Examining the impact of Turkey’s emerging Muslim Democrats on processes of party system institutionalization.

Submitted by Marc Herzog to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics, in May 2011.

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Marc Herzog .................................................................
Abstract

This doctoral thesis examines the impact of moderate Islamist parties on party system institutionalization in Turkey. Its focus is on the political emergence of ‘Muslim-Democrat’ parties. This term was coined by the scholar Vali Nasr and refers to a new sub-type of party actor in the spectrum of political Islam that employs Islamic religiousity in its electoral appeal but operates within the normative framework of liberal democracy. The central question driving this thesis is to uncover how Turkey’s Muslim-Democrat parties have had a positive effect in advancing the institutionalization of Turkey’s party system. This thesis attempts to contribute to the broader debate regarding the compatibility of Islamist parties and democratic politics in demonstrating that the former, when adopting a moderate format akin to the ‘Muslim-Democrat’ ideal type, can have a positive effect in advancing processes of party system institutionalization. This effect would then be critically discussed within the context of its impact on broader democratic consolidation. The AKP, Turkey’s incumbent party, is chosen as the case study of a Muslim Democrat party.

The theoretical basis for the empirical element of this thesis is informed by the research framework for party system institutionalization that was formulated by Mainwaring and Scully in the context of Latin American ‘third-wave’ democracies. They posit four specific factors to examine the institutional strengths of democratic party systems. This framework is used to examine the development of the Turkish party system and the impact of the Islamist parties, especially Muslim-Democrat parties, on these processes. The bulk of this thesis uses statistical analyses of aggregate electoral as well as attitudinal survey data as well as examining the political discourse of the election manifestoes of Turkey’s Islamist and Muslim-Democrat parties using content analysis as well as discourse analysis. The findings of this analysis conclude that Muslim-Democrat parties like the AKP have indeed contributed towards party system institutionalization in Turkey both in terms of stabilizing inter-party competition and social rootedness as well as increasing the legitimacy of democratic civilian politics. In that sense, their effect on party system institutionalization has had a beneficial effect on Turkey’s democratic consolidation.
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Contents

List of figures and tables ................................................................................................................. 8

Chapter 1 - Introduction .................................................................................................................. 10
1.1 Muslim-Democrat parties ........................................................................................................ 12
1.2 Focus of the thesis .................................................................................................................... 14
   1.2.1 The case of Turkey ........................................................................................................... 16
1.3 Overview of research strategies .............................................................................................. 20
1.4 Findings of the research and implications .............................................................................. 21
1.5 Summary of the thesis chapters .............................................................................................. 22

Chapter 2 - The theoretical framework ......................................................................................... 25
2.1 Democratization, democratic transition and consolidation .................................................... 25
   2.1.1 The Transitology Framework .......................................................................................... 27
   2.1.2 Political Parties ................................................................................................................ 34
   2.1.3 Religious Parties and the Islamist spectrum ................................................................. 37
   2.1.4 Party Systems .................................................................................................................. 45
2.2 Mainwaring and Scully’s research framework ........................................................................ 53

Chapter 3 - The context of the Turkish case ................................................................................. 57
3.1 A brief outline of Turkey’s history ............................................................................................ 58
   3.1.1 Flaws and Failings of Turkey’s political and party system ............................................ 71
3.2 Outline of the Turkish Islamist party spectrum ...................................................................... 81
3.3 Research question and hypotheses ......................................................................................... 95

Chapter 4 - Measuring party system stability in Turkey and the influence of
Islamist and Muslim-Democrat parties ......................................................................................... 99
4.1 - Overview of the various research methodologies, research question, aims and hypotheses of research .................................................................................................................................................. 100
   4.1.1 Longitudinal analysis of aggregate electoral and attitudinal survey data ................. 101
   4.1.2 Manifesto analysis ........................................................................................................... 101
4.2 Issues of conceptual stretching and contextual range ......................................................... 102
4.3 Operationalisation of the research questions .................................................. 104

4.3.1 Stability in inter-party competition ...................................................... 105
4.3.2 Political legitimacy ........................................................................ 106
4.3.3 Social rootedness ........................................................................ 107
4.3.4 Autonomy of party organisations .................................................... 108
4.3.5 Moderation of political discourse towards a pro-systemic stance .... 108

4.4 Research methods .............................................................................. 109

4.4.1 Statistical analyses of electoral data ............................................... 109
4.4.2 Electoral volatility ......................................................................... 111
4.4.3 Party system fractionalization ......................................................... 112
4.4.4 Social rootedness ........................................................................ 112
4.4.5 Political legitimacy ....................................................................... 114
4.4.6 Party manifesto analysis ................................................................. 115
4.4.7 Data Sources ............................................................................... 118

