The Role of the Opposition Bloc in the Democratization Process of the Last two Decades in Turkeys

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Abstract

Just as the political structure of any country can have a positive or negative impact on the democratization process; The opposition bloc, which includes political parties and currents, civic institutions, etc., has a dual positive and negative impact on this process. In Turkey, the influence of the opposition bloc in the democratization process has been relatively positive for a century. However, in the last two decades, with the rise of the Islamist Justice and Development Party to power, the Turkish opposition bloc has adopted varying approaches to the political structure, which has had a more negative impact on democratization process. The current research has examined the performance of the Republic People's Party as the largest opposition party, focusing on three main approaches of Turkish parties towards the political structure. To this end, a historical institutionalism approach has been adopted using library and digital resources. In terms of methodology, this study has employed the process tracing method. Turkish opposition bloc, especially the political parties, though considered to be a major indicator of democracy, seems to have adopted undemocratic political procedures such as "appeasement procedure", "supportive procedure" and "deviant procedure" in the last two decades.

Keywords: Opposition Bloc, Democratization Process, Process Tracing, Political Parties, Turkey.

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1. Introduction

An understanding of the different paths that political institutions take over time can help to realize why some countries are democratic and some are dictatorial. However, only few of these paths have led to democracy so far. Acemoğlu and Robinson (1392) believed that democracy is consolidated when the foreign countries do not find a strong motive to overthrow it. The consolidation of democracy depends on "1) the strength of civil society, 2) the structure of political institutions, 3) the nature of political and economic crises, 4) the level of economic inequality, 5) the structure of the economy, and 6) the form and scope of globalization" (Acemoğlu and Robinson,1392: 13)[1]. In fact, the answers to key questions (e.g., Why do some countries have a democratic system while some other countries are governed by dictatorships or other non-democratic regimes? Why do many non-democratic countries move toward a democratic system? What factors determine when and how this transition will take place? Why do some democracies, after they are established, endure but some others experience coups and return to dictatorship?) should be accounted for by the strengths and weaknesses of these six issues.

In general, the issues of which societies, when and under what conditions transition from dictatorship to democracy occurs and it is consolidated are in direct relationship with the conflict between the elites and the ordinary citizens over politics. These groups have opposite preferences about political concepts such as democracy and dictatorship as they know well that these institutions lead to different social choices. However, it should be noted that political institutions not only determine the limits of redistribution, or who will benefit from the policies, but also have the role of regulating and legitimizing the future allocation of political power[2].

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1. In this regard, we can refer to the process of "Europeanization" which, from the point of view of some theorists, is "an incremental process to change the direction and form of politics, in such a way that the political and economic dynamics of the European Council (EC) will be part of the organizational logic of national politics and decision-making process (Shokouhi, Safari & Moradifar, 2022: 4). For example, three important effects of Turkey's Europeanization process (1999-2005) and its impact on foreign policy include: (1) Desire to be active and accept risk, (2) Efforts to resolve bilateral disputes and develop relations with neighboring countries, and (3) Moving away from the win-loss approach and adopting a win-win approach (Shokouhi and et al,2022:10).

1. In order to understand the formation of political, economic, social and cultural institutions, one must refer to the history of societies and understand how these institutions,

Ordinary citizens in a democratic system have more power now and later, because they participate in the political process, than in non-democratic regimes. One of the instruments with which citizens can help preserve and strengthen democracy and consolidate it are 'civil institutions' such as opposition parties. However, in most research, more attention is paid to structural factors, especially the 'structure of government' in examining the role of influential factors in the democratization process. Nevertheless, 'Opposition Bloc' as a governmental alternative can play a significant role in this process. Therefore, in this research, an attempt is made to first discuss the concept of the opposition bloc and its functions, and then analyze the role and functions of Turkey's opposition bloc in relation to the democratization process in this country.

Turkey is among the few countries in the Middle East that has had a long experience in democracy. One of the stabilizing and evolutionary foundations of the Turkish democracy model is the formation of a nascent party system based on various social divisions since the founding of the Republic of Turkey. As Lewis (2002) argued, only in a handful of countries is domestic and historic democracy the result of a long and gradual process of evolution. In most countries, democracy is a new, imported and imposed phenomenon; however, Turkey's democracy was not imported, nor imposed, but the result of the Turks' own free choice. It is true that the Turks have largely followed foreign models, but they did choose the own model, be it right or wrong, being more influential than external forces in determining the speed and manner of democratic development. This has certainly increased the possibility of the survival of these institutions in Turkey (Lewis,2002).

Nevertheless, the process of democracy in Turkey has shown a kind of fluctuating pattern since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, in which Turkey has never achieved democratic stability and has always faced issues that have both helped to strengthen democracy and prepared the ground for threatening and weakening it. Although the process of democratization in Turkey has historically undergone an evolutionary process under the influence of stabilizing variables, like other non-Western models of democracy, the experience of this type of political system and form of governance is not very old. Consequently, through transition

whether planned or unplanned, were established and formulated, and what conflicting forces and interests were involved in the backstage (Kazemi,2012:19-17).

process, it has encountered challenges, called democratic fluctuates, that have made the process of stabilizing democracy in the country hard (Arghavani and et al,2018).

Some experts state that one of the negative components of Turkey's democratization process has been the changes in the governmental institutions to stabilize authoritarianism especially intensified since 2015. Burak Kopur (2015) believed that the electoral victory of Turkey's ruling party in 2015 confirmed the German political dictum that 'the time of presidency is the time of crisis', and the implementation of Erdogan's strategies in the country has turned Turkey into a constantly exceptional country. He maintained that Erdogan tried to increase authoritarianism by changing three government institutions: (1) Ministry of Justice as a protective shield, (2) the security-intelligence department as an advisor and assistant, and (3) the media as a tool for manipulation (Samiei Isfahani and et al,2022).

