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## The Historical and Political Transformation of Türkiye: An Appraisal

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### Abstract:

This paper examines the historical and political evolution of Türkiye from the late 1940s to the early 21st century, with a focus on the rise and impact of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP - Justice and Development Party). It traces the dynamics of Turkish politics, the interplay between secularism and Islamism and the socio-economic reforms introduced by successive governments. The paper explores significant events such as military coups, economic crises and political reforms, highlighting the challenges and transformations that shaped contemporary Türkiye. The AKP came into power in 2001, evolving from various Islamic political parties that had existed since the 1960s. The first of these was the Democratic Party, which was conservative in nature. The AKP shares a similar agenda, aiming to revive Islamic beliefs and traditions. Its primary policy focus has been on fostering cordial relations with both Muslim-majority states and the West. The findings indicate that the AKP's reformist policies, economic success and strategic positioning in regional and global politics have had a profound impact on Türkiye's political landscape.

**Keywords:** Türkiye, AKP, Justice and Development Party, secularism, Islamism, military coups, economic reforms, political stability, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

### INTRODUCTION

The political landscape of Türkiye has undergone significant transformations since the late 1940s. This period has been marked by a series of military coups, economic challenges and political reforms that have shaped the nation's governance and socio-economic development. The rise of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP - Justice and Development Party) in the early 21st century represents a pivotal moment in Turkish history. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Türkiye's political evolution, focusing on the interplay between secularism and

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Islamism, the role of military interventions and the impact of economic reforms. By examining these factors, the paper seeks to understand the underlying dynamics that have influenced Türkiye's contemporary political and economic landscape.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section explains the research method used to study Türkiye's historical and political changes from the late 1940s to the early 21st century. It examines the balance between secularism and Islamism, the effects of military coups and the social and economic reforms by various governments, leading up to the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The research employs a qualitative historical analysis, which is suitable for examining political changes and complex social and economic issues over an extended period. This method helps in understanding the factors and dynamics that have shaped modern Türkiye.

### **THE HISTORY OF TÜRKIYE: FROM SELJUKS TO OTTOMANS**

The great Muslim empires, such as the Seljuks, Mongols and Timurids, ruled for centuries over what are now Western Europe, Iran, Iraq and much of the known world. These empires were originally tribes that moved into and conquered these areas from nearby regions. The Seljuks hold a significant place in Turkish history. They were part of the Turkish Oghuz tribe<sup>3</sup>, which came from Central Asia (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). As the tribe began conquering different areas, they became known as the Seljuks. Over time, as they settled in the area that is now Türkiye, they were referred to as the Anatolian Seljuks. The Seljuk Empire covered a vast area, ruling over regions including Iran, Iraq, Georgia, Armenia and parts of the Byzantine Empire in Anatolia. In 1071, the Seljuks fought the battle of Manzikert in Eastern Anatolia, capturing the Byzantine Emperor Romanos IV and subsequently spreading across Asia Minor<sup>4</sup>, where they established a new state. Most Seljuk migrants settled in Anatolia, forming small groups of warriors called ghazis. These warriors were led by local chiefs (beys) or Sufi holy men (babas). The Greeks and Armenians in Anatolia, already weakened by earlier invasions, suffered further due to the Seljuk warfare, migrations and conversions to Islam. By the end of the 11th century, the Turkish State began to take shape. The Seljuks established an Islamic government in Central and Southern Anatolia, setting up an administrative system based on Islamic principles, which became a model for the next 500 years in Turkish history. The Seljuks chose Konya as their capital and built their state system on Sunni Islam. They appointed qadis (judges) to administer justice, and funds from waqfs (charitable foundations) were used to establish colleges. Additional income was raised through protection taxes collected from non-Muslims living in the state. Sufis played a key role in promoting community harmony, helping the nomadic-warrior Seljuks settle down and cooperate in their pursuit of power.

Sufi masters and religious leaders always understood the needs and feelings of society. Rulers often sought their unofficial advice to manage power struggles. Sufis, with their tolerant approach towards Christians and other religions, helped foster a tradition of peaceful coexistence between

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<sup>3</sup> Oghuz was the name of an old man who led the tribe.

<sup>4</sup> Anatolia, the central region of present-day Turkey, is also known as Asia Minor. Geographically, Asia Minor extends from Asia towards Europe, which is why it is often referred to as "Asia" within Turkey.

Turks and non-Muslims. This made it easier for people to convert to Islam or develop a sense of camaraderie with Muslims. The Seljuks appointed governors for each province, with officials working under these governors. Their army was vast, both Turkish Muslims and Christian slaves.

In 1242-43, the Mongols defeated the Seljuks. People from all sections of society, including warriors, nomads and immigrants, fought against the Mongol invasion and the Byzantine Empire, which was trying to maintain its power. After several battles for survival, the Seljuks managed to keep control over some areas, such as the Karaman Beylik in Cilicia Province. By 1335, Konya had become the capital of this region (Lyle 1984, 9-53). During the Seljuks era, the majority of Turks, who were nomads belonging to different tribes, migrated to Türkiye. From 1301 to 1922, Osman, a Turk nomadic leader, established the Ottoman State, which ruled for centuries over Europe, the Middle East and Africa (Bozdağlıoğlu 2003, 35-50). During the Ottoman era, many invaders entered the Ottoman realm and established their rule.

In 1402, Timur the Lame invaded Anatolia and besieged the eastern provinces of the young Ottoman State. He declared himself the protector of Muslim principalities in Anatolia. Timur defeated Bayazid I (1389-1402), significantly reducing the Ottoman Empire's territory. Though the Ottomans suffered greatly from this loss, they soon annexed other Turkish principalities in Anatolia and expanded their borders into Serbia. The Ottoman Empire's conquests caused great anxiety across Europe (Lapidus 2002, 248-75). In their quest to conquer Constantinople, the Ottomans first captured the Thrace region in Europe and laid siege to the Byzantine capital. Despite many challenges, they eventually succeeded. By the early 1450s, the Ottomans had conquered all Byzantine territories<sup>5</sup> and Greece. In May 1453, Constantinople fell to the Ottomans. In 1458, the city, now known as Istanbul, became the capital of the Ottoman Empire, replacing Edirne. The Ottoman Empire grew to cover a vast area. In Europe, its borders extended to Austria and parts of Russia. In Asia, it included Arabia and the western part of Iran. In Africa, the empire controlled the entire northern region from Egypt to Algeria. Additionally, the Ottomans ruled over large islands like Crete and Cyprus, as well as many smaller islands in the Aegean and Mediterranean seas.

