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# Authoritarian neoliberalism, crisis, and consolidation: the political economy of regime change in Turkey

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyze Turkey's recent authoritarian transformation from a critical political economy perspective and to examine the main determinants of, what we call, the 'authoritarian consolidation attempt' of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). For that purpose, first, we sought answers to the following question: why did the AKP engage in a more authoritarian political agenda in the 2010s? We critically review the literature on the contemporary dynamics of authoritarianism, particularly focusing on two explanatory frameworks, competitive authoritarianism, and authoritarian neoliberalism. We argue that the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism did not end up with democratization in Turkey in the 2010s, rather the power bloc initiated a strategy of the authoritarian fix as a reaction to the multiple crises that were a combination of the state crisis and the crisis of capital accumulation regime. Second, we analyzed how authoritarianism in Turkey is *en route* to consolidation in the aftermath of the transition to the Turkish presidential system in 2018, and what the fundamental factors of this consolidation are. We investigated the main features of Turkish presidentialism following the three-dimensional framework of authoritarian consolidation, including infrastructural, despotic, and discursive power analyses. As a result, we suggest a critical political economy account to unfold contemporary dynamics of authoritarianism based on the Turkish case.

## KEYWORDS

Competitive authoritarianism; authoritarian neoliberalism; authoritarian consolidation; critical political economy; Turkey; regime change

## 1. Introduction

The fall of the Berlin Wall was celebrated by many, including liberals, who believed that democratization and market reforms would go hand in hand in a globalized world (Bhagwati, 2004; Friedman, 2000). During the 1990s, the neoliberal policy framework has spread to almost all regions under the auspices of the Bretton Woods institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB). The 2000s saw a continuation of this wave at least for the European periphery, in which many countries followed a reform agenda set by the European Union (EU) institutions, including privatizations, labour market reforms, installing independent regulatory agencies, limiting budget deficits and introducing monetary policy reforms like central bank independence. The Global Financial Crisis of 2008 was a turning point for the global political economy particularly about the liberal premises on the alignment of the democratization and market reforms: after two-decade long neoliberal reform agenda, the 2010s saw the rise of authoritarianism globally (Hellmeier et al., 2021).

The contemporary rise of authoritarianism globally in the 2010s has been addressed by different variants of the mainstream political science and the critical political economy disciplines. While the former mostly focuses on analysing the political regime types, it tends to provide causal explanations that depend on non-economic factors, i.e. right-wing populists' anti-immigrant and xenophobic discourse (Mudde, 2007; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). The latter, on the other hand, addresses the interrelated nature of political regimes, state forms and capital accumulation regimes (Bruff, 2016; Ibsen, 2019; Tansel, 2017). In this study, competitive authoritarianism and authoritarian neoliberalism, two relevant frameworks from both disciplines, are selected to uncover the contemporary dynamics of rising authoritarianism with a specific focus on Turkey. We argue that the recent experience of Turkey with authoritarianism assigns a challenging task to both frameworks; explaining the main causal dynamics of the deepening authoritarianism of AKP governments in the 2010s. In other words, the question of how the so-called democratization process of the early 2000s ended up deepening the authoritarian rule in Turkey remains to be addressed.

Indeed, Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, made it clear that, unlike its predecessor pro-Islamic parties, his party represents a pro-European, market-friendly, liberal, and democratic version of conservatism when they came into power in 2002. Hence, they chose the term 'conservative democracy' instead of 'political Islamism' to define their political agenda (Moudouros, 2014). The AKP's civilianization agenda set by in alignment with the EU membership candidacy (Akkaya, 2020), and its attempt for so-called 'democratic consolidation' was welcomed by not only domestic social forces such as capitalist groups (Hürriyet, 2003) and liberal-left intelligentsia (Insel, 2003; Keyman & Öniş, 2007) but also by politicians and mass media abroad (Tuğal, 2016). However, since its third landslide victory in 2011, Turkish politics under the AKP rule have started to be associated with 'democratic backsliding', rather than such consolidation (Özbudun, 2015; Somer, 2016; cf. Tansel, 2018). Especially after the Gezi Park Protests in June 2013 and the failed coup attempt in July 2016, the international media started to define Erdoğan as an 'autocrat' (Yilmaz & Bashirov, 2018).

2013 was a turning point for Turkey both politically and economically (Bedirhanoglu, 2020). As for the former, the internal conflicts within the ruling bloc intensified after 2013 as it was seen in an escalated battle between the AKP and the Gülenists.<sup>1</sup> Regarding the latter, one of the most significant internal contradictions of Turkey's accumulation regime, dependent financialization, became more visible as a result of the onset of the contraction phase of global financial cycles, which manifested itself as the Fed's decision of tightening global liquidity (Güngen, 2020). These multiple crises were, at the same time, signs of the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey. As a result, these political and economic challenges caused the AKP to lose its parliamentary majority in the general election of 2015 for the first time since 2002. Following the failed coup attempt in July 2016, the State of Emergency (SoE) was declared and renewed eight times until July 2018 (Kaygusuz & Aydın, 2020). Under the SoE, more than 150 thousand people were dismissed from their official duties, thousands of soldiers and judges were arrested, and hundreds of schools, universities, foundations, trade unions and media outlets were closed down (Akça et al., 2018). Meanwhile, a constitutional referendum was held to abolish the office of the Prime Minister and replace it with an executive presidency and transform the parliamentary system into a presidential one in April 2017. Next year, the general/presidential elections were held in June 2018, shortly after the end of the SoE, in which the AKP received 42.5% of the votes and Erdoğan was re-elected with 52.5%. Thus, the authoritarian transformation was strengthened by regime change in 2018. Two years after the failed coup attempt, Erdoğan was able to undermine all opposition powers and managed to establish a new regime without checks and balances. Such transformation brings the authoritarian regime change in Turkey under scrutiny.

We argue that this short chronological description also signifies the fact that the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism did not end up with democratization in Turkey, rather the power bloc initiated a strategy of the authoritarian fix as a reaction to the multiple crises, a combination of state crisis and crisis of capital accumulation regime. How and why the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism resulted in deepening the non-democratic regime in Turkey remains puzzling which we aim to unravel in this study. To do so, we ask two interrelated research questions in this article. The first one is why Turkey's ruling party, the AKP, engaged in a more authoritarian political agenda in the 2010s. In order to address this question, we critically review the literature on the contemporary dynamics of authoritarianism, particularly focusing on two explanatory frameworks, competitive authoritarianism and authoritarian neoliberalism. The second question is how authoritarianism in Turkey is *en route* to consolidation in the aftermath of the transition to the Turkish presidential system in 2018 and what the fundamental factors of this consolidation are. We analyse the main features of Turkish presidentialism following Göbel's (2011) three-dimensional framework of authoritarian consolidation, including infrastructural, despotic, and discursive power analyses. The purpose of this article is, therefore, to analyse Turkey's recent transformation from a critical political economy (CPE) perspective (Bieler & Morton, 2018; Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Bruff, 2011, 2014; Bruff & Tansel, 2019; Crouch, 2011; Jessop, 2014; Peck & Theodore, 2007; Saad-Filho, 2020) and examine the main determinants of, what we call, the 'authoritarian consolidation attempt' of the Erdoğan government. This research also aims to engage in the study of regime change by bringing the CPE approach in.

