Understanding populist politics in Turkey: a hegemonic depth approach

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to understand populism as a hegemonic project involving a struggle for power between different social forces. We take a critical realist approach in defining populism. This implies several things. We develop a new approach to understanding populist politics by taking neither a purely discursive (Laclau), nor a solely structural (Poulantzas), but a critical realist approach and analysing the three-way relationship between structural conditions, agency, and institutional framework. Second, it implies that populist politics is composed of complex and often contradictory dynamics and emergent features involving mainly domestic but also international processes. We develop this through a combination of three concepts – passive revolution, hegemonic depth, and partial hegemony. These indicate how a hegemonic project is situated in deeper social relations and how hegemonic leadership responds to this. We take the policies of AKP government in Turkey as a case in populist hegemonic project. We demonstrate that AKP has followed different hegemonic projects during its rule changing from an initial majoritarian populist politics to one of neoliberal authoritarian populism as it has consolidated its hegemonic depth. These different populist projects involve alternative visions of Turkey but are nevertheless all compatible with a global neoliberal agenda.

Keywords: Populism; Turkey; Critical Realism; Hegemonic Depth; Hegemonic Project

Introduction

This article discusses the development of populism in Turkey during the rule of the Justice and Development Party (hereafter AKP) under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The AKP’s populism is an important example of the rise of new Islamic populisms emerging out of the contradictions of globalised capitalist development. Populism has been an instrument of AKP policy both before it came to power in 2002 as well as the main backbone of its policies since then. In the following analysis we make a separation between the initial phase of populism from below as a counterhegemonic struggle against the established elites and populism from above as implemented after the movement assumed political power.

Although distinct phases, the article employs a conceptual framework that emphasises their continuity insofar as the second phase is an outgrowth of the first. In doing this we combine a Gramscian analysis of hegemony with Poulantzian arguments about populism and the power bloc and critical realist arguments about social stratification, structural depth, and the structure-agency relationship. More specifically, we centre our argument on the three concepts of passive revolution, hegemonic depth, and partial hegemony since these emphasise both the specificity of the AKP’s populism, and its location in relation to underlying social structures and changing global context.

Just as recent years have seen a strong rise of populism, populist movements, and populist governments throughout the world, so we have witnessed the rise of increasing interest in populism within IR.¹ In this study, we discuss the rise and persistence of populist politics in Turkey while developing our own analysis of populism as an alternative to the dominant positions on this subject. Many recent accounts can be divided into those influenced by the post-structuralism of Ernesto Laclau’s work on populism and those favouring the more structuralist approach of Nicos Poulantzas as developed in his concept of authoritarian statism. We find merit in these approaches and draw on them in the account of Turkish populism presented below. However, we place more focus on the Gramscian element of hegemonic construction in order to emphasise agency, while underpinning this with a critical realist philosophy. The advantages of this, in our view, are that it provides: (a) a more historical account of the rise of authoritarian populism; and (b) a more in-depth account of how populism works as a hegemonic strategy.

We believe that such a structural approach is present in Gramsci’s work and, in particular, in his idea of passive revolution. This refers to the way that a leading group is able to maintain its rule by advancing a programme of social reorganisation and modernisation along the lines developed by the AKP in Turkey. This works by appealing to the masses, as the AKP did though its use of populist, anti-establishment rhetoric, while effectively denying the masses the opportunity to exercise real power. This is done though the ruling group’s management of deeper underlying socioeconomic processes. Thus hegemonic rule is not just about the construction of alliances, but also about how the ruling group is able to relate to deeper structural processes and use these to maintain its rule.² Passive revolution is therefore about social, political, and economic change but it is also about the continuity of existing trends – in this case the AKP’s relationship with neoliberal transformations that pre-dated the AKP’s coming to power and the wider global context that saw the leading groups in Turkey positioning themselves in relation to the global promotion of neoliberalism. Though the concept of passive revolution we can investigate how the AKP used a specific strategy to incorporate the Islamic-conservative masses into the wider neoliberal social project.

The idea of passive revolution flows over into the concept of hegemonic depth, which we use to differentiate periods of AKP development. Hegemonic depth is a critical realist concept conveying the idea of a stratified reality. The concept better tackles the shifting priorities and strategies of different forms of statecraft by linking different hegemonic projects of rule to underlying relations, providing a more totalising account.³ Hegemonic projects refer to ‘the mobilization of support behind a concrete, national-popular program of action which asserts a general interest in the pursuit of objectives that explicitly or implicitly advance the long term interests of the hegemonic class (fraction)’.⁴ Here, populism is seen as a hegemonic project, which, in turn, must establish itself in relation to a larger set of mutually overdetermined social relations that enable and constrain such a project. This implies that populism, as a hegemonic project, appears initially to be a more democratic form of politics as evident during the rise and consolidation of the power of the AKP. In its initial stages, populism was an important instrument in resolving crises of hegemony from the pre-AKP period, encouraging the rise of counterhegemonic resistance by directing societal resentment against the established elites. However, once the AKP assumed political power, populist politics increasingly took an antagonistic form with a strict separation

¹See, for instance, Frank A. Stegel, David B. MacDonald, and Dirk Waters (eds), Populism and World Politics: Exploring Inter- and Transnational Dimensions (London and New York: Palgrave, 2019).
between the ‘people’ representing the AKP power bloc and the rest of the ‘people’. As it seeks greater hegemony, AKP rule has taken on an increasingly authoritarian form.

Hegemonic depth allows us to examine Turkey in terms of stages of hegemony. We argue that a new era started with the election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to presidency and the transformation of Turkey from a parliamentary system to an executive presidential system. The state of emergency declared in the wake of the 2016 coup attempt has eroded democratic institutions and Turkey appears to have entered into a ‘permanent state of exception’, something ensured by the way that hegemonic depth has been achieved. The new system gives Erdoğan unlimited powers, allowing him to dissolve the parliament, call for new elections, make appointments to all positions within the state institutions, and run the country by issuing presidential decrees. There is no longer a separation of powers and an independent judiciary. Populist politics has polarised the country between the supporters of the AKP claiming to represent the people and the nation, and the other half that now represents the ‘other people’ or the ‘second nation’ (as witnessed in the formation of the ‘People’s Alliance’ between the AKP and the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) on 20 February 2018 and the ‘National Alliance’ between the CHP (Republican People’s Party), İP (the Good Party), HDP (Peoples’ Democratic Party), and the SP (Felicity Party) on 3 May 2018.

