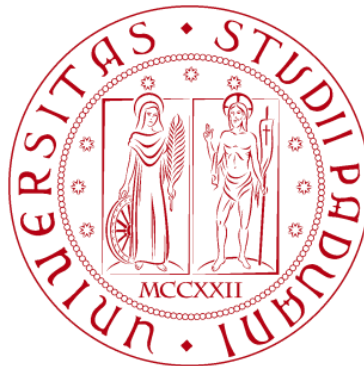


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**THE TRANSITION FROM DEMOCRACY TOWARDS
AUTHORITARIANISM**

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Abstract

In this study, I aim to examine the concept of democracy compared to authoritarian regimes. There is a trend of authoritarian leaders in the world, who initially came to power through democratic elections. Democracy seems to lose its preferred status in many countries. The world is going through a phase of populist leaders with exuberant personalities. The definition and characteristics of political leaders will be discussed in this paper, along with the possible reasons that lead them to become power-hungry. This study will also include some well-known examples around the world, highlighting their undemocratic policies. The cases of Russia and Türkiye will be the main focus of the second and third chapters, especially after the controversies surrounding Erdogan's powerful grip on Türkiye, and Putin's notorious rise to power that culminated in the invasion of Ukraine. As can be seen from both cases, these leaders came to power through democratic methods and later turned into power-seeking populist figures. Therefore, this research will try to shed light on the questions including but not limited to: What drives a democratically-elected leader to become a totalitarian? What kind of precautions could be taken to prevent such a change? Do these two countries' histories have a connection with this trend? Do they want to recreate their former empires?

Introduction

The shift from democratic to authoritarian governments is a widespread phenomenon that has impacted many countries worldwide. Democracy, the dominant type of governance around the world, is characterized by free and fair elections of leaders, the safeguarding of individual rights and freedoms, and the rule of law. In contrast, authoritarianism is defined by the concentration of power in the hands of a single individual or group, the suppression of individual rights and freedoms, and the use of force or coercion to maintain control.

Numerous factors can lead to a transition from democracy to authoritarianism, including the actions of leaders and elites, external influences, economic and social conditions, and the actions of political parties and civil society groups. The thesis presented delves into these factors in more depth and examines two specific cases where a transition from democracy to authoritarianism has occurred. The consequences of this transition for the affected countries and the global community are also analyzed. This systematic change can be observed in many countries as it is a currently growing issue.

The concept of democracy is tested in these case studies with their historical development process. Democracy is, according to this work, not a guaranteed political system by itself, it is instead a periodic process that is subject to change at any given time. Democracy must be considered as a concrete everyday process that states must survey and implement into their systems.

The first chapter of this thesis includes a historical overlook of democracy, the definition of democratic institutions and their processes. Several countries with a well-functioning democracy are mentioned to exhibit the differences between the latter cases. The latter cases include some of the most repressive countries in the world. These are elaborated to demonstrate how far governments, or their leaders, can go to exert their power. These examples provide a reason to prefer democracy over other types of governments, at least in the modern sense. After the results of the authoritarian tendency, the less inclusive recent

examples in the EU are given. However, analyzing the cases of Russia and Türkiye¹ revealed that democracy by itself is not enough to provide a system based on equality and rule of law. Analyzing different cases is a useful method to understand a complex issue, especially when it comes to largely populated countries such as Russia and Türkiye this thesis focuses on. Historical contexts of these countries are also provided to reveal whether a similar political leaning happened in the past or not.

The second chapter covers the first case analysis: Russia's change of democratic course. Starting from the late Soviet era, a historical background to illustrate the reasons for the Soviet dissolution is provided, and the new federation's emergence is also elaborated. Russian Federation's recent policies that violate democratic values are mentioned. Eight years after the collapse, the Russian Federation saw Putin rise to power with the resignation of former president Boris Yeltsin on December 31 1999. Putin was already chosen as the acting Prime Minister of the Government of the Russian Federation. Yeltsin openly expressed his interest in seeing Putin as his successor. Initially, Putin was not known to the public, but he quickly gained popularity after the Second Chechen War. In 2014, Russia launched its first military operations into Ukrainian territory, the most notable being Crimea. In 2020, Putin signed an executive order to allow himself to run for two additional six-year terms and amend the term limits ensured by the constitution by doing so. In February 2022, he launched another military operation into Ukrainian borders, this time going so far as to invade the capital, Kyiv. He defended the necessity of this assault based on the denazification of Ukraine. He gained worldwide notoriety after this unjustified operation. He even threatened to stop Russia's energy lines from operating into European territory unless they stopped supporting the Ukrainian cause.

Lastly, the third chapter explores the Turkish case. Starting from a brief timeline of the foundation of the Republic of Türkiye, its progression into pluralist democracy is elaborated. The main focus of this chapter is the current Turkish government. Erdoğan had somewhat moderate policies when he came to power in 2002. However, as he gained more influence

¹ After the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent an official letter to the UN in May 2022, Turkey changed its name to Türkiye with the recognition of the UN. See page 52 for more information about Türkiye.

over the country's fate, he lost track of his promised policies and turned into a populist leader. His ever-growing dominance over the people caused concerns and dissatisfaction. In 2016, Türkiye experienced a bloody attempt to take over the government by a religious organization deeply rooted in all areas. A country-wide purge followed, resulting in over 120.000 dismissals and the closure of over 2,500 institutions and organizations. In 2017, fearing the potential dangers of the powers that were still on the loose, he initiated a referendum to change Türkiye's parliamentary system into a presidential one to grant himself the ultimate authority. After Erdoğan narrowly received satisfactory results, he became the most powerful person in the country. As the economy in Türkiye started to go downhill due to erroneous policies that resulted in insufficient production, he tried to force his grip on the Central Bank to mitigate the devaluation of the Turkish currency. The intervention of the Central Bank made everything even worse than they were. As of 2023, the majority of the Turkish population is having difficulties even affording basic needs. It is now widely believed that he lost millions of supporters, and people are afraid of a potentially bloody conflict after the elections in May 2023. Erdoğan's specific case, namely his path to becoming a powerhouse, is included in this work.

For a better understanding of the concept of democratic transition, some research questions are answered. The research questions this thesis focuses on are:

- What are the key factors that contribute to the decline of democratic institutions and the rise of authoritarianism?
- What is the role of the economy in the decline of democracy and the rise of authoritarianism?
- How do different countries' histories and political cultures shape their vulnerability to democratic erosion and authoritarian takeover?
- How do the role of the media, civil society and the opposition parties change during the transition from democracy towards authoritarianism?

Relevant content on both Russia and Türkiye are examined and given references including books, academic sources, newspapers, national addresses, and websites. I avoided government-backed institutions as much as possible to provide an unbiased opinion. I instead

looked to foreign sources for a clearer and more distant perspective. The extensive literature review yielded a qualitative analysis. Since these are historical events, qualitative analysis is one of the few reliable methods to illustrate the points and provide arguments.

A comparative analysis between Russia and Türkiye will help to elaborate how and why such a change of discourse occurs in the modern world. The thesis concludes with suggestions for precautions that can prevent this change.

Chapter I: The Period of World Wars and the Emergence of Democratic Governments

Democratic governments emerged as a response to the abuses of power and lack of accountability of monarchical and authoritarian regimes. The earliest known democracy finds its roots in ancient Athens, where citizens would directly participate in decision-making through a system of assemblies and juries. Over time, democratic principles and practices have evolved and spread to other countries, often as a result of social movements and political struggles. Today, many countries have some form of democratic government, where citizens have the right to elect their leaders and hold them accountable through regular elections and other mechanisms of accountability. Although democracy is what many governments prefer now, it was not the case until recently. The history of mankind is filled with empires and monarchies. The democratic trend gained popularity only in recent decades. The most dramatic change from monarchy to democracy happened after World War I. It was the first ultimate war, meaning that it changed social, political and economic standards for good. It saw the end of many dynasties that reigned over the world for centuries such as the Habsburgs, Romanovs, and Hohenzollerns and a few years after the war, the Ottomans. These empires were crumbling, but they were far from being ineffective. Glencross and Rowbotham, in their book, argued that the individuals and the institution as a collective, were not passive and symbolic entities but rather active and literal embodiments of national identities, as they possessed the power to influence events that many have disregarded as beyond their control. (Glencross & Rowbotham, 2018)

The period between the two World Wars caused a profound change in political systems around the world. In many countries, the demands of war led to the suspension of democratic norms and practices, as governments focused on mobilizing their populations and resources for the war effort. As a result, the concentration of power was left in the hands of autocratic leaders, who used their authority to suppress dissent and control the flow of information². The war also caused the rise of authoritarian regimes that seized power after the war.

² See Ahmed Zogu in Albania, Ioannis Metaxas in Greece, Miklos Horthy in Hungary, Mussolini in Italy, Antanas Smetona in Lithuania, Antonio Salazar in Portugal, Joseph Stalin in the Russian Empire, and Alexander I of Yugoslavia.

The end of the Second World War caused more colonial empires to break down. More independent states emerged in Asia, the Middle East and Africa. After World War II, democracy experienced a resurgence in many parts of the world. In the years following the war, many countries that had been under authoritarian rule transitioned to democracy, and existing democracies were strengthened. This period saw the establishment of many international institutions and agreements that aimed to promote democracy and protect human rights. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) made democratic principles the foundation of the new prevailing system. It proclaimed: “The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the government,” and that “this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures”³. The statute of the Council of Europe that was signed in 1949 also reaffirmed the states’ devotion to the spiritual and moral values which are the common heritage of their peoples and the true source of individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law, principles which form the basis of all genuine democracy.⁴

Not all the countries became representative democracies, many states in Europe remained under Soviet rule whereas, in Southern Europe, Spain and Portugal were authoritarian dictatorships. The influence of liberal democracy was as late as the 1980s in the communist states of Eastern Europe.

The 1990s and 2000s saw a large part of Eastern Europe move towards liberal democracy due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Latin America, East and Southeast Asia, and several Arab, Central Asian and African states, also moved towards greater liberal democracy in these years.

By the end of the century, the world had changed from having in 1900 not a single liberal democracy with universal suffrage, to 120 of the world's 192 nations, or 62% of the world

³ U.N. General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (New York: United Nations, 1948), art. 21(3).

⁴ Statute of the Council of Europe (London, 1949)

population having become such democracies. Out of 120 democracies, 85 were liberal (Freedom House, 2000).

Democratization Theories

To shed light on the transition to authoritarianism, democratization theories must be explained as they are the reverse of such a transition. “The process of democratization is the replacement of a government that was not chosen this way by one that is selected in a free, open, and fair election. It involves bringing about the end of the non-democratic regime, the inauguration of the democratic regime, and then the consolidation of the democratic system” (Huntington, 1991).

Democratization theories explain the process of transition from an authoritarian or non-democratic regime to a democratic one. The main theories that explain the democratic transition are modernization, global diffusion, social movement, elite and economic determinism theories.

According to the modernization theory, economic development and modernization increase people's awareness, demands, democratic rights and freedoms, eventually achieving democratization. “Modernization is, above all, a process that increases the economic and political capabilities of a society: it increases economic capabilities through industrialization, and political capabilities through bureaucratization. Modernization is widely attractive because it enables a society to move from being poor, to being rich. Accordingly, the core process of modernization is industrialization; economic growth becomes the dominant societal goal, and achievement motivation becomes the dominant individual-level goal. Postmodern values become prevalent, bringing a variety of societal changes, from equal rights for women to democratic political institutions and the decline of socialist regimes” (Inglehart, 1997). The advanced industrial societies, according to Inglehart, “almost inevitably give way to increasingly similar gender roles”. This statement holds its value in developed societies today.

Lipset, quoting Weber, stated that “modern democracy in its clearest forms can only occur under the unique conditions of capitalist industrialization” (Lipset, 1959). A fully developed

capitalist system is able to offer its citizens better means to question, unite and act in the name of democratic progress. Such capitalist systems are found in the United States, Nordic countries and continental Europe, where democratic progress is above the world average.

Global diffusion theory argues that democratization is spread through the influence of other democracies, both through direct pressure and through the emulation of successful democratic models. Democratic transitions are more likely to happen in countries that are surrounded by democratic regimes (Gleditsch & Ward, 2006). Democratic spillover, as this process can also be called, owes much of its emergence to other countries' transitions as democratization is more likely to happen as a chain reaction.

Elkink argues that democratization is “contagious”, and must be understood not only with macro-level changes, but with the inclusion of individual behavioral patterns, as it is the individuals “who alter constitutions, decide to organize elections, decide to protest against their regime, and decide whether or not to suppress the opposition” whether they belong to the elite or the masses (Elkink, 2011).

Similarly, social movement theory emphasizes the role of social movements in catalyzing democratization, arguing that sustained pressure from civil society actors can force authoritarian regimes to liberalize. Social movements are an important part of the democratic modernization process (Melucci, 1989). They both argue that people are the driving force behind democratization in the end.

Della Porta argued that “social movements contribute to democratization only under certain conditions. Collective mobilization has frequently produced destabilization of authoritarian regimes, but it has also led to an intensification of repression or the collapse of weak democratic regimes, particularly when social movements do not keep to democratic conceptions” (della Porta, 2014).

Tilly stated a similar point, that the emergence of social movements does not result in democratization at all times, as they can also be “on behalf of inequality and exclusion”. He also considered social movements and democracy intertwined with each other, stating that

democratization promotes social movements, which in turn further encourages people to engage in collective action. Social movements can contribute to democratization under some conditions, namely when they increase the influence of individuals over decisions that impact them, by expanding the range of participants in political activities, equalizing the influence of participants, blocking the direct conversion of categorical inequalities into political decision-making, and/or integrating previously separated networks of trust into political processes (Tilly, Castañeda, & Wood, 2020). Tilly and Della Porta had contrasting arguments with Melucci and Elkins. Can the will of the people lead to a suppressive authoritarian government? It is possible, provided that they aim to create an oligarchic system that would benefit their own interests. I argue that the driving force behind people's actions is their feeling of importance. After their more basic needs are met, people begin to seek a sense of greatness. As human beings, it is etched in our very existence. The ones who can resist this sensation and therefore seek the greater good can initiate a social reform that would benefit the most.

A democratic transition may have another catalyzer: the elite. In most cases, the elite opposes democracy, as there is a conflict of interests. If a large group of impoverished people are ruled by a privileged elite, it results in tyranny or oligarchy (Lipset, 1959). And for a ruling elite, democratization rarely yields desirable results. However, a threat to their safety and wealth may push for a systematic change that is more egalitarian. Acemoglu and Robinson argued that the elites might be forced to make concessions in case of threats caused by social unrest. The possibility of strikes, riots and sometimes revolutions is a costly and undesirable outcome. Making concessions instead of facing the wrath of society often costs less (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006). Democratization, in such cases, may occur as a result of the transfer of power to the people from the elite.

These theories are not mutually exclusive, they merely try to explain why a democratic transition might happen in a country. They draw on multiple factors to illustrate a more detailed understanding of democratization which further helps with the causal explanation of non-democratization. One factor may promote or hinder another one in terms of democratic progress. It is difficult and unnecessary to categorize a country under strict hypotheses

because every case is unique. Each theory listed here has plausibility under its ideal conditions.

The Definition and Characteristics of Democratic Governments

Democratic governments ensure that the will of the people is the ultimate source of power and authority. This is expressed through regular elections, in which citizens can vote for their representatives and question their accountability. The essential principles of democracy are the sovereignty of the people and majority rule, meaning that the government's authority ultimately derives from the people. In democratic systems, multiple political parties with different ideologies, interests, and constituents exist and compete for power. This competition helps to ensure that a range of viewpoints and concerns are represented in government and prevents any single group from having too much influence on the political process.

The rule of law is the main principle ensuring that all individuals and institutions, including the government itself, are subject to the law. An accountable government with justice and fairness is possible thanks to this principle.

Reliable democratic governments protect the individual rights and liberties of their citizens such as the right to free speech, freedom of religion, and the right to a fair trial. This helps to ensure that individuals are not subject to arbitrary treatment by the state, and can hold the government accountable for any abuses of power.

The presence of checks and balances enables a system that has accountability within its institutions. Each branch of the government has individual power that one or the other may interfere with if needed. Although not perfect, the United States happens to be an efficient democratic system. The national government may have the power to check the actions of state governments, the judiciary may impeach the head of government, and the president may use the veto power (The White House). Such a mechanism can prevent any branch taking power into its own hands.

