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4. The Presidential Election and e-Memorandum

In order to understand the April 27 Process, it is essential to analyze the AKP and the factors behind its rise. Therefore, the aim of the chapter is to investigate the AKP and its rise. The investigation will first provide the basic factual history of the AKP. After this, different theoretical accounts that were offered by scholars to explain the case of AKP will be summarized. Finally, a partly new theoretical approach will be proposed for the analysis of the AKP. The new approach will be proposed through the criticism and rejection of some parts of the existing literature and, of course, by drawing inspiration from other parts. At the end, this new approach will also be placed into the general theoretical framework of the dissertation: the Gramscian conceptualization of hegemony and Mardin’s center-periphery analysis.

4.1. Rise of the AKP

The AKP’s 34.29 percent landslide electoral victory in the November 2002 general elections constituted the first step in a series of election victories that the AKP would have during its political life. The election victory that the AKP achieved in the first election it participated in less than one year after its establishment is a key point that should not be overlooked. Yet, it is not the starting point, even though many accounts that will be given as examples in the following section treated it as such. In order to maintain a historical perspective in the discussions of secularism in Turkey and in this dissertation, an accurate analysis of the AKP should start with (1) the political and social atmosphere in Turkey on the eve of the 2002 elections, (2) the condition of the electorate in the above-mentioned period and (3) the messages of the AKP that were transmitted to the electorate at this time.

4.1.1. The Political and Social Atmosphere on the Eve of the 2002 General Elections

Looking at the general social and political atmosphere in the country before the 2002 general elections, it can be said the February 28 Process did not last for a thousand years as hoped by Chief of General Staff Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu. However, in the last years of the 1990s and the first years of the 2000s, military tutelage was still prevailing in Turkish politics. Arguments between succeeding prime ministers and TSK were good indicators of the TSK’s continuing
involvement in Turkish politics. At the end of 2001, Army Commander Yaşar Büyükanıt defined the situation as follows:

“It is important to learn the Atatürkist thought system. However, the main thing is to turn lifestyles into a behavior type that is in conformity with this thought system. Those countries that fail to form a common denominator are in an environment of conflict. Our common denominator is a secular and democratic Turkey within an Atatürkist thought system and unitary structure. Every action that does not converge with this common denominator is an enemy of our nation and homeland and must be fought. The Atatürkist thought system is your only soldier.”

It should be noted that Büyükanıt gave this speech in the opening ceremony of the Gülhane Military Medical School and at that time the coalition government of the DSP, MHP and ANAP was in power, which meant that the reactionaries of the February 28 Process had been away from power for three years and all the recommendations of the February 28 MGK meeting were being realized. What Büyükanıt defined as the “Atatürkist Thought System” was the official ideology of the Turkish state, which the TSK utilized as a source of legitimacy for its interventions in civil politics. As very clearly revealed in the statement, the TSK regarded any attempt at deviance from the official ideology as hostility toward the Republic and itself as well. Furthermore, the TSK’s tutelage was not limited to the political realm but also expanded to the social realm with the aim of bringing lifestyles into conformity with the official ideology. As a result of this understanding, the political realm of the country was extremely narrowed down and took on an artificial character.

The characteristics and structures of the governments that succeeded Refahyol reflected this constrained and artificial political atmosphere. The 1999 general elections were the first since the February 28 Process. The coalition government established after the 1999 elections between the statist and central leftist DSP, the nationalist and rightist MHP, the and central right and liberal ANAP had been the most long-lived coalition government in Turkey’s history. In other words, the long life of the coalition government despite the considerably different party programs, policies and historical backgrounds of the coalition partners showed the constrained and artificial character of the Turkish political realm during and after the February 28 Process. The formula for this harmony within the coalition government consisted in the fact that the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi, FP), which succeeded the RP, and the DYP

were the only opposition parties in the parliament. Any change in the coalition government would have meant the inclusion of either the FP or the DYP in the government. However, it was well-known that the TSK was against the FP and the DYP, which were regarded as responsible for the rising danger of reaction. This was the reality that Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit referred to when he frequently said that the country did not have an alternative government.153

Being unsure about the possible results of an early general election and in the company of a powerful force majeure, i.e. the TSK, the coalition partners could only continue their “consistent cooperation.” However, the constrained and artificial character of the political realm erupted with a discussion between President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit in the MGK meeting on 19 February, 2001. It was again a MGK meeting that set the scene for another turning point in Republican history. It was claimed that President Sezer threw a copy of the Turkish constitution in Prime Minister Ecevit’s face. According to political rumors, President Sezer accused the government of corruption. As a response to the president’s accusations, it was rumored that Deputy Prime Minister Hüsamettin Özkan called President Sezer unthankful because it had been Ecevit’s government that nominated and elected Sezer as president.154 Ecevit stated in the press conference held after the aborted MGK meeting that this was a huge crisis. Contrary to what was expected, the government was not dissolved after the crisis and the coalition partners did not call for an early election. The “consistent cooperation” of the government was still continuing despite the huge crisis.

On the other hand, the government could not prevent the economic crisis that was triggered by the political crisis. On February 21, only three days after the MGK crisis, the economic situation was regarded as the deepest economic crisis in the history of the country,155 which had already been in a crisis since 1998. The paradox that the deepest economic crises in the history of the country broke out in the term of its most consistent coalition government is the key element for understanding the artificial and constrained political realm of the period.

Meanwhile, Turkey continued to experience other firsts. The tension in the streets was also rising to an unprecedented level. This time it was not student groups or activists that went out but artisans and craftsmen; the most conservative and traditional classes. The rallies that started with the throwing of a cash register at Prime Minister Ecevit by a bankrupted artisan


154 For details of the political rumors see: “Türkiye Sizinle Gurur Duyuyor” Radikal, February 20, 2001; “Hortum Patladı” Yeni Şafak, February 20, 2001;İşte O Tartışma” Star, February 20, 2011.

gained a communal character and spread to every corner of the country. Turkey witnessed craftsmen’s and artisans’ protest rallies in Konya, Ankara, Kayseri, İzmir, Gaziantep, Sivas, Çankırı and Kocaeli. The protests of artisans and craftsmen reflected the dimensions of the huge crisis that the country was passing through. The protest of any social group and their dissatisfaction with the condition of the country was quite normal in Turkey. However, when the people in the street constituted the most traditional segment of the society that had never gone out in protests before, it meant that the issue was deeper than simple dissatisfaction or discomfort. That is, it corresponded to a certain hegemonic crisis that had been held at bay with the help of the February 28 Process in the short run but deepened by that same process in the long term. While economic and social crises were deepening, Ecevit’s health was also deteriorating. Ecevit, who was 77 at the time, was moved to a hospital on May 5, 2002. After his treatment, which lasted longer than one week, Ecevit was discharged from the hospital. However, after a short time he returned to the hospital and his condition was serious toward the end of June 2002. It was not surprising that Turkey, experiencing the deepest economic and social crisis of its history, its prime minister having been hospitalized for severe health problems, faced the dissatisfaction of the urban middle class and the conservative electorate.

4.1.2. The Urban Middle Class and the Conservative Electorate

The condition of the urban middle classes, who supported the February 28 Process but later faced the deepest social and economical crisis in Republican history, and of the conservative electorate under such a crisis environment is also important for understanding the rise of the AKP.