### **The Ottomans Legacy and Challenges**

The Sultans were the heads of the Ottoman Empire, but they were also regarded as leaders by the entire Muslim community (Ummah). They were known for their flexibility and tolerance towards Christians. Christians who respected Muslims and their laws were allowed to live peacefully and without much discrimination.

The infantry of the Ottoman Empire, known as the Janissaries, were professional soldiers who held significant influence over the state. They served as the guards of the Sultan's Palace and as key troops in his army. However, over time the Janissaries began to pursue their own interests, leading to riots and violent actions to seize control over the Sultan and the government. They frequently set parts of Istanbul on fire and even assassinated Sultans, such as Sultan Selim III in 1808 and viziers who attempted to disband them. In 1826, Sultan Mahmud II, having formed a new and modern army, disbanded the Janissaries after they revolted violently.

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<sup>5</sup> Byzantine Empire was consisted of Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Albania.

Despite numerous reform efforts, the Ottoman State continued to decline. Minority groups within the Empire began demanding their own homelands. Although the Turks were the ruling class, they were, in fact, a minority in terms of population. In some regions, the Turkish majority wanted more control to keep the Empire intact and pressured the Sultans to grant them a greater share of power.

Another major reason for the decline of the Ottoman Empire was weak leadership, especially in its later years, with the exception of the 33-year reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II. The Empire faced numerous challenges, including independence movements from various nations. The leaders struggled to manage internal affairs effectively and their reliance on force often led to losses and widespread unrest, such as the violent riots that followed the abolition of the Janissaries. From 1853 to 1856, the Ottoman Empire allied with Britain and France in the Crimean War to prevent Russia from encroaching on Turkish territories. The Ottoman government believed that foreign domination was harming their economy, leading to increased poverty. Although the Ottoman Empire defeated Russia and regained some territories, this victory did not improve its poor economic condition. During the war, a significant portion of the Empire's financial resources were mortgaged to foreign powers, leaving the economy in a dire state (Lyle 1984, 9-53).

### ***The Ottoman Empire's Inspiration from Western Civilization and its Advancements***

Although the Ottomans believed Islamic civilization was superior to Western civilization, by the 19th century and the Industrial Revolution, they recognized that the West was ahead in technology and science. The Ottomans were concerned about their slow progress in these areas and were eager to learn from the West to acquire new technologies and scientific advancements. Until the French Revolution, the Ottoman state and society kept their distance from Western culture and were slow to adopt Western advancements. Many Ottoman Sultans initiated reforms during their respective reigns.

Sultan Selim III, who reigned from 1789 to 1807, was particularly enthusiastic about incorporating European science and technology into the Ottoman Empire. He initiated a reform programme, called Nizam-i-Cedid (New Order). The main goal of his reforms was to strengthen the state's institutions to better combat both external and internal enemies.<sup>6</sup>

After the assassination of Sultan Selim III, his successor, Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839), initiated another reform programme to integrate European technology, science and language into the Ottoman Empire. These reforms were extensively implemented in the army, central bureaucracy, provincial administration, taxation, education and communication sectors.

As a result of these reforms, new military and medical schools were opened in 1827 and 1836 and the Faculty of Administrative Sciences was established in 1859. These institutions featured a secular curriculum. Prominent Western languages like French and English were required for admission and foreign teachers were hired to instruct there. These reforms led to the emergence of a military and bureaucratic class with secular and materialistic ideas.

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<sup>6</sup>External enemies stood for any foreign element with any potential of invasion, while the phrase internal enemies stood for the state minorities who were struggling for their independent states.

Another aim of Sultan Mahmud II's reform programme was to curb foreign interventions by addressing the religious differences within Ottoman society. To achieve this, the government sought to provide more rights to religious minorities, such as Armenians and to counter the rising waves of nationalism. Institutions with secular curricula were promoted and both Christian and Muslim children were admitted to foreign schools.

In the 19th century, this reform programme, known as Tanzimat, brought radical changes and left a lasting impact on Ottoman society. These reforms initiated a series of events that ultimately contributed to the collapse of the Empire in the early 1900s.

### ***The Young Ottomans Rise as Supporters of Islam***

In the 1870s, the Young Ottomans emerged as strong opponents of the political system established under the Tanzimat Reforms. They criticized the design and implementation of these reforms, arguing that the Ottoman Empire should preserve its Muslim identity by maintaining its own Islamic culture, history and traditions, rather than blindly adopting European culture. The Young Ottomans believed that Islam provided a richer and more valuable culture and tradition than Europe. They argued that while Europe's technological advances should be embraced, its culture should be rejected. The Young Ottomans also opposed the bureaucratic government, advocating for a democratic and parliamentary system. They believed that such a system would protect the country from public opposition and that the government should be governed according to Islamic laws within the constitution. Their influence led to the creation and implementation of the historic 1876 Constitution and the establishment of the first Ottoman Parliament.

### **Sultan Abdulhamid-II: Refined Reforms and Pan-Islamism Policies (1876-1909)**

During his 33-year rule from 1876 to 1909, Sultan Abdulhamid II refined earlier reforms and steered them towards beneficial outcomes throughout the Ottoman Empire. Unlike previous reforms, Abdulhamid II placed special emphasis on establishing vocational and technical institutions. These schools aimed to equip Turkish youth with Western scientific and technological knowledge, creating a productive fusion for the Empire's progress. This approach distinguished his reforms from those of the 18th and 19th centuries.