Most governments have democratic elections to ensure that the elected candidate is granted the power to rule. Elections are essential for democratic governments and are typically used

to choose representatives with decision-making power to govern on behalf of the people. Elections are held at regular intervals (unless there is a change in the constitution), such as every few years, and allow citizens to cast their votes for the candidates or political parties of their choice.

Democratic elections require numerous steps to be conducted fairly and properly. First, the government or election commission will establish the rules and regulations for the election, including the qualifications for candidates and the procedures for voting and counting ballots. These rules are designed to ensure that the election is free, fair, and transparent and that the results accurately reflect the will of the people.

Next, the candidates or political parties will campaign for votes, using a variety of tactics such as rallies, speeches, and advertising. During this time, voters will have the opportunity to learn about the candidates and their platforms, and to decide which ones they want to support.

On election day, voters will go to designated polling places to cast their ballots. In many countries, this is done by marking a paper ballot with a pen or pencil, although some countries have adopted electronic voting systems. The ballots are then counted by election officials. Democratically transparent states allow representatives from all political parties to safeguard the counting process. Even the most known democratic governments or regions implemented regulations to control or limit voter behavior. This is known as voter suppression and examples include Australia, Canada (although not implemented by the officials), Israel, and the United States.⁵

After the election, the candidate or party with the most votes is declared the winner and will go on to form the government or serve as the representative for the relevant electoral district. If no candidate or party receives a majority of the votes, a runoff election may be held between the top two candidates.

⁵ See the 2006 elections in Australia, the 2011 federal election in Canada, the 2019 general elections in Israel, and Trump's Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity in 2017.

Democratic elections are an important mechanism for citizens to exercise their power and choose their representatives. An efficient voting system should be characterized by rules and regulations designed to ensure fairness and transparency, and by competition among candidates or political parties. The results of the election are then used to determine who will govern on behalf of the people; therefore, any mistake or connivance may result in dramatic changes in society.

A fair electoral may seem useful under ideal circumstances; however, it does not always yield representativeness. The victorious majority may pursue its own interests while ignoring the minority, resulting in the tyranny of the majority. Highly populated countries tend to have an underrepresented society as in the cases of Russia and Türkiye, the two main cases this paper will elaborate on. Populism plays a major role in these countries' domestic politics as it proves to be useful for attracting votes from the majority of voters.

While democracy is the preferred governmental system of many societies around the world, not every democratic system functions as fair as intended. Many countries in the world have only recently transitioned to democracy, and may still be facing challenges in establishing strong and effective institutions and building a culture of respect for the rule of law and individual rights.

Each country has different political, economic, and social conditions. Some countries may have higher levels of inequality, poverty, or conflict, which can make it more difficult to build and maintain a functioning democratic system. The cultural and historical background also changes how a certain society understands democracy and practices it.

The most effective form of democracy can be observed in Nordic countries. Their unique mixture of collective culture that enables them to be sensitive towards fellow human beings, efficient educational system and economic freedom make them the most *democratically* favorable region in the world.

The Nordic Model

The most developed examples of democracy are usually seen in Nordic countries. The Nordic model functions well above the world average when it comes to democracy. It refers to a specific type of economic and social system that is characterized by a combination of free-market capitalism and comprehensive social benefits. This system is known for providing its citizens with top-quality services such as free education and healthcare, as well as generous pension payments for retirees, which attract attention from around the world. (Iqbal & Todi, 2015)

Nordic countries, which include Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, are often considered to be among the most democratic countries in the world even though Denmark, Norway and Sweden are constitutional monarchies. There are several factors to consider as to why these countries have a higher understanding of democracy.

Nordic countries have a high level of democracy due to the long tradition of democratic governance in these countries. All of the Nordic countries have a history of democratic rule that stretches back for many centuries, and they have established strong and well-functioning democratic institutions over this time. This history of democratic governance has helped to create a culture of democracy in these countries, with high levels of political participation and a strong commitment to democratic values.

They enjoy functioning democracies thanks to their high levels of political participation and engagement. In these countries, voter turnout is often high, and citizens have a strong sense of political efficacy, meaning that they believe their votes can make a difference. The governments, as a result, are aware that they are accountable to the people and responsive to their needs and concerns.

The presence of a strong welfare system, coupled with a commitment to social justice enables a narrow gap between different income levels. These countries have developed comprehensive systems of social protection that provide for the needs of their citizens, such as education, healthcare, and income support. This has helped to create a more equal society and has reduced some of the economic and social inequalities that can undermine democracy.

The taxpayers willingly fund these benefits as they have long built a trustworthy relationship with their respective governments. The citizens have a high degree of trust in their government and a history of working together to reach compromises and address societal challenges through democratic participation. (Anderson, et al., 2007)

Their policymakers succeeded to utilize the capitalist system combined with high taxation and welfare benefits for all citizens. Their political culture is multi-party parliamentary democracy characterized by powerful social democratic parties and consensus. Policy-making is more collaborative, with a higher level of discussion and collective bargaining between employers and workers in the labor market via trade unions. Corporatism can also be found in other circumstances. As a result, all residents are treated equally, and workforce participation is encouraged. Gender equality is a defining feature of society, resulting in both a high level of workplace participation by women and a high level of parental engagement by men. (Anderson, et al., 2007)

Nordic countries are often characterized by a high level of trust and social cohesion. In these countries, there is a strong sense of community and shared values, which can help to foster a sense of common purpose and solidarity. This can make it easier for people to work together and resolve conflicts through peaceful means, which is essential for a functioning democratic system.

Overall, Nordic countries are considered to be the most democratic states because of their long history of democratic governance, high levels of political participation and engagement, strong welfare systems, and high levels of trust and social cohesion. These factors create the conditions necessary for a functioning and sustainable democratic system.

Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany is a parliamentary democracy, with a President serving as the head of state without significant political power. Instead, the government and bicameral legislature, consisting of the Bundestag and the Bundesrat, hold the real power. The electoral system used in Germany is a "mixed" system, in which half of the members are elected through a single-member plurality system in small, geographically compact electoral

districts, and the other half are elected through a proportional representation system based on regional party lists and national vote totals. This innovative system was implemented under the guidance of the United States in 1949. A political party must win over 5% of the votes to enter the parliament unless they win at least three territorial constituencies through the first vote (Langenbacher, 2015).

The Parliamentary Council established the framework for a stable parliamentary system of government through the adoption of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany on May 8 1949 (Deutscher Bundestag, 2022). This law serves as the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany and lays out the guidelines for the country's political system, including the separation of powers, the roles and responsibilities of government institutions and the rights and freedoms of citizens. The Basic Law was adopted after World War II, following the collapse of Nazi Germany, and was established as a way to ensure that the country would never again experience the kind of totalitarian dictatorship that had led to the war.

Germany is a prime example of a truly democratic system. The main criterion to assess the level of democracy is the Chancellor's apparent inability to change the legislation and implement new policies without the support of the legislative branches. The Chancellor may only propose legislation, this fact alone makes Germany a well-functioning democracy as it limits the head of state as the singular decision-maker. However, it is not free of discrepancies.

The German unification in 1990 ended the authoritarian rule of East Germany by diffusing its population into West Germany. The socialist political and economic elements of East Germany were only marginally recognized in the constitutional revision of West Germany (Langenbacher, 2015). United Germany is a nation-state which has fused two very different political traditions and cultures into a single federal state structure guided by a common set of institutional mechanisms. It has embedded within its political community competing and often conflicting traditions of stable democracy, as well as developing democracy; traditions of market capitalism, as well as traditions of socialism and command economy (Kim & Robertson, 2003). According to the 2019 report conducted by the Federal Government of

Germany, “approval ratings for democracy give rise to concern in eastern Germany. Almost half the people in the east tend to be more dissatisfied with the way democracy is functioning. This dissatisfaction is also noticeable in the greatly varying election results in east and west in recent years” (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, 2019).

In East Germany, the government was controlled by the communist party and political participation was limited. This led to a lack of trust in the political system and a feeling of alienation among many citizens. In contrast, West Germany had a long-established tradition of democratic governance and a robust civil society, which helped to build trust and engagement among citizens.

The German government has been working to promote political and economic integration between the East and West since the reunification. The disparities in economic opportunities and living standards between the two regions affect political attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, the historical and cultural differences between the two regions continue to shape political perceptions, values and attitudes among the citizens.

The difference in political satisfaction is comprehensible if some factors are taken into consideration. Namely, “if democratic institutions or economic conditions improve with the length of time spent under democracy, this might increase the support for democracy directly” and “preferences for democracy increase as individuals experience more time living under democratic rule” (Fuchs-Schündeln & Schündeln, 2015).

Even though the political mentality differs between its east and west, Germany still presents a good example of a pluralistic democracy in Europe.

The Nordic countries and Germany are widely accepted democratic systems. They are included in this work to demonstrate one end of the democratic spectrum, while the latter examples present the opposite (and mostly unwanted) end.

The Definition of “Transition”

Not every country in the world can be expected to have the same level of commitment to the principles and values of democracy. Political leaders or elites may be more interested in maintaining their power and privileges rather than promoting the well-being and interests of the people they are responsible for. This can lead to corruption, authoritarianism, and other forms of non-democratic governance, such as totalitarianism and dictatorship. Authoritarianism, in this sense, is one of the possible outcomes of democracy, rather than a counterpart. As long as the society is satisfied (or manipulated to be satisfied) with the political agenda of the ruling elite/party, the transition can be expected, as it happened in many countries.

The constitution, if any, serves as a means to secure the political system. Many countries have introduced relevant articles to their constitution to prevent unnecessary extension of a head of a government’s tenure. “Presidential term limit is a restriction on the maximum length of tenure that a president can serve in office. It stipulates the length of term and the number of consecutive or non-consecutive terms that the chief executive is permitted to serve.” Term limits are an essential safeguard of democracy if they are binding. Especially in presidential regimes, term limits should be introduced to provide a balanced system. (Baturu, 2014).

While a constitutional background can provide a safe political environment against overly ambitious political figures, it is not always the case, as constitutions are also subject to change. “Many authoritarian populist movements have risen to power through normal electoral procedures. And while respecting those procedures, which provide for a state of emergency, they carry out actions that sometimes culminate in a forced change of the constitution. The constitutional armor is inadequate to preserve the formal democracy from authoritarian abuses” (Tomba, 2019). A constitution is a cornerstone of any fair political system, be it codified or not. The problem is the amendment of a constitution by political agents on a whim. One of the possible solutions may be making some articles non-amendable. The third chapter includes a detailed example of such an implementation in the Turkish constitution.

The emergence of authoritarianism often involves the construction of a common enemy by those in power, whether an external or internal group. This enemy serves to unite the population and justify the restriction of civil liberties and opposition. This political dynamic is particularly evident in times of crisis, as it can facilitate a seamless transition from a liberal-democratic state to an authoritarian one (Tomba, 2019).

The Definition and Characteristics of Authoritarian Regimes

Authoritarianism is the principle of submission to authority that denies individual freedoms partly or completely.

Authoritarian regimes have various characteristics, including a lack of transparency and accountability, a concentration of power in the hands of a small group of individuals, and a lack of political freedom and civil liberties for the population. These regimes are usually ruled by a strong leader who has absolute control over the government and the political system, and who is not subject to the rule of law.

Many authoritarian regimes suppress political opposition and use violence and force to maintain their power. These regimes often do not allow for free and fair elections and may engage in tactics such as vote-rigging, intimidation, and harassment of opposition candidates and supporters.

Restricting the freedom of the press and independent media, using propaganda and censorship to control the flow of information and shaping public opinion are common procedures in authoritarian regimes. Censoring and limiting the internet and other forms of communication is a common tactic in order to suppress dissent and prevent the spread of information that challenges their authority. China, Iran, Russia and Türkiye are known examples to implement such censorship on the internet and media to oppress people.

The control of the media is often the most sought type of control authoritarian regimes resort to. There is no doubt that with technology's omnipresence, banning, censoring and altering

news is more than a challenge for a contemporary authoritarian regime, as people have more ways than before to spread information.

China is a well-known state to impose these sanctions with success. It was argued that “the Chinese Communist Party has been transitioning from banning as much unfavorable information as possible, to what the officials call "dredging and blocking", or a combination of guiding public opinion and banning news reports.” (Tai, 2014) Changing public opinion in this sense yields a more favorable result as it is easier to persuade the public compared to completely banning the news.

North Korea, as a totalitarian state, ranked last on the Press Freedom Index of 2022. (Reporters Without Borders, 2022) The government wields a three-tiered approach to control the media at the ideological, physical, and institutional levels. The people in Korea are programmed to think, work and live under the shadow of their supreme leader, Kim Jong-un. (Kretchun & Kim, 2012)

Venezuela, another authoritarian country, ranked 159th of 180 countries on the same Press Freedom Index. President Nicolas Maduro rules with “a mixture of brutal repression political shrewdness and control of information.” A human rights organization called Espacio Publico reported 608 violations of freedom of expression in 2018 and 845 in the first eight months of 2019. (Pozzebon, 2020)

In 1979, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, Iran's shah at the time, was forced to leave the country due to widespread protests and civil unrest. This led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with Ruhollah Khomeini as its Supreme Leader. Khomeini initially declared that "in an Islamic society, women would be able to vote and have the same rights as men". (Abrahamian, 1982) However, these promises were to no avail. Iran quickly turned into an authoritarian government with basic human rights violations. Iran first experienced a nationwide crisis with the Bloody November in 1979, resulting with some 1500 murders by the regime, (Shahrokhi, 2019) then an even larger protest after Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian woman who died in police custody on September 16 2022. Her unfortunate death after the inhuman treatment sparked an unprecedented uprising against the

strict regime. Amini was killed by the morality police as a result of the alleged violation of the hijab law. The uprising caused over 500 deaths and many more arrests as of December 2022 (IHRNGO, 2022). The regime increasingly censored the media after the protests became a nationwide crisis.

Türkiye is another country that can be considered to have partial press freedom. Although not currently plagued with deadly protests, it still has a long history of government oppression. The parliament adopted a media law in 2020, amending the law with the same scope in 2007. According to the new law, foreign social network service providers whose services are accessed from Türkiye more than 1 million times per day must appoint a permanent representative in the country and take necessary precautions to store the data of users.⁶ This enabled the government to demand the personal information of anyone who committed a punishable crime on the internet, from the service providers.

Turkmenistan had been under repressive totalitarian regimes since 1990, especially during President for Life Saparmurat Niyazov's reign that lasted until 2006. According to a report by the U.S. Department of State, the Turkmen government was responsible for serious human rights abuses and restricting political and civil liberties. There was no opposition party, the judiciary was far from being independent. The government was even demolishing the private homes of citizens without considerable compensation. Freedom of speech and press were not permitted. The media was under complete control of the regime, allowing no criticism from anyone, it rather focused on The President's revered personality. Religious expression was limited. Labor rights were restricted. (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2002)

These governments put various degrees of oppression on their judiciary. An independent judiciary that is free from government intervention allows for the inspection of other branches of the government, as well as a functioning court of law. Authoritarian regimes intentionally restrict the judiciary to accuse their opposition and exempt their supporters and officials from

⁶ See Regulating Internet Publications and Combating Crimes Committed by Means of Such Publications. Law No. 7253

the jurisdiction in case of a punishable action. This means that there is no mechanism in place to hold the government accountable for its actions, and individuals who speak out against the regime or challenge its authority may face arbitrary detention, torture, or other forms of repression.

Authoritarianism fundamentally contrasts democratic values. However, it differs from totalitarianism in that authoritarian governments often lack a well-developed guiding ideology, tolerate some pluralism in social organization, lack the ability to mobilize the entire population in pursuit of national goals, and exercise power within relatively predictable limits.

The main difference between authoritarianism and totalitarianism is the extent of control and influence that the government has over society and its citizens. Authoritarian regimes are characterized by a concentration of power in the hands of a small group of individuals, and a lack of transparency and accountability. These regimes often suppress political opposition and restrict civil liberties, but they do not necessarily seek to control all aspects of society and the lives of their citizens.

On the other hand, totalitarian regimes seek to control every aspect of society and the lives of their citizens. These regimes are characterized by a single party or leader who has absolute control over the government and the political system. They use propaganda and censorship to control the flow of information and often use violence and force to maintain their power and suppress dissent. Totalitarian regimes also seek to control the economy, education, and other aspects of society, and they do not allow for any form of political opposition or independent institutions.

