government operating in an increasingly insecure environment. It does not depict a regime that is by any measure consolidated. Although the failed coup attempt appears to have given President Erdoğan the pretext and the tools to clampdown on the opposition and entrench his personal rule, the hyper-propagandized image of an omnipotent and omnipresent leader belies the institutionalization of a political system and ideology that enjoys dominance of the state and hegemony in society. To the contrary, post-coup Turkey is a state and country in deep crisis.

A corresponding puzzle is the speed and intensity with which this transformation has occurred. Even for the sceptics of the tentative liberalization measures under the first two AKP governments in the 2000s, Turkey's descent into crisis and authoritarianism in the space of a few years has been nothing short of dramatic. Given the size of the country's economy, it may also prove theory-busting (Brownlee 2016). Indeed, some of the AKP's harshest critics cited above were until recently visibly more optimistic about the possibilities for some sort of democratization: Özbudun, for instance, advised the government on the drafting of a new civilian constitution. Tuđal's seminal work, *Passive Revolution* (2009), explored the 'moderation' of political Islam in Turkey through its absorption by capitalism. In more recent works by Tuđal and others, the combination of social conservatism and neoliberalism, once seen as the recipe for Turkey's success story under the AKP, is treated as the building block of its current populist authoritarianism. This is not to suggest that these scholars are inconsistent in their analyses; it is indeed possible to explain both the earlier and the latter AKP periods through the same combination. But if social conservatism and neoliberalism have been present in both periods, they cannot alone explain this dramatic transformation.¹

We try to address this puzzle by emphasizing the role of existential insecurity, increasingly felt by Turkey's key political actors, particularly (but not exclusively) within the ruling AKP, and projected upon their constituents and opponents. Although insecurity has been a key factor in keeping Turkey's power arrangements 'weak' both before and during the AKP era, in the previous arrangement, it could be contained and manipulated to some extent for the purposes of regime maintenance in a relatively predictable geopolitical environment. Since the late 2000s, the pursuit of regime change in a super-fluid geopolitical setting has raised insecurities exponentially, and precipitated the country's rapid 'exit from democracy'. Our assertion that Turkey has left the realm of democratic politics is based on the evidence and observation that President Erdoğan is no longer in a position to share or relinquish power and has to dominate in order to survive.

We unpack this assertion in the following order: the first section elaborates on the concepts of existential and ontological insecurity and their relationship with democracy and authoritarianism. In the second section, we touch upon the ontological insecurities rooted in the republic's foundational experience and the deep lack of trust between the main socio-political camps under Kemalist tutelage, and note the continuities into the AKP era. In the last two sections, we analyse the new factors that led to Turkey's 'exit from democracy'. These are, namely: the publicly articulated Islamist project of conquering and restructuring the regime, which has triggered vicious power struggles between and within various elite groups inside the state; and a simultaneous environment of heightened geopolitical fluidity, both in Europe and in the post-Arab Spring Middle East, that has raised both the stakes and the risks associated with these domestic power struggles.

1. Existential insecurity and democracy

For even the most democratically accountable and open governments, the balance between providing security and maintaining civil liberties can be a daunting task, especially when there are competing demands coming from society. Once taken away for interests of security, regaining democratic rights and liberties can prove much more difficult. Securitization, in other words, is highly path dependent. This is not only true for autocracies – like Egypt, which was ruled under a continuous state of exception from 1981 to 2011 – but also for established democracies: the PATRIOT Act, which gives the US Government extensive surveillance powers over citizens, has been extended repeatedly since 2001. Whether Turkey will follow these examples and perpetuate the state of exception declared after the failed coup of July 2016 remains to be seen.

While all democracies have to contend with varying types and degrees of insecurity, we distinguish 'existential security', i.e., freedom from fear of political and physical annihilation, as the 'inescapable sine qua non' of democracy alongside open, free and fair elections.² A constitutive feature of democracy is that election losers lose no more than their public positions, while their civil liberties, political rights and private lives (and those of their supporters) remain unharmed. In other words, democracies are those political systems where participants do not have to fear for their physical well-being and security if they lose out in competition. In authoritarian systems, on the other hand, incumbents are 'insecure in power because they are insecure in opposition. Losing power would leave them as vulnerable in the future as their opponents are in the present. Their stakes of defeat are infinite'

(Schedler 2013, 25). As a result, electoral competition in such systems is highly restricted, tilted to favour the incumbents or banned outright.

Existential insecurity describes the imminent and tangible fears and threats perceived by political actors, and shared with or passed onto their followers. These may include foreign invasion, violent overthrow by coup or revolution, repression or the possibility of going to prison or worse. Sources of insecurity may be internal or external. The perceived danger may be real or exaggerated. Fear may be used and abused by actors to maintain party discipline, mobilize popular support or legitimize non-democratic actions. In any case, the impact of insecurity on politics is substantial. In an environment where political actors fear for their survival, the nature of politics shifts from deliberative to zero-sum.

Existential insecurity instils an 'all or nothing' logic to decision-making, rendering meaningful concessions and power sharing costly, risky and even seemingly suicidal. When politics turns into a struggle for actual – and not just electoral – survival, democracy practically ceases to exist. As such, insecurity should be seen not only as an outcome of authoritarianism, but also as a cause of it. The catch is that unless political actors seemingly locked in an existential struggle can make mutually risky, and often unpopular, concessions at key moments, the prevailing dichotomous logic of domination or destruction sets in motion a vicious cycle that operates until either the former (authoritarian consolidation) or the latter (regime crisis or civil war) is assured. Since either outcome can be excruciatingly difficult to reach, this fragile authoritarian phase can be intense and long drawn out.

Such urgent fears, in turn, may be informed by other, more deeply engrained 'ontological insecurities'. A concept borrowed from psychology by sociologists and IR theorists, ontological security refers to one's sense of *being* in the world, or in the words of Giddens (1990, 92), 'the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action'. According to Giddens, such security 'feeds on basic trust and therefore implies "a *mutuality* of experience"' (Giddens 1990, quoted in Zarakol 2010). The lack of such security implies the absence of a proper grounding of the 'self' in the world, or one that is at odds with the environment. An ontologically insecure person cannot take their identity and that of others for granted and constantly look for ways to avoid losing their self (Laing 1990).

In constructivist International Relations literature, ontological security has been used to explain how states view themselves in relation to other states and the international system. The degree to which this self-perception is endogenously or exogenously shaped may have to do with the given country's historical and present position within the existing system. Self-perceptions of countries like France or the US may be more autonomously formed as these are constitutive actors of the still dominant, but arguably floundering, Western-built international order, while states that were 'brought into' European civilization tend to define themselves more in relation to the Western 'other'. Zarakol, for instance, has argued that Turkey's inability to recognize and apologize for the Armenian genocide stems from the modern Turkish state's ontological insecurity vis-à-vis the West, where most demands for apology come from. As a result of the country's formative experience of grappling with Western modernity throughout the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, Turks, secular or Islamist, have come to 'resent [the West's] intrusive gaze, but crave its approval, and suspect the approval when it is dispensed, yet sense discrimination when it is not' (Zarakol 2010, 10).

