The Rising Tide of Conservatism in Turkey

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Foreword and Acknowledgments

This book is the product of deliberations and arguments that originated from a series of surveys we conducted from the 1990s onward. More specifically, in chronological order, the research by Ali Çarkoğlu and Binnaz Toprak in 1999 gave clear indication of the strong influence of religion in Turkish sociopolitical behavior and attitudes. Later in 2003, a survey of attitudes toward women in business, politics, and society in Turkey conducted by Ersin Kalaycıoğlu and Binnaz Toprak unearthed some evidence that a staunch belief in traditional, parochial, and highly conservative norms about family life undermined the chances of girls and later women from getting an education, seeking employment in businesses away from home, and following interests and careers in politics. Research conducted by Ali Çarkoğlu, Fatoş Gökşen and Murat Çizakça in 2004 on charitable foundations in Turkey similarly indicated that strong attachments to traditions and sensitivity exhibited toward their preservation played a critical role in social solidarity and charitable donations. It looked as if highly traditional and conservative standards, norms, and values were dominating Turkish society just as Turkey was transforming from an agricultural society into an industrial one and simultaneously becoming increasingly integrated into the global markets of the post–Cold War era. We further observed that while the new government policies of a liberal market economy and privatization were settling in, mounting criticisms of these practices as undermining national independence and bringing the country under Western domination were also developing. It was under the influence of these social, economic, and political events and research findings that we wanted to systematically examine the mind-set of the Turkish population in the early years of the twenty-first century. More specifically, we wanted to probe into why the Turkish population seemed to be becoming more conservative as the Turkish economy became more integrated with global markets and industrial development, urbanization, and overall socioeconomic change gained pace in the country. Was it change, the pace of rapid social mobilization, globalization, or democratization and freedom, which were setting roots in the country, that precipitated an interest in traditions, family, the state, the nation, and the like? Were the correlations between change and the increase in traditional, religious, and conservative values, beliefs, and practices that we thought we were observing in the previous studies of Turkish society in fact true? How then could we best account for the associations between rapid socioeconomic and cultural mutation and religiosity, traditionalism, family values, and conservatism?

We shared our observations, preliminary findings, and speculations with our colleagues, university administrations, and organizations that fund social science research in Turkey. Our deliberations and debates generated interest among our colleagues and some potential

sponsors, who extended support to our research efforts, and we began to conduct focus group discussions in Istanbul, Kayseri, Trabzon, and Diyarbakir in late 2005. The focus group discussions—consisting of a voting-age (18 years and older) population of men and women around the country—not only further fueled our interest in our research matter but also provided us with valuable clues as to how we could ask various questions in and through a survey of mass beliefs, attitudes, values, and opinions. In late March through May of 2006 we were able to survey the socioeconomic and political attitudes, values, and opinions of about 1846 voting-age adults in Turkey. This book is a report of our findings from that field survey.

Sabancı and Işık Universities and the Open Society Institute in Turkey thus supported this book and the findings from the field survey on which it is based. We are very grateful for the financial support they extended to our survey project. We are also grateful for the efficient and kind service the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) provided to us in drawing a nationally representative sample through a probability procedure we devised with it. Çağlayan Işık and Ebru Tetik of Frekans Fieldwork Company provided reliable research aid and coordinated the fieldwork organization. Ali Çarkoğlu is particularly grateful to the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS) for providing a peaceful and comfortable working environment that helped him finalize the manuscript for publication in the fall of 2008. We would also like to extend our gratitude to our wives, Gül Çarkoğlu and Sema Kalaycıoğlu, for their understanding and encouragement during the field survey and the composition of this book.

Our gratitude is also due to Anthony Wahl of Palgrave for his review and support of our initial proposal for this book and Emily Hue of Palgrave for keeping us on track and on schedule while composing this book.

The secretarial help of İpek Dübüş, then at Işık University and now with the Istanbul Policy Center of Sabancı University, was invaluable to us, both in aiding coordination and maintaining our appointment schedules. Hasret Dikici Bilgin helped us prepare the index for our book. Our students at Sabancı University were the first to hear about our findings and as usual gave us their feedback and their healthy skeptical evaluations. The fact that some of them are using these findings as the basis of their own future research is our main source of academic reward.