This leads into our third concept for analysing populism in Turkey, that of partial hegemony. We use this term to convey a double meaning. On the one hand, partial is used to mean imperfect and incomplete. In combination with the concepts of passive revolution and hegemonic depth, we show how hegemony has not fully developed in Turkey in the sense of being fully totalising and enjoying widespread consensus. On the other hand, partial can be taken to mean partisan, preferential, and favouring of one side over another. We argue that this partial hegemony is particularly evident in the period from 2011 when AKP hegemony was oriented towards AKP supporters with increasingly authoritarian and coercive measures directed against a significant number of opponents. This is consistent with the changing character of AKP populism, the development of a we/they binary in AKP rhetoric and ultimately a form of authoritarian statism. We start the article by setting out some understandings of populism and critically engaging with the view put forward by Ernesto Laclau. Against this, we return to a more Gramscian conception of populism by showing how populist politics is embedded within wider social and historical relations. We outline our approach in relation to hegemonic projects and use critical realism and historical materialism to underpin this. We then look at the rise of the AKP and look at distinct stages of its hegemony, distinguishing between its emergence as a counterhegemonic force and its transformation into an authoritarian populist government.

Defining populism

There is no agreed definition of populism itself. It is a contested concept and has been defined as an ideology, discourse, a mass movement, political strategy, or simply a way of doing politics. There is a general consensus that populism arises when there is a crisis of confidence about a political system’s ability to solve social problems. All definitions of populism emphasise the importance of appealing to the ‘people’, dichotomising society into two antagonistic segments: the people and the elite – the establishment or the ruling class that not only exploits the people but also prevents them from exercising power. Another key feature of populism is the existence

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5Our use of hegemony in this article derives from Gramsci and is different from a purely political understanding of the concept. For instance, Bashirov and Lancaster define the AKP as a ‘hegemony-seeking party whose primary goal is to achieve political hegemony’. AKP in this view has now transformed itself into a hegemonic party that ‘does not allow for fair electoral competition’, has ‘clear authoritarian tendencies’ and possesses ‘governmental hegemony’. See Galib Bashirov and Caroline Lancaster, ‘End of moderation: the radicalization of the AKP in Turkey’, Democratization, 25:7 (2018), pp. 1214–15.

of unfulfilled demands and a discourse critiquing political institutions for not meeting them. Therefore, populist movements express new political identities, representations, and the politicisation of issues that had previously not been part of the political agenda. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser argue that populism is a ‘thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people.” Chantal Mouffe describes populism as a way of doing politics. For her, populism is not an ideology or a political regime, and cannot be attributed to a specific programmatic content. It is compatible with different forms of government. It emerges when one aims at building a new subject of collective action – the people – capable of reconfiguring a social order lived as unfair.

In this article we want to particularly engage with Laclau’s widely discussed definition that argues that ‘populism is, quite simply, a way of constructing the political’. What is crucial for us is Laclau’s emphasis on populism as a discursive strategy. For Laclau it is the flexibility of a populist discourse referring to the people as an empty signifier that makes populism a very important way of doing politics. Therefore, populism almost always appears attached to other discursive elements, which are crucial for the promotion of political projects that are appealing to a broader public.

by ‘populism’ we do not understand a type of movement – identifiable with either a special social base or a particular ideological orientation – but a political logic. All the attempts at finding what is idiosyncratic in populism in elements such as a peasant or small-ownership constituency, or resistance to economic modernisation, or manipulation by marginalised elites are, as we have seen, essentially flawed

This view is underpinned by Laclau’s particular interpretation of the concept of hegemony – something that we contest in this article. For Laclau, ‘hegemony is nothing more than the investment, in a partial object, of a fullness which will always evade us because it is purely mythical’. While there is some relevance to Gramsci’s notions of ‘common sense’ and ‘Sorelian myth’ in this allusion, the argument bears closer resemblance to the anti-essentialism of poststructuralist theorising. Hegemony, therefore, is deprived of its material basis and becomes a process of articulation and rearticulation, inscription and reinscription. In this process, the discursive act of ‘naming’ becomes the key moment, the basis for the constitution of a ‘people’ – a people whose boundaries and equivalential components permanently fluctuate. Everything is ultimately the product of hegemonic (re)inscription / (re)articulation with nothing existing prior to this moment. As Laclau says:

What is important is to grasp the pattern of this process of rearticulation: it depends on partially keeping in operation the central signifiers of popular radicalism while inscribing in a different chain of equivalences many of the democratic demands. This hegemonic rearticulation is possible because no social demand has ascribed to it, as a ‘manifest destiny’ any a priori form of inscription – everything depends on a hegemonic contest … To refer to this

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9 Ibid.
11 Mudde and Kaltwasser, Populism, p. 6.
13 Ibid., p. 116.
14 Ibid., p. 226.
ambiguity of the popular signifiers and of the demands that they articulate we will speak of floating signifiers. The kind of structural relation that constitutes them is different from the one that we have found operating in the empty signifiers.  

The problem for us is that Laclau turns what should be a structural-strategic relation between social groups into something that is purely about discursive signification. This only works if we foreground practice, but any element of social structure as a relatively enduring set of social relations is missing. It is not clear whether the ontological and epistemological implications of this approach are fully appreciated by those using Laclau’s arguments on populism.

The influence of Laclau on discussions about populism leads to the adoption of an overly discursive view. This can, for instance, be observed in one of the analyses of Turkish populism by Dinçşahin. Following Francesco Panizza’s appropriation of Laclau, he adopts a discursive analysis called asymptomatic reading of populism. He distinguishes between the empiricist and historicist approaches and opts for a symptomatic reading that searches for ‘symptoms’ of populism in the discourse of the political leaders. This approach, according to Dinçşahin, ‘frees itself from the temporal and spatial bonds inherent in alternative approaches by analysing the discourse of populist leaders.’ This, in our view, is an ahistorical view of history that reduces it to the contingent interplay of discrete elements whose meaning is dependent upon their inscription and articulation within discourse. By contrast, we believe that understanding populist politics requires locating it within the overall framework of societal dynamics and efforts of social classes to assert their hegemony within a social formation. As an example, to analyse Erdoğan’s populism only as a ‘medium of mass mobilisation’ is to limit populism to an instrument of manipulation or a strategy of leadership without dealing with the underlying social relations that give rise to populism. Likewise, Orçun Selçuk who analyses populism in Turkey, Venezuela, and Ecuador defines it ‘as a political phenomenon in the context of a specific mode of governance’. In our view, such politicist definitions of populism are incomplete as these approaches do not locate populism in the context of deeper, underlying social relations.