### ***Preventing Western Cultural Influence***

Sultan Abdulhamid II sought to prevent the spread of Western ideology, culture and traditions within the Ottoman Empire, viewing these elements as disruptive forces. He advocated for the localization of Western military technology and education, ensuring they were adapted to fit the Empire's needs. Abdulhamid II leveraged the title of Caliphate as a strategic policy to counter Western influence, a policy known as Pan-Islamism. This policy aimed to strengthen Islamic unity in reaction to Western dominance, which had been highly influential in the Empire during the 1870s.

### ***Impact and Challenges of Pan-Islamism***

While Pan-Islamism kept Western powers at bay during Abdulhamid II's reign, it also led to increased nationalist sentiments among the diverse ethnic and religious groups within the Empire. This policy faced resistance from the new generation of Ottoman bureaucrats and officers, who were influenced by liberal, secular and constitutional ideas.

### ***Emergence of the Young Ottomans and Young Turks***

The Movement of the Young Ottomans was initially founded by four students from the Military Medical College under the name Ittihad-i-Osmani Cemiyeti (Society of Ottoman Unity). They later formed a small committee called Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Committee of Union and Progress). The movement eventually became known as the Young Turks, a name derived from the French term "Jeunes Turcs." Most members of this movement were students, advocating for democratic and constitutional reforms in the Ottoman Empire.

### ***The Modernization Revolution of the Western-Oriented Young Turks***

The Young Turks were strong advocates and practitioners of Western ideas, culture and traditions, and their influence grew rapidly. In 1908, these Western-minded young officials initiated a movement against the policies of Sultan Abdulhamid II, leading to the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era. Under this new constitution, the judicial and educational systems were secularized.

The curriculum in religious schools was modernized, making the study of European languages compulsory. This significantly reduced the influence of the Ulema (Islamic scholars). The Young Turks' modernization programme extended beyond education, affecting every field of life. However, their approach to modernization was disorganized and led to significant upheaval.

In just a few years, officials from the Union and Progress Society, part of the Young Turks movement, dragged the Ottoman Empire into World War I alongside Germany. This involvement led to fighting on multiple fronts, the loss of millions of lives and the eventual collapse of the Empire due to their unplanned and sweeping policies.

### ***Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: Father of Modern Türkiye and Secularization Reforms***

Following the Turkish National Struggle (1919-1922) to repel foreign invaders, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the modern Turkish Republic in 1923. His leadership led to a comprehensive secularization of the state, aligning with his dedication to Westernization in both thought and practice. Atatürk's reforms were guided by Kemalist Ideology, which encompassed six principles: Nationalism, Republicanism, Populism, Secularism, Statism and Revolutionism. Of these, Republicanism, Nationalism and Secularism were particularly central to the new Turkish state. These principles were officially introduced in 1931 and enshrined in the 1937 Constitution.

Atatürk introduced major reforms aimed at secularization. On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1924, the Caliphate, Shaikh ul-Islam, the Ministry of Sharia, Sharia courts and religious schools were abolished. The Tevhid-i Tedrisat (Unification of Education) Law established secular, co-educational schools. Secular dress codes and calendar reforms were introduced. On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1925, new laws were launched that prohibited religious dress. In November 1925, wearing the Fez was made illegal and Western dress, including suits and hats, was introduced. In December 1925, the Gregorian calendar replaced the Hijri calendar and Sunday became the official day of rest. Legal and script reforms were also enacted. On October 4, 1926, the Swiss Civil Code<sup>7</sup> was adopted for domestic family

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<sup>7</sup> It was a Western legal charter.

matters. On May 24, 1928, international numerals replaced Arabic numerals. On November 3, 1928, the Turkish Parliament enacted a law to replace the Arabic alphabet with the new Turkish script. The Arabic script was banned to enhance education and cultural progress, as it was associated with Islamic identity. New language and religious practices were introduced. The Quran was translated into Turkish and all religious prayers, sermons and rites were conducted in Turkish rather than Arabic. These reforms aimed to modernize Türkiye and align it with Western standards, while diminishing the influence of Islam in public and state affairs (Lapidus 2002, 248-75).

### **İsmet İnönü's Rise to Power after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk**

After Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's death in 1938, İsmet İnönü, his successor, worked to consolidate Atatürk's reforms and maintain the Kemalist structure (Çetin 2009, 11-54). During his leadership, Türkiye faced many challenges. İnönü imposed Martial Law across much of Türkiye to preserve Atatürk's reforms and ensure political stability (Howard 2001, 23-241).

During World War II, Türkiye encountered several significant issues, such as shortages of basic goods, cash flow problems and high inflation (Çetin 2009, 11-54). To address these economic issues, İnönü's government imposed very high taxes on civil servants and the business community, which caused widespread hardship. The severe inflation and heavy taxes led to considerable suffering among the population. İnönü's administration dealt harshly with student protests against government policies. Key figures in the protests were arrested and accused of plotting to overthrow the government and potentially lead Türkiye into the war on Germany's side. Throughout his leadership, İsmet İnönü worked to stabilize Türkiye and maintain its position in a challenging global environment while managing internal dissent and economic difficulties (Temkin, 1999).

### **Political Party System in Türkiye and Military Coups**

The single-party system in Türkiye lasted for twenty-seven years, ending in 1950. After the World War II, a combination of domestic and international factors, alongside social, military and economic conditions, began to drive the transition towards a multi-party system.<sup>8</sup> Between 1945 and 1946, fifteen new political parties were established in Türkiye. Earlier attempts at multi-party politics, including the formation of the Progressive Republican Party (1924) and the Free Republican Party (1930), were dissolved by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Despite these earlier attempts, the Democrat Party (DP) emerged as the main opposition party in 1946 (Howard 2001, 40). Four parliamentary leaders; former PM Celal Bayar, Refik Koraltan, Fuad Köprülü and Adnan Menderes, formally requested that the Government implement constitutional guarantees of democracy (Howard 2001, 41).

The four leaders voiced their concerns through the press, which led to their expulsion from the CHP, though Bayar resigned voluntarily. However, facing both domestic and international pressures in 1946, İnönü allowed them to form the Democrat Party (DP). The DP became a platform for those who were skeptical or critical of the Republican People's Party (RPP) government, providing a space for expressing the grievances that had accumulated over the years (Howard 2001, 43-46).

