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# Why is Democracy in Decline: Democratic Backsliding in Venezuela and Turkey

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WHY IS DEMOCRACY IN DECLINE:
DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING IN VENEZUELA AND TURKEY

by

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# ABSTRACT

It has long been argued that the end of the 20th century marked the triumph of liberal democracy. The third wave of democracy has increased the number of democracies in the world unprecedentedly and gave hope to many that democratic revolution is underway. However, in the last decade, this democratization process seems to have halted; there has been decline both in the number and quality of democracies. This thesis proposes an agent-based theory of democratic backsliding. More specifically, it is argued that leaders with undemocratic normative preferences and their ability to mobilize previously persecuted segments of society are the driving factors behind the present-day authoritarian resurgence. While the leader's fight with the oppressors of the marginalized group can bring a short term of democratization, we argue that the unconditional support given by the marginalized group to the leader can allow the leader to undermine democracy by removing the checks on his power. The paper attempts to investigate similarities in the process of democratic derogation in a comparative case study of Venezuela and Turkey. The study shows that the support given to Erdogan and Chavez by the previously persecuted groups in their respective countries, religious/conservatives in Turkey and poor in Venezuela, allowed both leaders to undermine democracy in a subtle and incremental way.

*To*
*My beloved wife, Esra Nur*
*My lovely family*
*And*
*People who suffer under oppressive regimes*

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# INTRODUCTION

It has long been argued that the end of the 20th century marked the triumph of liberal democracy. The third wave of democracy has increased the number of democracies in the world unprecedentedly and gave hope to many that democratic revolution is underway. However, in the last decade, this democratization process seems to have halted. There has been decline both in the number and quality of democracies worldwide (Diamond 2015). The recent autocratic turn was evident not only in young democracies but also in the older, established ones. In Turkey, the country once portrayed as role-model for Muslim countries for its success in harmonizing democracy with Islam, Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) has moved the country away from democracy by silencing media, cracking down on the opposition, and imprisoning political rivals. On the other side, in Venezuela, one of the oldest democracies in Latin America, Chavez's autocratic rule, has undermined civil and political rights in the country. So, the question is, why do some countries experience democratic backsliding?

The literature is rich with answers attempting to explain why the democracy is in retreat in some countries while not in the others. Some scholars see the political culture in these counties unsuitable for a liberal democracy (Inglehart & Welzel 2005). Others emphasize the weakness of democratic institutions as a cause of democratic degradation (Kapstein & Converse 2008). However, the fact that the recent wave of authoritarianism has occurred in countries where it is least expected by above criteria poses a significant challenge. Turkey have had its highest growth rate in decades under Erdogan's authoritarian rule while both Poland and Hungary were EU members when autocratic tendencies of

became more visible in both countries. My preliminary empirical investigation showed that the recent autocratic wave is driven by leaders with undemocratic normative preferences who were backed by a historically marginalized segment of society. Although neither the undemocratic leaders nor the frustrated masses proved sufficient by themselves for democratic backsliding, their combination has led to the degradation of democracy in many cases. Therefore, I build my theory on Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán(2013)'s argument that the leaders with undemocratic normative preferences is the part of the democratic backsliding mechanism. I argue that the recent trend in some democratic countries toward authoritarianism caused by leader's ability to mobilize previously persecuted segment of the public. While the leader's fight with the old system can bring a short term of democratization, marginalized groups' unconditional support to the leader allows the leader to do more than fighting the old system: it enables the leader to destroy all democratic constrains on his power. Democratic backsliding comes as a result of a three-step process: leader starts fighting with the establishment and the country experiences a short term of pseudo-democratization, the marginalized group supports leader unconditionally, the leader uses his power not just to fight with the establishment but to remove checks on his power.

In this paper, I start with the definition of democracy and discuss the democratic backsliding. Then, various explanations for the causes of democratic decline will be discussed. I attempt to show that the existing institutional, socio-economical, and international explanations are not enough to account for the decline of democracy. Then, I argue that democratic backsliding comes as a result of combination of undemocratic leaders with the frustration of certain groups in the society who has been excluded from the system. The study shows that in two prominent cases of democratic backsliding in the twenty-first

century, the abovementioned mechanism was in effect. In both Venezuela and Turkey, the leaders, Chavez and Erdogan, used the power that is given by the marginalized groups in their society, poor and religious/conservatives respectively, to fight against establishment to undermine democratic checks on their power.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Is Democratic Backsliding Real?

Why do some countries experience democratic backsliding? Any attempt to answer this question should start with the discussion of whether there is a backsliding or not. The literature on the regime transition provides contradicting views. While the world witnessed the proliferation of democracies all around the world during since the third wave of democratization, whether the trend continues in the twenty-first country is a matter of discussion among the political scientists. Some scholars argue that in last two decades, there is a significant decrease both in the quantity and the quality of democracy in the world (Diamond 2002, 2010; Kapstein & Converse 2008). Diamond (2014) contends that the rise of democracy in the world came to a prolonged halt. Since 2006, there has been no expansion in the number of democracies and the average level of freedom in the world has decreased by a small margin (Diamond 2002, 2014). The trend was especially visible among developing countries (Kapstein & Converse 2008). On the other side, other scholars contend that the idea of democratic backsliding derives from scholars' misperceptions (Levitsky & Way 2015; Carothers 2002). excessively optimistic and unrealistic understanding of events in the 1990s has led scholars to assume a linear path from autocracy to democracy (Carothers 2002). However, the relative political pluralism in the 1990s resulted from the weakness of authoritarian regimes and as the autocrats returned to power, the illusion of democratization faded away leaving many pro-democracy scholars in disappointment (Levitsky & Way 2015).

In general, while some scholars might be exaggerating the number of democratic breakdowns, the recent incidents of authoritarianism cannot simply be explained as unsuccessful attempts of democratization. The current global wave of authoritarianism is especially evident in countries such as Turkey, Venezuela, Philippines which met with democracy before the third wave of democratization. Political parties and relatively competitive multi-party elections were by no means new to the backsliding countries: the history of political parties dates back to the 1930s in Philippines and multi-party elections have been held in Turkey since 1950s. Therefore, while we can safely conclude that the recent authoritarian trend is a reality, understanding the nature of this phenomena requires further deliberation.

## How Do We Define Democracy and Democratic Backsliding?

At the most basic level, conflicting reports regarding the performance of democracy are rooted in the question of how to define and measure democracy. The discussion on the definition can be narrowed to the two understandings of democracy: minimalist and maximalist. On the one hand, Przeworski (2000) and Schumpeter rely on a more procedural definition of democracy where filling office through free and fair elections considered sufficient for being classified as a democracy. On the other hand, Robert Dahl's (1971) definition of polyarchy brings more robust criteria and expect a democracy to provide certain civil and political liberties, media freedom and so on. Various definitions of democracy inevitably lead to different measurements. Levitsky and Way (2015) argue that once we exclude democratic moments, meaning a short period of relaxation from an authoritarian regime, 16 of Diamond's 25 cases of democratic breakdowns disappear. However, even Levitsky and Way recognize that some unambitiously democratic, such as Venezuela and

Thailand, and near-democratic, such as Nicaragua and Sri Lanka, went into an authoritarian transformation.

These different viewpoints indicate a fact about democracy. Regardless of the definition of democracy adopted, Diamond (2014) emphasizes that democracy is in many ways a continuous variable and the continuous variation on the parameters of democracy forces scholars to make subjective evaluations and set subjective threshold upon which the countries are regarded democracy. Therefore, it can be inferred that the one's perception of democratic backsliding will inevitably be influenced by how he defines and measures democracy.

I believe that adopting a maximalist understanding of democracy would be more helpful in terms of detecting democratic backsliding. First of all, democracy is a multidimensional and continuous variable and election by itself is not a good indicator of democracy. Civil rights, political freedoms, free and independent media etc. are the characteristics of functioning democracy and any attempt to define democracy should encompass these features (Diamond 2010). Secondly, the way the autocrats undermine democracy has changed significantly (Bermeo 2016). In the past, more blatant forms of democratic degradation like coups and election-day fraud were widespread but today democratic decline comes at the hands of democratically elected governments. Regarding the definition of democracy, I embrace, the definition of democratic backsliding should target to detect defects not only in the procedural but also substantial aspects of democracy. Therefore, I believe that Bermeo's (2016) definition of democratic backsliding is the most compelling one: "state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy". However, it should be noted that an 'existing democracy' should be

understood as democracy in maximalist approach. It means that apart from procedural characteristics, democracy should meet some substantial criteria such as the ones set by Dahl. At least three of the six criteria that Dahl regards as the sine qua non of democracy should be added to the minimalist definition of democracy: (1) freedom of expression, (2) alternative sources of information, and (3) associational autonomy or freedom of assembly (Dahl 2015). While the other three criteria, (1) elected officials, (2) free, fair, frequent elections, and (3) inclusive citizenship are implicitly or explicitly included in the minimalist definition of democracy, first three criteria allow us to consider hard to measure, substantial features of democracy.

As a result, while Levitsky and Way's approach shows that some democracies have never been democracies, it is obvious that the democracy is in retreat in a global scale in some other relatively established democracies. Once we agreed that the democratic backsliding is real, Bermeo's (2016) definition rightly assumes that democratic backsliding comes through state's own actions and the actions targets 'any of the political institutions', not just elections. Therefore, I will adopt a modified version of Bermeo's (2016) definition of democratic backsliding in the rest of the paper providing that the democracy is defined in a maximalist approach.

### Why Does Democratic Backsliding Happen?

There have been numerous studies dedicated to understanding decline of democracy. The factors that are presented by scholars as leading to democratic backsliding can be sorted out four broad categories: Institutional, Socioeconomic, International, and Actor-based.