The contribution of this paper is threefold. First, on the theoretical level, we suggest a causal mechanism to understand some of the main dynamics of contemporary authoritarian regimes based on our assessment of the mainstream political science literature from a critical political economy perspective. Second, we broaden the applicability of the concept of authoritarian neoliberalism based on the Turkish case by arguing that the current authoritarianization tendencies are shaped by the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism. In this way, we attempt to link the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism to authoritarian consolidation. Third, we provide an original perspective to understand Turkish presidentialism from a critical political economy perspective. To do so, we analysed data provided by the World Bank, V-Dem, Turkstat, various Turkish ministries, and the Fed. We also employed a process tracing method to clarify our contribution on the causal mechanism of contemporary authoritarianism based on the Turkish case.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a theoretical account by critically discussing the competitive authoritarianism and the authoritarian neoliberalism perspectives and offers a causal mechanism for the explanation of intensifying authoritarianism in the 2010s. Next, the paper analyses the post-2018 period in Section 3, where the main dynamics of the authoritarian consolidation attempt of the Erdoğan government have unfolded in Turkey. The conclusion provides a summary of the main findings of our research.

## 2. Understanding the contemporary dynamics of authoritarianism

The competitive authoritarianism framework has become an oft-cited scheme to understand the trajectory of democratic backsliding studies in mainstream political science literature in the 2010s. As Levitsky and Way (2010, p. 5) describe, '[c]ompetitive authoritarianism is a hybrid regime type, with important characteristics of both democracy and authoritarianism'. The authors argue that, unlike in full authoritarianism, opposition parties are able to compete for executive power thanks to the constitutional channels that still operate in competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky & Way, 2010, pp. 5–7). Drawing on Levitsky and Way's original conceptualization, it

is argued that competitive authoritarianism in Turkey is based on three conditions: unfair elections, uneven playing field (politicized state institutions, uneven media access, uneven access to resources), and violation of civil liberties (media, freedom of expression, repression of opposition and freedom of assembly) (Esen & Gümüştü, 2016). With regards to Turkey, we identify two sub-categories in the competitive authoritarianism framework. In the first one, studies on Turkey predominantly focus on the personalistic features of the authoritarian shift such as Erdoğan's charismatic leadership, personality, and style to grip onto power (Baykan, 2018). For instance, Yilmaz and Bashirov (2018, p. 1812) define this unique regime change as 'Erdoganism', and they point out four main dimensions of it: 'electoral authoritarianism as the electoral system, neopatrimonialism as the economic system, populism as the political strategy and Islamism as the political ideology'. They argue that no universal category covers the Turkish case adequately (Yilmaz & Bashirov, 2018, p. 1813), therefore the uniqueness of this category (cf. Yalman, 2009, pp. 116–155) and its four dimensions are tied up with Erdoğan's personality. For instance, in terms of populism as the political strategy, they argue that '[t]he personality of Tayyip Erdoğan is divinised by partisan voters and elites, and as such a cult of personality around him has been entrenched' (Yilmaz & Bashirov, 2018, p. 1821). These personal connections vis-à-vis the regime change in Turkey can be also seen within the dimensions of electoral authoritarianism, neopatrimonialism, and Islamism.

The second subcategory takes on the cultural features of authoritarianism. For long, Islam and democracy have been juxtaposed and assumed to be incompatible with each other. Islam has been seen as the reason for democratic underdevelopment in the Middle East. In more recent studies, scholars restructured this argument the other way around and they claimed that there is indeed a positive relationship between religion, or in particular Islam, and democracy. Drawing on Koesel's (2014) 'logic of religious and state interaction in authoritarian regimes', Öztürk's (2019, p. 81) article 'focuses on how the AKP and Erdoğan utilised religious groups in the [authoritarian] transition and on the relations that they formed with religious communities'. Although some assertions in the article fall into the first category as well, this article surveys the authoritarian shift in Turkey in terms of religious/cultural features.

In short, competitive authoritarianism is an acknowledged conceptualization to understand the dynamics of authoritarian regimes in which opposition parties are still able to come into power via elections. Although we acknowledge the merits of competitive authoritarianism, we argue that the concept does not provide a sufficient analytical perspective to explain the causality in understanding regime change in Turkey. It rather remains as descriptive as it characterizes the unfair elections and/or uneven playing field to define the regime. However, in order to understand the causality of regime change, it is crucial to expand the mainstream political science analyses of electoral regimes with critical political economy perspectives (Søndergaard, 2020). By doing so, we aim to provide a comprehensive analytical framework to understand the causality of regime changes. Based on this perspective, we assert that there are two inadequacies in this conceptualization.

First, competitive authoritarianism reduces authoritarianism into the characteristics of leaders or societies and attributes great importance to the agency at the expense of ignoring the structural elements of authoritarianism. Personal, religious/cultural, or electoral features of authoritarianism are undoubtedly crucial in understanding such shifts. However, competitive authoritarianism, by starting from these elements, assumes that there is a sharp and clear-cut temporal division in understanding authoritarianism. This is perhaps because authoritarianism's relationship with neoliberalism, populism, and Islamism is understood as being externally related. Therefore, this assumption ignores the pre-existing authoritarian features of neoliberalism and divides the AKP rule into almost a 'good AKP-bad AKP' divide (Erol, 2018), which corresponds to 'good and bad capitalism' perceptions (Bruff, 2014). While the former represents rule-based liberal

democracy, the latter exhibits crony capitalism. Such division ignores the continuity of the main trends in Turkey's political economy and makes the analysis somehow ahistorical.

Second, authoritarian characteristics that are embedded in neoliberalism's very own self (Biebricher, 2020; Bruff, 2014) do not feature in competitive authoritarianism accounts. There is almost an ideal type of depiction of neoliberalism and authoritarianism in competitive authoritarianism accounts that conceives them as externally related binary spheres. Furthermore, since the competitive authoritarianism perspective is stemmed from the mainstream political science literature, it sees market reforms, separation of economics and politics, formation of rule-based depoliticized state structure, i.e. implementation of neoliberal economic programmes, as part of the democratization process (Regilme, 2014). This approach resonates with the Modernisation Theory's premise that market reforms and democratization are meant to be implemented in close association with each other (Przeworski & Limongi, 1997). Contrary to these claims, however, the 2010s saw a rise of authoritarianism as a general trend in world politics (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). Therefore, we argue that the competitive authoritarianism argument is incapable of explaining a significant part of the current authoritarianization dynamics that is related to the legitimation crisis of the political regimes that implemented neoliberal market reforms, although it can be still useful to describe formal aspects of the hybrid regimes. This conclusion brings us to the concept of authoritarian neoliberalism.

The concept of authoritarian neoliberalism provides an alternative explanation for the current dynamics of authoritarianization. As Bruff (2014, p. 113) describes, authoritarian neoliberalism is defined as 'the reconfiguring of the state into a less democratic entity through constitutional and legal changes that seek to insulate it from social and political conflict'. In the aftermath of the GFC in 2008, neoliberalism's hegemonic position had been threatened, therefore the survival of economic governance has become more dependent on the coercive state apparatuses. The intertwining of authoritarian statism<sup>2</sup> and neoliberal reforms does not only make neoliberalism a resilient mode of economic and political governance, but it also defines the core component of neoliberalism effectively reproduced against popular opposition because contemporary neoliberal governance 'reinforces and increasingly relies upon (1) coercive state practices that discipline, marginalise and criminalise oppositional forces and (2) the judicial and administrative state apparatuses which limit the avenues in which neoliberal policies can be challenged' (Tansel, 2017, p. 2). Thus, the authoritarian neoliberalism concept provides a more comprehensive approach than competitive authoritarianism to the extent that it covers the hegemonic political economy trajectory, i.e. neoliberalism, that shapes the current authoritarianization trends.<sup>3</sup>

However, we argue that authoritarian neoliberalism does not provide a ready-to-use framework to explain the contemporary rise of authoritarianism globally, since the concept was particularly developed to explain the political economy trajectory of the Eurozone region in the post-2010 period (Bruff, 2016; Bruff & Wöhl, 2016). In the original formulation, authoritarian neoliberalism emerged 'as a response both to wider capitalist crisis and more specific legitimation crises of capitalist states' (Bruff, 2016, p. 108). Different from this original formulation, we use a slightly modified version of the concept to apply it in other regions. We argue that, particularly in the last decade, a specific kind of authoritarianism has been rising. The specific nature of the current authoritarianism has not been characterized by the technocratic and depoliticized government structure, which excluded subaltern classes from the decision-making processes.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the political strategies of right-wing forces against the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism have been shaping the current global authoritarian wave. These new strategies included erosion of the rule-based liberal international political and economic system, re-politicization of economic management, increasingly using redistributive welfare regimes, and assigning more active roles for the state,

including using development banks, establishing wealth funds in order to steer economic direction.<sup>5</sup> In many cases, this political-economic agenda has been accompanied by nationalist and conservative political forces, who have employed populist polarization strategies either in order to come to power or to consolidate their rule if they were already in power.

