Ruling Islamists’ Approaches to Minorities in Sudan and Turkey

by

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Abstract

Ruling Islamists’ interactions with ethnic minorities have been largely understudied and undertheorized. This research study examines ruling Islamists’ treatment of minorities, asking two questions. The first question is how do ruling Islamists treat minorities? And the second is what explains their treatments? To the extent that extant literature addresses these questions, it offers cultural-based explanations that stress the role of religious affiliation, suggesting that Islamists are more likely to accommodate co-Muslim ethnic minorities, and exclude, or perhaps repress, non-Muslim others.

This dissertation sets to address its questions through investigating Islamists’ approaches to the animist and Christian South Sudanese and Muslim Darfuri minorities in Sudan, as well as the Muslim Kurdish minority in Turkey. In contrast to what the ideational-centric literature expects, this research study has found that in both Sudan and Turkey Islamists lacked a coherent approach toward minorities. Rather, their strategies changed across time toward the groups examined between accommodative and repressive or vice versa. In addition to the presence of within-group diachronic variations, the case of Sudan also demonstrated across-group co-temporal variations in the treatment of minorities.

Since governing Islamists shifted their approaches toward all minority groups, despite differences in the groups’ religious affiliations, this study refutes the ideational-centric analysis. Instead, this research has found political strategic calculus to have had a considerable influence in shaping Islamists’ policies toward their respective minorities. This strategic calculus was shaped by two factors. The first was the necessity of building domestic alliances, which was largely an outcome of the strategic interactions between actors, including intra-Islamists’ interactions, and the varying formal and informal structures in place. The second factor involved
the regional and international dynamics that influenced the minority groups’ participation in domestic alliances through affecting their strategic capacity. While domestic actors’ strategic interactions affected the need for alliance-building, regional and international dynamics affected the configuration of such alliances by influencing the desire of potential minority groups to participate as allies.
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<tr>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or Justice and Development Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Adalet Partisi or Justice Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>Coordinating Council of Southern States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi or Republican People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Comprehensive Peace Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSP</td>
<td>Demokratik Sol Parti or Democratic Left Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTP</td>
<td>Demokratik Toplum Partisi or Democratic Society Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUP</td>
<td>Democratic Unionist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DYP</td>
<td>Dogru Yol Partisi or True Path Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEC</td>
<td>European Economic Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIS</td>
<td>Front Islamique du Salut or Islamic Salvation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Fazilet Partisi or Virtue Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>Southeast Anatolian Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNU</td>
<td>Government of National Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDP</td>
<td>Halkların Demokratik Partisi or Peoples’ Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEP</td>
<td>Halkın Emek Partisi or People’s Work Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSYK</td>
<td>Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICF</td>
<td>Islamic Charter Front</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>OIC</td>
<td>Organization of Islamic Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAIC</td>
<td>Popular Arab and Islamic Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCP</td>
<td>Popular Congress Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDF</td>
<td>Popular Defence Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PJAK</td>
<td><em>Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistane</em> or Kurdistan Free Life Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKK</td>
<td><em>Partiya Karkeren Kurdistane</em> or Kurdistan Workers' Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PYD</td>
<td><em>Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat</em> or Democratic Union Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCCNS</td>
<td>Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td><em>Refa Partisi</em> or Welfare Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTUK</td>
<td>High Audio-Visual Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAF</td>
<td>Sudanese Armed Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SETA</td>
<td>Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Sudanese Liberation Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td><em>Saadet Partisi</em> or Felicity Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>Special Provincial Administrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPLM/A</td>
<td>Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSCCSE</td>
<td>Southern Sudan Centre for Census, Statistics and Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSDF</td>
<td>South Sudan Defence Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSU</td>
<td>Sudanese Socialist Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAK</td>
<td><em>Teyrebazen Azadiya Kurdistan</em> or Kurdistan Freedom Hawks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNA</td>
<td>Transitional National Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSK</td>
<td><em>Turk Silahli Kuvvetleri</em> or Turkish Armed Forces</td>
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xv
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WGI</td>
<td>Worldwide Governance Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOK</td>
<td>Council of Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPG</td>
<td><em>Yekineyen Parastina Gel</em> or People’s Protection Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPJ</td>
<td><em>Yekineyen Parastina Jin</em> or Women’s Defence Units</td>
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Chapter 1. Introduction:

Political Islam and Minorities

In the past four decades Islamists have become important actors and arbiters of political power in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Islamist regimes emerged in Iran (1979) and Sudan (1989–2019), Islamist governments were voted into power in Turkey (since 2002), Tunisia (2011–2014 and 2019), and Egypt (2012–2013), and political Islamist parties have regularly dominated the parliaments in Jordan and Morocco (Ayoob 2008; Brown 2012; Cavatorta 2015; Haklai 2009; Mandaville 2007; Milton-Edwards et al. 2004; Tezcur 2010; Schwedler 2006; Wickham 2013)

In response to Islamists’ growing political power across MENA, academics and policy makers have renewed their focus on “Islamist politics.” Studies on Islamist approaches to democratic politics, war and peace, gender, and international relations have burgeoned. Within this expanding body of scholarship, research on the relationship between contemporary Islamist governments and minorities living under their rule remains sparse. In fact, there is little literature that empirically examines how Islamists in power treat minorities and none that uses a comparative approach. As a consequence, there is also no empirically-generated theoretical knowledge on the subject. Given the increased power of Islamists across MENA in the 21st century, this gap requires scholarly attention.

This study fills this gap in knowledge by investigating Islamists’ treatment of minorities. It addresses the following questions: how do Islamists treat minorities? Is there a coherent ‘Islamist approach’ to dealing with minorities? Or do Islamist governments spatially and diachronically differ in their treatment of minorities? If their treatment is variable, what explains
the variation? And what is the role of religious ideology in shaping their approach?

To the extent that extant, non-empirical literature presents expectations on the treatment of minorities, it highlights ideational variables. Some have argued that Islamists are adverse to pluralism due to theological reasons and communal commitments (Brown, Amr Hamzawy, and Ottaway 2006; Gellner 1981; Gerges 2012, 2013; Kedourie 1992; Lewis 1996). They suggest that Muslims and Islamists are more likely to accommodate co-Muslim minorities and repress non-Muslim ones. While empirical research on Islamist behavior relating to other areas is diverse and acknowledges non-ideational variables, the existing theoretical claims about Islamists’ treatment of minorities are largely shaped by ideological explanations. These claims are speculative and have not been put to a systematic empirical test.

This research, in contrast to what the ideational-centric literature expects, finds that Islamists do not have a singular and coherent approach toward minorities. Islamists shift their approaches between open and accommodative to closed and oppressive toward Muslim and non-Muslim minorities alike. Their minority treatment illustrates diachronic variation in treatment within each minority across time, as well as a co-temporal variation in treatment between the minorities. This study also demonstrates that religious affiliation does not explain Islamists’ approaches as it fails to account for the within-group diachronic and across-group co-temporal variations in Islamist treatment. In contrast to religious affiliation, it is strategic calculations that best explain Islamists’ shifting minority approaches. Islamist minority policies are an outcome of

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1 The work of Lewis, Kedourie and Gellner does not differentiate between Muslims and Islamists. It suggests that all Muslims are guided by theological commitments in their political behaviour. However, the difference is important. Muslims are defined as adherents of the Islamic faith and they can espouse various political or apolitical positions. Islamists are Muslims who aspire to use Islamic principles as central reference for political decision-making (Cavatorta 2015).

2 Work on Islamist movements, activism, and Islamist political parties has stressed the role of strategic calculations and institutional constraints on Islamist behaviour (Ayoob 2002; Brown 2012; Cavatorta 2015; Schwedler 2007; Singerman 1995; Tezcur 2010; Wickham 2007 and 2012; Wiktorowicz 2002).
attempts to preserve power, which occasionally require alliances and coalition building. Coalition building itself is contingent on strategic interactions between different internal actors, and the regional and international settings, as they work to influence minority groups’ capacity and bargaining power.

This chapter begins by outlining the strategies that states employ toward minorities. The discussion then turns to political Islam outlining three bodies of literature that shape contemporary assumptions about Islamist minority approaches. On this basis, the puzzle of contemporary Islamists’ minority approaches along with the research questions are restated. Subsequently, the chapter turns to the theoretical framework before providing the research methodology and an outline for the rest of the dissertation.

**States and Minorities**

Ethnic diversity has presented a challenge to ruling majorities in the non-Western hemisphere. States have used a range of strategies to manage ethnic minorities as collectives that share distinctive and enduring identities different from the state’s national one (Gurr 1993; McGarry and O’Leary 1994). Speaking in broad strokes, states have resorted to either open approaches aligned with accommodative strategies or closed approaches aligned with exclusionary and repressive ones. Accommodative strategies involve the recognition of ethno-cultural diversity and extension of cultural, economic, and political rights. Cultural rights entail the recognition and institutional promotion and development of minority culture (Levy 1997). Economic rights

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3 There is a robust literature on state-minority relations that examines various aspects of the phenomenon. For work relating to minority behaviour, mobilization and claims see Brubaker 1996; Cederman et al. 2010; Fearon and Laitin 2011; Gur 1993; Haklai 2011; Horowitz 1985; Houten 1998; Jenne 2007; Mylonas 2012; Petersen 2001, 2002; Toft 2003; Weiner 1971; and Wimmer 2013. For work on states’ management of ethnic diversity and response to minority behavior see Horowitz 1991; Lijphart 1991; Linz 1994; Lustick 1979; McGarry and O’Leary 1994.
relate to the betterment of group members’ material well-being and are often channeled through adequate distribution of wealth and investment (Gurr 2000). Lastly, political rights include the removal of restrictions to access power, representation in the central government, and the minority group’s self-autonomy if desired (Alonso and Ruiz-Rufino 2007, 238). Thus, accommodative strategies aim to reduce tensions and competitions over access to political power and resources.

In contrast, exclusionary and repressive strategies aim to eliminate or exclude minority groups through cultural repression, economic and political marginalization, as well as increased militarization and violence. States could resort to exclusionary violent strategies, such as genocides or ethnic expulsions, or non-violent strategies, such as cultural assimilation, to eliminate minority groups (McGarry and O’Leary 1994). Other exclusionary strategies include economic and political control that entail the domination over minorities by restricting their political, economic and administrative opportunities (Lustick 1979). More specifically, economic exclusion involves restriction on access to social and economic resources such as housing, land and employment, while political exclusion entails the prohibition of minority access to power and decision-making opportunities (Kymlicka 2004; Lustick 1979).

In brief, accommodative strategies involving cultural, economic and political policies that are favourable to the minority, as well as political engagement with the group, signify an open approach. In contrast, repressive strategies entailing exclusionary cultural, economic and political policies, as well as an increased military and violent action against the minority, indicate

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4 While the purpose of genocide is the complete ridding of racial or ethnic groups through intentional killing, the purpose of assimilation is “to eliminate politically relevant communities into a new transcendent identity” and absorb them into the dominant group’s culture (McGarry and O’Leary 1994, 102).

5 Control often transpires through coercive domination of one ethnic group over another and the cooption of its elite (Lustick 1979).
a closed approach. States have followed a variation of open or closed approaches, and at times have shifted between them.

Existing literature on Islamist governments suggests that Islamists would follow an open approach toward co-Muslim ethnic minorities and closed approach toward non-Muslim ethnic ones because of the religious identity it shares with the former. The literature on ethnic conflict does not distinguish between various identity types or treat religious identity as a potential independent variable (Chandra 2004; McCauley and McCauley 2017, 15-16; Posner 2017; Rothchild 1997; Smith 1983, 2001). This is because religion is viewed, similar to language, as a constitutive element of common culture—in many instances, ethnic, religious and linguistic traits align—and groups are assumed to share the same motivations under any identity context (McCauley 2017; Chandra 2004; Rothchild 1997; Posner 2005). Nonetheless, the literature on Islam and politics treats religious identity as an independent variable, and thereby suggests a deterministic role in shaping Islamists’ minority strategies (Brown, Amr Hamzawy, and Ottaway 2006; Gerges 2012, 2013; Mandaville 2012).

When it comes to analyzing Islamist minority strategies, a differentiation based on the ethnic minority’s religious identity is often hypothesized. Islamists are suggested to follow an open approach toward co-Muslim ethnic minorities (category A), groups that differ ethnically and linguistically from the dominant group but share its religious identity, and a closed approach toward ethnic non-Muslim minorities (category B), groups that differ ethnically, linguistically and religiously from the dominant group. There also groups that share ethnic identity with the dominant group but are religiously distinct (category C). However, since ideational-centric approaches suggest that religious affiliation is the all-important factor this research study focuses
on categories A and B. The differentiated types of minorities under Islamist governments are as follows:

- Ethnic (category A): This group differs ethnically from the dominant group but shares its religion.
- Ethnic and Religious (category B): This group differs ethnically and religiously from the dominant group.
- Religious (category C): This group shares ethnic identity with the dominant group but is religiously distinct.

**Political Islam**

Common assumptions about Islamists’ treatment of minorities have been shaped by three schools of thought. The first stresses Islam’s incompatibility with pluralism and democracy, and by extension its political forms. According to the literature of this school of thought, the Islamic tradition lacks the essential features that facilitated the development of modernization, liberalism and democratic governance in Western culture, which is detrimental to any type of political, social, or ethnic pluralism (Huntington 2011; Kedourie 1992; Lewis 1996). The second school of thought holds that Islam is compatible with democracy, pluralism, and modernization (Esposito 1991; Esposito et al. 1996; Voll 1982). As empirical studies have shown, Islamists have widely participated in democratic elections and have showed commitment to political pluralism across MENA (Brown 2012; Clark 2006; Hafez 2003; Hamzawy and Ottaway 2009; Schwedler 2006; Wickham 2004, 2013). However, while this body of work debunks the notion of Islamic exceptionalism in various areas, including democracy, violence, and gender, it shares with the first body of literature its scepticism about Islamists’ minority treatment, expressly because of ideological commitments (Brown, Amr Hamzawy, and Ottaway 2006; Gerges 2013, 2012; Mandaville 2012). Finally, a third body of literature argues that Islamic jurisprudence does
discriminate against non-Muslims. Relying on traditional interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic law, this literature suggests that Islam and its political forms are discriminatory against non-Muslims, and further that only under complete divorcing between the state and religion can non-Muslims be fully included (An-Na’im 1987; Kramer 1994).

Esposito and Shahin define political Islam as “the attempts of Muslim individuals, groups and movements to reconstruct the political, economic, social and cultural basis of their society along Islamic lines” (Esposito and Shahin 2013, 1). Accordingly, Islamists are those who believe that Islam “has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered” (Fuller 2003, xi). They use Islamic values as a central reference for policy making, conflicting with secular liberal groups who insist on excluding Islam entirely out of politics (Cavatorta 2015).

Political Islam, or Islamism, is generally understood as a political ideology rather than a theological subject. It is a modern phenomenon that emerged in the 19th century in response to the socio-political conditions of the Muslim world resulting from colonialism, disintegration, and exploitation by European forces. The collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate, the last political Islamic state that ruled over much of the Muslim land and peoples between the 14th and 20th centuries, had a catalyzing effect on the development of political Islam as an ideological movement. Ayoob argues that political Islam is an outcome of Muslim interactions—be it cultural, political, economic, militaristic, or intellectual—with the West during the latest centuries “when Western power has been in the ascendant and Muslims have become the objects, rather than the subjects

---

6 While Islamists hold that Islam is inherently political, citing religious sources such as the Quran (the holy book of Islam) and Hadith (collection of prophetic sayings), as well as notable jurisprudence, some argue that political Islam is an instrumentalization of Islam by actors, groups, organizations or individuals for political objectives (Denoeux 2002; Ayoob 2004). Beyond the reasons for politicising Islam, whether actual belief that Islam has an inherently political authoritative role or mere instrumentalization of the faith, political Islam is not a theological subject, but a political ideology.
of history” (Ayoob 2004, 4). The ideology offered a response “by imagining a future the foundations for which rest on re-appropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition” (Denoeux 2002, 61). Islamist thinkers advocated for what Roy (1994) calls “Islamo-nationalism” as a realigning of Muslim countries’ political institutions to Islamic principles, in contrast to the European secular-state model imposed through colonization and decolonization.

