Turkey's Paradigm Shifting since 1980s: A Historic Transformation from Kemalist Secularism to Islamist Politics

Sajib Kumar Banik

Abstract: *Turkish society is claimed to have progressed through a continuous confrontation between secularism and Islamist politics (or political Islam) since its inception as a republic. However, it is an important question to investigate how constitutionally a rigid secularist country like Turkey has been governed by pro-Islamist JDP and its leader Erdogan since 2002 and what accounted for this transformation in Turkish society and public perception. This article begins with the military coup of 1980, which was uniquely distinct and most ambitious in Turkish history as it unfolded a favorable environment for right-wing political parties to win over the people through political maneuvering. Henceforth, this article is an attempt to analyze this paradigm shifting that has transpired from Kemalist secularism to Islamist politics since the 1980s. Notably, the Turkish military, traditionally despite being the ultimate protector of Kemalist secularism, began to promote Islam to counteract leftist ideologies, a strategy further strengthened by Turgut* Özal's *liberal economic policies that integrated Islam into national identity, eventually provided a new momentum for Islamists to evolve in the 1980s. After analyzing the various factors that precipitated the dramatic rise of pro-Islamist Welfare Party (WP) in the 1990s, this paper ultimately aims to examine the rise of JDP and Erdogan in 2002 by employing a populist strategy, such as framing themselves as 'conservative-democrats' as opposed to focusing solely on religion and also Erdogan's creeping Islamization and authoritarianism through 'New Turkey' project.*

Key Words: *Kemalist Secularism, Political Islam, Turkish-Islamist Synthesis, Just Order, National View Movement, New-Ottomanism, Naqshbandi Order, New Turkey.*

Introduction

Mustafa Kemal, often known as Kemal Atatürk, founded the modern Turkish Republic as a secular democratic state in 1923. Previously, it was the center of the

* Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Dhaka

Ottoman Empire, which was administered with Islamic law (*Shari'a*) for almost 600 years, or, to put it another way, with a merger of politics and Islam. Atatürk's ideological legacy- known as Kemalism- consists of 'Six Arrows' (Turkish: *Altı Ok*): republicanism, populism, nationalism, reformism, statism and secularism. Based on these six guiding principles, Atatürk initiated a series of sweeping social, political and economic reforms to modernize and westernize Turkey. These reforms included the abolition of all Islamic institutions, the emancipation of women, implementing western legal systems, calendars, clothing and the Romanization of the Ottoman script, among other things. While he established Turkey as a secular and democratic state, Kemal Atatürk's brand of secularism is known as *laiklik* which can more accurately be translated as French *laïcité* (Kasaba, 2008). This is blatantly distinct from traditional secularism, which simply refers to the separation between state and church and limits religious believe to personal sphere rather than public. Moreover, Kemalist or Turkish style of totalitarian secularism (*laiklik*) does not merely believe in the separation between state and church but emphasize on the rigid subordination of religion under state. In Kemal Era (1923-1938), religion was not eliminated or suppressed but completely banished from the public sphere through series of Atatürk's reforms and strictly supervised by state, although independent religious brotherhoods continued clandestinely (Kasaba, 2008). Herein, it will not be irrelevant to understand Atatürk's view on religion, and modernity through his speech delivered in 1925:

> …the aim of the revolutions which we have been and are now accomplishing is to bring the people of the Turkish Republic into a state of society entirely modern and completely civilized in spirit and form…I flatly refuse to believe that today, in the luminous presence of science, knowledge, and civilization in all aspects, there exist, in the civilized community of Turkey, men so primitive as to seek their material and moral well-being from the guidance of one or another şeyh. Gentlemen, you and the whole nation must know, and know well, that the Republic of Turkey cannot be the land of şeyhs, dervishes, disciples and lay brothers. The straightest, truest Way (*tarikat*) is the way of civilization. To be a man, it is enough to do what civilization requires. The heads of the brotherhoods will understand this truth that I have uttered in all its clarity, and will of their own accord at once close their convents, and accept the fact that their disciples have at least come of age. (Lewis, 1968, pp.410-411)

However, after the foundation of Turkish Republic in 1923, history of Turkey enters into a phase of conflict between secularism and Islamist politics or political Islam[1]. Kemal established a single party regime (Republican People's Party, RPP) that lasted without any break until 1945 and ruled Turkey strictly following the doctrine of *laiklik*. During his time, Kemal tolerated no opposition. As he stated

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[1] Fundamentally speaking, political Islam (or Islamism) is essentially an ideology that supports bringing Islamic theology and tradition into the political arena (Charles, 1997).