Political institutions have long been at the heart of the discussion on democratic backsliding. The institutions are difficult to be created, and once they are created, their effects are deep and lasting. What gives an institution its power is the institutions ability to sanction non-conforming actors and behaviors (Lust, Waldner 2015). Scholars argue that certain institutional designs make democracies more vulnerable and likely to trigger a transition to autocratic rule. In the literature, it is argued that presidentialism as opposed to parliamentarism (Linz 1990; Maeda 2010), lack of independent and established judiciary (Gibler & Randazzo, 2011), low level of constrains on executive power (Kapstein & Converse 2008), non-consociational political institutions in pluralist societies (Lijphart 1977), render democracies more prone to autocratic turn. The debate on institutions has two implications for democratic backsliding. First, institutions can be designed to constrain executive and prevent the leaders from sliding the country into authoritarianism ((Linz, 1990; Maeda 2010; Gibler & Randazzo 2011; Kapstein & Converse 2008). Secondly, certain institutional designs can foster principles of consensus and power-sharing/power dividing and therefore, prevent instability and unconstrained competition (Lijphart 1977; Roeder & Rothchild 2005).

While the institutionalists emphasize the role of institutions in preventing democratic degradation, the recent examples of democratic degradation took place in countries where the institutionalist would expect the institutions to prevent the autocratic turn. Contrary to the Linz's (1990) expectations, Turkey was both parliamentary democracy when it entered into autocratic phase. Also, in Turkey, there has been relatively independent judiciary before the democratic recession. Turkey was in EU accession process and fulfilled many judicial

reforms to ensure the independence of the judiciary. Likewise, the democratic institutions in these countries were relatively settled. As being one of the oldest democracies in Latin America, Chavez had to overcome many challenges posed by rival political parties and judiciary in Venezuela. Lastly, the reforms undertaken by Hungary didn't stop countries slide into an authoritarian rule. Despite adopting a comprehensive reform program that required Hungary to create market capitalist economy and separate the branch of powers (Onis 2017), Hungary couldn't escape from experiencing democratic backsliding.

*Socio-Economic*

The other group of scholars relies on socio-economic factors to explain democratic retreat. It is argued that low per-capita income (Kapstein & Converse, 2008; Przeworski, et al. 2000), low economic growth and development (Maeda 2010), high economic inequality (Acemoglu & Robinson 2006; Kapstein & Converse 2008), oil income (Ross 2001), subordination of women (Fish 2002), lack of civic culture (Inglehart & Welzel 2005) increases the likelihood of democratic breakdown. Social and economic factors are linked to democratic backsliding in several ways. Low level of economic growth and development can harm the legitimacy of the incumbent and render the incumbent more fragile to 'exogenous threats' and 'informal exit' (Maeda 2010). Oil wealth reduces the incumbent's dependency on taxation and decreases the accountability of the leader (Ross, 2001). Also, high inequality might motivate elites to undermine democracy to prevent the implementation of redistributive policies through democratic channels (Acemoglu & Robinson 2006). On the other side, lack of civil culture and fundamental democratic values ease the transition from democracy to autocracy (Inglehart & Welzel 2005).

On the other side, the favorable socio-economic factors didn't stop Turkey from sliding into authoritarianism. When the democratic degradation started, Turkey was growing at a pace of %5 annually. it has had higher GDP per capita than the threshold (equal of Argentina's GDP per-capita in 1976) that was set by Przeworski (1976) and assumed to be the level above which no democracy should ever fell.

### *International*

The scholars who emphasize the role of international factors argue that international actors can facilitate or hinder democratic backsliding. More specifically, it is argued that low level of Western leverage and linkage (Levitsky & Way 2002), dependence on foreign aid (Acemoglu & Robinson 2004), expansion in autocracies' hinterland (Diamond 2015) increases the likelihood of democratic breakdown. The underlying assumption is that leverage to the democratic world increases the cost of transition to autocracy (Levitsky & Way 2002). Likewise, Larry Diamond (2015) claims that one of the reasons behind the resurge of autocracy in the last decade is the diminishing influence of the US and EU over hybrid regimes vis-à-vis autocracies like China and Russia.

However, Turkey's geographical and political proximity to the West couldn't stop its autocratic turn. The EU is Turkey's number one import and export trade partner and the and has been the member of NATO since 1952. Despite that, democracy is in retreat in Turkey. On the other side, the retreat of democracy in Hungary and Poland occurred after both countries became full members of EU.

# THEORY AND METHODS

## Defining Concepts: Undemocratic Leaders and Marginalized Group

Examining all the arguments, I believe that an actor-based approach could help to understand the recent authoritarian wave in the world. The empirical evidence from the recent examples of democratic backsliding shows that institutional, socio-economical, and international arguments doesn't fully explain the recent authoritarian wave in the world. In this step, Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán (2013) present an actor-based approach to study democratic backsliding. Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán (2013) say that the leaders' normative preferences and policy radicalism can either facilitate or prevent transition to autocracy. More specifically, they argue that the leader's lack of commitment to democratic values and their tendency to follow radical policies increase the risk of autocratic turn. To understand the recent autocratic trend in the world, I propose to use an actor-based approach: democratic backsliding occurs when the political leaders with undemocratic normative preferences mobilize the certain segment of society who holds grievances from the past and whose support is enough to bring the leaders to power.

Regarding the first factor, I built on the Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán (2013) who see leader's undemocratic affiliation as the causes of democratic breakdown. Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán(2013) defines having a *normative preference for democracy* as such that "an actor values democracy intrinsically- in other words, above any specific policy outcomes". Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán(2013) argues that the leader's commitment to democracy might be understood from his willingness to incur policy costs in order to defend competitive

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regime. Although I mostly adopt Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán's conceptualization of democratic/undemocratic leaders, I believe that defining undemocratic leaders, rather than the democratic ones, would be more helpful. I have two reasons to contest Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán's definition: First of all, defining democratic leaders requires us to specify the democratic norms that we expect leaders to uphold. However, almost every leader might be caught in breach of one of the democratic principals in his political life even if this behavior is not consistent. Therefore, defining the democratic leaders, rather than the undemocratic ones, means setting the bar high for the leaders and might led scholars to wrongfully label leaders with commitment to democracy as "undemocratic leaders". Secondly, defining democratic leaders requires scholars to define the concept in positive terms and look for the positive traits among leaders. However, actions that violates democratic norms are easier to detect than the actions that are compatible with democracy. In most cases, leader's undemocratic practices will be more remarkable and draw attention from media, international community and public. Therefore, defining undemocratic leaders will allow us to conceptualize undemocratic leaders through undemocratic actions and ultimately will make it easy to decide whether a leader is democratic or democratic. I will define undemocratic leaders as the actors who doesn't value democracy intrinsically, and therefore, doesn't uphold democracy above any specific policy outcomes.

Undemocratic leaders might be willing to subvert democratic regimes for several reasons. First, leader's ideological affiliation can make them hostile to democratic regimes. Some ideologies are inherently hostile to democratic order (e.g. Fascism (Wellhofer 2003), Radical Islam (Fukuyama 2006)) and their followers might be ready to subvert the regime whenever they have a chance. Secondly, democratic norms and institutions might constrain

leader's power. Some fundamental principles of democracy, such as division of power, accountability, transparency, might disturb the leaders who don't believe the value of such principals in the first place.

On the other side, the marginalized segment of the society can be conceptualized by using Frances Stewart's (2008) theory of horizontal inequality. According to horizontal inequality theory, inequality between various groups within the society as opposed to inequality between individuals and households is the main motivation behind the conflicts. The theory suggests that deep resentment occurs when "cultural differences coincide with economic and political differences between groups" (Stewart and Brown, 2007). Relying on the civil war literature, I will argue that horizontal inequalities are the motivation behind the group mobilization (Langer 2006). The previously persecuted segment of public will be inclined to elect the leader who will help them to fight the injustices that they have been exposed to. In this step, leader's personal traits become important. Besley's (2005) political selection theory might illuminate why the persecuted group will look for certain leaders. Besley argues that, contrary to the expectations of conventional theories of conflicting voter interests, the characteristics of the elected politician matter for the society. The marginalized group might choose the undemocratic leader knowing his/her undemocratic tendencies. The group might support the leader regardless of his undemocratic tendencies due to overlapping interests, ideology etc. between the leader and the group. The support of the group might continue even the leader's undemocratic tendencies weren't clear initially and became visible later on. The marginalized group might still support the leaders as long as his undemocratic actions don't endanger their interest.

When it comes to the conceptualization of marginalized group, Stewart mentions conditions such as the recognizability of the group (both by the members of the group and outsiders), difficulty of movement from one group to another for horizontal inequality to exist. Although I use Stewart's conceptualization of horizontal inequality to define marginalized group, my conceptualization of marginalized group differs from Stewart's conceptualization when it comes to what constitutes a group. While Stewart contends that the groups should be either ethnic, racial, or religious, I propose that the group identity is constructed by the marginalization process that precedes victory of the leader-group coalition and doesn't have to based on one of the three commonalities mentioned above. While ethnicity, race, or religion might be decisive in some cases, factors other than these identities such as economic deprivation during the marginalization process might be a defining characteristic of the group. In sum, I conceptualize marginalization as the persecution/exclusion of a certain group of people in the political, social, or economic sphere due to a common identity/interest among the members of the group which creates a collective consciousness among group members. Therefore, marginalized group is a group that is (1) recognizable by both its members and outsiders, (2) difficult to move in and move out, and (3) consists of people who hold grievances due to prior persecutions.  In that sense, black people in the United States might fit into the definition of marginalized group. On the other side, Republicans or Democrats cannot be considered as a marginalized group since the people in both groups doesn't have a common history of persecution.