2.Method

Institutionalism is a major approach in political science that emphasizes the role of institutions in the formation of behaviors and policies. In this approach, the study of institutions has priority over the study of individual actions (Pearson,2013). The institutionalist approach considers three characteristics for institutions: (1) The structural characteristic of society or politics, (2) Some degree of stability over time, and (3) The effect of some institution on the behavior of individuals (Peters,2007). One of the main approaches of new institutionalism is historical institutionalism as the first type of new institutionalism in political sciences. Emphasizing the institutional configuration of the society and the distribution of power in this configuration, historical institutionalism approach provides a suitable theoretical framework and method. The most important features of this approach are its dealing with specific real events, taking seriously history and traces of historical processes, taking care of the context of institutional configuration, and paying attention to power and conflict of interests in institutional developments. In general, in historical institutionalism, institutions are not only categories resulting from collective intelligent design, but they are categories developed through historical process to remain as a legacy for the future and leave impact on the goals of the activists and the path of achieving the goals at other times. From the perspective of historical institutionalism, the process of institutionalism and

the institutional actions of actors are deeply constrained by the hidden institutional heritage in the background of institutional actions. Moreover, they are influenced by social and political conflicts around different interests in a specific historical period (Kheiri and Karimi,2019). In historical institutionalism, concepts such as critical moment, time horizon, path dependence and positive feedback are evaluated.

Critical moments create solid paths for political transformation (Pearson, 2013). There are short moments in which opportunities for significant institutional reform pop up, followed by long periods of institutional stability. Such moments are important because they provide institutional arrangements on the paths that can be very difficult to change later (Pearson, 2013).

According to time horizon, many consequences of political decisions, especially complex policy-making interventions or basic institutional reforms are only fruitful in the long term, but political activists and especially politicians are often interested in the short-term consequences of their actions but not long-term effects (Pearson,2013). In general, the issues of timing and sequencing are related to the importance of historical events and unrecurring but significantly influencing turning points for political and social developments. It shows that the quality of such sequences has an immense effect on the final path. A certain sequence can make some processes almost irreversible and rule out entirely some other options (Kheiri and Karimi,2020).

The idea-centeredness in historical institutionalism is that the policies adopted during the formation of the institution or in its early stages will have a continuous and significant effect on subsequent policies. Therefore, the historical moments of the establishment of an institution are of fundamental importance. The concept that explains how institutions are reproduced along a certain historical path is "path dependence". From this point of view, institutional capacity and past heritage are among the factors that influence the future paths (Hosseinizadeh,2012).

Positive feedback process includes features such as unpredictability, inflexibility, unforgettability and potential inefficiency of the path. The dynamic of positive feedback has two basic features that show the analyst's sense of path dependence: The first component shows how, in some social contexts, the cost of giving up one option and switching to another increases significantly over time. The second feature shows that paying attention to

the categories of timing and sequence and the formation moments and turning points help strengthen and separate them from the periods that are the path of convergence. Positive feedback occurs when each step taken in a path increases the possible increase of the next steps in the same path increases (Pearson,2013).

3.Theoretical Framework

Roshmeyer and et al. (1997) discussed the role of civil society in the process of democratization more than other scholars. They held a high role for civil society, and recognized political parties as a part of civil society as long as they had not taken the office. They maintained that, after social class equilibrium, the balance of power between the government and the civil society has the most important effect on advancing the democratization process, considering self-governance and autonomy for the government in relation to the society, but holding civil society as a counterweight against the government power. Therefore, despite the key role of the government in the process of democratization, their theory is not state-oriented but rather society-oriented (Ghazimoradi,2018).

However, enumerating the positive roles of civil society in democratization process does not mean that it is unconditional. White (2004) believes that the statement "a stronger civil society leads to a more democratic society" is utterly meaningless unless the social forces that make up the civil society are carefully identified. Some civil society forces are anti-democratic and some prefer authoritarianism. For him, civil society should include parties and attributes its political orientation to the structure of parties and their leaders. To examine the role of civil society in democratization process, it is not possible to comment on its density and strength, but it is necessary to answer these questions:

- What are the sectors of civil society?
- What are the rewards of each sector?
- What are the norms and political beliefs of each sector?
- What is the power of each sector to exercise power against the government?
- What is the contribution of civil society to the forces of the international scene?

Gill argues that if civil society organizations do not exert political pressure, only "civil society forces" and not civil society itself are formed. He

believes that civil society forces precede civil society. In defining civil society forces, he states that these forces, but not civil society, are formed in a situation where self-governing groups can act in the defense of their members and promote their interests, but not politically, and they cannot impose restrictions on the government (Ghazimoradi,2018).

Thus, it can be said that a civil society is powerful (its organizations and forces have high intensity and density). It is not under the control of the upper classes, and it does not reflect the government's wishes through the coalition of parts of it with the government, but has a political orientation and can turn the political awareness of its members into political action. It plays proper roles in different stages of democratization and without enticing political mobilization during the establishment of democracy, it can provide the opportunity for institutions to be built, hence, playing a positive role in the democratization process (Fazeli,2011).