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<sup>8</sup>In the wake of World War II, there was a global push towards democracy as a reaction against dictatorial regimes. As a result, many countries transitioned from single-party rule to establish multi-party democracies.

### **Türkiye Under the Government of the Democratic Party (DP)**

Once, the DP fully organized itself, the RPP called for early elections in May 1946 and won by a narrow margin. However, the RPP faced internal conflict between its single-party-statist members and its reform-minded members, leading to the resignation of the RPP leader. In response, the Party adopted a new development plan, which emphasized the need for religious education in exclusive schools under the Ministry of National Education's control and the establishment of a Faculty of Divinity in Ankara in 1949.

In the post-World War II context, with the establishment of the United Nations and international pressure due to Türkiye's signing of the UN Charter, the RPP relaxed its stance towards Islam. Despite this, in the 1950 elections, the RPP secured only 69 seats, while the DP won an absolute majority with 408 seats (Jahangir, 2001). This marked the end of the single-party dictatorship and the start of a democratically elected government. Celal Bayar became the President and Adnan Menderes became Türkiye's first democratically elected Prime Minister (Howard 2001, 54).

In 1950, to purge the revolutionary core in the Army General Staff, the DP discharged the top brass who had ties to İnönü. Constitutional secularists and their supporters viewed the Democrats and the Democrat Party as a direct threat to the secular state's existence. That same year, the DP ended the 27-year ban on religious content by introducing radio broadcasts of Qur'an recitations for 20 minutes per week. Additionally, the DP fulfilled its public pledge by incorporating religious courses into the public school curriculum.

More İmam-Hatip schools<sup>9</sup> were established and the call to prayer (adhan) was restored in Arabic after being banned since 1931. The unpopular People's Houses and Village Institutes were shut down. The DP-majority parliament also passed laws making it a crime to defame Atatürk's memory by violating his Principles and Reforms. Additionally, a law was enacted to protect the Turkish currency from defamation. Secular circles grew increasingly resentful of the Democrat Party (DP), accusing it of using religion for political gain. By the mid-1950s, the rapid economic growth that the DP initially achieved began to slow, causing dissatisfaction among both the business community and academics. The party started losing support and from 1955 onward, members of the Turkish Armed Forces began conspiring against the government (Howard 2001, 66-74). A small group of army officers started a movement against the elected DP government. These officers were introducing revolutionary ideas into the training of cadets and junior officers.

### **1957 Elections, 1960 Military Coup and the Fall of the Democratic Party (DP)**

In the 1957 elections, the DP won with 48 percent of the vote, but this result showed a decline in their majority and popularity. Meanwhile, the RPP gained new support from intellectuals and businessmen who had previously supported the DP (Howard 2001, 73-90). In 1958-59, the DP government took steps to stabilize the economy, including rescheduling debt and securing additional loans from the USA and the OEEC. This led to a partial economic recovery, but

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<sup>9</sup> İmam-Hatip schools are state-run institutions designed to provide religious education in line with state policies. Mostly funded by public donations, these schools are managed by the Ministry of National Education. The ministry sets the national curriculum, which includes additional courses on Islam. These schools train preachers, imams, and teachers using state-appointed and state-paid educators.



dissatisfaction remained among state employees and the elite. The RPP capitalized on this unrest and İnönü's tour of Anatolia led to violence when Prime Minister Menderes ordered troops to disrupt it. Student protests and riots erupted, with police violence resulting in five deaths and several injuries. Military officers and cadets also joined the opposition movement (Howard 2001, 73-90).

Tensions continued to rise and by 1960, dissatisfaction with the DP led to a military coup. The coup was partly fuelled by a reactionary movement within the military that opposed the DP government and was incorporating revolutionary ideas into the training of cadets and junior officers. As a result of the coup, the DP was removed from power, leading to its eventual downfall (Shankland 1999, 25-240).

In response to the growing unrest and opposition, Martial Law was declared. On May 14, 1960, demonstrations broke out in the streets and by May 25, violent clashes occurred within Parliament, injuring fifteen parliamentarians. The situation culminated on May 27, when the Turkish Armed Forces seized control of the state, arresting DP parliamentarians and shutting down the party (Howard 2001,73-90).

### **1960 Military Coup Brings General Cemal Gürsel to Power**

After the 1960 military coup, General Cemal Gürsel became the leader of the National Unity Committee (NUC). He took on the roles of President, Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief (Zurcher 1997, 173-215). Under General Gürsel's military rule, a new Constitution was enacted in 1961. Known as the 'Compromise Constitution,' it was created with the approval of the National Unity Committee (NUC) and various politicians (Howard 2001, 90-93). The 1960 Constitution introduced major changes to both society and government. It created a bicameral legislature and established the Constitutional Court (CC). This court, consisting of fifteen members selected from the judiciary, parliament, law faculties and presidential appointments, was tasked with reviewing laws and parliamentary orders based on requests from individuals or political parties (Metz, 1996). Hundreds of DP deputies faced charges of corruption and high treason, with their trials and executions beginning during the National Elections of 1961. Celal Bayar, the deposed President, was released due to his age and illness, but Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, and Finance Minister Hasan Polatkan were sentenced to death in September 1961 (Howard 2001, 6-135).

### **1961 General Elections: İnönü's Chp Comes to Power**

In the 1961 elections, İnönü's CHP (Republican People's Party) won 73 seats. The remaining members of the DP formed the Justice Party, which secured only three seats. Cemal Gürsel, the leader of the coup, was elected as President (Çetin 2009, 11-54).

İnönü's government faced significant political instability over the next several years. He operated with several coalition governments while receiving full support from the Armed Forces, both of which were committed to upholding the Constitution and avoiding martial law. However, in late 1961, workers began protesting in the streets for their right to strike. Colonel Talat Aydemir from the Military Academy attempted a second coup but failed and was executed in May 1963. During local elections, the RPP lost ground and İnönü resigned. The victorious Justice Party (JP) lacked an

outright majority, so it formed a coalition government with the RPP. This coalition lasted for fourteen months until it was brought down by a budget vote in 1965, leading to new elections (Hale 1994, 13-119).

