

CHAPTER TWO

The Rise of Political Islam and the AKP

Islam and Islamism in Turkish Politics from the 1950s to the 1980s

As has repeatedly happened throughout Turkish history, Islam made a comeback in Turkish society following Atatürk's passing, fueled by opposition to his authoritarian tactics, centralized political power, and embrace of Western values. A classic split was emerging between the political elites of the center (mainly in Ankara and Istanbul) and the conservative masses of the periphery (in Anatolia); this split would play out in the democratic decades that followed.

The Naqshibandi Sufis had significant influence over the Anatolian masses; they opposed Atatürk's decision to replace *sharia* with secular law and his emphasis on the political-legal supremacy of citizenship over Islamic religious affiliation in defining Turkish identity. Atatürk viewed the Naqshibandis'

strict hierarchical organization as a threat to the authority of the state, with students surrendering their own thinking to their *shaykh's* spiritual, political, and social teachings. Atatürk also worried that the Sufis' emphasis on *umma* would undercut his Turkish identity based on citizenship. He therefore banned all Naqshibandi and other *tariqas*, or religious orders, that were based on a strict, top-down order.

The Naqshibandis nonetheless continued to operate underground. Their interpretation of Islam, which stressed *sharia*, sustained a social movement aimed at preserving the conservative Sunnism that Abdülhamit II had embraced. Parallel to their efforts, another movement had developed in the early twentieth century around Said Nursi, an Islamic thinker who wanted to merge Islam and politics even while appreciating the utility of Western science and technology. Nursi began his religious training in the 1880s with leading Naqshibandi *shaykhs*. In the first years of the Turkish Republic, he developed a large following. The Nurcus, or “followers of light” as they came to be called, opposed Atatürk's strong push for Westernization and strove to protect the cultural role of Islam. They grew into a powerful political force in the 1960s.¹

Atatürk was nonetheless determined to press ahead with his historic reform agenda. Though a multi-party democracy was his ultimate goal, the Republican People's Party (CHP) ruled in an authoritarian manner and dominated Turkish politics until 1950. In that year, the Democrat Party, hewing to a more culturally conservative position, prevailed in the national elections, and its leader, Adnan Menderes, became Turkey's first democratically elected prime minister.

Menderes' party relied on the support of the masses of conservative voters on Turkey's political periphery. In contrast to the CHP's political base in the state's civilian and military bureaucracies, the Democrat Party still favored a central role for Islam in Turkish society. Menderes loosened the restrictive economic, political, and cultural policies, which Atatürk had put in place to channel the republic's development toward a secular democracy. Menderes' liberal economic policies favored free enterprise, but massive imports of foreign goods led to economic crisis and insolvency. He opened the door for a resurgence of cultural Islam. He reinstated Arabic as the official language of the call to prayer. He also established a faculty of divinity at the University of Ankara, as well as secondary schools for training prayer leaders (*imams*) and deliverers of sermons (*hatips*), known as the İmam Hatip Schools. Menderes' policies thus reintroduced religion into the public space.

Those policies agitated the secular establishment, which believed that Atatürk's vision of the Turkish Republic was being undermined. Though Menderes remained popular with voters on the periphery, he grew increasingly authoritarian in his second term, and was ousted by the Turkish military in a coup in May 1960. Tried and convicted of violating the Constitution, he was hanged in September 1961. Those who favored a greater role for Islam in Turkish society capitalized on that brutal act, rallying new followers with demands for a more "just" (i.e., Islamic) political system.

Severe economic and political instability plagued the 1960s. A serious economic recession late in that decade led to labor

strikes, violent demonstrations, and political assassinations. Pro-Islam students and political groups united with right-wing nationalists to counter leftist student and worker movements; both sides carried out bombings, kidnappings, and assassinations. The Turkish political center had come apart.

Against the backdrop of political and economic chaos, efforts continued within Turkey to restore Islam's societal role. Such efforts were boosted by groups in the Middle East that had emerged earlier in the century with the aim of restoring Islam's place in politics and throughout their societies—in Turkey's case, after Atatürk abolished the caliphate in 1924. These groups aimed to promote not cultural Islam but *Islamism*, a political-religious ideology that maintains that a Muslim can practice “proper” Islam only in a state and society governed by *sharia*.