States do not only reflect their ontological (in)securities outwards, onto other states and the international system, but also inwards, onto society. Subnational communities construct alternative systems of meaning and self-narratives (Rumelili 2015), with direct bearing on the nature of national politics. Rustow's emphasis on 'national unity' as democracy's only background condition helps explain the relationship between ontological security and democracy. By national unity, Rustow (1970) referred to the silent confidence underpinning the people's sense of belonging in a distinct and clearly defined political community. Secessionist or irredentist movements, exclusionary and hostile policies targeting a section of the population or extreme distrust between constitutive parts of a polity can be seen as manifestations of ontological insecurity that hinder democracy. Rustow also noted that 'the background condition [...] is best fulfilled when national unity is accepted unthinkingly, is silently taken for granted'.

Any vocal consensus about national unity, in fact, should make us wary. Most of the rhetoric of nationalism has poured from the lips of people who felt least secure in their sense of national identity. (1970, 351)

This is a critical observation concerning modern-day Turkey, with its ubiquitous national flags, democracy vigils and government-organized national unity rallies.

2. Historical sources and legacies of insecurity

In this section, we discuss in more detail how historically rooted insecurities and subnational 'tribalisms' have rendered Turkey a weak democracy under Kemalist tutelage and informed the hegemonic struggles and the deeper existential insecurities of the AKP era.

2.1. Institutional fragility and insecurity under Kemalist tutelage

In successive waves of World Values Surveys, Turkey ranked among countries with the lowest level of interpersonal trust. Other international studies documented the prevalence of strongly negative views in Turkey for other countries, groups and international organizations (Grim and Wike 2007; GMF 2015). Findings from in-depth country surveys suggest that trust in Turkey is 'tribal' rather than individualistic: value-based communities – shaped around religious, ethnic or educational identities³ – exhibit high levels of internal trust but low trust for other groups (Esmer 2012; KONDA 2012). With many of their roots in the turbulent dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Turkish Republic, unresolved identity issues do not only provide the basis for present-day Turkey's socio-political fault lines (Secularist vs. Islamist, Turkish vs. Kurdish, Sunni vs. Alevi, etc.) but also fuel the insecurities that sustain and legitimate its non-democratic structures.

The young republic's first brief experiment with democracy was aborted following a major Sunni Kurdish uprising against the enforced secularization, Turkification and centralization project of the new Kemalist regime and a foiled assassination attempt on its charismatic leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.⁴ Its second attempt, the result of a pragmatic response to the shifting power dynamics of the post-Second World War order, was interrupted with the military coup in 1960. The coup was preceded by a decade of democratically elected single-party rule under the conservative Democrat Party (DP). The DP oversaw an initial period of economic growth and gradual relaxation of the strict secular laws of the Kemalist regime, which proved popular with a majority of the electorate. Its latter years, however, were

marked, alongside a slowing economy, with a growing fear of being overthrown, purges in the army and the bureaucracy under the guise of anti-communism and attempts to silence critics and rule through the executive offices. The coup that toppled the DP government and hanged three of its leaders, including Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, was carried out by left-leaning junior officers who believed that the Kemalist revolution was under existential threat (Belge 2011).

The DP rule and the 1960 coup were the first instances when the populist majoritarianism of conservative parties clashed with the tutelary elitism of the Kemalist guardians. Claiming the DP's legacy and replicating its winning formula – mixing social conservatism, populism and capitalism – the Motherland Party (ANAP) of Turgut Özal and the AKP of Erdoğan carried significant electoral majorities and formed single-party governments in the 1980s and 2000s, respectively. Emboldened by their mass appeal, both leaders displayed a procedural and majoritarian understanding of democracy. Like the DP, they emphasized elections as the manifestation of the 'nation's will' (*milli irade*) and the sole source of democratic legitimacy, pushed to re-strengthen the executive branch,⁵ and clashed with an overbearing military.

Throughout the cold war, geopolitical insecurities emanating from Turkey's role as a pro-Western outpost helped sustain the non-democratic tutelary institutions established with the 1960 coup and entrenched through periodic military interventions and subsequent constitutional changes. Through institutions like the National Security Council, the Constitutional Court and the Presidency, the guardians determined the contours of democratic contestation; but they had neither the interest nor the popular or international support to suspend democracy outright, except during relatively brief periods of direct military intervention. The Western (particularly US) support for this tutelary arrangement continued through the 1990s as the Turkish military took on the rising challenges of political Islam and Kurdish ethno-nationalism, which were, ironically, strengthened by the anti-communist, anti-Kurdish and pro-Islamic policies of the 1980 coup leaders (Cizre 2003; Öktem 2011).

In short, until the emergence of the AKP in 2002 as a highly pragmatic and effective political movement with a pro-US and pro-EU agenda, Turkey's geopolitical alignments ensured the survival of its hybrid system, where the tutelary and democratic institutions coexisted in a state of mutually ensured fragility and contested boundaries. The realignment of the 2000s, during which the West for the first time sided with an elected government against interventionist senior officers, brought this arrangement to an end and unleashed a hegemonic struggle for the control of the state. Fuelled by deep rooted socio-political distrusts, this struggle has been fought in existential terms within the context of an increasingly uncertain geopolitical terrain.

2.2. Islamist politics and insecurities

Like their Kemalist counterparts, Turkey's Islamists harbour their own ontological insecurities vis-à-vis the West, whose cultural imperialism and militarism they blame for the downfall of the two institutions they venerate and glorify – the Ottoman state and the caliphate – as well as for the present-day plight of Muslims, especially in Palestine. This resentment extends to the Kemalist regime, viewed as a product of Western cultural imperialism and an oppressor of Turkey's Muslims. Unlike the Kemalists, who advocated the wholesale adoption of Western norms and culture to join the ranks of 'civilised nations', the Islamists have envisioned an Ottoman Islamic restoration. Inspired by the early twentieth-century

Islamic revivalists, Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, key figures of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, this vision acknowledges Western modernity as a reality to contend with and to instrumentalize on technical and political levels, while arguing for a separate and authentic set of societal norms and Islamic morality (Pargeter 2013; Cornell and Kaya 2015; Wickham 2015).