**A Leader-Based Approach to Democratic Backsliding**

Table 1: Role of Leader and Marginalized Group in Democratic Backsliding

|  | Undemocratic Leader | Democratic Leader |
|---|---|---|
| Marginalized Group | Democratic Backsliding | Less Favorable Environment for Democratic Backsliding |
| Non-Marginalized Group | Less Favorable Environment for Democratic Backsliding | No Backsliding Expected |

I argue that the democratic backsliding comes with the combination of two factors that are the necessary part of a condition which is itself unnecessary but sufficient for the result (INUS) (Wagemann 2017): (1) the existence of leaders with undemocratic normative preferences and (2) support from the marginalized group within the society whose support is continuous and large enough to empower the leader. None of these factors are sufficient enough by itself to trigger the hypothesized result. However, once they are brought together with other necessary conditions, they became sufficient to initiate the process. While the unconditional support given by the marginalized group to the leader is supposed to be used against the persecutors and could bring short terms of democratization, after defeating the oppressors, the leaders begin to use this power to undermine democratic institutions. Undemocratic leader's hostility toward democratic institutions stems from their majoritarian understanding of democracy: they see any check on their power as an intervention to the national will since they portray themselves as the embodiment of the national will. When the

leader starts to use this power to attack democratic institutions, the marginalized group has no choice but to support the leader since it is too costly for them to abandon their leader in this fight (Slavik 2017). In sum, the support given by the marginalized group to eliminate its rivals in the politics allows undemocratic leaders to consolidate their power at the expense of democracy.

When democratic backsliding occurs as a result of the combination of undemocratic leader and marginalized group, we expect a certain mechanism of backsliding to exist. First, when a certain group, whose support is enough to bring the undemocratic leader to power without making too much concessions, is marginalized in the country, the group becomes ready to support the leader who pledge to protect the group's interests. Then, to appeal to the marginalized group, the leader starts fighting with the old regime which tried to keep the marginalized group out of the system. In this step, given to the old regime's certain undemocratic characteristics, fight with the old regime brings a short term of democratization. The short term of democratization comes as a result of the weakening of the institutions that are the instruments of the old regime and used by the regime protect their interests at the expense of majority. However, at the end, the unconditional support given to the leader allows him not just to fight with establishment but also eliminate the check and balances on his power which end up with the collapse of democracy. In sum, we can say that the mechanism of democratic backsliding is threefold: (1) leader's fight with establishment and pseudo-democratization phase, (2) marginalized people's unconditional support for the leader in this fight, (3) erosion of check and balances and weakening of democratic institutions that result with erosion of democracy. These three steps don't have to occur in a

chronological order and they are rather intertwined with each other during the leader's

incumbency.

Fight with Establishment and Pseudo-Democratization → Unconditional Support from the Marginalized Group → Elimination of Checks and Balances → DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

Figure 1:Mechanism of Democratic Backsliding

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On the one hand, while the convergence of the two factors, undemocratic leaders and marginalized group, could bring democratic backsliding, lack of one of these two factor can save the democracy. When the marginalized group exists with a democratic leader, it is likely that the leader and group will pursue their interest within the system without destroying democracy. A democratic leader can appeal to the needs of the marginalized group by negotiating with the other political actors in the system. In this case, the leader will still have a strong backing of the marginalized group but we expect him to use this power to gain concessions within the system without destroying democracy. However, the existence of a marginalized group can still be a threat to democracy since it is easy for an undemocratic leader to gain popularity once the society is polarized and a certain group is marginalized.

On the other hand, the existence of an undemocratic leader without a marginalized group is also less likely to trigger the mechanism of democratic backsliding that we mentioned. In our model, the existence of the marginalized group precedes the leaders' rise into power and we expect leaders to be come to power as a result of the support from the marginalized group. For democratic backsliding to occur in the way we explained, the leader should be supported extensively and continuously by the marginalized group to come to power and fight with the establishment. Democratic backsliding comes as a result of a process, rather than a specific moment/event, and therefore, without the backing of the marginalized group it is unlikely for a leader to come to power first, and then undermine democracy in the way we specified.

Lastly, if neither of these factors exists, we expect likelihood of democratic backsliding to be the lowest. Without a leader to lead the de-democratization process and a marginalized group to support the leaders in the process, it is difficult to trigger and maintain

the mechanism of democratic backsliding. While decline in the democracy might be possible through other mechanisms, we argue that the democratic backsliding that we experience in these days is mainly leader-driven. Although I accept that the democratic backsliding can happen in other ways, the mechanism we explained above results in democratic backsliding and it is the main driving factor in present-day decline of democracy.

*Hypothesis: Democratic backsliding occurs when a leader with undemocratic normative preferences is supported by a previously persecuted segment of society.*

## Operationalization of Variables

The first line of the argument suggests that the election of the leaders with undemocratic normative preferences is the INUS cause of the democratic backsliding. Agent-based theories in democracy studies have long emphasized the role of the leaders. Recently, the study by Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán (2013) has shown that the leaders' normative preferences affect the quality of democracy in the country. As a common sense, it can be said that the leaders' perceptions of democracy are reflected in policies they follow. In this study, to measure the normative preferences of political leaders, I will engage in a content analysis. More specifically, I will focus on the publicly available speeches, interviews, statements that the leaders have made during their political career. The primary sources for the study will be the newspapers, magazines, books, biographies, TV programs and other media outlets. I will follow the scheme presented by Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán (2013), and decide the position of leaders toward democracy. In their scheme, Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán (2013) ask following questions to decide whether the leaders have undemocratic normative preferences or not:

Whether they;

1) expressed hostility toward democratic institutions [such as parties, legislatures, courts, or electoral bodies] rather than simply challenging their decisions;

2) questioned the validity of democratic procedures when these produced unfavorable results;

3) claimed to be the sole representative of the people[1];

4) questioned the legitimacy of any opposition outside an encompassing national movement; or

5) frequently dismissed peaceful opponents as enemies of the people or the country;

6) attacked civil society and media.

While none of the factors is sufficient by itself to classify a leader undemocratic, these factors will provide a basis for the qualitative evaluation of the leaders' normative preferences.

As mentioned above, the election of leader is not enough by itself, the marginalized segment of the society should give enough support to the leader to come and stay in the power and this support should be continuous and significant. What is important is the leaders' ability to mobilize the previously marginalized portion of the population. This side of the argument has two points.

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[1] While "claiming to be a sole representative of the people" might not be inherently undemocratic, doing it in a way to delegitimize other political actors should be regarded undemocratic. This point should be considered together with the "questioning the legitimacy of opposition" criteria.

First, the supporting group should have a common grievance on which the leader can build his base. There might be various reason for this common grievance, such as oppression of the conservative majority by the state elite in Turkey or the negligence of poor population in Venezuela, but the existence of grievance in the population remains unchanged. In the example of Turkey, marginalized group will be defined as the religious/conservative majority in Turkey who has been excluded from political and social life by the ultra-secular elites of newly established Republic. When it comes to Venezuela, the marginalized group is the poor people, who are generally dark-skinned and live in *cerros* (hills) (Cannon 2008) in Venezuela who has been economically disadvantaged compared to wealthy elite.

Secondly, since the degradation of democracy, requires extended time and the continuing legitimacy of the leader, I argue that the support from the marginalized group has to be significant and continuing. By the word significant, I refer to the magnitude of the support. Although I refrain from drawing certain boundaries, I propose that the support has to be in a magnitude that allows the leader to form the government without a coalition partner, pass legislation, or amend the constitution. Moreover, the support for the leader has to be continuing. Constant support for the leader can be best reflected through repeated election victories since these leaders mostly rely on majoritarian understanding of democracy and the ballot box is the most important instrument to maintain the legitimacy of their regime. Although there are other indicators to measure support for the regime, elections are the only field that the people can freely demonstrate their sentiments about the regime without a fear of persecution. By saying repeated, we refer to two or more election victories for legislative, presidency or constitutional amendments. I argue that the support for the leader is unconditional, meaning that the group will support the leader even if the leader doesn't abide

by democratic norms as long as he continues to protect the interests of the marginalized group. The group cannot cease to support the leader since punishing the leader for his undemocratic practices is too costly in such polarized environment of the struggle with the establishment.

While the support from the marginalized group is the main factor that empowers leader's power, the support from the other members of the coalition is also important. During their fight with the establishment, leaders establish coalition with various political actors such as the business associations, ethnic groups, political movements and so on. Undemocratic leaders use these coalitions to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the old regime to undermine their power. The extend of coalition increases the legitimacy of the leader in domestic and international arena in his struggle against the establishment. However, as the leader completes his takeover of government institutions and need less to the support from the other members of the coalition, it becomes less costly for the leader to break with his coalition partners, and even to eliminate them. What distinguish the marginalized group from the other members of the coalition is that the due to high polarization, marginalized group sees the struggle with the old regime as an existential issue and identify their interests with the leader. Therefore, while it is easier for other groups to leave the coalition when their interests are threatened, it is more difficult for the marginalized group due to their perception of threat to their existence.

Lastly, I will use various sources to measure democratic backsliding in the two countries. Since we aim to measure the damage to democracy made by the leaders and their supportive group, we will focus on the time period when these two factors, leader and marginalized group, were present together. It means that we are focusing on Chavez and

Erdogan's incumbency, from 1998 to 2013 and 2002 to present respectively. As discussed at the beginning of the paper, measuring democratic backsliding requires us to go beyond the procedural indicators of democracy and deal with the substantial aspects of democratic process. Relying on Dahl's criteria for democracy, practices such as filling government agencies with loyalists, weakening civil society, ruling by extraconstitutional power (e.g. presidential decrees) will be regarded as indicators of democratic backsliding. In this step, I will also benefit from reports and indexes from various institutions. Although I will be looking for qualitative measures of democratic backsliding, I will use studies such as Rule of Law Index by World Justice Project, World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, and Judicial Independence Index by World Economic Forum as a secondary source to support my findings.

**Data and Methods**

In this study, two prominent cases of backsliding, namely, Turkey and Venezuela, will be examined. On the one hand, I believe that both countries, Turkey and Venezuela can be considered as democratically backsliding countries for the purpose of the paper. While the two countries have an experience with democracy, the democracy wasn't consolidated and had its own problems in both countries. Excluding the short term of democratization that came in the first years of the fight between the leader and the previous elite, the intensity and rapidity of autocratic actions undermining democratic institutions and procedures in recent years indicates that democracy is in decline in both countries. On the other hand, the democratic backsliding mechanism that lead to the fall of democracy in these two countries is strikingly similar. In both countries, democratic decline came as a result of a three-step process: Erdogan and Chavez's fight with the establishment in their countries, support from

previously persecuted groups, conservatives in Turkey and poor people in Venezuela, for the leaders in their respective countries, and undermining of democratic institutions by Erdogan and Chavez using the power given to them. All in all, their trajectory from democracy to authoritarianism qualifies both countries as democratically backsliding countries for the purpose of the study.