in early 1920s: "Let the people leave the politics alone for the present. For ten or fifteen years more I must rule. After that perhaps I may be able to let them speak openly." (Tomlin, 1940). However, soon after the demise of Kemal Atatürk in 1938 and with the advent of multiparty democracy in 1946, religious forces started to proliferate in varying degrees, yet religiously based political ideologies began to resurface explicitly at the end of the 1960s. And, these all initiated by Necmettin Erbakan who formed National View Movement (*Milli Görüş*[2]) in 1969 with the intention of promoting social justice, industrialization and a national culture and education system based on Islamic principles. Even though, French revolution introduced the idea of radical secularization but the French term *laïcité* did not get momentum until 1880s as one of an assertive views (Chelini-Point, 2010). Rather *laïcité* had to endure a protracted struggle to gain dominance, which is now residing at the core of French national consciousness. In the same way since its inception, Turkish idea of *laiklik* has been struggling to cope with and influence over Turkish society (Rear, 2014). In early Republican era, the state established total control over religious affairs and institutions without any major obstacle but this began to change by the end of 1960s and Turkey has undergone a historic shift away from Kemalist secularism since 1980s. Turkey, a secular democratic state in Eurasia, is presently governed by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of the pro-Islamist Justice and Development Party (JDP). This article is an attempt to analyze the manner in which Turkish society has transitioned from Kemalist secularism to Islamist politics since 1980s by presenting three specific objectives:

- Firstly, to investigate how the coup of 1980 paved the way to Turkish-Islamist Synthesis and State-led Islamization (or Islamization from above);
- Secondly, to examine the causes of the strong resurrection of political Islam in the 1990s by the Welfare Party (WP) and subsequent rise and success of Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (JDP); and
- Thirdly, a critical understanding of Erdogan as a new 'Atatürk' in an era of 'Neo-Ottomanism[3]' and his creeping Islamization by 'New Turkey' project.

[2] A worldview based primarily on two pillars—imported Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood ideology and nostalgia for Turkey's Ottoman past—was formed by the *Milli Görüş* movement, the backbone of political Islam in Turkey (Cornell, 2017).

[3] Over the past two decades, Neo-Ottomanism has been a prevalent political discourse in Turkish social and political life. Neo-Ottomanism is attributed to the AKP and its leader Erdogan for its rise both as an ideology and policy in Turkey. It refers to a strategic and ideological framework in which Turkey seeks to extend its political, economic, and cultural clout over territories under the erstwhile domain of the Ottoman Empire, i.e., the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans (Latham, 2024). Tokdoğan argues that the use of Neo-Ottomanism, as a political narrative under Erdogan and his entourage, created a sense of new national mood by utilizing politics of emotions and eventually contributed to the durability of Erdogan's rule (Tokdoğan, 2024). The new Turkish cultural and economic elites support Erdogan's interpretation of Neo-Ottomanism as a way of life that aligns with a more expansive Islamic worldview and upholds their positions of power (Yavuz, 2020).

This study aims to apply methodical investigation to engage with above mentioned study objectives or research questions. In terms of methodology, this paper essentially will be qualitative in nature, primarily catering secondary sources. Sources have been evaluated based on explanatory and in-depth analytic techniques and historical methods. This research extensively combed through a wide range of secondary sources comprised of: books, research articles, newspapers, report, document and working paper of renowned international centers and institutes and also different scholarly writings available in various reliable websites etc. This essay is mainly divided into three segments: Firstly, it talks about how Turkey's military establishment in the 1980s initially promoted Islamization through Turkish-Islamist Synthesis, which allowed Islamists to reorganize and thrive on. Secondly, it addresses the strong resurrection of political Islam in the early 1990s and its development. Ultimately, this study concluded by analyzing Recep Tayyip Erdogan and JDP's coming into power in 2002 using moderate and populist approach, despite having a clear Islamic root, as well as its gradual Islamization through education reforms, revised foreign policy, dismantling of the republican establishments including powerful military and by the implementation of the 'New Turkey' plan.

Understanding Turkish-Islamist Synthesis and State-led Islamization in the 1980s

Turkey experienced two military interventions before 1980, one in 1960 and another in 1971. But the third military intervention of 1980 was the most ambitious and the longest lasting in the modern Turkish history. Military assumed political leadership up until 1983 parliamentary elections and triggered a turning point in state policy. This coup was staged due to a boom in left- and right-wing violence which brought the Turkey on the verge of the civil war in the 1970s. This violence resulted on 1,126 political assassinations in 1979, a number that ascended until the military coup to 1500 for the period from January to September 1980 alone (Karakas, 2007). As a consequence, military took over the authority to restore order and martial law was enforced by the military following the coup. The government and parliament all were dissolved. The primary goal of the military was the suppression of political violence and political violence had virtually ceased by 1982. With severe punishments and many executions, the coup was successful in suppression the both radical left and right in a relatively brief period of time. In November 1982, a new constitution was granted. The Turkish military actually reacted even more harshly against leftists following the 1980 coup because, during the Cold War, they were seen as a particularly serious threat to Turkish secularism. In an ironic turn of events, following 1980, the Turkish military embraced a prominent role in bolstering Islamic conservatism in Turkey (ElIgür, 2010). In an attempt to prevent leftist ideologies, the military eventually attempted to elevate the role of Islam by instrumentalizing religion against the leftist mobilization of the time. As Halil Karaveli concludes,