Under the Turkish tutelary democracy, this meant engaging in party politics along the tenuous divide between permissible and prohibited grounds. But despite the guardians' constant lip service to secularism, the anti-communist priorities of the military and successive centre-right parties during the cold war allowed for the steady rise of Islamist politics. Thanks to its effective grass-roots mobilization, particularly in the neglected urban sprawls, the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP) of Necmettin Erbakan scored a series of electoral victories in the 1990s that shocked the Kemalist establishment. In 1996, Erbakan became prime minister in Turkey's first Islamist-led coalition government, only to be overthrown in a 'soft coup'. The following year, the Constitutional Court outlawed Welfare. Many of the founders of the AKP, including Erdoğan, were former Welfare members. An ambitious young politician with a working-class background, Erdoğan was elected mayor of Istanbul in 1994. In 1999, he received a prison sentence for reciting a poem that the court found was inciting the public to religious violence. Following the verdict, the daily *Hürriyet*, whose editorial team often took directives from senior generals at the time, reported the supposed stifling of Erdoğan's political ambitions with thinly disguised *schadenfreude*, running the headline 'He can't even be a village head anymore' (*Muhtar bile olamaz*) (Özkök 2013, translated by the authors).

These experiences certainly contributed to the distrustful worldview of Erdoğan and his associates, while convincing them of the necessity to confront the guardians via more pragmatic means. In the early 2000s, this pragmatism led the founders of the newly established AKP to abandon the ideological combativeness of their Islamist predecessors and move to the tolerated central ground occupied by popular conservative parties of the past. It also led them to seek an alliance of convenience with a diverse group of actors, including a small but influential group of pro-EU liberal intellectuals, and the Gülen movement: a religious, political, socio-economic network headed by the US-based charismatic preacher Fethullah Gülen, with considerable power and ambitions in Turkey as well as globally.

This alliance became undone soon after it succeeded in disassembling the military's tutelage and the AKP established itself as the dominant force in Turkey's politics. The same process turned Erdoğan into a great leader and a 'refounder' in the eyes of his followers, akin to Atatürk for the Kemalists (Kırmızı 2016). Having outdone the legacies of Menderes, Özal and his mentor Erbakan, he has been passionately compared, by both Kemalists and Islamists, to Sultan Abdülhamit II, the nineteenth-century Ottoman sultan, detested by the Kemalists as a paranoid and reactionary autocrat, and revered by the Islamists as the last great regent and the first modern protagonist of pan-Islamist policies.

These comparisons do not only reveal the intense pride and adoration (or loathing, depending on the perspective) felt towards a populist leader. They also demonstrate how the power struggle has been experienced on both sides as more than just electoral competition, where losing is part of the game, but rather as a struggle for all times – an existential battle for hegemony and survival on the basis of an essentialist reading of Turkey's modern history.⁶ Central to this narrative are the facts that Abdülhamit, Menderes and Erbakan were all overthrown by the military and that Menderes was executed, while Özal's premature death

in 1993 has been a source of conspiracy theories. As Erdoğan became more assertive in his vision of radically transforming state and society in ‘New Turkey’ (*Yeni Türkiye*), the fates of these past leaders have served as cautionary tales through which the growing opposition to this rule and vision has come to be framed.

A defiant expression of this historical narrative is the slogan ‘You hanged Menderes, you poisoned Özal, we will not let you devour Erdoğan!’, which first appeared on posters at the ‘Respect for National Will’ (*Milli İradeye Saygı*) rallies, organized by the government in response to the Gezi demonstrations of 2013. Many secular opponents of the AKP joined those demonstrations to protest, among other things, the government’s plans to demolish the Atatürk Cultural Centre, a modernist republican landmark in Istanbul’s symbolically charged Taksim Square, and build a mosque and a replica of an Ottoman-era barracks to restore a religious imperial image to the heart of the city (Ekmekçi 2013). The fact that shortly after the failed coup of July 2016, President Erdoğan vowed to push ahead with the suspended plans for Taksim Square, rescinded the headscarf ban for female police officers and renamed a major military hospital in Istanbul after Abdülhamit implies that, although the government officially points to the Gülenists as the main culprit, the AKP leadership also sees the coup attempt as the latest chapter in their hegemonic struggle against the Kemalist Republic.

3. Hegemonic struggles and regime crisis

Since the early years of the AKP government, Turkey’s decisive political battles have been fought not inside the parliament, between members of the governing party and the opposition, and in full view of the public, but rather in the shape of byzantine palace intrigues within the halls of the state bureaucracy – the military, the judiciary, the police and the intelligence services – or in the party itself. In the first phase, the newly elected AKP survived a number of critical interventions from key actors within the tutelary establishment. These included two aborted coup plans in 2003 and 2004,⁷ judicial obstructions, secularist mass protests and a military ultimatum against the AKP’s nomination of Abdullah Gül for presidency in 2007 and a closure case at the Constitutional Court in 2008. It is evident that these intrigues were, above all, meant to create an environment of heightened insecurity, in which the AKP government would eventually unravel and ultimately falter.

The AKP survived these challenges and retaliated in the second phase with a far-reaching judicial restructuring, approved in a constitutional referendum in 2010, and two court cases (known as ‘Ergenekon’ and ‘Balyoz’) ostensibly against alleged coup plotters, but encompassing a wide range of government critics. The third phase saw the dramatic unravelling of the strategic alliance between the AKP and the Gülen movement, which had been instrumental in defanging the Kemalist tutelage. Simmering tensions boiled over in late 2013 when pro-Gülen prosecutors launched a high-profile corruption probe targeting top AKP officials and members of Erdoğan’s family. The government responded by purging suspected Gülenists from the judiciary and the police, and cracking down on their educational, media and business interests, a process that intensified after the failed coup of July 2016. In the process, the verdicts of the coup trials were overturned. From 2011 onwards, a concurrent process saw the gradual marginalization of senior AKP figures from key positions within the party and the government, and their replacement with Erdoğan loyalists.

All of these power struggles have had vital implications for the rule of law, the democratic process, institutional (dis)trust and state capacity in Turkey.

3.1. Rule of law

In order to contend with the powerful tutelary actors, the AKP government sought the resources of another extra-parliamentary actor with high hegemonic ambitions and little concern for transparency, democratic accountability and the rule of law. Even if these two movements have different histories, religious reference points and a level of disagreement pertaining to political methods, the AKP government vested its full trust into what ultimately was a fellow Islamic movement, made up of pious Muslims whose goal was to bring Islam to a prominent position in Turkish society. The pro-Gülen prosecutors and media used the coup trials to settle old scores with long-standing rivals, such as the Kemalist civil society organizations involved in a court case against Gülen in the late 1990s, which had prompted him to go to exile in the United States. The indictments included illegally obtained wiretappings and evidence that turned out to be fabricated or tampered with. Through the court cases, the members of the Gülen movement also silenced independent critics, like journalists Ahmet Şık and Nedim Şener, who were investigating the Gülenist network within the police and its alleged involvement in the 2007 murder of Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink (Saymaz 2016). Finally, as emerging evidence suggests, they expanded their influence inside the military and the judiciary alongside other key state institutions.