The winners of the 1999 general elections were the central leftist DSP and the nationalist and right wing MHP. The reason these two parties came first and second in the election goes back to the February 28 Process and it is indicative of the condition of the urban middle class and the conservative electorate on the eve of the 2002 elections. The historic hegemonic center of Turkish capitalism defined reaction and PKK as the country’s two problem axes. The mobilization of the urban middle classes in the February 28 Process and later the results of the 1999 elections show that the urban middle classes seemed satisfied with this understanding on the part of the historic hegemonic center.

Having the advantage of being the prime minister when Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, was captured, Bülent Ecevit and his DSP came first in the 1999 general elections with 22.19 percent of the vote. Furthermore, Ecevit’s DSP’s “faith-respectful secularism,”
“inançlara saygılı laiklik” was also a factor in its party’s election result. The party was secular enough to submit to the TSK’s demands for increasing its influence in politics, and respectful and tolerant enough to assuage the concerns of conservatives and urban middle classes that were also uneasy about a crisis like the February 28 Process despite the fact that they supported the secularist measures in the process. The same binary of reaction and PKK was also evident in the 17.98 percent of the vote the MHP received in the 1999 elections. As nationalists, the MHP fit very well the role of the hawk in a period when people expected the execution of Abdullah Öcalan. Being the hawk in the struggle against the PKK was not the only expectation from MHP. With its conservative character, the party was also expected to represent the conservative masses, whose means were crippled by the February 28 Process. Although it never had an Islamist tone, the MHP, which even made an electoral alliance with the RP in the 1991 general elections, was the second-best choice for the conservatives. Furthermore, popular conservative figures like Necip Fazıl Kısakürek\textsuperscript{156} also formed a transparent zone between the conservative masses and the MHP.\textsuperscript{157} As a result of these historical ties, the MHP became the address of the conservative electorate who did not support the FP, the successor of the banned RP. Furthermore, the iron fist of the MHP also played a role in the conservative electorate’s choice of the MHP rather than the FP. Mehmet Bekaroğlu\textsuperscript{158} claims that the FP did not manage to put forward an astute and powerful opposition and that the electorate therefore abandoned the party not because of its victimhood, but because of its being helpless and incompetent.\textsuperscript{159} However, the MHP disappointed the conservative electorate in the very first step during the opening ceremony of the TBMM. Far from supporting Merve Kavakçı, the headscarf-wearing deputy of FP, against those who claimed Kavakçı could not take the deputy oath with her headscarf on, the party asked its member, Nesrin Ünal, a headscarf-wearing deputy, to take her headscarf off during the meetings of the TBMM. Thus, this party failed to satisfy the conservative sectors of Turkish society.

Although they supported the “appropriate” parties against reaction and the PKK, which were Turkey’s major problems according to the understanding put forward during the February 28 Process, it is difficult to say the urban middle classes and conservatives were satisfied, as none of the problems that caused the February 28 crisis were solved. On the contrary, Turkey’s long-standing problems of corruption, underdevelopment, unemployment, and

\textsuperscript{156} Kısakürek was a well-known conservative poet. Kısakürek’s nationalist tone was also as powerful as his conservatism in the ideology he formulated as “the Great East.”


\textsuperscript{158} Mehmet Bekaroğlu, an academician, was a deputy from the VP between 1999-2002. In this period Bekaroğlu tried to formulate an effective opposition to the government and historic bloc that was not only limited to the secularism debate.

political and economic instability were deepened as a result of these extraordinary conditions; that is, the artificial and constrained character of the social and political realms. Therefore, it can be said that the urban middle classes and conservative electorate were ready to be flexible voters in the coming elections if they received the appropriate political messages and program. Under such circumstances it is important to understand the ideology and message of the AKP.

4.1.3. The Ideology and Message of the AKP

While the country’s atmosphere of crisis and ambiguity continued, along with the resulting dissatisfaction of the electorate, the popularity of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his party, which included many figures from center-right besides the reformist wing of MG, increased. Erdoğan and his party’s public relations policies offered an alternative to the Turkish electorate in the crisis conditions. In his visits to several Anatolian cities both before the establishment of the party and during the election campaign, Erdoğan talked to thousands of people. During his speeches he recited the first verse of a popular song, which was also frequently sung in stadiums in football matches: “We Walked Together On These Roads,” “Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda.” The crowds replied to Erdoğan with the second verse: “We Got Soaked Together Under the Rain,” “Beraber Islandık Yaşan Yaşmurda.” This kind of populist and comprehensive political language brought the support of a right wing and liberal electorate that had never supported a MG party before. Pointing to the military tutelage over civilian politics, he was stating: “We will stand tall, but we will not become obstinate,” “Dik Duracağız ama Dikleしまいceğiz.” With the first part of the motto he was targeting the MHP, which had been the earlier preference of conservative votes but later became a disappointment because of its compromising politics with the TSK. The second part of the motto targeted the previous MG parties, which were criticized for being “too radical” and irreconcilable with the TSK and other state institutions. Thus, he constantly emphasized that the AKP would not be an ideological party, but a practical one.

The ideologists of the AKP conceptualized the party’s ideology of “ideology-lessness” as conservative democracy. However, neither scholars in the field nor the ideologists who first coined the term, Ömer Çelik and Yasin Akdoğan, have defined it yet. In spite of party’s many years in power now and the many documents its ideologists produced, it is still impossible to infer the boundaries of the term, what it excludes or includes. Yet, the non-definition of the term does not depend on a technical impossibility but rather on a choice: ideology-lessness. For example, in various academic and political documents written by Çelik and Akdoğan,
after declaring the death of ideology, they mention the “opportunities” of conservative democracy instead of its definition.160

The first part of the concept – conservatism, *muhafazakarlık* – has nothing to do with the conceptual discussions of political science. When referring to conservatism, the AKP and its actors were not talking about conserving the political system and its norms; rather, they meant the conservation of social and cultural norms, which were highly intertwined with religiosity. The cultural, social and religious connotations of the concept offered the AKP a discursive opportunity to define the priorities of the party, as when Mehmet Ali Şahin, an influential AKP member, declared that the headscarf was not a priority of the party.161 Şahin’s message was clear: “Although we are all conservatives like you, for now we are unable to solve the headscarf problem,” and he was sure that the message was also understood clearly by the electorate.

The second part of the concept was also an opportunity to communicate with the urban middle classes and the capitalists. By underlining democracy, the AKP stressed that it had differentiated itself from the traditional MG line and appreciated the market economy and capitalist democracy. Indeed, as mentioned in the chapters about the RP and the February 28 Process, seen from a Gramscian perspective, the RP was also ready to come to terms with capitalist democracy and market economy, but either its reconciliatory message was not clearly submitted to the historic hegemonic center or the historic hegemonic center was not very eager to receive the message. Contrary to the RP, the AKP’s luck was that it was more powerful than the RP against the historic hegemonic center. Its message regarding the market economy and capitalist democracy was more powerful and understandable and, finally, the historic hegemonic center was more in need of cooperation than it had been in 1997. It should be noted that the 2001 economic crisis was destructive for the country’s major capitalists in the long term, as well as being disastrous for lower-income groups in the short term. In terms of a Gramscian conceptualization, one part of the historic hegemonic center, capitalists and/or media, was in a position such that it had to defend its specific interests rather than the general interests of the historic hegemonic center, which meant the collapse of the hegemonic alliance built in the February 28 Process and the building of a new one with the AKP, even if it was

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only temporary. The huge support of the central media for the AKP both before and after the 2002 general elections was the chief indicator of the new alliance.\textsuperscript{162}

In conclusion, the political and social crises on the eve of the 2002 elections, the dissatisfaction of the urban middle class and the conservative electorate in the election process and, finally, the AKP’s ideology and communication strategy were the main reasons for the landslide election victory. Besides these influential factors, the attitude of the historic hegemonic center toward the AKP was also influential both in the election results and the AKP’s performance, i.e. its ability and capacity to rule the country. However this attitude did not remain stable towards the presidential elections.

