

# *Formation of a Majoritarian Democracy Discourse in Turkey: An Examination of the Democrat Party, 1946-1960*

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This study focuses on the formation of a majoritarian democracy understanding in Turkish politics and argues that the Democrat Party (DP), which is the first opposition party to rise to power with the 1950 elections, had a majoritarian approach to democracy. Borrowing Guillermo O'Donnell's "delegative democracy" concept and discussing the main causes of the adoption of a majoritarian democracy discourse by the DP, the parliamentary speeches of the DP's leaders are used as the basic source and the democracy discourse of the DP is analyzed in areas related to the party's approach to key sociopolitical issues, including the democracy understanding of the party, definition of nation and citizen, elections, political control and accountability, and the political and social opposition. The research revealed that from its early opposition days to

the last day of its ten years of power, the DP showed all the typical characteristics of a delegative democracy. It considered the Turkish nation as a monolithic society and rejected any kind of social, economic or ideological fragments within the nation, introduced itself as a national movement, saw elections as the only tool for the citizens to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction towards the political decision-makers, identified itself with the national will and showcased a highly individual leadership.

*Keywords:* Democrat Party, delegative democracy, majoritarianism, Adnan Menderes, center-right

## ÖZ

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Bu çalışma Türk siyasi hayatında çoğunlukçu demokrasi anlayışının oluşumuna odaklanmakta ve 1950 yılında seçimle iktidara gelen ilk muhalefet partisi olan Demokrat Parti’nin (DP) çoğunlukçu bir demokrasi söylemi olduğunu savunmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda Guillermo O’Donnell’in “delegatif demokrasi” kavramından yola çıkılarak ve DP’nin çoğunlukçu bir demokrasi söylemi benimsemesinin altındaki nedenler tartışılarak, DP liderlerinin meclis konuşmaları temel kaynak olarak kullanılmış ve DP’nin demokrasi söylemi partinin demokrasi anlayışı, millet ve vatandaş tanımı, seçimler, siyasi kontrol ve hesap verilebilirlik, siyasal ve sosyal muhalefet gibi temel sosyopolitik meselelere olan yaklaşımı bağlamında incelenmiştir. Araştırma, DP’nin muhalefette bulunduğu ilk günlerden iktidarda kaldığı on yıl boyunca delegatif demokrasinin tüm özelliklerini barındırdığını ortaya koymaktadır. DP Türk ulusunu monolitik bir toplum olarak görmüş ve her türlü sosyal, ekonomik veya ideolojik farklılıkları reddetmiştir. Parti kendisini ulusal bir hareket olarak tanıtmış, seçimleri vatandaşların siyasi karar vericilerle ilgili tutumlarını ifade edebilecekleri yegâne araç olarak konumlandırmış, kendisini milli irade ile özdeşleştirmiş ve oldukça bireysel bir liderlik yapısı sergilemiştir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Demokrat Parti, delegatif demokrasi, çoğunlukçu demokrasi, Adnan Menderes, merkez sağ

## Introduction

With the general elections of 1950, center-right parties became the key players of Turkish political life. Of the nineteen elections held in Turkey since 1950, Demokrat Parti (Democrat Party or DP) or its successors, Adalet Partisi (Justice Party or AP), Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party or ANAP) and Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party or AKP) received more

than 40 percent of the votes in eleven of them, and all single-party governments formed in Turkey since 1950 are by these center-right parties.

Despite the consensus in the existing literature that the DP is the pioneer of center-right in Turkey,<sup>1</sup> the party's majoritarianism is mainly studied as part of its populist ideology.<sup>2</sup> Although its understanding of democracy and populism is indeed intertwined, still, the DP's majoritarianism deserves particular attention, as it is this majoritarian view that shaped the policies of the party in other policy areas, including its attitudes towards the opposition. Second, as Yılmaz,<sup>3</sup> Özbudun,<sup>4</sup> and Sayarı<sup>5</sup> also argue, majoritarianism has become the main trend of the center-right politics in Turkey after the DP, and studying the pioneer of this rhetoric can help to understand the democracy that is prevalent in contemporary Turkish politics.

### **Majoritarianism and the Concept of Delegative Democracy**

Majoritarianism finds its roots in Rousseau's Social Contract and his concept of general will. According to him, general will is the sum of actions and policies that are in everyone's interest, hence sovereignty must be the exercise of this general will. Rousseau is against the idea of social fragmentation, as if a particular fragment gains relatively more power, general will cannot be exercised, and personal interests begin to prevail. He claims, therefore, that "if the general will is to be able to express itself, there should be no partial society within the state"<sup>6</sup>. The French Revolution incorporated Rousseau's idea of monolithic society into the idea of monolithic nation, making power intolerant

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, İlkey Sunar, *State, Society and Democracy in Turkey*, Bahçeşehir Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2004 and Nuray Mert, *Merkez Sağın Kısa Tarihi*, Selis Kitaplar, İstanbul, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Sabri Sayarı argues that populism represented Menderes's worldview most accurately, and will of the people was an important characteristic of this belief system. He also holds that Menderes's populist ideology reflects "his basic understanding of democracy as a system in which the wishes of the people, as expressed through elections, are the basis for the legitimacy of the government's actions and policies" See Sabri Sayarı, "Adnan Menderes: Between Democratic and Authoritarian Populism", *Political Leaders and Democracy in Turkey*, M. Heper & S. Sayarı (Ed.), 2002, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Hakan Yılmaz, "Democracy and Freedom: The Redefinition of the Ideology of the Turkish Regime in the Postwar Period," *Elites and Change in the Mediterranean*, in A. Marquina (Ed.), 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Ergun Özbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics: Challenges to Democratic Consolidation*, Lynne Reinner Publications, UK, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Sayarı, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On The Social Contract*, translated by G.D.H Cole, Dover Publications, New York, 2008, p. 35.

to differences more than ever.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the revolution strengthened majoritarianism and created a solid basis for its legitimization.