As a result, what could have been an opportunity to publicly reckon with Turkey's troubled history of human rights abuses and extra-judicial meddling into democratic politics turned into a process that further eroded the rule of law and the public's trust in the justice system. These developments took place with the full knowledge and generous support of the AKP government. It was only when the Gülenists used the same methods against his government and family that Erdoğan labelled them a sinister 'parallel organisation' plotting to capture the state, and resorted to a frenzied crackdown that similarly violated the due course of justice.

3.2. Democratic process

As the hegemonic struggles for the control of the state intensified, the AKP came to rely increasingly on its parliamentary majority to pass laws and restructure institutions to strengthen its hand in these existential battles. From the establishment of Specially Authorised Courts (*Özel Yetkili Mahkemeler*) to try alleged coup plotters and Kurdish dissidents, to successive revisions in the anti-terrorism legislation that significantly broadened the definition of terrorism and gave security personnel great legal impunity and the laws extending the censorship of the Internet, many of these changes rolled back the democratic reforms undertaken in the late 1990s and the early 2000s as part of Turkey's EU accession process. After the AKP's third election victory in 2011, these have been accompanied by regulations aimed openly at constructing Erdoğan's 'New Turkey', such as raising a 'pious generation' through the education reforms of 2012 or restrictions on the sale and consumption of alcohol (cf. Lüküslü 2016, in this issue). Since being elected president in August 2014, Erdoğan has frequently held cabinet meetings in his presidential palace, reducing the

parliament to a rubber stamp legislature, where omnibus bills are approved in late-night emergency sessions without meaningful debate or scrutiny.⁸

In this process, frequently held elections – the only formally sanctioned instances of mass political participation, besides government-organized public rallies – have become sites of continuous popular mobilization. Rather than a platform to discuss specific policy issues, they have turned into plebiscites on the competing life-or-death narratives on offer.⁹ Especially since the 2014 local elections – the first country-wide poll following the Gezi protests and the corruption probes – the AKP campaigns made extensive use (and abuse) of nationalist symbols, imagery and references, including the national flag and the anthem, to frame every election as a crucial battle in the war of liberation, not a routine democratic exercise where losing is much a possibility as winning.¹⁰

This has been accompanied with the near-monopolization of the media and civil society by the government, where the lively and pluralistic atmosphere of the early to mid-2000s – in retrospect, a temporary outcome of the tentative power balance between the guardians and the AKP, than a sign of democratization – gradually gave way to a government-dominated space in which the price of non-compliance has steadily risen.¹¹ In the absence of deliberative routes to addressing the concerns of the democratic opposition and other non-represented groups, disenfranchised segments of the population started taking their grievances to the streets, and faced heavy-handed responses from the government.

Furthermore, despite the rhetorical emphasis on the sanctity of elections, there is evidence to suggest that the ruling party has been unwilling to jeopardize its parliamentary majority through the electoral process. This means having to secure at least 45% of the national vote in every general election, a tall order in a multiparty system despite the absurdly high 10% threshold, even for a party as popular as the AKP. As a result, the government has increasingly resorted to long-term manipulation tactics aimed at tilting the electoral field in its favour. These include, among others, gerrymandering (Hurriyet Daily News 2012), hampering media access for the opposition, using government funds for incumbent campaigns and harassing opponents – all done ‘in a way that the elections themselves do not appear fraudulent’ (Bermeo 2016, 13).¹²

Erdoğan’s extreme reluctance to share power became explicit in 2015, when the ruling party lost its parliamentary majority in the June election. After two months of foot-dragging by the AKP, the president refused to give the task of forming a coalition government to the second party (in this case, the CHP) as is customary, and instead called for a repeat election in November. Following a second campaign taking place in a ‘climate of violence and fear’ (OSCE/ODIHR 2015b) amidst renewed conflict and 24-h curfews in the Kurdish provinces, the snap poll brought the AKP back to power as a single party. In other words, when faced with an unfavourable outcome, Erdoğan chose to ignore the democratic ‘will of the nation’ and repeat elections until the desired result was reached.

3.3. Institutional (dis)trust and state capacity

The third implication of the ruthless and secretive nature of these hegemonic struggles has been the institutionalization of extreme paranoia and distrust – or what Schedler has called ‘hidden action’¹³ – within the state apparatus and the AKP. Since the late 2000s, successive waves of ideological mass purges have taken place on the basis of media-driven character assassinations, testimonials of dubious integrity and McCarthy era-type witch hunts, in

which accusing one of being a member of the so-called ‘Ergenekon’ terror network (or, later the ‘Fethullahist Terror Organisation’, as the Gülen movement is officially labelled after their fallout with the government) has become an effective way of political, or even personal, score settling.

The split between Gülen and the AKP has been particularly traumatic for the ruling party and Erdoğan as it struck at the heart of the coalition that worked together since 2002. Unlike the struggle against the Kemalists, which pitted two opposing worldviews and lifestyles against each other, the split with the Gülenists triggered a fratricide within the political Islamist ‘tribe’ that saw fellow Muslims and AKP members turn against one another. In this process, Erdoğan fell apart with some of his oldest comrades, such as his high school classmate and former interior minister Idris Naim Şahin, or veteran Islamist politician and fellow AKP founder Bülent Arınç. More recently, some of those in the president’s closest entourage, such as his aide-de-camp, were involved in the coup attempt that threatened his life and those of his family. We can safely claim that these experiences contributed to the Turkish leader’s highly distrustful mindset that values personal loyalty above professional merit or ideological dedication.

Erdoğan’s grip over the party machinery appears largely secured following the sidelining of senior and independent AKP figures¹⁴ and their replacement with devotees of ‘Reis’, or ‘the Chief’ as his supporters call Erdoğan. The first sign of personalization of power in the party had come in 2011, when then Prime Minister Erdoğan handpicked the candidates standing for parliamentary election. The extraordinary congress of the AKP in May 2016, with its main theme being loyalty to the leader, completed the party’s transformation from an outward looking and relatively pluralistic entity into an absolutist structure characterized with leader veneration, institutionalized distrust and conspiracy theories.

On the other hand, the coup attempt and the subsequent removal of more than a hundred thousand public servants revealed Erdoğan’s still tenuous control over the state apparatus. In filling the gap left from the Gülenists – themselves the primary beneficiaries of the earlier Kemalist purges – the government has relied mainly on four groups: loyalists of Erdoğan from the party’s youth branch; ultra-nationalists ideologically closer to the far-right Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP)¹⁵; members of other Islamic fraternities;¹⁶ and opportunists with no clear ideological or political convictions.¹⁷ It appears that some ultra-nationalist Kemalists associated with the Homeland Party (*Vatan Partisi*) of Doğu Perinçek have been finding their way back to the state’s security apparatus (Gürcan 2016). While this patchwork alliance shares illiberal, anti-Kurdish, anti-Western and anti-intellectual tendencies, which are reflected on the government’s discourse and policies,¹⁸ it is not built upon a coherent ideological platform. Rather, like the ruling party, it is shaped around loyalty to the leader and an existential threat narrative based on nationalist-religious myths, societal resentments and conspiracy theories, elaborated in the next section.