Islamic intellectuals, including Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) and his teacher Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), were at the forefront of the development of political Islam (March 2015). Hasan al-Banna’s (1906–1949) literary and political work, calling for an end to European cultural and political imperialism and a restructuring of social and political institutions along Islamic lines, is thought to be the most foundational work on political Islam (March 2015). The appeal of political Islam continued after decolonization as secular state leaders failed to develop their states’ economic, social, cultural, and political institutions. Roy explains that “The attraction of political Islam increased as the governing elites failed to deliver on their promises of economic progress, political participation, and personal dignity to expectant populations emerging from colonial bondage. It is in this era, from the 1950s to the 1970s, that political Islam, as we know it today, came of age” (Roy 1994, 3).

Islamist movements gained prominence in nearly all of the Muslim world. Al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood shortly after the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1928, and within a few years, the organization attracted millions of members in Egypt and opened up branches in the majority of Arab states including Sudan, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mandatory Palestine. Outside the Arab world other Islamist movements were independently founded. In Turkey, various Islamist parties were established out of the Nurchus and Naqshibandi movements, and in Iran, an Islamic Republic was founded owing to
Khomeini’s revolutionary Shia Islamism. Islamist organizations also gained traction in South Asia. Al-Maudid, a prominent Islamic thinker, founded Jamaat-i-Islami in British India, which has been one of the most influential Islamist organizations in the region. Islamist movements were also popular in Southeast Asia and established political branches such as the Parti Islam in Malaysia and Jamiat-ul-Ulama in Indonesia (Ayoob 2004).

Yet, these Islamist movements are not all the same. Islamism is a broad and nuanced political ideology (March 2015; Dabashi 1993; Ramadan 2009). While Islamists tend to be on the right of the political spectrum, they can range from “left-leaning populist protest movements to ultraconservative movements devoted more to social control over morality than to economic redistribution” (March 2015, 1). Islamist movements can differ on several other issues. First, Islamists disagree on the interpretation and understanding of the role of Islamic law in society—either literal or deriving—and the method of implementing their particular understanding with some calling for a reliance on orthodox sources and methods and others calling for an increased *ijtihad* or a human interpretative role (Esposito and Shahin 2013; March 2015). Second, Islamists can be revisionists who work within the system, but also can assume revolutionary tendencies seeking to overthrow it. Furthermore, while most Islamists have committed themselves to non-violence, there are offshoots that have opted for the use of violence against the state such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. In their relationship with the state, Islamists range from “extreme quietists who preach near-Hobbesian obedience to even the most tyrannical rulers and others who participate in competitive politics,” and some who engage in a jihad against the state (March 2015, 104). Their relations with their respective states differed, while in Yemen they sometimes coalesced with the ruling elites, in Egypt for example, their interactions have been characterized by intimidation and repression (Brown 2012; Schwedler 2006; Wickham 2013).
Not only is Islamism diverse but it is also evolving, according to Fuller (2003). Islamists can be “radical or moderate, political or apolitical, violent or quietist, traditional or modernist, democratic or authoritarian,” and they can shift between these categories (Fuller 2003, 49). Variation in Islamism or the processes of evolution and diversification are an outcome of a number of factors and particularly, “the tolerance of local regimes, the nature of local politics, and the reigning pattern of global power” (Fuller 2003, 51).

In MENA, Islamists have long had a significant following, and in some cases, have even managed to seize political power. Their ascendance to power has occurred in varying contexts and through different means. In Iran, where the Shah’s regime was particularly repressive, Islamists led the revolution and established the Islamic Republic after the Shah’s overthrow (Bakhash 1986; Kurzman 2004; Tezcur 2010). In Sudan, where Islamists have been the frequent targets of military dictatorships, they came to power through aligning with Islamist factions in the military upon realizing the imminence of an anti-Islamist coup (Ahmad and Sorbo 2013; El-Affendi 1991; Masoud et al. 2013; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005). In Turkey, Islamists came to power through democratic elections in 2002 (Carkoglu 2007; Tepe 2008; Tezcur 2010; Yavuz 2003). In other countries where they have had widespread backing, such as Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, Islamist parties have participated in tightly monitored electoral processes (Brown 2012; Clark 2006; Hafez 2003; Hamzawy and Ottaway 2009; Schwedler 2006; Wickham 2013).

The 2011 Arab Spring presented a political opportunity to Islamist movements and parties in the region and facilitated their access to power at times. For example, in Tunisia, Islamists won the parliamentary elections of 2011 and 2019 after the uprisings succeeded intoppling the country’s authoritarian regime (Cavatorta 2015; Sadiki and Bouandel 2016). In
Morocco, Islamists won plurality of seats in the 2011 and 2016 parliamentary elections after the constitutional monarchy adopted new democratic reforms (Al-Anani 2012; Volpi 2017). Although in Egypt in 2012 Islamists won the parliamentary and presidential elections after the ousting of the country’s long-ruling dictator, they were then forcibly removed by a military coup supported by counter revolution forces in 2013 (Al-Anani 2015; Brown 2013; Pioppi 2013). Nonetheless, the Arab Spring did not only result in electoral opportunities for Islamist parties in the region. In instances where civil unrest followed the uprisings, Islamist parties, as those in Syria, Libya and Yemen, have been implicated in violent civil conflicts (Brynen 2012).

The popularity of Islamists in MENA has been a serious concern for Western policymakers. In some cases, Western states have militarily, financially and diplomatically supported MENA’s authoritarian regimes to keep Islamists away from power (Cavatorta 2009; Mandaville 2013; Zakaria 2004). This is best illustrated through the Algerian case when the Islamist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won the 1991 legislative elections, prompting a Western-supported military coup (Cavatorta 2009). Zakaria explains the rationale of Western actors about Islamists: “the Arab rulers of the Middle East are autocratic, corrupt, and heavy-handed. But they are still more liberal, tolerant, and pluralistic than those who would likely replace them” (Zakaria 2004, 2). Twenty years after the Algerian FIS scenario, during the Arab Spring in 2011, little had changed about the Western policy makers’ opposition to political Islam. Several members in the House of Representatives recommended that the US cut off aid to MENA states if Islamists came to power (Mandaville 2013). The fear was that the Arab Spring would be eclipsed by an “Islamist winter” (Mandaville 2013). Such scepticism about political Islam relies on a corpus of literature that has stressed Islamic exceptionalism (Huntington 2011; Kedourie 1992; Lewis 1996).
The argument of Islamic exceptionalism holds that Islamic culture, history, and theology lack the vital components for modernization and democratic governance, and might in fact be detrimental to liberal democracy (Huntington 2011; Kedourie 1992; Lewis 1996). Kedourie argues that “there is nothing in the political tradition of Islam of the Arab world—which are the political traditions of Islam—which might make familiar or indeed intelligible, the organizing ideas of constitutional and representative governments” (Kedourie 1992, 5). While Lewis (1996) holds that the problem is with the absence of secularism, contending that all religions pose a threat to the modern democratic political system, Huntington (2000) applies some differentiation. For Huntington, Western Christianity is compatible with democracy, but Islam is not. He argues that Islamic culture negatively influences the “receptivity” of democracy of MENA residents (Huntington 2000, 70).\footnote{The school opposing this camp sees Islamic history, tradition and theology differently, holding that there is no given conflict between Islam and democracy. In fact, Esposito and Voll argue that important values such as “constitutional opposition and limits on arbitrary government power” are part of Islamic heritage and could provide the foundation for the democratic political system in Muslim-majority countries (Esposito and Voll 1996, 51). They critique the Islamic exceptionalism thesis because it is founded on “two faulty assumptions…that democratic is possible in one form, and that Islam can be expressed in only one way” (Esposito and Shahin 2013, 76).} According to this perspective, Islam also struggles with religious pluralism and gender equality, placing minorities and women in subordinate positions and giving them less rights (Kedourie 1994). Furthermore, this school of thought points to Islam’s proclivity for violence (Lewis 1990, 2003) or see it as inherently violent (Huntington 2000; Pipes 1995).

Nielsen views this understanding of Islam generally and Islamic law specifically as “simplistic” and argues that it is “rooted in out-of-date scholarship” that has been reinforced by developments in the Muslim world (Nielsen 2002, 255). He finds that Islamist movements have received most attention when they have “expounded those traditional rules of Shar’iah such as the death penalty for apostasy and adultery, harsh punishments for certain other crimes, and oppression of women and non-Muslims,” such as the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan (Nielsen 2002, 255).
Nielsen continues to state that “the West has gradually accepted such rules and traditions as ‘typical’ of the Islamic world” (Nielsen 2002, 255). Ultimately, the prevailing view is that Islamists in power will have detrimental effects not only on Western interests and security, but also on the ideals of democracy, liberalism, and pluralism.

Several studies have nonetheless dispelled the notion of Islamic exceptionalism. Research has shown that Islamists have widely participated in democratic elections in various MENA states, taken advantage of political pluralism forming coalitions and alliances with liberal, secular or leftist parties, and have handed over power after losing elections (Brown 2012; Cavatorta 2015; Clark 2006; Schwedler 2006; Wickham 2013, 2004). Research has also demonstrated that Muslim societies are not more violent than others (Esposito 2015; Fish 2002; Fish, Jensenius, and Michel 2010; Ghadbian 2000; Omar 2017; Toft 2007; Stepan 2000). When it comes to Islamist political organizations specifically, studies have demonstrated their overwhelming rejection of violence (Hamzawy and Ottaway 2009; Schwedler 2006; Wickham 2004). While a minority adheres to violent methods, scholars argue that this is an outcome of the wider political and socioeconomic environments (al-Anani 2015; Ghadbian 2000). Concerning gender, studies have pointed to the variation of Muslim women’s treatment across the Muslim world (Donno and Russett 2004; Fish 2002). Research on Islamists’ approaches to women has also shown variation between cases. For example, in Tunisia the Islamist party has supported progress in women’s political and economic rights and supported women-focused legislations (Abdo-Katsipis 2017). In Sudan, on the other hand, Islamists pursued repressive policies toward women with dire sociopolitical and economic implications (Tonnessen 2010, 2011).
Islam and Minorities

Despite the growing tendency in the literature to reject culturally based explanations for Islamist policies in various areas, when it comes to minority policies, there is a widespread assumption that religious ideology constitutes the basis of Islamist rationale. Mandaville (2012) argues that while Islamists have clearly committed themselves to the procedural aspects of democracy, the fact remains that Islamists’ commitment to “genuine political pluralism—particularly as regards the equal status of women and religious minorities—is unproven at best.” Brown, Ottaway and Hamzawy (2006) have also stated that Islamist treatment of minorities constitutes a “gray zone” because of Islamists’ ideological commitments. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria’s horrifying treatment and massacres committed against religious minorities further entrenches the mentioned “typical” view of Islamic exceptionalism and adds to the concern of minority treatment. This concern is also partially a result of the traditional interpretations of Islamic law that allow for political and economic discrimination against religious minorities (An-Na'im 1987).

Islamic law is based on human scholarly interpretation or jurisprudence of the Quran, Islam’s holy book, and Hadith, sayings of the prophet (Dutton 2002; Esposito 2011). The Islamic tradition recognizes linguistic and ethnic differences between peoples and prohibits discrimination on either basis (Ataman 2003). The prophet’s Hadith from his last sermon is often cited to stress this point: “an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a White has no superiority over a Black nor a Black has any superiority over a White except by piety and good action” (Ataman 2003, 95). While there is no justification for discrimination on ethnic grounds according to this interpretation, the citation
omits religious minorities. Accordingly, An-Na’im (1987) argues that Islamic law discriminates against religious minorities. In settings where traditional Islamic law was applied, subjects of Muslim rule were categorized based on religious affiliation into three groups: Muslims; ‘People of the Book’ or non-Muslims who believe in one of the heavenly revealed scriptures (mainly Christians and Jews); and non-believers. People of the Book were given the status of dhimmhis as groups who were in contract with the authority. Although this contract granted the groups considerable cultural and economic rights, it widely curtailed their political rights. Through this contract, People of the Book were entitled to the freedom of belief, practice of their religious rituals privately and publicly, construction and maintenance of their places of worship, educational and judicial community autonomy in accordance with their religious law and customs, and security of person and property (An-Na'im 1987; Yousif 2000). During the Ottoman period for example, People of the Book, or each millet, non-Muslim religious group, was led by clergymen who were responsible for the group’s civil status, educational and judicial institutions, property, and tax collection (Yousif 2000). Lewis describes the rights of non-Muslim groups during the Ottoman period in the following quote:

[non-Muslims] were allowed to practice their religion and to maintain, and when necessary, repair their places of worship. In general, they enjoyed a large degree of autonomy under their religious chiefs. they lived by their own and not by Muslim law. In most civil matters, including marriage, divorce, inheritance, and the like, as well as disputes between members of the same community, their disputes were heard before their
Dhimmis as members of these communities enjoyed these rights as long as the terms of their contract were fulfilled. The most important element of their contract was the payment of jizy whole a poll-tax paid as tribute for the security provided and in lieu of conscripted military service.

While these rights were significant, An-Na’im (1987) and Ma’oz (1999) argue that non-Muslims remained subject to discrimination. For instance, dhimmis were not allowed to proselytize and preach their faith. While they were allowed to convert, Muslims were not allowed to change their religion (An-Na'im 1987). Furthermore, the jizy whole was also discriminatory as it aided in the differentiation between Muslims and non-Muslims. More important was the political discrimination. Dhimmis were not allowed to hold positions of authority over Muslims, facing restrictions on senior political positions (An-Na'im 1987; Ma’oz 1999). According to Kramer (1994), under these settings, Muslims held all political power and People of the Book remained merely protected subjects.

The discrimination against the third group, the unbelievers, in Islamic law settings was even more severe. People in this group were not entitled to the same rights as People of the Book unless they were under aman, a contract of safe conduct. Aman was mainly implemented in the early part of the Islamic period before Muslim territory expanded eastwards of the Arabian Peninsula. Facing large populations of non-Abrahamic faith followers, Muslim rulers, including the Ottomans, relaxed the definition of dhimmhi to include some of these communities as well. Although An-Na’im agrees to the limitation of the application of aman historically, he maintains

9 For example, followers of Zoroastrian, Hindu and Buddhist faiths.
that strict Islamic law of an Islamic state

...does not contemplate their [unbelievers’] permanent residence, let alone partial citizenship of an Islamic state. Unbelievers are to be killed on sight unless they are granted temporary aman, safe conduct, by the Muslims. If an unbeliever is granted such aman, then his or her rights and duties are determined by the terms of the aman. Once it has lapsed or been revoked, they become harbis, at war with Muslims. As such they have no permanent and general sanctity of life or property. (An-Na’im 1987, 12)

In short, An-Na’im (1987) maintains that Islamic law discriminates against all non-Muslim religious groups, and that equality cannot be guaranteed in a state unless it divorces itself completely from Islamic law or reference.  

In summary, the question of minorities under Islamists in power has been shaped by three perspectives in the literature, all of which share suspicions about Islamists’ minority treatment. The first perspective argues that Islam is inherently incompatible with Western liberal notions, including pluralism, because it lacks the necessary historic tradition for the development of such ideals. The second perspective, in contrast, holds that the Islamic tradition supports democracy and pluralism, and it further shows that Islamists have participated in democratic and plural politics across MENA. However, it maintains that while Islamist groups have demonstrated commitment to democratic politics, non-violence and peace, their minority policies remain

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10 While there is diversity of schools of thought amongst Islamists themselves on how to treat religious minorities, this diversity has oftentimes been overlooked by scholars studying Islam from the outside. For example, other Islamists such as Tunisian Rashid al-Ghannushi, and Egyptian Salīm al-‘Awwa and Abu al-Magd, have argued for an interpretation of Islamic law that is inclusive of religious minorities. They consider the concepts of dhimmah and jizya to be outdated and advocate for replacing them with equal citizenship (Nielson 2002).
uncertain and unproven at best. The third perspective contends that an application of Islamic law risks economic and political repression of non-Muslims because while its traditional interpretations prohibit discrimination on ethnic grounds, they allow for it on religious grounds. Accordingly, the most common expectations and assumptions about Islamists are as follows: Islamists in power are likely to be guided by their religious ideology in minority treatment; Islamists are expected to treat Muslim ethnic minorities favorably while discriminating against non-Muslim minorities, particularly politically and economically. This study sets to assess these claims through comparative analysis of ruling Islamists’ minority treatment.