Majoritarianism has two fundamental reflections: tyranny of the majority and delegative democracy. Coined by Tocqueville, tyranny of the majority refers to majoritarianism as a political phenomenon created by society that holds the potential to transform into a political pressure. The second version, O'Donnell's delegative democracy, is the politicized version of the tyranny of the majority.

O'Donnell coined the term delegative democracy based on his analyses of the democratic transformation of Latin American countries, but it is also useful in understanding the democracy rhetoric of Turkey's center-right politics. According to O'Donnell's definition, delegative democracies are

“strongly majoritarian: democracy is seen as constituting, in clean elections, a majority that empowers somebody to become, for a given number of years, the embodiment and interpreter of the highest interest of the nation.”<sup>8</sup>

But when the elections are over, voters are expected to dissociate themselves from politics and become inactive but cheering bystanders of the President's actions.

In this democracy rhetoric, the nation is perceived as a living organism: the idea of a class-based society is strongly rejected. In fact, in this view, “*the nation has to be healed and saved by uniting its chaotically dispersed fragments (sectoralism, political parties, egoism) into a harmonious whole.*”<sup>9</sup>

Another important characteristic of delegative democracies is how they perceive individualism. A nation's president is seen as the “embodiment of the nation and the main custodian of the national interest, which is incumbent upon him to define. What he does in government does not need to bear any resemblance to what he said or promised during the electoral campaign – he has been authorized to govern as he sees fit.”<sup>10</sup> He is considered as the sole representative of the national will, and accountability or independent civil organizations “*appear as an unnecessary impediment to the full authority that the president has been delegated to exercise.*”<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, expression of diversity and opposition is considered illegitimate and regarded as high treason. Their failure to provide

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<sup>7</sup> Charles E. Merriam, Jr, *History of the Theory of Sovereignty Since Rousseau*, Batoche Books, Ontario, 2001, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell, “Delegative Democracy?”, *Unpublished Paper Kellogg Institute, University of Notre Dame*, 1990, pp. 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

room for horizontal checks and balances leaves these democracies with low levels of institutionalization.

### Paths to Majoritarianism and the Case of Turkey

There are several institutional and historical approaches that can be used to explain majoritarian conceptualizations of democracy in a country. On the institutional level, a strong winner takes all system, a history of weak democratic institutions or a legacy of single-party governance could be considered among the hypotheses to illustrate the phenomenon. However, these institutional approaches fail to fully explain the Turkish case, as it has a proportional representation system and while weak democratic institutions are necessary to create conditions of a majoritarian democracy, they by themselves lack adequate reasoning to explain the emergence of majoritarianism and need to be supported by cultural and ideological motivations. As for the legacy of the single-party regime, while it is useful in explaining the analytical basis of the majoritarian democracy rhetoric, it requires a political party that *was “electorally dominant for a long time period and could make convincing majoritarian appeals based on garnering majority support at the ballot box.”*<sup>12</sup>

If the institutional approaches are insufficient to explain the Turkish case, what accounts for majoritarianism that began with the DP? As Kubicek suggests, *“what stands out with respect to state-society relations, both prior to and after initial democratization of Turkey, is a strong state that claims tutelage over the people; in short there was too little of ‘the people,’ not too much.”*<sup>13</sup> As Mardin<sup>14</sup> famously argues, the sociocultural center-periphery divide of the Ottoman Empire was inherited by the new Republic *“that pitted the ruling elites of the ‘center’ against a culturally heterogeneous ‘periphery’”*.<sup>15</sup> In the words of Kalaycıoğlu, the center in the early years of the Republican era was *“the estate of a coherent body of nationalist, centralist, laicist elite which holds the view that it represents and protects the state”*<sup>16</sup> and adopted a top-down modernization program that alienated the poorly educated, rural, conservative, peripheral masses which the center “systematically kept out of the

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Kubicek, “Majoritarian democracy in Turkey: causes and consequences,” *Democratic Consolidation in Turkey: Micro and Macro Challenges*, C. Erişen & P. Kubicek (Ed.), 2016, p. 126.

<sup>13</sup> Kubicek, *ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>14</sup> Şerif Mardin, “Center-periphery relations: A key to Turkish politics?,” *Daedalus*, 102(1), 1973.

<sup>15</sup> S. Erdem Aytaç & Ezgi Elçi, “Populism in Turkey,” *Populism around the World: A Comparative Perspective*, in D. Stockemer (Ed.), 2019, p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, “Elections and party preferences in Turkey: Changes and continuities in the 1990s,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 27(3), 1994, p.403.

power-wielding institutions of the state.”<sup>17</sup> Coming on the scene as the representative of the periphery in the second half of the 1940s, the DP’s election victory in 1950 allowed the periphery to gain power for the first time in the Turkish political history. Despite this electoral success, however, the center “continued to play a tutelary role, overseeing Turkish democracy and ensuring that the power of the periphery, irrespective of electoral outcomes, remained limited.”<sup>18</sup> This, starting with the DP, allowed the peripheral parties to adopt a populist strategy and majoritarian understanding of democracy. They “characterized the Turkish political scene as a struggle between the conservative, pious majority (“the people”) and the Western-oriented secular “elites,” who are holding the key institutions of power despite their electoral defeats”;<sup>19</sup> hence defiling the true national will.

### **Majoritarianism of the Democrat Party**

According to O’Donnell, one of the main features of a delegative democracy is how it views its political basis. In this type of democracies, since the party in power needs to embrace the nation as a whole, its “political basis had to be a movement, the supposedly vibrant overcoming of the factionalism and conflicts that parties bring about.”<sup>20</sup> For this reason, these parties tend to argue that they represent the nation as a whole and identify themselves with the national will, which, according to them, is never wrong and always promotes the highest interest of the nation.