Stepan believes that in order to understand how a democratic opposition can release the constraints of authoritarianism, we must first look at what the stance of the opposition is in relation to the other parts of the regime. In this analysis, the emphasis should be placed on the general relations of domination not on government structures. In general, the main parts of such relationships are as follows (Kadivar,2006):

- The main regime supporters (Those who realize that their political, economic, or institutional interests are best served in the status quo)
- The system of coercion and repression that keeps the regime in power
- Passive supporters of the regime
- Active opponents of the regime
- Passive opponents of the regime

Stepan lists the multiple functions or duties of the democratic opposition movement in authoritarian regimes as follows:

- Resistance to integration into the regime
- Protection of independent and self-governing areas against the regime
- Questioning the legitimacy of the regime
- Raising the cost of authoritarian ruling
- Creating an acceptable democratic alternative

Gill believes that civil society takes three points for granted:

- Autonomous or self-governing groups independent of the government with whom people organize their interests and plan [to realize] them (also politically)
- Public domain where different issues are discussed and the interests are pursued
- Recognition by the government of the legitimacy of the activities of these organizations and the public domain in which they are active (Ghazimoradi,2019)

For Gill, civil society is so important that is basically impossible to consolidate democratic structures without it. If civil society forces are not strong and developed, the pattern of political change is likely to be different, leading to the re-stabilization of an authoritarian regime (Gill,2000; Saei, 2018). Bashirieh (2007) believed that in order to achieve a relatively comprehensive model regarding the relationship between the opposition and the transition to democracy and its consolidation, several key factors should be considered: (a) Relative (in)ability of the opposition; (b) Unity and concentration or dispersion of the opposition; (c) Relationship with civil society; (d) The method of starting the transition process and the relationship with the reformist factions in the regime. Drawn upon Gill's and Roshmeyer et al.'s theories, the present research has adapted a maximalist approach to study civil society in Turkey, more particularly, our target point is "political parties", especially the parties and factions that are part of the opposition bloc.

4.The Performance of the Republican People's Party

In Turkey, parties have a history of at least a century and are considered among the most stable and institutionalized parts of civil society, and most importantly, they have always influenced, negatively or positively, the process of democratization and consolidation of democracy. The performance of the "People's Republic" party, as the largest opposition party in Turkey in the last two decades, is analyzed below in terms of two main characteristics, showing that the weak and somehow contradictory performance of this party is one of the obstacles in the process of democratization and consolidation of democracy.

5.Relative Weakness of the Republican People's Party

In general, the more established and powerful political parties are, the more likely they are to play a decisive role in transition to democracy. In fact, the

ability to mobilize various sources of power (political, economic and communication sources) is the main criterion to evaluate the capability of political factions and parties. On the contrary, the anti-democratic radicalism of the opposition groups, the severe internal conflicts between them, and the inability to mobilize power sources result in the opposition's incapability to get closer to the moderate and reformist factions. Under this condition, in case of the initial transition to democracy from above, the obtained democracy will be fragile and loosely based. In sum, the capability of the opposition is due to factors such as organization, broad social support, clear programs, strong leadership, and the ability to mobilize sources (Bashirieh,2007).

In Turkey, the opposition political parties not only fail to present a program of their plans and initiatives, but they only try to challenge and question the goals and programs of the ruling Justice and Development Party. They make "indirect" promises to the voters, claiming that they support all citizens in their programs regardless of their political orientations and whether they voted for their party or not (Soleimani and Ebadi,2012).

Basically, the arena of politics is the place of credibility. A citizen who casts his votes in favor of someone does not receive any guarantee that that party or politician will remain faithful to their promises or will be able to act on their slogans. Thus, they should gain trust in a rational and emotional way towards the party or the politician. The Republican People's Party, as the largest opposition party in Turkey in the last two decades, is a suitable example in this case as the main problem of this party is "weakness in gaining the trust of new voters". The people who are dissatisfied with the undemocratic policies of the Justice and Development Party, do not turn to the Republican Party either because of "lack of trust". For example, the amount of criticism and dissatisfaction with the ruling Justice and Development Party has increased dramatically in the last two decades due to events such as the Gezi Park crisis (2013), the failed coup of 2016, constitutional plebiscite in 2017 and directional change of some of the constitutional rules, especially the change of the political system from a parliamentary to a presidential system. In the elections of June 7, 2015, a significant number of voters of the Justice and Development Party punished their party by not voting for it. However, in the same elections, not only there was no difference in the number of votes of the Republican People's Party, but it also lost 1% of the votes. In other words, as can be seen in the

table below, the ruling Justice and Development Party lost 10% of its votes compared to the 2011 elections, but the Republican People's Party, as the leading party of the opposition, instead of gaining all or a significant portion of those votes, also lost 1% of their previous votes.

Table (1): Elections in Turkey

	Parliament Elections	Justice and Development Party	Republican People's Party
1	Nov. 3, 2002	34.43%	19.30%
2	July 22, 2007	46.58%	20.88%
3	June 12, 2011	49.90%	25.98%
4	June 7, 2015	40.87%	25%
5	Nov. 1, 2015 (Early Elections)	49.50%	25.32%

(**Source:** Türkiye'de seçimler –Vikipedi)

Therefore, the "incredibility" of the Republican People's Party (outside of its 25% supporters) is one of the main obstacles to the change of government in the last two decades in Turkey. In addition to the rather directional and ideological tradition of this party from 1923 to 2002, an important part of distrust is due to the "performance record of the leaders of this party" in the history of Turkey. One of these cases is related to the responsibility of Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the current leader of the Republican People's Party, which was widely reported in the media during the 2017 referendum campaign. In the 1990s, he was the general manager of SSK, or "Social Insurance Foundation of Turkey". The deplorable condition of the hospitals under this responsibility was severely criticized by the TV channel program makers in those years. Savas Ay, one of the most famous TV program makers in Turkey in the 1990s, shows on the TV screen that the hospitals under the supervision of Kemal Kilicdaroglu are nothing more than "disasters" in the full sense of the word (Ayhan,2011).