The Puzzle

While the literature expects Islamists to follow an open approach toward ethnic co-Muslim minorities and closed toward ethnic non-Muslims, the empirical findings in this research show that Islamists lack a coherent approach toward Muslim or non-Muslim minorities. Islamists have shifted their approaches irrespective of the minority groups’ religious affiliation, employing different approaches toward and between groups from different religious background.

More specifically, Islamists’ approaches have changed toward minorities diachronically. For instance, Sudan’s Islamist government ratified the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the animist and Christian South Sudanese that granted them the right to self-determination ten years after it launched a devastating war to subdue the South’s rebellion (El-Affendi 2013; Gallab 2008; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005; Sidahmed 2010). Sudan’s Islamists simultaneously changed their approach toward Muslim non-Arab Darfuris. Beginning in the early 2000s, the central government marginalized the once well represented non-Arab Darfuris from both the ruling party and government, replaced its inclusionary tone used in the prior decade toward them with hostility, and embarked on a genocidal campaign against the group (Flint and De Waal
Likewise, the policies of Turkey’s Islamists have shifted over time. In recent years, the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) government opted for a nationalist stance and violent measures toward its Kurdish minority, replacing its accommodative cultural, social and economic policies as well as the political dialogue it initiated in its early period (Akdag 2016; Yegen 2007, 2015; Yavuz and Ozcan 2006, 2015). In addition to the diachronic variation toward each minority, Islamists have also employed varied approaches between the Muslim and non-Muslim minorities. For instance, Sudan’s Islamists ratified an agreement with the largely animist and Christian South whilst at the same time waging war on Muslim Darfur.

As the extant literature lacks empirical bases, it fails to note or account for Islamists’ variations in approaches toward minorities. The existing literature has not provided an empirical analysis of Islamists’ approaches, and by extension, why treatment of minorities shifts over time, including following open approaches to non-Muslim minorities and closed approaches to Muslim others. In addition to identifying Islamists’ diachronic and co-temporal shifting minority approaches, this study investigates the conditions under which Islamists follow open and closed approaches. This study poses the question: what accounts for the shifts in Islamist minority approaches?

Theorizing Islamist Treatment of Minorities

Cultural accounts of Islamist behaviour assume that because of their religious ideology, Islamists would follow differentiated minority treatment based on the minority group’s religious affiliation. The cultural account is either expressly argued by the literature on Islamic exceptionalism (Gellner 1981; Kedourie 1992; Lewis 1996), supported by some of the literature on Islamic law and religious minorities (An-Na'im 1987; Kramer 1994), or indirectly implied by the literature on Islamist movements (Gerges 2013, 2012; Mandaville 2012). Due to religious
commitments, these culturally based explanations expect that Islamists would pursue an open approach toward co-Muslim ethnic minorities and a closed approach toward non-Muslim ethnic others. Despite its prominence, the cultural explanation fails to expound Islamist minority policies fully, as the cases of Sudan and Turkey demonstrate. This approach does not account for variation in minority treatment as it assumes that Islamists would continuously accommodate Muslim minorities and likewise exclude non-Muslim ones. Empirical observations show that Islamist governments have shifted their strategies toward minorities between open and closed regardless of religious affiliation.

**Structure and Minority Treatment**

Theories focusing on structural factors can provide insights on variation in minority policies. Some scholars hold that institutions could influence minority policies by constraining actors’ behaviour (Horowitz 1998; Roeder 1991). Some have argued that strong states are more likely to follow an open approach toward their minorities than states with weak capacity. Przeworski (2000) and Cordell and Wolff (2009), for example, argue that strong states—with effective policy instruments as well as sound economic structures and rich resources—are more likely to accommodate the political and economic demands of their minorities. This is because state capacity, measured in the strength of institutions and quality of bureaucracy, “affects the state’s ability and will to incorporate groups in the state sphere and provide equal concessions to the entire population” (Rudolfsen 2017, 124). Others find that weak states—with ineffective administrative and political institutions and limited economic resources—are less capable of dealing with minority demands and more likely to resort to inexpensive strategies such as isolation or assimilation (Brubaker and Laitin 1998; Hegre 2001; Walter 1999). The state-capacity focused approach would suggest that Islamists operating in weak states are more likely
to follow a closed approach to minorities, while Islamists working within strong states are more likely to pursue an open approach toward their minorities.

According to the state-capacity approach, Islamists in Turkey should be more likely to follow an open approach as Turkey’s state capacity—with its effective administrative institutions as well as sound economic structures and rich resources—allows Islamists the ability to accommodate the demands of the state’s Kurdish minority. Likewise, the approach suggests that Islamists in Sudan should be more likely to pursue a closed approach as the state’s underdeveloped economy and ineffective administrative and political institutions curb Islamists’ ability to respond to the Southern and Darfuri minorities. However, despite neither state experiencing significant changes in state capacity during the periods of Islamist tenure, Islamists have shifted their minority approaches toward and between minorities in both states. In Turkey, Islamists shifted their approach from open to closed toward the Kurdish minority. In Sudan, Islamists shifted their approach from open to closed toward the Darfuris and closed to open toward the South Sudanese.

State capacity can also be defined in relation to the state’s political institutions. Bulutgil (2017) details an account on how the state’s political institutions can affect minority policies. According to Bulutgil (2017), the structure and ideology of state leadership institutions can influence minority policies by constraining the behavior of the ruling elite. State leadership institutions include organizations such as influential political parties, and also politicized state institutions such as the military or judiciary (Bulutgil 2017). If these institutions are: (i) influenced by a certain ideology, whether nationalist or inclusive; and (ii) institutionally favored with ability to pressure the ruling elites, the ruling elite is less likely to have the ability to change
minority treatment (Bulutgil 2017). In contrast, if state leadership institutions are weak, ruling elites may be more likely to shift their policies toward minorities. This institutional account would suggest that Islamists working in disadvantageous political settings are less likely to change a status-quo minority approach, while Islamists enjoying political dominance are more likely to pursue new minority treatment approaches.

In accordance with the constraints of leadership institutions hypothesis, Islamists in Sudan would have the ability to pursue any approach they prefer as they were politically dominant facing no (or weak) opposition from other leadership organizations and institutions. In Sudan, Islamists were able to form an alliance with the military after successful efforts to infiltrate it, overthrow a democratically elected government, restructure the state’s political institutions in their favour, and ban political parties preventing any meaningful opposition against them. In Turkey, the hypothesis suggests that Islamists would have a limited ability to change minority policies as they faced nationalist and strong leadership institutions including the military, judiciary, and the traditional Kemalist party. However, in both Sudan and Turkey, Islamists managed to change minority policies irrespective of the presence or absence of strong leadership institutions. While the state-capacity hypothesis anticipates an open approach in Turkey and a closed approach in Sudan, the constraints proposed by the leadership institutions hypothesis suggests that a change in minority treatment is more likely in Sudan than Turkey. An explanation of Islamist minority treatment must account for the diachronic variation of Islamist approaches toward each minority and the co-temporal shift between minorities in both of Sudan and Turkey.

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11 For example, state leadership institutions that are ideologically nationalist and support monoethnic conceptions of citizenship are more likely to place restrictions on accommodative minority policies. These institutions can be favored by historical legacy and constitutional provisions among other things.
This study proposes to add an explanation focused on elite strategic calculations to account for Islamists’ shifting minority approaches. The proposed account provides that Islamist leaders are rational actors who strategize in accordance with their political needs. Ruling Islamists’ minority policies are an outcome of strategic calculus to preserve their positions of political power and privilege. Their political survival depends on coalition building that is in turn affected by internal actors’ strategic interactions and external support to minority groups. Thus, this account is able to explain the diachronic variation toward minorities as well as the co-temporal variation between them in both of Sudan and Turkey.

**Rational Choice and Religious Actors**

A body of work within the broader field of religion and politics has used rational choice premised accounts to explain the behavior of religious actors. The religious economy school uses microeconomic analyses to explain religious actors’ behaviour. In this work, religious actors and institutions are compared to an economic firm that prioritizes and calculates its benefits (Iannaccone 1995). Accordingly, religious political actors engage in practical cost-benefit analysis based merely on their political interests to consolidate either political, social or economic control, or all (Gill 1998). Some of the most notable works of this perspective in political science have been produced by Stathis Kalyvas, Carolyn Warner and Anthony Gill (Bellin 2008).

Kalyvas (1996) asks why confessional parties developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in countries like Germany, Italy and Belgium, but not in others, like France and Ireland. He also asks what led these parties to secularize over time. Incorporating strategic calculations, the Catholic Church, according to Kalyvas (1996), supported the development of confessional parties when it had the resources to challenge the 19th century liberal attack that
threatened its authority and privileges. Similarly, these confessional parties secularized over time to capture larger segments of the society and form the necessary alliances needed for survival (Kalyvas 1996).

Warner’s work (2000) explains why the church allied with Christian Democratic parties in some countries but not in others in the post-WWII period. She finds that across cases the ideological commitment of the parties did not correlate with the extent of church support. She argues that political parties’ access to power and influence on decision-making affected the likelihood of backing from the church. The church supported the parties that were more likely to win rather than those who shared its ideological commitment (Warner 2000). Ultimately, the church was guided by its desire to influence decision-making by strategically supporting successful parties, even if they did not share the church’s convictions.

While Warner’s research focuses on the behaviour of the church in Europe, Anthony Gill examines it in Latin America. Gill (1998) asks why the church opposed authoritarian rule in some Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Chile, but supported it in other countries such as Uruguay, Honduras and Bolivia. He argues that the church sought to protect itself from the threat posed by religious competition, specifically from the influx of evangelical protestant movements during the time. To keep its credibility, the church aligned with the masses against the regime (Gill 1998).

The studies above show that rational calculations for survival and influence explain the behavior of religious actors and institutions better than ideological commitments. Despite their innovative insights, these studies have been criticized for two shortcomings. First is the failure to explain when and how religious ideas become relevant or causal in politics (Bellin 2008). Second is the lack of generalizability to other religious institutions (Bellin 2008). Given that the
Catholic Church is an exceptionally centralized, bureaucratic and hierarchal institution, Bellin asks “might institutions in religious traditions like Islam that are less centrally organized, less hieratical, and more internally competitive tend to be more accountable for their ideological fidelity to their followers?” (Bellin 2008, 327). By examining ruling Islamists’ behavior in Sudan and Turkey, this thesis addresses her question. It investigates whether Islamists, despite the different historical, contextual, and structural context they work in, are also guided by strategic calculus.

**Islamism and Elite Interest**

This dissertation demonstrates that the logic of rational and strategic reasoning can explain the behavior of Islamists no less than it does Catholic institutions and actors. In fact, a number of scholars have advanced the argument of Islamist pragmatism when examining participation in electoral politics. Wickham’s work (2013) on the Muslim Brotherhood’s political participation in Egypt argues that strategic calculations, along with political learning, guided Islamist mobilization, and specifically their participation in electoral politics. Islamists adopted a democratic platform for several strategic reasons. First, it gave them moral superiority vis-à-vis the authoritarian government. Second, it facilitated alliances with other secular, liberal and leftist opposition groups. Finally, it increased the domestic and international pressures on the government to democratize (Wickham 2013).

Other studies have shown how institutions shape Islamists’ strategic calculus. For example, Schwedler’s comparative research (2006) in Jordan and Yemen demonstrates that Islamist electoral behavior is largely shaped by a strategic calculus in highly repressive and authoritarian contexts. She states that Islamists participate in elections to strengthen their
political power, but their participation depends on whether “the potential gains of participation outweigh the cost” (Schwedler 2006, 56). Brown also finds Islamists in Egypt, Kuwait, Jordan and the Palestinian Territories to react to the “shifting semi-authoritarian opportunities” with conditional and calculated participation in elections (Brown 2012, 10). Ottaway and Hamzawy contend that rational choice institutionalism explains not only the electoral behavior of Islamists but also their choice of democratic participation in the first place. They argue that Islamists’ commitment to democracy and their moderation is an outcome of the political environment and conditions under which they participate. Ottaway and Hamzawy explain that “it is the balance of power among the different groups—its own determined by the politics of the country as well as the internal politics of the organization—that will decide whether a party or movement will remain committed to democratic participation” (Hamzawy and Ottaway 2009, 46). These studies find that ideology is often influenced by pragmatism and institutional constraints. For example, Brown states that Islamists will “bend their ideologies” to facilitate participation and augment electoral gains (Brown 2012, 3). Tezcur (2010) also sees ideology in a similar light. By examining the record of Islamist reformers in Turkey and Iran, he concludes that Islamists have reinterpreted political Islam in accordance with the existing political institutions. According to Tezcur, the reformer Islamist faction in Iran had to appear more ideologically Islamist than it actually was, and the AKP in Turkey had to appear to be more secular. In sum, these authors see pragmatism, shaped by the institutional characteristics of the regime, playing a larger role in the behaviour of Islamists than ideological positions.

Although these studies offer more empirically grounded and theoretically advanced insights of Islamist politics than the exceptionalism thesis, the role of strategic calculations is analyzed within the scope of electoral politics only. The transferability of the argument to other
institutional contexts has yet to be explored. Furthermore, most of this scholarship, with exception to Tezcur, concerns Islamists as movements and parties in opposition under authoritarian contexts rather than in positions of power. Yet, the scepticism expressed in the literature on Islamic exceptionalism is indeed concerned with what happens after Islamists come to power. Examining the position of Islamists in power, as opposed to Islamists in opposition under repressive regimes, as well as analyzing Islamists’ minority policies—where religious ideology is thought to be the all-important factor—will allow a more robust understanding of Islamists’ political behavior and decision-making when unconstrained by authoritarian repression.

Upon investigating drivers for change in Islamists’ strategies toward minorities in Sudan and Turkey, this dissertation demonstrates that religious doctrine fails to explain Islamist shifting minority approaches. Sudan’s Islamists ratified an unprecedented power-sharing agreement with the largely animist and Christian South, while at the same time waging a genocidal war on Muslim Darfur. Moreover, although the Islamists had succeeded in garnering support from Darfuris in Sudan and Kurds in Turkey through stressing religious brotherhood, ultimately, religious affiliation did not affect their change in approach.

This study argues that Islamists’ shifting minority approaches are an outcome of elite strategic calculations. More specifically, the research demonstrates that Islamists shift their minority approaches to preserve their positions of power and privilege. Islamists seek to build alliances with minorities when they needed them for survival, pursuing open approach in return. The inclusion of minorities in ruling coalitions depends on both internal actors’ strategic interactions that affect the need for minority alliances, as well as the external dynamics that influence minority groups’ strategic capacity and bargaining power.
Strategic Calculus and Coalition Building

The scholarship on political survival argues that holding on to power is a primary goal of all politicians (Black 1958; Downs 1957; Riker 1962; Wintrobe 1998). De Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson, and Smith note that “the survival in office is central to all politics,” and that leaders “are driven by one notion, the preservation of their positions of power and privilege” (De Mesquita et al. 2003, 35). To ensure their survival, leaders maneuver to establish the winning or ruling coalitions, “the most important element of political survival” (De Mesquita et al. 2003).

While the formation of coalitions has been well established in literature on democratic politics (Riker 1962; Schofield 1993; Smith 1998), there is more recent literature that points to the necessity of coalition building in authoritarian context as well (Posner 2004; Svolik 2012). Posner contends that “positioning oneself as the leader of a weighty political coalition is a central ingredient for political success even in non-democratic contexts” (Posner 2004, 538). De Mesquita and his collaborators provide an analytic framework for coalition building in both democratic and authoritarian settings. They define the winning coalition as a group who controls the essential features that constitute political power in the system. In democracies the winning coalition is the group of voters who elect the leader; in other systems it is the set of people who control enough other instruments of power to keep the leader in office. If the leader loses the loyalty of a sufficient number of members of the

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12 Rational choice or strategic calculus of elites or minority groups is emphasized in the broader literature on ethnic politics, including that on nation-formation (Brass 1991; Marx 2002), and ethnic violence and civil war (Brown 1996; David 1997; De Figueiredo and Weingast 1999; Lake and Rothchild 1996; Mansfield and Snyder 1995; Ogachi 1999; Posen 1993).
winning collation, a challenger can remove and replace her in office. (De Mesquita et al. 2003, 7-8)\textsuperscript{13}

Similarly, Svolik defines the winning coalition as a group that consists of individuals and groups whose support of the leader is both “necessary and sufficient for the survival of the government” (Svolik 2012, 478).