Chapter 5 – The AKP’s discourse of Muslim Democracy ......................... 120

5.1 The Political Discourse of Turkey’s Islamist parties until the AKP ........ 123

5.1.1 The Milli Görüş movement of the 1970s and its political discourse ... 124
5.1.2 Welfare Party and its political discourse of the Just Order .......... 126
5.1.3 The theme of religion in the manifestoes of the Welfare and Virtue Party ................................................................. 128
5.1.4 The themes of democracy, freedom and human rights in the manifestoes of the Welfare and Virtue Party ......................... 132

5.2 The AKP’s ‘post-Islamist’ discourse of Conservative Democracy ...... 135

5.2.1 Conservative Democracy in Erdoğan’s 2005 speech to the American Enterprise Institute ......................................................... 137
5.2.2 The AKP electoral manifestoes and ‘Conservative Democracy’ ...... 141
5.2.3 Laver and Benoit’s expert survey on Turkish parties ................. 152

5.3 Conclusion ....................................................................................... 158

Chapter 6 – Regularity in inter-party competition in the party system and social rootedness ............................................................. 161

6.1 Regularity in inter-party competition .................................................. 165

6.1.1 Electoral Volatility in general ......................................................... 165
6.1.2 The Turkish context ................................................................. 166
6.1.3 Fractionalization of the party system ...................................... 169
6.1.4 Electoral volatility in national elections in Turkey 1987-2009 ...... 172
6.1.5 Electoral volatility per party bloc at national level and for the individual electoral regions ........................................ 178
6.2. Social Rootedness ................................................................. 182
   6.2.1 Age of political parties ................................................... 183
   6.2.2 Relative electoral difference ............................................. 186
   6.2.3 Social rootedness of Islamist parties .................................. 195
6.3 Conclusion ............................................................................. 202

Chapter 7. Legitimacy of the electoral process and its key actors ......... 204
7.1 Attitudes towards the legitimacy of regime Principles, Institutions and Actors .............................................................................. 206
   7.1.1 Confidence in regime principles, institutions and actors .......... 208
   7.1.2 Confidence in the regime institution of government ............... 211
   7.1.3 Confidence in the regime institution of parliament ............... 214
   7.1.4 Confidence in the regime actors of political parties ............... 215
   7.1.5 Support for democratic governance ..................................... 217
   7.1.6 Confidence in the institution of the Turkish armed forces ....... 220
   7.1.7 Voter turn-out as a measure of confidence in the electoral process .... 223
7.2 Regression analysis of Islamist voting preferences and religiosity in their impact on civilian regime institutions ........................................ 226
   7.2.1 Confidence in government ............................................... 229
   7.2.2 Confidence in parliament ............................................... 231
   7.2.3 Confidence in political parties ......................................... 234
   7.2.4 Overall analysis of the regression models ............................ 236
7.3 Conclusion ............................................................................. 243

Chapter 8 - Conclusion ................................................................ 247
8.1 Manifesto analysis .................................................................. 249
8.2 Mainwaring and Scully’s Research Framework ............................ 251
   8.2.1 Regularity in inter-party competition ................................. 252
   8.2.2 Social Rootedness .......................................................... 253
8.2.3 Legitimacy of electoral process and key political actors .......... 255
8.3 Implications for a future research agenda ............................................ 256
8.4 Party system institutionalization and democratic consolidation .............. 259
  8.4.1 Party system institutionalization and democratic consolidation in Turkey .................. 261

Appendix .................................................................................................................. 265
Glossary of Party Acronyms .................................................................................... 274
Bibliography ............................................................................................................. 277

List of Figures and tables

Tables
3.1: Turkish governments during the 1990s .............................................. 69
4.1: Genealogy of Turkey’s Islamist party spectrum .................................... 103
4.2: Pairing of local and national elections ............................................... 113
5.1: Historical evolution of the Islamist’s discourse ................................... 123
6.1: Comparison between the 2002 and 2007 national vote-share of the parties ........ 175
6.2: Age of political parties ........................................................................ 185
6.3: Overview of the electoral pairings between local and national election vote-share .... 186
6.4: Pearson r coefficient for correlations between respective local and national elections .... 194
7.1: Strength and direction of the association between Islamist voting preferences and the dependent variables ................................................................. 236
7.2: Strength and direction of the association between religious self-identification and the dependent variables ........................................................................ 239
7.3: Ordinal regression analysis for confidence in government for Turkey ................... 271
7.4: Ordinal regression analysis for confidence in parliament for Turkey .................. 272
7.5: Ordinal regression analysis for confidence in political parties for Turkey .............. 273