> … the military undermined the widely Atatürk legacy – of which it is generally assumed to be the unwavering watchdog, a modern myth if there ever was one – first by the promotion of the Islamization of society and of state ideology, and secondly, and perhaps more devastatingly, by mobilizing the Atatürk legacy of secularism (or rather the rhetoric about it) in the service of authoritarianism. (Karaveli, 2008)

However, almost immediately after the coup, the military-run government, albeit one that was still in power, looked for an ideology considered as moderate which would guarantee social stability and not pose a new threat to itself. Despite both of the radical left and right were severely restricted, their support bases were still sizeable in the society. In order to rule out the possibility of social explosions, a unifying ideology was required and that ideology turned out to be Islam. Because for the vast majority of Turkish society, Islam had been a major source of social solidarity and inspiration for centuries. That is why, under military tutelage, religious education was made compulsory in all schools. The state also opened Quranic classes and promoted moral and religious education. In effect, military essentially adopted the path to institute a process of state controlled 'Islamization from above' (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008). Military sought to fuse Islamic symbols with nationals expecting that it will help them to enter a more homogeneous and less Islamic community and will insulate the mass people from left-wing ideologies. Based on the tripod of 'the family, the mosque, the barracks', this new 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' was designated to diminish the challenge of radical leftist ideologies and also to reduce the appeal of non-Turkish strands of Islamic thinking penetrating into Turkey from the outside world like Pakistan and Arab countries (Karakas, 2007). The military also hoped, the new synthesis would act as a counter to Islamic radicalism from Iran. Indeed, Turkish-Islamic Synthesis could be explained as a new nationalism that adopted the predominant interpretation of Sunnism in Turkey and thereby aimed to shield pious Turkey from international Islamist movements (Baren, 2010). This synthesis crystalized the convergence of Turkish nationalism with Sunni Islam. It also represents a radical departure from Kemalist secularism. Eventually, this environment produced the ideal conditions for political Islam to develop in Turkey as an alternative ideology. Many leftist and rightist, in fact, who ceased themselves to continue politics in their political arena leaned toward Islam with the hope of carrying on their struggle (Yilmaz, 2012). Thus since the early 1980s on, Islam had become a new harbor for many leftist and rightist groups.

In 1983, the military went back to barrack leaving political arena and political parties were thereafter allowed to resume their activities. The Welfare Party (WP) came into existence in this respect, as the continuation of the erstwhile National Salvation Party (NSP) on July 19, 1983 under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan. NSP was formed in 1972 as an heir of National Order Party (NOP) under Erbakan's direction. However, the influence of WP in political arena remained largely limited

throughout the 1980s due to the success of the newly established Motherland Party (MP) under the leadership of Turgut Ozal.

Islamization process, generally, became more evident with the MP government that came to the power in the post-coup period in 1983. Having received 45% of the vote, MP came to the office in 1983. Ozal became the Prime Minister and remained in this post from 1983 to 1989 and Turkey's President until his death in 1993. During his tenure as Prime Minister, Ozal favored and intensified the integration of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis into the official state discourse. Even though Turkish-Islamic Synthesis – as a mixture of Sunni Islam and Turkish nationalism – adopted and implemented by the military but it was maintained by the Ozal and his center-right MP rule (1983-91) (ElIgür, 2010).There is no proof that Ozal supported either the introduction of Islamic law (*Shari'a*) or the abolition of Secularism (Jenkins, 2008). Instead he continued to regulate society through secular laws while society simultaneously was coloring itself with culture and identity. Ozal built a new bridge between state, society and religion. He was the first Turkish Prime Minister who embarked himself on the pilgrimage to Mecca (1988) and introduced daily fasting during Ramadan to his administration. The core of Ozal's administration was made up of prominent Naqshbandi order. MP's concern for gaining votes from *tarikats*[4] (religious orders) ever increasingly led it to practice more tolerance towards religious figures and groups (Yilmaz, 2012). As claimed by Turgut Ozal, material like industrialization and moral like protection of Turkish cultural heritage should be two indispensable factors of development-both of which would ensure a stronger Turkish society. Ozal considered Islam as a crucial component of the Turkish culture. In Ozal's opinion, Turkish people would take benefits from western technology and simultaneously had to live and think like Turks. Ozal regarded strong faith in Allah as an essential factor for the republican solidarity. Ozal was also a critic of enforced secularism in Turkey (ElIgür, 2010). He believed that the teaching of the core of religion was beneficial. MP emphasized the opening up of Quran courses, mosques and *Imam-Hatip* (Khatib) schools. Ozal continued the mosque building program during his six years tenure in office and an average of 2000 new mosques were set up each year (Jenkins, 2008). Between the years 1983 and 1990, an average of 135 Quran courses were established an average each year. From 1983 to 1989, eight more *Imam-Hatip* schools were opened (Jenkins, 2008). Ozal also adopted the policy of opening market. By opening the business door to Kuwaiti and Saudi finance houses, he created an opportunity for an Islamist business class and laid one of the foundations for Islamism and Islamic movement in Turkey (ElIgür, 2010). Consequently, the so-called 'Anatolian-bourgeoisie', a new middle class which is deeply grounded in Islamic culture,

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[4] The *tarikats* were the pillars of popular Islam: "By the eighteenth century the brotherhoods [*tarikats*] had established themselves in almost every town and village in Turkey. … They were able to dominate the professional and social, as well as religious life." (Lewis, 1968, p.401)

was born (ElIgür, 2010). This middle class group was pro-democratic in nature and supported greater religious freedom. MP pursued a strategy of establishing Islamic cadre and facilitating their entrance into the state bureaucracy and secular universities, as such, made a way of creating an Islamist elite. Actually, Ozal's official reconsideration of Islam as a part of Turkish-Islamic identity coupled with liberal economic policy offered a new momentum and self-confidence for Islamic interest groups.