While both authoritarianism and totalitarianism are lightened forms of dictatorship, totalitarianism is a more extreme and all-encompassing form of authoritarianism that seeks to control every aspect of society and the lives of its citizens.

There are several examples of totalitarian regimes around the world. One of the most prominent examples is North Korea, which is ruled by a single party and a dictator who has absolute control over the government and the political system. North Korea uses propaganda and censorship to control the flow of information and does not allow for any form of political opposition or independent institutions. The regime also maintains its power through the use of violence and force and has been criticized for its human rights abuses, including the use of forced labor and torture.

Another example of a totalitarian regime is Eritrea, which is ruled by a single party and a president who has been in power since 1993. The regime in Eritrea uses censorship and propaganda to control the flow of information and does not allow for any form of political opposition or independent institutions. The government also uses violence and force to maintain its power and has been criticized for its human rights abuses, including the use of forced labor and arbitrary detention. (Human Rights Watch, 2021)

Authoritarian regimes are particularly common in Latin America as well. In Latin America, the leaders of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, Evo Morales, Rafael Correa, and Hugo Chávez, respectively, have used constituent assemblies as a means to increase their own powers and extend their time in office, while also weakening checks and balances in their respective countries. They have also used the law in a discretionary manner for political purposes, targeting and undermining the opposition. This move towards a form of competitive authoritarianism has also been seen in Nicaragua under the leadership of Daniel Ortega. The effort of President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras to follow in the footsteps of these leaders by calling for a constituent assembly and planning to remain in power was halted by a controversial coup in 2009. Additionally, former President and current Vice President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner of Argentina, whose supporters were inspired by Chávez, considered constitutional changes and re-election, raising concerns from civil society about threats to the country's hard-won democracy due to continuing attacks on the press and the president's concentration of power. (Weyland, 2013)

The Authoritarian Leaders

There are many different types of political leaders in the world. This study aims to analyze the characteristics of initially democratic authoritarian leaders. Some came into power with democratic means, and their later transition to authoritarianism shadowed their initial success. When a leader who is originally democratically elected becomes authoritarian, it could be due to a desire for personal power, a belief that authoritarian rule is necessary to achieve specific goals, a fear of being ousted from power, and a lack of checks and balances on their authority. External threats and challenges, such as economic instability or security issues, may also push a leader figure to pursue more self-centered interests. Additionally, a democratically elected leader may gradually undermine democratic institutions and norms to consolidate power.

Authoritarian leaders are characterized by their desire for absolute control over political, social, and economic life. They often seek to suppress dissent and opposition and may use tactics such as censorship, imprisonment, and violence to maintain their grip on power. Authoritarian leaders may claim to act on behalf of the people, but in reality, they serve their own interests and those of a small group of elites. They often lack accountability and are not bound by the rule of law. Additionally, authoritarian leaders may reject the principles of democracy and seek to concentrate power within themselves.

The historical aspect of authoritarian leadership is considered hostile and destructive, as two of the most prominent examples were Mussolini and Hitler during World War II. This type of leadership was often seen in right-wing governments, and today many democratic governments are becoming more aligned with right-wing policies. What causes such a transition even in societies where democracy is deeply rooted?

Right-Wing Populism

Both left and right-wingers may promote authoritarianism. Here, some right-oriented political parties are mentioned because they present an interesting case. European Union countries have been known for their libertarian systems. Is this about to change? The predisposition towards right-wing policies is visible even among states that laid the

foundations of democracy. The most recent transition to a tougher, less-inclusive stance took place in Italy when Giorgia Meloni's political party Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy), came into power. It is reported as the most far-right government since the term of Benito Mussolini. (Clinch, 2022) Meloni's promises to target uncontrolled immigration by a naval blockade contributed to her rise to power.

In one of the most inclusive democracies in the world, Sweden, Ulf Kristersson was elected with the support of the country's most far-right party, Sweden Democrats. The newly-elected prime minister stated that he will grant an influential position to Sweden Democrats. The same party backed Kristersson on the condition of tougher immigration laws. (Ringstrom & Johnson, 2022)

The European Parliament declared in September that "Hungary can no longer be considered a full democracy". The members stated their concerns about the functionality of its constitutional and electoral procedures, the independence of the judiciary, corruption and conflicts of interest, and freedom of expression, particularly media pluralism. Academic freedom, religious freedom, freedom of association, and the right to equal treatment, including LGBTI+ rights, minorities' rights, and the rights of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees are all considered problematic. (European Parliament, 2022)

In June 2022, Marine Le Pen's National Rally, France's far-right party, got 41% of votes, enabling them to win 89 seats in the parliament, a significant increase from the previous 8 seats. (Hird, 2022) Marine Le Pen stated that she aims to cut immigration, ban some Muslim practices, and repair relations with Russia. (Walt, 2022) This is a clear indication that her anti-immigration policies are gaining popularity.

The examples listed are not meant as authoritarian regimes; they are included to remark on the growing trend of right-wing populism. The reasons are varied: The dissatisfaction caused by rising living costs and energy crises play a significant part. The Ukrainian invasion and the growing number of immigrants also worsen the discomfort. The rise of far-right populism in every country is somewhat similar. They are hostile towards multiculturalism and centered

around national identity, and they more often than not oppose gender rights and freedom of minorities.

Hubris Syndrome and Cults of Personality

It is not surprising to witness some leaders' tendency to lose their initial humility once they believe they gained enough power. In the end, human beings are drawn to power, as it inflates their fragile selves like nothing else. As writer and orator Robert Ingersoll uttered about Abraham Lincoln in 1895, "if you want to find out what a man is to the bottom, give him power. Any man can stand adversity — only a great man can stand prosperity".⁷ It is, therefore, not surprising to witness some political leaders of sovereign countries act selfishly and overcontrolling, as there is a much greater power at stake.

This trend of personality change is named hubris syndrome. It is a psychological condition that can affect individuals with high influence and power, such as political leaders. It is characterized by an overinflated sense of self-importance, a lack of self-awareness, and a willingness to take risks without considering the consequences. People with hubris syndrome may believe that they are immune to criticism and they are infallible, which can lead them to make reckless decisions. This condition can be observed in people who are in positions of power for an extended period, and it can have grave consequences for the affected individuals and the people and organizations they lead.

Owen masterfully expressed that "the virtues of a representative democracy lie in the scope it gives elected leaders to exercise real leadership and to show the decisiveness most voters prefer to hesitation, doubt and vacillation. But the exercise of that leadership needs to carry the trust of the electorate, which is usually lost when the leader crosses the borderline between decisive and hubristic leadership." (Owen, 2007)

The change of character can even be observed in speech patterns. A team of Hungarian researchers stated that "powerful figures, such as politicians, who show a behavioral pattern of exuberant self-confidence, recklessness, and contempt for others may be the subject of the

⁷ Robert Ingersoll's speech on Jan. 16, 1883.

acquired personality disorder, the hubris syndrome, which has been demonstrated to leave its mark on speech patterns. (Magyari, Pléh, & Forgács, 2022) Their study explored the characteristic language patterns of Hungarian prime ministers with a specific focus on the usage of “we” rather than “I”. Their findings indicated that the last prime minister Viktor Orbán, who is often considered to have close ties with far-right populism, used the first-person plural more than the singular pronouns during his second term. Similar speech patterns can be observed in other right-wing politicians.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s national addresses are filled with words such as “we, us, our”, thus indicating a sense of grandeur. The observation of his speech patterns during rallies and public addresses aligns with the previous research. Anomalies in the speech more often than not can be traced to mental instability.

When a political leader starts to lose touch with reality, typically accelerated by the traditional attribution of superior personal traits, a cult may form around the said figure. And the growth of the cult results in unwanted consequences for the people and even the leader himself. The examples above would remain pale in comparison to some leaders that created extreme cults of personality. It is of paramount importance to learn from history to avoid similar wrongdoings.

North Korea

A vivid example of a personal cult can be observed in North Korea. The North Korean regime has been controlled by the Kim dynasty since 1948. The Korean Peninsula was split after the defeat of Japan in World War II. Kim Il-sung came to power with the goal of reunifying the Korean Peninsula. He gained absolute control of North Korea until his death in 1994. His son, Kim Jong-il, had the title of supreme leader until his death in 2011. He then was followed by the third generation of the dynasty, Kim Jong-un. Kim Jong-un is a controversial figure and has a strong grip on the country. The public is forced to display loyalty towards him. Ironically, the dynasty members created the same kind of personality cults surrounding their earthly presence, just as the head of their occupying power during World War II, Hirohito,

did.⁸ They even went so far as to create a whole calendar system to replace the Gregorian calendar. According to the *Suche* calendar, the birth year of Kim Il-sung, 1912, was deemed as year 1. The calendar was implemented on the 49th anniversary of the foundation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.⁹ Il-sung's birthday, April 15, is still celebrated as the "Day of the Sun" nationwide. (Lee, 2001) Such a deification of a leader was not even seen during Hitler's time. Revering a human being to this extent is beyond logic and nothing short of madness.

China

The founder and the former leader of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong, had a similar kind of personality cult, although to a lesser extent. His launch of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 heightened his status of supremacy. It was argued that Mao openly criticized and rejected the cult around him. (Ke, Tao, & Xujun, 1995) The revolution lasted until Mao died in 1976. Deng Xiaoping, the head of the Chinese government after Mao, launched a counter-revolution in 1978 to correct the mistakes of the Cultural Revolution. (Xiaoping, 1980) According to the interview, Xiaoping believed that "Mao Zedong's one-man rule was reminiscent of the country's imperial past" and he aimed to prevent another cult-like formation for the next leader of China.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan's former leader and the First Secretary of the Turkmen Communist Party, Saparmurat Niyazov, ruled the country from 1990 until he died in 2006. Unlike many contemporary examples, he was a full-fledged dictator who built a strong cult around him that was very similar to the Kim dynasty. His drastic actions included proclaiming himself as "Turkmenbashi"¹⁰, erecting a \$12 million-dollar rotating statue in Ashgabat (Podelco, 2012), writing the book, the *Ruhnama*, and making it the primary text for basically every

⁸ Emperor Shōwa, known as Hirohito in the Western world, was the Emperor of Japan during World War II, having godlike features according to the Constitution of the Empire of Japan established in 1899. After their defeat, at the request of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, Hirohito explicitly denied his divinity, leading to a new constitution in 1947.

⁹ The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is the official name of North Korea.

¹⁰ Head of the Turkmen

institution in the country, including schools, universities and governmental organizations, even making it part of the driving tests. Turkmen State University had opened a department called the Department of the Holy Ruhnama of Turkmenbashi as a pursuable major. Niyazov stated that those who read the two-volume work thrice were destined for heaven. He then changed the word for bread in the local language, giving it his mother's name gurbansoltan. (L.A. Times, 2006) The Hippocratic Oath was replaced with an oath to the President. (RFE/RL, 2005) All things aside, he provided Turkmen citizens with free water, natural gas and electricity, given the fact that the country has the world's sixth-largest natural gas reserves. (Kim, 2015) That said, Niyazov's inflated self-image at least allowed something vital for his fellow citizens.

Zimbabwe

Robert Mugabe, the former President of Zimbabwe, was a well-known controversial figure. He served as the Prime minister from 1980 to 1987, becoming the President after the amendment of the constitution in 1987. He had a long term as the President until he died in 2017. Mugabe was the leader of the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front, and within the party, he was more than just a political leader. “He was seen as a demi-god, feared and rarely challenged”. This is why he was chosen during the People's Congress in 2014 as the single presidential candidate at the age of 90 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). He was also seen as a savior of African people from the clutch of the white minority. Robert Mugabe had opposing views to Ian Smith's government¹¹ in his youth, and for that, he was forced to go into exile to Nigeria. By no surprise, he became interested in Marxism and African nationalism. He was a strong advocate for decolonization and the empowerment of the black majority in his country. He supported the redistribution of land from white farmers to landless black Zimbabweans. In 2000, Mugabe implemented a controversial land resettlement process in which the state seized approximately 10 million hectares of white-owned farmland and redistributed it to various groups, including peasant farmers and members of the political elite (Mlambo, 2014). Since then, “government-backed militia known as war veterans killed

¹¹ Ian Douglas Smith was the Prime Minister of Rhodesia (known as Southern Rhodesia until October 1964 and now known as Zimbabwe) from 1964 to 1979.

up to a dozen white farmers and scores of their black employees in a campaign of terror that saw hundreds injured and many more fleeing the country” (Koinange, 2005). Nationalism and empowerment of an oppressed minority group are acceptable ideologies until they go too far and displace others. Mugabe’s actions provided an example of “the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors” as Freire wrote (Freire, 1968).

Iraq

Iraq’s former leader Saddam Hussein changed history. He was one of the figures that turned Middle Eastern nations and especially Muslims into “bad guys” in the eyes of the West, along with Usama bin Laden. Although terrorism binds no religion or nation, the change of perception is an undeniable, sad truth. Even though that change could be observed mostly in Americans, as they were on one side of the conflict in Iraq, their changed perception reverberated to other Western nations. Americans’ devoutness even “served to foster strong anti-communist sentiments among many theologically conservative and religiously committed citizens against the "godless atheism" of the Marxist ideology of the Soviet Union” (Smidt, 2005). In the case of Iraq, Saddam Hussein’s actions solidified Western discontent more than religion. He used, tortured, killed and victimized people, and he became the victim of his actions in the end. Saddam Hussein was actively engaged in politics from a young age and, at the age of 22, he was involved in an unsuccessful assassination attempt against Abd al-Karim Qasim.¹² When the Ba'ath Party gained power in 1968, “he was well-positioned due to his relation as a cousin of President Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr”. He became the de facto leader of Iraq even before he assumed the presidency, as he forced the former leader Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr to resign in 1976. Saddam Hussein then served as the fifth president of Iraq from 1979 until his downfall in 2003. Saddam Hussein’s success can be tied to the Iraqi people’s need for a strong leader as they had suffered from “long periods of instability and numerous coups d’état that affected the country’s growth and development” as well as his understanding of the “nation’s yearning for stability and prosperity” and exploitation of this very need to “create an authoritarian regime and a personality cult based

¹² Abd al-Karim Qasim became the first prime minister of Iraq after the July 14 Revolution in 1958.

on seemingly persuasive promises of a brighter future” (Sassoon, 2012). Saddam Hussein's authoritarian rule was characterized by rigged elections (Reuters, 1995), numerous human rights abuse cases, including an estimated 250,000 arbitrary killings (Human Rights Watch, 2004), and ethnic cleansings such as the Halabja massacre committed in 1988¹³ (Blaydes, 2018).

These atrocities were ordered and executed without much opposition due to his solidified power. The decision-making was primarily in the hands of the president and was characterized by a lack of consultation. By the 1980s, official statements such as "an order from the leader, the President" eliminated the need for discussion and were considered equivalent to laws. Saddam Hussein's orders were effectively treated as laws that were implemented in every aspect of civil and official life (Sassoon, 2012).

Romania

Nicolae Ceaușescu's tight rule in Romania is mentioned to illustrate a similarly riveting contemporary case with not one but two figures. Ceaușescu became the general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party in 1965, which he later alienated from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to bid his own will. Ceaușescu initially showed a resilient character beneficial to Romania, including an independent foreign policy, lighter press censorship and the ending of Romania's participation in the Warsaw Pact. When Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Romanian government refused to join thanks to Ceaușescu's initially independent policies. Unsurprisingly, leaders of the Western world were more than eager to meet a communist leader who could openly oppose Moscow.

He was a deeply strange man that admired Stalin, but even Stalin would probably be ashamed to have such an admirer. Ceaușescu's leadership style and policies changed significantly after a state visit to North Korea and China in 1971. Before this trip, he was viewed as more of a nationalist leader than a hardline communist, but after being impressed by the personal style of rule and cult status of leaders like Kim Il-Sung and Mao Zedong, he returned to Romania

¹³ During the Halabja massacre, the Iraqi government used chemical weapons against a civilian-populated area, killing an estimated 5000 people.

with a more authoritarian and Stalinist approach. He felt that he deserved a similar kind of respect and began to relentlessly pursue Stalinist policies.

Ceaușescu aimed to erase foreign debt by completely exporting Romania's agricultural products, causing firstly a rationing of basic goods and later nationwide starvation. Energy resources were strictly limited and allocated primarily for export purposes, specifically for sale to Italy and West Germany. His secret police force, the Securitate, persecuted, tortured and killed countless citizens on the ground of opposition to Ceaușescu. They spread rumors to keep people from even imagining doing something wrong. Speaking to foreign people had to be reported. The Securitate banned yoga in 1982 after Ceaușescu considered it a political act (Sebestyen, 2009).

