Islamic Movements under Different Authoritarian Contexts: Tolerance, Prohibition, and Regime's Threat Perception in Egypt and Turkey

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, my sister, my nephew Youssef, and the soul of my grandfather.

To my mother, nothing I have achieved would have been possible without you. You believed in me when no one else did, stood by me through every moment of doubt, and chose my dreams over every tradition and social expectation. Thank you for cheering on every "crazy idea," for being my greatest supporter, and for showing me what strength, ambition, and love look like. You have been my supermom and my role model, and everything I am becoming is rooted in what you are. I hope you enjoy harvesting the success you helped grow.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines why Islamic movements that were tolerated for decades by authoritarian regimes in Egypt and Turkey were suddenly subjected to prohibition, restructuring, or repression. Existing literature often assumes that regimes consistently tolerate Islamic actors because they provide essential welfare services, bolster regime legitimacy, or fill governance gaps. Yet the experiences of al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya (Egypt) and the Gülen Movement (Turkey) reveal a more complex trajectory: both movements expanded under state supervision throughout the 1980s–2000s, only to face abrupt and sweeping crackdowns following major political ruptures in 2013 and 2016.

Using a qualitative comparative design grounded in semi-structured interviews and the analysis of primary and secondary sources, the dissertation uncovers how authoritarian regimes reassessed their once-valued Islamic partners when broader political conditions shifted. Despite differences in their organizational identities, al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya, as an apolitical charity, and the Gülen Movement, as a more politically embedded network, were ultimately prohibited. Their long-standing provision of social services, deep societal presence, and even periods of close cooperation with the state did not shield them from repression.

The study finds that the decisive factor explaining this reversal is not organizational type, level of political engagement, or depth of patronage ties, but regime perceptions of authoritarian stability. When rulers perceived their own positions as secure, these movements were tolerated, co-opted, or incorporated into governance strategies. Yet, in moments of instability, such as post-Arab Spring uncertainty in Egypt or escalating intra-elite conflict in Turkey, rulers reinterpreted the same movements as autonomous, expansive, and politically threatening. Building on these insights, the dissertation develops the Adaptive Authoritarian Tolerance Framework, which conceptualizes tolerance not as a fixed state-movement equilibrium, but as a fluid, perception-driven boundary that expands or contracts according to shifts in authoritarian stability. The framework emphasizes the bounded rationality of rulers, heightened sensitivity to organizational autonomy, and mobilizational potential during periods of perceived vulnerability. This study contributes to broader debates on authoritarian governance, state–religion relations, and the evolving landscape of Islamic activism in the Middle East.

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List of Abbreviations

AKP – *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party), ruling party in Turkey

Diyanet – *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* (Presidency of Religious Affairs, Turkey)

FETÖ – *Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü* (Fethullahist Terrorist Organization), official Turkish state designation for the Gülen movement

JS – *Al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya*, Egyptian Islamic charitable organization

MB – Muslim Brotherhood

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

SMEs – Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

SDIF / TMSF – Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (*Tasarruf Mevduatı Sigorta Fonu*, Turkey)

IMF – International Monetary Fund

WB – World Bank

MOE – Ministry of Education

MOI – Ministry of Interior

MOE – Ministry of Endowments / Ministry of Awqaf (Egypt)

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NDP – National Democratic Party (Egypt)

Waqf (pl. Awqaf) – Islamic endowment

Chapter one

Introduction

Social activism in authoritarian contexts has been a subject of extensive debate regarding when and how such activism is permitted under oppressive circumstances (Wickham, 2002, p. 15; Clark, 2004, p. 41). Many arguments tend to oversimplify these interactions by reducing Islamic activism to functional roles, such as regime co-optation, welfare provision, or filling gaps in state service delivery, thereby overlooking the political, institutional, and identity-driven dynamics that shape how Islamic movements actually interact with authoritarian regimes (Clark, 2004, p. 949). Some scholars often argue that as long as authoritarian regimes need Islamic movements for economic reasons or to consolidate their popularity, they will tolerate these movements and allow them to fill the gaps left by the regime (Cammett & Luong, 2014, p. 4; Wiktorowicz, 2001, p. 85).

This observation has been valid for decades since it captures the contradiction between the mainstream understanding of how authoritarian regimes can be repressive towards civil society on the one hand and their actual tolerance of Islamic movements on the other hand, which could threaten their popularity. During the neoliberal changes that began in many Middle Eastern countries in the 1980s, various authoritarian regimes struggled to address the deteriorating economic conditions of their populations. As a result, they permitted Islamic charities to operate under strict censorship to avoid potential uprisings due to financial issues (Wiktorowicz, 2001, p. 85). Additionally, some regimes refrained from repressing these movements as a part of political correctness conditioned by neoliberal funding (Wiktorowicz, 2001, p. 85).

Over the years, this approach to analyzing the interactions between regimes and movements has become overly simplistic, assuming that authoritarian regimes will always tolerate Islamic movements in cases of socioeconomic need. However, the rapidly changing landscape in recent decades calls for reconsidering this analysis. The 2011 Arab uprisings profoundly shifted how regimes across the Middle East perceived Islamic activism. As mass mobilizations toppled entrenched rulers in Tunisia, Egypt, and later Libya and Yemen, and as Islamic actors gained electoral strength or entered government in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco, many authoritarian

regimes became acutely alarmed by the consequences of their earlier tolerance (Josua and Edel, 2021, p. 592). Even in countries where no regime collapsed, such as Jordan and Morocco, rulers interpreted the regional wave as evidence that Islamic movements could rapidly transform from tolerated social actors into powerful political contenders. Thus, the post-2011 moment generated a region-wide recalibration of threat perception, pushing regimes to tighten control over Islamic activism that they had previously allowed to expand (Josua and Edel, 2021, p. 592).

Consequently, in many cases across the region, both the regimes that survived the wave of regime change and those that were toppled entered a phase of authoritarian restoration or stabilization, prompting them to crack down on Islamic movements, regardless of their socio-economic significance. The core research problem addressed in this dissertation is why Islamic movements that were tolerated for decades by authoritarian regimes were suddenly subjected to prohibition, restructuring, or outright repression. The study focuses on the period from the 1980s to the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings and 2016 coup in Turkey, when these shifts became most visible and consequential.

This dissertation aims to explore the complex and evolving relationship between authoritarian governments and Islamic movements. It analyses the various factors that influence whether authoritarian regimes tolerate or suppress these movements, shedding light on the nuances of this interaction. It investigates this complex interplay through a comparative case study analysis of two prominent examples: Al-Jama'a al-Shariah (JS) in Egypt and the Gülen Movement in Turkey. The selection of Al-Jamyiah al-Shariah in Egypt and the Gülen Movement in Turkey as case studies offers a valuable framework for comparison. Both movements emerged in distinct historical and political contexts, exhibited varying degrees of political engagement; nevertheless, they faced similar levels of repression and co-optation by authoritarian regimes. Although al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya is a formal organization and the Gülen Movement is a broader religious network, both function as large-scale Islamic actors providing welfare, education, and spiritual outreach under authoritarian constraints (Brooke, 2015, p. 16; Jager, 2016, p. 4). For this dissertation, the unit of analysis is therefore the Islamic actor itself, not its organizational form, which allows for meaningful comparison of how regimes manage or suppress such actors despite structural differences.

A key similarity across both cases is the significant shift towards government-imposed prohibition of these movements in both countries. Following the 2013 coup in Egypt and the 2016 coup

attempt in Turkey, both authoritarian regimes, despite initially showing a degree of engagement or tolerance, albeit under restrictions, chose to implement severe repression, effectively banning these movements and the services they provide (Biagini & Ardovini, 2022, p. 6; Tas, 2018, p. 9).

This research aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining the conditions under which authoritarian regimes choose to tolerate or prohibit Islamic movements. It challenges the existing assumptions about the impact of economic conditions and service provision by Islamic movements on regime tolerance. It also examines the varying degrees of government repression in relation to the level of authoritarian stability. It highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of the client-patron relationship between regimes and Islamic movements. In this dissertation, the term "Islamic movement" refers to a broad category of Islamic actors that combine religious, social, and educational functions, rather than exclusively political Islamist parties. This includes charitable organizations, service-providing networks, and religiously inspired social movements, as well as actors whose engagement with the state extends beyond formal political competition (Bayat, 2013, p. 46).

The dissertation tests three hypotheses: first, that tolerance towards Islamic movements does not depend on the economic situation of the authoritarian regime nor the size of services provided by the movements; second, that the strength and scale of the government's attack on the movement does not depend on the movement's level of political engagement. By "political engagement," I refer not only to formal participation in party politics or electoral competition, but also to indirect or informal activities such as influencing public debate, shaping community mobilization, managing large social networks, or engaging in advocacy that may affect power relations with the state. The third hypothesis is that the client-patron relationship between the regime and the movement is not static or permanent, but can take different forms. In this dissertation, the term "client–patron relationship" refers to the reciprocal but asymmetric exchange between authoritarian regimes and Islamic actors, in which regimes provide legal space, protection, or resources. At the same time, movements offer social services, legitimacy, or social control on behalf of the state (Auyero, 1999, p. 30).

This research employs a qualitative approach, involving in-depth case analysis and an examination of both primary and secondary resources. Comparative analysis will identify patterns, variations, and causal interactions in the relationship between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements

across the two cases. This research has significant implications for understanding the dynamics of authoritarianism and the strategies employed by governments and Islamic movements to navigate complex political landscapes. The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the conditions that facilitate cooperation or conflict between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements.

Research Puzzle, Hypothesis, and Research Question

The literature concerning Islamic NGOs within authoritarian contexts has emerged from the empirical reality of "established authoritarianism" and "punctuated pluralism," which allowed earlier authoritarian regimes to tolerate Islamic movements. Many prior approaches have been overly rational in assuming that this balance would always persist (Wickham, 2002, p. 15; Clark, 2004, p. 41). The project's central puzzle arises from the differing authoritarian dynamics before and after the 2013 coup in Egypt and the 2016 coup in Turkey. Neither country had economic development nor solid alternatives for the organizations they closed, yet the authoritarian regimes decided to shut down these organizations. Consequently, the research question is: *under which conditions do authoritarian regimes tolerate or prohibit Islamic Movements?* This study analyzes the reasons for the shifts in the regimes' approach to interacting with Islamic organizations, despite their persistent inability to provide social services on a comparable scale to the closed organizations.

Furthermore, the attack not only targeted explicitly politicized groups or those that engaged in a ruling coalition with the government, but also any large-scale popular group that might pose a potential threat to the stability of the authoritarian regime. Based on this observation and the puzzle at hand, a comparative analysis will be conducted between the cases of Egypt and Turkey in the 1980s, examining their state of punctuated pluralism until the 2013 and 2016 coups, and the subsequent state of authoritarian restoration and diminished pluralism. The comparison will mainly be conducted between the Turkish regime's interaction with the Gülen movement, which can be classified as a political movement, and the Egyptian regime's interactions with Al Jamyiah Al Shariah, which did not have explicit political engagement and would be classified more as a charitable organization. Although Egypt and Turkey differ formally in regime type, with Turkey maintaining the appearance of an illiberal democracy while Egypt remained openly authoritarian,

their trajectories are comparable because both regimes operated through increasingly authoritarian practices, especially from the 2000s onward (Kirazli, 2025, p. 36). In both contexts, rulers relied on Islamic movements as useful intermediaries for welfare provision, social control, and ideological legitimacy, only to later frame the same actors as autonomous threats. The timeframe from the early 1980s to 2013/2016 captures this shared arc: the expansion of Islamic movements during the neoliberal restructuring of the 1980s; their consolidation during periods of political instrumentalization by the state; and finally, the decisive authoritarian rupture, 2013 in Egypt and 2016 in Turkey, when long-tolerated movements were abruptly prohibited. This period, therefore, provides a coherent comparative window through which the rise, accommodation, and repression of Islamic activism can be analyzed.

Hypothesis

Based on the above-mentioned research puzzle, the research variables are divided as follows;

- Authoritarian stability is the *independent variable*
- The autonomy of Islamic movements is the *dependent variable*
- Economic conditions of the regime and political activity levels of the movements are the *control variable*s

H1: The more pressing security and political stabilization requirements for the authoritarian regime, the less tolerant it will be towards Islamic movements, irrespective of how significant they are in social services provision

H2: The depth of the clientelist relationship between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements does not determine the level of regime tolerance; even deeply embedded clientelist ties do not guarantee a movement's survival during periods of authoritarian instability.

H3: The degree of a movement's political engagement does not influence the likelihood of authoritarian repression during periods of authoritarian restoration or instability.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Conceptualizing Authoritarianism and Authoritarian Resilience

Linz (2000) defines authoritarian rule as a system characterized by limited or non-existent pluralism, often lacking a distinct ideology. In authoritarian regimes, political mobilization is highly regulated and typically occurs when it supports the stability of the authority (p. 159).

Authoritarian resilience refers to the ability of authoritarian or hybrid/competitive authoritarian governments to endure challenges and pressures without collapsing or transitioning toward democracy. This requires adaptability, involving adjustments to policies to counter internal or external threats, keeping control over essential institutions and power dynamics, and often seeking to uphold or project legitimacy by offering critical services, fostering national pride, or collaborating with religious or cultural organizations (Linz, 2000, p. 21).

Conceptualizing Islamic Movements

The term "Islamic movements" is an umbrella term for various entities that aim to incorporate Islamic principles into both the public and private spheres. This diversity is manifested in several forms, including Islamist political parties, grassroots social movements, and international networks that span Muslim communities on a broad scale (Eickelman, 2003, p. 340).

Islamist parties typically mobilize for public support through political engagement to implement Islamic law (Sharia) within the political system or decision-making processes (Esposito, 2000, p. 6). These parties view political engagement as a means to construct a society that aligns with their values. Theoretically, social movements aim to address pressing issues such as poverty, education, and unemployment, drawing inspiration from Islamic teachings as they strive for change (Esposito, 2000, p. 6).

On an ideological level, Islamic movements represent various perspectives/ideologies. Some groups have a gradual and peaceful approach to implementing political and social change within current systems Esposito, 2000, p. 8). In contrast, others present a more radical transformation, which may aim to establish an Islamic state. The diverse interpretations of Islamic texts and the varied applications of Islamic principles in various contexts contribute to this ideological diversity (Esposito, 2000, p. 8).

Islamic movements pursue diverse objectives, including political participation through electoral means, social change focused on issues such as poverty and education within an Islamic framework, and, for some, the establishment of an Islamic state governed by Sharia law (Esposito, 2000, p. 8). Their organizational structures can range from hierarchical with centralized leadership to decentralized networks. They employ various strategies to achieve their goals, including propaganda and media campaigns, utilizing social media platforms, leading public service provision sectors, and organizing public protests and demonstrations (Esposito, 2000, p. 8).

Authoritarian stability

In this dissertation, authoritarian stability refers not to the absence of dissent or the presence of institutional order, but to the extent to which an authoritarian regime perceives its own grip on power to be secure, uncontested, and predictable**.** Stability is therefore understood as a subjective and perception-driven condition, shaped by how ruling elites interpret threats, evaluate rival centers of authority, and assess their control over coercive and bureaucratic institutions (Slater, 2010, pp. 12-14).

Rather than conceiving stability as an objective macro-level indicator, this dissertation treats perceived stability as an analytic variable that conditions how authoritarian rulers judge Islamic movements. Periods of turmoil, such as the post–Arab Spring transition in Egypt, or episodes of elite fragmentation and escalating intra-regime competition, such as the confrontation between Erdoğan and the Gülen movement prior to 2016, constitute phases of low authoritarian stability, during which rulers become hypersensitive to autonomous Islamic organizations and more likely to view them as potential challengers (Gerschewski, 2015, p. 18; Bellin, 2004, pp. 143-145).

Proposed Theoretical Framework

- ***Clientelism and Patronage***

According to Legg (1972), Political clientelism is primarily understood as the formation of mutually beneficial and transactional relationships between individuals who have hopes of gaining

access, or actual access, to the management of limited resources (patron-political party-state) that are sought after by those who lack them (client-voter) (p. 45).

This theory can explain the mutual implicit agreement between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements, as well as the stability of their relationship in particular phases. The strength of this theory lies in its ability to capture co-optation as a key method employed by the regime to manipulate civil society organizations. Clientelism explains how authoritarian governments can incorporate Islamic movements into the political scene by exchanging material and political benefits for loyalty and support (Legg, 1972, p. 54). This may involve granting access to resources, offering patronage privileges such as safety and restricted tolerance, and allowing some political engagement in return for the movement's support of the regime, as well as, in some cases, filling economic gaps (Legg, 1972, p. 54). Additionally, it helps explain the power hierarchy/structure in such kinds of interactions. The theory explains the fundamental power disparity within the relationship between the patron and the client, where the regime possesses absolute control over the movement. This explains how regimes can influence Islamic movements to serve the regime's objectives. Another strength is that it can, in some contexts, explain the variation in the interaction between the state and the movements. Clientelism may explain the different levels of cooperation and conflict between regimes and movements. Factors such as the type of exchange, the distribution of benefits, and the power dynamics between participants can significantly influence the nature of their relationship.

However, Oversimplification is the most critical limitation of this theory. Clientelism may overly simplify the changing and complex aspects of the patron-client relationship. It does not consider the ideological motives, internal dynamics, or changes in approach of Islamic movements. More importantly, it overlooks the changes in regimes' perspectives/approaches toward Islamic movements. Hence, this theory does not comprehensively explain repression as a resort for many regimes in cases of an alarming threat. Although clientelism provides some insight into co-optation, it cannot entirely explain why regimes may resort to repressing Islamic movements. Factors like perceived threats to the regime's stability, ideological conflicts, and the development of internal divisions within the movement may be more influential in these cases. Hence, the theory can explain the phases of harmony between the regimes and the movements in both cases, which

can be described as a state of mutual benefit; however, it fails to capture the updates to the regime's approach.

- ***Bounded Rationality***

To address the research question, the theory of bounded rationality will be followed to explain the sudden shift in strategies employed by the Egyptian and Turkish regimes following the coups. As Simon (1972) noted,

Decision-makers' actions stem from various emerging incentives/factors that influence their choices. Although decision-makers act rationally according to rational choice theory, their rationality is limited by two critical factors: their limited cognitive abilities and the complexity of, or updates to, their surrounding environment (p. 7). Moreover, individuals often pursue options that provide immediate satisfaction rather than striving for long-term ideal outcomes (Simon, 1972, p. 8). The theory suggests that problems do not exist before solutions; decision-makers often foresee potential issues and proactively devise solutions to address them. Bounded rationality theory explains the thought processes of actors seeking to fulfill their interests. It provides a framework for understanding how the authoritarian regime altered its traditional approach to managing Islamic movements after the 2013 and 2016 coups, despite its continued struggles in delivering social services.

- ***Political Opportunity Structure***

Political opportunity structure is described by Meyer (2004) as follows: political factors can either boost or hinder the likelihood of mobilization, influence the types of claims that can be made, determine the strategies of influence that can be employed, and shape the ability of movements to impact mainstream politics and policy (p. 32). In other words, the political factors that might facilitate or trouble the activities of a social movement are not fixed nor relevant in every single case. The strength of this theory in the context of this study lies in its ability to highlight the factors that influence the rise or decline of Islamic movements. Elements such as regime openness or elite cohesion can impact the activity, or lack thereof, of Islamic movements. Building on this observation, this theory can also explain variations in movement in response to the available

opportunities. This helps analyze the correlation between the regime's stability as a political opportunity and the rise of Islamic movements vs the regime's instability or repression of Islamic movements. Another strength of this theory is its flexibility. It can also explain the adoption processes of Islamic movements in response to the opportunities at hand and, hence, how strong/deep the client-patron relationship is at a particular phase. However, this theory has a few limitations. Its application in an authoritarian context can be significantly limited. It might also not reflect how these regimes use methods like surveillance, censorship, and violence to restrict opportunities for political mobilization.

For this reason, the dissertation integrates the concepts of political opportunity structure and bounded rationality. While political opportunity structure accounts for how Islamic movements perceive and respond to shifting constraints and opportunities, bounded rationality captures how authoritarian regimes make decisions about tolerance and repression in nontransparent, rapidly changing environments. In doing so, the analysis reconciles a structuralist perspective (political opportunity structure) with an agency-centered one (bounded rationality), treating the interaction between regimes and movements as a process shaped by both structural conditions and decision-making limitations.

Research Design

- *Qualitative approach*

This research examines the complex relationships between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements, with a specific focus on the cases of the Gülen Movement in Turkey and Al-Jamyia Al-Shariah in Egypt. Given the complicated nature of these relationships, a qualitative approach is deemed most appropriate for the following reasons.;

- ➔ Deep exploration of actors' perspectives through interviews: Uncovering the attitudes, motivations, and interpretations of key actors involved in these complex relationships.
- ➔ Identification of subtle factors: Recognizing and understanding the nuanced nature of power dynamics and the role of historical and contextual factors that influence regime-movement interactions.

- ➔ Contextualized understanding and testing the validity of the current approach: studying these relationships within their historical, political, and social contexts allows for a more detailed understanding of the factors that shape regime-movement interactions in each case. More importantly, testing the ability of the current approach to explain the updates to the relationship between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements throughout the last decade.
- ➔ Development of grounded theory: Building a theoretical framework from the data, capturing the complexities and variations in the relationships between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements.

- *Case selection*

This research employs the **Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) approach**. The selection of the Gülen Movement in Turkey and Al Jamyiah Al Shariah in Egypt as case studies is deliberate and driven by the following considerations:

- Different Core Characteristics:

Political Engagement Levels of the Islamic Movement

The Gülen movement, as described by Fethullah Gülen and its advocates, is portrayed as a peaceful civil society organization dedicated to social work and philanthropy with no political ambitions. However, on the ground, particularly after the 1980s coup and the subsequent neoliberal changes, the movement gained economic and political power. During the AKP's rule, the Gülen movement formed an implicit coalition with the regime, while also gaining further political influence by infiltrating the judicial system and owning several media outlets. This growing influence and popularity of the Gülen movement posed a threat to the authority of the AKP. In contrast, Al Jamyiah Al Shariah (JS) in Egypt is a long-established charity with thousands of branches nationwide, providing social and essential services to low-income families. The JS has neither engaged in political activities nor formed alliances with regimes (Brooke, 2015, p. 16; Jager, 2016, p. 4). Although there were a few attempts by the Muslim Brotherhood to take over the

organization, JS has not participated in political activities nor engaged in any ruling coalition with any of the Egyptian regimes since its inception. Hence, comparing two movements with different levels of political activity shows whether authoritarian regimes' tolerance toward Islamic movements depends on the level of a movement's political integration.

- The Similarities between the cases under study
  - ➢ Both movements had existed in authoritarian contexts with varying degrees of tolerance prior to the coups, which marked a shift from authoritarian stability to authoritarian restoration (Brooke, 2015, p. 16; Jäger, 2016, p. 4).
  - ➢ Both movements were permitted to function due to rational calculations made by their respective regimes, which in both cases concerned the provision of social services as a means of enhancing authoritarian resilience (Brooke, 2015, p. 16; Jäger, 2016, p. 4).
  - ➢ The outcome of the trajectory of both movements marks the most critical similarity, as the different political activity levels of the movements and the persistent socio-economic needs of the regime did not interfere with the regime's tolerance of these movements. However, the regimes eventually repressed both (Biagini & Ardovini, 2022, p. 6; Tas, 2018, p. 9).

Timeframe

This research examines the relationship between authoritarian governments and Islamic movements in Egypt from the 1980s to 2013 and in Turkey from the 1980s to 2016. This timeframe encompasses the adoption of neoliberal economic reforms, which increased the regime's tolerance towards the Gülen and JS movements. After the 2013 and 2016 coups, both regimes in Egypt and Turkey initiated a crackdown on Islamic movements. Hence, a comparative study between both countries and the nature of the movements under study will be conducted to investigate the conditions under which Islamic movements are tolerated or not in authoritarian regimes.

Justification for Case Selection:

- Theoretical significance: Examining these cases enables a comprehensive investigation of significant theoretical concepts, including the impact of regime type and economic factors, as well as the interactions between clients and patrons within the dynamics of regime-movement engagements.
- Empirical Significance: The Gülen Movement and Al-Jamyiah Al-Shariah are influential movements with considerable social and political weight. Analyzing their experiences offers critical observations into the dynamic interplay between religion, politics, and power in modern authoritarian contexts.

Data Collection

- Secondary resources will be utilized to analyze the existing literature and assess the effectiveness of current approaches to studying updates in authoritarian tactics toward Islamic movements. In addition, news articles regarding the crackdown on these movements will be examined, along with statistics on the branches that have been shut down and the repercussions of closing these organizations. Secondary resources will also serve as references for the background and historical context of the interactions between the regimes and the movements.
- Primary resources, namely semi-structured interviews, will be conducted to guarantee flexibility and depth in data collection. The purpose of conducting interviews is to get a deeper understanding of the following aspects: to what extent the movements were engaged in political activity or a ruling coalition with the regimes, the structure/depth of the patron-client approach, what was the milestone where the patron-client relationship got affected, the size of the attack on the movements, are their possible alternatives for the closed movements and are their possibilities for these movements to regain their previous status. The sampling strategy for the interviews will be “purposive.” According to this strategy, interviewees will be selected based on their relevant knowledge, experiences, and

perspectives on the research question. The following factors will be taken into account while employing this method:

1. Diversity of Perspectives: The interview sample will be carefully selected to guarantee diversity through different perspectives, including:
    A. Members of the movements: Individuals currently or previously involved in the Gülen Movement or Al-Jamyia Al-Shariah, offering insights into their experiences related to the puzzle under study.
    B. Government officials: Individuals who hold positions in the field of government's interactions with civil society organizations and have insights into the regime's decision-making processes. An example of this is the Ministry of Social Affairs in Egypt.
    C. Academics: Scholars specializing in Turkish and Egyptian politics, Islamic studies, and political sociology who would offer theoretical and analytical reflections on the validity of the current approach in analyzing the interactions between the regimes and the movements.
    D. Civil society actors: members from civil society organizations engaged with or witnessed the details of the crackdown on the movements.
2. Snowball Sampling: In some cases, snowball sampling may be employed. This technique involves identifying initial interviewees and then asking them to recommend others who have valuable knowledge and are willing to participate. This can help identify individuals who may be typically difficult to reach.
3. Theoretical Sampling: Theoretical sampling may be used throughout the collection and analysis processes. This includes selecting additional interviewees based on the emerging themes and research questions that arise during the study.

Interviews guide

The interview guide for this study will be semi-structured, ensuring flexibility and adaptability while addressing essential themes and topics. It will be progressively developed and refined during research, complemented by insights from initial interviews and emerging themes. It will include open-ended and detailed questions to extract relevant

responses. Focusing on key themes and the flexibility of this interview guide type will support the collection of data to better understand the complex dynamics between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements. The interviews will revolve around the following themes:

- Regime Perceptions of the Movement's Nature:
    - How did the regime perceive the movement's ideology, goals, and activities?
    - What were the regime's concerns regarding the movement's influence?
    - How did the regime evaluate the movement's threat to its power and stability?
- Factors Influencing Regime Decisions:
    - What factors influenced the regime's decisions regarding tolerance or repression of the movement?
        - Economic conditions
        - Public opinion
        - Regime ideology and interests
    - How did these factors interact and influence regime behavior?
- The dynamics of the Regime-Movement relationship:
    - What was the nature of the relationship between the regime and the movement?
        - Cooperative? Adversarial?
        - Were there periods of cooperation and conflict?
        - How did these dynamics evolve?
    - Did a client-patron relationship exist between the regime and the movement? If so, how did it function?
- The Movement's Perspective:
    - How did the movement perceive its relationship with the regime?
    - What were the movement's goals and objectives in its interactions with the regime?
    - How did the movement respond to regime pressures and restrictions?
    - Did the movement engage in any form of accommodation or resistance to the regime?
- The Impact of the 2013 and 2016 Coups:
    - How did the 2013 and 2016 coups impact the regime-movement relationship?

- What were these events' immediate and long-term consequences for the regime and the movement?
- How did the regime's response to the movement change after these events?
- Is there a possibility for the movements to regain their previous status?

Data Analysis

- **Thematic analysis** will be the primary method used to analyze the interview transcripts. It involves identifying, analyzing, and generating patterns of themes within the data. By employing a thematic analysis approach, the main themes and patterns within the interview data will be identified and interpreted, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements. The main steps for this analysis include;

1. Familiarization:
   - Examining the interview transcripts to gain a detailed understanding of the data.
2. Generating Themes:
   - Detecting overarching themes that highlight the core of the data and help answer the research questions. For example, the timeframe for the patron-client approach, its depth, and the milestone events that altered the trajectory of the relationship between the two actors.
3. Reviewing Themes:
   - Comparing the themes to the original transcripts to guarantee that they accurately reflect the interviewees' perspectives.
4. Defining and categorizing Themes:
   - Define the detected theme and describe its relevance and significance to the research, and whether they validate or negate the proposed hypothesis.

- **A comparative analysis** of the experiences of the Gülen Movement in Turkey and Al-Jamyia Al-Shariah in Egypt will be conducted. This analysis will be conducted through the following approach;

  <u>1. Systematic Comparison of Themes:</u>

- Identify Core Themes: Identify the key themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of each case study. These may include regime perceptions of the movement, factors influencing regime decisions, and the nature of regime-movement interaction

2. Cross-Case Comparison:

Systematically compare the manifestations of these themes between the two cases.

- Similarities: Identify similarities in how these themes manifest in both contexts. For example, the regime's perspective on the threat posed by the movements and the movements' adaptation strategies to those perspectives.
- Differences: Focus on identifying the key differences in how these themes manifested in each case, for example, the level of each movement's political engagement or the size of the regimes' attack on the movements

3. Drawing Broader Conclusions:

- Concluding: A precise conclusion about the motives that affect regime-movement interactions in authoritarian contexts can be drawn from the comparative analysis.
- Theoretical Implications: The findings can contribute to existing theories of authoritarianism, regime-religion relations, and social movements by introducing an approach that explains the updates to authoritarian perspectives of Islamic movements.

Limitations of the Research

The following limitations might be encountered while conducting this research;

- Potential for Researcher Bias: researcher bias may occur throughout data collection and interpretation.
- Limitations of Interview Data:
  - Social Desirability Bias: Interviewees may provide socially preferable answers and refrain from disclosing information that could be perceived as negative or controversial.

    - Selective Memory: Interviewees may selectively recall information that supports their perspectives or narratives.
- Difficulty in Generalizability: Although the findings may offer valuable insights into the specific cases of the Gülen Movement in Turkey and Al-Jamia Al-Shariah in Egypt, they may not be generalizable to all contexts. The exact historical, political, and social contexts of these cases may limit the applicability of the findings to other countries or situations.
- Difficulty of Studying Sensitive Political Issues: Researching sensitive political issues, such as the relationship between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements, can be challenged by the following factors;
    - Difficulties in reaching out to interviewees: securing interviews with government officials or members of the movements may be challenging due to security concerns, political sensitivities, or logistical constraints.
    - Confidentiality considerations: Ensuring the confidentiality of interviewees, particularly those who have been or are still members of the movements.

Conclusion

This chapter outlines the methodological and theoretical approaches adopted for this research, which investigates the complex interactions between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements, focusing on the cases of the Gülen Movement in Turkey and Al-Jamia Al-Shariah in Egypt. A qualitative research design centered on in-depth semi-structured interviews has been selected to explore the perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of key actors involved in these complex relationships. The research employs a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) to leverage the differences between the cases (in terms of political activity levels among the movements) while focusing on the factors that explain similar outcomes (the crackdown on the movements). A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to select interviewees from diverse backgrounds, including former movement members, government officials, academics, and civil society actors. Thematic analysis will be employed to identify and interpret key themes within the interview data, followed by a comparative study to determine the factors that explain the differences in regime behavior towards the movements. The theories of clientelism, bounded rationality, and the political opportunity structure will be employed to address this research

question. By employing the methodological and theoretical approaches mentioned, this research seeks to generate insights into the complex dynamics between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of these critical relationships in contemporary political contexts and developing a new theory that can explain the updates to the interactions between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Authoritarian regimes differ markedly in how they manage and interact with civil society. While some repress civic actors outright, others co-opt, regulate, or tolerate them. This variation raises a central question: under what conditions do authoritarian regimes tolerate or prohibit Islamic movements? The puzzle that motivates this chapter arises from two cases, Egypt and Turkey, where ruling elites dismantled major Islamic organizations such as al-Jamʿiyyah al-Sharʿiyyah after 2013 and the Gülen movement after 2016. Both movements had long contributed to welfare provision and education, filling gaps created by neoliberal reforms. Yet, rather than preserving these service networks, the regimes opted for closure and repression.

This paradox challenges conventional rational-choice assumptions that authoritarian rulers will maintain cooperative relations with actors who strengthen regime resilience. Instead, this study argues that in periods of heightened instability, regimes operate under bounded rationality, making crisis-driven decisions aimed at neutralizing perceived threats, even at the expense of long-term stability and social provision. The aim of this study is to reassess how authoritarian regimes respond to societal actors under conditions of uncertainty, addressing the gap in existing literature that overlooks the short-term, threat-driven logic shaping regime behavior during moments of crisis. This chapter reviews the theoretical foundations of this puzzle, surveying how existing scholarship explains the management of civil society under authoritarian rule. It organizes the discussion around three clusters of explanation: (1) historical and learning approaches; (2) civil society under authoritarianism; and (3) threat perception and social contract in authoritarianism.

This chapter is organized into six sections that collectively build the theoretical foundation for understanding how and why authoritarian regimes tolerate or prohibit Islamic movements. The first section, "Authoritarian Learning and Resilience," reviews the literature on how regimes adapt to challenges and crises, highlighting the mechanisms of survival, including repression, co-optation, and legitimation. This provides the historical and conceptual background for understanding the learning processes that shape later decisions toward societal actors.

The second section, “Activism, Social Movements, and Civil Society under Authoritarian Regimes,” examines how regimes manage civil society more broadly, identifying the conditions under which cooperation or confrontation occurs. It helps situate Islamic movements within the wider debate about authoritarian control over associational life.

The third section, “Threat Perception in Authoritarianism,” shifts the focus from structural explanations to cognitive ones, exploring how regimes perceive and prioritize threats. This section is crucial to the study’s central argument that, during instability, regimes operate under bounded rationality and may act on perceived, rather than objective, threats.

The fourth section, “Social Contract and Political Culture in Authoritarianism,” examines how regimes legitimize their rule through implicit bargains and cultural norms, illustrating how shifts in legitimacy strategies under neoliberal and post-crisis conditions influence tolerance toward Islamic actors.

The fifth section, “The Politics of Welfare Provision in Authoritarianism and the Patron–Client Relationship,” connects the discussion to the material foundations of regime survival. It shows how welfare provision and clientelism became tools for maintaining support, but also how neoliberal retrenchment created dependency on Islamic service providers, setting the stage for the paradox of repression.

Finally, the sixth section, “Authoritarian Approach towards Islamic Movements,” integrates the preceding debates to explain how Islamic movements were managed, tolerated, or ultimately repressed. It highlights how regimes in Egypt and Turkey, faced with instability, redefined these movements as immediate threats and shut them down despite their social utility. Together, these sections establish a framework for analyzing how authoritarian decision-making under uncertainty leads to the closure of Islamic movements, thereby addressing a gap in the literature that overlooks the role of crisis-driven, short-term calculations in shaping state–Islamic relations.

Authoritarian Learning and Resilience

This section reviews the literature on how authoritarian regimes survive and adapt over time. Understanding these mechanisms of resilience, such as repression, co-optation, and legitimation, helps explain the broader logic through which regimes manage societal actors, including Islamic movements.

Historical and comparative studies suggest that authoritarian regimes learn from past crises and from the experiences of other regimes in managing dissent. On a broader level of analysis of authoritarian learning in the Arab world, Heydemann and Leenders (2011) argued that the ability of certain authoritarian governments in the Middle East to repress movements can, to some extent, be attributed to their ability to quickly learn from and adjust to the new challenges presented by widespread protests, which threatened the persistence of these regimes. Additionally, Heydemann and Leeders (2011) consider this ability to adapt as a vital characteristic of some authoritarian governments in the Arab region, a trait they have described as 'recombinant authoritarianism' (P. 4).

In other words, the phenomenon of authoritarian adaptation and learning was evident in how ruling powers in countries like Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Syria observed the developments of uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. They assessed the international community's reaction to these events and, as a result, crafted strategies that, in their view, might increase their chances of overcoming this surge of public dissent and continuing their governance (Heydeman and Leenders, 2011, p. 5). Furthermore, the approaches taken by these regimes are not merely defensive or reactionary in nature. Instead, they can be understood as complicated, multi-level interactions involving the government, the populace, and international players. Through these interactions, authoritarian regimes devise strategies aimed at influencing the strategic decisions of their citizens' allies, all while continuously revising their assessments of their odds not only of repressing opposition but also, if necessary, of negotiating the conditions under which they might leave power (Heydeman and Leenders, 2014, p. 5).

At the foundational level, governments are implementing strategies to prevent the formation of internal divisions within their ruling coalitions and essential support groups, mainly to avoid the defection of military forces, which were crucial in toppling authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt (Heydeman and Leenders, 2014, p. 5). While Heydemann and Leenders primarily focus on regimes that successfully avoided revolutionary collapse, their framework can also inform an analysis of those that reconstituted authoritarian rule following regime breakdowns. In cases such as Egypt and, to some extent, Tunisia, post-uprising elites drew lessons from these failures, particularly regarding the centrality of military cohesion and control over transitional processes. This often involves raising the pay of military personnel and providing financial incentives to regime supporters. Secondly, governments tailor narratives designed to influence the thought

process of citizens, highlighting the risks of engaging in opposition and the adverse outcomes of regime change, such as sectarian violence, chaos, and economic downturn. Thirdly, governments devise diplomatic and political approaches to navigate the international landscape, seeking support from allies opposed to revolutions and striving to mitigate criticism and sanctions from opponents (Heydeman and Leenders, 2014, p. 6).

Heydemann and Leenders (2014) argue that authoritarianism is not a linear concept and can be updated in response to internal and external threats. However, their argument laid the foundation for further discussions on the strategies of authoritarian regimes in learning or resilience. Regarding strategies of authoritarian resilience, Bellin (2012) argues that what sets the Middle East apart is not a lack of prerequisites for democracy, but rather the existence of factors that promote strong authoritarian regimes (p. 129). Central to this was a repressive state apparatus, which had both the ability and the determination to crush any democratic movements within society (Bellin, 2012, p. 129). This formidable capability for repression stemmed from a combination of four key elements. These elements were: (1) the financial robustness of the state's repressive forces, which was exceptionally strong in many countries in the region due to their access to revenues from oil, gas, strategic location, and other forms of income; (2) the ability to sustain networks of international support, which many states in the Middle East managed to keep even after the Cold War, thanks to their strategic importance to Western security interests; (3) the degree of institutional development within the repressive apparatus, which remained low in major regional players like Syria, Saudi Arabia, as well as in Jordan, Morocco, Libya, Yemen, and the Gulf kingdoms, though it was higher in countries like Egypt and Tunisia; and (4) the relatively low level of public mobilization against the state, which meant there was typically minimal resistance against the repressive forces in efforts toward political reform (Bellin, 2012, p. 129).

The first two factors, financial stability and international support, were crucial in ensuring that the repressive forces had the necessary resources and workforce for suppression. The last two factors, institutional development and public mobilization, were crucial to influencing the repressive forces' willingness to suppress (Bellin, 2012, p. 129). If the repressive apparatus was organized around personal loyalties rather than institutional structures, it was less likely to welcome changes to the regime, fearing that reforms could lead to its collapse (Bellin, 2012, p. 130). Bellin (2012) emphasized the state’s security apparatus since it can shut down potential threats directly and

aggressively. I would argue that Bellin's (2012) argument is more applicable in contentious politics, where authoritarian regimes use their forces to stabilize their rule.

Regarding less direct and more sustainable resilience methods, Svolik (2012) identifies two critical aspects of authoritarian governance: authoritarian control and the distribution of power. Essentially, the stability of authoritarian regimes hinges on their capacity to ensure societal control and a degree of unity among the ruling elite. Svolik (2012) categorizes authoritarian control into co-optation and repression. While Svolik's framework provides a useful foundation for understanding how authoritarian regimes maintain cohesion and avert instability, its emphasis on continuity does not fully capture the trajectories of regimes that have faced breakdown and subsequently re-established control. In the Middle Eastern context, cases such as Egypt and Turkey illustrate a pattern of regime reconfiguration following episodes of political disruption, rather than uninterrupted stability.

According to Svolik (2012), authoritarian regimes gain advantages by creating political structures that help overcome issues related to monitoring within authoritarian power-sharing arrangements (p. 89). These formal deliberative and decision-making bodies serve two primary purposes. Firstly, the procedural elements of institutionalized power-sharing enhance transparency among authoritarian leaders. Secondly, the formal characteristics of these institutions help solve monitoring issues in authoritarian power-sharing. The existence of formal rules makes it easier to identify when the dictator fails to comply (Svolik, 2012, p. 89).

A large body of work on authoritarian resilience examines how regimes adapt and endure through mechanisms of repression, co-optation, and legitimation, offering a foundation for understanding how rulers decide when to tolerate or suppress social and religious movements.

Adding to Svolik's (2012) argument of the importance of the elite's coherence, Gerschewski (2013) agrees with the importance of a united internal structure for authoritarian regimes. Still, he pays more attention to legitimacy as a foundation for a solid regime since it springs from the population. In his (2013) model, Gerschewski suggests a foundational framework that integrates various elements contributing to the stability of autocratic regimes (p. 18). He contends that contemporary research on autocracy has predominantly tackled repression and co-optation, neglecting the aspect of legitimation. According to his model, autocratic governments depend on three fundamental pillars: repression, co-optation, and legitimation. The distinction among autocratic systems manifests in how they operationalize and balance these strategies (Gerschewski,

2013, p. 19). For an extended period, it was believed that Arab Spring populist authoritarian states maintained power through a "social contract": a mutual agreement that ensured political compliance in exchange for decent economic outcomes. However, increasing disenchantment led citizens in Tunisia and Egypt to retreat from this "social contract" and take to the streets in protest (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 19). For Gerschewski (2013), legitimacy can be operationalized by distinguishing between specific and diffuse support. Specifically, support hinges on meeting the popular needs regarding socio-economic progress and safety. On the other hand, diffuse support is often associated with conceptual elements like political ideologies, which foster long-term allegiance by enhancing unity within a group (P. 20). Legitimacy enhances resilience to crises, with all governmental systems striving to cultivate a broad-based conviction among the population that their system is normatively and fundamentally better than any alternative (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 20).

Grauvogel and von Soest (2014) dug into the relationship between legitimacy and authoritarian resilience beyond the socioeconomic prerequisites of legitimacy. According to Grauvogel and von Soest (2014), a regime's legitimation strategy can be built upon six dimensions: ideology, foundational myth, personalism, international engagement, procedural mechanisms, and performance (p. 638). Instead of naming specific factors that boost legitimacy or authoritarian resilience, Geddes et al. (2018) argue that devising specific methods for resilience might not be effective for all cases (p. 97). Geddes et al. (2018) state that the strength of such regimes cannot be attributed to isolated causes, but rather to the complex interactions between several causal variables. As such, examining the interactions of these causes and how they influence each other should be examined (Geddes et al., 2018, p. 97). For example, Geddes et al. (2018) demonstrate that the impact of economic recessions on authoritarian regimes varies depending on the institutional foundations of these regimes (p. 97). Dictatorships lacking solid party structures are more vulnerable to collapse during economic decline, whereas those rooted in well-developed party networks tend to exhibit greater resilience (Geddes et al., 2018, p. 98). Their research also highlights a divergence in the influences of centralization on regimes' durability: while concentrated power may, in some instances, undermine stability in party-based systems, it appears to enhance the survival prospects of military-led regimes (Geddes et al., 2018, p. 98).

In sum, the impact of economic crises on authoritarian stability is not uniform. It depends not only on the regime's institutional structure and financial resilience, but also on the strength and nature of power dynamics within the ruling elite (Geddes et al., 2018, p. 98).

On the regime typology and at a more specific level of analysis, Hadenius and Teorell (2007) contend that regimes with multiple parties are the least stable and most prone to democratization, given that their electoral systems permit a level of competition (P. 153). This aspect makes such regimes susceptible to incremental enhancements (Hadenius and Teorell, 2007, p. 153). Moving to the impact of the international arena on authoritarian stabilization, Darwich (2018) argues that the intervention of superpowers to bolster local leaders in suppressing dissenting movements inversely affected the longevity of those regimes (p. 4). Those without foreign backing had to forge alliances with various groups within society to sustain their power, resulting in a more inclusive governance structure and broader societal support (Darwich, 2018, p. 4). Conversely, regimes that heavily rely on external support for their survival have little incentive to negotiate or cooperate with domestic dissenters. This dependence on foreign patrons sets such regimes on a trajectory towards deterioration and eventual downfall, as they lack a connection with a societal base (Darwich, 2018, p. 5). In addition to the superpowers alliance, Debre (2020) states that regional organizations serve as platforms that influence the balance of power among local actors by offering extra resources to specific groups, thus significantly limiting others (p. 395). When autocratic leaders can utilize the benefits of membership in regional organizations and avoid limitations, they can enhance their strategies for remaining in power by gaining more material, informational, and conceptual support (Debre, 2020, 395).

The focus on the impact of international integration on the degree of authoritarian resilience in the literature is less extensive compared to the impact of internal forces. Bunce, McFaul, and Stoner-Weiss (2010) agreed with the mainstream understanding of civil society's impact on authoritarianism and argued that, based on the post-communist experience, it's clear that weak civil societies can act as a significant barrier to democratic transformation (p. 205). Taken together, the literature on authoritarian resilience and regime durability provides the conceptual foundation for understanding how civil society becomes incorporated into the mechanisms of authoritarian governance. Rather than existing as an independent sphere, civil society under authoritarian rule often functions as an extension or instrument of state control, contributing to the reproduction of regime legitimacy (Weiss, 2010, p. 205). This strand of scholarship, exemplified by Lorch (2017),

shifts the focus from how regimes survive in the abstract to how they co-opt and utilize societal actors in sustaining their rule.

Lorch (2017) examines, in the cases of Algeria and Mozambique, how civil society organizations, contrary to their theoretical role, sometimes lead to the stabilization of authoritarianism. Lorch (2017) argues that both the regimes in Algeria and Mozambique have sought to manipulate civil society as a veneer of democratic governance, showcasing the existence and actions of civil society organizations as evidence of pluralistic values and the freedom of association (p. 14). While Algeria, as a rentier state, primarily employed this approach to bolster its legitimacy within the country, Mozambique, which is more reliant on foreign donors, has also extensively utilized this tactic to secure legitimacy internationally (Lorch, 2017, p. 14). I would argue that, in the case of Algeria, as analyzed by Lorch (2017), civil society organizations have a psychological dimension, as the regime utilizes them to mobilize public support.

The literature on psychological manipulation techniques in authoritarianism is extensive, as exemplified by Zhu's (2021) discussion on the role of historical legacy. Zhu (2021) suggests that some authoritarian regimes nurture their power and legitimacy through the narrative of their "historical contributions" to the nation's independence or unification (p. 49). Such dynamics are seen in the cases of Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Namibia. Moreover, historical legacies that emphasize obedience to authority and prioritize the group's needs over individual ones, as observed following years of governance by the Communist Party in Vietnam, also play a role (Zhu, 2021, p. 49). Another similar explanation is provided by Diamond (2010), who explains that challenges to peace and cohesion within a nation can justify the sustainability of the existing order (p. 12). As seen in Burma, the concern over potential conflicts following wars or the threats to a nation's cohesion amid active insurgencies reinforces authoritarian resilience. Likewise, the fear of terrorism can be used as a justification for keeping authoritarian governance in place, as observed in Algeria (Diamond, 2010, p. 12).

This trend of linking authoritarian stability to psychology or political culture is significant since it can explain the legitimacy and support that many authoritarian regimes enjoy. On a similar note, De Smet (2021) argues that a deep state with a well-rooted culture of authoritarianism makes the possibility of authoritarian decay almost impossible due to the persistence of authoritarian norms and institutions (p. 14). The studies on authoritarian learning/resilience in the literature are abundant; however, authoritarian restitution is somewhat under-studied, especially concerning

decision-making in such critical times. Authoritarian learning is a prerequisite for authoritarian stabilization, as in times of instability, authoritarian regimes tend to avoid repeating the mistakes of a previous regime by making decisions that achieve short-term satisfaction. While these studies explain how regimes maintain stability through learning and adaptation, they pay less attention to how such strategies shape interactions with broader social movements and civic actors, a question explored in the next section.

Activism, Social Movements, and Civil Society under Authoritarian Regimes

Building on this, the second section turns to how authoritarian regimes manage collective action and associational life. It situates Islamic movements within broader debates on civil society under repression, showing how regimes decide when to tolerate, monitor, or suppress social activism. Research on civil society under authoritarian rule examines how regimes manage associational life, tolerating, regulating, or repressing movements in response to shifting political needs.

Ottaway (2009) offers a straightforward and mainstream understanding of activism under authoritarianism by arguing that, despite the imposition of numerous restrictions through official laws and processes, as well as violent pressure to constrain their actions to politically non-threatening areas, civil society organizations are still permitted a certain amount of room to function (p. 69). This argument is complemented by Carothers and Brechenmacher's (2014) argument of "closing space." They argue that authoritarian governments are inclined to impose limitations on civil society's more politically active segments, mainly consisting of NGOs dedicated to social justice, human rights, democratization, and environmental advocacy (p. 120). These organizations, which often aim to advance "Western" liberal values, typically receive significant support from international donors. A major aspect of these restrictions involves cutting foreign funding to these entities (Carothers and Brechenmacher, 2014, p. 120).

On this note, Gramsci (1970) proposed a significant explanation for the state's coercion of civil society. Gramsci (1970) argues that the prevalence of the state is upheld through coercive methods (p. 100). It exercises hegemony over both the political and civil sectors, making the state synonymous with the entire social structure and negating the independence of civil society. Civil society and the state are often indistinguishable and function as single entity (Gramsci, 1970, p.

100). Cavatorta (2012) adds to the previous arguments that the state's behavior toward civil society is linked to the type of regime (p. 2). Cavatorta (2012) argues that various authoritarian governments rely on distinct forms of legitimacy, which differ significantly among types of regimes, and employ multiple tactics to manage the social changes they encounter (p. 2). Specific regimes, like Myanmar's, depend heavily on military force to suppress any internal opposition and generally function in a state of isolation from their citizens (Cavatorta, 2012, p. 2). Conversely, other governments, such as Morocco's, do not excessively rely on such repressive measures and manage to sustain themselves through various strategies, including co-optation and divide-and-conquer tactics (Cavatorta, 2012, p. 2).

Other scholars stress that tolerance under authoritarianism is conditional and often accompanied by depoliticization and strict state oversight of associational activity. Gleiss (2017) provides a counterargument to the regime's type and approaches by arguing that the control over civil society by the state varies and is influenced by several factors, including the origin of an organization's funding, its operational scale, the stage of its organizational growth, and the nature of its activities (p. 5). What can be grasped from Gleiss's (2017) argument is that the degree of civil society organization politicization is a prerequisite for the state's acceptance. Another similar argument to Gleiss's (2017) has been provided by Salamon (2015), as he argued that some segments of civil society may at times willingly cooperate with authoritarian regimes due to religious or nationalistic beliefs, which serve as a fertile ground for the emergence of such a form of uncivil society (p. 2183). I would argue that Salamon's (2015) argument is one of the explanations for the emergence of the patron-client relationship between the state and civil society, as they may cooperate due to shared interests/beliefs. In the absence of a mutual ground with civil society organizations, Heurlin (2010) argues that authoritarian regimes may establish semi-official organizations to engage with the public (p. 225).

A similar observation, regarding co-optation, has been noted by Anheier (2003), who argued that the regime's attempts to infiltrate and politicize civil society organizations could lead to non-political civic organizations becoming aligned with the government (p. 26). By transforming neutral civil society organizations into supporters, these actions aim to garner loyalty and expand their support base (Anheier, 2003, p. 26). For a large scale of political and apolitical civil society organizations, Alscher (2017) noted that authoritarian regimes try to forge ties with the less

politically involved segments of their nonprofit sectors, aiming to enhance the quality and accessibility of public services in areas like social care, health, or education (p. 16).

While much of this literature focuses on apolitical organizations, the boundary between social provision and political mobilization is often blurred in contexts where religious movements operate as service providers. In Egypt and Turkey, Islamist organizations have historically combined welfare delivery with moral and political outreach, embedding political meanings within practices of social care. This overlap complicates the distinction between co-opted and oppositional civil society and may also account for periodic state crackdowns on organizations that appear apolitical yet function as vehicles of broader cultural and ideological influence.

On this note, Lorch and Bunk (2017) linked civil society to the methods of authoritarian resilience, arguing that in authoritarian systems, the delivery of social welfare services by civil society organizations has a stabilizing impact, thereby enhancing the regime's legitimacy based on its performance (p. 991). In an attempt to draw a clear map of the regime's co-optation versus repression, Toepler (2020) illustrates in the following figure that NGOs focusing on advocacy and social change are primarily affected by legal constraints. In contrast, independent nonprofit organizations dedicated to providing services tend to receive support from the government (p. 662).

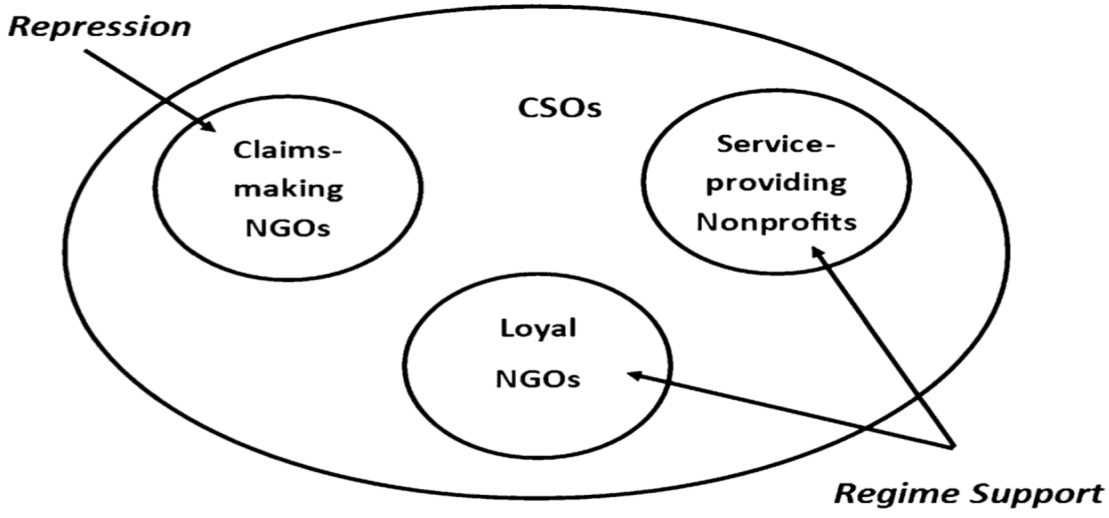


Fig. 1 Different types of CSOs in authoritarian contexts

I would argue that the interaction summarized by this figure is one of the most prevalent explanations in the literature for the relationship between authoritarian regimes and CSOs prior to the critical changes in Egypt and Turkey. This hypothesis assumes that the regime will only shut down civil society organizations if they are engaged in politics.

The regime type as the dependent variable in this equation has been discussed by Obuch (2017) as he highlighted that the contribution of civil society to democratization and the roles they assume could be influenced by the political regime context in which they operate (P. 16). From a broad perspective, Obuch's (2017) argument seems to be pinpointing the reality of state-civil society interactions in authoritarianism; however, by "regime context" Obuch (2017) refers to authoritarianism vs. democracy while he overlooked "regime context" as the variations within authoritarianism (authoritarian stability vs. authoritarian restitution). In authoritarian contexts, Liverani (2008) explains how civil society organizations maneuver their existence in repressive environments (p. 302). He argues that not all civil society organizations originate from political activist backgrounds, necessitating the intervention of authoritarian regimes to neutralize their political influence and maintain control (Liverani, 2008, p. 302). For NGOs focused on advocacy and making claims, the primary concern is implementing strategies that allow them to withstand oppressive measures. Meanwhile, nonprofits dedicated to providing services must adjust to the evolving structures within the domain of welfare policies (Liverani, 2008, p. 302). However, in many Middle Eastern contexts, service-providing NGOs have also operated as vehicles for political clientelism, linking social welfare provision to networks of religious or partisan affiliation. Organizations associated with movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or the Gülen network in Turkey exemplify this dynamic, where welfare activities functioned both as social outreach and as mechanisms of political mobilization and loyalty-building. Liverani's (2008) argument limits danger and repression to the politically active organization, as they directly threaten the regime; however, he overlooks the changes in authoritarian dynamics during times of instability.

Regarding the tools used by civil society organizations in authoritarian regimes, Beinin and Vairel (2013) argue that under such regimes, activists must conceal their actions when political involvement becomes risky (p. 203). Informality and fragmentation become essential in these circumstances, enabling activists to withdraw and redirect their efforts whenever their security is jeopardized. This aspect of informal activism serves a vital role, as it allows activists to either go

underground or reassess their level of commitment when faced with threats to their safety (Beinin and Vairel, 2013, p. 203). Not only do many civil society organizations go underground to avoid state repression, but collectivity and networking are also targeted by authoritarian regimes, as noted by Della Porta and Diani (2006). According to Della Porta and Diani (2006), intricate informal connections often exist among various movement groups (p. 176). However, maintaining these informal networks in the MENA countries is challenging due to the oppressive political environment, which hinders the formation of such networks (Della Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 176). I would argue that going underground as a shield against state repression, as discussed by Beinin and Vairel (2013), is rather superficial, as it establishes a rule that can change based on various social and economic circumstances. Informality does not always guarantee protection, and formality does not necessarily make one an easy target. Various cases, including those studied in this research, demonstrate a change in regime stability and the calculation determining the degree of repression it practices. These same counterarguments apply to Della Porta and Diani (2006).

On repression strategies, Davenport (2004) notes that when a regime encounters more internal threats, particularly those involving large-scale public mobilizations, its level of repression tends to rise. This often escalates to a degree that movements find unexpected (p. 7). As threats and intimidation mount, and when the perceived risk of public mobilization outweighs the consequences of repression, the regime is likely to increase its repressive measures (Davenport, 2004, p. 7). I would argue that Davenport (2004) accurately addressed the dilemma of rational choice calculations in the use of repression during a threat. He accurately stated "internal threat" as a reference to the utilization of repression; nevertheless, he specified "large-scale public mobilization," which I argue is not the only pressing threat that pushes regimes to use repression. Based on various authoritarian perceptions, threats have been proven to be subtle, subjective, and often indirect. Nevertheless, the deployment of repression remains a discretionary act by the regime, which chooses between coercive and non-coercive instruments depending on its assessment of threat severity, political costs, and the availability of alternative control mechanisms. Wedeen (1999) added to Davenport's (2004) argument by proposing that when movements gain public support and result in widespread mobilization, authoritarian regimes often retaliate by intensifying their oppressive actions (p. 97). These actions target those directly involved in the movements and those who sympathize with the cause to spread fear and prevent further

mobilization (Davenport, 2004, p. 97). The focus on public sympathy/support is significant, as it pays more attention to less material threats. However, mobilizing public support is not a prerequisite for repression since some authoritarian regimes often benefit from the movements' popularity.

On co-optation, as an alternative to repression, Isakhan (2023) argues that co-opting individuals from opposing groups into state institutions, such as parliaments, parties, or the executive branch, plays a key role in maintaining the stability of an authoritarian regime (p. 223). It also serves to break up movements by creating internal conflicts and mistrust among their members (Isakhan, 2023, p. 223). As a result, some members may withdraw from their original movement to start a new one or stop participating in civic and political activities altogether. Those assimilated into the regime foster skepticism among the movements and the general population, as they use state-supported media to discredit opposition movements (Isakhan, 2023, p. 223). Building on this view, Magaloni and Kricheli (2010) argue that adversaries consent to participate in these political organizations, drawn by the prospect of increased (though restricted) influence on policy and opportunities for political advancement (p. 126). These entities facilitate an exchange of compromises for allegiance between the autocrat and possible contenders, thus allowing for power distribution between the autocrat and his governing coalition (Magaloni and Kricheli, 2010, p. 126). Magaloni and Kricheli's (2010) argument is one of the primary explanations for the harmony between authoritarian regimes and civil society in many authoritarian contexts.

Co-optation as a tool for mobilizing support has been discussed by Geddes (2006) as follows: Co-optation can serve as a powerful strategy to prevent elite groups from overthrowing a dictator (p. 79). By ensuring the obedience of significant segments of society, dictators demonstrate to their adversaries that they are widely supported by the people, indicating that the public would likely oppose any attempt to remove them from power (Geddes, 2006, p. 79). Building on Geddes's (2006) argument, Magaloni (2008) refines it by providing more specific insights into the dynamics of co-opting political parties. Magaloni (2008) argues that parties serve as a mechanism for dictators to make credible promises about distributing power and the benefits of holding office among those who join them, rather than forming opposition groups (p. 720). While a single-party system can serve as an effective mechanism for incorporating opposition, allowing multiple parties would provide greater advantages. By introducing pluralism, even if punctuated, into the political landscape, the regime offers potential challengers with a range of options, enabling segments of

the opposition to calibrate their level of alignment or cooperation with those in power (Magaloni, 2008, p. 720).

Although co-optation might seem like a solid and low-cost method of containing rivalries, as compared to repression, in practice, authoritarian rulers frequently combine both strategies, using selective repression to discipline those who resist co-optation, as observed under Mubarak's regime in Egypt. It can, however, backfire intensely. On this note, Boix and Svolik (2007) highlight that dictators relying heavily on co-optative mechanisms face particular dangers. Establishing such institutions inadvertently creates an arena for political competition, which can lead to instability (p. 10). It also provides an opportunity for adversaries to develop their support networks. Moreover, not everyone who is incorporated into this system will remain loyal; some might leverage their positions to mobilize potential followers, creating a network strong enough to challenge the leader's authority (Boix and Svolik, 2007, p. 10). Therefore, it's crucial for dictators employing co-optation strategies to ensure that those who demonstrate more extraordinary dedication to their cause are granted increased power (Boix and Svolik, 2007, p. 10).