Islamists seek, over time, to establish a global community of Muslims (*umma*) who identify themselves as Muslims rather than as citizens of any country. The Turkish adherents developed an all-encompassing strategy to transform society into an Islamic state, embracing a top-down approach of securing political power as well as a bottom-up approach of shaping children's minds, beginning in elementary school.

The Muslim Brotherhood emerged as (and remains) the primary international group advancing Islamism. Formed in Egypt in 1928, its most influential thinker has been Sayyid Qutb, whose seminal work of 1964, *Milestones*, laid out both a grand strategy and tactical plan for Islamists to seize political power and replace secular governments with Islamist states by

generating a critical mass of followers in government and society at large.

Beginning in the 1960s, Necmettin Erbakan emerged as a crucial conduit of the Muslim Brotherhood into Turkey. Erbakan was a former professor of engineering who had studied in both Turkey and Germany, winning election to parliament in 1969 as an independent from religiously conservative Konya.

In sharp contrast to the reformist spirit of the *Tanzimat* and Atatürk periods, Erbakan believed Turkey was in moral decay due to Western influences. He advocated purifying society by restoring Islam's predominant role in it. Erbakan was heavily inspired by the writings of Sayyid Qutb, particularly Qutb's call for the rural intelligentsia to organize itself and gradually gain control of the government from the urban elite. In 1970, with encouragement from a key *shaykh* of the Naqshibandi order, Mehmet Zahid Kotku, Erbakan formed Turkey's first Islamic political party, the National Order, to pursue these Islamist objectives. Erbakan became the political leader of the party, while Kotku provided its spiritual guidance. Kotku emerged as Turkey's most influential Naqshibandi leader and a link between some of the country's key leaders; in addition to Erbakan, Kotku's disciples included future President Turgut Özal and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Throughout the 1960s, Erbakan's activism coincided with continuing societal chaos, as Islamists and far-right nationalists clashed with leftists and the economy floundered. In March 1971, the chief of the Turkish army's general staff handed center-right Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel a memorandum demanding the formation of a democratic gov-

ernment in line with Atatürk's reformist vision. This, the soldiers believed, would end the civil strife that was tearing Turkey apart.

Demirel's support was centered primarily among farmers and workers, rather than the secular elite. Eventually, he would emerge as one of Turkey's staunchest defenders of secular democracy while serving as President in the 1990s, and nowadays he enjoys wide respect as one of the "wise men" of the nation's politics. But in early 1971, Demirel balked at the general staff's directive to bolster democracy along Kemalist lines, and resigned. Martial law descended in April 1971 (and continued for two years). Turkey's military authorities shut down the National Order Party, and Erbakan went into exile in Germany.

A year later, Erbakan returned and established a successor to the National Order Party—the National Salvation Party. It was Islamism by another name. Erbakan's popularity grew. In 1974, he joined the coalition government of Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, a social democrat whose lengthy political career included three terms as prime minister, the last one ending with the Justice and Development Party's landmark victory in November 2002. By partnering with Ecevit, Erbakan became Turkey's first co-leader of a national government to advocate the return of *sharia* and re-establishment of a religious state in Turkey. Erbakan, following Qutb's prescription, now helped members of the National Salvation Party and other Islamists gain positions of influence in institutions of the secular state.

Operating from his position of power, Erbakan expanded his Islamist efforts. They included rallying sentiment in Turk-

ish communities abroad: in his 1975 manifesto, *Milli Görüş* (National Vision), he called on Turks living in Europe to identify themselves primarily as a community of Turkish Muslims and to avoid assimilation into mainstream European societies. The manifesto decried the de-Islamization of Turkey and called for a “just order” of society, meaning the return of Islam to a predominant position in determining national identity and organizing society; real justice, he argued, was impossible to achieve in a secular democracy. Erbakan’s movement established chapters in Turkey and throughout Europe, propagating an anti-Western and anti-Semitic ideology that called—and still calls—for restoration of *sharia* rule in Turkey and relegates women to secondary status.