4.2. The Presidential Elections and the e-Memorandum

The temporary coalition between the AKP and the capitalist wing of the Turkish historic hegemonic center started to dissolve during the presidential election process. The real problem for the capitalist wing of the historic hegemonic center was not a conservative president or the headscarf of a potential conservative president’s wife. The problem that caused a split in the alliance between the AKP and the capitalist wing of the Turkish historic hegemonic center was the former’s strong chance at creating a “national popular” and replacing the existing historic hegemonic center with a new one or, in other words, eliminating the traditional capitalist classes from the formation of a new historic hegemonic center.

The AKP’s five years of majority rule had created a suitable base for the flourishing of a new modernity, sociality and political economy that in the end had the potential to create a new national popular. The change in the media industry is a good example of the creation of a new national popular. This time it was not only the conservative media institutions that were supporting the conservatives; the center media was also supporting the AKP and its societal base. The fact that Ömer Çelik’s columns in which he formulated and publicized the conservative democracy ideology had been published in 	extit{Sabah} was just one of the indicators of the changing balances in the historic hegemonic center. Another example of this shift was the increasing visibility of conservative popular figures on TV channels. Figures like Fehmi

\textsuperscript{162} The reports and comments from the center media indicate support for the AKP; “Anadolu İhtilali,” 	extit{Sabah}, November 04, 2002; “Sosyal Patlama Sandıkta Oldu,” 	extit{Hürriyet}, November 4, 2002; “AKP Tek Başına İktidar,” 	extit{Milliyet}, November 4, 2002;
Koru became increasingly sought-after commentators for newscasts and current affairs programs while discussing government policy. The conservative bureaucrats who had been removed from their posts over accusations of being reactionaries in the February 28 Process started to return to civil service in higher ranks and they joined the existing conservative bureaucrats whose promotions had been increased by the AKP. The story of Central Bank Director Durmuş Yılmaz is a good case for understanding the promotion of conservative bureaucrats. Yılmaz, who was appointed as the bank’s director in 2006, was the third name sent to the President by the government for appointment because the previous candidates’ appointment had been blocked by President Sezer due to their supposed incompatibility with the basic principles of the republic – principles that were mentioned in the speech of then-Army Commander Yaşar Büyükancı, which quoted previously. Although Yılmaz was also incompatible with the secular character of the Republic, President Sezer somehow accepted his appointment. However, the appointment was harshly criticized by the center media, which claimed that the professional qualities and lifestyle of Yılmaz did not meet the criteria for being a Central Bank director. In the end, Yılmaz, whose term finished in May 2011 and who was then appointed as chief advisor to the President, was regarded as one of the most successful Central Bank directors. Parallel to these developments in the bureaucracy, conservative businessmen that had been exposed to a witch-hunt based on the claim that they represented a reactionary danger got their seats reserved on the plane of the prime minister for foreign visits in order to sign international trade agreements. İmam-Hatip high school graduates and students whose right to higher education had been crippled in the February 28 Process, and as a result continued their university education abroad, started to return to Turkey as bureaucrats, white-collar workers and academicians.

In 2007, the hot topic on the political agenda was the possibility of a change in the post of the presidency paralleling the direction of the change in the bureaucracy, the media and the business world. While the discussion on the profile of the new president was continuing, Sabih Kanadoğlu, an ardent Kemalist and retired chief prosecutor of the Court of Appeals, claimed that a qualified majority (3/5) of the parliament was needed as the meeting quorum for a presidential election. When Kanadoğlu first put forward his argument, his claims were

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163 Fehmi Koru is a conservative columnist and political analyst. Koru has close ties with AKP member politicians. In particular, his close friendship with President Abdullah Gül, who had been prime minister and minister of foreign affairs before being elected as president, attracted significant public attention.

164 Ertuğrul Özkök, who in the beginning thought that Yılmaz’s appointment was not professional but political, later apologized to Yılmaz and commented that he was one of the most successful directors not only for himself but also for the international authorities; Özkök, E. “Meğer O Ayakkabını Biz Ters Giyimizı,” Hürriyet, April 15, 2011, accessed June 01, 2011, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/17551589.asp


not taken seriously and were regarded as the desperate efforts of an old-school Kemalist. However, as the presidential election drew nearer, the historic hegemonic center realized that there was no option other than this so-called 367-formula to prevent the election of a conservative as the president.

While these discussions were going on, the media did not find it difficult to use its traditional means of opposition to the conservatives and began to publish news and comments about the gradual Islamization of the country and the AKP’s weakness in defending the country’s interests against PKK:

“As the controversy grew more bitter, secular media outlets run by the Doğan family began publishing the illustrated life stories of the headscarf-wearing wives of AKP ministers and high-level civil servants. Such, the coverage implied, would be the permanent fate of Turkish women if the headscarf ban were not maintained. And not only that: Turkey would become an Islamic state. The conspiracy theories about Islamization, oddly enough, are fueled by strong anti-American sentiment.”

Like the Susurluk Rallies of the February 28 Process, in this period a series of rallies were organized under the name of “Republican Rallies,” “Cumhuriyet Mitingleri”. Again the main hegemonic civil society apparatus of the historic hegemonic center, i.e. the Kemalist NGOs, were on the scene as the organizers of the rallies. While the rallies were being organized by the ADD, which was led by Şener Eruygur, the retired commander of the gendarmerie, on April 12, two days before the ADD’s first meeting in Ankara, Chief of General Staff Yaşar Büyükkanıt explained that he hoped not a “fake,” “sözde” but a “real,” “özde” secular president would be elected. The Ankara Republican Rally took place at Tandoğan Square with the participation of thousands of people, who later walked to Anıtkabir and finished the rally there. The Republican Rallies continued after the e-memorandum issued by the TSK on April 27. Other crowded rallies took place on April 29 in Istanbul and on May 13 in Izmir, in addition to smaller ones organized in Çanakkale and Manisa on May 5.