On a scale broader than repression and co-optation as methods utilized by authoritarian regimes in dealing with civil society organizations, Young (2000) suggests categorizing the interactions between state entities and civil society organizations into three main types: complementary, supplementary, and adversarial, utilizing rational choice theory to account for the differences in these relationships (p. 153). Najam (2000) adds to Young's (2000) categorization, providing a different perspective on the change in categories. According to Najam (2000), the dynamics between the state and civil society manifest in four categories: cooperation, complementarity, confrontation, and co-optation (p. 381). These categories are determined by whether their policy objectives and methods align or differ. Najam points out that non-engagement is not considered a form of relationship in this context (Najam, 2000, p. 381). I argue that Najam's (2000) model focuses on the goals and methods of policy, overlooking how power imbalances in non-democratic environments can influence the reasons and ways in which civil society participants interact with state representatives. As mentioned above, most arguments assume that politicized associations are the ones in the most danger and that service provision associations are safe as long as they fill an economic gap for the regime.

Threat Perception in Authoritarianism

This section focuses on how authoritarian leaders perceive and respond to threats. Rather than assuming rational decision-making, it highlights how perceptions of instability and opposition shape bounded-rational decisions, which can even prohibit cooperative movements.

This section will examine scholarly arguments on what strictly authoritarian regimes perceive as threatening, to what extent, and how they react accordingly. Starting with a general observation of the predatory nature of authoritarianism toward threat, Duckitt and Sibley (2009) argue that authoritarianism possesses a deep connection to the existing social structure and is highly sensitive to any threats against it (p. 102). Irrespective of the simplicity of Duckitt and Sibley's (2009) argument, it entails that authoritarianism is not a static state/approach and can be "susceptible" to threats. This observation challenges the "rational choice" school of thought in studying authoritarianism, which mainly assumes that authoritarianism is a solid and rigid approach that is difficult to fluctuate. On this note, Doty, Peterson, and Winter (1991) note that authoritarian tendencies vary based on personal and situational factors, suggesting that it acts more as a variable ideology than a fixed aspect of one's personality (p. 631). One of the studies on the changes in authoritarian dynamics has been provided by Sales (1973), who states that authoritarian tendencies often increase in response to societal threats. During economic turmoil, measures indicating societal authoritarianism typically rise (p. 48).

Building on the last study, Altemeyer (1988) argues that when individuals are presented with a scenario depicting society in a state of political and economic turmoil characterized by high rates of crime, unemployment, and terrorism, there tends to be a rise in the endorsement of authoritarianism and support for authoritarian political regimes (p. 163). The degree of people's acceptance of the change in authoritarian dynamics, especially its intensification in times of threat, strengthens authoritarian stabilization (Altemeyer, 1988, p. 163). Regarding this observation, Kay (2008) notes that individuals may compensate for their perceived lack of control by relying on external sources of authority. Furthermore, Kakkar and Sivanathan (2017) demonstrated that when faced with economic instability, there's a heightened inclination towards favoring assertive and authoritarian leaders, primarily due to a diminished sense of control among individuals (p. 63).

Back to threat perception, apart from the impact of people's reactions, Tversky and Kahneman (1973) provide an essential study on the relationship between cognitive processes and authoritarian

reactions. They argue that cognitive functions can sometimes lead to inaccurate results. Specifically, the availability heuristic might lead to overestimating or underestimating threats (p. 209). This heuristic is defined by the propensity to judge the likelihood of events based on how easily examples come to mind and their emotional impact, rather than the actual probability of such events happening. People with authoritarian tendencies may be particularly prone to this bias in perceiving threats, as research has indicated they tend to consume news stories with threatening content more frequently and perceive various threats differently than individuals with lower authoritarian attitudes (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973, p. 209). Similarly, Roccato and Russo (2017) suggest that authoritarians exaggerate the threats to society, as they perceive these threats to be sources of anxiety (p. 605). To some extent, this tendency to overestimate could account for the link between perceived societal threats and authoritarianism. It creates a self-reinforcing cycle where estimating threats intensifies pre-existing authoritarian tendencies (Roccato and Russo, 2017, p. 605). Authoritarian tendencies as a reaction to threat perception are examined in greater depth by Lambert and Chasteen (1997), who suggest that in times of threat, authoritarianism is not only intolerant but also exclusionist (p. 75).

These last two arguments confirm that authoritarian regimes often respond to short-run pressing threats rather than long-term, rationally calculated choices. However, these arguments overlooked the relationship between the types of threats and authoritarian reactions. Regarding threat typologies, Corenblum and Stephan (2001) proposed the integrated threat theory, which outlines, among other distinctions, the difference between realistic threats and symbolic threats (p. 265). Realistic threats are those that could cause harm to physical or concrete entities, such as finances, territory, or human lives. On the other hand, symbolic threats encompass potential risks to more abstract elements of society, including threats to the identity of the in-group, its value systems, beliefs, or overall perspective (for example, through changes in language, religion, or ethics) (Corenblum and Stephan, 2001, p. 256).

In addition to threat typology, Rippl et al. (2007) distinguish between “collective” and “individual” threats. Collective threats refer to a perceived threat that endangers society, while individual threats refer to the belief that one's safety or well-being is at risk (p. 308). I argue that Rippl et al.’s (2007) argument is of great relevance to the cases under study since it explains why the regimes in Egypt and Turkey decided to shut down thousands of charities without considering the impact of the lack

of services they provided on society. This indicates that individual threats outweighed collective threats.

Regarding the degree of authoritarian stability in dealing with threats, Sibley and Duckitt's (2008) research highlights that scores derived from a commonly utilized scale for measuring right-wing authoritarianism are significantly influenced by specific circumstances and are altered through group socialization (p. 672). This suggests that the scale may not necessarily capture stable personality characteristics or inherent tendencies, but rather reflects social and ideological attitudes that can change over time. Sibley and Duckitt (2008) argue that authoritarianism is not a fixed trait, but rather is influenced by various contextual factors. Such factors include immediate situational impacts, which act as a threat stimulus, and the effects of long-term socialization (Sibley and Duckitt, 2008, p. 672). Regarding situational threats, the underlying theory posits that critical life events prompt authoritarian shifts at the level of authoritarianism. Often characterized by their threatening nature, these events compel individuals to adjust their attitudinal preferences as a form of compensation (Sibley and Duckitt, 2008, p. 672). A similar study was conducted by Pettigrew (1999), who suggests that the concept of authoritarian personality is rooted in factors such as situational contexts, socialization practices, and the family's environment or structure. This implies that shifts in social connections and institutional structures can directly impact authoritarian tendencies (p. 26). Oesterreich (1996) focuses more on the effects of the situational context on the activation of authoritarian attitudes. He suggests that authoritarian tendencies emerge to guide behavior in periods of crisis or swift societal transformation. This authoritarian response alleviates fear and insecurity by offering refuge in a defined set of norms and rules (p. 171).

Some scholars dispute the notion that situational context determines the degree of authoritarian response. In other words, the degree of threat does not automatically trigger aggressive authoritarian reactions in all contexts equally. For example, Mirisola et al. (2014) suggest that individuals with low authoritarian predispositions are more susceptible to shifting toward authoritarian beliefs under certain conditions, such as perceived threat or instability (p. 806). In contrast, those who already score high on authoritarianism tend to maintain their stance consistently, displaying a more rigid and enduring orientation regardless of contextual changes (Mirisola et al., 2014, p. 806). Although these studies focus on individual-level psychological mechanisms, they are relevant for understanding the social foundations upon which authoritarian

regimes consolidate power. When individuals under perceived threat gravitate toward authoritarian values, this collectively translates into a political environment more tolerant of coercion and state control, thereby reinforcing regime stability.

It can be inferred that when faced with threats, individuals with initially low authoritarian tendencies are more susceptible to feelings of losing control, which in turn amplifies their authoritarian beliefs as a compensatory response (Mirisola et al., 2014, p. 806). Russo et al. (2020) provide a counterargument to Mirisola et al. (2014) by arguing that individuals with high authoritarian scores often perceive societal threats as more critical than they actually are. This perception intensifies their original views and provides more robust support for authoritarian political structures (p. 23). The arguments reviewed in this section validate, to a great extent, especially the argument provided by Mirisola et al. (2014) that threat perception has a direct impact on the decision-making processes of authoritarian regimes.

Social Contact and Political Culture in Authoritarianism

This section examines how political culture and social contracts underpin the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes. It demonstrates how shifts in legitimacy narratives, especially following neoliberal reforms, reshape the boundaries of tolerated Islamic activism.

Hauslohner (1987) explains the social contract, characterizing it as a collection of norms or "implicit agreements widely acknowledged by both the public and the elite as the rightful and just principles guiding economic interactions" (p. 72). A more detailed explanation has been provided by Makarkin and Oppenheimer (2011), who argue that a social contract is understood as a deal in which the populace agrees to support the governing body on the condition that the government ensures a satisfactory standard of living for most of its citizens (p. 1462).

Similarly, Auzan (2009) suggests that the social contract represents a mutual exchange of expectations regarding rights and freedoms, which needs to be formally articulated (p. 64). Auzan (2009) explains his definition of social contract in the context of the fall of the USSR as follows: Russian citizens reached an agreement with their government, opting to trade “political freedoms for stability” (p. 65). The economic upheaval of the 1990s, which plunged many Russians into dire

financial straits, along with a “diminished appetite for democracy” among the populace, led to a reshaping of the relationship between the state and its citizens following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Auzan, 2009, p. 65). Due to the challenges posed by the sudden shift from a state-controlled to a market-driven economy, economic outcomes became the primary lens through which citizens assessed the performance of their leaders (Auzan, 2009, p. 65).

Feldmann and Mazepus (2018) contribute to the previous arguments by suggesting that the stability of social contracts should not be assumed. Instead of seeing it as a fixed agreement that guarantees conditional tolerance and the legitimacy of the regime, it's crucial to examine how social contracts are upheld and renegotiated over time, along with the regime’s methods for legitimization. Should the contract conditions evolve, the significance of specific performance measures for evaluating output legitimacy may shift (Feldmann and Mazepus, 2018, p. 62). Riker (1984) links Feldmann and Mazepus’s (2018) observation to the strategic manipulation of choice conditions. This often involves various administrative resources, especially crucial in authoritarian and hybrid regimes. Furthermore, the effectiveness of this legitimization approach in resonating with the public and becoming integrated into a social contract or a framework of norms that outlines the expectations of both the populace and the elite from the regime might be connected to the political culture (p. 8). This phenomenon has been explained again by Feldmann and Mazepus (2018) in the context of Putin’s rule as follows: During the economic crisis, the Putin regime successfully shifted the focus of Russia's social contract. By emphasizing national security and nationalism as primary benchmarks, the regime maintained positive evaluations, even as oil prices and economic growth declined. This strategic pivot enabled the regime to maintain favorable perceptions despite the weakening economic conditions, which had previously been a vital component of the social contract under Putin prior to 2008 (Feldmann and Mazepus, 2018, p. 63).

Moving to the substance of social contracts, North (1990) proposes “protection” in exchange for legitimacy, which might encompass defense against external dangers posed by different nations. Security for individuals or humans against physical dangers like crimes or politically-driven assaults by others, theft, homicide, diseases, or environmental harm; and legal protection, meaning the presence and application of the law, primarily focusing on enforcing human and civil rights (p. 316).

Another significant substance, which is “provision” in exchange for legitimacy, is outlined by Avdagic et al. (2011) as follows: The provision of fundamental amenities, including access to

essential resources (such as land and water), infrastructure (covering utilities, transport, and communication), social services (like education, healthcare, and social security), and economic opportunities (encompassing employment, a favorable business environment, and government procurement) (p. 35). I argue that this type of bargain authoritarian social contract is the most common in the literature on the MENA region. However, this conceptualization assumes a rational and transactional relationship between state and society, which may oversimplify the complex mechanisms through which authoritarian legitimacy is maintained. As several scholars note, authoritarian endurance often relies not only on material exchanges but also on coercion, manipulation, and ingrained social conventions that guide compliance and political behavior beyond conscious calculation. The least common type is the "participation" in exchange for legitimacy, which is highlighted by Kinninmont (2017) as the contract where the involvement of all citizens in the process of political decision-making at various levels is necessary for generating support and acceptance (p. 14).

Regarding the possibility of sustaining these social contracts, Grävengholt, Ziaja, and Kreibaum (2015) argue that when sovereigns achieve at least a basic level of these three key aspects, they gain the legitimacy of their subordinates (p. 58). This, in turn, allows them to depend less on force to maintain their authority. Conversely, the inability to fulfill one or more of these obligations can lead to instability or even threaten the stability of the state (Grävengholt, Ziaja, and Kreibaum, 2015, p. 58). I would argue that authoritarian governments are not necessarily fulfilling these three types of contracts; they do, in most cases, invest heavily in one or two types, mostly protection and provision. On a deeper level of analysis, Cassani (2017) specifies the kind of regimes and the kind of contracts they apply. Cassani (2017) notes that military dictatorships often focus on protection, while young democracies prioritize participation, and autocracies rooted in ideology typically stress the importance of provision (p. 352). In the cases of Egypt and Turkey, it is important to note, however, that the nature of regime legitimacy differs significantly between the two. While post-2013 Egypt represents a fully consolidated military authoritarian regime, Turkey under the AKP has maintained an electoral framework that sustains a degree of competitive legality and popular legitimacy. To generate people's acceptance after shutdowns, governments resorted to updating social contracts by using the narrative of protecting the nation from enemies.

On a similar note, Muggah et al. (2012) argue that some countries fail to fulfill all three essential functions of the state, exhibiting weaknesses or dysfunctionality in state authority, legitimacy, and capacity (p. 23). As a result, they require assistance in providing protection, ensuring participation, and fulfilling their provisions. Typically, these nations may still uphold social contracts established by previous governments or external entities, but need a cohesive, nationwide agreement (Muggah et al., 2012, p. 23). Muggah et al. (2012) highlighted a critical point regarding the sustainability of social contracts. They argue that "inheriting" social contracts without further adjustments to accommodate any changes in circumstances leads to the system's collapse. However, rather than simple decay, social contracts may also undergo transformation in response to global economic restructuring. Neoliberal reforms, characterized by privatization, austerity, and the state's retreat from welfare provision, have redefined the terms of state–societal relations in many contexts, both authoritarian and democratic, without necessarily leading to regime breakdown.

An alternative to the observation on the decay of the social contract is provided by Weber (1922), who argues that the authority of governments to govern a nation stems from either coercion or legitimacy, or a blend of the two (p. 13). Governments with adequate financial, logistical, and human resources may depend primarily on coercion. However, less powerful governments need to seek alternative methods to guarantee that the most significant groups within society acknowledge their governance and the social contract they propose. Consequently, social agreements tend to be more inclusive and balanced when the government is less powerful and more reliant on societal approval (Weber, 1922, p. 13). Weber (1922) also notes that the validity and acceptance of governance depend on three key elements: the charismatic appeal of the leader, the power of tradition, and adherence to legal frameworks, such as democratic voting processes (p. 14).

Regarding social contracts in the MENA region, Abdullatif et al. (2019) argue that most countries in the MENA region gained independence following World War II (p. 17). Although some established republics and others maintained monarchies, their societal agreements shared commonalities. Following their independence, many countries in the MENA region established populist-authoritarian social contracts. These agreements provided citizens with social benefits and protection while limiting their political involvement. However, these social contracts weakened over time, culminating in the uprisings of 2010–11. Since those events, the social

agreements within MENA countries have undergone significant diversification in their development (Abdullatif et al., 2019, p. 7).

On this note, Schlumberger (2010) argues that the government's primary responsibility is to provide services. Initially, the republics in the MENA region, including Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, and Tunisia, established their authority based on legitimacy derived from performance, offering advantages across the board via subsidies for energy, food, water, and public transit, along with public health care and education, and social support (p. 237). I argue that Sclumberger's (2010) argument significantly generalizes the nature of social contracts in the MENA, as the social contract was updated during the last century and across different MENA countries, and cannot be categorized solely as an authoritarian services provision contract. Regarding service provision, Loewe (2010) notes that expenditure on health and education is significantly favored by people experiencing poverty. Yet, the distribution of most other advantages tended to be more regressive: jobs in the public sector and social housing primarily catered to the urban middle class, economic perks were directed at businesspeople with strong connections, and subsidies predominantly benefited the wealthy due to their higher overall consumption levels (p. 132).

Loewe (2010) assumed that the elite network and the middle to upper classes benefited the most from service provision. Nevertheless, empirically, the poor segment of the population, especially in the case of Egypt, benefited more than any other segment in applying the authoritarian-bargain model. Similarly, Kamrava (2014) highlights that during the 2000s, governments in the MENA region primarily distributed their external rent income towards societal groups, which was crucial for maintaining their power (p. 66). This mainly included the urban middle class, comprising both upper and lower urban sectors, including academics and formal sector workers. As a result, these governments gradually became disconnected from the grassroots levels, prioritizing their core supporters and other influential groups that could challenge their authority (Kamarava, 2014, p. 66).

Loewe, Zintl, and Houdret (2021) summarized the changes in the social contract in the MENA countries before and after the Arab Spring in the following figure.

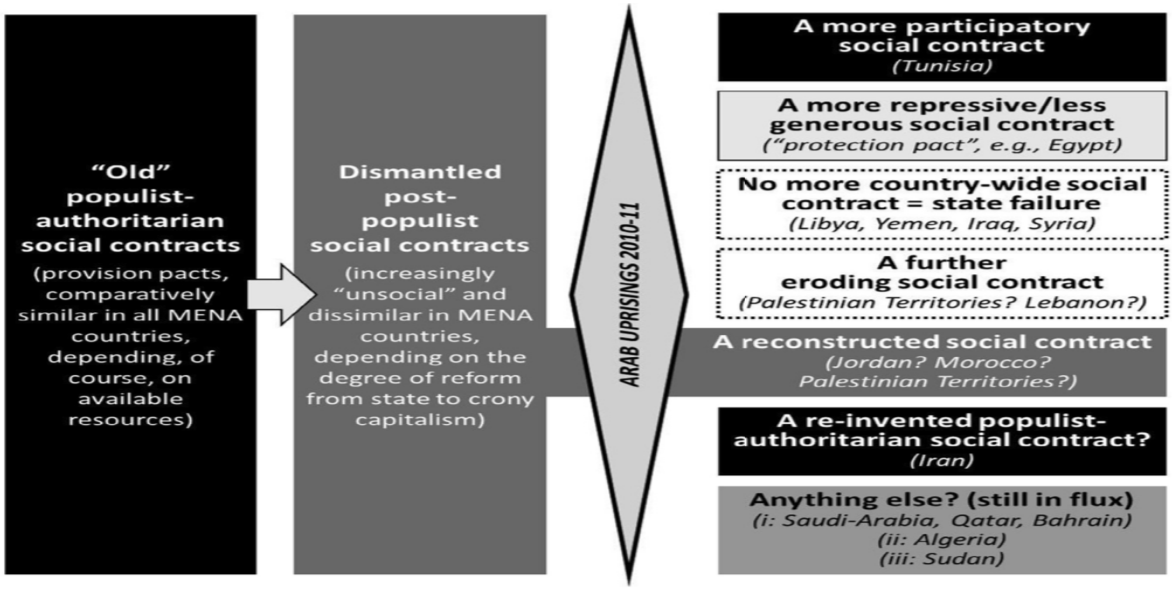


Fig. 4. The development of social contracts in major MENA countries. Source: Own design.

Concerning political culture and its relation to the social contract and the stabilization of authoritarianism, Kornhauser (2013) argues that there is a strong connection between the form of political governance and the prevailing political ethos, suggesting that authoritarian governments are both a result of and contribute to maintaining authoritarian political attitudes (p. 178). On another note, Lipset (1960) highlighted the profoundly undemocratic tendencies among lower-class groups, attributing these to the lifestyle of the lower class, which cultivates individuals who exhibit rigid and intolerant political attitudes (p. 89). Factors contributing to the development of authoritarianism within these groups include a lack of education, minimal involvement in voluntary organizations, economic instability, and scarce interaction with mass media (Lipset, 1960, p. 89). A counterargument to Lipset (1960) has been provided by Hamilton (1972), who proposed that authoritarian tendencies often develop in rural regions and are brought into the urban working-class environment via migration from rural to urban areas. However, it is important to note that such interpretations, rooted in classical modernization theory, have been substantially revised by later scholarship. Historical-sociological analyses have shown that democratization was often driven by working-class mobilization and contentious collective action, whereas liberal middle-class forces were at times resistant to mass political inclusion. This shift highlights how early liberal approaches, such as Lipset's, relied on deterministic links between socioeconomic development and democratic attitudes that subsequent research has problematized.

Hamilton (1972) determined that 'class' does not play a crucial role in fostering authoritarianism. Instead, he suggested that the correct approach should be to identify the origins of intolerance across different social classes (p. 403). On a broader level of analysis, Almond and Verba (1963) coined the term 'congruence' to suggest that political stability in any regime, whether authoritarian or not, is achieved when there is a match between the governing authority's patterns and the populace's beliefs in that authority. The congruence thesis posits that authoritarian systems can maintain stability as long as the public views the concentration of power in a dictator as legitimate (p. 489).

The Politics of Welfare Provision in Authoritarianism and the Patron-Client Relationship

This section connects political economy and social control by examining welfare provision and patron–client networks. It shows how welfare distribution both sustains regime legitimacy and deepens dependence on Islamic service providers, creating a paradox when these actors are later repressed. Genschel (2004) argues that the welfare services of authoritarian systems extend beyond essential social and economic support. They serve as a tactical means for co-optation, enabling rulers to secure backing while reducing potential challenges (p. 618). This general observation provided by Genschel (2004) captures the essence of the existing literature. The literature on service provision is divided into modernization, power resources, and redistributive theory. Rosenfeld (2021) highlights that modernization theory emphasizes how socioeconomic progress fosters a growing middle class that seeks increased welfare (p. 48). However, it overlooks the capability of authoritarian regimes to provide welfare while achieving high economic growth without shifting towards democracy. Yet, this capacity is not simply a matter of regime policy or preference. In many developing authoritarian contexts, welfare provision is constrained by structural economic factors, such as limited fiscal resources, external dependency, and uneven income distribution. These constraints often result in selective and politically motivated welfare schemes that reinforce clientelist or populist relations rather than broad-based redistribution.

The theory’s dependence on democratic changes and the expectations of the middle class misses the nuances in autocratic systems where welfare can be offered even without these conditions

(Rosenfeld, 2021, p. 48). Concerning power resources theory, Korpi (2006) suggests that the influence of bargaining power among social groups, especially the working class, is significant in the redistribution of resources (p. 188). The working class influences government policy through two main channels: trade unions in the marketplace and leftist parties in the political sphere. This concept assumes the existence of rights and mechanisms for collective action, which are frequently limited or regulated in authoritarian regimes, thereby challenging the direct application of this theory in autocratic settings (Korpi, 2006, p. 188). Iversen and Soskice (2006) argue that the redistributive theory characterizes the middle class as the societal segment that includes individuals with the median income (p. 173). Within an authoritarian regime, the individual with the median income capable of impacting policy decisions would be part of a significantly smaller group of decision-makers, leading to a scenario where the middle class aligns more closely with the affluent or upper class (Soskice, 2006, p. 173).

These three theories overlooked the reality of service provision as a method of authoritarian resilience. Kim and Gandhi (2010) note that authoritarian leaders turn to social welfare programs to ensure loyalty and control over the elite and the general populace when confronted with the constraints of oppressive tactics (p. 653). Throughout Mexico's authoritarian era from 1929 to 2000, the dominant party's method of gaining and securing the support of critical allies by offering them tangible rewards played a crucial role in sustaining its authority (Kim and Gandhi, 2010, p. 653). However, Olson (1993) argues that autocratic rulers focus on reducing the availability of public services while increasing their likelihood of staying in power (p. 573). Since authoritarian leaders operate with fewer restrictions, they can concentrate on pleasing a critical minority essential for their retention of power. This approach of catering to a select group of crucial supporters through distributing private benefits is deemed a more efficient method for gaining allegiance than the widespread distribution of public services, which sharply differs from what is anticipated in democratic systems (Olson, 1993, p. 573). I argue that in authoritarian regimes, welfare allocation is not necessarily guided by demographic size or objective need, but by political utility. Governments tend to direct benefits toward groups that are strategically significant for regime survival, such as urban workers, civil servants, or organized constituencies, rather than marginalized populations who are less capable of mobilization or posing a threat.

Mares and Carnes (2009) highlight the variety within authoritarian governments, which explains the differences in their social policy approaches. These governments maintain their power through three primary methods (p. 98). The first relies heavily on unchecked oppression, with the leader maximizing personal gains while allocating resources primarily towards their enforcement mechanisms rather than on public welfare. In the second model, the ruler aims to avert potential coups by distributing economic benefits among key leaders within specific industries while limiting economic competition nationally (Mares and Carnes, 2009, p. 98). Social welfare programs in this scenario are typically exclusive to formal sector employees, ensuring their allegiance through substantial benefits.

Lastly, the third approach promotes controlled competition among organizations with limited authority (Mares and Carnes, p. 98). Rudra and Haggard (2005) suggest that authoritarian governments with a certain level of competition and organized interest groups tend to implement more responsive social policies than strict authoritarian regimes that heavily restrict such activities (p. 1020). They note that countries like Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Rwanda's choice to institutionalize social transfers during times of distributional crisis, primarily driven by internal pressures perceived as threats to their political stability (Rudra and Haggard, 2005, p. 1020).

Most of the available literature explains the rise of service delivery NGOs in light of the neoliberal changes that encouraged many authoritarian regimes to tolerate these organizations. Such transformations were closely linked to the economic restructuring processes of the late twentieth century, when many states faced deep fiscal imbalances and were compelled to implement structural reforms promoted by international financial institutions (Soliman, 2011, p. 102). The downsizing of public employment, the privatization of state-owned enterprises, and the retrenchment of social spending collectively diminished the state's welfare capacity. In this context, NGOs increasingly assumed responsibilities once carried out by public agencies, allowing authoritarian governments to mitigate social discontent and maintain stability without expanding political participation (Soliman, 2011, p. 102).

On this note, Bebbington (1993) argues that several neo-liberal policies significantly affect NGOs that deliver social services (p. 50). Amidst the growing poverty that accompanies economic restructuring, these NGOs need to serve a larger portion of the population. The most impactful policy on these NGOs has been the reduction of the public sector. As a result, many NGOs are now taking over roles that were once the government's responsibility (Bebbington, 1993, p. 50).

Since this was the case in most developing countries that underwent neoliberal changes, the literature on the proliferation of service delivery NGOs is primarily discussed in a similar manner to Bebbington (1993). Accordingly, the patron-client approach explained the interactions between the regimes and these NGOs. Chan (1993) provides one of these explanations by stating that civil society under state control represents a type of corporatism (p. 151).

In this model, the government decides which groups are recognized as legitimate and establishes a partnership with them that is not entirely balanced. The state does not exert direct control; instead, it allows these organizations a certain level of independence. However, it requires a disciplined collaboration based on cooperation within certain areas, often involving tripartite agreements between business, labor, and the government (Chan, 1993, p. 151). Clientelism, in this sense, is considered one of the reasons for the stabilization of authoritarian regimes. Roniger (2004) argues that clientelism, similar to neo-patrimonialism, is often seen as undermining the very pillars of democracy (p. 354). It hijacks governmental functions by special interest groups, deteriorating the state's institutional effectiveness and eroding the notion of the common good. From this perspective, clientelism is contrary to the development of public accountability and administrative oversight mechanisms. It may lead to the public sector being filled with unqualified staff, skew the processes and pricing of public projects, and result in agreements involving public assets (Roniger, 2004, p. 354).

The patron-client approach in authoritarian regimes has been applied thoroughly to the relationship between governments and elites. However, using the patron-client approach to the relationship between the regime and movements has not been sufficiently addressed.

Authoritarian Approach towards Islamic Movements

The final section integrates the preceding debates to explain how authoritarian regimes manage Islamic movements in practice. It traces how changing perceptions of threat during instability led Egyptian and Turkish regimes to close Islamic organizations despite their previous role in welfare and service provision. In the 2000s, researchers increasingly and more overtly employed concepts such as "political opportunity structures," "resource mobilization," and "framing processes," which were developed by experts in social movements, to analyze Islamic movements in the MENA region (Haklai, 2009, p. 37). The concept of opportunity structures has been widely embraced as

a framework for understanding the timing and mechanisms behind the mobilization of Islamic movements. A seminal application of this concept can be found in Wickham's (2002) examination of the situation in Egypt. Wickham (2002) proposes that the effective mobilization of Islamic movements in Egypt hinged on the strategic efforts of a mobilizing elite to leverage and generate opportunities for political engagement (p. 40). According to her research, such opportunities were forged in Egypt's political "periphery," outside the confines of official political institutions and beyond the reach of state authority. In alternative spaces, such as private mosques, cultural groups, welfare organizations, and university campuses, activists can connect with and recruit followers (Wickham, 2002, p. 40).

Schwedler (2006) has also explored how opportunity structures influence Islamic movements. By analyzing the differences between the Yemeni Islah party and the Jordanian IAF, Schwedler (2006) suggests that variations in political opportunity structures and additional factors can account for the differences in ideological moderation observed between the two instances (p. 195). Some have argued that political opportunity structures influence the strategies and tactics employed by Islamic movements. Hafez and Wiktorowicz (2004) suggest that when Islamic movements face broad, undifferentiated state repression, it often leads to violent responses (p. 305). This is because such repression restricts the movement's tactical choices, sidelines moderate voices, and lends credibility to those within the movement who call for violence. On the other hand, when state repression is targeted and distinguishes between moderate and radical elements, it can create opportunities for moderate voices to emerge and foster a preference for non-violent methods (Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 2004, p. 305). Singerman (2004) posits that Islamic movements often resort to informal networks and alliances as strategies to circumvent state surveillance (p. 23). Conversely, Yavuz (2004) notes that in Turkey's liberalizing environment, organized Islamic groups capitalized on the expanding opportunities presented by economic reforms to gather resources and disseminate their messages through the marketplace (p. 56). Regarding resource mobilization and recruitment, numerous studies indicate that mosques and Islamic NGOs are essential organizational resources for recruiting activists. Thus, welfare associations play roles that are both social and political. Additionally, some researchers highlight the significance of business ventures, Islamic banks, and other income-generating activities (Haklai, 2009, p. 38). On a broader level of analysis, Safa (2007) discussed the traditional dynamics between the state and civil society, noting that authoritarian regimes have generally accepted these organizations'

developmental and humanitarian roles (p. 2). Globalization and external pressures initially prompted these regimes to permit more significant involvement in developmental and charitable activities (p. 2). Over time, NGOs have become vital players in the social services sector, albeit under strict oversight of any potential political actions they might undertake. Ultimately, the rationale behind legitimizing NGOs was more focused on advancing development rather than fostering civic engagement and empowering communities (Safa, 2007, p. 2).

Jari (2010) arrived at a similar yet distinct conclusion, suggesting that the rise of civil society organizations, particularly NGOs, seems mainly due to a top-down approach or pressure from the international community (p. 11). As a result, he argues that their developmental function has overshadowed any genuine political or civic engagement. However, he posits that while the regime's censorship might seem strict, the primary reason for the lack of political involvement is the deficit of political awareness and the absence of genuine alliances (p. 11). This depoliticized mode of operation is not unique to NGOs. Adly (2023) demonstrates, in his analysis of Islamist-affiliated business networks in Egypt, how non-state actors can sustain extensive economic and social roles within authoritarian settings by developing what he terms an "Islamist economic habitus." Through dense associational and moral networks, these actors manage to deliver welfare and maintain influence while adhering to regime-imposed constraints. His study illustrates how authoritarian tolerance toward non-state initiatives is often contingent on their ability to perform socially useful functions without translating them into overt political mobilization (Adly, 2023, pp. 339–342).

Similar dynamics are evident in the charitable sphere. As Atia (2013) demonstrates in her study of Islamic charity in Egypt, pious giving has increasingly aligned with neoliberal rationalities, resulting in a form of "pious neoliberalism" that reconciles religious ethics with market-oriented development. This framework helps explain why Islamic charitable organizations, including those in Turkey, were tolerated by authoritarian regimes so long as they remained focused on social provision rather than political mobilization.

A similar concept was presented by Bayat (2002) in his analysis of the factors contributing to the rise of charitable activities within civil society. He argued that states have gradually stepped back from their social responsibilities, a hallmark of their populist systems (p. 12). For example, food and fuel subsidies have been removed in countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Iran, coinciding with an increased demand for civil society institutions to assume these roles (p. 12). Bayat (2002)

concluded that "when states cannot meet the needs of the middle and lower classes, they turn to civil associations to fulfill them" (p. 12). He noted that "social Islam" has emerged as a crucial means for impoverished communities to meet their needs (Bayat, 2002, p. 12). Significantly, their efforts extended beyond meeting physical needs, as they also focused on community development. As a result, in many countries, governments attempted to counter the mobilization strategies used by the Islamists. Yet, they allowed their existence to ensure that the populace's needs were met and to prevent potential uprisings (Bayat, 2002, p. 12).

Brown (2012) established clear distinctions regarding the relationship between the state and civil society in authoritarian settings. His analysis centered on Arab regimes, suggesting that these "semi-authoritarian" systems do not eliminate civil society; however, these organizations are significantly hindered by established authoritarian practices (p. 1). Some Islamist organizations, inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, emerged to address the gaps created by the government (Brown, 2012, p. 1). These Islamic movements also broadened their charitable initiatives while improving their organizational capacity to mobilize public support (p. 2). However, it is also important to recognize that not all Islamist actors pursued explicitly political agendas. Beyond the Muslim Brotherhood's activist model, other strands of the Islamic Awakening (al-saḥwa al-Islāmiyya), including charitable Salafi and Sufi networks, contributed to welfare provision and social development while avoiding overt political confrontation. These actors exemplify how Islamic activism can persist under authoritarian rule through apolitical and service-oriented engagement.

As argued earlier in this review, when Islamic movements stick to their socio-economic rule and services provision, they managed, before the Arab Spring and the 2016 coup in Turkey, to co-exist in authoritarian circumstances. However, another fraction of Islamic movements took a paramilitary turn. On this note, Hafiz and Wictorowicz (2004) argue that the emergence of violent Islamic contention is not primarily driven by ideological factors or unstable psychological states, but is largely influenced by external circumstances shaped by state policies regarding Islamists (p. 62). While some specific Islamic groups may resort to violence regardless of state actions, the consistency of tactics among these outlier groups does not account for the overall intensity or timing of violence (Wictotowicz, 2004, p. 62). I would argue that Hafiz and Wictorowicz (2004) put all paramilitary Islamic movements in the same pot since we have so many cases of movements that resorted to violence as a shortcut to their goals and not as a response to the regime's repression.

Numerous studies on Islamic activism focus on the root causes that drive the resurgence of Islam. These factors include socioeconomic crises resulting from failed secular modernization efforts (Dekmejian, 1995, p. 57), demographic challenges, the lasting impacts of colonialism and neo-imperialism, as well as foreign dominance (Burgat and Dowell, 1993, p. 212). Additionally, the Arab defeat in the 1967 war with Israel has been highlighted (Haddad, 1992, p. 103). Islamism is viewed as a locally constructed response to the everyday realities shaped by issues such as housing shortages, increasing unemployment, declining social services, rising costs, and a pervasive feeling of cultural, political, military, and economic vulnerability. At least two aspects of state repression warrant close examination: timing and targeting. According to Brockett (1995), repression is considered preemptive when it occurs before an opposition movement has had the chance to gather and rally diverse supporters around a shared objective (p. 258). In contrast, repression is categorized as reactive when it occurs during the active phase of the protest cycle, which follows the period when activists have built up organizational momentum (Brockett, 1995, p. 258). On the other hand, Mason and Krane (1989) emphasize that the targeting of repression involves the various groups affected by state repression (p. 181). When state repression is selective, it focuses specifically on the leaders and key activists within the movement. In contrast, it becomes indiscriminate when it includes supporters, sympathizers, and ordinary citizens who are merely suspected of being involved in the movement (Mason and Krane, 1989, p. 181).

The available literature on the authoritarian approach towards Islamic movements classifies the regime's reaction based on how politically active, especially with violent tendencies, the Islamic movements are. In cases of initiating paramilitary activities, regimes usually utilize all means to contain this danger, as it poses explicit threats. Meanwhile, Islamic movements with charitable or service-provision bases were tolerated and allowed to function most of the time. Nevertheless, little to no attention is paid to the updates in authoritarian dynamics that have happened in many Middle Eastern cases. The change in the dictatorial regime’s rational calculations that pushed them to shut down both political and apolitical movements, even when these movements are still serving the regime the most, was greatly overlooked in the interactions between the state-Islamic movements. Not only was this point ignored, but also the strength/degree of the regime’s attack on these organizations based on how involved they were with the ruling coalition. This study aims specifically to fill this gap in the literature through testing the proposed hypothesis and building a theory that can explain the authoritarian updates in the MENA region.

Chapter Three

History of Islamic Activism

Understanding the historical evolution of Islamic activism is essential for grasping how contemporary authoritarian regimes in the Middle East perceive, regulate, and at times suppress Islamic movements. The interactions between states and Islamist actors do not emerge suddenly; they are rooted in a long trajectory of religious reform, social mobilization, and political engagement. This chapter traces the evolution from the late nineteenth century to the 1980s, providing the historical foundations necessary to understand how Islamic activism first developed, how states initially responded to it, and how early patterns of accommodation and confrontation emerged.

The objective is not to provide an exhaustive chronological account, but to highlight the institutional and ideological dynamics through which Islamic activism emerged and evolved during this formative period. The focus is primarily on reformist, charitable, and political strands of Islamic activism, the streams that would later crystallize into influential social and religious organizations. By examining the relationships these actors developed with colonial administrations, monarchies, and post-independence authoritarian regimes, the chapter identifies the early mechanisms through which states alternated between tolerating, co-opting, and repressing Islamic actors.

Three themes guide the discussion. First, Islamic activism often arose as both a response to state weakness and a critique of imposed secular or colonial orders, positioning itself as a moral and social alternative when regimes failed to meet societal expectations. Second, the organizational forms adopted by Islamic actors, whether charitable associations, reformist networks, or politically oriented societies, were shaped by their encounters with repression, controlled pluralism, and strategic co-optation. Third, these cycles of engagement produced enduring institutional and ideological legacies that continued to shape how regimes approached Islamic activism in subsequent decades.

By ending in the 1980s, this chapter establishes the historical and conceptual groundwork for the period of intensified state–Islam interactions that follows. A subsequent chapter examines the era from the 1980s to the 2013-2016 period in depth, when Islamic movements, such as the Gülen movement in Turkey and al-Jamyiah al-Sharyia in Egypt, expanded significantly and became central to the strategies of authoritarian regimes. The historical arc traced here, therefore, serves as both a foundation and a bridge, linking early reformist and charitable activism to the contemporary questions of authoritarian tolerance and prohibition explored throughout this dissertation.

The emergence of activism in Islam was not due to the desire to immediately resort to violence to achieve the rules of religion, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century. Instead, the organization of peaceful activism was a method of resisting the rulers' corruption and Western occupation (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 633). According to Ibrahim (2007), fighting corruption and occupation was not the only reason for pushing Muslim youths to be activists, but also the element of "establishment Islam" (p. 633). The establishment of Islam, or the Institutionalization of Islam, was manifested by Al Azhar and the Ministry of Endowments, both of which experienced many ups and downs throughout the last century (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 634).

Al-Azhar and the Tension Between Religious Mediation and State Co-optation

Al-Azhar's historical trajectory illustrates how the gradual co-optation of formal religious institutions by the state created space for independent Islamic actors to emerge. As Al-Azhar became increasingly integrated into regime structures and lost its autonomous authority, new reformist and charitable activists positioned themselves as alternative sources of religious legitimacy and social leadership (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 634). This section examines how this process unfolded and how it shaped the early landscape of Islamic activism in Egypt.

Initially, Al-Azhar was established as an independent institution for providing Islamic education. Al Azhar has been considered the leading religious institution in Egypt and many other Islamic countries for decades. The independence of Al Azhar was indeed perceived as a critical prerequisite for its success and credibility, as well as for guaranteeing that it would not be

controlled or co-opted by the state (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 634). The Ministry of Endowments has played a significant role in the independence of Al Azhar, as it sought to secure funds through religious endowments to ensure that Al Azhar would remain an institution representing the masses to their rulers. This independence began to be tightened during the rule of Mohamed Ali (1805-1848), as he brought all Islamic endowments under his authority. Incorporating religious institutions and creating parallel secular educational institutions was part of Mohamed Ali's modernization plan and a method of challenging the Ottoman authority (Moustafa, 2000, p. 12). Accordingly, Al Azhar Sheikhs and scholars became government employees and advocated for it, rather than representing the people (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 635). Scholars such as Mouhamed Abdo tried to keep their independence from state control, which was indeed, at this point, a deviation from the trajectory determined from above. To counterbalance the influence of such independent scholars, the government enlisted other intellectuals for advocacy, thereby polishing its image (Moustafa, 2000, p. 14). The co-optation of Al Azhar was not limited to the rule of Mohamed Ali; it marked the culmination of multiple milestones, where Al Azhar's role for the state was significant in rallying the public around the state (Moustafa, 2000, p. 14). The rulers who succeeded Mohamed Ali followed the same trajectory, even by issuing laws that centralized power in Al Azhar by establishing high-ranking positions, notably the Sheikh of Al Azhar. Hence, this institution would be internally more fragmented and thus more controllable (Moustafa, 2000, p. 14).

One significant example of this observation was the co-optation of Al Azhar by the kingdom during the World Wars and the 1952 coup (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 335). However, in this section, I will not delve deeper into the details of Al Azhar's authoritarian corporatism; instead, I will explore how this corporatism contributed to the emergence of Islamic activism. In other words, finding an alternative to represent the suppressed masses was one of the essential reasons for the formation of Islamic groups. Some of these groups indeed chose radicalism as a means to achieve their goals, which will be explained in the following sections.

One prominent example of this observation is the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Since their formation in 1928, they have criticized Al Azhar for their submission to the government, weakness, and fragmentation (Zeghal, 1999, p. 6). What further facilitated the incorporation of Al Azhar into the political system, in addition to the previously mentioned secular initiatives by Mohamed Ali, is Al Azhar's opposition towards the British occupation and the parliament (Crecelius, 1966, p.

26). The antagonism towards the British occupation is self-evident; however, their relationship with the parliament was problematic to a great extent. This rivalry was a paradox of traditionalism versus modernization, and for Al Azhar's Ulama back then, any call for modernization was perceived as an attack on Islam itself (Crecelius, 1966, p. 26). Thus, Egyptian society was dichotomized between Al Azhar Ulama and the royalty, who sided together on the one hand and were opposed by the parliament and political parties on the other (Crecelius, 1966, p. 26). During the era of King Farouk, the parliament initiated a deliberate marginalization campaign against Al Azhar by cutting expenses and spreading outrageous rhetoric against it. After 1952, the corporatism of Al Azhar within the authoritarian regime intensified, as it was coupled with several milestones in political life (Crecelius, 1966, p. 26).

President Gamal Abdel Nasser knew that gaining the public's support could be facilitated by collaborating with Al Azhar's Ulama (Crecelius, 1966, p. 26). This collaboration was manifested by the president and the leaders visiting Ulama, who organized Friday prayers in prominent mosques, and, more importantly, by customizing the religious speech to serve the current agenda. As critical as it sounds, the alteration of religious speech played a massive role in undermining the credibility of Al Azhar, as Ulama used to stress the importance of obeying rulers and portraying them as leaders of the nation (Ummah) (Crecelius, 1966, p. 27). This soft manipulation was followed by an aggressive plan that weakened Al Azhar's internal structure. Almost all of Waqf's lands that supported Al Azhar financially, even slightly, were nationalized as part of the massive nationalization plan initiated by Nasser, which is accurately described by some literature as the "nationalization of Al Azhar" itself (Crecelius, 1966, p. 27).

Furthermore, the religious courts were closed in an attempt to establish one modern legal system (Crecelius, 1966, p. 28). They were losing sources of power, whether economic, social, or legal. They abolished any chance of independence for Al Azhar and entirely subjected it to the regime as one of the state's supporting arms (Crecelius, 1966, p. 28).

At the beginning of the coup, the Free Officers were willing to cooperate with the MB, as it was a rising religious power that had successfully gathered many young people around it. However, the regime did not take long to retreat from this plan due to the group's violent inclination and increasing greed for political power (Crecelius, 1966, p. 28). Consequently, it was the rational choice for the regime to exclude the MB from the picture and unite with Al Azhar, thereby strengthening its power and counterbalancing the MB's influence by having a large, moderate

Islamic institution on the other hand (Crecelius, 1966, p. 28). Having Al Azhar as an organ of the ruling regime made Ulama responsible for fighting the MB and containing their political aspirations. One of the major attacks that Al Azhar initiated against the MB was intellectual and religious speech. For instance, Al Azhar referred to the MB scholars and authors as extremists and deviants (Barraclough, 1998, p. 208). However, it is worth noting that some MB scholars had extreme ideas, and the purpose of stating these attacks here is not to defend those scholars, but rather to reveal the extent to which Al Azhar was collaborating with the regime. Al Azhar has publicly condemned the MB for its fierce rivalry with the regime throughout the second half of the last century (Barraclough, 1998, p. 208). On another note, not only did Al Azhar fight against the MB, but they were also responsible for legitimizing the acts of the regime through their appealing religious speech. One of the very famous examples of this observation is the legitimization of the Camp David agreement, which was itself a shocking move for many Egyptians; hence, Ulama needed to give a simple, religious, not too political, justification for the agreement so it would be easier for the public to absorb it and accept it (Barraclough, 1998, p. 208).

The increasing violence of some of the Islamic groups, along with the authoritarian resilience attempts, transformed Al Azhar into a politicized institution, as mentioned before. The public realized that Al Azhar was no longer an autonomous actor; consequently, they lost faith and confidence in it as their primary religious reference (Barraclough, 1998, p. 208). This co-optation indeed had multiple severe social consequences, the most problematic of which was the emergence of Islamic groups, many of which had underground activities later. These previous factors created a vicious circle where the manipulation of Al Azhar led to the emergence of extremism, which again pushed the government to fight extremism through the monopoly of religious speech (Barraclough, 1998, p. 208). Additionally, the openness of Egyptian society, especially after Nasser's era, along with the lack of solid religious guidance and discourse, encouraged some Islamic groups to revive the application of "Islamic principles" in society (Barraclough, 1998, p. 209). The development of Islamic activism in this regard was not a linear process; instead, it evolved in response to the milestones that occurred throughout the last century. For instance, many of the Islamic groups, which will be explained in detail later, including both peaceful and violent ones, had a relatively smooth and charitable beginning, and many of them established fully fledged militias (Barraclough, 1998, p. 209). When the manipulation of Al Azhar escalated into justifying the acts of the regimes on a theological basis, not only did they start forcibly to restore Islamic

speech, but they also assassinated Ulamas, politicians, and, on top of the list, was President Al Sadat (Barraclough, 1998, p. 209). This ongoing triangular conflict between the state, Al Azhar, on the one hand, and the Islamic groups, namely the MB and Muslims Group (Al Jamaah Al Islamyiah), on the other, boosted the urge of the Islamic groups to compensate for the gap left by Al Azhar.

As mentioned before, the maturation of Islamic groups into entirely political and apolitical active bodies was neither a sudden nor a linear process. Ibrahim (2007) argued that changes in the internal structure and strategies of Islamic groups occurred within three primary turns (p. 640). The first turn was the role played by the Islamic groups, which was the fundamental "preaching and advocacy" role that characterized many of the religious groups at their early emergence stage and before politicization emerged on the scene, and which roughly took place starting from the beginning of the last century until the 1952 coup (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 649). Based on historical evidence, I would argue that the second role was the most critical shift in the history of Islamic groups, as preaching and advocacy were insufficient to cope with the complexities of politics and society; hence, "organization and confrontation" were introduced (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 649). The concepts of organization, politicization, violence, and militias were gradually introduced by many groups to the political arena due to various factors such as the manipulation of Al Azhar, as discussed before, the fall of the Ottoman empire, modernization of the society, and the very own political aspirations of many of these groups (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 649). The shift from one stage to the other was always accompanied by conflicts between the group's members and the government, the rise of extremism, and the undermining of Al Azhar. Confrontations did not introduce so much power and influence to Islamic groups; on the contrary, many of them ended up being announced as terrorist groups and were prohibited from practicing any societal or political activities (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 649).

The failure of organization and confrontations was followed by a new nonviolent method of activism, "institutionalization" (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 649). Many Islamic groups, mainly the MB, considered shifting their method of activism to a more standardized and formal way through which they can gain recognition and popularity. This shift was due to the bloody conflict with the regime, as well as international, societal, and economic changes (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 649). Institutionalization in this context refers to the rise of the patron-client relationship, where many Islamic activists/groups were allowed to build mosques and charities.

One can always argue that the shift from one trajectory to another is a survival mechanism that Islamic movements use to adapt to ongoing social, economic, and political changes. They consistently worked on creating, regaining, and preserving their place in the social and political landscape. This argument is accurate to a great extent; however, despite the significant role it played in the equation, what has been mostly overlooked by many scholars is the idea of an identity crisis, which was one of the essential episodes of societal change.

Identity Crisis and the Evolution of Islamic Activism in Modern Egypt

Periods of political upheaval and ideological dislocation created fertile ground for Islamic activism to develop new forms of social and political engagement. This section examines how debates over national identity, modernity, and legitimacy influenced the development of Islamic actors. Before delving into deeper details, the impact of identity change on the formation/activity of Islamic movements was most salient in the first stage of activity, namely, preaching and advocacy. What is meant by identity crises here is the difficulty that many Middle Eastern countries faced after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in forming a unified national identity of their own, following long decades of having an identity imposed from above (Kumaraswamy, 2006, p. 17). The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire left the Egyptians facing the fact that they had created no national collective identity, which was necessary for uniting them (Kumaraswamy, 2006, p. 17). For the sake of the theme under study, this section will examine the impact of the Ottoman Empire's collapse on destabilizing societal identity.

Given the fact that the Ottoman Empire was acting as the savior of Islam in the whole world in general and the leader of the Islamic nations in particular, their collapse, and even the creation of a secular state in Turkey after the World Wars, left many former Ottoman provinces in an identity dilemma. Many countries, notably Egypt, after the collapse of the Ottomans, sought to manifest their identity in religion and preserve the previously consolidated notion of the Islamic Ummah (*nation*) (Kumaraswamy, 2006, p. 17). This identity crisis stemmed from the province's status as an Ottoman territory for 281 years (1517-1798) (Winter, 1992). The aim of this statement is not to argue that the Ottomans' rule had a strong hold over the population, nor did it ultimately shape the religious identity of the people; rather, it is to analyze the factors that prompted many people to become actively religious after the end of their rule.

As argued by Winter (1992), the Ottomans did not introduce the institutionalization of Islam and a structured Islamic rule; on the contrary, the Mamluk rule that preceded the Ottomans and lasted for more than two hundred years had a more structured and rigid system (p. 30). Since the Ottoman rule of Egypt was less hierarchical than the Mamluk rule, the Ulama, Sufis, and Ashraf gradually gained control and began to interact directly with the people (Winter, 1992, p. 30). This was one of the reasons preachers and religious scholars contributed to the shaping of religion as a factor in national identity. However, this ever-increasing foothold of the Ulama and Sufis did, one way or another, boost the power of Ottoman rule, as many were convinced that this rule was the best for the sake of the Islamic nation (Winter, 1992, p. 31). In many of their writings, they always highlighted their appreciation for the Islamic imprint of the Ottoman rule and their commitment to Islamic Sharia (Winter, 1992, p. 31).

On another note, it was quite puzzling at the time why Ottoman rule was more appealing to the public than the previous eras, despite all of them being foreign rule. Some Islamic political theories explain this paradox by arguing that if a ruler is mainly identified as a Muslim ruler, he is advocating for the victory and the spread of Islam and shows a strong sense of leadership, he will be accepted by the public even if he does not share the same language or the culture with governed (Winter, 1992, p. 32). Unlike the status of co-optation of the Ulama mentioned earlier, the Ulama under Ottoman occupation enjoyed a considerable degree of independence from the rulers. They thus gained credibility in the eyes of society. They were once the guardians of Islamic principles, responsible for uniting the people, enhancing the stability of the state, and upholding societal norms and traditions (Winter, 1992, p. 32).

On that note, and returning to Al Azhar's role, the Ottoman rule did not utilize Al Azhar as a tool to stabilize its own role. On the contrary, Al Azhar Ulama were largely independent. Some of them, who did not belong to the mainstream track of submission to Islamic rule, were even able to criticize aspects of Ottoman rule (Winter, 1992, p. 32). The Ottoman rulers of Egypt contributed financially to the growth of Al Azhar, maintaining this support without compromising on their interest in keeping the institution as the primary religious reference for the public (Winter, 1992, p. 33). Not only was Al Azhar the center of religious preaching and guidance, but it was also the place where political activity often began and was organized. For instance, if the public were to oppose any policies or actions initiated by the rulers, they would either refer to Al Azhar as their spokesman or protest under his guidance (Winter, 1992, p. 33). This does not mean there were

many passive and manipulated Sheikhs and Ulama; nevertheless, Al Azhar mostly played the role of the public spokesman. This increased the people's sense of dependence and trust in Al Azhar as their religious compass, and the need for independent religious groups/Ulamas was minimal(Winter, 1992, p. 33). Although the correlations between the two factors under study in this section, the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of Islamic activism, seem loose, they are interconnected to a great extent. The fall of Ottoman rule problematized people's perception and understanding of their identity since religion was an integral component of identity formation at this point (Winter, 1992, p. 33). To sum up the significance of the Ottomans to the consolidation of religion, the Ottomans depended to a great extent on the narrative of being the leaders of the Islamic nations and the saviors of Islam to facilitate their acceptance as Islamic rulers and not as "foreign invaders," which gradually made the public at ease with their urge to protect their religion. At the same time, the second factor is the growth of Al Azhar as the representative of the public. Consequently, the fall of the Ottomans left many people with the question of what was next. To what extent would the collapse of the Ottoman "Islamic" rule undermine the power of religion in society? These questions alarmed the Egyptians about their need to protect Islam and fill the gap left by the Ottomans. This marked another significant step toward an increasingly active Islamic movement.

Modern Revival Waves and the Expansion of Islamic Activism

The modern Islamic revival was not a single movement but a series of interconnected waves driven by socioeconomic change, regional politics, and shifts in regime strategy. This section analyzes how these revival waves diversified Islamic activism and extended its reach into society. To understand the extent to which the Islamic revival contributed to the rise of activism in Egypt, it is necessary to outline the ethos/anatomy of this revival first. In simple terms, Islamic revival would be defined as the calls for the Islamization of society and the reclaiming of Sharia as a basis for societal organization (Aly, 1982, p. 98). There are three main attributes of Islamic revival movements. Firstly, there is the concept of "pervasiveness." This means that the call for returning to Islamic roots is usually widespread in the communities where Muslims are numerically more significant. The support of revivalists did not typically come from a specific economic or social class, and it was widespread among both upper and lower classes (Dekmejian, 1980, p. 2). The

second attribute is “polycentrism”. There is always a center for revival movements with powerful institutions and Ulama. At the beginning of the last century, Egypt was the center of the first modern wave because of the establishment of the MB, a role model internationally for many Islamic activists to follow. The third and most important attribute is “persistence.” This attribute concerns the ability to form these movements when society is most vulnerable to religious fragility (Dekmejian, 1980, p. 2). These attributes indicate, in one way or another, why such movements happen in the first place. One of the explanations that is valid to a great extent is that they typically occur in response to catastrophes. As indicated in this chapter, changes in the type of rule, the rise of conventional religious schools, European invasion, societal modernization, conflicts with Israel, and economic hardships typically led to Islamic revivalism. For example, the Nasserist and Ataturk models have been extensively modernized and are not based on religious Islamic rules, rapidly destabilizing the “religious” Egyptian society as the public knows it. Economically, the worse the economic situation and the wider the gap between the rich and the poor, the stronger the calls for returning to Islam to achieve equity and organize society (Haddad, 1987, p. 19). Another explanation for the persistence of revival movements is that revivalists were consistently more active post-crisis, establishing a psychological niche for their distressed societies. To draw a more precise map for the phases of revivalism in Egypt, the significant events and their corresponding waves are elaborated as follows;

- Phase one (British occupation, 1882-1965): Intellectual revivalists, such as Muhamed Abdu, emerged to protect Islam from colonial powers and missionaries. It is worth noting that the MB was initially established for this purpose (Haddad, 1987, p. 19), and this coincided with the creation of secular schools and legal systems that gradually marginalized Sharia’s practice (Aly, 1982). At this phase, radicalism was not among the revivalists’ policy tools. Instead, they are oriented toward intellectual communication.
- Phase two (Nasser’s rule, 1954-1970): This wave, unlike the first one, did not emerge as a response to international threats; instead, it was a reaction to the non-Islamic socialist ideologies prevalent during Nasser’s time. This time, they also marked the rise of political activism as a counter-movement to the new societal direction. This period also witnessed the spread of controversial writers, such as Said Kotb, whose writings had a significant influence. It marked the beginning of a new approach to the application of Islam (Haddad,

1987, p. 20). Violence started to be introduced in this phase as an alternative strategy to force their ideologies.

- Phase three (the conflicts with Israel and American influence, 1967-1990s): With the rise of American influence and the wars with Israel, another revivalist wave emerged, similar but more robust in its application. This phase sort of targeted the Islamization of society. The penetration of American influence in many countries, due to its position as a global superpower and the effects of globalization, has intensified religious speech and, in many cases, radicalized it. Fearing the extent to which the "Islamic" Egyptian society would be affected by Western society was a strong motive behind a significant change in the societal trajectory. For example, the extreme speeches about the veil (Hijab) and the prohibition of many social and cultural habits that have been part of society for decades. What made the situation even more complicated is that society has been divided into two contradictory blocks; one is the more open/exposed, in most cases, those who follow society's modernization and opening up of opportunities. The other is the traditional people who refused to give up on Sharia's polycentrism (Aly, 1982, p. 99). On another note, during the time of the Israeli wars, the element of fighting as a pillar in Islam (Al-Jihad) became dominant in religious rhetoric. The outbreak of the radical Islamic school of thought went out of control, and it developed into terrorist attacks (Haddad, 1987, p. 23).

Apart from these three clear-cut milestones and their corresponding huge revival waves, there were deeply rooted societal dilemmas that permanently urged a return to Sharia. First and foremost, there are persistent economic hardships and unequal distribution of wealth and income. Egypt has long been a stark example of economic inequality (Haddad, 1987, p. 24). This discrepancy resulted from multiple factors, including corruption, poor governance, and the sudden shift to neoliberalism in the 1970s. The ever-increasing poverty and inequality have always raised skepticism about following the Western liberal economic model and its incompatibility with the Islamic one (Haddad, 1987, p. 24). Consequently, many Islamic thinkers, and more importantly, the public demanded a return to economic laws driven by Sharia, as they perceived it as the key to achieving equality and having a government that supervises the behavior of both rulers and citizens (Haddad, 1987, p. 24). Nevertheless, having Islamic Sharia per se as the primary reference for rule was always the case in the Egyptian constitution. However, having a pure Islamic rule was never an

option because of the path dependency that always defined the Egyptian political system after the 1952 coup. However, for many revivalists, the light at the end of the tunnel was to be active socially by providing economic services, fulfilling the pillar of Zakat, and achieving equality (Haddad, 1987, p. 25).

The second dilemma is the political trajectory and instability. Similar to the economic dilemma and, as mentioned earlier, the British mandate and the quest for the Western model of governance, the Sharia solution to life was revived, one way or another (Haddad, 1987, p. 25). Not only was the fear of the "Western" impact on the Egyptian traditional society the primary motive for revivalism, but the disenchantment resulting from the unfulfilled promises of making Egypt a developed state by following the Western way of governance (Haddad, 1987, p. 24). The post-1925 coup regimes have always been portrayed nationally and internationally as authoritarian, consistently violating human rights, and deeply corrupt, irrespective of any political liberalization attempts that might have taken place in the 1970s-1980s. Hence, a governance model with a religious basis constituted a significant part of the revivalist school of thought, which typically began with intellectual observations and writings and developed into various forms of political activism (Haddad, 1987, p. 24). The third dilemma is ideology. As important as the previous economic and political factors, ideologies do serve as a wheel for the rise of Islam as an alternative to the failing imported ideologies. Unlike the political and economic dilemmas, the significance of ideologies is not driven by one social class; instead, it is a collective awareness/behavior that springs from various social strata (Haddad, 1987, p. 25). In other words, in the political and economic dilemma, it was instead the more economically underprivileged or the more politically oppressed who were mostly bringing the solution of Islamic Sharia to the table. However, regardless of the degree of political awareness and economic privileges that different classes enjoyed, many Muslims looked at the societal and political problems through the Islamic ideology lens. For example, some people believe that the more we commit to Sharia teachings and deviate from Western models, the more prosperous the society will be and the fewer hardships it will face (Haddad, 1987, p. 25).