To test our argument, I will use comparative case study method. I will be relying on the Mill's method of difference approach (Gerring 2008). Mill's approach suggests that the common factors found in different cases would be the cause for the similarity in the dependent variable across cases (Bennett 2008). To decide the normative preferences of leaders, I will examine their entire political life and will use speeches, interviews, statements that are publicly available via media outlets. I will study the marginalized/persecuted groups by analyzing the historical trajectory behind the emergence of such groups using secondary sources. Examining the cases, we expect that although there is variation across cases on the factors that are thought to be main causes of backsliding, one factor will be present in all cases: the election of a leader with undemocratic normative preferences and the support from the marginalized group. I argue that our hypothesized factor is present in all cases demonstrates its relationship with the decline in democracy.

What is common among the two prominent examples of the democratic backsliding is the leader's role in undermining democracy and support for them coming from a certain segment of the society. While both leaders, Erdogan and Chavez, undermined democracy in their countries, they also showed hostility toward democratic institutions and procedures in their tenure or beforehand (Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán 2013). As an example, Erdogan declared that he doesn't obey and respect a Supreme Court decision which was in favor of a

dissenting journalist. Chavez plotted a coup attempt before coming to power through elections and made similar remarks. Also, the people whose support was vital for the leaders in their respective countries can be conceptualized as marginalized/persecuted groups. In Turkey, while Erdogan's base consisted of a wide variety of groups, the main support for him came from the pious/conservatives who has been discriminated by secular/republican elite in political and social life (Ozbudun 2006). Similarly, while Chavez was able to get the support of a broad group of coalition of groups including leftists, military officers, and middle class, the backbone of the coalition was the poor of Venezuela who were neglected by the political elite for a long time and were able to raise their voice during Chavez's tenure. What distinguish marginalized group from the other members of the coalitions is that for the marginalized group, elections are not just a policy preference but an existential battle between "us" and "them" (Slavik 2017). Therefore, while the other members of coalition can choose not to support the leaders for his policy preferences, polarization produced as a result of the battle with the establishment makes marginalized group feel that their existence and achievements are threatened and leave them with no choice but to support the leader.

I believe that the cases selected in our model will allow us to make comparison across competing explanations and make cake causal inferences. The cases that we select shows greater variation across potential explanations for democratic backsliding. For instance, some theories that see culture as the reason behind the decline in democracy sees Islam as the main factor for democratic degradation (Fish 2002). However, in our study, one country, Venezuela, that has experienced democratic decline is predominantly Christian. Furthermore, theories focusing on international factors would argue that affiliation with the democratic organization would prevent democratic backsliding. However, it didn't happen in the case of

Turkey, a candidate for membership of EU. When it comes to the economic factors, the two

countries show significant variation. For instance, income inequality is significantly higher in

Venezuela than Turkey. When it comes to the GDP per capita, Turkey has much higher GDP

per capita rates than Venezuela. So, I believe that my model gives opportunities to compete

for rival explanations for democratic backsliding and to test my argument.

# DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING AROUND THE WORLD: TURKEY AND VENEZUELA IN PERSPECTIVE

Despite the political, economic, social differences between Turkey and Venezuela, the way democracy deteriorated in both countries is similar in many aspects. Both countries are regarded as relatively established democracies prior to the deterioration of democracy in the last decade. The decline of democracy came after the election of the strong leaders whose commitment to democracy were always in question. The way the leaders mobilized the society, especially the part of the society which has been disregarded or suppressed by the previous administrations, and undermined democracy is very similar in both countries. A comparative comparison of the democratic backsliding process in both countries might reveal some important dynamics with regards to the decline of democracy in the global perspective.

## Venezuela

As being one of the oldest democracies in the Latin America, the crumbling of democracy in the country provides a good example of democratic backsliding. While democracy in Venezuela has never been perfect, the country has been able to maintain a system of free elections and universal suffrage since 1958 (Crisp 1996). Apart from fulfilling the procedural requirements of democracy, the political system in Venezuela ensured the peaceful transfer of power between opposite political groups and prevented the military's direct intervention to the system from 1958 to 1992. However, starting from the beginning of 1980s, the country entered into a series of economic, political, social crisis. The political turmoil has only accelerated with the election of Hugo Chavez. With the support of the poor segment of Venezuelan society, whose voice hardly heard of during the previous

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administrations, Chavez was able to wage a war against establishment in the country. Chavez's tactics and policies undermined the democratic procedures and institutions in the country.

<p style="text-align:center"><em>Venezuela before Chavez: Rule by Parties (1958-1998)</em></p>

The history of democracy in Venezuela can be traced back to 1950s. After a series of power shifts between authoritarian leaders and military, two main political parties, centre-left *Acción Democrática* (AD) and center-right *Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente* (COPEI), signed a power sharing pact, known as Puntofijo, in 1958 (Hellinger 2005). The pact ensured the peaceful transition of power between AD and COPEI and cooperation of both parties to prevent contestation from outside. In this system, what Coppedge (2002) calls "partyarchy", two parties' good relations with the important figures of Venezuelan society such as the military, business sector, and NGOs enabled them to maintain stability and governability in the country. While the parties were able to keep outside actors from intervening in the political affairs by providing them perks and promotions (Coppedge 2002), they conducted an iron discipline in the internal party affairs (Hellinger 2005). Contesting the Puntofijo either from inside or outside meant expulsion and losing access to rent that is mainly provided by the oil money.

From a socioeconomic perspective, OPEC oil boom in 1970s has enabled the Puntofijo regime to make some changes in the positive direction. From 1973 to 1979, the increasing government revenues were spent to develop the socioeconomic factors such as education level, minimum wage, employment and so on. While inequality and discrimination existed during the Puntojijo regime, increase in the level of standards in the country has helped the regime to cover such problems. The fact that the poor didn't benefited from the

improvements in the country as much as middle or upper class didn't create immediate social tensions until 1980s. As a result, AD and COPEI was able to transfer power between themselves peacefully and placate the other groups within the society through sharing a certain amount of rents with them.

*Crisis of Punttofijo: Mass Discontent (1979-1998)*

The positive image of the Puntofijo has disappeared starting from the 1980s. Following the prosperous and stable days of the 1960s and 70s, the country has experienced enormous economic, social, and political crisis in the next two decades (Mainwaring 2012, Cannon 2008). The result was a massive discontent, especially among the poor sections of, Venezuelan society. The anger accumulated in 40 years has resulted in the collapse of Puntofijo and became a fuel for the new regime.

The grievances that led to the fall of the system can be attributed to two main failures of Puntofijo regime: economic and legitimacy/representation crisis. On the one hand, plummeting oil prices (Coppedge 2002), systematic corruption/clientelism(Coppedge 2002) and failure to adjust to trending neoliberal policies (Roberts 2003, Lander 2005) gave way to a significant loss in the quality of living conditions of the majority of population in Venezuela. According to the estimates, total poverty in the country has increased from 36 to 68 percent of the population between1984 and 1991(Lander 2005). In the last two decades prior to Chavez's inauguration, inflation and unemployment rates has surged while government revenues and real wages plummeted (Corrales 1999).

On the other hand, economic and political failures of the Puntofijo regime has undermined the legitimacy of the system. First off, Puntofijo has disproportionately favored middle and upper classes over the lower class but it became more visible with the economic

failures of the system. As the economic crisis deepened, the poor section of society became more excluded from the system but their voice hardly heard by the decision makers. As an example, introduction of new neo-liberal policies under president Perez has increased the cost of basic needs of people such as transportation and decreased the employment opportunities for poor thorugh privatization where the state was the principal employer (Avancadoz 2005). In the Puntofijo system, the two parties have expanded their influence all over the institutions in the society. Both parties have developed strong corporatist and clientelistic networks with different organizations and distributed rents through these linkages (Buxton 2005). The linkages that once strengthened the system and promoted stability now prevented decision makers from seeing the growing dissatisfaction in the lower levels of society and take necessary measurements (Coppedge 2002).

The discontent of masses with the regime and the grievances that accumulated over the time became more visible through the end of 1980s. The voter turnout rates were one indicator of dissatisfaction with the regime. Abstention rates grew from 3.5% in 1973 to 12% in 1978, 18% in 1988, and 39.8% in 1993(Coppedge 2002). The dissatisfaction turned into violence with Caracazo when poor of Caracas flowed from hills into the city center and demonstrated their anger as a response to neoliberal reforms and rises in the prices of common good and services in 1989(Cannon 2008) Also, the lack of large scale opposition against coup attempts in 1992 confirmed the argument that legitimacy of system was in question on the eyes of the majority of the population (Lalander 2006, Lander 2005). The poor in Venezuela was the number one victim of the regime's unfriendly policies and the socio-economic crisis amid the collapse of the system. The grievances of the poor have

provided an opportunity for Chavez to appeal to the poor and eventually get their full

support.

*Chavez as an Undemocratic Leader*

Chavez's rise to power came amid the crisis of Puntofijo regime. From the first event,

the coup attempt against President Carlos Andres Perez, that introduced Chavez to the

Venezuelan society, it became clear that Chavez was not a staunch supporter of the form of

the democracy that is accepted in the Western world. Our examination shows that there are

many elements in Chavez's rhetoric and actions that violate the basic principles of democracy

and led us to conclude that he has undemocratic normative preferences. Before focusing on

the undemocratic characteristics of Hugo Chavez, it should be noted that not all of his actions

damaged democracy. Chavez has broken the hegemony of Puntofijo over Venezuelan

politics, extended voter enfranchisement, developed social programs aiming to improve poor

people's conditions. However, these developments were largely overturned after 2004 as

Chavez his grip of power intensified.

