“National Outlook Movement” in Turkey: A Study on the Rise and Development of Islamic Political Parties

YANG Chen & GUO Changgang

(Center for Turkish Studies, Shanghai University)

Abstract: The Turkish “National Outlook Movement”, defined as a continuous Islamic Political Parties’ movement since the 1970s was led by Turkish former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. Apart from factors of economy, society, psychology, culture and ideology, the rise of Islamic Political parties was due to the inclusion-coaptation strategy initiated by the state. As a 40 years’ lasting movement, the development, climax, crisis and continuity of “National Outlook Movement” will be of great help in understanding the relationship between modernization and secularization, religion and democracy, as well as the complex reasons of religious revival.

Key Words: National Outlook Movement; Islamic Political Party; Inclusion-Coaptation Strategy; Turkey

I

The “National Outlook Movement” has been a continuous

\footnote{YANG Chen, visiting scholar of Asian Studies Center at Boğaziçi Üniversitesi, Turkey. Dr. GUO Changgang, professor of history at Shanghai University, and Director of Center for Turkish Studies at Shanghai University. This article takes Turkey’s “National Outlook Movement” (Milli Görüş Hareketi) as an example to study the evolution of political Islam in Turkey that has lasted nearly 40 years. The aim is to understand the origin, development, and evolution of political Islam in Turkey as a whole, as well as its social and political changes and its future development trend.}
Islamic Political Parties’ movement since the 1970s; it has been led mainly by Turkish politicians and the former Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan (1926-2011). It is also a collective label of all movements that “promote the religious agenda of political parties expressing a particular tradition (such as Islamic tradition)” (Yıldız, A., 2003: 188). The movement has both religious and non-religious themes, representing the trial of accommodation between traditional Islam and Modernism in the political sphere (Özbudun, E., 1988: 146). Its main feature is to restore the decisive role of Islam in Turkish society, to regard Islam as a national idea or a national identity of Turkey, and to make it the spiritual bond to achieve the cohesion of Turks.

Erbakan is not only the founder and spiritual leader of the Turkish “National Outlook Movement”, but also a Turkish evergreen political movement. He had been a role in Turkish political arena for more than 40 years. Erbakan was born in Turkey in 1926 in Sinop by the Black Sea. He attended Istanbul High School, and graduated in 1948 from the Mechanical Engineering Department of Istanbul Technical University. He worked as a faculty in the university then. Later, he studied at RWTH Aachen in Germany and obtained Doctor’s degree. After returning home, Erbakan continued his research and teaching at Istanbul Technical University, and was promoted to the rank of professor in 1965. In 1966, he was appointed as the Minister of Industry, Commerce and Industry Association of Turkey, and later he served as Secretary-in-General of the Association and the Chairman of the Association. In 1969, since he failed to join the Justice Party led by Süleyman Demirel, Erbakan participated in the election then as an independent candidate in Konya. This officially announced his political career. In 1975, he completed a book named “National Outlook”, and illustrated the concept of “National Outlook Movement” in the book (Erbakan, N., 2014: 9-11).

In the late 1960s, in Turkey, two factions—the left and the right wing, strongly opposed each other. Meanwhile, the outbreak of anti-Americanism arose occasionally. Coupled with a severe
economic crisis, these had led to problems in the balance of all the forces in the country (Çetin, M., 2014: 17-20). There were conflicts between the large companies centered in Istanbul and small and medium enterprises that centered at provincial capital cities. The Justice Party, which was once highly supported by the public in the 1960s, gradually favored the interests of big companies, and therefore started to lose public support, which provided an opportunity for the rise and development of a number of small parties. The electoral bases of these small parties were mainly on the low-income groups in rural areas, small workshop owners and small and medium enterprises.

Within this context, in 1970, Erbakan founded the first Islamic party that stepped into Turkey’s political arena—the National Order Party, which marks the formal rise of political Islam in Turkey, as well as the start of the “National Outlook Movement”. The leaders of the National Order Party wanted to restore traditional values and institutions. They believed that it was a historical mistake that Kemalists replaced the history and culture of the Ottoman Empire as well as the Islam with the Western model, which was also the source of all kinds of misfortune of contemporary Turkey. Their goal was to create “national order” and end the process of the Westernization. In their opinion, Turkey’s identity and future should be closely linked with the Islamic world rather than the West. In 1971, a military coup broke out in Turkey (Rabasa, A. & and Larrabee, F., 2008: 40) . As a result, the National Order Party was banned due to “being against the country’s secular nature”.

In 1972, Erbakan’s followers founded the National Salvation Party, whose slogan was “the Great Turkey Once Again”, trying to reconcile Islamist and Turkish nationalism like what the national order party did. In terms of the problems Turkey was facing, the party’s solution was a return to Islam and to adopt the Muslim way

---

1. Its Turkish name is Milli Nizam Partisi, MNP, translated as the National Order Party (NOP) in English.
2. The National Salvation Party, NSP, is “Milli Selamet Partisi, MSP” in Turkish. Its slogan is “Yeniden Büyük Türkiye” in Turkish language.
of life. The party believed that the Westernization process of Turkey had led to the split of Turkish society and backwardness of the country. Only economic measures to establish and developing a heavy industry based in Anatolia could result in Turkey being a strong country away from the West and become the leader of the Islamic world. At the same time, the National Salvation Party hoped to establish a Muslim common market, using the Islamic Dinar as the common currency, and set up a Muslim defensive alliance. In the 1973 elections, the party won 12% of the vote, and 11% of the number of parliamentary seats, becoming the third largest political party in Turkey. It formed a coalition government with the Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP). The Bülent Ecevit was the president, and Erbakan was elected as the deputy prime minister. This election is of great significance. The ideologies of the National Salvation Party and the Republican People’s Party were diametrically opposed to each other. The two parties were “ice and fire” since the time of birth of the Republic of Turkey. The National Salvation Party advocated Islamists, while the Republican People’s Party supported secularism. However, the two parties eventually join hands, which also marked the political Islam as a legitimate political force in Turkey’s political arena. After the dissolution of the joint government, the National Salvation Party joined the National Front Government led by Süleyman Demirel. In the 1970s, Erbakan was elected Deputy Prime Minister for three times of the joint government, and became representative of the Islamic movement in Turkey. He used his position and influence to continue promoting the status of religion in the state and social life.

