

THE PERSONALISTIC SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, ERDOGANISM

Abstract

The liberal reforms, economic development, and moderate foreign policy implemented in the first decade of the 2000s have made Turkey a force to be reckoned with on the world stage, especially in the Middle East. During this period, Turkey was seen as a Muslim country with a quasi-democratic government, a liberal economy, and modern values. However, after the 2013 Gezi Park protests, Erdogan's political course has changed significantly, and his rule has taken on an authoritarian form. It is more acceptable for us to define the regime as Erdoganism, which is characterized by four main factors: electoral authoritarianism as an electoral system, neopatrimonialism as an economic system, populism as a political strategy, and Islamism as a political ideology. Like its predecessor Kemalism, Erdoganism is also a personalistic ideology.

Keywords: *Turkey, Erdoganism, AKP, personalistic regime, authoritarianism*

Since the AKP and Erdogan came to power in Turkey, the country's political course has changed significantly. The liberal reforms, economic development, and moderate foreign policy implemented in the first decade of the 2000s have made Turkey a force to be reckoned with on the world stage, especially in the Middle East. During this period, Turkey was seen as a Muslim country with a quasi-democratic government, a liberal economy, and modern values. However, after the 2013 Gezi Park protests, Erdogan's political course has changed significantly, and his rule has taken on an authoritarian form. He used his victory in the 2014 presidential election to justify power consolidation. The current Turkish regime is often described as electoral or competitive authoritarianism, but it is more acceptable for us to define the regime as Erdoganism, which belongs to Yilmaz and Bashirov. Erdoganism is characterized by four main factors: electoral authoritarianism as an electoral system, neopatrimonialism as an economic system, populism as a political strategy, and Islamism as a political ideology. Like its predecessor Kemalism, Erdoganism is also a personalistic ideology.

When defining a personalistic regime, it is important to consider theories such as Sultanism, Khomeinism, and Kemalism. In all three cases, the country's leader is the embodiment of the country and the nation itself. Elections are only an attempt to put the regime's desired political course within the legal framework. All these regimes are also neopatrimonial, when the country's resources are distributed only to the regime's supporters. It should also be noted that unlike Sultanism, Khomeinism and Kemalism are populist regimes that actively use Islam and secularism, respectively, along with national ideologies to maintain their legitimacy.

Electoral authoritarianism is a key defining factor of Erdoganism. Electoral authoritarian regimes are characterized by unequal conditions for the position and the opposition, unfair and unfree elections, and severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms. Although Turkey has never been a liberal democracy, elections have been held in a free and fair environment since the 1950s, with the defeated party peacefully leaving the occupied offices. However, the 2015 election crisis showed that Erdogan was not ready to cede positions peacefully. The failure to reach an agreement on the formation of a coalition government, and the simultaneous activation of the PKK in southeastern Turkey, created an atmosphere of fear in the country, which ultimately helped Turkey's ruling party regain its positions in Meclis. During the second round of elections in November 2015, and then the constitutional referendum in 2017, it became clear that the electoral system in Turkey is neither free nor fair.

After the 2017 referendum, Turkey switched to a presidential system of government. The president can issue decrees, submit the state budget, appoint ministers and other senior officials, and appoint more than half of the judges of the Supreme Court without the consent of the prime minister and parliament.

Another important aspect of Erdoganism is neopatrimonialism. Under neopatrimonialism, all relations between the ruler and the ruled, as well as political and administrative relations, are of a personal nature. There is no boundary between the private and public spheres. Neopatrimonialism involves both formal and informal mechanisms of loyalty to the ruler. It is based on a demand-supply system, when in exchange for protection or private interests, the ruler effectively buys the loyalty of the ruled.

Since coming to power, the AKP has actively supported and promoted Anatolian businesses. Thus, on the one hand, he attracted the periphery to the center, and on the other hand, he created a new middle class, which is distinguished by its unconditional loyalty to the ruling party and especially to Erdogan. The Turkish government managed to capture the Turkish media space through such loyal businesses. Opposition or critical media outlets were either closed altogether or were bought by businesses loyal to the party. As a result, in 2018, "Freedom House" included Turkey in the list of "not free" countries for the first time since 1999. Turkey has also been in first place in terms of the number of imprisoned journalists since 2016.

Another important aspect of Erdoganism is populism. Populism views politics from a specific moral prism: the people against a corrupt or morally inadequate elite. Populism divides society into two poles: "us" and "them"; "Friends" and "enemies"; "people" and "elite." Populism is not only anti-elitist, but also anti-pluralist. Populists deny the legitimacy of any opposition, since they alone embody the will of the people. Any opponent is equated with absolute evil. A charismatic leader is an essential component of populism, his authority is unconditional, and decisions are not subject to questioning.

In Turkey, populism is significantly associated with Islam. The conservative Muslim majority, discriminated against under the Kemalist regime and unable to find a place in the secular state, has become the concept of "we" for Turkey's populist government. Erdogan presents himself as the voice of the oppressed, the "real people." He is the defender of their interests against the old elite.

Islamism is an ideology that strives to embody Islamic values in both cultural and social and political spheres. Islamism sees a way to solve modern social and political

challenges within a new reading of traditional Islam. At the same time, Islamists are pragmatic thinkers who exchange theological ideals for political achievements.

After being elected for a second term, the Islamist worldview emerged with renewed force in the AKP's rhetoric. This should in no way be seen as a theocratic regime or a path to a theocratic regime. On the contrary, in the case of Turkey, religion is completely subordinate to political power and does not have an independent position on political issues.

The emergence and popularization of theological scholars close to the government also deserves attention. The leaders of the Diyanet actively defend the ruling party and Erdogan, especially on issues such as the abolition of the New Year celebration and the deprivation of women's right to abortion. They also often use jihadist takfiri to demonize Kurdish nationalists and Gülen followers and declare them as heretics. As a result, the liberal democratic reforms that the AKP implemented when it came to power were subsequently ignored and used to concentrate power. The victory in the 2014 presidential election gave Erdogan much more legitimacy in the eyes of voters than his predecessors appointed by parliament. In addition, the 2016 military coup attempt and the two-year state of emergency significantly helped Erdogan adapt the country's institutions and government bodies to his goals and ambitions.