Since 2010, one of the important arguments in relation to the leadership and governance of the opposition bloc in Turkey has been the level of "capability and competence" of Kamal Qalichdaraglu as the head of the Republican People's Party in leading the country. On May 22, 2010, when he was elected as the new leader at the 33rd Ordinary Congress of the Republican People's Party, Kilicdaroglu promised to change the structure of the party and, most importantly, he promised to "bring the party to power". However, these claims and dreams have not been realized after almost 10

years, and the ability to become an "alternative" to replace the ruling Justice and Development Party and to gain power has decreased. Although this party won the votes of some major Turkish cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir in the municipal elections of March 31, 2019, this victory was affected by two important factors: (1) Intensified authoritarianism of the Justice and Development Party and the economic crisis. (2) The support of other political parties and groups, including Kurdish Democratic Regions Party and Alevi Kurds. Another important obstacle is the existence of differences and disharmony among the internal leaders of the Republican People's Party. Almost the thoughts of three leaders rule this party: 1. Deniz Baykal, its leader until 2010; 2. kemal kılıçdaroğlu, the current leader of the party; 3. Under Saw, the former secretary general of the party. Although kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the party since 2010, has relatively high relative power, he is incapable of present a comprehensive political discourse outside of the norms and rules of his party because he fears that he will tarnish the mental image of the party in the supporters and make disintegration among the main ideological voters. Thus, he has avoided adopting unconventional policies that break the tradition in the last 10 years. For example, he has not made any decision or expressed his opinion on changing some principles and constitutional rules of Kemalism or issues of Kurds and Alevi community. This indifference and negligence by the party leader is witnessed by the mass supporters and officials within the party. Although he introduces the Republican People's Party in the central circuit of the Turkish political sphere, the complex discourse of the party and the characteristics of the electoral and provincial candidates show the reverse. Moreover, he is not looking for ideological change and modernization but decides to create a new discourse for the party that provides a collective coalition around the Republican People's Party (kömürcü,2011).

Basically, the performance and track record of the Republican People's Party show that in authoritarian parties, party leaders can usually use negative motivations for their power-seeking purposes at the expense of legitimacy. Thus, when coercion within a party organization reaches this point, we wonder what still motivates a local party member to actively work for the party. For example, one of the local party members said about his party:

> I fully believe in the principles of the doctrine of Kemalism, secularism and republicanism. There is authoritarianism within the Republican

> People's Party, but my beliefs are reflected only in this party. I don't think any other party is closer to me than this party".[1]

Another local member of the Republican People's Party expresses his motives for joining this party as follows:

> I belonged to a radical left party between 1997-1999, but later I realized that for a meaningful and legal struggle, I should change my affiliation and started working in the Republican People's Party. I think the Republican People's Party is a failure. To be successful and attractive to people, we need a democratic structure. In the current structure, our opinions have no value. The reason we are here today is because we have an emotional bond with the party, not because we endorse the current party leaders.[2]

Another local member of the party said:

> The process of selecting candidates in our party is not democratic. We are not satisfied with this process and also with the selected candidates, but since they are the candidates of our party, we have to support them. In other words, regardless of who the leader of our party is, we continue to vote for this party.3

These examples show that ordinary supporters of the Republican People's Party have strong ideological motives. Negative incentives—such as the risk of marginalization—do not deter them from joining the party. Many members of the Republican People's Party do not believe in the leadership of the party but in its ideology. Therefore, authoritarianism within the Republican People's Party has an oligarchic nature. Although the power of the party's central elite is illegitimate, it is maintained by providing negative incentives for the local members who are ideologically affiliated with the party.

kılıçdaroğlu's another weak point is his emphasis on ethnic-religious issues, causing the reaction of other leaders of the Republican People's Party who are against the political use of ethnic-religious issues in politics. For example, after kılıçdaroğlu's speech on ethnicities in 2010 in Diyarbakır province, Deniz Baykal, the former leader of the Republican People's Party, said that ethno-religious issues should not be used in politics (Tuğal,2009).

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1. Interview with a local party member from the CHP, Istanbul, October 13, 2007.
2. Interview with a local party member from the CHP, Ankara, September 13, 2007.
3. Interview with a local party member from the CHP, Istanbul, October 19, 2007.

Another important issue is that the Republican People's Party under the leadership of kılıçdaroğlu has always tried to introduce itself as a social democratic party with a relatively leftist orientation, which has caused the party leaders to always emphasize things such as democratization, workers' rights, poverty and unemployment, welfare, etc. However, the ideological structure and manifesto of this party and most importantly the decisions and practical policies of the party show that there is a big gap between the words and actions. In general, the party under the authority of Kılıçdarağlu will never deviate from the legacy of "being Atatürk" and will not ignore its historical heritage (Ayata,2010). Perzorski believes that the legitimacy crisis cannot change a regime, what is needed is the existence of an organized alternative (Kadivar,2006). However, the Republican People's Party is facing many obstacles to achieve this vantage. First, it seeks to create a new identity without going beyond the historical legacy of the party and its hard ideological supporters. Secondly, it relies only on rivalry with the Justice and Development Party to produce and create new motivation and excitement. Third, heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory combinations such as secular-left-urban-educated classes suggest that it is impossible for them to reach consensus. Fatih Erbakan, the chairperson of the Welfare Party, says about the procedure and political behavior of the Turkish opposition (www. İslamianaliz.com:10: Haziran,2019):

> For 17 years, the Turkish opposition has been criticizing the ruling Justice and Development Party for pursuing only one goal: "This authority should go, its replacement is not important, it is enough that we get rid of this authority". This hate-oriented, jealous, vindictive, personal policy is of no use to the people. Today in Turkey, the opposition bloc only criticizes without proposing a solution. It only detects the problem, but does not provide any measures or solutions.