Finally, each wave of purges and subsequent loyalty-based recruitment drive further deprived the bureaucracy and the ruling party of competent personnel. Given that many of the latest recruits lack the expertise, qualifications or international connections of the better trained Kemalists, or indeed the Gülenists, this final transformation has left the AKP with a dwindling pool of competent administrators to run the state efficiently, something the party had prided itself upon during the 2000s. In a highly volatile geopolitical environment, reduced state capacity and an insecure one-man rule have exposed Turkey to the violent centrifugal effects of regional conflicts. As Somer (2016) notes in this issue, this

state of fragility and constant purges stand in stark contrast with the spectacular displays of power and authority in the government's carefully choreographed public rallies and commemorative events.

4. Regional crises as catalysts of exit from democracy

The geopolitical shifts and uncertainties surrounding Turkey since the late 2000s have influenced the country's social and political dynamics and contributed to its dramatic transformation into a weak authoritarian regime beset by insecurity. The geopolitical dimension added speed and intensity to this transition, even if it did not alter its fundamental dynamics. In other words, in a more stable regional environment, without the added tensions and uncertainties associated with the systemic crises unfolding in Europe and the Middle East, Turkey's own historically referenced hegemonic struggles may have unfolded in a less explosive fashion. Instead, these crises have considerably escalated the stakes of Turkey's existing power struggles, intensified its actors' quest for power and extended an overall sense of existential insecurity to all sectors of society. The concurrence of these factors precipitated the country's exit from democracy.

4.1. Democratic backsliding in the West

Turkey's transformation cannot be understood in isolation from the democratic backsliding in the West (Foa and Mounk 2016) and especially in Europe, which had provided impetus for the country's previous attempts at democratic reform. Turkey's EU accession process played an instrumental role in unlocking the societal power and institutional dominance of its tutelary actors and creating space for its hegemonic struggles. But the same process failed to ensure the emergence of a consolidated democracy. With Turkey's path to full membership effectively blocked by individual member states after 2006, the EU lost much of its leverage on Turkey's political direction.

Since the financial crisis of 2008, the faltering of the liberal democratic project in Europe and the waning of the EU's normative influence over its own members and neighbourhood have belied the post-cold war assumption that economic prosperity and liberal democracy went hand in hand. This has given new currency to illiberal democratic (Zakaria 1997) or capitalist authoritarian models as attractive alternatives to liberal democracy. Coinciding with a period of fast economic growth, electoral domination and rising regional ambitions for Turkey in the early 2010s, the AKP leadership clearly opted for this alternative model and even turned Turkey into a prominent example of it.¹⁹ In their newfound confidence, senior party officials started speaking openly about ending their instrumental alliance with the pro-EU liberals at home because 'the Turkey we will construct [...] is not going to be [one] they will be able to accept'.²⁰

Although the EU's progress reports, once considered a document of great national importance in Turkey, started featuring more scathing criticism of the AKP's authoritarian turn, these were summarily dismissed by Turkish officials as written in bad faith. After 2015, Europe's own existential insecurities triggered by the refugee crisis forced the EU to sacrifice entirely what was left of its normative influence on Turkey and devise a new relationship on a purely strategic basis. Embodied in the refugee deal signed in March 2016, this relationship envisions Turkey not as a potential member, whose internal transformation mattered to the

EU, but rather as Europe's gatekeeper, whose government can do as it pleases as long as it keeps unwanted refugees out of the continent (Economist 2016). In a telling sign of Europe's new priorities, the European Commission delayed publishing its 2015 progress report on Turkey to avoid antagonizing President Erdoğan ahead of the elections in November.

Finally, the rise of right-wing populist and Islamophobic discourses in Europe have encouraged their anti-Western counterparts in Turkey, rekindling the deep-rooted ontological insecurities that the EU accession process unsuccessfully attempted to address. Paradoxically, while the AKP officials routinely chastised Western countries, and by extension those whom they saw as Westernized, i.e., inauthentic, Turks, for their cultural immorality and democratic double standards, they also pointed (often inaccurately) to the West's democratic shortcomings to justify Turkey's own encroachments on civil rights and liberties (Nuhurat and Akkoyunlu 2013). Erdoğan defended his government's crackdown of Gezi protests by comparing it favourably to the New York City police officers' treatment of the Occupy Wall Street protestors, in which he falsely claimed that 17 people had been killed. He has scolded the EU for criticizing Turkey's anti-terrorism legislation, even as European countries have been expanding the scope of their anti-terror laws in the wake of the Paris attacks of November 2015. Likewise, the state of emergency declared in France after the same attacks has been used by the AKP officials to rationalize the clampdown in Turkey following the failed coup of July 2016.

4.2. Hegemony and insecurity in the post-Arab Spring Middle East

While the crisis of liberal democracy in the West undermined the struggle for democracy in Turkey, the simultaneous mutation of the Arab uprisings into a region-wide conflagration of armed conflicts, violent extremism and state failure – and Turkey's role in this mutation – enflamed the country's socio-political fault lines and accelerated its insecure authoritarian decline. This has occurred in three consecutive phases, during which Turkey's domestic and regional politics have become virtually intertwined: in the first phase, between 2011 and 2013, the AKP emerged with a revisionist agenda aimed at reshaping both Turkey and the post-Arab Spring Middle East. This 'neo-Ottomanist' agenda suffered major setbacks at home and abroad during the second phase, between mid-2013 and mid-2015, plunging Turkey's key political actors into heightened existential insecurity. Finally, in the third phase, these tensions turned into open violence on Turkey's soil in the shape of the renewed conflict with the Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK), terror attacks linked to Islamic State (IS) and the coup attempt of July 2016. In the course of these three phases, democratic institutions and processes fell victim to the prevailing all-or-nothing logic of the hegemonic ambitions and escalating insecurities of key actors.

At the onset of the Arab Spring uprisings, Turkey emerged – and was initially cheered on by the US and UK foreign policy establishments – as the purported 'champion of the Arab Spring' and a model for the post-revolutionary Arab countries. 2011 was a year of spectacular economic growth, victory over the Kemalist guardians and a third consecutive general election win for the AKP. The same year also saw the overthrow of secular dictators and the rise of popular Islamist movements in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, while Turkey's southern neighbour Syria looked next in line. These movements shared ideological kinship with Turkey's ruling party and looked up to it as an example. The simultaneous occurrence of so many propitious events helped bolster a sense of manifest destiny among Turkey's

ruling Islamists that their ‘moment in the sun’ had finally arrived (Akkoyunlu, Nicolaidis, and Öktem 2013).