Other scholars argue that while coalition building in democracies is channeled through constituted rules and institutions, in non-democratic countries the methods by which leaders consolidate support are more obscure (Bienen and Van De Walle 1991; Bratton and Van de Walle 1997; Van de Walle 2007, 2003). Coalition building in non-democratic countries is often an outcome of “patronage-based political systems in which collations have long been negotiated through informal bargaining over the distribution of state resources among multiple groups” (Arriola 2013, 234). However, a new body of literature has demonstrated that coalition building in non-democratic countries can also materialize through formal institutions (Blaydes 2007; Brownlee 2007; Ghandi and Przeworski 2006, 2007; Geddes 1999; Lust-Okar 2006; Magaloni 2006; Myerson 2008; Smith 2005; Slater 2003; Svolik 2009).\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} The winning coalition is a subset of the selectorate, those in society who have power to remove the incumbent and whose support is necessary to claim political power “over the reminder of the selectorate as well as the disenfranchised members of the society” (De Mesquita et al. 2003, 42). Systems with large winning coalitions are democratic and those with small winning coalitions and large selectorate are autocratic while there are some, such as monarchies and juntas, who have small coalitions and selectorates.

\textsuperscript{14} According to Ghandi and Przeworski, “institutions are not just ‘window dressing’ because they are the result of strategic choice and have an impact on the survival of autocrats” that more often than not depends on coalition building (Ghandi and Przeworski 2007, 1280). A growing literature examines the role of elections (Blaydes 2007; Lust-okar 2006); legislatures (Ghandi and Przeworski 2006; Myerson 2008); parties (Brownlee 2007; Geddes 1999; Magaloni 2006; Smith 2005), and the bureaucracy (Slater 2003) in authoritarian politics generally. Svolik (2009) notes two additional differentiating features between democratic and non-democratic regimes: accountability, and the use of violence as political power in dictatorships must be backed by the threat of using violence.
In both democratic and authoritarian governments leaders form coalitions. Coalition building can occur through the distribution of spoils or rents (Browne and Frendreis 1980; De Mesquita et al. 2003; Grossman and Noh 1990; McGuire and Olson 1996; Wintrobe 1998, 1990); through policy concessions (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, 2006; Laver 1998; Laver and Schofield 1990; Müller and Strom 1999); or power-sharing (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003; Lijphart 1977; Magaloni 2008; McCulloch and McGarry 2017; Mehler 2009). Spoils and rents can range from special privileges, to graft and bribes, and favorable contracts and tax terms. Policy concessions can relate to cultural, social, economic or political changes. Power-sharing can manifest itself at four different levels: central (political), territorial (federalism and decentralization), military, and economic power-sharing (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003). While political power-sharing entails the distribution of political power among political groups, territorial power sharing concerns the division of autonomy between the central government and regional governments on the basis of federalism and decentralization. In contrast, military power-sharing involves the distribution of the state’s coercive power. Finally, there is economic power-sharing that involves the distribution of economic resources among the different groups.

Who are possible allies for governing parties? Diverse political, economic and social forces can constitute ruling coalitions. Coalition building can be an outcome of socio-economic, ethnic, sectarian or tribal groups, and corporate or military circles (Svolik 2012). In ethnically heterogeneous settings, incumbents sometimes need to assemble multiethnic coalitions to retain power (Arriola 2013). As Posner observes, “if the cultural cleavage defines groups that are large enough to constitute viable coalitions in the competition for political power, then politicians will mobilize these groups and the cleavage that divides them will become politically salient” (Posner 2013).
Researchers have found that both size and territorial concentration make for a stable support base that increases the government’s likelihood of including minorities in the coalition (Gherghina 2014; Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe 2007; Posner 2004). This is because size and territorial concentration can contribute to the minority’s political and military capacity. If the minority enjoys a sizeable population it can offer a powerful source of political or armed mobilization for or against the incumbent. Similarly, the minority group’s territorial concentration allows it to better organize politically and militarily to mobilize in support, or opposition, of the incumbent.16

Political and military capacity can be an outcome of not only population size and territorial concentration but also the external support the minority group receives (Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe 2007; Saideman and Zahar 2008; Zahar 2010).17 Foreign involvement or third-party intervention can take many shapes. External support could take the form of ideological encouragement, military and non-military financial assistance, access to information, cross border sanctuaries, military training in exile, military equipment, advisors, peacekeeping personnel, blockades, cross border raids and more (Bélanger, Duchesne, and Paquin 2005; Cetinyan 2002; Haywood 2014; Zahar 2010). External actors can increase the capacity of the minority group by enabling it to better organize politically and militarily. Existing research has demonstrated that if regional and international actors’ support strengthens the minority group to

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16 Minority groups’ use of armed or political opposition is largely an outcome of the political institutions in place (Gurr 1993). For instance, in systems where political institutions are effective and accessible, minority groups’ political power can heavily impact their inclusion in a coalition.

17 The external dimension is stressed in various bodies of literatures on ethnic conflict (Belanger, Duchesne, and Paquin 2005; Carment and James 1997; Heraclides 1991; Saideman 2002, 2001; Salehyan et al. 2011; Toft 2003; Young 1994). In the literature on secession, Horowitz (1985), Young (1994), and Heraclides (1991) see the presence of foreign support as a primary determinant of the secessionist movement’s ability to gain secession. External intervention is also stressed in the literature on civil war (Collier, Hoeffler and Rohner 2008; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Hegre and Sambanis 2006). The role of external actors is equally highlighted on the literature on conflict resolution (Belanger, Duchesne, and Paquin 2005; Zahar 2003, 2010).
the point that it becomes a significant political and military actor and possibly threatens the
government’s survival, the central government is more likely to negotiate with the minority
group its participation in a ruling coalition, offering power-sharing and policy concessions
(Jenne 2007; Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe 2007).

While a government may be interested in including the minority in a coalition, the
minority might not reciprocate. The minority’s stance partly depends on its bargaining power and
strategic leverage, which as mentioned above are largely an outcome of external support. More
specifically, if the minority wants more than the central government can or is willing to offer,
and assumes greater power vis-à-vis the center, the minority might not be interested in joining
the coalition.

I argue that Islamists’ shifting approaches toward minorities need to be interpreted within
this framework. When the government’s survival requires a formal or informal coalition with the
minority and the latter participates, an open approach can be expected. If the minority rejects
coalition participation or if the government’s survival does not necessitate such coalition in the
first place, a closed approach is likely. The government will attempt to coalesce with the
minority group in a formal or informal alliance if it ensures or increases its chances for survival
given the political circumstances, particularly internal competition and strategic interactions
between the various actors. The government is more likely to build an alliance with a minority if
the minority enjoys high strategic and political leverage, which in many cases is tied to external
support. However, external support also influences whether the minority wants to be part of the
coalition. If the minority refuses to coalesce in an alliance, given its own strategic calculus,
tensions and a closed approach are more likely.
I argue that this dynamic can be observed at work in Sudan and Turkey. The late 1990s saw the split of Sudan’s solidified Islamist base. The division led to an intra-Islamist competition over new allies. As non-Arab Darfuris, already suspicious of the government, sided with the splintering faction, the government shifted its treatment of this minority from open to closed. The government then offered the South Sudanese policy concessions and power sharing to prevent it from forming a counter-coalition with the splintering Islamist faction and non-Arab Darfuris. The central government succeeded in attracting the South to its side by curtailing its external support through improving relations with regional and international actors who had sponsored it militarily and diplomatically through the 1990s. With lowered strategic capacity and leverage, the South Sudanese agreed to form a coalition with the governing Islamists.

In Turkey, throughout the 2000s, the Islamist government enjoyed the support of various segments of the population, including the Kurdish minority. With hopes to build a formal coalition with the Kurdish nationalist political party for the 2017 constitutional referendum that would shift the political structure in its favour, the Islamist government pursued negotiations with the armed Kurdish nationalist wing more vigorously, resulting in a ceasefire in 2013. However, the regional and international environment hindered the formation of this coalition. The war in Syria provided the Kurdish armed wing with large resources that changed its commitment and enthusiasm about forming an alliance with the Islamist government. With its increased strategic leverage, the armed group sought to pressure the government for more provisions, demanding full autonomy. The Islamist party then formed a coalition with the ultranationalist party and pursued a closed approach toward the Kurdish minority.
Methodology and Data

This research study analyzes minority treatment under the Islamist governments of the Justice and Development Party that has been in power in Turkey since 2002, and the Sudanese National Islamic Front/National Congress Party that ruled Sudan from 1989 to 2019. I examine the treatment of three minority groups in Sudan and Turkey. For Sudan, I look at the South Sudanese minority, which constituted one quarter of the Sudanese population prior to its secession in 2011 and is largely animist and Christian. I also examine the non-Arab Darfuris, who constitute about one sixth of the Sudanese population and are all Muslim. The variation in group type allows me to examine differences in treatment of minorities in categories B and A. For Turkey, I examine the treatment of the largely Muslim Kurdish minority that makes up 15 to 20 percent of the population (Category A). Furthermore, not only are these groups statistically significant but they are also territorially bound, as Figure 1 and Figure 2 show. South Sudanese lived in the southern region of Sudan prior to secession, non-Arab Darfuris live in the Western Sudanese region of Darfur, and Kurds are concentrated in Turkey’s southeast.
Figure 1. Formerly united Sudan with South Sudan and Darfur

Figure 2. The Kurdish-dominated southeast in Turkey


The two cases are suitable for answering the questions for a number of reasons. First, as Table 1 shows, Islamists have been in power for a prolonged period, allowing sufficient time to observe minority treatment systematically and over time. In Sudan, Islamists came to power through a military coup in 1989, and in Turkey, the Islamist party was elected to power in 2002. Second, the two states are ethnically heterogeneous with sizable minorities as Table 1 shows. Third, as Table 2 demonstrates, the three minorities examined in this study exhibit variation in the religious affiliation with Islamists: Kurds and Darfuris share the Islamists’ religious identity, whereas the South Sudanese do not. The variation in the minorities’ religious identity allows for
an assessment of the role of religious affiliation in minority treatment. During the Islamist tenure, Sudan and Turkey shared a common dependent variable: shifting minority treatment approaches. Islamists in Sudan and Turkey have changed their minority treatment toward the minorities examined diachronically between open and closed.

Table 1. Ethnic majorities and Islamists in Turkey and Sudan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Sudan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islamist in power</td>
<td>2002–present</td>
<td>1989–2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic majority</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>48–70%&lt;sup&gt;18&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant ethnic minority</td>
<td>15–20% (Kurds)</td>
<td>25% (South Sudanese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6–8% (non-Arab Darfuris)</td>
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</table>


Table 2. Minority groups’ religious affiliation and population share in percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Population Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Sudanese</td>
<td>Animists and Christians</td>
<td>25% (prior to secession)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Arab Darfuris</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>6–8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurds</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>15–20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<sup>18</sup> There is no adequate data on the Arab majority in Sudan for a number of reasons. The last census in 2008 excluded ethnic composition. The last census that included accurate information on ethnic and linguistic data was conducted in 1956. According to that census Arab made nearly 40%. Additionally, ethnic identity is fluid in Sudan. Because Arabic is the primary language in the majority of the country, there is no significant distinction between Arabic-speaking and ethnically Arab. Ultimately, the question of how “Arab” is defined determines whether their numbers are at the lower or higher end of the estimate.
This dissertation follows a qualitative comparative method that entails the systematic analysis of a small number of cases. The case selection is based on the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) under which the cases compared display “maximum heterogeneity” in all relevant variables except the variable of interest (Mills, Durepos, and Weibe 2010). With the cases featuring a common dependent variable and different potential causal variables, a process of falsification or elimination of independent variables is pursued. Subsequently, an examination of similarities at the lower sub-systematic level, such as individual actors, groups, social classes or communities is followed to identify those variables that are sufficiently common to produce the dependent variable (Przeworski and Teune 1970). Sudan and Turkey differ in various aspects including culture, Islamist ideology and historical development, institutions, as well as economic performance. Sudan has an Afro-Arab culture, while Turkey’s is influenced by Eastern Mediterranean, central Asian, as well as European cultures (Kushner 1997; Sharkey 2008). Linguistically, Sudan’s official language is Arabic, but there are hundreds of spoken indigenous African languages in the country. Turkey’s official language is Turkish, but it has a number of linguistic minorities as well (Kushner 1997; Sharkey 2009).

Furthermore, the forms of Islamism adopted by the ruling Islamists also differed in each country. Sudan’s Islamists were revolutionaries. They articulated an ultra-conservative understanding of Islam with the objective of a literal application of Shariah and a rigid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Case selection: Differences between Turkey and Sudan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture/language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious ideology of governing Islamists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority treatment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Islamization of the state’s institutions (Ahmed 2008; El-Battahani 2013; El-Affendi 2013; Gallab 2008). Turkey’s Islamists, on the other hand, espoused a revisionist form of Islamism acknowledging Islam’s role in the Turkish society yet maintaining support for secularism (Atacan 2005; Tepe 2008; Tezcur 2010).

Furthermore, Islamists in both states came to power through different means. In Sudan, they came to power through a coup overthrowing a democratically elected government. In Turkey by contrast, Islamists came to power through democratic elections. Islamists in both states also differed in terms of their domestic and regional policies. Once in power, Sudan’s Islamists led campaigns of political repression and intimidation with no regard to human rights. They also followed an interventionist and aggressive regional policy that included the support of violent Islamist movements outside Sudan. Turkey’s Islamist party, in contrast, stressed its commitment to democratic principles and the strengthening of human rights and civil society. The Islamist party in Turkey also committed itself to pursuing the European Union (EU) accession process and meeting its criteria along with sustaining amicable relations with its neighbours.

Equally notable are the political and economic dissimilarities between Sudan and Turkey. The states differ in economic development, state capacity, and regime type. As Table 4 and Table 5 reveal, Turkey and Sudan display significant structural differences. Sudan relies mainly on primary exports with 80 percent of its working force working in the agricultural sector. By contrast, Turkey enjoys a diverse economy with strong manufacturing, construction, service and agricultural sectors. In 2010, Sudan had a GDP of $65.63 billion whereas Turkey’s was $771.90 billion. Furthermore, whereas about half of Sudan’s near 40 million (46.5 percent of

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19 2010 is the last year data is available on a unified Sudan as South Sudan seceded in 2011.
population) lived in poverty around the same period, in Turkey 17.1 percent of the country’s 77.7 million did (Bierbaum, Fay, and Ross-Larson 2009). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with its low education, health, and life expectancy rates, Sudan ranks low on the human development index at 167th in the world. By contrast, Turkey with high literacy, health, and life expectancy rates, as well as low poverty rates, ranked as 64th in the world (UNDP 2018).

Table 4. Demographic and economic differences between Sudan and Turkey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sudan</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geographic area</strong></td>
<td>1.86 million km²</td>
<td>783,562 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population (2015)</strong></td>
<td>38.65 million</td>
<td>77.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main economic sector</strong></td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Secondary, tertiary and some primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GDP (2015)</strong></td>
<td>$97.16 billion</td>
<td>$859.8 billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Finally, the two countries also exhibit considerable differences in measurements of state capacity. According to an index developed by the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), produced by the Brookings Institute and the World Bank, Turkey scores much higher in political stability, government effectiveness, rule of law and control of corruption than Sudan (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2010). As Table 5 displays, Sudan ranks as one of the world’s worst, occupying the lowest percentile rank out of 100. Finally, in terms of regime type, as of 2010, the Economist Intelligence Unit classified Turkey as a hybrid regime, while it classified Sudan as an authoritarian one (Economic Intelligence Unit 2010).20

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20 EIU assesses democratic performance based on four criteria: competitive, multiparty political system; universal adult suffrage; regularly contested elections conducted on the basis of secret ballots, reasonable ballot security and the absence of massive voter fraud; and, significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open campaigning.
Table 5. Governance indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political stability and absence of violence</th>
<th>Government effectiveness</th>
<th>Rule of law</th>
<th>Control of corruption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Table shows the percentile rank of the country on each governance indicator in 2013. Percentile rank indicates the percentage of countries worldwide that rate below the selected country. Percentile rank indicates rank of country among all countries in the world with 0 corresponding to the lowest and 100 to the highest.