INTRODUCTION

Going Back to the Future

An institutional military coup on September 12, 1980, led to the third breakdown of Turkish democracy since 1945. The military government that took over the reins of government dramatically overhauled the Turkish political regime, as it drew up and adopted a new constitution in 1982 through a popular referendum, in which 90 percent of the voters participated and slightly more than 90 percent of those who participated voted in its favor. A series of related political laws and regulations were put in place for what may best be termed a semiparliamentary regime, where the office of the president was entrusted with new powers of administrative oversight, which converted it into an almost tutelary organ of the state. The legislature was further relegated to a subservient position vis-à-vis the executive in a parliamentary design in which the prime minister would serve as the leader of the largest group in the unicameral National Assembly and also use the powers of the executive branch of the government. Further endowed with the powers of the decree that had the force of law and could only be submitted to legislative oversight after the decree's adoption and implementation, the executive would reign supreme and protect the country against the alleged perils of communist defiance and political turmoil.

The improved powers of the executive branch of the government were formulated as a method of rendering the state strong, which was assumed to be necessary to cope with the chronic political instability of the pre-1982 era of Turkish politics. The administrative tutelary powers and position of the president of the country, which would be entrusted to a retired general or a similar "statesman" figure, were designed to ensure that irresponsible politicians, who are motivated to promote their specific and often selfish personal or party interests, would be kept under control. The president as statesman would be induced to observe and look after the collective interests of the realm and protect it against the irresponsible politicians, who would compromise any values for votes. On such assumptions, and under the watchful eyes of the leader of the military junta, General Kenan Evren, who was elected as the president in 1982 for a seven-year term, Turkey went back to multiparty politics in 1983.

A highly restricted and closely monitored list of political parties could participate in the 1983 general elections, but the one least controlled by the military junta, the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi—ANAP), won. The two parties most favored by the military junta were not supported at the polls, and they bowed out of politics in a

few years. When the tenure of the president, General Kenan Evren, ended in 1989, the prime minister and ANAP leader, Turgut Özal, successfully ran for the presidency. For the first time since the 1950s, the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi—TBMM) voted for the leader of the majority group in the National Assembly to become the president of the country. Thus, the design of the 1982 constitution received a major blow. The presidency, which was devised as the preserve of statesmen who would only look after the collective interests of the realm, came under the dominance of the "irresponsible politicians," who would promote partisan and special interests as a vocation.[1]

In the course of these events as the grip of the military on free competition among political parties and politicians was relaxed, the political rights and liberties of former politicians were reinstituted by 1986. In the 1987 general elections, the older leaders of the once-powerful parties of the pre-1980 era of Turkish politics reemerged to lead their their newly recognized political parties The former powerhouses of the left-of-center Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi—CHP) and the former right-of-center Justice Party (Adalet Partisi—AP) had been closed down along with all the other legal parties in 1981. The political Islamist National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi—MSP) and the ultranationalist, anticommunist Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi—MHP), both of which had played critical roles in establishing and running coalition governments in the 1970s, had also been banned. The old parties were reestablished under new names to claim their old turfs in the party system. Two parties emerged on the left-of-center, the Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Parti—DSP) of the former CHP leader Bülent Ecevit and the Social Democratic Party (Sosyal Demokrat Parti—SODEP) that later merged with the Populist Party (Halkçı Parti—HP) and eventually emerged the Social Democratic Populist Party (Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti—SHP), in which the bulk of the cadres of the former CHP were reorganized under the leadership of Professor Erdal İnönü. The Welfare Party (Refah Partisi—RP) was established by the political Islamists under the leadership of their former leader Necmettin Erbakan, the MHP was reorganized by their old-time leader Colonel Alparslan Türkeş into the National Toil Party (Milliyetçi Çalışma Partisi—MÇP), and the former AP was regrouped as the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi—DYP) of Süleyman Demirel. However, the DYP found itself sharing almost the same ideological spot as Özal's ANAP. With two parties emerging to claim the same ideological position on the left-of-center and two on the right-of-center, new turf wars started among them and the other political parties in the country. In the 1987 elections, the ANAP was again able to win a plurality of votes and a majority of the National Assembly seats, though the DYP and its leader, Demirel, wreaked havoc in the country in the opposition, arguing that the last-minute election law amendments had not only caused a gross disproportionality between the distribution of votes and parliamentary seats, but also rendered the 1987 elections illegitimate. In the late 1980s, it looked as if the old game of left-of-center versus right-of-center was reemerging, with the additional complexity of twin parties representing each of those ideological positions, as opposed to the CHP of the left and the AP of the right in the pre-1980 politics.[2]