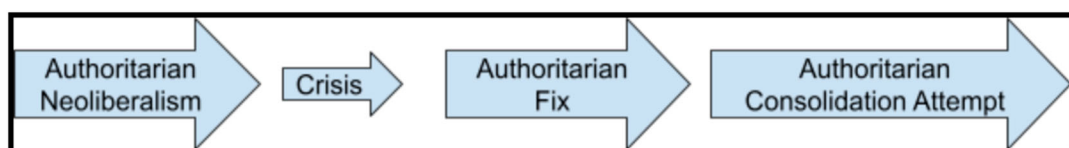
These general trends in the global political economy can be seen both in the global North and South. On the one hand, erosion of the welfare state, permanent fiscal austerity (Bieling, 2021; Blyth, 2013), financial and trade liberalizations, and immigration waves fuelled the rise of right-wing authoritarian forces (Rodrik, 2021), which caused the strengthening of the trend of ‘de-democratization of capitalism’ (Hall, 2022; Streeck, 2014), or in a broader sense, emerging the authoritarian tendencies in the global North (Brown, 2019; Fraser, 2015; Merkel, 2014). On the other hand, implementation of conditional IMF programmes, changing state and society relations according to the principles of post-Washington Consensus policies including central banking independence, inflation targeting regimes, fiscal austerity, and labour market reforms towards creating flexibility in hiring and firing conditions have been hollowing out the procedural democracies, while have paved the wave of rising right-wing politics in many countries in the global South. While Jayasuriya (2020) analyses these new dynamics of the rise of authoritarianism in Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand; Chacko (2018) investigates the rise of Narendra Modi of India from a similar perspective. Along with East Asian cases, a similar authoritarianization pattern can be observed in Central and Eastern European countries like Poland (Lendvai-Bainton & Szewlewa, 2021; Shields, 2015, 2019), and Hungary (Scheiring, 2021). For instance, Scheiring and Szombati (2020) argue by employing the Polanyian framework that the recent ‘authoritarian re-embedding’ has developed as a reaction to the ‘neoliberal disembedding’ period of the previous decades in which market reforms were implemented. In a similar vein, Berberoglu’s (2021) edited volume also argues that the current authoritarianization dynamics stemmed from the rise of nationalism, which developed as a response to the crisis of neoliberal globalization. Therefore, the latest authoritarianization wave in the post-2008 period has been marked by a reaction to market reforms and technocratic managements of the 1990s and the 2000s, while right-wing, religious and conservative movements took the lead particularly in countries where organized labour and left-wing politics were significantly marginalized.

Turkey is no exception to this latter trend. The AKP governments managed to establish authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey mainly via employing the neoliberal populist strategy between 2002 and 2013 (Akçay, 2021). The IMF programme and the EU membership agenda were considered as external anchors of the neoliberal programme of the early 2000s, when large-scale privatizations took place (Bakır & Öniş, 2010). One direct consequence of these large-scale privatizations was the marginalization of trade unions,<sup>6</sup> who were able to stop privatizations in the 1990s (Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018). Marginalization of trade unions, or more generally labour movement did not take place only through privatizations, but also the introduction of new regulations about industrial relations aimed to create a more flexible hiring and firing conditions structurally undermined labour’s power economically and politically during the 2000s (Özkiziltan, 2019). That dynamic was key to the establishment of authoritarian neoliberalism during the 2000s. Building a new conservative welfare regime (Özdemir, 2020), and creating a more inclusive financial system have been two components of authoritarian neoliberalism in the early 2000s in Turkey (Akçay, 2018). As for the former, new social assistance programmes that were introduced in many developing countries at the beginning of the 2000s constituted new welfare regimes, albeit limited (Dorlach, 2020). These support programmes helped governments soften neoliberal recipes’ negative societal consequences (Özden et al., 2017). As for the latter, making consumer credits and

mortgages available for lower-income groups have been one of the key features of the financialization experiences of developing countries in the 2000s (Karacimen, 2014). Availability of cheap loans also functioned as a compensation mechanism that substitutes lack of wage increases (Güven, 2016), for instance, the ratio of household debt to GDP increased more than 10-fold, from 1.8% in 2002 to 19.6% in 2013 (Akçay & Güngen, 2019). Social inclusion through the newly established conservative welfare regime and financial inclusion through cheap loans were accompanied by the formation of the regulatory state structure, a suggestion by the WB and EU institutions to Turkey. This state structure was established through depoliticization of economic management (Kutun, 2020), including creating an independent central bank for the management of monetary policy (Akçay, 2009; Bakır, 2007), and installing other independent regulatory agencies (Atiyas, 2012). This political-economic constellation in the early 2000s was facilitated by high economic growth rates that were enabled by abundant capital inflows to Turkey (Orhangazi & Yeldan, 2021). The latter element also constituted the key component of Turkey's dominant capital accumulation regime, i.e. dependent financialization, which characterized Turkey's integration into the world economy (Akçay, 2021; Güngen, 2020). In short, an authoritarian neoliberal regime had already been established in Turkey when the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC) hit the world economy. Therefore, we suggest that the current authoritarianization tendencies have been shaped by the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism. In order to elaborate this argument, we present a causal mechanism for the contemporary rise of authoritarianism in Figure 1.

By providing this causal mechanism, we aim to consider both structural dynamics and consequences of the actor-based power struggle, particularly the ones within the power bloc. While the analysis of the crisis phase of the mechanism requires a critical political economy approach that is equipped with the analysis of the structural dynamics of the crisis of the capital accumulation regime,<sup>7</sup> the following phases, the authoritarian fix and consolidation attempt, necessitates a more actor-oriented explanation. In this analysis, we assume that the political survival strategies of the political elite take place on the basis of the structural crisis conditions, which limit the available options for the political actors.

Based on this argument, we suggest that the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism, which has manifested itself as the amalgamation of the state crisis and the crisis of capital accumulation regime, created new political and economic challenges for the AKP after 2013. The AKP's main response to these challenges can be understood with the concept of the 'authoritarian fix'. We use this concept, following Bruff (2014), to emphasize the particular avenue that the AKP turned when it encountered the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism. We also argue that changing the political regime towards a more authoritarian form, i.e. Turkish presidentialism, in the post-2018 period has been an extension of the strategy of authoritarian fix that had developed against the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism in the post-2013 term. In this sense, the authoritarian consolidation concept refers to a transition, from procedural democracy to non-democratic forms of government (Akçay, 2021; Ambrosio, 2014; Göbel, 2011). This specific nature of the concept



**Figure 1.** Causal mechanism of contemporary authoritarianism.

stemmed from its focus on the interregnum period between two established regimes, procedural democracy and full authoritarianism. Precisely for this reason, the concept is marked by contractionary tendencies that generated hybrid political forms and accumulation regimes, which make this interregnum period fragile and open to the economic and political crises. The concept also examines the establishment of the newly formed authoritarian regimes as the state-building process.