In short, Islamist politics in Turkey was assisted to reorganize in a variety of ways throughout the 1980s, primarily by the military and then by the Ozal government. First, it was sparked by the Turkish military initiated Turkish-Islamist Synthesis, which ultimately reinforced Islam's position as a counterweight to radical leftist ideology. Later, the adoption of Turkish-Islamic Synthesis into state discourse and liberal economic policy followed by Ozal administration served to solidify the role of Islam into political arena. This change in the Turkish Republic could therefore be referred to as Islamization from above rather than from below.

Political Islam in Power: The Case of Welfare Party

Political Islam (or Islamism) witnessed a strong resurrection in the early 1990s. Previously mentioned, Welfare Party (WP) was formed in 1983 under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan. This party was the successor of the previous NSP and its ideology differed little from that of the NSP. When the WP ran in the 1987 national elections, it received just 7.3% of the registered votes, well for fourth place. But in the next national elections held in 1991, it touched the figure 16.2%, nearly twice as many votes as in the previous national election. In truth, Turkey's economy had a slump after 1987 as a result of the global recession and the country's growing budget deficit, which led to an increase in inflation and unemployment (Akyüz and Boratav, 2002). Due to this, MP's popularity quickly declined after 1987 and was supplanted in the 1991 elections by a coalition of the center-right and center-left (Kasaba, 2008). In the local elections held in 1994, WP received 19% of total votes cast and won the Mayor's office in 28 municipalities including mega cities like Ankara and Istanbul. However, WP came in first in the 1995 national elections with 21.6% of the registered votes and formed a coalition government in June 20, 1996, with the center-right True Path Party with Erbakan as Prime Minister (Yilmiz, 2012). For the first time since the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, Turkey was led by an Islamic Prime Minister from an Islamic Party, which came as a huge shock to the country's secular elite. Now, the question that arises as vital one is: What were the key causes of WP's sharp ascent in the early 1990s?

A number of variables contributed to WP's dramatic rise on that time. One of the most important factors in the rise of the WP was the decline of the leftist political parties after 1980. Following the 1980 coup, military directed a massive crackdown against leftist organization, although military banned all political parties and many leaders were sent to jail. When the system opened up through

lifting political sanctions again in 1983, the rightist organizations were able to reorganize. The left, on the other side, suffered further from the both the collapse of the Soviet Union and the inability to originate a new program that would challenge free market economy. In Ozal's era, Turkey's economy was shifted from import-substitute policies to export oriented growth. With the state subsidies slash down, marginalized people became even more marginalized. Whereas the vote of the urban poor had largely been for the RPP (Republican People's Party) in the 1970s, it was transferred to the WP in the 1980s and 1990s which resulted in a notable shift in WP voter turnout (Toprak, 2005). Since the 1990s, WP no longer dependent only on the vote bank of traditional conservatives but began to garner support and votes particularly from the urban poor (Altunisik, 2005). In addition, the success of WP can be attributed to its activities in delivering material goods rather than its image as an Islamist party. WP was successful because of its better understanding of the first lesson of democracy, which was to cater to the needs and desires of the voting public. Therefore, the WP's popularity was largely due to its emphasis on social issues rather than religion, which essentially represented a dramatic change in the Welfare's political agenda. This broadened WP's appeal and helped it to extend beyond the hard core religious backing.

In early 1990s, WP had a legion of devoted volunteer, particularly women who performed volunteer activities by providing a network of social-welfare help to the underprivileged (Baren, 2010). WP benefited from anti-westernism as well. Moreover, one significant factor in the WP's growing acceptance was the Just Order Project. In reality, WP succeeded in winning over the votes of traditional urban center-leftists by promising the end of corruption and pledging to establish 'Just Order' rooted in Islamic tradition. WP promised to introduce 'Just Order'[5], if it once could get in the power (Jenkins, 2008). Just Order was not merely an Islamic political order. Also, it is completely not against the Turkish Republican founding principles. Just Order was composed of four different but interrelated areas. These include: politics, economics, science and morality or religion (Yilmaz, 2012). The political aspect focused on gaining political power in order to re-arrange the distribution of national wealth for the better social adjustments. Besides, the primary emphasis of the economic component was 'Just Economic Order'. This economic order represented a third way between Socialism and Capitalism. State's policy was supposed to benefit people with low income. State supported free entrepreneurship as well as build its own heavy industry. It was also in favor of eliminating banking interest from the economic domain. Religious part proposed to reduce moral decline in society by introducing a more spiritual lifestyle based on Islamic principles. Finally, scientific order promoted the freedom of expression, encouraged transfer of modern technology and scientific advancement in all its forms. WP's promise to restore the national pride was also another significant