In 1980, the National Salvation Party’s religious gatherings in

---

Footnote: From January 26, 1974 to November 17, 1974, Necmettin Erbakan was elected deputy prime minister for the first time; Bülent Ecevit was the president during this time. This was also a period of the Cyprus crisis. March 31, 1975 to June 21, 1977 was the second time Necmettin Erbakan served the Deputy Prime Minister, and Süleyman Demirel was the then President. His third deputy prime minister experience started from July 21, 1977 and ended on January 5, 1978; Süleyman Demirel was the then President as well.
Konya became the cause of third military intervention. The National Salvation Party has also been banned. Erbakan and his aides had been prohibited in politics in a decade (Liu, Y., 2000: 119). However, in 1983, Erbakan formed a new political party, the Welfare Party, on the foundation of the National Salvation Party. But the formation of the religious discourse of the Welfare Party was influenced by the identity politics at that time. In order to meet political Kurdish demands, the Welfare Party continued to emphasize the theme of brotherly Islamic friendship. The Welfare Party has two famous aphorisms: the first one is “the coalescence of state and nation”; the second is “60 million are brothers of one another”. To this end, the Welfare Party committed to Islamic identity, and integrated the anti-institution ethnic and political tide into Turkish democracy. Its specific objectives were: firstly, to reduce the secular elites’ concern about the state’s territorial integrity, and to coerce the entire state affairs based on this; secondly, on the premise of national sovereignty integrity, to create a compromise on ethnic identity issues at the political level. In summary, the Welfare Party’s religious discourse not only included the needs to provide the service to this religion, but also included the expression of the religion’s political appeal (Yıldız, A., 2003: 188).

However, when the Welfare Party won the election and reached the heights of power, the military and the Constitutional Court again banned the party accusing Islamist parties of posing a threat to the secular regime. The following Virtue Party could not escape the same fate. Instead, the Felicity Party and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) survived to this date. However, the Felicity Party, which still adheres to the traditional doctrine, has much smaller influence than the previous parties. It has completely fallen to the edge of the power game. The AKP, which advocates reformism, has become the ruling party in Turkey, and has been in power for 13 years. Thus, the “national outlook movement” can also be seen as a process that five political parties, which support the

---

2. The Virtue Party, VP, is Fazilet Partisi, FP, in Turkish.
concept of the Islam identity, have continuously strived for 40 years to achieve their goal. While these parties were banned one by one, their members still tried to form a new political party in order to ensure the continuity of the “National Outlook Movement”. The timelines of the five political parties are as follows:

Political parties that participated in “National Outlook Movement” (Yılmaz, I., 2009: 94)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Party</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The National Order Party</td>
<td>Necmettin Erbakan</td>
<td>1970.01.26~1971.01.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Welfare Party</td>
<td>Ahmet Tekdal</td>
<td>1983.06.19~1998.01.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Necmettin Erbakan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Virtue Party</td>
<td>Recai Kutan</td>
<td>1997.12.17~2001.06.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Felicity Party</td>
<td>Recai Kutan</td>
<td>2001.7.20~Present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “National Outlook Movement” has been in place from the 1970s to the present. This is because it succeeded in obtaining the support of marginalized groups. The Eastern and southeastern Anatolia provinces, the Kurds, the urban poor and the emerging SME entrepreneurs, all can find resonance in this movement. They become the public opinion and the political foundation of the Welfare Party’s victory in the 1990s election (Yılmaz, M., 2002: 365-373). In addition, their efforts to integrate religion, culture, and ethnic issues with economic mission have formed the foundation of the public support for “National Outlook Movement”.

Firstly, and most importantly, one mission of the “National Outlook Movement” is to promote Islam; secondly, the economic mission of the “National Outlook Movement” is to improve the national economy by developing heavy industry and defense industry; and, thirdly, the social mission of the “National Outlook Movement” is to establish an “order of justice”. In short, the core
and essence of the “National Outlook Movement” are to criticize the West and to reconcile Islam and modernity. At the national level, this is presented as fundamental criticism against Turkey’s history of Westernization; at the international level, its mission is to promote Turkey’s foreign policy change, that is, from the traditional pro-Western stance to the pro-Islamic world policy (Dalay, G. & Friedman, D., 2013: 124-126).

II

Strictly, the “National Outlook Movement” is not really a movement with a clear political program. It only hopes to promote the spread of Islam under the guise of nationalism, because the “milli” (i.e., the nation) has double meaning of both the religious and ethnic nation in Turkish. However, from the historical and cultural perspective, the “National Outlook” means exactly Islam (Yıldız, A., 2003: 190). Just as the secular state system in Turkey, these Islamist parties cannot openly show their Islamic identity, but there is no doubt about their Islamist essence (Dagi, I., 2005: 8). To understand the rise of Turkey’s “National Outlook Movement”, it is necessary to have a general understanding about the worldwide religious revival in the 1970s, in particular the rise of political Islam.