So far, we addressed a specific mechanism of the contemporary authoritarianization wave and argued that the mainstream political science accounts should be complemented by the critical political economy approaches in order to uncover the current dynamics of authoritarianism. In this context, we maintain that to understand the main dynamics of authoritarianism in Turkey, it is crucial to transcend the personalistic and culturalist accounts and incorporate structural factors within the analysis. Although neoliberalism does not simply rely on coercion and coercive state apparatuses, the survival of neoliberalism essentially and increasingly required less consensual politics. Nonetheless, neoliberalism's need for authoritarian regimes does not necessarily demand repositioning politics around religiosity, it necessitates certain governance methods such as the centralization of decision-making, reproducing discourses and generating consent around already-existing social hierarchies, and reconfiguring the rule of law, the state's functions, and unionization in line with the ruling party's interests. In short, the competitive authoritarianism concept can be useful to discuss the results of the authoritarianization mechanism that we introduced. Yet, the authoritarian consolidation concept provides a more analytically powerful framework since it includes critical political economy perspectives. In the following section, we implement the theoretical framework and the causal mechanism to the Turkish case for explaining the contemporary dynamics of authoritarianism.

### **3. Authoritarian consolidation attempt in the post-2018 period**

The concept of authoritarian consolidation alludes to a transition process towards the full authoritarian regimes, i.e. fascism. We draw on Göbel's (2011) elaboration and analyse the political economy of Turkish presidentialism regarding three dimensions: infrastructural, despotic and discursive powers of the new regime. We also analyse the 2018–2019 crisis as it was a crucial challenge to the new presidential regime and argue that the Erdoğan government's avoidance of implementing the IMF programme after the crisis opened the door for the new regime to establish itself.

#### ***3.1. Institutional experimentation: the new institutional architecture of the regime***

Since its early tenure, the AKP and its leader Erdoğan backed the proposal to amend the constitution for a presidential system. The 1982 Constitution already gave some limited executive power to the president, therefore, unlike in the 1960 Constitution, the president was not simply an impartial head of state, it was also equipped with some veto power that overlapped with the government's authority. However, it was the 2007 amendments that enabled the president to be elected by popular vote that created a conflict between the government's and the president's representative legitimacy (Dinçşahin, 2013). Arguably, the 2017 amendments solved this problem by abolishing the Prime Minister's office, as a part of Erdoğan's strategy of the authoritarian fix. This institutional change meant that the president as the head of state has been given the authority to form the cabinet so that it has also become the head of government. The amendments also introduced new authorities to the president such as to issue presidential decrees, declare the state of emergency, renew

the elections, manage the fiscal budget, appoint central bank governors and supreme court members, which used to be shared by the legislative and executive powers.

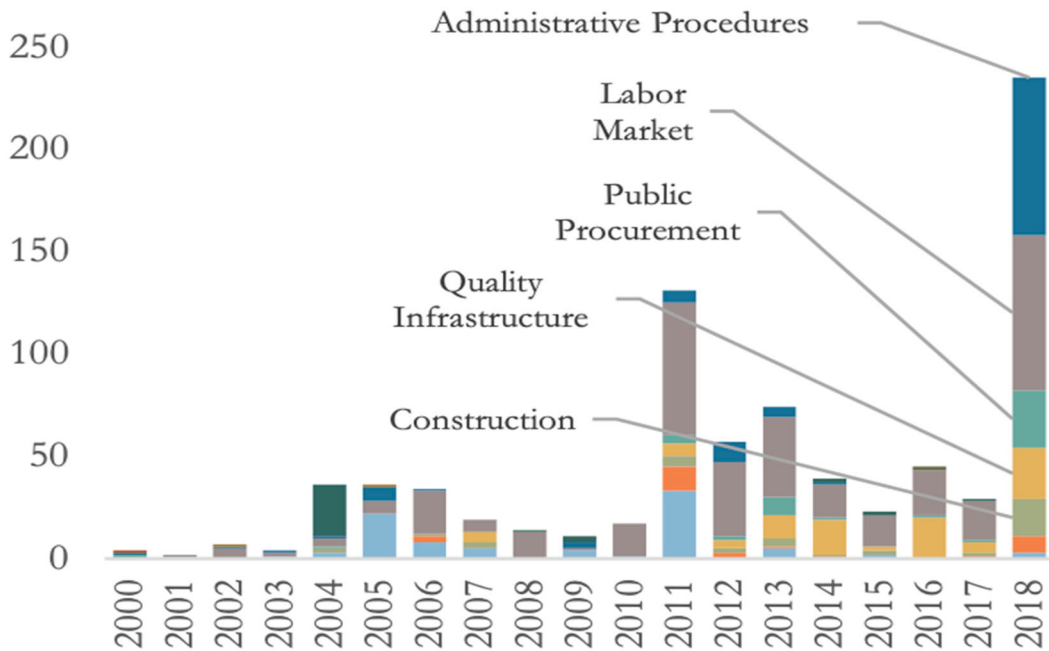
These new authorities given to the president, who was elected directly by the people, have been actively employed in the post-2018 period to dismantle the technocratic state structure and depoliticized economic management. The structure and management were established in the early 2000s in the aftermath of the economic crisis. Although the ‘repoliticisation’ of economic management, including erosion of autonomy of the regulatory agencies (Ozel, 2012), had already begun after the GFC, it intensified during the post-2018 period.<sup>8</sup> The apparent sight of this tendency has been increasing the turnover rate of the central bank governors. During the new presidential regime, Turkey’s central bank (CBRT) had four governors in three years between 2018 and 2021 (CBRT, 2021). However, the most tantalizing part of this change, arguably, was the removal of the president’s impartiality, so that the president, when nominated for the elections, does not need to cut ties with the associated political party (Bilgin & Erdoğan, 2018).

The 2017 amendments did not only change the institutional architecture of the regime, but it also provided unbalanced and unchecked legislative and executive powers and the ability to control the higher judicial bodies to the head of state. The entire executive authority of government was canalized to the head of state and the parliament was severely weakened against the president. The violation of the separation of powers has been accompanied by the removal of impartiality. In some ways, the new Turkish presidential system replicated the American system, however, instead of weak party discipline, the Turkish system is structured around a strong party discipline. This is unprecedentedly problematic because it could easily lead to one political party dominating the autocratic system.

The violation of judicial independence is another aspect of this new architecture (Özbudun, 2019). The president is given the authority to directly appoint twelve out of fifteen members of the Constitutional Court, which is the highest legal body in Turkey. The rest of the three members are appointed by the weakened parliament. Needless to say, the majority of the parliament will be held by the political party led by the president. So, the president appoints the entire board of the highest legal body in Turkey one way or another.

The new regime in Turkey is established on the centralization of power without checks and balances, accountability, and controllability. This centralization did not only undermine the liberal democracy’s basic principle of the separation of powers it also severely weakened the parliament and inconvenienced the possibility of any opposition party coming into power. The infrastructural power in Turkey, thus, was restructured in 2017–2018 and became a more effective tool to regulate society through further-centralized executive institutions and a political party that is incorporated within the executive power (Kaygusuz, 2018). In this sense, the post-2018 period has been characterized by the state-building activities of the new regime, in which legal activism took an important part.

