Letter From the Editors

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Greetings from the editors of the APSA MENA Politics Section Newsletter!

We are delighted to present the Spring 2023 issue of the newsletter! The newsletter continues to be a central forum for the MENA political science community featuring original research on timely issues, critical reflections on emerging topics, and reviews of important books and research projects. The latest issue features a fascinating glimpse at data collection and archiving trends, two symposia on Turkey's ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) and on social policy, and finally two roundtables centred upon racial politics as well as a ground-breaking new volume on regional political science.

In the first section, the standalone articles take on the question of how to broaden access to systematic and reliable statistical data on the MENA region. Michael Robbins, Director of the Arab Barometer, presents the key findings from the Arab Barometer's seventh wave. Beyond sharing the survey's important findings, his article takes a real and deep dive into how to best access and utilize high-quality statistical data on the region and share it within and beyond academic and policy communities. An important public resource for researchers working on the region is put forward by Charles Kurzman, Seteney Shami,

and Neil Ketchley in their article. They draw our readers' attention to the Arab Council for the Social Sciences Dataverse, an interdisciplinary data archive for social science research datasets. The ACSS Dataverse allows researchers and institutions both to deposit and access research data on the Arab region. We believe that the repository is an exceptionally important resource for researchers, students, and policy maker interested in understanding and researching the MENA region. We strongly encourage our colleagues to utilize it and deposit their work in it.

In addition to these valuable resources, we would like to bring our readers' attention to a valuable text on research design. Professor Mark Tessler of the University of Michigan published *Social Science Research in the Arab World and Beyond: A Guide for Students, Instructors and Researchers* (Springer, 2022). The foundational volume is intended for those seeking an overview of disciplinary social science research at the introductory or intermediate level. It is particularly aimed at researchers based in the Middle East and North Africa. It covers conceptual as well as methodological aspects of research design, and it illustrates these elements with examples of political and social science research projects carried out in the region.

Letter from the Editors (continued)

Some of the exercises involve the analysis of Arab Barometer survey data. The book is supported by a generous grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and facilitated by APSA-MENA workshops held throughout the region, the text has been made available online and open-access. It can be downloaded freely at SpringerLink or OAPEN. In addition, Qatar University Press has translated this book into Arabic, and has made it available online and open-access. This Arabic edition can be downloaded freely through Qatar University Press.

The two symposia address timely and important issues The first symposium on Turkey addresses the legacy of AKP's two-decade of rule. The symposium brings together nine scholars who reflect on a significant dimension of this era: Ideological evolution by Sultan Tepe, foreign policy by Lisel Hintz, economic policy by Ali Guven, local politics by Charlotte Joppien, gender by Didem Unal and Simten Cosar, Kurdish issue by Zeki Sarigil, earthquake politics by Sebnem Gumuscu, civil society by Bilge Yabanci, and land and capital by Melih Yesilbag. We told the contributors to examine their topics in comparison with the pre-AKP era and briefly comment on the upcoming elections. We are hoping our colleagues find this symposium helpful as the parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled on May 14th are approaching.

The second symposium features four pieces by five contributors who reflect on recent reconfigurations on social policy in the region. Three of these pieces discuss the idiosyncratic features of country cases—Egypt by Neil Russell, United Arab Emirates by Beth-any Shockley and Stephen Louw, and Turkey by Erdem Yoruk—and one piece by Claudia Yaoukim examines the gender dimensions of these reconfigurations. Case studies highlight the fact that while each case has been deeply shaped by their national contexts, they have been nevertheless following the same neoliberal policy, the safety net model. The safety model targets the poorest of the poor of the population through assistance programs. Ironically, however, the model is part of the neoliberal policies that attack the labor rights, privatization and financialization, which directly contribute to the creation of poverty as well as gender inequality.

The newsletter ends with two roundtables, with each structured a bit differently. The first, convened with the help of Editorial Board member Rana B. Khoury, presents a long-form e-mail exchange between five junior and senior scholars (Houda Mzioudet, Yasmeen Abu Laban, Amanda Sahar d'Urso, Abigail Bakan, and Nisrine Hilizah) concerning the study of race, racialization, and racism. Drawing upon shared personal experiences, innovative scholarship, and historical memories, these contributors establish why MENA political scientists should be far more attuned to how race shapes communal struggles, political identities, and state-society relations in both MENA societies and MENA-heritage peoples around the world.

The second roundtable is a traditional book review discussion, with prominent comparative political scientists (Amaney Jamal, Mark Tessler, Tom Pepinsky, and Oliver Schlumberger) addressing the impact and scope of the recently published *The Political Science of the Middle*

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East, eds. Marc Lynch, Jillian Schwedler, and Sean Yom (Oxford University Press, 2022). Representing the collective effort of nearly four dozen MENA social scientists, this volume has merited considerable attention over the past year. The roundtable presents new perspectives on both the book and the future frontiers of our discipline.

As always, we are excited to receive your ideas and suggestions for each of our sections–stand-alone articles, symposia, and roundtable. Please send your proposals no later than July 1, 2023. Send stand-alone article proposals to Nermin Allam (nermin.allam@rutgers.edu), symposium proposals to Gamze Çavdar (gamze.cavdar@colostate.edu) and roundtable proposals to Sean Yom (seanyom@temple.edu). Section members outside the U.S. are particularly encouraged to submit their proposals and ideas.

Nermin Allam, Gamze Çavdar,
and Sean Yom

AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION
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News from the APSA MENA Section

It is once again my pleasure to write a brief review of section activities for the MENA Politics section newsletter. The section has had a somewhat quiet year but is also in the process of some institutional growth and collaboration.

First, there is the bread and butter of every section's work: preparation for the 2023 APSA Annual Meeting. With 11 panels scheduled for the meeting in Los Angeles, the MENA Politics section will have its largest presence yet. As you all know, panel allocation speaks to attendance at previous meetings, so kudos once again to Marwa Shalaby and Nadav Shelef for organizing such an engaging program in 2022. This year's program co-chairs, Nadine Sika and Curtis Ryan, report that the growing size and strength of the section meant that they received far more high-quality proposals than they could accommodate, and selection was quite competitive. They are excited to have put together a schedule that includes panels on topics of established interest in our research community, as well as some new areas of inquiry. In particular, the section will sponsor more panels reflecting debates in International Relations than we did in the past two years, as well as some exciting new work on urban politics and urban violence. We also have co-sponsored panels with the Public Opinion and Migration and Citizenship sections and will host an Author-Meets-Critics event on Jillian Schwedler's new book, Protesting Jordan: Geographies of Power and Dissent.

The program chairs did note with surprise that they received no proposals for panels related to the politics of gender – a research area in which we know there is considerable strength among our membership. I encourage people working in this area to propose something for 2024. The section also received few submissions indicating openness to being included in a poster session. We can always expect to be allocated at least one poster session – if your work is amenable to presentation in this format or could be, or if you know someone for whom this would be a good opportunity, please consider this option.

Beyond the annual program, the MENA Politics section also co-sponsored with the Democracy and Autocracy an Emerging Scholars Workshop targeting researchers from the MENA region. This was initiated by Liz Nugent, who is active in both sections and current vice-chair of the Democracy and Autocracy section. Selected applicants will come to Los Angeles for a day-long program on August 30, the day before the Annual Meeting begins, and their subsequent attendance and participation in the meeting will be supported by APSA. I'm glad the two sections could collaborate on this and encourage section members to engage with the selected scholars in LA.

Section Vice-Chair, Yael Zeira, recruited more than a dozen section members to serve on selection committees for our various prizes, to be awarded at the annual Business Meeting. The January 1st deadline for prize nominations was set earlier than in the past, which caused some confusion. The newly-standardized deadline was a response to past challenges raised by prior section award committees; it gives committees plenty of time to carefully read the nominated work. Please anticipate a January 1st deadline moving forward and take note of the eligibility guidelines on the section website.

News from the APSA MENA Section (continued)

Though we hope to see as many of you as possible at the Los Angeles meeting, difficulties with visas, health-related concerns, family leaves, labor strikes, and a general desire to share good news with loved ones collectively informed the section leadership's decision to hold the 2023 Business Meeting in a virtual format during the 2023 APSA Annual meeting. Whether you join the virtual meeting from LA or from Cairo, we hope you will participate in celebrating some of the finest recent work in our field.

Lastly, we are working with APSA to finalize the ballot for our upcoming section leadership election, based on the recommendations of our Nominating Committee. Janine Clark, Steven Heydemann, and Matthew Buehler carefully identified a well-rounded group of candidates for the positions of chair, treasurer, and one at-large representative. Please keep an eye out for an electronic ballot from APSA sometime in late spring and submit your votes. The newly elected section leaders will begin their two-year terms at the Business Meeting, joining continuing section leaders, Yael Zeira and Allison Hartnett. That means that this is my last update as section chair. I thank my fellow section leaders for their consistent spirit of collaboration and all of you for the good will that I have encountered over the past two years when asking you to contribute in ways large and small to ensuring that the MENA Politics section continues as a meaningful part of our intellectual and professional lives.

Stacey Philbrick Yadav
MENA Politics Section Chair

News from the APSA MENA Program Section

The American Political Science Association's MENA Program is a multi-year effort to support political science research and networking among early-career scholars across in the Arab Middle East and North Africa. Through a series of workshops, departmental collaborations, research grants, and other opportunities, the program extends APSA's engagement with the international political science community and strengthens research networks linking American scholars with colleagues overseas. The goal of APSA's MENA Workshops, generously funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York, is to enhance the capacities and resources of political scientists in the Arab MENA region, while also providing a forum for supporting their ongoing research.

We are pleased to share that Carnegie Corporation of New York has renewed its support for APSA's MENA Program through 2025. The MENA Program will continue its annual Research Development Workshop, mentoring initiative, alumni research grants and collaboration with Political Science departments at universities across the region. A call for applications will be announced in the coming weeks for the 10th annual MENA Workshop to be held later this year.

In addition to the 6-day research development workshops, APSA will begin organizing an annual MENA Methods Training Workshop to provide additional opportunities in the region for rigorous training in both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The workshop will be hosted by a different university or research institute and focus on a different methodological approach each year, and it will include opportunities for virtual as well as in-person participation. A call for applications will be announced in the coming months for the first MENA Methods Training Workshop.

APSA will also continue to partner with the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (IQMR) at Syracuse University and the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan to support MENA scholars in receiving qualitative and quantitative methods training at their annual summer schools. This summer, APSA will support ten scholars from the region to attend the IQMR and ICPSR summer programs in 2023.

The Arab Political Science Network (APSN) resumed in-person activities with a workshop on Teaching Research Methods in the Arab world. This was the first in-person workshop since the pandemic and took place at the American University in Cairo on February 3, 2023. The workshop brought together 15 faculty members to share and reflect on their experience teaching methodology courses. The diverse participation (country, language of teaching, career level and type of method) enriched the discussion, helped identify common areas of challenges and highlighted potential ways to overcome some of them. APSN is working with some participants to publish a symposium from the submitted memos.

APSN, in collaboration with the University of Birmingham, is organizing two-day research and writing workshop for graduate students from the Arab world. The in-person workshop will be held on May 26-27 in Beirut, Lebanon, featuring 10 MA and PhD students and three discussants. The participants will receive feedback on their full papers and tips on developing their writing skills. The participants will also have an opportunity to attend some of the sessions of the Arab Council of

News from the APSA MENA Program (continued)

the Social Sciences, which runs May 25-28 in Beirut.

The network is also organizing a workshop for early-career scholars from the Arab world working on their first book project and focusing on the region. This event is organized in collaboration with the Center for Lebanese Studies (CLS) and will be divided into virtual and in-person sessions. Finally, we invite you to check season two of APSN's collaboration with podcast Ghayn, which features conversations in Arabic about academic books in social sciences. You can find more information about APSN's events on their website and sign up for their newsletter and follow them on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

We look forward to sharing program news, updates, and additional information on APSA's MENA Program website: http://web.apsanet.org/mena/

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APSA MENA Project Team
American Political Science Association

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Bulletin from REMENA (Research & Ethics in the Middle East)

The REMENA Project—the Special Commission on Research Ethics in the Middle East and North Africa—continues to develop recommendations for responsible, ethical and constructive social inquiry in and on the region.

During the fall, after an in-person meeting at the American Political Science Association's annual meeting in Montreal, several fruitful on-line seminars were hosted in conjunction with APSA on how faculty advisors might fruitfully discuss questions of ethics with students (and colleagues) who are anticipating carrying out research in the region. Special thanks to several of our APSA-MENA colleagues who participated, notably Stacey Philbrick-Yadav, Rabab El-Mahdi and Nermin Allam. Lisa Anderson, project PI, also took the opportunity of a visit to Dakar, Senegal, to discuss the project with colleagues at Universite Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD). In all these meetings, the utility of a simple, systematic assessment tool, to be used by prospective researcher in conjunction with other institutional requirements—Institutional Review Boards, for example—was debated and endorsed. Dissemination plans for this tool are being considered now; inquiries and suggestions are welcome.

After a disappointing postponement of the workshop scheduled for Tunis at the end of January due to threats of general strikes in the transport sector, we finally met in person in Cairo in early March, hosted by the Alternative Policy Solutions project at the American University in Cairo. The discussions focused on several of the project's workstreams. On the first day, Ellen Lust presented a valuable scan of research funding; despite the difficulties in establishing intraregional funding flows, patterns of who and what gets funded, and insofar (as we can tell) why, exhibited distinct preferences for international political issues to the detriment of, for example, local social policy debates, economics or critical theory. A discussion on social science research outside the academy—in think tanks, development organizations, research institutes—with members of such organizations in Jordan, Egypt and Yemen revealed a far more complex picture of the relationship between funding and research. In these circumstances, the funders often shape not only research personnel and topics but dissemination, as many such institutions view the results as proprietary or share the result only with government clients (who, in turn, are often unwilling or unable to utilize them effectively).

The second day started with a panel on "the questions we ask and who the research is for," animated by Lila Abu-Lughod and Rabab El-Mahdi. This discussion produced a number of rewarding and thought-provoking observations, not least the dilemmas posed by the suppression of questions or what has been called "the norm of not noticing," as well as the appropriation of what is already known in some communities by repackaging it as "knowledge production" for others. Several initiatives to incorporate the voices of research "subjects" and focus scholarly work on novel issues and formats were proposed; this discussion will continue under the aegis of the working group on dissemination.

Finally, the Cairo workshop took advantage of being on Cairo to hear from a number of scholars conducting research in Egypt using a variety of methods, from ethnography to list experiments.

Bulletin from REMENA (Research & Ethics in the Middle East)

This produced a lively debate on the ethics of experimental methods and a particularly profitable discussion with the Executive Director of J-PAL Middle East and North Africa, Ahmed Elsayed.

Many thanks to all those who participated; the full list of participants is available on the REMENA website. The value of in-person discussion and debate—good ideas that develop over dinner and pop up while waiting for the bus!—was amply demonstrated and we look forward to more such opportunities.

To that end, the Tunis meeting, which is to devoted to discussions of research dissemination and further exploration of non-academic social science research venues and methods, is now planned for mid-May. The Carnegie Corporation has generously extended project funding for an additional two years; we expect to be "caught-up" with our COVID-delayed work by this coming fall and working on the final drafts of our recommendations and guidelines and on dissemination plans in the coming year. Stay tuned! And, as always, feel free to be in touch with comments of questions, our email is: remena@columbia.edu.

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Public Opinion in MENA: Reflections from Arab Barometer

Michael Robbins

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Arab Barometer is a research network that provides insight into the social, political, and economic attitudes and values of ordinary citizens across the Arab world. Our goal is to provide insights into the views of ordinary citizens across the MENA region on a range of topics, including economic issues, views of government, political system preferences, gender issues, religiosity, and international affairs, among others. Over the course of nearly two decades, we have produced a publicly available data source that has tracked these topics dating to the years before the Arab Spring, during and after the uprisings, and then during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021-2022, Arab Barometer completed its seventh wave of surveys across twelve countries in MENA. This wave sought to capture public attitudes in the period following the initial outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic while the Russian invasion of Ukraine occurred mid-wave. Many new topics were added to adapt the survey instrument to an ever-changing region. For example, for the first time we asked questions about food insecurity and perceptions of race; we included a significant section on the challenges resulting from COVID; we significantly revised our

battery on the environment; and we developed a new set of questions to track barriers to women's labor force participation. The result was an innovative questionnaire that shed new light on many long-standing topics while also providing insight into new issue areas.

Key Findings

Coming out of our new wave, we have highlighted a number of key findings that are particularly noteworthy. First, food insecurity has reached alarming levels. In half of the countries surveyed, a majority of citizens say they have run out of food without the ability to afford more in the past year. In Egypt, this applies to two-thirds of citizens. In most countries, including Egypt, fieldwork was conducted prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, meaning that food shortages and rising costs have assuredly exacerbated.

Second, concerns about the benefits of democracy are growing across the region. Although the percentage in Iraq and Tunisia, who have worries about this system of governance, has grown consistently over the last decade, in other countries there had been relatively little change. However, perceptions

in other MENA countries changed dramatically over the past four years with citizens stating greater concern about it. Yet, this does not mean citizens have turned against democracy. Instead, the results make clear that citizens have come to realize that this system is not perfect but most still want it anyway.

Third, citizens are becoming more supportive of gender equality. For most of the last decade, there have not been significant shifts in views of women, but over the last four years perceptions trended toward a growing belief that women should play a more equal role in public and private life. Possibly, this is a result of changes in social relations brought about by the pandemic, but regardless of the reason, women appear to have made tangible gains in public opinion toward greater equality.

Fourth, citizens are deeply concerned about environmental issues with a particular focus on areas that affect their daily lives. Concerns related to water scarcity or water pollution tend to predominate, but other issues such as air quality and trash are also common issues. There is broad support for governments to do more to tackle climate change, but when asked about their top concerns, the environment trails other issues like economic conditions or corruption.

Use of Data

When Arab Barometer completed its first wave in 2007, the primary use of the data was academic in nature. The first wave represented the first major comparative study of public opinion across the MENA region that was freely available to researchers to download. Many scholars took advantage of this new resource to evaluate long-standing hypotheses about MENA publics and their attitudes.

In the waves that followed, the project's approach remained centered on the needs of academic researchers. Our approach to survey design, execution, and quality control processes takes into account best practices from the literature on public opinion. Our methodological approaches are often innovative, and our survey experiments and innovations have made significant advances in how to conduct public opinion research in low- and middle-income countries.

However, beyond academic research, we have also sought to increase the availability and use of public opinion data in other spheres. This has included a particular emphasis on using the data to inform policy discussion as well as to help the broader public better understand their world. In the case of the former, we seek to share the findings with those working to solve key challenges affecting the region. Our recent analysis of food insecurity has been widely discussed and used to highlight this growing problem across the region. We have also shared our findings on issues related to climate change with members of civil society, advocacy groups, parliamentarians, and government officials working to inform their strategies. Many policy organizations and leaders have also taken note of our findings on barriers to women's participation in the labor force to find solutions that can address these issues.

Additionally, the Arab Barometer has also sought to increase the engagement of the data with ordinary citizens. Learning about what their fellow citizens think on crucial issues is an important source of information in any society, but particularly in a region where there are few other reliable sources of popular attitudes. Ensuring accurate information exists about views of government, social issues, and other topics is essential to helping citizens

have a better grasp of their own societies.

A key element of this strategy is ensuring results are covered by the media. In the first six months after releasing our last wave of findings, we received more than 1,000 media hits, with roughly two-thirds of these stories being in Arabic. A number of major news outlets have covered the results, but many bloggers and others have also used the results to inform their writings. This means that results from our seventh wave are the most widely covered of any survey project ever conducted in the region.

Ability to Conduct Fieldwork

Since the start of the project, there have been major gains in the capacity of local partners to conduct public opinion research. The rise of survey research units and professional firms and their growing experience mean that there are reliable partners in most countries that can carry out the fieldwork. The Arab Barometer team has worked with many of these organizations to increase their capacities and to ensure they implement best practices. We have also worked together on implementing new methodological approaches in survey research. The ability to work with these now established organizations has made survey research significantly easier to implement in recent years.

Despite these gains, the challenges related to carrying out public opinion research are mounting. In the years after the Arab Spring, there was an increasing ability to be able to carry out public opinion surveys. In countries like Tunisia and Egypt, public opinion surveys became feasible for the first time. Elsewhere, broadly speaking, governmental restrictions—whether formal or tacit—became less prohibitive.

In more recent years, however, this trend has reversed. Projects like Arab Barometer have been used to hold governments to account and provide insight into the specific grievance citizens may hold. As the situation across MENA has deteriorated economically and basic rights become more restrictive, governments have increased prohibitions on conducting public opinion research.

In our recent waves, authorities in multiple countries refused to grant permission for the survey before removing items they deemed sensitive. Some of these relate to points that the government clearly recognizes as a source of concern to its own interests. For example, in our fifth wave, the Algerian government refused a question about confidence in the military and four days after fieldwork ended the *hirak* movement began protesting against a government dominated by military figures. However, these items are not all about domestic politics or the views of the government. In some cases, these items were related to international affairs or religious practice. Or, in the case of Mauritania, the points of sensitivity were primarily related to perceptions about race relations.

While restrictions on conducting in-person public opinion surveys have changed over the past decade in much of the region, the GCC countries remain a major exception. For the most part, it has not been possible to carry out independent surveys in these countries. Kuwait and, to a partial extent, Qatar stand out in this regard. In the former, with modifications to the survey instrument, it has been possible to conduct Arab Barometer. In the latter, Qatar University's Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) has done important work on public opinion. However, in the remaining four GCC countries, the ability for scholars to conduct surveys has

remained very limited.

Given the challenges of conducting in-person interviews across a growing number of countries, other approaches may be required. For example, a number of researchers have turned to telephone surveys to circumvent this challenge. During the pandemic, Arab Barometer also explored the use of telephone surveys to measure public opinion. However, in a mode experiment, Arab Barometer has found that there are meaningful differences in not only sample characteristics, but also in response patterns by those who answer the same questions on the phone compared with in person. Respondents recruited by phone tend to be from a higher socio-economic status, and those interviewed on the phone provide responses that are significantly more pro-regime compared with those interviewed in person in countries that are politically closed. Additional research would be required to adjust for these biases, but this knowledge will likely be essential to ensure continued ability to conduct public opinion surveys in some MENA countries.

Use for Teaching

Arab Barometer releases the data it collects in multiple forms. The data sets are publicly available on our website (in Arabic and English) for students who have sufficient training to use statistical software directly. This availability makes it possible to construct assignments for students and to test theories empirically using the survey results.

Arab Barometer can also be used to augment training in statistical methods. With the support of the Carnegie Corporation, Mark Tessler has authored a new open-source book, available in both English and Arabic, that presents and discusses the logic and method of social science research (Tessler 2023). This resource examines a range of concepts from univariate analysis to multivariate regression, with Arab Barometer representing the primary data source in the chapters. The book has not only a particular relevance for social scientists from MENA or a teaching resource in universities across MENA but also offers methodological guidance for anyone working on this region.

An additional resource for students is the online data analysis portal on Arab Barometer's website. For teaching, this tool is particularly aimed at undergraduate students who have had limited methodological training or do not have access to statistical software. The portal, available in Arabic and English, allows students to conduct an independent exploration of the data, including running univariate or bivariate analysis. This tool can be used to provide them with ready access to the data source for class assignments or research papers.

Conclusion

Arab Barometer is a project developed by political scientists seeking to provide insight into how publics across the MENA region perceive their world. It is intended to be a resource for the research community, a means to help publics and policymakers working on MENA better understand the views of ordinary citizens, and a tool to help students gain a more complete picture of this complex region. Arab Barometer is continually trying to improve on the quality and content of our surveys and openly welcomes feedback from the researchers and other interested individuals in pursuit of this goal and prepare for future waves of the survey. ◆

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Introducing the ACSS Dataverse

Charles Kurzman, Seteney Shami, and Neil Ketchley

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It is a common complaint: researchers cannot access high-quality statistical data for countries in the Arab region. While quantitative data forms the basis for much of social-scientific analysis elsewhere in the world, scholarship on the Arab region does not adequately contribute to these conversations due to a general lack of systematic and reliable information. Reading newspaper articles and thinktank reports from the region, it is common to come across analyses of survey data and government statistics that contain important insights into the region's people and its politics. In most cases, however, this source material is not made publicly available – and is sometimes securitized. In consequence, no further analysis of this data is possible, beyond the findings reported in publications. Without access to high-quality secondary data, we are limited in the kinds of inferences that we can make about key social and political phenomena.

While this is a familiar problem that goes decades back, we are beginning to see inno-

vative digital solutions. Online archiving initiatives like IPUMS International, based at the University of Minnesota; ICPSR, based at the University of Michigan; and the Dataverse Project, based at Harvard University, have increased access to data for a number of Global South contexts. These data archives allow researchers to download material in a variety of formats and languages. The new availability of data is supported by academic journals and research funders, which increasingly require both quantitative and qualitative scholars to deposit their research materials prior to publication.

Unfortunately, though, we estimate that less than 1 percent of the datasets held in such venues focus on Arab countries (the region accounts for approximately 5 percent of the world's population). Indeed, a cursory review of published academic research on – and from – the region suggests that these holdings represent only a tiny proportion of the data collected in Arab countries on issues including economic preferences, political behaviour, religious commitments, and social structures. This is not helped by the fact that none of the major Middle East studies journals currently require authors to deposit their data.

To address this, we need a permanent online archive for social science data that offers free access to datasets on the Arab region. The first such archive was established a decade ago by the Economic Research Forum in Cairo, Egypt, which offers access to government surveys on household income and expenditures, labor force participation, and other subjects.

In 2019, the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) launched a broad interdisciplinary data archive for social science re

search datasets, the ACSS Dataverse, which allows researchers and institutions both to deposit and access research data on the Arab region (See Figure 1).

The ACSS Dataverse was established under the Arab Public Data Initiative, a partnership between the Odum Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, and the University of Oxford. The Initiative works to promote the norm and practices of data management and sharing among social scientists and research institutions in the Arab region. Alongside the Dataverse, it also builds data management capacity in the region through workshops and training sessions at regional, country and institutional levels. The interface and hardware for the ACSS Dataverse are maintained by the Odum Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; the content is collected and curated by the ACSS under data deposit agreements signed by researchers who own the datasets. The datasets and documentation can be in Arabic, English, or French, the three most common languages used by social scientists in the Arab region; the ACSS Dataverse's user documents are in all three languages. Readers of this newsletter can easily deposit their data by contacting: dataverse@theacss.org.

This Initiative forms part of a global movement toward open science and open data. Recently, UNESCO (2021) adopted a resolution encouraging "open research data" to be made "available in a timely and user-friendly, human- and machine-readable and actionable format, in accordance with principles of good data governance and stewardship, notably the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) principles, supported by regular curation and maintenance." Similar
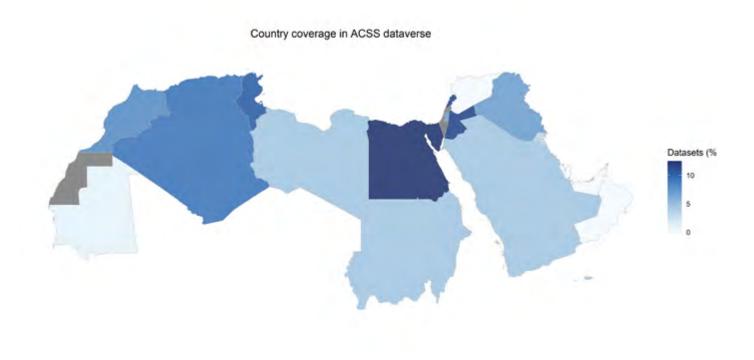
Figure 1. Dataset coverage by country in the ACSS Dataverse

recommendations have emerged as part of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the World Data Forum, as well as nongovernmental initiatives such as the [Registry of Research Data Repositories](#), the [International Science Council's World Data System](#) , and the [Dataverse Project](#), which now has almost 100 installations around the world, including the ACSS Dataverse.

As of the end of March 2023, the ACSS Dataverse contains 126 datasets from 15 Arab countries, and further deposits are welcome. Figure 1 shows the current country coverage in the data archive. The initiative has had particular success with data deposits from cross-national survey projects, including the Arab Barometer, the Arab Transformations Project, the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Data Set, and the Middle East Values Survey. Additional datasets have been deposited by individual researchers. The Initiative is currently working with a number of research institutes and thinktanks based in the region, who plan to make their data publicly available. Institutions can have their own sub-dataverses in the ACSS Dataverse (see an example in Figure 2).

The process of soliciting data deposits has not been easy, especially from the Arab region itself, where norms around open science remain nascent. Part of this difficulty no doubt reflects the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has reduced the ability to do the needed outreach to potential data depositors. Even before the pandemic, however, it was often difficult to find the right professional or institutional connections to approach researchers. To give an example: Odum Institute researchers analyzed publicly-available metadata from 4,124 articles from Arab social science journals in the commercial eMarefa database. Based on the titles

and abstracts of these articles, it was estimated that about 10% of these articles drew on statistical datasets, but none of these data resources seemed to be publicly available. Over the past year, the Arab Data Initiative has contacted authors whose data was deemed relevant for inclusion in the ACSS Dataverse. However, at the time of writing, the response rate has been very low.

Going forward, we plan to continue our efforts to recruit datasets from social-science researchers and research organizations, both through our professional networks and appeals such as this. We are also working to broaden access to data through our own data collection efforts. In the coming years, we have funding to make available, through the Dataverse, historic census reports from the Arab region, as well as statistical handbooks, shapefiles from geo-referenced maps, and text from digitized newspapers.

We encourage colleagues who are interested in contributing to these efforts to get in touch by email: dataverse@theacss.org.

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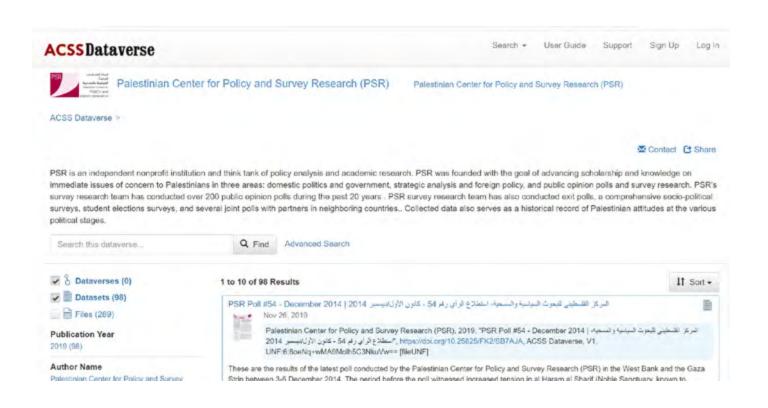
Figure 2. ACSS sub-dataverse for the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research

Research Symposium: AKP Rule in Turkey: A Recipe for Authoritarianism

Introduction

Gamze Çavdar and Sebnem Gumuscu

Turkey is set for a pivotal year in 2023: Founded on October 29th, 1923, this year marks the 100th anniversary of the republic. As the Turkish Republic enters its second century, the task of assessing the first 100 years and identifying its deadlocks and breakthroughs will be inevitable for the country. The lessons drawn from this assessment will be used to set up the foundations of the next century. A major crossroad in this endeavor is the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, scheduled for May 14th. The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*-AKP), the dominant political force in the country since 2002, and its leader President Tayyip Erdoğan are among the front runners in these elections. Erdoğan and his party ruled the country largely uncontested for over twenty years and changed its political regime and institutions, economic and social policies, and foreign policy agenda—even changing the official name of the country from Turkey to Türkiye. In May, however, Erdoğan is running up against a largely united opposition. In a rare move, six opposition parties, referred to as "the Table of Six" supported by additional parties including the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halklarin Demokratik Partisi*-HDP) and the socialist Turkish Labor Party (*Turkiye Isci Partisi*-TIP), have poised to defeat the AKP and put an end to Erdoğan's political career. While the details of the upcoming elections were unfolding, the country woke up to devastating news on February 6th:

Twin earthquakes, impacting 10 cities in the south of the country, resulted in over 50,000 dead, 800,000 disabled, and millions homeless. Coupled with the ongoing economic crisis, this recent disaster further complicates the electoral competition. It is more likely than ever that Erdoğan and the AKP could lose power in May. Regardless of the outcome, one-fifth of the republic's 100 years took place under the AKP rule. Therefore, we have decided to dedicate a symposium in our spring issue that examines the impact of AKP rule in Turkey over the past two decades. This symposium brings together nine articles each of which examines a different aspect of the AKP rule, from economic policies and women's rights to urban development and local governance to foreign policy and disaster management.