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[5] The concept of Just Order encompassed not only an equal distribution of resources but also a community guided by Islamic principles and morality (Jenkins, 2008).

factor for its nationwide rise as the largest party in the 1990s. Erbakan consistently highlighted that Turkey possessed the potential to lead the Muslim world, much like the Ottoman Empire had done for centuries. For that, not the West but the Muslim world were the right ground for Turkey to enhance her influence and making the Turkey a leading country. No other political party in the 1990s embodied such popular desire for national pride and dignified foreign policy (Yilmaz, 2012).

However, the WP's assuming political power led the secular elite to contain the Islamist movements and Erbakan had to deal with two competing issues as the head of the government. On the one hand, he had a clear Islamic political agenda that would have annoyed the army and on the other hand, by maintaining the secular status quo, he would have distanced the core of the WP's follower from the party. Erbakan's political agenda, however, was well-known and not obscure. When Erbakan appointed as Prime Minister, he suggested the ban on female students and civil servant's wearing an Islamic headscarf should be lifted. Additionally, he proposed the restructuring of the Turkish law. In order to facilitate the enforcement of Islamic law, he also argued in favor of legal pluralism (ElIgür, 2010). Erbakan pushed for the gender-segregated buses and prohibition of alcohol in government owned restaurants. He also wanted to increase *Imam-Hatip* and Quran schools (Baren, 2010). In January 1997, Erbakan entertained Islamic *tarikat* leaders into his official residence and took initiatives to place a good number of their supporters into state bureaucracy. He and his party's devout leaders also proposed to build a grand mosque at Taksim Square of Istanbul – an area that symbolizes Atatürk's project of westernization and modernism by his Cultural Center, home to opera, ballet and imported western cultural traditions etc. (Kasaba, 2008). Erbakan also aimed to alter Turkey's foreign policy in order to foster closer ties with the Muslim world. Consequently, another Turkish military intervention happened on February 28, 1997. In the context of contemporary Turkish history, it is referred to as a 'soft coup' or 'post-modern coup' (Yilmaz, 2021).

The WP was closed down by the constitutional court on January 16, 1998, following the military intervention, on the grounds that the party disregarded the principles of secularism and the legal regulations governing political parties. As a consequence, the Virtue Party (VP) succeeded WP. VP tried to give up the path of previous WP and it emphasized on the issue of democracy and human rights. The Virtue Party did, in fact, adopt certain western principles. However, the Turkish military felt that this little change was insufficient. The very same individuals who had been involved in the WP and now made up VP's political cadres were not able to persuade the constitutional court that they had undergone sufficient changes. So, the VP had to follow the same fate of WP. It was closed down in June 2001. One thing was clearer by the military takeover of 1997: any direct attempt to forward an Islamic agenda would not be met with military support, but would rather face stiff opposition. Since then, a large number of Islamist movement members had come to the conclusion that minimizing the religious agenda and avoiding direct conflict with secularists could be the only way for Islamists to prosper. Islamist politicians

learned from the 1990s turmoil that secularism is a well-entrenched force in Turkish politics and society. So following the closing down of the VP, the Islamist movement split into two factions. Both of factions were assembled and organized around new parties. The Justice and Development party (JDP), also known as the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi), was created by the younger generation referred to as 'reformists'. The old guard formed the Happiness Party (HP).

Thus Islamist politics, led mostly by the WP, so evidently gained ground in Turkey during the 1990s. Addressing social issues along with religion, decline of the leftist ideologies due to the disintegration of the USSR, adopting the Just Order Project, anti-westernism and dignified foreign policy -all that helped WP's ascent to prominence and popularity. But the military coup of 1997 and subsequent closing down of WP and VP pushed Islamist to revisit their political strategy by embracing political pragmatism, which is further demonstrated by the establishment of the JDP in 2001.

Justice and Development Party (JDP) and Creeping Islamization

JDP was founded in 2001 under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. From the ashes of the defunct Welfare Party and Virtue Party, the pro-Islamist JDP was formed as the fifth and final incarnation. The origin of the JDP can be traced back to the 1970s (Ahmad, 1991). JDP, indeed, is the latest representative of a chain of Islamic parties, which started with the establishment of National Order Party in 1970 (Aydin & Cakir, 2007). Prior to continuing the conversation, it is important to understand the JDP's ideological foundations. A political party with clear Islamic roots is the JDP. Erdogan, the charismatic leader of the JDP, has been involved in politics since 1969. His political career began with the National View Movement (*Milli Görüş*), a think tank affiliated with the National Salvation Party (NSP) and the National Order Party (NOP). Bulent Arinc and Abdullah Gul, two other JDP leaders, were also came from the National View Movement (Heper & Sule, 2003). Erdogan attended in the Iskenderpasa Seminary of the Naqshbendi[6] as an adult, with the goal of establishing Sunni morality dominance over the world. Iskenderpasa Seminary must have had a strong impact on him. He himself pointed out that Sufism had an influence on him (Heper & Sule, 2003). In 1986, Erdogan was elected to the central executive committee of the Welfare Party (WP). In 1994 local elections, the Islamist WP nominated Erdogan as their candidate for Istanbul metropolitan mayor.