The impact of this legislative centralization and legal activism could be seen in [Figure 2](#). The number of changes in statutory and presidential decrees increased unprecedentedly in 2018. It is worth mentioning that most of these decrees are qualitatively constitutive. The proportion of these changes are concentrated mainly in day-to-day administration that consolidated the new regime’s authoritarian procedural centralization and labour market reforms that suppressed the awakening of working-class resistance. The other changes were made in public procurement, quality infrastructure, and construction areas, which provided the Government with the means to sustain its project of the creation of loyal business groups.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 2.** Number of changes in decrees in Turkey's new executive presidential system. Source: World Bank (2019, p. 57).

The state-building efforts of the new regime have been, however, one of the most challenging aspects of the current authoritarian consolidation attempt. They have been marked by the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism as a manifestation of the structural crisis of Turkish capitalism in which the crisis of capital accumulation regime and the state crisis overlapped. The institutional experimentation of the new regime, then, can be seen as a reaction to the state crisis that erupted in 2013. Although this authoritarian state-building process has been led by the nationalist coalition that was established right after the June 2015 general elections, it has been disrupted by conflicting interests of different capital fractions that resulted in contradicting regulations (Bozkurt, 2021).

### 3.2. Despotic power of the new regime

Since the general elections in June 2015, the power to coerce one's will on the people (Göbel, 2011, p. 177), or in other words, the despotic power has become more significant in Turkey. The AKP failed to secure enough votes to form a single-party government for the first time since 2002 in the 2015 elections. This result was significant for the establishment of a new nationalist alliance in the ruling bloc grounded on the ending 'Kurdish Opening'.<sup>10</sup> The government's 'trench operation' against the Kurdish opposition, who declared 'democratic autonomous' regions in the south-east of Turkey, between August 2015 (Diken, 2015) and March 2016 (Bozarlan, 2016) was a decisive period for the emergence of a new nationalist alliance between the AKP and the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). During this period, not only the 'Kurdish Opening' ended, but also several ISIS-related suicide bombers killed hundreds of people in political rallies of the opposition in Turkey. The increasing violence in the aftermath of these developments

assisted the government to consolidate despotic power which was also intensified by the coup attempt of 2016.

Following the failed coup attempt in July 2016, not only the putschist soldiers and the Gülenists but also left-wing dissidents were criminalized and dismissed in the purge. Over 160 thousand people from a variety of sectors (security personnel, judges, teachers etc.) were suspended and more than 75 thousand people were arrested (Altıparmak & Akdeniz, 2017). However, in terms of despotic power, the most significant development was the arrest of a large group of HDP MPs, including its co-presidents Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ in November 2016. They are both still in prison as of August 2021. The arrest of incumbent MPs and the co-presidents was a clear sign of imposing one's will on the people by coercion.

The authoritarian fix strategy's two crucial political turning points, the 2017 referendum on the change of political regime from parliamentary to the presidential one, and the 2018 presidential and general elections, took place under emergency rule. During the 2017 referendum, there were multiple cases of state oppression on the various 'No' campaign rallies<sup>11</sup> directly connected to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the General Directorate of Security (Sözcü, 2017). Also, on the referendum day, while the voting was still going on, the Supreme Electoral Council annulled the rule that required each ballot must have an official stamp, meaning unstamped ballots would be valid. The decision was heavily contested and criticized immediately as the margin between 'Yes' and 'No' was very narrow. Official numbers were 51.41% for Yes and 48.59% for No. The opposition parties declared that this was fraudulent as 1.5 million 'Yes' votes were unstamped. The campaign period of the 2018 general and presidential elections was also under the SoE. The rallies and campaigns of opposition parties suffered from the political oppression caused by the arbitrary decisions of the state agencies based on the nationwide martial law that had been there for almost two years. There were also allegations of ballot stuffing for the AKP and MHP in Şanlıurfa province. Most importantly, the HDP had to campaign and take part in the elections while both its co-presidents and some prominent MPs were jailed (DW, 2018). In short, the emergency rule was used 'as an autocratising tool' by the regime between 2016 and 2018 (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020b).

The oppression of mass media was also another dimension of despotism. According to Reporters Without Borders, 33 journalists were incarcerated in Turkey in 2018 which made Turkey the third country with the highest number of imprisoned journalists in the world after China and Egypt (Evrensel, 2018). It is also safe to argue that by 2015–2016, the entire mainstream media in Turkey were liquidated and became overwhelmingly pro-AKP by various methods such as transfer of media ownership, using incentives and procurements in other sectors, and oppression (Altınors, 2016).

The local elections of 2019 took place under the shadow of the 2018–2019 economic crisis, which was triggered by a currency crisis in 2018 and turned into an economic recession (Orhangazi & Yeldan, 2021). The crisis also had political damages: the AKP and MHP election alliance lost all major cities in local elections. Nevertheless, the local elections in 2019 demonstrated that, unlike the electoral/competitive authoritarianism arguments, the authoritarian regime in Turkey was not so much 'electorally competitive', as the AKP proved that it will not give up on power willingly. We argue that the authoritarian regime in Turkey has become more despotic on two grounds. First, although the AKP lost five of six largest cities in Turkey (including Istanbul and Ankara which were held by the AKP and former Islamic parties since 1994), the Supreme Electoral Council, politically under the AKP influence annulled Istanbul mayoral election with unfounded grounds. Ekrem İmamoğlu, the CHP candidate won the re-run of this election with a greater margin in June (March: 0.16%, June: 9.22%). Second, the HDP won three metropolitan and fifty-seven districts in March.

However, the Ministry of Interior Affairs overruled the election results and appointed trustees to most of these municipalities (including Diyarbakir, Van, and Mardin Metropolitan Municipalities) on alleged terror grounds in August of 2020 (Bianet, 2020).<sup>12</sup> As Tutkal (2021) documented, the government's strategy of removal of the elected mayors was not unique to the 2019 elections, rather it became a systematic attitude.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it is clear that the government's appointed trustee policy goes beyond the definition of competitive authoritarianism.

Nevertheless, since the early 2010s, both civil and political liberties indexes have plummeted rapidly, according to the data collated by the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem, 2021). Both indexes indicate rapid falls as far as the low degrees of the early 1980s when the junta ruled the country in the aftermath of the infamous coup. The fall in the rule of law index is even sharper. As demonstrated in Figure 3, the index fell to an all-time-low in 2017, and between 2017 and 2019, the index shows half the parameter that was recorded for the junta years of 1981–1983. The unprecedented decrease in the rule of law and both civil and political liberties indicate the consolidation of despotic power in the aftermath of the coup attempt in 2016.

Labour rights were not exempt from this composition. Although the labour movement has been dramatically weakened in the early years of the AKP governments, the number of industrial strikes increased in the post-2013 period because of the crisis of dependent financialization. As it can be seen in Figure 4, working-class activities are heavily suppressed in 2018 with the consolidation of despotic power. Hence, Erdoğan highlighted at a party meeting at the end of 2018 that under the SoE, strikes have become obsolete under their rule. Nonetheless, 7 of 15 strike bans in Turkey since 2002 took place under the SoE in 2017 and 2018, including the Strike at MESS Group with 130k workers (T24, 2018).