In light of the preceding depiction about the nature of politics in the Turkey-to-be of the 1990s, the 1991 general elections results were a total surprise. The RP had joined forces with the MÇP and another small extreme right-wing party called the Reformist Democracy Party (Islahatçi Demokrasi Partisi—IDP), all of which fielded candidates

on the RP ticket and won an unprecedented 16.9 percent of the national vote. This is in contrast to the 1973 elections in which the MSP, the RP's predeccesor, had won about 11 percent of the vote. The MHP had not surpassed 6.4 percent of the vote since the 1970s.

The political Islamist–ethnic Turkish nationalist alliance appeared to be able to attract about one out of every six votes in the 1991 general elections. In fact, two thresholds were surpassed in these elections. The first was a legal barrage, established by the military government that had drawn up the election laws of a very steep 10 percent national threshold for the political parties to obtain in the general elections to gain any representation in the TBMM. The joint RP ticket had enabled the "Turkist-Islamist" alliance to go over that 10 percent barrage first. The RP also surpassed a second threshold, which was more of a political-psychological barrage, of voters casting their votes for the first time in their lives in favor of a political Islamist ticket representing the "Turkist-Islamist alliance." The 1991 elections appeared to be a harbinger of the new politics emerging in Turkey. However, the first Turkish Values Survey of 1990 had not detected any shift in the ideological spectrum of Turkey.[3] A major shift in the voters' ideological orientations had begun to occur, and by the 1995 elections the RP, this time alone, would obtain more than 21.4 percent of the national vote and establish itself as the largest group in the TBMM. In fact, it was possible to observe the ideological background of the most important voter realignment in Turkish politics that occurred in 1995 only about a year later, in the 1996 field survey of the Turkish Values Study.

A Sharp Shift to the Right

By December 1996, Turkish voters had shifted their allegiances sharply to the right, with an unprecedented 18 percent registering themselves as "far right" supporters, and the center of the left-right divide was rapidly eroding. In 1990 about 21.8 percent of the voters had placed themselves on the left of the ideological spectrum scale; 22.7 percent on the right; and about 43.5 percent somewhere in the center. However, in 1996, the percentage of voters at the center dwindled down to 32.6 and that at the left to 19.8, whereas the percentage of voters on the right went up to 38.9.

Since the 1950s Turkish voters had often supported the parties on the right. The Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti—DP) of the 1950s and the AP of the 1960s attracted massive support from the voters. The exceptional 1970s had the left-wing parties obtaining a little over 40 percent of the national vote by the 1977 elections, but the right-wing parties still shared close to 60 percent of the vote among themselves.[4] The pundits and students of Turkish politics could easily argue that Turkish voters have always tended to lean to the right of the ideological spectrum. However, what we observed in the mid-1990s were two major changes in the already right-heavy mindset of the Turkish public. From the 1950s to 1996 Turkish voters tended to show a centripetal tendency in their ideological leanings. The distribution of their ideological inclinations seemed to follow the pattern observed in 1990. However, in the 1995 general elections, the center of the left-right spread of ideologies seemed to be eroding rapidly, while the far right was gaining popularity equally rapidly. The unimodal distribution of ideological leanings was rapidly becoming multimodal. The Turkish voters had been ideologically centripetal, but did not refrain from voting for the right-of-center or left-of-center parties in the past. Their voting decisions were made on pragmatic, not ideological, grounds. As of 1996, the data seemed to indicate that the

Turkish voters were coming under the influence of ideologies, and thus their voting behavior was becoming less pragmatic and more ideological. The same pattern of ideological sensitivity seemed to continue in the 1999 general elections but occurred to a lesser degree in the 2002 and 2007 elections when predominantly economic pragmatism seems to have resurfaced. Nevertheless, ideological sensitivities continue to divide voters along a new left-right definition that underlines the religion versus secularism debate more intensively.[5] Third, ideological orientations have also been coming under the influence of such primordial and ascriptive characteristics as lineage, religion, sect, and ethnicity.[6] Fourth and finally, this ideological development indicates that Turkish voters were getting polarized. Turkey had experienced polarization in the past, but then the ideological differences between the poles were relatively close, and the centripetal orientation of the voters was able to somehow and somewhat bridge the gap between the poles. The post–Cold War Turkey was now hosting voters who were divided into cultural blocs that were deeply separated by huge ideological rifts. The divisions were also incorporating ideas that were more primordial and ascriptive in character. With the pragmatic centrists rapidly decreasing serious conflicts that threatened to rip the voting blocs and the country apart began to emerge.