Turkey was long considered to be one of the few cases with a better record of democracy in the MENA region: Indeed, the country enjoyed relatively free and regular local and national elections (interrupted by military interventions in 1960, 1971, and 1980) since 1950. A rotation of power encouraged the development of more labor and women's movements. Turkey's secular legal system, adopted in 1928, recognized women's equal political, economic, and civil rights. It identified the state as a social one, highlighting its responsibility of eliminating all forms of discrimination and ensuring equity among its citizens. As a close U.S. ally and a NATO member

member since 1952, Turkey, with an overwhelming majority Muslim population, raised hopes for its Western allies as a welcomed addition to the Western coalition. As an EU candidate, Turkey, at least ostensibly, seemed to meet the EU membership criteria concerning democracy. Moreover, the George W. Bush administration took a further step by hailing the AKP as a model for other Muslim-majority countries to emulate. Ironically, however, only 20 years later Turkey, under the same party, hit the rock bottom to the extent that we hope no other country ever experiences. Millions live below the hunger and poverty line. Online activities, such as retweets, are criminalized and subject to routine detention. The separation of powers is practically non-existent with all power concentrated in the hands of President Erdoğan. National resources are being exploited for clientelist networks. Femicide and sexual crimes have skyrocketed. The mayors of the municipalities won by the HDP were replaced by trustees (*kayyum*), practically disenfranchising millions in the Kurdish-majority cities. The media is largely owned by AKP loyalists and strictly controlled to manipulate the population and spread disinformation. Likewise, media freedom is declining, with hundreds of journalists in jail. Academic autonomy and freedoms are systematically violated as the central government single-handedly switch instructional modalities, fire and hire professors at political will, and redesign major institutions top-down. Additionally, the government resorts to extralegal activities through organized crime networks to suppress dissent.

The journey of moving Turkey, with a relatively functioning democratic system, to the club of autocrats was incremental. Until the AKP consolidated its power, it played the game of democracy and therefore received the support of a broad coalition of various political leanings, such as liberals, nationalists, conservatives, and Kurds. As the party consolidated its power in the parliament, it began undermining the separation of powers starting with the judiciary, eventually gaining control of independent public institutions, such as the Supreme Election Council, Council of Higher Education, Radio and TV Supreme Council, the Central Bank, and the like, and filled them with loyalists who had no credentials except for being the AKP supporters. Then, thanks to the AKP's close ally at the time, the Gulenists, it gathered information about everyone through illegal means, which were later used to blackmail politicians, generals, prosecutors, etc. In the meantime, the AKP government carefully managed to keep the opposition divided while going after its targeted opposition group. For instance, as the AKP went after top military generals through carefully fabricated lawsuits named *Ergenekon* and *Balyoz*, it told the opposition that they had plotted a coup. Similarly, when it was going after the HDP-gained municipalities, it told everyone else that the mayors of these cities had connections with terrorist groups. In other words, in each of these cases, it managed to keep the opposition divided and silent. In the meantime, the AKP government was pouring Islam into society through every possible means, including through the Directorate of Religious Affairs which now has a higher budget than those of six other ministries combined, through media, through the curriculum changes in K-12, and through Erdoğan's speeches and electoral campaigns. While the masses were numbed with religion, the AKP's top brass and its clientelist networks seized and exploited the natural resources of the country. In 2018, the AKP amended the constitution—approved in a referendum—to replace the parliamentary

system with a strangely tailored system of presidentialism, which is nothing but a system engineering to make sure that the AKP wins all elections and forever remains in power. In sum, the AKP's recipe for authoritarianism started with chopping the opposition into small pieces, melting the separation of powers, stir-frying with an Islamist flavor, adding media manipulation and disinformation, and serving it cold with a pinch of mafia.

The February earthquakes are a showcase that has revealed the many illnesses of the ruling party. The entire state apparatus waited for an order from Erdoğan to initiate a response. Central public agencies, tasked with disaster relief (i.e., AFAD), failed miserably because they lacked sufficient resources and competent personnel, many of whom have religious and political references instead of proper expertise or experience in managing disasters. Entities like the Turkish Red Crescent are colonized and privatized by Erdoğan's cronies who are making profits by selling tents and food to the victims. The reality of the situation is that none of these actors were truly prepared for a major earthquake, despite the billions of dollars that have been collected as earthquake tax. Still, there has been no accountability in any of these failures with zero officials resigning after the quake.

Although it looks like Erdoğan has created a system that renders other autocrats jealous, there is no such thing as the perfect recipe for authoritarianism. No matter how hard the regime tries to cover up its real face, the mask is bound to fall—sooner or later. Overall, Turkish society has shown great resilience, despite the odds against the popular and political opposition: The Turkish citizens refused to surrender their political efficacy by incessant-ly showing up at the polls to support their political parties; young people resisted in *Gezi Parki* at the expense of their lives; women have organized to resist to Erdoğan's insults; the Kurdish population has refused to surrender to his demands; and most importantly, people have refused to give up imagining a better future. Although Erdoğan has ruled Turkey for 20 years, changing it in so many ways, his regime is no longer able to respond to the demands of a dynamic society. Erdoğan has no promises for the millions of people who are yearning for a better future, and, irrespective of the outcome of the elections, Erdoğan is *passé* in Turkish politics. ◆

Looking Backward and Thinking Forward: the Triumph and Demise of AKP

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Turkey's Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP) came to power in 2002 with a bright beam of hope; it was seen as an authentic democratizing force. Over the last 21 years, the Party revamped the entire political system without leaving any part untouched, from its tax codes to the top executive office, including the country's official name, which is now Türkiye. As Turkey faces another critical set of elections in 2023, the challenges and opportunities posed by the upcoming elections mirror the contexts of the 2002 elections. Therefore, understanding how AKP was formed is not a historical excavation. It helps us understand some cyclical patterns in Turkey's politics by highlighting the transformation of Turkey's Islamists, the critical importance of coalition formation during economic and democratic change, the pivotal role of the women, and the international context on Turkey's parties' successful bids for power. Likewise, understanding the emergence and transformation of AKP warns us against conventional explanations that declare AKP's formation and dominance as a reaction to economic crisis or the failure of coalition governments without engaging the Party's democratic value deficiency that has shaped its policies since its inception.

Among a large number of factors that paved the way for the AKP's establishment and triumph, critical ones include both the failure and success of Turkey's first generation of Islamic parties, the National View Parties (1960-2002); the disintegration of Turkey's left, the destabilizing impact of the adopted IMF and EU-related reforms; Turkey's transition to a neoliberal economic system; the creation of a risk-averse population; and the changing U.S. foreign policy after 9/11. A review of the establishment of AKP from the accounts of its insiders shows that the Party's pragmatism took over its ideology. Although the Party's ideology was marred by contradictions that did not affect it electorally due to Turkey's polarized system where "voting against" is more powerful than voting for a party. Despite its claim of resolving the Islamists' key headscarf issue, the Party's political cadres did not empower the women who helped to bring them to power. Twenty-two years after its establishment, many women's groups have lost their autonomy.

Uncompromising vs. Complacent Islamist Elite

AKP's power was built on the successful mobilization of the first-generation Islamists under Necmettin Erbakan (1926-2011), Turkey's first Islamist prime minister. Erbakan led a group of parties often dubbed Milli Görüş or

Nationalist View Parties-- The National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi, 1970-1971), the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi, 1972-1981), the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, 1983-1998), the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi, 1997-2001), and the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi, 2001-). Erbakan's political Islam had anti-systemic qualities and directly opposed Turkey's secularism. The Party built well-knit domestic and international networks and trained and recruited many new members. Under National View Parties, Turkey's Islamists mastered door-to-door mobilization tools, especially among women and neighborhood-level network organizations among diaspora populations, especially in Europe.

In 1995 the Welfare Party received 21.4 votes but became the main Party in the parliament against the divided left. Having a chilling effect on Turkey's Islamists was the February 28 decision of the National Security Council that compelled the Party to adopt policies limiting the expansion of Islamist education and groups. The closure of the Welfare Party in 1998 occurred after Turkey's Islamists reached the zenith of their power. The court concluded that the Party had become a center of activities violating its constitutional obligations to respect Turkey's secular principles. The closure included seizing the Party's assets and banning the Party's leaders from political activity for five years. The reincarnation of Welfare under the Virtue party secured 111 parliamentary seats in the 1999 elections.

In this context, a group of the Welfare Party who later formed the AKP elite decided that Erbakan's anti-systemic confrontational policies were too costly and that a new party that worked within the system would be most effective when the newly established Virtue Party had its first party congress in 2000.

Abdullah Gül's bid to lead the Party created excitement among reformists to change the Party from within. Still, the Party's internal bylaws and election rules did not allow the Party's younger faction, who asked for a different type of leadership, to overcome internal party obstacles. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan could not attend the congress due to his political restrictions. He was convicted of violating the commitment not to incite hate and separation by reciting a poem at a 1997 party rally.

The decision to bar Erdoğan from politics turned him into a charismatic power figure within the National View movement (Milliyet, 1998). Gül's bid would have been successful if the Party's İstanbul delegates had supported him. Nevertheless, for some accounts, due to the last-minute decision of Erdoğan, the İstanbul delegates of the Party did not support Gül paving the way to the foundation of a new second genre of Islamist Party (Bursalı 2021, NTV-MSNBC 2000). The reformist block under Gül lost by a close margin, receiving 521 ballots, while the status quo pro-Erbakan, Recai Kutan, received 633 votes; consequently, Turkey's Islamists were split. In a stiff competition that resulted in the victory of the old dominant elite, the seed of AKP was sown. Therefore, one can argue that AKP was established on May 14, 2000 (Bursalı 2021, NTV-MSNBC 2000). The new elite gathered around Abdullah Gül wanted to create a new genre of an Islamist party that was not anti-systemic and emphasized accommodating, not contentious, policies. This accommodating approach led the AKP to build a broad coalition of forces.

From Anti-Systemic Ideology to Ultra-Pragmatic Realism

Perhaps due to the fear of further political

exclusion, the AKP brought together leaders who asked for change and more rights in their respective communities for differing reasons. Instead of rallying around a shared positive agenda, the leaders focused on a negative agenda demanding the removal of existing bans and restrictions (Tepe, 2005). With the promise of fighting Turkey's democracy's three demons: poverty, corruption, and prohibitions, the Party focused on eroding the dominance of various institutions, from the military to hierarchical parties. A review of the formation of the AKP in 2001 indicates that the Party included people from different sides of the political spectrum. The elite included people from all these different ideological orientations, including the former centrist neoliberal Motherland (Anavatan) party, the secular Republican People's (Cumhuriyet Halk) Party, and the Nationalist Action Party. Among those who rose to leadership or active positions were Ertuğrul Yalcinbayir, a member of parliament from the centrist neoliberal Motherland Party, and Ertuğrul Günay, who once served as the general secretary of AKP's nemesis, the Republican People's Party. Others like Sadık Yakut joined the AKP after serving as a public prosecutor and serving in the parliament as a member of the National Action Party. Thus, in its formative year, the AKP included people from different political orientations that focused on rights against institutions and states and committed themselves to create a neoliberal economic system where the state played a limited but critical role.

Given the lack of a positive agenda of broad founding cadres, the first generation of the AKP elite gained support from various groups, but that gradually disintegrated. One can argue that those committed liberals who focused on corruption and both rights and liberties left the Party after its first term in 2007. Those who viewed the Party as a powerful tool against tutelage to constrain the power of the military and state institutions continued to support the Party until 2013, despite many red flags. The 2013 Gezi Protests against aggressive urban transformations, increasing authoritarianism under the AKP, and the 17-25 December Corruption and Bribery scandals that linked top AKP leaders to corrupt schemes alienated many supporters. The clandestine Islamist Gülenist allies of the Party, which strived to dominate Turkey's democracy with an Islamist political theology, parted ways with AKP in 2014 after a significant blow to its transnational networks with the Party's decision to close the educational network. Likewise, the failed 2013-2015 Peace Process ended with the defection of the Kurdish electorate from the Party (Anadolu Agency 2014). As a result, the profile of AKP's founding constituencies and elite differs from its 2023 profile, yet the Party maintains its electoral dominance.

Given AKP's metamorphosis, it is not surprising that a significant number of the Party's founding members either resigned or were expelled from the Party. As the list of founding leaders kept shrinking, the Party finally removed the list of founding members from its website. Those who left the party elite expressed a wide range of concerns. Although Erdoğan repeatedly uses and sings the lyrics of the popular song "we walked together on this road" at his rallies, it seems that neither the road nor those who travel with Erdoğan remains the same. One former AKP organization leader mentioned how the Party went against its promise to remove political difficulties from political participation. Some were shocked when the Party changed electoral ballots disadvantaging independent, mostly Kurdish candidates, despite "good relations" with the Kurds. The newly adopted

adopted ballots listed all the independents, confusing the supporters of independent candidates who were asked to identify the names of their candidates from an overcrowded ballot. Women defectors of the Party mentioned how, despite the expectations that it would "solve the headscarf" issue, AKP also put the issue on the back burner in its earlier years, raising further concerns among not only Islamist women but also liberal groups. The Party's violent reactions to the Gezi Protests of 2013 and its use of force even in city centers showed the additional limits of its liberal and right-centered policies.

From State-Centrist Developmentalist to Neoliberal Policies

Instead of being a child of economic crisis, AKP was born in an economic environment described as both an economy of collapse and recovery. At the end of 1999, Turkey's economy had shrunk by 6.1%, and inflation had reached 70%, expanding budget deficits, with the annual average compound rate of Treasury interests reaching 106%. In this context, Turkey adopted a three-year "Inflation Reduction Program" with the standby support of the International Monetary Fund. Although the program increased capital influx, the pace of the decline in inflation did not meet expectations. With the rising real exchange rate causing a rapid import increase, the external deficit grew alarmingly. As these developments increased banks' liquidity demand, the liquidity crisis arose; overnight interest rates increased drastically to 183% in December from a high rate of 39% in October.

After adopting a series of structural adjustments and monetary and exchange rate policies in 1999, the country consolidated its banking system. In 2002, when AKP came to power, Turkey's economy was relatively stable and ready to reap the benefit of a globally integrated neoliberal economy despite the slow transition. Thus, instead of inheriting an economic wreck, AKP was established and came to power in a recovering economy with improving credentials. Although the first generation of Islamists committed themselves to heavy industrial-centered development and production of local technology, AKP changed its attention. AKP focused its policies on consumption and a construction-centered neoliberal economy while using the increased cash flow for its social welfare programs. When it was established, AKP adopted not a brand new economic reform agenda but appropriated the policies of the DSP-National Action Party-led coalition government. The recovering system allowed the Party to gradually appropriate the necessary funds and promote its own agenda by postponing the privatization of specific sectors to manage its supporters' demands better and ensure its bets in crucial elections.

The Impact of the Natural Disasters: Earthquake in Politics?

For some, the effect of the 1999 earthquakes was one of the main reasons for the AKP's successful establishment and rise to power. In fact, the 1999 earthquake hit the country's industrial and financial heart claiming more than 35 thousand lives. The disaster showed poor building codes and the state's inability to address emergencies. Turkey's most recent 2023 earthquake and the startling delayed response from the state have changed the assessment of the 1999 coalition government's response and suggested that they were more effective than argued.

Nevertheless, although the large-scale damages of the 1999 earthquake exposed the dire

consequences of prevalent corrupt practices in building houses, it also helped the government solicit international support. Although the quake revealed some of the states' weaknesses, one of the unintended consequences of the earthquake was increasing international support for Turkey's recovery and expanding financial aid. Thus fueling the AKP's successful economic policies during and after its establishment was the favorable global environment that committed to supporting Turkey's rebuilding. The earthquake also emboldened the AKP's construction-centered growth policies. The Party came to power in an environment where restoring buildings and new construction became a vital issue entrusted to the central government. Due to the necessary measurements to assess the risk of a natural disaster and its environmental impact, the central government became the ultimate authority to make decisions on construction-related matters, gradually turning it into a critical economic-profit area and a primary source of clientelism and corruption.

The international winds under AKP's wing? The West and Islamists:

Unlike Erbakan, who visited Iran on his first official visit, Erdoğan consolidated his support in the West. At the Helsinki Summit of the European Council, Turkey was officially recognized as a candidate for full membership on December 12, 1999. Thus, AKP was able to promote its reform agenda to limit the power of bureaucracy and the military with broader support, presenting them as preparations for the negotiations for full membership, which were started on October 3, 2005. Beyond Europe, Erdoğan visited the U.S. before the 2002 elections and gained the support of many security elites. Erdoğan's interest in the West coincided with the U.S.'

attempt to form a broad coalition to invade Iraq. So due to their mutual interests, it was a happy marriage. AKP wanted to promote E.U. policies and align itself with the best to promote its neoliberal policies. When the U.S. wanted to use Turkey's military bases to prevent Iraq's use of weapons of mass destruction and penalize its ties to the September 11 attack, Erdoğan's government supported the proposal, which failed in the parliament with a small margin on March 1, 2003. Although the parliament rejected a resolution authorizing the deployment of U.S. ground forces from Turkey to open a northern front in a war against Iraq, the country opened its bases one year later (Associated Press, 2004). Thus despite its increasingly anti-Western rhetoric, AKP's rise to power was due to its alignment with the West's policies and envisioned global system.

From solving the headscarf issue to creating new women's rights issues

A key force behind the Party's ascendancy to power was the organized women's movement that wanted to resolve the headscarf ban that limited practicing Muslim women's rights and public participation. Although women were credited with keeping the grassroots vibrant and mobilizing support for the AKP, the Party's relationship with women has been contentious since its inception. For instance, despite carrying the banners of Muslim women's rights, partly due to the political vacuum left by other parties, the Party did not place any women candidate with a headscarf in its first parliamentary elections in 2002. Even after it consolidated its power, the Party refused to nominate a woman with a headscarf in the 2007 elections, causing great resentment among Muslim women's movements. The Party instead used its access to state power to give more visibility and power to women

in its own ranks and public offices, especially those who had lost their positions because of the ban. Only after 2013 was the headscarf ban removed. Yet since then, the increasing influence of religious sects on the Party has resulted in the repeal of the İstanbul Convention—an international agreement that protected women and children, and sexual minorities against violence. Such changes were adopted overnight with a presidential decree without deliberation amidst the opposition, including AKP-sponsored Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği, KADEM (the Woman and Democracy Association) led by Erdoğan's daughter.

As the Party formed an electoral coalition with radical fringe parties, women now risk the repeal of Law 6284, which ensures the protection of women and children against violence (Resmi Gazete, 2012). AKP came to power on the shoulders of women and successfully removed the scarf-ban. However, after consolidating its power, the Party used its clout and privileged its electoral survival by aligning itself with conservative religious groups and proposing policies reinforcing traditional gender roles. As the Party's 2023 agenda lists policies denying women's fundamental rights and confining them to home, it provides another example of how AKP failed to deliver on perhaps one of the most critical promises.

What's Next? Looking Backward and Thinking Forward

In the words of a woman AKP founder, Fatma Bostan-Ünsal who was expelled from the Party when she signed a petition, AKP means disappointment and missed opportunity for many who once rooted for its success. In fact, for many, the first two years of AKP offered a glimpse of how an Islamist Liberal Democratic Party would look like with its inclusive elite and commitment to social justice and clean politics. However, instead of clarifying its ideology and institutional structure, AKP expanded its pragmatism and thrived on the conducive global financial conditions without building a sustainable economy. The Party quickly succumbed to the issues it sought to battle—corruption and restrictions. The Party's electoral alliance with uncompromising nationalist and religious parties is a testimony to how AKP's politics, after 22 years, forged a similar vortex of anti-right and anti-liberal policies that it once tried to fill in 2001.

The defeat of populism in select countries like Zambia, Brazil, and the U.S. and, the growing concern about liberal democracies, the expansion of right-wing authoritarian aggression displayed by Israel and Russia create a conducive global environment for countries to strive to maintain their democracy. Likewise, Turkey's recent earthquake shows that clientelism and corruption are eventually deadly, making the public demand to stop bribery and clientelism louder than ever. The conditions of Turkey in 2023 are eerily similar to those in 2002, which elevated AKP as a solution to Turkey's political and economic impasses. Turkey's women once again rally for their rights and risk losing years of struggle.

Turkey's politics is at yet another crossroads in 2023. The country has another opportunity to form a coalition of democratic forces not rooted in converging short-term interests but in long-term commitments to a pluralistic, liberal society where differences are a source of unity, not polarization. AKP's experience shows that only when a coalition of democratizing forces prevails can Turkey avoid repeating the vicious cycles prompted by AKP-- a party, instead of ensuring a modus vivendi of

free and clean politics as it promised in 2001, brought the country to the brink of becoming closed authoritarianism with more restrictions than it inherited.◆

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The AKP Era's Impact on Local Politics

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Despite its proximity and relevance for citizens' daily lives, local politics are rarely the focus of any analysis of Turkish contemporary politics. This article addresses the desiderata by briefly introducing the legal basis of Turkish local politics from Ottoman times until today. A focus is put on the most important legal changes under the AKP government in 2004, 2005, and 2012. In a second step, the AKP's somewhat surprising advocacy of decentralization is analyzed by taking its predecessor parties, namely the Welfare Party (RP), into account. In the end, a short outlook is given as to where local politics under the AKP might be heading in the coming years, that is if the party wins the national elections in May 2023. The article claims that Turkey is characterized by a centralist tradition where "the local" is looked at with suspicion. Due to its political past, the AKP, in its early days, opened this up towards a strengthening of local democracy. However, the more it consolidated its political power, the party returned to a centralist approach. Interestingly the CHP has turned towards a grassrootization of Kemalist politics, a factor that may prove decisive in the upcoming elections.

Local politics prior to the AKP's rise to power

Characterized by a strong centralist tradition, Turkish local politics has experienced different periods of centralization, de-centralization, and re-centralization from Ottoman times until today. The first municipalities were introduced by way of trial in the Istanbul districts of Beyoğlu and Galata in 1857 and later extended to other parts of the country (Çelik, 1986, 43). After the founding of the Turkish Republic, any (provincial) agitation was countered by strict centralist administrative measures, and state power was established vis-a-vis traditional authorities like ethnic or religious leaders. As this created difficulties of its own, a nationwide system of municipalities was introduced by Law 1580 in 1930, however, cities gained only very narrow competences (Aytaç, 1990; Massicard & Bayraktar, 2009). More than thirty years later the Constitution of 1961 (Articles 112 and 116) allowed further decentralization of political power but was never adopted into national law. However, the mayor, who had formerly been elected by the members of the town council among themselves and required the approval of the central government, was now elected directly by the citizens' vote (Açikel & Balcı, 2009, 92-99).

Turkey's intrastate migration from East to West and village to town, which had begun as early as the 1950s, created a new urban lower class that was courted by politicians, e.g. by recognizing housing rights or delivering access to water, gas, and electricity (Erder & İncioğlu, 2008, 8-10; Sengül, 2005, 81-82). Legally, the introduction of a new level of local government, the *büyükşehir belediyesi* (metropolitan municipality), in 1984 (Law 3030) answered the challenges posed by the rapid growth of Turkish cities as it established metropolitan municipalities as influential agents with economic power. The most important of which was the development and adoption of investment plans.[1]

The AKP's roots in local politics

Before coming to the AKP's focus on decentralization in its early days, one needs to go back to the 1980s and 1990s to gain an understanding of its core motivation. At that time increasing social differences were often, especially after the suppression of many leftist solidarity groups due to the 1980s coup, absorbed by Islamist welfare associations and foundations (Tuğal, 2009). In the 1990s, one of the AKP's main predecessor parties, the Welfare Party (RP), gained impressive electoral success. In the 1984 elections, the RP won 17 municipalities. In 1989, they won more than 100 municipalities. The year 1994

marked the national breakthrough when it won 327 municipalities, including major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, and Kayseri. The RP became known as the founder of a conservative municipal practice relying on primary identities (ethnic, religious, kin, *hemşehrilik*) for political mobilization and activism.[2]

After coming to power, the AKP party officials referred to a certain pragmatic style they developed at that time. This included the following: a) a focus on service provision (this meant a professionalization and 'customer focus' from the side of municipalities e.g., waste management, maintenance of streets, lighting, sewerage, and installation of power cables); b) a large-scale provision of welfare; c) a superior party organization (especially with regards to the use of neighborhood representatives and women's groups for political mobilization); d) a high sensitivity to primary identities and a flexibility to varying local contexts (White, 2002; Tuğal, 2009; Joppien, 2018). With its flexible political ideology *muhafazakar demokrasi* (conservative democracy) the AKP was much better equipped to adapt to different local contexts. Other than the rather strict Kemalist ideology that required a certain type of 'enlightened citizen', in its early days, the AKP successfully acknowledged different local identities and practices (Joppien, 2011).

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1 As well, it aimed to re-bind the city municipalities more strongly to governmental structures after their 'liberal period' in the 1970s (Marcou, 2006, 25). Further subordinated district authorities (ilçe belediyesi) were established.

2 As the RP was permanently threatened with closure, it advocated a more general decentralization of political power (Massicard, 2009). The political center saw its influence in politics and society endangered by the RP's success, a development that resulted in a coup by memorandum in 1997, and the subsequent banning of the party in 1998 by a decision of the constitutional court. But for many of its party members, the experience of a party ban was not new. Some had already been members of the National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi) that was banned in 1971, and/or the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi), that was banned in 1980. As a consequence of these negative experiences, the RP had grown deeply skeptical regarding the 'agents of the centre' (i.e., the military, judiciary and bureaucracy) and accordingly advocated a stronger decentralization of political power (Joppien, 2011, 71-77). As a result, the AKP too, especially in the early days of its existence, favored less state and stronger local self-government.

AKP's move towards decentralization

In 2004 and 2005, the AKP passed two laws (Law 5216 on metropolitan municipalities and Law 5393 on municipalities) that further pursued decentralization by giving greater financial autonomy to the municipal units. Furthermore, metropolitan municipalities obtained far-reaching flexibility vis-à-vis hiring decisions. Also, city councils could now abolish, combine, or establish municipal departments without the approval of the Ministry of the Interior. In terms of structural changes, the position of the city council was strengthened against the organs of the central government, which meant an increase of power on the part of the mayor who presides over the council. As a result, the mayor's role was strengthened by taking a moderator role in urban development processes. Subsequently, their political decisions did not only serve the needs of the citizens as their 'traditional clientele', but increasingly served the needs of those of investors. Further, metropolitan municipalities were now authorized to take out national and international loans and began to act as investors themselves. They offered services by transferring them either to private service providers or to publicly owned companies (*Belediye İktisadi Teşekkülleri* - BİT). Critiques of these legal reforms mainly arose around the mayor's new role as an omnipresent figure, and the importance of their networks, e.g., his external advisors. This resulted in the weakening of municipal organs as the council or committee. Although such power shifts date back to the introduction of metropolitan municipalities in the 1980s, the legal reforms introduced by the AKP in

2004 and 2005 further pushed local politics towards an economy-driven understanding (Açikel & Balcı, 2009, 94-106; Parlak, Sobacı, & Ökmen, 2008; Joppien, 2014b).[3]

All over, most observers were in favor of the 2004 and 2005 legal reforms. However, Law 6360 (November 2012) was criticized as a move towards re-centralization as it abolished the administrative level of villages and downgraded towns with less than 2,000 citizens to villages. By concentrating so much power in the hands of the metropolitan municipalities, whose number was increased from 16 to 30, the law disentitles local institutions and representative bodies of their right to self-administration, further strengthened the position of the mayor in an unhealthy way, and rather than preserving local peculiarities, further advanced a 'cultural homogenization' of Turkey. Interestingly, the government argued that the new law would make local politics more effective and improve services for citizens (Deveci, 2013; Karasu, 2013). The quote in the 2013 Progress Report prepared by Turkey, underlines this evaluation (Turkish Ministry for EU Affairs, 2013, 10).

"[...] metropolitan borders have been revised so as to ensure the effective and productive provision of public services which aims to enhance democracy at the local level, increase efficiency in municipal services and improve provision of services by municipalities"

As the quote exemplifies, citizens' satisfaction, not participation, is equated with democratization. This demonstrates, that the AKP's municipal approach is much more

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3 In addition, also the party's attempts -at least in its early days- to join the European Union were favourable of further decentralization. The European Charter of Local Self-Government (Charte européenne de l'autonomie locale) influences the new legislation on local governments, both in the new EU Member States and in Turkey.

influenced by the idea of service provision (*hizmet*), rather than improving citizen participation or higher transparency of political processes, to secure votes. As a result, most critics have argued that the latest legal reform, Law 6360 (2012), has overturned the AKP's previous commitment to decentralization, and shows the party is seeking to recentralize political power at the national level.[4]

AKP Municipalism in the scope of the 2019 elections

As a result of its flexible approach, the AKP was successful in local elections. In 2004 it won around 41% of the votes, in 2009 around 38%, and in 2014 around 42%. Despite winning around 42% of the votes, the local elections in March 2019 were somewhat traumatic for the AKP as it lost power in eight out of the twelve biggest cities, including the two major cities of Ankara and Istanbul. The reasons are manifold: The previous 'ideological flexibility' is nowadays jeopardized by President Erdoğan's confrontational and divisive political style that doesn't allow for much diversity. Further, the AKP's once progressive municipal strategy regarding candidate selection, led way to a strategy driven by mistrust. In many greater municipalities, the AKP appointed former ministers as candidates, that is people that possess the trust of the political center, not necessarily the local party grassroots. Further, the results also seem to indicate that the AKP's capacity to deliver new input regarding municipal practice is limited. After nearly 21 years in power at the national level, the party's capacity to renew itself seems low to many citizens. Likewise,

the term *hizmet* (service) might have been discredited by the conflict between the AKP and the Gülen-led *hizmet* movement that escalated in 2013.

With respect to the Kurdish electorate that in parts supported the AKP, the implementation of compulsory administrators in several municipalities in the Southeast in 2016, led to a decline in support. Since the regional elections in 2019, about 3/4 of the mayors were removed from office as "supporters of terrorism". The CHP on the other hand has successfully changed their strategy to show more understanding of diverse local contexts. Previously were it tended to appoint intellectuals or other leading figures, it now appointed candidates with previous municipal experience, often in district municipalities. Together, with the rather low visibility of party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the 2019 election campaign showed an interesting 'grassrootization' of Kemalist politics. Assumingly, this is one important reason for the CHP's electoral success. The CHP, with its candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu, had won Istanbul in the first round, however, the results were annulled by the election commission after receiving pressure from the AKP and its junior partner, the ultranationalist MHP. However, the repeat election was to the AKP's disadvantage: not only did İmamoğlu raise the number of votes won to 54%, but the move drew much criticism, even from previous AKP members and politicians. Further, the election campaign, as well as İmamoğlu's performance in municipal office, gave many citizens the impression that CHP's politics were much less about identity politics as in

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4 It further seems plausible that the party's shift towards recentralization may have been due to the fact that large cities such as Istanbul or Ankara lack land for new construction. The inclusion of rural areas into the metropolitan municipality administration has opened up new markets for urban development. One aspect was the replacement of the Special Provincial Administrations (il özel idaresi) with the 'Departments of Monitoring Investment and Coordination' indeed points towards economic motives.

the past and much more about the issues of daily life. The more national politics became monopolized by the AKP, the less citizens felt that local politics were an arena where they could make a difference.