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168 The exact number of participants in the rallies was controversial. The organizer ADD claimed that the number of participants was more than a million, whereas Reuters, quoting a senior police officer, stated that more than 300,000 people attended the rally; “Hundreds of thousands rally against Turkish Government,” Reuters, April 14, 2007, accessed May 10, 2011, http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/04/14/us-turkey-presidency-protest-idUSL1445102820070414
Besides controversy over the number of participants in these rallies, there were also ambiguities regarding the socio-political composition of the crowds and the message they wanted to give. First of all, the organizers and participants of the rallies should be differentiated. Among the organizers and prominent figures that took the stage and delivered speeches there were NGO’s like the ADD, the ÇYDD and the Republican Women’s Association and figures such as Türkan Saylan, Nur Serter, Necla Arat and Tuncay Özkan. Türkan Saylan, Nur Serter and Necla Arat are retired old-school Kemalist academicians who were chief actors behind the headscarf bans in universities in the 1990s. Tuncay Özkan is a journalist who supported the center-right Mesut Yılmaz in the 1990s and turned out to be a Kemalist-nationalist, ulusalci, against the AKP in 2000s. Now Özkan has been arrested and is accused of being a member of an intra-state criminal organization that planned a coup d’etat against ruling AKP. Both the outlook of the organizing community and the speeches they delivered in the rallies were a far stretch from democratic norms and values. However, fortunately, the “thinly veiled pro-military”\textsuperscript{169} message of the organizers was not shared by the participants.\textsuperscript{170} The middle class urban participants\textsuperscript{171} were not in conformity with the militarist tone that could be heard from the stage. The participants, who chanted the slogan “Neither Shariah, nor coup, but fully independent Turkey,” “Ne Şeriat Ne Darbe, Tam Bağımsız Türkiye” clearly stated that they were against a military intervention.

As a result of the manipulation of the historic hegemonic center and the media, participants in the Republican Rallies were fearful about the dangers of reaction and Kurdish separatism that supposedly awaited Turkey in the near future under the rule of the AKP. The alternative modernity offered by the AKP to the less modernized segments of Turkish society and the resulting increase in public visibility for these previously less-modernized segments in the high-status spheres that were previously totally defined and therefore dominated by the middle-class urban participants of the Republican Rallies, created a desire to preserve and protect modern lifestyles.\textsuperscript{172} As will be demonstrated in the discourse analysis chapter, this sensitivity was manipulated by the media into a fear of creeping and gradual Islamization and subsequently mobilized in the form of Republican Rallies. The stress on a “fully independent Turkey” in the slogans chanted in the Republican Rallies was the result of the rising

\textsuperscript{172} Somer, M. Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey, p.1278.
nationalism in the country that was again affected by the tone of newspaper discourse in the period.

Chief of General Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt’s press conference on April 12 was another important turning point in the discussions about the presidential election. In the beginning, the focus of the press conference was not the presidential election, contrary to what was expected by the journalists who attended the conference. Only at the end of the conference did Büyükanıt talk about the presidential election and state that the TSK was expecting a president who was “really, not superficially (pseudo),” “sözde değil özde,” in full conformity with the basic principles of the Republic. These words from Büyükanıt and the reactions of the journalists in attendance reflected the militant position of the journalists in Turkey. Among many other questions, after noting that it was not allowed for military officers’ wives to wear a headscarf and that the president was the supreme commander of the TSK, Taki Doğan of the Habertürk Television Channel asked what the TSK’s reaction would be if someone whose wife wore a headscarf was elected as president – the supreme commander of the army by definition. Büyükanıt reacted to the question by stating that he understood and accepted the question but would not answer it. After Doğan, Murat Yetkin of Radikal took the floor and, noting that Büyükanıt had explained his desire for the election a president who was really in conformity with the basic principles of the Republic, Yetkin asked whether Büyükanıt felt any doubt about that. As an answer Büyükanıt had a negative attitude to the question, and he only said that he had no doubts about the election of a president who was in conformity with the basic principles of the Republic. Büyükanıt was far from showing the iron fist that had been expected and provoked by the attending journalists. Finally, unsatisfied with Büyükanıt’s reply, Emin Çölaşan of Hürriyet grasped the microphone from Yetkin and, mentioning that there was a certain name that was supposed to be the candidate for the presidency, asked whether “that certain name” was really in conformity with the basic principles of the Republic. Büyükanıt, clearly more civilian-minded than Çölaşan, said he did not want to talk about particular names.

Not taking the 367-condition and the Republican Rallies seriously, the AKP seemed uninterested in these discussions. When asked about them, prime minister answered that the presidential elections would not be on their agenda until election time. Furthermore, Erdoğan stated that the opposition parties played with the presidential elections like children playing a game. Not heeding the historic hegemonic center’s threats regarding the quorum and

military intervention\textsuperscript{175}, Erdoğan delayed declaring his party’s candidate for presidency until the last minute. On April 24, three days before the first round of elections and the last day of the applications for the candidacy, Erdoğan declared Abdullah Gül as the AKP’s candidate for the presidential election.

Normally, Erdoğan’s declaration of Gül as the presidential candidate was not something problematic or unexpected due to the democratic standards of Turkey and earlier precedents. The last three presidents before Gül had been the only Turkish presidents without a military background. Özal, the first of these, was the leader of the ANAP that was the majority ruling party during the election period. Süleyman Demirel, the second, even lacked the majority Özal had. He was the leader of the DYP, which was the winner of the last elections and the bigger partner in the ruling coalition government. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, the third, was the president of the Constitutional Court and nobody even considered his name among the potential candidates until Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit of the post-February 28 Process mentioned his name. As a result of the constrained and artificial political atmosphere of the period, a great consensus was reached around Sezer, who displayed a democratic character until he was elected as the president and was known by the liberal and pro-freedom speeches he delivered once a year in the opening ceremonies of the Constitutional Court. Considering these past practices, Gül’s candidacy for the presidency would not have been an unexpected situation in terms of the political tradition of Turkey. Furthermore, Erdoğan did not nominate himself, but chose a more moderate figure, Gül, for the presidency. However, Gül’s presidency was opposed on the grounds of a lack of a consensus. This was a condition, just like the 367 quorum, that had never been sought for previous presidents.

The AKP was the only party and Abdullah Gül was the only candidate that was present in the parliament when it gathered for the first round of the presidential election on April 27. At the end of the first round, Gül took 357 votes but could not reach 367, which was the majority-quorum needed for being elected in the first round. However, 367 was also the meeting quorum according to the CHP and, therefore, the opposition party brought the election before the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court was expected to explain its decision before the second round that would be held three days later. However, the TSK took the initiative

from the Constitutional Court and issued a memorandum on its website at midnight on April 27.176

The e-memorandum started with the cliché of a reactionary danger that had been increasingly targeting the secular Republic in the recent past. After that, examples of this rising reactionary danger were mentioned. The first example was from Şanlıurfa, regarding a children’s choir’s singing of religious songs in a meeting organized for the celebration of the Prophet Muhammed’s birthday. However, it was not the first time the same organization was cited as an indicator of rise of rising reactionary danger. The organization was previously reported by Milliyet on April 24.177 The second example was also an event in the context of the celebrations of the Prophet Muhammed’s birthday. It was again religious songs and a children’s choir that were regarded as a sign of the rise of reactionary danger in Denizli and it was again Milliyet that previously reported the event.178 After the demonstration of the evidence of the crime, the e-memorandum declared the culprit: it was the administrative organs that let the events be organized. The e-memorandum stated that the attitude of the administrative organs toward these kinds of reactionary actions did not comply with the chief of general staff’s definition of real seculars. In its final section, the e-memorandum brought the presidential election to the center of the argument and stated that as a result of the cited examples of rising reactionary danger, the secular character of the republic had begun to be discussed in the presidential election process. The e-memorandum concluded with the threat of a coup d’état as in the MGK press release of February 28: The TSK is a party in the discussions on secularism and the presidential election and it shall display its attitude and actions when it is needed.