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[6] The conservative Naqshbandiyya Sufi order and its offshoot have dominated Turkey's political Islamic movement. In fact, Erbakan's *Milli Görüş* movement's core comprised of the followers of the Iskenderpaşa wing of the Khaledi branch of the Naqshbandi Sufi order. The Naqshbandis' staunch opposition to the Ottoman Empire's westernizing reforms throughout the nineteenth century best captures their orthodox character (Cornell, 2017 &Weismann, 2007). This Sufi order is steadfastly commited to the orthodox Sunni tradition and the *Shari'a*; mysticism is just a 'second story' to be completed after fulfilling official Islamic duties (Hourani, 1981).

However, Erdogan has been very popular since his mayoral candidacy of Istanbul in 1994. While the WP had nationwide 19 percent of the vote in the local municipal elections, the WP received 25 percent of the vote in Istanbul. Erdogan was mayor until 1998. That year, he received a four-and-a-half-month prison sentence and was banned from participating in active politics. After an incident of 1997 in which he read a poem considered pro-Islamist by judges, he was prohibited from holding any official post until 2003. Erdogan and JDP seems to have studied WP's saga and drawn lessons from it. Each time Islamic party was dissolved, its successor claimed to be more moderate and less Islamist. From the ashes of Erbakan's failure, the JDP was born. Although it originated from the National View movement, JDP leaders claimed to have discarded its ideological baggage, describing it as a post-Islamist party (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2015). Since its inception in 2001, JDP sought to portray itself as a conservative rather than a religious party. JDP came to the power in the 2002 elections, obtaining 34% of the vote. While asked in a press conference after the national election of 2002, the JDP leader Erdogan portrayed JDP as 'conservative and democrat'– though most people took their self-described label of 'conservative democrat' as 'Muslim democrats' similar to Christian democrats in the West – not a 'religion centric' political party (H. Yavuz, 2006). That was the language of the JDP which was constantly spoken since its inception in an attempt to separate itself from the political movement namely National View Movement led by Necmettin Erbakan since 1969. The JDP elite not only labelled themselves as 'conservative democrat' but also placed a strong emphasis on democracy, human rights, EU membership, globalization, neo-liberal economic policies, competitive market economy and eschewed 'anti-western' discourse (Aydin & Cakir, 2007).

There were several reasons for this change in discourse and policy. The 1997 post-modern coup initiated a learning process among political Islamists that a party without upholding secularism would not have the opportunity to participate permanently and effectively in the Turkish political system due to constitutional limitations. They also realized that they needed the West and democracy to forge a wider front against the centers of radical secularism in the judiciary, state bureaucracy, mainstream media and especially the military. It would be a mistake to understand JDP as a monolithic or homogenous party; rather, it is a coalition of different fractions. As many as five factions can be identified within the party (Aydin & Cakir, 2007). JDP's supporters comprising of diverse ideological positions ranging from center-right voters and Islamists to nationalists and liberal leftists. Although the core of the party and the vast majority of its parliamentarian are those who were previously affiliated with the National View Movement in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s under the leadership of Erbakan. JDP won its first four consecutive elections of 2002, 2007, 2011 and 2015 with landslide victories. JDP won 34.28% of the votes in 2002, 46.58% in 2007, 49.90% in 2011 and 49.50% in 2015 *(Wright, 2012)*. JDP also won the elections of 2018 and 2023 scoring 42.56% and 35.63% of vote respectively. Mainly, the enormous success of financial policies of JDP made it possible. JDP has been ruling Turkey since 2002. It's rule by its

nature can be divided into different periods. In its first term (2002-2007), JDP was relatively benevolent as it had oscillated between Islamism and neo-liberalism (William & Özbudun, 2010). The second term saw a major setback, including the rise of a one man authority of the party and the government, dismantling of the republican establishment and the beginning of a crackdown on the press. JDP has taken the path of Islamization and authoritarianism as the party has deepened its hold on power, especially since its third consecutive election victory in 2011 (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2015). JDP's time in the power can be divided into more specific periods. The JDP carried out a number of significant political and economic reforms in Turkish history during its first term in office. In its first term, JDP espoused more collegial and democratic decision making system. At that time these reforms were appreciated by the West. But the reformation era was really limited in its first three years ending in 2005. Between 2005 and 2007, JDP focused on strengthening of power. This pattern has continued ever since. Religion was progressively introduced into politics prior to the JDP's third term, but after 2011, Islamization has become increasingly obvious. Before JDP's third term it gradually injected religion into politics but since 2011 Islamization is more overt.

