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Introduction

Turkey is the only Muslim secular-democratic state: the Atatürk Revolution (1923–38) relegated Islam to the private sphere; yet Islam has remained an active force in Turkish society, manifest both in the articulated views of some intellectual elites and in the activities of secretive, grassroots Islamic religious brotherhoods or orders (tarikats). But repeated attempts to establish an Islamic political party in the period following World War II ended in failure until the foundation of the National Order Party (NOP) in 1970. An Islamist social movement has achieved unqualified success only since the 1990s. An Islamist successor to the NOP, the Welfare Party (WP) entered the government by securing the highest vote share (21.4%) in the 1995 general elections along with 158 seats in the 550-seat parliament. The most recent in a series of successive Islamist parties, the Justice and Development Party (JDP), is now the party of government as a result of its securing 34.3 percent of the popular vote in the 2002 general elections, entitling it to 363 seats in parliament. The party further increased its support in the 2007 general elections by securing 46.6 percent of the popular vote and 341 seats in parliament, and following the elections, placed its candidate into the presidency of Turkey.

What accounts for the relatively sudden increase, after seventy years, in the political salience of Islam and the success of an Islamist social movement in Turkish politics? The research question of this book, “Why has political Islam, which has been part of Turkish politics since the 1970s, been on the rise only

1 The Islamic brotherhoods, as the main institutions of Sufism, originally aimed at searching for divine truth and purification of the soul, thus enabling the achievement of the status of insan-i kâmil (perfect human being). See Mustafa Kara, Tásavvuf ve Tarikatlar Taribi [History of Sufism and Islamic Brotherhoods], 5th ed. (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1999), 18–19. Yet, Ünver Günay, a divinity professor, argues that the Islamic orders were not immune from the institutional decline of the Ottoman Empire – as a result of which they turned out to be centers of exploitation of the public’s religious sentiments for tarikat leaders’ personal economic gains. See Ünver Günay, “Türkiye’de Toplumsal Değişme ve Tarikatlar” [Social Change and Islamic Brotherhoods in Turkey], İslâmiyât V, no. 4 (2002): 141–62.
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since the 1990s, but not before?” is an important one, and a review of the existing literature on Turkey reveals that there is a gap in adequately addressing it. The existing literature offers very rich and detailed analyses regarding the components of political Islam in Turkey such as Islamic brotherhoods, the role of Islamist women in political Islam, Islamism in shantytowns, Islamist intellectuals, and Islamism as identity politics. But this literature provides only a partial answer to the research question.

This book views the Islamist mobilization in Turkey as a social movement and uses the political process model (PPM) variant of the theory advanced by Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly, and others to explain the puzzle.

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Tarrow defines social movements as "collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities." The PPM proposes that movement entrepreneurs do not determine their goals, strategies, and tactics with respect to mobilization in a vacuum. Rather, the political context – that is, the presence of a favorable political opportunity for mobilization, along with the movement’s organizational dynamics and the framing of movement activists – plays a crucial role. Drawing upon the PPM, this study argues that the rise of political Islam in Turkey can be attributed to specific actions: the introduction by the military regime in power from 1980 to 1983 of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (TIS – Türk İslam Sentezi), a mixture of Sunni Islam and nationalism, as a state policy to counter the leftist movement in Turkey. The TIS was maintained by the center-right Motherland Party (MP), which ruled from 1983 to 1991, and created the first political opportunity structure (POS 1) that was framed by Islamic forces to establish strong organizational networks. This constituted the first phase of the mobilization of political Islam in Turkey (1980–91).

The Islamists, having established strong organizational networks and framed a viable political rhetoric of a “Just Order,” then successfully seized upon the malfunctioning of the state since the 1990s as the second political opportunity structure (POS 2). This constituted the second phase of the movement’s mobilization, from 1991 to the present. In the 1990s, the Islamists, unlike the mainstream political parties, exploited this POS 2 to compete successfully in democratic elections.