In 1970s, there was a worldwide religious revival movement (Wang, X., 2010: 41-50), including the rise of political Islam (Zhang, F. & Guo, C., 2011; Juergensmeyer, M., 2008: 244). In terms of the reason for the rise of political Islam, academics have different interpretations. First, at the social and economic levels, some scholars believe that the rise of Religiopolitical Actor is because a

---

1 Mark Juergensmeyer, former chairman of the American Academy of Religion, once called those who participated in the global rebel movement as “religious activists”, instead of “fundamentalists”. He pointed out that religious activists on the one hand were against Modernist values, but on the other hand were very modern men; they embraced traditional religious values on the one hand, but on the other hand rejected secular ideology. See, also: Guo Changgang, “9/11 is a reflection of development of tension between ‘religious’ and ‘secular politics’-- Mark Juergensmeyer,” Chinese Social Sciences Today, September 4, 2011,
middle class society emerged from the pilgrim group. For example, Professor Hakan Yavuz, from the Middle East Research Center at the University of Utah, believes that the modernization process in some religious countries produces a lot of well-educated religious citizens, and with the enhancement of economic status, they want their cultural and political demands that were once repressed to be met. They are eager to become an important political force as well. Hakan Yavuz also believes that compared with some countries that lack a middle class, religious and political movements of those with more modest middle-class are more moderate and less prone to become extremism (Yavuz, H., 2004: 213-232).

However, some scholars believe that Religiopolitical Actors are produced by the “economic deprivation theory”. For example, Turkish celebrated historian Feroz Ahmed believes that becoming a Religiopolitical Actor is more attractive to groups that suffer from economic deprivation in society, especially the urban poor or grassroots people, because socially marginalized groups are more likely to be attracted or manipulated by religion (Ahmed, F., 1991: 3-21). Professor L. Carl Brown believes that as the urbanization process continues to accelerate and the continuous development of higher education in the Middle East countries, massive rural populations migrate to urban areas. Young groups of higher education began to emerge, but as social competitiveness becomes more and more intense, these youths also become very anxious, partly because they cannot find a satisfactory job-- a lot of them simply cannot find a job at all. They thus are dissatisfied with the existing regime and instead become active participants in the political religious movements. They are determined to find an alternative to the existing regime, thus becoming fans of religious political movements (Brown, C., 2000). Second, the rise of political Islam is also associated with certain ideological factors. Angel M.

http://sspress.cass.cn/paper/24620.htm [last access date: December 30, 2014]

Here, Religiopolitical Actor refers to those individuals and groups who have religious beliefs, and participate in politics through active or passive political action.
Rabasa, senior political scientist of RAND believes that after independence, the Middle East countries have tried a variety of “secular” ideologies, such as liberal nationalism, Nasser’s social Arabism, and the Baha’i Faith, etc. However, they all failed to achieve stable economic growth and the development of representative political institutions, nor improve the international influence of the country (Rabasa, A., 2004: 36). These failures of secular modes and ideology motivate the rise of the Islamic mode - perhaps returning to Islam is the solution to the problems (Özbudun, E., 2001: 238-265).

Of course, the Islamic cultural traditions should also be an important consideration. Orientalist scholar Bernard Lewis, points out that, unlike other religions, Islam is more prone to politicization. He believes that since Prophet Muhammad, political leadership is intertwined with religious leadership of Islam. The current trend of political Islam in the Middle East is closely related to this feature of Islam (Lewis, B., 2002).

Generally speaking, the “National Outlook Movement” in Turkey, which represents the force of Islam, is a small part of the global religious revival movement in the 1970s. The specific evolution has distinctive local characteristics. Renowned Turkish scholar Serif Martin proposed the theory of “core versus periphery” to summarize the historical development of Turkey, which still has an important impact on Turkish academia, and has raised concern, comment and reflection of a large number of scholars.

First, the Turkish community shows enormous social and cultural gap between the “center” and the “edge”. Early in the era of the one-party system in the Republic of Turkey (1923-1946), the country’s elites, who hold a secular ideology, launched several top-to-bottom social reforms. Their goal was to achieve a high degree of “contemporary civilization”, namely, the European civilization. In these elites’ opinion, the Oriental culture and traditional way of life are the fundamental causes of the decline of the Ottoman Empire as well as economic backwardness of the Republic of Turkey, of which Islamic culture particularly is viewed
as “medieval relic” and must be limited. Thus, under the rule of the Republican People’s Party, the government tried to compress the public space of the religion, such as the ban on public performances of oriental music, and the establishment of rural institutions in order to achieve socialization of villagers, among other things. They tried to carry out reforms and a wide range of management on religious institutions, religious functions and religious education through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Sarfati, Y., 2009: 71-72). However, the Kemalists’ ideas of secular nationalism, progressivism and activism, and their approaches to change the Islamic way of life into a Western way of life do not fully penetrate into the entire Turkish society, especially the ideas of those living far from the rural city. In the vast rural areas of Anatolia, Islamic consciousness is still the basis of common identity for most social groups. Based on this, according to historian Feroz Ahmed, at the beginning of the implementation of the multi-party system, the Republican People’s Party had to recognize Islam as an important factor in Turkish politics, and begin to compromise on religious issues. Otherwise, it will be difficult to get enough votes in the election (Özkan, B., 2015: 73).