However, in its first term, JDP attempted to criminalize adultery in 2004. Secularists also reacted harshly to Erdogan's 2004 attempt to criminalize adultery and also appointment of religious conservatives into bureaucratic positions. Moreover, alcoholic beverages were progressively outlawed by JDP from state agencies and cafeterias of ministries. JDP-controlled municipal governments prohibited the consumption of alcohol on public places also (Karakas, 2007). This was attempted before by the Welfare Party. These attempts went against the secular sense and much associated with the religious tone. Another point was that JDP supported lifting the headscarf ban from the beginning. The headscarf ban was reignited in the spring of 2006. JDP has long favored lifting the ban on Islamic dress or wearing headscarf in universities. Additionally, it aimed to eliminate discrimination against graduates of Islamic high schools (*Imam-Hatip* Schools). JDP maintained at the time that a woman should be able to wear anything she pleases. It was argued that wearing a headscarf is a fundamental right (Karakas, 2007). However, wearing a headscarf in public was seen by secularists as a political attack on the fundamentals of the secular state rather than as a matter of personal preferences. They viewed headscarf as an obvious and ubiquitous representation of the Islamists in Turkish society which they are really afraid of.

But in February 2008, following the victory in the second term general elections, parliament amended two articles of the constitutional framework to allow for the repeal of the ban on wearing headscarves in universities (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008). It is now visibly noticeable that a growing number of Turkish women are wearing headscarves in Turkey. Not only had that, Erdogan, also declared that he would put Abdullah Gül forward for the presidency in 2007. Gül was a candidate from Islamist movement and his wife usually wear headscarf. Abdullah Gül was

associated with *Milli Görüş* movement. In Turkey, the presidency is a ceremonial but prestigious position because both the military and the opposition saw it as the final stronghold of secularism. Seen from the republican establishment, the presidency served as a safeguard, providing a system of checks and balances that kept the JDP from seizing entire control of the state. In 2008, Islamist Abdullah Gül was elected as President of Turkey by the JDP despite the opposition of secularists. It was a very powerful jab against the secular elite. JDP consolidated its gain between 2008 and 2011, despite political and global economic turbulence.

When JDP came to power in its second term, it was also able to effectively chop off the legs of the powerful military which serves as the ultimate protector of Kemalist idealism. At first, it disempowered the formidable defender of Kemalism while also lifting some of the reigns that traditionally restricted religious practices. By 2011, JDP consolidated its supremacy over military. The military chief of staff resigned on July 29, 2011, following a dispute with Erdogan regarding staff promotions. The chief of army, air force and navy demanded an early retirement on the same day. Half of all Turkish admirals and one out of every ten generals on active duty were imprisoned for plotting against the government by the beginning of 2012 (Wright, 2012). It was a paradigm shift for a country that had experienced recurring military coups.

Turkey has been overtly Islamized since 2011. Because, during its first two terms in government, the JDP administration refrained from openly adopting Islamic discourse and making overt attempts to Islamize. However, Erdogan and his associates felt secure enough after the 2011 election to accelerate efforts to Islamize the country. This happened first in the realm of foreign policy and then persisted in the key areas of domestic affairs. The JDP's Islamism was primarily most seen in its foreign policy, which showed strong ties to Islamic organizations and regimes across the Middle East. It then shifted to the domestic sphere. Islamization didn't roar for a very long time and the JDP also didn't introduce conspicuous efforts to Islamize Turkey. However, this has been taking place repeatedly since 2011. The primary exhibits was the education system, which Erdogan changed to include a significant amount of Islamic content. His intention was to raise 'pious generation' in Turkey (*Alaranta, 2015)*. Erdogan stated in February 2012 that 'raising pious generations' was the goal of his government. Beginning that month, Erdogan's government embarked on wholesale reform designed to Islamize Turkey's education system. One of the biggest changes that came along after the 1997 post-modern coup was the eight-year extension of compulsory schooling which stopped children from attending religious schools until they were fourteen years of age. Additionally, the university entrance exam system was changed to make it more challenging for *Imam-Hatip* graduates to be admitted to non-theology undergraduate degree program. And these changes were proved to be effective: the percentage of graduates enrolling in higher education fell from 75% to 25%, and the enrollment of *Imam-Hatip* students of relevant age fell from 11%

to 2% (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2015). However, the JDP introduced the 4+4+4 reform program in February 2012. This law permits vocational schools, including *Imam-Hatip* schools, to reopen from fifth grade. The law allows parents to home-school their children after fourth grade, which is expected to lead to fewer girls in rural areas receiving formal education. In *Imam-Hatip* schools, there were sixty-five thousand children registered when the JDP was first elected in 2002 and that number rose to 658,000 in 2013. There were about a million students enrolled by May 2015 (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2015). JDP's reforms have also greatly expanded religious content of regular academic high schools. But the classes featured only education in the tenets of Sunni Islam. In March 2014, the government was mandated to restructure the ministry of education in its entirety by a new legislation. During JDP's rule, women are experiencing increased violence. The huge rise in domestic violence and female abuse under the JDP's rule is the clearest indicator of Turkey's loss of women's rights and protections (Alvi, 2015). Because, instead of tightening the legal framework, Erdogan's government forces more Islam onto society through the Directorate of Religious Affairs or the educational curriculum to solve the violence against women, believing the sanctity of family is prior to women's rights (Gümüşçü, 2024).