Figures in the main text
3.1: Mean tenure in years of party leaders of Turkey’s current mainstream parties ...................... 77
3.2: Aggregate electoral vote share in Turkey of Islamist parties: 1987-2009 ...................... 90
3.3: Conceptual scheme of this research thesis ............................................... 97
5.1: Coverage in election manifestoes of Islamist parties of specific themes: 1991-1999 ........ 131
5.2: Coverage in election manifestoes of Islamist parties of key themes: 1991-1999 ............ 133
5.3: Election poster of Erdoğan, Özal and Menderes ...................................... 140
5.4: Election poster of Erdoğan, Özal and Menderes ...................................... 141
5.5: Parties on political left to right scale .................................................... 153
5.6: Perceived importance of dimensions to AKP ......................................... 154
5.7: Degree to which parties support religious principles in politics vis-a-vis secularism .... 155
5.8: Degree to which parties support Turkish EU membership ............................ 158
6.1: Main regional categorization of Turkey .................................................. 163
6.2: The effective number of parties in Turkish elections from 1987-2009 ...................... 171
6.3: Total electoral volatility for national elections 1987-2007 .......................... 172
6.4: Total electoral volatility per individual region for national elections: 1987-2007 ........ 178
6.5: Electoral volatility of all party-blocs in national elections: 1991-2007 ................. 179
6.6: Electoral volatility of Islamist parties in national elections 1987-2007 ................. 181
6.7: Proportional electoral difference for parties with vote-share above 5% or below ...... 192
6.8: Revised proportional electoral difference of parties with more than 5% vote-share .... 193

7
6.9: Relative electoral difference of the main Islamist party in each electoral pairing compared to other groups…………………………………………………………………………………………197
6.10: Relative electoral difference in percent for the Islamist bloc ………………………………………….198
6.11: Relative electoral difference of the Islamist party bloc in the electoral regions……………….199
6.12: Geographic overview of the provinces where Islamist parties received highest vote-share: 1987-2007………………………………………………………………………………………….202
7.1: Confidence in percent in various regime institutions: 1991-2007………………………….209
7.2: Overall support in percent for: 1996-2007………………………………………………………..210
7.3: Confidence in percent in government for individual party blocs: 1991-2007………………212
7.4: Confidence in government for respondents with religious or non-religious self-identification: 1991-2007…………………………………………………………………………….213
7.5: Confidence in parliament for the individual party blocs: 1991-2007………………………214
7.6: Confidence in parliament for respondents with religious or non-religious self-identification: 1991-2007……………………………………………………………………215
7.7: Confidence for political parties for individual party blocs: 1996-2007……………………216
7.8: Confidence for political parties for respondents with religious or non-religious self-identification………………………………………………………………………217
7.9: Support for having a democratic political system for individual party blocs………………218
7.10: Support for having a democratic political system for respondents with religious or non-religious self-identification……………………………………………………………218
7.11: Support for political leaders being chosen through electoral alternation for individual party blocs……………………………………………………………………………..220
7.12: Eurobarometer survey data on public confidence in percent in the armed forces: 2006-2009………………………………………………………………………….221
7.13: Confidence for the armed forces for respondents with religious or non-religious self-identification……………………………………………………………………….222
7.16: Impact of highly positive religious self-identification on confidence on various regime institutions: 1991-2007…………………………………………………………………………….239
7.17: Impact of left-wing voting support on confidence in civilian regime institutions…………242
7.18: Impact of non-voting preferences on confidence in civilian regime institutions…………243
8.1: Conceptual scheme of this research thesis……………………………………………………248

Figures and tables in the appendix

5.1.1: Space in election manifestoes of all parties devoted to positive mentions of tradition and morality: 1991-1999……………………………………………………………………………….265
5.2.1: Space in election manifestoes for positive mentions of freedom and human rights: 1991-1999…………………………………………………………………………………….265
5.2.2: Space in election manifestoes for positive mentions of democracy: 1991-1999…………266
6.2.1: Effective number of parties in Turkish national elections per region: 1987 - 2009 ………266
6.5.1: Inter-bloc volatility in the Anatolia and Black Sea region for national elections: 1987-2007……………………………………………………………………………………….267
6.5.2: Inter-bloc volatility in the South-Eastern region for national elections: 1987-2007……267
6.5.3: Inter-bloc volatility in the Aegean and Mediterranean coastal region for national elections: 1987-2007…………………………………………………………………………….268
6.5.4: Inter-bloc volatility in Istanbul for national elections: 1987-2007………………………..268
6.5.5: Inter-bloc volatility in percent in Ankara for national elections: 1987-2007……………269
7.17.1: Turnout in percent for national elections at regional level: 1987-2007………………270
7.17.2: Turnout in percent for local elections at regional level: 1989-2009………………….270