Meanwhile, violence and political chaos continued throughout the 1970s, with Islamists and leftists repeatedly clashing with right-leaning nationalists. In 1980, the Turkish military launched yet another coup. One result: the Constitutional Court banned Erbakan’s National Salvation Party (and all other political parties). The party members were excluded from politics for “threatening national security and unity.” Erbakan reemerged politically in 1983, launching yet another party, Refah (Welfare).

In 1980, the Turkish military reacted even more harshly against the leftists, because, in the midst of the Cold War, they were considered an especially grave threat to Turkey’s secular democracy. In an attempt to reduce social tension and focus on the main political danger, the military tried to placate Islamists with a policy of “controlled Islam.” Its goal was a “Turkish-Islamic synthesis,” a new nationalism that em-

braced the predominant interpretation of Sunnism in Turkey and thereby aimed to shield pious Turks from international Islamist movements. To implement controlled Islam, the Turkish government restored mandatory (Sunni) religious education in secondary schools, broadcast religious TV programs, loosened controls on *tariqas*, increased the number of the Qur'an schools for young children, and greatly expanded the number of Imam Hatip schools (from 72 in 1970 to 382 in 1988).² Graduates of the religious schools, who had been permitted only to become clergy, were now allowed to enter all professions (except the military) and increasingly found positions in the government bureaucracy.

Turkey's secular leaders believed that by letting off some Islamist steam, they could prevent the societal pot from boiling over while they focused on what they viewed as the primary threats to democracy—leftist movements in general and communism in particular. This approach echoed that of the United States. In the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Washington viewed Soviet power and communist expansion as greater threats than the Islamism reflected in the Iranian Revolution that same year. As the cornerstone of its Afghanistan policy, therefore, the United States forged alliances with the Islamist *mujahedeen* against the Soviets and supported Pakistani President Zia ul-Haq's openings to Islamists in his country. Washington discounted the threat to democracy posed by the political Islam that swept Iran. Similarly, in Ankara, the technocratic government hoped it could maintain a controlled opening to Islam.

Ankara viewed the policy of controlled Islam as similar to Atatürk's attempt to create a Turkish Islam that reflected Anatolia's Islamic traditions rather than the Sunnism that had predominated in Arab lands for centuries. But whereas Atatürk and his successors in the Republican People's Party had implemented policies to keep Islam from regaining a predominant role in politics and society, the technocratic government removed many of those constraints. For example, in the 1930s, the government had established "village institutes" (*köy enstitüleri*) and "people's houses" (*halk evleri*) to channel rural Anatolians (especially women) toward secular attitudes. Village institutes provided vocational training that produced scores of teachers for secular schools, while people's houses focused on the arts and history in an attempt to produce Turkish citizens who embraced secularism and Western modernity along with the Islamic and secular traditions of Anatolia. During the political tumult of the 1950s, the Turkish government closed those institutions, fearing they were being used for communist indoctrination. Consequently, by 1980, the rulers lacked a key policy tool to calibrate the policy of controlled Islam.

The decisions of the Turkish military and the technocratic government following the 1980 coup thus cleared the way for Islamists to strengthen their political power and for Islam to regain momentum as a key determinant of Turkish nationalism. Fethullah Gülen was the leading Islamist thinker who took advantage of this opening. Gülen drew on and expanded the thinking of Islamist theorist Said Nursi, whose ideology sought to blend conservative Islamic social norms with science and technology from the West. Formerly a government-em-

ployed imam, Gülen established secular schools (as well as sporting and cultural organizations) across Turkey, the Caucasus, Central Asia, East Asia, Africa, and eventually even in the United States.

While these organizations carry on secular activities, Gülen's followers teach Islamic values and norms on the margins, especially in student dormitories. In the 1980s, Gülen's teachings about tolerance, peace, spirituality, science, and integration with the West became popular with Turkey's top secular leaders and were seen as the "real face" of Turkish Islam.

The leaders thus hoped that Gülen and his movement could nurture a national identity that would achieve Turkey's long-elusive goal: retaining Atatürk's focus on citizenship and Westernization while embracing an interpretation of Islam rooted in Turkish culture. In this same vein, the military looked to Turgut Özal, a World Bank economist in Washington during the 1980 coup, to restore stability by striking that balance in Turkish society. Over the next decade, Özal would emerge as one of the republic's most prominent leaders.