The fourth dilemma is social change. Many Egyptians have always perceived their society as very traditional and religious, a source of pride for many. With the increasing openness of society to Western ideas, especially following neoliberal changes, and the easy access to information facilitated by technological advancements, a more stringent Islamic school of thought emerged

(Lapidus, 1997, p. 105). For example, the awareness campaigns on birth control methods and female genital mutilation were highly attacked, especially by the less educated people and in rural areas, and have been counterbalanced by extreme religious preaching. Additionally, the change in dress code for boys and girls, as well as habits and aspirations, made the return to Islamic teachings even more specific and integrated into everyday interactions (Lapidus, 1997, p. 105). The fifth factor is migration. The impact of migration on the rise of Islamic consciousness has been overlooked in the literature, despite its significant direct influence during the oil boom of the 1970s. As a side effect of the neoliberal changes initiated by Sadat, which coincided with the oil boom in the Gulf countries, many Egyptians migrated to the Gulf in search of better economic circumstances for themselves and their families (Lapidus, 1997, p. 105). Since migration often entails unfavorable social consequences for migrants, such as social exclusion and limited opportunities, a solid ideology that serves as a psychological support system for them is necessary. Hence, holding onto Islam and even investing in it was a comforting and coping mechanism for migrants. For instance, attending religious lessons and Friday prayers created social networks where Islam served as the common bond between the migrants and the locals (Lapidus, 1997, p. 105).

More importantly, the idea of investing in Islam and its significant contribution to the third and most considerable revival wave. Some affluent migrants had their investments and wealth manifested in flourishing Islam (Lapidus, 1997, p. 106). This investment was evident in the growing numbers of mosques and charitable organizations, especially in Sadat's era. Additionally, the proliferation of Islamic publications, such as books and recorded tapes, was a more convenient and disseminable way of preaching (Lapidus, 1997, p. 106). From some effluents' perspective, wealth is best devoted to the glory of Islam and the service of unprivileged Muslim families. These societal changes, given their highly dynamic nature, have long fueled the renewal and emergence of various Islamic thought, speech, and activism(Lapidus, 1997, p. 106).

The Diverse Currents of Islamic Activism: Reformist, Charitable, and Political

Islamic activism in Egypt crystallized into multiple currents, each with distinct goals, constituencies, and relationships with the state. This section distinguishes between reformist,

charitable, and political forms of activism to clarify how each type navigated the authoritarian environment. The political clash of interests and power between the government and some Islamic groups in Egypt over the last century, until very recently, has significantly shaped our perception of the various modes of Islamic activism. Although this reality enriched the literature on political Islam, it also left a non-negligible gap in the literature, namely the difference between political and non-political activism. This section aims to provide a clear map of political and apolitical mobilization, as well as how the intersection of specific national and international factors led to different modes of Islamic activism.

The introduction of activism to Islam started, in most cases, from the Utopian and romanticized idea of having the perfect Muslim society where the Muslim youth are working to build a prosperous society (Hashem, 2006, p. 43). As mentioned earlier, having a solid Islamic institution like Al-Azhar was necessary for organizing society, guiding people spiritually, and sometimes anchoring the public, even when political activism was required. Although the history of Al Azhar Ulama has witnessed several ups and downs, it has been perceived by the public as the guardians of Islam, and it has enjoyed broad support and trust (Hashem, 2006, p. 43). However, the urge to build this "perfect" Muslim society had to take a trajectory other than the one where the Ulama is the leading actor. In other words, many youths began to question the efficiency/sustainability of the Ulama's orientation towards their ideal society project, and more importantly, the ever-increasing and complicated problems of Muslim society. For them, this orientation was somewhat static and traditional, and at a certain point, excluding the Ulama from aspiration and planning became necessary (Hashem, 2006, p. 43).

Although this exclusion only targeted those with crippling conventional ideas, some other Ulama/scholars were even the motives behind the rise of political Islam, especially in the middle of the last century. A prominent example is writers like Al Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb. Still, it is noteworthy in this context that their influence divided society into two factions: those who had faith in the conventional Ulama and the active youth who sought to radically change society (Hashem, 2006, p. 43). This distinction takes us to the different shades of activism. First and foremost, national activism. National activism often arises from a society in turmoil, plagued by numerous social, political, and economic issues. From the activists' perspective, these issues arose due to the loss of correct religious guidance (Hashem, 2006, p. 43).

Based on this, the dream of recreating a traditional, historical Islamic society was the primary motive for change, and it also had to be integrated into their modernized society. Even if the youth aimed for the above-mentioned traditional end, they had to employ modern techniques to accomplish this ultimate goal. The two primary methods used were "mosque reinsertion and Islamic Social Institutions (ISI)" (Hashem, 2006, p. 41). Mosque restoration was both traditional and critical, as it aimed to revive mosques as places of worship and centers for knowledge and teaching. The renovation of mosques, in this sense, took place in two ways. The first was to have "mosques of knowledge" where Sheikhs provide "Islamic science such as Fiqh and Islamic interpretations." The second way, which paved the road for the rise of activism as a pillar of Islam, is through "behavioral mosques." These mosques were concerned with teaching young people how to practice Islam daily and how conventional Islamic principles could be applied in their modern context.

In most cases, this call for practicing Islam became a broader political/societal activity (Hashem, 2006, p. 44). For instance, it is evident that mosques' considerable role in Egypt started in Sadat's period and continued until 2013. They used to trigger political and social talks on how Muslims are responsible for changing their corrupt societies (Fahmy, 2020, p. 61). The second sub-mode of activism is Islamic social institutions. It is a concept that emerged from the state's inability to address pressing societal issues. It was a way to prove that Islam can fix modern problems, fulfill their responsibilities towards their societies as Muslim youth, and, in many cases, gain social and political power. I would argue that this mode was a socio-political upheaval with many power repercussions for both the movements and the regime. The ISI was formed to provide educational and welfare services to the unprivileged people who, because of the corrupt governments, are deprived of basic needs. They began through small networks, and some developed into forming a parallel state in many peripheral countries, such as Al-Jamiah Al-Shariah (Fahmy, 2020, p. 62).

The second shade of Islamic activism is global/international activism. It is worth noting that this wave of activity occurred on a larger scale because it was built upon critical political and international developments. Consequently, broad-scope groups were formed, like the Muslim Brothers, due to the increasing skepticism about the Ulama's ability to enlighten and guide the people. They were intellectually and practically connected to groups in other countries with similar circumstances (Hashem, 2006, p. 45).

Moving to another shade of activism, which is the individualistic approach. Independent Ulama/scholars initiated this kind of activism through preaching or providing regular lessons in mosques. This includes Al-Sheikh El Sharawy, Al-Sheikh Kishk, and Amr Khaled. Although this shade of activism seems to be the least critical one, big groups were formed, and terrorist attacks were implemented because of the influential preaching of some Sheikhs (Hashem, 2006, p. 45). Examining the micro level of activism in Egypt through a deeper lens reveals a significant manifestation of Islamic revivalism, as discussed in the previous section, in the daily practices that may appear superficial at first glance. Still, it has always had a profound impact on the levels of activism. Many people have initiated this micro/daily application of Islamic principles as a form of activism, such as getting veiled, attending mosques, quitting arts, or even using only Islamic greetings. These changes might seem like a mere shift in habits; however, societal interactions and perceptions underwent a significant transformation during the period from the 1970s to the 1990s (Binzel & Carvalho, 2016, p. 78).

The previous distinctions between international, national, and individualist activism occurred in political and apolitical spectrums. Nevertheless, the post-9/11 literature has been focusing significantly on political Islam, and there exist more misconceptions about it; furthermore, apolitical activism needs to be studied to a great extent (Ayoob, 2004, p. 1). These misconceptions are detectable in using the terms “political Islam” and “Islamic activists” interchangeably, which is practically invalid to a great extent. Additionally, the overlap between political Islam and violence has been, in most cases, at the center of the debate. Indeed, in many cases, political activism has, one way or another, led to violent and bloody outcomes; however, it is a broader phenomenon with many social, psychological, and religious layers that should not be reduced to its outcomes (Ayoob, 2004, p. 1).

I would define political Islam as the alternation of Islam from a theological belief to a political ideology (Ayoob, 2004, p. 2). In some cases, this concept entails the instrumentalization of Islam to achieve political goals. As perceived by some Islamists, it is a means of purging society of all political and social “impurities” (Ayoob, 2004, p. 1). Islam as a political ideology, in some cases, originated from the romanticized objective of building an Islamic society that fully commits to Sharia law. Nevertheless, the increasing complexities of the political and economic issues added an essential layer to their initial goal: political empowerment and authority. (Ayoob, 2004, p. 2). Consequently, many Islamic activists joined political life, either officially as an attempt to

influence policy-making and through the service provision sector, or through underground militias (Gumuscu, 2010, p. 54). On another note, the members of Islamic groups were not only the poor and unprivileged; many of them were intellectuals who were supported by those who grieved their regime and the global economic system. A map of the affiliation of known MB members in the 1950s reveals that most members were students, civil servants, and teachers, with the smallest percentage comprising religious functionaries (Munson, 2001, p. 12).

To summarize the distinction between political and apolitical activism, political activism emerged with the rise of the MB and subsequently polarized, growing in different ways. The first approach is the development of political groups with paramilitary wings to restructure society and combat systemic oppression. The second way was to gain public support through official access to political life and the provision of public services. Moving to apolitical activism, which, as discussed previously, was evident through the renewal of religious speech to counterbalance the modernity of the society, the increase in the number of private mosques, the establishment of charities that have no political affiliation, and businesses that were run by Islamic elites, such as banks and investment companies.

Islamic Activists Between Idealism, Pragmatism, and Radicalization

The spectrum of Islamic activism reflected varying interpretations of how to respond to political exclusion and social injustice. This section examines how differing strategies, ranging from idealistic reform to pragmatic engagement and radical militancy, emerged in response to the pressures of the regime. The purpose of this section is not to repeat what has already been studied for years on the MB and the other major groups, as well as their trajectory, but rather to clarify their strategies and coping mechanisms as a foundation for the broader picture that this research aims to draw. I will start with the MB as the leading Islamic movement in Egypt, since many other movements were somehow driven by or at least intellectually and religiously connected to it. The MB was established in Islamylia in 1928 by Hassan Al Bana (Munson, 2001, p. 12). As discussed before, the societal and political turmoil, such as the identity crisis that followed the fall of the Ottomans and the British occupation, resulted in the first modern Islamic revival attempt, of which the inception of the MB was a manifestation (Munson, 2001, p. 12). Theoretically, the MB started, and their initial goal was to continue as an apolitical religious group that materially and religiously

helps the unprivileged Muslim youth. They provided spiritual and moral guidance to their members on a smaller, communal scale, compensating for Al Azhar's fluctuations and the changes discussed earlier. Since it was not in Cairo, the MB made steady and slow progress in its first three years (Munson, 2001, p. 12). Hence, Al Bana relocated their activities to the center, where a broader audience could interact with them. Consequently, the group experienced a dramatic increase in the number of members and branches throughout Egypt, while also maintaining a solid internal organizational structure. The late 1930s marked their entry into the political arena, as they began collecting funds and raising awareness of the escalating Arab-Israeli conflict crisis (Munson, 2001, p. 13).

Gradually, the group became officially politically active when they ran for the parliamentary elections in 1941. They gained the necessary confidence through their vast public base, stemming from their opposition to the British occupation and their social reforms, which were facilitated by the revival of Islam (Munson, 2001, p. 13). As is usually the case in an authoritarian context, the increased political influence of the MB backfired when the leaders were jailed for the first time, a decision that was made by the British occupation. Tensions between the group, the regime, and the occupation fundamentally altered their strategy, elevating their activism to the next level. In the mid-1940s, the group established its secret security apparatus to defend its leaders and members (Munson, 2001, p. 13). By the mid-1950s, the group's activity took a pretty violent trajectory; consequently, hundreds of the members were jailed, and Gamal Abdel Nasser banned the group after one of their attempts to assassinate him (Beinin, 2005, p. 27). The MB activity during Nasser's period was more intellectual and political than charitable, due to the shift in political ideology toward socialism and a relatively stable economic system. However, the change in the regime from Nasser to Sadat resulted in a shift in the methodology of the MB (Beinin, 2005, p. 27).

To begin with, Al Sadat did not give official legal recognition to the MB due to their previous violent incident, but they functioned in a more liberal space than they did under Nasser. Al Sadat significantly scaled back the socialist and Nasserist projects, redirecting Egypt toward a neoliberal, Western-oriented approach (Beinin, 2005, p. 27). Thus, many of the MB prisoners were released from jail, and those who had been exiled returned to Egypt. The MB policy alternative entailed strategizing economically rather than taking a direct course of political action, so they would gradually gain a stronger foothold in society. The change in planning led to the dichotomization

of the group's members into two factions: one that supports the change, and the other, the active/angry youth who want to radically change society.

Societal Mobilization/Change through Economic Strategizing

Starting with the fraction that chose peaceful economic strategizing, Al Sadat implemented the open-door policies as a part of the neoliberal reforms in the 1970s, which entailed opening up the national economy to the international market through reinforcing tourism, labor remittances, foreign loans, and empowering the private sector (Ibrahim, 1982, p. 66). These new changes gradually widened the gap between the rich, who grew richer through wealth accumulation, and the poor, who became poorer due to price increases and inflation. The emergence of newly rising economic elites also led to their inclusion in political life. Although the economic and political situation appeared to be active on the surface, the quality of life decreased significantly (Menza, 2012, p. 222). Vital services, such as education, healthcare, and even access to water and food, have been reduced in the capital and major cities due to the concentration of capital there. As a consequence, poverty rates in rural and peripheral areas skyrocketed. This does not mean that the inhabitants of big cities did not suffer from economic hardships, but access to services in remote areas was even more limited (Menza, 2012, p. 222).

To avoid delving deeper into irrelevant economic details, the consequences of the neoliberal changes are as follows: national industrial activity decreased, the import-to-export ratio increased, and the same was true for production and consumption ratios. Receiving loans and printing money were the only ways out of the economic crisis, but this was only feasible in the short run, as the deficit was a gradual outcome (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 86). With the increasing financial crisis, the Gulf Organization for Development (GODE) and many other bilateral donors provided financial support to Egypt until the Baghdad Summit in 1976, which halted all assistance following the conclusion of the Camp David agreement with Israel (Lavy, 1948, p. 2).

Having the primary source of assistance blocked, Western aid was the only way out of this dilemma. This is precisely where political and economic liberalism merged during Sadat's era. Receiving loans from the IMF was consistently conditioned by the initiation of political correctness campaigns. This was manifested in the release of prisoners of conscience, the permitting of some opposition parties to function, and the toleration of civil society organizations

(Ibrahim, 1982, p. 66). They were also modifying political life in this way, as it had a significant implication for the resilience of the authoritarian regime by distracting the people from economic neglect by emphasizing their political advancements (Ates, 2005, p. 79). Nevertheless, what seemed to be pluralistic and liberal at this point was punctuated and controlled by the state apparatus to contain the opposition. Even this relatively tight room for interaction benefited the Islamic groups, especially the MB, as compared to Nasser's era, since they were allowed to rise to the surface again. Many economically well-off members established enterprises and investment companies, integrating them into the foreign trade sector. More importantly, others initiated charitable projects, such as schools and clinics, where many Muslim youths were actively involved (Ates, 2005, p. 79).

Since the number of mosques skyrocketed during Sadat's time, many Islamic groups, not only the MB, were encouraged to attach small charities to it. The leaders are anchoring for people in rough times and guaranteeing public trust in the MB charities. For example, during the bread riots in 1977, the MB attacked the regime and accused it of being detached from society (Ibrahim, 1982, p. 67). Moving to Mubarak's era, the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were implemented at the beginning of the 1990s. This neoliberal program required stricter economic circumstances, such as privatization and cutting subsidies on public goods. Some World Bank statistics indicated that five years after implementing the SAPs, the poverty and unemployment rates increased to nearly 20% (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 88). As a result of the gradual withdrawal of the regime from service provision, some Islamic charities worked to substitute for the government by establishing a parallel, non-governmental service provision sector. According to Kandil (2011), by 2010, the percentage of Islamic charities accounted for 80% of all civil society organizations, many of which were owned by the MB, given that they were the most influential group in the last few decades (p. 5). The dynamics of interactions between Mubarak's regime and Islamic charities will be explained in a separate chapter that studies the rise of patron-client relations. Still, as a brief context clarification, the charities used to fall under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). The ministry had the absolute upper hand in monitoring the groups, their activities, and their funds. However, there was a way of getting around this, as many charities were affiliated with mosques, as discussed earlier, and they received numerous donations, which were quite challenging to track (Abdel Rahman, 2004, p. 35). Some statistics indicate that the number of prominent mosques in 2006 exceeded 70,000, while the number of small mosques (Zawya)

reached 20,000 (Masoud, 2013, p. 13). Using their charity channels to mobilize public support qualified their active leaders to infiltrate political life as well. It was not a legally recognized political activity, but instead took over major platforms for socio-political initiatives. For instance, the MB took over the five most active syndicates from 1989 to 1992 (Fahmy, 1999, p. 8).

Naming all Islamic charities in Egypt in this research is ambitious and out of scope, as I am not studying individual cases but rather the pattern of relations between the state and Islamic movements; however, I will briefly shed light on the leading Islamic groups that have been active for decades. The primary example is Al Jameyah Al Sharia. It was established in 1912 and was intellectually connected to the MB at its early stages. Later, they had actual charitable and economic cooperation. The organization had over 1000 branches throughout Egypt, offering a wide range of services, including religious lessons, as well as food, water, and electricity. Many more cases involved organizations that were directly owned by the MB, loosely connected to them, or independent of them. Still, they faced similar destinies, one way or another. I will primarily focus on the case of Al Jameyah Al-Sharia in this research because it is an interesting case of a group that, despite lacking direct political activity, was entirely closed by the regime and had all its services terminated.

The Deviant Faction and Radical Planning

Another faction of Islamists mainly aimed to radically change society. While the infiltration of the syndicates presented smooth integration into the political arena, other youth were convinced that changing society and achieving equality should be done through a direct, intense course of action. Initially, the dichotomization of the MB happened due to the drastic measures taken against them by Nasser's regime (Kenney, 2006, p. 126). The political debates among prison leaders shifted from moderate to extreme positions. During the rule of Sadat and the political correctness campaign, many MB members and leaders considered seizing the opportunity to engage in a relatively peaceful mode of interaction with the regime, thereby resurfacing. Consequently, the other members who were jailed and were influenced by Sayyid Qutb and Hassan al-Hudaybi's writings and death perceived the former faction as passive. Based on that, violence and underground planning were the ways they resorted to taking revenge and also restructuring the society according to their beliefs. There were two main militant Islamic groups in the period from

the 1970s to the 1990s: “the Technical military academy group (*Jama’at Al Fanya Al Askarya*) and the Muslim Group (Jama’at Al Islamyia).” (Kenney, 2006, p. 126).

The Rise of Islamic Activism in Turkey: Islamic vs. Islamist Movements

Although the dynamics underpinning the rise of Islamic activism in Turkey resemble those observed in Egypt in broad terms, the relationship between state, religion, and society in the Turkish case unfolded through fundamentally different and more complex trajectories. The early republican project radically altered the public role of Islam, transforming it from the overarching moral and political framework of the Ottoman order into a religion confined largely to the private sphere. This abrupt redefinition of religious authority generated a profound sense of societal dislocation, accelerating the identity crisis already underway during the empire’s final decades and fueling new forms of Islamic activism as communities sought to re-anchor themselves in a rapidly changing social landscape.

Yet the Turkish case diverges sharply from Egypt in one crucial respect: whereas Egypt’s rulers progressively absorbed and neutralized formal religious institutions, most notably through the co-optation of al-Azhar, Turkey’s secular-nationalist state periodically relied on forms of controlled Islam to achieve political ends. Particularly during moments of ideological contestation, such as the rise of leftist mobilization or Kurdish nationalism, the Turkish state strategically empowered certain religious actors to stabilize the political order. This selective use of Islam as a counterweight both constrained and enabled Islamic activism, creating opportunities for religious groups to operate within the authoritarian framework rather than wholly against it.

Taken together, these dynamics shaped a distinctive path for the emergence of Islamic activism in Turkey. Rather than developing solely in response to state repression, Islamic activism evolved through shifting state–societal interactions during periods of nation-building, ideological engineering, economic transformation, and political crisis. In what follows, this section examines how these milestone transitions created the conditions under which various forms of Islamic activism, charitable, reformist, and political, took root and eventually established a foothold in Turkish society.

Identity Politics and the Role of Islam in the Formation of Modern Turkey

The early Turkish Republic's redefinition of national identity and its restrictive approach toward Islam provide essential background for understanding how authoritarian regimes later justified the regulation of Islamic movements. By illustrating how the state positioned Islam during nation-building, this section explains the historical roots of the control, exclusion, and selective tolerance strategies analyzed in this dissertation. Turkey in the Ottoman era was a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society; hence, Islam and the Ulama were integral components of the government-governed relationship. The absolute power granted to the Sultans authorized them to protect Islam and the nation. Every source of political power, including the legal system, was derived from Sharia (Islamic law) (Lord, 2018, p. 38). The Sultan was not only perceived as the representative of absolute political authority but also the representative of God (Eligur, 2010, p. 16). Sharia played the most significant role in defining Islam as a pillar of the rule and led to a systemic institutionalization and integration of Ulama into the authority. Ulama developed this institutionalization into full-fledged control over the judicial and educational sectors (Eligur, 2010, p. 16). This deep entanglement of religious authority and political power in the Ottoman system created institutional expectations and popular habits of religio-political legitimacy, making later attempts at strict secularization inherently contentious.

Furthermore, the highest rank among the Ulama is that of Sheikh Al Islam, who was a crucial actor in the decision-making processes, and reaching high ranks was contingent upon being a Muslim (Lord, 2018, p. 39). Moving to the position of Islam within the society, irrespective of how stratified the society was, religion drew demarcation lines between classes and ethnic groups. Specifically, being a Muslim was one of the most significant privileges that society members enjoyed, as they prioritized owning land, holding important positions, and running businesses (Lord, 2018, p. 40). Tracing the gradual consolidation of Islam throughout the Ottoman era suggests that, as mentioned earlier, until the collapse of Ottoman rule and even for a while after, people mainly identified themselves as "Muslims" (Eligur, 2010, p. 38). By the time of modernization and the establishment of the republic in 1923 by Ataturk, Islam was deeply rooted in the society on the one hand, while on the other, the founders of the republic aimed at completely decoupling social, political, and economic life from the guidance of religion (Eligur, 2010, p. 38). This abrupt ideological shift created a structural mismatch between state-building elites and

societal norms, laying the groundwork for future Islamic activism to emerge as a vehicle for cultural continuity and social representation.

Parallel to the beginning of this transformation, it should be noted that the underground practices of Islam, along with uniting with other Muslims, turned Islam from a religion to an ideology through which they believed they could protect their society (Eligur, 2010, p. 42).
This modernization campaign stemmed from the founders' shared belief that the Ottoman Empire collapsed due to the erosion of Islamic authority and its lack of integration in every domain. (Köni, 2015, p. 340). In most cases, Islamic authority was manifested in the Ulama, who held almost the upper hand in policy-making, thereby blocking previous endeavors for modernization. This rigid religious control has been perceived as a reason why the country was unable to cope with modern global changes and, more importantly, why it was defeated in World War II (Köni, 2015, p. 340). Consequently, forming a country with a modern secular political and societal system was the remedy for the unprecedented crisis. As mentioned before, on the verge and during the secularization processes, a vast percentage of the population had Islam as the main constituent of their identity, and it was scary for them to experience all the robust steps towards a secular state that withstands their profound traditional society (Köni, 2015, p. 341). To gain a deeper understanding of the psychology of the public at the time, I will summarize the country's transformation, which will help clarify the status of the identity crisis and, consequently, the rise of activism as a coping mechanism. The building stones were intended to abolish the system of the Caliphate altogether, and by 1928, the article that established Islam as the state religion was removed (Köni, 2015, p. 341). This former step was complemented by the addition of the principle of secularism to the constitution by the mid-1930s. Furthermore, "religious foundations, associations, schools, and Sufi Tariqa were banned. Educational and legal systems were secularized, and the alphabet was changed from Arabic to Latin even though religious attire was banned in public" (Köni, 2015, p. 342). Irrespective of the drastic measures implemented by the reformers, no matter how they tried to eliminate the influence of religion on private life, they focused more on the legal and upper levels than on the private spheres they initially targeted (Köni, 2015, p. 342).

As indicated earlier in this section, Turkish Islam was manifested in two levels. The first layer was the entrenched formal religion of the state, which the Ulama represented. The second layer consisted of spiritual and faith practices that unfolded from below. Within this sphere, the Islamic Brotherhoods (Tarikat) were the most trusted and followed (Eligur, 2010, p. 45). Unlike Ulama, who were mostly incorporated into the state apparatus, the brotherhoods used to be independent and influential to a great extent. For Atatürk, undermining the influence of the Ulama was a less complicated mission than that of the brotherhoods, since they were officially integrated into the system. Part of the new rule's authority consolidation plan was to repress the opposition, which primarily included the brotherhoods; consequently, their activities were forced into underground channels (Eligur, 2010, p. 45). The suppression of these independent religious networks unintentionally strengthened the appeal of non-state Islamic actors, a dynamic that echoes across both the Egyptian and Turkish cases and becomes central to understanding later patterns of authoritarian tolerance and repression. These two suppression mechanisms marked the diminution of any formal religious authority; in addition to the intense secularization pressure from above, many people were left confused about their identity, yet determined to actively rescue their religion.

Modernization and the Center–Periphery Divide in Turkish Society

Turkey's modernization process deepened a structural divide between the secular state elite and socially conservative religious groups, shaping the conditions under which Islamic activism became politically meaningful. Understanding this divide is crucial for explaining why Islamic actors later emerged as vehicles of societal representation and why authoritarian regimes alternated between tolerating and repressing them.

The psychological consequences of the identity crisis were not the only result of the collapse of Ottoman rule and the transformation processes. Forcing an intense, large-scale modernization project from the state level led to the dichotomization of society into bourgeois/elite and working-class classes (Demiralp, 2009, p. 318). Secular changes, Westernization, and industrial and educational development were primarily implemented in big cities or centers. Therefore, two social classes emerged: highly educated, affluent, secular, and politically privileged. The other class is the periphery inhabitants, who were geographically remote from the developed center,

which created a state of contention among this class in response to socio-political and economic inequality (Demiralp, 2009, p. 319). This growing divide not only produced grievances but also established the sociological basis for Islamic activism to function as a counter-elite project, mobilizing peripheral groups who felt excluded from the republican modernization agenda (Demiralp, 2009, p. 319).

As was always the case for so many people before the formation of the modern state, Islam constituted a spiritual shelter for the less privileged people and also an ideology through which many social movements were created. However, it is worth noting that the official formation of any religious social movement did not occur until the end of one-party rule in 1945 (Demiralp, 2009, p. 319). After that point, numerous endeavors were made to sustain the presence of faith-based movements, which experienced fluctuations in accordance with shifts in the political situation. The timing of this organizational emergence is significant because it occurred precisely when the state's capacity to monopolize ideological space weakened, revealing how political openings, however limited, enable Islamic actors to institutionalize their presence.

Nevertheless, Necmettin Erbakan established several Islamic parties to address economic inequality, and aspiring Muslim businesspeople joined his parties. While urban secularist businesspeople enjoyed large-scale political and financial networks that facilitated the development of their businesses, Erbakan provided a common denominator for Islamic entrepreneurs and a method for representation and lobbying (Demiralp, 2009, p. 320). Not only were the entrepreneurs the biggest supporters of Erbakan's parties, but also the students who moved to urban cities and struggled to cope with these cities' affluent, Westernized lifestyles (Demiralp, 2009, p. 320). This coalition of peripheral business elites and socially conservative youth demonstrates how political Islam translated socioeconomic frustrations into organized political mobilization, a pattern similarly observed in Egypt's Islamist movements (Demiralp, 2009, p. 320).

On a similar note, and analogous to the case of Egypt, the globalization and unprecedented development of the global market in the late 1970s led the state to lose control over economic activities within its territory. The government remains the most substantial political actor; thus, the classic paradox of the people resorting to the government to compensate for economic changes

versus their actual ability to do so emerged (Onis, 1997, p. 745). In other words, people's expectations of the government solving their economic hardships exceed its ability to circumvent the deteriorating circumstances. Amid the pressure exerted by the international community to implement neoliberal changes, a state of poor governance, an unprecedented rise in poverty and inequality, and the inability of local actors, such as unions, to lobby effectively coincided (Onis, 1997, p. 745). The pressure from globalization and neoliberal policies led to the rise of identity politics, where various groups, ethnicities, and social classes competed for greater political and economic representation (Onis, 1997, p. 746).

For the sake of argument, this section will focus on how the economic and social implications of globalization and neoliberalism generated political Islamic activity as an ideology. During the 1980s-1990s, political Islam emerged as a form of identity politics through which many people perceived it as an alternative to the orthodox state and secular politics. Additionally, it was an ideological platform where they could express their discontent. More importantly, for economically less privileged people, it alleviated their chronic economic hardships, as many political Islamic groups had clear strategies for improving their financial situation (Onis, 1997, p. 746). In this sense, political Islam served as both a moral discourse and an economic strategy, enabling Islamic movements to present themselves as more responsive to the needs of marginalized constituencies than the state.

The main takeaway from this observation is that advocates of political Islam came from diverse backgrounds. For instance, people experiencing poverty who needed an alternative to the state's lack of presence, intellectuals who were not fully engaged in urban modern life, as well as aspiring businesspeople trying to upgrade their social position (Onis, 1997, p. 746).

One of the leading examples of the rise of political Islamic parties is the Welfare Party (WP), which coincided with the implementation of the structural adjustment programs in the 1980s. Due to the wave of financial crises and political instability in the late 1970s, the military initiated a coup in 1980, and its rule lasted for three years (Onis, 1997, p. 747). The purpose of that transitional period, as announced, is to stabilize the political sphere and pave the way for a market-oriented system. Part of the military's stabilization plan was to deter leftist activity by granting autonomy to Islamic groups, thereby counterbalancing them (Onis, 1997, p. 747). These political

reasons will be analyzed in the coming sections. Still, it is essential to note the intersection between the political and economic reasons that pushed the Welfare Party to the surface. This deliberate empowerment of Islamic actors illustrates how authoritarian regimes may tolerate religious movements instrumentally, only to reassess them as threats once their social base expands, a dynamic central to this dissertation's theoretical argument.

Moving to the financial implications, unlike the case of Egypt, there was a significant improvement in Turkey, resulting from the structural adjustment programs, as evidenced by the growth of the GNP (Onis, 1997, p. 748). Nevertheless, income and wealth disparities increased at the micro level, and the economic situation deteriorated significantly for a substantial portion of society. The rise of the Welfare Party resulted mainly from two phenomena: the first is people with low income who are getting poorer and need a party with a solid program to solve their issues, and, as mentioned before, for business owners to develop their businesses during this competitive era through networking with politicians (Onis, 1997, p. 748).

The Re-Emergence of Islamic Activism Under a Secular State Framework

The re-emergence of Islamic activism within a secular legal environment reveals how Islamic groups learned to operate under authoritarian constraints, an adaptive capacity central to the argument of this dissertation. Analyzing the strategies Islamic actors adopted in this period helps explain why some movements later appeared manageable to the state, while others were seen as autonomous and potentially threatening.

With the establishment of the secular state in 1923 and the abolition of almost all the deeply rooted Islamic ethos from political and social life, some faith-based groups that already existed before the establishment of the secular state were forced underground (Köni, 2015, p. 340). Naming the various groups and Tariqat during the Ottoman Empire is outside the scope; however, it is essential to highlight the case of one of the most influential groups, the Nursi movement. The founder of the movement, Said Nursi, employed a revivalist approach, aiming to revitalize Islamic discourse in response to societal modernization (Sahin, 2011, p. 227). The weakening of the Ottoman Empire marked a shift in its engagement in politics, as evidenced by Said Nursi's call for the unification of Muslims to save the Islamic nation. The Nursi movement withdrew from the political scene

after the secularization of the state, focusing instead on spreading Islamic teachings on a small societal scale (Sahin, 2011, p. 227). Similar to the case of Egypt, revivalism played a crucial role in the emergence of activism as a subtle or implicit form of resistance and identity reform. By redirecting its efforts toward education, preaching, and small-scale study circles rather than overt political contestation, the Nursi movement exemplified a mode of Islamic activism that could survive within secular constraints while gradually rebuilding an autonomous religious sphere (Sahin, 2011, p. 227).

From 1923 to 1945, Turkey was ruled by a single party, the Republican People's Party (RPP), established by Atatürk (Köni, 2015, p. 340). As previously discussed, the RPP aimed to ultimately minimize the role of religion and develop an elite and middle-class urban sector that would sustain societal reforms. Furthermore, the RPP overlooked the problems faced by the masses, especially the inhabitants of rural areas and peasants, and suppressed the practices of faith that had previously served as spiritual support (Eligur, 2010, p. 47). They also considered stabilizing the economy during the war by printing more money, which led to an aggressive wave of inflation and, consequently, increased poverty. Not only did the RPP fail on the economic level, but what they claimed to be the golden age of Turkey and the corrections of the Ottomans' failures were not the case. Secularizing the state per se was successful in Westernizing political, economic, and legal systems, mainly through the marginalization of religion, as mentioned above; yet, this transition was highly undemocratic (Axiarlis, 2014, p. 23). The enforcement of secularism by the state was argued to be authoritarian, which was evidenced by the unprecedented power and violence practiced by the security apparatus. Eradicating any opposing political power, namely the Islamists, was, from the Kemalists' perspective, the way to sustain a stable secular rule. In practice, however, this combination of economic mismanagement and coercive secularism eroded the regime's moral legitimacy and made Islamic actors increasingly attractive as alternative points of identification and opposition (Axiarlis, 2014, p. 23).

Building on this view, the Islamists and any Islamic group in general are not only posing a threat to the newly established secular ideology but also to the process of authoritarian restitution as one of the most potent opposing powers (Axiarlis, 2014, p. 24). Due to the internal and external pressures resulting from the dictatorial nature of the RPP, a multi-party system was established in

1964, allowing various previously marginalized societal classes to compete for representation (Rabasa, 2008, p. 35).

Before discussing the context of the resurgence of Islamic movements/parties, it is essential to highlight that the previously discussed economic situation and political repression were not the only reasons for Islamic-based activities. An interesting study on this note was conducted by Livny (2020), who investigated the psychological motives behind the success of Islamic parties compared to their non-religious counterparts (p. 6). He developed the theory of "trust-based" orientation in the subconscious selection process. Based on these two factors, Linvy (2020) suggests that a relatively significant percentage of followers and members of Islamic groups believe that these groups were established by "good people" (p. 6). Throughout his field research, Linvy (2020) concluded that the trust many people initially had in Islamic groups did not stem from objective results or success, but rather from the assumption that they were performing good deeds (p. 7).

Based on this observation, the ability of many Islamic groups to reappear on the surface and the significant support they gained from the Turkish public can be attributed to the shared identity (Linvy, 2020, p. 7). As argued before, during the one-party rule of the RPP, the public, along with Islamic scholars and Islamic groups, witnessed a period of religious marginalization and a minimal space where they preserved their identities as Muslims. Nevertheless, establishing the multiparty system marked a more substantial chance for Islamic movements to claim an official position in political and social life (Larabee, 2008, p. 35). It is noteworthy that the nature of Islamic activism in Turkey and Egypt differs significantly, as the groups in Turkey were not forced underground to the same extent as their counterparts in Egypt. With the competition for votes and power in Turkey, previously marginalized parties officially sought representation. In 1950, the Democratic Party took over the government, replacing the RPP (Larabee, 2008, p. 35). Although the Democratic Party (DP) won the majority of votes during the secular era, it was not as committed to the Kemalist doctrine of rule as the RPP. In effect, the DP loosened the drastic secular measures forced by the Kemalist regime, and more importantly, it slowly re-legitimized the presence of Islamic practices in the social sphere. With this newly granted autonomy, many religious groups established their official channels for the first time after the secular state was established (Larabee, 2008, p. 36). Having said this, these significant changes backfired, and the Kemalists, along with the military, planned a coup in 1960. From the Kemalists' perspective, the resurgence of Islamic parties/groups

would potentially threaten the progress they have made during the last couple of decades. Since Islamic groups had already managed to rebuild their channels during the ten-year rule of the DP, it was not easy to recontain them, coupled with the amendment of the constitution to include more associational freedoms (Larabee, 2008, p. 37). This sequence illustrates a recurring pattern in authoritarian politics: once Islamic actors have developed dense organizational infrastructures and electoral linkages, coercive measures become increasingly costly, prompting regimes to adopt more nuanced strategies of containment and selective co-optation. Having said this, this is not a static technique that authoritarian regimes always choose. Switching between coercive and co-optation strategies depends on the regime's perception of threat in a given context.

Religious networks experienced a surge in the 1960s in response to the growing challenges of modernization, particularly in supporting the poor and the conservative. As a result of these increasing networks, many have been officially channeled under the umbrella of the first established Islamic party in the 1970s, founded by Necmettin Erbakan (Larabee, 2008, p. 37). Ironically and quite similarly to the case of Egypt, contentious politics between left and right activists led to a series of violent events in the 1970s and the 1980s. Consequently, the military intervened to restore stability by giving more autonomy and power to the Islamists to even out the increasing influence of the leftists. If we examine the military plan more closely, we would notice that the military attempted to avoid falling into the trap of over-empowering the Islamic forces; hence, they took the following steps. The military tried to institutionalize Islam from above by gradually merging "Islamic symbols with nationalism" to unite people on the one hand and contain the rise of political Islam on the other (Larabee, 2008, p. 38).

As a means of supporting the institutionalization project, a group of Islamic scholars was tasked with enhancing the new Islamic nationalist ideology and making the identity of the past appealing to the present. The educational system and soft power, specifically the media, were utilized to integrate this synthesis into the formation of the new identity (Larabee, 2008, p. 38). The role of religion was officially brought back to schools, which weakened and indeed undermined the principles of secularism that the Kemalists had implanted. At the same time, under the 1980 constitution, Turkey was still identified as a secular state (Larabee, 2008, p. 38). The privileges granted to the Islamic parties due to the political arrangements of the military and the diverse agendas, which ranged from political Islam to purely charitable work, were successfully reinforced in society. What emerged was a hybrid configuration in which the state attempted to

instrumentalize Islam as a tool of social control, even as Islamic actors used the new openings to consolidate their own autonomous networks, an ambiguity that would later complicate efforts to prohibit them outright (Larabee, 2008, p. 38).

Returning to the role of economic transformation in the rise of Islamic activism, the urbanization and centralization processes contributed to the resorting to Islam as a refuge in the early modernization era. In comparison, the global trend of economic liberalization in the 1980s gave the Muslim elite and parties a greater opportunity to establish a distinct niche (Larabee, 2008, p. 36). With the neoliberal changes came the confining of the state's role and the emergence of an economically active capitalist class that was difficult to define ideologically in Turkey. Hence, the door was opened for faith-based businesses and Muslim elites/businessmen to compete and merge equally in a control-free economic environment (Larabee, 2008, p. 39). Moving to the classic case of international pressure to liberalize the economy versus its side effects, especially the widening of the gap between social classes, in times of economic crisis, as thoroughly explained in the case of Egypt, Islamic charities seem appealing and comforting for those struggling to secure their daily needs (Larabee, 2008, p. 39). Another privilege for Islamic groups was the political liberalization/correctness waves that accompanied the opening of the economy. Many political groups and opposition parties were allowed to be active politically, and among these groups were those affiliated with Muslims. They opposed the state, infiltrated different media outlets, and reached various audiences (Larabee, 2008, p. 40). Furthermore, some established schools and universities, which in turn opened many people's horizons to the social and political activities of Islamic movements (Larabee, 2008, p. 35). Similar to the urbanization that occurred at the beginning of the secularization/westernization era, the influx of capital and industrialization encouraged the inhabitants to migrate to the center. Demographically, the rural population leaned more towards conservatism and the traditional ethos of the "Islamic Ottoman rule." Moving to the center, in this case, strengthened the opportunity for the politically aspiring Islamists to be voted for and to gain official access to party life (Larabee, 2008, p. 40).

Although Islamic activism in Turkey re-emerged under strict secular constraints, it did not develop as a single coherent movement. Instead, similar to the Egyptian case, it unfolded across several interconnected strands that reflected different social needs, ideological orientations, and

conceptions of religious engagement. Reformist and spiritually oriented communities, such as the Nursi networks, focused on Islamic renewal, literacy, and piety as strategies to "preserve" Islamic identity under a secular state. At the same time, charitable and educational initiatives proliferated in informal spaces, filling welfare and educational gaps left by the state and establishing grassroots forms of religious social capital. Parallel to these developments, more politically oriented currents, eventually crystallizing in movements such as Mili Görüş, sought to articulate Islamic values within a structured political framework, directly challenging the secular political order (Larabee, 2008, p. 40).

Together, these strands constituted the diverse ecosystem of Islamic activism in late twentieth-century Turkey, each offering different pathways through which religiously inspired actors adapted to authoritarian secularism. This diversity not only shaped the internal evolution of Turkish Islamic activism but also conditioned how the state perceived and responded to different groups, tolerating those that appeared socially useful or politically active, while restricting or repressing those seen as autonomous or mobilizational. The following sections examine two of these strands in greater depth: the explicitly political trajectory embodied in Mili Görüş, and the educational, spiritual tradition rooted in the Nursi movement, both of which would significantly shape Turkey's later encounter with Islamic civil society and state strategies of control.

The National Outlook Movement (Mili Görüş): The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey

Mili Görüş's entry into formal politics offers an early example of how Islamic movements can challenge authoritarian power structures and provoke shifts in regime strategy. Examining this movement helps clarify the political conditions under which Islamic activism becomes either tolerated as controlled opposition or repressed as a threat to state ideology.

Within the previously explained social and economic context, the first political Islamic party was founded by Erbakan in 1970. More importantly, Erbakan not only established the first official party but also laid the foundation for almost all of the political Islamic parties that followed for the next four decades; this foundation is the National Outlook Movement, also known as the Mili Görüş (Yang and Guo, 2015, p. 3). The purpose of this section is not to discuss what has been reiterated in the literature on political Islam in Turkey, but to highlight the difference between

political Islam and Islamic activism in the case of Turkey. Although the line between these two phenomena seems quite blurry, from a purely theoretical perspective, they are distinct in terms of their political nature. This distinction is crucial for the purposes of this dissertation because regimes tend to perceive explicitly political Islamist actors as more directly challenging state authority, while socially or religiously oriented movements may initially be viewed as less threatening and therefore more tolerable. Nevertheless, this distinction is not relevant to authoritarian regimes, nor is it a deciding criterion when authoritarian regimes enter a phase of political instability or authoritarian stabilization.

Not only theoretically, but as will be shown later in this research, those who belong to the Gülen identify themselves as an Islamic-affiliated group, not a political Islamic one. We may agree or disagree with their identification based on our empirical evidence; however, it is essential to differentiate between these two kinds of activism, at least from a theoretical perspective, to analyze the regime's threat perception (Yang and Guo, 2015, p. 3). In other words, the crackdown initiated by the government, whether in Egypt or Turkey, did not only target the politicized groups but also almost all Islamic groups.

The National Outlook Movement served as the ideological foundation for a chain of political Islamic parties, beginning with the National Order Party. The ideological basis of the party was to challenge Westernization and to revive the traditional identity instead (Yang and Guo, 2015, p. 3). It was clear that the party was attempting to gradually eliminate the secular project; hence, the party was banned in 1971 as a side effect of the military coup, which was primarily initiated to preserve the secular nature of the state. Nevertheless, a year later, the members of the dissolved party established the National Salvation Party to maintain the method of using Islam as an ideological shield (Yang and Guo, 2015, p. 5). By 1973, the party had become the third-largest party, and Erbakan was appointed Prime Minister, representing Islamic activism in Turkey. However, after almost ten years of identity and contentious politics, the National Salvation Party did not escape the same fate as the previous party, and it was banned again at the beginning of the 1980s (Yang and Guo, 2015, p. 5). With the establishment of the Welfare Party, political Islam advocated for more than just identity politics. Due to the aforementioned economic conditions, the discourse on social welfare and equality intensified in the Mili Gorus party chain. Because of this solid social foundation, the party appealed to the public and became the center of Islamic activism.

The Welfare Party was followed by two other parties, Virtue and Felicity, which were banned to a greater or lesser extent due to the classic clash between Islamism and secularism (Yang and Guo, 2015, p. 6). This chain was largely concluded by the establishment of the ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has been in power for almost two decades. The repeated banning and reconstitution of parties within the National Outlook tradition illustrates a pattern of cyclical toleration and prohibition: Islamic actors were allowed to participate insofar as they remained within the informal red lines of the secular establishment, but were sanctioned once their mobilizational capacity appeared to threaten regime control.

In summary, as argued by some scholars, the National Outlook Movement was part of the religio-political activity that emerged in the 1970s in response to the global Islamic revival wave. As discussed previously, it was the outcome of a complex interplay of socio-economic phenomena. Politically, they played the role of clients in the client-patron equation with the regime. Additionally, identity politics played a role in the rise of the National Outlook Movement, particularly during the Welfare Party era, following failed attempts to join the EU. These attempts further increased the public's hatred of the West and heightened their need for a discourse that nourishes their national and traditional identity (Yang and Guo, 2015, p. 16).

Having said this, the conventional discourse of both the movement and the welfare party had a critical drawback. The clash between the secular and Islamist forces intensified since the movement was perceived as a real threat to secularism, resulting in the Welfare Party being banned. Interestingly, the Virtue Party was established after the Welfare Party adapted to the requirements/expectations of the regime, the leftists, and their modern times. The new party even supported attempts to join the EU and shifted away from a strictly nationalist discourse (Yang and Guo, 2015, p. 17). This observation illustrates how the client (the Islamic movements) reposition themselves in the client-patron relationship when the patron's (the government and the military) sense of threat increases and they respond with attacks against the client. This adaptation happened again when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) was established. Not only did the party advocate for liberal policies, Westernization, and human rights, but in 2003, the AKP denied any connection to the National Outlook Movement to appease the regime and public opinion (Yang and Guo, 2015, p. 18). These strategic shifts indicate that Islamic political actors have internalized

the constraints of the authoritarian environment and recalibrated their discourse and alliances to lower their perceived threat profile and secure continued access to the political arena.

At the beginning of their rule, the party leaders sought to avoid falling into the same trap as their successors; hence, they aimed to establish a broad social base that would enable all social strata to support them. Their strategy was to keep the support of the conservative right and poor people on the one hand, and to gain the support of the left secular faction by performing under the Kemalist Ideology. What can be roughly concluded from the rationale behind the National Outlook Movement and its chain of parties is that they aimed at an explicit Islamization of the secular state by introducing new versions of themselves to cope with the opposition (Yang and Guo, 2015, p. 18).

The Nursi Movement: Between Religious Renewal and Implicit Political Engagement

The Nursi movement's implicit yet socially transformative approach demonstrates how non-confrontational Islamic activism can expand under authoritarian secularism without immediately triggering repression. Exploring this case sheds light on why certain Islamic actors are perceived as socially useful or politically threatening.

Regardless of how subtle and critical the differences are between Islamic and Islamist approaches, and how difficult it can be to categorize a particular group as an Islamic group with no political orientation, many scholars would argue that the Nursi movement follows an entirely different school of thought than the National Outlook Movement. The target here is not to judge who belongs to what, but to highlight the differences between the two movements and to what extent they were connected and overlapped, both theoretically and empirically. A breakdown and introduction to the Nursi Movement's school of thought and approach should be provided to differentiate between the two movements. As explained in the earlier section, the Nursi Movement emerged and was politically active towards the end of the Ottoman rule (Sahin, 2011, p. 226). The renewal movement believed in fitting Quranic texts to the modern context. Even in the time of secularizing the state and amid the crackdown on every Islamic institution and practice, the founder of the movement, Said Nursi, chose to avoid direct clashes with the authority and to work implicitly

on protecting the identity of Muslims (Sahin, 2011, p. 226). On this note, Hendrick (2009) provides a helpful explanation for why some Islamic movements choose to be active implicitly or only on a societal level, without penetrating political life (p. 343). Hendrick (2009) connected this phenomenon to the Gramscian passive revolution (p. 343). By this concept, Gramsci referred to the gradual social transformation/penetration without challenging/changing the political authority (Hendrick, 2009, p. 344). According to Gramsci, less powerful groups attempt to change society by gradually infiltrating essential institutions, such as the media and education, to reproduce their superstructure (Hendrick, 2009, p. 344).

I argue that applying the passive revolution concept to the approach of the Nursi Movement is greatly accurate, as the groups that sprang from it, namely the Gülen movement, focused more on societal developments rather than acquiring political authority. One can argue that both the National Outlook Movement and Nursi Movement targeted changing the very nature of the secular state and recreating an Islamic one, but with different approaches to this goal. This argument might be valid to a great extent due to the complicated and interconnected interactions between the followers of both ideological movements. For this purpose, we will focus on the Gülen movement as one of the leading groups derived from the Nursi movement. The Gülen or Hizmet movement was established in the late 1960s by Fethullah Gülen to serve the community and spread Islamic teaching in a non-political way, as quoted by the movement's followers (Hendrick, 2009, p. 352). Nevertheless, it is essential to note here that in Cetin's (2012) book "*Questions and Answers on the Gülen Movement,*" a book that summarizes the field research he has done on the movement, there were a couple of answers, I argue, that contradict the announced purpose of "serving the community." As quoted by the followers, "Hizmet deals with human needs at the cultural and spiritual level. This provides help and support for individuals against the imposition of lifestyles that do not provide them with the cultural basis for their self-identification" (Cetin, 2012, p. 39). On that note, they also answered that "the institutionalization of services represents an important method of linking society's past and present culture. It also indicates people's need for unity between their culture and modernity" (Cetin, 2012, p. 39). These quotes demonstrate that their mission also encompassed cultural and political dimensions, as they aimed to preserve the roots and mitigate the impact of modernity. Such formulations suggest that even ostensibly apolitical service provision can carry an implicit project of cultural and normative reconstruction, blurring

the boundary between “religious” and “political” activism in ways that are central to this dissertation’s focus on regime threat perception.

With these goals, the Gülen movement began by publishing periodicals that discussed scientific and religious issues, as well as hosting talks and seminars, thereby providing a wide and varied base of supporters (Hendrick, 2009, p. 345). In the early 1980s, during the peak of the Islamic nationalism synthesis, the soft integration of media and periodicals evolved into actual educational institutions. Gulen established many private schools, which were, on the one hand, built by an Islamic group while, on the other hand, they were obliged by the state to keep religion out of the curricula (Hendrick, 2009, p. 345). By the 1990s, the group services had taken an international turn, establishing their schools in many African countries, Asia, the USA, and Western Europe. As a symbol of soft power, the developer, Gülen, was authorized to organize campaigns where intellectuals, academicians, and politicians gathered to discuss solving critical economic issues and the clashes between political factions (Hendrick, 2009, p. 346). Based on that, they had strong connections with various political parties, which allowed them to be softly engaged in politics without directly running for elections. As it will be indicated later, the trajectory of the Gülen movement had many turmoils that swung from having a solid popular base to political conflicts to a honeymoon phase with the AKP to the final stage of being announced as a terrorist group.

The trajectories of Islamic activism in Egypt and Turkey reflect the cumulative effects of nation-building, institutional restructuring, and the evolution of regimes’ control over religious authority. In both contexts, regimes attempted to monopolize religious authority, whether through the co-optation of Egypt’s Al-Azhar or Turkey’s assertive secularization, yet these efforts inadvertently produced the conditions under which autonomous Islamic actors thrived. Reformist intellectuals, charitable networks, and political movements gained influence precisely because formal religious institutions were weakened, politicized, or mistrusted by society.

Across both cases, Islamic activism adapted to the constraints and opportunities presented by the state, learning to operate at times through social service networks and at other times through political mobilization or community-based religious education. These forms of activism were not uniform: Egypt witnessed the institutional consolidation of charitable and political Islam under organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya, while Turkey experienced the growth of community-centered movements, including Nurcu networks, and the

ascent of Mili Görüş as a political challenge to the secular center. Yet in both settings, the evolution of Islamic activism reflected broader societal tensions between secular elites and peripheral constituencies, between state authority and grassroots legitimacy, and between efforts to control religion and the persistent demand for moral and social representation.

These historical dynamics illuminate a central insight: authoritarian regimes do not confront Islamic movements as neutral actors, but as products of their own earlier strategies of co-optation and exclusion. Moments of state weakness or ideological crisis typically opened space for Islamic activism, while phases of consolidation encouraged tighter regulation and politicized repression. The patterns of tolerance, co-optation, and confrontation observed throughout the twentieth century thus established the institutional and normative foundations that shaped how later regimes, from Mubarak and Sisi in Egypt to the post-1980 Turkish state and ultimately the AKP, interpreted and responded to Islamic movements.

By ending the narrative in the 1980s, this chapter sets the stage for the period when Islamic activism underwent its most significant expansion and became central to authoritarian strategies of governance. The subsequent chapters build on this historical foundation to examine the conditions under which regimes tolerated certain movements, such as al-Jamyia al-Shar'iyya in Egypt or the Gülen movement in Turkey, while prohibiting, dismantling, or repressing others. The patterns traced here thus provide the conceptual and empirical backdrop for the dissertation's central inquiry into the determinants of authoritarian tolerance and prohibition of Islamic actors.

Chapter Four

Modern State-Society Relations in Egypt and Turkey

This chapter examines how authoritarian regimes in Egypt and Turkey have managed their relationships with society, particularly with religious and civic actors, to sustain power and legitimacy in the face of changing political and economic conditions. By tracing these evolving interactions over time, the chapter seeks to uncover the historical roots of contemporary regime strategies, showing how patterns of accommodation and repression toward Islamic movements are part of a broader and recurring logic of state control over civil society. Framed through the concepts of the authoritarian bargain and patron–client dynamics, the analysis situates the regimes' engagement with religion and welfare provision within the wider context of authoritarian adaptation and state-society bargaining.

The chapter argues that these shifting relationships reflect not a coherent master plan, but a form of bounded rationality, where regimes adjust their behavior under uncertainty to preserve authority amid declining state capacity and eroding social contracts. Across both Egypt and Turkey, few interrelated patterns emerge. First**,** the authoritarian bargain is fluid: rulers continuously recalibrate the balance between coercion, welfare provision, and ideological legitimation. Second, religion can serve as a regime-instrumentalized tool, employed through co-optation, alliance, or bureaucratic control to reinforce power. Third, the outsourcing of welfare provision to religious and civic organizations has repeatedly produced unintended consequences, granting these actors moral authority and social influence that regimes later sought to contain. Ultimately**,** despite their distinct historical trajectories, Egypt and Turkey have converged on a similar mode of governance, characterized by dominant ruling parties, blurred boundaries between the state and party, and the instrumental use of religion to justify authoritarian consolidation.

By tracing these patterns across time, the chapter demonstrates that the current strategies of repression and selective tolerance are a manifestation of authoritarian stabilization, a reconfiguration of control in which regimes adapt mechanisms of repression, co-optation, welfare

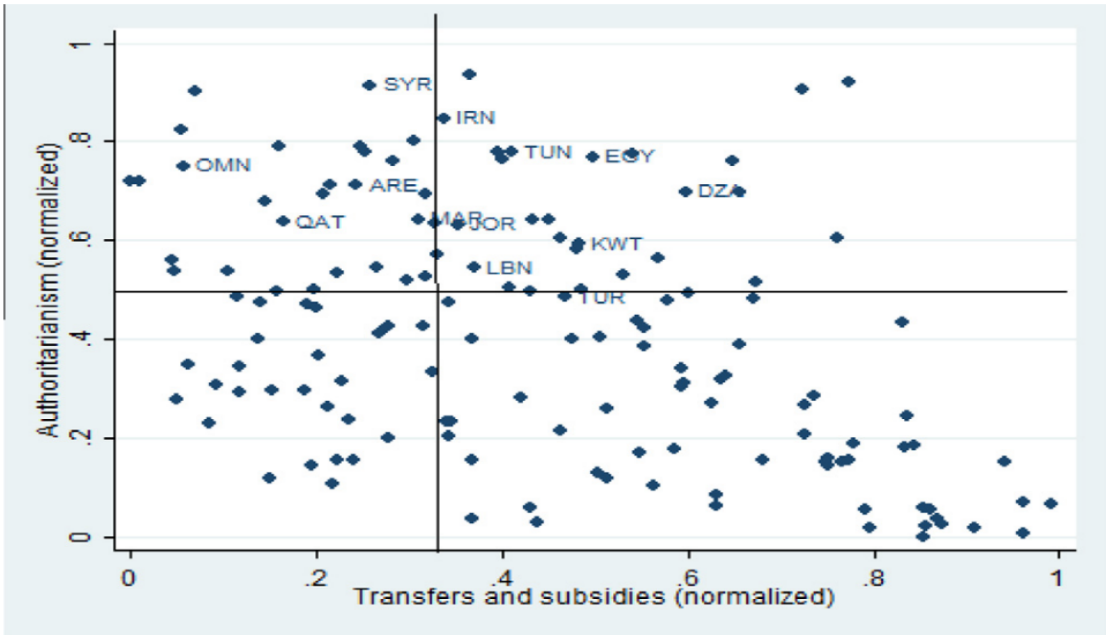
provision, and religious management to sustain their rule under new social and economic constraints.

Theoretical Perspectives on the Social Contracts in Authoritarian Regimes

Since this chapter seeks to trace the historical and conceptual roots of authoritarian regime strategies, this section examines how the idea of the social contract has been theorized in the context of the Middle East. Rather than treating the social contract as a static exchange between rulers and ruled, the section explores how scholars have linked its changing forms to shifting strategies of authoritarian governance. Much of the literature initially framed the MENA social contract within the authoritarian–redistributive model, in which regimes secured compliance through state employment, subsidies, and welfare provision in exchange for political support (Rougier, 2015, p. 150). Over time, however, the erosion of this redistributive capacity and the rise of neoliberal reforms prompted new interpretations that highlight how regimes recalibrated their legitimacy strategies, outsourcing welfare, invoking religion, and expanding coercive control, to preserve power.

Rougier (2015) argues that the authoritarian-distributive approach can best describe the nature of the social contract in the Middle East (p. 150). The post-independence circumstances of some of the MENA countries created the model of the developmental and welfare states. In such a model, typically, the public trades off their political rights for socio-economic privileges (Rougier, 2015, p. 150). These socio-economic privileges are, in this model, primarily controlled by the state through its direct intervention and distribution authority. Hence, the distribution of resources lays the foundation for the social contract in the Middle East. As the provider of services, the state was swiftly granted the support of at least the middle and lower economic classes. Even during financial crises, less affluent MENA countries faced the dilemma of removing subsidies on some goods, subsidizing others, and reducing the quality of others, as "distribution" is a prerequisite for political support (Rougier, 2015, p. 151). The other pillar of the social contract is the role of the public. Political rights and freedoms are sacrificed in exchange for the safety and services provided by the state. Despite liberalization efforts, the state would always devise a complex mechanism and repressive security to counterbalance those endeavors. To summarize Rougier's argument, some MENA countries experienced relatively high levels of authoritarianism and redistribution, which

shaped the nature of the social contract in the region (2015, p. 152). The dots in Figure 1 illustrate the correlation between these two variables,



(Rougier, 2015, p. 152)

Many scholars have referred to this authoritarian bargain as a social contract perfectly capable of explaining the dynamics between the state and society. However, Feldmann and Mazepus (2018) touched upon the intersection of the authoritarian bargain social contract and the role of political culture. The authors defined political culture as "the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which define the situation in which a political action would take place; it provides the subjective orientation to politics" (Feldmann & Mazepus, 2018, p. 60).

When applying this abstract definition in the context of authoritarian regimes, the public's mentality and behavior usually slow down the process of restructuring the political culture when needed. For example, the slow changes in beliefs towards the political system or extreme political conservatism create a path-dependent culture that can be inherited and manipulated by the regime in power, although it may change if the material conditions sustaining it are altered (Feldmann & Mazepus, 2018, p. 61). Accordingly, sustaining a single social contract for an extended period is feasible for authoritarian regimes to maintain their power. Feldman and Mazepus (2018)

highlighted a significant point that has been overlooked by some scholars: how this authoritarian-redistributive social contract pressures the regime itself. Authoritarian regimes being bound by this contract leave no room for any decay in their distributive capabilities (P. 62).

Linking this observation to the cases under study, authoritarian regimes that deliberately allow Islamic movements to function are a means of maintaining these social services whenever the regime is unable to fulfill its part of the social contract. This way, potential social unrest resulting from economic hardships will be avoided as much as possible. With this authoritarian-redistributive contract serving as a path-dependent approach to the state-society relationship, the public's perception of democracy versus authoritarianism shifts in favor of the authoritarian regime in power.

The leader in such a contract has savior and paternalistic attributes; accordingly, having a leader with these characteristics is necessary for stabilizing their country and deterring potential enemies (Pipes, 2004, p.12). I argue that Pipes's (2004) arguments add another critical layer to Feldman and Mazepus's (2018) argument regarding the social contract, as the constant provision of services is not the only indicator of the regime's survival, but also the paternalistic narratives used by the government. So, legitimacy, in some cases, is not necessarily attached to the output the state generates.

However, under neoliberal reforms and austerity pressures, many authoritarian states began outsourcing welfare provision to non-state actors, including Islamic organizations. These groups filled the gaps left by the state's retrenchment and gained growing influence within society. When their autonomy began to challenge the regime's control over patronage and legitimacy, the state responded by recentralizing service provision, often through coercive measures or direct shutdowns. This observation explains why the current regimes in Egypt and Turkey relied on the narrative of "saving the state" when they shut down service providers, and to what extent this narrative sustained the regimes' legitimacy.

State-Society Relations in Modern Egypt

Regulating Religious Spheres

The core of this study is to observe the fluctuations in the carrot-and-stick strategy that Egyptian regimes have employed toward religious institutions and movements, as well as the manipulation of religion to sustain their rule. These fluctuations were manifested in the regimes' deliberate choices over when to extend limited freedoms to Islamic movements and when to restrict them in order to prevent the emergence of an alternative authority. While these shifts demonstrate the strategic use of religion as a tool of governance, they also reflect a deeper ideological struggle over who holds the right to define and represent Islam in the public sphere. This section examines how successive Egyptian regimes have navigated the boundaries of tolerance and repression toward Islamic actors, thereby illuminating the conditions under which authoritarian rulers perceived religion as a resource to be instrumentalized or as a threat to be contained. Through this lens, it traces how patterns of control, co-optation, and confrontation evolved in Egypt's modern history, culminating in Sisi's consolidation, and reveals the long-term foundations of the regime's current stance toward Islamic movements.