In addition, the economic policies pursued by the elites also widen the gap between economic development of the city and that of the countryside. During the Great Depression from 1929 to 1933, Turkey modeled the European countries to take a state-led industrialization program. As a result, the metropolitan area achieved rapid industrialization, and bureaucratic and emerging industrial bourgeoisie that controlled the country’s economic lifeline became the biggest beneficiary of the policy. In contrast, the interests of farmers were largely harmed—they became victims of industrial development. They did not have enough tractors for farming, and suffered from power shortage. Many rural areas even had no roads. However, at the same time, those farmers had to bear the ever-increasing taxes and the state-imposed secularization reform (Çetin, M., 2014: 8-9). Thus, there forms a binary society opposition in Turkey, that is, the opposition between traditional Islamic people
living in the rural hinterlands and modern Western elites living in cities prevailed. This opposition is called the “center-edge” gap (Mardin, S., 1974: 169-190), or the opposition between “White Turks” and “Black Turks” (Demiralp, S., 2012: 514-515), which is the most important opposition in the Turkish social and political life.

Second, the core-periphery gap continues to be politicized. With Turkey began the transition to multi-party system in 1946, the ruling Democratic Party began to implement liberal economic policies. The mechanization of agriculture became widespread, declining farm labor demand, and a large number of rural surplus labor forces began to flow to urban areas. That is, “marginal groups” migrated to the “central region” (Akdoğan, G., 2009: 8-12; Yalcintam, C. & Erbas, A., 2003: 94). However, even though rural population moves to the cities, they only enter the special concept of “center”, instead of the real center. They can only live in “slums” (gecekondu) (Akbulut, M. & Başlık, S., 2011: 1-5), and become the “urban edge people” and not

---

① Contemporary Turkish politics is not only experiencing an ideological struggle between Islamists and secularists, but also a more deep-seated antagonism between old urban elite and emerging rural non-business groups, namely, the opposition between White Turks and Black Turks. This opposition is mainly determined by class and geography. “White Turks” include the military, the media, the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie, who are dedicated to promoting the value of the upper classes, and try to affect the orientation of the entire nation using their way of life, values, culture and taste as the standard. They are mainly born in Istanbul, or at least a second or third generation immigrants living in Istanbul. “Black Turks” include private entrepreneurs, farmers, etc. They mostly hold the religious and cultural conservatism positions, mainly living in rural Anatolia, or slums in big cities. Currently, the contradiction between the two groups are growing.

② Due to immigration, the population of Istanbul increased from 0.86 million in the early 20th century to 1.1 million by the mid-1920s, and further increased to 10 million in 2000. By 2007, it had reached 12.5 million. The share of Istanbul city population in Turkey’s total population were: 4.6% in 1935, 1945 and after World War II; in 1955 it increased to 5.27%; 5.29% in 1960; in 1965, it climbed to 5.55%; in the year of 2000, it was 14.75%. By the year of 2000, the number of slum dwellers in Istanbul accounted for 75% of the city population.

③ Gecekondu means slum in Turkish. It generally refers to the houses built in one night; most of these houses are built on state-owned land, but there is no legal license, nor any construction plan. In fact, these constructions are against the law, but because these houses were mostly built before the Turkish elections,
really into the urban mainstream. They cannot find a decent job, or a stable income as well as corresponding social security (Karpat, K., 2009: 100-106). Faced with this group, urban elites think presence of these people not only leads to ruralization of the cities, bringing a shortage of public resources in infrastructure, but also bring the threat of their concept of traditional Islamic culture. In short, the social and cultural gap between the edge and the center was not progressively bridged in the 1990s, but instead, became more severe. The main reason is that the yearning and optimism of the first generation of “urban marginal men” who live in slums has given way to disappointment and pessimism of the second and third generation residents. If the former has better economic and educational opportunities compared to those who remain in the rural areas, then the latter is confined to low-income parents and humble social status, and thus feels the discrimination from urban locals and suffer from scarcity of economic opportunities in comparison with urban residents. Discrimination from urban elites on the one hand is from the negative image of slum dwellers and urban governance problems they bring to the cities; on the other hand, it also because of an increase in contact with the slum dwellers as a large number of urban aboriginal move to the suburbs, which further stimulates contradictions between elite residents and slum dwellers. Slum dwellers gradually turn from rural populations that are unable to integrate into the cities from “the other” that attacks urban values and social order. It is this identity opposition that exacerbates the gap between the two sides.

Third, the secular state began to take inclusion-cooptation strategy, absorbing religious forces to expand its ruling foundation. After 1945, as the migration from rural population to urban areas accelerated, Islam began to re-emerge in the public space. Then

in order to get votes, politicians provided these houses with legal license or provided some other services. However, in fact, this brings great obstacles to municipal infrastructure.

¹ Males from Gecekondu mainly are street vendors, construction workers or professional drivers; women mainly engage in small family workshops or waiter occupation.
The ruling Democratic Party immediately took advantage of this trend. They absorbed religious groups to join this political party, built new mosques, reopened the Holy Sepulcher, and established seminary schools and universities. They thereby greatly restored the Islamic Heritage of the Ottoman Society (Jung, D. & Piccoli, W., 2001: 118-122). Until the early 1970s, right and neutral parties basically had great appeal to marginalized groups. Among them, the most representative politician is Necmettin Erbakan. Although the national order party and national salvage party that Erbakan created have been banned, in fact, in Turkish politics, Religiopolitical actors have begun to be incorporated into the government’s bureaucracy. By working in a coalition government, Erbakan successfully expanded the influence of “National Outlook Movement”. Even in the period of military government (1980-1983), in order to end the ideological chaos, the military also selectively used some Islamic elements. One of them is the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis ideology promoted by the Hearth of Intellectuals, an organization that holds conservative views. This ideology has become the source of cultural and educational policies of the Motherland Party. Thus, Religiopolitical actors are also increasingly subject to public attention, which has laid the most important foundation for Islamic parties to achieve electoral victory and step into the peak of power in the 1990s.