Movement activists (“entrepreneurs”) may engage in institutional/conventional activities (peaceful protests, lobbying, forming new political parties, petitioning government bodies, or engaging in legal battles) or noninstitutional/unconventional activity, ranging from terrorism to civil disobedience. Political context determines movement entrepreneurs’ framing activities. As David Meyer and Debra Minkoff argue, “a polity that provides openness to one kind of participation may be closed to others.” The political context – the existence in Turkey of a secular-democratic polity and its acceptance by the majority of its citizens – determined the movement entrepreneurs’ strategies. Thus, the Islamist movement in Turkey is a good example of how movement entrepreneurs frame their strategies according to the existing political context. The Islamists, while utilizing social networks (such as charitable organizations, foundations, economic enterprises, media, Quran courses, dormitories, and schools that belong to Islamic brotherhoods [tarikats]) to Islamize the society from below – by changing individual habits and social relations, thus mobilizing by developing

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11 I adopt the term Islamizing the society from below from Sheri Berman, “Islamism, Revolution, and Civil Society,” APSA, Perspectives on Politics 1, no. 2 (June 2003): 257–72.
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an Islamist collective identity – have at the same time managed to increase their political power by founding a political party (in 1970) under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan, the NOP. This book focuses on the dominant form of Islamic activism in Turkey – mobilization through a political party – by analyzing four Islamist political parties (the WP; its successor, the Virtue Party (VP); and its successors, the Felicity Party (FP) and the JDP).

Political Islamists, though differing in their means (violent and nonviolent), regard the individual and collective return to the Asr-ı Saadet – the age of happiness during the Prophet Muhammad’s era – as the solution to the political and socioeconomic problems of Muslim societies. Islamist terrorist organizations continue to exist in Turkey (e.g., Hizbullah, the IBDA-C [Islamic Great Orient Fighters Front], and the Islamic Jihad). These seek to bring the rule of Islamic law (Sharia) to Turkey by initiating an Iranian-style, top-down revolution. Beginning in the 1990s, a number of prominent professors (Muammer Aksoy, Bahriye Üçok, Ahmet Taner Kışlalı, and Necip Hablemitoğlu) and journalists (Üğur Mumcu and Çetin Emecz), who wrote and spoke openly about the dangers of an Islamist threat to secularism in Turkey, were assassinated. Yet, the existence of a secular-democratic state structure and the acceptance of secularism by the majority of citizens have marginalized these terrorist groups in Turkish society. More mainstream political Islamists in Turkey therefore have been pursuing a more cautious and effective strategy to challenge secularism and democracy in the country.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO ISLAMIST MOBILIZATION

The existing literature on political Islam in the Muslim world focuses on cultural and socioeconomic factors underlying the movement’s mobilization. Furthermore, as Quintan Wiktorowicz notes, most publications on the Islamist...
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movement do not go beyond descriptive analyses of the ideology, structure, and goals of various Islamic actors or the histories of particular movements. From the perspective of social movement theory, however, grievances – the existence of social strains or relative deprivation, giving rise to claims against the existing social and political order – are “a necessary but not a sufficient condition of social protest.”

Herbert Kitschelt, in his analysis of the mobilization of antinuclear movements in four democracies (France, Sweden, the United States, and West Germany), finds that even though citizens of these countries expressed similar grievances, the mobilization of the antinuclear movement in these countries developed in distinct ways, shaped by the overall political structure: that is, whether the political input structure was open or closed and whether the political output structure was weak or strong. From this perspective, grievances by themselves cannot explain variations in the mobilization of social movements.

Along the same lines as Kitschelt, Eric Hobsbawm finds that Peruvian peasants’ age-old land grievances did not lead to collective action against landlords; rather, it was the struggles for power between elites seeking the support of subaltern classes – what Tarrow calls unstable elite alignments – that led to the peasants’ collective action. Social movement theory suggests the mobilization of citizens suffering from grievances is contingent on two factors: people must perceive that their situation is amenable to change; and, more importantly, movement entrepreneurs must successfully generate motivation, resources, and political opportunities for collective action. “Even under the most extreme conditions of human misery and exploitation,” Carrie Rosefsky Wickham notes, “the emergence of collective protest is not assured.”

This book argues that grievance-based explanations alone cannot explain the mobilization of political Islam in Turkey. Cultural explanations, which are based on grievances, regard political Islam as a protest movement against modernity and Western colonial domination. As will be argued in Chapter 2, this, too, is inadequate in the Turkish case. Atatürk established the secular

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17 Kitschelt finds that “political opportunity structures functioned as ‘filters’ between the mobilization of the movement and its choice of strategies and its capacity to change the social environment.” In ibid.
20 Ibid., 7.
state in Turkey in the aftermath of the War of Independence (1923). The goal of infusing Turks with Western liberal ideas was to create a new type of citizenship, and hence a modern society, rather than an umma (Islamic community of believers), where there would be no room for individualism. It should be noted that the Turkish experiment in secularism represented not a gradual change but a drastic one, which also included a degree of forceful state imposition. The revolutionary movement headed by Atatürk aimed at removing Islam from public affairs and relegating religion to the private sphere through state control; thus, religious institutions were not just separated from the state, but became subservient to it. The dismantling of the sultanate, the caliphate, the ulema (the religious class), and the Islamic brotherhoods disestablished institutional Islam in Turkey.