In Egypt, the regime's relationship with Islamic movements has long been shaped by competing claims to religious authority. The state projects itself as the guardian of a "moderate" and institutionalized Islam, primarily through Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Religious Endowments, while portraying Islamist movements as politicized distortions of faith. This ideological divide allows the regime to legitimize both its selective cooperation with certain religious actors and its repression of others, framing its actions as the defense of national and religious integrity rather than mere political control.

McCallum (2012) illustrated this phenomenon by breaking down the relationship between authoritarian regimes and religious institutions into "support and resistance" (p. 110). The support usually stems from the regime and the religious institutions seeking benefits from their cooperation, for instance, reclaiming or preserving religion as a component of the national identity, or the more frequent scenario of fighting the same enemy. This scenario occurred in many authoritarian states where communism experienced significant growth in the middle of the last century, and where both actors worked to undermine the communist power. Moving to the other

category, resistance, in this case, religious institutions represent the opposition and fight to defend human rights (McCallum, 2012, p. 111). Representing the opposition is crucial, as the patron-client approach is often established through it. The regime is aware that religious institutions/movements might be politicized and mobilize public support due to their relevance to the public. Hence, the regime attempts to co-opt these institutions/movements so it can contain their power. This co-optation manifests in the allocation of privileges to religious organizations, which, in turn, mobilize their influence and social authority to legitimize the regime's decisions (McCallum, 2012, p. 112).

Nevertheless, as Wickham (2000) argued, the shifts from these two strategies are not static, and the regimes can switch between them when needed (p. 212). This conclusion by Wickham (2000) is highly relevant to this study, as it also challenges the assumptions of the regimes as permanent rational actors. Throughout this chapter, the modern history of the state's policies towards religion, the public sphere, and public service delivery is examined to understand the shift in the regime's approach. By juxtaposing support and resistance within this framework, these studies reveal how the regime's strategies were reactive rather than systematically designed long-term policy.

The way authoritarian regimes perceive threats and formulate strategies toward Islamic movements during times of instability is, to a great extent, shaped by the relationship between the state and religion within its broader political and societal contexts (McCallum, 2012, p. 112). Looking at the intersection of faith, state structures, societal forces, and political mobilization clarifies why the regimes in Egypt and Turkey have shown such acute sensitivity toward movements with a religious, particularly Islamic, orientation. This sensitivity is largely rooted in the capacity of these movements to mobilize autonomous networks of followers, charities, and financial resources outside the control of the state. Their ability to provide social services and articulate moral authority grants them a degree of legitimacy that competes with the regime's own claims to represent and protect society (McCallum, 2012, p. 112). This dynamic reveals the inherent vulnerability of authoritarian governance: any actor capable of organizing social legitimacy independently of the state becomes a significant concern, regardless of its formal political stance.

As explained in detail in the chapter on the history of Islamic activism, since the Islamic openness of Egypt and until the Ottoman rule, religion in Egyptian society became a constituent part of the national identity. However, the state's early twentieth-century decision to institutionalize religion through Al-Azhar and to subordinate religious authority to state control laid the groundwork for long-standing contention with Islamist actors. From the 1920s onward, movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood began challenging this monopoly by offering alternative interpretations of Islam and mobilizing their own constituencies (Warburg, 1982, p. 2). This struggle over religious authority has since become a central axis of state–society relations in Egypt. Thus, religion and religious institutions and movements were either utilized by the regime or deterred entirely if necessary (Warburg, 1982, p. 2). This duality demonstrates how the regime's relationship with religion was largely moving between instrumentalization and suppression, depending on whether religious institutions could be contained under state authority or not.

At the beginning of the last century, with the rise of the Muslim Brothers as a form of resistance against British occupation and during the decline of the Ottoman Empire, Islam was revitalized in society as a means of countering occupation. Based on that, Al Azhar, the leading Islamic institution, took an anti-secular stand; hence, Kings Fouad and Farouq sided with Al Azhar and adopted a pan-Islamic approach (Warburg, 1982, p. 2). Moving to the opposite case, where the post-independence secular approach took over as a dominant political thought, and Pan-Islamism became less popular. During the 1960s and early 1970s, the political leadership employed less religious rhetoric in their policymaking and speeches (Warburg, 1982, p. 3). The dominant imprint in Nasser's speeches, for example, was Pan-Arabism and socialist inclination, with little reference to religious principles. However, Islam was later used as a counterforce to modernity and Western ideologies (Warburg, 1982, p. 4).

This resulted in more integration of Islam into Egypt's internal and foreign policies during Sadat's era. Not only was the urge of the society to return to Islam as an identity the leading force for having more Islamic orientation in Sadat's rule, but also fighting communism was another driving force. Since the internal and international socio-political trends were oriented against communism, Sadat's policy-making and speeches coincided with the requirements of the time (Abul-Latif, 2011, p. 2). Such a transformation in policy-making and discourse from Nasser's to Sadat's era demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between the state and religion when they coexist

in a highly conservative society like Egypt's. Religion was undermined and almost fought against by Nasser's regime, and it went to the other extreme by Sadat's regime, where it was a tool for dominance. (Abul-Latif, 2011, p. 2)

Sadat aimed to radically change the structure of the previous political system by shifting the international alliance and reorienting the economic system towards a capitalist one. However, the main obstacle was the communist ideology. According to the regime's perspective, ideology should be fought against by another ideology; hence, Islamic rhetoric was present in the discourse, and Islamic movements reappeared in the social and political arena. Many of the Islamic groups' members were released from jail, and they received financial support from the regime to rebuild their movements (Abul-Latif, 2011, p. 3). Regarding discourse analysis, Abdul-Latif (2011) argued that President Sadat often began or concluded his speeches with Qur'anic verses (p. 12). Abdul-Latif (2011) analyzed some of Sadat's discourse and found that the verses were very well chosen and altered. Sadat excluded words, stressed others, and added his interpretations of the verses to suit the occasion of the speech (Abul-Latif, 2011, p. 13). Sadat was, more importantly, referred to as "the Believer President" by the media to highlight the difference between him and the secular regime of Nasser (Elghayesh, 2016, p. 336). Sadat's selective embrace of Islamism thus reflected a bounded rationality: a short-term effort to consolidate legitimacy and counter ideological rivals, without a clear strategy for managing the long-term empowerment of religious actors.

Moving to a similar yet more updated interaction with religion during Mubarak's era. During the 1970s, Sadat pursued a deliberate policy of religious liberalization, allowing the Muslim Brotherhood to reemerge as a social and political force after years of repression under Nasser (Elghayesh, 2016, p. 336). This opening extended to the growing Islamist student groups, notably al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, which were tolerated and even indirectly encouraged to counterbalance leftist activism on university campuses. While this strategy temporarily consolidated Sadat's position and bolstered his image as the "Believer President," it also empowered actors whose ideological ambitions increasingly diverged from the regime's own project (Elghayesh, 2016, p. 336). The radicalization of these movements ultimately culminated in Sadat's assassination in 1981, illustrating the unintended consequences of instrumentalizing religion for political control. The assassination of Sadat by the Islamists reshaped the interactions between the Islamists and the regime (Elghayesh, 2016, p. 336).

Mubarak did not pursue the same plan of integrating Islamists into politics; instead, he aimed to maintain the same religious identity in society while substituting the activities of the Islamists with government-controlled ones (Elghayesh, 2016, p. 337). In doing so, Mubarak relied heavily on state religious institutions such as Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Endowments to propagate a domesticated form of Islamism aligned with regime interests. Prominent clerics and preachers from within these institutions articulated a conservative yet loyalist discourse, presenting the regime as the legitimate guardian of religion while delegitimizing oppositional Islamists (Elghayesh, 2016, p. 337). This approach blurred the boundaries between state Islam and controlled Islamism, allowing the regime to sustain public religiosity while containing political spaces. This balancing act reflects the authoritarian dilemma: maintaining social legitimacy through religion while preventing religion from becoming a source of autonomous political mobilization.

It is worth noting that the instrumentalization of Islam was relatively intense in Mubarak's era since the usage of religion and the activities of Islamic movements were all working for the benefit of the state. To achieve that goal, the regime used "the media, education, legislation, and the toleration of some Islamic opposition figures" (Elghayesh, 2016, p. 338). Starting in the 1980s, the number of religious shows and the appearance of preachers on TV increased relatively; however, due to the difficulty of instrumentalizing Islam vs. Losing control over Islamists, the usage of religious speech in Mubarak's discourse was inconsistent compared to Sadat. In this sense, Elghayesh (2016) conducted a lengthy discourse analysis of Muabarak's speeches. For example, an intense usage of Qur'anic verses in Mubarak's speeches in the early stage of his rule was a necessity to provide a counter-moderate model to that of the Islamists. Then, the Islamic reference in his speeches declined gradually (Elghayesh, 2016, p. 340). To sum up, the instrumentalization of Islam in Mubarak's speech was explicit during the times of Islamic extremism/terrorism, and it was less direct in the relatively peaceful periods.

Since the chapter on the history of Islamic activism examines the ups and downs that Islamic movements experienced in the last century, this section will explore the strategies adopted by the state to control Islamic actors. During the modern era, the relationship between the state and religious movements has become more intricate, with the state employing increasingly sophisticated methods to regulate and contain Islamism. Gramsci's notion of counter-hegemony

offers valuable insight into the roots of this complexity, shedding light on how power is negotiated and contested between state authorities and Islamist actors. Counter-hegemony refers to the emergence of an ideology that aims to challenge or counterbalance a prominent ideology (Kandil, 2011, p. 44). Islamism, therefore, should not be seen simply as a counter-ideology to a secular regime, but as a rival project competing for the authority to define and deploy Islam as a source of legitimacy and social order (Kandil, 2011, p. 44). Although this chapter and section specifically focus on the perception of the state and the change in its methodology as the patron in the "patron-client" relationship, it is essential to examine how fluctuations in the Islamist approach led to a shift in the state's threat perception.

One of the clearest examples of Islamism as a manifestation of counter-hegemony in Egypt is the Muslim Brotherhood. One of the reasons why the MB was established in the first place was to challenge the British occupation and contain any possibility of secularization by the occupation. Thus, the government had to shut down the MB in response to the pressure posed by the occupation (Kandil, 2011, p. 45). In the case of the Monarchy, the regime responded to the external pressure and accordingly chose to repress the Islamists. Additionally, the MB developed a paramilitary wing, which left no room for co-optation by the regime or potential cooperation with it (Kandil, 2011, p. 46).

After the coup and the independence, the MB expected that the new regime would adopt Islam as a state ideology. However, Nasser adopted various ideologies, including Arabism, nationalism, and socialism (Wickham, 2002, p. 15). The regime sought to monopolize religion as part of its modernization and nation-building project, incorporating conservative religious discourses under state supervision while excluding autonomous Islamist actors (Wickham, 2002, p. 15). As a result of the confrontation style adopted by the regime, the MB challenged state power through intense mobilization and assassination attempts. The regime accordingly chose to use the stick method. The MB was dissolved, and the leaders were jailed (Wickham, 2002, p. 15). During Sadat's era, in response to the rise of communism in the 1960s and 1970s, Sadat decided to tolerate the Islamists, who would challenge the communists on one hand, and as part of the political correctness wave. With the radicalization of some Islamist movements and the assassination of Sadat, Mubarak adopted the modernization-participation strategy through which the less radical groups, like the MB, were allowed to participate in political life to eliminate the power of the radicals (Wickham, 2002, p. 17). In line with Gramsci's notion of counter-hegemony, the state's

reinforcement of the security apparatus and the marginalization of Islamist participation in political life compelled Islamist movements to adopt a more restrained and less confrontational strategy. Penetrating civil society and the services provision sector was a stabilizing technique for the Islamists' ideology. Gramsci, in his concept of counter-hegemony, argued that a "subordinate group", in this case the Islamists, cannot suddenly and directly aspire to be the hegemon, but rather gradually and through providing ideological alternatives and practices to the prevailing one (Wickham, 2002, p. 18).

To sustain the counter-hegemonic ideology, the Islamists sought to introduce a new model for the "perfect Muslim" that would make people who are already Muslim question whether they are good Muslims or not, then gradually raise skepticism about the politics of the rulers and highlight the flaws of the decision-makers (Wickham, 2002, p. 18). Afterward comes the step of gathering people around their ideology and representing the collective will of the public (Wickham, 2002, p. 18). Although these cultural penetration strategies were evident to the regime, "rational choice" was the source of its decision-making. According to the regime, tolerating them is a win-win situation as long as the Islamists act within the boundaries of these cultural and ideological spheres and do not directly threaten the regime politically (Kandil, 2011, p. 47).

Kandil (2011) argues that even tolerating the cultural penetration or ideological revival by the Islamists benefited the regime, as it kept the public occupied by questioning and developing their identity and ideology, rather than focusing on their political rights and criticizing the rulers (p. 50). Nevertheless, the Islamists succeeded in infiltrating political life due to the opposition's weakness and to the representation and mediation roles they claimed. For instance, MB infiltrated political life and almost every field of soft power and civil society, such as education, media, charity work, and syndicates (Kandil, 2011, p. 50). The moderation-participation strategy of Mubarak shifted to a more aggressive one with the parliamentary elections of the 1990s, during which the MB and their allied parties gained many votes (Kandil, 2011, p. 54). More importantly, the terrorist attacks implemented by the radical Islamists in the 1990s pushed the regime to suppress the MB and their potential allies. Regarding syndicates and educational institutions, Mubarak's regime issued Law 100 of 1993, which increased government oversight of the electoral process and even granted the government the right to directly appoint deans and chairs. On a similar note, Mubarak ordered the parliament to add an article in the constitution prohibiting "religiously-based activities" (Kandil,

2011, p. 54). The regime aimed at politically excluding the Islamists and limiting them, as much as possible, to charitable channels. The change in the regime's strategy from implicit to explicit confrontations was reflected in Mubarak's discourse, where he stated on multiple occasions that the Islamists, especially the MB, constitute a threat to national security (Meijer, 2005, p. 280). However, it is significant to note here that the state's coercion did not reach the stage of completely blocking the Islamists from societal interactions as long as they were interfering directly in politics (Meijer, 2005, p. 280). This method of punctuated pluralism provided an opportunity for Islamists to gain more power by transforming economic and social disadvantages into spheres of opportunity and shelter for struggling citizens (Meijer, 2005, p. 280). This pattern captures the core dynamic at the heart of this study: regimes tolerated Islamist activity as long as it served social stability, yet their recurring overreactions to perceived threats reveal a bounded logic of authoritarian adaptation.

The Fluidity of Authoritarian Bargain: Social contract and political culture

Understanding the evolution of Egypt's current state–society relations requires examining the social and cultural foundations that shape the regime's approach to governance. This section examines the interplay between the social contract and political culture in shaping the boundaries of state authority, social participation, and religious expression. In doing so, it highlights how notions of citizenship and belonging have provided both the justification and the social basis for the regime's regulation of Islamic movements. The analysis demonstrates that the social contract in Egypt has not only influenced the state's choices at certain points in history, determining when Islamic activism is tolerated or curtailed, but also shaped **societal acceptance** of these decisions by embedding obedience, hierarchy, and moral legitimacy within the broader political culture.

The attempt to establish a modern state was first initiated during the liberal experiment between 1922 and the coup of 1952 (Steuer, 2015, p. 242). This project, however, was short-lived due to the regime's failure to achieve social equality and, more significantly, the constraints imposed by the British occupation. As a consequence of this failure, the 1952 coup occurred. At its outset, the Muslim Brotherhood supported the military, anticipating a new phase in which the secular project would no longer dominate the political sphere. Nevertheless, Nasser subsequently sought to curtail the potential of Islamist activities (Steuer, 2015, p. 242). His approach was to sustain the idea of

the nation-state and appeal to all classes without excluding any social or economic strata. Nasser promoted social equality programs and employed an appealing discourse that fostered a sense of citizenship (Steuer, 2015, p. 242). The following charts clarify that Nasser delivered over 1000 speeches, all of which served that purpose in 18 years of rule.

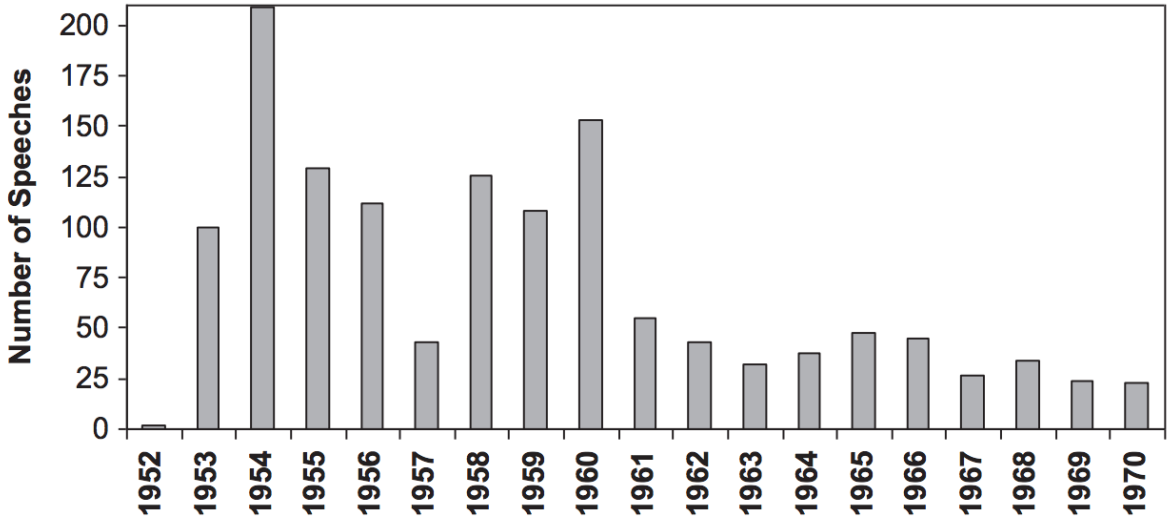


FIGURE 3.1 Nasser speeches per year (1952–1970).[16]

(Hamad, 2013, p. 79)

The rupture in the notion of citizenship emerged through the suppression of freedoms and the violation of human rights, developments that were nevertheless tolerated due to the regime's persuasive discourse and Nasser's charismatic leadership (Steuer, 2015, p. 244). Some milestones, such as the non-alignment movements, the nationalization of the Suez Canal, and the tripartite aggression, in a way, created a new sense of authoritarianism (Hamad, 2013, p. 76). By the mid-1950s, exclusive and unlimited empowering articles were added to the constitution. Even populist narratives and the portrayal of the regime as representing marginalized and less economically privileged people were used as a tool to sustain the regime's legitimacy and authority (Alterman, 2000, p. 115). Consequently, a new flavor of authoritarian political culture emerged, and it gained authority through public acceptance and the status quo (Alterman, 2000, p. 115). The primary post-coup narrative of the government was to achieve financial progress and maintain security. Nevertheless, political life was falling apart since no opposition party was allowed, and public debates were never tolerated. Security, economic, and political resources were dedicated to suppressing any potential threat from the Islamists or other forms of opposition (Alterman, 2000,

p. 116). The deterioration of political and social life was overlooked, as even minor developments in the country were amplified in significance against the backdrop of the severe conditions created by seventy years of British occupation (Hamad, 2013, p. 77). Utilizing media was one of the most essential tools for authoritarian resilience at this time. The arts sector was tailored to praise Nasser's achievements and frame him as the savior of the nation (Hamad, 2013, p. 78). Within his 18 years of rule, Nasser marked the beginning of the state's exchange of security and stability for political rights and freedoms. A new approach to political authority replaced the other inherited ruling approaches (Hamad, 2013, p. 80).

Moreover, the tight control over financial resources placed additional pressure on civil society associations, almost disabling any possibility of activity. The absence of a practical or partially functioning civil society, coupled with Nasser's authoritarian censorship, made the dream of democratization nearly impossible (Hamad, 2013, p. 83). Hamad (2013) conducted a discourse analysis of Nasser's speech on the Revolution Day, and he found that "freedom" was the most recurring concept in the speeches, followed by "democracy" and "justice" (p. 83). "Freedom was mentioned 224 times or about 13 mentions a year; Democracy came a distant second with 117 citations, lastly justice with 106 references" (Hamad, 2013, p. 84). By "freedom," Nasser referred to the nation as a whole and as a post-independence slogan with no reference to individual freedoms. The only reference to freedom in Nasser's speech on a micro-level is emancipation from poverty. Similarly, justice referred not to any legal aspect, but rather to social justice and equality. Democracy, on a similar note, was primarily linked to the concept of social justice in many speeches aimed at transforming the ethos of democracy from political liberalism to one of equality (Hamad, 2013, p. 85).

Regarding the argument of political culture and its relationship to state-society relations, the policies and discourse of Nasser effectively marginalized "political and legal liberalism" from public discussion (Hamad, 2013, p. 86). Not only were the people scared of the consequences of speaking up, but political and legal liberty values gradually became a less relevant component of the Egyptian political culture. Prioritizing material privileges over nonmaterial or political ones is a culture that was enforced by Nasser's policies and has endured, more or less, to this day (Hamad, 2013, p. 86).

As argued above, the public accepted this trade-off between political freedom, stability, and social justice, which was a key factor in the success of Nasser's authoritarianism. Nevertheless, Sadat lacked two critical elements in this equation: social justice and economic privileges, both of which were undermined by the neoliberal reforms (Hamad, 2013, p. 113). He sought to fill this gap by Islamizing his discourse, a strategy that resonated with a public still recovering from the 1967 defeat. At the same time, he emphasized rhetoric centered on democratization and liberalization, themes that had been marginalized mainly under Nasser (Hamad, 2013, p. 114). In short, Sadat's period did not significantly change the social contract established by Nasser. Still, the public gave up their political rights for economic privileges, and this observation was particularly suitable during the time of Sadat, due to the deteriorating economic conditions (Pratt, 2006, p. 78). Notably, one of the significant changes in the state-society relation was the liberalization project, through which political Islam rose to the surface. Efforts to liberalize society and promote political correctness have not led to the development of an active and independent civil society. Civil society organizations were not only suppressed, but the post-1952 regimes also actively demonized them, portraying such organizations as a threat to Egyptian sovereignty (Pratt, 2006, p. 78). Consequently, many citizens came to view civil society as a tool of Western influence and a danger to Egyptian traditions, particularly because these associations often received funding from abroad. Statistically, many civil society organizations have resorted to external funding due to a lack of national support. Within large-scale civil society organizations, social services organizations were implicitly allowed to receive external funds, which, in another context, was a ground for criticism of human rights organizations (Pratt, 2006, p. 78).

As explained above, sustaining the "authoritarian bargain" social contract needed strategic planning from the regimes' side. Multiple updates to the contract had to be introduced constantly. When Nasser came to power, he relied on the narratives of nationalism, social justice, and pan-Arabism, which people most needed after independence. These narratives were not suitable for the time of Sadat, when political Islam and neo-liberalism rose. Sadat introduced updates to open-door policies and Islamic rhetoric to cope with the political and social advancements. I would argue that Mubarak largely failed to update the social contract through meaningful economic, social, and political reforms, a failure that served as a primary trigger for the 2011 unrest. He maintained that democracy was unsuitable for the Egyptian context and continued Sadat's approach of controlled pluralism. Notably, Mubarak frequently asserted that earlier attempts to establish a liberal political

system in Egypt, prior to the 1952 coup, had failed because neither Egyptian politicians nor the general population were prepared for liberalism. The persistent conflicts and competing interests both between and within political parties further demonstrated that leaders were unable to adequately represent popular demands, instead prioritizing their own agendas (Bhuiyan, 2015, p. 499).

In practice, during Mubarak's era, formal pluralism was largely superficial, although, on paper, the political system was described as multiparty. The National Democratic Party (NDP) was the ruling party, with Mubarak's son as the upper hand in the committee (Bhuiyan, 2015, p. 500). The parliament granted unprecedented powers to the regime by renewing the emergency law, which allows for the shutdown or prevention of any political activity (Bhuiyan, 2015, p. 500). This law was justified internationally and nationally by the narrative of fighting terrorism and stabilizing the nation. This narrative had a substantial impact on the public, as it encouraged tolerance of rights violations under the guise of protecting national security. During the eras of Nasser and Sadat, especially after the 1977 riots, the public largely accepted this narrative due to the regimes' economic initiatives, which sought to meet popular needs. In contrast, poor economic governance from the 1990s until 2011 became a central factor in the collapse of Mubarak's social contract. Some national charities attempted to address financial needs, making their efforts comparable to the aid provided by international organizations (Bhuiyan, 2015, p. 502). Despite national and global efforts to meet the public's needs, poverty and unemployment increased, and civil liberties were largely absent (Bhuiyan, 2015, p. 502).

The previous arguments and observations were endeavors to analyze the impact of the regimes' discourse and laws on reshaping the political culture of Egyptians. For a more precise analysis of the state-society relationship, the following section will operationalize the degree to which the political culture can be labeled as "democratic." Buhyian (2015) operationalized the public's tendency toward democracy by measuring the presence of the three following aspects: "inclusive participation, responsive institutions, and international practices and principles" (p. 503). "Inclusive participation, according to the 2010 UNDP Democratic Governance Guide, is measured through outcomes such as political party formation, electoral politics, and civil society" (Buhyian, 2015, p. 503). Regarding political parties, the law drafted during Sadat's era theoretically gave Egyptians the right to join parties of their choice or form new political parties. Nevertheless, the practice was drastically different. Processing the applications for new parties

takes months and even years; in most cases, these requests get rejected (Buhyian, 2015, p. 503). The Political Parties Affairs Committee (PPAC) was led by members of the National Democratic Party and the Ministry of Interior; hence, a small circle of the ruling elite determined the degree of political activity. Not only were the party's laws the primary constraint on the presence and effectiveness of parties as agents of political representation, but the chaotic and inefficient party structures, along with their weak ties to the regime, also fostered skepticism among opposition party members (Bhuiyan, 2015, p. 503).

Opposition parties in Egypt can be broadly categorized into three groups. The first category is a party that got the PPAC's permission but only exists on paper. They have a limited scope of activities due to authority limitations, and they receive no funding. Their integration into the political scene is a result of the regime's will to incorporate them, driven by authority calculations. Consequently, they are unknown to Egyptian citizens because they lack political influence (Collombier, 2013, p. 3). The second category comprises parties with a more robust political stand, which were denied official licenses. These parties rely on their resources, including nongovernmental funds and the inclusion of activists. Nevertheless, they are significantly excluded from politics (Collombier, 2013, p. 3). A third category would be the parties that have been licensed; accordingly, they are part of the regime. They are partially independent as long as their political integration does not conflict with the state's will (Collombier, 2013, p. 3). Even the UNDP, until the mid-2000s, did not have a significant influence on policy-making, and it was perceived as a tool by the regime to portray itself as "democratic" (Collombier, 2013, p. 3).

After the 1952 coup, Nasser established the Arab Socialist Union, which was intended to anchor political trends and mobilize the people. This marked the first attempt to institutionalize political participation under military rule. The establishment of the multiparty system by Sadat only increased the number of parties on the surface, while they were either prevented from participating in competitive democratic elections or remained passive due to tight censorship (Collombier, 2013, p. 4). Moving to electoral politics as a second aspect of inclusive participation, the previous analysis of party types roughly explains the culture of elections in Egypt. Between the 1952 coup and the 2011 revolution, both presidential and parliamentary elections failed to reflect the interests of the Egyptian people in politics due to a lack of options and a lack of transparency (Buhyian, 2015, p. 503). The last indicator in this element is civil society. Since the entire project aims to

analyze the various modes of interaction between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements, a separate chapter on this theme will be included in this study. On this point, civil society has constantly been exposed to autonomy issues. To control civil society organizations, the Ministry of Social Solidarity had the authority to issue licenses and oversee funds and activities (Buhyian, 2015, p. 504). Therefore, having an independent voice or representation of demands was not a possibility on the real ground and disappeared accordingly from the public's aspirations. The Mubarak regime's approach to civil society was not one of monolithic repression but a calculated strategy of management designed to neuter potential opposition while harnessing useful social actors. This resulted in a deeply constrained civic sphere, categorized by a clear hierarchy of state tolerance.

The legal environment was the primary tool of control. Law 84 of 2002 granted the Ministry of Social Solidarity extensive powers to approve or dissolve NGOs, control their funding, and even appoint their board members. This legal framework ensured that any independent organization operated under the constant threat of being shut down on a vague pretext, such as "threatening national security" or "receiving foreign funding" (Pratt, 2006).

Within these constraints, civil society entities can be understood through their relationship to the state:

1. **Co-opted and Government-Organized NGOs (GONGOs):** This category included organizations led by former government ministers. These entities often received tacit state approval and access to resources. Their function was to create a veneer of vibrant civic activity while ensuring that "civil society" discourse remained within boundaries that did not challenge the regime's core interests or expose its corruption (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 122).
2. **Tolerated but Contained Service NGOs:** The largest category consisted of apolitical organizations focused on localized social services, charity, development, and professional syndicates. While subject to intense bureaucratic harassment and scrutiny, they were generally permitted to operate as long as they strictly avoided human rights advocacy or political criticism. The regime tolerated them because they alleviated social pressures and

provided essential services that the state failed to deliver, effectively outsourcing its responsibilities without ceding political ground (Clark, 2004, p. 95).

3. **Criminalized and Repressed Rights-Based NGOs:** The third and most targeted tier comprised human rights organizations, grassroots labor movements, and democracy advocacy groups. These organizations were systematically framed as agents of foreign powers seeking to undermine Egyptian sovereignty and stability. Their members faced travel bans, asset freezes, surveillance, and imprisonment under terrorism laws (Wicham, 2002, p. 112).

It was within the cracks of this repressive system, specifically within the second category of "tolerated" service providers, that the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements found their niche. By focusing on apolitical charity, they built vast social networks and earned immense public trust. The state's short-sighted strategy of allowing this activity, believing it would keep the public and the Islamists depoliticized, ultimately backfired. It allowed Islamists to build a parallel societal infrastructure whose moral authority directly challenged the state's failing legitimacy, proving that even a contained civil society could become a formidable political force (Shehata, 2010, p. 87).

The second factor in operationalizing the lack of democracy in the state-society relationship is the presence of responsive institutions. The efficiency of institutions in service delivery and the effectiveness of checks and balances are significant indicators of the degree of democracy in a political culture. Service delivery as an indicator of state efficiency will be explained in detail in the following section. Service delivery is the central pillar in Egypt's authoritarian bargain social contract. The regime is primarily responsible for meeting the economic needs of the public. For the regime to cope with the financial problems and the increasing demands, some civil society organizations were allowed to interfere and provide essential services. A study shows that Mubarak's regime could not dedicate more than 4% of the government budget to safety net programs. As a result, a considerable portion of the population lacked basic needs (Buhyian, 2015, p. 505). Lacking basic needs keeps the culture stuck in the lowest levels of the hierarchy of needs, and thus, aspiring to political rights becomes a luxury. Moving to one of the crucial government's arms, the parliament. The parliament had, de facto, no opposing power or authority to the regime

due to the unlimited powers granted to the president by the constitution. The parliament usually has the lion's share in stabilizing the regime's power by approving empowering laws such as the emergency and political parties' laws (Buhyian, 2015, p. 505). International practices and principles are the third and last category in this operationalization attempt. Among these principles and practices is the anti-corruption principle. "In the 2012 Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Report, Egypt was ranked 118th of 176 with an index of 3.2, denoting a very corrupt country" (Buhyian, 2015, p. 506). In this report, several indicators are used to measure the degree of corruption in a country, including bribery, officials using their public office for private gain without facing consequences, and the government's ability to contain corruption in the public sector[1]. Concerning bribery, as an indicator of the micro levels of the culture of corruption, issuing licenses or official documents is, in most cases, facilitated by bribes or connections. On a border scale, the absence of checks and balances and a clear separation of powers signifies the unlimited powers claimed by the regime and the entourage/elite (Buhyian, 2015, p. 506).

To sum up, political culture is a path-dependent manifestation of how the rulers and the ruled perceive each other. In the case of Egypt, the authoritarian-bargain social contract that Nasser initiated after the 1952 coup changed the political culture accordingly. With the state normalizing unlimited authority, suppressing rights, and focusing on lower needs in the hierarchy, such as food and safety, the public culture became less liberal and less demanding politically. The exchange of political rights for basic needs gave unlimited access to authoritarianism in the regime. More importantly, decisions can be justified based on the social contract and accepted by the current political culture.

Regulating Public Services' Sphere and the Unintended Consequences of Outsourcing

The regulation of public service provision offers a critical lens for understanding how authoritarian regimes in Egypt have managed societal actors and sustained their legitimacy. This section examines the boundaries between co-optation and suppression in the state's engagement with welfare and service providers, particularly religious and civic organizations, and explores how

[1] https://www.transparency.org/en/news/how-cpi-scores-are-calculated

these arrangements evolved over time. By tracing the state's shifting role from direct provider to regulator and, at times, competitor, the analysis reveals how public services became a key arena through which rulers negotiated control, delegated responsibility, and reasserted authority. The purpose of this section is to examine how the state strategically balances its dependence on non-state actors for welfare delivery with efforts to limit their autonomy, thereby illustrating the regime's changing logic of governance.

Before examining the mechanisms through which the state regulates public services, it is necessary to outline the size and structure of the Egyptian bureaucracy in relation to the quality and scope of the services it provides. The Egyptian public administration is extensive and multi-layered. "It comprises 34 ministries; two are state ministries, and the rest are cabinet ministers. It also includes 234 independent agencies for public purposes, 23 government entities, and many local units. The local units are divided into 27 governorates and 323 service directorates" (Barsoum, 2018, p. 773). Despite its impressive size, this expansive bureaucratic apparatus has not translated into an efficient or balanced system. On the contrary, it has produced institutional conflicts, weak coordination across agencies, and a bloated public wage bill that places a considerable burden on the state's budget (Barsoum, 2018, p. 773).

Moreover, the existence of multiple administrative layers has not guaranteed a genuine decentralization of power or decision-making. Bureaucracy in Egypt remains highly centralized, yet paradoxically fragmented, mirroring the authoritarian nature of the political system itself. The president wields extensive executive authority, including the power to appoint the prime minister and form the government (Barsoum, 2018, p. 773). This centralization reinforces the fusion of political and economic control, as the state retains significant influence over the marketplace. The boundaries between the public and private sectors are often blurred, with the state continuing to intervene in private investments and even regaining control of privatized firms despite liberalization, privatization, and structural adjustment programs (Barsoum, 2018, p. 774). In practice, Egypt has maintained a form of state capitalism underpinned by central authority.

This dynamic is closely tied to the authoritarian-bargain social contract that has historically defined state-society relations in much of the Middle East, particularly in Egypt. In this arrangement, the state provides social welfare and economic benefits in exchange for limiting political and social

mobilization (Ibrahim, 2021, p. 3). The origins of this bargain can be traced back to Gamal Abdel Nasser, who institutionalized redistribution policies, expanded the public sector, and created mass employment opportunities within the state bureaucracy. In return, political freedoms were sharply restricted, with the security apparatus maintaining strict surveillance and suppressing opposition (Ibrahim, 2021, p. 3).

Under Anwar Sadat, the broad contours of this social contract persisted, even as he introduced limited political openings through his *infitah* (open-door) policies. However, the economic promises underpinning the bargain began to erode. The shift toward liberalization produced rising inequality and social discontent, while political liberalization remained tightly controlled. By the time of Hosni Mubarak's long rule, the weaknesses of this arrangement had become more visible. Continuous economic crises, coupled with high levels of unemployment and declining state capacity to provide welfare, undermined the legitimacy of the regime (Wikham, 2002, p. 45). The regime's shifts between cutting welfare and selectively involving civic actors reflected short-term crisis management rather than a consistent reform plan, showing that tolerance toward Islamic charities was an authoritarian resilience strategy.

It was within this context of state retreat and economic strain that Islamic charities gained prominence. These organizations increasingly filled the gap left by the declining welfare role of the state, providing essential services such as healthcare, education, and food aid (Clark, 2004, p. 5). For the regime, the activities of these charities functioned as a "safety strategy": they alleviated public frustration, reduced the likelihood of social unrest, and helped stabilize the country despite mounting economic hardship. While they were not fully autonomous, often subject to state monitoring, they nonetheless became crucial actors in sustaining the authoritarian bargain indirectly, compensating for the government's failure to uphold its side of the exchange (Ismail, 2006, p. 150).

At the same time, the growing influence of Islamic charities, many of which were linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, carried profound political implications (Ismail, 2006, p. 150). By embedding themselves in local communities and providing services where the state had failed, these organizations not only gained moral authority but also cultivated deep networks of loyalty and trust. As Atia (2013) demonstrates, this expansion of Islamic charity reflected a form of "pious

neoliberalism," where religious giving both compensated for and legitimized the state's retreat from welfare provision (p. 59). This social legitimacy translated into political capital, strengthening the Brotherhood's role as the primary opposition force to the regime (Shehata, 2010, p. 87). In effect, the welfare gap left by the state accidentally bolstered the rise of political Islam, as citizens increasingly associated Islamic movements with reliability, social justice, and grassroots representation in contrast to the inefficiency and corruption of state institutions (Bayat, 2007, p. 15).

In summary, the size of Egypt's bureaucracy and the persistence of centralization highlight the limitations of the state's regulatory model. Despite formal reforms, the political economy of Egypt has remained defined by state dominance, blurred boundaries between public and private sectors, and an authoritarian social contract that has grown increasingly difficult to sustain. The bureaucracy, however, functions on two intertwined levels: as an instrument of executive control, monitoring civil society and regulating the provision of services, and as a patronage network that channels jobs, salaries, and selective welfare to maintain regime loyalty (Kassem, 2004, p. 62). Yet, the emergence of Islamic charities was less a byproduct of bureaucratic inefficiency than a direct result of authoritarian governance itself. As Atia (2013) shows, Islamic charitable networks maintained substantial financial and organizational autonomy, allowing the regime to outsource welfare provision while avoiding direct accountability (p. 65). The reliance on Islamic charities to supplement declining state capacity underscores how non-state actors became essential in maintaining social stability. Yet, this very reliance simultaneously empowered Islamist movements, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, whose provision of services transformed them into key political challengers, thereby reshaping Egypt's political landscape. This trajectory highlights the paradox of authoritarian adaptation: the very mechanisms designed to stabilize the regime generated autonomous power bases that later heightened regime insecurity and provoked coercive backlash.

The calculated instrumentalization of religion, from Sadat's embrace of the Muslim Brotherhood to counter the left, to Mubarak's policy of "punctuated pluralism", was a shortsighted tactic to outsource social services and manufacture legitimacy. This strategy backfired spectacularly. By allowing Islamists to embed themselves within the fabric of civil society through schools, clinics, and charities, the state inadvertently fostered a parallel socio-political entity that ultimately challenged its monopoly on power.

State-Society Relations in Modern Turkey

Understanding the Turkish case requires tracing its roots to the late Ottoman period, where the fusion of bureaucratic authority and religious legitimacy first took shape. This historical foundation shaped how later regimes, both secular and Islamist, approached the management of religion and welfare, continually negotiating the balance between state control and faith-based influence. By tracing these transformations, this section demonstrates how successive Turkish regimes redefined the relationship between religion and the state to manage social order and political stability. Rather than following a linear path from suppression to accommodation, the Turkish experience reflects recurring attempts to reshape religious authority in ways that preserve regime control while adapting to shifting societal and ideological contexts.

Regulating Religious Spheres

State-society relations in modern Turkey are more complex than the Egyptian case due to the comprehensive secularization that occurred in the 1920s. Starting from the state-religion relation as one of the micro-levels of analysis, the regime of the newly modernized state believed that changing the societal identity from an Islamic to a secular one would promote the state's development and lower the likelihood of repeating the Ottoman experience. During Ottoman rule, Islam served as a national identity and a mediator between the state and society (Yavuz, 2003, p. 38). The Qur'an and Sunna worked as a foundation of governance, shaping not only state authority but also the fabric of daily social life. Within this framework, the ulama acted as key actors between rulers and the public, while also serving as custodians of religious legitimacy by examining the Sultan's decisions to ensure their alignment with the principles of Sharia (Yavuz, 2003, p. 40). Nevertheless, the Ulama were integrated into the state's bureaucracy to keep them under the control of the Sultan, as Islam was a key source of legitimacy for the rulers (Yavuz, 2003, p. 40).

In analyzing the interplay between state, society, and religion under Ottoman rule, it is clear that Islam functioned as a practical framework rather than an abstract religion. It guided the judicial system and directly influenced the decision-making processes. From the Ottoman rulers' perspective, religion was one of the means by which to control the public's ideological and political

orientation (Yavuz, 2003, p. 42). Regardless of the solid religious ties that constructed social and political identities, the foundation for modernization/ secularization was planted in the nineteenth century (Yavuz, 2003, p. 38). The Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876) introduced administrative changes to the ruling system by establishing new state institutions, including specialized departments that oversaw education and law (Berkes, 1998, p. 74). These reforms aimed to reduce religious and racial differences among the public by replacing Islam with "Ottomanism" as the foundation of citizenship (Berkes, 1998, p. 74). Although these reforms failed due to the ever-increasing focus on external challenges, they introduced new forms of citizenship to the public (Berkes, 1998, p. 74).

Nevertheless, the Ulama opposed these reforms because, in their view, they were weakening the very nature of the Ottoman Empire. For them, Islam has always been the ideology of Ottoman rule and the reason for the society's cohesion (Yavuz, 2003, p. 45). Following the 1878 war and the loss of the Balkan region, Islamic nationalism emerged as a practical solution for the rulers to address the divisions and unrest surfacing in society (Yavuz, 2003, p. 45). Sultan Abdelhamid II employed Islam as the state's ideology, which was operationalized through the introduction of Arabic newspapers, the co-opting of Sufi order leaders, and the highlighting of Arabic culture as a means of uniting society (Yavuz, 2003, p. 45).

Interestingly, Islam was used as a political ideology in the rhetoric of Mostafa Kemal Atatürk between 1920 and 1922 to unite the population against European imperialists (Findley, 1989, p. 90). After the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the republic in 1923, the founders accepted that Western modernization was the only way to save the republic. (Findley, 1989, p. 90). "Security of secularism" was an approach for the Kemalists to achieve their aim, which was manifested in brutal opposition to public Islamic practices (Findley, 1989, p. 90). However, protecting secularism did not entail prohibiting Islam but establishing an official version of Islam, referred to as "enlightened Islam", through which the state could control the leaders and practices (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 386). This model of "state-guided Islam" bears certain parallels with Egypt's nation-building process, where the postcolonial regime similarly sought to institutionalize religion under state authority, though with no secularized approach compared to Turkey's Kemalist reforms. In this official version of Islam, there is no contradiction between religion and the modernity project, which advocates for secularism, democracy, and the separation of religion and politics (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 386). The Directorate of Religious Affairs was responsible for shaping

this “statist Islam” and controlling the connections between religious actors to prevent the emergence of alternative versions of Islam (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 386). This arrangement reveals an important paradox in the Turkish model: while formally promoting secularism, the republic actually institutionalized religion more deeply within the state apparatus. Rather than separating mosque and state, it subordinated the former to the latter, creating a bureaucratic form of control that ensured religion could serve state interests without threatening its autonomy.

Atatürk’s rhetoric on religion before the establishment of the modern republic largely supported this observation. According to Atatürk, Islam was an approach to guaranteeing social unity. The instrumentalization of religion is explained by Durkheim’s hypothesis on the relationship between religion and society. In Durkheim’s view, “any coherent society is usually based on religious collectivity” (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 387).

The elites of the modern republic believed that the state and religion should not be separated, at least in practice, and that religion should be subject to continuous state supervision. For instance, it was stated in the constitution that “Education and instruction in religion and ethics shall be conducted under state supervision and control. Instruction in religious culture and moral education shall be compulsory in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other religious education and instruction shall be subject to the individual’s desire” (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 388). Furthermore, religious institutions were incorporated into the state’s bureaucracy under the supervision of the Directorate of Religious Affairs. The Directorate of Religious Affairs, established as a core organ of the state, is formally requested by the constitution to promote social cohesion and unity, while remaining outside the sphere of political decision-making (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 388). “The directorate controls all 86,000 mosques and employs the imams, muftis, and Muezzins, who are then salaried employees of the state” (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 389).

On the one hand, the Mufti acts as a mediator between Muslims and the rulers; on the other hand, it manages the Imams of every mosque and assigns them the speeches that politicians initially prepared. Imams thus became not merely bureaucratic functionaries but carriers of the state’s ideological project. Through close monitoring and regulation, their role was confined to transmitting officially sanctioned interpretations of religious texts, leaving little space for independent interpretations or alternative voices (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 390). It was, and still, illegal to work as an Imam if not appointed by the directorate; hence, the state managed to infiltrate and

control all mosques to a great extent (Ulutas, 2010, p. 394). It is essential to note that, by law, the directorate's authority did not extend to legal institutions, schools, and religious institutions, in order to prevent the infiltration of spiritual authority in these areas (Ulutas, 2010, p. 392). On a similar note, taming the influence of Islam was essential to start at the school level, where religion had played a key role previously. The Ministry of Education was responsible for setting and unifying secular curricula to plant the notion of a "Turkish citizen" as an alternative identity to the "Muslim citizen" notion (Shively, 2008, p. 684).

The single-party rule, which lasted until 1950, eliminated any potential influence the directorate might have had. The public, as well as the directorate employees, did not tolerate strict control over religion (Ulutas, 2010, p. 392). During the Democratic Party's rule between 1950 and 1960, the state loosened its control over religion to a certain extent. With the state-religion relationship in sync, the Directorate of Religious Affairs became more autonomous without changing the organization's responsibilities (Ulutas, 2010, p. 394). From the 1960s to the 1970s, the directorate's role underwent a scholarly transformation, and it became responsible for disseminating religious education and regulating the activities of independent Islamic scholars (Ulutas, 2010, p. 394). Following the 1980 coup, the 1982 constitution added a new responsibility to the directorate: ensuring societal solidarity and coherence. It is essential to note that the directorate also played a significant role in providing social services. It contributed to running hospitals and care centers, collecting money, and distributing it to low-income families (Ulutas, 2010, p. 396). As argued in the case of Egypt, the governmental discourse always mirrored the dynamics of state and religious relations. In some cases, such as President Nasser, the discrepancy between religious and nationalist discourses indicated the authority's limited use of religion. President Sadat frequently employed religious discourse to establish a strong social foundation by appealing to the public. In the case of Turkey, the Directorate of Religious Affairs was responsible for tailoring religious discourse to the regime's agenda, a role comparable to Egypt's Ministry of Awqaf, which similarly regulates religious rhetoric and mosque activities (Ulutas, 2010, p. 396). For example, Friday sermons often invoked the phrase "Fitnah", understood as a divine test for the faithful, to frame social and economic hardships in religious terms. By doing so, hardships were reinterpreted as spiritual trials, offering the public a sense of consolation and resilience during periods of crisis (Yilmaz, Albayrak, and Ertutk, 2022, p. 8).

The usage of religious speech by the directorate intensified greatly with the beginning of the AKP rule and the onset of authoritarianism. During times of terrorism, economic, or political crises, the directorate religiously justifies the aggressive reaction initiated by the regime. The following statement is an example of the terms often used in their speeches, as quoted by Yilmaz, Albayrak, and Ertutk (2022):

"Our country is affected from time to time by a great war on a global scale, which is staged to stir a great Fitnah. People of our nation, who have been brothers and neighbors and have lived side by side hand in hand for centuries, want to be turned against each other. On the other hand, we must never allow those who try to sow seeds of fitnah and sedition in our beautiful country. It is always prudent to be cautious against this great and cruel game. It is to act with precision. The day is the day to bond with each other" (p. 7).

This was a speech given by the directorate in July 2015 after the terrorist attack that took place in Istanbul. Using words like "games," "tricks," "traps," and "Fitnah" was to refer to the conspiracies planned by their "enemies" against the security of the nation (Yilmaz, Albayrak, and Ertutk, 2022, p. 8). The "enemies" of the state were often left vague and unexplained by the directorate to justify authoritarian actions on both national and international levels (Yilmaz, Albayrak, and Ertutk, 2022, p. 8).

Being an essential organ for the state, the directorate had quite an awkward status in society. Conservative Muslims did not fully trust the organization as their representative since it was co-opted by the state (Yilmaz, Albayrak, and Ertutk, 2022, p. 5). This case is remarkably analogous to the co-optation of the Ministry of Awqaf in Egypt and the resulting lack of social trust. For secularists in Turkey, the directorate stands in the way of fully secularizing society (Yilmaz, Albayrak, and Ertutk, 2022, p. 5).

Moving to the unofficial sphere of Islam, which was explicitly targeted by the secular regime. As explained before, the crackdown on Islam as an ideology and public practice was the first step to secularizing and modernizing the state. Atatürk's government not only established an official version of Islam but also worked systematically to suppress unofficial religious channels, aiming to replace traditional Islamic identity with a modern Turkish national identity (Yilmaz, 2005, p.

392). Article 24 in the 1924 constitution regulated practicing religious rituals and practices as follows;

"*No one shall be compelled to worship, participate in religious ceremonies and rites, reveal religious beliefs and convictions, or be blamed or accused because of his religious beliefs and convictions. Education and instruction in religion and ethics shall be conducted under State supervision and control. Instruction in religious culture and moral education shall be compulsory in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other religious education and instruction shall be subject to the individual's desire and, in the case of minors, to the request of their legal representatives. No one shall be allowed to exploit or abuse religion or religious feelings, or things held sacred by religion, in any manner whatsoever, for personal or political influence, or for even partially basing the fundamental, social, economic, political, and legal order of the State on religious tenets*" (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 392).

With its national, secular, and contemporary components, the Kemalist ideology was unable to bridge the void that civil Islam was meant to have forcibly left behind. This difficulty was rooted partly in the Muslim nationalist character of Turkish identity itself, which emerged from the late Ottoman ethno-religious conflicts and excluded non-Muslim communities. Moreover, the Kemalist regime's suppression of Sufi orders and religious institutions further deepened the rupture between state and society, contrasting with the Egyptian model that maintained tighter yet more accommodating control over organized religion (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 393)**.**

The secular policies and Westernization initiatives placed the value system of the country's Muslim population at risk. However, they failed to provide a comprehensive and compelling alternative that could replace civic Islam (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 394). Atatürk sought to exclude religion from public life, but he was quickly confronted with unexpected social repercussions. In Turkey, as the private sphere expanded, a greater depth and diversity have been added to private daily life; religion has grown more powerful and has taken on a central role in society (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 394). The wave of privatization has given religion a new character in life. Private religious instruction, Islamic fashion in clothing, music, and manufacturing, as well as Islamic learned journals, all of which are facets of private life, have made Islam present in a contemporary sense in Turkish society and have acted to prevent religion from becoming a personal conviction (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 394). Following Atatürk's death in 1938, a period of transition ensued, and by the early 1940s, the

ruling class was under pressure to adopt a democratic system. Following the Republican People's Party, founded by Atatürk, losing the 1950 election, Turkey witnessed a resurgence of Islamic sentiment. Different interests might be expressed publicly through competitive political parties; however, doing so also requires concessions to Islamic revivalism (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 395). The Democratic Party allowed the establishment of state schools to train Muslim chaplains and preachers. Muslim calls to prayer were tolerated to be performed in Arabic rather than Turkish. An increase in the budget of the Presidency of Religious Affairs and the construction of numerous new mosques, many of which were funded by private foundations rather than the state, were among the amendments implemented by the DP (Hale & Ozbudun, 2009, p. 8). Notably, the DP also maintained close ties with influential Sufi orders such as the Nakşibendi and Nurcu networks, setting a precedent for the continued engagement between political elites and religious brotherhoods in later governments. However, the DP government did not attempt to alter the republic's secular definition or modify secular criminal and civil laws to conform to the views of conservative Muslims (Hale & Ozbudun, 2009, p. 8).

In sum, the Turkish state's overarching strategy toward religion has been as fluid and politically calculated as that of its Egyptian counterpart. This strategy can be broken down into distinct phases, each reflecting the regime's immediate needs for legitimacy and control. To clarify the evolution of the Turkish regime's approach to religion, the following subsections provide a retrospective overview of these transformations, outlining the key phases since the republic's founding.

1. **The Foundational Suppression (1920s-1940s):** Atatürk's strategy was revolutionary and uncompromising: to dismantle Islam's public and institutional power to construct a secular, Western-oriented nation-state. This went beyond establishing the Diyanet; it involved the outright abolition of the Caliphate, Sufi orders (*tarikats*), and Islamic courts, as well as the banning of Islamic education and attire (Shively, 2008, p. 685). This was a "stick" approach with no "carrot," aimed at decapitating religion as a rival center of authority.
2. **The Tactical Accommodation (1950s-1970s):** With the transition to multi-party politics, the state's strategy shifted from suppression to controlled accommodation. The Democrat Party (DP) in the 1950s discovered that relaxing secularist strictures (e.g., allowing the Arabic call to prayer, expanding religious education) was a powerful way to win votes and

build a conservative base against the CHP elite (Yavuz, 2003, p. 360). This was a classic patron-client move: the state granted religious freedoms in exchange for political support. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, successive governments, including those after military interventions, continued this tactic, using state-sponsored religious education (the *Imam-Hatip* schools) and the Diyanet to promote a "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" intended to fight against both communism and Kurdish nationalism (White, 2013, p. 8).

3. **The AKP Synthesis: Instrumentalization and Empowerment (2000s-Present):** The AKP's rise represents the most sophisticated and consequential shift in strategy. Initially, the party framed itself as a conservative democrat, promising to expand religious freedoms (e.g., lifting the headscarf ban) within a secular framework to appeal to a broad base, including liberals and the EU (Koseoglu, 2018, p. 3). However, as it consolidated power, its strategy evolved into a full-scale instrumentalization of religion for political goals, mirroring Sadat's and Mubarak's tactics but from a position of executive strength rather than vulnerability.

This instrumentalization has two key facets:

- **Co-opting Religious Language:** As analyzed with the Diyanet's use of "fitnah," the AKP has masterfully framed its political project in religious terms. Opposition is not just criticism but "betrayal"; support for the government is equated with support for the faith. This creates a powerful moral binary that delegitimizes dissent (Yilmaz, Albayrak, & Erturk, 2022, p. 8).
- **Creating a Patronage Network:** The AKP has built a vast network of loyalists by favoring pious businesses for public contracts, placing its supporters in the bureaucracy, and allowing its grassroots to flourish in exchange for unwavering support. This transformed religious identity from a matter of personal conscience into a key to accessing economic and political resources, effectively creating a new "Islamic bourgeoisie" deeply tied to the party's fate (Buğra & Savaşkan, 2014, p. 162).

This phased analysis highlights how each historical stage, from Atatürk's suppression to the AKP's patronage, built incrementally on the previous one, revealing a consistent logic of state control

over religion that has ultimately come full circle: from crushing religious authority to harnessing it as a tool for consolidating a new authoritarian order.

The Fluidity of Authoritarian Bargain: Social contract and political culture

Understanding the evolution of state–society relations in modern Turkey requires examining how the country's political culture and social contract were constructed and redefined across successive regimes. This section explores how these foundational ideas have informed the state's approach to managing religion, welfare, and civic participation, thereby shaping the conditions under which Islamic movements were tolerated, co-opted, or suppressed. Framed by the republican legacy of secularism and the centralizing ethos of the Turkish state, the analysis highlights how the social contract in Turkey structured both the regime's regulatory strategies and the public's acceptance of them. In tracing these dynamics, the section demonstrates that political culture in Turkey has long been characterized by the tension between state-imposed secular modernity and the persistence of religious and communal identities. This enduring duality shaped both the state's logic of control and the societal accommodation of its authority, laying the groundwork for later transformations in the relationship between religion, citizenship, and governance.

This section examines the historical evolution of the relationship between the state and its citizens, with a focus on the impact of Kemalist ideology, religious freedom, and cultural pluralism. Not only did the "Turkish nation" not exist prior to the Founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, but Mustafa Kemal also failed to instill in the populace a sense of national identity with the new nation he sought to construct through the Turkish Revolution (Brockett, 2011, p. 25). Before a strong popular demand for reform emerged from below, most of Turkey's civil, legal, political, and social rights were granted from above with the proclamation of the Republic in 1923. The Republican elite framed citizenship as a tool to preserve national unity, and the Turkish model was primarily designed to consolidate the nation-state (Kadioglu, 2007, p. 285). Consequently, the "duties" of citizenship, intended to safeguard national unity, were emphasized, while the "rights" traditionally associated with citizenship were downplayed (Ustel, 2004). As the fundamental references of Turkish nationalism evolved over time, shifting from religious (1919–1923) to secular (1924–1929) themes and then to ethno-cultural (1929–1938) motifs, citizenship practices also underwent corresponding changes to reflect these shifts (Kadioglu, 2007, p. 285).

Two characteristics were absent until 1945, which are essential to the existence of the contemporary nation. People in early republican Turkey lacked a mass public culture in which they could participate and the freedom to exercise fundamental legal rights (Brockett, 2011, p. 25). Ataturk's nationalism rejected the idea that people could have an identity apart from their national identity. Differences and variety are suppressed to compel adherence to the nationalist ideology. Mustafa Kemal's turn toward Turkish nationalism after 1923 was not an isolated shift but a deliberate continuation of ideas already present. As Brockett (2011) notes, he claimed that the Turkish nation already existed and simply required his leadership to be aligned with the modern world (p. 25).

In framing the nation as the central source of identity, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk positioned it above all earlier forms of collective or personal belonging. To realize this vision, he oversaw nearly two decades of single-party rule under the Republican People's Party, depending on an authoritarian framework to consolidate reforms and reshape society (Brockett, 2011, p. 29). Between 1931 and 1945, Turkish politics reflected similar tendencies prevalent in other European nations at the time. The excessively harsh Press Law was passed in 1931, and the following suppression of free speech was a manifestation of the authoritarian consolidation of the state (Brockett, 2011, p. 29). Turkey's political liberalization began in late 1945, and the country's vibrant printing and publishing industries encouraged Turks to engage in the multiparty system. Furthermore, a new generation of Turkish politicians ran in the general elections held in 1946 and 1950 (Brockett, 2011, p. 29).

The Democratic Party emerged victorious in the 1950 elections and held power until a military coup d'état ousted it in 1960. In essence, Muslim conservatives were a small part of a coalition of opposing forces that the democrats represented. Accessible professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and businesspeople, comprised most of the DP's leadership, along with a few landowners. These individuals effectively formed a counter-elite to the state-dominated coalition that had ruled Turkey since 1923 (Hale & Ozbudun, 2009, p. 8). Turkey underwent a peaceful transition from authoritarianism to representative democracy, thanks to a movement of "reform" within the single-party political system, in contrast to Latin America and Southern Europe, where this change was realized through a significant break from the previous regime (Hale & Ozbudun, 2009, p. 8). Even though Turkey experienced three military interventions in 1960, 1971, and 1980, parliamentary democracy became a recognized and prominent "political norm of governance." However,

democracy never really solidified, and its possibilities were confined to majoritarian and functionalist ideologies (Keyman and Kanci, p. 2011, p. 325).

If Egypt's authoritarian system under Mubarak was characterized by the façade of a multi-party system dominated by a single hegemonic party (the NDP), Turkey's evolution presents a more complex but ultimately parallel story. Turkey's history demonstrates a transition from a period of genuine, if turbulent, multi-party competition to a contemporary system of "competitive" or "managed authoritarianism," where elections are regular but increasingly unfair, and the playing field is heavily tilted in favor of the ruling party.

The trajectory of this evolution is defined by the role of a "guardian state," an entrenched network of military and bureaucratic elites initially designed to protect the secular Kemalist order. This guardian state functioned as Turkey's equivalent of Egypt's Ministry of Interior, setting rigid red lines for political participation. Its primary tool was not a political party's committee but the threat of military intervention, as seen in the coups of 1960, 1971, and 1980, and the "post-modern coup" of 1997, which ousted the Islamist Refah Party government. This mechanism ensured that no party, even if democratically elected, could fundamentally challenge the core secular tenets of the state or the power of the elite (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016, p. 1585).

The military takeover in Turkey in 1980 led to extensive political and economic changes. Even though civil rule was reinstated in 1983, people's political, social, and economic rights were severely restricted under the new constitution adopted in 1982 (Keyman and Kanci, 2011, p. 328). Additionally, the nation began to experience the effects of globalization at this time. The minimum state and free-market rationality discourses gained increasing popularity in Turkey during the 1980s. The import-substitution model of development led to wide-ranging changes, including the opening up of the economy and the adoption of neoliberal economic principles. Turkey experienced the resurgence of Islamism, the expansion and fortification of civil society, and the intensification of the Kurdish war throughout these years (Keyman and Kanci, p. 2011, p. 328). The state elites increasingly employed nationalism, now referred to as "Ataturk nationalism," distinguishing it from the nationalisms of the left and right, to maintain the state's importance in the face of emerging social actors as globalization put the nation-state in a precarious position. This "authentic version" of nationalism was employed as a defensive tactic against the breakdown

of the organic, homogeneous society that had been desired since the republic's founding, and it found a home in the introduction and general principles of the new constitution (Keyman and Kanci, 2011, p. 328). The notion of national security was given particular weight when it was reorganized around "internal and external threats directed against Turkey." The two categories under which these dangers were reintroduced in 1995 into political speech were "the geopolitical significance of Turkey" and "the dislike of a strong Turkey." (Keyman and Kanji, p. 2011, p. 329). This time, however, the objectives for teaching "the subject of internal and external threats directed at Turkey" were specified as "realizing the significance of Turkey's location in the world" and "becoming aware that other states do not desire the advancement of Turkey." (Keyman and Kanji, p. 2011, p. 329).