In short, the development of the “National Outlook Movement” can be roughly summarized as follows. Firstly of all, in the formation of the Turkish nation-state, a severe economic and social gap was also one of the consequences. With the upgrading of urbanization and literacy rates, the contact between center and the edge grew, causing the gap to continue and be politicized. Religiopolitical actors began to rise. Secondly, the ideology of religiopolitical actors addressed social and cultural discontent of marginalized groups, which has laid a solid foundation for electoral gains. In addition, the secular government also used

---

Democratic Party, DP, is Demokrat Parti, DP, in Turkish.
inclusion-cooptation strategy to win the support of religiopolitical actors. It also indirectly contributed to the development of additional religiopolitical actors. For example, the secular government allowed religious forces to be in charge of some administrative departments, so that they could use national resources to benefit their own supporters or voters; religious forces were also empowered with the access to national cultural resources to highlight their religious identity and spread their religious ideology; the government also increased state funding for religious education to exploit more space to develop new alternative elites and spread religious discourse. If those absorbed by the Government were moderate religious forces, then the non-moderate religious forces from the external environment would criticize the former, accusing the government of utilizing religion as a tool, resulting in suspicion toward moderate forces and making non-moderates religious forces gain a wider range of support (Sarfati, Y., 2009: 35). These led to the same result, that is, inclusion-cooptation strategy that enhanced the power of religious forces, moderate or non-moderate alike. There are many examples: mild religious policy was being criticized during the ruling of the Motherland Party; during the ruling of the Welfare Party, power of non-moderate religious forces grew; and during the AKP administration, a mild religious policy again won the advantage.

III

After the second military coup, the National Salvation Party was banned in 1980 by the military, ending in the party’s leader Erbakan to be banned from all political parties. His followers then created the Welfare Party in 1983, and won in subsequent elections. In the period that Motherland Party was in power (1983-1991)\(^1\), Turgut Özal, a pragmatist, attempted to combine nationalism, conservatism, liberalism and Islamist ideologies. However, because

---

\(^1\) The Motherland Party, MP, is Anavatan Partisi, ANAP, in Turkish.
of internal factional struggle within the party, the consequences of liberal economic policies, social decay and decline of civic virtue, and resentment of Islamist religious forces towards the government’s initiative to absorb religious forces, the Motherland Party gradually declined. Conservative forces also abandoned the Motherland Party and joined the Welfare Party. Thus, the Welfare Party gradually became the center of Islamic forces in Turkey in the early 1990s, and won the subsequent election, reaching the summit of the “national outlook movement”. For example, in the 1994 local elections, the Welfare Party won 19% of the vote and won 28 cities’ mayoral seats, including Turkey’s largest cities Istanbul and Ankara. In the 1995 election, the Welfare Party won 21% of the popular vote, thereby forming a coalition government party with the True Path Party. Erbakan thus became the first pro-Islamic Prime Minister of the Republic.

The reason why the Welfare Party won an electoral victory was that the political mobilization carried out by religious activities expanded the party’s public support. The social justice agenda it pursued also enhanced the party’s social foundation. Particularly, giving social issues priority over religious issues was supported by the urban and rural marginalized groups. In particular, this attracted urban poor and rural low-income farmers who were dissatisfied with the liberalization policies in the 1980s (Kamrava, M., 1998: 292-294). To be specific, the reasons for the rise of the Welfare Party can be summarized into four points. First, the Welfare Party consolidated its public foundation. As supporters of the Redemption Party - traditional forces in rural areas – massively migrated to urban areas in the beginning of the 1970s, employment, housing, health care and other issues faced by these people had become the major concerns of the Welfare Party. Therefore, public support of the Welfare Party had grown from the countryside to the urban fringe (Yavuz, M., 1997: 74). Second, the Welfare Party’s ideological features were gradually diluted. Neoliberal economic policies

---

① The True Path Party, TPP, is Doğru Yol Partisi, DYP, in Turkish.
carried out by Turgut Özal’s Motherland Party not only failed to bring benefits to the urban poor or to support the rise of small-scale entrepreneurs, but also triggered a severe economic crisis and social problems such as corruption (Öniş, Z., 2004: 114). Therefore, compared to ideological issues, committing to solving economic and social problems had become an important reason that the Welfare Party won the election. Third, the Welfare Party’s political discourse began to adjust and change. The slogan of Welfare Party changed from the “divine order” to the more secularized “just order”. They advocated wealth redistribution. Various social and economic strata could accept this discourse strategy (Kamrava, M., 1998: 287-289). Fourth, the rise of the Welfare Party also benefited from the development of the world situation in the aftermath of the Cold War. The liberalization policies of Özal government in the 1980s were subject to the development of the international context. The biggest challenge it encountered was the rejection of Turkey’s EU membership application in 1987, which sparked an anti-Western wave among Turkish people. Meanwhile, Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” argument was very popular in the post-Cold War era, coupled with the West’s double standards on the issue of Muslims in Bosnia and Azerbaijan (Yavuz, M., 1997: 77); most of the Turks believed that the West had lost its sense of morality, and was no longer attractive. The Islamic culture and values began to be accepted by the general public.