Thus, the restructuring of the state and intensifying despotic power have been among the key components of the authoritarian consolidation project. The main driver of the rise of despotic power was the emergence of the nationalist alliance consisting of the AKP and the MHP. The

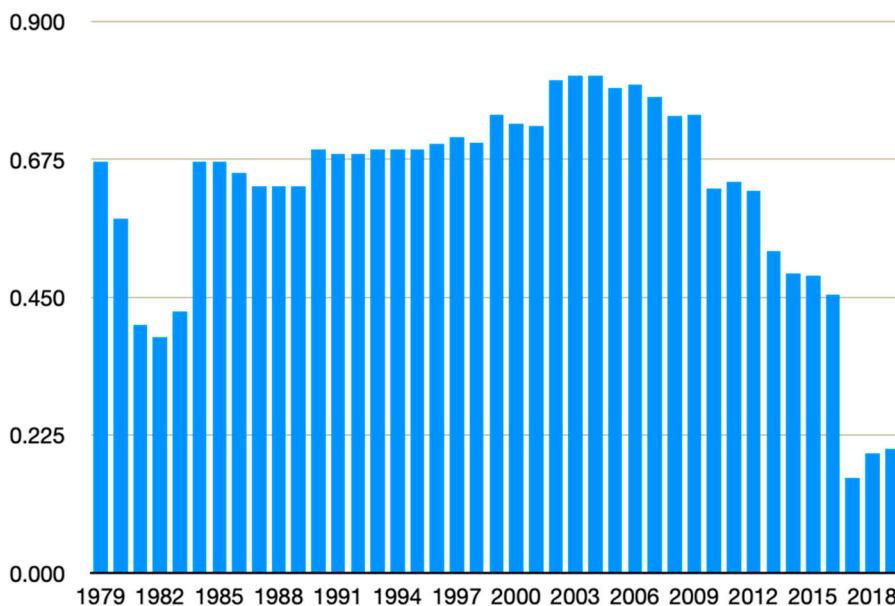
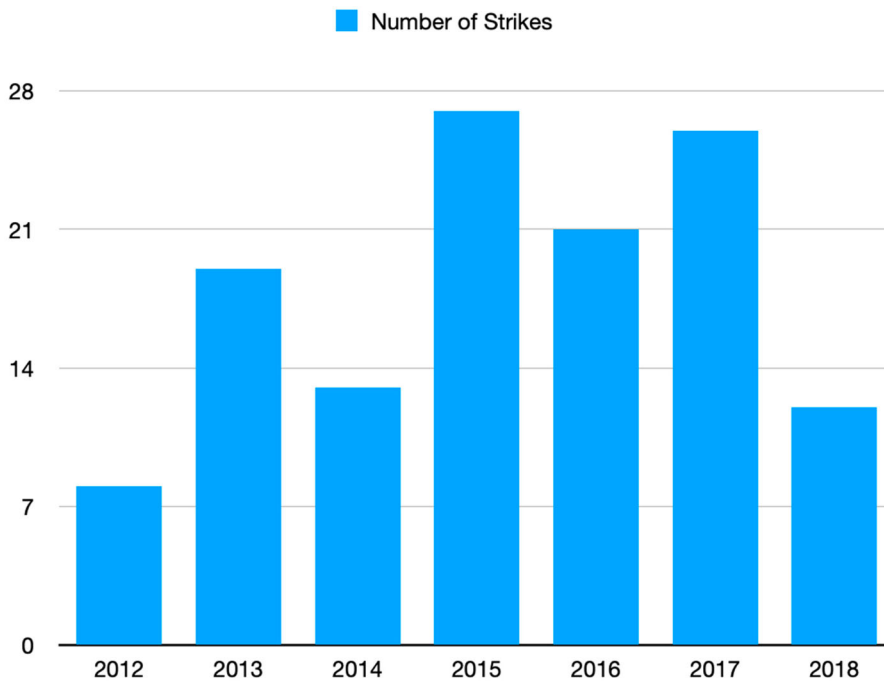


Figure 3. Rule of law index, Turkey. Source: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/VariableGraph/>.



**Figure 4.** The number of strikes in Turkey (public and private sectors combined). Source: Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, [https://www.csgb.gov.tr/media/53844/grev\\_lokavt.pdf](https://www.csgb.gov.tr/media/53844/grev_lokavt.pdf).

two-year-long emergency rule between 2016 and 2018, the systematic implementation of the policy of removal of the elected mayors affiliated with the HDP and appointing trustees to those positions, and finally, integration of some parts of the SoE into common law (Arslanalp & Erkmén, 2020a, p. 117) have been key components of the rise of the despotic power of the new regime. These elements did not only limit formal democratic liberties and rights of citizens but also suppressed labour movement in every means.

### ***3.3. Political polarization strategy as discursive power***

The political strategy of polarization, where ‘us’ versus ‘them’ rhetoric has been used by right-wing politics to mobilize the ‘pure people’ against ‘corrupt elites’, is one of the main characteristics of populist politics (Barr, 2019; Mudde, 2004; Müller, 2016; Weyland, 2001). Arguably, political polarization at the discursive level has been used as a ‘power to make people want what the government wants them to want’ (Göbel, 2011, p. 177) since the beginning of the AKP rule. The AKP’s hegemonic project of incorporating liberal politics within conservatism under the neoliberal political economy in its first period in the office demonstrated several examples such as taking over the EU membership bid, praising civilian politics over the military tutelage, and applying the IMF programme drafted in the aftermath of the 2000–2001 economic crisis. However, since the aborted attempt to elect the AKP’s Abdullah Gül as the new president that caused the Republican Protests and the E-memorandum, the AKP started to abandon inclusive political discourse and adopt a more polarizing one. In 2007, these developments further caused the General Elections in July, originally planned in November, and a constitutional referendum to change the election of the

president by popular vote in October. In April–May 2007 protests and the AKP’s closure trial in 2008, the AKP started to discover the positive impact of polarizing politics on the election results.

The AKP’s discourse against the workers who resisted the privatization could be given as significant examples of its increasing use of polarization strategy. During the 2009–2010 TEKEL Resistance, a mass strike by state-owned tobacco factory (TEKEL) workers against the privatization, Erdoğan responded to the workers’ demands as follows: ‘the TEKEL workers did not make us to be in power, our people did’ (Özüğurlu, 2011; Tansel, 2019; Yalman & Topal, 2019). In the following days, police brutality increased against the workers. Prior to the general elections in 2011, both Erdoğan’s polarizing discourse and the police brutality against the anti-AKP protests had become more significant. For example, Metin Lokumcu died of a cardiac arrest caused by tear gas used by police in Hopa (Evrensel, 2020). Although there were some noteworthy instances of increasing polarizing language and police brutality against the anti-government movements before June 2013, such as the Mayday Protests in Taksim in 2013, the Gezi Park protests famously marked a turning point not only for the more active usage of despotic power but also for the locating the populist polarization strategy at the centre of the discursive power.

While the Gezi Park protests, which aimed to protect the public park near the Taksim Square of İstanbul against the government’s project of turning this public park into a shopping mall, among the largest oppositions to the AKP, the government used these protests to consolidate its electorate by employing the populist polarization strategy as a component of its discursive power (Bilgiç, 2018). The AKP’s U-turn vis-à-vis the Kurdish Opening also demonstrates the effectiveness of polarizing language. Since it lost the parliamentary majority in June 2015, the AKP started to use extremely hostile language towards the HDP, such as associating the party and its politicians with the PKK or outlawed terrorist activities. This narrative helped the AKP to win the snap elections in November 2015. This language was not only used towards the HDP and its politicians, it was also repeatedly used against the Academics for Peace (Aydin, 2021). The discourse against the Gülenists was already hostile in the aftermath of the corruption scandal in December 2013, however, since the coup attempt in July 2016, the polarization strategy of the AKP also helped the party to consolidate a consensus around the regime change. Between 2016 and 2018 (the post-coup purge, the referendum and the elections), the discursive hostility against the dissent was certainly used to polarize the people and helped the AKP to consolidate the sufficient majority in the popular vote. Arguably, polarizing language backlashed in the local elections in March 2019 and in the Istanbul re-run elections in June 2019 in which the AKP lost five of the six largest city’s municipal elections. Perhaps, this defeat signified the limits of discursive power of the new regime.