Since its foundation, the DP grounded itself on a social movement that appeals the broader sections of the population. Already in 1947 Celal Bayar was arguing that the sole mission of the party is to establish democracy in the country.<sup>21</sup>

During the opposition years from 1946 to 1950, the leaders of the DP were already convinced that they were the representatives of the nation as a whole. For example, in one of his speeches in January 1947 Celal Bayar declared that “the DP is blessed with the privilege and honor to be the first party that was founded directly by the Turkish nation itself” and that “the DP is the party of the nation.”<sup>22</sup> He even argued that those who are against the DP are in fact against the entire Turkish nation.

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<sup>17</sup> Aytaç & Elçi, *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>18</sup> Kubicek, *ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>19</sup> Aytaç & Elçi, *ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>20</sup> O’Donnell, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Özel Şahingiray, *Celal Bayar’ın 1946, 1950 ve 1954 Yılları Seçim Kampanyasındaki Söylev ve Demeçleri*, Doğu Ltd Ortaklığı, Ankara, 1956, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

The attempt to identify the party with the nation as a whole grew even stronger after the DP came to power in 1950. The DP was proudly announcing that their government was born from the bosom of the nation, and according to Menderes, it was “*getting its inspiration and orders from villages, towns and cities of this country*”,<sup>23</sup> and “*carrying the responsibility of the 22 million people on its shoulders.*”<sup>24</sup> The shift in power was declared as a groundbreaking reform that enabled the nation to govern itself.<sup>25</sup> The DP, after all, was the sole representative of the nation’s struggle for democracy and freedom,<sup>26</sup> a struggle that ended with a victory thanks to the free and fair election in 1950. With the DP’s success, the party argued, the nation would now be governed by a party formed by the Turkish spirit of democracy.<sup>27</sup>

Such identification with the will of the nation provided a basis for the DP to justify and legitimate their actions. For example, during the parliamentary discussions to close down *Halkevi* (People’s Houses), one of the DP deputies, Süreyya Endik, offered to pay attention to the wishes of the Turkish nation, and justified the need to close down the houses by arguing that “*it is the nation’s will to close them down immediately.*”<sup>28</sup> The same rationale was also evident during the discussions to confiscate CHP’s properties in 1953, and during the discussions on the National Protection Law in 1956. During the parliamentary discussions of the former, deputy Kirişçiöğlü declared that there is a demand from the nation, as the nation that sent them to this assembly had been complaining about the issue in every congress and meeting, calling for the return of the unjust properties of the CHP.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, during the talks on the re-initiation of the National Protection Law, Menderes argued that the law in question was born in the hearts of the community, and it is for this reason that the DP brought the law proposal to the assembly in the first place.<sup>30</sup>

O’Donnell argues that in delegative democracies, elections are seen as the only tool that enables a party to gain legitimacy to rule the country. Majority won with the elections is interpreted as the irrefutable and unquestionable expression of the general will. Thus, elections are also seen as instruments to

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<sup>23</sup> *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi (TBMM TD)*, Session 46, 1954, p. 582

<sup>24</sup> Mustafa Doğan, *Adnan Medneres’in Konuşmaları*, Ekicigil Yayınları, İstanbul, 1957a, p. 149.

<sup>25</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 7, 1951, p. 140.

<sup>26</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 53, 1954, p. 1202.

<sup>27</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 41, 1952, p. 329.

<sup>28</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 111, 1951, p. 272.

<sup>29</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 17, 1953, p. 196.

<sup>30</sup> Mustafa Doğan, *Adnan Medneres’in Konuşmaları (İktidarda Meclis Konuşmaları)*, Ekicigil Yayınları, İstanbul, 1957b, p. 265.

confirm citizens' approval to the general administration and policies of the government in power.<sup>31</sup> The DP too saw elections as the only and the most important instrument for revealing the national will,<sup>32</sup> and a crucial part of citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms.<sup>33</sup> According to the party, elections indisputably express the will of the nation.<sup>34</sup> A leading figure of the DP, Osman Çiçekdağ, for example, argued that the day of the elections of 1950, May 14, is the day of the reestablishment of the Turkish national will, which was previously ignored and suppressed by the single-party regime.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, what the DP considered as the true will of the nation was the decision of the majority. Votes given to other parties were regarded as invalid. For example, about the results of the elections of 1950, Boyacıgiller argued that three million citizens that voted for the CHP in the elections of 1950 “do not oppose (to the DP) knowingly and willfully. Most of those votes were dispersed and obtained by pressuring the village headmen.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Zeki Örs was convinced that the votes given to the CHP were the votes of the ones who were scared of the rage of the CHP.<sup>37</sup>

Boyacıgiller's above-mentioned words about the elections of 1950 also reveal another important characteristic of the DP's understanding of the voting process; that it is a zero-sum game. The party that receives the majority was seen as the ultimate winner of the game, where the others, even though they also managed to get into the assembly, were just insignificant losers. Mükerrerem Sarol, the Minister of State in the third Menderes Cabinet, even argued that elections are like war, and the General (İsmet İnönü) lost in all three.<sup>38</sup>

In the DP's vision, elections were seen as a highly emotional and high stakes process, a distinctive quality of a typical delegative democracy. It was for this extreme importance attributed to the elections that before May 14, 1950, Bayar advised the voters to protect their votes “from any kind of intervention, like they protect their family integrity”<sup>39</sup>, and to vote from their “hearts, without any

<sup>31</sup> O'Donnell, *ibid.*, pp. 8-11.

<sup>32</sup> Şahingiray, *ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>33</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 4, 1954, p. 70.

<sup>34</sup> Similar emphasis made by various DP members: by Refik Koraltan: *TBMM TD*, Session 8, 1946, p. 184; by Fuat Köprülü: *TBMM TD*, Session 8, 1946, p. 123; by Adnan Menderes: *TBMM TD*, Session 17, 1953, p. 185; by Osman Şevki Çiçekdağ: *TBMM TD*, Session 18, 1950, pp. 449-450; by Ferit Alpiskender: *TBMM TD* Session 73, 1951, p. 94, and by Haluk Şalman: *TBMM TD*, Session 49, 1958, p. 1172.

