

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

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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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