Overall, the AKP’s will to grip on to power does not exclude discursive strategies to polarize people over several topics. The increasing control of media and the neo-Ottomanist foreign policy as the reconstruction of historical superiority as an identity is incorporated within this process too. Finally, the establishment of the Directorate of Communications, an administrative division in the Presidency and its growing importance in public administration and bureaucracy is noteworthy. This institutional restructuring also links discursive power to the authoritarian state-building efforts of the new regime.

### **3.4. 2018–2019 economic crisis as a challenge to the new regime**

The 2018–2019 crisis was one of the most serious challenges for Turkey’s new Presidential regime not only because the crisis undermined the position of the political elite in the power bloc, but also it became an early resilience test for Erdoğan’s presidency. We argue that the policy response of the

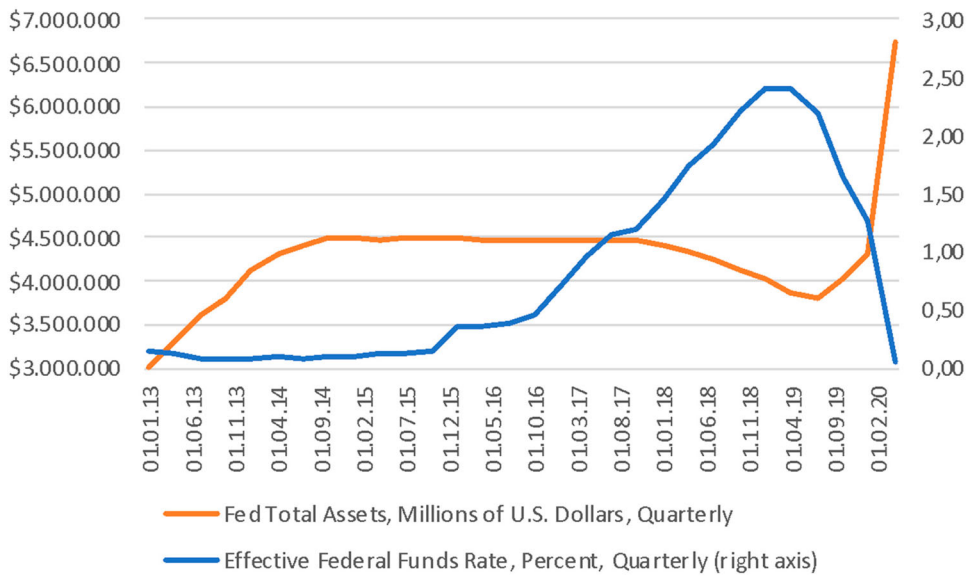
Erdoğan government, coupled with the changing international financial conditions in 2019 opened the door for the new regime to pursue the authoritarian consolidation strategy. The currency crisis caught the new presidential regime when the TL depreciated more than 40% against the US Dollar in the first eight months in 2018 (Akçay & Güngen, 2018). The CBRT had already increased its funding rate in May 2018, prior to the twin elections, presidential and parliament, on 24 June 2018 however it was not enough to stop the quick depreciation of the TL. Escalating foreign policy disputes between Turkey and the US after Erdoğan's election victory exacerbated the economic uncertainties that the new regime faced and this combination resulted in a sudden stop of capital inflows in August 2018.

In the same month, the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD) and the Union of Chambers and Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) announced that the 'tighter monetary policy is required in order to stabilise exchange rates', as were accompanying 'austerity measures' (Financial Times, 2018). The large capital group's call for the austerity measures brought about a colossal challenge for Erdoğan basically because it was almost certain that the austerity measures were going to undermine the new regime's electoral support and the political elite's position vis-à-vis the dominant fraction of capital in the power bloc. As a response, the CBRT increased interest rates drastically, which brought about a sharp credit crunch and following the contraction in the economic growth. Moreover, in September 2018 Erdoğan government announced its 'New Economic Program', which has elements of 'a classical austerity plan' (Güngen, 2020, p. 128).

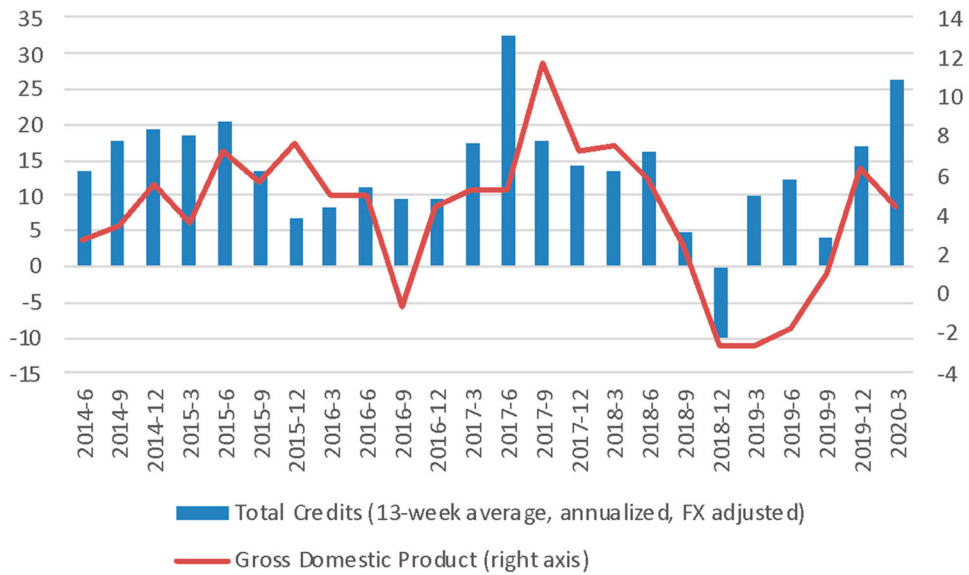
Typically, currency crises have been coupled with debt crises in the previous experiences of the global South and these twin crises commonly ended up with the implementation of an austerity programme under the auspices of the IMF. Nevertheless, as Akyüz (2020, p. 1) maintains that 'so far, the Turkish case appears to depart significantly from this pattern'. We argue that this seemingly divergent route opened for the Erdoğan government mainly because of changing global monetary conditions. It was not a coincidence that Turkey's 2018-2019 economic crisis corresponded to the peak of the quantitative tightening (QT) of the Fed, as Figure 5 demonstrates.

In 2018, the Fed was expanding the QT steps and raising the interest rate simultaneously. The result for Turkey was both increasing interest rates and depreciation of TL. These external factors coupled with the above-mentioned domestic uncertainties culminated in the recession in Turkey. However, in early 2019 the Fed made a 'U-turn' in its monetary policy stance because of increasing concerns of economic slowdown and changed it from tightening to easing again, as Figure 5 demonstrates. This change created huge policy space for Turkish policymakers, who were able to reduce interest rates by 12% during the second half of 2019 and to postpone the implementation of this harsh austerity package. These two measures also enabled the government to initiate a new credit expansion cycle by employing the public banks as countercyclical tools.

Therefore, both avoiding the IMF programme and postponing the implementation of austerity measures paved the way for authoritarian consolidation. Owing to the favourable international conditions the AKP was able to sustain its debt-driven growth model in 2019, as Figure 6 summarizes. Along with launching a new credit cycle, increasing the use of off-balance sheet liabilities in central bank reserves and using soft capital controls were two unorthodox measures that Turkish policymakers employed during the crisis (Akçay, 2021). In September 2018, Erdoğan appointed himself as the chairman of Turkey Wealth Fund, which has more than 200 billion US-Dollars worth assets, in order to consolidate its power (Pitel, 2018). Nevertheless, declining purchasing power, increasing unemployment to unprecedented levels and rising inflation were the three most crucial social costs of the crisis (World Bank, 2019).