By defining populism as an instrument for achieving hegemony in a social formation, we argue that populist movements are always related to a hegemonic project. As Stuart Hall argues, populism is one of the ways ‘in which popular consent can be constructed by a historical bloc seeking hegemony so as to harness to its support some popular discontents, neutralise the opposing forces, disaggregate the opposition and really incorporate some strategic elements of popular opinion into its own hegemonic project’. We hold a critical realist view of hegemony, believing

16Vedi R. Hadiz refers to the necessity to analyse the ‘social bases of the New Islamic Populism’ as opposed to the ideal- tional approaches of, for instance, Mudde and Taggart, but does not himself deal with the issue theoretically. Vedi R. Hadiz, ‘A new Islamic populism and the contradictions of development’, Journal of Contemporary Asia, 44:1 (2014), pp. 130, 133–5.
18Ibid., p. 640.
20See H. Bahadir Türk, ‘Populism as a medium of mass mobilization’: the case of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’, International Area Studies Review, 21:2 (2018), pp. 154, 158. Türk’s reference to ideological state apparatuses and mass clientelism in the construction of populism as a ‘medium of mass mobilization’ does not deal with populism itself as a social phenomenon which has underlying causes.
it to have a structural basis within the social formation, but where its realisation occurs through the concrete hegemonic projects of different agents. These hegemonic projects represent attempts to mobilise support in favour of a far reaching programme of action. As Gramsci argues, to secure the unity of society ‘it is the task of organic intellectuals to organise the social forces’ and ‘to develop a hegemonic project’ that will ‘transcend the particular economic-corporate interests of their social group by binding and cohering diverse aspirations, interests and identities into an historical bloc’. Bob Jessop also comments that ‘since the modern capitalist state and political sphere construes itself in reference to the dominance, not of a class, but rather of a national-popular entity, such leadership is always established through a hegemonic project that aspires to a representation of this entity though in an incomplete way’. However, hegemonic projects also have an international dimension and need to be articulated not only in relation to a domestic national-popular programme for the domestic classes, but also with the positions of respective states within the world order. Finally, in order to be successful, hegemonic projects will also have to be linked to an accumulation strategy, which is a specific economic growth model. However, as Jessop argues, ‘While accumulation strategies are directly concerned with economic expansion on a national or international scale, hegemonic projects can be concerned principally with various non-economic objectives, even if they are economically conditioned and economically relevant. The latter might include military success, social reform, political stability or moral regeneration.’ Therefore, a hegemonic project needs to be thought of as a totality of different relations and articulations at the economic, political, and ideological levels.

To summarise the approach developed in the rest of the article, we take a critical realist view of hegemony as opposed to a discursive one. Our main argument against Laclau’s approach is its reduction of reality to the level of discursive practices. This rejects the idea of deeper structures and when it is obliged to offer an ontology, it does so in the abstract form of symbolic production. Hegemony is deprived of its social content – whether this be political, economic, institutional, or class-based and is instead seen as the process of articulation rather than as a mediating point between social structures and social agents. The main agents who are at the centre of the following analysis would, according to Laclau, be deprived of any deeper social positioning or enduring identity. They would be sacrificed to the process of signification.

Critical realism, by contrast, advocates a stratified social ontology and our main task in analysing something is to identify the main underlying causes, mechanisms, and social structures and to decide which of these have prominence in relation to the phenomena studied. In the following analysis we will reject discourse theory’s reductive focus on the process of discursive articulation in favour of a stratified account of populism’s relationship to capitalism, the global economy, changing state formation, and mechanisms of governance. For us, this means rejecting Laclau’s rejection of historical materialism.

We set the Gramscian understanding of hegemony within the context of the reproduction and transformation of underlying social structures and generative mechanisms as well as the institutional ensemble of the state. In particular, this means drawing on Gramsci’s notion of passive revolution to highlight the conservative nature of social transformation insofar as the ruling groups tie their political projects to underlying socioeconomic developments, notably the process

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26 Jessop, State Theory, pp. 196–220.
27 Ibid., p. 208.
28 Joseph, Hegemony: A Realist Analysis.
of neoliberalisation, while seeking to exclude the supporting masses from any genuine political participation in this process of ‘modernisation’ and state transformation. This can also be seen from an international perspective as the ruling groups aligned their practices with changing forms of global regulation – known as the shift from postwar ‘embedded liberalism’ to a period of ‘unfettered globalisation’. Alongside Gramsci, we draw on Poulantzas and Jessop to provide a more specific account of the development and transformation of populist politics in Turkey. We see, for example, how post-1980 neoliberal economic policies produce both integration into the wider global economic structures, and relate to changes in class structure, manifested in changes in what Poulantzas calls the power bloc – a contradictory unity of different classes and fractions.

A more structural approach, such as that outlined by Bob Jessop, looks at how hegemonic projects relate to accumulation strategies seeking economic expansion on a national or global scale. The new accumulation strategy in Turkey came to be aligned with an alternative hegemonic project based on Islam and a new form of class struggle. As this achieves hegemonic depth within the state apparatus and wider Turkish society, so this also leads to a partial hegemony that is unable to reach right across society and appeal to all social groups, and so resorts to a ‘we’ and ‘they’ approach to politics. This ultimately explains the rise and changing form of populism and authoritarian statism under the AKP.

The AKP as an example of neoliberal rule and the rise of neoliberal populism

For us, any account of the rise of populism in Turkey must be historically specific, and a key element of the AKP’s rise to power is the dissatisfaction among the masses with the previous policies of neoliberalism and the specific changes in class and social identity accompanying those policies. As Michael Bray argues, “Neoliberal populism” is an intrinsic aspect of the rise to hegemony of neoliberalism amidst the fragmentation of traditional class identities, such that contemporary populisms revolve around neoliberalism’s reorientation of capitalist accumulation and its contradictory populist and de-democratising aspects. Therefore, right-wing/Islamic populism of the sort developed by the AKP should not be considered as a divergence from a ‘normal’ liberal democratic path of capitalist development; instead it is rooted in aspects that help constitute capitalism.

The global rise of neoliberalism as an ideology and policy model was a consequence of the crisis of accumulation of capitalism in the 1970s emphasising the value of free competition and the restoration of the power of capital through financialisation and marketisation. However, while uniting different capital groups under a new accumulation strategy, neoliberal policies worked to the disadvantage of the working classes due to reduced wages and increased exploitation. In this sense, we agree that populism can be seen as a ‘distinctive reaction to the