Contrary to the usual discourse of the TSK, what was unique in this incident was the counter-memorandum issued by the government’s spokesperson, Cemil Çiçek, the day after the e-memorandum.179 Instead of retreating like previous governments against the military’s opposition, the government clearly stated that the e-memorandum was regarded as a declaration made against the government and that this was unacceptable in a democratic system. Furthermore, reminding its audience of the fact that the TSK was an official institution under the command of the Office of the Prime Minister, any kind of statement by the TSK that targeted the government was not acceptable. The government’s counter

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176 e-memorandum can be reached from; http://www.tsk.tr/10_ARSIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_Basin_Aciklamalari/2007/BA_08.html, accessed May 20, 2011. Recently in September 2011 the TSK removed the e-memorandum from its official website.
memorandum also underlined the timing of the proclamation and concluded that the e-memorandum would be regarded as an attempt to influence the Constitutional Court in its decision about the presidential election.

The Constitutional Court’s decision to invalidate the first round of the presidential election with the excuse of the absence of the majority quorum (367) came almost immediately after the e-memorandum. The decision, which would have been questioned even if the TSK had not issued the e-memorandum, entirely lost its social and legal legitimacy. However, it was still binding for the presidential election. On May 6, the parliament met again to repeat the first round of the presidential election. The parliament was again incapable of meeting the quorum because of the absence of the CHP. The government therefore decided to call for early elections, as required by the constitution in the event of a failure to elect a new president. The election of the new president became the first task of the new parliament that would be established after the general elections. However, the deadlock in the presidential election process was not because of the quorum or any other secondary factors such as the personality of the candidate or his wife’s headscarf. The deadlock was in the relationship between the AKP and the historic hegemonic center.

4.3. Reading the AKP and the Historic Hegemonic Center

There is a very significant body of literature on the AKP. Many scholars from different theoretical schools have discussed various characteristics of the AKP. Of course, like every other body of academic work, the literature on the AKP is also subject to certain criticisms. The criticisms may be about the general shortcomings of the theoretical body within which the scholars prefer to speak or they may be based on the particular features of a given analysis. However, with regard to the literature on the AKP, most of the analyses unfortunately have two specific shortcomings regardless of the capacities of the various theoretical tools used and the personal tendencies of the analyst.

The first common shortcoming of such analyses is a kind of problem of anachronism. Most of the time analyses of the AKP deal with an account of how the AKP became successful in ruling the country in the fields of education, health, transportation and the economy. Moreover, once a comparative perspective with the record sheet of Turkey’s traditional right and left-wing political parties is offered, it becomes nearly impossible for the reader to not be convinced by the arguments that display these successes as the reasons for rise of the AKP. But while they are extremely convincing in explaining the electorate’s continuing support of
the AKP in the 2007 elections, they say nothing about the first success of party in the 2002 elections.

The other characteristic of existing literature on the AKP is retrospective analysis. Scholars precisely “designate” the presidential election crisis as the starting point of the analyses and then continue with the results of the presidential election crisis, the fault lines and strategies of the AKP and the other parties in the crisis. Most of the time the analysis finishes with an evaluation of the “results of the crisis” if the presidential election process finished by the time the article was written; or predictions – unfortunately most of the time wishes – for the possible results of the presidential election crisis if the presidential election process had not finished by the time the article was written. In both cases the presidential election crisis is treated as a unit that naturally started before the presidential election, continued during the election process and finished with the election of Abdullah Gül as the new president. Unfortunately, none of these analyses answers questions such as these: Why did the AKP and the other parties in the presidential election crisis not settle on a middle way like they did in many cases between 2002 and 2007? What was the role of previous developments in the disagreement between the AKP and the other parties in the crisis? What was it that changed with the election of a president like Abdullah Gül, rather than somebody else?

To answer these questions together with many others, to overcome the two major shortcomings of the existing AKP analyses and, finally, to generate a more accurate account of the AKP, a literature analysis seems to best way to begin. Grouping will be an effective means to start the analysis of existing literature on the AKP. However, it should be mentioned that grouping will be used as a methodological tool, which means that the groups will not be exhaustive or exclusive. Although it is possible to mark some scholars who strictly follow a theoretical school in the analysis of the AKP, the majority of scholars can be placed in several schools. In addition to the diversity among the different works from a given scholar, it is even possible to observe different theoretical explanations in a single work. With these methodological reservations in mind, the following grouping is suggested: (1) Orientalism and Modernization Theory, (2) Political Economy Theory, (3) Social Movement Theory, (4) Modernity and Civil Society Theory.

As a result of the abundance of literature on the AKP, it is impossible to cover all the examples of a theoretical explanation. Therefore, there must be some limiting of the amount of literature that will be covered for each theoretical explanation. The first of the selection criteria will be the type of publication. Articles and chapters in edited volumes will be preferred to books because they are more focused on a single issue. Secondly, well-known
and established scholars advancing a theoretical explanation will be preferred to others. Finally, typical examples of a theoretical explanation will be preferred to others regardless of the reputation of the author.

Using this criteria an overview of orientalist and modernist explanations for the rise of the AKP can be made as follows:

### 4.1.1. Orientalism and Modernization Theory

In their explanations for the rise of global Islamic movements in general and the Turkish AKP in particular, culture, tradition and nature are the concepts used most often by the disciples of orientalism and modernization theory. According to the scholars of these schools, there are fundamental cultural differences between the East and the West and these cultural differences make it impossible for eastern cultures to abandon traditional values and norms for modern ones. Moreover, scholars who are closer to orientalism than modernization theory claim that the nature of Islam is very political and, therefore, not compatible with modern notions of democracy, human rights and freedom.

Scholars of orientalism and modernization theory who study conservative movements and the AKP of Turkey claim that the AKP as a successor of the MG tradition is hostile to the secular character of Turkish Republic. However, because of the harsh reaction of Turkey’s civil and military bureaucracy to religious fundamentalism, the AKP has to hide its real aims and keep the Islamization of Turkish society as a hidden agenda. Otherwise, the Turkish Constitutional Court would ban the party with many other further sanctions like the ones that were applied to former political parties of the MG. Therefore, the AKP prefers methods of gradual Islamization. It uses small and underground attempts rather than direct confrontations with the defenders of secularism.

Michael Rubin’s piece is a typical example of the orientalist and modernist explanations of the AKP. In his article Rubin makes a reference to the “hidden agenda” discussion and writes that Erdoğan’s actions contradict his rhetoric:

> “His actions often contradict his rhetoric. He has endorsed, for example, the dream of Turkey’s secular elite to enter the European Union, but only so far as to
The claim that, rather than fully adopting the European Union’s norms on democracy and human rights, the first aim of the AKP’s reforms is to limit the political influence of the military is also accepted by other scholars in the field. However, by invoking the TSK, which violated the Turkish constitution through direct and indirect coups several times in the history of the Turkish Republic, as a “guardian of the Turkish constitution,” Rubin manipulates the conflict between the AKP and the TSK, and presents the TSK as the defender of democracy and constitutional rule.

Rubin further claims that Erdoğan and his AKP are applying a policy of gradual Islamization and threatening Turkish secularism. According to Rubin, education, the judiciary and other segments of the civil bureaucracy are domains in which the AKP is applying its gradual Islamization policy. Rubin claims:

“Traditionally, Turkish students had three choices for their secondary education: they could enroll at so-called Imam Hatip religious schools and enter the clergy; they could enter vocational schools to study a trade; or they could matriculate at secondary high schools, enter university, and then move into either the public or private sectors. Erdoğan changed the system: by equating Imam Hatip degrees with high schools degrees, he enabled Islamist students to enter university and qualify for government jobs, despite never having mastered Western fundamentals.”  