Summary and outlook

The developments described above lead to the following conclusions: Firstly, the AKP's ideological past explains its locally oriented, pragmatic, political style. Secondly, the more the party consolidated its power, and was less threatened by a possible party closure, the more it moved towards a re-centralization of political power, which became further visible by the introduction of the presidential system in 2018. Considering legal changes and the AKP's past, it shows that the party was interested in more decentralization, but not necessarily more democratization. In the case of Turkey, decentralization mainly served economic aims with the reinforcement of private sector capital uppermost in mind. This is also underlined by the party's understanding of citizens as consumers aiming for service provision, not participation. As regards the party's once flexible ideology that allowed it to adapt to different local contexts in different ways, it has become more and more undermined by Erdoğan's confrontational political style. The older generation of people with a shared RP past has either left the party or been marginalized within the AKP. Whereas the AKP has, to a degree, lost contact with its roots and has become more authoritarian, the CHP's electoral victory in 2019 in Istanbul and other major cities clearly showed that its grassrootization was an important factor. Somewhat ironically, local politics, once the AKPs powerhouse, might now be the decisive factor for its decline. ◆

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Civil Society in Turkey: One Hundred Years of Solitude?

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Studies on Turkey's civil society typically highlight the centralist state tradition as a historically inhibiting factor for the underdevelopment of a robust civil society. In this brief article, I aim to address how the Justice and Development Party (AKP)'s 20 years of uninterrupted rule has impacted civil society. To answer this question, I first capture the long history of civil society in Turkey. Then, I draw upon insights from multi-sited fieldwork in Turkey and five European countries between 2017 and 2022 to account for the AKP period.

My argument is two-fold. First, the state has historically viewed civil society with suspicion as it may threaten national security or facilitate "terrorism" and "anarchism." Thus, the state treats civil society and organized citizenry as entities to be subdued or co-opted. Nevertheless, focusing only on the political structures distracts and denies the agency's role. There is still a strong legacy of civil society in Turkey thanks to the contentious and autonomous mobilization of workers and youth in the 1960s-70s and the pluralization of civil society after the 1980 coup. Instead of seeing these periods as brief exceptions to the rule, we should understand that they represent the deep currents of grassroots culture and democratic legacy in Turkey. This legacy separates Turkey from many countries in the MENA region, where more consolidated autocracies did not allow organized civil society and suppressed attempts of autonomous mobilizations (Yabanci 2021). Second, over the last two decades of AKP-led gradual autocratization, three parallel and conflicting developments in civil society have unfolded: selective repression, cooptation, and contestation. These processes uphold both the statist interventionism and civic contestations of civil society, and yet, autocratization has also imposed ruptures and new paths.

The Historical Development of Civil Society

Any discussion of Turkish civil society compels a debate on the historically rampant role of the centralized state, which dates back to the Ottoman Empire, to account for the "underdevelopment" of the current civil society. Extant studies grapple with the effect of the patron state on the development of civil society, inherited by modern Turkey (Heper 1985; Mardin 1969). They show how the security and unity of the new state were absolute priorities for the republican elites. For instance, during the early years of the republic, women's and workers' organizations were effectively crushed or co-opted by the

Kemalist doctrine of a classless, unified and homogenous nation (Zihnioğlu 2019; Yildizoğlu and Margulies 1984). After the transition to multi-party democracy in the 1950s, the Democrat Party, the first real challenger of the founding Republican People's Party (CHP), allowed for the emergence of trade unions only under the "state-friendly" Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türk-İş). Worse still, the military that regularly seized power once every decade viewed civil society as a cause of chaos and disorder. Particularly, the 1980 military regime eliminated trade unions, associations, and political parties, as well as limiting the freedom of assembly and association.

Yet, despite historical, structural, and institutional limitations, Turkey's civil society also experienced significant periods of emergence, revitalization, and dynamism, such as the 1960s and 1970s labour and youth mobilizations. Strikes persisted for months with leftist trade unions capable of rallying up to 300,000 workers at once (Yildizoğlu and Margulies 1984). Furthermore, the leftist student movement organized sit-ins, protests, and boycotts to demand education reform and the repression of universities. The group became increasingly politicized and even adopted violent means (Feyzioglu 2004). In the post-1980, new mobilizations were driven by professional associations with international connections and Europeanization agendas. This included Kurdish, feminist, and Islamist grassroots movements which advocated for their rights and democratic participation. These civil society actors emerged not because of a change in the state tradition, but despite it.

Enter the AKP: Civil society between repression, cooptation and contention

In 2002, when the AKP came to power, civil society was shaped by two factors. On the one hand, the statist tradition was still dominant. On the other hand, civil society was also growing thanks to new groups seeking to mobilize and the impact of the "civil society hype" of the 1990s. In the post-Gezi protests period, as the AKP's monopolizing agenda turned to slow-motion autocratization, (see Esen and Gumuscu 2016; Akkoyunlu and Öktem 2016), civil society was forced to undergo a significant transformation driven by repression, cooptation, and contestation.

Repression

Over the last decade, civil society has faced deteriorating levels of direct and indirect repression (ICNL 2022). Repression ranges from extensive and additional auditing, frequent fiscal penalties to police and judicial proceedings, closures and confiscation of property, and worse still, accusations of terrorism, money laundering, and foreign intelligence. These repressive measures are often meticulously chosen not to conflict with the law (Scheppele 2018). However, the laws are often the source of the problem. For instance, the current civil society legislation has ambiguous clauses banning organizations "against law and morality" and "the characteristics of the Republic". Similarly, "propaganda of a terrorist organization" foresees imprisonment, but there is neither a definition of terrorism nor terrorist propaganda in the penal code. These elusive clauses often serve as a pretext to target activists and organizations. In fact, organizations promoting gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights faced repression for being against morality. Likewise, many human rights organizations and activists were prosecuted for promoting terrorism.

The crucial issue about repression is that it is

selective. In fact, repression is discriminately and strategically used against organizations or individuals that can create a rippling effect across society about issues that increase the threat perception of the government. These issues include the rights of minorities, social justice, peace and reconciliation, and lately women's and LGBTQI+ rights. When repression is selective, anticipating it is difficult. Hence, my respondents argued that this situation limits mobilization on certain topics and invites self-censorship. Furthermore, selective repression might also prevent solidarity with the repressed.

Cooptation

Power-abusing rulers in hybrid regimes face "civil society dilemma" (Yabanci 2019). Unlike fully consolidated and secure autocratic regimes, they cannot entirely shut down civil society. Probably not because they do not dream of it, but, first, despite having electoral hegemony, they do not have the capacity of controlling civic life altogether. Second, they also rely on a selective form of repression discussed above, a resource-saving and legitimizing yet effective tool. However, the dilemma emerges at this juncture: By not crushing civil society, autocratic regimes cannot prevent politically-alienated groups from establishing themselves through civil society. Their solution is to co-opt civil society so that it does not only acquiesce to the slow-motion autocratization but ideologically engages with it.

This civil society dilemma motivated government-oriented civil society's impressive expansion in Turkey over the last decade. These organizations have some independence regarding their internal activities and membership structures but are organically linked to those in power. They are granted the freedom of association and assembly that is denied or limited to others, and they are free to establish grassroots links with society. These organizations have expanded across Turkey, working especially on issues involving youth, education, women, and family.

Despite their professional appearance, these organizations are based on clientelist networks. Those in top management positions benefit significantly from connections with government members in getting perks and benefits. In contrast, lower-ranking members and volunteers hope to gain access to these networks in the future. And yet, there is more to this story than the top-down patron-client relationship between the AKP and government-oriented organizations. With their extensive organizational capacity, they bring the state to society by penetrating everyday life and becoming integrated with their target groups' daily socialization and routines.

How do they do that? They set up such a myriad of institutionalized approaches that I can only discuss a few here. One main practice is organizing camps, summer/winter schools, extra-curricular training, and socialization sites for youth. These daily activities engage youth from secondary school to the university level. At camps, participants learn Quran and Islamic theology for half of the day, the second half is spared for more entertainment and physical activities. However, these activities are always managed in a particular way. For instance, archery, shooting with air rifles, and horse-riding are encouraged as Turkish "ancient sports" over others. There are also regular seminars, talks, and discussions taking place at the premises of these organizations across Turkey. These activities provide what Riley and Fernandez (2014) call "politicized leisure". Routine socialization exposes young people to

nationalist-conservative narratives of history, nation-building revolving around hostility towards minorities and 'the West', or contemporary politics such as the Turkish army's excursion into northern Syria, the presidential system, and elections.

Government-oriented civil society also runs electoral campaigns in favor of the AKP in Turkey and abroad among the diaspora voters. For the 2017 constitutional referendum, these organizations actively reached out to their target groups to convince them to vote for the presidential system. They set up information desks at key locations in big cities and organized seminars at universities. Volunteers patrolled streets to talk to people, paid visits to shopkeepers and nonworking women at their homes, and created the "taxi for yes" campaign that transported people for free while they were informed about "the advantages of the new presidential system".

Being constantly mobilized "on the ground" allows government-oriented organizations to form distinct public spaces that continuously reproduce and invent narratives. These organizations serve a critical role in connecting citizens to authoritarian governance by promoting specific subjectivities that not only passively accept undemocratic governance but also actively engage with it through moral, ideological, and mobilization efforts. By actively engaging with their target groups within society, they can observe their needs and desires and offer valuable insights to the government regarding their preferences and grievances. These organizations also demonstrate that the AKP has incorporated civil society into its ruling coalition to embed autocratization further into society.

Contestation

Contestation has been possible amid intensifying repression and a fast-autocratizing system because the more that the AKP has manipulated electoral and partisan arenas, the more dissenting societal forces have turned to civil society in search of alternative organizational forms, creating a complex and pluralistic civil society ecology. Civil society today increasingly resembles a network of horizontally organized, social movement type, informal and ad hoc groups, local collectives, and issue-based regional platforms. To highlight a few, gender movement, labor, and environmental justice mobilizations have accumulated considerable skills and the support of communities in recent years. They follow a strategy of what I called elsewhere a 'tactful contention' (Yabanci 2023). This strategy has developed over years of trial and error. It encompasses (a) informalization to create participatory and democratic internal practices, (b) framing strategy that allows them to communicate their immediate local resentments through more universally resonating claims, and (c) the ability to combine contentious disruptive mediums of action with litigation, public awareness, and democratic innovations across local, regional, national, and online arenas.

Considering the level of repression, many actors pulled out a diverse and innovative action repertoire. They resort to the usual arsenal of social movements like protests, strikes, and demonstrations. Protests, demonstrations, and marches continued even during the two-year-long state of emergency following the 2016 coup, becoming small scale but almost daily (Arslanalp and Erkmen 2020). Besides the traditional repertoire of street action, "off-street" mediums, such as outside lobbying, litigation at national and interna-

tional courts, organization of public sphere, citizen assemblies, election observation, civil disobedience, reclamations of space, agenda-setting through social media, and the facilitation of citizen complaints, constitute the majority of collective action in civil society for women, workers, and environmental justice mobilizations to name a few. Perhaps most importantly, contesting groups within civil society have gained an impressive capacity to switch between these mediums as repression has an extensive range. They adapt to and steer selective repression by switching between different mediums while the target, timing, and duration of repression are constantly anticipated. As one of my respondents said, "If they close one passage, we invent another". Bending but not breaking has become the key to civil society's resilience in Turkey.

Conclusion

After two decades of AKP rule, Turkey's civil society has become a complex terrain where democratic and undemocratic forces can both gain influence. The unpredictability of repression makes it an effective tool, aggravating the expectation of persecution and obliging civil society to prioritize staying afloat, not always visible mobilization. Furthermore, the AKP has also sought to expand and complement its political hegemony by creating a distinct sector of government-oriented civil society. Coopted civil society is a reminder that autocratization involves not only formal institutions but also informal structures. And yet, civil society is also a sphere for challenging autocratic state power, as evidenced by new mobilizations at the grassroots level.

Regardless of the results of the 2023 elections, civil society will continue to be relevant for Turkey. Democratic and autonomous civil society will need to strive hard to get their claims recognized and acted upon. Even in the possible scenario of oppositional victory, parochialism and internal fighting, due to ideological disagreements, might prevent the oppositional bloc from allying with civil society. But also, the government-oriented ones will require attention. By becoming part of the state or an informal extension of it, government-oriented civil society has gained considerable negotiating power vis-à-vis the state. The AKP so far managed to balance them delicately, distributing perks and benefits to avoid open competition and discontent. If the AKP gets another term, the question is if it has the resources to keep them mobilized, given the dire economic conditions. In the case of an oppositional victory, the question would be how to treat their corrupt clientelist structures during the looming post-autocratic transition. ◆

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The AKP and Economic Policy in Turkey

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The Turkish economy under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) evolved in two disparate acts. The first, from 2002 until the end of that decade, featured International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank-led structural reforms and adherence to dominant policy norms of the day, generating financial stability as well as rapid and reasonably equitable growth in a favorable external context. After an interlude that saw the AKP consolidate its power, the second act from 2013 onwards has ushered in a darker period of stagnation followed by decline. The hallmarks of this period include poor policy design and institutional erosion amidst democratic breakdown that altogether undermined macro fundamentals, median incomes, income distribution, and the country's standing as an emerging power.

There is disagreement on how different the AKP's policy aims were in each of these periods. Some scholars argue that there has been strong continuity in the AKP's economic policy regarding the party's *neoliberal* preferences; the seeds of many structural problems today were sown during its early years in office (Akçay 2021; Tansel 2020). Others suggest that economic outcomes have been so varied because these periods were governed by starkly different policy logics: while r*egulatory neoliberalism* dominated thinking in

the 2000s, the latter period rested on disjointed efforts to carve a state capitalist growth path (Öniş 2019; Öniş and Kutlay 2021). These contending perspectives agree on one point; the unprecedented scale of cronyism and systematic plunder that has characterized the AKP's increasingly authoritarian rule in the past decade (Esen and Gumuscu 2021), which I shall also submit here as the biggest challenge facing the Turkish economy today.

Before the AKP

Like most of its peers in the global South, Turkey adopted a state-directed model of capitalist development in the aftermath of the Second World War. Following a protracted debt crisis in the late 1970s, it embarked on a bold program of economic liberalization in 1980 under Turgut Özal, a top bureaucrat at the time who later became prime minister as the leader of the center-right Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi, or ANAP). The ANAP was to remain in power from 1983 until 1991, overseeing Turkey's gradual re-democratization following the 1980 military coup. Yet the party's reformist ambitions waned in its later years in office as electoral competition intensified (Rodrik 1991). Important strides were made in trade and financial liberalization (instrumentally, capital account liberalization), but the state continued

to play a major role in the economy thanks to the persistence of large public sector firms and various supports and subsidies targeting popular interests. Most notably, to address growing distributive tensions, the ANAP by the late 1980s would often resort to old-style populist side payments, such as higher public salaries and generous agricultural supports, at the expense of fiscal prudence.

This combination of half-hearted liberalization, intense democratic competition, and popular distributive pressures profoundly shaped the Turkish political economy in the 1990s. The 1991 general elections ushered in a decade of weak coalition governments that preserved Özal's policy legacy of partial neoliberalism and financial openness while continuing a path of perpetual fiscal expansion, eventually leading to acute high inflation. Macroeconomic instability also rendered the weakly regulated, yet internationally exposed, Turkish financial system open to external shocks, illustrated first during the 1994 financial crisis. From then on, Turkey was stuck in boom-and-bust cycles of growth as both fiscal deficits and the obligations of domestic retail banks spiraled out of control (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu and Yeldan 2000). In early 2001, a poorly designed exchange rate-based stabilization program with the IMF turned sour, precipitating the severest financial crisis in recent Turkish history. This mortally damaged the electability of the political parties that made up the coalition government at the time, thereby paving the way for the AKP's surprise victory in the 2002 elections.

Note, though, that the notoriety of the 1990s, a theme the AKP summons relentlessly to this day to embellish its accomplishments in comparison, is only partially deserved. Not only did several other large middle-income countries encounter similar financial crises at the time (Öniş and Aysan 2000), but the 1990s was not exactly a "lost decade" for Turkey either. Despite major financial shocks, Turkey grew on average by 4% per annum and a respectable manufacturing base emerged, spurred by the customs union set up with the EU.

The AKP's First Term: Turkey's Post-Washington Consensus Moment

By the time the AKP came to power, Turkey had already signed up for a comprehensive reform program with the IMF and the World Bank, led by Kemal Derviş, himself a former World Bank vice-president. Elements of this technocratic initiative closely mirrored what was labeled the "post-Washington Consensus" in mainstream development policy advice, which accepted the neoliberalism of the original Washington Consensus, but expanded the policy agenda by emphasizing social sustainability, such as poverty reduction, and calling for a more effective regulatory role for the state via extensive institutional upgrading (Öniş and Şenses 2005). This social and regulatory neoliberalism was central to the AKP's first term, and its perceived success greatly facilitated the party's electoral fortunes for years to come.

Three points about this period (2002-2007) are worth stressing. The first is the AKP's pragmatic and in time increasingly partial implementation of Derviş's reform program. The party was keen to commit to measures considered vital for fisco-financial stabilization. Chief among these were reforms that aimed to overhaul the debt management regime, achieve fiscal rationalization, reinforce the independence of the central bank, and finally restructure the banking system. This was accompanied by an unprecedented pri-

vatization drive. Yet the AKP proved far less eager to proceed with policies that it deemed detrimental to its electoral base or party-political aims, such as reforming the agricultural support regime or embracing firm anti-corruption principles in public tenders.

Second, this was a period of extraordinarily fortuitous external circumstances. In addition to generous IMF and World Bank loans, Turkey was also a candidate for EU accession during much of this period. This served as an additional "external anchor" by both narrowing the AKP's policy options and encouraging foreign investment into the country (Öniş and Bakır 2007). Equally important, the AKP's first term overlapped with exceptionally fat years in the global economy, during which stable conditions for global finance, ample liquidity in the system, and a weak dollar lifted all boats, with most developing economies recording fast growth rates.

The third point concerns the complex economic legacy of the AKP's first term. Macroeconomic indicators were encouraging: fiscal discipline was achieved, inflation was down to single digits, and the Turkish GDP tripled by 2008 to surpass $10,000 per capita (note, again, the weak dollar during this period; even then the gain in real terms was an impressive 50 percent over 6 years). At the same time, the AKP failed to take advantage of good times to address the structural flaws of the Turkish economy. Despite rapid growth, savings remained low, unemployment was high, and Turkey continued to endure high current account deficits and hence remained dependent on foreign capital. Crucially, high growth rates were in part driven by private consumption as banks turned from financing public deficits to providing extensive consumer loans. While offering short-term welfare gains for popular classes, especially in

the form of accelerated home ownership, this credit boom ultimately failed to transform Turkey's production profile and help escape its "middle income trap", for it did little to foster the provision of higher value-added goods and services. Instead, it led to record levels of household debt, progressively undermining disposable incomes.

In hindsight, the AKP's strategic aim during its first term was to construct and maintain a cross-class coalition by appealing to both elite and popular interests (Güven 2016). On one side was its commitment to stability and growth, to unfettered market expansion by adhering to orthodox recipes of the day, including an increasingly flexible labor regime, which undermined labor rights and discouraged unionization. On the other side was a concern for appeasing its key electoral base, Turkey's socially conservative lower and lower-middle classes, without derailing the former project. This involved a combination of credit-driven consumerism and more direct means of poverty relief via expanded social assistance programs. Often termed "neoliberal populism" (Bozkurt 2013), this balancing act proved feasible for a while, yet could not be sustained amidst sea changes in the international economy and growing structural strains in the Turkish economy.

Between Neoliberalism, Statism, and Cronyism: The Impasse of the Late AKP Period

By the early 2010s, the AKP had consolidated its hold on power. The party's gradual abandonment of policy orthodoxy was already evident in its delayed and piecemeal response to the global financial crisis of 2008 (Öniş and Güven 2011). Relatively fast growth driven by credit boom and ever larger current account deficits continued for a few more years,

although structural weaknesses, from a collapse in savings to record household and corporate debt, began to drag down the Turkish economy. Between a major corruption scandal leading to a political purge, a coup attempt by the Gülenists, and the years of turbulence that followed, relative stagnation set in. Between 2014 and 2019 Turkey's annual growth rate averaged just above 4%, not far from the much maligned 1990s (World Bank 2023).

A currency crisis right after the 2018 elections piled on more misery, after which the Turkish economy appears to have entered a protracted crisis. A weakened lira and rampant inflation, reaching levels reminiscent of the 1990s, depressed incomes further and have led to a persistent decline in living standards in a context of growing distributive inequality. A permanently loose monetary policy has been set on Erdoğan's orders to ensure the continuation of credit-driven growth. In the meantime, none of the systemic issues in the Turkish economy, from a massively mismanaged agricultural support regime leading to a food price crisis, to an ever-widened trade deficit, and a low female labor force participation rate, has received sufficient policy attention. Once considered a leading emerging market, Turkey now appears to be another low-wage economy with little hope for climbing up the ladder to the high-income bracket in the near future. What went wrong?

One would be tempted to think the downturn in the Turkish economy is connected to the breakdown of Turkish democracy. In the past decade, the AKP rule has descended into a policy mode guided by the short-term preferences of a narrow circle with little regard for long-term developmental ends. The literature on authoritarian neoliberalism captures

this dynamic well: while party policy has broadly benefited capital — radically so in the post-pandemic period — the AKP's hallmark has been its unconditional support for sectors that offer quick, steady profits, such as mining, energy, and construction. These are industries are characterized by a concentration of pro-government firms that benefit from selective provision of public tenders and very relaxed environmental and labour standards (Adaman, Akbulut and Arsel 2017). While there has been some R&D support for industrial upgrading and more active use of public resources to bolster ailing firms, increased state activism, which mirrors shifts in international development thinking and trends elsewhere (Öniş and Kutlay 2021), has failed to facilitate industrial upgrading in a context of weakened state capacity and strained relations with large, Marmara-based conglomerates. The perceived move towards state capitalism had no recognizable impact on the structure of the Turkish economy.

Ultimately, it is difficult to ascertain a consistent, forward-looking economic policy path in the AKP's final years. Those who associate this period alternatively with continued neoliberalism, state capitalism, and cronyism bring into relief different facets of contemporary Turkish political economy (Güven 2023). Yet the damage caused by the latter is substantial. Nepotism by the AKP elite in the allocation of government roles and patron-clientelistic relations between the party and pro-government business (especially via public-private partnerships and government contracts) has led to systematic and unprecedented levels of plunder of the country's resources, including frequent instances of land grabbing and awless ownership. Excessive politicization of bureaucracy in a hyper-presidential regime has eroded institutional capacity in core organizations of the economic

bureaucracy. These are outcomes that stem not from ideational or policy differences, but from a deficit in the quality of governance unlike at any other point in modern Turkish history.

Much rides on the forthcoming elections. Regardless of who wins, a reckoning in the short run is inevitable. Poor policy decisions of the past few years, especially on the monetary front, will bring about a correction, especially in a context of the rebuilding effort, in the wake of the great South-eastern earthquake, that will stretch public finances. Beyond this, there is a world of difference in what respective winners can offer. The JDP retaining power will likely mean the continuation of what is now almost an anti-policy stance, with various measures cobbled together to maximize the immediate interests of the party and its electoral coalition. An opposition win, by contrast, will signal the return to a semblance of normalcy for a country with a reasonably well-educated workforce. This is the scenario under which the structural problems of the Turkish economy might finally begin to receive overdue attention. ◆

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AKP Foreign Policy for Wider Audiences: Spotlighting Puzzles and Voices from the Region

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Introduction

Turkey's foreign policy has witnessed major temporal shifts and contemporaneously conflicting policies since its founding a century ago. Two decades under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) serve as a compressed but much accelerated representation of these dynamics (Akkoyunlu 2021; Cop and Zihnioğlu 2017). The aggressive activism and then implosion of then-foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's "zero problems with neighbors" policy as part of a broader "strategic depth" doctrine exemplifies this (Öktem 2015; Sözen 2010). Further, the failure of that attempted outreach produced its own complex set of policy reversals, as did a search for partners in a "post-Western order" (Kutlay and Öniş 2021) – some of whom, like Russia, Turkey opposed on the battlefield but collaborated with on energy and defense (Köstem 2018; Yıldız 2021).

These reorientations and inconsistencies make Turkey an empirically rich case for political scientists identifying, conceptualizing, and testing foreign policy decisions and outcomes. Although comprising a constellation of components that make some aspects sui generis (Öztürk and Sözeri 2018), Turkey can serve as a highly useful "critical case" for parsing out explanatory factors at multiple levels of analysis (Buhari-Gülmez 2017, 8). From EU candidate and NATO member to middle power to home country with diasporas in many states, Turkey's numerous identities offer much material for comparative foreign policy study (Arkılıç 2022; Ongur and Zengin 2016; Baser 2016). Compressing the scope of analysis to AKP rule allows scholars to hold ruling party and leader – AKP co-founder, prime minister, and now president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – constant while explaining foreign policy swings.

While Turkish International Relations (IR) is arguably its own subfield (Bilgin and Tanrısever 2009), non-Turkey scholars of IR and foreign policy analysis (FPA) can extract valuable comparative insights by reviewing the Turkish case. In turn, Turkey IR and FPA scholars can benefit from wider engagement across their community (Aydınlı and Biltekin 2017). With this goal in mind, I edited a 2020 APSA MENA newsletter symposium with contributions from Sinem Adar, Sercan Canbolat, Sibel Oktay, and Ferhat Zabun that analyzed AKP domestic-foreign policy linkages with useful takeaways for Turkey and non-

Turkey scholars. Here, I expand on three motivations driving that symposium: 1) bringing research on Turkish foreign policy to a widely-read disciplinary platform; 2) providing a Global South counterpoint to assumptions baked into IR and FPA conceptual frameworks (Aydınlı and Matthews 2008); and 3) spotlighting the important work of scholars from Turkey and the region.

To do so, I review several zig-zags and contradictions in AKP foreign policy to illustrate its utility as a case for analysis. I then examine explanatory factors at structural, domestic politics, and individual levels to specify and organize key elements shaping foreign policy in the AKP era. This analytical approach also serves to illuminate trajectories of influence across levels – e.g., how foreign policy responses to shifting regional patterns are filtered through regime durability concerns or personality traits. I am deeply cognizant I cannot include thousands of important contributions. Nevertheless, I hope this piece offers insight on specific issues while spotlighting informed voices from the region.

A plethora of puzzles

The AKP's first term beginning in 2002 introduced a number of zig-zags in foreign policy that would come to be characteristic of its tenure and that present useful cases for study. The reorientation away from previous governments' relatively non-interventionist, Western-oriented policies toward the aggressive activism in former Ottoman and other neighboring territories championed by Davutoğlu exemplifies this (Özkan 2014). While notable exceptions exist – e.g., Turkey's 1974 intervention in Cyprus that led to US sanctions (Sayarı 2003; Aydın 2000) – legacies of territorial losses and concerns about the Soviet Union on its border produced Turkish

restraint in foreign policy, prioritizing border integrity and transatlantic ties institutionalized through NATO. Quantitative studies of diplomatic activism usefully demonstrate that the highly engaged approach the AKP took, particularly with its Middle East neighbors, marked a significant shift from Turkey's previous stance (Aydın-Çakır and Akdağ 2017).

This new activism was, as many scholars argue, guided by multiple, sometimes contradictory, role conceptions (Aras and Görener 2010), and ran up against impediments at multiple levels of analysis. To illustrate the point with just one set of bilateral relations, Turkey has accepted Soviet aid, allied with NATO against the Soviet Union, shot down a Russian aircraft, purchased a missile defense system from Russia, and supported groups in Syria, Libya, and Azerbaijan that countered Russian interests (Köstem 2018; Yıldız 2021). In the wake of Russia's 2022 invasion, Turkey supplied Ukraine with drones that slowed Russia's advance (Soyaltın-Colella and Demiryol 2022), but also refused to participate in sanctions against Russia. The context and details of these foreign policy gambits are particular to the Turkish case, but the phenomena of reorientating bilateral relations and balancing conflicting domestic and foreign interests are not.

Expanding focus to other sets of Turkey's bilateral relations over the last 20 years reveals a plethora of puzzles for theory-building, theory-testing, and comparative study. After near war with Syria shortly before the AKP came to power, for example, relations warmed dramatically through a personal friendship between Erdoğan and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (Altunışık and Tür 2006). In 2011, relations swung back toward militarization, with Ankara arming rebel militias against Assad's forces and carrying out military incur-

sions against Kurdish targets in northern Syria (Alım 2022; Parlar Dal 2016; Tür 2016). Tentative steps toward rapprochement are currently underway. Ties with Israel demonstrate similar turbulence (Tür 2012). Relations veered sharply from close cooperation in the early 2000s to diplomatically downgraded ties in 2011 in the wake of the Mavi Marmara flotilla crisis (Aytürk 2011; Oğuzlu 2010). A 2016 reconciliation agreement devolved into the 2018 recall of ambassadors following Israeli state violence against Palestinians; diplomatic ties were restored again in 2022 (Ulusoy 2020).

Relationships with other countries may demonstrate fewer flipflops but still contain significant shifts. Turkey's relations with Egypt flipped from strong support toward outright hostility following the ouster of Erdoğan's ideological kin in political Islam Mohammed Morsi (Taş 2022a). Turkey's support of Qatar during the 2017-21 Gulf Cooperation Council crisis led to severe tensions with the UAE, but less so with Saudi Arabia (Battaloğlu 2021, Cengiz 2019). The latter raises a puzzle, especially given the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. The failure of the "zero problems" policy also generates puzzling cases for analysis. The broad initiative aimed to ameliorate longstanding disputes with border states such as Armenia (Cheterian 2017) and Greece (involving conflict over Cyprus; Bahçeli 2003) as well as improve relations to the south.

Structural factors: shifting regional dynamics

From the very brief discussion above, patterns emerge that point scholars to explanatory factors at various levels of analysis. At the structural level, the over-ambition of Davu-

toğlu's "zero-problems" policy overlooked the interconnected, zero-sum nature of many of its neighborhood disputes (Özkeçeci-Taner 2017). In trying to resolve relations with Armenia, for example, Azerbaijan objected (Aras and Akpınar 2011). Closer ties with Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government disturbed Baghdad (Müftüler-Baç 2014); partnering with Iran to address its nuclear ambitions riled the US, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt (Özkan 2010).

The fallout of the Arab Uprisings provided a further structural challenge to the AKP's ambitions of a more activist role in the region. Initial political changes created optimism for democratic transition and also openings for the AKP's ideological kin in cases like Egypt and Tunisia. However, the Uprisings devolved in many cases into retrenchment of authoritarianism, the crushing of political Islamists, and, in the case of Syria, conflict on Turkey's borders that thwarted the AKP's ambitions (Alım 2022; Parlar Dal 2016). Ankara's ensuing regional isolation, compounded by the Abraham Accords, helps explain why ties with both Saudi and the UAE moved toward rapprochement (Bardakçı 2021).