Despite this forced expulsion of Islam from public life and its restriction to the private realm – and the subsequent introduction of a series of reforms aimed at modernizing and Westernizing the country – there was no popular Islamist mobilization in Turkey. Rather, political Islamists were reduced to a marginal group. The Islamic brotherhoods that were antithetical to secularism in the country were forced underground, in the form of Quran courses beyond state control.21 As Verta Taylor argues, movements that are confronted with a nonreceptive political and social environment do not disappear; they develop “abeyance structures.” According to Taylor, when a movement loses support, its activists become isolated to establish alternative structures in order to keep the movement fresh. A “movement in abeyance” develops, in the form of a group of activists who find a niche for themselves and who ensure the continuance of the movement by maintaining activist networks, goals, and tactics along with a collective identity. Thus, abeyance structures maintain the movement and play a crucial role in later rounds of movement mobilization.22

The Islamic brotherhoods and the illegal Quran courses they organized played an important role as abeyance structures in maintaining the Islamist movement in Turkey in the form of an Islamist collective identity. As abeyance structures, the Islamic brotherhoods sustained Islamist perspectives and aspirations. Thus, they served as the breeding grounds for the creation of an Islamic elite that later not only seized upon existing POSs, but also created new ones. Since the transition to a multiparty system in Turkey, the Islamic brotherhoods have pursued three basic strategies vis-à-vis political parties: they have supported by electoral means the leading center-right parties,23 voted for the

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23 Taylor suggests that movements in abeyance structures “may have little impact in their own time and may contribute, however unwillingly, to maintenance of the status quo.” In ibid., 762.
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political Islamist parties, and provided the organizational basis for the formation of political Islamist parties, beginning with the NOP.

Cultural explanations that regard political Islam as a protest movement against Western colonial domination are inappropriate in the Turkish case. Turkey was never subjected to Western colonial domination. The Turkish Revolution, which introduced a secular state, was a successful struggle to forestall Western imperialism and domination. Thus, unlike the case of Arab countries, where there was simultaneously Western colonial domination and endeavors to install a Western type of state, in Turkey there was both independence and secularism. The Turkish Revolution’s goal was achieving secularism for the sake of preventing any future Western domination. Furthermore, there were no massive social demonstrations against modernization attempts in the country.

If the secular Turkish state cannot be regarded as a political remnant of colonialism, then what are the factors that have led to the rise of political Islam in Turkey? Analyses that focus on socioeconomic factors, which emphasize the absence of economic prosperity, provide only a partial explanation in the Turkish case. Turkish citizens who regard political Islam as offering them an effective vehicle for the expression of their anger at the government, and as a way to exert pressure for political and economic change, do support political Islam. To a certain degree, the rise of political Islam is therefore a response to the malfunctioning state in Turkey. But the Turkish state began to malfunction long before the rise of political Islam. Moreover, the malfunctioning state by itself cannot explain how the Islamist movement could establish the well-organized and resource-rich networks, formal and informal, that enabled it to address the ills of the secular state in the 1990s.

A malfunctioning state creates inequalities and a sense of relative deprivation that are structural conditions providing a basis for grievances. But for a successful movement mobilization, movement entrepreneurs must turn these conditions into popular grievances by framing a viable political rhetoric that encourages a sense of unfairness. In the Turkish case, the WP entrepreneurs successfully framed the “Just Order,” which created a perception of unfairness in the minds of the electorate. Thus, for grievances to lead to a successful social movement mobilization, there must be present both a POS and movement entrepreneurs who successfully frame an existing POS by establishing a dynamic relationship among movement networks, framing processes (movement entrepreneurs’

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25 Ernest Gellner also notes that Turkish achievement of political modernity was not an alien imposition, but was a result of endogenous development. See Ernest Gellner, Encounters with Nationalism (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1994), 81–91.