31Jessop, State Theory, p. 34.
33There were three previous attempts to form Islamic parties in Turkey following the principles of what is known as the National Outlook (Milli Görüş): The National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi) banned in 1971 by the Constitutional Court; National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi) banned in 1981; and the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) also banned in 1998 for violating the secular principles of the state. The AKP was formed in 2001 from a split in Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi), which was formed after the Welfare Party was closed. AKP initially declared itself to be the representative of moderate Islamism with a conservative democratic ideology. However, it switched to a form of authoritarianism as it started to lose its hegemonic depth.
social dislocations of globalisation', albeit one that depends on particular local, regional, and historical contexts. It was therefore necessary to cushion the negative effects of the market to prevent political instability, maintain social cohesion, and to render neoliberal policies socially acceptable. Hall uses the term authoritarian populism instead of neoliberal populism to describe the policies followed under neoliberalism to offset its negative effects. Poulantzas on the other hand explains the consequences of neoliberalism for state regimes. He makes a distinction between normal and exceptional forms of state under the capitalist mode of production. One of the normal forms of state according to Poulantzas, is authoritarian statism that becomes dominant with neoliberalism. In other words, authoritarianism is inherent to neoliberalism and part of its normal functioning. Authoritarian statism according to Poulantzas denotes the tendency in contemporary capitalism for ‘intensified state control over every sphere of socio-economic life combined with the radical decline of the institutions of political democracy and with draconian and multi-form curtailment’ One of the key tendencies of authoritarian statist regimes for Poulantzas is the wide use of plebiscitary and populist forms of consent. Indeed, the global economic crisis of 2007–08 has especially strengthened the existing authoritarian elements in liberal democracies through restructuring of the coercive and judicial state apparatuses, concentration of power in the executive, use of repressive surveillance mechanisms, and insulation of decision-making processes from public scrutiny. Authoritarian statist regimes such as Turkey under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s rule, likewise, arose from the structural necessity to manage and contain social and political conflicts associated with neoliberal policies. Although the form of authoritarianism has changed, the AKP continued the authoritarian political strategies, which have in fact been a feature of Turkish politics since the 12 September 1980 military coup. However, the distinguishing feature of AKP authoritarianism was that it was successful in securing consent by populist measures. Therefore, although the neoliberal policies led to the marginalisation and oppression of broad segments of society and especially the working classes, the populist welfare measures made the dependent classes supporters of the neoliberal accumulation strategy itself, thus strengthening the power of capital over labour. Therefore, populism has been an instrument of regulating stability and providing a unifying image of ‘national will’ for the neoliberal model, serving as the main mechanism for entrenching the AKP’s hegemonic depth.

AKP populism conforms to the main features of populism outlined above. In politicising the sedimented social relations in Turkey through its political organisation it offered political, moral, and intellectual leadership to those who had so far been marginalised and left out of the political agenda. It did so by constituting an opposition between the ‘people’ and the establishment creating new and collective forms of identification around the ‘people’. This initially seemed to be an agonistic confrontation (in the words of Mouffe) articulating diverse grievances to the way in which the country was governed by the coalition of Kemalist civil-military bureaucracy and the capital groups dependent on them. In expressing the marginalised grievances, Erdoğan articulated a frontier between a ‘we’ – of national values and ‘they’ composed of the parties in power, the civil-military bureaucracy and the secularists. Indeed, the AKP has successfully articulated different populist strategies at different stages of its rule leading to a dramatic surge in its electoral support and increase in its share of the vote up until the elections of June 2015. Nevertheless, as AKP

hegemony has deepened, as Mouffe might argue, ‘agonistic dynamics of pluralism’ have transformed into an antagonistic dualism of ‘we’ and ‘they’.\textsuperscript{40} In other words, instead of deepening democracy, the AKP has deepened its ‘partial hegemony’ on the basis of a we/they binary, assuming a consensual form for ‘we’ and a coercive form against ‘they’, increasingly resembling a Schmittian friend-enemy relation. Therefore, despite the talk of ‘one nation’ and ‘one people’, the AKP’s populist hegemony has been partial in nature followed mostly to the benefit of its supporters.

Turkey’s integration into the structures of global neoliberalism predates the AKP’s coming to power in 2002. Together with the state-led capitalist industrialisation of the Kemalist period, Turkey was involved in the application of import substitution strategies (ISI) until the 1980s when a transition to export led growth was made.\textsuperscript{41} Turkey’s transition to neoliberalism was the outcome of a military coup that took place in 1980. The Turkish military has intervened into Turkish politics several times when there has been a crisis of hegemony within the power bloc (directly through taking over the state apparatus in 1960, 1971, and 1980, forcing the government to resign in 1997 by what is called the postmodern coup, and indirectly through the e-memorandum of 2007 which underscored the role of the military in defending secularism). Therefore, the military as an institution has not been independent of class politics and has been an active player within the coercive state apparatus to maintain the conditions of capital accumulation. The marriage of Islam and nationalism occurred after the 1980 coup under the name of Turkish-Islamic synthesis.\textsuperscript{42} However, in this period Islam was geared to the needs of the existing authoritarian official ideology supporting the ruling class hegemony. With the AKP coming to power, the reverse was to become true and nationalism would be geared to the needs of Islam as the pillar of the new ideological synthesis.\textsuperscript{43}

The key agent of the new neoliberal accumulation strategy that was initiated with the 24 January 1980 measures was Turgut Özal (prime minister between 1983–9 and president between 1989–93) who applied the structural adjustment programmes and conditions laid down by the IMF and the World Bank. The economic policies undertaken during Özal’s rule led to the rise and consolidation of religious and conservative business classes called the Anatolian Tigers resulting ‘in the incorporation of the Islamic-conservative masses into the wider neoliberal social project’.\textsuperscript{44} The economic crises of 1994, 2000, and 2001 dismantled the weak societal basis of Özal’s neoliberal hegemonic project.\textsuperscript{45} The 1990s was such a period of hegemonic crisis as well as weak coalition governments who were reluctant supporters of the policies implemented by the military. The AKP capitalised upon the inability of the dominant classes to resolve the recurrent crises and came forward with their own hegemonic project directly challenging the secular, statist, republican tutelary regime, which it defined as the characteristic of the existing regime. Once in power, the AKP politically and institutionally continued the authoritarian structure, which it inherited from the pre-crisis situation, while economically following similar neoliberal economic policies prescribed by the IMF. Thus the AKP’s Islamic challenge was

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., pp. 20–1.
\textsuperscript{44}See Ahmet Berkmen, ‘State and capital in Turkey during the neoliberal era’, in Akça et al. (eds), \textit{Turkey Reframed}, pp. 49–50, 62 and also passim for a review of state/capital relations in Turkey.
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., pp. 54–5.
'absorbed into neoliberal capitalism’ in what Gramsci described as a passive revolution increasingly turning into a pro-state, pro-market, and pro-capitalist political party as it entrenched its hegemony.\(^{46}\) Along the way, the state-capital relation assumed a much more integrated structure suitable for the creation of populist hegemonic projects. The AKP gradually increased its hegemonic depth by fighting against the traditional institutions of the state apparatus and the civil-military bureaucracy, promoting the civilisation of the state apparatus and elimination of military tutelage.\(^ {47}\)

**Passive revolution\(^ {48}\)**

When Gramsci talks of hegemony he refers not just to actual hegemonic projects, but to a deeper level of social organisation, ultimately related to the cohesion of society itself and to fundamental social processes like capital accumulation as mentioned above. It is for this reason that he talks of historical bloc as the unity of structure and the superstructure.\(^ {49}\) Moreover, he argues that there is a degree of structural selectivity in terms of which groups may present themselves as leading – to become hegemonic, a group must have behind it the economic, political, and cultural conditions that allow it to put itself forward as leading. This is the social basis upon which hegemonic projects are to develop. Related to the notion of passive revolution, it can be argued that a ruling group can maintain its hegemony through advancing a programme of social reorganisation and modernisation that is founded upon already existing social trends and dynamics.\(^ {50}\)

According to this understanding, hegemony is not just about the construction of social and political alliances but also about how the ruling group is able to engage with deeper structural processes. Passive revolution is therefore about social, political, and economic change, but is also about continuity.