### **1965 Elections: Justice Party (JP) Comes to Power**

In the October 1965 elections, Süleyman Demirel's Justice Party (JP) won a majority of the votes. Demirel adopted the policies of the old DP democrats, reconciling with the military by granting them full autonomy in their affairs and shaping the defence budget. This decision led to a split in the JP, resulting in the formation of two factions. One faction was the Republican Peasants National Party (RPNP), led by former Colonel Alparslan Türkeş. Türkeş, a key figure in the 1960 junta who had returned from exile in 1963, retired and then took over the leadership of the RPNP with a strong nationalist agenda (Çetin 2009, 11-54). The second faction, the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party – NOP), was formed by Necmettin Erbakan in 1970 (Howard 2001, 9-137). This party is significant as it was the first Islamist party in Türkiye. Erbakan, a well-known academic and engineer, became prominent for his advocacy of a role for Islam in public and political life. In 1967, leftists established the Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (DİSK), or Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions. DİSK was anti-capitalist and politically radical, promoting street demonstrations and strikes to achieve its goals. The introduction of proportional representation allowed smaller parties to enter Parliament, leading to increased influence from extremist groups on both the left and right (Çetin 2009, 11-54). The leftist parties opposed imperialism, Western influence and American bases (Metz, 1996), organizing demonstrations and strikes with the support of various social groups, including students and business communities. By 1969, the country was in a state of unrest and elections were anticipated in October. The Justice Party (JP) won the elections but struggled to maintain a stable parliamentary majority. The Republican People's Party (RPP) continued to face identity issues. Six additional parties entered Parliament, but none secured even seven percent of the votes. In 1970, internal dissent within the JP led to the resignation of Süleyman Demirel due to economic difficulties, unpopular corrective measures and delays in the budget.

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### **1973 Elections and Cyprus Crisis**

In the 1973 elections, the Republican People's Party (RPP) and the National Salvation Party (NSP) formed a coalition government. In July 1974, Greek Cypriot guerrillas who sought union with Greece overthrew the Cypriot President and installed Nikos Sampson, a guerrilla leader, in his place. This led to widespread violence across Cyprus. In response, Türkiye, as one of the guarantor countries, intervened by landing troops in Northern Cyprus to protect the Turkish-Cypriots. Türkiye quickly secured control over one-third of the island (Howard 2001, 7-145). By the end of 1974, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit resigned to call for elections, believing that his party, the RPP, would win a majority following the Cyprus intervention. However, the leaders of other parties prevented the elections from taking place. As a result, Ecevit's RPP faced difficulties in continuing to govern effectively.

### **Reasons Behind the 1980 Coup**

Until September 12, 1980, the RPP formed several coalitions with different parties, but these coalitions were unstable due to their inability to manage economic issues and control political

violence (Çetin 2009, 11-54). By the late 1970s, public order had deteriorated significantly, with both right-wing and left-wing parties arming youth groups to protect their interests, leading the country into civil strife. These youth groups, driven by their party ideologies, engaged in extensive violent campaigns, radical activities, demonstrations and killings across the country against government officials. The civil strife intensified over time, particularly between the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Union (DİSK), the Turkish Workers' Party and other leftist groups on one side and the Istanbul Police Force on the other (Howard 2001, 4-153). By September 12, 1980, many security personnel, journalists, intellectuals, party officials, labour union leaders and even government ministers had been murdered. University students were heavily involved in riots, strikes, demonstrations and even killings, with many students dying in the violence. In 1978, Abdullah Öcalan, a leftist student at Ankara University, founded the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) and began a separatist insurgency in the south eastern provinces (Ayata, 1997). In response to the escalating violence, Prime Minister Ecevit was forced to declare Martial Law in 1978.

### **1980 Military Intervention and its Aftermath**

As the situation worsened, the Turkish Armed Forces intervened on September 12, 1980, disbanding the Parliament and the Government and detaining the Prime Minister, party leaders and parliamentarians. The 1961 Constitution was suspended (Howard 2001, 4-153), with provisions conflicting with Martial Law being removed. The remaining parts stayed in effect until they were replaced or amended (Barkey, 2000). The Martial Law Administration then began drafting a new Constitution, which was approved in a 1982 public referendum. The 1982 Constitution introduced significant changes, emphasizing the integrity of the state and national security. It strengthened the powers of the President<sup>10</sup> and formalized the role of the Military (Çetin 2009, 11-54). The coup leaders, including the five Commanders of the Armed Forces, established the National Security Council (NSC) and granted themselves indefinite and unlimited authority. General Kenan Evren became Head of State and appointed an interim cabinet largely composed of retired officers and sympathetic state bureaucrats. Martial Law Commanders were given extensive authority over various aspects of public life in all provinces, including education, the press and economic activities (Hale, 1994).

Remarkably, the violence from Rightist-Leftist clashes ended abruptly on September 12, 1980. However, within a month after the coup, the Army began a new campaign against Kurdish separatists. Following the coup, Türkiye's civilian politicians struggled to control the Military's actions in the Southeast (Barkey, 2000). By 1983, the Army intensified its fight against Kurdish separatism and also cracked down on Islamic political activism (Çetin 2009, 11-54). Universities were placed under the oversight of a newly established Council of Higher Education (YÖK) (Howard

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<sup>10</sup> Under the new system, the President was granted significant authority, including the power to appoint the Cabinet, the Constitutional Court, the Military Court of Cessation, the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors, and the High Court of Appeals. Additionally, the President would chair the National Security Council (NSC), which was established as a permanent entity. The NSC had the right to present its perspectives on national security to the Council of Ministers, who were obligated to prioritize the NSC's recommendations.

2001, 4-160). Turgut Özal remained in the post-coup Cabinet as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Economic Affairs (Tutkun, 1998).