Women in Romania during the time of Nicolae Ceausescu's rule faced significant discrimination, especially in terms of reproductive rights. In 1986, to coincide with his birthday, Nicolae Ceausescu announced a new law that prohibited abortion for women under the age of 45. The previous law prohibited abortion for women under 40, but it was made even stricter as Ceausescu believed that it was not effective enough. The Ceaușescu couple had a goal of increasing Romania's population from 23 million to 30 million and as such, Romania was the only country in the socialist bloc to have laws against abortion, which was widely used in Eastern Europe as the main form of birth control. In addition, contraception was banned, there was no sex education in schools, and the minimum marriage age for girls was reduced to 15 (Sebestyen, 2009).

Former Soviet leader Gorbachev said about Ceaușescu, “indeed it is hard to imagine a major politician without his share of vanity and self-confidence. In this sense, though, Ceaușescu was in a class of his own” (Gorbachev, 1995).

Ceaușescu's case is different from all the other examples given here as he shared his distinguished position with his equally inadequate wife, Elena. Elena Ceaușescu had an even stronger desire for recognition than her husband. Despite having limited education and being expelled from school at the age of 14, she eventually obtained a degree in chemistry. Her husband appointed her as the head of the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Petrochemistry

of the Romanian Academy (ICEHCM), even though she didn't have the qualifications or experience to hold that position (Sebestyen, 2009). This move was seen as a way to increase her power and prestige, but it hindered the development of research and scientific advancement in the country, as every research had to receive her approval. Elena Ceaușescu also forced some citizens to relocate to make way for construction projects.

The examples these countries presented are given to illustrate how an extreme form of authoritarianism may emerge. The leaders listed here may have had charisma, the ability to inspire, persuasiveness, breadth of vision, willingness to take chances, high aspirations, and bold self-confidence, as they are all traits associated with successful leadership. However, there is another side to this profile: impetuosity, a refusal to listen to or follow counsel, and a specific type of incompetence when impulsivity, recklessness, and frequent inattention to detail predominate. This can result in poor leadership and damage on a large scale (Owen & Davidson, 2009).

That is why overpowered political leaders often create problems for their countries and the people they serve. Overly powerful leaders are prone to be less accountable to the public and may make decisions that are not in the best interests of the people. They are also more inclined to abuse their power to suppress dissent and opposition and use their authority to profit themselves and their allies at the expense of the public. Such leaders undermine democratic institutions and the rule of law, which declines political stability and civic engagement as seen from the examples.

Chapter II: The Case of Russia

The Russian Empire, which existed from 1721 until 1917, was a monarchy ruled by the Tsars. In 1917, a revolution occurred in Russia, which led to the overthrow of the Tsarist regime and the establishment of a communist government. This government was led by the Bolshevik party, which was headed by Vladimir Lenin (Tucker, 1999).

Under Lenin and his successor, Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Union implemented a series of policies aimed at transforming the country into a communist state. These included the nationalization of industries, the collectivization of agriculture, and the suppression of political opposition.

In the years following the revolution, the Soviet Union became a major world power and a leading proponent of communism. However, the communist system was beset by many problems, including corruption, inefficiency, and widespread human rights abuses.

The Soviet Union was a very centralized and authoritarian state, and power was concentrated in the hands of a small group of elites who were able to use their positions to enrich themselves. This led to widespread corruption at all levels of government and society, with officials and party leaders using their positions to engage in corrupt practices such as bribery, nepotism, and embezzlement. As Soviet author Simis stated, “there was wholesale corruption in the ruling circles of the republic” (Simis, 1982).

Another problem of communist Russia was inefficiency. The Soviet Union's economy was heavily centralized and controlled by the state, which meant that it was often inefficient and unable to meet the needs of its people. The lack of competition and the absence of market incentives led to widespread shortages of basic goods and services, and the quality of goods was often poor. The circumstances in the country made it very easy for corruption to thrive. During and after the war, people in the legal system, as well as the general population who were struggling financially, were barely able to survive on the limited food they were able to obtain with their ration cards. This lack of resources made it difficult for them to resist the temptation of corruption (Simis, 1982).

Communist Russia was known for violating human rights. The Soviet Union suppressed political opposition and individual freedoms, and it frequently arrested and imprisoned political dissidents and perceived enemies of the state. It also targeted human rights activists for repression. The Soviet Union operated labor camps called gulags, where prisoners were subjected to harsh conditions and often died. “We now know as well beyond a reasonable doubt that there were more than 13 million Red Holocaust victims 1929–53, and that this figure could rise above 20 million” (Rosefielde, 2010).

In the late 1980s, a series of reforms known as perestroika (meaning "restructuring") was implemented by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. These reforms were intended to liberalize the Soviet economy and political system. The Soviet Union had economic stagnation, corruption, and a lack of individual freedoms.

The main goal of perestroika was to overhaul the Soviet economy and make it more efficient and responsive to the needs of the people. To achieve this, Gorbachev introduced several market-oriented reforms, including the liberalization of prices, the introduction of private property and entrepreneurship, and the decentralization of economic decision-making. These reforms were intended to create a more competitive and dynamic economy, but they also caused significant disruptions and led to widespread shortages and hyperinflation. “The policy of perestroika led to the relaxation of strong central control over the productive sector and federal budgets. This relaxation of central control and the fact that it was not replaced by the rigors of competition and market forces led ultimately to the development of various forms of disequilibrium and, most recently, to hyperinflation” (Filatochev & Bradshaw, 1992).

Perestroika also included political reforms designed to increase transparency and accountability in government. Gorbachev introduced measures such as glasnost, or "openness," which allowed for greater freedom of expression and the media, and the introduction of elections for local and national legislative bodies. These reforms helped to create a more pluralistic political system and allow for greater public participation in the decision-making process. Glasnost was a policy of greater transparency and openness in the government of the Soviet Union.

With the introduction of glasnost, the Soviet government began to allow greater freedom of expression, including publicly criticizing systematic problems and discussing potential solutions (Hunt, 2016). This resulted in the emergence of a more diverse and critical media landscape, as well as the ability of individuals to discuss sensitive political and social issues more openly. Glasnost also led to the release of many political prisoners and the rehabilitation of individuals who had been wrongly imprisoned in the past. Perestroika, as Gorbachev has noted, "means a decisive turn toward science, a business-like partnership between it and practice with a view to achieving the highest end results, the ability to place any initiative on a firm scientific footing and the willingness and ardent desire on the part of scientists actively to support the party's course of renewing society" (Zaslavskaya, 1988).

Perestroika had a significant impact on the Soviet Union and played a major role in the collapse of communism in the country. While the reforms brought about important changes, they also contributed to the destabilization of the Soviet Union and the breakup of the country in 1991.

Perestroika was implemented to revitalize the Soviet Union's economy but resulted in increased government spending and deficits, as well as rising inflation and food prices. These economic reforms also had political consequences, leading to the first democratic elections in Soviet history and the creation of a new Congress of People's Deputies.

The first democratic elections in the Soviet Union took place in 1989, as part of the policy of perestroika implemented by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. These elections marked a significant shift in the Soviet political landscape, as they were the first free and fair elections to be held in the country.

Before the elections, the Soviet Union had been a one-party state, with the Communist Party holding a monopoly on political power. Under the policy of perestroika, however, Gorbachev introduced many political reforms, including the right to form political parties and freely criticize the government. These reforms paved the way for the first democratic elections in the Soviet Union.

The 1989 elections were held for the newly created Congress of People's Deputies, which was intended to serve as a representative body for the Soviet people. The elections were contested by some political parties, including the Communist Party and various reformist and opposition groups. In the end, the Communist Party retained a majority of seats in Congress, but the elections marked a significant step towards greater political openness and democracy in the Soviet Union. The decentralization of power that accompanied these reforms caused tension and alienated the Communist Party, contributing to the breakup of the Soviet Union. Priestland argued that “the Party, undermined by splits within its ranks and by challenges from liberals and nationalists, lost its authority and was forced to relinquish power (Priestland, 2002).

The Collapse of the Soviet Union

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a major turning point in Russia's history. After decades of oppressive communist rule, the country was suddenly thrust into a period of political and economic uncertainty. The collapse had several immediate effects, both within the former Soviet states and on the international stage. Russia was left with a weak and fragmented government, a struggling economy, and a population that was largely unfamiliar with the concept of democracy.

Within the former Soviet states, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a period of political, economic and ethnic uncertainty. The ethnic conflicts and separatist movements were the results of different groups seeking to assert their autonomy or independence. Before the collapse, ideas of national independence were largely unthinkable and undesirable for both the elites and the population of the region. The collapse of the Soviet Union made it necessary for these societies to rebuild themselves, though they have done so at different speeds and with varying levels of success and differing goals (Zürcher, 2007).

In the economic sphere, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to many challenges for the newly independent states. The Soviet economy had been highly centralized and controlled, and the transition to a market-based system was difficult for many of the newly independent states.

Many of the countries that emerged from the Soviet Union experienced economic decline and instability in the aftermath of the collapse.

The economic decline in the former Soviet states was caused by the transition to a market-based economy. The Soviet Union had been based on a planned economy, in which the government played a central role in allocating resources and setting prices. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of the newly independent states had to transition to market-based economies, which required the introduction of new economic policies and the establishment of new institutions. As Edgar L. Feige wrote, “the transformation is complex because a rapid transition from socialism to a market economy is historically unprecedented and requires a fundamental restructuring of a nation’s economic, political, social and legal institutions as well as its physical infrastructure” (Feige, 2003). As history showed, this transition was not smooth, and many of the countries that emerged from the Soviet Union experienced an economic decline as they struggled to adapt to the new system. However, Langhammer and Lücke argued that “the decline in aggregate output and inter-republican trade started as early as 1990 when centralized control over the economy began to crumble. By contrast, market-oriented economic reforms which may have entailed structural adjustment were only implemented from the beginning of 1992” and “the decline of trade in the post-Soviet states coincided with a substantial fall in aggregate output, with the collapse of the payments system, and with the erection of various trade barriers (mostly export controls) between the post-Soviet states. This process started as early as 1990, and hence before any market-oriented economic reforms were undertaken that might have led to structural adjustment.” (Langhammer & Lücke, 1995).

Another factor to consider was that the Soviet Union’s trading partnerships became void after the collapse. The Soviet Union had been a major trading partner for many countries around the world, and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a significant decline in trade for many of the former Soviet states. This decline in trade hurt the economies of the newly independent states, as it led to a decrease in exports and a decline in economic growth. As a result, the newly-independent states then planned to establish a free-trade area. However, this

agreement named the CIS Free trade Agreement was signed as late as 2011 by some of the former Soviet states (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2019).

On the international stage, the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a new era in international relations. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a significant shift in the global balance of power, as the United States emerged as the dominant global superpower. It also had a significant impact on international security, as the Soviet Union had been one of the major powers in the international system for decades. The collapse of the Soviet Union also led to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from some Eastern European countries, where they had been stationed since the end of World War II. The first withdrawal was from Hungary in April 1991 (Savranskaya, 2010).

The immediate effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union were far-reaching and had significant consequences for the region and the world. The collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new one, with radical changes in politics, economics, and international relations.

The Collapse: Aftermath

In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, Boris Yeltsin, who had been the President of the Russian Republic within the Soviet Union, became the President of the newly independent Russian Federation and consequently faced the daunting task of rebuilding the country's political and economic systems. He quickly set about introducing a series of reforms, including the privatization of state-owned enterprises, the introduction of a market economy, and the establishment of a new constitution.

Along with the aforementioned reforms, the liberalization of trade and foreign investment, and the creation of a new currency have also been planned. Additionally, the new constitution Yeltsin implemented established a presidential system of government and granted new rights and freedoms to Russian citizens, and he supported the development of a more independent and professional judiciary and the expansion of press freedom. However, Yeltsin's radical reforms caused significant changes in the Russian economy, including the implementation of market-oriented policies and the privatization of state-owned enterprises. These changes

resulted in a period of economic turmoil, as many Russians faced decreased wages, high inflation, and rising crime rates (Kesselman, Krieger, & Joseph, 2019), and his efforts to strengthen democratic institutions were often hindered by political fighting and resistance from powerful elites. Having strong ties to the old Soviet mechanism, the powerful oligarchs aimed to protect their familiar system.

As the leader of the newly independent Russian Federation, Yeltsin took a more radical approach to reform than Gorbachev had done. He quickly proclaimed his commitment to Western-style democracy and market economic reform. However, that program was controversial and proved hard to implement (Kesselman, Krieger, & Joseph, 2019).

The state institutions were unable to collect taxes, enforce law and order, and maintain infrastructure. Yeltsin's administration was already crumbling and his administration saw a steady decline in officials. The market reforms introduced in such an environment loosened Yeltsin's control and Russia became more vulnerable (Shevtsova, 2007).

The aim to improve the economy and the need to build more economic partnerships led to the inclusion of the IMF. The presence of the IMF wasn't exactly a welcome change for Russian society. "The IMF, acting for the G-7 governments, became Moscow's principal foreign partner. By the spring of 1992, however, after having lifted many price controls, the Yeltsin administration found itself facing fierce domestic opposition" for the reasons aforementioned (Reddaway, 1994).

Despite these efforts, the transition to democracy was far from smooth. In 1993, Yeltsin faced a major challenge when the Russian parliament attempted to impeach him. The impeachment was prompted by some factors, such as Yeltsin's handling of the country's economic and political problems, as well as his decision to dissolve the parliament and call for new elections in 1993.

The impeachment proceedings were initiated by a group of legislators in the parliament, who accused Yeltsin of violating the Russian Constitution and of making decisions that were harmful to the country. The impeachment proceedings were supported by political parties

and groups, including the Communist Party and the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (Sokolov & Kirilenko, 2013).

Despite the attempts to impeach him, Yeltsin survived the impeachment vote and remained in power. He was able to accomplish this by appealing to the Russian people, who favored him and opposed the impeachment efforts. Yeltsin also had the support of the military against the parliament.

In the years that followed, Russia's democratic institutions continued to develop. In 1996, Yeltsin was re-elected president in a landslide victory. His victory was seen as a sign that the Russian people had embraced democracy and he remained in office until 1999 when he survived another impeachment attempt (Manaev, 2019). In response, Yeltsin dissolved the parliament and called for new elections. This move sparked a constitutional crisis and ultimately led to a violent confrontation between Yeltsin's supporters and opponents. The crisis was eventually resolved, but it highlighted the fragility of Russia's fledgling democracy.

During his second term as president, Boris Yeltsin experienced poor health and the failure of his economic policies. These issues were further compounded by a major financial crisis in 1998 (Kesselman, Krieger, & Joseph, 2019). Russia experienced an economic crisis in 1998 due to the government's inability to implement necessary economic reforms, particularly structural reforms to promote market functioning and minimize the role of the state in the economy. These reforms were essential to provide the conditions for long-term economic growth and stability, but the government was unable to implement them successfully due to political and economic constraints.

The price of oil dropped, and it had a severe effect on the economy as it is one of Russia's main exports. The Asian financial crisis in 1997 was an important factor in oil prices. The Asian financial crisis in 1997 discouraged investors to lend to developing countries. The negative shockwave disrupted the oil prices, further deteriorating the Russian economy (Rutland, 2001). The drop in the price of oil hurt Russia's balance of payments, as the country was heavily reliant on oil exports for foreign currency earnings. According to a report by a

federal US bank, Russia lost around \$4 billion in 1998 due to the decreasing prices (Chiodo & Owyang, 2002). This, in turn, depreciated the value of the ruble, which further worsened the economic challenges the country was facing.

Additionally, the crisis was exacerbated by the fact that Russia had a high level of external debt, which made it more vulnerable to economic shocks and difficult for the country to respond to the crisis.

Putin's Rise to Power

Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin was born on October 7 1952 in Saint Petersburg, Russia, or formerly known as Leningrad, Soviet Union. Putin studied law at Leningrad State University (now Saint Petersburg State University) in 1970 and graduated in 1975 (Hoffman, 2000). He received his Ph. D. in economics at the Saint Petersburg Mining University (Vartanov, 2006). He joined the KGB in 1975 and worked as a foreign intelligence officer until 1990 (Sakwa, 2004). He was appointed as the director of the Federal Security Service, the successor of the KGB, by Yeltsin. (Rosefielde & Hedlund, 2009)

Russian Federation's democratic progress changed its course with the rise of Vladimir Putin. Putin became President of Russia under disputed circumstances. Previously holding a high position in the Federal Security Service (FSB), Putin was appointed this time the Prime Minister of Russia by President Boris Yeltsin in 1999. Yeltsin, who was dealing with political and economic issues, viewed Putin as a trustworthy and reliable ally who could help stabilize the country and continue the process of economic and political reform.