For these reasons, ideological differences among the nationalists, conservatives, liberals and Islamists on the West and Westernization in the past gradually receded. With increased discontent of the Turkish people towards the Western world, political isolation from the West, and split of values with the West, seeking a new national identity had become the background of Welfare Party’s rise in 1990s (Dagi, I., 2005: 16). Because of the inherent separation between the right and left political parties in Turkish politics, and that the two sides were unable to implement reforms to solve social problems, the Welfare Party became a strong substitute force in Turkey. However, although the Welfare Party won the support of the
majority of the urban and rural poor people after adjusting the discourse strategies in an effort to resolve social and economic problems, it was unable to solve the country’s problems when it came to power. Erbakan and other leaders still insisted on using the traditional Islamic discourse against the existing system, resulting in the interests of the secular regime being seriously damaged. As a result, the policy pursued by the Welfare Party not only failed to effectively reduce the intensity of social conflict, but also led to the development of division and opposition between secularists and Islamists in Turkish society (Rabasa, A., 2004: 43). Eventually, Erbakan was blamed by Islamists, while coming under pressure from secularists. On the one hand, Erbakan had promised to stay away from the West, but in fact he was powerless to stop the Turkish government from forming the Customs Union with the EU or to sign a military training cooperation agreement with Israel in 1996, which led to discontent among the Islamists. On the other hand, Erbakan was in favor of lifting the headscarf ban. In addition, Erdoğan, then mayor of Istanbul, hoped to build a mosque in Taksim Square (Sözen, E. & Yavuz, H., 2014: 147)\(^\text{①}\). This series of proposals further exacerbated doubts about secularism.

The Welfare Party leaders still used the traditional Islamic discourse and implemented the pro-Islamic policy after they came to power, which caused strong resistance from the guardian of secularism - the military. They feared that reinforced political Islam forces would threaten the secular political system significantly (Dagi, I., 2004: 17). Faced with the impact of Islam on secularism and the challenges the Welfare Party posed on the secular system, the military began to take action. The General Staff of the Army set up a “Western Working Group” and started investigation towards the Islamic community’s activities in the country. Soon, the National

\(^{①}\) Taksim Square is the heart of modern Istanbul, but it is also typical of the rupture zone of Turkish society. Artists, writers, and actors who pursue bohemian lifestyle and unorthodox thinking encounter here. A variety of lifestyles and values converge here, making Taksim Square the center of anti-establishment, which has important political and social significance in Turkey.
Security Committee, (NSC), composed of the military commander, chief of staff and Cabinet members, made a series of decisions on February 28, 1997. They determined to strengthen the secular characteristics of the Turkish states, eliminating the threat of Islamist ideology and urged the government to take measures to protect the secular identity (Dagi, I., 2004: 18). This is the famous Turkish political “February 28 Process”, also known as Soft Coup or Post-modern Coup.

After the “2/28 process” in 1997, since the opposition between the Welfare Party and secularists, including the military, escalated, the Welfare Party eventually was declared illegal and was banned. Then, the Virtue Party formed by the former Welfare Party members once again stepped into politics, but the Virtue Party had a major shift in its attitude in terms of dealing with the Western world, compared to the Welfare Party. The Virtue Party no longer opposed to the West, and instead began to cooperate with the West, and actively accepted democracy, human rights and the rule of law and other Western political philosophy. This was because the “2/28 Process” compelled the leaders of the “National Outlook Movement” to realize that they could not shake the position of the military, or break the influence of the secularist on politics and the law, and also failed to reach a consensus in Turkish society. Thus, they began to seek Western support and to use the Western concept of “democracy, human rights and the rule of law” to fight against the military’s “dictatorship”. The paradox is that the Virtue Party’s stance was contrary to the idea of anti-Western tradition that they had always insisted on. This was a complete departure from the traditional attitude which also led to a crisis regarding the legitimacy of the Virtue Party, and triggered an internal division of the “National Outlook Movement” (Gumuscu, S. & Sert, D., 2009: 960-963). Change of the Virtue Party’s discourse was an important turning point of the “National Outlook Movement”.

No matter what adjustments the Virtue Party made, defenders of secularism and the military still viewed the Virtue Party as the successor to the Welfare Party. This came from the military’s
hostility towards the “National Outlook Movement”, viewing them as a threat to political stability and number one reactionary force of Turkey’s political system. In this case, the “National Outlook Movement” had only two choices: either direct confrontation with secularists resolving the legality issue of political parties, namely to figure out how to avoid legal or political obstacles of secularism and legally carrying out public activities. However, even though the Virtue Party took the second approach, and actively adjusted its discourse strategy, it was still accused of violation of the Constitution and the Political Parties Act in 2001 and was banned. After this, internal divisions within the “National Outlook Movement” came to the open. The traditionalist (Gelenekçiler) in the movement created the Felicity Party under the leadership of Recai Kutan. Necmettin Erbakan was actually still in control behind the scenes, and insisted on the Islamist position of the movement. The reformist (Yenilikçiler) in the movement created the Justice and Development Party under the leadership of Erdoğan. They abandoned the Islamist stance, turned to Conservative Democracy position, and actively supported democracy, human rights, pluralism and other Western values. This was because of the Islamic parties’ continuous conflict with the secular regime and the experience of being banned had provided a lesson to reformists, who thus took a more flexible and cooperative attitude. They also communicated and interacted with the secular regime, the military, and businessmen until they came to power (Gumuscu, S. & Sert, D., 2009: 961).