It is clear that Rubin lacks some basic information on Turkey, Turkish politics and the Turkish education system. It seems that Rubin does not know that from 1971 onwards İmam-Hatip School graduates, like graduates of other vocational schools, had the right of university admission, but that this right was taken away in the February 28 Process and that, therefore, the AKP was not trying to equate the degrees of İmam-Hatip graduates with high school degrees, but was attempting to return to the pre-1998 status quo. As a result of Rubin’s lack of information on Turkey - and on Islam as well - he thinks that there is a distinct class of clergy in Islam and that by graduating from İmam-Hatip Schools in Turkey, people can become a part of Rubin’s imaginary clergy. Also, with the final sentences quoted above

181 Rubin, M. Will Turkey Have an Islamist President?, p.4.
Rubin equates being an İmam-Hatip student with being an Islamist student and this is only possible with the essentialist and holistic interpretations of orientalism. Finally, the claim that İmam-Hatip graduates “never mastered Western fundamentals” shows a lack of basic information that can be obtained with a simple web search.

There are many other examples of a fundamental lack of information in Rubin’s piece. Although it is not worth discussing and analyzing them in a detailed way, some other cases can be cited as examples, such as his mention of “a Saudi-style headscarf” worn by the prospective first lady of Turkey, a Turkish private finance institution named “Eski Finans,” a “Higher Education Board composed of university rectors,” Erdoğan’s “multimillion-dollar villa in Istanbul,” and “the very real threat of street violence that might lead Erdoğan to call early elections.”

R. Quinn Mecham’s piece is the second example of orientalist and modernist explanations of the AKP. However it should be noted that, compared to Rubin’s article, Mecham’s work is less orientalist and can be considered within the boundaries of academic literature. Mecham’s article starts with an analysis of the FP. This party was established as the successor of the RP, which was dissolved by the Constitutional Court as a result of the February 28 Process. Mecham explains the political language and priorities of the FP and claims that because of “the possibility of military intervention, a fear of legal closure by the courts, and the need to maintain and expand their electoral constituency,” the FP adopted a more democratic and liberal attitude. Mecham mentions that with the split in the MG after the closure of the FP, the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi, SP) constituted the traditional wing and the AKP constituted the moderates. According to Mecham, the landslide electoral victories of the AKP can be explained as follows: “Felicity was the successor to previously banned parties, and thus a party that was unacceptable to secular forces in the political establishment. As the AK Party [AKP] appeared to have a greater chance of maintaining its legality, voters searching for a Islamically-minded alternative to the government strategically opted for the AKP, believing it

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182 Rubin, M. Will Turkey Have an Islamist President?, p.1.
183 Rubin, M. Will Turkey Have an Islamist President?, p.3. Most likely he was attempting to refer to Asya Finans, the private finance institution known to be close to the Gülen Movement – a Turkey-based transnational religious community that was named after its leader, Fethullah Gülen. The movement owns many commercial companies, including numerous media institutions, in addition to some 100 Turkish schools opened worldwide.
184 Rubin, M. Will Turkey Have an Islamist President?, p.4. The Turkish Higher Education Board is not composed of university rectors. The members of the board are appointed by different state institutions such as the presidency, parliament, government, etc.
185 Rubin, M. Will Turkey Have an Islamist President?, p.5.
186 Rubin, M. Will Turkey Have an Islamist President?, p.7.
188 Mecham, R. Q. From the Ashes of Virtue, p.350.
189 Throughout the text, explanations in square brackets belong to the writer.
had a greater chance of becoming an important player."\textsuperscript{190} Mecham also mentions that the majority of the electorate that previously voted for the RP and the FP were not ideologically Islamist. Rather, they were “sympathetic to Islamic issues but voted for Erbakan’s movement as an act of protest against the existing political establishment.” Therefore, the AKP’s moderate stance gained support from the electorate.\textsuperscript{191} Additionally, he claims that the “most important reason for the AK Party’s dramatic success […] was a series of strategic decisions by party leaders to moderate their message and image in an attempt to appeal to the more secular-minded center-right.”\textsuperscript{192}

Mecham defines the self-fulfilling true direction for conservative politics in Turkey as abandoning an ideological stance and instead adopting capitalist democracy. Moreover, ignoring the historical background of discussions about secularism in Turkey, Mecham claims that the electorate’s expectation from a conservative political party is also compatible with the self-fulfilling direction he defined for conservative politics. In conclusion, although his taking of the FP as the starting point for analysis and his comparison between the AKP and the FP are worth mentioning as strengths the Mecham’s piece, it should still be criticized for its modernist tone, lack of broad historical perspective on the discussion of secularism in Turkey and its lack of regard for the other factors behind the rise of the AKP, such as political economy.

In general, the orientalist and modernist explanations ignore the Turkish experience of secularism and, therefore, Turkish historicity. In the absence of these considerations, the orientalist and modernist explanations depend on ideal types and reductionist and generic explanations. However, conservative movements in Turkey are not simply anti-regime, fundamentalist movements, but a complex set of demands and ideologies related to the economy, identity, politics and cultural differentiation. Therefore, although the orientalist and modernist explanations are accurate in pointing out the AKP’s shift in discourse and the role of legal and extra-legal constraints in this shift, they entirely ignore the transformation that the conservatives underwent and the interaction between the AKP’s shift in discourse and the transformation of the conservatives in the country. Furthermore, what the orientalist and modernist explanations missed was the influence of political economy on the rise of the AKP.

\textsuperscript{190} Mecham, R. Q. From the Ashes of Virtue, p.353.
\textsuperscript{191} Mecham, R. Q. From the Ashes of Virtue, p.353.
\textsuperscript{192} Mecham, R. Q. From the Ashes of Virtue, p.353.
4.1.2. Political Economy Theory

Scholars of political economy studying Islamism in general and the AKP in particular, focus on economic factors in order to explain the rise of the AKP. Political economy explanations focus on class relations, unemployment in cities, especially among university graduates, rural to urban migration and provincial businessmen. Furthermore, they interpret the social and political dissatisfaction of traditional groups as a reflection of an economic situation.

Although it does not directly refer to the AKP, the article by Fuat Keyman and Berrin Koyuncu is one of the leading works that brings the social and political dissatisfaction of traditional groups into the discussion. Their explanation of Turkey’s recent political economy starts with a detailed analysis of the economic crisis Turkey faced in 2001, which is generally missing in the work of other scholars studying the same subject. At the end of the analysis, Keyman and Koyuncu conclude that the reasons for and the solution to the economic crisis are not only economic, but also political. They write:

“A long term, effective and democratic solution not only to February crisis, but more importantly to the structural problems of the state-centric Turkish modernity lies in an attempt to restructure state-society relations by taking into consideration the changing sociological and institutional nature of the political economy of Turkish capitalism.”