Putin was the fifth prime minister during the two years between 1997-1999 (Sakwa, 2004). Because of the political turmoil, when Putin became President of Russia, he was not expected to hold the position for long and was initially unpopular due to his connections to the Yeltsin government and the state security agency. Yeltsin and Putin faced a crisis in Chechnya when militants invaded neighboring Dagestan in 1999. The bombings of apartment buildings in Moscow and southern Russia that year, which were blamed on Chechen terrorists, led to a large-scale invasion of Chechnya by Russia in September. Putin's authorization of extreme force helped him to achieve a no-nonsense stance. The Russian military's initial successes in

the conflict, combined with improvements in the economy, helped the government win the December 1999 elections. With Putin's looming success, Yeltsin recognized that it was time for him to step down and he resigned as president on December 31 1999. Yeltsin named Putin as acting president and Putin granted Yeltsin and his family immunity from legal prosecution and a generous pension. Putin won 53% of the vote in the first round of the presidential election in March 2000 (Riasanovsky & Steinberg, 2019). This marked the start of his first presidential term.

Vladimir Putin has already served three terms as President of Russia between 2000-2004, 2004-2008 and 2012-2018. Between 2012 and 2018, he was the Prime Minister, as the constitution at the time did not allow more than two consecutive terms.¹⁴ He signed an executive order in 2020 to remove consecutive term limits. The removal or amendment of constitutional term limits is a common practice among authoritarian leaders to consolidate their power.

Developments During Putin's Tenure

In the early years of his presidency, Putin took several precautions to strengthen the state and improve the functioning of the market. He implemented economic and political reforms, including the privatization of state-owned enterprises, the liberalization of trade and foreign investment, and the establishment of a new currency, the ruble. Russian oligarchs posed a threat to his plans, and Putin was able to bargain with them in exchange for their influence (Sakwa, 2004). According to Russian political scientist Migranyan, Putin reestablished the power hierarchy, abolishing the supremacy of regional elites and removing the political influence of "oligarchs and oligopolies in the federal center" (Migranyan, 2004). He also worked to assert Russia's influence on the global stage and to promote the country's interests abroad.

While his initial policies seemed fruitful for the country, his discourse changed in the later years. As President of Russia, Vladimir Putin's behavior has become increasingly authoritarian, as he has sought to consolidate power and suppress opposition. He has used

¹⁴ See the constitution of Russia, Chapter 4, Article 81/3

his position as President to strengthen the security services, clamp down on dissent and critical media, and eliminate potential rivals. He has also used the country's energy resources as a tool of foreign policy, using Russia's status as a major energy supplier to exert influence over other countries.

Putin even went so far as to say during his annual national address that the collapse of the Soviet Union “was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century” (Osborn & Ostroukh, 2021). The very same century in which two World Wars, two atomic bombings and Holocaust took place. Although Putin had admitted that “Communism had been a blind alley, far away from the mainstream of civilization.”¹⁵, his actions to halt any attempt by the West indicate that he may very well be willing to create a new centralized Russian sovereign state that protects the Christian values. Putin, in this sense, seemed ardently willing to undermine NATO’s progression. The conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 demonstrated an outcome of this mindset.

Russian-Georgian Conflict

The Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions in Georgia remained under the control of a Russian-backed group after the collapse of the Soviet Union. When the new government in Georgia pushed for more ambitious reforms and better relations with the West, the relations between Russia and Georgia began to decline.

The change of the government in 2003, also called as “Rose Revolution”, marked the end of the Soviet mindset in Georgia, as the ousted President Shevardnadze was a Soviet loyalist. Shevardnadze was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union between 1985 and 1991. The fact that NATO offered Georgia full membership in 2008 further deteriorated the relationship. The crisis culminated with the bombing of Georgian territory by South Ossetian forces, backed by Russia (Tsamalashvili & Whitmore, 2008).

An EU-funded report, however, claimed that the conflict was initiated by a Georgian artillery attack. (Tagliavini, 2009) As a response, Georgia attempted to regain control over the region

¹⁵ This was told by Vladislav Surkov, former First Deputy Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration.

of South Ossetia, which had previously declared independence from Georgia. Russian army then infiltrated Georgia going as far as Tbilisi, and they swiftly defeated the Georgian military and occupied large portions of the nation. The following 5-day military intervention by Russia broke the 1992 Sochi ceasefire agreement that brokered peace in the region.¹⁶ The conflict caused over 800 casualties, including military personnel and civilians (Tagliavini, 2009). Tens of thousands of individuals were displaced from both South Ossetia and Georgia. The war ended with Russia officially recognizing the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, however, this move was not recognized by most countries.

The war was met with widespread international condemnation, with many countries and international organizations criticizing Russia's actions and calling for an end to the fighting. On August 12 2008, Russia declared a ceasefire and the EU brokered a Six-Point ceasefire agreement, which called for an immediate end to hostilities and the withdrawal of Russian forces to their pre-war positions. As part of the agreement, Georgia also agreed to withdraw its troops from South Ossetia and Abkhazia and permit Russian peacekeepers to maintain security in the region (United Nations, 2008). Although the ceasefire was successful in stopping the fighting, tensions between Russia and Georgia remained high in the years following the war, with both sides accusing the other of violating the terms of the agreement. The war also had a significant impact on the region's security dynamics and relations between Russia and other countries, with Russia's recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia being viewed by some as a violation of Georgia's sovereignty and not recognized by the international community, which further escalated tensions between Russia and the West.¹⁷

The Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008 was only one of the outcomes of Russia's aggressive, border-changing attitude that spanned over two decades.

¹⁶ See Agreement on Principles of Settlement of the Georgian - Ossetian Conflict, June 24 1992

¹⁷ Countries such as Ukraine, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, Poland and Hungary defended Georgia. France and Germany abstained from any blame, whereas Italy and Belarus took Russia's side.

The Annexation of Crimea

The Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 was one of the major geopolitical injustices in the 21st century. Crimea had been a part of the Ukrainian government since 1954, albeit receiving autonomous status in 1995¹⁸ (Zadorozhnii, 2016). Viktor Yanukovich, then President of Ukraine, promised that he would sign the European Union–Ukraine Association Agreement that would improve political relations and enable free trade between Ukraine and European Union. The Parliament passed the statement with the approval of 315 of the 349 members (Kyiv Post, 2013). The pending approval of the agreement was met with pressure from the Kremlin. Yanukovich’s disposition of approaching Russia’s proposal for a Russian-led customs union instead sparked aggression from unrestful citizens (Dinan, Nugent, & Paterson, 2017), who were also fed up with their government’s “issues with corruption and the violation of human rights” (Chebotariova, 2015). President Viktor Yanukovich was removed from office as a result of the Euromaidan protests (Marples & Mills, 2015). The Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine took place after the bloody protests between security forces and protesters. More than 100 people were killed (Chebotariova, 2015), resulting in the occupation of government buildings by the protesters.

Russia denounced the new government and considered Yanukovich’s removal as a coup, followed by the deployment of Russian troops to Crimea on February 27 (Marples & Mills, 2015). The annexation marked the start of the Russian-Ukrainian War that is unfortunately still ongoing more violently. Russia installed the Aksyonov government in Crimea after the invasion of troops. On March 16 2014, a referendum was held in Crimea to determine its status, which resulted in a reported 96% of voters supporting the peninsula joining the Russian Federation. However, this “referendum” was held at gunpoint under the supervision of Putin’s special forces. If not for this referendum, the peninsula would have remained within the sovereign borders of Ukraine (Wynnyckyj, 2019). This vote solidified the

¹⁸ Crimea had been a part of the Russian Empire, then the Soviet Union and was “gifted” to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic in 1954. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine gained independence and with it, the then-autonomous Crimean parliament proclaimed their independence, even installing a President, Yury Meshkov. The Parliament of Ukraine abolished the constitution and presidency of Crimea in 1995, giving it an autonomous status once more with the establishment of the Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in 1998.

annexation of Crimea by Russia (Marples & Mills, 2015). The referendum was deemed as a violation of international law and received condemnation from the international community. G8 countries, then made up of France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Japan and Russia, decided to kick Russia out of the group (Smale & Shear, 2014). Putin denied the term “annexation”, stating that it was the right of people’s self-determination, as well as claiming that they (the Russian government) “had no right to abandon the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol to the mercy of nationalist and radical militants” (Sakwa, 2015). Russian nationalists had labelled the Orange Revolution fascist as well, on the claims that the Ukrainian extreme right-wing was involved in the demonstrations back in 2004¹⁹ (Umland, 2013). It must be noted that the same claim of *fascist Ukraine* is still the main reason behind the Ukrainian invasion today. Interestingly, another authoritarian government, China, stated that it did not deem the military intervention as annexation, recognized the region’s importance for Russia, and also respected Ukraine's sovereignty. They even abstained from voting against Russia’s illegal activity in the United Nations Security Council (United Nations, 2014). Ukraine’s territorial integrity was later reaffirmed in the United Nations General Assembly on March 27 2014 as a response to the referendum in Crimea held on March 16 (United Nations, 2014).

This conflict cost many lives and spawned the outbreak of a new global conflict between Russia and the West (Wynnyckyj, 2019).

War in Donbas

Donbas consists of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. The War in Donbas coincided with the annexation of Crimea. The Donbas region was considered to stand apart from other areas in Ukraine, and its inhabitants were particularly inclined to back separation. Following the outbreak of violence and the sudden change of government in Kyiv in February 2014, the people of Donbas protested and mobilized for conflict, as they felt their identity was being threatened by the shift in power (Platonova, 2022).

¹⁹ The Orange Revolution was a series of protests in Ukraine after the Presidential election of 2004. The protesters claimed that the election was a fraud.

This conflict initially did not involve the Russian military. It began as discontent against the new government. Russia utilized this conflict and backed the separatists. The Ukrainian military's strategy from April to May 2014 was to secure key areas around the cities in the Donbas region that were controlled by pro-Russian separatists. This was done to prepare for a final offensive to retake these cities once the national mobilization was completed. The goal was to isolate and surround the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk (Kofman, et al., 2017).

When the Ukrainian operation succeeded and the army regained much of territory from separatists, the Russian government made threatened to use military force and deployed a large number of its military personnel to the border regions of Donetsk and Luhansk as well as other areas of Ukraine in the spring and summer of 2014 (Katchanovski, 2016). Russia would normally avoid a conventional war due to the military costs. Russia's goal of destabilizing Ukraine did not require a full-scale war, but it had to resort to mobilization due to an unsuccessful proxy war. They aimed to use the Donbas region as a means of exerting influence and control over Ukraine's political direction (Kofman, et al., 2017).

The violent conflict in Donbas can be characterized as a civil war with the involvement of both internal and external forces. The initial participation of local separatist groups, as well as the presence of local and non-local individuals in leadership and armed positions, suggest that the origins of the conflict are rooted in a civil war (Katchanovski, 2016).

After the conflicts, the separatists succeeded and declared Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) as independent states which received no recognition from the United Nations. To end the conflict in the region, an agreement was signed on September 5 2014 in Minsk, Belarus. The Minsk Protocol implemented a ceasefire, which failed as the LPR and DPR forces launched a military operation into Ukrainian-controlled areas (Walker & Grytsenko, 2015). To prevent a complete Russian invasion, a second round of high-level talks was organized by the EU in Minsk in February 2015, resulting in a new peace agreement, known as Minsk II, which was signed by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany. Minsk II also failed to bring true peace. News outlets reported that in 2015, there were daily reports of 1-3 Ukrainian soldiers killed and an additional 3-5 injured

as a result of artillery shelling across the line of contact in the Donbas region (Wynnyckyj, 2019).

The dispute was never resolved. Russia's official recognition of DPR and LPR as independent states on February 21 2022, and the authorization of the military force the next day marked the beginning of the full-scale war that is still ongoing as of February 2023.

Invasion of Ukraine

Russia's irredentist policies resulted in the full-scale military operation into Ukrainian territory on February 24 2022, which was the continuation of the war in Donbas. The Russian government began amassing its army in the region in March 2021 while denying plans to attack Ukraine (Reuters, 2022). Vladimir Putin justified the Russian government's actions by claiming that it is *denazifying* Ukraine, thus protecting the Ukrainian citizens from genocide and preventing NATO from expanding its territory (Putin, 2021).

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 was a sudden event that had global outcomes. This latest aggression against Ukraine, following the 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea, broke international political trust and resulted in potential war crimes. Five million Ukrainians fled the country within 6 weeks due to the destruction and suffering caused by the invasion. President Putin's expectation of a quick victory and a warm welcome from the Ukrainian people was not fulfilled. Alongside the military conflict, an economic war has emerged, with Western-led sanctions and Russian counter-sanctions. (Welfens, 2022).

The Russian government did not only invade a sovereign country's border integrity but also plagued its own citizens' lives. Millions of unwilling men were called to arms, and when the government was struggling to recruit new personnel, government-backed paramilitary organizations fueled the need for new blood by releasing prison inmates with the promise of their freedom. They only had to fight in the Ukrainian war for six months in exchange for their freedom in Russia or abroad. The Russian demographic structure will undoubtedly be affected by the losses and the release of such criminals into society.

This unjustified operation against Ukraine's border integrity caused a serious international crisis, including the biggest refugee crisis since World War II (Lubrani, 2022). Thousands of civilians lost their lives (United Nations, 2023), and millions were displaced. The backlash from the Russian citizens was met with severe punishment by the authorities. The media was immediately censored for any criticism of the regime.

Suppression of Civilians and the Press

The protests of war were met with repression by the Russian government. Individuals who expressed opposition to the war faced repercussions such as dismissal and expulsion from universities. Independent media outlets that reported on military operations were blocked, leading many to stop operating or refrain from covering the topic altogether due to a law that carried a sentence of up to 15 years in prison for disseminating false information about the Russian military's actions. The authorities also blocked access to popular social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

In addition, over 14,000 people, including minors, lawyers, and journalists, were detained during the first 17 days of anti-war protests. It was also reported that there have been 19,535 detentions by the Russian authorities since February 24 2022²⁰ (OVD-Info, 2022).

Press freedom was threatened with the new legislation called "Russian 2022 Laws Establishing War Censorship and Prohibiting Anti-War Statements and Calls for Sanctions". These federal laws aimed to silence the anti-war stance of media outlets. The implemented legislation criminalizes the reporting and demonstration against the war, which carries a penalty of up to 15 years in prison. These laws prohibit the dissemination of false information regarding the Russian military, advocating for an end to their deployment, and supporting sanctions against Russia (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

"Over the past few days, journalists have been leaving Russia en masse - criminal punishment for the so-called fake news about the war and the massive media censor have done their job" (Proekt, 2022).

²⁰ As of January 28 2023.

Amnesty International condemned the laws in its report. “New laws speedily passed on March 4, in a matter of just one day, by both chambers of the Russian parliament and signed by President Putin, introduced amendments to the Criminal Code and the Code of Administrative Offences severely limiting the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. These legislative initiatives were rushed through in the context of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine that will have far-reaching and devastating consequences for human rights in Russia beyond the armed conflict” (Amnesty International, 2022).

Restrictions on Civil Society

Under Putin's leadership, the Russian political elite has created an enemy group for various reasons. This group is often blamed for promoting homosexuality globally in order to decrease birth rates in Russia and maintain the dominance of the West. Promoting gay rights is a calculated strategy to make Russians more easily controlled by the capitalist elite. “In September 2013, a Russian diplomat repeated this argument at a conference on human rights in China. Gay rights were nothing more than the chosen weapon of a global neoliberal conspiracy, meant to prepare virtuous traditional societies such as Russia and China for exploitation. President Putin took the next step at his global summit at Valdai a few days later, comparing same-sex partnerships to Satanism. He associated gay rights with a Western model that “opens a direct path to degradation and primitivism, resulting in a profound demographic and moral crisis.” The Russian parliament had by then passed a law “For the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values” (Snyder, 2018).

Putin’s executive order in 2020 to remove term limits caused controversy as it was undemocratic; and the amendment included not only a removal of term limits but also a ban on same-sex marriages (Chadwick, 2020). This is a prime example of a sanction imposed by an authoritarian government as it violates at least a part of society’s lifestyle.