In 1983, the National Security Council (NSC) allowed the formation of new political parties. However, many new parties were similar in form, ideas and management to those previously banned and were not permitted to contest elections or were closed down. The NSC approved only three new parties: the Nationalist Democracy Party (NDP), led by retired General Turgut Sunalp; the Populist Party, headed by Necdet Calp, a former private secretary to İsmet İnönü; and the Motherland Party (MP), founded by Turgut Özal (Hale, 1994).

### **1983 Elections: Turgut Özal Comes to Power**

In the 1983 elections, the Motherland Party (ANAP), led by Turgut Özal, secured 45 percent of the vote and won an absolute majority in Parliament (Howard 2001, 5-164). Özal served as Prime Minister from 1983 to 1987 and then became President of Türkiye in 1989 (Hale, 1994). He used his presidency to redefine Türkiye's role both regionally and globally (Metz, 1996).

Özal was instrumental in reshaping Türkiye's economic policy, focusing on boosting the economy and addressing its previous weaknesses. His economic strategy included encouraging exports, making products competitive in the global market, implementing high interest rates to control inflation, gradually privatizing inefficient state enterprises, controlling wages and eliminating state subsidies for industries (Zürcher 1994, 173-292). Turgut Özal believed that Türkiye's economic issues could be resolved through close cooperation with the USA and by pursuing full membership in the European Union (Ficici, 2001). Although his economic liberalization efforts were significant, they did not lead to political liberalization. Özal brought new faces into Turkish politics but struggled to gain full civilian control over the Military (Zürcher 1994, 173-292). Özal supported the role of Islam in public life, recognizing its significance for many Turkish citizens. Emulating the policies of the Menderes Government,<sup>11</sup> Özal's administration established 34 new İmam-Hatip schools in a single year (Çetin 2009, 11-54). Graduates from these schools were allowed to pursue various degree programmes at Turkish universities, including Faculties of Divinity. Some members of Parliament and the Cabinet were seen attending mosques on religious occasions and the Parliament allowed female students to wear headscarves in class without restrictions (Shankland 1999, 8-27). Özal called for a public referendum on whether banned party leaders should be allowed to return to politics. Following public approval in the referendum, he called for early elections in 1987. In these elections, the Motherland Party secured an absolute majority, winning 292 out of 450 seats. Erdal İnönü's Social Democrat Party (Sosyal Demokrat Parti - SDP) entered the Parliament with 99 seats (Aktaş, 1990). When Özal became the 8th President of Türkiye, his Motherland Party (ANAP) began to decline due to mismanagement. The 1990s saw numerous coalition governments, particularly between Demirel's True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi - DYP) and İnönü's Social Democrat Party. Özal died suddenly on April 17, 1993, shortly after returning

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<sup>11</sup> The decade from 1950 to 1960 is known as the Democrat Party era or the Menderes decade. During this period, three general elections took place in 1950, 1954, and 1957. As a result of these elections, Adnan Menderes served as Prime Minister, leading the government on five separate occasions. The Menderes era can be analyzed under the following categories: the advancement of democracy, economic growth, and shifts in domestic and foreign policies.

from a Central Asia tour. Within a month, Süleyman Demirel became the 9th President and Tansu Çiller became the country's first-ever woman Prime Minister. During the latter half of 1993, the Turkish Armed Forces intensified operations against the PKK. The government, fearing a threat to fledgling democracy, could not halt the military's actions. By April 1994, Türkiye experienced a severe economic collapse, with the stock market crashing overnight. Inflation and costs soared (Howard 2001, 6-175), leading to a loss of confidence in Tansu Çiller's government. Elections were held in 1995 and Erbakan's Welfare Party (Refah Partisi - WP) won the largest share of the vote with 21.4 percent. Erbakan then formed a coalition government with Tansu Çiller until his resignation in 1997.<sup>12</sup> The 1980 military coup in Türkiye aimed not only to address the severe chaos in the country but also to counteract the growing and unchecked Islamic influence in public life. In subsequent years, efforts were made to limit Islamic influence within the secular framework. Plans were devised to reduce admissions to İmam-Hatip schools and other faith-inspired institutions.

Despite operating under the jurisdiction of the National Ministry of Education in a secular, state-inspected setting, by 1997, graduates of state schools were allowed to pursue higher education in social sciences and other post-secondary vocational institutions. These schools enrolled one-tenth of eligible secondary education students (Kinzer, 1997). However, the use of headscarves was banned in schools, universities and the entire public sphere, leading to widespread public protests and hunger strikes, but these actions had no effect. Police detained twenty leading Muslim businessmen on charges of funding harmful Islamic activities. In 1998, the Chief Prosecutor in Ankara's State Security Court sought the closure of MUSİAD (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association) (Çevik, 1998).

### **1999 Elections: MHP Comes to Power**

After Motherland Party leader Mesut Yılmaz's resignation, elections were held in April 1999 (Howard, 2001, p. 183). In these elections, the Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP - Nationalist Action Party) won and formed a coalition government with Bülent Ecevit's Demokratik Sol Parti (DSP - Democratic Left Party).<sup>13</sup>

MHP emphasized nationalism over Islamism. The political culture in Türkiye was influenced by both Islam and Turkism, particularly in the most conservative provinces. MHP aimed to unify nationalism, reducing external and internal influences on the Turkish Islamic lifestyle. The Kurdish problem had intensified since 1984 and MHP's government sent military forces to various regions to stabilize the situation and promote national unity.

MHP was composed of three previously banned parties, emerging when Turkish nationalism reactivated in 1984 in response to Kurdish ethno-nationalism. Nationalistic discourse dominated

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<sup>12</sup>The Republican People's Party (RP) was dissolved by the Constitutional Court. It was succeeded by the Fazilet Party, also known as the Virtue Party.