Abdulkadir Selvi, the famous writer of "Hurriyat" newspaper in Turkey, wrote about the 36th Congress of the Republican People's Party: "In this Congress, there was no regret and desire to achieve sovereignty"; Because the leader of this party

> ➢ demanded the fall of the walls that the government has built before them, but they did not say how.
> ➢ did not explain how the Republican People's Party will determine their presidential candidate.

> ➢ did not mention any changes in the party and its policy, nor did give any new enthusiasm hope.
> ➢ asked the supporters of the Republican People's Party to tear down the walls, but because they didn't give hope and enthusiasm, they built a wall against the party's desire to reach the sovereignty of the country (Hürriyet,4.2.2018).

In general, the Republican People's Party, as the leading party of the opposition, both in terms of structure and leadership challenges some weaknesses, the most important of which are noted below.

(A) Weakness of party leadership (Yıldırım,2009)

- Mixing up socio-economic approaches and measures with political approaches and the democratization process.
- Unstable, volatile and sometimes compromising personality.
- Intra-party differences.

(B) Structural weaknesses and challenges

- Weak political credibility and legitimacy among in public.
- People and political groups' lack of trust in the capacity of the party to manage the country.
- Failure to provide a practical solution for the country's major problems.
- Failure to provide a democratic, acceptable and comprehensive alternative.

Despite significant internal reforms over the past 10 years, due to various and intertwined reasons, the Republican People's Party under the leadership of Kılıçdaroğlu, has been unsuccessful in taking power from Erdogan, the leader of the Justice and Development Party.

The internal changes of the Republican People's Party, the degree of popularity and the limitations it faces also inform us about how much political parties are interested in changes in authoritarian regimes. We can examine this change by focusing on the following three issues:

> (a) How and in what direction has the party changed from top to bottom in terms of organizational staff?
> (b) What does the change in the organizational staff suggest about the main problems facing Turkey's domestic politics especially the economic space?

        (c) What do these changes tell us about Turkey's foreign policy and position in the world?

It seems that the change in the management organization under the leadership of Kılıçdarağlu has failed to provide a harmonious discourse within the party. Although this can be considered as pluralism, it provides grounds for disharmony especially at the local level. Moreover, the party still lacks a comprehensive policy for important issues such as the Kurds, the Alevi community, and the relationship between religion and the state (Erdi Öztürk,2002). However, the party is now at a turning point in history, and has a chance to be accepted by the people to be a suitable alternative to take over the power. Because the Justice and Development Party is experiencing an economic crisis, the social differences have deepened and the current presidential system in alliance with the National Movement Party is creating enduring crises at both domestic and foreign levels, which are very costly with consequences that have greatly reduced people's well-being (Bedirhanoğlu,2021).

6.Dispersion in the Opposition

The unity or dispersion of the opposition is an important issue from the perspective of political mobilization against the regime. If the opposition is united, under the condition of polarization of the political situation, the active political forces will stand against the regime. However, if there is dispersion in the opposition, it is possible that the regime will use it to continue its dominance more. This issue is also important from the perspective of negotiating with the regime for transition and consolidation. In case of unity of the opposition, it will be almost impossible to make loose compromises that prolong the privileges of the ruling class. Conversely, in case of dispersion within the opposition, the possibility of partial transitions through compromises and conservative agreements will increase (Bashirieh, 2007).

In Turkey, almost since 2007, when the government of the Justice and Development Party turned into an authoritarian and undemocratic structure, there has been no unity in the opposition bloc. Almost all three important parties of the opposition bloc, namely the Republican People's Party, the Nationalist Movement Party and the People's Democratic Party, have followed their own approaches. Thus, with the strengthening of the authoritarianism of the Justice and Development Party, three conflicting situations have been formed among the opposition parties.

6-1. A Critical Compromising Appeasement-Oriented Approach

This approach is actually specific to the Republic People's Partyy as the largest opposition party. Despite keeping the appearance of an opposition, this party cooperates with the ruling regime in critical moments of decision-making. This appeasement-oriented approach occurs mostly in the parliament. For example, the positive vote of this party to "remove the immunity of the representatives", faced a wide reaction from the opposition bloc, which they interpreted it as "appeasement coupled with treason". As a result of this cooperation, the ruling party removed the immunity of the representatives of the People's Democratic Party and imprisoned most of their leaders (Gözler,2016).