According to this triumphalist view, Erdoğan’s ‘New Turkey’ was finally re-embracing its authentic Islamic identity, reclaiming its forgotten imperial heritage and returning to its natural leadership role in the former Ottoman territories under the leadership of the AKP and Erdoğan. It was in this context that government policies began to resemble the grand gestures of revolutionary regimes: from intra-party purges to state capture, from Islamist social policies to the building of landmark mosques and bridges and finally to extending patronage to Islamist movements abroad, the discourse and manifestations of a ‘New Turkey’ began to take hold. These policies in turn created new insecurities and resentments towards AKP rule, which exploded to surface with the Gezi protests of 2013.

Coming on the heels of the Gezi protests, the military coup in Egypt against the Muslim Brotherhood-supported presidency of Mohammad Morsi dealt both a geopolitical and a psychological blow to the AKP leadership.²¹ The toppling of a key Islamist ally following mass anti-government protests and the imprisonment of its elected leader did not only undermine the AKP’s regional ambitions but also plunged the party into a deeper level of insecurity, contributing to an alarmist reading of the domestic and regional dynamics and provoking historically rooted fears of violent overthrow.²²

Turkey remained a supporter of Morsi long after the latter’s overthrow. At AKP rallies, Erdoğan regularly invoked the ‘Rabaa’ gesture, a symbol of the public square where up to a thousand Morsi supporters were massacred by the Egyptian military in August 2013, to remind supporters of the dangers awaiting them unless they stood steadfast behind the government (Hurriyet Daily News 2013b; Haddad 2015). At the same time, Turkey’s Islamists viewed Western media and governments’ muted response to the coup as opposed to their extensive coverage of the Gezi protests, and speedy endorsement of the military-backed Sisi regime in Egypt as confirmation of their deep running mistrust and resentment of the West and its double standards when it comes to democracy in the Muslim world.²³ Compounding this suspicion was the shift in Western strategic focus from toppling the Assad regime to fighting IS, and the subsequent view of Iran and Syrian Kurds as resourceful allies in this endeavour.

The third phase of authoritarian decline started after the June 2015 election. It was marked by the spill over of violent conflict in Syria and Iraq into Turkey, with the rising number of the IS-linked suicide attacks and the collapse of the already fragile peace negotiations between the government and the PKK. Erdoğan’s vocal opposition to the military and political gains of the PKK-backed Kurdish forces in Northern Syria (or Rojava), for fear of a renewed campaign for independence in Turkey, had already brought the talks to the brink of collapse in 2014. The government’s perceived support for the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, and its unwillingness to prevent or properly investigate the IS-linked suicide attacks against the supporters of the pro-Kurdish leftist Peoples’ Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP) also alienated AKP-voting conservative Kurds and tribes. In the June election, these groups abandoned the ruling party en masse for the HDP, playing a crucial role in pushing it over the 10% threshold and depriving the AKP of a parliamentary majority. Immediately after the election, the government signalled the end of the peace process.²⁴ Emboldened by the Kurdish successes waging urban guerrilla warfare against the IS in Syria, and reportedly (mis)interpreting the HDP’s electoral gains as a sign of the people’s readiness for an uprising (Bozarslan 2016), the PKK took the war to the cities.

The outbreak of violence is reminiscent of the war between the Turkish state and the PKK in the 1990s. Publicly available photographic evidence, eye-witness accounts and international human rights reports suggest widespread and systematic human rights abuses and extra-judicial killings by the security forces.²⁵ A state of emergency came into force in the Kurdish provinces, putting entire towns under 24-h curfew. Several urban centres were reduced to rubble in some of the most intensive fighting in recent memory (Demirbaş 2016). The displacement of at least 200.000 civilians from the conflict zone has been accompanied by mob violence against Kurds in Turkish cities and PKK-linked terror attacks in Turkey's Western metropolises (United Nations 2016). These took place at the same time as the Islamic State carried out major terror attacks in Istanbul, in apparent retaliation to the government's acquiescence to US pressure to take action against jihadist operations and safe havens inside Turkey.

In response to these concurrent developments, the AKP government opted for the questionable narrative that two mortal enemies, PKK and IS, were secretly collaborating against Turkey's Government, in what then Prime Minister Davutoğlu called 'cocktail terrorism'. This was in fact part of a wider discourse that depicts Turkey as a country under relentless assault from a coalition of foreign enemies, interest lobbies and fifth columnists, directed by a nebulous 'supreme intelligence' (*üst akıl*) that is bent on preventing the country's spectacular rise as a global power under the popular leadership of Erdoğan (Akyol 2015).

This discourse is articulated directly by the president, embellished to apocalyptic proportions by government officials and media pundits,²⁶ and communicated to the public via a plethora of pro-government channels, which now almost monopolize the national media landscape. It portrays Erdoğan as the true embodiment of democracy and the nation's will, from which those designated by the government as terrorist, traitor or 'anti-national' (*gayri-milli*) are excluded. Simultaneously, it justifies the abuse or suspension of democratic procedures and rule of law on the basis of emergency laws, whether in forced seizures of private property, shutting down opposition media and arresting critical journalists, granting legal immunity to security forces participating in counter-terrorism operations or repeating unfavourable election results.

The reading of any and all challenges, including democratic, legitimate and non-threatening ones, through the prism of a global conspiracy reveals a siege mentality that has rendered democratic processes and institutions powerless and in effect created conditions for both a vicious cycle and a self-fulfilling prophecy. The coup attempt of 15 July 2016 and its dramatic aftermath can be seen as an outcome – and a further catalyst – of this vicious cycle of ever rising existential insecurity, authoritarian decline and a political arena where actors resort to increasingly violent measures to maintain grip on power and avoid annihilation.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that Turkey's fast-paced authoritarian decline since the late 2000s has been intimately connected to the domestic and regional power struggles its key political actors have been involved in and the rapid rise in existential insecurity emanating from these struggles. Insecurity was already a mainstay of Turkey's politics, rendering its political institutions weak, before the rise of the AKP. The tutelary arrangement that ensured the coexistence of democratic and tutelary institutions in a state of mutual fragility survived for over half a century thanks to the relatively stable geopolitical alignments of the cold

war era. The realignment of the early 2000s led to the erosion of the societal power and the institutional dominance of the tutelary actors, opening space for elite-level power struggles to capture and reshape state institutions.

Fuelled by historically rooted fears, ambitions and resentments, these battles have been fought within the secretive halls of the state bureaucracy and the ruling party, at a time of increasing geopolitical uncertainty in Europe and the Middle East, two of Turkey's overlapping neighbourhoods. These struggles have inflicted extensive damage on the rule of law, the democratic institutions and state capacity in Turkey, taking the country down a vicious cycle of all-or-nothing politics and authoritarian clampdown, in which the democratic middle ground between domination and annihilation has ceased to exist. In the light of the brutal nature of these struggles, we find it necessary to rethink Turkey's earlier era of tentative liberalization in the early to mid-2000s as the fleeting outcome of a tentative power balance between warring factions at a time of relative geopolitical stability and normative EU influence, rather than a meaningful step towards democratic consolidation.