Domestic factors: regime stability, economics, and identity

These cases suggest the need to examine how domestic politics considerations interact with structural factors to shape foreign policy. Turning to the AKP's post-Arab Uprising foreign policy, domestic politics factors help explain the shift from activist outreach based on historical ties to increased militarism abroad (Turan 2018), including in the Eastern Mediterranean (Mehmetçik and Celik 2022). A hard nationalist turn and accelerated autocratization at home following the 2015 breakdown of the ceasefire with the Kurdistan

Workers' Party and the 2016 coup attempt further heightened regional tensions (Arat and Pamuk 2019). Concerns on both fronts caused the EU to suspend Turkey's stalled accession process (Dursun-Özkanca 2022). While the 2016 EU-Turkey refugee deal constituted a point of transactional cooperation (Saatçioğlu 2020), Turkey's military incursions against Kurdish targets in northern Syria and nationalist coalition-pleasing defense purchases from Russia led to sanctions from European countries and the US. These sanctions can exacerbate pre-existing Euro-skepticism (Gülmez 2013) and anti-Americanism (Güney 2008), fueling populist sentiment within Turkey. This, in turn shapes, nationalist posturing at the international level, which can dampen public concerns on issues like economic crises (Aytaç 2021) while inflaming tensions that can inhibit rapprochements and explain policy zig-zags. And so on.

Economic crisis and related regime stability concerns can help explain the conditions under which the AKP switches in tone from hostile, identity-based rhetoric and politics to rapprochement (Kuşku-Sönmez 2019). Identity-based disputes generated by AKP overtures to Palestinians, Uyghurs, Muslim Brotherhood actors and others tended to take a back seat, however, when Turkey found itself diplomatically isolated and in need of investment. Similarly, Ankara's need to sustain the level of investment, trade, tourism, and access for pilgrims to Mecca that Saudi Arabia provides likely explains the AKP's relatively soft response to Khashoggi's murder (Başkan 2019). In a similarly motivated shift, when faced with much-needed Chinese investment, Erdoğan switched from calling attacks on Muslim Turkic Uyghurs a genocide in 2009 to presiding over an extradition agreement affecting Turkey's Uyghurs (Öniş and Yalikun 2021; Üngör 2019; Oktay 2020).

Individual factors: personality traits and personalized rule

A burgeoning literature in Turkish FPA focuses on individual-level factors that have wide applicability for other cases. Erdoğan shares personality and leadership traits, populist style, and personalized centralization of power with many other hyper-masculine nationalist strongmen leaders like Russian President Vladimir Putin (Taş 2022b). These similarities both shape the empirics of foreign policy, as seen in the hegemonic masculinity undergirding the relationship between the two men's personalized diplomacy (Akça Ataç 2022), and facilitate useful comparative study. Erdoğan's lengthy tenure provides useful conditions for probing variation.

Recent scholarship usefully points to Erdoğan's unusually high levels of distrust of others and "stark judgments of right and wrong," (Görener and Ucal 2011, 373), how these traits vary across domestic and foreign audiences (Kesgin 2020), and how they shift following traumatic events (Balcı and Efe 2021). Individual-level approaches also useful provide groundwork for understanding what changes in foreign policy might follow once Erdoğan leaves office, whether after elections in May or in the future. Finally, scholars from Turkey also make multiple contributions in line with this piece's goal of expanding diversity in the discipline and thus of broad interest. Examples include studies deepening the literature on women leaders (Kesgin 2012) and those developing non-English coding schemes for "at a distance" leader analysis (Özdamar, Canbolat, and Young 2020; Canbolat 2020). ◆

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The AKP and the Kurdish Question in Turkey

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Introduction

The Kurdish conflict has been one of the most arduous problems that the Turkish state has faced throughout the Republican era. The conflict is not just a preeminent domestic matter, but also a major factor in Turkey's relations with neighboring states in the region (e.g., Syria, Iraq and Iran) and international actors such as the European Union (EU) and the United States.

The PKK (*Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan*, Kurdistan Workers Party), which was established in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan and his friends as a Marxist/Leninist organization, became the dominant Kurdish ethnonationalist group in Turkey during the first half of the 1980s. The PKK declared its ultimate objective as establishing an independent and socialist Kurdish state in the Middle East. In order to achieve its goal, the PKK initiated an armed struggle against the Turkish state in August 1984. The armed conflict between Turkish security forces and the PKK escalated throughout the first half of the 1990s. The Kurdish conflict in Turkey is known as one of the most prolonged ethnic conflicts in the post-World War II era, resulting in around 40,000 casualties, the demolition of at least 3,000 villages, and the internal displacement of at least 3,000,000 people (e.g., see Marcus 2007; Bozarslan 2008; Watts 2010; Aydin and Emrence 2015; Tezcür 2016; Gurses 2018; Sarigil 2018).

This piece briefly examines Turkey's Kurdish question before and during the political leadership of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), which has been in power since 2002. The analysis also addresses the prospects of the Kurdish conflict in the region.

The Kurdish Issue prior to the AKP

Since the mid-1920s till the late 1990s, the overall state attitude towards Kurdish ethnic identity and demands has been intolerant, suppressive, and assimilationist. The state has treated the Kurdish problem as a matter of socio-economic under-development, security, and terrorism, rather than as an ethno-political issue. As a result, the state has insisted on pursuing socio-economic and military measures and policies to deal with this problem (see also Yeğen 1996 and 2009). However, beginning with the early 2000s, there has been

towards this problem. For instance, the state has acknowledged the political aspects of the problem, enabling them to achieve some legal and institutional changes to reach a final settlement of the problem (see below). This temperance of the state's perspective on the issue was a result of the Europeanization process initiated with the European Council Helsinki Summit in December 1999. During that summit, EU member states officially recognized Turkey as a candidate country for EU membership. One main requirement of candidate countries who are seeking EU membership is the protection of minorities and minority rights. Hence, the recognition of Turkey as a candidate country for EU membership led to major reforms in Turkish political sphere (Özdemir and Sarigil 2015). Therefore, the coalition government, composed of the center left Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Parti*, DSP), the center-right Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, ANAP), and the nationalist Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), amended the constitution to allow for the use of languages and dialects other than Turkish, mainly Kurdish, in daily life and in the press. The coalition also changed several related laws to align them with these constitutional amendments (see the Appendix).

The Kurdish Issue during the AKP

Emerged as an offshoot of the banned pro-Islamic Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*, FP, 1997-2000), the conservative AKP came to power in November 2002 and has dominated Turkish politics over the past two decades. Regarding its attitudes and policies towards the Kurdish issue, the AKP era can be divided into two different periods: 1) generally reformist and accommodationist attitude between 2002 and 2015; and 2) suppressive attitude since 2015.

Regarding the first stage, once in power, the AKP embraced the Europeanization process already launched by the coalition government by initiating further reforms across many issue areas. These initiations addressed an array of political criteria such as democracy, rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities, which were considered prerequisites for the start of accession negotiations with the EU. The AKP government also accomplished major legal and institutional changes, which granted expanded cultural rights to the Kurdish ethic minority, such as legalizing publishing and broadcasting in Kurdish, legalizing learning the Kurdish language, allowing parents to give their children Kurdish names, allowing political party campaigns to be in Kurdish, allowing defendants to use their mother language during court trials, opening the institutes of Kurdology, allowing Kurdish place names, and introducing elective Kurdish courses into the public education curriculum (see the Appendix for a list of the reforms). As Figure 1 indicates, AKP's reformist agenda substantially increased the ruling party's electoral popularity among Kurds during the 2007 general elections.

In addition to granting cultural rights and freedoms, the AKP government also politically engaged with the main actors of the Kurdish ethnopolitical movement for a final peaceful settlement. The main cases of this political engagement was the Kurdish Initiative (*Kürt Açılımı*) (March-October 2009); the Oslo Talks (2009-2011); and the Resolution Process (*Çözüm Süreci*) (2013-2015). These initiatives involved direct and indirect talks and negotiations among various actors including the government, national intelligence, pro-Kurdish political parties, and PKK leadership. However, the Resolution Process failed and the armed clashes between the

security forces and the PKK resumed in the aftermath of the 2015 general elections. What might be the reason(s) for this failure? One possible reason is that the AKP government did not, or could not, attain the expected electoral benefits of its political efforts and initiatives to resolve the Kurdish conflict. As Figure 1 confirms, the ruling AKP achieved its highest electoral popularity in Kurdish-majority provinces during the 2007 general elections. However, despite several legal and institutional reforms and resolution efforts since then, AKP popularity among Kurds declined in the following elections. Simultaneously, pro-Kurdish political parties substantially increased their electoral support in the region.

In addition, the ultranationalist MHP, which was opposing the ruling AKP at that time, harshly criticized the government's Kurdish initiatives and enhanced its social popularity at the expense of the ruling AKP (from 14.3% in 2007 to 16,3 in June 2015).[1] In other words, being critical of the AKP's Kurdish initiatives, which involved negotiations with the Kurdish side, encouraged many nationalist voters to shift their support from the AKP to the Turkish nationalist party during the 2015 June elections. Primarily due to these electoral developments, the AKP, for the first time, lost the parliamentary majority during the June 2015 general elections. Thus, given the fact that these efforts were electorally costly for the incumbents, there was not much electoral incentive for the government to maintain peace negotiations with the Kurdish side.

Another possible reason for the failure of the peace negotiations is the possible impact of regional developments on actors' perceptions and preferences. The Syrian Civil War, which erupted in 2011, led to a totally new political environment in the region. For instance, after long state discrimination and repression,

Figure 1: Average electoral popularity of the AKP and pro-Kurdish political parties in Kurdish-majority provinces (parliamentary elections) (2002-2018)
Note: The following provinces are included: Batman, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Mardin, Muş, Siirt, Şanlıurfa, Şırnak, Van.

1 It is, however, important to note that, in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt in July 2016, the opposition MHP and the ruling AKP entered into an alliance, called People's Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı). The end of the Kurdish initiatives and the coup attempt facilitated the rapprochement between these two parties.

Syrian Kurds took control of several parts of northern and northeastern Syria in 2012. The rise of de facto Kurdish autonomy in northern Syria, and the empowerment of Syrian Kurdish groups affiliated with the PKK movement (e.g., the Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat*, PYD) and its armed group, the People's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, YPG)) seem to have altered both AKP's and Kurdish movement's perceptions about, and expectations of, the Resolution Process (see also Sarigil 2021). This new reality in the region might have weakened actors' commitment to the ongoing peace negotiations.

After the failure of the Resolution Process, the AKP government resorted to increasingly suppressive measures against the Kurdish ethnopolitical movement. Other than increasing military operations against the PKK presence inside Turkey, northern Syria, and Iraq, the AKP government took repressive political actions against the Kurdish ethnopolitical groups (Gunes 2021). For instance, in order to cut the Kurdish movement's access to state resources, the government took over the vast majority of municipalities controlled by pro-Kurdish political parties (around 95 out of 102 municipalities). In other words, most of the mayors from pro-Kurdish political parties, who had been elected by local people during the March 2014 municipal elections, were replaced by government-appointed trustees (*kayyum*). The government repeated the same repressive measures against the municipalities won by pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democracy Party (*Halkların Democray*

Partisi, HDP) after the March 2019 local elections. Furthermore, leveraging its control over the parliament and the judiciary, the government ensured the removal of the immunity granted to 18 HDP deputies which resulted in their subsequent arrest. HDP co-leaders Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ were among those arrested politicians. Finally, several pro-Kurdish civil-society organizations and pro-Kurdish media outlets were also banned or closed.

The Prospect of the Kurdish Question

What might be the prospects of the Kurdish issue in Turkey? More specifically, how might the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey (to be held mid-May 2023) affect this poignant and destructive issue? A short answer is that it depends on the outcome of the elections. If the ruling People's Alliance (*Cumhur İttifakı*), composed of the conservative/Islamist AKP; the ultranationalist MHP; and nationalist and conservative Grand Unity Party (*Büyük Birlik Partisi*, BBP)[2], wins the elections and continues to control the presidency and parliamentary majority, then, one might expect the persistence of repressive measures (political, judicial, and military) against the Kurdish ethnopolitical movement inside and outside of Turkey. In the past five years, Turkish polity is no longer defined as partly free or as a semi democratic regime but as a competitive (or electoral) authoritarian regime (Esen and Gumuscu 2016). An electoral victory of the People's Alliance would mean a further cons-

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2 Right before the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections, two small and radical parties Islamist New Welfare Party (Yeniden Refah Partisi, YRP) and pro-Kurdish and Islamist Free Cause Party (Hür Dava Partisi, Hüda Par) joined the People's Alliance. The YRP was established in 2018 as a successor of the Islamist Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) (1983-1998), which was led by Necmettin Erbakan. Fatih Erbakan, Necmettin Erbakan's son, is the current leader of the YRP. The Hüda Par was established in 2012 and it has roots in Kurdish Hezbollah, an armed and militant organization, which waged an armed struggle against Turkish security forces and the PKK in the eastern and southeastern regions, especially during the first half of the 1990s.

consolidation of an already authoritarian regime in the country. It is not surprising that such an outcome would have a detrimental impact on the Kurdish ethnopolitical movement. In that case, one should expect increasing coercive measures against political actors (e.g., pro-Kurdish political parties, and civil-society organizations) and further military operations against Kurdish armed groups within and beyond the Turkish borders. In other words, the likelihood of a peaceful resolution of the problem would further decline. On the other hand, if the opposition bloc (i.e., the Nation Alliance, composed of several center-right, center-left, and conservative political parties) wins, then we might see a new wave of moderation in state attitude and certain reforms that expand Kurdish rights and freedoms, similar to the early 2000s. The Nation Alliance promises several democratization reforms including instating an improved parliamentary system, introducing a more democratic constitution, reinstalling the rule of law and judicial independence, improving the transparency and accountability of the political system, and enhancing and protecting fundamental rights and freedoms. Such democratization reforms would certainly benefit the Kurdish ethnopolitical movement as well. In brief, regardless of who wins the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey, the elections would have major consequences for the Kurdish question not only domestically, but also in neighboring countries (i.e., Syria, Iraq, and Iran). ◆

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Appendix: *The AKP and the Kurdish Question in Turkey*

Constitutional amendments:

October 2001
• The third part of Article 26 was removed. By this amendment, the ban on the usage of languages and dialects other than Turkish in daily life and in disseminating thoughts was removed.
• The second part of Article 28 was removed. Thus, restrictions on the usage of languages and dialects other than Turkish in the *press* were removed.

Legal and institutional changes:

March 2002 (*The Second Harmonizing Package*)[a]
• Fifth section of Article 16 of the Press Law was removed. By this change, language restrictions in the press were removed (*Law No: 5680, New Press Law: 5187*).

August 2002, (*The Third Harmonizing Package*, a.k.a. Mini Democracy Package)
• Turkish citizens can learn languages and dialects other than Turkish (Kurdish for instance) through private courses (*The Law on the Learning and Education in Foreign Languages and Learning Languages and Dialects other than Turkish*, Law No: 2923)
• Radio and television institutions (public, private) can also broadcast in languages other than Turkish, namely Kurdish (*The Law on Radio and TV Establishing and Broadcasting, Law No: 3984*).

August 2002
• Death penalty was removed. As a result, the life of imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was spared. His death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment.

November 2002
• The state of emergency (*Olağanüstü Hal*, OHAL) was retracted in Kurdish regions. (It was introduced in 1987 in several eastern and southeastern provinces and it granted extraordinary powers to regional governor.)

January 2003 (*The Fourth Harmonizing Package*)
• Language restrictions in the activities of associations were eased. Associations can use foreign languages in their non-official correspondence (*Article 6 of the Law on Associations*).

June 2003 (*The Sixth Harmonizing Package*)
• Allowing private radios and TV channels to broadcast in languages and dialects which are used by Turkish citizens was restated in this harmonizing package (*The Law on Radio and TV Establishing and Broadcasting, Law No: 3984*).

• Civil Registry Law was amended to permit parents to name their children as they desire, provided that such names are considered to comply with "moral values" and do not offend the public (Kurdish names can be chosen).

Appendix: *The AKP and the Kurdish Question in Turkey (continued)*

July 2003 (*The Seventh Harmonizing Package*)
• Further changes on the regulations of language courses in *The Law on the Learning and Education in Foreign Languages and Learning Languages and Dialects other than Turkish (Law No: 2923)*
• Council of Ministers alone can regulate and decide which languages are to be taught.

January 2009
• TRT 6, a public TV channel broadcasting only in Kurdish, was launched

April 2010
• *De facto* use of Kurdish in political party campaigns was allowed.

October 2010
• The Institute of Kurdology was opened at Mardin Artuklu University. Later, Kurdish and Zaza Literature Departments in Muş Alparslan University and Tunceli University were opened as well.

April 2011
• In Kurdish-majority provinces, Kurdish sermons in mosques, which are all state controlled, were allowed.

September 2012
• Elective Kurdish courses for secondary level schools were introduced.

December 2012
• Defense in mother language during court trials was allowed.

October 2013
• Education in mother language at *private* schools
• Allowing Kurdish place names
• Legalizing use of Kurdish in political party campaigns.
• The removal of the (Turkish) nationalist oath recited by students at primary schools
• The removal of criminal sanctions for the use of the letters Q, X and W used in Kurdish.

Note:
a: Harmonizing packages involved the reforms achieved by Turkish governments to fulfill EU membership criteria (a.k.a. the Copenhagen Criteria).

Land, Capital and Politics in the Republic

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Land-based accumulation (LBA) is a key feature of contemporary capitalism. In simple terms, it refers to the process through which capital is channeled to built environment production (real estate and infrastructural construction) in the absence of profitable investment opportunities in manufacturing (Harvey 1985). LBA's rise to prominence as a core dynamic of capitalist accumulation across the globe corresponds to the neoliberal era. Since the 1980s, there has been an escalation in the importance of land and real estate within global circuits. The financial meltdown of 2008, triggered by the subprime mortgage crisis in the US, demonstrated the devastating consequences of the centrality of real estate markets in contemporary capitalism, leading to a burgeoning of literature on the multifaceted impacts of LBA.

A noteworthy dimension that is emphasized in the literature is the politics of LBA, that is, the growing prominence of land utilized for political power in contemporary capitalism. Shatkin (2017) argues that, through "the real estate turn", state actors have developed novel strategies to "monetize land" either "by extracting revenue from land development or by distributing the profits of land development to powerful corporate backers of the state." States have extensively resorted to utilizing their land management powers to establish and consolidate alliances with designated business groups, furthering their distinct political agendas. This process has brought novel dynamics to state-business relations under contemporary capitalism.

Turkey under the AKP rule can be considered a textbook case of LBA, especially as built environment production turned into the central growth engine of the domestic economy. The country witnessed a massive construction boom in this period, with unprecedented levels of home building and infrastructural activity. The boom was enabled by a full-fledged state strategy that drastically restructured the built environment production scene. Through LBA, the ruling AKP was able to channel state resources to raise a new generation of firms in the construction industry with organic ties to the party. This strengthened its power among domestic capital and generates novel mechanisms to finance party politics (Yeşilbağ 2022). As such, LBA came to constitute the political-economic backbone of the AKP rule. Below, I will first delve into the question of how this dynamic has played out throughout the history of the Turkish Republic. Then, I will specifically discuss the AKP period.

Land as a Resource in Politics Before the AKP Era

The Early Republican era (1923-1950) was marked by decisively stagnant urbanization. Under these circumstances, built environment production did not turn into a prominent activity for capital accumulation. The Democrat Party (DP) era (1950-60) was the first period in which construction began to acquire significance at the national scale. While DP's economic policy mainly focused on agricultural and commercial interests, a number of lucrative opportunities, including military construction facilities under the NATO Agreement, public infrastructure facilities, and especially road building, turned out to be crucial in the emergence of the first generation of large-scale contracting firms such as Enka, Alarko and Tekfen (Öztürk 2010, 73-74). These firms would constitute the top league of the domestic construction industry until the AKP period. The contracts received by these firms in this period were often subject to widespread criticism due to allegations of corruption. The destruction of Istanbul's certain historical neighborhoods to open up space for modern roads was equally controversial on the grounds of massive land speculation (Atılgan 2015, 407). It is hard to claim that DP's economic policy included a strategic orientation towards the construction industry comparable to that of AKP. Yet, the DP era was a significant step in the birth of the large-scale construction industry in Turkey.

The two decades from 1960 to 1980 were marked by the dominance of the import substitution industrialization (ISI) strategy. The domestic manufacturing industry was privileged as the top-priority sector that would constitute the kernel of the growth machine. The deterioration of living conditions in the countryside, accompanied by employment opportunities in the emerging domestic industries concentrated in big cities, led to an immense flood of rural migration towards these cities. In the absence of an extensive formal policy of social housing, the ubiquitous resolution was illegal and irregular settlements on unoccupied land, known as gecekondus (Buğra 1998). For a long time, gecekondu construction was not part of the formal market economy. On the other hand, the apartmentization process that drove the formal construction sector in the concerned period was dominated by petty entrepreneurs (Tekeli 2009). In this period, big capital typically abstained from investing in the residential construction sector.

The non-residential segment of the construction sector, infrastructural and industrial construction, however, followed a rather different pattern. By nature, this type of construction activity required larger capital, technical expertise, and an organized corporate structure. Given the substantial share of the state in the domestic economy in this period, the state was by far the biggest client. The already large-scale first-generation firms thrived on these contracts and most of them transformed themselves into holding companies around the 1970s. Nonetheless, in line with the strategic priorities of the ISI framework, it was big manufacturing capital that called the shots and construction capital remained secondary in terms of scale and scope.

Turkey's neoliberal turn initiated by the military coup in 1980 followed the general contours of the neoliberal framework in the developing world. The ISI model was dismantled, labor militancy was crushed, and the economy was liberalized. A key trend in this period was the globalizaion of real estate

markets. In this regard, foreign investments in service sectors and retail trade, enabled by the liberalization of the economy, acted as a strong source of demand for real estate markets, most visibly in Istanbul (Keyder 2005). Generally speaking, the restructuring of urban space drove forward urban rent as a highly crucial resource for investors. Various reforms towards deregulation of planning, commercialization of public land, and state rescaling, played a vital role in the facilitation of this restructuring process (Yeşilbağ 2020). The vibrant real estate markets and the immense potential of urban rent, accompanied by a looser regulatory environment, rendered housing a highly lucrative economic sector in this period. Under these conditions, corporate capitalists began to acquire a significant share of the market, typically through large-scale projects and high-rise buildings. Thus, the housing market in this period was energized by the involvement of corporate capitalists, leading to the "urbanization of capital" (Şengül 2003). The loose regulatory environment granted state managers, both at the central and the newly introduced metropolitan level, significant authority to commercialize public land and grant zoning rights, which in turn created a fertile ground for corrupt practices. As a matter of fact, in this period, real estate turned into a convenient spot to park money gained through illegal activities (Green 2005). The post-1980 era witnessed a period in which construction gained immense momentum and played a crucial role in domestic growth. The considerable construction boom that started in the 1980s, however, would turn out to be rather short-lived, due to the chaotic deterioration of the economy in the following decade.

The AKP Era: Land-Based Accumulation at Full Scale

After AKP's rise to power in 2002, Turkey witnessed yet another and more intensive construction boom. Except for the global financial crisis years, the share of the construction industry in the domestic economy steadily increased until 2017. At the peak of this boom, with a 9.8% share of construction in total value added, Turkey was at the top among all OECD countries by a wide margin. The total of more than 10 million dwelling units built in this era was higher than half of the sum in EU-28 countries combined. The fever in housing was accompanied by a similar boom in the mega project scene that got intensified especially after 2008. In terms of public-private partnership (PPP) investmets, Turkey's performance was unmatched in Europe (Yeşilbağ 2020).

The construction boom was by no means a spontaneous response of market actors to conducive conditions. On the contrary, it was enabled by a full-fledged strategy of LBA implemented by the ruling AKP. The components of this strategy included a colossal commodification of public land; the transformation of TOKİ (Toplu Konut İdaresi-Mass Housing Administration) into a super institution equipped with immense resources and overarching authority along with several rounds of legislative changes in planning, zoning, land development, housing finance, urban transformation, and public procurement (Yeşilbağ 2020). AKP's construction drive obviously had some macroeconomic rationales including stimulating rapid growth in a number of related industries or creating jobs. Yet, it was more than that. LBA strategy effectively served as a mechanism to intervene in the intracapitalist balance of power in favor of the ruling party. While the AKP has always pursued an overall business-friendly agenda, it has also carried out a systematic set of policies to promote capital groups that

are organically linked with the party. These groups, thus, experienced a huge leap in this period, dramatically enhancing their power and wealth. Due to its inherent dependence on discretionary state action, construction turned out to be the optimum industry for such politically driven selective promotion. Both in infrastructural and housing segments, success in the industry depended on either receiving state contracts or land zoning rights. Through a meticulous tailoring of the legislative and regulatory framework of built environment production, most notably of the Public Procurement Law, the AKP managed to cater to the needs of its privileged capitalists in line with its political agenda.

Accumulation patterns in the upper echelons of the construction industry leave no doubt about the efficacy of this strategy. According to ENR Turkey, which ranks firms according to the total value of the contracts received from the state, eight of the top 10 firms are organically linked with the AKP. The World Bank list that ranks contractors of infrastructure projects in the developing world with respect to the investment value of total contracts received from the state from 1990 to 2019, reveals additional striking evidence. Accordingly, half of the top 10 firms originate from Turkey, and unsurprisingly, all five have ties with the AKP (Yeşilbağ 2022). These are the notorious "gang of five" that has been generating considerable rage among the broad opposition as AKP's favorite contractors. The overall trend is that the old generation of big construction capital has lost its share in the domestic market and has been replaced by a new generation of firms with links to the ruling party.

A few remarks are in order. First, the LBA strategy is not merely a one-way mechanism to selectively nurture designated capitalists.

What is at stake can be defined as a party-capital complex. In this complex, the party distributes resources to designated capitalists and these capitalists, whose prospects tightly depend on their connections to the party, return the favor by publicly endorsing the party and contributing to the financing of party politics through informal mechanisms such as making donations to party-affiliated foundations or creating employment opportunities for the party rank-and-file (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014, Esen and Gümüşçü 2018, Yeşilbağ 2022). Second, the new market leaders have been pursuing a diversification agenda by expanding to other industries, most notably, mining and energy. Third, while the lion's share of the construction profits has been captured exclusively by AKP-linked firms, TÜSİAD firms have also received their share in related activities such as the production of input materials for construction or housing finance. Thus, the beneficiaries of the construction drive are not limited to "the gang of five".

Since the 1950s, relations between land, capital accumulation, and politics have been an ongoing theme in Turkish politics. The AKP era has transformed these relations into a systematic strategy of LBA and rendered construction as the backbone of its political-economic machinery. It should be noted that, contrary to widespread conviction, the AKP's strategy is not simply a peculiarity of Turkish politics under the AKP rule. LBA is a widespread pattern in contemporary global capitalism that has been manifesting itself in several diverse cases including Japan, the UK, China, the UAE, among others. Moreover, it should be remembered that the Turkish boom was firmly predicated upon foreign capital flows from advanced capitalist countries, especially British expertise in the PPP scene (Smith 2019). Thus, regarding LBA

as an aberration of the AKP rule misses its promoters in the global scene as well as its systemic roots. Concomitantly, analytically weak conceptualizations such as crony capitalism should be avoided. As Boratav (2016, 2) succinctly reminds us, "vis à vis the state the bourgeoisie is, by nature, a rent-seeking and, hence, potentially corrupt class."

This last point has crucial implications for the current political scene in Turkey and the question of how things may unfold after the elections in May. The twin earthquakes in February demonstrated the devastating consequences of AKP's built environment policies with a tremendous death toll, spectacular infrastructural inadequacy, and further deterioration of the housing crisis. It is probable that the AKP rule might not be able to survive this total collapse of its own making. Perhaps, the LBA strategy that has functioned as the pivotal element of the party's tight grip on power will, this time, serve as its coup de grace. This situation is creating fertile ground for questioning the systemic problems in the built environment production scene and for the popularization of demands to reverse the commodification of land. The main opposition alliance, on the other hand, has remained careful to follow a business-friendly agenda and seemingly limited its projections to the persecutions of state managers involved in corruption and sanctions against "the gang of five." Unless a radical perspective for the decommodification of land and the right to housing forces its way into the political horizon, land is expected to remain an irresistible site of capital accumulation as well as a crucial resource for statecraft. ◆

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A Natural or Political Disaster?
Erdoğan, Earthquakes, and Elections

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Turkey was shaken by a major 7.8 magnitude earthquake in August 1999. The epicenter was located in densely populated industrial zones in the country's northwest. More than 18,000 were killed and hundreds of thousands were left homeless. Hours after the quake civil society organizations and the Turkish armed forces were on the ground helping survivors in rescue and relief efforts. Yet, the coalition government was criticized for its delayed response to the event.

24 years later in early February 2023, Turkey's southeast was hit by two major quakes of a similar magnitude. 10 cities were affected, two of which were almost completely destroyed. Thousands of buildings collapsed, killing more than 50,000 people by conservative estimates. Thousands of these victims survived the quake but later died waiting for rescue teams, who failed to arrive on the scene until days later.

Over the course of 24 years, many things have changed in Turkey. In 1999, the Turkish GDP/capita was 4000 USD, and by 2023 it reached 10,000 USD. A very strict and well-designed building code was passed after the quake in 1999 to prevent future large-scale destruction. Besides, after 1999, incoming governments collected more than 80

billion USD in 'earthquake' tax to strengthen existing buildings and prepare the country for future quakes. Moreover, over the course of 24 years, the country's transportation and telecommunications infrastructure improved significantly. Now there is an airport in every city, and cell phone towers envelop all corners of the country. The technology which is available in rescue efforts is also more sophisticated than it was 25 years ago. Finally, Turkey since 2018, is a presidential system that is highly centralized and equipped to act swiftly at times of crisis.

Given greater resources, solid legal safeguards, improved infrastructure, and centralized executive authority, one would expect then to witness much less destruction and better-coordinated relief efforts in response to the 2023 quake. So, what happened? How can we explain the scale of destruction experienced in 2023, which is much greater than that caused by the 1999 quake, despite greater material, institutional, and technological resources at the government's disposal?

This piece argues that the cause of this destruction is political in nature and closely linked to the political system that the Justice and Development Party (AKP), and its leader Tayyip Erdoğan, have built in the past two decades. President Erdoğan has been ruling

the country in different capacities since 2003—first as prime minister, then as the president within the existing parliamentary system, and since 2018, as the president in a hyper-presidential system. Furthermore, since the transition to a presidential system, Erdoğan has monopolized power and is now the sole authority to make all executive decisions (Esen and Gumuscu 2018a). Arguably, Erdoğan governments have failed in two key areas in the recent disaster. First, they failed to build safe cities, residential areas, hospitals, factories, and schools. Second, they failed in mobilizing resources and coordinating rescue and relief efforts, which led to a significant increase in the death toll. These failures stem from the political and economic system that is characterized by the personalist and autocratic rule of President Erdoğan which is ridden with corruption. Below, I first discuss the AKP's failure in building safe cities and then turn to its failed relief and rescue operations.

Construction, Corruption, and Coalitions

The Turkish economy under Erdoğan's leadership has relied on construction as its driving force. A construction boom over the past twenty years saw the building of housing projects, airports, highways, bridges, subways, and hospital complexes. This boom, supported by the government's monetary policy and public-private partnerships with loan and turnover guarantees, led to a major change, as the construction sector reached the share of manufacturing in the Turkish economy (Sönmez 2017).

Erdoğan government sidelined or gutted all independent agencies that are supposed to hold the government, contractors, developers, and mayors accountable in this construction boom. In mega-projects funded by

the state, there emerged a network of crony connections between the government and its business allies. For instance, the independent Public Procurement Authority (Kamu Ihale Kurumu) was stripped of its oversight functions, while the government changed the public tender act more than 160 times to align the legislative framework with its political-economic interests (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014). In addition to the legislative changes, the AKP also redesigned the Turkish judicial system, including the higher courts (the Constitutional Court, Court of Accounts, and Court of Cassation), and increased the executive's control over the judicial branch. The courts have been largely packed and higher courts' authority has been undermined (Özbudun 2015, Soyaltın-Colella 2022). This led to decreasing accountability in both public megaprojects supported by the government, and housing projects run by private businesses and public authorities.