The military originally brought Özal back to Ankara as minister of economics to rejuvenate the economy through liberal reforms aimed at stimulating export-led growth and replacing the previous policy of import substitution. Özal's economic reforms succeeded, providing him with a political following. He formed the center-right Motherland Party, which triumphed in parliamentary elections in 1983. His tenure as prime minister lasted until November 1989, when he became president.

Özal was a disciple of Naqshibandi Sufi leader Kotku and previously a member of Erbakan's National Salvation Party. In the 1983 election campaign, Özal appealed to what he termed the long-repressed Muslim identity of Turks and promised a political leadership more sensitive to religious issues. During his rule, the number of Imam Hatip schools and mosques expanded. Özal also opened Turkey to Islamist finance—for example, banking according to *sharia* norms, which forbid interest. This led for the first time to a large influx of capital from Saudi Arabia, which follows the extremists' Wahhabi version of Islamism.

Özal's government repeatedly tried, but ultimately failed, to lift the ban on women wearing the Islamic headscarf in universities. During the 1980s, the headscarf became a political symbol for women who wanted to declare their adherence to Muslim beliefs as their primary identity. Previously, urban women generally did not wear a head covering, while rural women traditionally wore loosely fitting ones in the Turkish folk tradition. Following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, however, female university students in Turkey also began covering their heads with a scarf worn tightly around the face and neck to conceal skin and hair in the Islamist style. After the 1980 coup, Turkey's council of ministers and Constitutional Court banned headscarves for university students and public sector employees as threats to the secular principles of the republic.

Though Özal expanded openings for Islam in society under the policy of controlled Islam, it would be inaccurate to categorize Özal himself as an Islamist. Unlike Erbakan, he embraced Western ideas and even backed the United States

(albeit belatedly) in the Persian Gulf War. His policies democratized and liberalized Turkey, promoting an opening to the global economy and generating a new business elite (both secular and Islamic), which strongly supported him.

Özal thus embodied the fusion of Islam and Westernization that was emerging as a modern Turkish identity. (His wife, leading a secular lifestyle and eschewing the Islamic headscarf, represented this fusion.) He enjoyed support from Islamists and liberals within Turkey, as well as from the West. Özal seemed to be the transformative figure Turkey's liberals had awaited to launch a so-called Second Republic. It would be based on Atatürk's achievements but would address the religious concerns of conservative Muslims—as well as the complaints of the Kurdish and Alevi minorities who felt they had never obtained the rights and opportunities promised by Atatürk.

The Islamist Victory of the Mid-1990s— A New Vision for Turkey

When Özal died of an apparent heart attack in April 1993, Turkey lost its strongest economic manager and political leader on the center-right. His death ushered in a new period of economic and political instability. Ordinary citizens grew weary of constant political bickering between Turkey's center-right and center-left, and of the serious corruption that emerged during Özal's era and accelerated following his death.

This dissatisfaction worked to the advantage of Erbakan's Welfare Party, which in the 1994 local elections emerged as stronger than its counterparts in the major cities, finishing first in Istanbul and Ankara. The Welfare Party succeeded in winning over the center-left's traditional urban voters by promising to end corruption and to impose a "just order" rooted in Islamic traditions. While such pledges were not new in Turkish politics, urban voters viewed Welfare as more credible because the party's embrace of Islam made it seem morally "purer" than the discredited parties of the center-left and center-right. Moreover, Welfare's urban base grew as many rural voters, who had traditionally considered Islam a core element of their identity, migrated to the cities.

This burst in support for Erbakan's party set the stage for its landmark victory (with 21 percent of the vote) in the December 1995 parliamentary election. That marked the first time an Islamist political party had ever won a plurality in a Turkish national election. The result caused panic among the secular elite, prompting a political stalemate. The result: Özal's Motherland Party (now run by future Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz) and Tansu Çiller's (also) center-right True Path Party formed a minority coalition government in March 1996. Three months later, the Welfare Party brought about the coalition's collapse through a censure vote in parliament. Rather than call for new elections, President Süleyman Demirel turned to Erbakan to form a new government. After Yılmaz refused to join with Erbakan, Çiller agreed to form a coalition and made Erbakan prime minister.