Here we explain how the AKP developed a hegemonic strategy based on the principles of passive revolution that engages the wider masses while simultaneously denying them the possibly of exercising real power. As previously noted, the AKP was able to do this by developing a hegemonic project based on neoliberal Islamism and presented itself as a conservative democratic party based on Islamic principles. Against the republican, secular, tutelary statist tradition of the previous regimes, it defended Islam, democracy, and the free market. The Islamic liberal model it defended came to be known as the ‘Turkish Model’ of development meaning ‘marriage of formal democracy, free market capitalism and a (toned down) conservative Islam’.\(^ {51}\) Although the party programme described the AKP as conservative democrat, this really implied ‘Muslim democrat’, somewhat similar to Christian democrats in the West.\(^ {52}\) The AKP’s new hegemonic project sought to mobilise popular support through a ‘chain of equivalences’ (in Laclau’s terminology) consisting of resentment against republican civil-military tutelage as well as against the adverse consequences of previously applied neoliberal policies on the masses. According to Erdoğan, it was only ‘the people’ that could seek to protect the Republic and not an institution such as the army. However, in its populist discourse it also articulated the other grievances within


\(^{48}\) Definitionally, then, a passive revolution can be a technique of statecraft which an emergent bourgeois class may deploy by drawing in subaltern social classes while establishing a new state on the basis of the institution of capitalism’ or ‘the expansion of capitalism as a mode of production’. Adam David Morton, ‘What is this thing called passive revolution’, *From the Desk Drawer* (11 July 2012); also Adam David Morton, ‘The continuum of passive revolution’, *Capital and Class*, 34:3 (2010), pp. 315–42.


\(^{51}\) Morton, ‘What is this thing’, p. 4.

society such as restrictions put on wearing the headscarf and on the political and cultural obstacles for the development of a new pious generation.

The post-1980 neoliberal economic policies, while leading to the integration with the global economy, had resulted in the rise of new economic classes mostly associated with the medium scale Islamic Anatolian capital, which had so far been suppressed by the big capital groups of Istanbul and the Marmara region (the first generation bourgeoisie). As distinct from this big group of capital groups formed during the ISI period of the 1960s and 1970s, the AKP represented a new category of bourgeoisie variously called the second generation bourgeoisie, devout bourgeoisie, green capital, or Islamic-oriented Anatolian capital, which strengthened after the 1980s, particularly with President Özal’s export oriented economic policies that supported the pious Muslim businessmen of Anatolia.

The AKP’s initial hegemony was made possible by uniting different class fractions of different strengths and orientations. The AKP was able to forge an alliance between these different capital groups of the first generation bourgeoisie (which until then had been supported by the state), and the rising second-generation Muslim bourgeoisie of Anatolia mostly organised under MUSIAD (Association of Muslim Businessmen). The first group was economically and politically hegemonic while the latter group was dispersed both in numbers as well as geographically and did not have direct access to political power except through patronage and clientelistic relationships. However, as Poulantzas argues, ‘the class struggle, the rivalry between the interests of these social forces is constantly present, since these interests retain their specific character of antagonism.’ Indeed, there was an uneven distribution of political and economic power within the power bloc, which allowed the AKP to offer leadership while keeping other fractions and elites in a secondary position. This was to be the cause of the split between Gülenists and the AKP cadres in 2013 finally leading to the aborted coup of 15 July 2016.

When the AKP assumed power it pursued the dominant organisational forms of capital of the time, followed neoliberal policies, and embraced free market principles that were already adopted by the previous governments. This was obviously related to broader international hegemonic or imperial structures of neoliberal capitalist accumulation. Indeed, the AKP’s rise to power also coincided with the United States’ search for a defender of its imperialist interests in the Middle East in the post-9/11 period. In structural terms the AKP seemed to fit the requirements of the new geopolitical situation: a moderately Islamic government in a country with a democratic past acting as a transmission belt for the interests of globalised neoliberalism in the Middle East. The Turkish model was expected to deepen political, ideological, and global hegemonic accumulation patterns in the region. It was hoped that the new regime in Turkey “would spread the belief in (an Islamised version of) the American way in military, diplomatic, economic, and cultural venues throughout its region and the Muslim world.” With its (perceived) economic miracle, marriage of religion, and liberal authoritarian democracy and participation in the Great Middle East Project, Turkey served all these purposes.

**Stages of AKP hegemony**

We use the concept of hegemonic depth to examine the rise, consolidation, and the decline of the AKP in terms of different stages of hegemony. We use it both to denote the process of linking

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54Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, p. 239.


56Tuğal, *End of the Turkish Model*, p. 275.

agential struggles to structural developments as well as to understand the degree of embeddedness of hegemony within social structures.\textsuperscript{58} Hegemonic depth in this sense is therefore necessary to secure the relations between different actors, practices, institutions, and underlying social relations. As the AKP gained hegemonic depth, its engagement with deeper, underlying social processes, neoliberal economic developments, and the state apparatus became increasingly entrenched, culminating in the development of an authoritarian populist regime. We identify the first period as between 2002 and 2007, when AKP hegemony was weak. The period between 2007 and 2011 corresponds to the consolidation of AKP hegemony. The third period starts from 2011 when AKP hegemony started to become partial (oriented only to a section of the ‘people’ who are its supporters) and increasingly authoritarian, resorting to coercion to maintain its partial hegemony. A new stage signalling the decline of AKP hegemony has started with the 31 March 2019 elections for the mayor of İstanbul culminating in the election of Ekrem İmamoğlu after the repeat election of 23 June 2019.

We take the first two periods of AKP hegemony together in respect to the changing nature of populism. In charting the AKP’s trajectory of rule, 2002–07 is taken as a period of demilitarisation, consolidation of democracy, and economic growth. The relationship between the people and the power bloc in the first period might be described as a populistic unity. This period can also be characterised by the reconstitution of the state apparatus in line with the AKP’s Islamist ideology. At this stage, the AKP had to work with existing institutions to establish its hegemony presenting its hegemonic project in a democratic way. As Poulantzas argues, any apparatus that is already dominant can be transformed into a privileged centre of its interests.\textsuperscript{59} Indeed, this was the AKP’s main ambition when its hegemony was still weak.