It seemed as if the very mind-set of the Turkish voters had dramatically changed between the end of the Cold War and the start of the post–Cold War era.[7] The Turkish voters seemed to have come under the spell of the new post–Cold War global era and their political attitudes seemed to have shifted dramatically toward the right of the left-right spectrum. Indeed, even the far right and its parties benefited from this change of heart and mind in Turkey. The new forces of Turkey were no longer only separated as left-of-center and right-of-center parties, but as the Sunni political Islamist and the ethnic Turkish nationalist political movements, parties, and intellectuals, and their Alevi, secularist, and ethnic Kurdish nationalist opponents.

Turkish political thinking, ideological nomenclature, and discourse began to change in the 1990s. Voters, political leaders, party spokespersons, civil society gatherings, and nongovernmental organizations dropped the earlier rhetoric about class differences and wars, false class consciousness, infrastructure and superstructure, and rights of labor and began to employ such terms as "believers" (*inanan*), "faithful" (*mümin*), "oppressed" (*mazlum*), "identity" (*kimlik*), "laicism" (*laiklik*), and the like. Sectarian and ethnic origins began to gain notoriety in the political discourse of the newspaper editorials, magazine and journal interviews, media reporter and panelist discussions, as well as in the rhetoric of political leaders and campaign activists, pickets at rallies, and slogans in demonstrations. Religious brotherhoods, Sufi orders, and religious communities, although all of them had been closed down and banned by the Republican governments from the early 1920s onward, began to gain visibility, as if they were legal and conventional part and parcel of the polity in Turkey. Turkish mental maps had changed from being organized around social class and class relations, economic growth, and income generation and distribution to being built upon identity and the creation of ethno-religious political selves in the country. Turkish political thinking and understanding of politics underwent a dramatic transformation in the early 1990s. Why did such a transformation occur, and why was it so easy to orient the masses toward an ethno-religious understanding of the polity?

In the following chapters of this book, we will try to simultaneously tackle three core issues. First, we will define and describe the new mass politics and political thinking in Turkey. Second, we will examine why such a change occurred the way it did. Finally,

we will examine the domestic and international consequences of such an ideological shift in Turkish politics.

In the first chapter, we scrutinize the peculiarities of the international context within which the Turkish political system came to experience the transformation of its political thinking at the end of the Cold War era. We trace the transformation of an increasingly reactionary, conservative rhetoric among the political elites, pundits of politics, and some intellectual circles that conveniently fit into the ideological context of both Turkish and Kurdish ethnic nationalisms and that of political Islam.

In the second chapter we examine the domestic circumstances that led to the phenomenon of the rising right, political Islam, and ethnic Turkish nationalism in Turkey. Within this conceptual framework we provide for an assessment of the social and political developments in modern Turkey to help contextualize the progression of conservative attitudes in the country from a domestic politics perspective. We examine how the international environment's impact upon elite perceptions and ideologies that overlapped with suitable individual-level traits shaped the mind-set of the Turkish electorate in a way that increasingly became more conservative and reactionary on various domestic and international political issues.

In the third chapter, we, on the basis of out nationwide representative survey data, delve further into the measurement of the right-wing political mind-set of several major intellectual groups in Turkey that form the foundation of resistance to modernization and thus make up the backbone of rising conservatism in the country We will base our measures of religiosity, authoritarianism, anomie, political efficacy, dogmatism, self-confidence, tolerance, and finally xenophobia on empirical data from our survey of national attitudes, orientations, and values conducted in 2006. We thus hope to show the intricate complementarities and contrasts that are empirically reflected in our observations of the Turkish political culture.

In the fourth chapter we develop different measures of a major explanatory variable in all accounts of conservatism—that is, the influence of uncertainty, change, and the way individuals tend to deal with these issues in a fast-moving society. We first exemplify in a historical context the rapid pace of social change in the country, then develop empirically based measures of reactions toward change and account for individual-level differences in different strategies people use to deal with both change and uncertainty. Our main argument here is that change is rapid and uncertainty is inherently very high in Turkish society. Institutionally, through the education system, as well as culturally, the mass public is not well equipped to deal with these challenges in a way that could be supportive of a stable democratic system. We argue that given the overall attitudes and reactions toward change and uncertainty, and the dire effects of rapid social mobilization and the turbulence it causes, democratic consolidation is essentially problematic.