They proceed to explain that “the changing sociological and institutional nature of the political economy of Turkish capitalism” brings with it “the legitimacy crisis of the strong-state tradition” and “the emergence of alternative modernities.” They further claim that these two processes cannot be understood without reference to “the process of globalization, which involves mostly Turkey’s full-membership application to the EU.” At that point Keyman and Koyuncu mention that “despite the differences with respect to their specific claims to identity and modernity, the economic actors all locate themselves as strong supporters of the process of European integration.” MÜSİAD is one of these economic

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actors and “today, it is not possible to analyze the globalization of Turkish economic life without reference to MÜSİAD and the dissemination of its sub-units through the country.”

On the subject of the AKP, Ziya Öniş is one of the leading scholars of the political economy school. Among his numerous works on the AKP, the book chapter titled “The Political Economy of Turkey’s Justice and Development Party” is a good example for analysis. In the chapter Öniş suggests three factors in order to understand the rise of the AKP. Firstly, according to Öniş, “the party has been extremely successful in constituting a cross-class electoral alliance, incorporating into its orbit both winners and losers from the neo-liberal globalization process.” Secondly, “the strong track record of the AKP’s predecessors, the Welfare and the Virtue Parties at the level of municipal governments is another key element of importance.” Finally, “the failures of the conventional or established parties of either the center-right or the center-left in achieving sustained and equitable growth, in avoiding costly financial crises, and in tackling the problem of pervasive corruption have also paved the way for the party’s unprecedented electoral success in the recent era.” Further, Öniş claims that the question of whether the AKP will be successful in sustaining its electoral success is also mainly about the economic performance of the party: “Clearly, an adequate answer to this question requires a systematic and critical analysis of the AKP government’s performance, notably in the economic realm.”

Öniş mentions that AKP’s chief strength in bringing together the losers and winners of global neo-liberal policies is its ability to appeal to “diverse segments of Turkish society using religion as an effective mechanism of mutual trust and bondage.” Through such an explanation Öniş pays attention to non-economic factors that have been essential in the rise of the AKP. In doing so, he tries to overcome the major loophole in the political economy theory.

Yıldırım’s book chapter on the AKP and its relations with workers is a good sample of the political economy perspective on the party. Yıldırım analyzes the dual approach of the AKP to workers, who constituted both the party’s major source of electoral support and the major

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204 Öniş, Z. The Political Economy of Turkey’s Justice and Development Party, p. 207.
group that was affected negatively by the party’s liberal economic policies. The major strength of Yıldırım’s piece is that, although it takes economical factors as the starting point of analysis, it is not confined to economic relations but includes identity politics that sometimes - as in the case of the AKP - dominate the field of economy. Therefore, although economic explanations have an important role in explaining the rise of the AKP, non-economic factors such as the role of elites and activists, resource mobilization, and opportunity structures also offer insights into the party’s ascendancy.

4.1.3. Social Movement Theory

Social movement theory basically focuses on the role of activists and elites in the transformation of conservative politics and looks at resource mobilization and opportunity structures to explain the rise of the AKP. Scholars of this school claim that the Turkish conservative elites and activists, seeing the harsh secular opposition of the primarily military bureaucracy, developed a moderate policy and rhetoric as a result of a political learning process.

According to Çınar the transformation of conservative politics began immediately after the February 28 Process with the FP. Underlining the split in the FP as one between the older and younger generations, Çınar claims:

“The younger generation [...] favored an Islam-sensitive, rather than Islamist, political stance and employed a more comprehensive and consistent language of democracy and human rights. In this way, they hoped to be able to fill the political vacuum created by the February 28 Process, to make inroads into Turkey’s power structure and to better represent the interests of Islamic identity without risking their own political survival.”

As quoted above, the February 28 Process not only stimulated a political learning process for the AKP, but also created an opportunity structure which Çınar describes as “the political vacuum created by the February 28 Process.”

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208 Yıldırım, E. Labor Pains or Achilles’ Heel, p. 235.
Somer\textsuperscript{212} explains the transformation as a middle-class phenomenon and talks about a conflict between secular and religious elites:

\textit{“The religious-conservative elite are challenging the status of the secularist state elite. The new elite ascended power by challenging old-style Islamists of the Erbakan tradition and culturally Muslim–conservative yet secularist politicians of the Demirel tradition. Economically competition is occurring between the secularist big business elite and the recently emerged Islamic-conservative business elite.”}\textsuperscript{213}

Çarkoğlu’s “The New Generation Pro-Islamists in Turkey”\textsuperscript{214} also pays attention to the new generation of conservatives that appeared as an alternative to both the traditional conservative elites and also the secular elites. In contrast to the majority of analyses of the AKP, which depend on quantitative surveys, Çarkoğlu’s research takes into account new trends in the Turkish electorate and the position of AKP supporters according to these new trends. In the end, one of the major conclusions of the research is as follows: “The electoral base of AKP in November 2002 were primarily coming from a relatively younger generation having significant religious conservative traits.”\textsuperscript{215}

As a general evaluation of the social movement accounts of the AKP, one of the basic strengths is the stress on the transformation of conservatives after the February 28 Process. While explaining this transformation, social movement theorists differentiate themselves from the modernists and orientalists that regard the transformation as discursive and pragmatic. Social movement theorists tend to explain the transformation as an internalized one. Although figures like Çarkoğlu concentrated on electoral behavior, the question of how the masses supported the transformation should be answered; that is, if they really supported the transformation and whether the modernity and civil society approach can explain their support for the conservative transformation.

4.1.4. Modernity and Civil Society Theory

Modernity and civil society accounts are more explanatory in terms of the point where the social movement theory fails in its explanation of the conservative masses’ support for the

\textsuperscript{212} Somer, M. Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey, p.1271-89.
\textsuperscript{213} Somer, M. Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey, p.1275.
\textsuperscript{215} Çarkoğlu, A. The New Generation Pro-Islamists in Turkey, p. 175.
transformation of the elite and activists. Indeed, modernity and civil society theorists do not ignore the role of activists and elites. However, they also introduce new experiences of civil society and different “modernities” in order to explain how the masses participated in the transformation. At this point Göle introduces the difference between Islamism and post-Islamism in her “Snapshots of Islamic Modernities”:

“The actors of Islamism acquired professional profiles, increased their diversity and their public visibility. This was true not only of the militants and politicians, but also of engineers, lawyers, intellectuals, novelists, and journalists; all contributed to the production, transmission, and dissemination of Islamic values and discourse. In addition to political activism, forms of artistic and intellectual expression entered into the domain of Islamic cultural criticism with the publication and circulation of newspapers, periodicals, novels, films, and music. [...] In other words, Islamism is concomitant with the formation of new middle classes and is on the way to creating its own intellectual, political and entrepreneurial elites, drawing on their increasing public visibility and commercial success. We can speak of a post-Islamist stage in which Islamism is losing its political and revolutionary fervour but steadily infiltrating social and cultural everyday life practices.”216

Therefore, it can be said that the diversification of professional profiles from politicians to novelists and musicians and increasing public visibility are the major factors behind the spread of the transformation from the elites to the masses. Of course, civil society is the major medium of the spread together with (alternative) modernity;

“They [the new actors of Islamism] often became “Islamist” by following a common path: after moving from their small provincial towns to cities, they encounter, during their years in high school and university, the works of authors who set up the landmarks of contemporary Islamist ideology.”217

Educational capital, therefore, is seen as the major way of experiencing modernity:

“As new actors of Islamism are endowed with two sources of educational capital—religious and secular—they communicate Islamic idiom to the public debate. New

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217 Göle, N. Snapshots of Islamic Modernities, p.95.
actors of Islamism regain authority through the use they make of religious knowledge, but also through their criticism of modernity as cultural program.”