<sup>13</sup>MHP (Nationalist Action Party) and DSP (Democratic Left Party) had many commonalities. Both had negated the ethnic and the religious identities in Turkey. They did not deal or considered the Southern Anatolian problem as a Kurdish problem.

society, with the powerful National Security Council labelling Islamism and Kurdish separatism as enemies of the state.<sup>14</sup>

MHP gained support by launching emotional demonstrations honouring those killed in clashes with the PKK, promoting Turkish unity and the Army. MHP's victory in the 1999 elections was attributed not only to its nationalism but also to its anti-corruption stance and effective economic policies. Despite its nationalist, liberal and Islamic-minded policy-makers, MHP could not suppress its Islamic elements in the long run.<sup>15</sup> The MHP government failed in its anti-corruption efforts. In the 2002 elections, MHP and its coalition partners became unpopular due to perceived corruption and their implementation of International Monetary Fund policies. The coalition parties, led by MHP, yielded to the NSC's dominance and policies, failing to address Türkiye's social, economic and political problems effectively.

### **Justice and Development Party: Policies and Role in Politics**

The Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP - Justice and Development Party) was formed on August 14, 2001 by the reformist faction of previously banned Islamic parties such as Refah Partisi (RP - Welfare Party),<sup>16</sup> which later became Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party). The Virtue Party split into two due to differences over reforms and traditions. The AKP identified itself with a reformist discourse, attracting popular support from a young and middle-aged conservative base desiring social change. Due to some members' past affiliations, the AKP was initially associated with an Islamic base and was believed to have the support of the Gülen Movement.<sup>17</sup> However, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the leader of the AKP, consistently denied that his party had an Islamic agenda. In the 1994 local elections, RP's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became the Mayor of Istanbul. In the 2004 local elections, the AKP won 42 percent of the votes. In the general elections held on July 22, 2007, the AKP secured 46.6 percent of the votes, winning 341 out of 550 seats in parliament. The AKP faced criticism for

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<sup>14</sup>From the MHP's perspective, nationalism involves opposing cosmopolitanism and culturally distinct ethnic groups such as Kurds, Alevis, and Christian communities, aiming to unify them under a singular national identity.

<sup>15</sup>The MHP no longer supports the death penalty for jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and no longer favors a ban on the wearing of Islamic headscarves in government schools and by state officers.

<sup>16</sup>Refah Party was banned in 1998.

<sup>17</sup>The Gülen Movement is a non-political civil society movement with humble faith-based community roots inspired by the teachings of M. Fethullah Gülen, a prominent Turkish Muslim scholar. Despite Fethullah Gülen and his numerous followers staying away from politics, the political scenario in Turkey post-1990s often assumed that election-winning parties succeeded due to the support of the Movement. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) and its Milli Görüş (National Vision) base had a clear stance against Fethullah Gülen and his community. However, the widespread presence and societal integration of Gülen-inspired institutions across Turkey, along with the Refah Party's victory in the 1995 elections, led to a formal interaction between these institutions and the government. Whether it was the Refah Party or parties like the CHP or DYP, the state-authority-respecting Gülen Movement maintained a cordial but distant stance with those in power. While Erbakan's long political career and influence, along with Gülen's positive activism, contributed to raising Islamic consciousness among young generations, their approaches differed: Gülen discouraged youth from engaging in politics and harmful actions, whereas the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) and Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi) encouraged them to participate actively in social change through politics.

blurring the lines between religion and secularism, as evidenced by attempts like banning the sale of alcoholic beverages by the AKP-based Mayor of Ankara.<sup>18</sup>

In 2007, the AKP passed a bill to lift the headscarf ban in all universities, which the Constitutional Court later annulled, citing contradictions with constitutional articles 2, 4 and 148.<sup>19</sup> Türkiye's Chief Prosecutor filed a case against the AKP for alleged non-secular activities, seeking to ban the party. The case lasted for 2½ months and although six out of eleven Constitutional Court members voted to ban the AKP, the required seven votes were not met and the case was dropped.

The AKP's economic reforms were notably successful, with a rapid economic growth and a decrease in the inflation rate to a single digit, reaching 8.8 percent by June 2004. Financially, the AKP governments were among the most successful in contemporary Turkish history. The AKP actively pursued European Union membership and in January 2005, became an observer member in the European People's Party (EPP), the Conservative Party of the EU. However, if the EU were to reject Türkiye's membership, there is a concern that the AKP could split between its reformist and conservative factions, potentially leading to another period of political instability in Türkiye (Kosebalaban 2008, 2).

The AKP did not strictly follow political Islam. Instead, it presented itself as socially conservative and aimed to implement conservative-liberal reforms, especially related to Türkiye's goal of joining the European Union. The AKP managed to convince many liberal and socialist intellectuals that it had moved away from political Islam and was now a mainstream conservative party. Many scholars believed that the AKP did not threaten democracy or secularism. The party's promise to make Türkiye more liberal by reducing the influence of the military and secular elites was seen as genuine because it represented marginalized groups in society.

From 2002 to 2007, the AKP (Justice and Development Party) gained support from a coalition of various groups, including liberals. This alliance worked well for both the AKP and its partners. Liberal elites viewed the AKP as a force that could reshape the Republic, reduce militant secularism and weaken the power of the secular bureaucracy and military. The AKP aimed to integrate Islamists into the neoliberal economy while challenging secular dominance. It promised democratic constitutional changes, mobilizing groups harmed by neoliberal policies and those wanting to join the global market.

After 2007, the AKP stopped pursuing liberal reforms and shifted its approach due to two major events: a lawsuit accusing them of threatening the constitution and the constitutional court, influenced by the military, blocking their second-in-command from becoming president. The AKP started focusing more on Islamic revivalism, which led to the constitutional court taking action against them. The court ruled that the AKP was undermining the secular nature of the state and

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<sup>18</sup>The ban was soon lifted in response to pressure from local business owners. However, a license is still required for sales.

<sup>19</sup>Article 2 says that Turkey is a Secular Republic. Article 4 put forward the necessary conditions that the first three articles of the constitution are impossible to amend. These three Articles define the Republic's core values, including secularism. Article 148 describes the duties of the Constitutional Court. With the headscarf issue, the Court declared its own body able to decide on any future constitutional amendments to ease the ban on wearing the headscarf in universities.

blocked a proposed law that would have allowed headscarves in public offices and schools. These decisions were resisted by the old establishment but didn't gain much support from opposition groups.