Despite the ideational and historical differences between Turkey and Sudan’s Islamists as well as the differing cultural, economic and institutional settings that they operate in, Islamists in both states have shifted their approaches toward minorities between open and closed. In its early period (1989–2000), the Sudanese Islamist government followed a closed approach toward the South Sudanese marked by extensive exclusionary Islamization policies, and increased militarization and violence. In the early 2000s, however, Sudan’s Islamists pursued an open approach toward the South Sudanese signified in a positive and compromising stance, accommodative social, economic and political policies, and intensive negotiations that resulted in a cessation of violence and the South’s right to self-determination.

There was also a notable change in the Islamist approach toward Darfur from the early 1990s to the early 2000s. During the first decade of their rule, Islamists pursued inclusive political policies, and attempted to manage sporadic inter-ethnic conflicts in the region impartially to contain violence. However, during the second decade of their rule, ruling Islamists adopted a hostile stance toward non-Arab Darfuris, marginalized them politically, and carried out devastating campaigns of violence against them in support of the Arab groups.
Turkey’s Islamist government also pursued two distinct approaches toward the Kurdish minority. The first (2002–2015) was marked by positive and conciliatory position, advancement of accommodative Kurdish cultural, legal, economic, and political rights, and a commitment to resolving the Kurdish conflict through dialogue coupled with a reduction of violence. The second (post–2015) has been marked by the halting of Kurdish-focused cultural policies, reversal of legal and political rights, increased reliance on military means to end the conflict, and a new nationalist stance.

To identify the causes of the shifts, I pay close attention to the description and temporal sequencing of the events surrounding the periods of the shifts. The study employs qualitative process tracing which Collier defines as “an analytic tool for drawing descriptive and casual inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence, often understood as part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena” (Collier 2011, 824). A careful construction of the sequence of events, across cases and within cases, allows for the search for “observable evidence of each step” (Van Evera 1997, 64). Because of its thorough examination of the chain of events and decision making process, process tracing can “uncover the micro-foundations of individual behavior that connect hypothesized causes and outcomes” and reveal the motivations of decision makers or government officials (Falleti 2015, 2). I identify the cause and effect link between the independent and dependent variables through an observance of the sequence of events and steps that impact decision making and produce the shifts in treatment of minorities.

I used data gathered from primary and secondary sources to construct the chain of events. I carried out fieldwork in Khartoum, from December 2015 to March 2016 and throughout December 2016 and January 2017, and in Istanbul and Ankara, from February 2017 through May 2017. The fieldwork included ethnographic observations, archival work and interviews with
Islamists from the ruling party and government, members of minority group parties and associations, members of mainstream opposition, and activists in civil society organizations. I also use interviews I conducted from May 2012 through July 2012 in Khartoum. The archival work entailed data gathering from the National Records of Sudan on government composition, administrative changes and budget allocations by the Islamist government in the 1990s. Participant observations focused on Islamists behaviour, their interactions with others, and the application of their policies.\textsuperscript{21} In addition to interviews, I analyzed other primary data such as constitutions, party programs, party memorandums, and speeches. The secondary sources I used included reports and datasets prepared by governmental and non-governmental departments, centers, and institutes.

To indicate which minority-treatment approach the governing Islamists use, I rely on three indicators: policy, government engagement with the minority, and violence. Minority related policies have been broadly used in the literature on minority politics to analyse minority treatment (Banting and Kymlicka 2013; Joppke and Morawska 2003; Vasta 2007; Vermeersch 2003). This research monitors cultural, socio-economic and political policies. To identify policy changes, I analyse party and government programs as well as constitutional and legal changes. Government policies are also at times backed by rhetoric, which I also note in identifying the approach. To also take note of minority input in policy changes, I observe governments’ efforts of engagement with the minority. More specifically, I examine governments’ commitment to negotiations and peace processes through the extent to which it includes minority representatives in the negotiations and implements minority-recommended policies. Finally, I examine statistics

\textsuperscript{21} For example, I noticed how they interact with others and with me (someone almost always of different gender). I also observed the uneven implementation of dress codes in Sudan. It was often that these restrictions were implemented in poorer parts of Khartoum.
on state violence toward minorities, a method used by some literature on minority and ethnic politics (Bjorgo 2003; Gurr 2000; Feldman 1991; Levene 2005; Ni Aolain 2000; Valentino 2004). While violence can range from psychological to various forms of physical, this research specifically examines the number of fatalities. For data on violence I consult the Location and Event Data Project, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, and the World Peace Foundation.

While there could be instances of changes in one or two of the indicators, a shift in all is a better measure of a comprehensive change in approach. This is because a change in some indicators but not others could be attributed to causes other than a full change in approach. For example, a decline in violence alone could be a result of war fatigue. The use of the three indicators simultaneously also aids in the comparison of the cases used. Using policy alone to compare minority treatment in Sudan and Turkey would not provide sufficient description for comparative analysis. This is because there are greater transparent policy-making instruments in Turkey. While policies in Turkey can be easily monitored and identified, in Sudan policies are harder to track because the legislature is largely ineffective and policy making occurs behind closed doors. An analysis of policy, government’s engagement with the minority, and violence can provide better overall indicators of each case and facilitate a comparison between the two.

**Thesis Outline**

The next chapter provides background information on Sudan’s political context. It also traces the Sudanese Islamist movement, focusing on its behaviour during periods of democratic and military rule. The chapter demonstrates that Sudan’s Islamists, prior to their ascendance to power, acted strategically in the face of existing political constraints to increase their access to the state and promote their agenda.

Chapter three begins with a brief discussion of Sudan’s ethnic diversity. After detailing
contextual information on the country’s largest ethnic minorities, the South Sudanese and Darfuris, the chapter traces the Islamists’ approaches toward each group. The chapter demonstrates that Islamists followed shifting minority approaches toward the groups.

Chapter four presents an analysis of the coalition Islamists formed with the military to gain power in Sudan. It then moves to a discussion about the way in which disagreements over institutional changes initiated by the regime’s leadership, Hasan al-Turabi, led to divisions within the regime. The chapter continues by detailing the discord between Turabi, younger Islamists, and the military that ultimately led to the Islamist movement’s split into two distinct factions. An examination of how this fracture affected alliance seeking and building follows, which in turn explains the shift in minority treatment. The chapter concludes by examining how external support for the South Sudanese affected their participation in the government’s coalition.

Chapters five, six and seven shift the focus to Turkey and are structured in a manner similar to the chapters on Sudan. Chapter five provides background information on Turkey’s political context while also tracing the rise of Islamist parties in the country. It shows how, much like Sudan, Islamists behaved strategically, founding political parties, building coalitions, and reinventing their ideological frames after consistent closures by Kemalist institutions. A brief discussion on ethnic diversity in Turkey introduces the sixth chapter. Next, it provides a discussion on the state’s assimilationist strategies toward its Kurdish minority. It then proceeds to focus on the AKP’s approaches toward the minority, demonstrating a diachronic variation in its policies.

Chapter seven reviews how the AKP’s open approach was focused on cultivating Kurdish votes to tackle Turkey’s Kemalist forces, which the AKP considered a threat to its interests. The chapter then examines the AKP’s loss of support from among the conservatives and liberals that
pushed the party to establish alternative allies. The AKP required alliances to pass a set of constitutional amendments geared at strengthening the executive branch and consolidating its power. Next, the chapter discusses the AKP’s pursuit of forming a formal coalition with the Kurdish nationalist party through vigorous negotiations with the party’s parent armed organization. After discussing the failure of such an alliance, the chapter analyzes the AKP’s coalition building with the ultranationalist party. Lastly, the chapter discusses how minority external support affected the willingness of the Kurdish nationalist armed group to participate in the government’s coalition.

Finally, chapter eight offers some concluding remarks. It restates the gap in the literature and underlines how this dissertation fills that gap. After drawing implications for the scholarship on Islamist politics and state-minority relations, it conveys the study’s limitations while also identifying possible areas for future research.
Chapter 2

Sudanese Politics and Islamism

Sudan’s Muslim Brotherhood, also known as the movement, Al-haraka or Al-ikhwan, began as a branch of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1940s. It started as a student movement, but soon founded political associations and parties to become a regular participant in Sudan’s politics. Its objective, like its sister organization in Egypt, was to establish an Islamic state. During its early decades the movement also prioritized challenging the popular leftist and communist forces in the country (Sihadmed and Sidahmed 2005, 97; Warburg 2008; Warburg 2003). However, in contrast to its Egyptian counterpart’s reformist ideology that followed a bottom-up approach to Islamization that focused on tarbiya or education, Sudan’s movement espoused a revolutionary ideology, believing that the Islamization of society “should be accomplished through the systematic exercise of state power” (Gallab 2008, 103). This chapter uncovers how, to increase its access to the state, the movement behaved strategically, at times shifting its ideological priorities.

This chapter traces the rise of Sudan’s Islamist movement, which went from being a fringe political organization in the 1950s to becoming the state’s only political authority in 1989. The chapter then focuses on Islamist political behaviour during Sudan’s periods of democratic and authoritarian rule to demonstrate how the Islamists performed calculated political maneuvering. This analysis shows that their behaviour in Sudan, prior to their ascendance to power, corroborates the existing literature’s findings that Islamists act strategically in the face of existing political constraints and shift their ideological priorities accordingly (Brown 2012; Clark
Before analyzing Islamist behaviour in Sudan, the state’s political context, particularly its political and civil instability, is explained to provide a foundation.

**Historical Background**

Sudan’s post-independence era has been characterized by a high degree of political and civil instability. This unrest is demonstrated in the country’s oscillation between short periods of democratic rule, governed by ineffective parliamentary governments, and long periods of military rule. Sudan’s three democratic periods, from 1956–1958, 1965–1969, and 1986–1989, were led by the National Umma Party (NUP), whose failure to achieve parliamentary majority forced it to enter into coalitions with Sudan’s other mainstream party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). While most coalition governments during these periods included the two parties, coalitions at times included other smaller parties. For example, the Sudanese Communist Party, the Islamist movement in its various party incarnations, as well as other ethnic and regional political parties achieved modest results in parliamentary share, with some of them participating in NUP-led governments.

The ineffectiveness of the multi-party coalition governments was an outcome of partisan squabbles exacerbated by the two mainstream parties’ lack of coherent ideological positions, weak structures, and internal factionalism. As a result, the various coalition governments in all three democratic periods failed on a number of fronts: to found a permanent constitution for the

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22 Both parties have origins dating back to the nineteenth century and are based on sectarian loyalties. The NUP is linked to the Mahdiyya/Ansar Sufi order, whereas the DUP is affiliated with the Khatmiyya Sufi order. Despite their evident religious affiliation, both of these parties have preserved the secular state institutions founded by the Condominium regime, a period of Anglo-Egyptian rule in Sudan that ran from 1899–1955 (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005).
country, settle the debate on Sudan’s identity (whether it was Afro-Arab, Arab-Islamic, African, or Sudanese), and deal with the country’s growing economic and development needs (Sharkey 2008). The ineffectiveness of the parliamentary coalitions constituted a primary reason for the continuous interference of the military in Sudanese politics. Thus, each of the three democratic governments was overthrown by a military coup, typically no more than four years after elections (El-Battahani 2013; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005).

The military in Sudan is seen as a political entity, rather than a professional bureaucratic institution, because of its frequent interference in civilian politics (El-Battahani 2013; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005). Military regimes ruled Sudan in three periods that lasted throughout most of the state’s post-independence existence, from 1958–1964, 1969–1985, and 1989–2019. Military officers ousted civilian governments with ease and without much resistance in all three coups, in 1964, 1985, and 2019. Although these regimes managed to bring periods of stability to the country, they also failed to deal with Sudan’s core problems, including nation-building, regional turmoil, and economic development. Furthermore, the regimes had abysmal human rights records. Peaceful protests organized by urbanized civil society organizations, professional syndicates, trade unions, and student associations brought these military regimes to their end.

One feature of note in Sudan’s politics during both its democratic and military periods has been the need to build coalitions. During the democratic periods, political parties, having failed to achieve a majority, often formed formal parliamentary coalitions with other parties. During military periods, military rulers often formed alliances with political organizations before coming to power, and once in power they strategically coopted new alliances and excluded old ones in an effort to prolong their rule. In many instances, national and ethnic parties cooperated with ruling military regimes during their tenure. For example, the first military regime of 1958–
1964 successfully coopted DUP, which later changed its position from strongly opposing the regime to becoming one of its strongest supporters. While the second military regime partnered up with the South’s political movement in the 1970s, during the late 1970s and early 1980s it coopted the Islamists at the cost of excluding its former Southern partners (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005).

Another feature of Sudan’s democratic and military governments was their failure to provide a long-lasting solution to Sudan’s civil instability, evidenced in its long-lived South Sudanese Civil War. For example, the Anyanya I, an armed militia group, started a mutiny that set off Africa’s longest civil war in August 1955, a few months before Sudan’s independence in January 1956. The mutiny came in response to the transitional government’s failure, during its tenure of 1954–1956, to respond to the Southern demand for a federal structure that would allow the South Sudanese autonomy over their own affairs—important, given their distinct linguistic, cultural, and political history (El-Battahani 2013; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005). The rebellion was initially relatively small in scale, and it continued in the first democratic period (1956–1958), during which the NUP-led coalition government failed to agree on a solution. However, it escalated as a result of the first military regime’s Arabization and Islamization

23 Under British rule, the South was a separate administrative unit. As the British were planning their withdrawal from the country, they joined the South with Sudan. This was part of an Anglo-Egyptian agreement in 1953 that stipulated offering a united Sudan to Egypt in exchange for control over the Suez Canal. Prior to independence in January 1956, the British had divided Sudan into two separate administrative units and implemented the “closed regions law,” which restricted trade, travel, and any sort of communication between the two. Furthermore, each region was expected to use its own language and practice its local beliefs, with severe repercussions for those who did not acquiesce. Upon the British planning their exit from the continent, they considered joining the South with Uganda, but the decision to unite it with Sudan instead was an outcome of the agreement signed with the Egyptians. Then, as the British departed the South, northern Sudanese were replacing the British officers, administrators, and teachers in the South; this alarmed the Southerners, who in turn made demands for self-government to the northern elites at the 1954 Juba conference. The resulting mutiny started in August 1955, and the British, in a hurry to leave, granted the Sudanese independence in January 1956, leaving the central government to handle the mutiny.
assimilation programs in the South (1958-1964) (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005). A ten-year truce was reached when the second military regime, led by Nimerie, negotiated an agreement with the South, granting it self-government in 1972. However, in 1983, Nimerie unilaterally contravened the agreement, setting off Sudan’s Second Civil War. The war continued until 2005, when an Islamist military regime negotiated another peace agreement that granted the South the right to self-determination. Due to their duration, the South Sudanese Civil Wars claimed the lives of nearly three million people, cost the state significant amount of resources, and crippled its political and economic development (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005).

Sudan’s Islamists: From the Margins to the Centre

Sudan’s Islamists have managed to persist and expand in spite of the country’s turbulent politics. Between independence and the late 1980s, Islamists succeeded in transforming from a fringe lobby group to becoming the only political authority in the country. Their political success is owed to Hassan al-Turabi, a lawyer with a doctorate from the University of Paris in constitutional law, who assumed the movement’s leadership in 1964. He developed a long-term vision for the movement to increase its political influence and advance its agenda. As this section will show, strategizing was central to realizing the Islamist vision.