In 2003, Erdoğan publicly broke the relationship with the “National Outlook Movement”. Compared to the adherence of “National Outlook Movement” to Islamic values and Islamic discourse, the AKP was trying to reconcile conflicts between modernity and tradition, universalism and nativism, reason and spirit, in contradiction to the “National Outlook Movement”.

First, the “conservative democracy” of the AKP’s advocates contains political philosophy in the following five areas: 1) they refuse to use a revolutionary rhetoric to change society, advocating
gradual reform instead; 2) the establishment of limited government, and the protection of individual freedoms; 3) to resolve political issues on the basis of consultation; 4) to accept the existence of different socio-cultures, and be tolerant in order to survive; 5) the political authority and legitimacy should be based on the value of the rule of law and public support (Sarfati, Y., 2009: 283-284). Generally speaking, the AKP implements conservative social policy and the political system of democratization process. They try to gain the support of marginal groups just like the Democratic Party led by Peter Lacey in the 1950s, the Justice Party led by Demirel in the 1960s and Özal’s Motherland Party in the 1980s. These groups are mostly conservative, nationalist, Islamist and respect democracy, so the AKP’s political foundation and public support comes from both urban and rural people, the rich and the poor, as well as highly educated and less educated; it has become a more broad-based ruling center-right party.

Second, the AKP’s political program is justice and development, and this program has been the classic theme of the rightist parties in Turkey since the 1950s. The purpose has been to fight against secularism state elites and military bureaucracy under the shadow of the Kemalist ideology, relying on a wide range of public support. They want the public to gain the benefits of economic development, and empower people with stronger potential and weaken the arbitrary style of the secular elites in national affairs. It is with the Program of Justice and Development that the AKP has succeeded to overcome the deficiencies of the center-right parties in the elections. Therefore, it cannot be simply viewed as another Islamist party, but instead, a representative of the requirements of marginal people, who in the past were suppressed by strong national traditions.

Thirdly, the AKP is very different from the “National Outlook Movement” on economic and foreign policies. Although the AKP insists that social justice is very important, it promotes the neo-liberal economic policy in the era of Özal, and the idea of full integration into the global economy, prompting the rapid development of the Turkish economy. This is different from the
“National Outlook Movement”, which gives the government the important function of developing the national economy. Meanwhile, the AKP rejects any dogmatic anti-Western stance. On the other hand, it also refutes Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” theory, and focuses on the dialogue among civilizations (Ardıcı, N., 2014: 105-111). Based on this understanding of civilization, the AKP changed its foreign policy: it actively sought to join the EU, focused on the diplomatic balance between the West and the East, and actively participated in various international organizations, which made Turkey an important player in global governance.

The above three points reveal the differences between Justice and Development Party and the “National Outlook movement”, which may come to the conclusion that the AKP is not a continuation of the “National Outlook Movement”. After all, we have never seen any of Islamic political party that would take the initiative to implement Western-oriented campaign in order to join the European Union, actively advocate the globalization movement, cooperate with international actors, attract foreign direct investments, accept neoliberal economic policies, and implement market reforms and privatization projects. However, the AKP’s Islamic background has still not been embraced by many secularists and elites who have strong national power. They remained suspicious that Erdoğan’s government has a “secret motion”. They also have doubts about whether the AKP can really change its Islamist ideology because no one can rule out the possibility of their commitment to that ideology. Even though the country has experienced moderate conservatism for a few years, the AKP is likely to return to Islamism at any time (Lagendijk, J., 2012: 167-176).

After all, it was in 2008 while relations between Turkey and the EU as well as the United States fell in trouble, which was rare in the history of Turkey. In Turkey’s history, it is normal that Turkey has good relationships with one side (EU or the US), and bad relationships with the other. However, it is very abnormal that the relationship with both sides worsens (Gordon, P. & Taspinar, O., 2008: 48). Thus, it is probably not accurate to call the AKP a
“post-Islamist party”. A more suitable label is an evolution of the “National Outlook Movement”. The AKP represents the transformation of some Turkish Islamists. Although there are still Islamists who insist on the creed of Erbakan, and are hostile to the West and globalization, some Islamists have begun to respond to Erdoğan’s call to embrace a more open, free, democratic and humane political system. As the famous Turkish political scientist Ziya Öniş put it, the following four elements contribute to this shift (Öniş, Z., 2006).

First, when Erbakan became Turkey’s Prime Minister, and the “National Outlook Movement” reached high levels, this resulted in the emergence of the “2/28 coup”. Erbakan was forced to resign, and the Welfare Party was also banned, which indicated that the secularist forces still have significant influence on control and control over state power. This provides a baseline that the “National Outlook Movement” cannot challenge the secular order. Second, Islamists recognize the importance of parliamentary democracy. Under the condition that red lines cannot be broken, they need to expand the scope of marginal groups through the democratization of the means. It should become a staunch supporter of democracy, which also helps moderation of Islamists. Third, in order to get more support, the Islamists must rely on the rise of the more religious middle class. Therefore, they naturally favor liberal economic system and correspondent policies under globalization, which will help generate a lot of Muslim entrepreneurs and scholars. It will further create more freedom for political participation. Fourth, in order to seek more political participation, the EU membership application process has become an important tool for Islamists. The EU can effectively protect the Muslim identity of Islamists, and also can put pressure on the secularist elite to give up their control power.