The condemnation of the 2016 fake coup and the defense of the repressive measures against the coup plotters by the Republican People's Party have been other issues that provoked criticism from the opposition bloc. According to the opponents, this approach adapted by the Republican People's Party has doubled the legitimacy of the ruling party while everyone knows that the coup and the suppression of the coup was a countermeasure between Fethullah Gulen and Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The appeasement-oriented approach of the Republican people's Party, especially under the leadership of Kılıçdarağlu, was repeated once again in 2019. When the government repeated the policy of interfering in the affairs of municipalities and dismissed the mayors elected by the people and appointed its approved mayors, the Republican People's Party once again approved the government's action and did not support the protestors' decision to demonstrate against the government. Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı, the deposed mayor of Diyarbakır, said in a message addressed to Kemal Kılıçdarağlu, the leader of the Republican People's Party of Turkey:

> The leader of the Turkish opposition believes that when such incidents occur, we don't think it is right to go to the streets and start protests and demonstrations. My advice to you is that when you made a mistake in removing the immunity of Turkish parliament members, don't make the second mistake. Such mistakes will never be forgiven by neither history nor the nation. There are neither stones nor sticks in the hands of the protesters, a nation is proudly in the streets to support their votes and will and shout: "My vote is my honor" and we will not deviate from it (gazeteduvar.com.tr,23/8/2019).

Also, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's appeasing and flexible behavior with Kemal Kılıçdarağlu has led many analysts and experts to believe that the leaders of the Justice and Development Party and the Republican People's Party always maintain each other's interests. Every day, Kılıçdarağlu publicly makes open critical and radical comments against the policies of the Justice and Development Party and Erdoğan's behavior, but there is not much reaction from the government. For example, when Kılıçdarağlu won the votes in the 36th Congress of the Republican People's Party, Erdogan immediately congratulated him. while a little while before it, Kılıçdarağlu held the famous "Justice" march for a distance of 400 kilometers from Ankara to Istanbul to oppose and protest the ruling government's policies, and tried to provoke the world's public opinion against the Justice and Development Party government.

6-2. Cooperation and Coalition Approach
This characteristic is specific to the Nationalist Movement Party. Almost since 2013, this party has abandoned the opposition and cooperated to form an alliance with the ruling Justice and Development Party, strengthening the foundations of the ruling power. With the cooperation and coalition of this party, the ruling party was able to win the 2015 parliamentary elections, the 2017 referendum, the 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections, and the 2019 municipal elections. Many analysts of Turkish politics have interpreted the cooperation of the Nationalist Movement Party with the Justice and Development Party in the 2017 referendum as a visa for the Presidency of the Nationalist Movement Party (Coşkun,2017).

In the 2015 parliamentary elections, with the proposal of the Republican People's Party, it was decided that a 60% coalition government from the Republican People's Party, the Nationalist Movement Party and several other small parties be formed to confront the Justice and Development Party government. But Dolat Baghcheli, the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party, opposed this coalition and said: "They talk of the 60% opposition bloc. In our opinion, this is nonsense" (Radikal,2015).

Moreover, in the constitutional referendum on April 16, 2017, the cooperation of the Nationalist Movement Party made the "Yes" bloc (consisting of the Justice and Development Party, Nationalist Movement Party, Vatan Party and several other small parties) against the "No" bloc (consisting of the Republican People's Party, Peoples' Democratic Party, Good Party and some other small parties) to win with only 2% more. This

event changed Turkey's political system from a parliamentary to a presidential one, putting the process of democratization and consolidation of Turkish democracy in jeopardy (Türkiye'de seçimler – Vikipedi).

Of course, we should not ignore the benefit of the Nationalist Movement Party from this policy as it helped this party to secure itself against rejection and destruction. Before 2015, the number of votes for this party did not reach 10%, but now it has increased to more than 13%. In the 2019 municipal elections, this party won in 4 new provinces (Türkiye,2019 Yerel seçimler sonuçu). Unlike the early years of the coalition, when the Nationalist Movement Party's dependence on the Justice and Development Party was higher, this dependence is much less now. Today, this party is the third largest party in Turkey, and its leader, Dolat Baghcheli, is one of the most influential political leaders in Turkey. Furthermore, although the leaders of the Justice and Development Party first sought to temporarily exploit the votes of the Nationalist Movement Party to succeed in the elections and remove the obstacles, despite the initial achievements, it gradually produced negative results. Firstly, the Justice and Development Party offended a large part of its moderate supporters and especially the ethnic minorities by emphasizing nationalist thoughts. Secondly, it violated the unity and independence of the party such that now it has to compromise with the Nationalist Movement Party or other parties in all affairs in the society. For example, the Nationalist Movement Party has been one of the most influential parties in changing the trend of Turkey's foreign policy from Westernism to Eurasianism. In other words, after the 2016 coup failed, and rumor had it that "Beyond Erdogan Project" had been ignited by Brussels and Washington, the government inevitably pushed Erdogan to find domestic and foreign allies to maintain and consolidate his domestic power. In the domestic sphere, the nationalist and Eurasianist political currents, which had a long hostility to Turkey's western-centric approach, were at the center of Erdogan's coalition attempt to maintain the internal balance. At the international level, the Eurasian powers, mainly Russia and Iran, became the main allies of Erdogan's established political system (Gol-Mohammadi,2022).

It is worth mentioning that the idea of Eurasianism in Turkey's political sphere has provided grounds for the proximity of nationalist and leftist parties to the Justice and Development Party and the formation of an Islamist-nationalist coalition, especially after the 2016 coup. Erdoğan has

also successfully used the support of these currents on different occasions such as the April 2017 constitutional amendment referendum and the June 2018 presidential elections. It is clear that this canny compromise is partly due to the decline of the hegemony of the Justice and Development Party in the parliamentary elections and Erdogan's attempt to form an inclusive coalition against the opposition bloc. Erdoğan's harsh criticisms of Western allies, challenging the liberal international order and his famous slogan "national and local elections" are the positions that the anti-Western leaders of the National Movement Party and the Homeland Party have been insisting on for the past decades (Gol-Mohammadi,2022).