In the fifth chapter we lay down the characteristics of the multidimensional composition of Turkish conservatism. As such, we suggest that a number of competing as well as complementing facets of conservatism have to be taken into account if one is to fully grasp the complex nature of Turkish political development. We offer an empirical explanatory framework and assess the competing hypotheses to explain the nature of conservatism in Turkey. What is striking in this account is primarily the multidimensional character of conservatism in the country. It is not only religiosity that defines conservatism in Turkey, but also authoritarian stands on politics as well as an old-fashioned social perspective, especially concerning the youth and women in

Turkish society. These different dimensions of conservatism obviously are relevant in shaping its consequences in domestic and foreign policy areas.

In the sixth chapter, we present historical cases of tension that stand to challenge consolidation of Turkish democracy. We empirically analyze three major issues in current Turkish politics that are directly linked to consolidation of democratic rule in the country. The first is the issue of the role of religion in Turkish society and its challenge to the political system, as represented by the demonstrations for lifting the ban on women's *türban* (headscarves) in public offices. The second is the issue of reforms in the country that are geared toward meeting the Copenhagen Criteria for joining the European Union (EU). The third is the issue of democratic values, as they support or hinder all political reform in the country. Our objective here is not only to provide a short summary of historical developments in these three areas but also to present our findings of the public opinion on these and related issues. We will argue that all challenges that hinder reform in the country are deeply rooted in the slant toward conservatism present in the Turkish elites and masses alike.

In the seventh chapter we focus on the role that international relations and geopolitics has played on the development and sustenance of conservatism in Turkey in the post–Cold War era. We examine how the public of Turkey, which is a potential member of the EU, views the union and how Turkey's prospects for becoming an EU member country have also been influenced by the rising conservatism. Similarly, this rising tide of conservatism and religiosity in Turkey has contributed to Turkey's rapidly changing opinion about of the United States and affected Turkish-U.S. relations. The invasion of Iraq and the events that have taken place in Turkey and in the north of Iraq ever since the Iraq War of 2003 seem to be weakening the image of the United States among Muslims the world over, and particularly those in Turkey. The same events also seemed to have fostered greater suspicion and fear of the "real U.S. intentions" and thus seemed to have contributed to a further development of xenophobia, chauvinism, and hence conservatism among the Turkish masses. Our data analysis seems to point out that international affairs, which appear to have piled up many thorny issues at the doorstep of Turkey in Iraq, Georgia, Armenia, Cyprus, and Greece, have played a role in increasing fears, uncertainty, and risks, and thus in creating a fertile environment for the emergence and sustenance of conservatism among the Turkish public.

In the final chapter of this book we provide a conclusion of this study, which also encompasses an evaluation of the degree to which the Turkish experience fits into comparable contexts wherein similar phenomena have been analyzed. As such, we offer a series of empirical and conceptual implications for the study of developing democracies all around the world on the basis of the Turkish experience. We also propose suggestions concerning the implications of our findings for the study of Turkish society and public policy making.

What kind of a public policy is most suited to deal with rising religious conservatism and its demands for increased visibility in the public space, as demonstrated by the *türban* conflict? What kind of reform process is likely to develop in the country as it aims for full membership in the EU? What are the implications of the cultural traits, and conservatism in particular, of Turkish society for Turkish foreign policy making? It is these and other similar questions that we have attempted to provide answers for in this book.

CHAPTER 1

Shock, Awe, and Suspense

Turkey has been governed since 1982 according to the semiparliamentary regime that was drawn up by the military junta in the aftermath of the September 12, 1980, military coup. This military coup occurred when the democratic regime broke down, which led to the annulment of the liberal constitution of 1961 and the introduction of a new constitution in 1982 that stressed law and order. The new political regime of semiparliamentarism was based on three main assumptions. The first assumption was that Turkish democracy could not perform in an environment of liberty and vigorous civic participation that operated through a pluralist interest-group system. The previous parliamentary regime of the 1961 constitution provided a liberal democratic context for political participation, which produced a wide spectrum of associations, activists, and activities married with a plurality of political parties that spanned almost the entire gamut of left- and right-wing ideologies and interests in the 1960s and 1970s. However, such a rich and vigorous political milieu of political participation coincided with a rising spiral of protests and unconventional political participation. In the 1970s the political situation in the country began to deteriorate into a civil war of various Marxist and Marxist-Leninist organizations, on the one hand, and the ultranationalist, anticommunist, and fascist organizations, on the other. When the Turkish liberal democratic regime broke down in 1980, it was popularly assumed that the liberal-pluralist interest-group system had contributed to its downfall.