The AKP’s main target in this period was the tutelary military regime, undertaking civilisation measures to increase the power of civil rule over state institutions. At this stage, the institutional mechanisms of building a sustainable hegemony were established. Democratic reforms were undertaken in line with the requirements of EU membership. The government used the EU candidacy as a pretext for engaging, in Gramsci’s terms, a ‘war of manoeuvre’ to combat civil military tutelage and deepen its domestic and regional hegemony. In the AKP’s hegemonic discourse, civilisation was used in exchange with democratisation. In the words of Laclau, this period was characterised by attempts for the ‘democratisation of democracy’.\textsuperscript{60} The regional mechanisms of neoliberal hegemonic depth were also formed. Given its economic success in achieving high growth rates, the AKP in this period was considered as the guardian of neoliberal policies in the Middle East, and as a bridge between Islam and democracy – in short, an instrument of neoliberal hegemonic depth. Agential interests were integrated and overdetermined by both the structural conditions of local, regional, and global requirements of capital accumulation.

The AKP’s economic policies were based on principles of neoliberal-economic governance such as the stand-by agreements and the structural adjustment packages of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) involving financial and capital account liberalisation, tight monetary policy, and the privatisation of state enterprises. The main consequences of these policies were unstable work conditions, development of an informal and flexible labour market, and sluggish real wages. However, instead of a confrontation with the working classes, the AKP followed a hegemonic strategy of co-opting working-class resentment by adopting various populist measures while seeking to atomise the working classes and neutralise class antagonisms.\textsuperscript{61} Accordingly, it pursued populist policies of social and financial inclusion of the marginalised sectors.

\textsuperscript{58}See Yalvaç, ‘Strategic depth or hegemonic depth’ for further elaboration.
\textsuperscript{59}Poulantzas, \textit{State, Power and Socialism}, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{60}Mudde and Kaltwasser, \textit{Populism}, p. 79.
In other words the AKP eliminated a class-based collective form of politics, which in return required an authoritarian state. However, it simultaneously advocated populist welfare policies to maintain its hegemony. The main cause of the affinity between (neo)populism and neoliberalism ultimately can be traced to the class nature of neoliberal politics.

The populist policies implemented were also compatible with the institutions of neoliberal governance such as the World Bank, which was encouraging a worldwide ‘fight against poverty’.

Some scholars characterise AKP policies in this period as social liberalism to refer to its policy of financial and social inclusion and inclusive growth. Ziya Öniş, for instance, uses this concept to conceptualise the AKP’s effective use of ‘redistributive politics as a tool for electoral support’. The populist welfare programmes comprised of different redistributive social assistance programmes, such as the Green Card System providing health benefits, the ensuing General Health Insurance System expanding insurance coverage to all citizens, and the Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) programme oriented to meeting the needs of the poorest households. Extending bank loans to those previously excluded from the banking system made it possible to incorporate them into the consumer market as well as reduce their inclination for challenging the system. These policies helped reduce social tensions without any alteration in the implementation of neoliberal policies. In short, it facilitated neoliberalism’s acceptance by those who are most adversely affected while controlling class politics through patronage networks and clientelistic ties.

The second period of AKP hegemonic rule was a transitional phase between 2007 and the 2011 elections where the AKP further consolidated its hegemony, particularly increasing its power over the state apparatus. In this period, the strength of the military was further reduced and a new power foci was created based on the AKP-Cemaat (the Gülenists) alliance. In this period, the relations with the military once again deteriorated in the reaction of the military to Abdullah Gül’s application for presidency. The military was against the election of an Islamist president and saw this as a threat to the secular nature of the regime, showing its muscle by issuing an e-memorandum on 27 April 2007 against Gül’s presidential candidacy. Gül eventually was elected as the 11th president of the Republic in August 2008. This was the AKP’s most significant victory against the tutelage of civil-military bureaucracy, consolidating its hegemonic depth within the state apparatus. After the Constitutional Referendum of 2010 and the AKP electoral victory in 2011 general elections, the AKP regime increasingly became more authoritarian.

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62 Aytaç and Öniş argue that unlike Argentina, which had a left-wing populism seeking to redress social inequalities, Erdoğan’s policies, in line with the principles of ‘regulatory neoliberalism’ represent a right-wing populism due to (1) the retreat of the state to a primarily regulatory function; (2) the emphasis on pro-capital policies and a general neglect of labour interests, and (3) a rather reactive and conservative macroeconomic policy- making. Ibid., pp. 4–45; see also Ümit Akçay, ‘Neoliberal Populism in Turkey and its Crisis’, Working Paper No. 100 (Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Recht Berlin/Institute for International Political Economy Berlin, 2008), p. 3.


68 Some scholars argue that there was a transition from authoritarian statist to fascism as an exceptional form of state after 2011. See, among others, Haldun Gülapal, ‘Askeri Darbe, Sivil Faşizm [Military coup, civilian fascism]’, Birikim (17 October
Crisis within the hegemonic bloc and the state of exception

The landslide victory in the 2007 elections also gave a glimpse of the increasing authoritarianism that was to come. Two issues in particular affected the AKP’s trajectory of governance and created a crisis within the hegemonic bloc that would lead to the development of partial hegemony. The first major indication of a hegemonic crisis in AKP rule was the Gezi Park protests of June 2013 based on an alliance of secular democratic forces against the AKP government. The second one was the split in the power bloc itself, leading to the most significant crisis of hegemony since the AKP came to power.

The counterhegemonic resistance of the Gezi Park Protests erupted to oppose a planned construction of a shopping complex in Gezi Park, Taksim Square in Istanbul. The protests spread to the whole country after the police used violence to suppress them, leading to the emergence of a new external enemy, a new ‘equivalent’ in the terminology of Laclau consisting of the republicans, secularists, the students, the unemployed, women of different background and LGBT groups who were seen as obstacles to the realisation of the ‘national will’.

The second crisis of hegemony manifested itself within the power bloc between Gülenists (followers of Fethullah Gülen) and the AKP, culminating in the disintegration of the alliance between the two and a shift towards greater authoritarianism. Gülen had been a close ally of Erdoğan since the beginning of AKP rule and had achieved enormous power through his control of media and educational institutions, having established private schools in many parts of the world. The populist infrastructure of AKP governance was already established by the Gülen movement as early as the 1970s through a network of private schools and different charities. The Gülen network steadily increased its powers within the police, the army, the judiciary, and the intelligence services. As Jessop mentions, the state’s ‘different apparatuses, sections, and levels serve as power centres for different fractions or fractional alliances in the power bloc’. Indeed, in the power vacuum left after the removal of Kemalist cadres from the state apparatus, the power of Gülenists had also increased in the key institutions of the state apparatus, forming a network of what Erdoğan later was to call a ‘deep’ or ‘parallel’ state. The main cause of the split between the Gülenists and the AKP was their exclusion from the public procurements process and thus spoils of the system. Gülenists felt that they were being treated unfairly given their power and the support they had given to the regime since the movement began. The AKP, on the other hand, was increasingly running the state in the form of concentric circles with close family members in the front.