The very first event that has introduced Chavez to the Venezuelan society shows that

Chavez's commitment to democracy is questionable. Chavez has participated the coup

attempt against President Carlos Andres Perez in 1992. Although the Venezuelan society has

met with Chavez when he appeared on the TV to acknowledge the failure of the coup and to

take the full responsibility for the attempt, his relationship with undemocratic organizations

can be traced back to his involvement with the clandestine civil-military organization named

*Movimiento Bolivariano* 200[2] (MBR-200) (Canache 2002). When MBR-200 organized a coup attempt in 1992, Chavez has been charged with a central role: capturing the capital, Caracas. While Chavez's fellow military officers were able to control the rest of the country Chavez wasn't able to take control of Caracas. Eventually, when the coup has failed, Chavez went to jail for two years with his fellow army officers before they are all pardoned by new president Rafael Caldera (Hawkins 2003).

During and after his fight with the old regime, Chavez has made it clear that he doesn't embrace a liberal notion of democracy. Referring to the superiority of the will of people, Chavez has promoted a participatory democracy as opposed to a liberal one. However, as Mainwaring emphasizes, "to be a participatory democracy, a regime must first be a democracy" (Mainwaring 2012). Relying on our definition of undemocratic leader, examination of Chavez's incumbency shows that his policies and rhetoric is in no way democratic. Certain characteristics of Chavez display lack of Chavez's commitment to democracy: (1) seeing himself as the true representative of people and demonizing opposition, (2) attacking democratic institutions whose policies are not in line with Chavez, (3) and not respecting democratic procedures when they produces undesirable results for him.

As the Chavez's struggle with the old regime intensified, it became clear that he sees himself as the only true representative of the people and his opponents as the enemy of the nation (Moreno 2008). One of the Chavez's most important election promise was to fight with the corrupt regime and capitalism and he perceived his struggle with the opposition as a

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[2] MBR 200 is the organization, combined of military personnel and civilians, that planned the 1992 coup attempt against the President Carlos Andres Perez and his administration (Hawkings 2013).

"war". He has seen his so-called Bolivar Revolution as the continuation of Bolivar's Independence Wars that had brought independence to the Venezuela and some other Latin American countries. Portraying his struggle with the opposition as "war", Chavez has tried to impose the idea that he was the only and the true representative of the Venezuelan people and opposing to him is like opposing to the nation. In one of his election campaigns, Chavez assured the Venezuelan society that he is only an instrument of the people and said that "you are not going to re-elect Chávez really, you are going to re-elect yourselves – the people will re-elect the people.".  He even went further into linking his mission to God and call Jesus as his commander-in-chief. An expected consequence of this kind of reasoning is to see the opposing parties as enemies. Chavez has portrayed the opposition as the enemy of the nation and labelled them as being "terrorists", "assassins", "traitors", "usurpers" (Moreno 2008). In a more specific example, Chavez has called the students who were protesting the closure of a private TV channel as "pups of the American Empire" and "supporters of the enemy of the country". Considering the fact that Chavez systematically labelled his opponents as the enemies of people and delegitimized them, Chavez's portraying of himself exclusively as the true representative of people is a breach of a fundamental democratic values.

Chavez was also notorious for attacking democratic institutions. While Chavez gave utter importance to elections and always tied his legitimacy to it, the democratic institutions and check-and-balance system that are inseparable elements of democracy were under attack during Chavez's incumbency (Human Rights Watch 2008). The state of judiciary during Chavez's tenure exemplifies how democratic institutions are undermined. While the judiciary in Venezuela has its own problems even before Chavez, it was Chavez who turned judiciary into an instrument of the government. In 2004, Chavez filled the ranks of Supreme Court by

passing a court-packing law. Since the Supreme Court was also in charge of appointment and removal of lower court judges, this move has devastating effects for the whole judiciary system and judiciary (Human Rights Watch 2008). Chavez's undermining of judiciary wasn't limited to new laws and regulations; he specifically targeted certain judges whose decisions Chavez didn't like. In a famous example, Chavez has publicly called for the imprisonment of a judge, Maria Afuini, who released an imprisoned banker. After saying that Simon Bolivar would have had the judge shot, he called for judge to get the maximum penalty and be imprisoned for 30 years. The judge has stayed in pretrial detention for more than a year and has been moved to house arrest (Human Rights Watch 2013).

Media was also among Chavez' targets. Although Chavez didn't have good relations with the media and the media was overtly hostile against him from the beginning, his actions throughout his tenure has virtually eroded all of the critical media. On the one hand, the number of government controlled media and the time given to cover Chavez has increased substantially over the time. In addition to the fact that 5 more state-owned TV stations has been established, virtually all the media has been forced to cover Chavez due to a law that dictates media stations to air the President's speeches and other government events, which sometimes last for hours, alive (Human Rights Watch 2008). A more specific example of an attack on media came in 2007 as the Chavez announced that his government will refuse to renew the license of one of the most popular TV stations, RCTV, in the country. Silencing of RCTV has left the country with a single major critical channel, Globovision, which also faced heavy fines and criminal investigations.

Last but not least, Chavez has questioned the validity of democratic procedures and in many occasions. For instance, Chavez's government has failed to carry out binding rulings of

Inter-American Court of Human Rights and prevented the court from conducting investigations in the country. As a result, Venezuela withdrew from the American Convention of Human Rights in 2012 (Human Rights Watch 2013). In another example, Chavez has ordered the firing of 18,000 Pétroleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA) workers since they have used their right to strike. Last but not least, imprisonment of María Afiuni, the judge who was imprisoned for his ruling after Chavez targeted her, was another example that shows Chavez's lack of respect for democratic procedures. Despite all the incidents that shows Chavez's animosity toward democratic institutions, he continued to gather support from the society.

*Fall of Democracy in Venezuela*

The fall of democracy in Venezuela didn't come all of a sudden, it was a process that is incremental and subtle. However, the mechanism that brought the end of democracy in Venezuela is still identifiable. The process of democratic deterioration in Venezuela can be understood in three stages: Chavez's fight with the establishment, marginalized people's unconditional support for Chavez, and democratic backsliding.

*Chavez's fight with the establishment and pseudo-democratization (1998-2004)*

When Chavez came to power in 1998, not just only poor but almost all the segments of society has been fed up with the Puntofijo regime and the demand for change was visible (Corrales 2011). In this sense, Chavez and his movement has filled this vacuum (Morgan 2007; Coppedge 2002) by promising to fight with the old system and eventually change it. Chavez's victory in 1998 presidential elections showed that his pledge to change the system is welcomed by a significant part of the society. However, the change, or revolution as Chavez says, wouldn't be without a struggle since the Puntofijo system has shaped the

country for almost half a century. Although AD and COPEI has experienced a significant lost in the election, their effect continued to exist in different institutions such as congress, courts, bureaucracy, and electoral council (Buxton 2005; Coppedge 2002). Also, the playground on which Chavez had fought with the old system was also created by the old regime in a way to favor it. Therefore, Chavez choose to fight with the old system as his number one priority in the couple years of his presidency.

Chavez's fight with the old system happened in various areas with a breathtaking speed within a couple of years. Less than a year after coming to power in 1998, his first step was to create a constituent assembly to change the constitution. The National Constituent Assembly(ANC) not only wrote a new constitution but also assumed the role of the Congress and the Supreme Court in the transition process. Filled with the pro-Chavez members, ANC worked to undermine the influence of Chavez's rivals. Even before the court-packing law that has changed the composition of the Supreme Court in favor of Chavez in 2004 (Human Rights Watch 2008), ANC has created Judicial Emergency Commission that purged many low and high-level judges (Coppedge 2002). The long arm of Chavez has also reached to National Electoral Council(CNE) where pro-Chavez officers has been placed in spots vacated by fired "partisan" CNE officials (Corrales 2011; Coppedge 2002). While trying to change the system in his favor, Chavez has also resisted attempts by the opposition and the remnants of old regime to remove him from the power. In 2002, Chavez has returned to power after being removed from the office for 48 hours in a failed coup attempt. Two years later, referendum to to recall Chavez from the office has also resulted in Chavez's victory. As a result, during this six-year period, Chavez has not only resisted against attempt to remove him from the office but also planted the seeds of his new regime.

Chavez's fight with the old regime has also meant that the country was being freed from some of the problematic aspects of the old regime. During Chavez's first couple of years in power, Puntofijo's extensive influence over the state institutions has partially been eliminated, voter enfranchisement has been broadened (Jackson 2012), social programs aiming to decrease inequality has been started. However, these steps didn't necessarily brought democratization. Chavez's later actions proved that steps toward democratization were either tactical moves in the fight against the establishment or aimed to create Chavez's electoral base. For instance, while National Election Council(CNE) had was more or less a multi-party council before many of employees has been fired for their political affiliations, the newly-appointed members were even more partisan than the previous one with at least two thirds of them are pro-Chavez (Coppedge 2002). Likewise, Chavez's mission programs were also criticized for using government funds clientelistically and discriminating against political opponents (Penfold-Becerra 2007).

In sum, as promised, Chavez has started a war with the old regime in which his main support came from the poor section of the society. While the fight with establishment is not a direct indicator of democratic backsliding, and even caused a short term of democratization, the unconditional support that is given to Chavez in the struggle allowed him to use his power to undermine democracy.