<sup>35</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 110, 1951, p. 636.

<sup>36</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 4, 1950, p. 83.

<sup>37</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 21, 1950, p. 542.

<sup>38</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 27, 1960, p. 218. He refers to the elections of 1950, 1954 and 1957.

<sup>39</sup> Şahingiray, *ibid.*, p.253.

hesitation.”<sup>40</sup> Elections of 1950 started to be referred as a national revolution, a “festival for democracy and freedom”<sup>41</sup> and a “nationwide mutiny”<sup>42</sup> for the CHP.

Elections, in the eyes of the party that governed Turkey from 1950 to 1960, were also considered as the ultimate mechanism for a party to gain legitimacy. It was regarded as a way for gaining citizen’s approval for the governance of the country. It is perhaps this rationale that made the DP gain excessive self-confidence and lean towards authoritarian governance, after winning the elections of 1954 with a higher majority than the previous one. Samet Ağaoğlu argued that “*in these elections, the Turkish nation gave the majority of its votes to the DP to show that it is fully approving the performance of the government.*”<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Namık Gedik interpreted the results as the proof of a meaningful and magnificent confidence for the DP government<sup>44</sup>, and Menderes saw it as “the nation’s approval of the government’s actions in every single policy area.”<sup>45</sup> But above all, Sıtkı Koraltan gave the most striking speech:<sup>46</sup>

“Our actions and policies in the last six years were embraced by the crushing majority and passed through the souls of the mass public that, after four years of experience, Turkish nation once again put the DP in charge, and it is now standing erect, as the treasure and joy of this grand nation. [...] What does this overwhelming majority mean? It is the unquestionable love of the Turkish Nation to the DP government. “I saw what you did, I believe in what you would do and therefore I am giving you my heart with my vote” is what is meant with [this] result.”

The DP described election days as adjudication days,<sup>47</sup> where the nation is the ultimate arbitrator.<sup>48</sup> However, according to the DP, it is at this point that the citizens’ responsibility and participation to the political decision-making process end. In between two election periods, citizens are expected to become inactive bystanders, not to involve in any other political activity, and leave the

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.419.

<sup>41</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 27, 1960, p. 218.

<sup>42</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 5, 1950, p. 128.

<sup>43</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 17, 1953, p. 181.

<sup>44</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 4, 1954, p. 72.

<sup>45</sup> Şerif Demir, *Türk Siyasi Tarihinde Adnan Menderes*, Paraf Yayınları, İstanbul, 2010, p. 298.

<sup>46</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 4, 1954, p. 70.

<sup>47</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 17, 1953, p. 220.

<sup>48</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 57, 1954, p. 218.

job to the government in power. To give an example, before elections of 1950, Kenan Öner addressed the citizens with these words:<sup>49</sup>

“Your most important responsibility on the election day is to find your polling station and use your right to vote. It is when you use this right that your political power will prevail. If you do not use your right, you will lose your permission to complain about the governance for four years.”

In delegative democracies, institutions that create political control and accountability are viewed as

“nuisances that come attached to the domestic and international advantages of being a democratically elected President. Accountability to those institutions, or to other private or semi-private organizations, appears as an unnecessary impediment to the full authority that the President has been delegated to exercise.”<sup>50</sup>

Contrary to what is expected, the members of the DP were in favor of horizontal accountability and political control, and they continuously promoted the crucial need for such autonomous institutions. Already in their opposition years, for example, Menderes was convinced that “*the authority and the competence of the government, which actually uses the power of the nation and acts on behalf of it, should be restricted in a way that ensures the individual and political rights of the citizens.*”<sup>51</sup> Similarly, in their proposal for the new Election Law in 1946, the DP suggested judicial supervision of elections, provided that the “judges were neutral and objective, and therefore could supervise the elections in the same manner.”<sup>52</sup>

For the DP, the judiciary was seen as the most important institution for the political control and for the “*proper development of democracy.*”<sup>53</sup> In order for it to function properly, the complete autonomy of it was considered mandatory, and as in relation to this vision, it was argued that “*it is impossible to live in a state where there is no sovereignty left in judges’ sense of rights and wrongs.*”<sup>54</sup> They saw the judicial institutions as active troops of the CHP<sup>55</sup>, and hence wanted to discard all the adjustments of the single party regime to “save the judiciary mechanism both

<sup>49</sup> Orhan Cemal Fersoy, *Bir Devre Adını Veren Başbakan Adnan Menderes*, Garanti Matbaası, İstanbul, 1971, p. 152.

<sup>50</sup> O’Donnell, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Fersoy, *ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>52</sup> Şahingiray, *ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>53</sup> Doğan, *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> TBMM TD, Session 12, 1950, p. 81.

<sup>55</sup> Hüseyin Şeyhanlıoğlu, *Türk Siyasal Muhafazakârlığın Kurumsallaşması ve Demokrat Parti*, Kadim Yayınları, Ankara, p. 259.

from any external pressure and the control of the ministry, and to give the full sovereignty it deserves, as soon as possible.”<sup>56</sup>

According to the DP, the government should also operate under the supervision of laws. The words of Hamid Şevket İnce, during the parliamentary talks on November 29, 1950 illustrate this point:<sup>57</sup>

“Dear friends, the assembly is not a pharmacy that holds the cure for everything. The assembly is an institution that operates within the borders provided by the law, by the constitution. It does not have the judicial function. [...] We are capable of doing everything, but only within the rules of law.”

In addition to the judicial institutions, the national assembly was also considered, in theory, as a legitimate instrument to control governmental power. Menderes expressed this view when he was responding to the opposition’s claims regarding government pressure on the judiciary:<sup>58</sup>

“There is Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (Turkish Grand National Assembly – TBMM), there is you. If you prove that the government is actually treading this path, we will lose our dignity and legitimacy to power.”