Political Repression

The Russian government did not only suppress civilians and the media but the political opposition was also targeted for voicing their opinions about the government and protesting the invasion of Ukraine.

The most recent political repression before the Ukrainian crisis was the poisoning and incarceration of Alexei Navalny, a prominent opposition leader and anti-corruption activist. During a flight to Moscow, the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation felt ill and went into a coma (BBC, 2020). He later was admitted to a hospital in Berlin and recovered. Toxicology reports later confirmed that he was poisoned with a Soviet-era chemical nerve agent (Bundesregierung, 2020). Upon his return to Russia, he was detained and sent to prison (The Moscow Times, 2021).

Experts appointed by the UN Human Rights Council stated that the Russian government was behind the poisoning (United Nations, 2021). However, the government denied the allegations of the opposition leader's poisoning.

This incident marks a common practice applied by oppressive regimes. They resort to different methods to silence and sometimes eliminate dissident figures. In a fair democratic system, people from all views can voice their opinions without repercussions. Glorification and zealous protection of a single political ideal are infallible characteristics of oppressive regimes.

Putin's rise to power was a result of personal ambition and political skill, as well as consolidation of his position with carefully planned interventions. He continues to be a contested figure due to his actions and is criticized worldwide, and there are even claims about him going mentally unstable. Although he previously stated that he would step down as president in 2024 after his term ends (Reuters, 2018), his soon-to-be 24-year rule is already filled with blood, tears, and suffering. Putin currently presents an unpreferable example of excessive political power. It would not be a far-fetched prediction to claim that Putin will continue to control Russian politics even if he steps down as the president. Russia needs time

for restoration, as the old Soviet generation is still very much alive, and they are inclined to be ruled by their perception of strongmen. Even if Putin will be replaced with someone else, a similar personality will take his position as long as this mindset continues to exist. To grant the new generation the grace of unexploited democracy, it must be educated about its power, value of life, individualism, dignity and empathy. As a structural reform, the amendment of the constitution should be revoked to deny any more removal of term limits.

Chapter III: The Case of Türkiye

The Turkish land, known as Anatolia, was home to the Ottoman Empire until its abolition in November 1922. The long-lasting empire lost most of its remaining borders before World War I, partly due to the emerging nationalism idea it caused. The Ottoman Empire was facing economic decline, political instability, and social unrest. These factors, along with the empire's inability to modernize and adapt to changing circumstances, expedited its decline and weakened its ability to maintain control over its territories.

Externally, the Ottoman Empire was under pressure from European states that were seeking to expand their empires and influence in the region. The empire was vulnerable to this threat as it had already weakened, and it was eventually forced to cede territory through a series of treaties and agreements. Some of the major territories that the Ottoman Empire lost before World War I include: Egypt, Libya, The Balkans and Palestine.²¹ (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009)

Following the end of World War I, the victorious Allied Powers aimed to disintegrate the Ottoman Empire following the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920. (Kinross, 1977) The Turkish National Movement rejected the agreement as it meant the end of their country, and the agreement was never ratified. The immediate danger of losing their homeland sparked an unprecedented nationalist sensation in the Turkish people, and the liberation movement leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, sought to found an independent national assembly on April 23 1920. The newly-founded government under Mustafa Kemal successfully made their way into negotiations in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1922. The Turkish delegation, after prolonged negotiations, signed the Lausanne Treaty on July 24 1923, in which they secured a sovereign Turkish territory in exchange for giving up Arab parts that were rich with oil²². (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) The Lausanne Treaty provided future security for the Turkish liberation movement, as it ensured recognition of the Turkish state by the Allied Powers. As the

²¹ Egypt was declared a British protectorate in 1914 after years of British influence and control. Libya was occupied by Italy in 1911 and formally annexed in 1934. The Balkan states gained their independence during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Palestine was conquered by the British Empire during World War I and it has been a disputed area ever since.

²² The disputed city of Mosul was resolved between Türkiye and Great Britain later in 1926.

founding father Kemal Atatürk said: “I don’t think it is necessary any further to compare the principles underlying the Lausanne Peace Treaty with other proposals for peace. This treaty is a document declaring that all efforts, prepared over centuries, and thought to have been accomplished through the Sevres Treaty to crush the Turkish nation have been in vain. It is a diplomatic victory unheard of in Ottoman history!”²³

The Foundation of the Turkish Republic

The time to found an independent republic came after the signing of the Lausanne treaty, and the modern Republic of Türkiye (formerly known as Turkey) was founded on October 29 1923 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. After the independence, a team of distinguished government officials under the supervision of Atatürk implemented a series of swift political, economic, and social reforms that transformed Türkiye into the secular, democratic, and modern nation-state that it is today (or was until recently).

Atatürk's reforms included the adoption of a new constitution in 1921 (the Ottoman law was based on religion and it had lost its purpose) that established a parliamentary democracy and the separation of powers, the adoption of a new Turkish alphabet and the promotion of the use of the Turkish language, new education and art institutions, and changing of the economy into a state-controlled one. Atatürk also implemented a series of land and legal reforms that aimed to modernize and westernize the country, and he worked to cultivate strong relations with other countries around the world. The Atatürk Reforms were ambitious and far-reaching, and they changed many aspects of Turkish society and government. “Consolidating their hold on the bureaucracy, the Kemalists²⁴ set on a path of rapid westernization, via policies formulated at the center and implemented by the bureaucracy.” (Turan, 1984)

The Turkish revolution was different from other revolutions at the time as it “completely rejected the religious basis of legitimation and attempted instead to develop a secular national one as the major ideological parameter of the new collectivity, with very little emphasis on the social components of ideologies.” (Eisenstadt, 1984) Given the fact that Turkish society

²³ From Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s Great Speech in 1927. It was a 36-hour speech that spanned over six days.

²⁴ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s ideology is called Kemalism.

was pious at heart, achieving this proved challenging as some parts of the society revolted against these reforms. The revolts were especially frequent after the Hat Revolution in 1925. In less than three months, 57 people were executed, and hundreds were jailed. (Aksoy, 2018) Turkish government's punishment for the non-compliance of Kemalist reforms was swift and harsh, as they were seen as detrimental acts instigated by the Western agents that undermine the foundation of the new modern republic.

Possibly the most important step to become a westernized secular state was the ratification of the 1924 Constitution in 1928. Article 2 of the 1924 Constitution stated that the religion of the Turkish State is Islam, the language is Turkish, and the capital is Ankara. The Turkish state gained a theocratic feature with this article as the former Ottoman Empire. The 1928 ratification, however, removed the mention of any religion and indisputably ensured secularism as the main ideology. (Gözübüyük, 2017)

Another crowning achievement of Turkish democracy was the enactment of a law granting women the right to vote and run for office in local elections in 1934. It took until 1945 for Turkish women to gain the right to vote and run for office in national elections, with the adoption of a new electoral law that granted all citizens over the age of 21 the right to vote, regardless of gender. (Inan, 1977) "Women's suffrage in 1934 was a remarkable achievement for the time as women were allowed to actively participate in the elections and became political candidates a decade or more before women in such Western European countries as France, Italy, and Belgium — a mark of Atatürk's far-reaching social changes" (Oxford University Press, 2012).

"Among his many accomplishments, the following stand out in particular: the creation of a modern republican state structure with a constitution, an elected parliament and other western-type institutions; founding of a political party as the chief agent of modernization, and brief experiments with a multi-party system; recruitment of a modern bureaucracy; building of a new capital at Ankara; disestablishment of religion by removing religious officials from their institutionalized positions and secularizing education and the courts; emancipation of women both politically (through passive, then active voting rights) and

socially (by instituting monogamy and discouraging the veil); adoption of the Latin in place of the Arabic alphabet, and reformation of the Turkish language; and urging men to adopt western clothing” (Landau, 1984).

These were initially the most important reforms that turned Türkiye into a more democratic state where regular elections were held, people were free from the influence of religious courts under the law and women’s political participation was encouraged. Although not a full-fledged democratic system by today’s standards, it was revolutionary at the time. It was not entirely democratic as most of Atatürk’s reforms were top-down. The reforms received support from a large portion of Turkish society. These revitalizing reforms, unsurprisingly, were not welcomed by the clergy, the Ottoman royalists, and especially Great Britain, whose interests were at stake.²⁵ (Wright, 1926)

The Democratic Progress After 1960

Turkish society enjoyed a mostly intact democratic system up until 1960, except for the 1946 elections where there were “open ballots and votes were counted in secret”. (Akşin, 1997) It was an example of abuse of power, as the political party that committed this, Republican People’s Party (CHP), was founded by Atatürk personally.

1960 marked an important year of the Turkish history of democracy. The loser of the shady 1946 elections, the Democrat Party (DP), won in the 1950 elections partly due to the removal of restrictions that were put in place in 1946. It was the ruling party until May 27 1960, when a coup d’état was carried out by a group of military officials led by General Cemal Gürsel. The coup was motivated by a desire to address economic instability, political polarization, and a perceived threat to the secular order from religious and ideological movements. It left a dent in the country’s ongoing democratic mentality.

The coup was successful in overthrowing the government of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and his Democrat Party, which had been in power since 1950. Menderes and several other

²⁵ Great Britain’s and the newly-founded Turkish government’s interests clashed about Mosul, a territory in Iraq. Atatürk’s reforms directly opposed Britain’s interests as one of the most important ideas behind them was border integrity. The situation was resolved in Britain’s favor.

government officials were arrested and later tried and executed for crimes against the state in 1961. (Akşin, 1997) Menderes was the first and only democratically elected leader to be overthrown and executed in Turkish history. The execution is a reminder of the fragility of democratic institutions and the importance of protecting them from those who would seek to undermine them.

Following the coup, Democrat Party was closed, and a new government was established under the leadership of General Gürsel, who intended to modernize and liberalize the country. These reforms included the establishment of a new constitution, the promotion of economic development and foreign investment, and the protection of individual rights and freedoms.

The 1961 Constitution of the Turkish Republic brought many changes for a more democratic Türkiye. The most prominent changes were as follows: the adoption of a pluralist democratic system and a bicameral legislature for the first time, the foundation of the Constitutional Court, and the removal of the President's alignment with political parties. The new constitution also ensured a social welfare system where local authorities' span of authority increased. With the introduction of the new constitution, "the state became a 'social state' promising 'social and economic rights', with provisions for the State to plan economic development so as to achieve social justice, and individuals to have the right to own and inherit property and have the freedom of work and enterprise." (Ahmad, 2003)

The coup of 1960 resulted in a difficult period for Türkiye. The military government responsible for the coup established the National Unity Committee, a body of military and civilian leaders tasked with assisting the cabinet and coordinating the country's transition to a new government.

The Committee imposed strict censorship on the press, suppressed opposition parties and declared martial law in Istanbul and Ankara. (Armaoğlu, 1996) The next year, NUC allowed the reemergence of democracy, and following the general elections in 1961, Türkiye's first coalition government was founded. It is important to note that the closed-down DP's power base remained intact, and the two new neo-Democrat parties got 48.5% of the votes in total, well enough to form the government. However, the junta did not let these parties form the

government as they shared roots with DP. The same year also marked the foundation of the first political party that had socialist policies, the Worker's Party of Turkey (TIP). The party got 3% of the total votes in the 1965 elections which was a milestone in a pluralist democracy. (Akşin, 1997)

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Türkiye experienced a period of political instability and economic crisis. Frequent government changes, high inflation, and a large public debt discouraged millions of citizens. People are reminiscing about those times even now. The current government has been in power for so long partly due to this instability in the past, as they have been skillfully making propaganda about their ability to ensure a somewhat stable country for their supporters.

In 1971, the military issued a memorandum, warning the Justice Party (AP) government about its policies and actions, which it saw as a deviation from Atatürk's principles. The memorandum led to the resignation of the Prime Minister and the formation of a new government. This memorandum was not a government takeover in the classic sense. However, it still meant a blow to democracy as it was a top-down warning that the government had to abide by. Additionally, "the Workers' Party was proscribed on the same day as the memorandum was issued, its leaders accused of carrying out communist propaganda and supporting Kurdish separatism" (Ahmad, 2003).

1980 Military Coup

In 1980, a group of military officers led a coup and established a new interim government once more. The junta removed Süleyman Demirel²⁶'s government, abolished the cabinet and shelved the constitution. It marked the start of an oppressive period in Turkish politics. The junta founded National Security Council after the coup, replacing the legislation with a group of high-ranking officers and preparing the law that abolished many political parties.

The reasons for the military intervention were the prevalence of extrajudicial murders and the ambiguous political landscape. After the coup, the junta held elections in 1983. This was the third intervention in just two decades, damaging the democratic progress beyond repair. This military coup is generally believed to be the main reason behind the emergence of political Islam in Türkiye today.

A law dated 1981 abolished 18 political parties, including the first political party of Türkiye, the Republican People's Party (CHP) (Onuş, 2021). Only three parties were allowed to enter the 1983 elections. A tightened democratic environment left too few choices for people to express their opinions. The junta loosened its strong grip and allowed the foundation of new political parties after the election. The limitation of choices by the junta drove people to follow right-wing parties that were allowed to participate in the 1987 elections.

One of the most prominent right-wing parties, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) emerged as a powerful political force in Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s, known for its ultra-nationalist and populist policies. It played a role in the 1971 military memorandum and the 1980 military coup. MHP has been the main political party representing conservative Turkism over the years. Now it is nothing more than a populist bandwagon party.

Apart from the emergence of MHP, arguably the most important outcome altering the democratic process was the introduction of the election threshold of a whopping 10%.

²⁶ Süleyman Demirel was the former seven-time prime minister and the 9th president of the Turkish Republic, who died in 2015. A prominent politician for over four decades, he was known for his humble origins and witty attitude that won his supporters.

The law on legislative election dated June 10 1983 introduced a threshold of 10%. According to this, any political party below 10% of the total votes would not be able to get into parliament. An amendment to the same law, dated March 31 2022, reduced the threshold to 7%, still one of the highest in the world (Turkish Grand National Assembly, 1983). It is interesting to note that MHP's votes have been in a downward trend recently. Given that they are the prominent supporters of the ruling party and the fear that MHP will not win enough votes to enter the parliament, the motive behind the reduction of the threshold can be understood. It is highly doubtful that the ruling parties considered the threshold too high to be democratic because if they did, they would reduce it much earlier than 2022.

It is worth noting that this period was challenging for Türkiye as the country was trying to establish and solidify its democratic institutions while also dealing with economic and social challenges, it was a period of great change and uncertainty, with political instability and economic crisis being prevalent.

With the coup, the army aimed to restore order and initiate a new political system. In 1982, a new constitution was approved by referendum. The president, according to the new legislation, would have a 7-year term and could appoint the prime minister and dismiss the parliament. The balance of power had changed in favor of the president to promote stronger governments. The Senate was abolished and the Grand National Assembly became the only legislative power (Turkish Grand National Assembly, 1982). The short-lived bicameral system was no more. The 10% threshold (one of the highest in the world at the time) was introduced to reduce the influence of smaller parties.

As renowned historian Ahmad wrote, “the principal concern of the junta was the political and institutional restructuring of the country and they set about the task with great abandon. They were determined to de-politicize the urban youth who had come to play such an important role since the 1960s. That required crushing every manifestation of dissent from the left, including revolutionaries, social democrats, trade unionists, and even members of the nuclear disarmament. The extreme right, represented by the MHP, was crushed though its ideology was adopted in the form of the so-called ‘Turkish-Islamic synthesis’” (Ahmad,

1993). The undemocratic tendency in Türkiye today is an outcome of this very ideology. The Islamists succeeded thanks to their manipulation of the people in the name of religion, which has an unshakable position for many Turkish people.

The Period of the Motherland Party

1983 was an important year for Turkish politics, firstly because of the dissolution of the National Security Council (Ahmad, 1985), and secondly, the junta's reluctant acceptance of Turgut Özal's victory for the Motherland Party (AP) in the 1983 elections against the Nationalist Democracy Party (MDP), a party led by the army general Turgut Sunalp. The junta explicitly supported the MDP, but the public, who was worn down by the breakdown of law and order, the galloping inflation and shortages of basic goods, was not keen on being ruled by an authoritarian army rule once more. Turgut Özal emerged in such an environment as a technocrat who had close ties to financial circles in the West, namely the IMF and the World Bank (Ahmad, 1993). He was primarily preferred for his economic reforms that transformed Türkiye into the liberal, free-market economy today.