*Poor people's unconditional support (1998-2013)*

In his fight with the old regime, Chavez has primarily relied on the support from the lower-class Venezuelans. Initially, the exclusive characteristic of the old system has prevented the low-class Venezuelans from benefiting the prosperity of the oil-rich country. When the economic situation worsened in the country, poor people of the country was first to

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be affected. The anger that the lower-class Venezuelans has developed as a result of their marginalization became a fuel for Chavez and his movement. For instance, as showed by Lupu (2010), the poor has disproportionately supported Chavez in 1998 presidential elections. However, not all of his support came from the lower-class citizens (Ramizez 2005). While he was supported by 60% of the electorate in some elections, he has a solid base of support at around 30% of the electorate that consistently voted for him. The other 30% percent wasn't as solid as the first one and people in the second 30% didn't necessarily supported Chavez unconditionally (Coppedge 2002). Poor people's support for Chavez not only empowered him to come to power but also helped him to maintain his fight with the establishment. When Chavez has been threatened to be removed from the power in 2004's make-or-break referendum, the support from his constituency has allowed him to stay in power(Penfold-Becerra 2007). In times when the second %30 percent wasn't ready to support Chavez, the solid %30 percent he has allowed him to reach his goals as it happened in 1998 presidential elections. Although the abstention rates in the elections were high in Venezuela, the poor people whose socioeconomic condition got better with Chavez's *misiones* (missions) and who believed that Chavez represents them in the political arena didn't hesitate to participate in elections and cast their vote for Chavez. Therefore, the majority support that allowed Chavez to pursue his political agenda came from a wide spectrum of people but the poor people's unconditional support was vital for him to come to power and maintain his rule.

This phenomenon brings another question: why poor in Venezuela unconditionally supported Chavez although he showed undemocratic tendencies from the beginning? This question leaves us with two options: Chavez's electoral base either didn't consider his actions

undemocratic or they supported him albeit his autocratic tendencies (Canache 2002). Canache answers this question by saying that both assumptions are true. According to Canache(2002), Chavez has been predominantly supported by a constituency who were ambivalent toward democracy in 1998 elections. When we consider the results together with Coppedge's(2002) findings, it is safe to infer that the poor who unconditionally supported Chavez supported him despite his authoritarian tendencies. In addition, nationwide survey results also show that Chavez supporters are less committed to democratic values. Although the support for democracy in Venezuela is comparatively high compared to other countries in the region, the studies shows that the support for democracy among Chavez's constituency is highly associated with affect for Chavez (Hawkins, Patch, Anguiano & Seligson 2007). The fact that Chavez's supporters are particularly less tolerant than his opponents also show that Chavez's supporters didn't necessarily embraced democratic values (Hawkins et al. 2007).

The reason behind the unconditional nature of this support is the poor people's discontent with the previous regime and the continuous fight with the "enemy". Poor people's unpleasant memories about the old regime and Chavez's framing of the old regime/opposition as enemy further polarized the society. In such polarized atmosphere, punishing Chavez for not behaving democratically became too costly for the lower-class: it almost means supporting your enemy (Slavik 2017). As a result of this process, Chavez got an implicit green light for his undemocratic actions from the most important segment of his electoral base.

*Democratic decline (2004-2013)*

The state of democracy in Venezuela has worsened almost in every aspect during Chavez's incumbency. However, this change has hardly turned into a problem for Chavez

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since the source of legitimacy for him has also been transformed during his incumbency. During his fight with the remnants of old regime, Chavez has increasingly relied on popular legitimacy as opposed to liberal democratic legitimacy (Coppedge 2002). Chavez has considered the will of people as the ultimate source of legitimacy and didn't hesitate to engage in actions that are helpful for him to achieve his political agenda but incompatible with liberal democratic principles.

One of the first actions of Chavez when he come to power was to paralyze the other two branches of government: legislative and judiciary. In 2000, Chavez has been granted authority to decree laws in areas ranging from banking to land reform(Garcia-Serra 2001). By the power of rule by decree, Chavez became able to bypass the National Assembly and removed opposition's ability to check the President's power via legislative function (Garcia-Serra 2001). In addition, the court-packing law that was passed in 2004 enabled Chavez to control Supreme Court and give him opportunity to fire and appoint judges at lower courts (Human Rights Watch 2008). Reports from international non-governmental organizations also confirm these findings. According to Judicial Independence Index by World Economic Forum, Venezuela has one of the worst judicial independence scores in the world and it has been in steep decline in the last years of Chavez's presidency.

Chavez's attacks on democracy was not limited to other branches of government, he undermined democracy in Venezuela in many aspects. Election safety, which has not been a real concern to Venezuelans before Chavez, has been at risk during his term. After the opposition led referendum to remove Chavez in 2004, tens of thousands of people who signed petitions to support oppositions' resolution has been blacklisted and denied to jobs, contracts and other government programs (Human Rights Watch 2013). The state of media

also causes real concerns about democracy in Venezuela. Chavez regime restricted opposition media outlets through its executive power, expanded the scope of infamous insult laws, used financial sources as a weapon to intimidate media outlets. Diminishing press freedom has also been documented by Reporters Without Borders. According to their reports between 2000 and 2012, Venezuela's press freedom ranking has constantly worsened and Venezuela's status changed from "noticeable problems" to "difficult situation".

All of these developments show that Chavez's uncontrolled power undermined democracy in Venezuela. Discontent with the previous regime motivated the poor in Venezuela to support Chavez and the atmosphere of constant struggle had rally around the flag effect among Chavez supporters. Chavez supporters has seen him as the guarantor of the protection of their achievements and supported him despite his undemocratic practices. The result was the slow death of democracy in Venezuela.

## Turkey

Turkey, one of the oldest democracies in the Middle East, provides another example of democratic deterioration in the twenty-first century. Although its history can be traced back to the last days of the Ottoman Empire, democracy in Turkey has never been perfect. Democracy has been interrupted four times by the military in the 90-year history of the young republic. Since the establishment of the republic, one of the main, and arguably the most important, issue that shaped the trajectory of democracy in the country was the struggle between the secular elite at the center and religious-conservative at the periphery. In this struggle, with the help of the military, the center elite was able to keep conservatives away from the state up until the end of twentieth century. When Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party(AKP) came to power with the help of long-time neglected conservatives,

he launched a war against the center elite and its most important instrument; military. Erdogan was able to put an end to center elite's authoritarianism some people become hopeful that he would bring more democracy. However, his 17-years incumbency shows that he ended the secular authoritarianism only to start his own style of it.  At the end, Erdogan's authoritarian rule has undermined democracy in Turkey.

*Dancing with Democracy (1946-2001)*

When the Ottoman Empire collapsed after World War 1, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk started the Independence War and established the Republic of Turkey in 1923. The new republic has been built with a revolutionary agenda and it was distinct in many ways from its predecessor. The founding elite has desired the republic to be modern, which almost meant to be Western, and enacted many changes in political and social arena. Among other things, such as changing the alphabet and rewriting the official history, the status of religion was particularly important to the young republic. The predecessor of Turkey, Ottoman Empire, was a pioneer of Sunni interpretation of Islam for centuries and the religion has been an important factor in shaping the society. The new republican elite has associated religion with the collapsed Ottoman Empire and tried to break away from both Ottoman and Islamic legacy (Yavuz 2000).  As a result, the new Turkish state adopted an assertive secularism approach and attempted to exclude religion from the public sphere (Kuru 2007). The republican elite tried to limit the influence of religion with a series of actions such as closing *tekke ve zaviyeler* (religious lodges), changing the alphabet from Arabic to Latin, banning *fes and sarık* (turban). This has created tension between secular, progressive center (also known as Kemalists) and religious, conservative periphery that is still ongoing.

The tension between the secular/elitist center and religious/conservative periphery has shaped the development of democracy in Turkey. Since transition to multiparty system in 1946, relatively free and fair elections have been held in Turkey and peaceful transfer of power has existed to the date. In these elections, parties representing the religious, conservative periphery has won the majority votes under different names (Ozbudun 2013). However, the military, which is often regarded as the guardian of the Kemalist regime, has intervened several times (1960, 1971, 1980, 1997) to put an end to civilian rule. Not surprisingly, the religious, conservative governments were generally the victims of military intervention. Although the centrist parties were never able get the enough votes to form a majority government in six decades (Carkoglu 2007), they ensured that their interests and the principals of regime are remained protected by using their influence in the critical institutions such as military and judiciary (Yilmaz 2017). However, these interventions couldn't stop the long-term rise of conservatives in Turkish politics and has led to a major confrontation between two sides in 1990s.

*February 28 Postmodern coup: A Pyrrhic Victory*

The rise of religious-conservatives in Turkey was reflected in elections in 1990s. Refah Partisi(Welfare Party), which has been created by the Islamist *Milli Gorus Hareketi* (National Outlook Movement), has increased its vote share in 1994 Local Elections and 1995 Parliamentary Election, capturing the mayoral seats in two biggest cities(Istanbul and Ankara) and becoming single-largest vote-getter respectively. The rise of religious/conservatives once again alarmed the secular elite. In the second half of 1990s, an aggressive campaign against conservatives launched by the secular elites within media, military, judiciary. The conservatives in general Islamists in particular felt threatened,

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encircled, and discriminated as *turban*(headscarf) was banned in universities(Kuru 2007), their companies were labelled as *yesil sermaye* (newly emerging conservative capital fraction) and blacklisted(Mecham 2004), their Welfare Party-led government was forced to resign, the party itself was closed by the Constitutional Court, and the members of the party has faced criminal lawsuits one of which has led to the imprisonment of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, then-mayor of Istanbul (Yilmaz 2017).