Although this was the DP’s political discourse, its policies and decisions were indicating the opposite. The relationship between the government and the institutions of political control and accountability became tense as the government increased the control of these institutions.

Before the DP era, civil servants who complete thirty years of office could be pensioned off, but with their legal right to dispute the decision. When the DP came to power, however, they first foreclosed the right of objection, and reduced the terms in service to twenty-five years. Until 1954, the members of the supreme court, the council of state, the court of auditors and university professors were exempt from this enforcement. But with the Law on Amendment of the Certain Clauses of Retirement Fund<sup>59</sup> adopted on June 21, 1954, civil servants working in those institutions also started to become subjected to the same procedure. Following this, with a new legislation<sup>60</sup> adopted on July 6, 1954, the legal requirement of twenty-five years of office was eliminated, paving the way for the government to remove any civil servant from

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<sup>56</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 4, 1950, p. 81.

<sup>57</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 12, 1950, p. 553.

<sup>58</sup> Doğan, *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>59</sup> *TC Emekli Sandığı Kanununun Bazı Maddelerinin Değiştirilmesi Hakkında Kanun* (Law on the Amendment of the Law of Turkish Retirement Fund). For parliamentary debates, see *TBMM TD*, Session 11, 1954, pp. 218-251.

<sup>60</sup> *Bağlı Buldukları Teşkilat Emrine Alınmak Suretiyle Vazifeden Uzaklaştırılacaklar Hakkında Kanun* (Law on the Removal from Office by Order of the Governance they Serve). For parliamentary debates, see *TBMM TD*, Session 17, 1954, pp. 430-469.

the service without any legal constraints, leaving them with no right of appeal and with no legal protection:<sup>61</sup>

“Considering the important role these institutions play in majoritarian democracies for holding the arbitrariness of the government in bounds, it was easy to predict that these amendments were the signs of the DP’s underlying intentions that are to become apparent in the near future.”

In consequence, without legal restrictions, the DP government initiated a major liquidation process among civil servants, especially among the judiciary. On May 3, 1956, sixteen judges – three of them being members of the supreme court – were fired. It was followed by the forced retirement of seven more judges, including the president of the supreme court and the chief public prosecutor of the republic. According to Eroğul,<sup>62</sup> this process is the proof that the DP was not hesitant to distort the fundamentals of a democratic regime.

In terms of the issue of political accountability, the DP saw “accountability to the nation” - through the elections - as the only legitimate way of honoring this principle. Hakkı Gedik, for example, argued that the DP is only “responsible to the court of national conscience.”<sup>63</sup> Likewise, Menderes was always confident that the only authority that they are subject to is the general will of the Turkish nation.<sup>64</sup> In the party’s judgment, the government could only surrender to the will of the nation, and as long as the party represents it, it is superior to any other political institution.

In delegative democracies, because the party that wins the elections comes to power with the approval of the majority of the citizens, it considers itself as the only legitimate representative of the national will. Consequently, any opposition towards their party, which means towards the will of the nation, is regarded as treason.<sup>65</sup>

In the first four years of its political life, the DP was the most enthusiastic supporter of political opposition and establishment of a sustainable multi-party regime, as its survival and success depended on the adoption of these principles. During those years and in the first years in government, political opposition was seen as a fundamental value for a proper democratic regime. For example, Bayar once argued; “no one can claim that having more than one political party is destructive to the national unity. Because that leads to false conclusions like denying

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<sup>61</sup> Cem Eroğul, *Demokrat Parti: Tarihi ve İdeolojisi*, İmge Kitabevi, Ankara, 1990, p. 164.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> TBMM TD, Session 46, 1954, p. 582.

<sup>64</sup> Doğan, *ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>65</sup> O'Donnell, *ibid.*, p. 9.

democracy or claiming that democratic states lack national unity.”<sup>66</sup> Likewise, according to Menderes, the first article of the DP’s program clearly expressed that “democratic regime can only be established by various parties which have mutual feelings of love and respect to one another.”<sup>67</sup> Similarly, during the first years of its power, the DP leadership was pleased with having competing parties in Turkish political life, and saw, especially the CHP, as a “valuable component of the democratic life.”<sup>68</sup>

This positive attitude, however, did not last long. The increase in the number of opposing parties<sup>69</sup> and their criticisms to the government’s policies especially after the elections of 1954 made significant changes in the DP’s approach to political opposition. The party leadership began to define opposition as a “handful of opposers”<sup>70</sup>, whom, according to the DP, was trying to tyrannize over the greater majority.<sup>71</sup> Gradually, the DP started to define “proper” and “ideal” opposition. According to Menderes, for example, the political struggle between the parties “should take place within the boundaries of the highest interests of the nation. Therefore, the idea that opposition is what it is, it is democracy, freedom of rights, it can do whatever it wants as long as the law sanctions, is not acceptable to the principles of the DP.”<sup>72</sup> For the DP, the ideal opposition was constructive and supportive of the government, the true representative of the highest interest of the nation. Consequently, any other behavior outside these lines were regarded as opposition to the national will. It was with this rationale in mind that Haluk Şaman, an important figure in the DP, made the following observation about the main opposition party during the parliamentary discussions on Sırrı Atalay’s proposal for ordering a parliamentary inquiry for some of the broadcasts of the national radio:<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Şahingiray, *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> TBMM TD, Session 58, 1951, p. 66.

<sup>68</sup> TBMM TD, Session 56, 1953, p. 1379.

<sup>69</sup> Opposition parties that participated in the general elections were:

Republican People’s Party (1923-...), Peasants Party (1952-1958), Republican Nation Party (1954-1958), Republican Peasant’s Nation Party (1958-1969), Nation Party (1948-1954), Freedom Party (1955-1958), Democratic Worker’s Party (1950-1954) and Land Party (1954-1957).

<sup>70</sup> TBMM TD, Session 17, 1954, p. 454.