Another key actor who lost their clout in this process has been the professional associations and organizations. Formerly established in a corporatist fashion, these chambers were charged to oversee and approve urban development projects and to protect public interest. The AKP sidelined these chambers in a 2013 legislation that shattered their centralized authority and privatized the oversight and auditing processes of construction projects. This legislation turned audits into corrupt exchanges where, as reported by scholars, new audit companies treated the oversight process as a profitable formality where engineers rented their diplomas to unqualified persons and signed reports without proper investigation (Engin and Özbil 2022). This led to further corruption and poor quality in new buildings. Most local governments are also controlled by the AKP, making these corrupt exchanges at all levels mundane.

These changes created strong ties between the AKP governments and municipalities on the one hand and contractors and developers—small or large—on the other. The unregulated and increasingly politicized construction boom helped the party build crony ties with major contractors exchanging tenders and bids for political and campaign support (Esen and Gumuscu 2018b). They formed the backbone of AKP's ruling coalition. Such corruption was largely enabled by a drastic decline in freedom of the press. With an estimated 90 percent of the Turkish media under government control, thanks to pro-AKP business-people taking over existing media companies, the press no longer performs its tasks as watchdogs to hold different levels of the government and actors in the construction sector accountable.

The construction sector also played a central role in AKP's relationship with its constituency. To receive the support of lower-middle-income families, the AKP occasionally used the housing card. In its first term in power, the government expanded municipal services to unregistered homes and lifted prison sentences for those who extended utilities to buildings that violated existing codes. In 2012, the party centralized land management in disaster-prone areas and started an extensive urban development process. The construction boom in housing directly impacted the lives of millions of people. While some were adversely affected, many benefitted from this boom as they contracted their old homes to developers to get multi-story apartment complexes in return. Again in 2018, weeks before the general election, the government passed an amnesty for all buildings that violated the building codes. Around 10 million residential buildings were covered by this amnesty, practically legalizing their illegal possessions, and reducing existing legal safeguards to irrele-

vance. Thousands of these buildings were in cities affected by the earthquake, and several of them turned into rubble in February.

Needless to say, corruption, particularly in the construction sector, had been a key issue in Turkey, as the scale of destruction of the 1999 earthquake also attests. However, no other government in Turkish modern history has amassed as much power as the AKP with almost absolute control over the local and central government, the media, and civil society. The extent of this control gave the corrupt practices in the construction sector a systemic quality, generating large-scale destruction, despite growing resources and improved technology.

AKP's autocratic state

Behind this unprecedented level of political control lies the increasingly authoritarian political system. Parallel to the growing corruption in the politics of construction, we observe a gradual slide into authoritarianism under the AKP's 20 years in office. A key feature of this authoritarian slide has been the centralization of power in Erdoğan's hands. First, as prime minister, Erdoğan pursued executive aggrandizement (Bermeo 2015) at the expense of the judicial branch and other autonomous agencies of the government, as I discussed above. After 2014, Erdoğan pushed for a presidential system that would sideline the legislative branch. The failed coup attempt in 2016 allowed him to establish de facto presidentialism through a state of emergency. Under these extraordinary circumstances, his party then passed a constitutional referendum in 2017 to institutionalize his monopoly of power. In the 2018 elections, the country completed its transition to a presidential system with very few checks and balances and amassed extensive power in the presidential

office. The new system gave power and authority in pretty much all aspects of governance to Erdoğan. Every single decision, from environmental regulations to horse races, had to pass through him. This authority also included giving approval to all state agencies before they carry out their agenda. The justification for these changes was to increase government effectiveness and allow the executive branch to take swift action in times of crisis.

AKP's dismal performance in relief and rescue efforts:

In this system, all public agencies are tied to Erdoğan. They lack autonomy or agency and cannot act without his approval. When they do act, they make sure to refer to Erdoğan's orders. Therefore, on the day of the earthquake and its aftermath, all public agencies waited for his orders. A key institution that was charged with relief and rescue was the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), which was created in 2009 as the central agency to manage natural disasters, including earthquakes, and coordinate rescue and relief efforts. AFAD's capacity, however, fell quite short to meet the need in the past months. AFAD could send only 10,000 personnel for rescue where more than 6,500 buildings collapsed across 10 cities. One reason for this shortcoming was AFAD's limited resources, which were cut by the government in 2023 by 30 percent. It was clear that the agency was not prepared for a disaster of such magnitude. Although tens of countries sent support for rescue and relief, and hundreds of thousands of Turkish citizens volunteered and made donations, AFAD failed to coordinate these resources. Such shortcomings and failures led to significant delays in rescue efforts, driving the death toll higher and higher.

Both AFAD and the Turkish Red Crescent failed in their relief efforts. People who survived the quakes waited for food, water, shelter, and sanitation for days and weeks. As these agencies fell short, civil society organizations tried to pick up the pieces. Several scandals were revealed in the meantime. One instance concerned the Turkish Red Crescent, which sold its tents to civil society organizations rather than sending them to the disaster affected areas for free.

These agencies tasked with rescue and relief clearly proved their incompetence. If limited resources are one main reason why these agencies failed, the other is their incompetent personnel. This incompetence is directly linked to the de-institutionalization caused by the new presidential system and increasingly partisan and nepotistic hiring practices within such institutions. AFAD, for instance, like many other state agencies, turned into the party's fiefdom for partisan appointments. For instance, the head of the Disaster Response Department is a theologian trained in the study of Islamic tradition with no expertise in disaster management. Similarly, 150 years old Turkish Red Crescent has turned into a target of nepotistic connections. Its director, Kerem Kınık, hired his family members in different parts of the organization, while former Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım's family members colonized the Istanbul branch of the Turkish Red Crescent.

Curiously enough, given the widescale destruction and lack of resources in AFAD, Erdoğan did not mobilize the material and human resources of the Turkish armed forces for relief efforts in the areas impacted by the earthquake. In fact, the Turkish army--the second largest in NATO--had several divisions stationed in different cities affected by the earthquake. Although they could be

be quickly deployed for relief and rescue, Erdoğan decided to keep the armed forces in their barracks, while thousands of Turkish people waited for help. A few days after the quake, the government deployed around 6,000 troops to help with relief efforts. These efforts were too little too late.

Erdoğan's reluctance to deploy the armed forces was informed by his political agenda. He spent considerable effort over the past 20 years to subdue the Turkish military and replace it with his own person as the most trusted actor in Turkish society. Indeed, in his first term in power, Erdoğan had stripped the armed forces of its authority to act in times of humanitarian disasters. This led to the declining capacity of the Turkish military in relief efforts (Özkan 2023).

Managing voters' perceptions instead of the crisis:

Instead of mobilizing all public resources for relief and rescue, Erdoğan chose to manage people's perception of his government's overall performance. Waging what one might call information warfare, government-controlled media exclusively focused on rescue operations turning them into major achievements for the government. Some of these rescue efforts were carried out by foreign teams which were replaced by AFAD teams right before the person was recovered from under the rubble. No shortcomings of the government were covered in any of these news stories. When survivors wanted to voice their unmet needs in live coverage, they were censored by reporters who worked for pro-government media companies.

The government also attempted to control social media to make sure its success story was the only narrative around relief and rescue

operations. The day after the quake, outspoken critics on social media were detained for hours. On day two, the AKP-controlled Information and Communications Technologies Authority (BTK) restricted traffic on Twitter, which had served as an alternative information source for millions of people, including those who were trapped under the rubble. As a result of these restrictions, rescue and relief teams run by the civil society lost their main communications channel. Only after a huge popular backlash, the BTK lifted restrictions on Twitter. Yet, AKP trolls remained active in social media to silence dissenting voices. In the meantime, Erdoğan defamed those who were criticizing his administration for its dismal performance and threatened his critics with further legal action. A few weeks after the quakes, government controlled Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) issued several fines against independent news channels for their critical coverage of the disaster. Even civil society organizations, which helped survivors but at the same time overshadowed the government with their superb performance, were not spared, as political leaders and AKP trolls attacked and tried to discredit them.

What's next?

The general election scheduled on May 14 is critical in many respects. Opposition parties recognize the problems associated with hyper-presidentialism and lack of accountability in the system. They call for a return to a more democratic parliamentary system and the rebuilding of public institutions that are undermined by Erdoğan in the past two decades. They also promise to replace prevalent nepotism and partisan appointments with meritocratic practices. This is what the Turkish state and democracy need after several years of backsliding and deinstitutionalization. The

opposition has increased its election chances, despite the uneven political playing field in the country, by forming an electoral alliance and fielding a joint candidate, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. Kılıçdaroğlu promised to cut crony ties between the state and contractors, end corruption by overhauling the construction sector and serve the needs of the Turkish people for safe housing. These are bold promises against entrenched interests. If Kılıçdaroğlu wins the elections, it will be curious to see if he can fulfill these promises.

Erdoğan, meanwhile, is facing a double crisis caused by his economic and governance failures. Arguably, he is the weakest he has been since coming to power. That said, he has substantial control over the state and can mobilize its resources to stay in power. If that happens to be the case, there is not much reason to expect a significant change in the crony ties and the corrupt system the party forged over the years. ◆

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Gender Regime in Turkey Today

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As we pen this text, Turkey is preparing for presidential and general elections only a few weeks ahead (14 May). Party politics is overwhelmed with electoral alliances. Gender regime takes its place in this milieu. We observe the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) form a coalition with the New Welfare Party (YRP) and Free Cause Party (HÜDAPAR) with open opposition to gender equality and women's rights demands. This seems to be extreme even for the AKP, considering that the İstanbul Convention (IC, 2011) was ratified during its rule.

The AKP came to power at a time of crisis in center politics that was the dominant platform for coalition governments in the 1990s. It came with the promise to end the economic crisis in the country. It came into a gender regime, defined mostly by Kemalist Republican priorities. The Republican gender regime calls women into equal citizenship on the condition that they strip off their sexual identities - an impossible task for sure. Women are offered equality of opportunities in public life while expected to prioritize their familial responsibilities. Republican patriarchy invited women into the public sphere as asexual subjects and asked them to abide by their familial responsibilities in subordination to men. The corresponding gender regime is meant to liberate women from Islamic seclusion through modernization. As such this gender regime asked for its own feminism - in Tekeli's words, *state feminism*. The AKP, on the other hand, painted a liberal-Muslim political stance; the gender rhetoric of its prominent members was one axis in this respect. The party has been consistent in ignoring and condemning feminist politics, voicing doubts about the convenience and feasibility of gender equality. But this was

open to negotiations with different organizations from within the women's movements in Turkey - including the feminists. The liberal rhetoric was also manipulated to continue positive relations with the European Union.

AKP's rule in two decades can be classified into three periods based on the party's approach to rights-based politics in general, and gender equality in particular. The first period (2002-2010) is marked by the party's attempts to appear liberal in identity-related measures and neoliberal in the rest. This period witnessed the Penal Code reforms (2004), amendments to the Law on Municipalities (2005) that set the state responsible for opening women's shelters, and the formation of a parliamentary commission for gender equality (2009). The unfolding of gender history has so far evinced that these measures were not planned for mid or long-term practices. One example is the amendment that abandoned the rapists to escape punishment in case they marry the rape victims. The annulment is still in place, but rape cases almost always encounter conservative touches in governmental discourse. The mode of patriarchy in this and the following period is named neoliberal-conservative.

The second period (2011-2013) is marked by the exclusive familialism in gender policies. Here, we see selective dialogue and bargaining with women's rights organizations, and a tendency to use such processes, as a showcase to fend off more opposition - domestic and international (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2011). In 2011 the AKP government hosted the inauguration of The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence in İstanbul - i.e., the İstanbul Convention (IC). Turkey was among the first signatories to the IC, manifesting the AKP's tendency to appear

pro-European and liberal in its ruling tactics. It also represents the party's success in maneuvering around the claims of women's rights/feminist organizations while keeping its conservative electorate at bay by maintaining its stance against gender equality. In this balancing effort, the party aims to preserve its women electorate with a sensitivity to women's rights, its moderate representation at the international level, and its conservative and Islamist social background. Despite this, the AKP succeeded in evading a united opposition from within the women's movements in the country by usual neoliberal maneuvers - stepping into the negotiation platform with single issues at hand; separating feminist rights-based claims from citizenship rights, and addressing women's rights organizations (WRO) individually and not as members of the women's movement.

Finally, 2014 marks the start of AKP's third phase in governing, and its gender regime. This phase hosts the consolidation of the personalistic-religious mode of patriarchy, which defines the socio-political setting where the state is represented in the persona of the president. The gender policies are devised, presented, and implemented as if the state, in the person of the president, has an intimate connection between women and men. Here, *he* is situated as a patriarch, calling women to take hold of their familial and/or domestic responsibilities as professional deeds. This state and its president are different from the earlier Republican counterpart by aiming to create a personal and intimate relationship with the citizens in general. The state is pictured in the persona of the president, and thus its relation to different genders is built with reference to a cis-male ruler denying nonconforming gender identities. The president does not need any intermediaries in his relationship with the people in general and with women in

particular. Thus, in his Sunni-Turkish identity, he asks to be portrayed as the ideal ruler of the household and approaches the nation as the household (Coşar 2022).

New Discursive Strategies and Political Tactics

As the AKP consolidated its personalistic "one-man rule", particularly from the 2016 *coup d'etat* attempt onwards, its strategic use of gender politics has gained new dimensions with a variety of discursive strategies and political tactics, perpetuating polarization in society. The opposition to feminist politics has always been a key part of AKP's religio-conservative value system (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2011). In the post-2019 period, this opposition has acquired Schmittian qualities, turning the concept of gender, gender-equality activism, and LGBTQI+ rights into a "political enemy". Securitization strategies have been put in place, tapping into social fears about the allegedly negative effects of gendered perspectives on family, nation, and culture.

Turkey's withdrawal from the IC in 2021 exemplifies a critical political juncture where AKP's securitization of gender crystallizes. While the AKP regarded the ratification of the IC as a matter of national pride in 2011, in a contemporary context, it turned the IC into a "problem space". AKP's opposition to the IC revolves around the idea that the convention granting protection from violence, regardless of gender and sexual orientation, is not in tune with the so-called socio-cultural sensitivities (BBC Türkçe 2019). Thus, the IC is framed as a Western imposition of a wide range of actors such as European states, international bodies, left-wing and liberal politicians, feminists, and LGBTQI+ people. The convention is imagined to be a "Trojan horse" aimed to smuggle same-sex relations into law

and to disintegrate the national moral fabric: "Some actors are attacking our national and spiritual values again. … In our understanding, supporters of these marginal acts that clash with our faith and our culture are allies of the same perversion..." (T24 2020).

AKP's vilification of the IC draws on a populist appropriation of anti-gender ideology, a reactionary political position adopted by contemporary right-wing populist (RWP) politics, transnational men's movements, and anti-gender mobilizations that denotes opposition to a broad amalgam of socio-political reforms, namely sexual and reproductive rights, same-sex marriage, new reproductive technologies, gender mainstreaming, and protection against gender violence (Graff and Korolzcuk 2021). Recent feminist studies demonstrate that in contexts where RWP parties are in power, anti-genderism is incorporated into the state agenda to reinforce the discursively constructed antagonistic divides in society between the elites and the national will. This enhances RWP actors' claims to be the "legitimate" defenders of the "common" people against the "depraved" elites (Paternotte and Kuhar 2017).

In the Turkish context, Islamist civilizationalist frames contribute to AKP's populist securitization and vilification of the "gender ideology", associating the "perversities" of "gender ideology" with "European sexual democracy", a political narrative framing Europe as the avatar of sexual freedom and nonnormative sexualities (Ayoub and Paternotte 2014). In this rhetoric, the discursive link between "strong families" and Islamist civilizationalism functions as a means of symbolic boundary making, constructing "decadent" Europe as its antagonistic frontier and a source of threat to family and culture. AKP's Islamist civilizationalist discourses foreground parti-

cular attention to Islam to cultivate a nativist national belonging and represent Islam as the panacea to the "perils" of Western lifestyles. Problematizing the "gender ideology" of the IC as a civilizational threat to the family, an anonymous AKP official states:

"We argue that the family institution is the main societal pillar. But there is no family in Europe, only individuals. Once you destroy family, what you get is the third gender…" (BBC Türkçe 2021)).

The proliferation of anti-gender rhetorical strategies in AKP's reshuffling of the gender regime goes hand in hand with the party's emerging coalitions with anti-gender mobilizations. In the post-2019 period, AKP actors have explicitly articulated their selective support for anti-gender actors and facilitated anti-gender rallies, while denying permission to other protests such as pride walks and feminist demonstrations. AKP mayors and MPs joined these anti-gender rallies organized in different cities and amplified their anti-equality demands (Kaos GL 2022). This shift toward a fierce performance of anti-genderism makes gender equality politics more contentious with serious consequences for the future of gender policy-making and gender-equal democracy.

Prospects and Challenges

When AKP first won the general elections in 2002, the WROs/feminist organizations were at a relatively advantageous stage in terms of institutionalization, transnational activities, and bargaining tactics at the national, regional, and local levels. The party initially manipulated the shortcomings of the Republican

gender regime for women's rights and liberties in drawing a gender-friendly portrait. By the presidential election by popular vote in 2014 - for the first time in Turkey - it is possible to see the shift from a pro-bargaining position to a securitizing one. The party rhetoric was increasingly imbued with survivalist notes - declaration of a *new* national liberation, emphasis on internal and external enemies, and criminalization of socio-political opposition as terrorist involvements marked the post-2014 political agenda of the AKP governments, and Erdoğan as the President, tending to fascistic practices.[1] The 2016 *coup d'état* attempt and the following two-year-long State of Emergency helped the AKP government and Erdoğan in their attempts to frame politics and their policies into security discourse: political space is defined as a *war zone*, and politics is presented as a matter of survival. Accompanying this discourse is a rhetorical reference to the fate-based pattern of things, where the irrationalities are explained on the basis of faith. It also relates to the way women are considered - in terms of their God-given, inborn, *essential* subordination to men - in terms of their nature (fıtrat). Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya (Minister of Family and Social Policies in the 65th government), details women's fıtrat in terms of "family and children" and condemns women's claims for independence as "one of the main delusions of the modern world" (Yakın Bir Gelecekte 2015).

Women who divert from *fıtrat*, thus feminists who always do so, take their share from the securitized discourse:

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1 Here we refer to fascism as a form of relation to politics. See Eley 2014. In our reading, fascistic politics is manifested in the dominance of fear in politics – fear of losing power, fear of punishment by the institutional power-holders; personalization of politics; and anti-intellectualism.

"A group, gathering as if for Women's Day in Taksim, … insulted the call to prayer with whistles, slogans. … They directly attack our independence and future. … Therefore, we will struggle with these enemies of the call to prayer and flag, to the end" (Erdoğan Yine 2019).

As the AKP's personalistic-religious patriarchy is consolidating, the *daughters of the Republic* are replaced by *our lady sisters*; the State as a father - the papa-state - is replaced by the leader as an ordinary but ideal male, preferably the Sunni-Turkish one in his most *authentic* mode; and the ideal family modeled on bourgeois ethics is replaced by family as a social security net, while citizens are called into acting as *devout* family members in their identification with the nation.

The upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections constitute a decisive political moment for the future of the country. The hostile language that Erdoğan uses vis-a-vis the growing anger and criticism in the country over AKP's incapacity to respond to the devastating series of earthquakes, has given the first signals of what awaits Turkey in case the current parliamentary composition and presidency are continued. As the Republic enters its second century, a possible electoral victory of Erdoğan's political incivility and machismo might mean further discourse institutionalization in which *one man's* rule will be further reflected in institutional politics. The party's recent rhetoric and policy initiatives indicate that new institutional structures, such as women's universities, government-mandated family research centers, and constitutional changes to further suppress LGBTQI+ rights will most probably be introduced. This new wave of institutionalization and its gendered modalities will perpetuate the *culture war* and the increased polarization around key gender issues such as violence against women, reproductive rights, and LGBTQI+ rights while leaving women and LGBTQI+ subjects without any legal protection mechanisms. The alliance that the AKP forged with Islamist fundamentalists, the YRP and Hüda-Par, to widen its conservative voter base in the upcoming elections, also signals the increase in the risks against rights-based politics in the country. The proposed abolishment of Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Combating Domestic Violence is one example in this respect. Similar to the negative campaign on the IC, the main idea behind this opposition to Law No. 6284 is that it allegedly disintegrates families and disrupts the national moral fabric. As political bargains in AKP's People's Alliance are made around compromises from women's rights, a possible victory for AKP would also mean that Islamist fundamentalist circles will have greater leeway in the new government to reconfigure gender policymaking along anti-equality perspectives. ◆

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Research Symposium: Recent Reconfigurations to Social Policy in the MENA Region: Old Wine in a New Bottle?

Introduction

Gamze Çavdar

Like much of the late industrializing world, the MENA region has never developed a rights-based social welfare system like the one in Europe that was created as a culmination of a democratization process. Social welfare regimes in the MENA region show great variation among countries due to differing levels of state capacity, social movements, and economic development. On the one end of the continuum, one finds the poorest countries, such as Yemen and Syria, which struggle to provide basic services even to the poorest segments of their population. On the other end, one finds the oil rich GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries that offer generous programs to their citizens (Karshenas et al. 2014). This symposium brings together a total of four articles that discuss recent reconfigurations of welfare regimes in the region. Each of the three articles discusses the idiosyncrasies of a single case—Egypt, United Arab Emirates, and Turkey—followed by an article that discusses the gender dimensions.

Despite their differences, the examinations of the current welfare regimes in Egypt, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates highlight a series of characteristics that they all have in common: First, they are on their way to adopting, or have already adopted, the model of "social safety nets". The concept of "social safety nets" or "social assistance" was first introduced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in connection to the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) lending model, which aimed to reduce the role of the government in the economies of developing countries—later they were included among the Sustainable Development Goals. The social safety nets refer to the specific programs that target the poorest of the poor to alleviate the impacts of these SAPs. The term is an analogy drawn from acrobatics where high-wire walkers are protected by a safety net if they were to fall (Paitoonpong et al. 2008). Put differently, social safety nets aim to "catch" and protect those citizens who fall out of the system and into extreme poverty, thereby jeopardizing the sustainability of the capitalist system. The scope of these assistance programs has expanded over time in response to soaring poverty. According to the World Bank's 2018 definition, social safety nets include unconditional cash transfers, conditional cash transfers, social pensions, food and in-kind transfers, school feeding programs, public works, fee waivers, targeted subsidies, and other interventions or social services provided to vulnerable populations (The State of Social Safety Nets 2018, 6). It is important to highlight that these programs could be public or private, the latter of which is especially encouraged by international financial agencies on the basis that public programs cannot possibly scale up to the needs of growing populations. The point here is that social safety nets are not a departure from the neoliberal model of development, rather, it is a less expansive, more austere, and market-oriented version of the welfare system—a

version that Garlard calls "WS 2.0" (Garlard 2016). Therefore, social safety nets represent part of a whole neoliberal package that all three cases have implemented in their unique ways. The rest of this package includes selective tax cuts, financial deregulation, privatization, credit expansion, the deterioration of public services, attacks on labor rights, limitations on subsidies, and the inclusion of non-governmental organizations in the provision of social services.

Second, fears about popular mobilizations in the face of soaring inequality and poverty have encouraged the expansion of social safety net programs. For instance, Neil Russell explains that in response to the popular uprisings of 2011, Egyptian social assistance programs have become much more generous, and President Sisi initiated two cash transfer programs namely Takaful and Karama. In the same way in Turkey, under the AKP rule, the average per capita welfare transfer has significantly increased and there has been an expansion of the scope of the programs with cash transfers and housing. As Erdem Yoruk discusses, the political mobilization of the increasing number of urban poor in Turkey has been a major concern since the 1990s. Bethany Shockley and Stephen Louw write that inequality—both individual and regional—is a major concern even in rich, oil-producing rentier states. Benefits are not equally distributed among the citizens as royal connections, being in an elite position vs non-elite citizens do matter. As UAE moves from subsidies to targeted benefits, low-income families receive help with food, electricity, water, etc. Nevertheless, inequalities remain in terms of quality and access to these services.

Third, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented expansions of social safety nets because the event significantly under-mined the employment and income of significant portions of the population, especially blue-collar workers. For instance, Egypt announced one of the most generous stimulus packages as a percentage of GDP and consolidated the state's direct role in service provision. In Turkey, the pandemic has worsened the economic crisis and increased the demands for social assistance programs and their services. The United Arab Emirates, too, significantly expanded its direct assistance to families in need, including providing free internet services to help with online education. However, these are ad-hoc arrangements, and the expansion could be reversed as soon as these governments decide that the need for these services is no longer there.

Fourth, although the inclusion of non-governmental organizations in the provision of social services is promoted by international financial agencies as "above politics", and justified only in monetary terms, their involvement is political and has had political consequences. Egypt first experienced the expansion of the Brotherhood-affiliated services under the Mubarak regime, then witnessed the dismantling of over 1000 Brotherhood-affiliated associations under President Sisi. Many other service providers were either nationalized or co-opted. The Egyptian case demonstrates the unreliable nature of these providers' involvement and vulnerability to political confrontation. Under the AKP rule in Turkey, the involvement of select faith-based organizations in the provision of social services has helped create a clientelist social welfare provision in which the AKP received political support in return (Cavdar 2022). In the UAE, there have been efforts to minimize Islamist groups', like Al-Islah, influence in the poorer regions of the country.

Fifth, as Claudia Yaoukim explains, the

pandemic has significantly increased the gendered gap in women's employment and labor market participation. Only a handful of MENA countries have adopted gender-sensitive responses to mitigate these impacts. Therefore, the already low level of female labor force participation in the MENA—often called the MENA paradox—has increased. Furthermore, COVID-19 has highlighted the intensive, unpaid, care work that is primarily carried out by women. The existing social safety nets fall short of addressing the burden of carrying out unpaid care by women.

As the world in general, and the MENA region in particular, deal with the unprecedented socio-economic crisis produced by the existing neoliberal global system, and exacerbated by the pandemic, it is clear that the number of people who are falling out of the system is greater than those caught by the social safety nets, whose best promise is nothing but to help them get back on top of the wire and continue the dangerous balancing act. In other words, this model bandages the wound while promoting the wide-range policies, such as the attacks on labor rights, privatization, and financialization, that continue to create insecure jobs, mass unemployment, and poverty. Furthermore, this social policy model offers nothing to millions of migrants, refugees, and women. Because the crisis is expected to become more embedded and widespread in the face of imminent artificial intelligence and automation, it is imperative to think outside the box of neoliberalism and imagine a different social policy model that is humane and equitable and meets the needs of all segments of the population. ◆

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Revisiting Egypt's Mixed Economy of Service Provision through COVID-19: State Social Policy, State-led Charities, and Co-opted (Islamic) NGOs

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Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, states across the world were tasked with policy responses to protect citizen welfare, with the poor and vulnerable at particular risk. While the pandemic appears over, public governance and the extension of social protections to communities remains as important as ever. States participate in the direct provision of social protection to varying degrees, with non-state actors often also playing a prominent role in social service provision (Cammett and MacLean 2014). However, in the authoritarian contexts of Middle East and North African (MENA) states, achieving social protection presents a dilemma for leaders around the balance between state and non-state service provision. States such as Egypt, which do not benefit from the abundance of natural resources of oil-rich Gulf states, face pressures to increase public provisions of support yet with relatively scant resources. External support from international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank offers one option, yet previous neoliberal arrangements have curbed rather than enlarged the state's functions (Harrigan and el-Said 2008). Domestically, civil society actors, including (Islamic) voluntary associations

and NGOs, can be encouraged to provide welfare services to ease the burden on the state (Pioppi 2007). While this serves a social function, it also presents a political risk, for welfare provision provides a potential source of support for Islamist political movements opposing the state.

In Egypt's 'mixed economy of charity' the extent of non-state service provision has fluctuated historically vis-à-vis the state and its own service apparatus (Singer 2008, 177). These relations can be understood as undergoing periodic cycles of accommodation and suppression, depending on the (sometimes enforced) requirements of the state during critical junctures. Whereas economic liberalisation adjustments under Sadat and Mubarak necessitated the encouragement of non-state welfare provision (Pioppi 2007), in my recent *Democratization* article, 'Reconstituted authoritarianism: Islam, service provision and the state in al-Sisi's Egypt' (2023), I detail the dismantlement of the Muslim Brotherhood's service apparatus under President Sisi and the extension of direct state controls over the Islamic charitable sector. The COVID-19 pandemic and the social challenges it poses presents an opportunity to revisit these

relations, and whether it is leading to another revision of Egypt's state-society balance of social provisions. The article examines four key areas of Egypt's current 'mixed economy' of service provision: the state's social policies, Takaful and Karama; the development of state-led charities, Tahya Masr and Bayt al-Zakat; state-pliant national NGOs, the Egyptian Food Bank and Misr el-Kheir; and the co-opted Islamic association, al-Gam'iyya al-Shar'iyya.

State Social Policies: Takaful and Karama

Since 2015, Egypt's flagship social policies under President Sisi include two cash transfer programmes - Takaful (insurance) and Karama (dignity). Supported by a $400 million investment from the World Bank, their establishment represented a shift in the Bank's orthodoxy and other international financial institutions around state service provision. During a previous fiscal crisis in 1991, an economic reform programme (ERSAP) was agreed with the IMF and World Bank to reinvigorate economic liberalization. The impact of this pro-market, anti-statist approach was significant decline in state welfare and encouragement of NGO activity to substitute (Hinnebusch 1993, 161). Since 2013, however, the IMF and World Bank have advocated reform of Egypt's vast energy and food subsidy system, with cash transfers providing a means of mitigating the reforms' impact on the poorest. The IMF agreed to lend $12 billion over three years, enabling increased service provision to compensate for reduced subsidies. IMF mission chief for Egypt Christopher Jarvis noted that, "to help the poor weather the reforms, the government is increasing cash transfers and spending on health, education, and infrastructure". These explicit recommendations for expanding state

health and education services contrasted the World Bank and IMF's pre-2013 stance.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to unprecedented extensions of direct state support globally, to mitigate the impact of national lockdowns and halting of economic activity, prompting questions around a new era of social-safety nets (The Economist 2021). Most Arab states announced stimulus packages targeting people and the economy mitigating the impact of the crisis, with Egypt displaying among the highest stimulus packages as a percentage of GDP in the region (UNESCAW 2020). Cash transfers and income support represented the main social policy protection measure across the world, mirrored in many MENA states. Among Egypt's social policy interventions was the extension of the Takaful and Karama programmes established in 2015. As the pandemic struck in early 2020, around 3 million households were enrolled in both programmes (World Bank 2020). Through extended World Bank support, 411,000 new families were added to the programme in 2020 (State Information Service 2021), with a further 300,000 being added across 2021 and 2022 (Moneim 2022). Through the continued support of international financial institutions, the Egyptian state extended the beneficiaries of this pre-existing initiative to address the health crisis.

State-led Charities: Tahya Masr and Bayt al-Zakat

The pre-2020 increase in cash transfers alongside subsidy reduction presented a challenge to ensure the net effect was not negative. The response was a hybridity increasing state control over society, with semblances of Nasserist welfarism, while maintaining the neoliberal political economy inherited from Sisi's predecessor Mubarak. Khalil and Dill (2018)

conceptualise this hybrid as 'statist neoliberalism', with austerity measures undertaken simultaneously to major development and welfare projects. They argue the Egyptian government 'is creating alternative avenues for resource mobilisation, through charity and business donations, to provide welfare services.' Two new state institutions – Bayt al-Zakat and Tahya Masr – were established for collecting and distributing charitable donations. Bayt al-Zakat is an outlet for Islamic charity, providing a new resource base to fund state-led welfare projects. Meanwhile, Tahya Masr is a presidential charity, formed to fund projects to boost the economy. Although its work has been largely directed towards 'mega-projects', like the new Nile suspension bridge (Morsy 2019), it also includes social projects reflecting the state's developmental foci.