The February 28 postmodern coup[3] aimed to cleanse the public sphere from Islamic influence (Yavuz 2000). The motive was not merely political; secular elites also aimed to control the growing influence of conservatives' rising economic activity (Yilmaz 2017). Although some generals of Turkish military expected the system they imposed to last for a 1,000 year, a new movement with an Islamist roots become one of the most viable alternatives amid the political and economic crisis of post-coup era. At the beginning of 2000s, a group of young Islamist in the leadership of Erdogan and Abdullah Gul has seceded from National Outlook Movement's newly founded Virtue Party and declared that they abandoned their previous Islamist ideology and will adopt democratic values and principals of free-market economy. The result was an increased interest in Erdogan and his friends' Justice and Development Party: they won enough vote to form a single-party government in 2002 elections (Yilmaz 2017). While AKP drew votes from various groups such Islamists, nationalists and even center-leftists, the most common identity that could be applied to majority of the AKP voter is conservative (KONDA 2010). The polls also confirm that

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[3] In February 28, 1997 National Security Council, which mostly consists of military officers, has forced the Islamist Welfare Party, and his leader Necmettin Erbakan, to resign from the coalition government due to accusations of anti-secular activities.

conservative/religious[4] people are the backbone of AKP: they constitute 90% percent of all AKP voters (KONDA 2018). In addition, a large proportion (over ¾) of the AKP supporters casted their votes for Erdogan's AKP in the next election in 2007 (KONDA 2007). These two situations reveal that AKP has a constituency that is predominantly conservative and supported the party repeatedly. As a result, it can be inferred that the conservatives, who has been marginalized by the secular elites in the past, has supported Erdogan's AKP overwhelmingly and brought it to the power.

*Erdogan as an Undemocratic Leader*

Although Erdogan has been actively involved in politics since his university years, he became more visible in 1990s with the rise National Outlook Movement's political parties. Before leading AKP to its landmark victory in 2002, he raised in the ranks of the movement's political parties and finally became the mayor of Istanbul. From the beginning, his discourse and policies has raised questions about Erdogan's commitment to democracy.

Although Erdogan claimed that they abandoned their "National Outlook" mindset, his previous affiliation with the National Outlook Movement and his controversial remarks had led many to have suspicion about his intentions. In an in interview in 1996, Erdogan said that "Democracy is like a train. You get off when you reach you destination." In a similar vein, when Erdogan was the mayor of Istanbul, he expressed that he sees himself as the *imam*

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[4] Conservatism in Turkey can be defined as "a systematic effort in preserving "the traditions, culture, religion and all those institutions that emanated from such sources."(Kalaycioglu 2007). The core principals of conservatism in Turkey can be described as "some form of religiosity, awe and suspicion of the state, and local heterodoxy which, in turn, bred decentralization as well as avoidance of the government, its officials, and their alien culture." ."(Kalaycioglu 2007)

(religious leader in Islam) of the city and he claimed that he is responsible for the sins if the citizens of Istanbul (Bädeker 2016). Moreover, his stance in the controversial issues in Turkey has made many thinks that he aims to follow his Islamist agenda through state power. Erdogan's harsh stance on controversial issues, such as abortion and alcohol, and his use of state power to incentivize conservative lifestyle in Turkey is taken as an indicator of his soft-Islamization (Hamid 2017)[5].

Although Erdogan's first years in office has made many to believe his and his party's democratic transformation, a holistic approach to Erdogan's incumbency reveals that is approach to democratic values was strategic and pragmatic to say the least. A couple of characteristics of Erdogan makes us label him as undemocratic: (1) seeing himself as the only true representative of people and delegitimizing the opposition, (2) targeting democratic institutions that constitutes a check on his power, (3) not respecting the democratic procedures that produces undesirable consequences for him. First of all, Erdogan has adopted a majoritarian approach to democracy and portrayed himself as the embodiment of *milli irade* (national will) while demonizing his opponents (White 2017). Erdogan has claimed that "my story is the story of the (this) people" and "either the people will by bringing me into power or oppressive minority will remain in the power". His approach is even reflected to his daily speeches: when he refers to government agencies he always uses possessive determiner (e.g. my police, my soldiers) to emphasize his authority over the referred agency (Selcuk 2016). He even claimed that the "state would collapse if he is down from the power".

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[5] Soft Islamization: Explain that Erdogan doesn't aim to implement a full-scale Islamic Law but he unfairly incentivizes conservative lifestyle by using state resources

One of Erdogan's distinctive undemocratic characteristic is his intolerance to his rivals (Lancaster 2014) and unwillingness to accept their legitimacy. In Erdogan's "us" versus "them" world with no gray area, there is no place to criticism or opposition (Gorener & Ucal 2011). As an indicator of this personal trait, over the time, Erdogan has dismissed the strong political figures in his inner circle one way or another and filled it with like-minded advisors (Gorener & Ucal 2011).Not surprisingly, while Erdogan perceived himself as the true voice of people, he didn't see his opponents as legitimate rivals. When he broke away with Gulen and his followers, he was quick to demonize his ex-allies. Erdogan called Gulen and his followers[6] "bloodthirsty murderers", "malignant tumor","hashashins" and accused them of being a terrorist organization and Mossad agents (SCF 2017). Likewise, politicians from pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party(HDP) was among Erdogan's targets. When the peace process between the government and Kurds failed, Erdogan blamed and asked for punishment of HDP members. The parliament was quick to lift the lawmakers' immunity that paved way to the imprisonment of HDP MPs including their leader Selahaddin Demirtas[7].

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[6] Gulen Movement (also known as Hizmet) is a religiously-inspired social movement originated in Turkey in 1960s. The leader of the movement, Fethullah Gulen, is an influential Muslim cleric and his movement inspired thousands of people all around the world. The movement's activities focus on education, media, interfaith dialogue and so on. The movement was an ally of Erdogan for years before breaking up in 2013. Erdogan regime accuses Gulen and his followers of conspiring the July 15, 2016 coup attempt but the members strongly denies such accusation. Since the coup attempt, Gulen followers has been persecuted in Turkey: they are purged from their jobs, imprisoned, and their assets have been seized.

[7] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/08/erdogan-lifts-turkish-mps-immunity-in-bid-to-kick-out-pro-kurdish-parties

Erdogan has accused Demirtas of being a terrorist and murderer and threatened him with death sentence[8].

Secondly, Erdogan is inclined toward confrontation, rather than cooperation, when he is challenged (Gorener & Ucal 2011). Erdogan didn't hesitate to target democratic institutions when these institutions produced undesirable consequences for him. Media, judiciary, and bureaucracy were the most notable targets of Erdogan. With regards to media, laws to intimidate journalists were passed, hundreds of media outlets were closed, and 149 journalists are currently imprisoned under Erdogan regime. In a specific example, Cumhuriyet's editors Erdem Gul and Can Dundar, whose Erdogan threatened to "pay the price for" publishing a story about Turkey's National Intelligence Agency(MIT) transporting weapons to Jihadi groups in Syria, has been arrested for months in pretrial detention. Given that bureaucracy and judiciary is filled with Erdogan loyalists, not to mention that Erdogan has a tight control over his party (Lancaster 2014) and his party has the parliamentary majority, laws and lawsuits against media freedom are the product of Erdogan's animosity against the media. Likewise, the police officers, who were in charge of 17/25 December operations in which people from Erdogan's inner circle including his son has been implicated, were accused by Erdogan with treason, dismissed from their jobs, and eventually arrested (Yilmaz 2017). Last but not least, judiciary was one another target. When High Council of Judges and Public Prosecutors(HSYK) criticized a government regulation which was threating the independence and impartiality of the judiciary, Erdogan responded by

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[8] https://news.sol.org.tr/erdogan-threats-pro-kurdish-partys-presidential-candidate-174872

saying that "he would immediately put the HSYK members on trial if he had the power so" (Ozbudun 2014).

Lastly, Erdogan revealed numerous time that he doesn't respect democratic procedures when they produce unfavorable results for him. When Constitutional Court decided that two journalists' rights have been violated and they need to be released from pretrial detention, he declared that "he neither respect nor accept" the Constitutional Court's ruling. Likewise, when Erdogan decided to build his 1000 room palace in a protected area, he ignored the court rulings that declared the construction illegal and has completed it. Given our definition of undemocratic leaders, it is clear that Erdogan's rhetoric and actions are incompatible with democracy.

*Fall of Democracy in Turkey*

The path of democratic backsliding in Turkey was almost identical with that of Venezuela's. Similar to Venezuela, a strong leader with the support of the masses were able to force the previously influential elites to retreat. However, the vacuum created by retreat of secular elite was filled by Erdogan's increasing unchecked power. The fall of democracy in Turkey can be examined in three steps: Erdogan's fight with the secular elite, conservative/religious people's unconditional support for Erdogan, and Erdogan's undermining of Turkish democracy.

*Erdogan's fight with establishment and temporary democratization (2002-2010)*

Before the rise Erdogan's AKP, secular elite in Turkey has acted as a veto power through its influence in the military and judicial institutions. Kemalists were able to prevent the people on the periphery to come to power through military coups and judicial activism

(Gumuscu 2016). AKP, with the help of national and international actors whom he convinced with his democratization agenda, was able to force secular elite to retreat over the time. Erdogan has also sought to break military's informal hegemony over the politics. In a series of investigations, called Ergenekon and Balyoz, started in 2007, high-ranking officials were put on trial for planning to overthrow the government. Later in 2010, Erdogan's government has passed laws that reduced the influence of military over the politics by reducing the number of military officers in National Security Council(MGK), removing military's right to respond to certain incidents without civil authorities' approval and so on (Gumuscu 2016). The steps taken by Erdogan has damaged the military's reputation and forced military to stay in their barracks.

On the other side, Erdogan's fight with the establishment continued in various platforms. In 2010, Edogan's victory in referendum has allowed Erdogan to intervene with highest judicial authorities of the country, such as the Constitutional Court and the High Council of Judges and Public Prosecutors(HSYK). Erdogan was able to break the influence of Kemalists in the high courts via court packing (Ozbudun 2014). Similarly, media also among Erdogan's targets. During Erdogan's incumbency, certain media outlets, which were part of the smear campaign against conservatives during February 28 postmodern coup, were shut down, sold to pro-government businessmen, or intimidated by fines and penalties. In a specific example, Dogan media group was hit with a historic $2.5 billion tax fine in 2009 (Freedom House 2014) and eventually sold to a pro-government businessman. In sum, with the help of the people who were the victims of old regime, Erdogan has waged a war against the secular elites in Turkey in various fields that has transformed the country.