Despite the international incentives to liberalize civil society, the authoritarian imprint of the rule was an obstacle to accomplishing their autonomy. The 1980 coup, in particular, had a devastating impact on civil society (Atalay, 2018, p. 180). The Constitution of 1982, formulated under military rule, prohibited all forms of group activities, including NGOs, labor unions, voluntary groups, and professional bodies. Although there were indicators of innovation within the civil society domain from the late 1980s onwards and throughout the 1990s, the persistent firm grip of the state on group activities has significantly discouraged Turkish citizens from engaging in civil political activities to a large extent (Atalay, 2018, p. 180). According to statistics from the Ministry of the Interior, fewer than 15% of people in Turkey are officially affiliated with voluntary organizations (Atalay, 2018, p. 180). The country hosts more than 280,000 non-governmental entities, including NGOs, foundations, and associations. Among these, professional associations account for 30%, sports-related groups for 21%, and religious organizations for 18% (Atalay, 2018, p. 180). Other significant sectors within this include the associative sphere, which encompasses areas such as education, humanitarian efforts, and cultural activities, each drawing around 6,000 members (Atalay, 2018, p. 180). The intensification of restrictions on organized civil society represents a significant setback for Turkey’s already weakened democracy.

Following the failed coup attempt, the government's harsh countermeasures have further undermined civil society (Atalay, 2018, p. 180). Numerous NGOs and associations have been closed down without any legal process. These include organizations across various sectors such as left-leaning groups, pro-Kurdish social and political entities, advocates for women's rights,

associations of lawyers focusing on human rights and civil liberties, and humanitarian organizations (Atalay, 2018, p. 181).

Mirroring the Egyptian state's strategy, the Turkish approach to civil society is not one of uniform repression but of calculated management designed to eliminate critical opposition while harnessing useful social forces. The space for civil society is defined by a group's proximity to state ideology and its utility to the regime's political goals, resulting in a clear hierarchy of tolerance.

Following the 1980 coup, the constitution imposed strict limits on associational life, characterizing it as a potential threat to national security. Although the 1990s brought some liberalization and the 2000s introduced further expansion under EU accession efforts, the state’s deep-rooted suspicion toward these associations never disappeared.

The contemporary landscape can be categorized into three distinct layers, reflecting a strategy of differentiated control:

1. **Co-opted and Government-Organized NGOs (GONGOs):** At the top tier are organizations that operate as extensions of state policy. These are often pious foundations and charities with close ties to the AKP, such as the Ensar Foundation. They receive preferential access to state funding and public contracts, particularly in the areas of education, welfare, and religious services (Atalay, 2018, p. 181; Tugal, 2016, p. 102). These organizations provide social services in areas where the state leaves a gap, while also leveraging their extensive networks to mobilize public support, effectively functioning as the social arm of the ruling party.
2. **Tolerated but Marginalized NGOs:** This category comprises organizations that address non-political issues, such as environmental protection, professional development, or poverty alleviation, without directly challenging the state's core agenda. These associations are subjected to intense observation and bureaucratic hurdles. Their existence is tolerated as long as they remain within state-defined red lines and avoid developing strong links with international critics or opposition groups (Onis & Kutlay, 2021, p. 15).
3. **Criminalized and Repressed NGOs:** This category includes organizations that directly challenge the state's narrative or represent marginalized identities. These entities are systematically targeted and framed as national security threats linked to terrorism or "moral

decay." Their activities are shut down through the aggressive use of anti-terror laws, asset freezes, and the imprisonment of their members (Yabanci, 2019, p. 14).

This tripartite structure reveals a sophisticated state strategy. Rather than eliminating civil society, the regime seeks to demobilize critical independent voices while actively cultivating a loyalist civil society that reinforces its power. This creates the illusion of a vibrant associative life while ensuring that truly pluralistic and oppositional voices are silenced, a strategy that closely parallels the Mubarak regime's management of the civic sphere in Egypt (Yabanci, 2019, p. 14).

On that note, identity politics have shaped Turkish social and political life within a historical framework that is both national and international in scope. This global framework is also implemented in the creation of civil society. More specifically, it has been proposed that the course of Turkish modernization during the late 1980s and the emergence of civil society as a significant player in Turkish politics were determined by four processes (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 222). Thus, these processes should be taken into account when examining the current political climate in Turkey, where the center-right and center-left political parties have been steadily losing support from the public and their capacity to craft compelling policies, while at the same time both the Identity politics' revival and civil society's rise as powerful forces for social and political transformation (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 222).

"The changing meaning of modernity," or "the emergence of alternative modernity," is the first process. Scholars and civil society organizations confirm that new actors, new development mindsets, and new identity claims have been integral to Turkey's modernization process since the 1980s (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 222). This indicates two things: first, the critique of secular-rational thought's exclusive role as Turkey's source of modernity is beginning to emerge; and second, Islamic discourse is becoming increasingly powerful as a "political actor" and "symbolic foundation" for the development of identity. However, the definition of modernity also changed, leading to the rise of civil society, civil rights, and democratization as distinct concepts (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 223). The push for a democratic conception of modernity paved the way for the rise in interest in civic engagement and citizenship. Thus, alternative approaches to identity, politics, and society have challenged the hegemony of the secular and state-centric nature of Turkish modernity since the 1980s (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 223). More importantly, though, is the growing presence of new actors with diverse societal visions and political discourses in

Turkish politics. Important and politically engaged civil society organizations have emerged alongside Islamic discourse and its political parties, advocating for the democratization of the secular and state-centric model of Turkish modernity by making it more liberal, civil, and consistent with the language of "rights" (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 223).

Another aspect concerns Turkey's "crisis of legitimacy of the strong-state tradition," which has been ongoing since the 1980s. With the beginning of the republic, Turkish modernization has been defined by and given rise to the "strong-state tradition" (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 224). This tradition indicates three things: first, the state has come to be perceived as capable of functioning almost independently from civil society; second, the state has established itself as "the primary context of politics,"; and third, the state has been heavily involved in the creation of cultural life (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 224). Until the 1980s, the strong-state tradition served as the organizing "internal variable" of Turkish politics. However, since the 1980s, democracy has become a global frame of reference for politics, and with it, new actors, mindsets, and modernization terminology have emerged. As a result, cultural variables have become crucial to understanding political activity (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 224). Consequently, the push for democratization stands as the foundational principle regulating the relationship between state and society, marking its significance in both the global and local arenas of Turkish politics.

This situation has ushered in new players at these levels, advocating for democratization and challenging the state's once undisputed role on a national scale (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 224). From this perspective, a notable effect of globalization on the path of Turkish modernization remains the state's ongoing struggle with legitimacy in upholding its status as the central arena for political discourse. This struggle stems from the movement toward civil society and cultural norms as the new benchmarks in political dialogue and terminology (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 225). To grasp the development of alternative modernity and the crisis in the legitimacy of the strong-state tradition, the evolving dynamics of international relations must be examined. Specifically, the influence of Turkey's journey towards becoming a full member of the European Union on its modernization efforts since the 1990s is crucial. The processes of European integration and globalization should be viewed as significant constraints that have shaped the interplay between politics, the state, and policy decisions throughout the 1990s (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 225).

Since December 1999, significant attention in Turkey has been directed towards implementing the essential reforms required to align with the political aspects of the membership requirements (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 226). In this regard, in 2001, the government initiated the 'National Program,' aiming to enhance the infrastructure and standards of democracy in Turkey to match European levels. This initiative aimed to establish a robust legal framework that would safeguard individual liberties, including the freedom of speech, the right to associate and assemble peacefully, and the expansion of civil society channels in the country (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 227). During this phase, the government has undertaken key reforms in the spheres of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. These amendments were significant in advancing Turkey's democratization and reshaping the republican citizenship model to become more democratic and liberal. Among these reforms were the abolition of the death penalty, the removal of legal barriers to the educational and broadcasting rights of various ethnic groups in their languages, and the acknowledgment of the rights of non-Muslim religious foundations to own property (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 227). Based on previous observations, these reforms suggested that the forces driving democratization in Turkey were not solely driven by international pressures, but rather an outcome of the convergence between EU membership incentives and the domestic political agenda of powerful actors, particularly the AKP (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 227).

The European Union significantly influenced the evolving dynamics between the state and society in Turkey to some extent (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 227). Hence, democratization from above (international) vs. below (national) is worthy of debate when it comes to recent regressions to authoritarianism.

Similarly, the phenomenon of globalization, particularly the expanding globalization of markets and the proliferation of global communication, has had a significant impact on Turkey’s political dynamics. This has effectively limited the economic policy choices available to both center-right and center-left political parties by serving as a structural limitation (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 228). From this, two crucial insights emerge. Firstly, the policy choices available to political parties have been increasingly constrained by the pressures of globalization. At the same time, globalization has generated complex challenges that demand coherent and well-designed policy responses. Issues such as environmental degradation, multicultural integration, and persistent poverty are now shaped as much by global forces as by domestic circumstances. Faced with these realities, political parties have struggled to offer sufficient solutions on their own. In this context,

supranational institutions and civil society organizations have emerged as influential actors in the political arena, often operating on a level comparable to traditional political parties.

(Keyman and Icduygu, 2010, p. 228). These four influential factors: the rise of alternative modernity, the legitimacy challenges facing the traditional strong-state model, European integration, and globalization, all operate within the nexus of global, national, and local dynamics. These elements highlight that since 1980, Turkish society has undergone "considerable transformation" driven in part by the forces of globalization that have profound effects on societal dynamics (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 228).

Since the 1980s, and particularly throughout the 1990s, there has been a significant increase in interest in discovering alternative approaches for realizing socio-political changes in Turkey that move beyond the entrenched tradition of a powerful state. This perspective posits that socio-political transformations are driven by a broader array of participants operating beyond the central political sphere, fostering a more inclusive political environment (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 229). The motivation behind this shift is rooted not only in widespread dissatisfaction with Turkey's dominant state-centric model but also in the perception that the state has become increasingly detached from societal concerns. Its limited effectiveness in addressing pressing social, cultural, and broader structural challenges has further fueled this discontent. At the same time, the call for a more participatory political culture reflects a growing recognition that the state alone is no longer equipped to manage the complex and evolving dynamics of Turkey's economy and cultural landscape (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 229).

Additionally, this shift is influenced by global factors, since the rise in global civil society movements and non-governmental organizations aligns with international trends, supporting the need for enhanced civic participation. The concept of a 'global civil society' has played a crucial role in providing the normative and institutional frameworks necessary for advocating for this expanded political participation in Turkey. In this context, the impact of globalization in shaping a political discourse that extends beyond state boundaries is a unifying theme among various civil society groups (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 229).

In the 1990s, the combined forces of the entrenched tradition of a powerful state in Turkey and the effects of globalization led to both a significant qualitative and quantitative growth in civil society organizations. These organizations have been seen as: (a) a crucial component in the democratization process; (b) a vital factor in stabilizing Turkey's relationship with the European

Union; and (c) a key aspect of modernizing and liberalizing the Turkish state, ensuring it becomes a political entity that is accountable to its society (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 229). Throughout the 1990s, both academia and public discourse in Turkey have strongly supported and promoted the concept of civil society, thereby granting these organizations a status similar to that of political entities, equipping them with normative and discursive influence. This has led to a rethinking of the relationship between the state and society/individuals, moving beyond the traditionally dominant state model to include the global discourse on civil rights (Keyman & Icduygu, 2010, p. 229).

On a similar note, in the early 1990s, the idea that Islam could thrive independently of state or political authority, influencing the social lives of Muslims without requiring governmental power, began to emerge in discussions among Muslim scholars (Koseoglu, 2018, p. 3). This shift from advocating for the creation of a state governed by Sharia law to seeking to assert Islamic dominance within civil society has been interpreted and analyzed in varied ways by academics (Koseoglu, 2018, p. 3). The moderation hypothesis posits that, in an effort to ensure their organizational survival in the face of political systems that pose a threat, and driven by a desire to maximize votes, Islamist radicals may consent to participating in democratic politics by progressively abandoning their extreme stances (Koseoglu, 2018, p. 3). The rise of the AKP has often been attributed to a 'moderation' within Islamism during the 1990s, marked by Islamists' compliance with the principles of democracy, civil society, and pluralism. The AKP's focus on ensuring economic stability and growth, along with its commitment to democratic reforms aligned with the European Union's process, was initially perceived as a remarkable example of Islamist moderation (Koseoglu, 2018, p. 3).

The rise of the AKP must be understood as a party that first won power within this system but then systematically dismantled the guardian state. After its election in 2002, the AKP initially pursued EU-backed reforms that curtailed the military's political role. Following pivotal events like the 2013 corruption scandals and the 2016 failed coup attempt, the AKP launched extensive purges not only against alleged Gülenists but also against secularists in the judiciary, military, academia, and civil service. This eliminated the old "guardian state" but replaced it with a new, highly centralized executive guardianship loyal to the president (Söyler, 2015, p. 112; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016, p. 1585).

Consequently, the AKP has consolidated a dominant-party system that, while operating through regular elections, has progressively limited political competition and civic freedoms, a pattern distinct from Mubarak's authoritarianism but comparable in its concentration of power and control over public life.

1. **Institutional Tilt:** The judiciary and state institutions like the Supreme Board of Elections (*YSK*) are widely perceived as favoring the AKP. Challenges to electoral results from opposition parties are routinely dismissed (Esen & Gumuscu, 2022, p. 118).
2. **Media Dominance:** Through the pro-government conglomerates that grew from the state's preferential treatment, the AKP enjoys overwhelmingly positive coverage, while opposition voices are smeared or silenced. This creates an uneven informational landscape for voters, reminiscent of state media dominance in Egypt (Yesil, 2016, p. 95).
3. **Patronage and Resource Advantage:** As detailed in the political economy section, control of the state allows the AKP to direct vast resources, public contracts, jobs, and social assistance, to its supporters, creating a powerful incentive for electoral loyalty **(**Buğra & Savaşkan, 2014, p. 65)
4. **Legal Harassment:** Opposition politicians, particularly from the pro-Kurdish HDP (now DEM Party), face relentless judicial harassment, terrorism charges, and imprisonment, effectively criminalizing meaningful opposition and removing competitors from the political arena (Günay & Dzihic, 2016, p. 540).

In essence, Turkey has moved from a system where the "rules of the game" were enforced by the military to protect secularism to one where a partisan judiciary and executive enforce them to protect the AKP's power. The result is a system that retains the formal institutions of democracy, elections, parties, and a parliament, but empties them of their competitive substance, creating a mirror image of the managed, hegemonic party system that characterized Mubarak's Egypt.

Regulating Public Services' Sphere and the Unintended Consequences of Outsourcing

Examining how the Turkish state has managed public service delivery offers valuable insight into its broader approach to governing society. Over time, successive regimes have sought to maintain control over welfare provision while selectively allowing religious and civic organizations to

participate in it. This delicate balance between inclusion and restriction has shifted in response to changing political and economic circumstances, revealing how welfare policy has become both a tool of legitimacy and a mechanism of control (Eder, 2009, p. 157). The evolution of service delivery in Turkey encapsulates the broader shift in the state-society bargain, moving from a state-centric model to a complex system where Islamic charities and neoliberal privatization compensate for state retreat, much like the Egyptian case. This transformation has profound political implications, creating new dependencies and legitimizing the ruling party's authority (Eder, 2009, p. 157).

Over half of the Turkish workforce is engaged in the informal sector, resulting in nearly 40 percent of the population lacking healthcare (Eder, 2009, p. 157). The Turkish government has consistently faced challenges in meeting the social security needs of its rapidly expanding population, exhibiting characteristics common to welfare systems in other developing nations. Yet, Turkey's growing economy and expanding middle class highlight that these challenges arise less from overall underdevelopment than from the uneven distribution of resources and the persistence of informal labor structures. Despite these challenges, the relatively low incidence of extreme poverty, even in the toughest economic periods, indicates that Turkey's combination of welfare institutions, albeit imperfect, has not been entirely unsuccessful (Eder, 2009, p. 158).

The shortcomings of Turkey's social policy infrastructure were clearly noticeable. Essentially, Turkey's traditional approach to social policy has primarily focused on offering free education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, along with public healthcare and a pension system, all of which are connected to one's employment status (Eder, 2009, p. 158). Almost half of the labor force is uninsured, as they work entirely within the informal sector of the economy or are unemployed. The combination of a low employment ratio and a significant level of informality within labor markets has significantly exacerbated the divide between individuals employed in formal roles and those in informal employment (Eder, 2009, p. 159). This situation has created a disparity between those who benefit from employer-paid insurance premiums and individuals without any coverage or access to essential healthcare services. Remarkably, this reveals an apparent disparity in terms of accessibility to critical services and protection for the employed populace, contrasting sharply with the lack of options available to others (Eder, 2009, p. 159).

The framework for welfare and social policy in Turkey has traditionally relied on informal mechanisms such as familial connections and personal networks (Eder, 2009, p. 160). Unlike its

counterparts in Latin America and Southern Europe, Turkey has not established substantial social assistance programs to support its economically vulnerable populations (Eder, 2009, p. 160). Instead, Turkey has utilized: (a) significant agricultural subsidies paired with tax exemptions for the rural sector; (b) the option for informal housing in city areas, where unofficial settlers could easily take over public lands; and, as seen in much of the developing world, (c) strong private family and community networks. These elements have been the cornerstone of the nation's welfare approach, playing a key role in preventing violent evictions, severe poverty, rapid market-driven changes, and social unrest (Eder, 2009, p. 160). Yet, this reliance on informal welfare mechanisms also reveals the Turkish state's long-standing ambivalence toward societal autonomy: it tolerated community-based aid as long as it depoliticized social discontent but suppressed it when it risked generating independent moral authority. This tension between dependence and distrust has been a structural feature of Turkish welfare governance ever since.

Since the 1960s, family businesses that have succeeded in the capitalist world and identify with secular values have played a significant role in supporting social welfare in Turkey. These philanthropists prioritize Ataturk's vision of nation-building over religious reasons for their contributions (Morvaridi, 2013, p. 310). Common initiatives they have assisted with involve fostering the growth of institutions in healthcare, education, and culture, showcasing a significant inclination towards national values. Founded in 1974 by secular philanthropists, the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği (TÜSİAD)) aims to promote corporate social responsibility. With the increase in the "super-rich" population in Turkey, there has been a corresponding rise in philanthropic activities from the private sector (Morvaridi, 2013, p. 311).

Following the 1980s in Turkey, a shift in public administration policy towards those of welfare states led to the adoption of privatization, decentralization, and welfare pluralism in the provision of social services. This change was driven by the inadequacy of social service organizations to fulfill public needs, leading to a perception of the state as less effective and reliable. Consequently, numerous decisions to privatize services were made as a strategy to address this crisis (Donmez, 2022, p. 31). The financial crisis led to an expansion of privatizations beyond sectors generating profits, encompassing areas like social security and publicly beneficial social services. This shift

initiated the implementation of private pension schemes and private health insurance plans (Donmez, 2022, p. 31).

Starting from the 1990s and during the AKP period, organizations rooted in Islamic civil society have emerged as key players in areas such as social welfare, information politics, and community organizing. These entities, primarily focused on charitable work, welfare distribution, and poverty reduction, collaborate with the government to address the social consequences of neoliberal economic strategies. Through this collaboration, the government is often perceived as being associated with the charitable activities, allowing it to harvest electoral benefits from the services provided by these organizations (Atalay, 2018, p. 181). The social welfare framework in Turkey is characterized by an informal security system that intersects with capitalism and informal employment sectors, as well as familial bonds. In such settings, political engagements are grounded in personal commitments and the dynamics between patrons and clients. Within this socio-economic and political landscape, both formal and informal networks of charity, alongside Islamic civil society groups of varying scales, act as integral parts of the institutional apparatus that carries out the state's objectives for welfare and development (Atalay, 2018, p. 181; Bugra & Savaskan, 2014, p. 158).

It is within this void that Islamic charities and civil society organizations, similar to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, surged to prominence. Organizations with roots in Islamic communities, such as the İHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation and numerous local associations, became essential players in poverty reduction, disaster relief, and welfare distribution (Atalay, 2018, p. 181). Their role is twofold:

1. **Service Provision:** They deliver efficient and desperately needed aid, food, clothing, healthcare, and scholarships to low-income communities, particularly in conservative heartlands and urban peripheries (Bugra & Savaskan, 2014, p. 158).
2. **Political Instrumentalization:** The AKP government has skillfully associated itself with this charitable activity. Through highly publicized events and campaigns, the party harvests electoral benefits, framing itself as a caretaker of people experiencing poverty. This creates a robust system of clientelism where access to resources becomes implicitly linked to political loyalty (Bugra & Savaskan, 2014, p. 158).

Thus, a new "Islamic neoliberal" model has emerged. The state facilitates and takes credit for welfare provision while outsourcing the cost and labor to its pious grassroots base. This system functions as a vital "safety strategy," alleviating the social discontent generated by neoliberal economic policies and rising inequality (Atalay, 2018, p. 181). By filling the gap left by the state, these Islamic actors, like their Egyptian counterparts, gain immense moral authority and social legitimacy. However, unlike the MB in Egypt, these Turkish entities are typically not in opposition but are integrated into the ruling party's coalition, thus strengthening the AKP's hold on power by embedding it within the very networks that sustain daily life for millions of Turks. The social contract is thus rewritten, and loyalty is exchanged not for universal state-provided benefits but for access to partisan channels of charitable provision (Atalay, 2018, p. 181).

Turkey's trajectory demonstrates a more complex, yet ultimately convergent, path to authoritarian consolidation. Unlike Egypt's relatively consistent authoritarian model, Turkey experienced a period of genuine democratic contestation, albeit one perpetually bounded by a secular "guardian state" (the military and judiciary). The AKP's rise signifies the most significant shift in the state-society relationship since the republic's founding. It did not merely exploit existing structures but fundamentally reconfigured them (Atalay, 2018, p. 181).

The AKP's strategy has been one of comprehensive capture. It successfully dismantled the old Kemalist guardian state through a combination of democratic reforms, strategic patronage, and sweeping purges. In its place, it has constructed a new, hegemonic system built on a combination of control: the instrumentalization of state-controlled religion (the Diyanet) for legitimacy, the creation of a loyalist bourgeoisie through neoliberal patronage, and the systematic dismantling of competitive politics through the repression of opposition and the co-optation of civil society (Atalay, 2018, p. 183).

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the fluctuating dynamics between the state and Islamic movements in Egypt and Turkey before the 2013 and 2016 coups are rational, calculated strategies employed by regimes to navigate the central dilemma of authoritarian rule: how to maintain legitimacy and stability when the capacity to fulfill the material promises of the social contract decays.

The comparative analysis reveals several core patterns:

1. **The Fluidity of the "Authoritarian Bargain":** The social contract is not static. As seen from Nasser to Sisi and from Atatürk to Erdoğan, regimes constantly recalibrate the terms of the bargain, shifting the mix of coercion, ideological persuasion, and material benefits, to address immediate political threats and economic constraints.
2. **Religion as a Political Tool:** In both cases, religion proved to be the most potent and readily available tool for legitimacy engineering. Whether through co-optation (Al-Azhar, the Diyanet), tactical alliance (Sadat with the MB, the DP with conservatives), or outright instrumentalization (the AKP's use of religious discourse), the state consistently sought to harness Islam's mobilizing power for its own ends.
3. **The Unintended Consequences of Outsourcing:** A critical finding is that the state's retreat from the welfare sphere and its subsequent reliance on Islamic groups to provide social services consistently backfired in the long term. This outsourcing granted Islamists moral authority, social legitimacy, and grassroots networks that could be translated into political capital, ultimately threatening the very regimes that initially enabled them.
4. **The Convergence of Models:** Despite different historical starting points, Egypt's post-colonial Arab socialism and Turkey's radical secularism, both states have converged on a similar model of governance. This model is characterized by the dominance of a hegemonic ruling party, the erosion of institutional checks and balances, the blurring of lines between state and party resources, and the use of religious narratives to justify authoritarian consolidation and economic failure.

In conclusion, the "Islamic question" in both Egypt and Turkey has never been solely about theology or identity. It has always been, at its core, a question of power. The regimes' alternating tolerance and repression of Islamic movements served as a barometer of their strength and confidence. When weak, they opened the political space to use Islamists as a tool; when threatened, they closed it with force. The enduring lesson is that in the absence of a legitimate, participatory social contract, the politics of religion become a central and highly volatile arena for the struggle over power and the right to rule.

Chapter Five

Consolidating the Patron-Client Approach as a State-Islamic Movement mode of Interaction in Egypt and Turkey from 1980-2014/2016

In the context of the Middle East, the relationship between the state and Islamic movements has been particularly complex and dynamic. This chapter delves into the patron-client relationship between these two actors in Egypt and Turkey, two pivotal regional countries. By examining the historical and contemporary trajectories of these relationships, this chapter sheds light on the underlying factors that have shaped their development. It will explore how the state has employed various strategies, including patronage, co-optation, and repression, to influence and control Islamic movements. Conversely, Islamic movements have navigated the complex political terrain by leveraging their social capital, organizational networks, and ideological appeal to gain influence. This comparative analysis will highlight the similarities and differences in the dynamics of the state-Islamic movement in Egypt and Turkey from the 1980s to 2013 in Egypt and 2016 in Turkey.

Consolidating the Patron-Client Approach as a Mode of Interaction in Egypt between the State and Islamic Movements

The purpose of this section is to trace how the Egyptian state, from the 1980s until the 2013 coup, institutionalized a patron–client relationship with Islamic movements as a mechanism of governance, social control, and welfare delivery. By examining the evolution of this relationship, particularly through the case of al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya, the section aims to demonstrate how regimes under Sadat and Mubarak managed Islamic activism not through outright repression but through selective incorporation and administrative regulation. This approach enabled the state to offload welfare responsibilities to Islamic charities while maintaining its political dominance. The section, therefore, situates Egypt's pre-2013 trajectory within a broader argument about authoritarian adaptation, showing that clientelism functioned as a flexible instrument of regime stability, enabling cooperation in periods of confidence and coercion in moments of insecurity.

The economic difficulties that arose following the 1967 defeat prompted a revision of the financial strategies that had been in place since the 1952 coup. In the 1970s, Egypt incorporated new global income sources into its economy (Menza, 2012, p. 323). President Sadat's open-door policy broadened the income streams to include external avenues such as tourism, labor remittances, revenue from the Suez Canal, and foreign loans (Menza, 2012, p. 323). These additions contributed to a concentration of wealth among specific segments of society, particularly those who were welcomed by Sadat to join the political elite (Menza, 2012, p. 323). The state's neoliberal retreat from social welfare created a severe service gap, particularly in rural and remote areas that the centralized government had long neglected. This disparity led to the emergence of various intermediaries in these neglected regions to fill the gaps (Menza, 2012, p. 324).

Nagarajan (2013) offers another perspective on the neoliberal trend that began during Sadat's era, noting its impact on the Egyptian economy in subsequent years (p. 27). Over time, the industrial sector's contribution to the economy gradually diminished (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 27). The disparity between imports and exports grew significantly, surpassing imports (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 27). As a result, this gap necessitated increased external borrowing. A similar trend was observed in the consumption-to-production ratio, which was managed using the same approach (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 27). This substantial shift in the economic landscape had a profound impact on the state's financial accounts (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 27). The intensification of debt and resulting deficit was evident during this period. Money was printed to address the deficit, leading to economic crises (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 27). By the mid-1970s, the financial emergency was apparent, prompting the establishment of the Gulf Organization for Development in Egypt (GODE), which dedicated billions of dollars to support development projects and alleviate financial struggles (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 27). In terms of income distribution, the divide between the upper and lower classes grew significantly due to tax reductions and expanded investment opportunities driven by neo-liberal policies (p. 27). As a result, the middle class began to disappear, and people experiencing poverty faced unprecedented economic hardships (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 27). Additionally, GODE was dissolved in the late 1970s, failing to produce the intended outcomes, which increased the country’s reliance on Western aid (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 27). Furthermore, the 1978 peace treaty with Israel exacerbated the situation, as Egypt was boycotted by several neighboring countries (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 27).

In addition to the economic consequences of the new path pursued by Al Sadat, he also launched a political liberalization initiative influenced by two main factors. The first is a strategy of authoritarian resilience (Tucker, 1978, p. 5). In other words, Al Sadat sought to create a limited space for political engagement to address the economic struggles faced by the populace (Tucker, 1978, p. 5). The second factor was shaped by the demands of the IMF, which led to some changes, such as the release of political prisoners and support for civil society organizations (Ates, 2005, p. 137). A notable instance of this push towards democratization was the return of members of the Muslim Brotherhood who had left Egypt during Nasser's regime, allowing them to establish their economic institutions upon their return (Ates, 2005, p. 137). In reality, certain members of the MB, particularly those who were truly impacted by Infitah, benefited from it as they increased their wealth through foreign trade and business ventures (Ates, 2005, p. 137). One significant advantage was the formation of investment companies in the 1980s (Zubaida, 1990, p. 152). These companies were established during the Infitah era to provide financial opportunities for Egyptians working in the Gulf (Zubaida, 1990, p. 152). In addition to launching extensive economic projects, the MB established thousands of clinics and schools to provide services to those excluded from the benefits of Infitah (Ates, 2005, p. 138).

Unlike Nasser and Sadat, Mubarak lacked a well-defined economic strategy. At the start of his presidency, he demonstrated isolationist policies, as the economy was in ruins following Sadat’s tenure. He sought to distance himself from the contentious legacy of his predecessors (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 28). Despite numerous economists highlighting the flaws in neoliberal reforms and several attempts to steer the economy toward mixed policies, by the mid-1980s, the regime was compelled to adopt the same neoliberal approach but with more vigorous measures (Amin, 1995, p. 1). This shift did not occur abruptly; instead, it developed gradually over time. The process began with privatization and, notably, the reduction of subsidies on public goods (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 30). As a result, the regime started to encounter the possibility of uprisings similar to those seen during Sadat's time (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 30). The only remaining solution was to explore potential international-level resolutions. Thus, negotiations concerning the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) with the IMF were implemented in 1987 (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 30).

One of the critical requirements of the SAPs was a reduction in public expenditure, which the regime did not fully achieve. Consequently, the program and financial assistance were suspended

(Nagarajan, 2013, p. 30). Furthermore, these measures were met with significant public opposition, compelling the regime to invoke emergency laws to manage the unrest (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 30). Ultimately, the lengthy negotiation process resulted in an agreement with the World Bank and the IMF in 1991 (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 30). The regime has primarily implemented the terms of this agreement, including measures such as reducing public spending, privatizing state assets, and devaluing the currency (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 30). An intriguing classification of public expenditure following the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) was proposed by Soliman (2011), who categorized expenditures into two primary types. The first type is referred to as "political control expenditure," encompassing all methods of empowerment, including "security apparatus and ideological control through media and culture" (p. 55). The second type focuses on economic development, including education and infrastructure (Soliman, 2011, p. 55).

Notably, spending on security forces accounted for the most significant portion of the national budget during the implementation of SAPs, which was utilized as a strategy to combat Islamic extremism initiated by Mubarak (Soliman, 2011, p. 56). A key takeaway from this analysis is that Mubarak preferred deploying the police and military to suppress Islamist movements rather than shutting down their charitable organizations. Expenditure on education, reflecting public spending, increased during the late 1990s; however, it did not significantly improve the educational process (Soliman, 2011, p. 69). The government focused on physically rebuilding schools damaged by the 1992 earthquake, while neglecting improvements in academic quality and teachers' salaries (Soliman, 2011, p. 69). As a result, the increased funding for the education sector did not benefit many individuals in practice (Soliman, 2011, p. 69). Furthermore, this nominal rise in educational spending fell from 19% to 11% within less than a decade (Mumtaz, 2011, p. 13).

These measures significantly contributed to reducing inflation; however, the agreement aimed to address the economic crisis only in the short term. There was no long-term strategic plan to enhance the national economy. More critically, poverty rates surged following the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). According to reports from the World Bank, "20 to 25 percent of the Egyptian population was living in poverty, with 10 to 13 percent classified as ultra-poor. The analysis also highlighted that poverty was more prevalent in rural areas lacking adequate health and educational facilities. Even food subsidies failed to reach many rural poor, and unemployment rates reached 22% within less than five years" (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 31). The

report identified key factors contributing to the rise in rural poverty, including the fact that a small group of elite landowners controlled nearly three-quarters of the agricultural land. Second, there was an unprecedented surge in food prices (Soliman, 2011, p. 69). The World Bank report indicated that the expenses associated with the minimum-cost diet increased by 216 percent in urban areas and 242 percent in rural regions (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 31). The report highlights several key negative impacts of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), including "labor displacement resulting from privatization, rising prices, and a decline in the provision of social services" (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 32).

In summary, while the SAPs addressed issues at the macro level, they worsened conditions at the micro level. Lesch (2011) highlights the significant impact of the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) on farmers who had previously benefited from land reforms initiated by Nasser. The government ceased providing fertilizers and pesticides and increased prices for water and electricity (p. 37). As a result, the agricultural sector began to decline, leading to severe impoverishment among farmers, who were the primary beneficiaries of this sector (Lesch, 2011, p. 38). To cope with these challenges, entire families, including children, in agricultural areas began working for landowners, resulting in a decrease in school enrollment rates by the late 1990s (Lesch, 2011, p. 38).

Additionally, government spending in crucial sectors suffered significantly after the introduction of SAPs; for instance, health expenditure as a share of GDP was halved by the mid-1990s (Görmüş, 2016, p. 63). The decline in government spending contributed to a broader trend of reduced public expenditure, which resulted in wage cuts and rising unemployment rates (Görmüş, 2016, p. 63). Similarly, "household expenditure surveys revealed that real per capita consumption fell between 1990/1991 and 1995/1996. During this period, the percentage of individuals living below the poverty line rose from 40% in rural and urban areas to 45% in urban regions and 50% in rural areas" (Kawamura, 2016, p. 141). In response to the state's gradual retreat from providing public services, various Islamic NGOs began to fill the void left by the government and oppose the neoliberal policies of the regime. Islamic economic and charitable institutions aimed to significantly support the impoverished public, which had been heavily impacted by Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) (Görmüş, 2016, p. 63). As noted by Kandil (2011), by 2010, 80% of all civil society organizations were Islamic charities, most affiliated with the MB (p. 126). The

growing political power of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) primarily stems from its involvement in providing social services, including education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation (Görmüş, 2016, p. 65). A key example of this influence is their penetration into professional syndicates. The MB has taken control of 5 out of 22 syndicates, focusing on the most significant ones, lawyers, engineers, pharmacists, doctors, and scientists, while establishing a presence in the liberal syndicates (Fahmy, 1999, p. 552). The table below illustrates the number of MB seats held in these syndicates.

Year	**Syndicates**	**No. of seats**
1989	Engineers	41 (out of 43)
1990	Pharmacists	10 (out of 12)
1991	Physicians	11 (out of 12)

Source: (Abdel Rahman, 2004, p. 115)

In a related discussion, Abdelrahman (2004) emphasized the key features of implementing Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). The first two characteristics closely align with the observations made by Nagarajan (2013), who indicated that the program was viewed as a significant remedy for the country's fiscal crisis; however, it failed to deliver the expected outcomes (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 106). The third and most crucial aspect is postponing the program's implementation. This delay stems from concerns about potential social unrest that could arise if the government intensifies austerity measures, as well as from the interests of the elite class, which relies on the public sector for its economic and political standing (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 106). The regime recognized that a rapid shift towards privatization would jeopardize its authority (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 107). As a result, the government resorted to various authoritarian resilience strategies, primarily by granting greater autonomy to Islamic NGOs, to mitigate the sudden economic challenges mentioned earlier. This precarious approach will be further explored in the following section.

Regarding the political incentives for the rise of Islamic NGOs in the Mubarak era, Abdelrahman (2004) offers a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of Islamic revival or resurgence. This

term encompasses groups and movements advocating for the principles of Islam to serve as the foundation for political ideologies, replacing Westernized concepts (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 109). The contemporary Islamic revival can be attributed to a prior departure from Islamic principles and worsening economic conditions (Carvalho, 2009, p. 2). Consequently, it's reasonable to view Islamic revival as an overarching concept encompassing the rise of a new Islamic discourse, societal initiatives, charitable efforts, and guidance for political life (Carvalho, 2009, p. 3). This revival emerged in two significant waves: the first in the early 21st century and the second during the 1970s and 1980s (Carvalho, 2009, p. 3). While this broader Islamic revival was not necessarily a reaction against the governing regime or limited to political Islam, it contributed to the Islamization of Egyptian society, paving the way for the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups. This context may also explain the backlash against all Islamic NGOs after 2013, even those not affiliated with the MB (Masoud, 2018, p. 125).

During the 1990s, Egypt witnessed three prominent Islamist movements: the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Jihad, and Al Jama'a Al-Islamiyyah (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 110). These groups sought to integrate Islamic principles into the realms of politics and economics. While they shared the same objective, the Muslim Brotherhood adopted a distinct strategy, favoring a gradual and reformist approach to achieve their goals (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 110). The other groups adopted a contradictory strategy that heavily relied on violence to impose their agenda (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 111). Although these groups employed various economic and political methods, the regimes effectively managed to control the situation. Al Sadat and Mubarak utilized force and political exclusion to neutralize this potential threat to their rule while leveraging their popularity by supporting charitable efforts. Furthermore, these Islamic groups were used as a counterbalance to diminish the influence of other opposition factions (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 111). Al Sadat introduced the approach of punctuated pluralism as part of his political reform efforts, influenced by the IMF (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 113). However, these movements were not officially organized into political parties; instead, they operated through informal avenues such as charitable organizations, banks, schools, and labor unions (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 113). Moreover, many Islamic banks and investment firms emerged during this period (Zubaida, 1990, p. 152). As their popularity grew and they began to mobilize public sentiment against the regime, Al Sadat resorted to force, ultimately leading to his assassination (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 114). While Mubarak's administration did not drastically alter these dynamics, it is crucial to note that he felt particularly

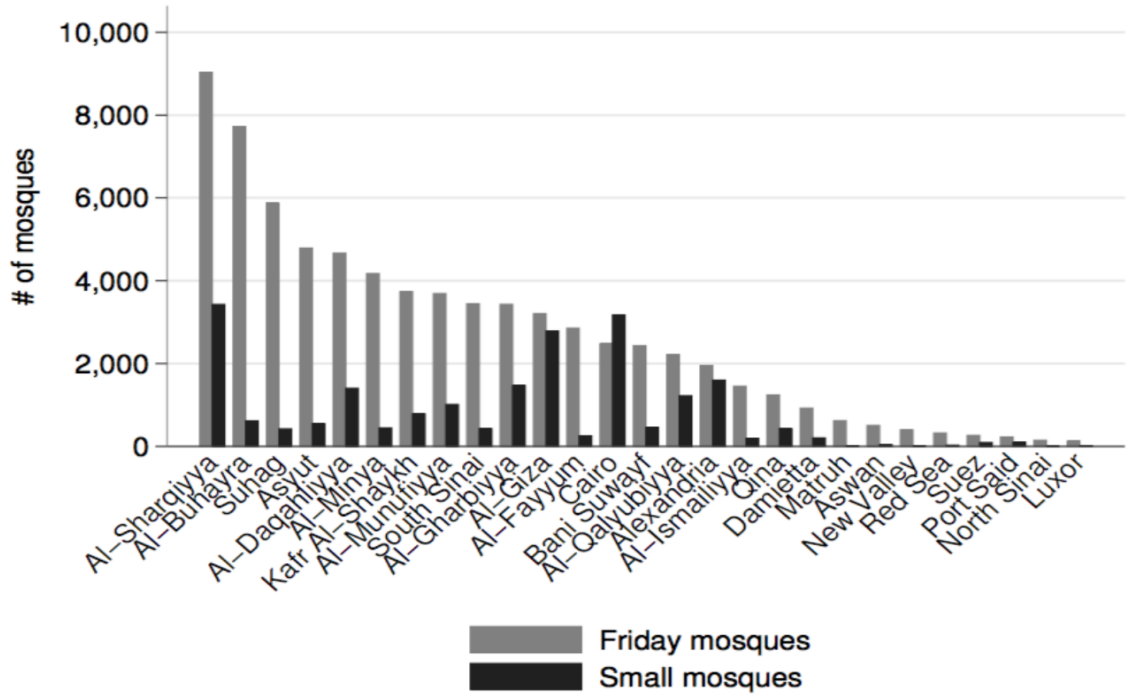
threatened by the circumstances surrounding his predecessor's assassination. To counter the influence of Islamic groups, he established a new sphere of punctuated pluralism for secular opposition, aiming to balance the power of the Islamists (Owen, 2013, p. 166). While this observation has been widely highlighted, I contend that it represents a crucial element in understanding the dynamics of the relationship between regimes and Islamists, which may clarify the current complexities of this relationship. In other words, the strategies employed by each regime in its interactions with Islamist groups are influenced by the threats it has encountered in the past. Therefore, I argue that traditional approaches are inadequate for explaining the relationship between regimes and Islamic NGOs, as it is not a fixed dynamic; somewhat, it is heavily influenced by authoritarian factors and how each regime interprets and responds to the threats posed by these organizations.

In a different context, Ranko (2014) suggested that the cooptation of Islamic groups served as a strategy to mitigate their potential threat. He compared Mubarak's approach to the "Inclusion-Moderation" hypothesis, which has been applied in post-revolutionary Europe (p. 3). Specific regimes employed this approach to limit radical groups by cautiously incorporating them into political life, expecting this to lead to their moderation (Ranko, 2014, p. 3). Mubarak specifically applied this technique by integrating Islamists, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), into the institutional framework established by the regime while imposing certain boundaries on their activities (Ranko, 2014, p. 3). This approach was evident in allowing the MB to participate in parliamentary elections and to play a significant role in civil society organizations (Ranko, 2014, p. 5).

Additionally, Mubarak sought to co-opt more moderate Islamists to diminish the influence of radical Islamists (Owen, 2013, p. 167). While nearly all Islamic groups were prohibited from establishing political parties, they were allowed to register as NGOs with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) and to adhere to the regulations set by the ministry. Despite the limited space available for Islamic NGOs, MOSA implemented various forms of control, including economic and political constraints (Owen, 2013, p. 167). A significant method of control over financial resources utilized by the ministry was executed through three channels: “(a) direct oversight of the NGOs’ budget and expenditures, (b) distribution of government grants, and (c) regulation of foreign funding” (Abdel Rahman, 2004, p. 132). Nonetheless, while these strict regulations

effectively managed external or official funding, they could not suppress public support for Islamic organizations.

The only funding exception permitted by MOSA was the donation to religious institutions (Habibi, 2012, p. 4). Since many Islamic charities were associated with mosques, they gathered substantial annual contributions not governed by MOSA (Habibi, 2012, p. 4). Statistics indicated that by 2006, the number of large mosques exceeded 71,000, while small mosques (Zawya) numbered over 21,000 (Masoud, 2013, p. 21). The figure below illustrates the distribution of mosques across the governorates.



Source: (Masoud, 2013, p. 21)

Apart from having funds as one of the main reasons for strengthening and spreading these NGOs, sympathy towards them did not spring solely from religious beliefs. More importantly, the Egyptian public's social, economic, and political status, characterized by economic deprivation and political suppression, led a significant segment of society to sympathize with them (Habibi, 2012, p. 4). The advocates of Islamic groups in general came from four societal fractions: a) the opponents of the elite businesspeople, b) intellectual opposition, c) the well-educated unemployed youth, and d) the proletariat (Habibi, 2012, p. 4). On the other hand, the recruitment mechanisms

deployed by the Islamic groups played a massive role in flourishing their organizations. Several of these organizations, particularly the MB, were highly effective in attracting bright and dedicated young people who were struggling with economic difficulties and soaring unemployment rates, particularly after the implementation of the SAPs (Zahid, 2010, p. 60). The table below illustrates the percentage of religious NGOs across various governorates.

Governorate	**Islamic NGOs**	**Coptic NGOs**
Cairo	21.43	6.43
Giza	22.92	2.69
Alexandria	31.32	5.39
Fayoum	25	7.87
Sohag	30.68	12.87
Menya	53.56	9.90
Assiout	43.19	8.37

Source: (Abdel Rahman, 2004, p. 139)

Mubarak's Threat Perception/Threat to the Authoritarian Rule

This section examines how the Mubarak regime perceived and managed threats emerging from Islamic movements, focusing on how these perceptions shaped the state's modes of control and accommodation. Its purpose is to unpack the logic through which the regime differentiated between acceptable and unacceptable forms of religious activism, thereby determining when cooperation gave way to containment or repression. By tracing the evolution of these perceptions across key moments of political and economic uncertainty, the section aims to illustrate how shifting interpretations of "threat" guided regime behavior toward Islamic actors. This analysis aims to lay the groundwork for understanding how divergent threat perceptions, rooted in different

political contexts and varying levels of regime insecurity, led to distinct authoritarian responses in both Egypt and Turkey in subsequent periods.

Despite the political and economic advantages gained by the regime through the rise of Islamic NGOs, the threat they posed to Mubarak's rule was clear. In the early 1990s, various Islamic groups emerged as potential challengers to the regime in political and economic arenas. The Muslim Brotherhood did not pose this threat alone; other groups also contributed to this challenge. Below is a list of Islamic groups considered most risky by Mubarak's regime:

The most pressing threat identified is Al Jama'a Al Islamya and Al Jihad (Gerges, 2000, p. 529). The rise of this form of Islamic revivalism in the 1990s posed a significant danger to both the regime and society for several reasons:

- The mass killings for which they claimed responsibility (Gerges, 2000, p. 529).
- Their involvement in the 1997 Luxor massacre harmed the tourism sector and led the public to blame the regime for inadequate preventive measures (Gerges, 2000, p. 530).
- The assassination of President Sadat in 1981 (Al-Awadi, 2005, p. 76).
- There has been a surge in terrorist attacks and Islamic paramilitary activities within Egypt and neighboring countries. A notable incident was the failed assassination attempt on Mubarak in Addis Ababa in 1995. That same year also saw an attack on the Egyptian embassy in Pakistan, which resulted in the deaths of several embassy staff members (Al-Awadi, 2005, p. 77).

The second significant threat comes from the Muslim Brotherhood. Initially, Mubarak believed that restricting the MB's political involvement would effectively contain them; however, this approach proved ineffective as they gained public support through their social services (Al-Awadi, 2005, p. 75). Their ability to attract support and sympathy, particularly among those who benefited from their charitable initiatives, had a negative impact on the regime's popularity (Al-Awadi, 2005, p. 75). Additionally, the increasing influence and popularity of the MB were seen as a destabilizing force against the regime's power due to various factors.

- The Algerian "Islamic Salvation Front" victory in 1992 raised concerns within the regime about a potentially similar situation in Egypt (Al-Awadi, 2005, p. 76).

- That same year, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) largely dominated the lawyers' syndicate, reflecting their increasing political influence (Al-Awadi, 2005, p. 76). This control over the syndicates had several direct and indirect effects, including the majority of staff members being affiliated with the MB, organizing group meetings within the syndicates, and, more significantly, utilizing these syndicates as platforms to challenge the regime (Al-Awadi, 2005, p. 79).
- The open opposition and criticism from the MB toward the regime served as a wake-up call for those who felt marginalized by the benefits of neoliberal economic policies (Al-Awadi, 2005, p. 77).

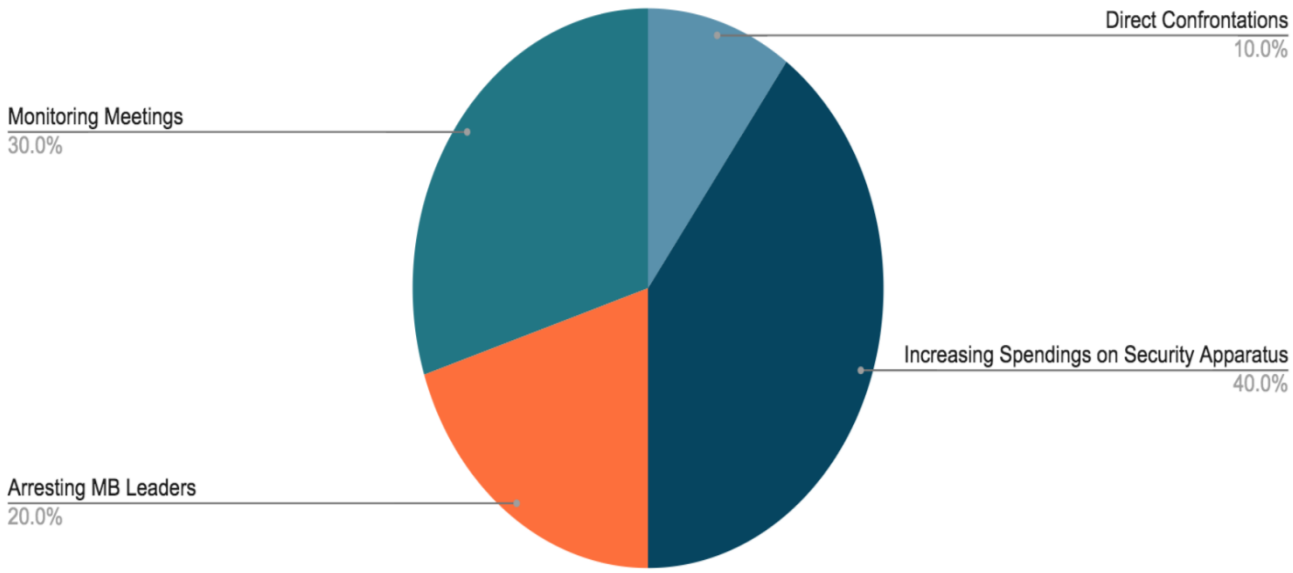
The Salafists represented the third and least significant threat to the regime. Although both the regime and Egyptian society were uneasy about the Salafists because of their controversial fatwas and political views, they did not pose a substantial direct threat to Mubarak's administration. For instance, they often critiqued the Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) strategies (Shalata, 2016, p. 165). Nevertheless, many Salafists expressed sympathy towards the MB, and several had political aspirations, prompting the regime to approach them cautiously (Brown, 2011, p. 5). Overall, the Salafists were not united in their opposition to the regime and tended to focus more on charitable activities, which made them relatively more acceptable to the authorities (Brown, 2011, p. 6).

Mubarak's Punctuated Pluralism: The Paradox of Autonomy vs. Threat

While previous evidence suggested that Mubarak tolerated Islamic organizations for their economic and political benefits, he implemented various strategies to address the potential threat posed by Islamists. The measures against groups like Al Jama'a and Al Jihad were particularly severe, involving mass arrests and confrontations by military and police forces (Gerges, 2000, p. 596). As noted by Soliman (2011), one technique the regime used was increasing funding for security forces during the 1990s (p. 55). Mubarak's administration viewed the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) as its primary adversary; although not entirely tolerant of other Islamic groups, the primary focus was on diminishing the MB's influence. By the mid-1990s, Mubarak escalated his campaign against the MB by implementing laws restricting their participation in unions and educational institutions.

Additionally, thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members faced arrests and were prosecuted in military courts (Al-Awadi, 2005, p. 74). This crackdown on the MB and their involvement in various organizations adversely impacted the public services they offered. To help fill this gap, some members contributed substantial financial donations to restore those services (Al-Awadi, 2005, p. 74). It can be argued that Mubarak's strategies for countering the MB included arresting and prosecuting members, rather than shutting down their charitable activities (Al-Awadi, 2005, p. 74). To manage the Salafist groups, Mubarak opted to oversee their significant gatherings while allowing them to continue their social activities, particularly their charitable efforts (Brown, 2011, p. 6).

Furthermore, their educational and religious institutions could operate as long as political discussions were avoided (Brown, 2011, p. 6). However, the regime had reservations about Al Jamyia Al Sharyia, as it was believed to have been infiltrated by Al Jama'a Al Islamya, which placed them under close observation. They could still do charitable work (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 104). The following chart outlines the primary strategies employed by Mubarak's regime to mitigate the Islamist threat.



Al Jamyiah Al Sharyiah

Sheikh Mahmoud Khattab al-Subki, a prominent figure among Al-Azhar scholars, established the Sharia Society on 11 December 1912, officially named “The Sharia Society for the Cooperation of Workers with the Book and Sunnah of Muhammad.”

Al-Jamyia al-Sharyia has a presence of approximately 3,000 branches nationwide (Brooke, 2015, p. 24). Nefissa (2011) describes it as “the most significant Islamic charity organization in terms of its social and political influence, as well as its geographic reach. It has captured Egypt’s largest ‘market share’ of Islamic social services." (p. 67). Menza (2012) refers to the organization as “Egypt's largest and most influential Islamic Social Institution.” The organization’s leader has stated that it controls over 6,000 mosques (Brooke, 2015, p. 24).

Al-Subki was driven by his concerns over the troubled state of Egyptian life under colonial rule. He observed how colonialism pushed Islam out of daily life and led to alterations in education and curricula, manipulated by foreign occupiers and missionary groups aiming to erode Egypt's identity, with Islam at its core (Fahmy, 2013, p. 169). This shift fostered a sense of loyalty to foreign powers, ultimately allowing the occupiers to control the country's resources. As a result, there was an evident decline in the focus on religious and Arabic studies, accompanied by an increase in Westernization, which devalued the role of Islamic law in societal, political, and economic matters (Fahmy, 2013, p. 169). Confronted with these crises and challenges, al-Sobki believed that true salvation could only be achieved by eliminating the superstitions that had become entwined with the religion. He believed that this would enable Muslims to embrace the principles of strength and resilience, thereby addressing societal weaknesses by fostering cooperation and solidarity among people. This conviction led him to establish Al-Jamyiah Al-Sharyiah, marking the first Islamic institution dedicated to the revival of the Sunnah (Fahmy, 2013, p. 169).

When the JS was founded, there was an intense discussion among Islamic scholars regarding societal reform. Two conflicting perspectives emerged: the first advocated for a top-down approach, while the second supported a bottom-up strategy (Fahmy, 2013, p. 169). Sheikh Al-Sobky adopted the latter approach, emphasizing the importance of society. He believed that by nurturing a new generation of Egyptian youth grounded in Islamic principles and values, this

generation would eventually rise to key positions in the state and carry out the necessary top-down reforms (Fahmy, 2013, p. 169).

Just two years after the founding of JS, Sheikh Al-Sobky was detained in 1914. He faced accusations of communicating with the Islamic Caliphate in Istanbul and opposing the British occupation in Egypt. Although he was released shortly after, he remained under house arrest and was prohibited from engaging in religious activities from 1914 until 1918 (Fahmy, 2013, p. 170). JS faced allegations of excluding individuals who disagreed with its teachings in its formative years. Additionally, when JS started constructing its mosques, it was criticized for failing to acknowledge prayers conducted in existing mosques. Nevertheless, Sheikh Al-Sobky refuted these claims and stated support for JS's principles (Fahmy, 2013, p. 170). In this phase, the JS concentrated on two primary tasks: preaching and constructing mosques. Sheikh Al-Sobky trained approximately 200 individuals to serve as preachers for the JS throughout Egypt (Fahmy, 2013, p. 170).

The JS's mission, as determined by Sheikh Al-Sobky, can be summarized as follows:

- Promoting accurate religious teachings and Islamic values to enlighten minds and shield Muslims from misguided beliefs and superstitions by providing ongoing preaching and guidance from knowledgeable and action-oriented individuals.
- Establishing offices dedicated to Quran memorization and schools focused on teaching Muslim children the principles of their faith and proper conduct.
- Building mosques where religious practices are conducted according to authentic teachings, while educating the community on the tenets of Islam.
- Publishing a religious magazine to explore various topics, including spiritual, moral, and literary issues, while also addressing doubts and defending the true essence of Islam.
- Printing and disseminating valuable materials aimed at educating minds and uplifting souls through religious and other relevant literature.
- Support those in need within society, particularly individuals who are unable to pursue their profession due to their religious beliefs.
- Establishing a hospital to care for underprivileged Muslims and promoting religious principles among them.

- Covering the costs of preparing the deceased of poor Muslims and setting up appropriate cemeteries for their burial.
- This organization does not engage in political matters, as these are the ruler's responsibility.

(Fahmy, 2013, p. 170)

In July 1952, Egypt underwent a significant shift in governance when the Free Officers' movement seized power and demanded the king's exile. The JS sought to capitalize on this situation to shape the state's institutions. Like other Islamic groups, JS viewed the end of the monarchy as an opportunity to implement Islamic governance. Amin al Sobky sent a message to Mohammad Naguib, the leader of the revolutionary council, stating: "JS, with all its branches across cities and villages, calls upon you, now that you have dismantled the foundations of tyranny, to establish the state of Islam and the rule of the Qur'an" (Fahmy, 2013, p. 170).

This correspondence was accompanied by a detailed letter outlining 14 proposals to be enacted by the new government:

1. All legislation should be derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

2. The initial phase of the educational system should align with Islamic principles and objectives.

3. All government employees must adhere to Islamic religious obligations (such as fasting during Ramadan and performing prayers), with non-compliance leading to termination.

4. A system for collecting Zakat should be established.

5. All un-Islamic practices in mosques must be eliminated.

6. There should be efforts to combat prostitution.

7. Alcohol consumption should be banned, with penalties for consumers, vendors, and producers.

8. All forms of drugs, including smoking, should be prohibited.

9. "Indecent" women should be arrested.

10. The practice of charging interest (Riba) should be abolished.

11. Gambling should be prohibited.

12. The closure of theaters, nightclubs, and bars is necessary.

13. Religious festivals should be banned throughout Egypt.

14. Women should be prohibited from visiting gravesites or attending funerals (Fahmy, 2013, p. 171).

The military regime dismissed all of these requests. Two years later, Nasser ousted Naguib and took control of the political landscape (Fahmy, 2013, p. 172). Nasser aimed to establish a powerful modern state that would strictly manage all aspects of society, including religion and religious groups. Following an assassination attempt in 1954 by the Muslim Brotherhood, Nasser initiated a crackdown, arresting numerous members of the organization and striving to enhance state oversight over all religious institutions within the community, including the JS (Fahmy, 2013, p. 172).

In 1964, the regime introduced Law 32 to oversee the functioning of associations within civil society. As a result, the JS was dissolved and re-registered that same year. Following the defeat in 1967, Nasser sought to reorganize Egyptian society in preparation for a future conflict with Israel. The administrative board of the JS was dissolved, and a new council was appointed, led by military general Abdel Rahman Amin (Fahmy, 2013, p. 174). This move was not explicitly aimed at the JS but was part of a broader strategy to restructure the civil sphere after the 1967 setback. Although Abdel Rahman Amin was imposed on the JS leadership, the range and scope of its activities grew under his guidance. He founded the first institute for training preachers. He supported the JS members' stance against merging with other religious groups, which Nasser was considering to enhance state control over the religious sector (Fahmy, 2013, p. 174).

Beginning in the 1970s, the JS experienced a notable revival. Initially focused on two primary missions, promoting Islamic values and constructing mosques, it additionally expanded its efforts to include social welfare during this period. This new phase led to the development of two main areas of engagement: the first emphasized religious preaching (Da‘wa), while the second concentrated on welfare initiatives (Fahmy, 2013, p. 174). The Da‘wa efforts involved conducting sermons and spiritual classes, organizing debates, establishing institutes for preacher training, publishing the Al-Tibyan magazine, and operating Qur’an institutes. This mission is supported by a group of religious scholars within JS, including 400 scholars from al-Azhar University, 2,000

male preachers, and 200 female preachers across Egypt (as of 2009 statistics). To further its objectives, JS also invites various religious figures, even those outside its organization, to participate in its conferences, debates, and preaching activities. Regarding its welfare initiatives, JS's projects are categorized into social and developmental programs, as well as medical services. These projects aim to alleviate poverty and provide healthcare to underprivileged families. Additionally, JS seeks to assist international students at al-Azhar University and has become a member of the International Islamic Council for Daw‘a and Relief (Fahmy, 2013, p. 174).

As noted earlier, the organization was founded on a preaching model that promoted Islamic principles within society until the mid-1980s. The organization has established 56 institutions dedicated to preaching education and 37 institutions focused on teaching the Quran and Sunnah, with nearly 15,000 students enrolling each year (a TV interview with Ali Gomaa, 2012). The societal/developmental turn of the organization skyrocketed in the 1980s, covering nearly all societal services. The medical field is where al-Jamyia al-Sharyia made a significant impact. The organization operates specialized hospitals throughout Egypt for eye care, dialysis, burn treatment, and cancer care, including a dedicated chemotherapy center (Brooke, 2015, p. 25). Additionally, it operates various specialized centers for premature infants across Beheira, Cairo, Giza, Menoufia, Qalubia, Fayoum, Kafr al-Sheikh, Sohag, and Suez governorates. The Almaza Hospital, located near Cairo and regarded as the “jewel” of JS network for premature birth care, features 150 incubators. Beyond these advanced medical facilities, there are likely hundreds of smaller JS clinics scattered throughout Egypt (Brooke, 2015, p. 25). JS operates “medical convoys” (Qawafel Tibiyya) to reach underserved regions, a program initiated in January 2004. According to statistics released by JS, they dispatch approximately two caravans each week, handling around 43,000 cases annually (Brooke, 2015, p. 25).

The organization has established affordable bread vendors and ensured a consistent water supply in remote areas, thereby addressing basic service needs. They have also established numerous orphanages nationwide, caring for nearly half a million children annually. Additionally, they support the marriages of girls from low-income families and orphans, facilitating around 50,000 marriages annually. Regarding human development, the organization provides literacy classes, enrolling about 13,000 individuals annually. Furthermore, women with limited income are

encouraged to participate in small, home-based projects, such as crafts and clothing production (Ali Gomaa, 2012).

Concerning funding, the organization strictly does not accept any external funds (as stated in a TV interview with Ali Gomaa). Al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya heavily depends on donations to support its activities. Officials from the organization indicate that a significant portion of their donations is sourced from affluent Egyptians who are eager to contribute but may not know the best ways to optimize their giving (Brooke, 2015, p. 25). Since funding is one of the biggest challenges civil society organizations face under authoritarian circumstances, JS has avoided receiving external funds to ensure the sustainability and stability of its activities, as announced by the organization's leaders.