During the pandemic's first phase, Tahya Masr claimed to provide food and humanitarian assistance to 500,000 families (Wu 2021). In January 2021, Health Minister Hala Zayed announced the fund would finance vaccine purchases (al-Yawm al-Saba'a 2021). The fund collected donations from banks and business for this purpose, eventually being entrusted with full responsibility for vaccination funding (al-Araby al-Jadid 2021), with the value of the initiative reaching £2 billion EGY (approx. $54 million) (Egypt Today 2021). Bayt al-Zakat, meanwhile, increased the breadth of its social protections to citizens. In April 2020, the families benefiting from its monthly sponsorship programmed rose doubled to 98,000 (Egypt Today 2020). Zakat funds supported 30,000 informal workers for three months as part of a Ministry of Manpower programme (Hammad 2021). Both state-led institutions played a prominent role coordinating with state ministries to provide social assistance during the pandemic.

State-pliant NGOs: Egyptian Food Bank and Misr el-Kheir

Under Sisi's presidency, the state re-established the predominance of select NGOs, particularly the Egyptian Food Bank and the Misr el-Kheir Foundation, as state collaborator's over service projects. State-owned media implored citizens to direct charitable donations to Misr el-Kheir (Noon Post 2015). A Sada el-Balad TV programme – a private yet pro-regime broadcaster - warned Egyptians not to donate money to Islamic associations, but to "reliable" sources, like Misr el-Kheir (Sada el-Balad 2016). These NGOs have strong government ties. Ali Goma'a, former Grand Mufti under Mubarak, supervises both Misr el-Kheir and the Egyptian Food Bank (Abdallah 2017). As with state-led charities, the pandemic provided the opportunity for state-pliant NGOs to closely collaborate with state institutions. In March 2020, the Food Bank launched a relief campaign to provide food packages to 1.5 million families by the end of Ramadan, costing £150 million EGY (approx. $10 million) (Farouk 2020). Misr el-Kheir worked alongside the Health Ministry providing hospitals with medical supplies to minimise the spread of the virus (Ferhat 2020). Ventilators were also provided for hospitals and refrigerators to preserve vaccines (al-Bawabh News 2021). Misr el-Kheir also provided cartons of food to support 100,000 families facing isolation and quarantine (Ferhat 2020).

Co-opted Islamic Associations

In December 2013, 1,055 Islamic associations with alleged Brotherhood affiliations were seized and either nationalized or co-opted (Russell 2023). This included 138 of 1,100

branches of al-Gamʻiyya al-Sharʻiyya, one of Egypt's oldest Islamic associations. It was historically close to the Brotherhood, with members often active in both organizations (Brooke 2015), with branches being sites for 'entryism' by both the Brotherhood and ruling NDP party under Mubarak (Masoud 2014). The association enhanced its political activism during the 2011-2013 transition, leaving it vulnerable to the wider Brotherhood crackdown (Russell 2021). The Ministry of Social Solidarity and General Federation of NGOs subsequently purged branches of Brotherhood influences. From 2015, the Ministry licensed the association's fundraising but under strict oversights over its collection and use. This prompted closer coordination and collaboration between al-Gamʻiyya al-Sharʻiyya and various state institutions social service projects.

On the eve of the pandemic, al-Gamʻiyya al-Sharʻiyya's General Secretary, Mustapha Ismail, spoke up their close relationship with state institutions. This included: providing medical convoys in the Nile Valley with the Foreign Ministry; a commitment to follow the unified sermon provided by the Awqaf Ministry in their mosques; collaboration with Tahya Masr to improve infrastructure in rural villages; and providing optical services in military hospitals (al-Yawm al-Sabaʻa 2020a). In March 2020, Ismail announced a major partnership with the Ministry of Social Solidarity amidst the emerging pandemic (Al-Gamʻiyya al-Sharʻiyya 2020a). Crisis management groups in governorates set up food distribution networks, direct cash support to families, and protection supplies from the virus (Al-Gamʻiyya al-Sharʻiyya 2020b), while charitable convoys provided material aid to more than 8,000 families (al-Yawm al-Sabaʻa 2020b). Al-Gamʻiyya al-Sharʻiyya also participated in the "Abwab al-Kheir" humanitarian convoy (IICDR 2021), alongside Tahya Masr, the Egyptian Food Bank and Misr el-Kheir (al-Yawm al-Sabaʻa 2021). The nationwide convoy apparently reached 5 million citizens, with al-Gamʻiyya al-Sharʻiyya's contribution including hundreds of trucks carrying foodstuffs, respiration devices, clothing, and baby milk. The depth of the association's capabilities as a partner for the state during the crisis was clear.

Conclusion

From the coup to the cusp of the pandemic, the Egyptian state under President Sisi pursued a policy restricting service provision by Brotherhood-affiliated associations. To avoid socio-economic unrest, it tried to minimise the impact by expanding its own service role, aided by revisions among international financial institutions towards state-led welfare, leading to the social policies of Takaful and Karama. Rather than enabling Islamic welfare more widely to ease the burden on the state, as occurred under Mubarak, the priority under Sisi was the development of state-led institutions, including Tahya Masr and Bayt al-Zakat, to solicit donations to support state development projects. Co-optation of pliant nationally-networked NGOs, like the Egyptian Food Bank and Misr el-Kheir, lent further support to achieve the state's social aims, with a prominent role for an al-Gamʻiyya al-Sharʻiyya purged of Brotherhood affiliation.

The pandemic necessitated a major governmental response in social policy, particularly direct state supports through social-safety nets. Instead of a return to widespread encouragement of non-state services, the problem's nature enabled consolidation rather revision of the 'mixed economy' developed under Sisi's rule. Stimulus packages globally focused on direct cash transfers amid the

halting of economic activity, which in Egypt led to the extension of the Takaful and Karama programmes. Tahya Masr continued its role as an 'alternative source of resource mobilization' by funding and procuring vaccinations. Tahya Masr coordinated with state institutions on various service projects, collaborating with co-opted NGOs and associations including the Egyptian Food Bank, Misr el-Kheir, and al-Gam'iyya al-Shar'iyya. While in many respects the pandemic represents a critical juncture, for the dynamics of service provision in Egypt, it served to consolidate the state's direct role as a social benefactor, either through its own social policies and institutions, or through state-led charity and co-opted NGOs. ◆

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The Welfare State in Turkey During Neoliberalism and its Political Foundations

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While neoliberalism is oftentimes expected to undermine the welfare state, the Turkish welfare state has most dramatically expanded during the neoliberal period. After the 2000s, Turkey witnessed a boom in social assistance programs for the poor. Before the 2000s, the Turkish welfare system was based on a corporatist fragmented social provision, in which employees in the state sector, workers, and the self-employed were members of different institutions with different qualities of service and benefits. Between the 1950s and the 1990s, the Turkish welfare system provided social security, including and most importantly pensions, job security, and free health care primarily for formally employed workers and their families. These benefits were distributed through different institutions according to beneficiaries' employment status and included a diverse set of benefits for employees in the state sector, private sector employees, the self-employed, and peasants. Leading up to the 1990s, the population groups that were excluded from the formal welfare system, i.e. those not registered in the employment-based system, were covered by informal social safety nets. These safety nets included free housing and land opportunities which were provided by the government, the supportive relationships maintained with rural relatives, and the traditional solidarity mechanism developed among the urban poor. The new welfare system of the 2000s has largely eliminated this fragmented structure and has created a social security institution and a general health insurance system to cover all citizens. At his point, services for the informal poor were equalized with formal sector employees (Yörük 2012). This puzzling expansion of the Turkish welfare state can be explicable when considering the political factors that triggered the delivery of new social programs.

In this piece, I will first describe the nature of the contemporary Turkish welfare system in the context of global trends in welfare provision. Then, I will explain the key political dynamics and changes that have led to the transformation of the Turkish welfare state.

Turkey: A Member of the Populist Welfare State Regime

As a result of the expansion of welfare programs, Turkey has become a part of a new welfare state regime, designated as the Populist Welfare Regime (Yörük, Öker, and Tafoya 2022). The Populist Welfare Regime is characterized by (1) the earlier (post-war) limited

development of fragmented and corporatist social security systems that benefitted the privileged segments of formal sector workers and civil servants at the expense of the informal urban and rural poor, and (2) the neoliberal period's rapid development of social assistance and health care programs that target the, previously excluded, urban and rural poor, where (3) increasing state capacity enabled these social policies. This welfare regime is called populist because it is a historical outcome of two waves of populist politics that dominated the political economy of the developmentalist and neoliberal periods. The first such wave of populist politics is the traditional populism of the second and third quarters of the twentieth century, which came to be characterized by the political machines of the leadership of developing countries (Kühner 2010). These include Vargas in Brazil, Peron in Argentina, Ecevit in Turkey, Allende in Chile, and Salazar in Portugal. The second populist wave materialized in the 2000s with an explicit emphasis on people vs elites and has been led by leaders such as Lula in Brazil, Krischner in Argentina, Erdoğan in Turkey, Thaksin in Thailand, Orban in Hungary, Modi in India, or Putin in Russia.

In 2011, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy in Turkey was established to administer central government programs and to introduce new social assistance benefits. The budget of the Ministry of Family and Social Policy increased from US$ 955 million in 2002 to US$11.6 billion in 2014. The ratio of social expenditures to the GNP increased from 0.5% to 1.5% during the same period (Ministry of Family and Social Policy 2015) (GLOW 2020). Between 2000 and 2015, the average per capital social assistance transfers increased by 115 percent (GLOW 2020). The AKP has drastically expanded means-tested social assistance, in-kind or cash transfers,

free healthcare programs for the poor, conditional cash transfers, programs for orphans, food stamps, housing, education, and disability aid for the poor, sharply increasing the number of beneficiaries and the share of government budgets allocated (Buğra and Keyder 2006; Dorlach 2019; Elveren 2008; Yörük 2022). The free healthcare card program coverage for the poor (the Green Card Program) increased from 4.2% to 12.7% of the population from 2003 to 2009. In 2012, a universal healthcare system was established and Green Card holders were included in the new system (Yörük 2022). As such, the regular in-kind and cash benefits from the central government for a poor family adds up to US$260 per month, while the official minimum wage in Turkey is US$370 (Özgür 2014).

The AKP government has also initiated social housing programs targeting the poor that provide houses with cheap credit, covering over three million families by 2013. The Ministry of Education distributed all school course books free of charge to all primary and secondary education students, amounting to 15 million students in total. 600 thousand students each year are part of free-transportation-to-school programs, where they are served free lunch at the school. AKP put into the constitution affirmative action policies for disabled people, which largely increased their participation in the labor market. The coverage and generosity of disability benefits tripled and doubled, respectively, since 2002. This is also the case for old-age pensions for the poor.

The Politics of Welfare State Development in Turkey

To understand why a Populist Welfare Regime has formed in Turkey, one needs to

focus on the political power of the poor as a source of consent and as a source of contention. This power has been a driving force in the expansion of social protection policies in Turkey, as the government tries to mobilize the consent and contain the contention of the poor by delivering higher social protection. Poor people's importance in the political arena came to be specially recognized after the 1990s when Turkey underwent crucial political changes. Poor people's consent has been crucial for the governing party AKP, which has ruled throughout the 2000s, in its struggle to capture and maintain national power.

Electoral Competition: After the 1990s, the poor in Turkey replaced the declining organized working class as the main source of pro-government political support. The AKP originated from the radical Islamist Welfare Party, in a reformed and politically more organized form, and came to national power with the 2002 elections. AKP has gained the support of a large portion of people who were economically and socially hurt by the harsh economic crisis of 2001. Over the 2000s, the political competition between the AKP and the old secular elite, that had traditionally ruled the country, evolved into a regime crisis. Both sides have done their best to annihilate each other's political leverage with the mobilization of every possible judicial, social, and bureaucratic force. In the struggle with the secular establishment, the AKP garnered the necessary legitimacy and power from the dynamism, activism, and massive support of the urban and rural poor, as opposed to the Republican People's Party (CHP) which has mostly relied on a middle-class base. To maintain their support from the poor, the party increased the level of pro-poor social welfare programs and used an anti-elite populist discourse (Yörük 2012; Yörük and Yüksel 2014). AKP waged this struggle first

against the Kemalist bloc that consisted of the main opposition party, military, and judicial bureaucracy, and second against the Gülenist organization that attempted to replace Kemalist cadres and waged the coup attempt in 2016. The poor were the main popular base of the AKP, in both elections and mass mobilizations against the enemies of the party.

During the 2000s, the governing AKP has also been competing intensively with these Kurdish parties across the Kurdish-majority regions of southern and southwestern Turkey and in the slum areas of metropolises. The AKP and the Kurdish party Peoples' Democracy Party (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi,* HDP) largely compete for the support of Turkey's Kurdish poor while the main opposition Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) gains its votes mainly from the middle classes and bourgeoisie (Yörük 2022). Kurdish party support is twice as high among the unemployed and those unable to work as its overall national vote. For both AKP and HDP, there is also a negative correlation between income and support. AKP expanded its popular base among the poor over the course of its rule. The rate of lower-income votes in total AKP votes has continuously increased. The share of votes coming from those with household incomes less than two minimum wages increased from 57% to 71% for AKP between 2007 and 2015 (Yörük and Comin 2020).

Social Unrest: Poor people's consent to the government was not the only contributor to the emergence of welfare neoliberalism. In fact, their contentions against the government are an equally important part of the story. Collective mobilization, mostly poor people against the government, contested the real and perceived exclusions perpetrated by state policy or inaction. Since the 1990s, the

informal proletariat of the slums, and particularly the Kurdish poor, became the center of contentious politics in Turkey. Since the 1990s, an informal proletariat has replaced the formal proletariat as the center of grassroots politics, and the main hegemonic struggle has shifted into winning the support of the informal proletariat in the struggle to delegitimize neoliberal policies. The poor as a political threat emerges, not unintentionally, but through the mobilization of radical political actors. The Islamist and Kurdish political movements became the main political actors who managed to mobilize grassroots opposition to the neoliberal project.

First, the Islamist movement in Turkey was the first large-scale actor to radicalize the poor during the 1990s. Following the military coup in 1980, the political stage was set for the Islamic movement to flourish and mobilize broader segments of the population. By the 1990s, Islamism had been organized into a mass political movement led by a radical Islamist party, the Welfare Party. Islamists were able to develop as the main political power, garnering the political support of the growing informal proletariat, using a powerful ideological framework called the Just Order (*Adil Düzen*) system. The Welfare Party embraced the slums with a rhetoric that combined justice and tradition, supported largely by welfare populism and by increasing the quality of urban services, especially in the long-neglected slums. This growing political power of the Islamists was translated into electoral success as the Islamist share of the vote increased from 8% in 1987 to 16% in 1991 and 22% in 1996, bringing the Welfare Party to national office. After less than a year in power, however, the Welfare Party's coalition government was overthrown by military intervention in 1997.

Second, thirty years of Kurdish armed struggle, urbanization, proletarianization and impoverishment expanded the Kurdish political movement into the slum areas of Turkey's major cities. These urban Kurds became increasingly radicalized, staging massive protests and uprisings since the 1990s, in both the Kurdish southeast and western cities. This ethnic threat to the regime was also expressed as electoral competition. Since the 1990s, the Kurdish movement in Turkey has been organized through both illegal and legal wings. This is similar to the efforts of the ETA-Herri Batasuna duo in Spain and the IRA-Sinn Féin duo in Northern Ireland. The legal and illegal wings of the Kurdish movement, together with hundreds of NGOs, youth and women's organizations, and political organizations of the Kurdish diaspora in most European countries, have together managed to mobilize Kurds to provide electoral support and instigate frequent uprisings in Turkey's urban areas. Since the late 1990s, uprisings, protests, and police appearance have become constant futures of the Kurdish-populated city slums, both in the Kurdish southeast and western regions. Kurdish party HDP has risen to become the governing AKP's main radical political rival in both areas, especially as the ceasefire agreement between PKK and the Turkish state since the early 2000s improves its chances of success in democratic politics. The growing power of the Kurdish opposition has become the main challenge to the AKP's hegemony. In sum, during the 2000s, AKP competed with the Kurdish parties to win the support of Turkey's Kurdish proletariat. While socialist Kurdish parties have partly replaced the radical Islamists of the 1990s, in responding to the grievances against neoliberalism of the informal proletariat, AKP has The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the process in which the poor has become the critical political actor to drive the changes in

Turkish welfare policies toward social assistance. Rates of poverty have sharply increased and demands of the poor for emergency relief have escalated. The pandemic has also worsened the current economic situation, which eventually ended up in a deep economic crisis by 2021, deepening poverty and increasing social policy demands. On top of this, the very crucial presidential and parliamentary elections in May 2023 have led to fierce competition among governing and opposition parties to propose more social programs for the poor and for the working population. Therefore, as the political dynamics remain the same, one can expect the Turkish welfare state to keep in the same line of development in the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

The recent Turkish political history has shown that political factors, which cannot be reduced to structural processes, have been shaping the evolution of the Turkish welfare system during the neoliberal period. Political parties pursue partisan interests, wage struggles against each other, and respond to grassroots mobilizations. Structural factors lead to welfare policy outcomes insofar as they are translated into political threats and opportunities for the major political actors. The direction and extent of the welfare system change depending on the level and form of political party competition. Also, political instability and social unrest have encouraged governments to re-organize welfare provision in ways that would maximize efforts that contain threats to the system. Turkish governments have used welfare provision as a political means of containing popular grievances and mobilizing popular support for competition for national power. In particular, political mobilizations of the poor, or various poor people's movements, have been respons-ible for the expansion of social assistance programs in Turkey. ◆

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Targeted Benefits and Social Cohesion: Evolving Social Welfare in the UAE

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As one of the wealthiest late rentier states, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has long been able to provide its citizens with a comprehensive package of social benefits and assistance. However, recent attempts to reduce its reliance on oil and gas rents have necessitated an evolved approach to welfare politics that combines an increasingly subtle but rigorous discrimination between insiders and outsiders, underpinned by uneven access to power and resources, targeted welfare benefits for citizens, and increased selective taxation in line with neoliberal economic principles. As testament to the continued relevance of the rentier bargain, in which rights are exchanged for patrimonial benefits dispensed by a significantly autonomous state, the government has been careful to adjust the pace of reforms in response to citizen reaction. This contribution discusses the general features of the welfare state in the post-COVID-19 era, including inequality among citizens, the change from subsidies to targeted benefits, social service decentralization, the role of excludable and direct benefits, and government revenue raising efforts. Importantly, welfare changes may signal a change in the nature of the dominant coalition at the heart of these structures – a mix of growing discrimination for insiders and outsiders.

Inequality among Citizens

Previous research by Gengler, Shockley, and Ewers (2020) on Qatar sought to understand the patterns of economic inequality among nationals in rentier states despite their generous welfare policies by delineating between citizens with royal connections and elite and non-elite citizens. Non-elite citizens depend disproportionately on non-excludable benefits that accrue to the individual without the

need for private connections to the state. Other benefits provided by the government in a deliberately ad hoc and at times idiosyncratic manner that allowed the government to manipulate patrimonial bonds with social and political elites. The same theoretical categorization can be applied to the UAE. In so doing we discuss, two additional categories of benefits are (1) targeted social care benefits for low-income nationals and (2) spending on traditional agriculture and livestock sectors.

From Subsidies to Targeted Benefits

In line with IMF recommendations, targeting seeks to reduce the UAE's dependence on expensive general subsidies and offer welfare benefits to lower-income nationals. The UAE was hailed as a leader in subsidy reform when it scrapped its fuel subsidies in 2015 in favor of setting prices monthly according to market prices (Boersma and Griffiths 2016). Notably, the new market determined prices apply to both residents and citizens. However, in the midst of the summer 2022 price hikes, the state announced a new social program for fuel that would lower the petrol price significantly for low-income Emiratis, defined as having a [monthly] household income of less than 25,000 AED (about 6,800 USD) (Maxwell and Al Shouk 2022, Oxborrow and Naar 2022). Qualifying heads of a family are entitled to a monthly subsidy of 300 litres, whilst working wives receive a subsidy of 200 litres (*Arabian Business*, 4 July 2022). The targeted fuel subsidies were part of a much larger package of additional social funding, which included generous food, electricity, and water, subsidies, as well as education, housing, and unemployment allowances, for qualifying families (*Arabian Business*, 4 July 2022).

The federal-level social protection program of the UAE has grown in size and scope with the recent 2022 reforms, but all of these changes have been made within a targeted framework: increased payments to unemployed citizens over the age of 45 and support for food expenses are new additions to the system that covers old age assistance, widows, vulnerable women and children, and persons with disabilities among others. These social assistance programs are administered by the Ministry of Community Development and supplemented by emirate-level programs that sometimes provide overlapping benefits. Table 1 provides information about the distribution of targeted benefits by emirate, with the number of recipient households shown in column 2. Furthermore, a program called Productive Families provides financial support to small family businesses. Interestingly, the last column of the table shows that the Northern Emirates have relied more heavily on these programs, whereas Abu Dhabi's participation has been limited. This is suggestive of the growing regional inequalities within the UAE.

Social Service Decentralization

If subsidy removal has led to increased targeting of benefits to less wealthy nationals, social service provision has focused on keeping services free for citizens. However, inequalities in terms of quality and access remain. For example, compulsory health insurance schemes in Abu Dhabi and Dubai connect access to healthcare directly to employment, although the exclusionary aspects of this type of neoliberal reform are mitigated by emirate-sponsored health insurance for nationals. In the poorer Northern Emirates, by contrast, where nationals are already more likely to depend on government services, no such schemes exist, meaning that access to private

Table 1: Social Care by Emirate

Emirate	Citizen Pop (2005)	Social assistance cases (2021)	% of population	*Productive family participants (2008-2021)*	% of population
Abu Dhabi	350277	14,122	4.03%	152	0.04%
Dubai	137573	7,475	5.43%	684	0.50%
Al Sharjah*	138272	6,576	4.76%	655	0.47%
Ajman*	39231	2,268	5.78%	226	0.58%
Umm Al Quwain*	15873	1,022	6.44%	196	1.23%
Ras Al Khaimah*	87848	5,166	5.88%	464	0.53%
Al Fujairah*	56421	4,867	8.63%	512	0.91%

*Northern Emirate

Sources: Authors' Elaboration from Ministry of Community Development and Bayanat, Official Data Portal of the UAE government

hospitals and clinics requires employment or the purchase of private insurance out of pocket. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted differences in health service provision capacity between emirates. A full treatment of subnational COVID-related policy differences is outside the scope of this piece. Suffice it to say, social service provision became increasingly decentralized as the pandemic wore on and each Emirate pursued its own health regulations and vaccine policies.

Education policies have witnessed a steady push toward privatizing secondary and even middle school education in a way that gives a category of wealthy national "insiders" better access to higher quality (usually English, relatively more secular) education that reinforces inequalities and differential access to the labor market (IPC-IG 2018). Non-nationals must pay a fee to attend public schools but many nationals also prefer to attend private schools citing higher quality and university preparation. This reinforces a growing preference for private education, and reinforces inequalities between those able to afford access and those who remain in public schools.

Excludable Benefits

In addition to benefits that are broadly available or targeted at low-income nationals, the state also provides an array of less clearly defined benefits that are accessed through personal or patronage networks. Such excludable benefits appear to be conveniently ill-defined in order to maximize government ability to utilize patronage channels to reinforce divisions between deserving insider-citizens and other-citizens. For example, they marginalize "Islamist" groups like Al Islah, once influential in poorer northern Emirates like Ras Al Khaimah, Ajman, and Fujairah. At times these benefits blend with formal access channels in a way that is less than straightforward. For example, while most citizens believe

themselves to be entitled to housing support from the state, many questions surround when, where, and how their house is completed. Government websites mention that services are for "deserving Emiratis" perhaps as a way of emphasizing that terms and conditions apply (UAE Government Portal 2022b).

Indirect Benefits

Another category of so-called "indirect" benefits accrues to individuals on the basis of the segment of society they belong to, with regard to the corporatist structure of the limited-access state (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009). These include rural development programs, especially in the areas of traditional livestock, farming and agriculture, and fishing. Such programs serve both the practical and political needs of the state. For example, government investments in farming in the Emirate of Sharjah serve to maintain a strong relationship between the state and rural sectors as well as contribute to greater food security for the nation (Sharjah Government Media Bureau 2022). Similarly, extensive subsidies underpin a well-developed camel racing industry, helping to support veterinarian, breeding, feed, and racing costs. This helps maintain an appreciation for heritage as well as provide economically for the livelihood of the Bedouin (Khalaf 1999). This applies equally to falconry, other traditional sports, and a wide array of traditional handicrafts. These activities are similar to the previously discussed "Productive Families" programs, but with a different style of implementation. They are not targeted specifically at poor families, and are dispersed via social networks, thus helping to bolster tribal patronage networks. In turn this serves to increase the social inclusion of these groups, which is indispensable for the continuance of

the social contract.

Raising Revenues

A fair amount of scholarship has explored the implications of the 5% VAT (Valued Added Tax) for the GCC (Ahmad and Al Faris 2010; Gengler, Shockley, and Ewers 2020). Diversified government income streams is part of the larger transition away from hydrocarbon dependence that has important implications for state society relations. The impositiong of taxes reduces the autonomy of the rentier state and reinforces the need to expand the coalition of elites with access to competition over state-controlled domestic rents. This process privileges a diverse set of previous political outsiders including non-tribal and even non-citizens. The latter category includes long-standing merchant elites, especially in Dubai, but also those connected to the emerging knowledge, tourist, alternative energy, and financial services sectors. An additional consequence of regressive taxation such as the VAT is the deepening of existing economic inequalities, and increase the dependence of poorer citizens – particularly in the Northern Emirates – on federal support as costs of living increase. The introduction of the 9% business tax, which is expected in June 2023, is being rationalized as a similar revenue-raising measure that aligns the UAE with international norms.

Concluding Remarks: Adjusting Expectations and Policies

Although welfare state reforms have been directed by an increasingly centralized federal executive, this does not mean that they are entirely top-down. Instead, they represent a complex interplay between different layers of state and federation, public opinion and expectations, economic necessities, and pol-

itical calculation. At times the state has tried to soften the impact of reforms for the most economically vulnerable in response to public concerns. In other cases, an emboldened executive has pushed through reforms that are at face value unpopular amongst sectors of the business community, primarily to comply with international tax codes and facilitate the expanded integration of sectors of the UAE economy into the global economic order. Despite generous social welfare, this is likely to increase inequality across class and region.

At other times, it attempts to encourage citizens to adjust their expectations with regard to employment. As government goes ahead with its planned scrapping of open-ended (permanent) contracts for citizens in favor of more vulnerable fixed-term contracts, various news articles featuring Emiratis working in sales at malls and earning relatively low salaries are thinly veiled attempts at normalizing the concept of less protected private sector employment for citizens that the state wishes to promote. However, these attempts are not altogether effective – as demonstrated by recent social media outrage against an advert aimed at recruiting citizens to work in a local Subway franchise (dubbed "sandwich gate"). Indeed, weaning citizens off state employment and its associated benefits will likely prove more difficult than implementing a new tax.

With regard to social cohesion, subnational inequalities are also a cause for concern. The affinity for government employment has privileged Abu Dhabi as many of the best and brightest of the Northern Emirates find their way into the national bureaucracy. This has been coupled with opportunistic policies which assert that government employees must live in Abu Dhabi to receive housing allowances, leaving the Northern Emirates at a

clear disadvantage for retaining skilled labor.

Finally, although access to resources is less tightly controlled, the elite coalition is expanding to include selected insider-citizens and even non-nationals, through the introduction of golden visas and quasi-citizenship options. This means that ordinary nationals will face considerably more job competition with non-nationals. Although the state remains adaptable, some citizens are concerned that recent policies in the UAE are more beneficial to selected insiders and foreigners than to themselves.

Targeted social welfare, which is in keeping with neoliberalism and IMF recommendations, is an effort to mitigate the growing inequalities and social tensions associated with the decline in the rentier state's ability to manipulate external rents. On the other hand, privatization of healthcare and education are likely to exacerbate economic inequalities. Meanwhile, COVID-19 has highlighted regional inequalities in administrative capacity, and the impact of increased taxation remains to be seen. As economic diversification proceeds it will inevitably create new categories of economic and political winners and losers. State-society relations will necessarily evolve as some citizens are unable to retain access to benefits, and as new and more powerful categories of citizen- and resident-insiders emerge. ◆

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Addressing Gender Inequality in the MENA Region during COVID-19: An Evaluation of Policies, Interventions, and Their Effectiveness

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Fundamentally reforming national policies in the MENA, particularly to protect and support the social and economic status of women is necessary for both, not to disrupt progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN 2015), and to expedite the estimated 115-years needed to close the gender gap in the region (WEF 2022). With the COVID-19 aftermath exacerbating the existing challenges for women at work in the MENA, failed national systems need to seriously consider women in policy interventions (UNDP 2022) to social and economic progress. This paper explores various gender policies and interventions in the MENA, their effectiveness and restructuring, as the region addresses COVID-19 and recovery in its aftermath.

The MENA Paradox and Covid

Although The Middle East and North African (MENA) region shares many features of gender inequality with the rest of the world, one of the unique characteristics of the region is that it has one of the lowest employment rates for women in the world, (WEF 2022), despite women's education rates in the region surpassing that of men (WB 2018; WEF 2022).

This phenomenon is referred to as the MENA Paradox. Comparatively, these rates are in direct contrast to the participation rates of men in the labor market across the MENA, which exceed women by over three-fold (WB 2022). In some sectors, such as STEM graduates in Arab countries, women surpass those in Europe or the US (WB 2019), yet less than a quarter of women in the MENA region are reported as participating in the labor force (WB 2022). This gender gap in the region's labor market has remained flat for decades, and according to a recent *Insight Report* from the World Economic Forum estimates that the rate of progress will take 115 years to close (WEF 2022). Despite it capturing the attention of the international community, including economists, social scientists, and practitioners working to improve women, peace and security of women and girls, MENA governments need to act. Reforming exiting national policies are central to seeing positive change in the region and providing support for women socially and economically.

According to the UNDP's COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, the MENA region ranked as one of the lowest to integrate a gender lens into policies issued to women during

the pandemic (UNDP 2022; UN Women 2022). Existing knowledge on national emergencies reveal several ways in which women are placed at a disadvantage. Despite that, only 13% of countries in the MENA integrated a gender sensitive lens during COVID (OECD 2022). Few countries (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, State of Palestine, and Tunisia) in the region included holistic support for women to addressing domestic violence, economic recovery, and unpaid carework, with some countries extending partial or no support (see Youakim and Abdallah 2022).

Various initiatives could have been extended that consider the roles and realities of women and to assess the external shortcomings women face during a crisis. These include supplemental income for unemployed women, social security payments to employers and staff, deferring loan payments or income tax payments for the private sector, enterprises and/or individuals, providing supplemental wage or paid leave, supporting women owned businesses, flexible work arrangements, childcare subsidies and more (IMF 2022; OECD 2022; Salti and Haddad 2021; Gentilini et al. 2021, 2022; WB 2022).

Gender-based discriminatory laws and social norms costs the region USD 575 billion a year. By failing to integrate gender-inclusive national policies and practices to employ women, the region squanders its economic potential and growth. Alongside undervaluing the potential and talent of women to contribute to the labor force, the region loses on boosting its GDP by twenty-six percent by 2025 (OECD SIGI Gender Index 2019).