Erdogan's defeat of Kemalists has accelearated the democratization process that started with EU accession process, democratic reforms, and neo-liberal economic policies during AKP rule. Erdogan's weakening of military put an end to military's tutelage over Turkish politics and his attempts to change the composition of high courts broke the hegemony of Kemalists in the judiciary (Ozbudun 2015). The groups that has been persecuted under the previous regimes, such as Kurds and Islamic movements, has also enjoyed a phase of normalization (Yilmaz 2017). However, these positive steps didn't turn into real achievements. After the 2010 referendum that tilted the playing field in favor of Erdogan and his AKP, most if not all the achievements have been rolled back.

*Religious/Conservative's support for Erdogan (2002-2018)*

Erdogan has been supported by a large margin of society in his fight with the old regime. Although Erdogan's support base fluctuated over the time, it is clear that the backbone of his constituency consists of religious/conservative people who has been the victim of previous regime. Religious/conservatives in Turkey were able to climb to their current economic and political situation only after Erdogan has cleared the way by fighting with the old regime who saw religious/conservatives as an existential threat. For this reason, supporting Erdogan is more than a simple policy change among alternatives for religious/conservative people; it is seen as taking side with their leader in an existential battle.

AKP was established as a traditional religious-conservative (Kalaycioglu 2007) and became successful to appeal to the conservative majority in the country (Ozbudun 2013). While AKP established a larger coalition than the traditional National Outlook Movement parties, it is still a right wing-party which represents "conservative-traditional Sunni Islamic values on the one hand and the liberalization of the economy in market capitalism on the

other" (Kalaycioglu 2008). These two features, representing the religious/conservative values and embracing liberal economic policies, were in direct conflict with the secular elites' interests and it was these features of the party that motivated people to vote for AKP (Kalaycioglu 2007).

A considerable portion of the AKP constituency has consistently supported the party and allowed the party to form a single-party government. On the one hand, conservatism became the number one identity that more than three fourth of the AKP voters chose to identify themselves with ahead of the other identities such as nationalist and rightist (KONDA 2010). Similarly, 70% of AKP voters identify themselves as religious (KONDA 2017). Although the role of economy in the vote preference in Turkey cannot be ignored (Carkoglu 2012, 2007; Kalaycioglu 2010), it seems that religious/conservative character of the voters played an important role and even shaped the voters' perception of economy in elections (Kalaycioglu 2008). The fact that Erdogan continued to enjoy over 50% of votes in 2018 Presidential elections when Turkish economy was struggling shows that his popularity doesn't only stem from economic performance.[9]

The secular-conservative division continues to be salient in today's Turkish politics (Kalaycioglu 2008; Erbudun 2013) and Erdogan was able to get a considerable support from conservatives by relying on polarization. Erdogan employed an "us versus them" rhetoric (Ercetin, Erdogan 2018) and he was able to consolidate his own base over the time. Erdogan used a rhetoric of victimization in which he presented his base as the victim and the previous elites as the oppressors (Ercetin & Erdogan 2018). Roughly, a three fourth of AKP voters has

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[9] https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-21/in-erdogan-s-turkey-markets-have-never-been-so-down-before-vote

repeatedly cast their votes for their party (KONDA 2007). Being consolidated behind

Erdogan, religious conservatives overwhelmingly supported Erdogan in critical times such as

2010 referendum and 2007 elections. Only with this support Erdogan was able to overcome

the barriers brought against him by Kemalists. 2007 referendum victory has allowed Erdogan

to elect Abdullah Gul as the president despite Kemalist institutions', such as military and

judiciary, strong opposition and 2010 referendum allowed him to break the Kemalist

hegemony in the judiciary (KONDA 2010). All in all, despite his growing authoritarian

tendencies, Erdogan was able to secure conservative's support in his fight with the secular

elite.

*Erosion of Democracy in Turkey (2010-2018)*

2010 referendum marked Erdogan's victory against Kemalists, but not necessarily

meant that the democracy would grow stronger. Kemalists' hegemony over the institutions

such as military, judiciary, and media, wasn't democratic either but the defeat of Kemalists

has left Erdogan's power unchecked and unbalanced. Erdogan's victory against Kemalist

skewed the balance of power in favor of Erdogan and terminated the Kemalists' ability to

check Erdogan's power (Yilmaz 2017). Finally, when Erdogan broke away with his longtime

ally Gulen and his followers and eliminated them totally at the end of the fight, Erdogan was

left with an unlimited power which he used to strengthen his regime and destroy democratic

institutors and procedures. During this term of democratic degradation, support for Erdogan

from his constituency didn't cease. He was even able to convert the Turkey's a century-old

parliamentary system into a presidential system and become a president with all powers

concentrated at his hands.

On the one hand, Erdogan has undermined the formal checks that exists on his power. With regard to judiciary, with a referendum that passed by 58% in 2010, the composition of judiciary was changed in a way to increase government's influence over the high courts. Later on, when Erdogan broke away with Hizmet in 2013, Cabinet of Turkey led by Erdogan has purged thousands of judges and prosecutors and redesigned the judiciary to fill the ranks with his loyalists. The case of Hidayet Karaca reveals the current state of judiciary in Turkey. Erdogan has targeted judges Metin Ozcelik and Mustafa Baser after they ruled to release Hidayet Karaca, the chairman of the now-closed critical media outlet Samanyolu Broadcasting Group in 2015, and the judges has been sacked from their positions, arrested, and sentenced to 10 years in prison for their decision.

On the other hand, legislative functions and legislative's ability to check Erdogan's power has also been destroyed by Erdogan. After the controversial July 15 coup attempt in 2016, Erdogan declared state of emergency and began to rule the country by presidential decrees. Although it is clearly stated in the constitution that the presidential decrees cannot relate to fundamental rights, Erdogan regime issued presidential decrees on topics ranging from purges in the government institutions to use of winter tires, and wedding programs to closure of TV channels. In other words, Erdogan regime used presidential decrees to assume the role of the legislature by bypassing the National Assembly. In addition, in 2016, Erdogan's AKP passed laws to lift MP's immunity which led to the imprisonment of dozens of MP's in Turkish parliaments including Selahattin Demirtas, the leader of pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party(HDP). In sum, Erdogan rendered the other two branches of government ineffective over the time.

Erdogan's undermining of democracy was not limited to government institutions. Since the failed coup attempt in 2016, 189 media outlets have been shut down and 319 journalists have been arrested which qualifies Turkey as the world's worst jailer of journalists. Turkey's diminishing press freedom has also been documented by Reporters Without Borders. In their reports from 2004 to 2014, RSF downgraded Turkey's situation from "noticeable problems" to "difficult situation". Along with journalists, academicians are also affected by the Erdogan regime's increasing authoritarian tendencies. Thousands of academics were expelled due to allegedly being a Gulen follower or signing a peace petition about Kurdish conflict (Yilmaz 2017). Last but not least, freedom of assembly has been significantly limited in Turkey in the last years. During Gezi Park protests in 2013, despite opposition even from his own party, Erdogan labeled the protestors as "handful of looters" (Taspinar 2017) and ordered the violent dispersal of protestors. Also, current state of emergency and the decrees issued by the government has allowed governors and other government officials to ban practically any public gathering from LGBT Parade to regular press briefings. All in all, Erdogan's unchecked power allowed him to undermine democracy in Turkey.

# COMPARING TURKEY AND VENEZUELA: A LEADER GUIDED DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

Turkey and Venezuela present a good example of deterioration of democracy at the hands of undemocratic leaders who appeals to a certain segment of the society. Although Turkey and Venezuela are very different in many aspects such as the structure of economy, culture, religion and so on, the fall of democracy in both countries exemplifies a new trend in authoritarianism: incremental and subtle subversion of democracy by the alliance of undemocratic leaders and previously marginalized segments of society.

Regarding the similarities in the way democracy regressed in both countries, first of all, both Turkey and Venezuela have had a relatively long democratic experience. Although democracy in both countries was far from being perfect and has its own defects, the rule of undemocratic leaders, Erdogan and Chavez, has even taken their countries below the level of democracy that they have inherited. In Puntofijo regime in Venezuela, two political parties were in control of the state and the political playfield was skewed in favor of these two parties. Likewise, in Turkey, secular elite has enjoyed formal and informal veto power through its influence over the political parties, military, and judiciary. Despite that, in both countries, relatively free and fair elections had been held and peaceful transfer of power had been ensured.

In both countries, existence of a certain segment of society who has been marginalized by the previous regime and the leaders with undemocratic preferences has paved to way for authoritarianism. In Venezuela, poor people's discontent with the Puntofijo regime became a fuel for Chavez in his fight with the establishment. Likewise, although

Erdogan and his AKP have had broad coalition of voters, conservative/religious people constituted backbone of Erdogan's supporters.

The way democracy has been destroyed was very similar in both countries. In Venezuela, Chavez began to fight with the establishment and appealed to his constituency whenever he needed support. It was the strong and consistent support of his electoral base that allowed Chavez to eliminate formal and informal veto powers of old regime. In a similar way, when challenged by the secular elites in Turkey, Erdogan has always chosen to go ballot box to reaffirm people's support. The polarized atmosphere in both countries gave the previously marginalized people no choice but to support their leaders. Simply, the struggle between two groups was nothing but an existential battle and deciding not to support your leader was a choice that is too costly that these marginalized groups couldn't bear. The result of this unconditional support was the defeat of marginalized groups along with destruction of democracy. Erdogan and Chavez, whose commitment to democracy were highly suspicious, has seized the opportunity to not just to defeat the enemy but to eliminate other democratic checks and balances on their power. So, Erdogan and Chavez has used their power to undermine democracy and to skew the playfield in favor of them. Freedom House's 2018 Freedom in the World report documents how democracy regressed in both countries. According to the report, Turkey and Venezuela are on the top of the list of countries that suffered decline in civil and political rights, ranked first and eighth respectively. To sum up, examination of two recent cases of democratic backsliding shows that the recent wave of authoritarianism is leader-driven. The fate of democracy in both countries shows how dangerous it would be when undemocratic leaders meet with a group who has been marginalized.

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