<sup>71</sup> TBMM TD, Session 73, 1956, p. 146.

<sup>72</sup> TBMM TD, Session 25, 1952, p. 91.

<sup>73</sup> The Proposal For Initiating and Investigation on Some Broadcasts of the National Radio by Kars Deputy Sırrı Atalay and His Friends. For parliamentary debates, see TBMM TD, Session 38, 1960, pp. 962-982.

“[CHP] practically opposes the national will since the 1950s. It aims to create uncertainty among the public and confuse citizens. Disseminating depravity, setting people against each other, preventing the government from serving the country, making up new issues every single day are also the political games that the CHP brings into play. Its political aim is to oppose and deny everything, and to present every good thing as bad. (...) Alteration and destruction are ethical for this party. The ambition of coming to power by using these methods is deeply rooted in its mentality.”<sup>74</sup>

The last three years of the DP government was a period of mutual accusations, resentments and contestations between the DP and the main opposition party. The attitude towards the opposition became more and more aggressive, finally leading the DP to order a parliamentary inquiry about the CHP on July 12, 1960. In this proposal, the CHP was accused for organizing a guerilla movement to come to power by illegal means.<sup>75</sup> During the parliamentary debates of this proposal, the Minister of State, Samet Ağaoğlu, legitimized their rigorous measures towards the opposition with these words:<sup>76</sup>

“Dear friends, the decision you will make today would destroy this rebellious and monopolist mentality forever. Because no one except the assembly and the government that is provided with its power, no individual, regardless of his history, have the right to declare: “I, on behalf of this or that group, revolt and refuse to comply with the rules.”

The passing of this proposal by the Parliament on April 18, 1960, according to Eroğul,<sup>77</sup> is a clear sign of the DP’s commitment to eliminate the opposition entirely, if the 1960 coup did not stop them a month later.

The DP’s attitude towards the social opposition was similar to that of political opposition. Due to its absolute and unquestionable belief that the DP itself was the very definition of the national will, when the non-public political mechanisms, such as the press, started to criticize government’s policies, the DP once again interpreted this as a betrayal to the national will. Similar to its approach to the political opposition, the DP began to define the boundaries of how the social opposition and punish those that refused to oblige.

During their opposition years and the first three years in power, the DP was moderate and sympathetic towards the press. It was defining press as the “*fourth estate*”<sup>78</sup>, and was considering the freedom of the press as “*the fundamental principle*

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<sup>74</sup> TBMM TD, Session 38, 1960, p. 963.

<sup>75</sup> Eroğul, *ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>76</sup> TBMM TD, Session 58, 1960, p. 198.

<sup>77</sup> Eroğul, *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> TBMM TD, Session 60, 1951, p. 98.

of democracy.<sup>79</sup> That is why the very first legal amendment that the DP made when it had come to power in May 1950 was on the press law. On July 21, 1950, only two months after the elections, the DP government approved the new law that liberalized the media from the excessive authorization of the government. With another amendment on June 1952, press members were granted with several legal guarantees such as generous social security rights, severance allowances and union rights.

Nevertheless, repressive tendencies of the DP towards the opposition, starting from its third year in the Government, also upset the journalists. With a new law<sup>80</sup> adopted on March 9, 1954, the DP reversed the rights it granted to press. With the new law, newspapers that print news that could affect the prestige of the country and insult one's honor and dignity would be faced with serious fines and penalty of imprisonment. The right for journalists to prove their claims was also eliminated. During the parliamentary debates for the adoption of this new press law, Özyörük legitimized the decision as follows:<sup>81</sup>

“Although press is vital for democracies and it is indeed an inseparable pillar of the system, there is no doubt that it could also lead to the degeneration of the regime if it departs from its principles and is used for personal opposition. It is proved by the history of all civilized nations that despite its crucial importance, it becomes a tool for attacking the national decision makers. (...) Just like any other liberties, freedom of press should also have boundaries.”

The DP's discourse on the issue became even more aggressive in the last four years of its power. The press law became more restrictive and oppressive with the amendments made in July 1956. The anti-government press was silenced, newspapers critical of the government was shut down, and journalists were sent to prison.<sup>82</sup> Mükerrerrem Sarol defined the boundaries in which the press could operate:<sup>83</sup>

“The reason for the existence of the freedom of press is their responsibility to inform citizens objectively about national interests and public events. That means, freedom granted to press is not a privilege. This freedom is granted because of its above-mentioned responsibility to the society (...) The limits of the freedom of press can be determined by assessing whether it performs this

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<sup>79</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 14, 1946, p. 296.

<sup>80</sup> Neşir Yoluyla veya Radyo ile İşlenecek Bazı Cürümler Hakkında Kanun (Law on the Felonies Committed through Publishing or Radio), see *TBMM TD*, Session 62, 1954, pp. 530-572.

<sup>81</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 60, 1954, pp. 405-406).

<sup>82</sup> Between 17 March 1954 and 14 May 1958, there were legal prosecutions about 1161 journalists and 238 of them were found guilty.

<sup>83</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 38, 1960, p. 993.

duty. The boundaries of the freedom are set by assessing this: sometimes in a wider, but sometimes in a narrower framework.”

The DP, from the very beginning, was antagonistic towards public demonstrations and street protests as well. It regarded street demonstrations as signs of anarchy<sup>84</sup> and illegitimate attempts to take over the power from a legitimately - elected government. Bahadır Dülger, for example, went so far as to declare that “*propaganda does not exist in democratic regimes. Propaganda is a political activity that is invented by totalitarian regimes and is used for political ambitions.*”<sup>85</sup>

The eventful public protests of the university students in Istanbul and Ankara on 28-29 April 1960 showed the antagonism of the DP to public opposition. Martial law was declared in these cities, and protestors were labeled as traitors, vagabonds, or reactionaries.<sup>86</sup> Menderes discussed the issue as follows:<sup>87</sup>

“Protesters in Istanbul and Ankara are just a handful of bedazzled citizens compared to the overall population of these cities. Although they chant “We don’t want you” in their slogans, unfortunately, they are not aware of what they do want. Do these things happen because of what they want anyway? They are just a tiny group of people here and there.”