The agency of key political actors, of the Kemalist guardians, the Gülenists and in particular of Erdoğan, has been as decisive in this transition as the underlying structural dynamics. Driven by a sense of mission, as well as by past and present suspicions and resentments, Erdoğan emerged as a pragmatic coalition maker and also a ruthless accumulator of power, gradually sidelining fellow Islamist politicians, such as Abdullah Gül, who were more open to dialogue and reconciliation in times of crisis. In his pursuit of constructing 'New Turkey', Erdoğan has been both a major contributor and a victim of the existential insecurities that have precipitated Turkey's exit from democracy. Given the exponentially rising stakes of this pursuit, the hostilities, resentments and rights violations it has generated, and the existential threat narrative it has produced, the AKP is no longer in a position to engage in electoral competition on fair terms and accept sharing or relinquishing power in the case of defeat. In an atmosphere of constant and existential struggle, any step backwards is viewed as a step towards self-destruction. Evidence of this is the repeat elections of November 2015.

As a result, Turkey has fully entered the realm of authoritarian politics under one-man rule – a fact that has led to and was further reinforced by the failed coup attempt of July 2016. The failure of the bloody coup attempt has elevated Erdoğan's popularity, and Fethullah Gülen's infamy, to mythic proportions among significant portions of Turkey's population. Importantly, the split between Erdoğan and Gülen has introduced insecurity and distrust into what arguably has been Turkey's most powerful political 'tribe', the larger movement of political Islam. The coup attempt has also given the president a pretext – Erdoğan himself said the coup was a 'gift from God' – and the legal cover to freely suppress all real opposition to his rule, to consolidate his authority and to press ahead with constructing 'New Turkey'. At the time of writing, the likelihood of a popular referendum to replace the country's parliamentary system with a powerful executive presidency was increasing, a goal Erdoğan has been pursuing for years.

While this would cement Erdoğan's domination of Turkey's institutions, it would not guarantee hegemony in politics and society, as his authority still faces formidable challenges. These are, to list a few, the continued dilemma of having to choose between loyalists of questionable competence and competent personnel of questionable loyalties to run the state agencies and the party apparatus; the government's deepening involvement in the ongoing wars in Syria, Iraq and against the PKK, and the growing list of regional enemies these are creating; and finally, the presence of at least half of Turkey's electorate who do not support

Erdoğan or the AKP. The presence of these obstacles is likely to maintain Turkey in a weak and insecure authoritarian state in the foreseeable future.

In the context of the backsliding and deconsolidation observed even in mature democracies around the world, a pressing question Turkey's authoritarian turn leaves us with is the ability of liberal democratic processes and institutions to prevent authoritarian decline or to offer countries a way out of weak authoritarianism. How effective are the electoral and deliberative processes in providing socio-political actors facing debilitating existential insecurities with strategies to resolve their differences? If liberal democracy cannot offer an effective defence or remedy against the destructive forces of populist leaders, hegemonic struggles and existential insecurities, does this mean that it is a mere outcome that occurs only in those rare historical moments when conflict is temporarily muted and both geopolitical and global economic conditions are stable? And facing such existential challenges itself, can liberal democracy survive without the protection of tutelary powers, which are so often neither liberal nor democratic by their very nature?

The process of authoritarian power grab we have examined in this paper leads us to the conclusion that liberal democracy is a historical exception, whose survival with or without tutelary powers is all but predetermined. This appears to suggest for the case of Turkey that its political arrangements, to return to our initial reference to Przeworski, do not anymore amount to a system in which 'incumbents lose elections and leave if they do'. Under the conditions of heightened insecurity, mounting distrust even within political 'tribes' and an Islamist bloc in disarray, our expectations for Turkey's short-term trajectory are different. They range from weak and contested authoritarianism amidst threats of ideological and political radicalization, aggravated insecurity for all actors in the political landscape, and increasingly for all citizens, to a further deepening of Turkey's ontologically insecure position in the world.

Notes

1. In fairness to Tuğal, he has been sceptical of this 'success story' from early on. Also, in his latest book, *The Fall of the Turkish Model: How the Arab Uprisings Brought Down Islamic Liberalism*, he points to similar causal factors as we do in this paper to explain the transformation.
2. 'Elections, open, free, and fair, are the essence of democracy, the inescapable sine qua non' (Huntington 1993, 9).
3. A good example of this tribalism, but also of the fragility of trust even within such groups, is the almost unlimited trust, which members of different Islamic groups extended towards each other. The phrase 'Those whose face touch the prayer mat would never harm us' may explain the AKP's readiness to knowingly let the Gülen movement take over positions of power in the judiciary and military. It may also explain the deep shock in AKP circles at the realization that their main enemy was not the secular establishment anymore, but a fellow Islamist movement.
4. The Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925 and the assassination attempt of 1926 propelled the new regime to declare and consolidate its authority through martial law and the public executions of regime opponents (Atay 2009, 470).
5. The DP dominated Turkey's politics in the 1950s, partly thanks to a winner-takes-all voting system and the 1924 Constitution, which vested disproportionate authority in the executive branch. One of the main aims of the 1960 coup was to limit this executive power. To do so, the coup makers introduced a new voting system based on proportional representation, divided the legislative into upper and lower chambers and turned the ceremonial presidency into a