Although the junta was dubious about Özal, they granted him the authority to issue edicts without the need for approval by the parliament, thanks to his connections. The edicts had the same power as the laws. This was considered undemocratic, the parliament even issued a statement deeming its illegitimacy (Turkish Grand National Assembly, 1990). The legislative power, which is an essential mechanic of a democratic system, was ignored with this authorization.

Turgut Özal gained nationwide popularity with his successful economic policies which made Türkiye grow rapidly in the late 80s. Thanks to these reforms, "Türkiye has emerged as the "paragon of export-led growth" and an inspiring example of stabilization and liberalization" (Çeçen, Doğruel, & Doğruel, 1994).

Özal's AP came first in the 1987 elections thanks to these developments. Its share of the vote declined, but it increased its representation in parliament. It was because "the electoral law was amended four times between 1983 and 1987, adding to its complexity. The amendments

favored the ruling party even more by increasing its representation at the expense of the small parties which failed to garner 10 per cent of the vote and thus won no representation” (Ahmad, 1993). Before the election, the junta's restrictions on politicians' political rights were restored. Demirel came back as the head of the True Path Party (DYP), which received around 20% of the vote. Necmettin Erbakan, a well-known right-wing political figure, returned to politics as well with his newly formed Welfare Party (RP) (George & Stenhouse, 1988). Erbakan's former National Salvation Party (MSP) was closed down by the junta in 1980. The Welfare Party is the predecessor of Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) which has been in power since 2002.

The late 1980s Turkish politics was characterized by “fragmentation of the party system, a high volatility, the split of both political camps into two major parties and the rise of Islamists and Nationalists. In the 1990s, the rise and outlawing of the Islamist RP, has led to renewed intra- and inter-party debates about the constitutional conformity of Islamic political activities in the country” (Schüler, 2001).

Prime Minister Turgut Özal was elected president in 1989, consequently leaving the party leadership. After he departed from the role, the party leadership was taken by the leader of the liberal section, Mesut Yılmaz, who also became prime minister until the next elections in 1991 (Schüler, 2001). The absence of a strong popular leader, coupled with a freed group of politicians that was previously banned, enabled a suitable environment for the formerly smaller parties to rise. The importance of this change in politics is the rise of the RP which was previously banned from politics for its far-right policies. The RP gained popularity in the provinces with high Kurdish populations due to its use of religion, effective organizational skills, and promise of a fairer world under an Islamic brotherhood, leading to a steady increase in its votes in these areas (Kirişçi & Winrow, 2004). Given their anti-Kurdish stance, it is notable to mention that the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) entered the elections through the RP lists. An anti-Kurdish political group gaining votes in the Kurdish-populated areas showed that the people attributed more value to Islamic values than their ethnic identity.

The most important contribution Turgut Özal made to both democracy and the economic development of Turkey was the adjustment of the economy to market needs based on supply and demand, the freeing of the exchange rate, and the expansion of freedom in many areas. Özal also facilitated the claim to the squatter lands by the rural people who had migrated to the cities, thereby greatly helping the growth of the middle classes. As a result, the differences between rural and urban areas decreased, a large portion of the population received the opportunity to receive high education, and the social background and philosophy of the elites became more diverse. The internal migration from the countryside to the city deeply affected the structure and thought of political parties, and played a major role in establishing democracy from the bottom (Karpat, 2010).

While the country saw economic improvements, it is important to note that Özal's presidential position which he held until his death in 1993 also paved the way for Islamist factions to rise. Özal's personal relations and explicit support for politically influential Islamic sects helped these radical groups which were being persecuted through the 1970s become the new norm of political power. The Kurdish issue was another topic that has been widely debated and emerged in this period but will not be elaborated on in this work.

The Coalition Period

While Turkish politics had many coalitions before, the period mentioned here started in 1995. The collapse of the coalition between Prime Minister Tansu Çiller's²⁷ conservative True Path Party (DYP) and her junior partner, the social democratic Republican People's Party (CHP), led to a political crisis. This resulted in early elections in December 1995, in which the RP, narrowly won with 21.3% of the vote and 158 seats in the National Assembly. This result caused concern among secular Turkish voters, who feared that Welfare, under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan, would increase the role of Islam in the country. The Islamist party's harsh criticism of Turkey's close ties with the West, NATO membership, and efforts to join the EU raised concerns in the West (Sayarı, 1996).

²⁷ Tansu Çiller was the first and only female Prime Minister in the history of Türkiye.

The unprecedented rise of the RP also resulted in victory in the 1994 local elections in Türkiye's two largest cities, Istanbul and Ankara. The current Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then a member of the RP and close ally to its leader Necmettin Erbakan, became the mayor of Istanbul after his party's victory.

The rise of political Islam in Türkiye posed a threat to Western-oriented Kemalist principles that laid the foundation of the republic. While the Islamic resurgence dates back to 1950 with the victory of the Democrat Party, Atatürk's vision remained largely unchallenged until RP's succession (Sayarı, 1997). Their members openly criticized and promulgated policies that undermine the very values of a modern republic. These actions did not cause the party to lose popularity, in fact, the RP was nothing short of a pioneer. They managed to attract a much greater variety of supporters than any previous Islamist party. Their supportive base included not only conservative urban folk but also intellectuals, wealthy industrialists and professionals (White, 2002). Their success was also due to the decreased trust and policy-making ability of the center-right parties that ruled the country throughout the 1990s.

The Constitutional Court of Türkiye opened a case against the RP on the ground of anti-secular policies. Laicism, one of the founding ideologies of the modern republic, was threatened by a political party that had members orchestrating a new system to be ruled under Islamic law.

The notorious 28 February process, also popularly called the *post-modern coup*, began with a National Security Council meeting. The army issued a memorandum, ultimately forcing prime minister Necmettin Erbakan to resign. Previously, Erbakan lost considerable credibility due to his controversial actions. One scandal was the meeting between Erbakan and the then-leader of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi. The meeting took place in Libya on October 6 1996, as part of the prime ministerial visit to Africa. During the meeting, the former dictator explicitly insulted Erbakan and condemned Türkiye's cooperation with the United States. He stated that the Turkish government had no place to oppress and persecute Kurdish people and that the government should enable a Kurdish state to be founded. Erbakan's inability to provide an acceptable response met with intense criticism (Çakır, 2020). Possibly

an even more scandalous event took place on January 11 1997, when prime minister Erbakan invited more than fifty cult leaders to the prime ministerial residence for an Iftar meal. Currently, the most wanted man in Türkiye, Fethullah Gülen, was among the invitees but did not attend. Openly organizing an official invitation in a government complex with controversial cult leaders unendured by the progressive fractions of society was seen as a challenge against the very republic itself (Çaplı, Alankuş, & Timisi, 1999). The public and military backlash was too serious to ignore, thus leading to the memorandum.

However controversial he might have been, the forceful resignation of prime minister Erbakan was a blow to democracy. Even the most pro-democratic fractions seemed indifferent to this bloodless coup (Karpat, 2010).

The looming closure of the RP was foreseen by a fraction of the party that called itself the “National Vision Movement”. The members of this movement managed to establish a new Islamist party before RP’s closure by the Constitutional Court on January 16 1998. The newly formed Virtue Party (FP) “continued to attract a strong and equally diverse following” (White, 2002). Less than a year after its foundation, another party closure case was opened against the party for incitement of anti-secular activities. The party was closed down in 2001 and two of its members were dismissed from the parliament (NTV, 2001).

FP presents an important case in Turkish democratic progress. Before the party’s closure in 2001, two fronts of the party clashed. The “traditionalists” formed the Felicity Party (SP) under Recai Kutan, and the “reformists” formed the Justice and Development Party (AKP) under Abdullah Gül, who then proceeded to become President of Türkiye. The AKP is the current dominant party in the Turkish parliament, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Erdoğan's Rise to Power

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was born in 1954 in Rize, Türkiye. He attended religious schools throughout his early years. Records from his youth picture him as a successful orator (Brittanica, 2005). His religious education made him an avid supporter of political Islam. He later enrolled in Marmara University, and it was when he met Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of the Welfare Party and Erdoğan's mentor. The dispute about whether he graduated from university has never been resolved because a diploma or a graduation certificate is yet to be presented (Algül, et al., 2019). This poses a problem as it violates the constitution. According to article 101 of the Turkish constitution: "the President is elected directly by the people among Turkish citizens who are over the age of forty, have completed higher education, and are eligible to be elected as a member of parliament" (Turkish Grand National Assembly, 2017).

Erdoğan began his political career in 1976 when he became the leader of a local branch of the National Salvation Party (MSP). MSP's closure and the military coup forced him to pursue a career in the private sector. In 1983, he re-entered politics with the RP, which was the direct successor of MSP. He held various positions in the party, including a district head, member of the central executive committee, and province head for Istanbul until 1994 when he was elected as the mayor of Istanbul. During his three-year term as mayor, he gained popularity and completed projects started by the previous mayor. After reciting a poem at a meeting in 1997, he was charged with "inciting hostility and enmity through religious and racial differences" and sentenced to 10 months in prison following the military intervention on February 28. His term as the mayor ended in 1999, he then served his time later in the same year (Algül, et al., 2019).

With the closure of RP, he joined the FP where he had close relations with the reformist front. The reformist front proceeded to set up AKP in 2001. The party won the elections held on November 3 2002. President Ahmet Necdet Sezer appointed Abdullah Gül, the vice president of AKP, to form the government. Even though his party came first in the elections with 34.3%

of the votes, Erdoğan could not enter the parliament as he was banned from politics due to his charges in 1997.

Curiously, one of the electoral districts, Siirt, allegedly had mismanagement issues during the voting procedure. AKP appealed to the Supreme Board of Elections for annulment of the election results in Siirt (NTV, 2002). Erdoğan's political ban was lifted with the cooperation of Deniz Baykal, the leader of the largest opposition party, CHP. Thanks to this amendment in the constitution, Erdoğan was elected as a member of the parliament in the renewed elections and founded his first government in 2003 as the prime minister (Yalçın, 2014). Given his position as the leader of the main opposition party, Deniz Baykal's endeavors to support Erdoğan's political career were questioned by his voter base. The reason behind this motive is unknown.

Erdoğan's road to the prime ministerial position was also due to his close relations with the West. Erdoğan went to 14 European countries and attended the Copenhagen Summit in 2002 to advertise the Turkish government's interests in the West (Robins, 2003). Erdoğan, shrewdly, was showing the world that they were nothing to be afraid of and that the Turkish government was ready to become a member of the European Union. This was also to attract a left-leaning voter base, whose interests lay within the West. AKP's initial libertarian policies are striking to look at now. Considering how much they have tergiversated since then; it is truly a curious case of political power-grabbing. The Western governments were also inclined to cooperate with the new Islamic order, only with a few exceptions. A report even grouped political Islamists into four categories and stated that "it is tempting to choose the traditionalists (one of the four types of Islamists) as the primary agents for fostering democratic Islam, and indeed this appears to be the course that the West is inclined to take (Benard, 2003).

While they are not explained here in detail, the effects of the 2001 economic crisis should not be overlooked for AKP's success. The crisis was due to a regional recession and the devastating earthquake that hit Kocaeli in 1999. The coalition government founded after

Erbakan's resignation was left in shackles, and the voter base was looking for an alternative (Robins, 2003).

Overall, Erdoğan's initial political success was thanks to an almost Machiavellian political cunning, the crumbling trust for the government in power and broad support for AKP from the opposition and abroad alike.

Developments During Erdoğan's Reign

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been the head of government either as the prime minister, (2003–2014) or the president (2014–present) continuously for two decades. He's currently the longest-serving premier in Turkish history. He was initially a moderate politician, attracting a wide spectrum of voters from all political backgrounds thanks to his tendency to bring Türkiye closer to the EU. "Prime minister Erdoğan, President Gül and the new cabinet argued strenuously that they were pursuing it not simply as a matter of form; that the party, despite its Islamist origins, was genuinely committed to the quest for EU membership" (Robins, 2003). His efforts were proved unsuccessful due to Türkiye's lack of adaptation to EU regulations. It was also because that the EU kept halting the accession proceedings (Reuters, 2019). AKP's efforts even caused the nationalist elites to distance themselves from the EU, although they have been known to have a pro-EU stance. The same reverse effect can be observed in religious circles as well. AKP, a strong follower of Islam, aimed to raise a *pious generation*. AKP's, and more importantly, Erdoğan's actions were met with a strong reaction within the young generation against the religion itself (KONDA, 2022) (KONDA, 2018). While the role of technology in the rise of irreligiousness in Türkiye cannot be overlooked, AKP's selective policies favoring its believer base unintentionally caused a more *zetetic* youth. These selective policies include repeated tax increases for alcoholic beverages (which are forbidden by Islam), prioritizing religious schools, and funding mosque constructions (there are approximately 90,000 mosques and most of them are not visited). Converting people into atheism in Türkiye, where, in the past, 95% of people identified themselves as Muslim, is a considerable success.

Erdoğan's political spectrum had undergone important changes during his reign. What started as a moderationist, inclusive policy-making continued having discriminative, exclusivist, and offensive tones. This work includes the developments related to the democratic status of Türkiye.

The First Government of AKP (2003–2007)

AKP's first government under Erdoğan brought reforms to ensure a potential EU candidacy. The seemingly attractive policies to ready Türkiye for meeting the Copenhagen criteria proved unsuccessful. Cyprus, an island of strategic importance to Türkiye that was divided in 1974 by Northern and Southern governments (backed by Türkiye and Greece, respectively), continued to be a problem as well. The Nicosia government, as a member of the EU, threatened to veto Türkiye's application if Ankara did not lift its embargo on shipping (Beunderman, 2006). The efforts to meet the criteria were halted for the infrastructural deficiencies and the opening of the new chapters by the EU seemed to postpone the process indefinitely. Ankara saw itself as a natural ally of the EU in their long history (Adam, 2012). Joining the EU would economically and strategically benefit Türkiye. The initial affiliation between AKP and the EU was also due to the EU's support of Erdoğan.

It is widely believed that the first government had the "least AKP" characteristics of AKP compared to the later years. There was less government pressure because AKP was not completely incorporated into the system yet.

Gezi Park Protests

It was on May 28 2013 when a group of protesters organized a sit-in to contest an urban development plan without a reconstruction permit in Gezi Park in Taksim, Istanbul. Initially a peaceful protest against the planned demolition of the park to replace it with a shopping mall and an Ottoman-era building, Gezi Park protests culminated with a nationwide counter-movement against the reactionism of the surging political Islam. More people joined the demonstrations to call for greater democracy and the protection of civil liberties. The protests were far from peaceful by the end, with the law enforcement officers relentlessly punishing

protesters for just being at the scene. The violence “was not only non-proportional but also a threat to their right to live with dignity and to act and resist freely”. Resulting in 10 deaths (including a 15-year-old boy named Berkin Elvan, who later became a symbol of the resistance) and 8000 injured, the violence exercised by the government against the protesters was “aiming to reduce the protesters to powerlessness and undercut their right to human dignity” (Özdemir, 2015).

The Gezi protests marked a shift in urban activism in Turkey, as they challenged traditional ideas of identity, urban space, and democracy. By speaking out against government-led neo-liberal policies and growing repression, the protests became a routine part of urban life for many (Kapsali & Tsavdaroglou, 2016). The initial protests against the restructuring of the park transformed into a broader insurrection against the government’s intrusive policies that aimed to limit the freedoms of people with different outlooks on traditional Turkish life (Zihnioğlu, 2019). “Occupy Gezi” was the first such collective movement against the government, spread over 100 cities in Türkiye and worldwide after Berkin Elvan’s death made the news (Hürriyet, 2014) (Radikal, 2014). What Occupy Gezi started in 2013 drove people to protest the 2017 constitutional referendum, which was arguably the most dramatic step taken in Türkiye towards authoritarianism.

Corruption and Bribery Scandal

The bribery operation against government higher-ups, including four ministers, started on December 17 2013. The operation made the news for months, with voice recordings of Erdoğan and his son about illicitly moving millions of dollars becoming mainstream. The political figures and businesspeople found guilty of malpractice and bribery, were initially detained but later released without charges. The minister of economy resigned and continued to run his firm with impunity even after it was revealed that he accepted a bribe of 50 million Euros (euronews, 2022). At the time, seeing the AKP supporters’ reactions was tragicomic. The common folk was in denial of such wrongdoings even when the secret voice recordings became common knowledge, and some of them went so far as to claim that the released voice recordings of Erdoğan were edited. Other recordings revealed that Erdoğan was personally

calling media representatives to intervene with some broadcasts he did not like (Alan, 2015). It became clear that Türkiye was transformed into a *kleptocracy*²⁸.