Islamists followed different tactics during Sudan’s periods of democratic and military rule. During military rule, particularly in the second period (1969–1985), they shifted their strategies between opposition and cooperation in light of the opportunities offered by the regime. In the parliamentary periods, they formed political parties, fielded candidates, and built alliances

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24 For example, in the South, the government closed or nationalised mission schools to replace them with Qur’anic schools and mosques. It also changed the day of rest from Sunday to Friday. This was following the government’s decreeing Arabic and Islam as the official language and religion of the country.
with various other political parties. Nearing the end of the last democratic period (1986–1989), after serving as both opposition and coalition partners to the democratically elected government, they cooperated with loyalist factions from the military to overthrow the government and come to power. Their coup was carried out in response to fears of losing access to state institutions, and repression from an impending anti-Islamist military takeover. In short, from 1965 to 1989, Islamists acted strategically in that they shifted between cooperation with and opposition to both democratic and military regimes in an effort to increase their political clout and promote their Islamist programme. Alongside shifting strategies to suit the regime in power at the time, Islamists also shifted their ideological commitments, deprioritizing founding tenets and, at times, adopting new ones.

The movement was first able to make its presence felt during its participation in the NUP-led government of the second democratic period, which ran from 1965 to 1969. One year after Turabi assumed leadership of the group, the movement founded the Islamic Charter Front (ICF) and fielded candidates for the first time during the 1965 parliamentary elections. The results favoured the mainstream parties, NUP and the DUP, which were advantaged by a far-reaching urban and rural base as well as a majoritarian first-past-the-post system. As a result of its narrow base being limited to specific urban settings, particularly universities, the ICF gained only 5 out of 207 seats in parliament, coming in at 6th place (Ahmed 2008). However, even with its modest gains, due to the fragmented nature of Sudan’s politics, the ICF was politically relevant. The NUP needed the ICF’s political activism in urban localities, universities in particular, to combat the then popular leftist forces. The Islamists were able to form a coalition with the governing NUP to draft an Islamic constitution and ban the Communist Party from the National Assembly, a party they viewed as a threat to the country’s Islamic nature (El-Affendi
The Islamist movement continued with its political activism despite the ban on its ICF by Nimerie’s leftist military regime, which overthrew the NUP-led government in 1969. During the first half of Nimerie’s rule, from 1969 to 1977, when Islamists were subject to severe repression, they concentrated their political efforts in organizing civilian and armed campaigns with other parties to overthrow his regime (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005). Islamists changed their position from opposing to cooperating with the regime when Nimerie offered them rapprochement and participation in his government and the Sudanese Socialist Union (SSU) in 1977. Subsequently, Sidahmed and Sidahmed (2005) argue that Islamists actively supported the regime and Turabi became the first and only Islamist leader in the Arab and Islamic worlds to be a member of a socialist union.

The change in the Islamist approach to Nimerie’s regime was an outcome of strategic calculations to gain access to state institutions. While they lacked alternative channels to access state institutions during Nimerie’s first period, during reconciliation they were offered unprecedented opportunities. First, the Islamists were rewarded with a number of ministerial and judicial office positions, including one for Turabi, who became attorney general (El-Battahani 2013). Second, Nimerie allowed the movement to carry out its activities freely, even though political associations remained banned and the SSU was the only official political organization in the country.²⁵

This political space permitted Turabi, in addition to acquiring political representation for the movement, which allowed it to accrue experience in running state institutions, to increase the

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²⁵ Nimerie’s reconciliation with the Islamists and other political parties was an outcome of several reasons, including the worsening economic conditions due to increased oil prices and IMF austerity measures and the mounting political pressure from the opposition.
movement’s influence on the economy and expand its membership. From the late 1970s to the 1980s, the movement’s financial resources were estimated to have grown exponentially, from tens of thousands of pounds to millions (Makki 1990). The movement’s financial growth was facilitated by the introduction of Islamic banking in 1976, which allowed many of the movement’s members to become investors and high ranking employees in multi-million Islamic dollar banks, corporations, and international NGOs. The movement was also able to increase its financial clout through founding NGOs that channeled expatriates’ remittances after deducting their percentage without government taxation (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005; Warburg 2008). In the 1980s, there were more than 300,000 Sudanese expatriates with estimated earnings of more than 5 billion US dollar (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005, 55). The increase in financial resources allowed the movement to expand its support base (Sorbo and Ahmed 2013). First, it created a media empire that included Islamic television and radio stations with Islamic programs. Second, it expanded its base outside university and urban circles. It opened up regional offices in Darfur and started working in the South for the first time. It also created new youth and women’s wings (Makki 1990).

Atta el-Battahani describes Nimerie’s reconciliation period as a fundamental “critical juncture” in Al-haraka’s development (El-Battahani 2013, 25). The grand objective of Islamists was to create a powerful movement that could dominate the political, social, and economic arenas, so as to defeat the traditional parties in the next democratic period, upon the end of Nimerei’s regime (Cantori and Lowrie 1992; El-Affendi 1991; Makki 1990; Sidahmed 1996). Turabi outlined his strategy in an interview with al-Majallah on 29 June 1986, stating,
We knew what he wanted from the reconciliation and we did not expect anything from him. Our intention then was to build a wide base and an encompassing Islamic movement while avoiding any open move that may antagonize him because he wants power today and tomorrow and we want to inherit the social, political and economic future of the nation (*umma*). We were mobilizing the masses in rural areas and establishing banks… We were doing this while others were not paying attention. (Ahmed 2008, 4)

Turabi’s strategy proved successful when popular uprisings in April 1985 brought down Nimerie, ushering in the third democratic period. As a result of the movement’s political and economic progress, it was able to quickly organize politically. In a manner similar to that of the second democratic period, the movement founded a political party, fielded candidates, and formed coalitions with other parties. The movement’s new political party, the National Islamic Front (NIF), successfully performed in the 1986 parliamentary elections. It gained 18.4 percent of the vote, coming in third place after the NUP, at 38.2 percent, and the DUP at 29.2 percent. These elections were carried out in a manner similar to the 1965 elections with the same contenders (Ahmed 2008). The NUP and the DUP were the largest winners due to their wide rural and urban base and the majoritarian first-past-the-post system. The Islamists, nonetheless, as a result of their financial, geographic, and social expansion during Nimere’s tenure, were able to enlarge their support base. In urban settings, they were able to diversify their base, which was typically limited to university students, to include families of various socio-economic classes. Meanwhile, in rural areas and regions, they were able to establish a new support base.

In order to increase its popularity and undermine the mainstream parties, the NIF, whether it was part of the government or the opposition, focused on the one main issue of
Islamic law and penal code.\textsuperscript{26} Islamic law, including \textit{hudud}, was legalized by Nimerie in 1983 as a last resort to garner legitimacy in deteriorating economic and political conditions.\textsuperscript{27} Although the NIF had little to do with his decision, they supported it and objected to its removal even after Nimerie’s regime collapsed. They used the issue to pressure the NUP and the DUP, by accusing them of abandoning their Islamic and traditional constituencies. They also used the issue to portray themselves as the only true bearers of the religion and protectors of the Islamic nature of the country (El-Affendi 1991; Esposito and Voll 2001; Makki 1990; Sidahmed 1996). Islamic law was the most challenging issue for the NUP-led governments, since the Southern rebels of the second Sudanese Civil War stipulated its removal as a condition to ending the rebellion and negotiating with the state. Finally, in May 1989, the fifth NUP-led government, which included all parties except the NIF, agreed to revoke Islamic laws and to implement a framework to negotiate with the South. However, shortly after Islamists suspended their participation in the National Assembly, they formed an alliance with the military, which is more fully explained in chapter four, and overthrew the NUP-led government (Rogier 2005; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005).\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{26} NUP led five short-lived governments with different coalition compositions. While the first two included the NUP and DUP parties, the third included all three leading parties, the fourth government included the NUP and the NIF, and the fifth included all parties, including smaller ethnic parties, except the NIF (Sidahamed and Sidahmed 2005; Ottaway 1987). The first four governments failed to agree on policies concerning the deteriorating economic situation, the new war in the South, and Nimerie’s 1983 Islamic laws, due to disagreements and disputes.

\textsuperscript{27} Hudud are the fixed punishments for certain crimes. They include death, stoning, lashing, and hand amputation.

\textsuperscript{28} Under pressure from the army and the public, al-Mahdi’s fifth government moved toward a peace settlement to end the war. In May 1989, a one-month ceasefire was announced and the state of emergency was revoked. The following month, June 1989, the government agreed to revoke the implementation of the Islamic laws and cancel all military pacts with Egypt and Libya, which were the pre-negotiation conditions of the Southern rebels. On 30 June 1989, three days before negotiations were to start in Addis Ababa, the military, in alliance with the Islamists, led a coup.
The Coup

The Islamists overthrew the NUP’s democratic government to protect the movement, which, according to Turabi (1994, 2010), faced threat from domestic and foreign actors. More specifically, they desired to protect their access to power that was necessary to promote their programme. Due to internal and external pressure, in 1989, Sadiq al-Mahdi, leader of NUP, dissolved his coalition with NIF and formed another government with all other parties in order to sign the Sudanese Peace Initiative with the Southern rebels, abrogating Shariah laws. For the Islamists, their exclusion and the Sudanese Peace Initiative were a direct threat to their access to power and programme. Islamists were also threatened by the imminence of another hostile military coup. In response, they led a coup, overthrowing al-Mahdi’s government, halting the peace initiative, and preventing alternative hostile coups.

Since the 1986 elections, Islamists had concentrated their efforts on the preservation of Islamic law. Islamic laws constituted the heart of their agenda, taking precedence over the war with the South and the economic situation. However, the laws were opposed by leftists, including trade unions, communist party, and Southern rebels. These groups placed tremendous pressure on al-Mahdi to exclude the NIF and sign an agreement with the Southern rebels, cancelling Shariah application. Al-Mahdi also faced external pressure from Western states to dissolve his coalition with the NIF (Mohammed 2012). Abdelsalam explains that the government “was unable to attract the international support because of the presence of the NIF and the Secretary-General, Hasan al-Turabi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister” (Abdelsalam 2009, 84).

Turabi (1994) argued that Islamists executed the coup because hostile external and local actors would not allow Islamists to rule, whether they were part of a coalition or alone. Islamists
claimed that domestic and foreign actors did not follow the rules of democratic politics when it came to Islamists (El-Affendi 2013; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005; Warburg 2003). The NIF criticized the NUP government for giving in to pressure by leftists and seculars and excluding it despite being the third largest party. For Turabi (2010), NIF’s exclusion demonstrated that Islamists’ legislative ability will always be hindered, even if rightfully attained. Turabi (1994) also commonly cited the international community’s response to Islamists’ democratic successes, stressing what he identified as its double-standard. He stated,

The West is democratic, but if democracy anywhere gave birth to an Islamic state, they would abort it immediately. Unfortunately, many Western powers do not believe that democracy is an absolute and universal value; there are other values as well, but if democracy breeds Islam, then let us frustrate it completely. This has happened time and again in Turkey and it happened in Algeria. (Turabi 1994)

The Algerian and Turkish experience illustrated to Turabi that even if his party was to win an election, it would not be provided with international recognition and acceptance (Burr and Collins 2003). For this reason, the movement tactically concealed its role in the coup during the first year coup, choosing brigadier Omar al-Bashir as its figurehead and not a leading member of the movement.

Islamists also carried out the coup because of fear of repression by an alternative impending hostile military takeover (El-Affendi 2013; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005; Warburg 2003). Due to the Islamists’ experiences of persecution in the first and second military periods, the movement did not want to risk another hostile military regime that would repress them.
Turabi himself was imprisoned for six years and exiled for three more in the 1970s, and toward the end of Nimerie’s period of rule, there were rumours of his execution. Toward the end of al-Mahdi’s reign, there were reports and rumours warning of at least three coup plots in the planning stages, headed by various politicized factions of the military. In 1989, the Deputy Head of Sudan Security, Brigadier al-Hadi Busra, issued a report of the country’s situation, detailing a “lack of governance, political bickering and an atmosphere conducive to coup attempts” (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005, 34). Verhoeven explains that the Islamist movement “was aware of rumors that three coup plots were being planned, which, if successful, threatened to lead to years of harsh repression from which the Islamists, like the communists in the 1970s, might never recover” (Verhoeven 2013, 122). Turabi spoke openly of fear over the threat of a possible “extermination” of the Islamist movement, particularly given not only the experience of Islamists under past military regimes in Sudan, but also similar experiences of Islamists in other authoritarian states such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq (Cantori and Lowrie 1992).

In sum, Islamists carried out the coup to preserve their access to power, promote their agenda, and avoid repression by another hostile military regime. The Islamist coup was therefore largely an outcome of a desire to protect the movement and advance its programme. Since the second democratic period, Islamists’ strategic calculations, aimed at increasing their access to power, as Sorbo and Ahmed argue, guided much of their behaviour. They explain,

After spending eight years opposing Nimeiri’s regime, they [Ikhwan] ended up being the only supporter of that regime during its last years, using the argument that Nimeiri was implementing the Shariah laws – which, not coincidentally, could be used for building the Islamists’ own power base. Nevertheless when Nimeiri’s regime collapsed, the
Islamist movement managed to maneuver itself back into the power game by striking an alliance with the traditional parties before engineering the coup d’état that elevated it to the position of a sole power holder. (Sorbo and Ahmed 2013, 7)

**Islamists in Power**

Once in power, Sudan’s Islamists followed several measures to consolidate their power in order to facilitate the implementation of their Islamization programme. According to Gallab, “Islamists sought to systematically harness the ‘coercive apparatus’ of the state in order to institute an Islamist social and political order” (Gallab 2008, 97). They cracked down on the opposition and consolidated their power through the *tamkin* policy, namely firmly entrenching Islamist members in the state’s economic, social, political, and security institutions along replacing anyone who might be untrustworthy (El-Affendi 1995; Gallab 2008). As soon as it came to power, the Islamist regime started to crack down on political and civil societies. One of its first decrees was the suspension of political parties and trade unions. A state of emergency was called, prohibiting demonstrations and opposition newspapers, and allowing the regime to imprison journalists and political activists arbitrarily. Hundreds of trade unionists, political party members, activists, academics, journalists, and civil servants were brutally repressed. In 1994, Humans Rights Watch stated that, “secret detention houses, known as ‘ghost houses’, were established where leaders of trade unions and student unions were tortured in order to break any resistance” (Human Rights Watch 1994). This period, some argue, caused the destruction of one of Africa’s most vibrant civil societies (El-Affendi 2013; Lesch 1998). The government’s repression was not limited to political and civil societies. The regime also executed officers in the military. Nearly one year after the coup, the regime executed thirty-one army and police officers accused of coup
plotting (El-Affendi 2013, 1995; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005). Many believe that this was a pretext for removing un-cooperative officers (Adeeb 2017; El-Affendi 2013).

The regime also purged hundreds from civil service, army, and security institutions, and replaced them with ideologues and sympathizers. Over four years, the regime dismissed 73,640 people from various state institutions and departments, which is more than double the number of people laid off between 1904 and 1989 (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2006, 58). The regime also removed 11,000 army personnel, including 1600 officers (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2006, 58). According to Sorbo and Ahmed (2013), loyalty was seen to be more valuable than qualifications. By 1993, Islamists held all the leading political, economic, and social posts.

The removal of all forms of opposition allowed the regime to implement its new Islamist social agenda. The government launched *al-mashru al-hadari*’ or the “civilizing project” to respond to what it claimed was social decadence, and to transform the Sudanese society into “what it envisaged as the true Islam of the early days” (Ahmed 2008, 8). Subsequently, legal, institutional, and social changes were implemented in the pursuit of this project, including the founding of the largest ministry in the history of the country, namely the Ministry of Social Planning (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2006). In March 1991, not only did the NIF halt any discussion on the removal of Islamic laws, but it also introduced a new Islamic Penal code that included execution, amputation, and other punishments. In 1992, the Ulama or religious scholars issued a fatwa on apostasy, giving the order to kill any citizens defiant to the regime (El-Affendi 2006; El-Battahani 2013; Gallab 2008).

The regime also implemented other social and educational Islamization measures. It increased the construction of mosques and dedicated spaces for prayers in the workplace and public spaces. Furthermore, many Islamic programmes were introduced on various media
outlets, including TV and radio. The regime also introduced new curriculum at all education levels, with an emphasis placed on religious sciences. Additionally, the regime imposed a modest dress code on women and girls, particularly in the workplace, but also in public. Although there was no official law imposing hijab on women, the government, using its policing institutions, used intimidation to enforce the dress code (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005).