- non-partisan veto player. In the early 1990s, Özal advocated changing Turkey's parliamentary system with an executive presidentialism, a goal also championed by Erdoğan.
6. See (Kaplan 2016) and (Takvim 2015) for two favourable comparisons of Erdoğan and Abdülhamit by pro-AKP newspapers, (Sabah 2014) for an interview with Erdoğan's chief advisers Mustafa Varank and Aydın Ünal where they argue Erdoğan has been resisting the same existential threats that toppled Menderes; and (Özdil 2014) for a critical comparison of Erdoğan and Menderes by popular Kemalist columnist Yılmaz Özdil.
 7. Codenamed Sarıkız and Ayısıği, the plans were allegedly aborted at advanced stages when foiled by then Chief of the General Staff, Hilmi Özkök. The plans, detailed in the diaries of then Commander of the Navy Admiral Özden Örnek, were published by the investigative journal *Nokta* in 2007, which was summarily shut down by a military court. Unlike much of the key evidence presented in the future coup trials, which eventually turned out to be fabricated, there appears little debate over the authenticity of the Örnek diaries and the coup plans they detailed.
 8. See for instance 'Ruling AKP approves midnight bill to curb authority of chambers supporting Gezi' (Hurriyet Daily News 2013a); 'Turkish parliament approves omnibus code despite opposition calls' (Hurriyet Daily News 2016).
 9. The AKP and Erdoğan have proved masterful at framing every election as a decisive choice between the democratic, prosperous and powerful 'new Turkey' and the authoritarian, bankrupt and subservient 'old Turkey'. At least until a leadership change in 2010, the main opposition, Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), followed a similar strategy, presenting the AKP as a deadly threat against the secular republic, albeit with much less electoral success.
 10. Shortly before the repeat poll on 1 November 2015, İbrahim Karagül, editor-in-chief of the pro-government daily *Yeni Şafak*, wrote an op-ed titled '1 November is the defence of the fatherland', in which he argued: 'What's at stake is not an election. It is Turkey. Our nation was able to stand up after the Crusades, Mongol invasions and First World War, it will also succeed in spoiling this great game. This is why our struggle is the last War of Independence.' (Karagül 2015, translated by the authors)
 11. See Yabancı (2016) in this issue for the use of government-controlled civil society organizations in legitimating government policies and de-legitimizing and marginalizing independent civil society organizations.
 12. For analyses of the deteriorating integrity of Turkey's elections, see: OSCE/ODIHR (2014, 2015a, 2015b), Norris et al. (2016) and Akkoyunlu (forthcoming).
 13. '... while autocracies are well known for surveying their subjects, they also invest huge efforts in surveying their agents. Many of their information-gathering activities are self-directed, striving to find out what their bureaucracies do at different levels. In contemporary China, for instance, the Communist party works as a vast apparatus of meta-surveillance watching over the watchmen of the regime' (Schedler 2013, 38).
 14. These include, among others, Abdullah Gül, former Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, former Economy Minister Ali Babacan and former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu.
 15. Some of the most outspoken supporters of Erdoğan in this group, such as former interior minister and police chief Mehmet Ağar and mafia boss Sedat Peker, had been involved in state-sanctioned human rights abuses of Kurds and leftist dissidents in the 1990s. Convicted in the coup trials, they were released when the verdicts were overturned in 2014.
 16. Two of these are the Menzil and Süleymanlılar branches of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, whose members are well represented in several ministries and are said to be replacing the Gülenists in the police force (Evrensel 2016).
 17. A prominent case is journalist Yiğit Bulut, fierce critic of the AKP-turned die-hard supporter, who became advisor to Erdoğan after the Gezi protests in 2013. Bulut suggested that the German airline Lufthansa was behind the protests, as its market share would dwindle after the construction of Istanbul's third airport, and that foreign powers were trying to kill Erdoğan through telekinesis.

18. This discourse is exemplified, among other cases, by the harassment and persecution of 1128 academics who signed a petition in January 2016 condemning and calling for an end to the state's militaristic policies in the Kurdish provinces. President Erdoğan publicly labelled the petition as 'terrorist propaganda' and the signatories as 'pseudo-intellectuals, fifth columnists and traitors'. The signatories have been exposed as traitors on pro-government media, harassed by AKP supporters, including by ultra-nationalist mafia boss Sedat Peker, and now face a court case (Arslan 2016).
19. In a 2014 speech, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán made the case for an 'illiberal democracy' arguing that the global financial crisis of 2008 had proven that 'liberal democratic states can't remain globally competitive'. He listed Turkey, Russia and China as examples of 'successful' nations, 'none of which is liberal and some of which aren't even democracies' (Bloomberg 2014).
20. In the words of Aziz Babuşçu, the chairman of the AKP: 'Those who were our stakeholders during the past decade will not be our stakeholders in the coming decade. [...] The liberals, for instance, were our stakeholders during this process. But the future is the era of construction. And this construction era will not be as [the liberals] wish' (CNN Turk 2013).
21. Egypt under Morsi had turned into a firm ally and supporter of the AKP and Erdoğan. The two governments signed free trade and visa liberalization agreements, and Morsi was among the VIP guests at the AKP's 2012 Party Congress praising Turkey as 'a source of inspiration for the Middle East' whose involvement in the region was essential for 'economic and social rehabilitation following the Arab Spring revolutions' (Dünya 2012).
22. The opinion piece 'The Scenario to Suffocate Egypt and Turkey' by İbrahim Karagül, the editor-in-chief of pro-government daily *Yeni Şafak* and a regular companion of the president in his foreign trips, exemplifies this alarmist outlook: 'The ones who carried out the coup in Egypt dream the same dream for Turkey. They feed from the same source. They push for the same outcome through fabricated accusations, symbols and images' (Karagül 2013, translated by the authors).
23. 'Foreigners don't like us' declared Erdoğan at a trade summit for Islamic countries in Istanbul in November 2014. 'They love oil, gold, diamonds, and the cheap labour force of the Islamic world ... They look like friends, but they want us dead, they like seeing our children die' (Hurriyet Daily News 2014).
24. Deputy Prime Minister Yalçın Akdoğan claimed the day after the 7 June election: 'The process ahead will make everyone better understand that the AKP is the only guarantor of security and stability in Turkey [...] From now on, the HDP can only shoot the movie of the peace process' (Hürriyet 2015).
25. See Human Rights Watch (2016, 579–582) and Amnesty International (2016, 369–373).
26. Some of the themes frequently invoked by İbrahim Karagül, editor-in-chief of the pro-government daily *Yeni Şafak*, include 'the war for Mecca', 'the last War of Independence', 'the final struggle' against the crusaders and the arrival of the third golden age in a thousand years under Erdoğan. In an opinion piece on the coup attempt, titled 'They are provoking Turkey for the War of Apocalypse', Karagül argued: '15 July is the beginning of a new War of Independence for Turkey. [...] If they opened the gates of hell, the thousand-year old tradition of this land will rise and our nation will give them hell! I speak about a tradition that buried the crusaders into Anatolia!' (Karagül 2016).

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Notes on contributors

Karabekir Akkoyunlu is assistant professor of Modern Turkey at the Centre for Southeast European Studies, University of Graz. His research interests include foreign and domestic politics of Turkey and Iran, historical institutionalism, theories of democracy and democratization, hybrid regimes and civil-military relations.

Kerem Öktem is professor of Southeast European Studies and modern Turkey at the University of Graz and a research associate at the Centre for International Studies, University of Oxford. He works on authoritarianism, democracy and minorities in Turkey and its overlapping neighbourhoods. A particular area of interest is the study of Muslim communities in the Balkans and modern Muslim identities in the context of transnational Islamic networks. His latest publications include 'Austria', *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, Volume 8, 2016, (Leiden: Brill, 41–61), and 'One hundred years later: the personal, the political and the historical in four new books on the Armenian Genocide', *Caucasus Survey*, 2016 (Vol 4, No.1 : 92–104), co-authored with Sossie Kasbarian.

ORCID

Kerem Öktem  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8372-1772>

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