A series of changes that the MENA is undergoing, including the pandemic, post-Arab Spring fallout, geopolitical shifts, or civil wars in Yemen, Libya or Syria, have contributed to the region's need to boost its economy and support economic growth (Popal 2021). A part of the transformative changes needed are those in the existing traditional views of gender norms in the region (Arab Barometer 2022). For instance, according to a recent study by the Arab Barometer on Gender Attitudes and Trends in the MENA (2022), over 65% respondents in 9 of 12 countries agree with the statement "men are better at political leadership than women," with majority respondents disagreeing in only two of ten countries under study.[1] These gendered attitudes could also stem from several gender-discriminatory legal factors, including "protective" laws that restrict women's working hours, the sector in which they work, domestic expectations and carework, and/or hiring and promoting men in various sectors (Ferrant and Kolev 2016; OECD 2017).

Carework: A Women's Burden

As it stands, women in the MENA take on the primary role of carework. With schools and daycares closed during the pandemic, many women were forced to stay home to care for their children and/or elderly relatives, which has limited their ability to work outside the home. Both, higher unpaid carework demands with little to no government support for women's role as primary caretakers and/or in the workforce, has led to increased job insecurity for women (Youakim and Abdallah 2022). Women receive only partial support through governmental social insurance systems. For instance, Iran, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan are the only countries that provide paid maternity leave to women in the region. Such limited support for

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1 Algerians 76%, Sudan 71%, Libya 69%, Iraq 69%, Jordan 66%, Egypt 66%, Palestine 65%, Kuwait 65%; only in Lebanon and Tunisia do the majority of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree.

women has led to significant workforce participation barriers, particularly in the private sector, and especially for married women with children or those with less than secondary school education (Karshenas and Moghadam 2021). These trends stand in addition to discriminatory practices that lead to gender-wage gaps (Lassassi and Tansel 2020) existing prior to the pandemic.

According to the World Bank (2020), "over-representation of women among the inactive population, and in vulnerable forms of work (such as informal employment or domestic work) heightens their vulnerability to poverty in times of crisis" (9). The pandemic has made gender biases in the labor market more visible, with women more likely to be laid off or furloughed than men, making women a vulnerable population in terms of financial security and job stability (Krafft et al. 2022).

Support for women's empowerment and increasing their participation in the labor force has been a common collective effort of many organizations in the MENA prior to the pandemic (Assi and Marcati 2020). Scholars, such as Krafft et al. (2022) and others, argue that the pandemic provides an opportunity for policy reform given the exposure of numerous gender inequities that emerged during the pandemic. This is also exposed by the UNDP gender-sensitive policy tracker, with global measures not ensuring the protection and support of women's domestic roles, women work participation, women-led businesses, or social protections of women across national legislation efforts.

A need for national policy reform to support women's economic participation and roles was highlighted by many advocates since the start of the pandemic. With women-dominated sectors highly impacted, such as healthcare and education, support was needed and urgent (ILO 2020). Despite a forecast of uneven post-pandemic economic recovery in the MENA (EIU 2022), various measures, such as expanding access to affordable childcare, extending care for the elderly, promoting flexible work arrangements, and/or addressing gender biases in the labor market continue to be in demand for women in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Another Paradox: Neoliberalism and Gender Equity

International organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have supported and promoted neoliberal policies in the MENA, which have negatively impacted gender in the economy. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP), for instance, were used to support economic stability in the Global South and in Arab countries. Yet, encouraging the privatization of state-owned industries, removing government subsidies, and deregulating the labor market have not resulted with greater or more secure job opportunities for women in the region. In fact, feminist economists argue that such efforts have eroded labor protections for women, in addition to creating more precarious and informal work in the service sector (Olmsted 2010, 2020; Moghadam 1999). There are many examples of frameworks that have extended social and legal recommendations to barriers for women in the MENA, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017), which also do not consider women's intersectionality, nor do they consider a feminist economic approach (see Olmsted 2020). Transparency about critical economic issues is another

domain that could assist MENA governments in mitigating ongoing decline in GDP per capita, macroeconomic fragility, and poor labor market outcomes (Arezki et al. 2020). This is aside from numerous labor interventions that involve integrating other populations, such as the bulging youth populations who seek opportunities and face the highest unemployment rates in the world (ILO 2015). Though the region has made strides in developing human capital, such as with the World Bank, for instance, who partnered with organizations to support programs in Egypt, Jordan, Yemen (Perrin and Hyland 2023) the progress of the region largely depends on national governments to extend supportive policy measures.

Such international interference and policy recommendations for the MENA are clear: They strive to reduce gender inequality in the region by increasing women's participation in the labor force, improving their access to education, and reducing discrimination and violence against women. But there are key distinctions that should also be noted, such as the level of intervention and target audience. Despite some policies aimed at addressing systemic discrimination against women in the labor market (e.g., calling attention to updating labor laws, reinforcing monitoring or sanctions to close gaps in laws and practices), others are aimed at supporting working women currently in the labor force (e.g., maternity leave, childcare, incentivizing employers who support part-time employment, support for remote work, flexible hours) are aimed at supporting women who are already in the workforce. In sum, such international interference and recommendations for the MENA appear to support increasing women's economic and social empowerment. And, in turn, the policies have a wider effect on the economy and even its recovery post-pandemic (improved health outcomes, reduced rates of poverty). Yet, a key component and challenge to consider in such policies are the resources needed for implementation and the consequences of focusing on the market and outcomes rather than directing attention on the wellbeing and support of women in the labor market.

A Way Forward

While there may be challenges and drawbacks associated with implementing policies aimed at reducing gender inequality in the MENA region, the potential benefits are significant and should be carefully considered by policymakers and stakeholders. Given that Arab countries have a history of "being targeted for (post-) conflict reconstruction and development" (Olmsted 2020), bringing the attention of international actors to address post-COVID-19 recovery brings speculation. National commitments in advancing gender equity and economic empowerment in the MENA include an investment in early childhood education, introducing gender-sensitive procurement laws, and gender-responsive budgeting as priority intervention measures (Salti and Haddad 2021; see, SAWI Project) in various areas, such as with legal reform, advancing workplace and economic policies, and with advancing women's political representation through public awareness campaigns. Localization can help address gender inequality in the MENA region in several ways (UNICEF 2020). By promoting local ownership (including unionization, see Moghadam 1999 on market reforms) and participation, localization can help ensure that policies and programs are tailored to the specific needs and context of the region, which can increase their effectiveness and relevance. Through efforts of engaging local communities and leaders, localization can

help promote greater understanding of the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment and can help reduce resistance to change. Such efforts can promote local ownership, engage local communities, and build on existing capacity and sustainability efforts for women's economic empowerment.◆

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Roundtable:
The Politics of Race and Racialization

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Introduction

For this roundtable, we departed from the conventional model of featuring a single book focusing on our chosen topic of race and racialization in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Instead, we asked five colleagues to opine on this theme through an extended e-mail exchange. Rana B. Khoury, who sits on the editorial board of the newsletter, served as co-facilitator of this exchange. The dialogue took place in early spring 2023 and began with contributors describing how each became interested in the politics of race, what their primary research entailed, and how to make these ideas more salient to comparative political science.

We chose this theme for two reasons. First, issues of race and racialization remain relatively understudied by Middle East political scientists, and deserve greater academic visibility. Second, relatedly, they hold enormous salience in shaping modern states. Race is a socially constructed object, and it is rendered visible through racialization – meaning how powerholders invent racial categories, organize people into those groups, draw boundaries around those communities, and ascribe meaning into each racial stratum in the service of maintaining hierarchy. Inevitably, the racial claims of those powerholders are privileged. Those who suffer domination – colonized nations, migrant communities, religious minorities, and other undesirable Others – are fed into subordinate echelons of these hierarchies. Interconnected with this dehumanizing order are the familiar forces that social scientists study in other contexts, such as economic development, cultural contestation, political institutions, migration flows, and geopolitical conflict.

Our roundtable dialogue overlapped with

wrenching events this winter and spring, which illustrated these dynamics playing out in real-time. The Palestinian occupation, for instance, continued to seethe under violence and crisis. As Yasmeen Abu Laban and Abigail Bakan have argued in their work, that occupation expresses itself not only through Israel's economic and military dominion, but also discursive tropes that expose stateless Palestinians to anti-Arab racism reproduced through Israeli state practices. In the United States, the intersection of migration, identity, and Whiteness likewise has continued to roil society, which Amanda Sahar d'Urso unpacks in her research. Debates about racial inequality remain one of the most polarizing issues within American politics, playing out in the media and government. Finally, the ugly decision by Tunisian President Kais Saied to blame African migrants for Tunisia's economic and political doldrums unleashed a vile campaign of anti-Black racism. As both Houda Mzioudet and Nisrine Hilizah have shown in their work, such anti-Blackness is not merely episodic. It persists across the MENA and the world, the horrid legacy of Black slavery and affecting Black communities everywhere – from Black communities in Tunisia and Libya, as Mzioudet points out, to Black Sudanese refugees who struggled to find new homes after the 2000s, as Hilizah recounts.

This dialogue also underscores another memorable dimension: for many of us, the personal is political. Concerns about race, racism, and racialization are not merely intellectual curiosities. They often originate from private, subjective, and emotive experiences. Our positionality matters, because many of us commenced our academic journeys within educational contexts or cultural systems that incubated hierarchical systems of racial

domination. Some experienced racial discrimination or hatreds directly; others observed these horrific effects indirectly. In turn, racism is intersectional. That all of contributors are women also evokes our shared recognition that subordination exists in interlocking ways, and extends across multiple cleavages of identity and fields of being.

The deeply personal nature of studying race suggests that we might be better off dropping the fantasy that studying politics can be a "raceless" science. We could instead imagine it as a raceful endeavor, in which questions about race are never far from how we study the ordinary institutions and practices of political power that animate the discipline. In any case, re-centering this burgeoning field is a long overdue obligation for our scholarly community, and we hope this insightful dialogue emits this sense of enthusiasm and urgency.

Sean Yom and Rana B. Khoury

Houda Mzioudet

As a Black Tunisian who grew up aware of her racial identity in a country that often denied race and racism, I took it upon myself to discover my Black heritage, despite the lack of resources and the resistance from Tunisian academia and the absence of public space in giving space and representation for Black Tunisians before 2011.

After the Tunisian Revolution, I started to show more academic interest on race focusing on North Africa. Before 2011, I used to read some academic work on race pertaining to Britain, I did my MA on hip hop as a counterculture in Brixton (London) in the 1990s, as well as racial politics in the United States and the civil rights movement, with a particular focus on African-American literature and the feminist writers that help drive it.

There is a dearth in literature about Blackness in Tunisia except for a few academic resources in French or Arabic, with almost nothing in English. My work as a journalist in Tunisia and later in Libya opened my eyes to the complexity of race in both countries and the transnational connections between these racializing processes. After relocating to Libya in 2012 until 2014, I worked as a journalist and a researcher, which led to a personal journey into my family roots – mostly in the Fezzan area in the south of Libya, as well as some connections to Tripoli. I traveled to the Libyan south near the Chad and Niger border, where I conducted interviews with various ethnic communities, such as the Tebus, the Tuaregs and other Black Libyans of slave ancestry, and around the towns and cities of Sebha, Ghadames, Ubari, and Murzuk. My later fieldwork on the Black Tawerghan displaced population helped me to connect the

dots with Black Tunisians, many of whom hail from southern Libya and share a history with Black Libyans. It was an enriching experience of self-discovery about the history of the Black population of both countries, which is tightly linked to the trans-Saharan slave trade.

My current research focuses on both Tunisia and Libya with a particular focus on ethnic minorities, including the Amazigh, Tuaregs, Tebus, and other Black populations, as well as the revival of their cultures after the Arab uprisings. Using fieldwork, participant observations, and immersion within these communities, my academic experience has contributed to a growing literature on race and its politics and manifestations across North Africa. This has often led me to Ottoman studies, and archival materials from the Ottoman Empire has helped me dig into the history of Black migration in this region. In the US, the death of George Floyd and subsequent rising interest in racial politics in the MENA region has further strengthened my interest in how the Black slave trade and Ottoman past relates to the place of Blackness in these societies today. The work of Dr. Mostafa Minawi is particularly interesting in this field.

Incidentally, I plan to pursue a PhD in the next couple of years or so on Berber nationalism after the Arab uprisings, and its political and social implications. My work on race in North Africa is therefore more of a personal venture, an experience rooted in the search for justice by reappraising the forgotten history of Black populations in North Africa whose identities have been long erased, or at least marginalized, in public narratives that stretch across state media, educational curricula, academic forums, and cultural

formations.

Race remains a marginal topic in political science in the MENA region, despite some early attempts at cross-disciplinary engagement through anthropology, sociology and African/Black studies. Few apply mainstream topics studied in other regions to the Middle East, such as how race or racism shapes political participation or voting behavior. I understand this absence as partly related to the taboo nature of race itself and the difficulty in discussing racial discourse within Black communities in the region. Still, this leaves enormous gaps in our knowledge. For instance, so few scholars understand the legacy of Black slavery in many Arab states, and its ongoing legacy upon historical formations and political identity in post-colonial states.

I also see pitfalls when scholars adopt a Western-centric approach that fails to account for the complex realities of race in the MENA. Racism exists across the region, but it operates differently than in the West; and yet I see Western academics leveraging theories from African and Afro-diasporic literatures, which are not necessarily appropriate. We should instead embark upon new approaches by accessing archival materials, tapping oral histories, and finding more data about how Blackness and Black communities operate within overlapping contexts of cultural, economic, and political hierarchy. We must also support academics within the region, who may wish to study this topic further but have few incentives to do so within their own educational institutions.

Yasmeen Abu-Laban

I found Houda's discussion compelling and telling. I think many people, who are interested in issues of power and inequality when

it comes to different markers of identity and status, may have seen or experienced these things long before they even started university.

I am part of the Palestinian diaspora. My father's family was forced out of Palestine in 1948 before the creation of Israel by violence stemming from the Zionist political project. Unlike many Palestinian refugees still in camps, my father emigrated to the United States where he met and married my American-born mother. They eventually emigrated to Canada with my US-born brother. I was the only one in the immediate family to be a dual Canadian-American citizen from birth.

My peaceable family and childhood defied every element of the late Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis. However, the layers of experiences reflected in my family crystallized my interest in issues of dislocation, exclusion, migration, citizenship, multiculturalism, and belonging, as well as power, racism and anti-racism. For me, this was initially distilled into a focus on migration in political science, and I did Honours BA, MA and PhD theses in this area, graduating in 1996 with a doctorate addressing the US and France.

Before we get to the absence of race in discussions of what I am increasingly wanting to call SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa) rather than MENA, we have to talk about absences in the discipline of political science. When I was working on my PhD, there were very few political science professors, in either the US or Canada, who worked on immigration, let alone race. These areas have now been much more institutionalized in the discipline through developments like the creation of the Race, Ethnicity and Politics section in APSA in 1995, and the section

on Migration and Citizenship in 2012. In Canada, Abigail Bakan and I worked with others to create a section on Race, Ethnicity, Indigenous Peoples and Politics in the Canadian Political Science Association in 2009. But for the longest time, work in such areas required seriously pushing against disciplinary orthodoxies and lots of explanation, at a time when there were few women and minorities in the profession. It was difficult after 9/11 to also deal with the specificities of anti-Muslim racism in the discipline.

My work on race in relation to the SWANA primarily relates to Israel/Palestine. But this work comes out of this prior formation of pushing against disciplinary orthodoxies and having to grapple with the realities of race and racism in North America and Europe. I have collaborated extensively with Abigail Bakan on Israel/Palestine, because we share much in common as anti-racist and feminist comparativists. In our book, *Israel, Palestine and the Politics of Race: Exploring Identity in a Global Context* (IB Tauris/Bloomsbury, 2020) we explain how we came together across the purported divide of "Jew" and "Palestinian." This book was an outgrowth of a workshop attended by the late political theorist Charles Mills, who wrote the pivotal book The Racial Contract (Cornell University Press, 1997).

When it comes to Israel/Palestine, adopting this approach and working with Abigail have opened new space for innovative research. More recently, in the wake of new discussions following the murder of George Floyd and growing interest in forms of racism, Abigail and I have continued working on anti-Palestinian racism as well as antisemitism.

Amanda Sahar d'Urso

I study race among MENA/SWANA individuals in the US, rather than in the MENA/SWANA region itself. When I was an undergraduate, I double-majored in political science and "MENA Studies." I really thought that I would go into graduate school to study the region. For many reasons, however, it became apparent that I would not be able to study the region in the ways I wanted to. I was still interested enough in political science to try my hand at American politics—or comparative politics with the US as my case study. I turned my focus toward legislators' behavior and thought my dissertation would be on this or a similar topic.

This was my topic until one day in a graduate course on experimental political science, one of my friends told me that the "wildest thing" happened to him. My friend was studying civic engagement among high schoolers. He went to different high schools in the Chicago area to conduct his research. He picked high schools that varied across many sociodemographic features, including race. He told me that he had just visited a majority White high school and when he arrived, he pondered, "Where are all the White people?" As it turns out, a large portion of the students were of MENA/SWANA descent.

What my friend was not aware of is that in the US, MENA/SWANA individuals are legally classified as White by the Census Bureau. Interestingly, despite this legal classification, many of the MENA/SWANA students did not self-identify as White. As an Iranian-American, this is an experience I could acutely relate to: knowing I am legally classified as White but reticent to identify as such because of my racialization as a MENA/SWANA woman. And as much as I thought I

would step away from studying the MENA/SWANA region, my heart found its way back to studying MENA/SWANA identity but within the US.

My current work focuses on what MENA/SWANA identity can tell us about how Whiteness operates in the United States. While many works on ethnoracial politics focus on distant boundaries between ethnoracial groups (e.g., the dynamic between Black and Anglo-White Americans), MENA/SWANA identity provides an opportunity to study how Whiteness leverages groups at the margins of Whiteness to better define who is and is not White, and who fits best into the category of Whiteness. I am currently working on my book project that further explores MENA/SWANA identity in the US, and what it can teach us about Whiteness. But this is only one part of my scholarly journey, as it is a dangerous and egregious error to think of MENA/SWANA individuals as strictly White.

MENA/SWANA identity, in my opinion, should not be merely thought of as a *racial* category, but, perhaps, an *ethnic* category with racial diversity. The lived experiences between White MENA/SWANA and Black MENA/SWANA individuals in the US are vastly different, including both within and outside of MENA/SWANA communities. Merely grouping everyone with MENA/SWANA heritage as constituting the same sprawling racial object may not be the most equitable or just way of legally classifying this group. This is, of course, made more complicated by the fact that in my own work, I do not readily subscribe to the strict boundary between race and ethnicity that the US Census seems to subscribe to.

Abigail Bakan

My interest in the politics of race is long-standing, but my entry into conversations regarding race in SWANA/MENA and specifically Israel/Palestine is – though not new – more recent in my life and scholarship. I completed a PhD in Political Science at York University ages ago, with a focus on the Caribbean region. Having emigrated as a young teen with my family from Chicago to Toronto in the heat of the Vietnam War, my family was immersed in issues of war, violence, racism, and refuge. I continued to study global politics, especially the "Third World." This led to publications on labour, rebellion, and gendered migration from the West Indies and the Philippines, as well as sustained engagement with questions of political economy of gender, race, class, citizenship and power.

In all these pursuits, while I was not without a normative understanding of, and legibility in, the standard metrics of political science, I often found myself at the edge of how the discipline defined itself. There were and are epistemic limits, often unspoken, regarding what was and is considered "real" political science. Interdisciplinary studies of issues of race, gender and – though of course the defining remit of the discipline – power, seemed to press these boundaries.

And then… enter my rich, transformative, and ongoing collaboration with Yasmeen Abu-Laban. The invitation to pursue scholarly research on Israel/Palestine is itself a story (see our podcast episode on *Academic Aunties*)[1]. For my part, I have found myself immersed in the tensions and responsibilities associated with my Ashkenazi (European)

1 Academic Aunties, "When Yasmeen Met Abbie: Collaborations and Friendships in the Academy," 23 February 2022, https://www.academicaunties.com/episodes/research-collaborations-when-yasmeen-met-abbie/.

Jewish identity, regarding the politics of Israel/Palestine.

Addressing the realities of issues that focus on race and power – such as apartheid in Israel, colonial dispossession of Palestine, and anti-Palestinian racism – requires in-depth scholarly attention. But it also demands care to consider multiple audiences and varied anticipated responses. Efforts to silence such studies in the name of false charges of "antisemitism" have called for continual navigation of academic freedoms. And, with a rise of white nationalism and antisemitism (as anti-Jewish racism) in the US and Canada, we also face challenges and responsibilities that are both old and new at the same time.

This matrix of scholarship is both challenging and rewarding. It is not isolated to university life and research, but also relates to wider communities. In this regard, there have been some important recent studies on anti-Palestinian racism (such as by the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association), and the chilly climate on campuses (see reporting by Independent Jewish Voices Canada). Surely, such questions are, by rights, of central interest to political science.

Nisrine Hilizah

I first came to work on anti-Black racism and discrimination in the region while studying abroad in Morocco and Jordan in 2019. The focus of my study abroad program in Jordan was Syrian refugee integration and humanitarian action. Prior to moving to Jordan, I had spent the summer studying Modern Standard Arabic in Morocco. By the end of 2019, I had spent a total of six months abroad, and although these experiences were formative to my personal, academic, and professional growth, my time in Morocco and

Jordan, especially as a Black woman, did not come without its challenges. For this reason, I wanted to learn more about the experiences of Afro-Arabs and Black Africans in the region at large.

Inspired by my time abroad, I wrote my undergraduate thesis on Sudanese refugee integration in Jordan. My thesis analyzes the extent to which race, intersecting with other markers of identity, such as legal status, citizenship, class, and gender hinder Sudanese refugees from integrating into their host society and obtaining humanitarian aid. In doing so, I conducted research on the enslavement of Black Africans in Southwest Asia and North Africa, present-day manifestations of anti-Blackness in the region, and analyzed quantitative data on pertaining to access to employment, housing, education, and healthcare for non-Syrian refugee populations in Jordan.

I would be remiss, however, if I did not mention that my motivation to write my thesis and learn formal Arabic had been primarily driven by my urge to engage in self-exploration. In 2000, civil strife between the Arab-elite government of Khartoum and non-Arab populations in southern Sudan would result in two civil wars, the second of which prompted my family to seek refuge in Lebanon, and then later, become resettled refugees in the United States. In doing research for my undergraduate thesis, I was able to learn more about the history of slavery in Sudan and the social, political, and economic events that eventually led to the secession of South Sudan in 2011. In the end, I was able to successfully complete my senior thesis and graduate, but I was still very eager to continue exploring the history and development of anti-Blackness in this region of the world and its impact on Black populations there today.

This has brought me to Georgetown University, where I am currently pursuing an MA in Arab Studies and certificate in Refugees, Migration, and Humanitarian Emergencies from the School of Foreign Service. My graduate program has provided me with ample opportunities in and outside the classroom to explore my research interests. Among these opportunities are a podcast I published for a class in my first semester, entitled "Online Activism and Combating Anti-Blackness in the Arab World" (featuring our very own Houda Mzioudet!) on Status[2]; a webinar I organized and hosted the following semester titled "Black Arabic: A Conversation on Arabic Dialects in Sub-Saharan Africa;" and more recently, a report I published in August 2022 with the Arab Barometer, entitled "Racial Discrimination and Anti-Blackness in the Middle East and North Africa."

From these experiences, I have learned that issues of race/racism in the region is incredibly complex, and Western frameworks are not sufficient at capturing this. But despite this, present-day anti-Blackness in the region, with its roots in the Trans-Saharan, Indian Ocean, and Ottoman slave trades, persists. It manifests itself in the form of seemingly benign jokes, racial epithets, and in more extreme cases, violence by ordinary citizens, security forces, and the state. I argue that addressing anti-Blackness in the region is thus crucial because it predates European and Western interference. Although the issue of language and semantics (in both English and Arabic) remain one of the largest issues to overcome in properly addressing anti-Black racism in the SWANA, the fact that this is increasingly becoming a topic of discussion among both academics and people in the region serves as a testament for the dire need

to engage in this matter at a time where the realities of global anti-Blackness are impossible to ignore.

Sean Yom

Thank you for these responses, and for sharing your personal stories. When Rana and I first conceived of this roundtable, we were excited about the possibility of iterating an extended dialogue, and this is crystallizing wonderfully. Now, would any of you care to either respond to a colleague's point or expound further on your original ideas?

On the purely intellectual side, let us also provoke further conversation. I'm an interlocutor in these debates, but my understanding of race comes through the notion that we live amidst racial formations, that racial categories are laden with social meaning, and that such understandings are almost always hierarchical. Racial hierarchies are everywhere, and they feed power structures that dehumanize some to privilege others.

So how do we illuminate this; how do we make this interrogation of race, racialization, and racial formations more central to mainstream scholarship? Clearly, it's a lot of pushing against orthodoxy, as Yasmeen puts it. Perhaps one way is to engage existing racial hierarchies within settled societies, which are unambiguous in their effects but seldom studied. Anti-Blackness is one example, as Houda and Nisrine study in very different contexts. For reasons both sad and frustrating, the deprivation of Black peoples of their dignity and agency in the Arab world is not hard to find. But it's hard to erase and reverse. It requires a lot of sensitive, historical digging to uncover the social construction

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2 Status, "Online Activism & Anti-Black Racism in the Arab World," 22 February 2022, https://www.statushour.com/en/Interview/3665.

of anti-Blackness, and in turn explore how that creates blind spots in national narratives while overlapping with extant structures of marginalization. And like all forms of racism, anti-Blackness is inflected by the context that spawns it.

A second way is by excavating strategies of racialization within ongoing conflicts. I see Yasmeen and Abigail's work on the Israeli-Palestinian dynamic taking this up. The racial strategies at hand within the occupation fold into many other topics relating to how violent impositions are situated—governmentality, land, memory, and the conflation of ethnic identity with primordial claims. And as Nisrine notes, it's not hard to find other conflict zones where racialization is at play, as in the Sudan-South Sudan interplay. But its deployment in Palestine is probably more lost upon the West, and just as perniciously.

A third way is to destabilize racial categories themselves. Amanda's points and work speak directly to this—how do we deconstruct both the meaning given to racial minorities by hierarchical structures, and understand how dominant groups normalize and structure their supremacy? The issue of the US Census and its racial categorizations is a tantalizing one... it seems to operate always behind the social awareness of the very people it codes, and in turn creates all sorts of racialized understandings reproduced through social practices. It's done particular violence to Asian-Americans, too (e.g., in 1970, the US Census classified those of South Asian-Indian origin as White, despite infamous legal cases in prior decades that explicitly ruled South Asians as non-Whites).

Rana B. Khoury

I'm writing a note to say you are all on my mind as the Tunisian government has provoked crackdowns on Black citizens and migrants in the country, and as settler violence and clashes in the West Bank have frighteningly escalated. It's not lost on us that you are all women and people of color studying and tackling tenacious systems of injustice. In an important sense, we invited you to participate in the roundtable so that the larger discipline can learn from your voices and expertise. At the same time, we know that the work of undoing these systems often falls on the shoulders of affected communities. I want to express solidarity as we witness these difficult developments in the region.

Houda Mzioudet

Thank you, Rana, for your heartfelt words and empathy. The last couple of weeks have been a nightmare to be blunt, and this is in no way a euphemism about the development in the crisis in Tunisia (making sure family is safe, as this madness of racist mobs did not spare Black Tunisians like my family and friends). Thanks again for your support and understanding.

Abigail Bakan

Houda, this is such a tense and horrible situation, and I hope you and yours are able to stay safe. These moments remind us of the important work we do. Please keep posted as you can.

Yasmeen Abu-Laban

Houda, I hope you and your family will stay safe in this terrifying situation in Tunisia. Unfortunately, the racialized violence we are seeing is a reminder of why we need to address anti-Black racism and xenophobia in the region, as well as globally. That this is happening at the same time as mobs of settlers have engaged in what has been labeled by an Israeli General and the Israeli press as "pogroms" against Palestinians in Huwara is significant given the history of that word in relation to Tsarist Russia and anti-Jewish violence.

What's happening in Huwara to Palestinians also underscores the relevance of attending to ongoing racialized violence in the context of colonialism, a 55-year-old military occupation, and the mushrooming of Israeli settlements in contravention of international law. What we should take away from these examples as political scientists is that we need to examine power and the state, as well as the role of leaders – whether in government or civil society – in relation to racism and racialized violence. We also need to go further to consider how to advance anti-racism in light of specific conditions and contexts, as well as in light of the larger international system. It's a tall order, which is why we need more people to study and research these issues in the discipline.

Houda Mzioudet

Thank you, Yasmeen, for your concern and kind words. My family is well, though the Pandora's Box of unhinged racism has been open wide since the Tunisian president's statement has driven a wedge between Tunisian communities with increasing suspicion and fear. We have seen similar occurrences elsewhere, after far-right leaders took power—from Hungary to Brazil and the US under Trump. Sadly, Tunisia was a weak democracy that quickly fell into a quick autocratization, under a leader who was easily manipulated by not only local conspiracy theories but also regional leaders who took advantage of his ignorance over any semblance of basic political knowledge. Add, as well, the failure of Tunisian political parties to resolve the economic crisis, and the international pressures resulting from the war in Ukraine.

Thanks, Sean, for triggering this thread to further explore this topic for the roundtable. I had some time to scribble a few thoughts about the Tunisian identity crisis in relation to Saied's racist rhetoric. I plan to develop it into a more political philosophy paper (time permitting) on the impact of Western philosophy historical projection of Africa and the emergence of a decolonial philosophical tradition in Africa to deconstruct the issue of race, putting Tunisia at the heart of this debate.

Sean Yom

Houda, once again, thank you for these thoughts. I know they must be incredibly hard to formulate as you undertake public engagement on the anti-Black violence roiling Tunisia.

I just want to pluck out one idea that seems to run through many of our shared ideas. In your attachment, you wrote that amidst the xenophobia unfolding now, Tunisians needed "to look into the mirror and reconsider their complex identity and reconcile their Arab and Islamic identity with their alienated African identity." I think we can apply this broadly to all the frontiers of race we've been dis-

cussing over the past month—Palestine, the rest of the Arab world, and certainly the US and Canada. There are always, I think, unspoken lines drawn around nationhood that impose built-in hierarchies. What I despair is that the rest of the world often only reflects upon this when there is an explosive crisis at hand. In Tunisia and the US, those crises have come recently in the form of populist leaders stoking racial hatreds, whereas Palestinians live under a much broader racialized regime. How can we instigate more meaningful attention to these issues before racialized communities become targets of attack? (Partly a rhetorical question: if I had good answers, I'd be applying them right now!)

Amanda Sahar d'Urso

Hi all, I have hesitated to jump in, because I realize the gravity of the situation, and do not want to be the Americanist who makes it all about America…

But, Houda and Sean bring up a great point which I am seeing in the US. Many in the MENA/SWANA community seem to want a MENA/SWANA racial category (instead of being classified as White), but they are slow to acknowledge the racial diversity among their own community. I wrote some of this before, so my apologies for being a broken record. But the more I do this work, the more I see MENA/SWANA identity as an ethnic identity with a racial dimension. I have started to identify White MENA/SWANA, and I have already gotten push back from other White MENA/SWANA individuals who don't want to acknowledge the White privilege we have. I have always reiterated that in America, it is possible to be discriminated against by virtue of being from the MENA/SWANA —but also benefit from Whiteness. To quote W.E.B. DuBois, White MENA/SWANA

individuals still benefit from "wages of Whiteness" in ways that Black and Afro-MENA/SWANA individuals do not. How can we fight for recognition and inclusion while also being exclusionary?