6-3. Radical Deviant Radical Approach
This characteristic is true about the performance of the Peoples' Democratic Party. Despite its initial successes, this party, which belongs to the Kurdish community, gradually became undemocratic by adopting a deviant approach and directly and indirectly supporting the illegal policies and actions of the PKK.[1]

Obtaining 13 percent of the votes in the 2015 parliamentary elections made the leaders of the People's Democratic Party so proud of themselves that Selahattin Demirtaş, the leader of this party, kept repeating "We will not allow Erdogan to become president in 2018". The leaders of this party seemed to have forgot that in the 2015 elections, some of their votes were secured by other parties. The results of the field studies on the 2015 elections show that out of 13.1% of the votes of the People's Democratic Party, 4.2% were cast for the Justice and Development Party and 1.9% for the Republic People's Party. In this election, 2% of the Turkish citizens voted for the People's Democratic Party, so that this party could gain the right to enter the Turkish Parliament by obtaining the quorum of 10%, thus preventing the Justice and Development Party from gaining a majority in the parliament.

Many of the parliament members and major leaders of the People's Democratic Party are extremely dissatisfied with the party's cooperation with the PKK. For example, Ayhan Bilgen, a former parliament member

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1. In the last three decades, Turkey has deployed about 400,000 soldiers in its Kurdish regions. The war with the PKK has cost Turkey billions of dollars, and the rate of migration has been such that half of the population in some Mediterranean cities where no Kurds had lived in the past 45 years are now settled by Kurds (Kolaei and et al,2017).

from Kars, who later became the mayor of this city, took a strong stance along with some other recently arrested members and mayors, against the Peoples' Democratic Party and PKK leaders. They have demanded that the political path of the party be changed as soon as possible. Since there is no room in the ideological structure of the PKK to criticize the decisions made by the leaders, Biglen, Tan and other members' criticism are considered quite novel. Ayhan Bilgen's main criticisms of the People's Democratic Party include:

(a) Instead of showing that our party belongs to the whole of Turkey, our party has been reduced to only one corner, and instead of multiplying itself throughout Turkey and communicating with all the people of the country, surprisingly enough, it did the opposite and made the party Turkish (The main seats of the party leadership fell into the hands of the Turkish Left).

(b) Cronyism has overshadowed the organizational relationship and worn out the party.

(c) The party has not responded to the criticisms and demands of the supporters and has continuously ignored their opinions.

The criticisms of the former spokesman of the People's Democratic Party were expressed when this party, due to fully complying with PKK's hostile policies, was practically excluded from political arena. It was not only isolated in the parliament and the political atmosphere of the country, but also received cold opinions of the public and media.

Ayhan Bilgen is not the only parliament member and politician who has opened his mouth to criticism. Altan Tan, the former representative of Diyarbakir, also sharply criticized Demirtas in a live internet interview. He is known as an Islamist Kurd and has previously worked with Najmuddin Arbakan. During the peace negotiations and in his meeting with Öcalan, he said that he does not remain silent against PKK's demands.

When Tan met Öcalan in Imrali Island Prison in 2013, the imprisoned PKK leader made some remarks criticizing Altan Tan's father. Tan, whose father had been imprisoned as an Islamist Kurd in Diyarbakir prison and died under torture in the 1980 military coup, had replied Öcalan: "Now is not the time to review my father's record but we want to lead the peace talks with Turkey". In a news interview about Demirtas, Altan Tan said:

> We were leading the peace talks. We had meeting with the heads of the government, at the same time with Öcalan, and with the leaders of PKK in Qandil and Europe. It was at this time when the armed wing of the PKK

started fighting again in the cities. I said to Demirtas to either take a strong stand against them and say that we have promised to end the armed activity or if they really want to take everything by gun power, we should go back to our homes and not be the target of ridicule. It is not possible to talk about peace and negotiation, and then some others come out and use arms to show their power in the cities.

This Kurdish Islamist politician maintained:

In reply to my critical words, Demirtas remained silent. He said nothing. We repeated our words loudly in other places but PKK leaders silenced us. They directly told us that they had nothing to do with these issues.

Altan Tan has also said about the leadership of Turkish Kurds:

The Kurdish political movement in Turkey needs a leader. Demirtas, with his current situation, cannot be the leader of this movement, and if he has such an intention, he must take a stand against some issues. Now that he is in prison, he says, I can go with my wife to Meral Aksener's home and have breakfast. I say, I wish you would go with your wife to Erdogan and Abdullah Gul's homes to have breakfast during the peace negotiations. I wish you would not have said, the night after winning the elections, that we will not form a coalition with the Justice and Development Party. I wish you would not have made strange conditions for Davutoğlu when he called up and wished to meet us for negotiating the formation of the government (Independent Türkçe,15 Ekim 2020).

In general, the internal critics of the People's Democratic Party believe that this party should either continue to follow the policies of the PKK or end any relations with this radical terrorist group. Weapons and democracy do not go together.[1]

The ORC Research Institute conducted a survey on 2,900 people on October 8-9, 2020 about the leaders of the People's Democratic Party. The result indicated that only 7.2% of the participants voted positively for the leadership of Salahuddin Demirtas.

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1. From Ankara's perspective, precisely when Turkey was trying to make peace with its own Kurds, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Union Party's autonomy claim led them to create the state of Kurdistan. For Ankara, it means that the revival of PKK ideology leads to building a regional base to control the region, a serious threat to the borders and security of Turkey (Ahmadipour and et al,2020).

Figure (1): If Salahuddin Demirtaş Establishes a New Party, will you Vote?