The second assumption was about the nature of democratic government in Turkey. Turkish governments of the 1970s were odd coalition governments. In 1973 the CHP obtained the plurality of votes and seats in the TBMM and decided to form a government with the newly established political Islamist MSP on the grounds that both the CHP and the MSP were antiestablishment parties.[1] For the next seven years, Turkey experienced great difficulties in forming governments, when a host of shaky coalitions and minority governments came and went. These events gave the impression that coalition governments could not manage government affairs and should best be avoided.[2]

The third assumption was about the culture of political democracy in Turkey. The framers of the semiparliamentary regime of Turkey assumed that the popularly elected politicians were bound to fail in getting along with each other and would eventually get locked into a "no-holds-barred war."[3] Unless some mechanism of monitoring the populist politicians was established the democratic competition between politicians

would degenerate into populist promises and cross-party bickering, for popularly elected politicians would only seek their personal or their party's political interests to the detriment of national (collective) interest. The framers of the 1982 constitution seemed to have assumed that national (collective) interest could not be entrusted to the popularly elected politicians.

The powers of the president's office were overwhelmingly strengthened, and the 1982 constitution intended to create a tutelary overseer of Turkish democratic politics in the guise of the president. The powers of the TBMM and the judiciary were curtailed in the new regime of executive supremacy, whereby the government deviated significantly from its customary parliamentary regime and yet failed to form a semipresidential democracy. Instead, in its semiparliamentary format it seemed to have created a new form of the neo-patrimonial power structure, which was no more than the resuscitation of the old-style rule by executive fiat in a democratic guise that hence was referred to as neo-Hamidianism.[4] Other political laws, such as the Parliamentary Election Act of 1983, were also enacted to remedy the tendency toward fragmentation of the parliamentary party system by introducing a 10 percent national threshold for political parties to overcome for them to become eligible for parliamentary seats to become eligible for parliamentary seats. An illiberal constitution that stressed executive supremacy and law and order, the establishment of presidential tutelage and control over the government, and the establishment of a 10 percent threshold in the general elections set the stage for a regime that was presumed to be capable of coping with the challenges of the Cold War in Turkey.

In the meantime, a vacuum emerged in the political system when leftists and their activities began to be targeted as the main enemy of Turkey and harshly suppressed by the military junta. The socialist and social democratic associations and vigilantes had been effectively organized among the downtrodden in the shantytowns of the major cities throughout the 1960s and 1970s. When they were persecuted and liquidated in the early 1980s, the shantytowns began to be penetrated by alternative organized movements that effectively targeted the same audiences. In due time, Muslim brotherhoods (*tarikat*) and communities (*cemaat*) with deep pockets—armed with the ideology of political Islam—and traditional social welfare and solidarity networks began to fill the vacuum left behind by the socialists and social democrats. The political Islamist system of governance that was emerging in Iran in the early 1980s served as a moral and political inspiration for the establishment of the same model in Turkey. The Muslim brotherhoods seemed to have learned from Iran's experience with theocracy that if enough financial and human resources could be mobilized and if modern organization could be adopted (obviously acquired not from Iran but from Europe, and most specifically Germany, where they had found a hospitable political environment in which to blossom), the Turkish government could be wrested out of the hands of the secular, democratic, moderate left- and right-of-center parties and those political forces that came to be associated with them.

Two important and simultaneous developments helped the resurgence of the Islamic movement of Muslim brotherhoods, sectarian communities, and Sufi orders, which had been banned from public life and politics in Turkey since the early 1920s. One of these developments had its roots in the activities of the MSP in government in the 1970s, which led to the infiltration by the MSP of the agencies of the state that had been assigned to the MSP portfolio in the coalition governments. The resources and facilities of the state were wielded to promote the interests of organized religion in the