A turning point occurred in the relations between the Gülenists and the AKP following the charges against Erdoğan, his son, and some of the ministers for corruption launched by the Gülenist prosecutors, judges, and police in what is known as the ‘17–25 December 2013 events’. Indeed, the split with the Gülen group demonstrated the shaky alliance of interests within the power bloc. The relation between the two groups ended up in a final clash and the failed coup attempt by the Gülenists on 15 July 2016. After this the main ‘internal enemy’ was identified

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69 ‘A hegemonic bloc is a ‘broader ensemble of national popular forces mobilised behind a specific hegemonic project’ based on a durable alliance organised by a class or class fraction.’ Jessop, The State Theory, p. 74.


71 Sunger Savran, ‘Islamcilik, AKP, Burjuvazinin İç Savaşı [Islamism, AKP, the internal war of the bourgeoisie]’, in E. Balkan, N. Balkan, and A. Oncu (eds), Neoliberalizm, Islamci Sermayenin Yukselisi ve AKP [Neoliberalism, the Rise of Islamic Capital and the AKP] (Istanbul: Yordam, 2014), pp. 53–142.

72 ‘A hegemonic bloc is a “broader ensemble of national popular forces mobilised behind a specific hegemonic project”’ Jessop, The State Theory, p. 74.


75 Erik Meyersson, ‘Has the AKP facilitated cronyism through public procurement reforms in Turkey?’, Erik Meyersson Blog (31 March 2016).
with the Gülenists who had so far, allegedly, had illegitimately occupied key positions within the military and the state apparatus thus legitimising further authoritarianism of AKP rule. A state of emergency was declared on 20 July 2016, which was extended until after the elections of 24 June 2018. It was the Gülenist coup attempt more than any other incident that hastened the reconfiguration of the state apparatus in the direction of authoritarian statism, the creation of a neoliberal security state,74 and the institution of partial hegemony. A referendum was held in April 2017 and the amendment of the constitution received 51.4 per cent of the votes in favour of instituting an executive presidential regime institutionalising the mechanisms for more deeply embedding the state of exception.75 This transformation as a whole can be understood as complexly stratified across different structures, practices, and agents — caused both by an agential conflict due to a split within the power bloc and ‘the permanent instability of the bourgeoisie’s hegemony’76 (itself determined by more structural causes or what Poulantzas calls ‘a structural characteristic of the present phase’).77 This was overdetermined by the limits of neoliberal policies, which were becoming increasingly difficult to pursue both with respect to fulfilling the demands of different sections of the power bloc as well as with respect to popular demands of democracy and partial hegemony.

**Foreign policy as an instrument of hegemonic depth**

One of the key symbolic and ideological ‘equivalences’ of populism is nationalism. The articulation of populist and nationalist signifiers relate to the relevant hegemonic project that is pursued78 as well as to the stage of hegemonic depth. Populism and nationalism are related to each other in different ways but both are in turn imbricated with the related class interests that shape the hegemonic project. This can be seen in the way in which the AKP has utilised the concepts of the nation, national history, homeland, and national interest,79 both in its domestic as well as foreign policy discourse to secure the unity of the power bloc and consolidate its hegemonic depth.

Nationalism is not a neutral instrument of hegemony. While Laclau’s approach to populism suggests that it is a ‘floating signifier’, our approach sees it as more than a discursive category since different conceptions of nationalism entail deeper-rooted hegemonic projects that are sites of hegemonic struggle. The modern nation as Poulantzas argues is ‘the outcome of a relationship of forces between the “modern social classes” — one in which the nation is a stake for the various classes’.80 This can be observed in the way nationalism has functioned in the AKP’s hegemonic project. The most important aspect of the AKP’s use of the conception of nationalism in

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76Poulantzas, State Power, Socialism, p. 211.
77Ibid.
78Benjamin de Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Distinctions and articulations: a discourse theoretical framework for the study of populism and nationalism’, Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture, 24:4 (2017), pp. 301–19 (p. 312) mention this in the context of political projects. We see this as part of a broader hegemonic project linking class interests with domestic and international structures. The authors distinguish populism and nationalism ‘as different ways of discursively constructing and claiming to represent “the people”’ (p. 302). Following Laclau, they argue that ‘a discourse-theoretical approach to populism and nationalism … shifts away from “mainly sociological categories” … to the underlying logics that make these categories possible’ (p. 305). In our analysis, the underlying logic precisely refers to those sociological categories that pertain to social structures and class relations.
79Saracůlu and Demirkol, ‘Nationalism and foreign policy discourse’, p. 301.
the first stage of its hegemony has been the role ascribed to Muslimhood in the definition of the nation.81 During the formation of the Republic, Turkishness was a significant marker in defining national identity. However, the definition of the Turk included not only the Muslim people but also the non-Turkish Muslim peoples of Anatolia with a view to assimilating them to the newly born Republic.82 However, religion has assumed an independent importance of its own during the AKP period. The AKP defines the nation not in terms of Turkishness, but with respect to being a Sunni Muslim.83 This made it possible to include other ethnic minorities such as the Kurds under the definition of nation. Therefore, AKP nationalism can be included under the category of what Jessop calls inclusive nationalism, which implies that it successfully presents its interests as those of the people-nation as a whole.84 During AKP rule, the symbolic and discursive importance of being a Muslim therefore assumed a different meaning. However, populist politics concerning nationalism has not been restricted to the national boundaries and has also been transnationally and regionally articulated.

In fact, an important part of the AKP’s populism in its foreign policy was initially formulated in Islamic civilisational terms rather than national terms.85 The nation itself has sometimes been defined as encompassing different elements within the Islamic civilisation (such as Sunnis). This conception was particularly important in Ahmet Davutoğlu’s concept of strategic depth which emphasised Turkey’s Ottoman legacy and its historical responsibilities in the Middle East emanating from its historical past, denoting a ‘sense of social belonging constructed upon a strong historical socio-cultural basis’.86 According to Davutoğlu, Kemalism had ignored the cultural/civilisational essence of the Turkish nation that is rooted in its Ottoman past. Nevertheless, the civilisational aspect of AKP populism and its policy of external hegemonic depth has not involved a hegemonic project of domination (though it sometimes reviled nostalgic feelings towards the Ottoman Empire as in the desire of Erdoğan to pray in the Emevi Mosque in Aleppo) but one of becoming a leader in the region based on a common historical past and religion. However, the AKP eventually had to compromise its policy of strategic depth with its national populist interests and the current needs of global neoliberal hegemony that formed its class basis. The ‘realist moment’87 of strategic rivalry in the Middle East therefore made it impossible for Turkey to realise its regional political and economic hegemonic depth forcing it back to domestic markets particularly in the unproductive construction sector heavily exposing the economy to the inflow of foreign capital for its growth. The fate of the policy of strategic depth eventually was overdetermined by the underlying social relations, class interests, and the political and the economic global juncture.88