Turkey's first female prime minister (from June 1993 to March 1996), Çiller had earned a Ph.D. from the University of Connecticut and had acquired a small fortune through her husband's business ventures. She was thoroughly Western and an unlikely ally of the Islamist Erbakan. She even warned during the 1995 election campaign that her defeat and Erbakan's victory would bring Islamism to power. But she changed her mind during post-election negotiations with him over the formation of the new government, apparently hoping that Erbakan would moderate his Islamism once in power.

Çiller may also have been motivated by more personal considerations: once she agreed to form a coalition government with him, Erbakan dropped his threat to investigate corruption allegations against her. Contrary to Çiller's hopes, and those of many other members of the Turkish elites, Erbakan continued to challenge the secular establishment through Islamist policies. In 1994, he had advocated restoration of *sharia* to replace secular law, noting "of course it will be back; the only question is whether the process will be bloody or bloodless . . . we will make the process gradual so you will not feel any pain."³

As prime minister, Erbakan sought (but failed to achieve) gender-segregated buses and prohibition of alcohol in government-owned restaurants. He also pressed (and again failed) to significantly increase the number of Imam Hatip and Qur'an schools, as well as the lifting of the headscarf ban.⁴ In foreign policy, he tried to reorient Turkey away from its pro-EU direction, and he created the "D-8" (Developing Eight na-

tions) to promote economic and political unity among Muslim countries.⁵

Meanwhile, Fethullah Gülen's following continued to grow. His movement's cell-based, *tariqa*-style structure, together with a shift in his ideological emphasis, generated a cultlike devotion to Gülen. Before the mid-1990s, he had preached a spirit of tolerance that stressed the compatibility of Islam with secular democracy and the West. Now his agenda seemed to be moving beyond the cultural Islamic revival. Recordings of his lectures that surfaced in 1997 exposed the nature of his movement's closed meetings. They featured a crying Gülen who promised better days when the ideal Islamic society would finally be realized. Gülen advised his followers that "every method and path. . . [including] lying" was acceptable to achieve a society whose foundation was Islam. He warned them to "keep our heads down until the situation is ripe. . . until you have the power that is accumulated in constitutional institutions—in accord with the state structure in Turkey. . . ."

Many observers interpreted such language as an example of Islamic *taqiyya* (*dissimulation*), i.e., expressing public support for an accepted state policy to mask a hidden Islamist agenda. Fearing that such recorded statements indicated an attempt to infiltrate Turkey's police and military, and eventually overturn the secular regime, the Ankara State Security Court brought charges against Gülen. In 1998, he fled the country to avoid prosecution, and has since lived in the United States—from where he continues to direct a movement that has grown into the most powerful civil-society organization in Turkey.

Business, military, and civil-society leaders grew increasingly worried that the policies of Prime Minister Erbakan's coalition government and the separate activism of the Gülen movement were undermining Turkey's secular democratic system and Western orientation. The military issued public warnings suggesting a crackdown on such activities. Tensions peaked on February 28, 1997, when the military-dominated National Security Council (NSC) issued an ultimatum suggesting that the Welfare Party would be ousted from government and politics unless Erbakan ceased pursuing Islamist policies. As a result, he gave up his position in June 1997. Six months later, the Constitutional Court closed his party and once again banned Erbakan from active participation in politics.

Erbakan thereupon faded as a national political leader, but remained the leader of the Milli Görüş movement. He guided former members of his party, many of whom, in December 1998, founded the Virtue Party as a new Islamist expression. The Kemalists' counteractions against Erbakan's Islamist followers continued, and the pace of political party startings, stoppings, and shiftings accelerated: in June 2001, the Constitutional Court closed down the Virtue Party; Erbakan and his followers then founded the Felicity Party (which still exists but with a small following); in August 2001, a reformist Milli Görüş faction formed the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The AKP's Rise and Victory

The key founders of the AKP, former Istanbul Mayor Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, former Welfare Party spokesman and minis-

ter Abdullah Gül, and former parliamentarian Bülent Arınç, had all shaped their political identities and careers within Erbakan's Milli Görüş movement and his political parties. The AKP was more a broad movement than a unified party. Erdoğan, Gül, and Arınç each represented separate currents within Erbakan's wing. Erdoğan had the support of the Naqshibandis as well as connections to international movements like the Muslim Brotherhood; Gül represented the moderate wing of the Welfare Party, which sought coexistence with Turkey's secular authorities; Arınç had deep connections with the Gülen movement, and represented more aggressively anti-Kemalist elements among Erbakan's followers.