Menderes’s words confirmed the underlying mindset of the DP towards the opposition, as well as the role of citizens in politics. For the DP, the only mechanism for the citizens to participate in politics was through elections. Other mechanisms, especially street protests, were illegitimate attacks to the true will of the nation.

In delegative democracies, the nation is seen as a living organism, and social fragmentation is considered as harmful. The belief is that “*the nation has to be healed and saved by uniting its chaotically dispersed fragments (...) into a harmonious whole.*”<sup>88</sup>

In line with the above-mentioned characteristics of delegative democracies, the DP too saw the nation as a living organism, which was conducive to transformation and change; and rejected the idea of a class-based nation. This was clearly expressed by Emrullah Nutku, during the discussions on his proposal to make May 14 a national holiday instead of the Labor Day:<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> TBMM TD, Session 59, 1951, p. 98.

<sup>85</sup> TBMM TD, Session 50, 1960, p. 1005.

<sup>86</sup> TBMM TD, Session 62, 1960, p. 323.

<sup>87</sup> Fersoy, *ibid.*, pp. 421-42.

<sup>88</sup> O’Donnell, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>89</sup> TBMM TD, Session 102, 1951, p. 234.

“It is not our country’s tradition or habit to celebrate a day for a certain class. We are a classless society. Therefore, there is no point in recognizing a particular class’s holiday (...). If we need a holiday, that should be May 14 instead of May 1.”

Accordingly, the DP was also against the idea of minorities within the nation. This point was clearly expressed numerously by Celal Bayar in his electoral campaigns,<sup>90</sup> and by many other leading figures of the DP, especially after the Events of September 6-7, 1955. During the highly heated parliamentary debates after these events, even the president of the assembly declared that there are no minorities within the nation:<sup>91</sup>

“Osman Alişiroğlu: As a nation that is always hospitable towards the minorities and that shows them the greatest courtesy and fairness to those who live under its roof... (Loud noises saying, “There are no minorities!”)

The President: There are neither minorities nor majorities in the Turkish Nation.”

Similarly, within the same discussion, Sinan Tekelioğlu also stated that no one should talk about a case of minorities, as they are the people of the Turkish nation and are no different from other citizens.<sup>92</sup>

Individualism is one of the most striking characteristics of delegative democracies. In this type of democracies, the president is able to “*govern the country as he sees fit.*”<sup>93</sup> In other words, the highest will of the nation is delegated to him. This, in turn, causes low levels of institutionalization, disables the horizontal accountability, and allows the president to bend the rules and alter the policy choices very easily. But consequently and “*not surprisingly, these*

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<sup>90</sup> “As for the nation, the DP considers every citizen as Turks, regardless of their race or religion” (Şahingiray, *ibid.*, p.347).

“We are committed to a type of nationalism that depends on the idea of a common culture and ideal among citizens, established by a common history; and that strongly rejects any kind of discriminatory thoughts. Our Party considers every citizens as Turks, regardless of their race or religion” (Şahingiray, *ibid.*, p. 9).

We are all from the same paste. It is for this reason that the DP wants complete equality in this country” (Şahingiray, *ibid.*, p. 154).

<sup>91</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 80, 1955, p. 674. Another example is the conversation occurred between Muammer Alakant and the president of the Assembly:

Throughout its history, Turkish Nation have always treated Orthodox, Gregorian and Jewish citizens that entrusted themselves to the Turkish Nation with kindness and courtesy. (Noises from the left saying “You should be ashamed of yourself! You served as the Minister of State!”)

President: As you also know, there is only Turkish citizens in Turkey, there is no such thing as minorities. (*TBMM TD*, Session 23, 1956, p. 88).

<sup>92</sup> *TBMM TD*, Session 80, 1955, p. 681.

<sup>93</sup> O'Donnell, *ibid.*, p.8.

*Presidents suffer from the wildest wings in popularity: today they are acclaimed saviors, tomorrow they are cursed only as fallen gods can be.*"<sup>94</sup>

While in the opposition from 1946 to 1950, the DP leaders were against the idea of the ruling of the country by a particular cadre or class, and the personalization of power. In fact, it was the DP's biggest election strategy<sup>95</sup> to criticize the single-party regime for using the power for personal interests and establishing an authoritarian regime that favors only a particular section of the nation and completely ignores the general will.

Although the same discourse continued throughout the era,<sup>96</sup> in practice, there was indeed a personalized exercise of power in the DP government. In Turkey between 1950 and 1960, Adnan Menderes was the acclaimed savior of the nation<sup>97</sup> who would eventually become the fallen god with the 1960 military coup.

According to Sayarı, Menderes's authority came from several sources. Although he had already maintained significant influence over the party during the opposition years, "*it was his election as prime minister and DP chairman after the elections of 1950 that provided Menderes with the formal authority to exercise his power and control over the party.*"<sup>98</sup>

One of the reasons for Menderes to personalize his power is that although he was the leader of the countermovement against the CHP regime, he gained his political experience in this single-party order. *The authoritarian one-party regime*

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>95</sup> In one of his campaign speech in İzmir in 1949, Celal Bayar declared: "We should understand that it is wrong to commit the destiny of the country to a person or a particular cadre" See Şahingiray, *ibid.*, p.370. Similarly in his Bakırköy speech, he confidently argued that "in democratic regimes, there are no privileged individuals" See Şahingiray, *ibid.*, p.384.

<sup>96</sup> Menderes: "It is not acceptable to claim that the Government that came to power with elections of May 14 is a property of a particular cadre. Governments of particular cadres, or even particular individuals belong to the previous period" (*TBMM TD*, Session 59, 1951, p. 119).