Neo-Ottomanism, as a foreign policy discourse, influenced AKP foreign policy, particularly in its second term. After the 2008 economic crisis, the AKP turned its face to the Middle Eastern markets emphasising the significance of a Sunni-Islamic identity for the AKP’s foreign policy. This was intended to secure the interests of the green capital in the Middle East, which was unable to compete with the first generation bourgeoisie in other traditional European markets. In this context, it has supported jihadist forces fighting against Syria by supporting Iraq and

81Ibid.
83See Açıkgöz, ‘İslamcılık üç ideolojik ve üç politik dönüşümü’, passim.
88See Yalvaç, ’Strategic depth or hegemonic depth’.
ISID. In the same period, by threatening to keep the Syrian refugees within its borders, it has also challenged the EU. Its concepts of civilisation and the nation were instrumentalised and have in turn changed according to the circumstances. However, it is fair to say that the AKP’s foreign policy discourse of strategic depth, as well its aim to establish itself as a hegemon in the Middle East, has failed as the AKP became more sectarian in its foreign policy.91 The foreign policy discourse of the AKP has increasingly started to resemble the Kemalist ideas of national independence that had been denied since it came to power, assuming a more realist view (in the traditional IR sense) of national interest and power politics.

The partial hegemony of populism

The period of AKP rule after 2011 can be characterised as the transition from a period of broader hegemony based on a passive revolution from above to a narrower, more authoritarian populism. This can also be expressed as the institutionalisation of a ‘partial’ or populist hegemony denoting consent seeking policies towards the supporters of the regime, but greater coercion towards other sections of the ‘people’. As the AKP increased its hegemonic depth, its hegemony started to assume a more ‘partial’ and partisan nature emphasising majoritarianism as the key criteria of being a democracy.90 This contradicted the unitary concept of nation especially employed in its recent foreign policy discourse and manifested itself as a partial hegemony consisting of ‘two nations’ and two groups of people: people who are supporters of the regime and all the ‘others’ who are its opponents. As AKP rule has become more authoritarian, the partial nature of its hegemony not only vis-à-vis its once allies but also towards the ‘second people’ has become more and more visible.

The presidential election of 2014, the June elections of 2015, and the following snap election in November 2015 together with the aborted coup attempt of July 2016 all culminated in an accelerating drift towards authoritarianism and democratic backsliding.91 One of the turning points in

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89Tuğal, The Fall of the Turkish Model, p. 188.
the AKP’s deepening crisis of hegemony was the June 2015 elections when the AKP, despite taking 42.2 per cent of the votes, lost its majority in the parliament for the first time since 2002. However, the AKP regained its majority after the snap elections of November 2015. Nevertheless, the result of the June 2015 elections alerted Erdoğan and led him increasingly to the far right of the political spectrum by establishing an alliance with the ultra-nationalist groups represented by the MHP. Since the coup attempt, the government purged the Gülenists from all state institutions. The adversaries in this process have been variously defined as the nation against the terrorists. The AKP has since openly adopted a policy of partial-populist hegemony, prioritising achieving consensus with the ‘people’ who are its supporters, and resorting to a coercive policy towards the ‘people’ who are against AKP rule. As the AKP has become more authoritarian, a process of state tutelage over the military started replacing the former military tutelage over the state. Consequently, the AKP cadres became the new elite against which new anti-hegemonic forces are to struggle.

Conclusion
In this article, we have adopted a critical realist understanding of the AKP’s populism that relates it to underlying social relations. This better allows us to account for the rise of populism and the different forms it takes. We have argued that different discourses of populism need to be understood in terms of a Gramscian account of hegemonic projects defined in relation to underlying social and class relations. In our explanation, we thus avoid purely discursive or structuralist accounts of populism and restore the role of active agency while putting this in its social context. We do this through the concepts of passive revolution, hegemonic depth, and partial hegemony, allowing us to identify different stages of the AKP’s development and its transformation via different populist discourses, which are themselves rooted in class relations and relations of production.

As the results of the elections of 2018 demonstrate, the polarisation of Turkish society between the ‘people’ and the ‘other people’, the ‘nation’ and the ‘second nation’ seems to have been entrenched. The people’s alliance formed before the 24 June 2018 elections defined the people as those who supported the AKP and MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) alliance. An alternative alliance called the national alliance was formed with the coming together of four other opposition parties. While the AKP claimed to represent the people, the national alliance claimed to represent the nation: the people competed against the ‘second nation’, the nation represented the ‘second people’. The voting results indeed reflected this polarised division between the two nations and the two ‘peoples’.

Authoritarian rule in Turkey today seems to have been fully institutionalised. As Panizza argues, ‘populist leaders are a disturbing intrusion into the uneasy articulation of liberalism and democracy, and raise the spectre of a tyranny with popular support’. AKP populism has indeed been transformed into a ‘populist ventriloquism’ ‘in which the power bloc speaks in the name of the people and dissimulates its own ideas as those of the people.’ The state of emergency declared after the Gülen coup demonstrates that the ruling regime has been transformed into a ‘permanent state of exception’. However, the AKP faced its biggest hegemonic crisis of rule in the 31 March 2019 local elections where it was defeated both in Istanbul and

92As mentioned in the introduction.
95Both the liberal as well as the neo-Schmittian approaches treat the state of emergency as something exceptional to liberal democracy. Poulantzas on the other hand makes a distinction between normal and exceptional, arguing that exceptional state forms are compatible with the functioning of the capitalist mode of production. Neocleous goes one step further arguing that the state of exception is exactly inherent to normal law and is a natural part of liberal democratic rule for managing the social political antagonisms. M. Neocleous, Critique of Security (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).
Ankara, two of the main cities of Turkey that the AKP had governed since 1994. The elections in İstanbul were repeated on 23 June 2019 on charges of ‘theft’ of votes by the opposition. By securing 54.2 per cent of the votes, İmamoğlu has now been elected as the new mayor of İstanbul. His victory signifies a further decline of the hegemonic power of the AKP, a loosening of its hegemonic depth, and a new stage in Turkish politics. On the other hand, it is also likely to lead to a more centralised reconfiguration of the state apparatus by transferring key powers from the municipalities to the central governmen, which will further increase the existing authoritarian trends. The current situation is also ripe for new populist discourses (such as the recent ‘Türkiye’ discourse propogated by Erdoğan) or ‘equivalents’ in an attempt to regain the loss of hegemonic depth. The challenge, however, is much bigger as the AKP’s populism now faces much stronger alternative discourses involving attempts to redefine the ‘nation’ and the ‘people’.

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