The JS was aligned with Mubarak's regime, which allowed them to operate freely, particularly in the service provision sector (Fahmy, 2020, p. 154). Notably, the neoliberal reforms implemented by Mubarak during the 1990s intensified the charitable activities of the JS, as they aimed to fill the void left by the government (Fahmy, 2020, p. 154). The JS provided various services through their hospitals, schools, and mosques. In some areas, they distributed essential items like water and bread (Fahmy, 2020, p. 155). The regime's decision to permit the JS to function openly was not only a result of their inability to meet the public's economic needs but also a strategic move to balance the influence of radical Islamic groups and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), with a regime-supporting Islamic entity that focused on charitable work while steering clear of political engagement (Fahmy, 2020, p. 155). There was a mutual dependency between the Mubarak regime and the JS; the JS sought to maintain a positive relationship with the regime, while the regime leveraged the JS to contain other potential threats (Fahmy, 2020, p. 155). The relationship between Mubarak and JS faced numerous challenges in 1985, 1991, and 1995. In 1985, Al Jama'a Al Islamya aimed to establish its social presence by leveraging an established organization. To achieve this, they sought to attract supporters through the mosques associated with JS. Consequently, Al Jama'a infiltrated the JS mosques in Assiut (Fahmy, 2020, p. 156). Mubarak's government opted to substitute the mosque's administrative body with a council from the Ministry of Social Affairs (Fahmy, 2020, p. 156). The JS sought to address the issue without escalating tensions with the regime, which led them to deny any affiliation with Al Jama'a (Fahmy, 2020, p. 156). Given the regime's challenges in managing the presence of the JS, primarily due to their

extensive welfare services, they ultimately chose to reinstate the JS at their original mosques (Fahmy, 2020, p. 156). The second incident of threats emerged in 1991 when certain MB members infiltrated the JS administrative council (Fahmy, 2020, p. 156). The MB's expansion within the JS posed a significant risk to the regime, prompting initiatives to counter the politicization of the JS (Fahmy, 2020, p. 156). The third wave of confrontations occurred between 1995 and 1997 when a new leader affiliated with the MB took charge of the JS (Fahmy, 2020, p. 157). This substantial development led the regime to intervene directly in the organization's internal affairs, aiming to filter membership and curb the MB's growth within the JS (Fahmy, 2020, p. 157). Despite these challenges, the number of JS branches exceeded 1,000 by 2012, thanks to support from the MB, which was conditioned on the agreement that the JS would not be used as a political platform (Fahmy, 2020, p. 157). To sum up, the JS did not have any explicit political rules, and they were, to a great extent, involved in the patron-client relationship with governments before 2013 due to the vast services they provided and their scale.

In sum, the Egyptian case reveals that the patron–client approach served as a central axis of state–Islamic movement interaction under conditions of authoritarian stability. Islamic charities, such as al-Jamyiah al-Sharyiah, gained access to resources and public legitimacy through their service provision, while the state benefited from their welfare networks to compensate for its own retrenchment under neoliberal reforms. Yet this reciprocal arrangement was inherently unstable. The very autonomy and moral authority that made these organizations effective social partners simultaneously rendered them potential political liabilities. After the 2013 coup, the regime's growing insecurity transformed the cooperative logic of clientelism into suspicion and surveillance.

At the same time, the political and economic dynamics of the 1990s and 2000s, particularly the regime's success in maintaining social order and attracting external support, produced the illusion that this clientelist equilibrium was a fixed and sustainable mode of governance. This apparent stability reinforced what the chapter terms a hyper-rational approach to authoritarian control: the belief that carefully managed patronage networks could indefinitely contain Islamist activism without provoking confrontation. The Egyptian experience ultimately demonstrates the fragility of this assumption. Clientelist incorporation, while appearing durable in periods of economic growth and political calm, rested on a contingent balance that collapsed once the regime's

perception of security eroded, paving the way for the coercive turn that followed in the post-2013 era.

Consolidating the Patron-Client Approach as a State-Islamic Movement Mode of Interaction in Turkey

This section examines how the patron–client model became the dominant mode of interaction between the Turkish state and Islamic movements during the AKP era, particularly before 2016. Its purpose is to trace the political and institutional mechanisms through which cooperation between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gülen movement evolved from pragmatic partnership to structured interdependence. By analyzing this relationship within Turkey's broader neoliberal transformation and shifting political opportunity structures, the section demonstrates how Islamic actors were incorporated into state networks of influence, resource distribution, and legitimacy production. It argues that, much like in Egypt, clientelism served as a flexible tool of authoritarian governance, allowing the regime to co-opt autonomous social forces while projecting an image of pluralism and social participation. Understanding this period of cooperation is essential for explaining how patterns of dependency and informal exchange later shaped the dynamics of conflict and repression analyzed in the following chapter.

Turkey experienced significant political polarization and violence during the 1960s and particularly in the 1970s, involving university students, workers, police, teachers, and bureaucrats (Simsik, 2004, p. 112). Economically, Turkey's principal balance of payments crisis during the 1970s reflected the exhaustion of the import-substitution model of development. As protected domestic industries became increasingly inefficient and export growth stagnated, the country's external position deteriorated. This structural weakness was exacerbated by external shocks, particularly the oil price hikes of 1973 and 1979, which sharply increased import costs and deepened foreign exchange shortages. The crisis marked the collapse of the prevailing accumulation model and paved the way for the neoliberal restructuring of the 1980s (Onis, 1997, p. 749). On the political side, ineffective coalition governments worsened economic instability by delaying necessary adjustments. They were unable to curb the rise of terrorism and urban violence, jeopardizing the safety and daily lives of ordinary citizens (Onis, 1997, p. 749). In this context, it

was not unexpected that the military would intervene for the third time since the end of the war, resulting in the temporary suspension of democratic governance. Looking back, Turkey's period of military rule was relatively brief compared to that of Latin American countries. It spanned from September 1980 until the elections in November 1983, which reinstated parliamentary democracy, although in a limited capacity (Onis, 1997, p. 749). Nevertheless, this shorter period of military governance had significant implications for the future of the democratic system. The military aimed to establish stability during what they viewed as a transitional phase before democracy was restored. Their primary goal was to eliminate potential challenges to consolidating market-oriented reforms through measures intended to depoliticize the economy (Onis, 1997, p. 749).

This turmoil resulted in a military coup in 1980. The military council and subsequent governments imposed strict regulations on voluntary organizations, associations, and foundations, particularly targeting leftist groups that had been politically active before the coup (Simsik, 2004, p. 112). The Constitution of 1982 marked a significant turning point in this regard. Contrasting sharply with the liberal Constitution of 1961, the new constitution aimed to centralize power within the executive branch and restrict the social rights previously provided for labor unions and various interest groups (Onis, 1997, p. 750). On the one hand, Turkey adopted liberal economic policies to better integrate its national economy with global markets. On the other hand, it began fostering conservative attitudes in cultural and political arenas. The clash between these liberal and conservative approaches paved the way for various social movements to emerge in the public sphere, particularly as the dominant ideologies of the 1960s and 1970s, such as Marxism and nationalism, declined (Simsik, 2004, p. 112). Until the end of the 1980s, the Turkish regime maintained tight control over social movements and organizations. Only by the late 1980s did some tolerance for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with diverse cultural and ideological perspectives begin to develop. By the mid-1980s, notable movements that gained traction included Kurdish ethnic nationalism, Islamism, feminism, the Alevi cultural movement, environmentalism, and human rights activism (Simsik, 2004, p. 112).

The military coup on 12 September 1980 marked a pivotal moment for Islamists, allowing them to rise to dominance (Arisan, 2019, p. 11). As Özkan (2015) states;

The coup played a crucial role in promoting the rise of political Islam. It did this both directly, by establishing the 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis' as Turkey's core state ideology, and indirectly, by

suppressing the leftist opposition in the country. As a result, Islamists emerged as the primary political channel for the grievances of many low-income members of society (p. 79).

The military coup of 1980 created the essential socio-political environment for a transition to a market economy under a new constitution. Through military intervention, the working class and trade unions were 'disciplined,' youth movements that were heavily politicized were suppressed, and the growth of leftist and socialist movements was restrained (Sen, 2011, p. 63). The coup regime aggressively enforced neoliberal policies that the Justice Party (AP) had introduced to Turkey's political-economic framework just months before the coup. In 1980, the AP government sought to implement a 'structural adjustment and stabilization program' supported by the IMF and World Bank (Simsik, 2004, p. 112). This program addressed an accommodation crisis in Turkey by fundamentally altering the country's industrialization strategy, shifting from import substitution to export-oriented industrialization. To achieve this, the military regime harshly suppressed labor and leftist movements, froze wages and salaries, promoted exports through various incentives, and made significant alterations to public finance, banking, and exchange systems (Simsik, 2004, p. 112). Like many other nations, neoliberalism in Turkey did not mark a transition from a state-led development model to a purely free-market economy with minimal government intervention. While there has been considerable liberalization in crucial economic sectors such as finance, international trade, and capital flows, and to a lesser extent in the privatization of state-owned enterprises, the government has effectively reestablished itself as a significant player in the economy, along with being a major distributor of economic benefits to the private sector (Onis, 1997, p. 752).

The impacts of these changes were profoundly experienced by low-income groups, particularly those residing in provincial areas and slums of major cities. As a result of economic shifts, many individuals from poorer regions moved to urban centers, expanding impoverished neighborhoods where capital accumulation predominantly occurred. Throughout the 1970s, these areas and shantytowns became centers of activity for leftist movements and political parties (Simsik, 2004, p. 113). However, following the military coup, there was a gradual shift towards Islamization in these neighborhoods. This primarily economic transformation thrived under the political environment established by the semi-military regime of the 1980s, which imposed a Turkish-Islamic synthesis upon society while persistently marginalizing and criminalizing leftist ideologies

(Simsik, 2004, p. 113). The military elite viewed Islam as essential for fostering social and political stability. As a result, they supported legislation within the framework known as the 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis,' which blends nationalism with Islam to act as a safeguard against potential instability. A central aspect of the military's strategy was to diminish the political influence of the left, which they perceived as the primary source of conflict and unrest in the aftermath of 1980. Thus, the military utilized Islam to strengthen and institutionalize the regime established after 1980 (Onis, 1997, p. 750).

In the 1970s, most Islamists were small to medium-sized entrepreneurs primarily living in provincial areas. In addition to their ongoing clientelist ties with the state, their business relationships were grounded mainly in religious solidarity, which extended to their workers (Gulalp, 2002, p. 52). These business owners, artisans, and local traders gained significant influence in both rural areas and the disadvantaged neighborhoods of larger cities, creating strong networks of support that filled the gap left by social welfare programs for the urban poor and working class, particularly following the military coup in 1980 (Gulalp, 2002, p. 52). The perception of victimhood among Islamists, rooted in Turkish-Islamist ideology, has significant historical and political dimensions. Within Islamist intellectual and political circles, there is a prevalent belief that they are the actual casualties of Turkey's modernization process. This sentiment often stems from a loss associated with the idealized vision of a once-great and all-encompassing imperial state (Yilmaz, 2017, p. 493). The narrative of victimhood perpetuates itself through binary oppositions, such as urban versus rural, East versus West, and the contrasting images of Istanbul and Anatolia, with immoral, materialistic elites opposing the altruistic, spiritual lower classes. The emerging Islamist middle class shapes its identity through this conflict, presenting itself as "the humble and generous Anatolian small business owners" who uphold moral and traditional values, in contrast to "the large and secular entrepreneurs based in Istanbul" (Yilmaz, 2017, p. 493).

The emergence of the openly Islamist Welfare Party in the 1990s can be analyzed within this context. The conflict between the mid-sized Islamic-conservative capital of Anatolia and the Istanbul-based, Western-aligned, secular significant capital led to a decline in support for the center-right, which historically favored the urban elite while maintaining clientelist ties with poorer populations in major cities and regions (Ozden, 2018, p. 288). This dynamic changed in the

mid-1990s, as the export-led industrialization initiated in the post-1980 era, characterized by reduced labor costs and informal production in rural areas and slums, boosted capital accumulation for Anatolian businesses. This shift enhanced their financial strength. Simultaneously, as key proponents of a Turkish-Islamic synthesis nationwide and having built a long-standing clientelist network, the Islamists forged strong connections with state bureaucracy and gained substantial influence in various educational institutions, becoming too powerful to remain simply as 'clients.' (Ozden, 2018, p. 288). At this juncture, the Welfare Party (RP), which openly embraced Islamist rhetoric and frequently highlighted the binary concept of victimization, ascended to power as the leading partner in the coalition in 1995. The party had previously secured victories in major cities, such as Istanbul and Ankara, during the 1994 local elections. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a key member and well-known orator at RP demonstrations, had been elected as the mayor of Istanbul (Ozden, 2018, p. 288). Evaluating the Welfare Party based on its rhetoric surrounding a "just economic order," which highlights income distribution and the moral imperative of enhancing the financial conditions of people experiencing poverty, resembles a typical social-democratic party on the left (Onis, 1997, p. 754).

However, it distinguishes itself from conventional social democrats by emphasizing free enterprise and private capital as the main drivers of economic growth while downplaying the state's role in this process. The core message conveys that private enterprise, commercial endeavors, and the profit motive align well with fundamental Islamic principles, provided that the profits derived are obtained through legitimate and genuinely productive economic activities (Onis, 1997, p. 754). RP’s viewpoint embodies a paradoxical blend of 'tradition' and 'modernity.' The party exhibits a strong modernist inclination through its unwavering belief in the benefits of capital accumulation and economic growth, driven by the adoption and utilization of cutting-edge technology. Its focus on the significance of scientific education and modern technology is undoubtedly on par with the emphasis observed in other secular parties, whether on the right or the left (Onis, 1997, p. 755). The party established a mixed economy framework that combined the West's free market capitalism with the state-controlled socialism of the former Eastern Bloc. In this mixed economy approach, private enterprise is the primary driver of economic growth. At the same time, the government plays a crucial role in providing essential infrastructure and support for equitable distribution (Onis, 1997, p. 755). The Just Order document also includes several distinctly Islamic elements, particularly advocating interest-free banking. Looking back, it appears that the creators

of the just order vision aimed for a form of hyper-populism based on a morally justified compromise among different social classes, intending to build a broad coalition of political backing that encompasses both private businesses and the most disadvantaged members of society (Onis, 1997, p. 755).

The characterization of the Welfare Party as solely representing the weak and disadvantaged is relatively narrow, as it overlooks the significant emergence of Islamic capital and the Islamic bourgeoisie in Turkey following the post-1980 neoliberal period. Islamic businesses have provided a crucial financial foundation for the Welfare Party. It is clear that, without these economic resources, the Welfare Party would not have been able to deploy its distinctive organizational strategies, which ultimately contributed to its electoral success in the mid-1990s (Onis, 1997, p. 757). In the 1970s, small business owners and shopkeepers in the smaller towns of Inner Anatolia played a significant role as supporters of the National Salvation Party, which later evolved into the Welfare Party. This established a clear connection between Islamic business interests and political campaigns focused on Islamic themes, dating back to the late 1960s (Onis, 1997, p. 758). During the 1980s, there was a notable surge in the volume and scope of Islamic business activities. This growth was significantly fueled by substantial capital inflows from Saudi Arabia, which sought to capitalize on the new opportunities offered by the liberal economic climate, particularly in the financial sector (Onis, 1997, p. 758). The shift towards a market-oriented economy opened up profitable opportunities, prompting Islamic brotherhood organizations, or tariqat networks, to actively participate in substantial investment activities. By the 1990s, these Islamic networks had significantly strengthened, becoming key players in the economic landscape (Onis, 1997, p. 759). This observation demonstrates that the linkage between the regimes following the 1980 coup and Islamic businesses and networks sustained a patron-client relationship between both parties.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) emerged from the changes within Turkish Islamism. A faction broke away from Erbakan's Welfare Party, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to establish the AKP. Erdoğan gained popularity among Islamist business circles. During his tenure as the mayor of Istanbul, he provided favored treatment to companies connected to these Islamist groups in securing municipal contracts (Sen, 2011, p. 71). The influence of these business community members grew during the RP-led coalition government from 1996 to 1997, and several obtained government funding. The leadership of the AKP maintains strong ties with this business sector and

is part of it. Consequently, as the AKP rose to power, this new business group gained unprecedented opportunities to access public contracts and government loans (Sen, 2011, p. 71). Here, the interaction between Islamic business groups and the AKP reveals how tolerance translated into structured dependency. Unlike the Welfare Party, whose networks remained partially autonomous, AKP-era Islamic capital became intertwined with state institutions through procurement, municipal contracts, and state-backed finance. This shift marks the transition from ad hoc tolerance to a consolidated patron–client configuration in which Islamic actors relied on state resources while the state relied on their mobilization capacity. This reciprocal exchange is crucial for understanding why Islamic actors were tolerated to such an extent prior to the 2016 rupture.

The AKP's rise to power in 2002 was welcomed by Islamic factions, major business groups, secular capitalists, mainstream media, liberal intellectuals, and even some left-wing organizations. Following a decade marked by instability and fragile coalitions, along with a severe economic crisis in 2001, the AKP emerged as a potent electoral force, fostering a sense of consensus among significant segments of society, thereby providing a source of stability (Sen, 2011, p. 71). The AKP's early acceptance of EU accession reforms and its democratization initiatives, which focused on human rights and fundamental freedoms, sparked enthusiasm and optimism within society. Its clear pro-Western position, coupled with a reliance on a predominantly Islamic voter base, garnered significant support from the international community and was viewed as strong evidence of its drastic break from the anti-Western posture of the previous Welfare Party (Sen, 2011, p. 74). Even though the growing influence of ‘Islamic big capital’ aimed to connect with ‘world capital’ and significantly contributed to the AKP's early ‘Western-oriented’ political narrative, their perspective differed from a strictly ‘market-driven’ approach. Their financial and political achievements are deeply rooted in social relationships shaped by religious values and state-supported communal solidarity (Sen, 2011, p. 74).

The growth of productive capital led to an increase in the surplus product within the national economy, enabling the AKP to gain the support of subordinate classes through economic expansion and the use of populist and coercive redistribution strategies. The Social Aid and Solidarity Promotion Fund played a significant role in facilitating a type of coercive charity. This method allowed the AKP to maintain its power, blending elements of neoliberalism, Islamism, and

populism. The party framed itself as a voice for religious conservatism and a contemporary conservative ideology (Uysal, 2019, p. 21). The AKP's rhetoric on piety sought to integrate religion into the political framework, aiming to substitute the modern concept of a sovereign nation with a model based on a community of believers (ümmet). The AKP viewed democracy as an acceptable political system only to the extent that it aligned with Islam, recognizing various religious identities while ensuring that the electorate remained depoliticized when they cast their votes (Uysal, 2019, p. 21).

They sustained the “charity state” to consolidate the Islamization of the state apparatus and social structure. This process aimed to preserve the domination of the bourgeois class while effectively suppressing the subordinate classes under the guise of sanctity. The AKP promoted and spread piety through state institutions, most notably the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). This institution, which began cultivating its capitalist interests through the Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı (Turkey Diyanet Foundation) in the 1970s, received substantial economic, political, and social support to further its mission of disseminating piety (Uysal, 2019, p. 22). Additionally, the education system was Islamized to raise ‘pious youth.’ Religious brotherhoods were depicted as civil society organizations that address social needs resulting from the neoliberal state's retreat from distributional responsibilities. These brotherhoods, which gained wealth via charitable foundations (vakıf) backed by the Islamist bourgeoisie, state agencies, and municipalities, framed piety as a moral code and a "way of life," effectively integrating religious values into social reproduction (Uysal, 2019, p. 22). They engaged in charitable activities, including both cash and in-kind contributions, in both urban and rural settings. Religious brotherhoods established private schools, preparatory institutions, and educational dormitories and offered financial support to low-income families. Their goal was to prevent the development of class consciousness and the radicalization of the working class (Uysal, 2019, p. 23).

Thus, welfare provision under the AKP cannot be read simply as religious charity or neoliberal restructuring. It functioned as a mechanism for political containment: by channeling welfare through sympathetic Islamic associations and municipalities, the AKP created a vertically integrated system of dependency. Islamic movements and communities did not merely deliver welfare; they reproduced a political order in which access to resources increasingly depended on loyalty. This dynamic is central to explaining why Islamic actors were tolerated and incorporated into the regime’s governing coalition prior to 2016.

As mentioned above, the socioeconomic implications of the neoliberal changes were pretty damaging, especially for the low-income segment of society. The Turkish welfare system is typically categorized with Southern European welfare states due to several factors. First, its social policy is fragmented and hierarchical; second, there is a prevalence of self-employment, unpaid family labor, and informal employment within the labor market; third, there is no universal healthcare; and fourth, the family plays a crucial role in managing risk situations (Gocmen, 2014, p. 95). The Turkish state has historically not regarded social assistance for people experiencing poverty as a public policy responsibility. Instead, poverty has been viewed as an issue to be addressed by charitable individuals within the Turkish social policy framework. This perspective reflects a long-standing tradition of caring for the impoverished that dates back to the Middle Ages in the region. From the 8th to the 19th century, Vakif/Waqf institutions, which combined public and private resources to deliver social welfare services, played a vital role in the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the Turkic world (Gocmen, 2014, p. 95). Following the trends seen in European countries, Turkey established its primary welfare institutions after the mid-1940s. These included the Social Insurance Institution (1945) for workers, the Retirement Chest (1949) for civil servants, and Bag-Kur (1971) for the self-employed. These three organizations' primary functions were providing health and old-age benefits, which depended on employee and employer contributions. However, this system was exclusionary and did not encompass those unemployed or working in the informal sector (Gocmen, 2014, p. 95).

Before the 1980s, social assistance relied heavily on informal support systems provided by the state, families, and various social networks. Some examples of state aid for individuals not part of formal social security systems included agricultural support policies aimed at helping the rural population and preventing their migration to urban areas, informal housing assistance for unofficial settlements within cities, and job opportunities in state-run economic enterprises (Gocmen, 2014, p. 95). Following the 1980 coup d'état, two significant socio-economic trends influenced the Turkish political landscape: economic liberalization and the emergence of political Islam. The interplay of these factors contributed to the growth of civil society organizations in Turkey. While neoliberal policies intensified the challenges faced by the impoverished and disadvantaged, the moral imperative of political Islam to address poverty helped establish a supportive base, fostering the development of civil society associations (Gocmen, 2014, p. 96).

The leaders of the military coup sought to blend Islamic and nationalist objectives to establish "a more unified and less politically engaged Islamic community." This alteration in the dynamics between the state and religion led to the growing influence of the National Outlook Movement (Milli Görüş), which gave rise to pro-Islamic parties, including the Welfare Party, the Virtue Party, and the Justice and Development Party (Göçmen, 2014, p. 96). The changes in Turkey's socio-economic and political landscape led to reforms in the social security system and the creation of social assistance programs designed to help the unemployed and impoverished segments of the population. It would be inaccurate to characterize the post-1980s period of the Turkish welfare state as one of downsizing. Instead, this era was marked by a reorganization of social security and a growing need for social assistance within the welfare framework (Gocmen, 2014, p. 96). These modifications led to an increase in government spending, driven by both the growing number of claimants and the establishment of new organizations in the social assistance sector. In this context of escalating demand, there was also a growth in civil society associations, along with coordinated state efforts and initiatives at the municipal level (Gocmen, 2014, p. 97).

A characteristic shared by social assistance systems established at both the central and local levels is their charity-like structure, which is influenced by the existing political climate. The interplay between neo-liberalization and political Islam has created an environment conducive to the rise of civil society associations in the welfare sector through two significant mechanisms (Gocmen, 2014, p. 97). The networks of reciprocity that emerged during the rise of political Islam formed the economic foundation for the development of civil society associations. These networks fostered intra-community solidarity among Anatolian capital, enabling mutual support and collaboration among their members. Their growth and success were driven by a deep trust and solidarity rooted in Islamic ideals. Religious groups or communities, while constructing mosques, Qur'an courses, schools, and student dormitories through contributions from members or philanthropic donations made out of religious obligation, also established a customer and capital foundation for the educational institutions, businesses, and enterprises of their members." (Gocmen, 2014, p. 97). Evidence of the operation of these networks can be seen in the recent formation of umbrella associations driven by religious motivations. The Turkish Foundation of Voluntary Organizations (TGTV) is the largest national umbrella association with Islamic inclinations (Turkish Foundation of Voluntary Organizations, 2012).

This umbrella organization aims to serve as a connection among various sectors of Islamic civil society, including education, law, business, and social service associations. Significant Islamic business associations, such as MUSIAD and ASKON, are affiliated with the TGTV. As a result, the companies linked to these associations fund the initiatives of the religiously motivated umbrella associations (RMAs) (Gocmen, 2014, p. 97). These institutional developments transformed philanthropy into a political economy of loyalty. RMAs became intermediaries between the state and local communities, distributing goods, services, and opportunities in ways that reinforced partisan identity and weakened autonomous civic organization. In contrast to Egypt, where welfare activism often produced oppositional political identities, Turkish RMAs became deeply embedded within pro-government networks, making them key clients rather than potential challengers. This distinction helps explain why tolerance persisted longer in Turkey: co-optation had become the primary mode of governance.

The amendments to the associational laws and tax regulations, along with backing from pro-Islamic political parties, contribute to a favorable status for RMAs. The establishment of the new law on associations in 2004 led to the creation of a sub-department, known as the Department of Associations, within the Ministry of Interior, tasked with overseeing the formation and functioning of civil society organizations (Gocmen, 2014, p. 97). The change enabled the establishment and functioning of RMAs. During this time, joint projects between state institutions and civil society organizations emerged for the first time. The introduction of a food bank system in the income tax laws in 2004 allowed companies to receive tax exemptions for donations made to civil society associations. A subsequent amendment to the law in 2004 expanded the scope of assistance to include food, clothing, cleaning supplies, and fuel, consequently boosting the volume of donations received by RMAs from various businesses (Gocmen, 2014, p. 97). Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate that the rise of an AKP–Gülen patron–client alliance was not an sudden episode, but rather the culmination of long-term structural trends set in motion after the 1980 coup. Neoliberal restructuring weakened formal welfare institutions, while the state's deliberate promotion of Islam as a stabilizing force expanded the social, economic, and bureaucratic space in which Islamic actors could operate. As Islamic civil society evolved into an indispensable provider of services, legitimacy, and political support, the boundary between the state and the movement became increasingly porous. The AKP's ascent did not invent this model; it merely consolidated and weaponized it. By the 2000s, clientelism, religious solidarity, and state patronage

had merged into a durable system of governance, in which Islamic networks were both empowered and integrated. This structural entanglement, rather than short-term opportunism, explains why cooperation later hardened into dependency and why the rupture after 2016 took the form of a struggle within a previously shared ecosystem, rather than a clean confrontation between the state and the movement.

The Gülen Movement

Numerous scholars and academics have attempted to define the Gülen movement, offering various interpretations. Some describe it as a faith-based social movement, while others see it as a market-oriented religious education initiative. It is also viewed as a contemporary expression of Islam that fosters connections not only among different religions but also between democracy and Islam (Dogan, 2019, p. 41). Additionally, it is characterized as a non-political movement that still engages with politics and as an Islamic movement that aims to merge a modern interpretation of Islam with Turkish nationalism. The diverse definitions of the Gülen Movement can be attributed to its multifaceted roles: it serves as a religious movement by emphasizing personal transformation and spiritual practices, as a social movement through its broad involvement in sectors like education, healthcare, and media, and as a political movement because of its alleged influence within significant governmental and military positions. Scholars typically characterize the Gülen movement as a civic, social, and religious organization that began in Turkey and later expanded globally. They are recognized for their successful educational institutions (Dogan, 2019, p. 41).

The Hizmet (service) or Gülen movement was founded by Fethullah Gülen in 1969. Fethullah Gülen, the founder of the Hizmet Movement, is a prominent Turkish-Muslim scholar, philosopher, author, educational activist, and former preacher. Gülen completed his religious education and training under the guidance of several esteemed scholars, earning a traditional Islamic teaching license. He also completed his secondary education through external examinations. He obtained a state preacher license after passing an exam by the Turkish State's Directorate of Religious Affairs. He began preaching in Edirne, a city located in northwestern Turkey. During this period, he expanded his understanding of Islamic studies, natural sciences, and Western philosophical ideas (Fitzgerald, 2016, p. 4). While still a young man, Gülen became acquainted with the teachings of Said Nursi, the Kurdish-Turkish Islamic thinker whose intellectual legacy he chose to pursue.

Nursi (1877–1960) was a prominent modernist thinker in Turkey and the author of the Risalet Nur (Epistle of Light). Central to Nursi's philosophy is his vision for rejuvenating Turkish religious culture, which he believed was jeopardized by the growing influence of scientific skepticism and secularism in contemporary society. He envisioned this revival occurring not through political activism or violent upheaval but rather through a concept he referred to as "positive action." (Lagervall, 2021, p. 89). Gülen sought to convey his message of moral and spiritual reform to a broader public audience. While the teachings of Said Nursi formed the core of his message, Gülen emphasized their practical application within the local context of 1960s Izmir. He endeavored to demonstrate to his initial audience, students, small business owners, and tradespeople, how religious devotion could enhance, rather than hinder, their professional pursuits and be effectively integrated into their different spheres of worldly influence (Lagervall, 2021, p. 89).

In 1966, Gülen, serving as a state preacher, was relocated to Izmir, a city along Turkey's Aegean coast, where he managed a mosque without taking any salary for his public service. During this period, he founded the Hizmet (Service) movement, which initially gained popularity in Turkey and later expanded to over 100 countries worldwide (Lagervall, 2021, p. 89). Education centered on science has been the primary focus of the Gülen Movement (GM) since its founding. In the late 1960s, Gülen and a growing group of followers who resonated with his teachings began organizing summer revision camps in Izmir for local high school and university students. These initial camps were the foundation for the global network of private schools that the Gülen Movement would later establish. They were motivated by Gülen's vision of cultivating a 'golden generation' that would be equally knowledgeable in modern science, Islamic teachings, and ethics (Tee, 2021, p. 94).

In 1970, following the coup that took place on 12 March in Turkey, Gülen was detained and spent six months in prison without facing any charges. Despite this, he remained committed to promoting his ideology. By the late 1970s, he had gained a substantial following for his public sermons (Lagervall, 2021, p. 89). Gülen's growing community of supporters expanded beyond Izmir, founding additional summer camps, dormitories, and after-school study centers in various cities across Turkey (Tee, 2021, p. 94). Despite the occurrence of the third military coup in Turkey in 1980, the supporters of Hizmet persisted in their efforts and even expanded their activities. In 1982, the movement established its first private school in Izmir. Subsequently, private schools

affiliated with the Hizmet movement emerged in nearly every city across Turkey (Lagervall, 2021, p. 89). Throughout this decade, supporters of Gülen took advantage of new social and economic circumstances that greatly benefited the growth of their educational initiatives. Private "Gülen schools" emerged in cities across Turkey. In addition to their academic pursuits, Gülen followers became involved in various sectors during the 1980s. During this period, they started investing in business and media, which would later account for a substantial portion of the movement's financial and cultural resources (Tee, 2021, p. 95). In addition to engaging in education, economics, and politics, the Gülen movement established businesses, constructed schools, and published journals to cultivate religious and secular knowledge. Gülen sought out the economic resources required to expand and sustain his movement. Consequently, the movement relied on economic networks to foster market relationships that aimed to enhance the financial well-being of its participants (Dogan, 2019, p. 42).

In the financial industry, supporters of the movement founded Asya Finans in 1996, which rebranded as Bank Asya in 2006. It operates as a private finance institution in Turkey. By July 2007, the bank had 117 branches nationwide (Klinic, 2007, p. 126). The initiative also includes businesses in the tourism industry. The Asya Kızılcahamam Resort and Spa a facility is owned by Bank Asya. It was established in 2004 in a small town in the Ankara region (Klinic, 2007, p. 126). Alongside its financial institution and hotel, the Gülen movement is also involved in the media sector. The most significant outlets are Zaman Newspaper and Samanyolu Television (STV). Zaman was founded in 1986 and is currently one of the top three national newspapers in Turkey, boasting an average daily circulation of around 500,000. It even has international editions distributed in over 15 countries, including the United States. STV, which began operations in 1993, along with Zaman, has promoted the movement's viewpoints on various social and political matters. Their articles and programs have reinforced the movement's message of fostering dialogue with the state and different social groups (Klinic, 2007, p. 127). The education sector is perhaps the most crucial area for the Gülen movement. It began establishing educational institutions in Turkey during the 1980s, starting with tutoring centers (dershane) aimed at helping students prepare for university entrance exams. Over time, the movement expanded to include the establishment of private high schools that taught in English. Since the 1990s, the movement has also launched schools internationally, which have gained a reputation for providing high-quality education and have often ranked among the best in various countries. While many of these schools

charge tuition, they primarily receive financial support from Turkish businesspeople, and the tuition fees in numerous developing nations tend to be relatively low. Additionally, many students from less developed areas receive financial assistance from these schools, facilitating their integration into the political landscape of their respective countries (Klinic, 2007, p. 127).

During the 1990s, Turkey carried out various liberal reforms. Restrictions on the Kurdish language were lifted, private broadcasting companies broke the state's monopoly on media, and there was a relaxation of limitations on political participation for trade unions, academics, and students. Additionally, a Parliamentary Human Rights Commission was established. These liberalizing efforts peaked between 2002 and 2005 as Turkey sought to attain candidate status for the European Union (Klinic, 2007, p. 132). The structural changes resulted in the emergence of a dynamic civil society in Turkey over the past twenty years. Previously, civil society organizations were primarily controlled by the state. Still, during the 1990s and 2000s, they gained a degree of autonomy and began to represent various social groups that had not previously been described in civil society. The political liberalization in Turkey has created new avenues for the Gülen movement. The movement has leveraged these opportunities in several ways. Firstly, it discovered a platform to communicate its message to a broader audience, with Zaman and STV playing key roles in this effort. Additionally, the movement established the Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) to participate in public discussions (Klinic, 2007, p. 133). In Turkey's democratic landscape, the Gülen movement has garnered backing from various politicians to counteract the attempts of the bureaucratic elite to diminish its influence. While it hasn't explicitly endorsed any particular political party, the competitive environment of democratic politics has allowed the Gülen movement, which boasts millions of followers, to attract support from several political parties since 1994 (Klinic, 2007, p. 133). During the 1990s, the state and the media endorsed the Gülen movement as a more moderate nationalist alternative to Necmettin Erbakan and his brand of political Islam. However, Gülen was significantly impacted by the 28 February military intervention, especially after a leaked video revealed him advising his followers in the bureaucracy to keep a low profile and conceal their religious identities. He faced accusations of threatening the secular order by disguising his strategies with a democratic and moderate facade (Dogan, 2019, p. 54). Moreover, the secular mass media in Turkey launched a significant offensive against Gülen, alleging that he had a concealed plan to seize control of the state; many politicians chose not to oppose the movement at that time. Moreover, several political figures, including the president, the

prime minister, multiple ministers, and leaders of opposition parties, expressed their support for Gülen, even though it would have been simpler to criticize him (Klinic, 2007, p. 133).

Initially, various groups supported the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in its efforts to democratize the state, advance Turkey's candidacy for European Union membership, and enhance Turkey's cultural, economic, and political influence both regionally and globally. The AKP and the Gülen movement sought to transform Turkey into a nation characterized by strong Turkish nationalism and conservative religiosity (Dogan, 2019, p. 54). For decades, they collaborated to gain power and shared a committed opposition to the Kemalist forces in Turkey. The Gülen movement dedicated resources, both human and financial, to support the AKP, especially at the beginning of its rule. Their relationship remained positive until the movement's followers within the police and judiciary began to assert an increasing independence (Dogan, 2019, p. 54). The movement gained global recognition for its scientifically focused educational institutions, and its followers' ambitious integration into the free-market economy resulted in significant capital accumulation. It spread beyond Turkey to several nations in Central Asia, the United States, and Europe, even before the AKP was established. Through these networks, the movement established itself as a non-confrontational and peaceful participant in international politics (Dogan, 2019, p. 55).

The AKP was originally established to uphold Turkey's secular state tradition. While it hasn't directly opposed the secular foundation of the Turkish state, it has worked to create more space for authoritarian rule, which has led to the erosion of freedoms and rights. Following the difficult experiences stemming from the collapse of the National Outlook, the AKP was initially cautious about provoking a second 28 February coup. Similarly, the Gülen movement kept its distance from the AKP to avoid alarming the secular system (Dogan, 2019, p. 55). Both groups were cautious at the outset, with Gülen refraining from aligning with the new political Islam figures and Erdogan staying away from Gülen. However, the National Security Council (MGK), primarily composed of military officers, including then-Prime Minister Erdoğan and select AKP ministers, urged the AKP government to endorse an advisory ruling on “measures needed to counter activities by the Fethullah Gülen group” and requested the development of an action plan. This situation frustrated both groups, prompting them to form a strategic alliance for mutual benefit (Dogan, 2019, p. 55). The strategic alliance compelled both groups to set aside their differences and foster mutually

beneficial relationships. Contrary to popular belief, the partnership between the AKP and the Gülen movement during this period was not a natural one, but rather a strategic collaboration. Both factions avoided criticizing secularists and their fundamental principles as part of their joint approach. They exercised caution regarding secularist and Kemalist concerns, making sure not to provoke the state elite by challenging secularism (Dogan, 2019, p. 56). They advocated a pro-Western agenda to advance Turkey's EU membership process and foster market liberalization. Each supported the other as a strategy to navigate the challenging secular landscape. The educated youth associated with the Gülen movement were able to broaden their influence in various social, economic, and bureaucratic areas. At the same time, the AKP gained advantages from its presence within the state bureaucracy (Dogan, 2019, p. 56). The AKP distanced itself from the principles of its previous leader, Necmettin Erbakan, and aligned more closely with the Gülen movement's strategy for the long-term reconstruction of the state and society. Conversely, the Gülen movement showed support for the AKP due to the secular military's covert efforts to depict the movement as a terrorist group. Facing inadequate legal protections, Muslim organizations felt compelled to infiltrate the bureaucracy to safeguard themselves against the secularists and Kemalists (Dogan, 2019, p. 57).

In their conflict with the military, both factions formed a strategic alliance to diminish the military's influence within the state. For the AKP, backing the Gülen movement was crucial in countering rivals and extending its authority over the bureaucracy and other governmental functions. This necessity led the AKP to ally with the Gülen movement, even though they had notably different interpretations of Islam. Each group supported the other as a means of safeguarding themselves against the secular state (Klinic, 2007, p. 135). Despite their contrasting views, the two groups established a strategic alliance against military control and the secular elite, which had oppressed both factions. To limit the military's influence in politics and restore state and societal structures, the Gülen movement and its allies within the Turkish bureaucracy, particularly in the police and judiciary, supported the AKP. Following the AKP's electoral success in 2002, Erdoğan assumed the role of Prime Minister, with Gülen and his movement lending their support by leveraging their media outlets and broad base of followers within the Turkish judiciary and police (Dogan, 2019, p. 58). Turkish bureaucracy has long been a contentious topic shaped by the ideological, religious, and party-political affiliations of various groups, largely due to the limitations placed on legal and public political discourse by the Kemalist state ideology.

Consequently, conservative factions have managed to infiltrate the nation's political, economic, and cultural elite. This dynamic also explains how the Gülen movement secured key positions in the bureaucracy, where they played a crucial role in the AKP's struggle against secularists and Kemalists (Dogan, 2019, p. 58). The AKP maintained robust connections with the movement, which focused on integrating the country into the global market. This movement emerged as the main beneficiary of the AKP's active foreign policies in regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Conversely, the movement's extensive network of merchants, educators, journalists, and activists played a crucial role in the AKP's initiatives to reshape Turkey's national identity and enhance the Country's global reputation as a Muslim democracy (Dogan, 2019, p. 59).

The AKP and the Gülen movement were aligned in their support for a pro-Western agenda that advanced Turkey's EU membership process and promoted market liberalization. To establish a solid base against secularists and Kemalists, both groups recognized the importance of backing EU membership. Additionally, the Gülen movement championed market liberalization to secure financial resources for its rapidly growing initiatives and projects in Turkey and internationally. For instance, during his tenure as Turkey's foreign minister, Abdullah Gül encouraged Turkish diplomats to participate in events organized by the movement and offer their assistance (Dogan, 2019, p. 59). Despite being non-partisan and supporting various political parties, the movement strongly backed the AKP from 2001 to 2010. The AKP created a social and regulatory environment that allowed the Gülen movement to thrive, while the movement's support and involvement helped ensure the security of Erdogan and his administration. This led many to link the movement with the AKP. In truth, the desire for political power in Turkey brought the movement and the AKP together in a pragmatic alliance (Dogan, 2019, p. 59). The AKP supported appointing members from the movement to important bureaucratic roles and protected the movement's institutions. There are claims that the movement's followers had control over the technologically skilled intelligence division of the police, as well as key personnel and international relations departments. This situation raises doubts about the movement's characterization as a social, civil, and spiritual organization (Klinic, 2007, p. 137). The AKP and the Gülen movement recognized the necessity of uniting their efforts to endure the challenging secular landscape; without this alliance, both groups risked being eliminated by the secular establishment. The AKP particularly benefited from the movement, which provided educated personnel within the state bureaucracy. The presence of secularists in key bureaucratic roles posed a significant challenge for the AKP in effectively

managing state administration and political affairs. In exchange for supporting the AKP, the Gülen movement broadened its influence across social, economic, and bureaucratic domains. During this period, it is alleged that members of the movement secured important positions within the state bureaucracy, judiciary, media, and security forces (Dogan, 2019, p. 60).

From the outset, the Gülen movement maintained a strained relationship with the Turkish military. Although it had a presence in police forces and various areas of the Turkish bureaucracy, it did not have representation within the armed forces. The military conducts biannual reviews of its personnel, which often result in the dismissal of individuals linked to Islamist groups, particularly the Gülen movement (Tee, 2021, p. 98). This approach prompted followers of the movement to criticize Kemalists within the military. Between 2007 and 2010, pro-Gülen media outlets targeted the Turkish army, publishing allegations against active-duty personnel purportedly involved in a coup plot against the AKP government (Dogan, 2019, p. 61). The partnership between the AKP and the Gülen movement reached its height during the constitutional referendum on 12 September 2010. At this time, Fethullah Gülen actively urged his followers and other citizens of Turkey to vote in favor of the referendum. Although Gülen typically refrained from political involvement, he openly supported the reform package aimed at restructuring the higher courts and judicial councils (Dogan, 2019, p. 61). The support from the movement enabled the AKP to initiate a referendum in 2010 aimed at amending the military-imposed 1982 constitution, which resulted in over 57% approval from Turkish voters. This referendum altered the structure of the judicial bodies and effectively diminished the influence of secularists within the judiciary. The partnership between the AKP and Gülen led to the reconfiguration of the judicial system. The constitutional reform package allowed for the election of a new Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) (Dogan, 2019, p. 61).

To fulfill the terms of their strategic alliance, the AKP government transferred control of the Ministries of Education, Internal Affairs, and Justice to the Gülen movement. Erdogan suggested this during the initial phases of the conflict, remarking that the movement was ungrateful to the AKP, despite having received everything they had requested. In summary, the AKP-Gülen alliance prioritized their political considerations with the intention of dismantling the remaining aspects of the secular establishment (Tee, 2021, p. 99). Through its alliance with the AKP, the Gülen movement secured a strong foothold within the Turkish bureaucracy, presenting itself

internationally as a civil and liberal interpretation of Islam. The movement experienced its peak period at the beginning of the Erdogan administration. It gained access to various state sectors that were previously closed to its members, including the ministries of education, interior, foreign affairs, justice, and the security and intelligence directorates. Erdogan actively promoted the movement abroad, urging foreign leaders to permit the establishment of their schools and initiatives. In return, the movement supported the AKP during elections. The party's domestic and international successes solidified this alliance between 2002 and 2010. However, following 2010, Turkey faced increasing challenges in foreign policy and domestic issues, which strained the relationship between the two groups. Eventually, the AKP-Gülen alliance disintegrated as the two Islamic factions competed for power in the evolving Turkish landscape.

The AKP Threat Perception from 2002-2013

In the early years of the AKP's rule (2002–2010), the regime operated within a landscape defined by multiple, shifting sources of threat. At the time of its ascent, the AKP was not confronting Islamic competitors but rather entrenched secular institutions, the military, judiciary, and bureaucratic elites that had long embodied the Kemalist guardianship of the Republic. These actors viewed political Islam as a latent danger, and the AKP, despite its electoral legitimacy, was treated as a potential violator of secular orthodoxy. The party's first decade in power was thus marked by a cautious balancing act: appeasing the secular establishment while gradually reconfiguring its power.

The military and the Kemalist bureaucracy were initially the regime's most significant perceived threats. For the AKP, the overriding security concern was to avoid direct confrontation with the army while disempowering it through constitutional and judicial reforms. During this phase, Gülen's movement appeared to Erdoğan not as a rival but as a strategic ally and as an internal partner capable of neutralizing external threats from within the state apparatus (Cizre, 2008, p. 46).

Alongside secular elites, the Kurdish political movement also occupied a significant position in the AKP's hierarchy of insecurity. However, this was achieved through a combination of accommodation and coercion (Cizre, 2008, p. 73).

Against this backdrop, the Gülen movement emerged as an actor that is neither a secular threat nor an ethnic one, but a religious network with deep bureaucratic reach and moral authority. In the 2000s, the AKP adopted Gülenism as a complementary force, with its schools, media outlets, and international networks projecting an image of disciplined piety and modern professionalism that aligned with the government's project of conservative modernization. The movement's bureaucratic cadres played a pivotal role in the AKP's consolidation of power, particularly in the judiciary and police, where they helped dismantle the Kemalist establishment.

This phase represented a form of punctuated pluralism, in which the AKP tolerated and even empowered multiple non-state actors, such as religious communities, foundations, and associations, within tightly defined boundaries. As in Mubarak's Egypt, pluralism functioned as a political instrument rather than a principle: inclusion was conditional upon subordination, and cooperation was sustained only as long as it reinforced the regime's legitimacy

The Hyper-Rational Approach

The patterns observed across Egypt and Turkey highlight how the sustained coexistence between Islamic movements and authoritarian regimes led to a hyper-rational approach in the literature on authoritarianism. Emerging primarily from early 2000s analyses of authoritarian resilience, this perspective assumes that rulers engage Islamic NGOs through calculated strategies of co-optation and tolerance, allowing them autonomy insofar as they serve regime interests. In this framework, authoritarian control is viewed as an outcome of deliberate, instrumental reasoning, where the regime rationally balances repression and cooperation to maintain political stability and provide social welfare.

The historical experiences of both Egypt under Mubarak and Turkey under the AKP appear, at first glance, to confirm this logic. In each case, economic liberalization and the partial retreat of the state from welfare provision created space for Islamic organizations such as al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya (JS) and the Gülen movement to assume social responsibilities once monopolized by the state. Their popularity and efficiency made them useful partners for regimes seeking to project legitimacy and maintain social order amid neoliberal adjustment. As long as these movements

remained depoliticized and complementary to state objectives, they enjoyed relative freedom and material support.

This convergence between social need and political utility explains why much of the earlier scholarship, exemplified by Abdelrahman (2004), Clark (2004), and Hassan (2011), interpreted state–Islamic NGO relations through a rationalist, equilibrium-based lens. These studies argued that authoritarian leaders were unlikely to suppress Islamic NGOs as long as they contributed to regime stability and refrained from political mobilization. The logic implied a stable clientelist exchange, in which the state provided protection and regulatory tolerance while Islamic movements offered welfare delivery, moral legitimacy, and social pacification.

However, as demonstrated throughout this chapter, this hyper-rational interpretation rests on a narrow reading of authoritarian behavior. It assumes that rulers consistently calculate costs and benefits when deciding whether to repress or tolerate social actors. Yet the empirical record from both cases reveals that clientelist arrangements were neither fixed nor indefinitely sustainable. They were bound by the regimes' shifting perceptions of threat and stability. In Egypt, even non-political charities like JS became vulnerable when the regime's sense of control got destabilized. In Turkey, a once-formidable alliance between the AKP and the Gülen movement collapsed abruptly once the movement's influence appeared to challenge the regime's monopoly over moral and bureaucratic authority.

The comparative evidence, therefore, refines the hyper-rational thesis: tolerance toward Islamic NGOs persists only under conditions of authoritarian stability, that is, when rulers feel secure enough to manage pluralism instrumentally. Once insecurity rises, perceived threats outweigh rational calculation, and repression becomes the default response. Thus, the clientelist partnerships explored in this chapter are best understood not as fixed contracts but as bargains sustained only as long as they reinforce, rather than compete with, regime dominance.

By integrating the Egyptian and Turkish trajectories, this section underscores that the hyper-rational approach captures an important but incomplete phase in the life cycle of state–Islam relations. It explains how authoritarian regimes construct cooperation, but not how they abandon it. The following chapter builds on this insight by examining the moments when these pragmatic

alliances collapsed, when rational calculation gave way to reactive coercion, and how these breakdowns expose the fragility of clientelist governance under conditions of authoritarian stabilization.

Conclusion: Authoritarian Pluralism and the Rise of Clientelist Governance

The comparative analysis of Egypt and Turkey in this chapter demonstrates how authoritarian regimes constructed and managed pluralism through contingent forms of cooperation with Islamic movements. In both contexts, the early 2000s and early 2010s were characterized by an emerging equilibrium between state control and Islamic participation, where religious organizations served as intermediaries between citizens and the state. This pattern did not represent genuine liberalization but rather a controlled opening, an authoritarian pluralism managed through clientelist exchange and bounded by shifting political opportunity structures.

Neoliberal transformations in both countries redefined the social and economic landscape in ways that increased the utility of Islamic actors. The state's partial withdrawal from welfare provision created opportunities for religious charities and educational networks to fill social gaps, while their moral authority helped regimes legitimize inequality and maintain a moralized image of governance. This process was especially evident in the partnership between the AKP and the Gülen movement in Turkey, as well as between the Egyptian state and al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya (JS). Both arrangements embodied a pragmatic form of state–Islam accommodation: the regimes offered protection, resources, and administrative access, while the movements supplied welfare, social legitimacy, and political compliance.

These relationships were sustained by punctuated pluralism, a governing logic in which inclusion and tolerance were temporary and conditional. The regimes tolerated multiple Islamic actors only as long as they contributed to political stability and avoided overt politicization. Once the boundaries of acceptable participation were perceived to have been crossed, containment mechanisms, legal oversight, bureaucratic monitoring, and discursive regulation were activated to restore balance. In both cases, pluralism was not dismantled through abrupt repression but managed through cycles of selective accommodation and control.

The comparison also highlights that, while both Egypt and Turkey relied on clientelist networks, the depth and nature of these arrangements varied significantly. In Egypt, the relationship with JS remained primarily social and charitable, with limited penetration into political institutions. In Turkey, the Gülen movement's integration into the judiciary, police, and educational bureaucracy created a denser and more explicitly political form of cooperation. Nonetheless, both systems functioned within a bounded rationality of governance, where authoritarian regimes are not always necessarily functioning based on long-term rational calculations. Additionally, the long history of clientelism and mutual cooperation does not guarantee the tolerance granted to Islamic movements.

Theoretically, this chapter demonstrates that clientelism and punctuated pluralism serve as key instruments of authoritarian adaptation under neoliberal transformation. They enable regimes to govern through intermediaries, absorb social pressures, and project an image of inclusion without surrendering control. Yet, as will be shown in the next chapter, this system carries intrinsic contradictions. The same networks that stabilize authoritarian rule during periods of uncertainty can later become sources of perceived threat depending on the regime's stability status.

In summary, the Egyptian and Turkish experiences prior to 2013 and 2016 reveal the formation of a distinctive authoritarian mode of governance, a negotiated pluralism rooted in clientelist exchange and reactive flexibility. This chapter has traced how these arrangements emerged and evolved as pragmatic responses to economic and political pressures. The following chapter will build on this foundation to examine the fragility of clientelist governance and the reactive nature of authoritarian consolidation.

Chapter Six

Reactive Authoritarianism and the Politics of Insecurity: Egypt and Turkey's Crackdown on Islamic Movements

Following the periods of cautious engagement and strategic tolerance that once characterized interactions between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements in Egypt and Turkey, this chapter investigates the decisive turn towards repression that unfolded after the respective political ruptures of 2013 and 2016. The cases of al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya (JS) in Egypt and the Gülen Movement in Turkey, both deeply embedded in the provision of welfare, education, and religious services, offer a lens through which to understand how regimes that had previously relied on these actors as quasi-partners in social governance came to perceive them as existential threats. The chapter argues that the waves of closures, arrests, and expropriations that followed these ruptures signify not merely an acquisition of control, but a structural transformation in authoritarian behavior. What had once been negotiated cooperation between state and Islamic civil society was recast as a relationship of coercion and suspicion, as authoritarian leaders sought to consolidate power and redefine the permissible boundaries of religious activism.

In this chapter, authoritarian strategy is understood not as the outcome of a calculated, long-term strategy but as a form of bounded rationality, a constrained and reactive mode of decision-making shaped by uncertainty, insecurity, and limited information. Rather than engaging in deliberate planning, regimes act under perceived threat, seeking immediate control and short-term stability when their authority appears vulnerable. Decisions to repress are therefore impulsive responses to rising insecurity, designed to neutralize perceived dangers rather than to achieve coherent long-term goals. In this sense, authoritarian behavior reflects a logic of defensive adaptation: rulers translate anxiety into action, securitizing social and religious spaces to restore a sense of order and stability. The intensity and form of such repression depend less on objective threats than on how leaders perceive and interpret challenges to their dominance.

Building on this logic, the chapter posits that repression tends to escalate when regime insecurity intersects with the autonomy of NGOs. As Islamic movements accumulate independent moral

authority or capacity for social mobilization, they begin to embody alternative sources of legitimacy that unsettle the regime's rule. The analytical core of this chapter lies in demonstrating that repression is not conditioned by an organization's loyalty, utility, or political engagement, but by the regime's own moment of authoritarian stabilization. Regardless of how much the state benefits, socially, economically, or politically, from the activities of Islamic movements, and irrespective of whether these actors are politically active or confrontational, regimes will resort to suppression once their authority feels endangered. In such moments, perceived stability takes precedence over functional benefit, and repression becomes a means of reaffirming control rather than addressing genuine threats.

To trace these dynamics comparatively, the chapter examines how two distinct authoritarian contexts**,** Egypt after 2013 and Turkey after 2016, deploy repression as a reactive instrument of control. By analyzing both the discursive and institutional mechanisms of power, the chapter captures how authoritarian behavior adapts across regimes' threat perception while maintaining a shared logic: the transformation of independent Islamic movements into objects of surveillance, regulation, and moral suspicion.

The aim of this chapter is therefore twofold.
First, it seeks to empirically reconstruct the unfolding of repression as a reactive process during moments of regime insecurity. By analyzing both public narratives (as articulated in state and pro-government media) and private accounts (from interviews with state officials, association leaders, and practitioners), the chapter demonstrates how spontaneous and coercive actions were framed as deliberate moral imperatives, allowing regimes to legitimize repression while obscuring its social, political, and economic consequences.

Second, it aims to theoretically situate these empirical dynamics within the framework of authoritarian stabilization, explaining how regimes, acting under conditions of bounded rationality, translate insecurity into acts of control. This perspective illuminates how repression functions not as a coherent strategy but as an improvised response through which the state seeks to restore authority, reassert dominance over religious fields, and narrate coercion as an act of national salvation.

Methodologically, the chapter combines media discourse analysis and qualitative interview data to capture both the state's projected narratives and the lived experiences of actors navigating repression. A manual thematic coding process was applied to all interview transcripts and media texts to identify recurrent patterns of meaning across different actors. Each interview was read multiple times to grasp tone, vocabulary, and framing. Key phrases and sentences were highlighted and annotated with conceptual labels, such as securitization, compliance, and legitimacy, which were then clustered into broader analytical themes reflecting both regime strategy and organizational adaptation. This approach follows the principles of grounded thematic analysis, allowing categories to emerge inductively from the data. Codes were compared across groups, government officials, journalists, and NGO leaders, to trace points of convergence and divergence in their narratives. This manual approach ensured close engagement with the empirical material while maintaining conceptual coherence with the theoretical concerns of the dissertation regarding authoritarian governance and civil society.
A total of fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted across both countries. In Egypt, eight interviews were conducted: three with senior policymakers from the Ministry of Social Solidarity, one with a journalist from a state-aligned newspaper, one with an academic specializing in Islamic movements, and three with members of al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya (JS). In Turkey, seven interviews were conducted: two with journalists, two academics, and three members of the Gülen movement (two former and one current). Interviewees were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure diversity of perspective and depth of insight into the evolving relationship between Islamic organizations and the state.

The rationale for combining media discourse analysis with interview data lies in the need for triangulation between public narratives and internal perceptions. Media sources reveal how regimes officially framed the closures of Islamic organizations, while interviews illuminate the private rationalizations, adaptive strategies, and vocabularies that actors used to interpret repression. Together, these sources offer a more comprehensive view of authoritarian governance, encompassing both its representational and lived dimensions.

The chapter is divided into five main parts. The first section situates both Egypt and Turkey within the context of neoliberal restructuring, demonstrating how economic liberalization and welfare retrenchment have deepened the state's dependence on Islamic charities and educational networks.

However, paradoxically, as both regimes struggled with the social and economic fallout of these reforms, they chose to dismantle the very movements that had helped absorb those costs. The second section examines this turn to repression, tracing how moments of acute insecurity, the 2013 coup in Egypt and the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, triggered a rapid reclassification of once-tolerated religious actors into perceived existential threats. The third section analyzes state and pro-government media discourse, focusing on how shifting labels, from "social partners" to "extremists" and "terrorists", mirrored the regimes' evolving threat perceptions. This discursive transformation, presented as moral and national necessity, reveals how language operates as both a symptom and a tool of authoritarian stabilization. The fourth section explores the lived experiences and narratives of organizational actors, policymakers, journalists, and academics through a set of semi-structured interviews. These interviews aim to trace three interrelated dimensions: the extent to which the movements were politicized, the scope of their social service provision, and the detailed mechanisms and impact of the subsequent waves of repression. Finally, the fifth section presents a comparative synthesis, connecting the two cases through the lens of bounded rationality to argue that authoritarian regimes often act against their own structural interests in pursuit of short-term stabilization and moral control.

Neoliberal Reforms and Economic Circumstances during Sisi's Era

To start, a key aspect of this research is understanding why the regime initiated a backlash against Islamic-based NGOs, irrespective of the deteriorating economic conditions. Estimates indicated that 22% of Egyptians were living below the poverty line in 2008-2009 (Verme, 2014, p. 105), but by 2017-2018, this figure had risen to 32.7% (CAPMAS, 2019). Despite this significant increase in poverty rates, the regime pursued a crackdown on these NGOs, employing various methods to counteract the perceived threat they posed. The current economic difficulties and high poverty rates in Egyptian society are not a recent issue; however, a more intense phase of these struggles began following the implementation of neoliberal reforms in 2014 (Verme, 2014, p. 105). To address a fiscal deficit that represented 2.5% of GDP, two primary strategies from the IMF were adopted: "inclusive growth and deficit reduction" (Joya, 2017, p. 8). The inclusive growth strategy focused on promoting investment and financial development, while the deficit reduction strategy involved significant cuts to public spending alongside a substantial increase in taxes (Joya, 2017,

p. 8). One necessary consequence of the IMF agreement was the surge in consumer goods prices. As noted by Joya (2017), "The Sisi government announced food and fuel price increases of up to 78% in July 2014, coinciding with cuts to fuel and food subsidies" (p. 15). This reduction in public spending was evident in the decline of investments in housing, health care, and education (Joya, 2017, p. 16). For example, public housing investment dropped within less than two years, reaching its lowest percentage by 2016 (Joya, 2017, p. 16). Although these neoliberal reforms were intended to address the economic challenges inherited from Mubarak's regime, the observations mentioned highlight the worsening economic conditions. Therefore, despite the escalating economic hardship and the potential for social unrest exacerbated by the implementation of neoliberal reforms and the reduction of state-provided social welfare, the Egyptian regime paradoxically chose to intensify its crackdown on Islamic-based movements, which had historically played a significant role in providing social services.

What triggered the Crackdown on Islamic movements in Egypt post-2013?

Before delving into the details of the crackdown on Islamic NGOs, it is essential to consider a crucial question: Why did Sisi's regime choose to target these Islamic-based organizations despite the apparent necessity of their services for the public? The simplest answer points to the Muslim Brotherhood's ability to ascend to power in 2013, mainly due to its significant popularity. A more detailed explanation involves the unprecedented involvement of the Brotherhood in the political arena, which became evident during the weeks of the uprising (Rutherford, 2013, p. 5). Notably, their representation in both the lower and upper houses during 2012-2013 clearly indicated their rising popularity. The following table outlines these percentages as detailed by Rutherford (2013, p. 5).

Party	Lower House	Upper House
The MB Freedom and Justice Party	42%	58%

Al Nur Salafist Party	21%	25%
Al Wafd Party	10%	

This ultimately led to the victory of Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, in the 2012 presidential election. However, their time in power was short-lived, as they were ousted by the military in 2013. The crackdown that began in 2013 not only targeted the Muslim Brotherhood but also affected numerous other Islamic NGOs that were not opposing the regime (Rutherford, 2013, p. 6). This broad wave of repression is central to the research question, as it illustrates the significant shift in authoritarian tactics from Mubarak's administration to Sisi's. It is worth noting that the attack on the Muslim Brotherhood was one of the regime's initial and most notable actions against Islamic groups. According to Law 84 of 2002, all non-governmental organizations are entirely prohibited from participating in any paramilitary activities (Gamalelddin, 2013, para. 4). Following the 2013 coup, this law provided the legal basis for a sweeping government crackdown on Islamic organizations. In September 2013, a court decree included the following:

- Banning "all activities" associated with the Muslim Brotherhood (MB).
- Closing down all NGOs and charitable organizations linked to them.
- The leaders of the MB, including their supreme guide, Mohamed Badie, have been accused and charged with committing acts of violence against the public.
- Additionally, the assets of the leaders have been frozen (Gamalelddin, 2013, para.5).