26 Mark Tessler makes this argument for Arab states. This book demonstrates that it is equally true of Turkey. See Mark Tessler, “Democratic Concern and Islamic Resurgence: Converging Dimensions of the Arab World’s Political Agenda,” in Democracy and Its Limits: Lessons from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, eds. Howard Handelman and Mark Tessler (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 280.
shared understandings, goals, and tactics), grievances, and the POS. Both grievances and a social movement must exist in order for a successful social movement mobilization to occur.

The social movement literature focuses on the impact on movement mobilization of shifts in POSs, movement organizations, ideational factors such as culture, and social interaction. Such inquiry yields explanations that provide a more comprehensive framework for the analysis of the rise of political Islam in Turkey than grievance-based explanations alone. But social movement scholarship has focused on analyzing cases from Western Europe and the United States. The literature presents cases about civil rights movements operating in the context of civil states, where such movements have goals compatible with the values and norms of the state. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly note that there is a gap between studies of social movements in liberal democratic polities and those of social movements in the rest of the world. Along the same lines, Bert Klandermans, Suzanne Staggenborg, and Tarrow point out the lacuna in studies of social movements, by using similar methods and theoretical concepts, outside the range of Western democracies.

The Muslim world is almost entirely absent from the social movement literature. It provides a few analyses from the Iranian Revolution and pays some attention to the mobilization of political Islam in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen. This book applies social movement theory to a non-Western case. The Turkish case also presents a unique example of the mobilization of a social religious movement – that is, a noncivil movement – that challenges to the very definition of the state, which in the Turkish case is civil and secular. Analyses of

Islamist mobilization in the Muslim world (such as those relating to Iran, Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen) provide examples of the mobilization of a noncivil movement in the context of noncivil states: the Turkish case thus not only analyzes the applicability of the PPM to the non-Western world, but also presents a valuable test-case examining the impact of a civil context on a noncivil movement. Expanding the research agenda on social movements by applying the literature to a majority Muslim country with a secular-democratic structure permits a better understanding of the mobilization of political Islam in the Muslim world – a movement that is likely to remain strong in the region for years to come.

THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT LITERATURE

Because the social movement literature has been developed by analyzing cases from Western liberal democracies, it exhibits some important deficiencies with regard to explaining the mobilization of political Islam in Turkey, and hence needs to be amended in certain ways. First, with a few exceptions, the literature equates mobilization of a social movement with social protest activity – that is, moving the masses to challenge the authorities through demonstrations, boycotts, or other actions aiming at changing a specific policy. Hanspeter Kriesi argues that “the crucial element of a social movement is its overt challenge to authorities.” Similarly, William Gamson regards movement participation – which, he argues, is riskier than more conventional types of political action – as consisting of actions aimed at achieving political goals that are undertaken when conventional and institutionalized means such as voting are not available. This approach neglects the possibility that social movements may also utilize conventional means to enable or enhance mobilization.

The second deficiency of the literature is that it usually regards social movements as institutions separate from political parties. In this view, social

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movements try to realize their goals by influencing political parties.33 Craig Jenkins and Klandermans focus on the three-way struggle between social movements, political parties, and the state. Political parties, not social movements, according to this analysis, are the agents that deal directly with the state.14 This line of reasoning also excludes noncivil social movements that mobilize in the form of political parties with the goal of transforming a civil state into a non-civil one. McAdam is, accordingly, correct when he argues that the role social movements play in reshaping the institutional structure and political alignments of a given polity is an underdeveloped area of research.35 As will be shown in the following text, the Islamist movement in Turkey is a clear example of a social movement utilizing conventional means, in the form of a political party, to mobilize against a civil state – in this case, to replace a secular-democratic state structure with an Islamist one.

Third, most of the literature examines social movements that take place in the context of Western liberal democracies (such as feminism, environmentalism, and civil rights) and social movements for democratization in the former communist states.16 There is also an overwhelming emphasis on civil movements operating in the context of civil states. This has resulted in a tendency toward a positive normative bias in the literature: all social movements are assumed to share goals compatible with Western liberal ideas. Wiktorowicz notes, “Dominated by empirical research on the United States and Western Europe, social movement theory building has been heavily contextualized by liberal democratic polities and Western societies, thus narrowing the generalizability of findings and conclusions.”37 In the social movement literature analyzing mobilization by Islamist movements, there seems to be a tendency to focus primarily on the political context (democratic, semidemocratic, or authoritarian).


34 Doug McAdam, “Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions,” in McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements, 35–6.
35 Regarding the normative bias in the social movement literature, an analogous issue is the underemphasis on left-wing movements and their analyses by employing theories to understand right-wing protest.