Erdoğan (born in 1954) was perhaps the most prominent of these three future leaders of the AKP. Elected mayor of Istanbul in 1994 on a Welfare ticket, he catapulted into the national spotlight as the head of Turkey's commercial and cultural center, a city of 11 million inhabitants. His charisma and Islamist messages attracted the concern of Kemalist authorities in Ankara. While mayor, Erdoğan famously said, "Democracy is like a streetcar. You ride it until you arrive at your destination, and then you step off," and "We believe that democracy can never be the objective; it's only a tool." Supporting the return of *sharia*, he also said, "The statement that sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the people is a huge lie. Sovereignty unconditionally belongs to Allah." Erdoğan further declared, "Praise to God; we are all for *sharia*," and "One cannot be secular and a Muslim at the same time. You will either be a Muslim or a secularist."

Erdoğan made his most significant statement in December 1997, at a rally in the southeastern town of Siirt, where he quoted the following passage from a poem: “The mosques are our barracks, the domes are our helmets, the minarets are our bayonets, and the faithful are our soldiers.” That got Erdoğan convicted of subversion for “praising fundamentalism and violating a law that bans ‘provoking enmity and hatred among the people.’”⁶ The conviction followed the Welfare Party’s ban earlier in 1998. In 1999, Erdoğan began serving a ten-month term in jail; freed after four, he remained banned from politics.

Erdoğan’s imprisonment and banning shocked the new generation of Islamist leaders. As they looked to the future, they recognized the need for a more patient approach and a political movement that would build support for a greater political role for Islam within the structure of Turkey’s secular democracy. The AKP’s founders thus decided to break with Erbakan’s confrontational approach. They set out to build a center-right political party that could attract both pragmatic Islamists who were willing to work within the democratic system and liberal democrats who sought greater social, political, and economic freedoms. They were inspired by the outlook and political approach of Turgut Özal, whose Motherland Party united the business community, liberal democrats, the previously mentioned “second republicans,” and *tariqas* into a big, diffuse party.

To broaden their appeal beyond conservative Islamic voters, AKP leaders reframed their language, restraining Islamist slogans and stressing democracy, rule of law, and justice as uni-

versal values. They incorporated Turkey's EU accession into their platform and pledged to continue Turkey's cooperation with the IMF, marking additional breaks with the Islamist parties of the past. The AKP also stressed the centrality of NATO and partnership with the United States and Israel to Turkey's national security. In short, the AKP was trying to define itself as a conservative democratic party, akin to Europe's Christian Democrats.

As the party's leaders looked ahead to parliamentary elections scheduled for November 2002, they carried the above messages to voters through personal engagement with secular business leaders, intense media efforts, and grassroots outreach to the poor. To Turkey's elite business leaders, many of whom had centered their commercial empires in media holding companies and banking, the AKP made the case that they sought to expand Turkey's economy (as Özal had done) and strengthen democracy. AKP leaders claimed that they had evolved from the Islamism of Erbakan's Milli Görüş and his Welfare Party, and now posed no threat to the lifestyles of Turkey's business elite.

At the same time, the party began creating its own media outlets, drawing initially on the Gülen movement's newspapers and television network. As the Welfare Party had done in the previous elections, the AKP also reached out to poor voters, whom existing secular parties had largely ignored, promised to clean up the corruption that characterized the political elite, and offered financial assistance—even free food and coal—to needy families. Again, following the footsteps of the Welfare Party, the AKP cultivated Turkey's largest ethnic mi-

nority, the Kurds, and even some of the Alevis, by promising new openings in democratic and cultural rights.

Meanwhile, the secular political parties were losing support. Their credibility had suffered a severe blow back in 1996, before the formation of the AKP, when a senior national police official, a drug smuggler/murder suspect, and a pro-government vigilante were found in an automobile that crashed near the town of Susurluk in western Turkey. The investigation of this “Susurluk incident” uncovered an alleged conspiracy among the car crash victims, under government orders, to plot political assassinations. The probe expanded into alleged links between government security agencies, right-wing death squads, and criminal gangs that extended back to the early 1990s, dealing a serious blow to the established secular parties.