If Kemalists are staunch secularists and Westernizers, who have the actual control of state power, and the “National Outlook Movement” led by Erbakan was a representative of firm and anti-Western Islamist activists as well as the challengers who seek
alternatives of Kemalism, then the AKP, the evolution of the “National Outlook Movement”, is seeking to reconcile the conflicts of the above two sides. On the one hand, it implements Islamic social policy, and therefore gains the support of the conservative people; on the other hand, it implements liberal economic policies and democratic political policies, and wins the support of part of the secular and liberal people. Also, on the one hand, due to the pressure from the EU, they reform in order to expand rights of marginalized forces; on the other hand, they undermine secularism of the national elite power via the European Union’s pressure on the democratic process. Thus, the AKP is able to get the support of different social, ethnic and religious groups, to fill the power vacuum of the center-right parties in Turkey, and to rule for 13 years in Turkey. Of course, after going through political storms, the party also picks up the inherent flaws of Turkish politics. Just as the Democratic Party in the late 1950s, it has slowed down the reform, strengthened power, and gradually turns to authoritarianism, which reflected in the second and the third ruling term of this party.

Conclusion

The National Order Party and the National Salvation Party represent the initial stage of the “National Outlook Movement”, and the establishment and development of the Welfare Party drive the “National Outlook Movement” to new heights. However, on its way to the peak, it suffered from heavy strike. Even though the members changed the name of the party to the virtue party, it still was banned. The Felicity Party, successor of the “National Outlook Movement”, gradually declined to a marginal political party due to its poor performance in the elections in Turkey. The Justice and Development Party, which was from but exceeded the scope of the “National Outlook Movement”, won the “election hegemony” by virtue of its political program of “conservative democracy”, and position of representing “Islamic and conservative marginal power”, as well as its efforts on EU membership application process,
globalization, liberalization. It has governed for 13 years. The “National Outlook Movement” since the 1970s, which has lasted for more than 40 years, provides a new perspective to understand political development in Turkey.

First, from the perspective of party politics, the “National Outlook Movement” represents the legalization and moderation of political Islam. In 1973, The National Salvation Party led by Erbakan won 48 seats in parliamentary elections, while the Republican People’s Party won 185 seats. Although the ideologies of the two parties are very different, in the end, the two parties established a coalition government, marking the political debut of Political Islam in Turkey. Victory of the Welfare Party in the 1990s even drove political Islam up to the peak. The following decline and evolution of the “National Outlook Movement” indicates that political Islam does not resort to violent means, but instead takes moderation path, or accommodates into the mainstream politics, gradually gathering strength.

Secondly, from an ideological point of view, the national outlook movement not only represents the struggle between Islamism and secularism (the relationship with otherness), but also on behalf of the competition between nationalism and liberalism (own internal relations). Conflict between Islam and secularism is the key to understand the development of Turkish politics. The national outlook movement hopes to build a new Islamic identity and challenge the homogenization of cultural policy by secularists. At the same time, the establishment and success of the AKP also indicates the internal opposition of the national outlook movement between liberalists and nationalists. Although both must strengthen the social impact of Islam, the nationalists led by Erbakan are more anti-European, anti-American, anti-Western and anti-modernity, while the liberalists led by Erdoğan are more pro-European, pro-American, and pro-globalization process. For now, the evolution of the “national outlook movement”- the AKP, has greater audience, and thus has greater influence.

Finally, from the perspective of social change, the “National
"National Outlook Movement" represents a rise of conservative and Islamic marginal power. The center-edge theory is a path to understand social development in Turkey. Kemalists secular state elites and their institutions are in the center, such as the military, political parties (Republican People’s Party), the legislative body, the Constitutional Court, etc. Conservative Anatolian people and urban poor in middle-sized or large cities are on the edge. Political parties led by Erbakan are in favor of Islamist people, and Erdoğan’s AKP expands the boundaries of the “edge”, and thus has stronger public support. The “National Outlook Movement” has brought great challenges to secularists, but that does not mean Turkey’s secularism is suffering an even greater threat, because most people are still in favor of separation of politics and secularism in Turkey. Turkish society does not support the establishment of the rule of Islamic law. Support for Erbakan and Erdoğan can be regarded as a struggle of marginal power against the central force.

In the previous elections in Turkey during the last ten years, as the successor of “National Outlook Movement”, the Felicity Party’s vote rate remains at between 2% to 3%, while as an Evolution of the “National Outlook Movement”, AKP’s the vote is usually above 40%, which indicates that relying solely on the banner of “Islamism” (as an ideology) has gradually lost its political and ideological appeal, but it also shows that having conservative elements of the “Islam” (as a religion) can still obtain greater public support. Turkey’s political Islam has started to turn away from utilization of Islam as a tool to everyday Islamic politics. Islam as a personal faith continues to be strengthened. Meanwhile, the moderate Islamic political parties gradually adapt to the secular system. The development, climax, crisis and the continuation of the “National Outlook Movement”, especially the rise of the AKP, suggest Turkey’s Islamist parties are becoming more moderate. Although the “National Outlook Movement” repeatedly suffered prohibition from secular political system in the last 40 years, in the participatory process of democracy, it has gradually adapted to the rules of the electoral mechanism, which meets the long-term interests of the
Islamic parties and the secular state.

References

Arıç, N. (2014). Civilizational discourse, the “alliance of civilizations” and Turkish foreign policy, *Insight Turkey,* Vol.16, No.3.


Özkan, B. (2015: Spring).Turkey’s Islamists: from power-sharing to political incumbency, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*.


shatter-zone, Insight Turkey, Vol.16, No.1.