(**Source:** ORC Anketi.tr)

The interesting point of this survey is that out of 7.2% in the last Turkish elections, 4.2% of the People's Democratic Party voted for Mr. Demirtaş, 1.5% from the Republic People's Party, 0.7% from the Justice and Development Party, 0.1% from other parties and 0.7% those who did not vote.

7.Conclusion

Stepan () suggested five functions for the opposition bloc: (1) Resistance to integration into the regime, (2) Protection of independent and self-governing areas against the regime (3) Questioning the legitimacy of the regime, (4) Raising the cost of authoritarian rule, and (5) Creating an acceptable democratic alternative. Out of these five functions of the Turkish opposition bloc, it has been relatively successful in only two cases, namely "resistance to integration into the regime" and "questioning the legitimacy of the regime", for which, of course, there is an obvious reason. The existence of the opposition parties depends naturally on their independence and non-integration into the political structure and questioning the legitimacy of the regime. The Turkish opposition bloc has achieved almost no success in the other functions, sometimes acted passively and even biased in protecting independent and self-governing areas against the regime. For example, the positive vote of the parliamentary members of the Republic People's Party to remove the immunity of the representatives of the People's Democratic Party weakened the power of the leaders of the independent parties. The Turkish opposition bloc has performed extremely poorly in the fifth

function. During the last two decades, no acceptable democratic alternative has been presented by the opposition parties, especially by the Republic People's Party as the largest opposition party. Of course, this issue has been affected more by the performance of the Republic People's Party during the years of its rule. Every alternative introduced by this party is presumed to be ineffective by the people. Therefore, the degree of believability of the alternatives presented by the Republic People's Party is very low for the people. This is the reason why during the last two decades, the vote rate of this party has not risen over 25%.

Therefore, the Turkish opposition bloc, especially the largest opposition party, i.e., the Republic People's Party, has focused only on erosion and weakening process, completely forgetting the task of building an alternative. This is why the claim of the Turkish regime that the only possible alternative is "itself" is still valid. Furthermore, if the opposition only deals with the task of weakening the ruling order, and conflicts with the function of building, then any change in the future will simply be a change from one authoritarian government to another, rather than a change from authoritarianism to democracy. The opposition bloc parties in Turkey are still not taking practical steps to build the procedural foundations of democracy. For example, the Republic People's Party still cannot admit other parties of the opposition bloc especially the religious ones that are critical of the ruling structure in the institutions of the emerging democratic majority. In other words, the alternative democracy scope of the Republican Party of Turkey is small and limited. In fact, there is no consensus yet on the rules of the game, nor on its results. If the Turkish opposition focuses on procedure, then all democratic forces can act as one to get procedural warrants from the regime. In fact, a broad consensus on procedures among democratic groups can change significantly the relations of dominance within an authoritarian regime. Another important point is that the Republic People's Party has not yet been able to give guarantees to the previous supporters of the ruling Justice and Development Party in pursuit of their interests in the new institutional hierarchy based on fair democratic procedures. especially now that there is a conflict between the Gülen group and the Turkish government, the Republic People's Party has not yet made any efforts to attract the opposition forces.

According to the results of a survey, about 30% of Justice and Development Party supporters want to establish a new party and join it. It means that these

30% people have no desire to join the Republic People's Party, the People's Nationalist Movement, Good Party and Democratic People's Movement (Cumhuriyet,2019). Although the Kurds' "peace process" has been "frozen", in the words of Mr. Erdoğan, since 2013, and harsh policies are applied against the Kurdish community every day, there has not yet been a major shift in Kurdish votes from the Justice and Development Party to the Republican Party. In the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2018, the majority of Kurds voted for Erdogan's Justice and Development Party. Even the Kurdish People's Democratic Party was ranked second in the Kurdish community's votes. Also, the Alevi community with about 20 million people of the Turkish population, which protests the Justice and Development Party, does not definitively support the Republican People's Party. Because this party fails to fulfill their demands such as the recognition of Cemevis as their places of worship.

Finally, after nine defeats in different elections, the Turkish opposition bloc should now know very well that they need a broad and comprehensive coalition to win against the coalition of the President of the Justice and Development Party and the Nationalist Movement Party. A kind of coalition that can attract the Kurds, the Alevis and a substantial part of Turkish conservatives. The experience of the June 24, 2018 elections has shown that the Republican People's Party of Turkey will not be able to win against the Justice and Development Party without getting the votes of all the political groups in the opposition bloc in Turkey. With the deep polarization that has arisen in Turkey, the political atmosphere of the country has turned into two polar opposites of the conservative right-wing supporters of the Justice and Development Party and the socialist left-wing supporters of the Republican People's Party. According to the law, Turkey must hold parliamentary and presidential elections in 2023. The severe economic crises and the sharp decrease in the votes of the Justice and Development Party have provided a good ground for the triumph of the opposition bloc parties and seizing the majority of the parliament. As the results of some of the latest polls indicate the growth of the votes of the Republican People's Party and the decrease of the votes for the Justice and Development Party. For example, the results of the ORC poll conducted in May 2022 show that the number of votes for the Republican People's Party increased from 22.3% in February 2021 to 24.1% in May 2022, and the votes for Justice and Development Party has

decreased from 36.8% in February 2021 to 28% in May 2022 (Bir Gün,2022). They are shown in the figures below.

Figure (2): Votes for the Republican People's Party from February 2021 to May 2022
(**Source:** Bir Gün,2022)

Figure (3): Votes for Justice and Development Party from February 2021 to May 2022
(**Source:** Bir Gün,2022)

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