Finally, I want to share an experience I had sharing my research a few months ago. I was at Northwestern University giving a talk when, during the Q&A, someone asked if I thought MENA/SWANA was a race or a pan-ethnic group. I told them what I have told you here. An undergraduate student, who shared she was Coptic, was extremely upset with my answer that many MENA/SWANA individuals are White. Now, phenotypically, her skin pigmentation was even lighter than mine, and mine is very light. She seemed genuinely angered by the fact that I said people like her and like myself benefited from that Whiteness in certain circumstances. I continued by sharing that our lived experiences were different than those who are Black and Afro-MENA/SWANA. This is the case in the US and across the region, as we have been especially reminded of through Houda's experiences. I did try my best to explain my rationale, but I think she held to her original position. It just shows there is a long way to go, and it's not just about older versus younger generations.

Sean Yom and Rana B. Khoury

Thank you all, incredibly, for these thoughtful exchanges! We must regrettably close this session (as it is now mid-April 2023), but we are inspired by our mutual reflections, and our capacity to interface with very urgent events happening right across the region. We hope our readers have been inspired by the ideas shared in this virtual community, and look forward to the promising research that all of you have done in service of this topic.◆

Book Roundtable:

The Political Science of the Middle East, eds. Marc Lynch, Jillian Schwedler, and Sean Yom (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022)

Introduction

This second roundtable returns to the traditional model of featuring a single book – in this case, *The Political Science of the Middle East*, an ambitious co-edited volume that meticulously assesses the leading theories, methods, and topics that have sculpted the contours of our subfield over the past two decades. Because I not only was one of the co-editors of this volume but still serve as co-editor of this newsletter, I have recused myself from penning any response to the thoughtful reviews solicited from four senior colleagues, viz. Amaney Jamal, Mark Tessler, Oliver Schlumberger, and Tom Pepinsky. Marc Lynch and Jillian Schwedler, my esteemed book co-editors, instead offer their musings later on.

I will, however, provide a quick compass to the book. It was a gargantuan endeavor, with several conferences convened by the Project on Middle East Political Science across several mostly COVID-stricken years that gathered nearly four dozen scholars strewn throughout several continents and many institutions. The resulting volume encased ten distinctive topics of research (authoritarian regimes, contentious politics, international relations, conflict and violence, political economy, Islam and Islamism, sectarianism and identity, public opinion, migration, and local politics) into their own chapters, bookended by a rousing introduction and con-

clusion. Above all, the volume is readable. It presents all the big questions and debates that define these core matters through lucid language, the sort that any interested researcher, and not just MENA specialists, can appreciate.

Does the book succeed? I will let my erudite colleagues deliver the initial balance of judgment, and Marc and Jillian provide a final evaluation. But, on behalf of the small army of authors that stand behind this volume, I do hope this work embodies the best of what Middle East political science can achieve through the synergies of collaboration. As scholars, we reflect not just what our work says, but also whom our work involves and our writings touch.

Sean Yom

Amaney Jamal, Princeton University

Amaney A. Jamal is Dean of the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs. She is also the Edwards S. Sanford Professor of Politics and a Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton, and directs the Workshop on Arab Political Development and the Bobst-American University of Beirut Collaborative Initiative. Dr. Jamal's scholarship covers the Middle East and North Africa, mass and political behavior, political development and democratization, inequality and economic segregation, Muslim immigration, gender, race, religion, and class. Her book Barriers to Democracy *won the 2008 American Political Science Best Book Award in the Comparative Democratization section. She is an author or editor of three other books and numerous peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. She was named a Carnegie Scholar in 2006 and elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2020.*

This is a substantial undertaking that involves an incredible representation of Middle East political science. Written by the key leaders in our field, this fantastic volume does an exceptional job connecting academic scholarship to real-world political developments. It pays particular attention on the effect the Arab Uprisings had on mainstreaming the work of Middle East political scientists by creating inroads and opportunities into the larger discipline. The editors should be commended for pulling together this volume, which is both representative and inclusive. As they note, the book emerged out of the Project on Middle East Politics Science (POMEPS) initiative, which for over a decade has been a leading vehicle in fostering, promoting, and building the Middle East political science subfield.

The introductory chapter superbly captures the evolution of Middle East political science, as it continues to reconcile regional events with disciplinary reactions. The chapters that follow not only present theoretical and empirical advancements for various topics, but also the methodological progress and rigor achieved across a diverse set of conceptual approaches. Each of these multi-authored chapters charts out different strands in the literature, including major debates and viewpoints. Collectively, they attain the vision laid out in the introductory chapter:

Our purpose is to survey the field with an eye towards highlighting its contributions, identifying points of convergence and disagreement within the evolving literature, and charting out ways to continue to push research programs forward. It is a field-building exercise, not a scorekeeping one. (p. 3)

Given this mandate, the volume has emerged as the must-read "handbook" on Middle East political science. I personally appreciate the segments that chart out the field's historical evolution, as well as the volume's broader focus on the post-Arab Uprisings period of study. Because the chapters play close attention to how the uprisings revitalized the academic study of the region, readers gain the requisite context to assess and evaluate how the subfield has fared in the context of comparative political science.

Often with edited volumes, concerns linger that not all the chapters cohere in a systematic way. This is not an issue here. The volume

holds together nicely, and its various chapters are well-integrated by a common set of themes. Again, as the introductory chapter notes:

The Arab uprisings energized the field of Middle East political science in multiple ways over the following decade. There are at least six broad ways in which this new energy could be seen: new research questions, new data and methods, conceptual and theoretical development, the diversification of the field, new approaches to research ethics and public engagement, and a revitalization of the IR subfield. (p. 17)

Readers will find that each of the book's substantive chapters addresses these core themes with varying emphases, which bodes well for overall coherence. Even more impressively, each of the thematic chapters is co-authored by leading figures on the subject area. They are by-products of synergistic intellectual inputs. Overall, I am very proud to have this book on my shelf, and have it already listed as required reading in my graduate course on Middle East politics.

As with all volumes of this sort, I offer some comments to be helpful, and to ponder subsequent discussions about the future of our discipline. Why were these chapter-based themes selected as initial organizational devices for the working groups, which eventually became the co-authored teams penning each chapter? My sense is that these themes clustered around the authors' areas of expertise. However, if these topics were selected ex ante and populated subsequently by recruiting relevant scholars, then we should enumerate a more concrete discussion about how we prioritize ideas.

That, in turn, leads to another question: what is the volume missing? Do methodological

and theoretical "constraints" require that some subjects will be studied more systematically than others? After all, while the volume covers a vast array of topics and ideas, the chapters are not exhaustive. It might be worth explaining, in essence, whether the chapter-based themes emerged to match the expertise of the scholars present to attend the conferences that generated this book, or vice-versa.

This is important, because the particular focus on these themes might signal a reification of certain research areas over others. This handbook will certainly influence what graduate students may choose to study. (Indeed, each of the chapters will serve as comprehensive and authoritative preliminary/oral examination prep material!). To ensure future creativity and advancement in our field, it is important that we acknowledge that these are some of the most pressing, but not exhaustive topics to be studied in the post-Arab Uprisings period.

Mark Tessler, University of Michigan

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The *Political Science of the Middle East: Theory and Research since the Arab Uprisings*, hereafter PSME, was published in 2022 by Oxford University Press. The editors of this original and very insightful book are Marc Lynch, Jillian Schwedler, and Sean Yom. Bookending the volume are a lengthy and very helpful introduction by Marc Lynch and a thoughtful and insightful concluding reflection by Lisa Anderson. In between are ten multi-authored chapters covering topics ranging from authoritarianism and evolving forms of political control to, among others, political economy and development, Islam and Islamism, public opinion, and migration and displacement.

None of these ten chapters has fewer than three coauthors, and three chapters have six coauthors. In total, 47 scholars have contributed to the volume, more than one-third of whom are from the MENA region or countries in Europe. Accordingly, the ten excellent topic-focused chapters of PSME offer readers valuable state-of-the-art overviews put together by teams composed of some of the most prominent and experienced scholars in the field.

There are important ways in which the book provides a whole that is more than the sum of the parts. One part of this is to document the passing of the area studies/social science divide. While they clearly possess area studies expertise, the contributing scholars and the work they discuss are without ambivalence tied to the discipline of political science. This is part of the reason that "political science" is in the title of the book and that Lynch in the introductory chapter calls the political science of the Middle East a "maturing field."

In addition, and even more central to the volume's purpose, the book documents the ways that the Arab uprisings and associated developments have contributed to this maturation. On the one hand, the uprisings brought what one reviewer has called a burst of "ferment and creativity," and with it new research questions and attention to conceptualization and method. On the other, as Lynch notes in his introduction, these events increased recognition of the disciplinary relevance of the Middle East and North Africa. "Generalists," he writes, "now looked to the MENA as a critical site to explore questions important in their research programs."

Of course, there are other books that provide a broad overview of the Middle East and

North Africa. Some of these books are also organized, at least in part, according to topics like those covered in PSME. These books are intended, primarily if not exclusively, for university courses dealing broadly with the Middle East and North Africa. The table below, which shows adoption and sales figures in 2022, lists several of these books and indicates that some have been more frequently – and widely – adopted than others.

important findings.

As it happens, I regularly teach a seminar for which this book would be a perfect fit. Entitled "Disciplinary Research on Politics and Society in the Middle East and North Africa," we read and discuss reports published in high-impact disciplinary journals of the kind of research described in this volume, and some of the studies we read have been

Book and Publisher	Author or Editor	Current Edition	Schools Adopting	Classes Assigning	Sales
Middle East Politics: Changing Dynamics (Routledge)	Monshipouri	2019	7	12	172
An Introduction to the Modern Middle East: History, Religion, Political Economy, Politics (Taylor & Francis)	Sorenson	2018	6	11	272
Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East (Lynne Rienner)	Angrist	2019	42	84	1386
Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa (Routledge)	Yom	2019	35	78	2143
The Middle East (Sage)	Lust	2020	84	217	4401

The books listed in the table are generally very good. Many of the editors and contributors are prominent and well-known scholars. *PSME* is a different kind of volume, however. Although *PSME* may compete with some of these volumes for use in courses that provide a broad overview of the Middle East, *PSME* is not so much about the Middle East and North Africa as it is about research on the MENA region and about the *community of scholars*, including many younger scholars, who design and carry out this research. Accordingly, *PSME* will be of most interest to those wishing to know: the questions and puzzles to which recent and current political science research is addressed; the investigators who have been and are conducting this inquiry; the designs and methodologies that these researchers have employed; and the nature and theoretical implications of the most

carried out by the same scholars who have coauthored PSME's chapters. I mention this because the instructional value of *The Political Science of the Middle East* should not be missed.

Oliver Schlumberger, University of Tübingen in Germany

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The *Political Science of the Middle East* comes as a humble-looking paperback, but features twelve substantial, well-structured, and circumspect chapters on big themes. The concluding one by Lisa Anderson, *grande* dame of American political science on the Middle East, reflects on what political scientists of the Middle East and North Africa have achieved. The book's overall impetus demonstrates that studying MENA politics is not some exotic niche phenomenon that remains a global exception. That lingering, if often latent, reproach served in the past to belittle area expertise as opposed to – and often only seemingly – globally applicable "best practice" for causal inference (i.e., quantitative methods). This book shows that MENA political science is firmly embedded in disciplinary traditions, approaches, and methods. In that sense, it can be read as a contribution in halting the "widening (of) the gap between the payoffs from the accumulation of area expertise and the rewards associated with adhering to disciplinary 'best practice.'"[1]

Such a project has succeeded. Chances are that political scientists who are not specialized nor primarily interested in the Middle East will find the contributions to this book useful for their own work. This volume does render a tremendous service to the scholarly community in four regards.

First, it gathers no less than 47 contributors, based in the North America, Europe, and the Middle East, who cover many major fields of political science research. Second, each chapter reviews the key dimensions of its chosen topic, summarizes debates that political scientists have been engaging for some time, and – some more than others – reflect on theoretical and methodological questions. Each contributing team has been given enough leeway to structure topics within their respective areas of expertise, and while the task of writing individual chapters is certainly more daunting for so many co-authors, the book as a whole benefits from it. Each chapter – and this is rare – is brilliantly written, and the book reads coherently.

Third, many of the book's contributors are among the finest scholars of Middle East politics and represent leading voices that have themselves significantly initiated, led, and shaped the debates they now review. And yet these contributors are also diverse, including different generations from junior scholars to established senior colleagues (both of whom have different assets to bring to such an overview). Fourth, all chapters conclude with an outlook on their respective sub-fields, reflecting how their topic is embedded in the broader discipline but also identifying open research questions that are, for the most part, drawn stringently from the preceding analy-

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1 Rudra Sil, "The Survival and Adaptation of Area Studies," in *The SAGE Handbook of Political Science*, eds. Dirk Berg-Schlosser, Bertrand Badie, and Leonardo Morlino (London: SAGE, 2020), 269.

ses of the debates in their respective fields. This presents an amazingly rich reservoir of inspiration for future research.

It is a big editorial achievement that each chapter meets the top academic standard that the co-editors set. Each makes for interesting reading and does give the encompassing overview of the topic that one would expect. In that sense, then, the volume truly is a generational statement, a concise snapshot on the "state of the art" of what political science on the MENA region currently discusses. The biggest strength is showing that the collective reliance on general political science concepts, theories and methods was achieved not after the Arab uprisings, but before. It is the *what*, more than the *how*, that changed after 2011-12 with regard to how political scientists study the MENA. Yet, it still seems fair enough to take that empirical event as an opportunity to define a starting point for the period the book focuses on.

Still, if the goal is to give a comprehensive overview on global research on Middle East politics, there is a question about the book's main audience. While comprehensive and including a much bigger-than-usual number of contributors, the volume is not encyclopedic. It is not the kind of book that students with no idea of the subject matter or the region could take and quickly look up a certain issue, concept, or question. Second, while it resembles a textbook in the breadth of the topics covered as well as in the range of its contributors, it is not. This is because chapters are, in fact, written accessibly in style; but naturally, given the task, they are also written very densely in terms of content. The benefits will likely be bigger for readers who are familiar with prevailing political and social science debates, whereas undergraduates will likely not understand or even notice the rich-

ness of allusions and references to debates that are not themselves part of the book, but implicitly referred to. The question of the key target audience remains therefore somewhat open.

Second, while comprehensive, the volume hardly covers an "exhaustive array of topics," as the first chapter states. Important areas of debate – such as the evolution of the state and statehood in the Middle East, state-society relations, electoral and party politics, and indeed of political representation and participation more broadly – do not seem to have merited chapters in their own right. To be sure, individual chapters do mention and partially discuss these staple dimensions of politics, but readers will have a hard time finding the respective paragraphs scattered across several chapters. For instance, electoral politics is part of the chapters on authoritarianism, Islam, local politics, and public opinion.

As a result, there are many concrete, research-ready questions that the book does not cover. Informal mechanisms, and their decisive role in shaping political outcomes, is one example. Others include the fate of clientelism and patronage networks when regimes and the patrons inside them fall, or when states break down. In addition: What or whom do states represent where divisive imaginaries about its very identity exist in parallel, but are mutually incompatible? How have formal and informal ways of political participation evolved? How has party politics been re-shaped where the public space for political life widened, as in Tunisia, and what has replaced ruling parties after their regimes have fallen (or, as in Egypt, abandoned their former single parties)? Can legitimacy be dismissed as an analytical category, simply on grounds that one aspect of it – the personality

cults of leaders – has been found to function as an instrument of control rather than a pillar of belief by populations? And in methodological terms, how can we adapt old types, categories, or classes in comparative analysis in determining what is similar versus what is different when we reject "conventional" models of "methodological nationalism" (p. 288)?

Critical research has been published on these questions over the past decade, and some of its leading voices might have further enriched the book. The examples given here suffice to demonstrate that topics are always a matter of choice. Choice, in turn, always follows academic fashions, empirical events, and academic cultures. Imagine, for instance, an edited volume on Middle East political science two decades ago *without* a chapter on civil society: unthinkable. The "civil society" focus back then has given way to a chapter on protest and social movements. Likewise, the renewed interest in militaries, repression, and identity politics reflects recent trends not just in the MENA, and also wider engagement with these themes among political scientists studying other regions.

To some extent, the choices that govern the topics covered in this volume may mirror the academic culture of its organizers. A book published by three US-based American co-editors will adopt a different set of ideas than if it were published by MENA-based or even European-based scholars. To be sure, there is nothing inherently bad in this; we must simply be aware that the resulting outlook will be less than universal. As one data point, among the 153 names mentioned in the references to the introductory chapter, just 20 (13 percent) are *not* US-based or US-trained – and of these, all but three are either affiliated with US-based institutions or else based in Europe. Further, despite the

large number of contributors, only one of the twelve chapters (political economy of development) does *not* feature a US-based or US-trained author, and its three writers are based in London. All this suggests that to fulfil the promise that Anderson mentions in her concluding chapter, namely "to 'decenter' the discipline, transforming it into a project that may actually merit the universalistic aspirations implied in the claim to be a science" (p. 293), there is still some way to go.

These remarks aside, however, the bottom line is that no other volume of this kind currently exists. The tremendous effort that both editors and contributors have put into this volume has resulted in a must-read achievement. A recognizably matured field now offers the fruits of its effort. Readers owe the co-editors a debt of gratitude for offering them such a rich and tasty, yet easy to digest meal. Anyone interested in understanding the MENA's political life must not miss this volume, and no political science library should go without it. And then, after having digested this very rich food for thought, readers will look forward to a second edition that should continue the present endeavor and which, taken together with the present one, might be truly exhaustive and attain a more universalistic outlook.

Tom Pepinsky, Cornell University

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The *Political Science of the Middle East: Theory and Research Since the Arab Uprisings* is an important addition to the literature on Middle East politics. Breaking from what the editors term the "decennial tradition

of disciplinary self-flagellation" which is so characteristic of many area studies communities in political science, this comprehensive collection highlights the positive contributions made by emerging scholars who were trained to be political scientists and who retain a strong substantive commitment to the Middle East region. The tone is confident, sometimes verging on triumphant. Tied together by a thematic focus on the Arab Spring as a landmark event in the region, the volume successfully captures the energy in the Middle East politics community over the past decade, highlighting its internal diversity in terms of methods and theoretical perspectives as well as the prominent contributions made by emerging and established scholars alike.

I am not a scholar of the Middle East region, nor am I conversant in the region's political debates and dynamics, much less its intellectual debates. But I am an interested comparativist whose own region of specialization, Southeast Asia, has sometimes faced much of the withering disciplinary criticism that the Middle East studies community has often faced. I also find myself engaging with some

portions of the Middle East politics community due to my research on Islam in the Malay world, which positions me as a member of an intellectual community whose focus—for better or for worse—is variously Cairo, Mecca, Jerusalem, or Istanbul, and certainly not Jakarta or Kuala Lumpur. At the same time, my region of specialization does not occupy the central position in popular discourse and Western foreign policy that the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) occupies.

My outsider's perspective surely limits my ability to speak knowledgeably about contributions in this volume, but it might afford me some of the distance needed to pose questions that others might not think (or want) to pose about T*he Political Science of the Middle East* and its subject matter. In the spirit of engagement with a thriving intellectual community, here are three such questions.
What's in a region? The scope of "the Middle East" and "MENA" as world regions is surely contested, and as a non-specialist I found myself wondering what the boundaries of the region are. My impression is that Turkey and Iran are considered "in the region," and so are Mauritania and Sudan. I suspect that Chad and Azerbaijan are not. I am less sure about Israel. I believe that that Morocco is generally considered part of the MENA region, but there are scholars and citizens who would draw a line elsewhere. At the risk of making too obvious a point, our evaluation of Middle East political science as a body of scholarship

depends on which countries are being covered. Iran, for example, is thoroughly understudied relative to its population and global influence, and thinking carefully about how scholars conceptualize "regional politics" helps us to see the unevenness of topical coverage in the field.

What is the role of disciplinary power and status in defining the political science of the Middle East? In her concluding chapter, Lisa Anderson poses the question, "What accounts for the fact that virtually every textbook in comparative politics and almost all influential comparative politics theory omit the Middle East and North Africa?" My initial reaction was to think that this could not possibly be true: what training in comparative politics would be complete without Linz and Chehabi on sultanistic regimes; Said on orientalism; Wedeen on authority and domination; Pearlman on emotions; Mahdavi, Beblawi, or Chaudhry on rentierism; Brownlee, Blaydes, or Smith on authoritarian parties and elections; and other classic works? My own engagement with these topics stems from comparative politics, not from Middle East studies.

I think Anderson's question gets at something different: what about the discipline of political science encourages scholars to *pay attention* to work on (or from) the MENA region? One possibility is that political science encourages work that conceptualizes politics in vaguely democratic terms, as Anderson suggests, which excludes most of the Middle East unless the phenomena in question happen to be analogous to what is found in a consolidated democracy (voting in controlled elections, for example). But I don't think that this is right: our discipline has long been interested in questions of conflict, order,

mobilization, accountability, policymaking, nationalism, religion and secularism, revolution, and many others, with no inherent dependence on democracy.

This leads me to my third query: *How have Western interests shaped the development of the field?* I am writing these words on March 15, 2023, five days before the twentieth anniversary of the US-led coalition's invasion of Iraq. This, to me, seems just as important an event for the development of Middle East political science as was the Arab Spring uprisings. The Arab Spring was a moment of transnational mobilization with implications for hundreds of millions of ordinary people. But many of the excellent scholars who were there to interpret and understand these events and their aftermath had become interested in the region following the invasion of Iraq, which created a distinct academic demand—especially in American political science departments—for expertise in this part of the world.

Let me not be misunderstood: committed area specialists like Lisa Anderson, Eva Bellin, Carrie Wickham, and countless others had been active in establishing a Middle East political science long before the US-led invasion of Iraq. But as a field, it strikes me that

Middle East political science has always been shaped by foreign interests. For academics, and especially among those who are critical of Western influence in the region, the area's prominence depends on how it can speak to the political concerns of those abroad. That certainly explains, at least in part, the work that scholars do and the attention that that work receives.

The Middle East region is not alone in this regard. Southeast Asianists in political science

wrestle with these same three questions, and it can be healthy for the scholarly community to establish a common sense of purpose by characterizing recent years as "triumph over adversity," to borrow a final time from Anderson. It is unquestionably good to bring more of the Middle East into the political science mainstream, and the volume's editors are to be commended for assembling an outstanding set of authors who can speak to the many contributions of the field. I think that by posing some of these harder questions about scope, status, and purpose, this community can make its engagement even better.

Marc Lynch and Jillian Schwedler

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It is a pleasure to receive such thoughtful commentaries from brilliant colleagues. We are tempted to respond on behalf of our 47 authors only with our enthusiastic agreement with the positive sentiments expressed about the book's quality, scope, and contribution. But, since we have the opportunity to engage, we would like to expand a bit on some key choices we made in the production of the book and address some of the thoughtful critiques as well.

Our collective editorial response (which implicitly includes Sean Yom, though as co-editor of the newsletter he has refrained from directly opining here) reflects some of the broader discussions happening within the discipline. We have in mind two recently published analyses of publications about the MENA in top political science journals, one by Melani Cammett and Isabell Kendall[2] and the other by Mark Berlin and Anum Pasha Syed;[3] a number of journal special issues such as one spearheaded by André Bank and Jan Busse;[4] and finally a trenchantly critical take on the discipline's progress by Andrea Teti and Pamela Abbott.[5]

Mark Tessler's fascinating data on the sales and adoptions of the leading textbooks on the politics of the Middle East, of which we had never previously been aware, offers us the chance to mull over our audience and purpose. We do not imagine *The Political Sci-*

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2 Melani Cammett and Isabel Kendall, "Political Science Scholarship on the Middle East: A View from the Journals," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54 (2021): 448-455.
3 Mark Stephen Berlin and Anum Pasha Syed, "The Middle East and North Africa in Political Science Scholarship: Analyzing Publication Patterns in Leading Journals, 1990–2019," *International Studies Review* 24 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viac027.
4 André Bank and Jan Busse, "MENA Political Science Research a Decade after the Arab Uprisings: Facing the Facts on Tremulous Grounds," *Mediterranean Politics* 26 (2021): 539-562.
5 Andrea Teti and Pamela Abbott, "Scholarship on the Middle East in Political Science and International Relations: A Reassessment," *PS: Political Science & Politics* (2023), https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096522001378.

ence of the Middle East as a competing text to the works he astutely offers as comparators. We did not design it to offer comprehensive coverage of the region, and it certainly could not substitute in an undergraduate classroom for other textbooks that aim to introduce the history and politics of an entire region to new learners. Our hope was to provide a snapshot of a rapidly evolving and growing field of scholarship, with deep essays offering a series of windows into our intellectual ferment following the 2011 Arab uprisings. Our authors were tasked with surveying the literature and presenting it selectively, as well as showing how a decade of scholarly work and engagement had augured new research questions, reframed existing theoretical debates, and generated new data sources. We hoped – and still hope! – that graduate students and seasoned academics alike would mine its chapters for ideas, rather than seeking to produce a final and complete compendium purely for classroom use.

Oliver Schlumberger raises valid points about the centrality of US-based scholarship to the volume. Despite our efforts to ensure inclusion of diverse perspectives – more than a third of the authors are from the Middle East, and almost a quarter were at the time of writing based in a European university (if one still considers the UK to be European) – there is always more that could be done. Schlumberger accurately observes that whatever the composition of the total authorship, the intellectual agenda of the project still seems to revolve around the axes of American political science. A comparable volume populated primarily by European scholars or by MENA-based scholars would likely find different topics and themes to be more central to their disciplinary concerns, write in a different style, and spotlight a different pantheon of scholarly references. Those would be inter

esting books to read. But it's also the case that American scholars and scholarship, and the journals and publishing houses where they prefer to publish, do still dominate professional political science. The story we tell is one of the growing success of MENA-focused scholars from all of these locales in publishing in those journals, deploying their methods, and entering those debates. The content of our survey, in its way, illustrates that very underlying trend which we seek to explain.

Schlumberger is also correct in naming a whole range of important topics and themes which do not receive chapters of their own, including clientelism, elections, parties, and so forth. Here, we do not simply plead the word count, though we certainly did want the book to be short enough to be easily purchased and used in graduate seminars and other academic research agendas. As editors, Jillian, Sean, and I did not want to produce yet another 1,000-page handbook which virtually nobody (including a great many college libraries) could afford. We wanted the book to be read! Its chapter structure reflected not just a conscious choice on the part of the editors, but an extended discussion among some 40 scholars at our preliminary workshop. There were several topics which we initially thought should have their own chapters, only to have the collective voice of our contributors convince us that it would be better to have them inform all the other chapters: gender, most obviously, as well as the media and forms of political participation. Indeed, the editors and contributors had a lively debate about the merits of crafting a separate chapter on gender politics, but consensus emerged that a more effective approach was to incorporate discussions of genderized politics into various chapters instead, so as to embed gendered concerns across the entire book rather than treat this as a discrete, and perhaps toke-

nized, topic. That said, were there to be a second edition, or a companion volume, many of these topics would certainly be candidates for new chapters!

But, as Amaney Jamal notes in her incisive comments, to the extent that our volume succeeds on its own terms, then there may be unintended implications of those choices. The decision of which themes and topics to center indeed reflected the structured conversations of a large community of scholars, and then broken down through a dozen working groups that met across several conferences. But those deliberations were in turn structured by the expertise and methodological orientations of the participants. Moreover, each of the chapters of the book embodied energetic exchanges between scholars. The chapter on contentious politics, for instance, was initially framed as one concerned with mass uprisings and revolutions. However, after much engagement, the authors instead decided to recalibrate the chapter towards protests, which enabled them to address patterns and practices that the discipline's wider fixation on "big-event" rebellions tends to miss. The same could be said on the chapter regarding authoritarianism: rather than repeat the refrain that the MENA is filled with stubbornly non-democratic states, the contributors decided to emphasize the *varieties* of authoritarian institutions, strategies, and trajectories that have punctuated the post-Arab Uprisings era.

Nonetheless, Jamal makes a provocative point, and we take it seriously. Those not present in the initial discussions when we began this project could well see this marginalization, intended or unintended, further aggrandized as the book enters into wide circulation. She is right to push us, and the field as a whole, to be self-conscious in these

choices and to find ways to ensure ever-greater inclusivity. That concern should be echoed widely to our peers who may be working on similar projects, such as edited volumes, journal special issues, and field conferences.

Perhaps the most challenging commentary comes from Tom Pepinsky, writing from outside the MENA region but engaged with many of the same issues from the vantage point of Southeast Asia. His questioning of what the MENA entails as a region, for instance, is a piquant one: Middle East specialists have been wondering this for generations, because how this region is imagined within the global imagination has markedly changed over time. Today, the most widely accepted contours orient the Arab world (that is, the nearly two-dozen Arabic-speaking countries) plus Israel, Turkey, and Iran as our "core" region. But we often revisit this clumsy set of borders. For instance, the boundaries between sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab world have always been more porous than Westerners conceive – something that the new Carnegie-funded Program on African Social Research takes seriously, and which ongoing developments in Sudan make clear as well.

Pepinsky notes that the centrality of the MENA region to US foreign policy and the global political agenda is both a blessing and a curse for scholars of our region. It's good to have audiences care about the topics we study, and even better that – as Lynch's introduction to *The Political Science of the Middle East* documents – our scholarly community has risen to the occasion. But, at what cost does our field pursue topics which appear hot in the news cycle, finding ways to frame our findings around issues that touch upon the interests of governments and mass media organizations? Will those works of

scholar- scholarship endure? What happens when the world moves on?

These are valid concerns for at least some of the ideas that animate the Middle East political science field. Much as Pepinsky might suspect, MENA scholars are constantly attempting to sort out these problems in a manner that honors their academic independence but also responds to real-world events that often encourage, or even require, that same expertise to shape the public sphere. Those studying democracy and authoritarianism, for instance, or Islamist movements or civil conflict are obviously researching topics that broach the policy agenda of the US and its allies, and attract the headline-grabbing strategies of the mainstream media. With other topics, though, the overlap is not so clear. For example, our book's chapter on migration and displacement notably recenters its research agenda away from the "hot" topic of refugees that preoccupies the global humanitarian aid industry. The chapter on local politics likewise deals with spatial dynamics regarding the dispersion of power and social life in a way that would read completely alien to virtually any Western policymaker.

This discussion moves us towards a more staple critique: is greater attention from, and acceptance by, mainstream political science necessarily a positive thing? It certainly is, of course, to those scholars who get scarce jobs and secure tenure by publishing in those venues. But is that scholarship, for all its rigor and adoption of trendy methodologies, producing better and richer understandings of politics in the MENA region? In their critique of the field, Teti and Abbott bemoan what our book celebrates, arguing that professional disciplinary success has come at the expense

of theoretically diverse and empirically rich scholarship.[6] This debate harkens back to the Area Studies Controversy of yore, a framing of irremediable tension between thoroughly informed empirical area studies work and methodologically rigorous universal social science, which our book – like the field it describes – has pointedly attempted to move beyond. ◆

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6 Teti and Abbott, "Scholarship on the Middle East."

MISSION STATEMENT

The Middle East and North Africa Politics Section is an academic society at the American Political Science Association (APSA), established in 2018 to support, develop and publish research on the politics of the MENA region utilizing interdisciplinary methodological, theoretical and empirical tools. It seeks to fully integrate the rigorous study of the politics of the Middle East with the broader discipline of Political Science, to serve as an institutional home for the community of political scientists dedicated to the Middle East, and to incorporate both scholars from the MENA region and diverse scholars from the United States into the global study of Middle East politics. The section's bylaws and diversity statement can be found on its website, https://apsamena.org.

MENA Politics is the official newsletter of the APSA-MENA section. It is a biannual publication devoted to publishing new research findings, hosting productive debates, and highlighting noteworthy developments among the scholarly community. It is managed by the chief editors with the joint confidence of the editorial board and the APSA-MENA section.