

**MOBILIZING FOR CAPITALISM:
HOW ISLAMIC CIVIL SOCIETY MAKES A MARKET ECONOMY POSSIBLE IN TURKEY**

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Abstract:

This paper looks at how civil society can serve as a hegemonic tool. It also contributes to understanding how the IMF and World Bank realize their economic projects by focusing on the local context, and on the motivations and capacities of local actors. An examination of Turkey's Islamist parties helps answer the question of how economic reforms pass from IMF policy into national law. What domestic conditions either enable or prevent their passage? And, by what mechanisms is economic liberalization enacted and legitimized?

Turkey's political parties have commonly sought electoral success through populist economic policies built on patron-client relationships. However, the Turkish government's lack of a politically integrated civil society impeded its ability to work within the population. This changed with the ascent of the Islamist parties. During the 80's and 90's they built impressive civil society networks that gave them unprecedented capacity to reach out to and mobilize the population. The breadth of these civil society organizations contributed directly to the AKP's consistent and resounding electoral success since 2002. In addition to solving Turkey's chronic crisis of political hegemony, the AKP has successfully managed these organizations for the purpose of facilitating Turkey's neoliberal reforms. I will look at the nature of these networks, how they operate as a mechanism of power, and how they are integral to normalizing market logic among a large section of the population. Far from being anathema to capitalism, Turkey's new Muslim bourgeoisie embrace the market and market discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

Military tanks rolled into the streets of Turkey's major cities on September 12, 1980. Kenan Evran, one of several generals on the National Security Council, declared the coup d'état on the state television channel and extended martial law throughout the country. The military abolished Parliament, suspended the Constitution and banned all political parties and trade unions. Over the next three years the military government detained 650,000 people, put 210,000 on trial, demanded the execution of 7,000, executed 517, and revoked the citizenship of 14,000.¹ In addition, 171 people died of torture, 300 died while in jail due to "indeterminate" reasons, 23,677 organizations were closed down, 39 tons of printed news was burned, and 31 journalists were jailed. The military also opened files on 1,683,000 people, and denied 388,000 citizens their passports. Turkey's military focused its violence on the Turkish left, worker's unions, and socialist organizations, which had been exerting considerable power over Turkey's economy and politics during the 1970's. The coup decimated the Turkish left, and it still has not recovered.

The political violence of the previous decade led the Washington Post to hail the "gentle coup" that would return normalcy to Turkey.² With the assistance of the World Bank and IMF the military leaders appointed technocrats to implement "neoliberal" reforms that would shape

¹ Akça, "Hegemonic Projects," 16.

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1980/09/14/normality-returns-to-turkeys-cities-after-gentle-coup/b59e690b-d038-4db0-b4db-b114807908f7/>

Turkey's economic transformation for the coming decades. The strong hand of the military junta³ – having removed the popularly-elected government – did what politicians could not: they oversaw the transition from a state-capitalist, protectionist economy based on import substitution to a market-oriented economy that liberalized trade and finance, privatized the state-owned enterprises, and ended organized labor.⁴

Unfortunately, the military coup – albeit an important moment – is not what makes this story unique, nor did it end the political and economic tumult. The IMF-directed neoliberal regime only exacerbated Turkey's crisis of political hegemony, which continued for the next two decades. The 90s in particular were marked by weak coalition governments and elections where no party was able to win more than 27 percent of the vote. This changed with the ascent Turkey's Islamist parties. During the 80s and 90s the Islamist parties built impressive civil society networks that gave them unprecedented capacity to reach out to and mobilize the population. The breadth of these civil society organizations contributed directly to the AKP's consistent and resounding electoral success since 2002. In addition to solving Turkey's chronic crisis of political hegemony, the AKP has successfully managed these organizations for the purpose of facilitating Turkey's neoliberal reforms. I will look at the nature of these networks, how they operate as a mechanism of power, and how they are integral to normalizing market

³ Akça, "Hegemonic Projects," 16. Points out the strikingly similarity between other neoconservative projects in the cooperation between authoritarianism and market restructuring.

David Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. 79-82. David Harvey also notes that authoritarianism is a commonly favored method for enforcing a market-oriented economy, and that this tendency in neoliberalism sits at odds with individual freedoms. "neoconservatives therefore emphasize militarization as an antidote to the chaos of individual interests."

⁴ All these changes in the organization of the economy are framed as encouraging competition.

logic among a large section of the population. Far from being anathema to capitalism, Turkey's new Muslim bourgeoisie embraced market discourse (albeit, not disinterestedly).

This paper also contributes to understanding how the IMF and World Bank realize their economic projects by focusing on the local context, and on the motivations and capacities of local actors. How do economic reforms pass from IMF policy into national law? What domestic conditions either enable or prevent their passage? And, by what mechanisms is economic liberalization enacted and legitimized?

I start the paper by giving some background on the history of political mobilization in Turkey after WWII, when it took its first IMF loan. This period set the pattern for how political parties would operate. Similar to Philip Oxfhorn's description of Latin American politician's "controlled inclusion" of particular social groups, Turkish political parties have commonly sought electoral success through populist economic policies built on patron-client relationships.⁵ However, such narrow economic populism is a finite tool for the purposes of political mobilization as many civil society organizations remain carefully excluded, or at best, poorly integrated with the political system.

The second half of the paper traces the development of Turkey's Islamist parties and their civil society networks. I look at the organizational advantages that Islamist civil society provided political parties, and conversely, how civil society proved to be an important tool of governance once the AKP came into power.

⁵ Philip Oxfhorn, "Controlled Inclusion," 250.

Recent theories on civil society fit broadly into two schools. One, exemplified by Robert Putnam, sees a strong civil society as key to the proper functioning of democratic institutions and to efficient and egalitarian governance: in his words “strong society; strong state.”⁶ Similarly, some authors have argued that civil society organizations are crucial for representing popular interests and channeling those interests into policy preferences in the political arena.⁷

The second school sees civil society as a space of democratic resistance. This literature focuses on civil society organizations in Eastern Europe and their role in the overthrow of the authoritarian regimes there.⁸ For them, civil organizations serve as a locus for recruitment, mobilization, and opposition to authoritarian abuses.

Certainly civil society organizations are crucial for governance. However, contrary to the writings on civil society’s democratic virtues, there is evidence that civic organizations can also reinforce oppressive and authoritarian regimes.⁹ Further, I argue that in the relationship between civil and political society, power does not only move from the bottom up. Foucault presents such a theory. For him, civil society is an “art of governance”: a tool that ostensibly delimits the space of formal governance and so does not infringe on economic laws and “respects the specificity of the economy,” but yet still allows for a government which “*manages* [emphasis added] civil society, the nation, society, the social.”¹⁰ For him “civil society is the

⁶ Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 176.

⁷ Verba, Nie, & Kim, *Participation and Political Equality*.

⁸ Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

⁹ Jamal, *Barriers to Democracy*.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 296-7.

concrete ensemble within which these ideal points, economic men, must be placed so that they can be appropriately managed.”¹¹ In short, civil society is an extension of the state and exists for the purpose of inconspicuous economic management. One means by which civil society achieves this economic management – and which is central to this paper – is the internalization and normalization of market logic.

I also draw on Gramsci’s theories on civil society. He argues that civil society is a potential mechanism of power and an extension of the state that generates the “spontaneous consent” of the masses of the population.¹² Political parties, by shaping civil society, make of the latter a tool for securing the political hegemony and the material interests of the former.¹³

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 297.

¹² Gramsci, “Selections from the Prison Notebooks,” 190.

¹³ Gramsci, “Selections from the Prison Notebooks,” 253, 258, 268.