Considering the effectiveness of the İmam-Hatip graduates in conservative politics in general and the AKP in particular, the attention Göle pays to the role of education seems useful. However, the same İmam-Hatip graduates were also on the scene in the pre-February 28 period. Therefore, one should ask why the transformation took place during the AKP period rather than some other period. Göle answers this question by referring to the snapshots she picked in her article:

“These snapshots may indeed be considered as marginal, not representative of the Islamist movement. Stories about veiled students, the Islamic writer, the sex scandal in a religious order, an Islamic hotel for summer vacations, the Muslim sociologist - all may seem trivial. But it is precisely with these seemingly insignificant and unconnected threads that we intend to weave a new vision.”

Göle claims that the articulation and accumulation of “these seemingly insignificant and unconnected threads” has contributed to the transformation of conservative activism in Turkey. In other words, it is a matter of time for these snapshots and “seemingly insignificant and unconnected threads” (read as alternative modernities) to form modernity.

Yavuz is another figure who has paid great attention to the notion of Islamic modernity and civil society in explaining the AKP. In the introduction to his edited volume, Yavuz claims that as a result of the liberal economic policies of the state, a new conservative bourgeoisie emerged and this new bourgeoisie is the real factor behind the transformation of the AKP. Where Yavuz differs from the other disciples of the modernity and civil society school is that he does not presume an inevitable clash between the secular state and conservative civil society. In fact, Yavuz claims that there is a mutual relationship of transformation between the two and that, thanks to the transformation of the Kemalist state, opportunity spaces were opened for conservative civil society and, in turn, conservative civil society facilitated the Kemalist state’s transformation.

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218 Göle, N. Snapshots of Islamic Modernities, p.98.
219 Many of the influential members of the AKP, including Erdoğan, are graduates of the Istanbul İmam-Hatip School from the period between 1965 and 1975.
220 Göle, N. Snapshots of Islamic Modernities, p.114.
222 Yavuz, M. H. The role of the New Bourgeoisie, p.4-6.
223 Yavuz, M. H. The role of the New Bourgeoisie, p.8.
It is clear that Yavuz’s explanations, like most of the others overviewed so far, are valuable for understanding the different factors contributed to the rise of the AKP, but cannot help explain how a party came to be the majority government less than one year after its establishment. An alternative reading is required to answer this question.

4.1.5. An Alternative Account

Putting aside the Orientalist explanation because of the criticisms put forward, the other three theoretical explanations - political economy, social movement and civil society - have useful elements for understanding the rise and evolution of the AKP. Although they do not qualify as exhaustive and exclusive explanations, the current theoretical explanations can be good tools of analysis for the AKP’s rise from 2002 onwards and especially for the 2004 local elections and the 2007 general elections. Yet they say almost nothing about the party’s rise in 2002, when less than one year had passed after its establishment. They offer only explanations about limited specific perspectives of the case.

An alternative account that attempts to explain all aspects of the case that are not covered by the existing explanations should depend on the political and social atmosphere after the February 28 Process; in other words: the developments of the period between 1997 and 2001. The political and social atmosphere after the February 28 Process was a typical example of what Gramsci has conceptualized as “hegemonic crisis.” Especially the dissatisfaction of the traditional classes that always constituted the backbone of hegemony and the display of this dissatisfaction as rallies are the key elements of the hegemonic crisis in terms of this study.

The hegemonic crisis in itself constituted the real reason for the February 28 Process and deepened afterwards. The hegemonic crisis also offered one of the most valuable chances for power for the AKP in the hegemonic struggle. As mentioned before, it was not only the dissatisfied electorate that supported the AKP in the hegemonic struggle. On the eve of the 2002 election and for a long time after the election, the relative support of capital and media for the AKP also continued. According to Gramsci, there is a relationship similar to a political division of labor between the different political actors as a result of their separation at the point of interests but if they require each other – Gramsci claims they do - they will unite when vital and major issues are in question.224 According to this explanation, the moments when vital and major issues are in question are not the test moments of a historic bloc; rather

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224 Gramsci, A. Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 158.
they are its formative moments. The pre-2002 period in Turkey was a crisis moment for capitalist democracy and that is why the historical elements of capitalist democracy agreed on articulating the AKP in order to overcome the crisis.

At this point questioning the reasons for the shift in the AKP’s discourse requires more examination in terms of the new alliance between the AKP and the capitalists. The harsh opposition of the Kemalist establishment was counted as the main reason for the shift in the AKP’s discourse. According to this explanation, as a result of the February 28 Process, the conservative politicians “recognized the red lines of Turkish secularism” and for Erdoğan in particular this lesson cost four months in prison. Although agreeing that conservatives passed through a political learning process that was stimulated by the February 28 Process, what must be asked is whether it was Turkish secularism or Turkish capitalism that taught the lesson. Furthermore, this line of questioning will also bring the conceptualization of the historic hegemonic center into the discussion.

Throughout its long history, conservatism in Turkey as an oppositional movement has always been aware of the red lines of Turkish secularism and it has always been harshly and clearly warned once it even came close to forgetting its place. Conservatism in Turkey has been very well aware of the coercive capacity of political society and has also tried to challenge or short circuit it. What was alien to Turkish conservatives until they met with the February 28 Process was civil society and its hegemonic capacity. For example, conservatives always knew the importance of the parliamentary majority for ruling the country, the limits according to which they can challenge the Turkish secularism with a parliamentary majority, and the results of challenging the secular character of the country. Yet, they did not have any idea how quickly they could lose their parliamentary majority or how rapidly they could lose their electoral support once they challenged the historic hegemonic center of the country, especially the capitalists. Also, they discovered that they needed the support of the media as well as popular or parliamentary support. Therefore, the AKP generated its new message, and shifted its discourse not only for the state apparatus but also for its traditional electorate, capitalists and the media.

On the eve of the presidential elections, the AKP enjoyed electoral support that increased every day and the support of the new class of capitalists, which started to form before the AKP but reached its peak with the AKP, as is mentioned by the political economy theorists.


226 Taşpinar, Ö. The Old Turks’ Revolt, p.123.
At this time the party was creating its new sociality, as mentioned by the social movement theorists, and its new modernity and elites within this new modernity, as mentioned by modernity and civil society theorists.

Under such conditions, the election of a conservative president would constitute the roof of the building of a new historic hegemonic center whose basement was the majority rule of the AKP and whose body was the shift of power in the media, bureaucracy, business and civil society. Once such a structure was built, the need of the AKP for the capitalist wing of the existing historic hegemonic center as a conveyor system would decrease. Furthermore, in terms of the existing historic hegemonic center, this also meant the emergence of new opponents. The election of a conservative president meant the starting point of the road leading to the point of no return and therefore marked the split of the alliance between the AKP and the capitalist wing of the historic hegemonic center. As a result of this split, the media, as part of the existing historic hegemonic bloc, participated in the April 27 Process through textual, discursive and social practices that will be analyzed in the following chapters. The theoretical tools of Gramsci and Mardin and an analysis of case studies, the February 28 and April 27 processes, and media discourse are crucial for understanding how the media participated in these processes.