The AKP government unsurprisingly rejected the accusations. They instead blamed a “parallel structure”, referring to the Gülen organization, led by the fugitive cult leader, Fethullah Gülen. This man and his organization are now considered the most dangerous terrorist organization in Türkiye. Curiously, they were allies before this operation. Gülen was also responsible for the attempted coup in 2016, owing to the increased tension after the scandal. The collaboration between the AKP and the Gülen dated back to the creation of the party. Having had an influential position within the Islamist cycle of politics for several decades, Fethullah Gülen had a deteriorating relationship with the previous Islamist prime minister, Erbakan. After the collapse of Erbakan’s MSP which ultimately led to the creation of AKP, Gülen sided with Erdoğan. After a government investigation against private schools owned by the Gülen movement, which ultimately led to the closure of over 1000 schools (odatv, 2018), the disclosure of high-level corruption was kickstarted by Gülen.

The Attempted Military Coup

In July 2016, Turkey experienced a coup attempt which was perpetrated by certain mid-level factions within its military, causing significant turmoil. The Council for Peace at Home, as the rogue army faction named itself, launched attacks in Ankara and Istanbul. They bombed the National Assembly (Hürriyet, 2016). Many (mostly pro-AKP) civilians occupied the streets to form a blockade against the tank formations. The bloody conflict resulted in nearly 250 deaths (179 were civilians) and more than ten thousand detentions (Anadolu Ajansı, 2016).

The ruling AKP and Erdoğan blamed the supporters of Fethullah Gülen for orchestrating the coup. Consequently, the government initiated a country-wide crackdown against alleged Gülenists across various sectors, including the military, civil society, and the government. This government purge against the deeply rooted organization resulted in the shutdown of

²⁸ Government by those who seek chiefly status and personal gain at the expense of the governed (Merriam-Webster definition).

critical media organizations and the imposition of a state of emergency that lasted for two years, during which thousands of individuals were arrested on accusations of promoting terrorism. The conflict between the religious cult and the government that became known for the bribery operation culminated with this military operation to take over the Turkish government. AKP's former allies had gone rogue and bit the hand that fed it. But how did an Islamist party gain so much power in a secular country and enable an even more aggressive religious cult to staff its administration? It is important to note that the Gülen cult had already been politicized long before AKP was founded. They were allowed to institutionalize within the military as early as the 1970s. Some of the previous coalition governments that were known to oppose religious organizations had nearly 400 army personnel discharged between 1985–2003 (Uzun, Akgün, & Yücel, 2017).

Understanding the power of Islamist parties in Türkiye requires insight into foreign powers. AKP happened to be a valuable ally for the West because they needed a moderate Islamist policy-maker to allow capitalist incentives within the country. The nationalist governments in the late 1990s had statist economic policies, they focused on the domestic means of production rather than encouraging importation. But the West needed political allies that would abide by their economic demands. The government's failure after the 2001 economic crisis created a power vacuum suitable for such a potential ally, namely an Islamist party, to emerge. This party, however, had to have a different ideology, because parties that followed the national secular ideology of Türkiye were not desirable allies. The AKP suitably filled that gap as its party officials were considering politics as a money-making scheme rather than governing a country.

One of the most important founding principles the Republic of Türkiye was based on was secularism, alternatively called laicism. It is simply the separation of state affairs and religion, rendering religious institutions ineffective on the governmental level. The Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in Türkiye, established in 1924, is responsible for the “administration of the affairs related to faith and worship of the religion of Islam” (Diyanet, 2013). The exclusion of Islamic influence over state affairs was met with a backlash at the time. AKP's current Islamist stance, thanks to its power, resurfaced this resistance from

the past. Labeling the secularists as *atheists*, some followers even called for the abolishment of secularism. AKP, a relatively weak party after its first government, was targeted by the Constitutional Court for becoming a focus of anti-secular activities (Cumhuriyet, 2008). The rise of Islamic mentality, in this sense, owes to the general preconception of secularism. Political Islamism posed as a direct (and more modern) competitor to this *dated* ideology.

The fragility of Turkish secularism was apparent before AKP's time. "Turkish secularism is actually based on total state control and even repression of religion" (Fuller, 2002). AKP happened to be the only viable alternative to Turkish secularism at the time. A literature review can reveal that Erdoğan, as their favored modernist candidate, was indeed the trojan horse of the West. He received direct support from many influential American politicians and officials (Cumhuriyet, 2022). The claim that the West had a tendency to support Islamist ideas can be examined by other reports and publications (Benard, 2003) (Kirişci & Sloat, 2019) (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008). However, the supported political figure became *too* powerful after ruling the country for over a decade.

Erdoğan's power reached an unprecedented level that defied any notion of democracy after the 2017 constitutional referendum.

The Constitutional Referendum

The Turkish government, with increasing concerns about its integrity due to the attempted coup in the previous year, held a constitutional referendum in 2017 that introduced structural changes to the political system by centralizing power in the presidency. The consolidation of power in the President was considered a solution to overcome the harmful activities perpetrated by *treacherous agents* within the system. The proposed reform would remove checks and balances to Erdoğan's power by giving him the ability to issue decrees, declare a state of emergency, appoint top officials and dissolve the parliament (Reuters, 2017).

The referendum was contentious, and the opposition campaign faced extensive oppression, such as the detention of opposition leaders and journalists and the closure of dissident media organizations. Scandalously, the Supreme Board of Elections, explicitly violating the

electoral law, decided that unstamped ballots would be accepted as valid after a request by the AKP (OSCE, 2017). Although the legitimacy of the referendum was disputed, and there were allegations of irregularities, the affirmative vote narrowly prevailed. Consequently, there was a concentration of power in the presidency, which weakened checks and balances. The opposition considered the referendum process anti-democratic, let alone the results.

The AKP, having lost a fraction of its supporters, was backed by its former opponent, the ultra-nationalist MHP. Erdoğan gained immense de facto power thanks to his supporters. According to the amended constitution, the President would be able to appoint and dismiss vice presidents, ministers, and senior public officials. The authority to regulate the principles and procedures for their appointments through presidential decrees, decide on the use of the Turkish Armed Forces, and issue presidential decrees on matters related to executive authority was also granted to him as promulgated (Official Gazette, 2017).

This referendum, even only by eliminating the power of the legislation, gained ironically an anti-democratic status. The current system allows a return to the parliamentary system only if there is a congressional resolution with 360 votes out of the 600 members. It is a daunting task because it requires strong coalitions or a single party's dominance over the parliament.

Initially a democratically elected party, AKP completed its *political cycle*²⁹ with the transition to the presidential system.

The Re-Election in Istanbul

The local elections were held on March 31 2019. The results were almost a prenotification of AKP's crumbling empire. The two largest cities in Türkiye, Ankara and Istanbul, had a change of management. Istanbul and Ankara municipalities had been under right-wing parties (RP and AKP) since 1994. Additionally, in the local elections of 2014, AKP won the mayoralty in 48 cities, including 18 metropolitan municipalities. However, in the 2019 local elections, the number of mayoral seats won by AKP decreased to 40 (BBC, 2019). The two

²⁹ Political cycle was meant to express the full democratic transition.

cities' preference for the main opposition party and eight fewer mayoralities compared to the last elections made a lasting impact on the AKP caucus.

What made the biggest impact, however, was not the loss of Ankara and Istanbul. The crippling blow to democracy was the nullification of the election in Istanbul. AKP, with its junior partner MHP, formed a conservative nationalist alliance called the People's Alliance. Due to the early unofficial results, they initially declared victory and celebrated the results. However, after the vote count, the official results had been announced and it was revealed that the duo lost by narrowly 13,000 votes. The Nation Alliance, which was formed by four opposition parties at the time, with its candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu, was declared victorious. Because Istanbul had more than 8,3 million voters (Anadolu Ajansı, 2019), the narrow victory of the Nation Alliance fueled AKP's suspicions. Being the most powerful party with all the political instruments at its disposal, AKP did not hesitate to contest the results. The People's Alliance filed a complaint to the Supreme Board of Elections for a re-run of the elections. Istanbul was especially important for AKP because it was the starting point of Erdoğan's political career as the mayor and it generated nearly one-third of Türkiye's GDP. The re-run in May yielded an astounding loss for the AKP, with its candidate Binali Yıldırım losing with a 10 per cent difference. Ekrem İmamoğlu, the opposition's candidate, received more votes in all districts of the city compared to the previous election in March, largely due to increased support from other opposition groups. Meanwhile, Yıldırım lost votes in all districts except for two (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2019) (Çağaptay, 2022).

One would almost think that even AKP supporters showed resilience against the increasing authoritarian tendencies of the government. Istanbul happens to be a proper representative of the Turkish demographics as it has elements from the whole political spectrum. That being said, the voter base of AKP in Istanbul would show similar behavior to that of Türkiye. Regardless of the results, the nullification of any election without sound proof of gerrymandering is a flagrant violation of people's will, and a clear indicator of an authoritarian, oppressive regime. The results of this election will probably echo into the next elections in May 2023.

The Takeover of the Government Institutions

AKP did not only suppress freedoms, polarize people, silence the opposition and impose its ideologies, but it also took over important government institutions via various political maneuvers.

AKP's increasing authoritarian tendencies became more apparent with Erdoğan's appointment of his son-in-law as the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources in 2015. Erdoğan's then 37-year-old son-in-law, Berat Albayrak, later appointed as the Minister of Economy, was a glowing example in a country that was already filled to the brim with nepotism. Albayrak resigned from his post in 2020 due to the failing economic policies that allegedly caused bad blood between Erdoğan and him (BBC, 2020). During his time as the Minister of Economy, he blamed the *Western powers* while the economy suffered enormously (BBC, 2018).

Another successful attempt to ensure ideological dominance was the election of Abdullah Gül as President in 2007. The AKP-dominated parliament elected him to pave the way for more mobilization of Islamist ideologies. Gül helped AKP with appointments of high-ranking officials into top government institutions.

The AKP made efforts to gain control over the judiciary, as evidenced by their attempt to shut down the Union of Judges and Prosecutors in October 2007 using the Ministries of International Affairs and Justice. This union worked to safeguard the independence of the judiciary from the influence of the legislative and executive branches.

The AKP is a striking example of effective propaganda making. All things considered, their voter base is still intact after all these economic and political drawbacks. The lack of an effective strategy on the part of the opposition also helped AKP to gain popularity without even having a tangible policy. AKP's promotion of the conservative ideology and continuous efforts to weaken the nationalist Kemalist ideology caused a loosened Kemalist institutional grip over the past decade. Thanks to this, their political, cultural, and economic elite enjoys wide popular support (İşiksel, 2013). However, assuming that AKP voters were too blinded

to realize that their consequent electoral victories are *Pyrrhic*³⁰ would not be a far-fetched estimation.

Conclusion

The Russian and Turkish examples of non-democratization or “de-democratization” (Tilly, 2003) present an ever-increasing and contemporary political phenomenon. One of the main reasons for these countries’ transition lies in the personalities of their leaders. As I discussed in the first chapter, personal gains are often the driving force behind the emergence of these self-centered and dominant characteristic traits. While these traits may be found in everyone, having a decision-making power catalyzes them in scenarios where power plays an important part. The acquisition of political power may come directly from the governed through democratic means such as propaganda, referendums and direct elections, and undemocratic means like coercion, threat and political sanctions. In any case, the more authority a leader acquires, the more monocratic the system becomes.

The role of economic factors in de-democratization must not be overlooked either. Some research showed that economic improvement equates to democratization (Lipset, 1959). There was also contrasting research about the insufficiency of such a unilateral inference (Cutright, 1963). I argue that while economic factors cannot solely affect the democratic performance of a country, it is surely an important indicator. To back this claim up, at least for the cases presented, the change in demand of the Turkish people during the years of Erdoğan’s rule can be examined (The World Bank, 2022). The Turkish Lira lost most of its value during Erdoğan’s increasingly oppressive rule. The economic hardships caused people to support Erdoğan even more because they supposed that a new leader would be too incompetent to overcome the economic crises. This caused a vicious cycle where people, even after experiencing devastating economic crises, still did not opt in favor of the opposition. Similarly, in Russia, people’s economic power decreased, albeit for a different reason. Putin’s aggressive stance caused sanctions from the West, resulting in an economic

³⁰ A Pyrrhic victory is not worth winning because so much is lost to achieve it (Merriam-Webster definition).

recession (Kolesnikov & Volkov, 2021). The average income of 99% of people in Russia was higher in 1991 than it was in 2015 (Alvaredo, Chancel, Piketty, Saez, & Zucman, 2017).

Overpowered leaders undermine democratic institutions, rendering them inefficient. Government officials and bureaucrats may be aware of their futility in the presence of a strong leader, thus allowing even more room for the leader. In summary, the popularization and reverence of a political leader, if not checked and balanced, often results in authoritarianism. An unbalanced concentration of power may result in catastrophes such as the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The aggressive foreign policy Putin pursued against his *enemies* culminated in thousands of lives lost, if not millions. After a year passed of the invasion of Ukraine, the Russian government still did not renounce its claims of the denazification of Ukraine and show any signs of a peaceful resolution, that is, if it can be made at this point.

Another factor causing authoritarianism is the cultural traits of a society. The social cultures of Russia and Türkiye share similarities. In both countries, traditional values are deemed too important. While most European societies enjoy an individualist lifestyle, Russia and Türkiye are stuck with a collectivist culture. This has undoubtedly started to change; however, the current governments are the products of the predominant collectivist culture. Russia owes this tendency to its imperial history and all the more so to its former communist regime, whereas Türkiye has always been a collectivist culture at its core. This is due to its history which is filled with idolized leaders and conflicts that kickstarted people's disposition for togetherness. This cultural trait tends to give less importance to individual rights and allows for a stronger political authority, naturally resulting in a government or leader that has authoritarian characteristics. Ministers may resign and governments change uneventfully in developed democracies, but in some countries, even a change of government is a historical event.

The role of the media and civil society can be detrimental to authoritarian leaders as long as they are not suppressed and censored. However, this presents a dilemma as authoritarian governments owe their reputation to their harsh treatment against criticisms. If any media

organization is able to present reliable information to expose an authoritarian system, it may kickstart an investigation by other government institutions. While not an authoritarian example, the notorious Watergate scandal that culminated with Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974 was an example of successful investigative journalism.

The opposition parties often share a similar fate with the media organizations in an authoritarian system. Even though they may not be sacked entirely as in totalitarian systems, their scope of action is crippled by the government's limitations. The political opposition in an authoritarian system must resort to gaining power via political means as much as possible, lest an unwanted armed conflict occurs. The powerful elite may, in such a situation, label the opposition as terrorists, thus allowing them to gain more popularity. A very well-known example could be the African National Congress in South Africa. Initially an opposition party, they later resorted to sabotage and guerilla warfare against the apartheid government and were labelled as terrorists as a result (Preez, 2011).

The prevention of de-democratization may be ensured with non-amendable articles of the constitution. As in Türkiye, where the 1982 constitution put into effect the first four articles, ensuring the republic's form of government, nomocracy, inseparable integrity, language and flag. In Türkiye, even a discussion of amending these articles would be met with immediate reaction. Similarly, introducing term limits in the constitution, as discussed in the first chapter, is a precaution taken by many governments to prevent a political leader to be elected indefinitely.

The separation of powers is a key principle that must be followed without concession. Abiding by this principle will enable different branches of government to check and balance each other, thus preventing an overpowered executive. Russia and Türkiye's presidential systems do not allow the presence of a balancing decision-making body. Instead, they are highly susceptible to their leaders' personal choices, thus neutralizing democratic processes.

A free press is another essential mechanism in a transparent government. Free press enables people the right to freedom of opinion and expression according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Freedoms of speech, assembly and organization are closely linked with

the freedom of the press. Every government must promote these freedoms to enable a more humanistic society. Promotion of political rights and raising awareness will improve the turnout rate for more pluralist elections and provide a better functioning democracy. Common sense within the society will play a role in preventing extremist ideologies to form and spread, and ultimately taking power. For this reason, the education of the masses is a safeguard for the prosperity of future generations.

While a developed economy may cause people to become apolitical, similar to modern education, it usually leaves no room for extremist ideologies. People's realization of their power increases and their dependence on a strong government decreases with economic freedom.

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