**Figure 5.** Effective federal funds rate and fed total assets (2013–2020). Source: Prepared by the authors based on the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis data, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org>.



**Figure 6.** GDP and loan growth in Turkey (2014–2020). Source: Prepared by the authors from Turkish statistical institute, national accounts, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Kategori/GetKategori?p=Industry-114>.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this article, we examined how authoritarianism in Turkey is *en route* to consolidation in the aftermath of the Turkish presidential system and aimed to analyse the political-economic factors contributing to the authoritarian consolidation attempt of the Erdoğan government. To do so,

we focussed on the new presidential regime that emerged as a nationalist-conservative reaction to the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism. Building on our critique of competitive authoritarianism accounts, we argued that a calibrated version of authoritarian neoliberalism concept better serves to explain Turkey's contemporary authoritarianization experience. Our key argument is, then, the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism has shaped the current authoritarianism dynamics, in which nationalist-conservative forces developed the strategy of the authoritarian fix as a reaction to the crisis of the state and the crisis of the accumulation regime of Turkey. Drawing on this debate, we developed our authoritarian consolidation approach by advancing Göbel's (2011) concept via incorporating critical political economy scholarship. We employ the concept of authoritarian fix to conceptualize institutional, discursive and despotic powers in the making of the new presidential regime.

We demonstrated empirically how the AKP and its leader Erdoğan carried out the authoritarian consolidation attempt in the post-2018 period. In terms of institutional power, the new presidential regime did not only give the president the entire executive authority, it also weakened the parliament and judicial independence against the president. It is evidently clear that by presidential decrees, the head of executive power has become *de facto* legislative power too. Therefore, instead of a rigid separation of powers, the new regime meant a one-man rule. Also, in 2018, the ruling by decrees was concentrated in administrative procedures, labour market, and public procurement, hence it is safe to maintain that alongside establishing the new administrative architecture, the new regime is firstly used to control the working-class opposition and to support loyal business groups.

In terms of despotic power, it is palpable that under the new regime, the rule of law deteriorated to levels even lower than in the 1980–1983 period when Turkey was ruled by the military dictatorship. Appointing trustees to the municipalities won by the HDP and the 2019 local elections in Istanbul also showed that the new regime is willing to go beyond the electorally competitive environment by suspending democratic elections. In terms of discursive power, the AKP and Erdoğan's populist rhetoric continued to aid the regime for consolidation. Finally, we analysed the 2018–2019 currency crisis as a challenge to the new regime and argued that the Fed's 'U-turn' in early 2019 created policy space for Turkey's new regime to survive without implementing harsh austerity measures with the assistance of the IMF. It is safe to argue that the AKP and its leader's tight grip on power have been intensified in recent years and the authoritarian consolidation attempt will continue in the recovery from the pandemic years of 2021–2022.

## Notes

1. The Gülenists were a religious community, led by a self-exiled Turkish cleric living in the US since the early 2000s, which was one of the key political allies of the AKP when it was struggling against the Kemalist establishment particularly after the presidential election crisis in 2007. This group was organised in civil society institutions mostly in the education and media sectors. Yet, they increased their influence in crucial state institutions including top police officials, judges particularly after the 2010 constitutional referendum, and top generals of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) after the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials. Nevertheless, the conflicts between the Gülenists and the AKP surfaced after the elimination of the Kemalist forces from the juridical branch and the TAF. The failed coup attempt in 2016 was the latest round of the political struggle to control the bureaucracy and seize the ultimate political power between the Gülenists and the AKP.
2. Authoritarian statism is a concept developed by Marxist political sociologist and theorist Nicos Poulantzas in order to grasp the changing nature of the state as a reaction to the crisis of the 1970s in advanced capitalist countries. The key characteristics of authoritarian statism are including the decline of the

- importance of parliaments and increasing concentration of power under the executive power, and undermining rule of law (Poulantzas, 2000).
3. The special issue of *Globalizations* (2019) edited by Ian Bruff and Cemal Burak Tansel on authoritarian neoliberalism was a good example for the range of this concept's application to the concrete cases. Indeed, there is a growing literature in the contemporary critical political economy perspective, which uses the authoritarian neoliberalism framework particularly for the global South, i.e. Malaysia (Juego, 2018), African countries (Harrison, 2019), Jordan and Morocco (Kreitmeyr, 2019), Mexico (Jenss, 2019), Brazil (Saad-Filho, 2020; Søndergaard, 2020), and Turkey (Tansel, 2018; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018; Özkiziltan, 2019; Akçay, 2021; Aydın, 2021; Özden et al., 2017; Yesil, 2016; Bilgiç, 2018). For a critique of authoritarian neoliberalism vis-à-vis regime change in Turkey see Pinar (2021).
  4. Gallo (2021) recently offers a taxonomy of authoritarian neoliberalism, which may have three varieties, technocracy, populist nationalism, and traditional authoritarianism. If we follow this taxonomy, our modified version of the concept suggests that there has been a shift from the technocratic version to the populist-nationalist one in Turkey during the AKP governments.
  5. Newly emerging 'state capitalism' literature also addresses this particular orientation (Alami & Dixon, 2021; Nölke et al., 2019; McNally, 2020).
  6. Trade union density declined more than 20% during the 2000s and reached 6.3% in 2015 (OECD, 2017).
  7. Hay's (1999) theoretical framework is useful here for unrevealing causal mechanisms between the crisis and transformation of the state.
  8. The 'repoliticisation' tendency has not unique to Turkey (Dönmez & Zemandl, 2019). It has been one of the key elements of contemporary right-wing populist reaction to rule-based policy-making processes, which have been discredited by the GFC since 2008.
  9. The relationship between the government and business groups has been framed differently by various scholarly accounts. While the critical political economy perspectives investigate the diverging interests of different capital fractions on the policymaking processes (Deniz, 2019) and more generally their position in the power bloc, the mainstream analyses tend to concentrate on the government's attempt to create loyal business groups (Gürakar, 2016). The former literature tends to focus on the incentive structures of various capital fractions that led them to pursue contractionary policy options, thus linking these class dynamics to the political processes, i.e. authoritarianization (Bozkurt, 2021). The latter literature, which pursues a line of investigation that goes back to the Public Choice School's 'rent-seeking' arguments (Tullock, 2005), maintains that 'crony capitalism' is a suitable concept to cover the contemporary political economy of Turkey (Atiyas et al., 2019). Since this aspect is beyond the limits of our manuscript we only mentioned to these alternative frameworks and clarify that we agree with the former line of research instead of the 'crony capitalism' framework since the crony capitalism analysis implies that the authoritarianization dynamics are mainly related with the crony attitudes and ignore the role of so-called non-crony sections of the business groups in the authoritarianization process (Akçay, 2021).
  10. The Kurdish Opening, including negotiations on the conditions of peace between the representatives of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an outlawed Kurdish group, and representatives of the state, had ups and downs between 2009 and 2015, but it ended after the AKP's election loss.
  11. The 'No' campaign was the opposition mobilization during the referendum in 2017.
  12. As of March 2020, there were only eighteen HDP district mayors left in charge. In June 2020, two HDP and one CHP MPs were expelled from the office, stripped from parliamentary immunity and detained on espionage and terrorism charges (McKernan, 2020).
  13. Whiting and Kaya (2021) also analyse this trend of 'permanent emergency rule' with a specific focus on local politics.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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