"In our party, there is no man, but friends. In the TBMM, the majority party is in charge, not the President." (Doğan, *ibid.*, p. 153).

Similarly, Cihad Baban: "The party that came to power today is not a party of this or that. These people are the ones who feel responsible for making the orders and wishes of Turkish people come true" (*TBMM TD*, Session 4, 1950, p. 79).

"We did not overthrow the previous regime to build another cadre regality" (*TBMM TD*, Session 4, 1950, p. 78).

Ferit Alpiskender: "The reform of May 14 is the day that put an end to the rule of a cadre and the rule of an individual" (*TBMM TD*, Session 73, 1951, p. 94).

<sup>97</sup> Sayarı, *ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

in which he got his political training and experience was notable the concentration of power in the hands of a single leader, first Atatürk, and after his death in 1938, İnönü”,<sup>99</sup> which, made a considerable impact on Menderes’s governance style when he came to power.

In addition to his political background, the most important source of Menderes’s personal authority and power was undoubtedly his electoral basis. Winning the elections of 1950 with more than 50% of the votes that had enabled him to form an absolute majority within the Assembly made Menderes gain an unquestionable strength. *“His strong electoral and parliamentary basis provided Menderes with an important political resource that enabled him to authoritatively direct the actions of his subordinates in the DP and the government.”*<sup>100</sup>

The fact that the DP won the elections of 1954 with even more majority than the elections of 1950 strengthened and consolidated Menderes’s power. It also made visible changes in Menderes’s political leadership. For example, according to Demir,<sup>101</sup> the elections of 1954 were the most critical juncture of the era, as the victory in this election made Menderes excessively self-confident about his leadership and in turn, led to an exercise of an authoritarian regime. *“The DP’s lopsided victory in 1954, coupled with Menderes’s growing political power and influence, increased his distaste of the criticisms directed at the government’s policies and his leadership.”*<sup>102</sup>

According to Sayarı, Menderes’s authority did not solely come from electoral or parliamentary power. It also had social and psychological aspects:<sup>103</sup>

“Menderes had that rare leadership quality of generating an effective bond between himself and his followers. His charismatic political persona undoubtedly played a major role in the emotional response and support that received from them. The emotional ties that he built with his asides, subordinates, and supporters in the DP’s organization also reflected Menderes’s ability to convey to those who came into contact with him a sense that he had a bold vision for implementing major projects that would transform Turkey.”

In line with Sayarı’s observation, Menderes, during one of the parliamentary discussions in 1957 argued that he was the only person in the country to take state matters in hand that fearless and nervy.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>101</sup> Demir, *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>103</sup> Sayarı, *ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>104</sup> TBMM TD, Session 72, 1957, p. 308.

Another important source of Menderes's authority over the DP group was his usage of political patronage for the consolidation of his power. That is to say, Menderes used governmental sources, most importantly the ministerial posts, in exchange for support and loyalty. "The Menderes loyalists were rewarded with jobs and employment in the government ministries, state economic enterprises, and municipal and local administrations."<sup>105</sup> Ahmad gives the best example of the hierarchical patron-client relationship within the Party, even in the first years of its power, when he discusses Menderes's first ministerial council with these words:<sup>106</sup>

"Only 6 (Menderes, Köprülü, Polatkan, İleri, Özsan and Velibeşe) could be considered truly party men. The rest were either technocrats or former bureaucrats who joined the party very recently (...) Furthermore, all were men with no independent standing in the party. They lacked the popularity and local support in their constituencies to be elected without party's promotion of their cause. Therefore, if they wish to remain in the cabinet, or even be re-elected, they had to be absolutely royal to the Prime Minister."

### **Conclusion**

In 1990, Guillermo O'Donnell coined the term delegative democracy to explain the unique features of the newly established, strongly majoritarian Latin American democracies. Delegative democracies, in O'Donnell's analyses, are grounded on extreme individualism of the elect president, who, as the representative of a widely recognized social movement, is the sole embodiment of the nation. In this view, elections are the only legitimate source of political participation, and any kind of political or social opposition, as well as other institutions of checks and balances, are considered as unnecessary impediments to the authority delegated to the president by the whole nation.

This study argued that even though the initial purpose of O'Donnell's delegative democracy was to conceptualize the democratic transformation of Latin American countries, the term it is also useful in explaining the Turkish democratic experience starting with the electoral success of the DP in the elections of 1950. The analysis of the democracy rhetoric of the DP through the parliamentary speeches of its deputies revealed that the first elected opposition party of the Republic too was a typical delegative democracy. Rather than limiting itself to the party basis, it identified itself with the whole nation. The party was presented as a mass social movement, the first political party that was founded by the Turkish nation (periphery) rather than the bureaucratic elites (center). It saw elections as the sole mechanism to reveal the national will,

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<sup>105</sup> Sayarı, *ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

and when elections are over, citizens were expected to wait until the next elections to show their support to or discontent with the government. The supremacy of the ballot box was constantly highlighted, and it was believed that the degree of political power relies only on the number of votes received from the people. Consequently, the party was hostile to social and political opposition and tend to criminalize any kind of criticism to the DP policies, as opposition was considered as direct revolt against the general will that was delegated to the party in power through elections. The tendency to silence contrarian voices grew stronger with the consecutive election victories and resulted in several laws and decrees to eliminate them altogether. Another aspect that made the DP a typical democracy was its extreme individualism, with Adnan Menderes as the irrefutable leader of the party and the acclaimed savior of the nation, who would eventually become the fallen god with the 1960 military coup.

This research limited itself to the democracy understanding of Turkey's first centre-right, peripheral opposition party to rise to power through free elections. The above-mentioned democracy rhetoric of the DP indeed had an impact on the understanding of democracy of both its rivals and successors and could claimed to be in existence even to this day. Further research is needed to analyse how this majoritarian view of democracy has changed or continued in the Turkish political life, which would be fruitful in understanding the debates surrounding the contemporary state of democracy in Turkey.

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