Recently, the JDP has been using 'New Turkey' or the 'New Century of Turkey' as a catchphrase to represent their political agenda of reconstructing the country since 2014. The 'New Turkey' is said to have overcome the political tutelage that the old secular elites are alleged to have exercised their political influence over the majority with the support of the military and the judiciary (Seufert, 2014). On August 2014, former Prime Minister Erdogan became first directly elected President. Upon assuming the role of Turkey's directly elected President, Erdogan promised to create a 'New Turkey'. Erdogan's 'New Turkey' can be best seen with his intention of authoritarianism and Islamization of Turkey. The 'New Turkey' project can be divided into three fields: political, cultural and economic (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2015). In political area it denotes the centralist, illiberal and authoritarian or paternalistic rule or legacy of the Kemalist regime (Kocamaner, 2015). In cultural sphere it encourages to make Turkish society solidly with Islamic values. In economic realm it supports crony capitalism. The coup of July 15, 2016, provided Erdogan the opportunity to introduce executive presidential system he had long craved. It also created an opportunity to knock down his main rival Fethullah Gülen or Gülenist movement. On April 16, 2017, a constitutional referendum was held nationwide in Turkey where voters had been asked to accept or reject eighteen amendments to the current constitution. Most significant amongst these included: the creation of an executive presidency, the replacement of the parliamentary form of government, the elimination of the prime minister post, raising of the parliamentary seat from 550 to 600, changes in the supreme board of judges and prosecutors. These amendments are now approved following the referendum. Now the changes have become effective after 2019 general elections. This plan actually is to make Erdogan an all-powerful President. Erdogan has also been re-elected

for another five-year term as President in a highly contested election held in May 2023. So, it is more likely that Erdogan will hold the presidential power until 2028, given that Erdogan stated he would resign in 2028 (Reuters, 2024). But some have speculated that Erdogan could run for presidency again if parliament calls early elections; in that case he will need to have a three-fifth majority of the parliament (Turkish Minute, 2024). Another way could be to remain in power for Erdogan through constitutional changes as Erdogan previously pronounced his desire to replace 1982 military government-era constitution (Congressional Research Service Report, 2024). Since constitutional amendments have given President Erdogan to control over legislative and judiciary, it is now not unlikely for him to maintain the implementation of the 'New Turkey' project that broadly encourages the authoritarianism and Islamization of Turkey.

Conclusion

In conclusion, political Islam or Islamist politics, arose as a distinct political force under the direction of Necmettin Erbakan in the 1970s, despite being the only true secular state in the Muslim world as per the view of Europeans' conventional wisdom (Jung, 2006). Ever since, Turkish political Islam became a staunch supporter of anti-Semitism, anti-westernism and pan-Islamism. Paradoxically, the Turkish military was instrumental in bolstering Islamist politics in Turkey following the coup of 1980. The 1980 military takeover cleared the path for Turkish-Islamist Synthesis and decline of the left, both of which had a major impact on the rise of Islamist politics in Turkey. The 1980s Turkish-Islamic Synthesis forges the way of repoliticization of Islam from the above. Later, in the aftermath of the Cold War, religion has grown in importance as a worldwide social and political movement. The Muslim world, particularly the Middle East, seems to be witnessing this trend. In this instance, Turkey was not an exception. The secular state Turkey was put under severe threat in the 1990s with the rise of the Welfare Party which ultimately came into office in 1996. Until 1990s Turkey's Islamic view was exclusively associated with the rejection of West, democracy and modernity. Following the post-modern coup of 1997, the nature of Turkey's political Islam underwent a transformation. JDP is an important case for the political Islam of Turkey. Despite having distinctly Islamic roots, the JDP made the claim to have abandoned the ideological baggage of the preceding Islamic party. JDP identified itself as a conservative democratic party. It initially eschewed anti-western rhetoric in favor of democracy, human rights, globalization, and EU membership. JDP's strategy developed from one of survival (2003-2007) to one of centralized power (2007-present). Since 2011 JDP has been moving in the direction of Islamization and authoritarianism. Erdogan's ambitious 'New Turkey' initiative has the potential to hasten the process of Islamization and authoritarianism. JDP is thereby transgressing Turkey's founding principles. Actually, it is clear that the JDP and Erdogan have a clear intention to change the meaning and practice of laicism of Turkey. On the one hand, it is encouraging political Islam in Turkey, while it also raises concerns for secularism.

However, it can be stated that Turkish Islamist politics didn't began its political role as a 'revolutionary underground movement' but emerged from a democratic parliamentary setting. Mainstream political Islam is more appealing when it comes to unfavorable internal circumstances, such as poverty, unequal wealth distribution, corruption, state suppression, lack of freedom, etc. In a situation where secular parties failed to produce workable answers to these problems, political Islam apparently emerged as a major alternative.

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