Conclusion

Along with providing a background on Islamists in Sudan, this chapter has demonstrated that their behaviour supports the existing literature stressing the role of strategic calculations in Islamist politics (Brown 2012; Clark 2006; Tezcur 2010; Schwedler 2006; Wickham 2013). Sudanese Islamists acted strategically and according to the institutional constraints and opportunities they encountered in an effort to increase their access to the state and promote their agenda. During democratic periods, they formed political parties, fielded candidates, and formed coalitions with other parties. During authoritarian periods, they shifted their strategies between opposition and cooperation, depending on the opportunities offered to them by the regime in power. During the last democratic period, upon their political exclusion and the imminence of a hostile military coup, Islamists overthrew the democratically elected government and came to power.

In cooperating with the military to overthrow al-Mahdi’s government, Islamists behaved similarly to other political forces in the past that also cooperated with the military in response to their political exclusion. Sidahmed and Sidahmed (2005) note that in all three coups in Sudan’s political history, the instigators were previously marginalized and isolated political parties, or parties that feared such fate. In the first coup (1958), the NUP Prime Minister called on his military supporters when he feared political defeat from a reunited DUP factions; in the second
(1969), the Sudanese Communist Party aligned with leftist loyalists in the military after the national assembly banned it and forced it to give up its seats; and in the last coup (1989), the Islamist party planned the government takeover with Islamist military officers, after it was the only party excluded from the ongoing peace initiative and constitutional negotiations with the South Sudanese.

This chapter has shown how Sudanese Islamists, as noted by the current literature, bend their ideologies to fit their changing strategies (Brown 2012; Tezcur 2010). After the movement was founded, Islamists’ ideological agenda underwent frequent changes. At times, they suspended and deprioritized founding tenets altogether. For example, in contrast to their rejection of the application of hudud in the 1960s, in the 1980s, they supported Nimerie’s hudud initiative and fought for its application even after his regime was overthrown.29 Also in contrast to their early position advocating a peaceful solution to the Southern rebellion in the 1960s, during the 1980s, they advocated a militant strategy in dealing with the South, claiming that the Southern rebels’ leftist ideology threatened Sudan’s Islamic nature (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005; Warburg 2008; Verhoeven 2013). Additionally, in contrast to their long-term commitment to democratic governance and opposition to military interventions in their early decades, in the late 1970s, they cooperated with Nimerie’s military regime, and in 1989, they overthrew a democratically elected government with aid from military loyalists (El-Affendi 2013; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005). Their ideological repositioning to the right after the 1970s was related to their shifting political strategies. In the 1980s, they supported hudud and opposed a solution to the South Sudanese civil war, in order to place pressure on the NUP government and portray

29 The 1965 programme of the ICF rejected the application of hudud, claiming that its application is limited for ideal societies that are impossible to attain. It also emphasized the rights of non-Muslims, guaranteed equality of citizenship, and, in comparison to 1956, did not specify the religion of the president to accommodate non-Muslims.
themselves as the only defenders of the Islamic nature of the country. They cooperated with Nimerie’s military regime, despite their earlier opposition to it, because it offered them post-sharing and the room to advance their movement. Finally, they used the military to overthrow al-Mahdi’s democratic government when they feared losing access to state institutions upon their political exclusion and repression by an imminent hostile military regime.

Although this chapter, along with providing a historical background of Islamist behaviour, has demonstrated the strategic calculations of Sudanese Islamists, at times at the cost of their ideological commitments, it has not addressed the scepticism concerning Islamist behaviour once in power. This scepticism is based on the conjecture that Islamists, once in power, will reprioritize and pursue their ideological aspirations because they are then likely to face less constraints. This is particularly concerning in cases like Sudan, where Islamists consolidated their power through institutional changes that removed earlier constraints that, at times, had forced them to deprioritize their ideological commitments for the sake of political maneuvering. Indeed, once in power, the Islamists implemented a wide-reaching social Islamization programme. Further examination of Islamists’ policies upon moving into positions of authority will allow for a more concrete analysis of their behaviour over time, the role of strategic calculations in their politics, as well as their ideology.

Although there are many policies that can be examined, this thesis observes and analyzes Islamist policies regarding minority treatment. As mentioned at the start of the thesis, much of the literature does not examine Islamist behaviour while they are in positions of power, and none of the existing literature examines their approaches toward minorities. This is an important focus because minority treatment is an area that Islamists are suspected to particularly struggle with, due to clear ideological guidelines in the Islamic tradition. An examination of Islamist minority
policies in instances of Islamists in power can help to explain Islamist behaviour more definitively. This will be the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter 3

Islamists’ Approaches to the South Sudanese and Darfuris in Sudan

In 1989, Sudanese Islamists, in collaboration with loyalists from the military, ascended to power through a coup. The objective of the coup was to found an Islamic state in line with Islamic laws and tradition. Accordingly, Islamists overhauled the political and social institutions, introducing new policies congruent with their ideological tenets. Minority related policies were also amended. In their first years in power, Islamists followed an open approach toward Muslim Darfuris (Category A), offering power-sharing and promoting stability in the region, while simultaneously following a closed approach toward the animist and Christian South Sudanese (Category B), pursuing exclusive and violent strategies against them. However, a decade later, Islamists changed their approaches to both of these groups. The Islamist regime launched a genocide against Muslim non-Arab Darfuris after excluding them from government and ended the war with the animist and Christian South Sudanese, signing a peace agreement that granted the South self-government and self-determination. Following a brief discussion of Sudan’s ethnic diversity, this chapter closely traces this shift in Islamist approaches toward the South Sudanese and Darfuris, after providing a brief background on each group.

Ethnic Minorities in Sudan

Sudan has been described as a microcosm of Africa because of its ethnic diversity (Deng 1995; Sharkey 2008). According to one account, prior to the secession of its southern region, Sudan was home to 56 ethnic groups and about 597 sub-ethnic groups, speaking a total of more than 115 languages (Deng 1995; Deng 2005). In 2010, the largest ethnic category, comprising those who considered themselves Arab, made up at least 40 percent of the population (Ateem 2007;
Sawant 1998). As Figure 3 shows, the major non-Arab groups in the formerly united Sudan included the Southern groups in the South, the Fur and Zaghawa in the west, the Beja in the northeast, and the Nubians in the far north.

Figure 3. Ethnic groups in the formerly united Sudan 1956-2011
While those who consider themselves Arab constitute the largest ethnic category, this group is not homogenous due to varying regional and tribal loyalties and affiliations, as well as levels of access to power (Deng 2005). Since the Condominium era, the period of Anglo-Egyptian rule over the Sudan (1899–1956), favoured by colonial powers, Arabs from the Northern Region (see Figure 4) attained far greater access to state institutions than non-Arabs or Arabs from the peripheries.

**Figure 4. Sudan’s administrative boundaries**

After independence in 1956, Arabs from the Northern Region dominated consecutive central governments and continued to implement policies that benefitted their region politically and economically, while neglecting others, including South Sudan and Darfur. This was done despite their small share in the population in comparison to other regions. According to the 2008 statistics, as Table 6 shows, while the Northern Region was home to less than 5 percent of the population, the South, comprised of three regions, was the most populous, at 21.8 percent, followed by Darfur at 19.2 percent. This research focuses on the South Sudanese and Darfuris, not only because the two groups are numerically the largest, but also because they have engaged in political and armed forms of contention with central governments because of their marginalization. Furthermore, each of the groups fits a different category outlined in the theoretical chapter. One group, the Darfuris, shares religion with the ruling Islamists but differ ethnically (Category A), while the other, Southern Sudanese differs ethnically and religiously (Category B). The next sections will provide a background of South Sudanese and Darfuris, after which the chapter moves to discuss Islamist approaches to the minorities.

**Table 6. Population of Sudan’s Regions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Population (000)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Region</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>1820</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khartoum</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>5274</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Region</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>7423</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Region</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>4534</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kordofan</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>4327</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darfur</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>5715</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahr Elghazal</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>2723</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Nile</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>2909</td>
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<td>Equatoria</td>
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<td>6.7</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
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The South Sudanese: Background

The South Sudanese are Nilotic peoples of various tribes, among which the largest are the Dinka and Nuer, who make up 40 and 20 percent of the South’s population respectively. In contrast with the African-Arab northerners, South Sudanese identify as African and non-Arab. In addition, compared to the mostly Muslim north, they follow animist beliefs, with a minority subscribing to the Christian and Islamic faiths. Prior to secession, the South Sudanese constituted nearly 25 percent of the Sudanese population. Geographically, they inhabited the largest region of the formerly united Sudan, which consists of Upper Nile, Equatoria, and Bahr El-Gazal, as Figure 4 shows (Sharkey 2008).

South Sudan’s cultural and historical differences represented a challenge to the nation-building and centralization efforts of Sudan’s governments. The South Sudanese resisted the Arabization and Islamization policies aimed at the homogenization of the Sudanese people, which were pursued and enforced to varying degrees by most of Sudan’s governments since independence in 1956. In fact, Nimerie’s regime, during its first ten years of power, was the only regime the South Sudanese supported because it granted them self-government. They most resisted the 1989 Islamist government because of its ambitious and elaborate Islamic system, which they argued was inherently discriminatory, even if it granted opt-outs for non-adherents.

The First Sudanese Civil War, which began in 1955 in response to the transitional government’s failure to respond to the South’s demands for decentralization, continued until 1972, when Nimerie’s military regime negotiated the Addis Ababa Agreement with Anyanya I, the rebel group representing the South. Politically, the Addis Ababa Agreement allowed for extensive power-sharing. In addition to opening space for Southern representation in the national government, it granted the South self-government. The South thus attained its own elected
legislature, the Southern Regional Assembly, and its own executive, led by the regional president and his appointed cabinet. The agreement’s social provisions were also accommodative. While it acknowledged Arabic as Sudan’s official language, it recognized English as the South’s principal administrative and didactic language. It further guaranteed freedom of religion, personal liberty, and equality of citizens to all in Sudan (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005).

The Second Civil War was set off in 1983 when Nimerie redrew the Southern boundaries despite objections from the Southern Regional Assembly. The South responded to Nimerie’s contravening of the agreement with an armed rebellion led by the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). As an armed and political movement, the SPLM/A was strikingly different from the Anyanya movement that had led the first civil war. In contrast to the Anyanya, the SPLM/A did not only intend to “liberate” the Southerners, but all of Sudan, holding that the underlying problem of the country was its unrepresentative centre. The SPLM/A and its leader, John Garang, were committed to a vision of a secular and socialist Sudan. In the movement’s manifesto, Garang proposed that the “New Sudan” be built on secularism and African citizenship (Peter 2010). This “New Sudan” would reflect the diverse populations and ensure economic, social, and political equality for citizens. The SPLM/A, then, was different from Anyanya, as its initial declarations were “unitary, not secessionist” (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005, 43).

Despite the removal of Nimerie and the election of a democratic civilian government, the war continued because of the Shariah law Nimerie had introduced in 1983. Although the introduction of Islamic law is not seen as the main cause of the rebellion, as it was announced

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30 In 1980, Nimerie proposed to the Southern Regional Assembly a plan to redraw the boundaries of the Southern regions. The following year, the assembly rejected his proposal, and Nimerie responded by dissolving the body. In 1983, he proceeded to create a new state in the South called “Unity” and divided the Southern region into three smaller ones with much less authority and power over economic matters (Rogier 2010, 27). Nimerie’s decision was motivated by, first, the goal of strategically placing the newly discovered oil fields outside the South’s jurisdiction, and second, by pressure from some Southern tribes (including the Nuer and Shiluk), who hoped that the redrawing would weaken the dominance of the Dinka, the largest ethnic group in the South (Gargandi 2016).
nine months after the start of the war in September 1983, it conflicted with the SPLM/A vision. SPLM/A leader Garang demanded that the newly elected al-Mahdi government repeal the Islamic decrees for the entire country, even the Muslim-majority north, arguing that any religion-based structure was unacceptable as it would allow religious discrimination and inequality. As al-Mahdi’s government was set to repeal the laws as part of a negotiated peace initiative with the SPLM/A, the Islamists, along with their military loyalists, ousted the government to prevent this from taking place.

**Islamist Governing Approaches toward the South Sudanese**

The Islamists had a negative view of the SPLM/A and its leader. Turabi accused Garang of manipulating racial, religious, and ideological lines for his cause (Cantori and Lowrie 1992). The regime also demonized him, presenting him as an eminent internal and external threat to the Muslim umma and the Islamist project. The Islamists further claimed that peace with the SPLM/A would constitute an unholy alliance with crusaders and communists. Consequently, when the regime came to power in 1989, it halted all negotiations and resorted to military combat, declaring a “jihad” against the South (Warburg 2003). The ruling Islamists followed a closed approach toward the South, characterized by increased militarization and violence and attempts to weaken the SPLM/A through support for splinter factions and proxy wars in the South. However, in the early 2000s, the Islamists entirely changed their approach, now pursuing an open approach marked by engagement in negotiations, reduction of violence, and generous extension of social, economic, and political rights – all supported by an overall compromising tone. Thus, the Islamists had two distinct approaches to the South in different time periods.

In their closed approach, the Islamists proceeded to double their military efforts. First, they dedicated substantial resources to security institutions. In 1992, the regime spent nearly five
percent of Sudan’s GDP on the military, the highest amount spent by any Sudanese government since 1969 (The World Bank Data 2017). This number was also more than double the average military spending for Sub-Saharan African countries around the same period. In terms of overall expenditure, the regime allocated the largest share to the military and continued to increase it gradually. By 1993, military spending made up over twenty percent of all government spending, and by 1999, it had reached forty-seven percent (The World Bank Data 2017).

Second, the regime diversified its military institutions. In addition to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), or alqwooat al musal’ha, it founded the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), or al-defa’ al-sha’aby, and the mujahedeen (Gargandi 2017). While the armed forces consisted of compulsorily conscripted students and civil servants between the ages of eighteen and thirty, the PDF found its recruits from three sources: tribal militias, volunteers, and recruits from the ranks of the Islamists, and the mujahedeen relied on deeply committed volunteers. The regime also channelled some of its resources into establishing new training and educational camps for the PDF and mujahedeen (Gallab 2008).

All three forces worked together in a campaign of a jihad against the South. In an interview, Ali Gargandi, former government minister and East Khartoum mayor during the Islamist regime, stated that “these jihadist groups [PDF and mujahedeen] would penetrate the South first followed and backed by the Sudanese Armed Forces.” According to former Prime Minister al-Mahdi, the regime’s use of religion in the civil war increased its fervour and violence (Gallab 2008). Subsequently, the war witnessed its most violent episodes during the early 1990s, as Figure 5 shows. While it is hard to break down the annual number of fatalities due to a paucity of information, in the same year, the average military spending for sub-Saharan African countries was 2.4 percent of all government spending. As for the percentage of military spending from overall spending in European countries, it was an average of 4.3 percent around the same period (World Bank).
of data, estimates suggest that the number of fatalities resulting from the South Sudan war was the highest in the early Islamist period, and this continued throughout the 1990s, until it drastically subsided in the early 2000s (Burr and Collins 2003; De Waal 2016).

Figure 5. Total civilian deaths in South Sudan from 1989 to 2013

Not only did Islamists restructure the army and found new institutions to fight the South, they also followed “a finely tuned policy of dividing the southerners” (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005, 58). First, the regime fuelled proxy wars between armed groups in the South to weaken the SPLM/A, where it faced dozens of armed opposition groups. While some of these armed groups
were local vigilantes responding to corrupt SPLM/A soldiers stationed in their communities, these local forces did not constitute a threat to the SPLM/A. The most serious challenge came from the armed groups that defected from the SPLM/A itself. The regime armed and supported all opposition to the SPLM/A, labelling them as “Friendly Forces” (Young 2003, 430). For example, in the early 1990s, the government supported the forces of Riek Machar, former SPLM/A commander, who alongside other former SPLM/A commanders formed the SPLM/A United Front to challenge Garang’s SPLM/A Mainstream. The internal fighting resulted in the deaths of nearly 300,000 (Young 2003, 425).