Throughout the '90s, the secular political leaders continued their bickering and fomented political instability against the backdrop of economic difficulty that had characterized Turkish politics for decades. Turkey endured ten coalition governments between 1991 and 2002, with each lasting at most two years. Allegations of massive corruption forced Mesut Yılmaz to resign as prime minister in 1998. The coalition governments proved dysfunctional and incapable of managing the growing economic problems. These economic tensions grew into a full-blown financial crisis in February 2001, when President Ahmet Necdet Sezer threw a copy of the Turkish constitution at Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit at a cabinet meeting, accusing the government of failing to advance reforms and combat corruption in the banking system.

Such political theatrics had a devastating financial impact. The value of the Turkish lira plunged by nearly 50 percent, consumer prices skyrocketed, and hundreds of thousands lost their jobs. Inflation almost doubled from 39 percent the previous year to 68 percent in 2001. Economic growth dropped from 6 percent the previous year to -7.4 percent. The corrupt banking system, which had led to the ousting of Prime Minister Yılmaz, collapsed. Turkey's financial system and economy were in freefall, and its political leaders were unable to resolve the crisis.

In spring, the IMF stepped in, with strong U.S. support, to help avert an economic catastrophe. The IMF offered a \$12-billion loan program, on top of its existing \$10-billion loan, which would make Turkey's overall program the largest in the IMF's portfolio. To secure these funds, Turkey would have to design and implement a sweeping reform of its banking system and entire economy. Conceding that his government was unable to develop such a reform program, Prime Minister Ecevit called for outside help, tapping a Turkish economist and vice president of the World Bank, Kemal Derviş. He made dramatic reforms, and they worked: by late 2001, the Turkish nation's financial system and economy were beginning to recover.

Derviş was hailed as the savior of the economy. He grew enormously popular among secularists, who viewed him as a potential national leader and counterweight to the Islamist alternative of the AKP. In the summer of 2002, Derviş tried to form a new liberal party with a full-blown commitment to a secularist agenda. His effort ultimately failed, leaving the

center-right and center-left without alternatives to the leaders who had discredited themselves through years of corruption, economic mismanagement, and a near-fatal financial malaise.

Turkey's 2001 financial crisis spawned a popular yearning for an entirely new generation of political leaders. This "throw-the-bums-out" mentality won the AKP additional support, even among many secular voters, who believed the party would sustain the Derviş reforms, curtail corruption, and thus restore economic stability. While some among the secular supporters of the AKP were concerned about a possible Islamist "hidden agenda," they were willing to give the party a chance. They reasoned that the democratic process itself—or the military if need be—would rein in leaders who tried to institute unacceptable policies.

It was clearly the AKP's moment. The party was even able to capitalize on its nickname, "AK," which means "white" or "clean" in Turkish. The new voters it had attracted complemented a solid base throughout Anatolia of conservative voters, especially emerging Islamic business leaders, who had felt slighted for decades by the secular magnates of the economic mainstream.

On November 3, 2002, the AKP won a dramatic victory in parliamentary elections. Its 34.3 percent of the vote translated into a majority of the seats in parliament, given that only one other party crossed the 10 percent threshold. The AKP was thus able to form the first single-party government in Turkey since 1987, giving millions of Turks across the political spectrum hope for a return to political and economic stability.

The AKP owed Erdogan a deep debt of gratitude for its electoral victory. During the course of three decades, he had laid the ideological and operational foundation for the party's eventual political success. Throughout that period, Erdogan had been relentless. When one party he headed was banned, he returned with another one bearing a different name. It could be said of him that he saw the promised land of an Islamist Turkey, but was not fated to enter it.

A younger generation of Islamists would pick up his torch. They learned from his errors and stepped forth to claim political power in their own right. They were keen to let the political process play out, proclaiming enough fidelity to the guiding principles of the Turkish republic, as they kept their gaze fixed on their own political model: a workable alternative to the secularism of the preceding eight decades.