The AKP faced backlash when trying to elect Abdullah Gul, who was seen as a challenge to secularism because of his wife's headscarf. This conflict helped the AKP gain support and wins a major electoral victory in 2007. Instead of continuing with liberal reforms, the AKP focused on solidifying its power. They worked to remove secular military leaders and made constitutional changes to give more power to the executive branch.

Initially, the AKP's resistance to the old guard seemed to be a step toward democracy and many hoped it would lead to a more democratic Türkiye. However, instead of becoming more democratic, the country moved towards authoritarianism. The AKP formed an alliance with the Gülen movement, which shared their resentment towards the old elites. This alliance, though initially beneficial, fell apart after a failed coup attempt in 2016. The Gülen movement was later blamed for manipulating evidence and plotting against the AKP. In the end, the AKP's shift away from liberal reforms led to a more authoritarian regime, with the party focusing on consolidating its power rather than promoting democracy. In the third period of the AKP, major changes were made to the Turkish constitution. In 2010, the constitutional changes were made to remove secular judges from their positions. In 2017, through constitutional changes, a new presidential system was introduced, where the president gained more power. The president could now make rules by decree, appoint vice presidents and control the judiciary by choosing judges for top courts. Before these changes, the AKP already had significant control over parliament, which meant less debate and compromise. The president also began to act as a party leader, losing the previous neutral role. The president used to be elected by parliament but now is elected directly by the people. This made the presidency seem more legitimate, even though it was mostly symbolic before. By 2014, Türkiye was effectively operating under a presidential system due to Erdoğan's actions and the new system was officially established in 2018. Between 2014 and 2016, Erdoğan tested the limits of his power, effectively suspending the constitution and ignoring some court decisions.

After a failed coup attempt in 2016, Erdoğan declared a state of emergency, which allowed him to rule by decree without judicial review. These decrees went beyond the emergency's original reasons and led to suppression of dissent, even though elections and a legal framework were still in place on paper. In short, the AKP's changes to the constitution increased the president's power and led to a more authoritarian government, especially after the state of emergency (Acar, 2024). Türkiye's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002 with a new foreign policy aimed at reviving the nation's traditional Islamic and Ottoman cultural heritage. The party shifted its foreign policy focus towards the Middle East, marking a departure from the earlier emphasis on Europe that had dominated Türkiye's foreign relations since its independence. It aimed to develop a cordial and multidimensional foreign policy to position the country as a significant global actor. The Political leaders of the AKP believed that western countries were neither fair nor neutral in their approach towards Muslims and Muslim majority countries.

They perceived Türkiye as being labelled a conservative country because it no longer adheres to Western forms of democracy and culture. Davutoğlu, in his 2001 book *Strategic Depth*, argued that the West has largely lost its influence and trustworthiness in the world. He noted that the rising



powers of the world are now Russia and China and that countries should balance their power with the West by obtaining economic, military and social development and power. Despite these beliefs, Türkiye has maintained a balanced foreign policy approach by enhancing cordial relations towards the Middle East, while also engaging with the West, as it is an applicant for EU permanent membership, NATO and of other organizations. However, its main focus has been on strengthening relations with Muslim countries (Arın, 2015).

## **FINDINGS**

The research reveals several key findings about Türkiye's political and economic evolution;

1. Türkiye, under the Ottoman Empire, had a rich traditional Islamic culture. However, reforms introduced during its later years paved the way for the influence of Western culture and civilization. These reforms aimed to bring Western modernity and technological advancements to the region. Despite these intentions, the growing influence of Western culture faced resistance from Islamic religious circles, which sought to restore and preserve the Islamic legacy and culture. By the 1950s, these religious circles had become politically and socially influential. The Democratic Party (DP), established during this period, carried a concealed agenda of implementing and restoring the Islamic legacy. However, following the imposition of martial law in the 1960s, the DP was banned. Subsequently, its ideology resurfaced in a new form through the Justice and Development Party (AKP).
2. Türkiye went through several military coups (1960, 1971, 1980) that greatly influenced its political trajectory. Each coup aimed to restore order during times of perceived chaos and instability, leading to the suspension of constitutions and the onset of military rule.
3. Economic policies from various governments, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, were pivotal in shaping Türkiye's economy. Turgut Özal, who served as Prime Minister and later as President, played a major role in opening up the economy and promoting growth.
4. The establishment of the AKP in 2001 marked a major shift in Turkish politics. Under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the AKP positioned itself as a reform-oriented party with conservative values. The party's economic policies spurred significant growth and its political strategies helped it become a dominant force in Turkish politics.
5. The ongoing conflict between secular and Islamic views has been a constant issue in Turkish politics. When the AKP came to power and made changes, such as lifting the headscarf ban in universities, it led to debates about how much Islam should influence public life and how to maintain secularism.
6. Türkiye's foreign policy, especially its goal of joining the European Union, affected its domestic politics. The AKP's efforts to align with European political standards and promote economic liberalization were partly motivated by the desire to integrate with the EU.
7. After 2007, the AKP shifted from making liberal reforms to adopting a more authoritarian style. Important events included a lawsuit against the AKP and the prevention of a well-known figure from becoming president. These events caused the party to change its language and actions. In 2010, the constitutional amendments were made that removed secular Judges from their positions.
8. The political system changed from a parliamentary democracy to a presidential one. In 2017, constitutional changes were made to create the presidential system, which gave more power

to the President. The President now has the power to rule by decree, the authority to appoint vice presidents and control over the judiciary. The AKP, through the presidential system, enhanced the role of legitimacy and diminish checks and balances.

## CONCLUSION

Türkiye's political, economic and social growth and development have been significantly influenced by secularism, islamization and military rule since its establishment as an independent state in the 1940s up to the present day. The rise of the AKP under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan brought major changes, boosting economic growth and altering Türkiye's political scene. Despite facing challenges like conflicts between secular and religious groups and economic crises, the AKP has stayed in power through strategic reforms and strong public support. The future stability and growth of Türkiye will depend on how well it can balance these differing ideologies and handle its socio-economic issues.

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