The decisions were integral to the regime's strategy in the war on terrorism, and the narrative surrounding this strategy significantly justified the wave of crackdowns. As previously noted, this crackdown began with the dissolution of the group in mid-2013, followed by a gradual prohibition of numerous Islamic NGOs, particularly those linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as many that were politically neutral (Al Malky, 2015, para. 2). By late 2013, approximately 1,300 organizations associated with the Brotherhood had been shut down, most of which were providing services to the poorest communities in Egypt (Al Malky, 2015, para. 2). Al Malky (2015) highlighted an important observation regarding the methods used during the crackdown; the

approach for this wave involved banning all organizations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, those engaged in paramilitary activities, and any not registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs (para, 4). These ambiguous criteria provided the regime with the authority to dissolve any organizations they suspect (Al Malky, 2015, para. 6). Fadel (2013) has supplied a more comprehensive map of the organizations that were closed in 2013, including the names of key Islamic charities, some of which were linked to the MB. The shutdown of these charities had devastating effects on numerous impoverished families that relied entirely on their support. Below is a summary of the initial phase of the crackdown on several major charities, as noted by Fadel (2013):

1. Al Mwasah Al Islamya
2. Al bey'a w Hymaytaha
3. Al Basmah Al Khayrya for special needs,
4. Al Mar'a Al Asrya
5. Al mawada
6. Ana Al Masry
7. Al Gamyia Al Sharyia
8. Al Mostakbl
9. Al Gamiya Al Sharia in Shebin el Kom city
10. Jamyet Al Mohafaza Al Quran Al Kareem in Berket El Sab'
11. Jamyet Tahfez Al Quran Al Kareem in Berket El Sab'
12. Al Jamyia el Sharia in Sars Al Lyan
13. Al Amal Charity
14. Al Takwa Charity
15. Al Nahda
16. Tanmyet Al Mogtama'
17. A'mal Al Ber
18. Al Mostakbal Charity in Ashmon
19. Manabe' Al Kheir Charity
20. Gamiya el Sharia in Kwesna
21. Al Safwa Charity
22. Shabab Al Kheir Charity
23. Jamyet Al Ahsan w Al Re'aya (Fadel, 2013)

The charities mentioned were shut down immediately following the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, in 2015, a second wave of closures occurred, affecting not only more MB-affiliated charities but also other non-MB Islamic organizations (Mada Masr, 2015, para. 2). During that year, Minister of Social Solidarity Ghada Wali issued an official statement explaining the rationale behind the crackdown on Islamic NGOs. She indicated that the organizations that were closed had failed to adhere to the original plans and objectives set with the ministry, as they had shifted towards a political agenda (Mada Masr, 2015, para. 2). More importantly, she emphasized that the situation involving the Muslim Brotherhood, specifically how they mobilized the public and posed a threat to national security, should never be repeated (Mada Masr, 2015, para. 3). This statement, framed within the larger context of the war on terrorism, provided the regime with the justification to shut down numerous Islamic charities, including those completely unrelated to the Brotherhood and practicing no political activities. The second phase of this crackdown was executed through two main strategies: the first being the total closure of many Islamic NGOs. In 2015, the Ministry of Social Solidarity shut down 169 charities affiliated with the Brotherhood, along with another 112 Islamic charities that had no ties to the Brotherhood, which were spread across various governorates (Mada Masr, 2015, para. 4). The second strategy centered on bureaucratic absorption, whereby the Ministry of Awqaf and other state institutions took direct control of mosques, schools, and welfare offices previously administered by these associations (Mada Masr, 2015, para. 4). Through this process, the regime not only dismantled autonomous religious networks but also reasserted administrative control over the provision of social services, effectively transforming welfare into an extension of state authority.

Law 149 of 2019: Bureaucratizing Civil Society Control

Law No. 149 of 2019 marks a significant milestone in Egypt's regulatory framework for civil society. Although presented publicly as a reform intended to replace the more restrictive previous law (Law 70/2017), in analytical terms, it both retains and deepens many of the authoritarian logics embedded in earlier frameworks. The law's provisions systematically translate regime concerns about order, security, and political control into legal and administrative constraints on NGOs (Shafick, 2020, p. 4). The following analysis examines how Law 149 advances bureaucratic control, securitization, and depoliticization, while drawing on theoretical lenses to explain how and why these mechanisms operate as they do. While Law No. 149 was framed publicly as a

corrective reform to earlier legislation, its substantive provisions reveal a continuity and deepening of authoritarian logics. Rather than creating an enabling environment for civil society, the law institutionalizes a framework of bureaucratic control that channels NGO activity into tightly regulated boundaries (Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2019, pp. 1-2). To understand how this operates in practice, it is necessary to examine the specific features through which restriction is embedded into everyday organizational life. The following subsections highlight the key mechanisms: registration and legal recognition, financial oversight, activity limitations, and surveillance that together constitute the architecture of control underpinning the law.

1. Registration and Legal Recognition

Law No. 149 requires all associations to register formally with the Ministry of Social Solidarity, a process framed as administrative but serving as a political filter. Legal recognition becomes contingent upon compliance with state-defined criteria, transforming registration into a mechanism of gatekeeping. Organizations unable or unwilling to align with state expectations face the threat of dissolution or denial of legal standing, effectively shrinking the permissible space for independent initiative (Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2019, pp. 1-2).

2. Financial Oversight and Dependency

Funding constitutes a second axis of control. The law imposes strict reporting and approval requirements on all sources of income, with particular emphasis on foreign contributions. Broad discretionary powers allow authorities to block, delay, or freeze transfers on the grounds of security or public order. This framework positions NGOs in a state of structural dependency on state approval, undermining their ability to plan and sustain activities independently and creating financial problems that discourage autonomy (Human Rights Watch, 2021, para. 6).

3. Restrictions on Activities and Scope

The law explicitly confines NGOs to areas of activity deemed compatible with state priorities, such as narrowly defined charitable or developmental work, while prohibiting engagement in politics, union activity, or any action that could be construed as threatening national unity. These provisions limit the scope of civil society to service delivery, excluding advocacy, rights-based mobilization, and independent religious outreach. The legal boundary between permissible and

impermissible activities remains deliberately vague, allowing authorities to retain wide interpretive latitude in enforcement (Human Rights Watch, 2021, para. 7).

4. Surveillance and Compliance Mechanisms

The regulatory framework institutionalizes surveillance through mandatory reporting, inspections, and the threat of administrative penalties. NGOs are required to submit detailed accounts of their finances, programs, and partnerships, which are subject to regular monitoring by ministry officials. Compliance thus becomes an ongoing burden, embedding oversight into the daily functioning of civil society organizations. The result is a routine system of bureaucratic supervision that normalizes state intrusion into internal governance (Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2019, pp. 2-3).

Taken together, these provisions illustrate how Law No. 149 transforms the legal environment into a mechanism of control. Registration, funding oversight, activity restrictions, and surveillance operate not simply as technical regulatory measures but as instruments for depoliticization and subordination. By embedding repression in bureaucratic routine, the law ensures that civil society organizations are aligned with state priorities.

Al Jamyiah Al Sharyiah Post 2013

Before delving into the complexities of the regime-JS interactions post-2013, it is crucial to understand how the previous regimes handled the critical political junctures of the JS. The relationship between Mubarak and the Jamiah Al Shariah (JS) underwent a series of tensions during 1985, 1991, and 1995. In 1985, Al Jam's Al Islamyiah sought to establish a presence in society by leveraging an already established organization. As part of this effort, Al Jama'a attempted to mobilize support through the mosques affiliated with the JS. Consequently, the mosques in Assiut became infiltrated by members of Al Jama'a (Fahmy, 2020, p. 156). In response, Mubarak's regime decided to replace the mosque's administrative body with a council appointed by the Ministry of Social Affairs (Fahmy, 2020, p. 156). The JS aimed to address the issue without escalating conflicts with the regime and therefore distanced itself from Al Jama'a (Fahmy, 2020, p. 156). Given the challenges the regime faced in suppressing the JS, particularly due to their extensive welfare activities, the regime forced higher supervision on their mosques (Fahmy, 2020,

p. 156). The second instance of threats emerged in 1991 when some members of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) infiltrated the administrative council of the JS (Fahmy, 2020, p. 156). This infiltration posed a significant potential danger to the regime, leading to calls against the politicization of the JS (Fahmy, 2020, p. 156). The third wave of confrontations occurred between 1995 and 1997, when a new leader affiliated with the MB took charge of the JS (Fahmy, 2020, p. 157). This significant development prompted the regime to intervene directly in the internal processes, scrutinizing members and curbing the MB's growth within the organization (Fahmy, 2020, p. 157). By 2012, the number of JS branches exceeded 1,000, as the MB provided support, with the condition that the JS would not be utilized as a political platform for the group (Fahmy, 2020, p. 157).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the JS has a rich history of providing social services that spans over a century, with more than a thousand branches throughout Egypt. Given the prior conflicts between the JS and various regimes prior to the revolution, along with the scholarly consensus that these regimes would not launch severe attacks on Islamic movements, one might have anticipated that the current regime would allow the JS to continue existing after 2013. This assumption is partly based on the fact that the JS does not function as an official political organization and also considers the financial challenges and other issues previously highlighted. Nonetheless, the government’s campaign against Islamic movements, as previously mentioned, was not limited to political factions or those associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. It primarily aimed at any significant, established organization that could potentially gain political influence and rally public support.

The following section aims to gain a deeper insight into the details of targeting the JS and the steps involved in undermining their service provision capacity and shutting down several branches. As indicated in the methodology chapter, in-depth interviews will be conducted with policy makers and employees in the JS to get the full image of the clashes between both sides, to gain an insight into the actions that were not particularly mentioned in media platforms, and more importantly, to avoid biases in testing the proposed hypothesis and theory building. Nevertheless, before analyzing actors' perspectives, I will provide an overview of media coverage on the clashes between the government and the JS to compare the official available information with the lived experiences. This comparison is crucial for understanding the motivations behind state actions, particularly

regarding the suppression of organizations providing social services, and for evaluating the hypothesis that regime stability was prioritized over service provision.

Government Pronouncements and Media Coverage of Organizational Closures

This section systematically analyzes the dominant narratives and framing strategies employed by official and state-aligned news media in Egypt regarding non-governmental organizations (NGOs), particularly Islamic charities. Its primary objective is to analyze the official discourse presented to the Egyptian public regarding these entities, especially in the context of state actions that led to the closing of NGOs and the heightened scrutiny of groups like Al-Jamyiah al-Shayiah (JS). Analyzing these media portrayals is critical for this dissertation as it reveals the regime's communication strategy to legitimize its consolidation of power after 2013. By examining the content, language, and emphasis in major state-controlled and state-aligned outlets, this analysis identifies the specific accusations, justifications, and legitimizing narratives used by the Egyptian state.

Methodology for News Analysis

A systematic review of major official and state-aligned news sources in Egypt was conducted, encompassing the period from 2013 to 2016. This period encapsulates the transformation from the initial phase of mass repression following the ouster of the MB to the subsequent institutionalization of control over civil society. By 2016, the Egyptian regime had consolidated its bureaucratic mechanisms of surveillance and regulation, in addition to the drafting of Law 70 (2017), which codified these repressive trends into formal legislation.

Primary sources included *Al-Ahram* (state-owned), *Al-Masry Al-Youm* (semi-official), *Al-Watan*, and *Youm7* (pro-government). State-run television bulletins and official government press releases were also consulted.

Keyword searches covered "إغلاق الجمعيات" (closing NGOs), "الجمعية الشرعية" (Al-Jamʿiyyah al-Sharʿiyyah), "الجمعيات الشرعية" (Islamic charities), "تمويل أجنبي" (foreign funding), and "الأمن" (security). The collected material was analyzed using discourse and content analysis to identify

recurring themes, frames, lexical patterns, and silences, revealing how state-controlled narratives evolved to justify repression.

State Narrative and Media Framing

The state-aligned newspaper *Al-Ahram* reported extensively on the growing confrontation between the Ministry of Religious Endowments and al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya (JS), framing it as a necessary intervention to protect mosques from politicization. In an article published in January 2014, *Al-Ahram* cited the Minister's decision to transfer approximately 6,000 mosques previously managed by JS to state control, accusing the association of "failing to uphold its commitments" and reporting "the discovery of weapons in a warehouse rented by the JS next to the Al-Haq Mosque in Helwan". It also noted that JS "failed to adhere to the protocol's terms and was influenced by extremists who spread radical ideology." The ministry thus "decided to integrate the association's mosques, which extremists influence and contribute to the spread of extreme ideologies, where unqualified preachers occupied pulpits." (Al Ahram, 2014, Para. 2-3).

The report further recounted that a JS preacher had "declared that investment certificates related to the Suez Canal project constituted usury," thereby portraying the association as a politically provocative actor. The Minister of Endowments warned that religious associations could be "exploited to support Brotherhood sleeper cells ('خلايا نائمة')" and instructed that JS preachers be replaced with state-approved imams. Inspectors were directed to ensure that sermons conformed to Al-Azhar's "moderate" discourse and avoided "divisive or political" preaching (Al-Ahram, 2014, Para. 3-5).

In late 2013, *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, a major state-aligned newspaper, reported on the government's decision to freeze the assets of Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiya and al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya, marking one of the earliest moments of open confrontation between the regime and Islamic charitable associations. The report detailed how both organizations initiated legal proceedings against the government, denouncing the decision as unjust and politically motivated. The associations argued that the freeze "يعتمد على ادعاءات كاذبة بانتمائهما لجماعة الإخوان المسلمين" ("was based on false claims of their affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood") and stressed their longstanding commitment to charitable and advocacy work (Al-Masry Al-Youm, 2013, Para 1-4).

The article further highlighted the social repercussions of this administrative measure, quoting a representative of al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya who stated that the government's decision had "أدى إلى إغلاق منشآت حيوية للعاملين وأثر على أرزاق آلاف الأسر محدودة الدخل" ("led to the closure of vital facilities for employees and affected the livelihoods of thousands of low-income families") (Al-Masry Al-Youm, 2013, Para 1-4). He rejected any accusations linking the associations to political Islam. He questioned the "منطق منع التبرعات عن المحتاجين ومعاقبة الجمعيات الخيرية" ("logic of preventing donations to the needy and punishing charitable organizations") (Al-Masry Al-Youm, 2013, Para 1-4).

The state-aligned outlet *Youm7* reported that staff at the children's hospital run by al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya in Nasr City "اشتكى عدد من العاملين ... من إغلاقها بشكل مفاجئ بدعوى عدم وجود ما يكفى من الأموال للإنفاق عليها" ("a number of employees complained about its sudden closure on the pretext that there were not enough funds to sustain its operations") (Youm7, 2017, para. 1). One employee stated that "تجهيزات كما فى تفاجئنا بقرار الغلق لمكان مهم للغنى والفقير ... فى أماكن كتير بفلوس ولا يوجد بها أي خدمات مماثلة هذا المكان" ("we were shocked by the decision to close such an important place that serves both rich and poor alike… there are many hospitals that charge money and are not equipped as well as this one") (Youm7, 2017, para. 3).

The pro-government newspaper *El-Watan* reported on renewed tensions between the Ministry of Religious Endowments and al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya, noting that the Ministry accused the association of failing to comply with its cooperation protocol. The paper quoted officials claiming that the JS "لم تلتزم ببنود البروتوكول، ولم تضع المساجد التابعة لها تحت إشراف أئمة الأوقاف والأزهر" ("did not adhere to the terms of the protocol and failed to place its affiliated mosques under the supervision of Endowments and Al-Azhar imams") (El-Watan, 2017, para. 2).

The Ministry further asserted that some mosques affiliated with the association "يُسيطر عليها متطرفون يعتلون المنابر دون علم كافٍ، ويساهمون في نشر أفكار هدامة" ("were controlled by extremists who occupied mosques without sufficient religious knowledge and contributed to the spread of destructive ideas") (El-Watan, 2017, para. 3). In response, the Ministry announced its decision "بدمج مساجد الجمعية الشرعية المتأثرة بالفكر المتطرف ضمن إشراف الأوقاف" ("to integrate al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya mosques influenced by extremist ideology under the direct supervision of the Endowments Ministry") (El-Watan, 2017, para. 4).

Conversely, Dr. Mohamed Mokhtar al-Mahdi, chairman of the association, rejected the accusations and stressed that "الجمعية تعمل تحت إشراف وزارة التضامن الاجتماعي وليس الأوقاف" ("the association operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Solidarity, not the Ministry of Endowments") (El-Watan, 2017, para. 5).

Finally, an interview with JS's Secretary General reiterated that the organization "refrains from political activities," "cooperates fully with state institutions," and "removes any imam proven to have violated state preaching guidelines."

Having presented a selection of key excerpts from official and state-aligned Egyptian news media spanning 2013 to 2016, this section now moves to a systematic analysis of these materials. The aim is to unpack the underlying narratives, rhetorical strategies, and framing devices employed by the regime to publicly portray NGOs and Islamic charities, particularly within the context of state-led reforms and crackdowns. By critically examining the language, themes, and omissions within these communications, the analysis below elucidates the state's strategic objectives during this period of "authoritarian stabilization."

Thematic Analysis: Grouping and Interpreting the Narratives

This section analyzes how the Egyptian state and pro-government media framed the closure and control of Islamic charities, particularly al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya (JS), following the 2013 coup. Drawing on coverage from *Al-Ahram* (2014), *Al-Masry Al-Youm* (2013), *Youm7* (2017), and *El-Watan* (2017), it reconstructs the official discourse that justified repression through the intertwining of national security, moral reform, and bureaucratic legality.

1. Framing the Role of Islamic Charities: From Partnership to Suspicion

Following 2013, the depiction of JS shifted from a welfare partner to a suspected incubator of extremism.

Al-Ahram framed the association as having " فشلت في الالتزام ببنود البروتوكول… وتأثرت بالمتطرفين وتساهم في نشر الأفكار المتشددة" ("failed to adhere to the protocol's terms… influenced by extremists and contributing to the spread of radical ideologies") (*Al-Ahram*, 2014, paras. 2–3). Similarly, *El-Watan* claimed that JS " لم تلتزم ببنود البروتوكول، ولم تضع المساجد التابعة لها تحت إشراف أئمة

الأوقاف والأزهر" ("did not comply with the protocol and failed to place its mosques under the supervision of Endowments and Al-Azhar imams") (*El-Watan*, 2017, para. 2).

By contrast, *Al-Masry Al-Youm* recorded the association's denial that " يعتمد القرار على ادعاءات كاذبة بانتمائنا للإخوان المسلمين" ("the decision [to freeze assets] is based on false claims of our affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood") (*Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 2013, paras. 1–4).

This transformation of JS's image from partner to threat illustrates the process of narrative securitization: routine administrative disputes were portrayed as matters of national survival. Within a framework of bounded rationality, this shift reflects the regime's reliance on simplified threat perceptions rather than evidence-based evaluation. The portrayal of "infiltration" and "non-compliance" served to legitimize pre-emptive coercion, signaling a reactive rather than calculated logic of control. Moreover, the case reveals that the patron–client dynamic between the state and Islamic movements is not a fixed or predictable structure. Instead, it fluctuates according to the regime's perceived level of stability and security. When authoritarian leaders sense heightened vulnerability, previously tolerated or even co-opted clients can rapidly be reclassified as threats, demonstrating that clientelism itself operates as a conditional and reversible form of control.

2. Discourse of "National Security" and "Order."

The term "الأمن القومي" (national security) became the central moral-legal justification for repression.

Al-Ahram warned that associations could be "مستغلة لدعم خلايا نائمة للإخوان المسلمين" ("exploited to support Brotherhood sleeper cells") and therefore required strict supervision of preachers and sermons (*Al-Ahram*, 2014, paras. 4–5).

Later, *El-Watan* presented the state's integration of JS mosques as a patriotic safeguard: " بدمج مساجد الجمعية الشرعية المتأثرة بالفكر المتطرف ضمن إشراف الأوقاف" ("integrating JS mosques influenced by extremist ideology under the direct supervision of the Ministry") (*El-Watan*, 2017, para. 4).

The usage/mention of national security converts bureaucratic oversight into a moral duty. From a critical discourse perspective, this language combines legality and loyalty, constructing coercion as a form of civic protection. It exemplifies authoritarian reactive logic: rather than planning a

long-term strategy, the regime responds to uncertainty with moral panic, expanding control in the name of defending order.

3. Portrayal of al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya (JS)

Across outlets, JS was personalized as the archetypal deviant organization. *Al-Ahram* emphasized that "يعتلي المنابر دعاة غير مؤهلين" ("unqualified preachers occupy pulpits") (*Al-Ahram*, 2014, para. 3), while *El-Watan* insisted the association's mosques had "يُسيطر عليها متطرفون… ويساهمون في نشر أفكار هدامة" ("been taken over by extremists who spread destructive ideas") (*El-Watan*, 2017, para. 3).
JS leaders, however, portrayed themselves as obedient and transparent: "نحرص على عدم ممارسة أي نشاط سياسي ونتعاون مع مؤسسات الدولة" ("we refrain from political activity and cooperate with state institutions") (Interview, 2014).

This tension demonstrates self-securitization, NGOs internalizing the state's security discourse to show loyalty. By emphasizing compliance ("إشراف"), moderation ("اعتدال"), and cooperation ("تعاون"), JS tried to regain legitimacy through obedience. Authoritarian control thus extends discursively through civil actors, who reproduce language that justifies their subordination, transforming repression into a shared moral project.

4. Justifying Crackdowns and Closures

State media consistently presented closures and asset freezes as acts of bureaucratic necessity rather than as acts of repression.

Al-Masry Al-Youm quoted JS representatives stating that the freez "أدى إلى إغلاق منشآت حيوية… وأثر على أرزاق آلاف الأسر محدودة الدخل" ("led to the closure of vital facilities and affected the livelihoods of thousands of low-income families") (*Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 2013, para. 3). Meanwhile, *Youm7* attributed the 2017 hospital closure to neutral financial reasons, quoting workers who complained that it was "بسبب عدم وجود ما يكفى من الأموال للإنفاق عليها" ("because there were not enough funds to sustain its operations") (*Youm7*, 2017, para. 1).

This administrative framing conceals coercion under the guise of technocratic language. By attributing closures to "funding shortages" or "regulatory enforcement," the state depoliticized

repression, rendering punishment a matter of procedure. From a bounded rationality perspective, this behavior reflects how authoritarian regimes prioritize immediate security imperatives over broader institutional or socioeconomic considerations. Even when the closures of welfare-providing organizations entail significant social or economic losses, the regime perceives them as acceptable collateral to restore short-term control and signal decisiveness. The logic of action is thus not guided by long-term calculation, but by the pursuit of instant political reassurance in the face of perceived threats.

5. Key Rhetorical and Framing Devices

Lexical Choices

Negative: "متطرفون" (extremists), "غير مرخص" (unlicensed), "اختراق" (infiltrated), "مُسَيَّس" (politicized).

Positive (state): "استقرار" (stability), "اعتدال" (moderation), "إشراف" (oversight), "الأمن القومي" (national security).

Metaphors and Analogies

"الخلايا النائمة" (sleeper cells) → casts opposition as a disease to be eradicated, not a deviation to be corrected.

"دمج المساجد" (integrating mosques) → implies purification and restoration, casting state control as moral repair.

Emotional Appeals

Fear and patriotism dominate the affective field. Citizens are urged to " دعم الدولة في حماية الأمن القومي" ("support the state in protecting national security") by accepting restrictions on independent religious activities.

Omissions

Absent from all coverage were references to:

- حق التقاضي (due process) or legal recourse.
- الأثر الاجتماعي والاقتصادي (social and economic impacts) of NGO closures.
- العواقب الإنسانية (humanitarian consequences) of halting medical and educational services.

By combining moralized vocabulary with strategic omission, the media transformed repression into virtue. The repetition of "moderation," "oversight," and "security" normalized subordination, erasing the human cost. This aligns with Fairclough's (1995) notion of the naturalization of ideology, where systems of power embed their assumptions so deeply into public discourse that coercion is no longer perceived as coercion, but as the natural order of governance (p. 465). In this context, the Egyptian regime's narrative transformed exceptional measures, such as mass closures, dismissals, and surveillance, into the language of "law," "stability," and "national security." Through repetition and moral framing, these acts came to appear as inevitable responses to disorder rather than as choices of repression. From a bounded rationality perspective, this naturalization serves a functional purpose: it allows the regime to justify reactive, short-term decisions made under conditions of perceived insecurity. By viewing emergency actions as "commonsense governance," the state minimizes public resistance while legitimizing its own improvisational and security-driven logic of control. In effect, Fairclough's insight helps reveal how the linguistic normalization of repression sustains authoritarian stability, not through coherent planning, but through the moralization of authority.

6. Synthesis: The Dominant Official Narrative

Between 2013 and 2017, Egyptian state-aligned media produced a unified discourse that transformed Islamic NGOs from welfare providers into latent threats to national stability. Al-Ahram and El-Watan institutionalized the legal-bureaucratic vocabulary of control; Youm7 translated repression into administrative routine; and Al-Masry Al-Youm offered limited space for social empathy within the same securitized frame.

What emerges from this pattern is not simply a case of discursive securitization but a broader expression of bounded rationality in authoritarian governance. Faced with acute insecurity after the 2013 coup, the regime's communicative strategy prioritized short-term reassurance over coherence or consistency. Through repeated references to "order," "moderation," and "national security," coercion was reframed as the moral and patriotic management of chaos. This discursive equilibrium, where fear and legality coexist, illustrates how regimes under stress transform impulsive repression into rule, allowing it to masquerade as rational statecraft.

Lived Experiences and Perspectives on the Crackdown: Qualitative Insights from Interviews

To complement the documentary and media analysis presented in the previous sections, this part examines insights drawn from semi-structured interviews, including three interviews with senior officials at the Egyptian Ministry of Social Solidarity. The interview dataset also includes conversations with academics specializing in civil society and Islamist movements, as well as current and former leaders of Al-Jamyiah Al-Sharyiah (JS), civil society actors, and journalists who have covered the post-2013 political environment. Together, these perspectives capture the interplay between state policy, scholarly interpretation, organizational self-representation, and media framing.

Whereas the previous section analyzed state-sponsored media coverage to reconstruct the official narrative and its dominant framing of NGOs as threats to national stability, this section aims to contrast that narrative with on-the-ground perspectives and institutional practices. These insights are particularly crucial for unpacking the complex interplay between state control, organizational adaptation, and authoritarian policy shifts in the aftermath of the 2013 coup in Egypt.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, following a flexible guide of questions that allowed participants to elaborate on key themes while ensuring comparability across cases. Each interview was documented through detailed field notes that captured participants' statements as fully and accurately as possible, including context, tone, and emphasis. This approach struck a balance between the need for systematic data collection and the practical and ethical constraints of working in politically sensitive environments, where audio recording was not always feasible. The interviews were supplemented by internal documents obtained from relevant state offices. These materials provide rich empirical evidence on the practical dimensions of state–NGO relations.

The analysis employs inductive thematic coding to identify recurring patterns in how the crackdown on Islamic charities was experienced, interpreted, and rationalized by different actors. Initial coding produced categories such as "partnership framing," "denial of repression," "Brotherhood infiltration justification," "centralized oversight," "funding as main challenge," and "depoliticization as core requirement." These codes were then grouped into broader thematic clusters, which form the structure of the discussion that follows.

This section interrogates four central questions:

1. How the regime's decision to repress JS was justified or contested by different actors.
2. Whether JS was seen internally as politically engaged or socially focused.
3. What was the scale of the crackdown wave on the association
4. How the association responded to state oversight and asset freezes.

In doing so, the analysis directly tests the study's hypotheses, particularly the claim that authoritarian repression does not necessarily follow political behavior or economic utility, but often emerges from shifts in regime security concerns and state logics of control. The interview material also provides critical nuance to the theoretical frameworks deployed in this research, shedding light on the limits of clientelist stability and the reactive nature of authoritarian rationality in moments of political upheaval.

The discussion proceeds by presenting each theme in turn, integrating voices from different respondent categories to reveal both consensus and contestation. These findings are then juxtaposed with earlier media analysis and relevant literature to identify gaps, contradictions, and points of confirmation in the regime's evolving strategy toward Islamic movements, most notably Al-Jamiah Al-Shariah.

Theme 1: Enduring Identity of JS as a Charitable Service Provider

A central finding across interviews is the persistent emphasis on JS's identity as a charitable service provider rather than a political actor. Members of the association consistently underlined that their mission was humanitarian, not political. One member stated, *"We never had any political intentions; our work has always been charitable. From the beginning, our goal was to support families in need and to promote Islamic values in education and health."* This reflects a deliberate distancing from the securitized portrayals of JS found in official media and government statements.

The journalist confirmed this image, particularly in the pre-2013 period, describing JS as *"one of the main pillars of charitable work in Egypt."* Hospitals, clinics, and welfare services offered by JS were widely acknowledged in public reporting. Even after the crackdown, the journalist noted

that coverage did not entirely erase this service-based identity, though it became increasingly overshadowed by narratives of infiltration and security risk.

The Ministry official, by contrast, acknowledged the association's contributions but framed them through the lens of regulation and oversight. For the Ministry, JS's social services were acceptable only as long as they were tightly controlled and aligned with state-defined objectives. This divergence points to a tension at the heart of state–NGO relations in authoritarian settings: while the regime relies on such associations to fill welfare gaps, it simultaneously fears their independent social legitimacy.

Theme 2: Shifts in Media Narratives After 2013

The interviews also revealed how narratives about JS shifted after the 2013 coup. According to the journalist, coverage prior to 2013 was service-oriented, mainly highlighting JS's hospitals, schools, and charitable projects. After 2013, however, the tone shifted toward suspicion and securitization. Stories of *"Muslim Brotherhood infiltration"* and the misuse of mosques for political purposes entered the headlines. The journalist explained that such reporting was deemed necessary to "inform the public on them so people would be aware of to whom they donate."

For JS members, this shift was both unfair and misleading. They rejected the allegation of politicization outright, stressing that any individuals linked to problematic groups were expelled immediately: *"If the state indicated that certain leaders within the association were undesirable, those individuals were promptly removed."* By presenting themselves as careful partners of the state, JS sought to counter the narrative of infiltration and maintain legitimacy.

The Ministry's framing agreed with the media's post-2013 emphasis on security. The official insisted that oversight was necessary because associations risked being "exploited to support sleeper cells" or "destabilize the country." This convergence between state and media discourse illustrates the process of securitization, whereby NGOs were transformed in public narratives from service providers into potential threats.

Theme 3: State Oversight and Legal Compliance

The third theme centers on the question of lawfulness and regulation. For the Ministry, the crackdown and subsequent legal frameworks were not repression but rather necessary regulation. The official repeatedly referenced Law 149 of 2019, which established strict reporting requirements and state oversight mechanisms. From this perspective, regulation was essential to ensure "transparency, accountability, and national security."

JS members offered a different narrative. While acknowledging the burden of increased reporting and ministry scrutiny, they framed compliance as part of their long-standing cooperative posture: *"We regularly submitted reports to the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Awqaf… we always worked in coordination with state authorities rather than independently."* This shows how JS adopted a strategy of accommodation to survive within an increasingly restrictive legal environment.

The journalist's perspective again sat between these two. Coverage of JS often highlighted disputes over asset freezes, the closing of hospitals, and eventual "settling" of legal battles. The journalist portrayed these developments as part of the broader national effort to hold NGOs accountable. Thus, while the Ministry emphasized control, JS emphasized cooperation, and the journalist presented compliance as a public storyline, reinforcing the state's authority.

Theme 4: Funding Challenges and Operational Adjustments

Funding emerged as a central axis of the crackdown. The Ministry official underscored the danger of foreign funding, which was framed as a potential channel for politicization and extremism. The journalist reinforced this interpretation, quoting security experts who argued that the new law would "cut off foreign funding to political Islamist groups" and thus protect national stability.

JS members, however, narrated the issue differently. While acknowledging financial strain and the closure of some branches, they highlighted the resilience of local donation networks. One official remarked that despite restrictions, "*our projects remained stable; donations declined, but domestic contributions kept us afloat*." In this narrative, funding is not a threat but a lifeline, enabling JS to sustain its services for thousands of low-income families.

The discrepancy illustrates the politicization of resources: what the state frames as a security risk, JS frames as a social necessity. This tension reflects the broader authoritarian logic of resource control, where financial flows are securitized to neutralize independent actors.

Theme 5: Community Consequences and Strategic Silences

Perhaps the most striking divergence across interviews concerns the consequences of repression for local communities. JS members explicitly acknowledged the harm caused by closures: *"Patients were harmed when hospitals were shut down, but we tried to provide alternatives."* This testimony highlights the real social cost of the crackdown for vulnerable populations who relied on JS services.

The journalist referenced hospital closures but framed them primarily as part of the legal and political consequences rather than emphasizing their human impact. Meanwhile, the Ministry official did not address community consequences at all, focusing instead on compliance and national stability.

From an analytical perspective, this pattern of silence reflects a key authoritarian strategy: repressing civil society while denying or obscuring the social costs, thus protecting the regime's claim to act in the "national interest."

Theme 6: Continuity, Adaptation, and Authoritarian Control

One of the most consistent findings across interviews is the way JS constructed its identity around continuity of charitable work, while simultaneously adapting to the state's expanding regulatory and security apparatus. This theme highlights the dynamic interaction between organizational strategies of survival and authoritarian logics of control.

Continuity as a Narrative of Legitimacy:

JS members repeatedly emphasized that their mission had remained stable for decades: "*Our projects have always been charitable; we never had political intentions.*" By stressing this continuity, they positioned themselves as reliable social actors, distinct from political movements and isolated from accusations of subversion. Even when acknowledging challenges such as asset

freezes or declining donations, JS officials framed these as temporary obstacles rather than structural threats: "*Even when our accounts were frozen, we continued providing care for patients and nursery children until the restrictions were lifted*."

This insistence on continuity functioned as a discursive strategy of legitimacy. By framing itself as apolitical and consistently dedicated to social welfare, JS sought to distance itself from the securitized narratives propagated by the state and media. This mirrors broader patterns in authoritarian contexts, where civil society organizations often rely on service delivery as both a source of legitimacy and a means of shielding themselves against repression.

Adaptation to New Regulatory Frameworks:

At the same time, JS officials described how the association adjusted to successive waves of regulation and oversight. They highlighted mechanisms of compliance: submitting regular reports, coordinating with state institutions, and promptly removing individuals flagged by authorities. "*If the state indicated that certain leaders within the association were undesirable, those individuals were promptly removed,*" one official explained, underscoring how adaptation was institutionalized into the association's governance structure.

Adaptation was also financial. JS described how they shifted reliance toward domestic donors when foreign funding streams were disrupted. This aligns with observations in the literature that Islamic charities often mobilize deep local networks of trust and religious obligation to sustain their work under pressure. In this sense, adaptation was not only about survival but also about demonstrating a form of loyalty through compliance: JS survived by showing that it could operate within the boundaries imposed by the state.

Authoritarian Framing of Adaptation as Control:

From the Ministry of Social Solidarity's perspective, however, this adaptation was not a mark of resilience but rather proof of the effectiveness of authoritarian control mechanisms. The ministry officials emphasized that laws such as Law 149 of 2019 had successfully brought NGOs into compliance, ensuring alignment with "national priorities" and preventing infiltration. In this narrative, the state, not the association, is the central actor: adaptation is recast as submission.

This framing reveals the asymmetry of power in NGO–state relations. While JS highlighted adaptation as an organizational achievement and marker of loyalty, the Ministry reinterpreted it as validation of its own authority. In authoritarian contexts, adaptation by NGOs is often narratively co-opted by the regime to demonstrate the state's capacity to regulate and dominate civil society.

Journalistic Ambivalence:

The journalist provided a more nuanced account, acknowledging both continuity and adaptation, but situating them within a broader narrative of infiltration and compliance. Coverage noted that JS remained active in healthcare and charity; however, such reports were often accompanied by references to extremism, mismanagement, or disputes with the Ministry. In journalistic narratives, adaptation became a story of conditional survival, NGOs could continue to serve, but only if they met ever-tightening state requirements.

This ambivalence reflects the dual role of journalists under authoritarianism: they preserve a record of civil society's contributions but simultaneously reinforce securitized framings that justify repression. The result is a hybrid narrative in which continuity is visible, but only within the shadow of suspicion and state control.

Theoretical Implications of the Interview Findings

The thematic analysis of interviews with Ministry officials, members of Al Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya (JS), and journalists offers an insightful understanding of how the repression of Islamic charities unfolded in Egypt after 2013. Beyond documenting divergent narratives, these findings have several broader theoretical implications for debates on authoritarian governance and civil society in the Middle East.

1. Securitization as a Mode of Authoritarian Governance

Across interviews, state and media actors framed JS not as a neutral charity but as a potential threat requiring constant surveillance. The Ministry justified intervention by invoking national security, infiltration, and the risk of "sleeper cells," while journalists reinforced this framing by emphasizing alleged links to extremism and foreign funding. This dynamic exemplifies how authoritarian

regimes deploy securitization not only as a rhetorical device but as a core mode of governance (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998, pp. 23–25).

By discursively constructing NGOs as "threats", the regime legitimized extraordinary measures such as asset freezes, closures, and intensive oversight, irrespective of the organizations' actual conduct. This pattern aligns with Wiktorowicz's (2000) argument that civil society in authoritarian contexts often functions as an arena of social control, where the state preemptively intervenes to discipline independent actors (pp. 44–45). The implication is that repression is not a reaction to NGO politicization, but rather a preventive strategy driven by regime insecurity and the desire to monopolize moral authority (Brumberg, 2002, p. 57).

2. Continuity, Adaptation, and the Bounded Rationality of Authoritarian Control

The interplay between continuity, adaptation, and control reveals the bounded rationality of authoritarian regimes. The repression of JS was not prompted by direct political behavior, even if the association explicitly avoided politics, but by the regime's anticipation of potential power accumulation. By recasting NGOs as possible sites of opposition, the regime constructed a rationale for repression independent of any tangible challenge.

JS's adaptive strategies also expose the limits of clientelist stability. While some literature portrays Islamic charities as quasi-clientelist partners that trade loyalty or services for tolerance, the interviews show that compliance did not ensure protection. Even after submitting regular reports and coordinating closely with ministries, JS faced surveillance, funding restrictions, and reputational attacks. This supports Levitsky and Way's (2010) observation that autocrats often prioritize control over institutional equilibrium, undermining their own welfare base in moments of insecurity (pp. 57-59).

The paradox here is sharp: NGOs may adapt by cooperating with oversight, but the state reinterprets their adaptability as confirmation of its own regulatory strength. Continuity becomes survival for NGOs, yet submission for the regime, a hallmark of authoritarian stabilization (Svolik, 2012, p. 38).

3. The Limits of Clientelism and the Fragility of Informal Pacts

Much of the literature on Islamic charities in authoritarian systems emphasizes their clientelist function: by delivering welfare, they relieve the state's burdens and gain tolerance in exchange for loyalty (Heydemann, 2007, pp. 3–5). The JS case complicates this narrative. Despite strict adherence to state rules and avoidance of political mobilization, the organization was still subjected to repression.

This outcome demonstrates that clientelistic bargains are fragile and conditional. They may hold under stability but collapse under conditions of regime anxiety or political rupture. In Egypt's case, the post-2013 transition led to a security-centered logic, in which loyalty was no longer sufficient to guarantee autonomy. As Gerschewski (2013) argues, autocratic endurance rests on the balance of legitimation, repression, and co-optation; when one pillar decays, regimes often overinvest in coercion (pp. 17–18).

4. Adaptive Strategies of NGOs under Authoritarianism

JS's narratives of compliance, fighting against infiltration, and local fundraising reveal how NGOs navigate shrinking civic space. These strategies align with theories of authoritarian resilience, where civil actors recalibrate their practices to accommodate new constraints while maintaining operational continuity (Brumberg, 2002, p. 59). Yet adaptation does not guarantee safety. Instead, it often becomes evidence of subordination.

The interviews show that while JS restructured operations to demonstrate obedience, these same actions were appropriated by the Ministry as proof of effective control. This dynamic exemplifies the duality of adaptation under authoritarianism: it is simultaneously a mechanism of survival and a technique of domination.

5. Silences and the Social Costs of Repression

A striking pattern across interviews is the selective omission of the social consequences of repression. While JS members described harm to patients and the collapse of welfare programs, both officials and journalists foregrounded legality, security, and oversight. Such silences reflect what Bourdieu (1991) terms "symbolic domination," which refers to the power to define what counts as legitimate discourse while erasing inconvenient suffering (pp. 163–165).

This discursive erasure reveals two key features of authoritarian communication. First, omission itself becomes a governing practice, sustaining the stabilization of order by excluding social costs from public discussion. Second, repression undermines welfare provision without acknowledgment, contradicting claims that autocracies balance coercion with service delivery. In Egypt, the regime willingly sacrificed social stability to eliminate spaces of autonomy (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 58).

Synthesis

The Egyptian case underscores several dynamics of authoritarian governance and civil–state relations:

1. Control over service delivery: regimes prioritize pre-emptive control over social benefits, even when this undermines welfare delivery.
2. Fragility of bargains: clientelist arrangements collapse when regime insecurity outweighs reciprocal tolerance.

This analysis reveals that repression in Egypt was less a reaction to NGO behavior than a manifestation of regime anxiety. It was pre-emptive, securitized, and rooted in a desire to monopolize power. By portraying JS as infiltrated or foreign-funded, the regime justified its interventions and silenced debate on the human costs of closures.

Theoretically, this challenges assumptions about durable co-optation and highlights the reactive, contingent, and securitized nature of authoritarian approaches. Practically, it demonstrates how regimes govern civil society through repression, discursive erasure, and bureaucratic absorption.

Documentary Analysis: Regulatory Discourse and Institutional Logic

This section analyses patterns found across official regulatory texts and provisions governing Islamic charitable organizations following the post-2013 regulatory reforms. Rather than citing individual documents, the presentation below synthesizes recurrent clauses, procedural requirements, and discursive moves that appear consistently in the state regulatory language. The aim is to identify how legal-bureaucratic forms were used to redefine organizational legitimacy and operational space.

Theme 1: Depoliticization as a Formal Condition of Legitimacy

The regulatory documents repeatedly establish political non-engagement as a formal eligibility requirement for organizational leadership and governance. Senior leadership is implicitly required to demonstrate a record free of electoral or partisan activity, and organizational statutes are structured to prevent individuals with a history of political activity from occupying decision-making roles. This legal framing effectively converts political neutrality into a compliance measure: organizations are deemed legitimate when they show the absence of formal political ties.

Theme 2: Financial Oversight as a Mechanism of Control

A second pattern emphasizes strict financial procedures, including mandatory banking arrangements with regulated financial institutions, constrained withdrawal and signature rules, and enhanced audit and reporting obligations. Although presented in technical terms of transparency and accountability, these measures function analytically as instruments of surveillance. By routing organizational funds through tightly regulated channels and increasing the frequency and visibility of financial reporting, the regulatory framework restricts managerial discretion. It enhances the state's capacity to monitor and, where necessary, intervene in resource flows. In practice, financial oversight thereby operates as a controllable choke point for organizational autonomy.

Theme 3: Centralization and Hierarchical Authority

Many clauses aggregate decision-making authority at a central organizational level while simultaneously granting oversight powers in supervisory bodies. Branch-level autonomy is contained: local sub-units require formal approval for operation, expansion, or electoral events, and central bodies retain the authority to merge, suspend, or dissolve local entities. The combined effect is to convert a previously decentralized network architecture into a vertically ordered structure that is easier for administrative systems to regulate. Conceptually, this pattern reveals how bureaucratic centralization becomes a means of neutralizing local initiative and of aligning organizational structures with centralized modes of governance.

Theme 4: Mission Framed Within State-Approved Boundaries

Regulatory language often reframes organizational missions to explicitly express religious and social objectives within the parameters approved by the state. Institutional missions are described in ways that emphasize social service, moderation, and coordination with recognized authorities while denying any orientation towards ideological extremism or autonomous political action. This discursive move accomplishes two things at once: it preserves a space for socially valuable activities, but only if those activities conform to an authorized interpretive framework. Hence, mission clauses serve as boundary-setting devices that determine the acceptable scope of religious expression and institutional intent.

Theme 5: Operationalization of Supervision and Compliance

Throughout the document, there is a pronounced shift toward operationalized oversight, including periodic reporting, standardized sermon reviews, time-limited assignments for religious personnel, and documentary verification of activities. The procedural emphasis normalizes continuous monitoring, making compliance more readable and enforceable through administrative routines. Such routinization transforms supervision into an everyday modality rather than an exceptional intervention, thereby embedding control into the organizational life cycle.

Theme 6: Strategic Omissions: The Social Costs Left Unaddressed

Notably, the regulatory texts rarely, if ever, articulate mechanisms to reduce the social consequences that may follow from enforcement actions (for example, service interruption, job loss, or reduced local welfare provision). The absence of provisions addressing continuity of services or contingency planning for affected beneficiaries constitutes a systematic silence. From a theoretical perspective, this omission is consequential, as it suggests that the documents prioritize mechanisms of control and legitimacy over considerations of social welfare continuity, thereby allowing for the reconfiguration of civil society, even at the expense of service gaps.

The regulatory framework surrounding Islamic charities in Egypt illustrates how authoritarian regimes attempt to translate political insecurities into bureaucratic instruments. By embedding control into legal and administrative routines, the state seeks to normalize surveillance, centralization, and depoliticization as technical requirements rather than overtly political acts. This

bureaucratic logic produces several interrelated effects that can be better understood through the lenses of bounded rationality, political opportunity structures, and patron–clientelism.

From the perspective of bounded rationality, the regulations reflect an authoritarian regime responding to uncertainty with simplified heuristics. Instead of distinguishing between compliant and non-compliant associations in practice, the state reduces its cognitive and administrative burden by imposing depoliticization clauses and routine financial controls. These measures enable the regime to act pre-emptively in the face of perceived risks without expending resources on evaluating individual organizations. The outcome is a form of "rule by templates": NGOs are assessed not by their actual practices but by their conformity to standardized, legally codified categories. Such an approach helps explain why even highly cooperative and apolitical charities, such as Al Jamʿiyyah al-Sharʿiyyah, were subjected to scrutiny and restrictions. Repression emerges less from specific deviation than from the state's preference for administratively simple, risk-averse solutions.

At the same time, the new legal environment reshapes the political opportunity structure available to NGOs. Prior to 2013, Islamic charities operated in a relatively permissive environment where service provision created channels for local legitimacy and, at times, even implicit bargaining with the state. The post-2013 regulations close these openings by redefining what counts as permissible activity. Political neutrality is no longer a strategic choice but a legal obligation, while service provision must be framed within state-sanctioned narratives of moderation and national interest. The new structure constrains collective action by narrowing the arenas in which NGOs can operate and by increasing the costs of any perceived deviation. Opportunities that once existed for Islamic charities to translate social legitimacy into bargaining power with the regime are thus prohibited, pushing organizations into compliance or gradual marginalization.

Finally, the framework also alters the dynamics of patron–clientelism, which has historically underpinned relations between the Egyptian state and Islamic welfare providers. Under this logic, charities could function as quasi-clients, delivering welfare in exchange for tolerance or protection by state patrons. However, the current regulations expose the fragility of this arrangement. Despite their avoidance of explicit politics and longstanding role in welfare delivery, organizations such as JS are no longer shielded by clientelist bargains. The primacy of regime security over welfare

stability means that compliance and loyalty do not guarantee protection from external threats. In fact, the very features that once made these organizations worthwhile clients, their broad reach, popular legitimacy, and financial capacity, are reframed as potential threats. What emerges is a clientelistic relationship stripped of reciprocity: NGOs are expected to serve, comply, and depoliticize, but the state reserves the right to intervene, freeze assets, or dissolve branches at will.

Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate that the regulatory logic achieves more than simple bureaucratic oversight; it reconstitutes the entire field of civil society under the rationality of authoritarianism. Legal clauses that appear administrative on the surface institutionalize a profound transformation. Political neutrality becomes a condition, financial flows become points of surveillance, organizational hierarchies become centralized and thus governable, and missions are reframed to align with state narratives of moderation and order. The social consequences of service disruption, staff dislocation, and beneficiary exclusion are systematically excluded from this regulatory discourse, underscoring the priority of control over welfare.

Theoretically, this integration suggests that authoritarian governance after 2013 is characterized by a combination of bounded rationality, narrowed opportunity structures, and the erosion of clientelistic reciprocity. The regime reduced uncertainty by simplifying complex realities into manageable categories, closed political opportunities that once allowed Islamic charities some room for maneuver, and renegotiated the patron–client framework into one of unilateral control. The result is a regulatory environment that secures the state's dominance but simultaneously undermines the very welfare networks that had historically underpinned regime stability.

The repression of al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya in Egypt offers a powerful illustration of how authoritarian regimes deploy legal and bureaucratic mechanisms to dismantle religious autonomy while preserving the façade of moral governance. Yet, as the following case demonstrates, such authoritarian stabilization is not limited to military dictatorships. In Turkey, the repression of the Gülen movement unfolded within a formally pluralistic political system that retained elections, a functioning parliament, and an active media environment, conditions that made the process of domination more complex. Examining Turkey alongside Egypt, therefore, demonstrates that despite the contrasting nature of the Islamic movements involved, one primarily charitable and apolitical, the other educational and politically networked, both ultimately faced similar

authoritarian repression. This convergence underscores that the decisive factor lies not in the movements' ideology or function, but in the regimes' reactive pursuit of short-term stability under conditions of perceived insecurity.

Whereas the regime in Egypt relied on bureaucratic absorption and administrative legality to suppress Islamic charities, the Turkish regime turned to populist moralism and partisan control to achieve a similar consolidation of power. The Egyptian regime sought to neutralize religious pluralism through regulation and direct takeover; the Turkish regime sought to monopolize religious legitimacy by recasting a former ally as an existential enemy. In both cases, repression emerged not from a vacuum but from within prior networks of cooperation between the state and Islamic civil society.

Continuity, Adaptation, and Authoritarian Control: The Case of the Gülen Movement

Following the Egyptian case, the Turkish experience offers a complementary lens on how authoritarian regimes manage Islamic civil society organizations that combine welfare provision with social legitimacy. The Gülen movement, which developed a vast network of schools, media outlets, and civil society initiatives, emerged as a key political actor in Turkey during the early 2000s. Initially tolerated and even allied with the ruling AKP, the movement came under severe scrutiny after the failed coup attempt of July 2016, which the government attributed to Gülenist networks.

This case examines the experiences of Gülen-affiliated organizations and actors as they navigated an unprecedented crackdown on their activities. Semi-structured interviews with former and current movement affiliates, journalists, and academics shed light on how these actors perceived and responded to repression. Documentary and regulatory analysis of emergency decrees, closures, and oversight mechanisms further reveals how state power was operationalized.

The Turkish case provides a critical point of comparison with Egypt. While both regimes securitized Islamic organizations, the Turkish crackdown occurred within a competitive authoritarian context marked by party-state consolidation rather than post-coup regime insecurity. Understanding the similarities and divergences in authoritarian strategies toward Islamic NGOs allows us to refine theoretical insights on repression, adaptation, and the reconfiguration of civil society in the Middle East.

Neoliberal Implications and Welfare Provision in the Turkish Context

In the early 2000s, Turkey underwent significant neoliberal reforms that reshaped its welfare landscape. The state's retreat from direct service provision led to increased reliance on private actors and civil society organizations to deliver education, healthcare, and social services (Özdemir, 2020, p. 6). This shift was particularly evident in regions where state infrastructure was lacking or underdeveloped. During the 2000s, the AKP restructured the balance among bourgeois fractions, bringing together Islamist and Westernist groups under the dominance of productive capital, while simultaneously disciplining subordinate classes through privatization,

subcontracting, and de-unionization, supported by rentier mechanisms (Özdemir, 2020, p. 6). Most notably, the AKP consolidated its control over the small- and medium-sized Islamist bourgeoisie by channeling local government tenders in their favor, while simultaneously privileging large-scale Westernist and Islamist capital through privatization and state-level contracts. By the 2010s, Islamist capital had expanded into the Middle East and Central Asia, leveraging shared Islamic norms and values as a basis for its penetration (Özdemir, 2020, p. 7). The AKP reinforced the 'charity state' as a means of advancing the Islamisation of both the state apparatus and the broader social fabric. This strategy served to secure bourgeois class dominance while subjugating subordinate classes under a veneer of sanctity. Through state institutions, the AKP articulated and disseminated piety, with the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) playing a central role in this effort. This institution had already developed its own material and capitalist interests (Tugal, 2009, p. 228). Meanwhile, the AKP framed religious brotherhoods as civil society organizations that could address social needs amid the neoliberal state's retreat from distributive functions. These brotherhoods, which collected resources through charitable foundations (*vakıf*) supported by the Islamist bourgeoisie, state institutions, and municipalities, promoted piety as a moral code and a 'way of life', thereby embedding religion into the processes of social reproduction (Kaya, 2015, p. 45).

From the 2000s into the 2010s, Turkey's political economy was shaped by market-friendly reforms, privatization, and a growing role for private and non-state actors in the delivery of education and social services. International institutions and domestic policy both encouraged private provision and fiscal consolidation; the IMF and World Bank records for the period document reforms to pensions, fiscal targets, and policies that effectively encouraged private saving and private provision (Tugal, 2009, p. 229).

These structural shifts mattered in three empirical ways:

1. **State–society gaps in social provision**

   Even as aggregate poverty declined over the 2000s and early 2010s (as measured by the World Bank, a marked reduction in extreme poverty occurred from the early 2000s to 2016). Significant distributional gaps persisted across regions and social groups. The

World Bank/Poverty & Equity briefing for Turkey shows that poverty (by middle-income country standards) fell substantially between 2004 and 2016. However, the report also highlights uneven gains and persistent vulnerability in poorer provinces, precisely the areas where private and faith-based providers expanded (World Bank, 2019, p. 2).

2. A significant and expanding role for private / non-state education and social services.

- Government statistics and education ministry data from the period document the expanding private sector in schooling (private primary/secondary schools and private tutoring centers), and the Ministry of Education's 2015/16 statistics show the material scale of non-state schooling in formal enrollment figures (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi, 2017, p. 2)
- The Gülen movement in particular had built an internationally visible network of schools and tutoring institutions. Contemporary reporting and field estimates before 2016 placed the movement's educational footprint in the hundreds of schools domestically and many hundreds more worldwide; major news agencies reported that roughly around 300–1,000 institutions were associated with the movement, and that thousands of students and staff depended on those institutions (Reuters, 2016, Para. 7).

3. Policy choices that both enabled private actors and then punished them.

- The AKP era created regulatory and fiscal conditions favorable to private actors in education and social service delivery (licensing regimes, fiscal incentives, and an expanded space for private foundations and charities). Yet those same institutional structures (formal registration, licensing, and centralized oversight) also made it administratively straightforward for the state to revoke licenses, seize assets, or close institutions when political calculations changed (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The immediate mechanism for the post-coup crackdown was an emergency decree. In July 2016, the government's first state-of-emergency decree authorized the closure of 1,043 private schools, 1,229 foundations and associations, 15 universities, and numerous medical institutions, a sweeping seizure of educational and social infrastructure that included many Gülen-linked institutions (Reuters, 2016, para. 5).

Neoliberal openings created opportunities for civil society actors to fill welfare gaps and gain social legitimacy, but the very integration of these actors into formal institutional and market structures made them vulnerable when political priorities shifted. Concretely:

- The Gülen network's schools and associated foundations had a significant scale and public utility in education and social services; however, that scale made them politically salient targets once they were framed as a security threat. After the July 2016 coup attempt, the government treated the movement as an existential threat, rapidly converting administrative levers (license revocation, asset seizure, emergency decrees) into instruments of repression. The sheer numbers of closures and suspensions demonstrate the speed and comprehensiveness of the response (Akay, 2018, p. 17).
- Pre-2016 policy choices ironically lowered the political transaction costs of repression. By operating through registered foundations, private schools, and formal staff rosters, Gülen institutions were obvious to the state, which meant the state could revoke recognition and seize assets quickly under emergency powers (Watmough, 2018, p. 102).
- International and domestic coverage documented that hundreds of schools and universities tied to the movement were closed and their assets transferred, even where those institutions provided services to local communities and international students. This confirms that service provision and size were insufficient shields once the movement was politicized and securitized by the regime (Watmough, 2018, p. 102).

Neoliberalization created the space and legitimacy for Gülen-affiliated schools and foundations to expand in education and welfare; however, this expansion did not translate into political security. Furthermore, formalization made repression administratively easy: once labelled a security threat, the state could remove legal standing, revoke licenses, freeze assets, and reassign institutions to state agencies, a strategy visible in the July 2016 emergency decrees.

Gülen Movement Post-2016

The failed coup attempt of July 2016 marked a turning point in Turkey's political trajectory, producing a period of extraordinary rule under the state of emergency that lasted until July 2018. Framed by the government as an existential struggle against the so-called 'Fethullahist Terrorist

Organization' (FETÖ), the aftermath of the coup witnessed one of the most extensive purge in the history of the Turkish Republic. The state of emergency provided the legal framework for the mass closure of Gülen-affiliated institutions across various sectors, including education, media, business, and civil society, as well as the dismissal, arrest, or prosecution of tens of thousands of individuals. This section situates the closure of the Gülen movement within the broader logic of authoritarian consolidation: while the network had become deeply embedded in Turkey's neoliberalized education and welfare landscape, its scale and social significance offered no protection against securitization and repression once political alliances broke. The following analysis traces the context, mechanisms, and consequences of these closures, presenting statistical evidence on the scope of institutional seizures, employment losses, and the restructuring of the public sphere under emergency rule.

The first visible divergence between the two sides emerged in the realm of foreign policy. Gülen openly opposed Erdoğan's increasingly anti-Israeli, pro-Iranian, and Muslim Brotherhood-oriented stance. A key moment was the Mavi Marmara incident of May 2010, when a flotilla sought to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza in solidarity with Palestinians. Gülen condemned the initiative, framing it as an unlawful act and a breach of Israeli sovereignty (Yafuv and Koc, 2016, p. 27). In parallel, Gülenist media outlets criticized Erdoğan's alignment with the Muslim Brotherhood, arguing instead that Turkey should prioritize its effort for EU accession and maintain strong relations with the United States (Yafuv and Koc, 2016, p. 27).

In November 2013, the AKP initiated a decisive move against the Gülen movement by ordering the closure of its extensive network of preparatory schools, thereby targeting a crucial source of the movement's financial resources and recruitment channels. This measure marked the transformation of tensions into open confrontation (Paul and Seyrek, 2017, p. 312). In response, Gülenist-affiliated prosecutors and media outlets launched a series of corruption investigations that directly implicated senior members of the ruling elite. While the Gülenists framed these revelations as an effort to expose systemic corruption and defend the rule of law, the AKP interpreted them as a direct attempt to destabilize the government (Paul and Seyrek, 2017, p. 312). Erdoğan denounced the investigations as a 'judicial coup,' claiming that prosecutors, police, and judges linked to the movement were cooperating with foreign allies to initiate a broader campaign of regime change. By mobilizing state resources and consolidating control over the political

narrative, Erdoğan successfully recast the scandal as an externally backed conspiracy rather than a domestic accountability crisis. In the aftermath, he further reinforced this framing by publicly asserting that he had been 'deceived' by the Gülen movement and seeking forgiveness from the nation, a move that both personalized the conflict and entrenched the portrayal of Gülenists as a threat to state sovereignty (Paul and Seyrek, 2017, p. 312).

Following the events of 2013, Erdoğan moved to eliminate actors capable of challenging his increasingly authoritarian trajectory, while progressively reorienting his politics toward the Islamist worldview of the Muslim Brotherhood. Over time, he abandoned the liberal and democratic discourse that had once characterized his leadership, reverting instead to a more overtly Islamist identity (Kardas and Balci, 2019, p. 146). The failed attempted coup of 15 July 2016 marked a decisive rupture in the ongoing political confrontation between the AKP and the Gülen movement. Before digging deeper into the coup and its consequences, it should be noted that there are extensive debates on who exactly initiated the coup and whether it was actually planned by the Gülen movement or was it a trap set by Erdoğan to topple the movement. This investigative question is less relevant to the study here and would diverge from the analytical lens of this chapter. The relevance of the coup in this case study is to examine how Erdoğan instrumentalized the coup to end the collaboration with the Gülen movement and get rid of their threat for good (Kardas and Balci, 2019, p. 146).

Merely four days later, on 20 July 2016, President Erdoğan invoked constitutional provisions to declare a state of emergency. While such measures are formally intended to safeguard the rule of law and respond to existential threats against the constitutional order of a democratic republic, in practice, the state of emergency in Turkey was instrumentalized to suspend constitutional guarantees and centralize authority (Yavuz and Koc, 2016, p. 146). Through this process, Erdoğan effectively consolidated power at the expense of institutional checks and legal norms, emerging as the de facto ruler of Turkey. Rather than employing the state of emergency to neutralize threats to the constitutional order, developments over the following 19 months demonstrate that the government utilized its extraordinary powers to restructure state institutions and redefine their functions (Yavuz and Koc, 2016, p. 146). This process entailed the closure of schools, newspapers, and radio stations without avenues for legal appeal or remedy. More than 150,000 civil servants and public employees have been dismissed, and over 50,000 individuals imprisoned. Reports by Amnesty International further indicate that torture and ill-treatment have become widespread

practices in Turkish detention facilities (Esen, 2021, p. 1079). Amid growing insecurity, Erdoğan increasingly adopted a nationalist tone in his rhetoric and forged a political alliance with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). The MHP, in turn, endorsed Erdoğan's initiative to replace the parliamentary system with an executive presidential model. Both parties agreed to submit the proposed constitutional amendments to a referendum held on 16 April 2017, which was narrowly approved with 51 percent in favor and 49 percent against. The referendum, however, unfolded in a context far from democratic, marked by severe restrictions on press freedom, the imprisonment of government critics under charges such as 'insulting the president,' and the extraordinary conditions of the state of emergency (Esen, 2021, p. 1080).

The intimidation, arrests, and purges of individuals associated with the Gülen movement continue, targeting not specific criminal acts but rather mere identification, affiliation, or even perceived sympathy with the movement. Such connections alone have been sufficient grounds for dismissal from public-sector positions (Yavuz and Koc, 2016, p. 147). Erdoğan has characterized the Gülen movement as a 'cancerous virus' within society, pledging to eradicate its adherents from state institutions and civic life. The rupture following the 2013 corruption investigations and the failed 2016 coup has not only marked the definitive collapse of the AKP-Gülen collaboration that once underpinned Turkey's experiment with 'moderate Islam,' but also signaled the transformation of this project into a vehicle for authoritarian stabilization rather than democratic reform (Yavuz and Koc, 2016, p. 147).

Regarding the Gülen network of social activities, Turkish authorities conducted a rapid and comprehensive campaign to dismantle the Gülen movement's educational infrastructure both within Turkey and abroad. Within weeks, emergency decrees authorized the closure or seizure of large numbers of institutions: initial government announcements and reporting documented the shuttering of 1,043 private schools, 1,229 foundations and associations, 35 medical institutions, 19 unions, and 15 universities (Letch, 2016, para. 2). The purges extended into higher education and the professions, with thousands of academics and tens of thousands of education personnel suspended or dismissed, producing a sharp contraction of institutional capacity and expertise in the Turkish education sector. The state also pursued an international campaign to replace or take control of Gülen-affiliated schools abroad, institutionalizing that effort through the state-backed Maarif Foundation and diplomatic pressure (Letch, 2016, para. 2). Taken together, these measures demonstrate that the Gülen movement's extensive service provision, encompassing its network of

schools, universities, and welfare organizations, offered no practical immunity from securitized repression once the movement was politically framed as an existential threat (Esen, 2021, p. 1079). These precautions were described by the government as follows: “The measure is necessary to prevent further unrest and insists it will only target those immediately associated with the coup attempt”. This suggests that the regime aimed to eliminate once and for all the threat posed by the Gülen movement, regardless of the strength of the pact or the extent of the social services the movement provided (Letch, 2016, para. 5).

The failed coup of July 2016 marked a turning point in Turkey, producing wide-ranging consequences that reshaped its political, social, and international trajectory. Domestically, Erdoğan consolidated an Islamist authoritarian regime, deploying religion, nationalism, and populist rhetoric to justify autocratic rule while deepening societal polarization and eroding the rule of law. Under prolonged emergency powers, the government dismantled institutional checks, repressed dissent, curtailed media and academic freedoms, and fostered a climate of fear through mass arrests, purges, and expropriations, including the seizure of nearly a thousand companies worth billions of dollars transferred to regime loyalists. Collectively, these developments underscore a paradigmatic shift in Turkey’s governance from pluralism and reform to securitization, majoritarianism, and authoritarian consolidation.

Government Pronouncements and Media Coverage of Organizational Closures in Turkey

This section systematically examines the dominant narratives and framing strategies deployed by the Turkish state and state-aligned media in the wake of the 15 July 2016 coup attempt. Its principal aim is to reconstruct the “official discourse” through which closures and seizures of Gülen-affiliated schools, universities, foundations, media outlets, and businesses were presented to the public, and to show how that discourse functioned to legitimate an unprecedented purge. By closely reading government pronouncements, emergency decrees, press releases, and coverage in state organs (*Anadolu Agency*, *TRT Haber*) alongside pro-government partisan titles (*Sabah*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Daily Sabah*), the analysis identifies recurring lexical fields, metaphors, and justificatory frames, such as terrorism, treason, foreign conspiracy, and the need for “cleansing”, that displaced discussion of service provision and social utility. Reconstructing this official story provides the baseline against which the lived experiences and institutional accounts gathered in interviews can

be compared, helping to reveal the political work performed by media framing in converting social actors into security threats and thereby rationalizing their exclusion from public life.

Methodology for News Analysis

The media review spans from July 2016 to mid-2018, corresponding to Turkey's state of emergency period. The primary sources fall into three categories:

- **State-owned outlets:** *Anadolu Agency (AA)*, the official state news agency, and *TRT Haber*, the state broadcaster's news channel. These act as near-verbatim transmitters of government frames and serve as the institutional source of legitimacy.
- **Pro-government partisan outlets:** *Sabah* and *Yeni Şafak*, privately owned but deeply aligned with AKP/Erdoğan ideology and narratives. *Daily Sabah* (English edition) similarly functions to export these frames to global audiences.
- **Independent and critical outlets:** *T24* offered a rare alternative framing within an increasingly restrictive media environment. While largely cautious in tone, its reporting provided limited critical space by documenting overreach in the purges.

Keyword searches were conducted using terms such as *"FETÖ," "terror," "schools," "universities," "closure,"* and *"coup"* in Turkish (e.g., *"okul kapatıldı," "terör örgütü," "FETÖ ile irtibatlı"*) across these outlets. A discourse analysis method was applied to detect recurring lexical strategies, framing shifts, metaphorical devices, and omissions.

1. Framing the Role of Gülenist Organizations: From Educational Networks to Terror Infrastructure

In the immediate post-coup period, Anadolu Agency reported that "149 schools, 3 universities, 150 associations, 15 foundations, and 4 health centers were closed in Istanbul under the emergency decree due to affiliation or connection to FETÖ/terror organization" (Anadolu Agency [AA], 2016a, July 23). Similar reports titled "FETÖ ile irtibatlı 4 okul kapatıldı" (*"Four schools linked to FETÖ closed"*) appeared nationwide, confirming the coordinated nature of the closures (AA, 2016b).

In an international frame, Anadolu Agency (AA) stated that "24 schools, approximately 300 associations, and 150 supplementary courses" (*"24 okul, yaklaşık 300 dernek ve 150 etüt merkezi"*) linked to the organization existed in Germany, warning that they "deceived the public regarding immigrant integration and sought to influence politicians" (*"kamuoyunu göçmen entegrasyonu konusunda aldattıkları ve siyasetçilere nüfuz etmeye çalıştıkları"*) (AA, 2016c).

This reframing of education as deception marked a profound shift. Yeni Şafak and Daily Sabah described the Gülenist schools abroad as "zehir saçıyor" (*"*poisoning Muslim youth*"*) and as part of a "Batı destekli sızma ağı" (*"*Western-backed network of infiltration*"*) (Yeni Şafak, 2017; Daily Sabah, 2016). They celebrated the Maarif Foundation's transfer of these institutions as a "temizlik" (*"*cleansing*"*) and "millileştirme" (*"*nationalization*"*) of education (Yeni Şafak, 2017).

By contrast, T24 occasionally referenced the impact of these closures on students and educators, noting the "kapatmaların kapsamının giderek genişlediği" (*"*the widening scope of the closures*"*) and the "bütün bir eğitim ekosisteminin çöktüğü" (*"*the collapse of entire education ecosystems*"*) (T24, 2017). While rare, such accounts disrupted the hegemonic frame that portrayed closures solely as victories over terrorism.

The discourse systematically redefines social institutions as security threats. The framing converts prior service-oriented organizations into instruments of infiltration, illustrating bounded rationality in state decision-making: the government simplifies a complex social landscape into a dualistic schema of "loyal/treasonous" actors, prioritizing perceived threat over nuanced evaluation of social utility (Demir, 2019, p. 8).

2. Discourse of National Security, Treason, and Foreign Conspiracy

Across both state and partisan media, FETÖ was consistently portrayed through the metaphors of disease and contamination. Erdoğan's speeches and TRT broadcasts repeatedly described the network as a "virüs" (*"*virus*"*) or "kanser" (*"*cancer*"*) that must be "ulusal bedenden temizlenmeli" (*"*cleansed from the national body*"*) (TRT Haber, 2017). Yeni Şafak's coverage of "Fetullah Gülen'in iade süreci" (*"*the extradition process of Fethullah Gülen*"*) detailed that Gülenists had "1980'lerin sonlarından itibaren polis, yargı, Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri ve bürokrasiye sızdıklarını" (*"*infiltrated the police, judiciary, Turkish Armed Forces, and bureaucracy since the

late 1980s"), and that by 2010 they "paralel devlet gibi davranmaya başladılar" (*"began to act like a parallel state"*) (Yeni Şafak, 2017).

Sabah amplified this moral panic by publishing a report titled *"Terör Örgütü Lideri Gülen'in 'Üç Ayak' Talimatı"* (*"*Terrorist Organization Leader Gülen's 'Three Pillars' Directive*"*), claiming that Gülen "sivil imamlarına yargıyı ele geçirme talimatı verdi" (*"*instructed civilian imams to take control of the judiciary") and that "bu üç ayak, Yargıtay, Danıştay ve Sayıştay, ya tamamen ele geçirilmeli ya da yok edilmelidir" (*"*these three pillars, Supreme Court, Council of State, and Court of Accounts, must either be fully controlled or destroyed") (Sabah, 2016). The same article alleged that "yardım paralarının yüzde onu doğrudan Gülen'e gönderiliyordu, 2014'ten sonra bu oran yüzde yirmiye çıktı" ("ten percent of charity funds were sent directly to Gülen, rising to twenty percent after 2014") (Sabah, 2016).

TRT and Daily Sabah internationalized the narrative by accusing FETÖ of being a *"CIA destekli terör tarikatı"* (*"*CIA-backed terrorist cult*"*), suggesting that its *"okullar ve şirketler ABD etkisinin paravanlarıdır"* ("schools and companies were fronts for U.S. influence") (TRT Haber, 2017; Daily Sabah, 2016).

Independent outlets like T24 did not deny the illegality of the coup but drew attention to the *"hukukun çiğnenmesi"* (*"*erosion of due process*"*) and *"adaletin seçici uygulanması"* (*"*selective application of justice*"*) (T24, 2017). These reports provided the only limited critique of the sweeping *"güvenlikleştirme"* ("securitization") of civil life, illustrating how the *"ulusal güvenlik"* ("national security") frame dominated even nominally independent reporting. The discourse centralizes authority and moral legitimacy within the state, portraying any deviation as an existential threat. Bounded rationality in crisis management explains the simplification of complex organizational networks into "parallel state" and foreign-backed narratives, enabling rapid decision-making (Jones, 2003, p. 403).

3. Portrayal of Service Organizations and Media Outlets

The closure of Gülen-linked institutions was framed as both *"vatan borcu"* ("patriotic duty") and *"ahlaki düzeltme"* ("moral correction"). TRT Haber and Anadolu Ajansı (AA) highlighted the shuttering of media outlets such as *Zaman* and *Samanyolu TV*, describing them as *"propaganda*

ve psikolojik harp merkezleri" ("centers of propaganda and psychological warfare") (TRT Haber, 2017; AA, 2016a).

When reporting the renaming of a school in Van as *"15 Temmuz Şehitleri İmam Hatip Ortaokulu"* ("15 July Martyrs Imam Hatip Middle School"), Yeni Şafak wrote that *"artık bu kurum FETÖ'nün elinde değil, halkın hizmetinde"* ("the community now benefits from this institution, no longer run by FETÖ") (Yeni Şafak, 2017). These symbolic acts of renaming transformed purges into redemptive narratives of *"ulusal yeniden doğuş"* ("national rebirth"), portraying repression as moral restoration.

Anadolu Ajansı (AA) and Sabah also emphasized that the seized assets were *"millete geri kazandırıldı"* ("handed back to the nation"), while TRT broadcasts showed images of students returning to *"temizlenmiş okullar"* ("cleansed schools") (AA, 2016b; Sabah, 2016).

In contrast, T24 occasionally featured the voices of dismissed teachers and displaced families, highlighting *"eğitimin kesintiye uğraması ve toplulukların dağılması"* ("education interrupted and communities dismantled") (T24, 2017).

These limited inclusions underscored how *sosyal kayıp* (social loss) was almost entirely erased from the *resmî söylem* (official discourse), revealing how state-aligned media transformed confiscation into a moral act of national reclamation.

Service provision is systematically reframed as either illegitimate or threatening, erasing prior legitimacy. Bounded rationality explains the media's oversimplification: the regime prioritizes security signals over social consequences, treating organizational closure as a problem-solving mechanism rather than a socially disruptive act.

4. Justifying Closures and Seizures

Anadolu Ajansı (AA) reported that *"yaklaşık 800 özel okul kapatıldı"* ("nearly 800 private schools were closed") and that *"öğretmenlerin lisansları Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı tarafından iptal edildi"* ("teachers' licenses were revoked by the Ministry of Education") (AA, 2016a).

The report emphasized the *"idari ve hukuki düzen"* ("administrative and legal order") of these measures.

Other AA bulletins stated that seized universities and dormitories were *"devlete devredildi"* ("transferred to the state") or *"yeni yönetim altında yeniden açıldı"* ("reopened under new management") (AA, 2016b).

Pro-government outlets framed these moves as acts of *ekonomik adalet* (economic justice). Yeni Şafak declared that *"terörü finanse eden şirketler güvence altına alındı ve millete geri kazandırıldı"* ("companies once financing terror have been secured and returned to the nation") (Yeni Şafak, 2017).
Sabah celebrated these asset transfers as *"çalınan servet döneminin sona erdiği"* ("ending the era of stolen wealth") (Sabah, 2016).

Independent media offered limited counterpoints. In an article titled *"10 adımda Fethullah Gülen'in yükselişi ve düşüşü"* ("Fethullah Gülen's Rise and Fall in 10 Steps"), T24 observed that as *"ihraç edilen kamu görevlilerinin sayısı 100 bine yaklaştı"* ("the number of dismissed public officials approached 100,000"), opposition parties *"başka bir darbeye karşı hükümeti destekledi ama Gülenist olmayan muhaliflerin de mağdur edildiğini dile getirdi"* ("supported the government against another coup but complained that non-Gülenist opponents were also being victimized") (T24, 2017).

Closures were justified through legalistic and moral narratives that privileged state-centric definitions of order and legitimacy. This reflects a logic of bounded rationality in authoritarian governance, wherein policymakers act under perceived urgency, selecting and simplifying information that validates immediate coercive action while disregarding the long-term social, political, and economic costs (Demir, 2019, p. 8). Within this logic, clientelist relations between the state and Islamic movements are not fixed structures of mutual benefit but contingent exchanges that collapse once loyalty is perceived as uncertain. The same companies and associations that were once praised for contributing to social welfare and national development were abruptly labeled as threats to state security, revealing the fragility of patron–client ties under conditions of authoritarian insecurity.

A similar discursive pattern emerged in Egyptian state media, where Islamic charities such as al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya were redefined from welfare partners into potential infiltrators. However, while Egypt's repression was articulated through bureaucratic and legal idioms of "law and order," Turkey's narrative moralized coercion as economic purification and patriotic reclamation, returning "stolen" resources to the nation, both cases illustrate how authoritarian regimes use clientelist reversal and moral-legal framing to transform abrupt acts of repression into performances of sovereign justice, masking insecurity as national renewal.

5. Key Rhetorical and Framing Devices

Lexical Choices

Harmful: "virus," "traitor," "terrorist," "parallel state."

Positive (state): "unity," "purification," "justice," "security."

Metaphors and Analogies

"Cleansing the state" → portrays repression as a remedy.

"Virus" and "infection" metaphors → materializing threat, implying eradication rather than reform.

Emotional Appeals

A sustained appeal to fear, patriotism, and gratitude structured the discourse. Citizens were urged to "defend democracy" by accepting the purge.

Omissions

Absent from state-aligned media were references to:

- Legal grounds or procedural fairness of these actions.
- The economic or social costs of mass dismissals.
- The humanitarian consequences of international closures.

Rhetorical devices legitimize state action and simplify complex socio-political phenomena. Metaphors of disease and purification create cognitive shortcuts, reducing dissent and enabling public acceptance of mass closures.

Synthesis: The Dominant Official Narrative

From 2016 to 2018, Turkey's state-owned (AA, TRT Haber) and pro-government partisan (Sabah, Yeni Şafak, Daily Sabah) media constructed a unified narrative: Gülenist institutions, once known for education, charity, and civic outreach, were redefined as the institutional backbone of treason and terrorism.

State outlets anchored this narrative in legal-bureaucratic language, framing closures as constitutional acts of defense. Partisan outlets used conspiratorial tones, presenting the purge as both moral purification and protection against Western subversion. Independent outlets such as T24 provided minimal but crucial critical reporting, documenting the overreach of emergency decrees and the collateral targeting of citizens.

Through metaphors of "virus," "cleansing," and "purification," repression became recovery, and the destruction of plural institutions was narratively aligned with the restoration of democracy and sovereignty.

Lived Experiences and Perspectives on the Crackdown: Qualitative Insights from Interviews

To complement the documentary and media analysis presented in the previous sections, this part examines insights drawn from semi-structured interviews with five respondents: investigative journalists, former and current members of the Hizmet (Gülen) Movement, academics specializing in civil society and Islamic networks, and directors of research centers focused on Hizmet studies. Together, these perspectives capture the interplay between state policy, organizational self-representation, scholarly interpretation, and media framing.

Whereas the previous section analyzed state-sponsored media coverage to reconstruct the official narrative of the Gülen Movement as a "parallel state" and a national security threat, this section contrasts that narrative with on-the-ground perspectives, insider experiences, and institutional practices. These insights are crucial for unpacking the complex interplay between authoritarian control, organizational adaptation, and the post-2016 crackdown on Gülen-affiliated institutions.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format and transcribed verbatim, allowing for precise thematic coding and contextual interpretation of participants' language and framing. The analysis employs inductive thematic coding to identify recurring patterns, which form the structure of the discussion that follows.

This section interrogates four central questions:

1. Why and to what extent did the AKP regime perceive the Gülen movement as a threat?
2. How was the AKP government's repression of the Gülen Movement justified or contested by the regime?
3. Whether the movement was internally considered politically active or socially focused, and what size services they provided?
4. How did movement members respond to bureaucratic purges, school closures, and asset seizures?

The analysis tests the hypothesis that repression under authoritarian rule is rarely determined by the practical utility of Islamic movements to the regime. Instead, it is often driven by perceived threats to regime security and efforts by ruling elites to consolidate power, even when such repression undermines the regime's own social or economic interests.

Theme 1: Multifaceted Identity of the Gülen Movement

Across interviews, respondents consistently emphasized the movement's dual nature. From the perspective of current members, the movement is primarily a humanitarian, educational, and religious initiative:

> "*There is no fixed definition of the movement. It can be an economic model. It can be defined in various dimensions, including religious and educational. It can be a social movement with a religious foundation*".

Similarly, the journalist acknowledged its public social footprint, particularly in education and charitable work, while emphasizing the political and bureaucratic influence:

> "*They are very active, their connections are deep, and they created a parallel state. They controlled interior ministries and the judiciary. The movement controlled 72 police departments*".

The dual structure of the Movement, described by the former member-turned-journalist, reflects the coexistence of a civil, social side and a covert bureaucratic wing:

> "*One side is the civil, social, and religious community, while the other is a hierarchical, disciplined, and covert wing that operated within the Turkish state… These civil servants led a dual life, one within the official hierarchy of the state and another aligned with the movement's underground structure*".

The academic echoed this, framing it as a "bureaucratic Islamism" model embedded within state institutions:

> "*50% of the judicial system belonged to the Gülen and the group's members occupied 80% of bureaucratic offices… Said Nurci believed in changing society through bureaucratic structures and means*" (Academic/former member).

While current members emphasize altruistic goals, such as education, interfaith dialogue, and social services, journalists, former members, and academics have foregrounded the movement's political reach, particularly before and during the early years of the AKP. This divergence illustrates the tension between internal self-perception and external securitized framings. In practice, the movement's political engagement was far from marginal: it developed a dense clientelist network with the AKP, facilitating mutual exchange of resources, bureaucratic access, and legitimacy. Through its schools, media outlets, and business associations, the Gülen network became an indispensable pillar of the ruling coalition during the 2000s, embedding itself deeply within the judiciary, police, and education sectors. However, clientelism in authoritarian settings is never fixed; once the regime's sense of security shifted, former partners could swiftly become enemies. The AKP's subsequent decision to suppress the Movement, despite its prior utility, illustrates how authoritarian rulers prioritize immediate control over the preservation of long-term alliances or institutional stability.

Theme 2: Shifts in Governmental and Media Narratives

The AKP's portrayal of the movement underwent a dramatic evolution over time. Initially, the movement was instrumentalized as an ally, supporting regime goals:

> "*The Gülen movement at the beginning of the AKP rule supported the regime because the AKP promised to support justice, development, and equality… from 2002–2010 the movement supported the AKP*" (current movement member).

Journalists and academics highlighted implicit power struggles emerging by 2009–2010, particularly regarding bureaucratic influence and corruption investigations:

> "*By 2011, the disagreement could no longer be concealed and gradually escalated into a massive storm… Erdogan perceived that the movement was becoming too powerful*" (former member).

The post-2013 narrative transformed the Movement from a cooperative civil society actor to a "parallel state" and ultimately a "terrorist organization":

> "*Erdogan started to call the movement a parallel state… In 2015, Erdogan declared the movement a 'terrorist organization'. People already started to flee; trials for 2 million people took place, and 500,000 were found guilty for affiliating with the Gülen movement*" (Journalist).

Media and government narratives emphasized national security, sidelining discussions of social services or community impact, consistent with the securitization process outlined in Buzan et al. (1998). It confirms again that regime perspectives can shift swiftly in response to "alarming threats."

Theme 3: State Oversight, Purges, and Legal Repression

The post-2016 crackdown represented an unprecedented authoritarian intervention, targeting movement members across education, media, judiciary, and military sectors:

> "*In the same night, 3000 judges were dismissed, 10,000 academics, and 30,000 military personnel… mass arrests, detentions, torture, unfair trials*" (current movement member).

Former members and journalists highlighted the systematic and comprehensive nature of the repression:

> "*It was the perfect chance for Erdogan to get rid of the movement. He got rid of everything that belonged to the movement*" (Journalist).
> "*People were not judged individually… Simply being associated with the Hizmet Movement… was enough to be treated as a terrorist*" (former member).

The director of the Hizmet studies center emphasized the instrumentalization of the Movement's social services by the AKP, noting that the regime prioritized political consolidation over social gaps created by closures:

> "*Erdogan does not think of a movement or a group as irreplaceable*" (Director).

This demonstrates again that the AKP did not make a long-term calculation of the side effects of targeting the movement and that the threats prompted the regime to launch an aggressive, unprecedented attack to contain the growing influence of the movement.

Theme 4: Social Services, Community Impact, and Resilience

Interviewees consistently underscored the breadth and significance of the movement's social footprint:

- **Education**: Schools, universities, and preparatory courses
- **Charity and dormitories**: Supporting disadvantaged students and families
- **Media outlets**: Platforms for civic engagement and education

Former members highlighted disruption to community life following closures:

> "*Families… could place their daughters in these student houses with peace of mind… Now, there is a massive void… rise in crime rates and decline in social cohesion*" (former member).

Journalists observed that these consequences were largely invisible in official narratives, which framed the crackdown purely in terms of security:

> "*No consideration was given for these services… Safety and security was a very effective narrative that justified the authoritarian escalation*" (Journalist).

The movement's internal strategy had emphasized adaptation and cooperation until persecution became unavoidable:

> "*We regularly submitted reports to authorities… we always worked in coordination with state authorities rather than independently*" (current member).

Despite adaptation, the 2016 crackdown effectively eliminated the Movement's operational capacity within Turkey.

Theme 5: Authoritarian Logic and the Culture of Fear

Interviewees highlighted Erdogan's approach to consolidating power, emphasizing pre-emptive purges, elimination of rivals, and establishment of a climate of fear:

> "*Erdogan is creating a new political culture; the culture of fear. He also attacked economically, closed all schools, universities, and media outlets… an entire social group was subjected to civil death*" (Academic/former member).

> "*For Erdogan, loyalty meant 'not opposing his rules and decisions and being subordinate to him'… no group is irreplaceable*" (Academic/former member).

This pattern illustrates the practice of collective punishment and the subordination of civil society to the regime's objectives. The combination of bureaucratic purges, media control, and legal repression reflects a deeply authoritarian strategy designed to neutralize independent social networks.

Theme 6: Continuity, Adaptation, and Organizational Lessons

Despite repression, interviewees highlighted the Movement's historical continuity, its educational mission, and the resilience of local networks prior to 2016:

> "*The movement once represented a near-perfect balance between its spiritual and social aims… admired among conservative communities*" (former member). "*Our projects remained stable; donations declined, but domestic contributions kept us afloat*" (current member).

The post-crackdown landscape demonstrates the limits of organizational adaptation under authoritarian regimes. Whereas the Movement attempted to operate within state-defined boundaries, the state recast adaptation as proof of its own authority, reinforcing asymmetrical power dynamics.

Theoretical Implications of the Interview Findings: Turkey

The thematic analysis of interviews with journalists, former and current members of the Gülen (Hizmet) Movement, academics, and directors of affiliated institutions provides a nuanced understanding of how state–movement relations in Turkey evolved from collaboration to confrontation. Beyond documenting divergent narratives, these insights offer broader theoretical implications for understanding authoritarian governance, civil society, and the politics of religion in contemporary Turkey.

1. Securitization as a Mode of Authoritarian Governance

Across interviews, both former officials and journalists emphasized that the AKP's post-2013 discourse reframed the Gülen Movement from a civic actor into an existential threat to state survival. Terms such as "parallel state," "traitor," and "terrorist organization" became dominant in official and media rhetoric. This transformation demonstrates how securitization operates not only as a discursive strategy but also as a practical instrument of governance.

By framing a religious–civil movement as a national security threat, the AKP legitimized extraordinary measures, mass arrests, institutional purges, the closure of schools and universities,

and the reclassification of civic engagement as terrorism. As interviewees repeatedly noted, repression was not triggered by the movement's overt political actions but by its perceived autonomy and bureaucratic embeddedness. This finding supports the argument that in authoritarian settings, securitization functions as a preventive rationality, a tool to neutralize potential sites of alternative legitimacy before they manifest open opposition.

2. Authoritarian Pragmatism and the Fragility of Alliances

Interview data reveal that the relationship between the AKP and the Gülen Movement was initially mutually beneficial. The movement's schools, charities, and media outlets enhanced the AKP's social legitimacy and helped it consolidate civilian rule against the influence of Kemalism. However, as several participants emphasized, this alliance was always instrumental and contingent, grounded in mutual benefit rather than ideological alignment.

Once the Movement's bureaucratic influence began to rival the AKP's control, the alliance fractured. This shift illustrates what Gerschewski (2013) identifies as the bounded rationality of authoritarian control, which means that authoritarian coalitions are inherently unstable, driven by the need to survive rather than consistent principles (pp. 16–18). Cooperation between the AKP and Hizmet thus reflected a temporary equilibrium, sustained only as long as the regime perceived the movement as non-threatening. When that perception changed, repression replaced partnership.

3. Covert Networks, Dual Structures, and Regime Anxiety

The interviews also expose the organizational complexity of the Gülen Movement, its dual structure comprising a visible civil wing and an implicit bureaucratic one. While initially this structure was a pragmatic adaptation to Turkey's secularist, exclusionary system, it later became central to the AKP's narrative of betrayal.

This dynamic illustrates how regimes can reinterpret organizational duality as a sign of threat. Authoritarian rulers often use ambiguity as a justification for coercion (Levitsky & Way, 2010, pp. 57–60). As one academic described, "*Erdogan's fear was not about what the movement did, but about what it could do*." This suggests that repression did not result from the movement's explicit

opposition to the regime, but rather from its growing capacity to gain social loyalty and moral legitimacy, independent of the regime.

4. Adaptive Strategies and the Regime's Usage of Submission

Some interviewees mentioned that movement members viewed themselves as educators and community builders, rather than as political actors. They described their commitment to "service" (*hizmet*), such as running schools, charities, and dialogue centers, as a way to help society while staying within the law. Even with increasing government supervision, participants emphasized how local administrators attempted to adapt rather than resist; they filed paperwork, restructured boards, and reassured authorities of their social mission. Yet the AKP reinterpreted this compliance as proof of infiltration and conspiracy. This pattern shows a paradox central to authoritarian resilience; adaptation can be both a survival strategy for civil actors and a mechanism of domination for regimes (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 21; Svolik, 2012, pp. 37–38).

5. Symbolic Domination and the Erasure of Social Costs

A striking element across interviews is the silence surrounding the human consequences of repression. The interviews detailed mass arrests, job dismissals, the closure of 18 universities and over 2,000 schools, and the disruption of community networks. However, as one journalist observed, "*no one in the public sphere spoke about the teachers or the students, only about security.*"

This absence of the humanitarian element proves the authoritarian use of "symbolic domination," which refers to the power to define what is classified as legitimate discourse and what is excluded from public visibility (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 163–165). The AKP replaced empathy with obedience or even support by making the narrative appealing to national security. Consequently, repression was reframed not as destruction, but as a duty to defend the nation.

6. Repression as Restructuring, Not Destruction

The post-2016 crackdown did not destroy Turkey's civil sphere; rather, it reshaped it. Interviewees argued that the regime did not only aim at containing the Gülen movement but also to monopolize

its social and educational spaces. State-run or pro-government equivalents replaced many schools, charities, and dormitories.

Thus, repression served dual purposes: it eliminated a rival moral authority while reconstituting the boundaries of permissible civic engagement. In this sense, repression in Turkey was not purely destructive but productive, it produced a new, state-centered civil society aligned with Erdogan's vision of ideological unity.

Synthesis

The Turkish case underscores several dynamics of authoritarian governance and civil society transformation:

1. **Securitization as a tool:** The framing of Hizmet as a "parallel state" legitimized extraordinary repression under the guise of protecting democracy.
2. **Fragile authoritarian bargains:** Alliances between ruling regimes and religious movements are inherently unstable, collapsing when perceived autonomy threatens the ruler's monopoly on power.
3. **Duality as danger:** Organizational complexity, once a protective mechanism, becomes a regime's justification for eradication.
4. **Narrative erasure:** By silencing the social costs of repression, the regime consolidates symbolic control over truth and legitimacy.
5. **Reconfiguration of civil society:** Repression transforms, rather than eliminates, the civic landscape, absorbing social functions into state-controlled structures.

In theoretical terms, these findings indicate that repression in Turkey, like that in Egypt, cannot be explained solely by the movement's behavior or political activism. Instead, it reflects the logic of pre-emptive control, securitized governance, and narrative monopoly. The Gülen Movement's fate reveals that under contemporary authoritarianism, social influence and autonomy constitute sufficient grounds for repression.

Official Discourse and Framing of the Gülen Movement: Erdoğan's Speeches and State Narratives

While the previous section traced the lived experiences of journalists, academics, and Gülen-affiliated actors navigating the post-2016 repressive environment, this section examines the regime's own language. Because direct interviews with policymakers were not feasible, like the case of Egypt, the following discourse analysis of President Erdoğan's speeches and official state statements serves as a complementary empirical window into how the regime itself narrated, rationalized, and moralized repression. These texts illuminate the ideological approach through which authoritarian control was justified and embedded within Turkey's evolving national and religious identity.

From Partnership to Paranoia: Constructing the "Parallel State"

In an interview following the failed coup attempt, Erdoğan retrospectively describes his relationship with Fethullah Gülen as having deteriorated after 2011:

> "The real problem began after 2011… There was an effort to take away some power, and this effort involved the police, security forces, and the judiciary" (Erdoğan, 2016a, [YouTube rOPik-zHHVA, 03:15–03:50]).

He further insists, "We were aware that they were trying to infiltrate various organizations, but we were not aware of their ultimate bad intentions" (Erdoğan, 2016a). The concept of a *"*parallel state*"* (*paralel devlet yapılanması*) became a central trope, casting the Gülen movement as a conspiracy threatening legitimate authority.

Official statements mirrored this framing. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the movement as "a criminal network that infiltrated the state apparatus for decades" (Republic of Türkiye MFA, 2017), while the Justice Ministry referred to it as "a terrorist structure masking as a civil initiative" (Anadolu Agency, 2017). Such terminology transformed bureaucratic competition into treason, rationalizing a policy of mass purges as a means of stabilizing the state.

15 July and the Myth of National Resurrection

In his memorial speech for the 2016 coup anniversary, Erdoğan fuses nationalism and Islam into a narrative of moral rebirth:

> "On the night of 15 July, I commemorate our martyrs who stood up to the traitors" (Erdoğan, 2017a, [YouTube Jei4HK5V6EE, 01:12–01:35]).

He invokes a transnational *ummah* (الأمة):

> "The calls to prayer that echoed through Istanbul… resonated in Skopje, Baku, and Cairo… From Pakistan to Indonesia, hands were raised to the heavens for Türkiye" (Erdoğan, 2017a).

These passages collapse the boundary between religious devotion and national defense. The defeat of the coup is portrayed not merely as a political event but as an ideological or religious triumph.

Pro-government outlets reproduced this language. Daily Sabah described 15 July as "the state was cleansed of a virus planted by Western intelligence and Gülen's cult" (*Daily Sabah*, 2017). Erdoğan's later statement that "the trap set by Gülen was successfully destroyed" highlights the purification frame, which frames coercion as a redemptive strategy (Erdoğan, 2017a).

Economic Cleansing and the Expansion of Securitization

Erdoğan extended this moral narrative into the economic domain. In a later address, he stated:

> "This organization has a business wing. Perhaps the business world is where they are strongest… We are determined to cut off all business ties, all revenue, and all connections of this bloody organization" (Erdoğan, 2019, [YouTube JKcTpOP38A4, 00:48–01:25]).

This discourse securitizes commerce itself, legitimizing widespread seizure of Gülen-linked schools, banks, and media companies. Official data published by the Anadolu Agency emphasized that "over 1,100 companies were transferred to the state's Savings Deposit Insurance Fund to prevent terrorist financing" (Anadolu Agency, 2019). Such economic control demonstrates the bureaucratic expansion of repression, from policing ideology to policing capital.

Lexical and Rhetorical Strategies

Across these sources, Erdoğan and allied media use a recurring set of lexical markers that reflect the authoritarian logic of repression:

- **Negative signifiers**: "virus," "traitor," "bloody organization," "parallel structure," "terrorist network."
- **Positive signifiers**: "nation," "faith," "purification," "unity."
  Metaphors such as "cutting off," "virus," and "cleansing the state" reframe coercion as a necessity. Appeals to religious transcendence ("ummah," "divine blessing") transform political violence into a national duty.

Erdoğan's discourse demonstrates a strategy of control rooted in securitized legitimacy. The Gülen movement's extensive networks in education, business, and media were perceived as a means of gaining power, prompting the regime to employ extraordinary measures as a form of self-defense. The logic suggests that, regardless of the organization's vast business network and the socio-economic services it provides, authoritarian regimes are most likely to be threatened by power generation through these services. In this sense, the speeches perform a dual function. They narrate the regime's political survival as an immediate necessity, while supporting this aim through a narrative of protecting the state.

Table 1. Comparative Logics of Authoritarian Repression in Egypt and Turkey

To clarify the comparative logic that underpins both cases, Table 1 summarizes the key dimensions through which authoritarian repression was constructed and enacted in Egypt and Turkey. While both regimes converged in their reliance on securitized narratives and control over religious legitimacy, they diverged in the institutional forms and discursive repertoires through which these objectives were pursued.

Analytical Dimension	Egypt (al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya)	Turkey (Gülen Movement)
Regime Type and Structure	authoritarianism with direct domination of state institutions.	Competitive, party-centric authoritarianism centered on President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP); electoral façade maintained.
Triggering Event	2013 coup and subsequent crackdown on Islamic charities and the Muslim Brotherhood.	2016 failed coup attempt attributed to the Gülen movement.
Primary Justification for Repression	National security, anti-terrorism, and stabilizing the state	Defense of sovereignty, divine justice, and the moral unity of the nation.
Dominant Discourse Frames	"Extremism," "foreign funding," "illegality," and "national unity."	"purification," "ummah," "divine mission," and "terrorist infiltration."
Mechanisms of Control	Legal dissolution of NGOs, takeover of mosques and schools by the Ministry of Awqaf, intensified surveillance and licensing regimes.	Mass purges of public employees, confiscation of Gülen-linked businesses, closure of schools and media outlets, expansion of the Diyanet.
Economic Dimension	Restrictions on charitable donations and funding under the banner of counter-terrorism; consolidation of state control over welfare distribution.	Economic securitization through the seizure of Gülen-affiliated companies and banks; financial networks brought under state authority.

Outcome for Civil Society	Domestication of NGOs and absorption into bureaucratic hierarchies; elimination of autonomous welfare provision.	Elimination of independent religious networks; incorporation of loyalist civil actors into AKP-aligned institutions.
Rationality of Authoritarian Behavior	Pre-emptive control, securitized legitimacy, and bureaucratic coercion framed as legal necessity.	Pre-emptive control, securitized legitimacy; repression framed as purification and rebirth.
Discursive Strategy	Bureaucratic-legal idiom emphasizing law, order, and regulation.	Populist-moral idiom invoking faith, and loyalty.
Broader Theoretical Implication	Authoritarianism as bureaucratic domination: erasing civil autonomy through regulation.	Authoritarianism as moral hegemony: absorbing civil autonomy through populist legitimation.

This table highlights that, despite the differing nature of both the Islamic movements and the regimes that governed them, the outcomes of repression converged. In Egypt and Turkey alike, variations in organizational structure and regime type, military versus populist, did not alter the ultimate result: both al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya and the Gülen Movement were dismantled or absorbed once perceived as threats. This convergence underscores a central argument of the chapter: regardless of context or prior cooperation, when regimes enter phases of heightened authoritarian stabilization, repression becomes the inevitable response to any autonomous source of moral or social authority.

Figure 1. Reactive Logic of Authoritarian Repression and Reconfiguration in Egypt and Turkey

Stage	Analytical Description	Empirical Expression in Egypt	Empirical Expression in Turkey
1. Perceived Regime Insecurity	Leaders interpret autonomous Islamic networks as immediate threats to their monopoly on power and legitimacy.	Post-2013 coup fear of Islamist resurgence triggers pre-emptive control over mosques and NGOs.	Post-2016 coup attempt fuels panic over infiltration and betrayal within the state.
2. Rapid Securitization of Civil Society	Civil and religious organizations are redefined as national security risks through moral and legal discourse.	Al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya framed as "extremism."	Gülenists branded as "terrorists," "traitors," and "viruses" undermining the nation's unity.
3. Coercive Reaction and Control	Swift and wide-reaching coercive measures are enacted to neutralize perceived threats and restore symbolic authority.	Mass closures of NGOs, confiscation of funds, and direct state absorption of religious institutions.	Purges, arrests, and property seizures framed as cleansing the state from internal enemies.
4. Short-Term Reconfiguration of Religious Authority	Repression is justified as protection of religion and national unity; autonomy is replaced with state guardianship.	Bureaucratic centralization through the Ministry of Awqaf's oversight and legal mechanisms.	Populist centralization through AKP dominance over religion, education, and charity.

This figure conceptualizes repression as a reactive cycle of authoritarian behavior. In moments of acute insecurity, regimes experience heightened threat perceptions that trigger rapid securitization

of civil society. Coercion follows not as a calculated policy but as a defensive reflex aimed at restoring immediate control. The process produces temporary reconfigurations of religious authority that reinforce regime dominance while revealing the flexibility of authoritarian rule.

Figure 1 illustrates the central dynamic of authoritarian behavior as understood in this dissertation: repression emerges not as a carefully calculated strategy but as a reactive response to perceived threats to regime survival. In both Egypt and Turkey, decisions to repress Islamic movements resulted from moments of insecurity, where leaders interpreted organizational autonomy and moral authority as immediate dangers to political stability. Authoritarian behavior thus operates through short-term logics of control, where the urgency to contain threats outweighs long-term social and political considerations. As the figure suggests, insecurity triggers rapid securitization, which then justifies coercive action and culminates in the reassertion of state dominance over the religious field. This reactive sequence demonstrates that authoritarian consolidation in the contemporary Middle East is sustained less by coherent planning than by continuous acts of defensive adaptation aimed at preserving power in the face of real or imagined challenges.

Comparative and Theoretical Synthesis: Authoritarian Reconfiguration of Islamic Movements in Egypt and Turkey

Despite their distinct political trajectories, the Egyptian and Turkish regimes exhibit strikingly similar authoritarian logics in their treatment of Islamic movements. In both contexts, the state's confrontation with al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya and the Gülen movement reflects a deeper process of authoritarian stabilization driven by a fear of organizational autonomy, ideological competition, and a response to immediate power requirements.

Both Sisi and Erdoğan deployed parallel rhetorical and institutional strategies to justify their crackdowns. In each case, repression was narrated through the language of national security and state sovereignty. Islamic civil actors were no longer portrayed as partners in social development but as infiltrators threatening the unity of the nation. The discourse of securitization, emphasizing "extremism," "foreign funding," and "politicized religion", supported the narrative through which coercion could be framed as a national duty. Bureaucratically, both regimes replaced the social service functions of these organizations within state-controlled frameworks, allowing repression

to coexist with claims of continuity in welfare provision. This pattern illustrates a shared logic of authoritarian behavior, in which control over civil society actors and service provision becomes a vital instrument of regime survival.

However, the pathways through which this logic unfolded diverged significantly. In Egypt, repression emerged from a military-led authoritarian restoration that sought to eliminate pluralistic religious authority. The Ministry of Awqaf and state-aligned media worked together to delegitimize Islamic charities as vectors of extremism, transforming Islamic movements into extensions of national security policy. This top-down model replaced negotiated control with direct domination, which made religious and civic life entirely subordinate to the state.

In Turkey, by contrast, repression took place within a competitive authoritarian framework that maintained the outward form of electoral legitimacy. Erdoğan's strategy was less about eradicating the religious field than about monopolizing it. The Gülen movement was not destroyed solely as a security threat, but also as a rival political and bureaucratic network capable of contesting the regime's authority. The post-2016 purges thus combined coercion with co-optation, using legal and economic mechanisms to reassert control over education, media, and charity work. Unlike Sisi's closure, Erdoğan's approach re-channeled religious authority into the orbit of the presidency, consolidating a hybrid model of personalized, party-centric authoritarianism.

Discursively, both regimes transformed repression into a moral performance of governance. In Egypt, al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya was reimagined as a latent threat to social cohesion, accused of "اختراق" (infiltration) and "نشر الأفكار المتشددة" (spreading extremist ideas). Bureaucratic and legalistic vocabularies presented the closures and supervision of religious charities as rational acts of law enforcement rather than as the suppression of pluralism. In Turkey, a similar transformation presented the Gülenists from partners to an internal enemy, described in pro-government outlets as a "virus," a "cancer," and a "parasitic network." These linguistic choices reveal how political anxiety was translated into extraordinary measures within narratives of national protection. While Egypt's repression was framed in the bureaucratic sphere of legality and regulation, Turkey's was presented with the language of justice and national rebirth. Both repertoires achieved the same outcome: the conversion of coercion into an act of self-defense by the authoritarian.

The interviews with organizational leaders underscore how repression grew from within existing relations of cooperation rather than from their absence. Both al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya and the Gülen movement had long functioned as clientelist actors, partners of the state in welfare provision and education. Their downfall happened not because they opposed the regime directly, but because their growing authority and capacity to mobilize resources challenged the regime's monopoly on legitimacy. In Egypt, despite strict compliance and cooperation, the association was accused of exerting social influence and stripped of its independence under the pretext of legal supervision. In Turkey, the Gülenists' alliance with the AKP was reframed as evidence of political influence, and the movement was declared a terrorist organization following the 2016 coup attempt. In both cases, loyalty proved insufficient protection once the state's calculus of control shifted. This demonstrates that authoritarian governance operates on a logic of instrumental tolerance, where collaboration is permitted only as long as it serves the regime's strategic objectives. When autonomous religious or social networks begin to embody alternative legitimacy, they are swiftly reclassified from partners to threats.

A central feature in both cases is the discursive erasure of the social costs of repression. Egyptian media ignored the closure of hospitals, schools, and welfare programs run by Islamic charities, focusing instead on the rhetoric of "القانون والنظام" (law and order). Turkish media also did not cover the humanitarian consequences of the purges and mass dismissals, instead emphasizing the victory of saving the nation. These discursive strategies are aimed at what Fairclough (1995) describes as the naturalization of ideology, where coercion is recast as common sense.

The broader theoretical implications of these parallels point to a model of authoritarian reconfiguration sustained by three dynamics: securitized governance, instrumental clientelism, and discursive moralization. First, securitized governance enables regimes to reframe social and religious organizations as existential threats, thereby legitimizing exceptional measures. Second, instrumental clientelism enables the state to co-opt and close Islamic movements according to shifting political priorities. Third, discursive moralization turns coercive actions into narratives of virtue, converting fear into consent. Egypt represents the bureaucratic variant of this model, where legality and regulation worked as a justification for coercion, while Turkey embodies its populist variant, where moral duty and national unity justify repression. Both reveal how authoritarian regimes sustain resilience not merely through coercive power but through discursive control. More

importantly, the various authoritarian methods employed to contain the threat and the distinct natures of the movements produced a similar outcome. This comparative evidence affirms the broader argument of this dissertation: authoritarian regimes in the contemporary Middle East do not make long-term rational calculations, and stability requirements outweigh political and economic considerations that once governed the relationship between the regimes and Islamic movements.

Chapter Seven

Findings, Hypothesis Testing and Theory Building

This chapter synthesizes the evidence from Egypt and Turkey to answer the dissertation's central question: *under what conditions do authoritarian regimes tolerate or prohibit Islamic movements?* Drawing on the trajectories of *al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya* (JS) in Egypt and the Gülen movement in Turkey, the chapter distills cross-case findings, evaluates the hypotheses, and presents a theory of authoritarian tolerance.

Across both cases, the evidence shows that neither the absence of political activism, nor the size of service provision, nor deep clientelist linkages protects Islamic movements when regimes experience instability or a rising threat perception. Instead, tolerance is dynamic, conditional, and highly sensitive to shifts in authoritarian stability.

The sections below outline six empirical findings, test the dissertation's hypotheses, and develop a theoretical framework to explain the adaptive logic of authoritarian tolerance.

Cross-Case Findings

Finding 1: The type of Islamic activism (political or apolitical) does *not determine* tolerance outcomes.

The JS is apolitical, service-driven, and historically cooperative with the regime. The Gülen movement, by contrast, is politically embedded, active in education, bureaucracy, and media.

Yet **both were tolerated for decades and then abruptly prohibited**.

This demonstrates that:

- Political activism does not *necessarily* trigger repression.
- Authoritarian regimes reassess groups based on contextual threats, not ideological types.

Implication:

Organizational "type" is not a definite criterion of tolerance.

Finding 2: The scale of social-service provision does not protect Islamic movements from a crackdown.

JS provides massive welfare support (hundreds of clinics, thousands of mosques, zakat networks). Gülen institutions deliver high-quality education and global outreach.

In both cases:

- The state relied on these services.
- The public benefited from and supported them.
- But neither scale nor utility protected the movements during moments of regime insecurity.

Implication:

Service provision is tolerated only when the regime is stable enough to see it as useful rather than threatening.

Finding 3: Regime stability shapes the tolerance threshold.

This is the *strongest* cross-case finding. Periods of instability or consolidation (2013 in Egypt, 2016 in Turkey) immediately narrowed the space for Islamic activists.

Tolerance collapsed not because of organizational behavior per se, but because:

- Authoritarian stability was threatened.
- Regimes recalibrated risk tolerance.
- Islamic groups became potential rivals for legitimacy.

Implication:

Authoritarian stability is the *primary* determinant of tolerance or prohibition.

Finding 4: Clientelism is reconfigured, not fixed.

Both regimes cultivated clientelist relationships:

- Egypt relied on JS for welfare mobilization, religious legitimacy, and the management of mosques.
- Turkey relied on Gülenists in the judiciary, police, and education sectors.

Yet when instability intensified:

- These networks were not a shield.
- Regimes restructured the clientelist equilibrium.
- Former partners became security threats.

Implication:
Clientelism is conditional and reversible; it protects groups only as long as the regime perceives them as controllable.

Finding 5: Public support increases regime sensitivity, even for apolitical groups.

JS had a wide popular base, especially among lower-income Egyptians. Gülenists had a broad urban constituency through their schools and a strong presence in civil society.

Large social bases amplify:

- The regime's anxiety about mobilization,
- The fear of alternative sources of authority,
- The perceived cost of allowing autonomy.

Implication:
Public support can magnify threat perception, even for non-political actors.

Finding 6: Crises provide the justification for crackdowns.

Both regimes used crises to legitimize prohibition:

- Egypt used the 2013 “war on terror” narrative to subsume or dissolve Islamic NGOs.
- Turkey used the 2016 coup attempt to designate the Gülen movement as a terrorist organization.

Crises enabled:

- Emergency powers,
- Legal restructuring,
- Public justification for repression,
- Suspension of prior alliances.

Implication:

Crises give authoritarian regimes the opportunity and the excuse to repress movements that they may have wanted to constrain for a long time.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: “The more pressing the security and political stabilization requirements for the authoritarian regime, the less tolerant it will be towards Islamic movements, irrespective of how significant they are in social-services provision.”

The empirical evidence from Egypt and Turkey consistently demonstrates that regime stability is the primary determinant of tolerance, outweighing all other organizational attributes. In both cases, Islamic movements were tolerated, incorporated, and in certain periods even encouraged as long as the regime perceived itself to be stable.

In Egypt, al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya (JS) served as a central partner to the state, providing extensive social services, operating thousands of mosques, and absorbing welfare burdens the government could not meet. Yet, after the 2013 destabilization, the regime’s tolerance collapsed almost immediately. The organization’s vast welfare apparatus, which once justified cooperation, became framed as a potential coordinating mechanism for mass influence. Its non-political nature and historical loyalty offered no protection when the regime’s priority shifted to consolidating power.

Similarly, the Turkish state had long embraced the Gülen movement, integrating Gülen-affiliated cadres into the judiciary, police, and education sectors. However, following the 2016 coup attempt, the same movement was redefined as an existential threat and prohibited en masse. Its earlier contributions in education, diplomacy, and service provision were rendered irrelevant in the face of heightened regime insecurity.

Across both cases, moments of political instability sharply reduced the regime's tolerance threshold, regardless of the movement's utility or apolitical profile. This confirms that the need for stabilization outweighs all the functional benefits that Islamic movements may provide.

H2: "The depth of the clientelist networks between authoritarian regimes and Islamic movements is not linear and does not guarantee the movement's survival."

The case studies show that patronage relationships between Islamic movements and authoritarian regimes are instrumental, reversible, and highly contingent. Patronage does not accumulate linearly in ways that protect groups; instead, it is reconfigured according to the interests of the regime.

In Egypt, JS maintained one of the most profound and enduring clientelist relationships with the state. It coordinated zakat distribution, ran clinics and schools, and controlled a significant portion of the religious sphere under state oversight. JS leaders were appointed or approved by state authorities, demonstrating tight vertical incorporation. Despite this deeply institutionalized relationship, the regime restructured the entire religious-NGO landscape after 2013, dissolving or subsuming JS branches to ensure direct control. Thus, extensive patronage did not prevent the organization from being curtailed; rather, it facilitated the state's ability to intervene effectively.

The Gülen movement illustrates a similar pattern. For decades, Gülenists operated as de facto partners of the Turkish state, especially within the bureaucracy and judiciary, positions that suggest a high degree of mutual dependency. Yet once Gülenists were reinterpreted as a threat to regime stability, the same networks that once enabled cooperation were rapidly dismantled. Clientelist ties not only failed to guarantee survival; they made the movement more vulnerable by rendering its internal structures legible and accessible to state countermeasures.

Therefore, in both cases, clientelist relations did not function as protective shields. Instead, they were reconfigured when the regime recalibrated its needs or threat perceptions. This demonstrates that clientelism in authoritarian contexts is fluid rather than durable, validating the second hypothesis.

H3: "The degree of a movement's political activity does not protect it from authoritarian crackdown in phases of authoritarian restitution or instability."

The JS–Gülen comparison provides clear evidence that political activism is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for repression. Islamic movements at opposite ends of the political spectrum were both tolerated and later prohibited, depending on broader regime dynamics.

JS represents an apolitical, service-oriented Islamic organization. It has historically avoided electoral politics, confrontational rhetoric, or calls for institutional reform. Yet, despite this complete political quietism, the organization faced significant restrictions and restructuring after 2013. This shows that repression was not tied to political activism but to the regime's broader strategy of controlling all Islamic spheres during instability.

Conversely, the Gülen movement was politically embedded from the outset, informally influencing state institutions, cultivating elite networks, and participating in national debates on governance and education. For decades, this political engagement was tolerated and even encouraged, as it aligned with state interests. Repression only occurred when instability escalated, and the regime reinterpreted the movement's influence as a threat.

Thus, political activism had no consistent predictive value across cases. The decisive factor was the timing and context of authoritarian stabilization, not the movement's level of political engagement.

Theory Building: The Adaptive Authoritarian Tolerance Framework

Taken together, the findings suggest that existing theoretical accounts only partially capture the dynamics observed in Egypt and Turkey. The cases show that authoritarian tolerance is not fixed nor derived from the intrinsic characteristics of Islamic movements, but rather emerges from

context-specific interpretations of threat and stability. These observations provide the basis for developing a more comprehensive theoretical framework that can explain the shifting patterns of tolerance and repression identified in this study.

Based on these insights, the advanced theory of adaptive authoritarian tolerance argues that:

"Authoritarian tolerance of Islamic movements is dynamic, situational, and contingent. It is shaped not by organizational type, welfare provision, or clientelist depth, but by how rulers interpret the following central factors: the stability of authoritarian rule and the changes in threat perception."

The state evaluates Islamic movements through the lens of regime security, and secondarily through:

1. Organizational autonomy
2. Mobilizational potential or public support

To unpack this argument, it is necessary to trace how shifts in authoritarian stability recalibrate rulers' risk assessments and produce corresponding adjustments in tolerance or prohibition.

When regimes feel stable:

- Islamic movements are framed as useful partners.
- Clientelist linkages expand.
- Welfare or educational services are encouraged.
- Autonomy is tolerated within limits.

When regimes feel unstable:

- Risk tolerance narrows.
- Autonomy becomes suspicious.
- Public support becomes threatening.
- Crisis framing enables repression.

Thus:
Stability → tolerance
Instability → prohibition

Causal Pathway

Below is the revised pathway, reorganized around regime stability as the primary driver**:**

Step 1: Perceived Authoritarian Instability

(e.g., political crisis, legitimacy crisis, coup threat)

- Triggers heightened surveillance
- Shifts the ruler calculations toward risk aversion

Step 2: Regime reassesses Islamic movements on two secondary axes:

- Organizational autonomy (ability to operate without state control)
- Mobilizational potential (public support, networks, services)

Step 3: If autonomy + mobilizational potential intersect with instability → heightened threat perception

Step 4: Breakdown of tolerance

- Legal restructuring
- Co-optation, absorption, or dissolution
- Criminalization and prohibition
- Reconstruction of clientelist networks in favor of loyalist actors

Step 5: New equilibrium

The regime establishes a controlled religious sphere, replacing autonomous actors with loyalist ones.

Conclusion and Implications

The comparative analysis of al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya in Egypt and the Gülen movement in Turkey demonstrates that authoritarian tolerance of Islamic activism is neither linear nor predictable through conventional explanatory variables. Movements with distinct ideological orientations, organizational structures, and degrees of political engagement nonetheless experienced strikingly similar trajectories: extended periods of accommodation followed by abrupt and far-reaching repression. These parallel outcomes challenge existing theoretical expectations and reveal that authoritarian regimes do not respond to Islamic actors based on inherent features such as ideological moderation, political quietism, charitable utility, or depth of clientelist networks. Instead, tolerance emerges as a dynamic, adaptive process fundamentally shaped by shifting perceptions of stability and threat.

The findings show that authoritarian rulers are not rational-choice actors in the classical sense. They do not operate with complete information, nor do they act according to stable strategic preferences. Rather, they exhibit bounded rationality, decision-making under uncertainty, filtered through cognitive biases, institutional blind spots, elite fragmentation, and emotional or symbolic pressures. Authoritarian decision-making is reactive, contingent, and shaped as much by crisis narratives and perceived vulnerability as by institutional logic. The same regime that once viewed an Islamic movement as a strategic partner may, under different political circumstances, rapidly reinterpret it as a threat.

This bounded rationality interacts with the core insight of the dissertation: authoritarian stability is the central determinant of tolerance. When rulers feel secure, Islamic movements, whether political or apolitical, may function as welfare intermediaries, identity managers, or socially embedded partners. When perceived instability intensifies, however, rulers reassess organizational autonomy, mobilizational capacity, and public support through a heightened threat lens. Under such conditions, even state-aligned or historically loyal actors become vulnerable to prohibition,

restructuring, or criminalization. Crises provide the legitimizing narratives that allow regimes to reframe repression as necessary and patriotic.

The Adaptive Authoritarian Tolerance Framework, developed in this dissertation, contributes to broader debates on authoritarian governance by reconceptualizing tolerance not as a stable equilibrium, but as a shifting boundary that expands and contracts depending on rulers' interpretations of stability and risk. By incorporating the immediate power requirements dimensions into authoritarian decision-making, the framework offers an explanation that can account for the sudden repression observed across contemporary authoritarian regimes.

These insights extend beyond Egypt and Turkey. Similar patterns are observable in Algeria's fluctuating tolerance of Islamic parties, Jordan's episodic crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia's restructuring of religious authority, and Tunisia's post-2016 securitization of Islamic civil society. Across these contexts, tolerance is not determined by what Islamic movements are, but by what authoritarian rulers perceive them to be at any given moment.

Ultimately, this dissertation argues that the trajectories of Islamic movements do not depend on their ideological content or social utility but on the shifting, crisis-driven, boundedly rational judgments of authoritarian rulers. These findings deepen our understanding of state–Islam relations and provide a conceptual foundation for future comparative work on the political lives of religious movements under authoritarianism.

Contributions of the Dissertation

This dissertation makes several contributions to the study of authoritarian governance and Islamic activism. The first is theoretical. The Adaptive Authoritarian Tolerance Framework challenges prevailing models that treat tolerance as a stable outcome driven by organizational characteristics, the depth of co-optation, or welfare utility. Instead, it shows that tolerance is dynamic and contingent, shaped primarily by regimes' shifting perceptions of their own stability and vulnerability. By foregrounding bounded rationality and crisis-driven decision-making, the framework offers a more realistic account of how and why authoritarian rulers abruptly recalibrate their stance toward Islamic actors.

Second, the study provides a substantive empirical contribution through a comparative analysis of al-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya in Egypt and the Gülen movement in Turkey. Despite their differences, apolitical versus political, locally rooted versus transnational, their trajectories reveal a shared pattern: long periods of state accommodation followed by swift repression once regimes reinterpreted them through a heightened threat lens. The dissertation brings together interview data and documentary evidence to illuminate these dynamics in unprecedented detail.

Third, the dissertation offers a conceptual contribution by reframing Islamic movements not as fixed "clients" or predetermined "threats," but as fluid actors whose meaning to the state changes over time. The concepts of organizational autonomy, mobilizational potential, and stability perception clarify why governments may suddenly reverse long-standing cooperation, even with movements that appear loyal or embedded.

Finally, the research makes a methodological contribution by demonstrating the value of structured comparison and elite interviews for examining authoritarian decision-making. This mixed qualitative approach reveals perceptions, fears, and internal justifications that are rarely visible in official documents.

Collectively, these contributions deepen our understanding of how authoritarian regimes manage religious actors and offer a framework with relevance beyond Egypt and Turkey, applying to broader patterns of state–Islam relations across the Middle East.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this dissertation faces several limitations.

Access to primary sources, especially former members of Islamic movements, was constrained by political sensitivity. Interviewees often spoke under conditions of fear, which may have shaped their narratives, and internal regime decision-making remains opaque, requiring inference from surrounding evidence rather than direct documentation.

Focusing on Egypt and Turkey strengthens internal validity but limits the generalizability of the findings. While the framework shows promise, its applicability to non–Middle Eastern authoritarian settings requires further testing to assess which elements travel across regions and which remain context-specific.

The study examines state perceptions and structural dynamics but does not fully explore internal debates and factional dynamics within Islamic movements themselves. Their strategic adaptations, internal disagreements, and ideological evolutions merit deeper study to complement the state-centered analysis presented here.

These limitations do not undermine the analytical contribution but indicate where future scholarship can refine and extend the claims advanced in this dissertation.

Directions for Future Research

The Adaptive Authoritarian Tolerance Framework opens several avenues for future inquiry.

Comparative testing beyond the Middle East—, uch as in China, Russia, Central Asia, or Southeast Asia, would evaluate the framework's broader applicability. These cases would shed light on whether the same mechanisms govern state tolerance of religious, ideological, or civil society movements across different authoritarian contexts.

Further research could investigate how tolerance thresholds evolve over decades, particularly during leadership transitions, elite conflicts, or institutional transformations. Such work would help identify cyclical patterns in tolerance and repression that extend beyond single-case analyses.

Further research should investigate how Islamic movements themselves interpret fluctuating tolerance. Examining whether they respond with moderation, institutionalization, fragmentation, or radicalization would provide a more comprehensive picture of the mutual adaptation between the state and society.

Ultimately, more attention should be devoted to the cognitive foundations of authoritarian decision-making, how uncertainty, fear, identity, symbolism, and elite narratives influence threat perception. This emerging area holds significant potential to deepen the theoretical implications of bounded rationality for authoritarian politics.

Final Conceptual Reflection

At its core, this dissertation posits that authoritarian governance is an adaptive and improvisational process. States do not tolerate or repress Islamic movements according to fixed rules or coherent long-term strategies; rather, they navigate a landscape of shifting threats, crises, and pressures on legitimacy. Islamic activism becomes a mirror through which authoritarian regimes reveal their vulnerabilities, recalibrate their alliances, and renegotiate the boundaries of permissible religious and social life.

The Adaptive Authoritarian Tolerance Framework captures this dynamic logic by centering analysis not on the characteristics of Islamic movements themselves, but on the **changing cognitive terrain of authoritarian rule**. Tolerance is not a sign of weakness, nor is repression always a sign of insecurity. Both are tools deployed in response to how rulers interpret their own stability at specific historical moments.

Ending on this note underscores a broader insight: authoritarianism is not merely a system of coercion but a field of ongoing negotiation between rulers, religious actors, and society. Understanding the future trajectories of Islamic movements—and the durability of authoritarian regimes—requires attention to these negotiations, to the instabilities that animate them, and to the shifting thresholds of tolerance that define them.

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