The causes of the factionalism were Garang’s authoritarian leadership as well as the dominance of his Dinka tribe over the SPLM/A. Garang’s former disciples criticized him for having excessive control over the SPLM/A. For example, he occasionally sidestepped other SPLM/A leadership personnel like chief commanders by communicating directly with commanders in the field. Additionally, members who had defected protested to Dinka domination over the SPLM/A and marginalization of other ethnic groups (Young 2003). For instance, the Dinka held a disproportionately large number of positions on the SPLM/A Leadership Council; during the time, seven out of the thirteen members were Dinka (Young 2003, 425). Accordingly, Machar’s feud with Garang was rooted in the latter’s unwillingness to share power and the marginalization of his Nuer ethnic group in the SPLM/A. Thus, the conflict between the two took on an ethnic character, with Garang’s forces largely from the Dinka and Machar’s from the Nuer (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005; Warburg 2008). Garang’s camp won the war because it was favoured logistically and numerically since the Dinka constituted the majority in the South (Young 2003).
In order to ensure continued fractionalization of the SPLM/A and hinder its potential reunion, the government signed a series of sham agreements with separate Southern factions, feigning power-sharing in return. The government amalgamated these agreements in what is known as the Khartoum Peace Agreement in 1997. The agreement was signed by five Southern groups, and included provisions on federalism, power-sharing, revenue-sharing, and even a referendum for the South’s self-determination. Furthermore, it created the Coordinating Council of Southern States (CCSS) as the governing political body of the Southern States. According to the agreement, the president of the CCSS had the power to select his cabinet and governors of the Southern States, as well as appoint members of the states’ legislative assemblies until elections were feasible. The agreement also brought together the various armed splinter factions in the newly founded South Sudan Defence Force (SSDF) (Government of Sudan and South Sudan United Democratic Salvation Front 1997). Riek Machar was appointed as vice president to al-Bashir, the president of the CCSS, and the head of SSDF.

The government strategically pursued the agreement to simply “divide the SPLA” and play its factions against each other (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005, 51). This is evidenced in the government’s hindrance of the agreement’s power-sharing and decentralization provisions. For example, as president of CCSS, Machar found his powers constantly undermined by the government, which imposed ministers on his cabinet and blocked his recommendations for governors (Young 2003). The government also constantly bypassed Machar and the Chief of Staff of the SSDF, Paulino Mantieb, by communicating with and supplying each armed faction of the SSDF separately. Sidahmed and Sidahmed argue that the agreement “remained mere paper with those signatories either deserting the government ranks or accusing it of lack of seriousness” (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005, 61). By the late 1990s, the government’s behaviour
had led the signatories of the agreement, including Riek Machar, to withdraw from the agreement, with some of them reuniting with Garang’s SPLM/A (Haywood 2014; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005; Young 2003).

**Change in Approach toward the South Sudanese: From Closed to Open**

Contrary to its approach during the 1990s, characterized by military-focused strategies to deal with the Southern rebels, by the early 2000s, the regime turned to negotiations. This change of approach manifested itself most clearly in the ratification of the CPA between the regime and the SPLM/A in 2005. The CPA is a compilation of a series of agreements signed by the parties starting in 2002, the first of which was the Machakos Agreement. The signatories of the agreement were John Garang and First Vice President Ali Osman Taha, who was also formerly Turabi’s deputy. The other protocols that constituted the CPA included those on security arrangement (2003), wealth-sharing (2004), and power-sharing (2004), and two additional protocols for disputed territories (2004).

First, the Islamist regime advanced accommodative cultural policies in line with its newfound open approach. Citizenship, rather than religious belief, was recognized as the basis of all rights and obligations for all Sudanese. Sudan no longer self-characterized in mono-religious terms, but was instead defined as “a multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual country” (CPA 2005, 5). Even more striking was Taha’s willingness to demote the status of Shariah since the regime claimed it came to power to protect and ensure its full implementation. The new conception of citizenship relegated Shariah to a personal level. For example, the CPA stated that
Eligibility for public office, including the presidency, public service and the enjoyment of all rights and duties shall be based on citizenship and not on religions, beliefs or customs….All personal family matters including marriage, divorce, inheritance, succession and affiliation may be governed by personal laws (including Shariah or other religious laws, customs or traditions) of those concerned. (CPA 2005, 5)

Further, the Islamist government recognized Sudan’s indigenous languages and declared that all languages in the country were to be “esteemed, fostered and promoted” (CPA 2005, 26). Although Arabic and English were recognized as the official languages for work and education, the CPA allowed any state in Sudan to adopt its majority language for these purposes. Thus, in contrast to the regime’s ideological and exclusionary tone during its early period, the language used in the CPA was one of inclusion.

Also, in contrast to the military-centred strategy of the 1990s, in 2003, the Islamist government committed itself to an internationally monitored ceasefire, and in the following year, it signed a permanent ceasefire agreement with the SPLM/A. Although the violence did not completely stop, it dramatically subsided, as Figure 5 shows.\footnote{Disruptions to the ceasefire mainly happened in disputed territories that were not resolved by the CPA.} Indeed, at the signing ceremony of the CPA, Garang stated, “with this peace agreement, the SPLM and the National Congress Party (NCP) government have brought half a century of war to a dignified end – congratulations. With this peace agreement, there will be no more bombs falling from the sky on innocent children and women” (Garang 2005).

Furthermore, in contrast to the earlier political exclusion of the South Sudanese, the Islamist government agreed to substantial power-sharing terms with the minority. The power-
sharing protocol stated that all parties were “convinced that decentralization and empowerment of all levels of government are cardinal principles of effective and fair administration of the country” (CPA 2005, 11). Subsequently, the protocol established the Government of National Unity (GNU). While the Islamist NCP represented 52 percent in the GNU’s judiciary, executive, and legislative institutions, the SPLM/A represented 28 percent, and the remaining parties, 20 percent. This ensured that the South Sudanese were proportionally represented in all governmental institutions.

In addition to granting the South Sudanese proportional representation in the central government, the Islamist regime granted them self-government. The South’s administration was given the title “Government of Southern Sudan” (GoSS), rather than being designated as a mere regional body. The GoSS enjoyed full autonomy under its president and leader of its executive branch, as well as its own independent legislature, which was tasked with making the South’s constitution, and its own judiciary. Furthermore, in granting the South authority normally only attributed to independent states, the Islamist government agreed to allow the South to keep its own army and consulates already open in states around the world.

Not only did the central government agree to share political power with the GoSS, but it also agreed to equally share oil wealth, signaling its open political and economic approach. This contrasted with the regime’s former monopoly over wealth and distribution. More specifically, after two percent was returned to the oil producing state, the wealth-sharing protocol distributed the remaining 98 percent of oil wealth equally between the GoSS and the GNU. Furthermore, the regime provided the GoSS with numerous powers over its economy, including those to collect personal income taxes, luxury taxes, and business taxes in the South. Furthermore, the South
could set up its own banking system and currency that would remain in place until the Central Bank could design a new currency that would reflect the cultural diversity of Sudan (CPA 2005).

Most striking was perhaps the Islamists’ agreement to the provision of self-determination. This was important because the regime considered the South, with its vast oil resources, to be an inseparable region of its Islamic republic when it first assumed power. The provision on self-determination allowed the people of the South to vote on a referendum on secession, on January 9, 2011 (CPA 2005). Although the Addis Ababa Agreement had similar provisions, the CPA was considerably more generous. Former government minister Amin Hassan Omer stated in an interview that “While the public thought that the Addis Ababa Agreement was quasi-independence, the CPA was thought to be the actual independence of the South” (Omer 2016).

In sum, from the early 1990s to the early 2000s, significant changes in violence and government policies can be observed. A decade after its ascendance to power, the Islamist government abandoned its military-focused strategy and engaged in serious negotiations with the South, granting it sweeping political, economic, and social rights. Considering that, ten years earlier, the Islamists’ first and foremost strategy was a jihad against the “communist” and “secular” South in an attempt to bring it under its rule, the change in direction is puzzling. The question that arises is, what explains the change in the Islamist approach toward the South? Before addressing this central question, it is important to trace how Islamists changed their approach toward Darfur. This is because it will demonstrate that the change in approach toward the South Sudanese was not an anomaly, and that the explanation of both cases intertwines.

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33 The South Sudanese voted overwhelmingly for secession on January 9th of 2011. Six months later, South Sudan became an independent state.
**Darfuris: Background**

After South Sudan, Darfur is the second largest geographical region and the second most populated in Sudan, with a population of seven million (Reeves 2005). Ethnically, Darfur has a mix of non-Arab and Arab tribes, with the former tending to be sedentary and to rely on agriculture, and the latter nomadic, depending on animal herding practices. In terms of religion, all Darfuris, non-Arab and Arab, are Muslim and of the Tijaniyya Sufi sect that developed in Morocco. Linguistically, Darfuris, even those who retain their indigenous African languages, use Arabic as their lingua franca. There is no exact information on the numerical ethnic composition of the area. However, according to the last census conducted in Darfur in 1983, non-Arab tribes make up the majority of the region’s population, about two thirds to three quarters (O’Fahey 2008; Reeves 2005). While non-Arab tribes reside in central Darfur, where the climate allows for farming, Arab herders often roam across northern and southern Darfur, where water is scarce. Darfur is named after its largest ethnic group, the Fur.\(^{34}\) In addition to the Fur, there are other non-Arab tribes such as the Masalit and Zaghawa. The Arab groups are divided, with the Abbala in the north and Baggara in the south. Each of these groups is further divided into multiple tribes.

Ethnicity in Darfur was not a primary identification marker. Other markers such as language (Arabic versus non-Arabic speakers), and more often, occupation (pastoralists or sedentary farmers) were more commonly used (El-Tom 2006). In fact, ethnicity in the region was described as fluid, with smaller groups assimilating into larger ones and with ethnicity changing with the nature of one’s work (Ateem 2007). For example, once a nomadic pastoralist acquired enough wealth and bought farmland to sustain his animals, he became a Fur or Masalit by virtue of moving into their area (Prunier 2005).

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\(^{34}\) The word *dar* means house or home in Arabic. Thus, Darfur means the House of the Fur.
Historically, occasional conflicts broke out amongst Darfuris over resources and land. Arab and non-Arab tribes engaged in conflict with each other as much as amongst themselves (Ateem 2007; Flint and De Waal 2005). These conflicts were often contained, either solved by the leaders of the tribes or through government intervention after Sudan’s independence. Sudanese governments have often played the role of a neutral third party and attempted to broker agreements. In the 1980s, frequency and intensity of such conflicts increased due to a number of factors, including a devastating drought, the implication of Darfur in the Chad–Libya war, resulting in a surge in the availability of weapons, and an Arabist militant ideology promulgated by the Libyan regime and adopted by members of Darfur’s Abbala Arab group.\(^{35}\) These factors resulted in an unprecedentedly violent conflict between the Fur and Arab militias between 1987 and 1989 that led to the deaths of thousands of people and the incineration of hundreds of villages (Prunier 2005).\(^{36}\)

While Darfur’s drought and the Chad–Libya war ended before the Islamists came to power, Arabist ideology had established a firm ground among the region’s Arabs. Specifically, it was popular among members of the Mahamid clan of the Abbala Arabs, whose Sheikh, Musa Hilal, was also the leader of the Arab Gathering, an Arab ultranationalist militant organization.

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\(^{35}\) During the late 1980s, and with the approval of al-Mahdi, Muammar Gaddafi used Darfur as a base to launch his armed campaign against Chad’s Hissene Habre regime. Darfuri groups became heavily implicated in the war. Gaddafi used Arab groups, such as the Beni Halba and Rizeigat Abbala, to fight his Chadian enemies. The Chadian regime, on the other hand, approached the non-Arab Zaghawa Bedayat to fight the Libyan-sponsored groups. Further complicating the matter, Chadian Arabs persecuted by Habre moved to Darfur and joined the Arab groups. The war was also affected by the Cold War, as Habre enjoyed US–French support, while Gaddafi attained the backing of the Soviet Union (El-Gizouli 2011; Flint and De Waal 2005; Prunier 2008).

\(^{36}\) The central government, preoccupied by waging war in the South, failed to respond to Darfur’s troubles. Finally, in 1989, after the end of the drought and the Chad–Libya war, al-Mahdi’s government tried to broker an agreement between the Fur and the Arab militias. He appointed a new governor, Tijane Sese, who succeeded in convening a peace conference in al-Fasher, Darfur’s capital, which entailed the disarmament of Fur self-defence groups and the Arab militias (Flint and De Waal 2005; Prunier 2008). His agreement used the term *Janjaweed* to describe the Arab militias and this was the first official use of the term. To curb the influence of Arab ideology, he also removed Musa Hilal, the leader of the Arab Gathering, from his position as Sheikh, or leader of his Mahamid tribe. However, before the deal could be implemented, the Islamist coup overthrew al-Mahdi’s government (Prunier 2005).
During the 1980s, the organization published flyers and made cassettes claiming that Arabs constituted the majority in the western region, Africans had ruled the region for long enough, and that it was time for the Arabs to govern (Flint and De Waal 2005). The group’s militias, known as Janjaweed, also attacked and burned down Fur villages during this period, using the weapons increasingly available in the region to arm themselves. The weapons were brought into Darfur through Libya, which used the region as a base for its campaign against the Chadian regime, and by the central government itself, as it armed southern Darfuri Arab tribes to fight the SPLM/A (El-Affendi 2013; Gallab 2008; Prunier 2005). The Arab Gathering remained active when Islamists assumed power, although not to the same extent due to the loss of external support and the al-Mahdi government’s removal of Musa Hilal from his position as Sheikh. The relationship between the group and the Islamist regime heavily influenced violence in the region during its ruling period as discussed in the subsequent section.

**Islamist Governing Approaches toward the Darfuris**

Darfuris’ Muslim identity despite their ethnic difference from northern Sundanese, motivated Islamist interest in the region. As early as the 1970s, Islamists attempted to attract Darfuris into their ranks, stressing their shared Muslim kinship. In the early 1990s, the Islamist regime offered Darfuris more power-sharing in comparison to earlier governments, and it also attempted to stabilize the region by containing violence. By the mid-1990s evidence suggests that the Islamist government began to move away from its open approach, failing to proportionally represent Darfuris in government institutions any longer and to deal with Arab militias despite their attacks on non-Arab Darfuris. The government shifted to a full closed approach in the early 2000s. Then, it used its military institutions and Arab militias to carry out organized campaigns of violence.
against non-Arab Darfuris, marginalized the group’s members in both the ruling party and government, and adopted an overtly hostile stance toward them.

In their open approach, Islamists adopted an inclusive tone toward Darfuris, stressing their shared faith and overlooking existing tribal and ethnic differences. Turabi (1993) believed that there was no place for ethno-nationalism in Islam and was one of the biggest critics of the Arabist ideology. During the 1970s, Islamists tried to attract young Darfuris in universities in Khartoum through their associations. By the 1980s, thanks to increased resources, the Islamists were able to set up branches in Darfur. Tajuddin Bashir Nyam, a young Darfuri, described his interaction with Islamists, saying

they sent people from Khartoum to speak to us, something other parties were not doing. Many of them were teachers. We found they were honest, very straightforward and with great morality….no one asked for tribes. They said, “Islam is our mother and father.” They organized football teams and debates, and gave us books to read…they gave us confidence and we were well respected by the community. (Flint and De Waal 2005, 19)

Young Darfuris found the Islamists’ community-focused vision, which transcended ethnic, tribal, and socio-economic divisions, promising. Many responded by joining the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1970s, and in the 1980s, a considerable number of Darfuris became NIF members (and later NCP members). To be sure, support for the NIF was tribally uneven. In fact, Gargandi (2017) suggested that the majority of Darfuri Islamists were from the non-Arab tribes.37

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37 The interviewee suggested that Islamists’ interest in non-Arab tribes was natural, since these tribes were better versed in Islam. It is by virtue of their sedentary lifestyles that they were able to sustain centuries-old religious
Specifically, Islamists’ recruitment efforts were most successful with the non-Arab Zaghawa tribe, which gave the party its first seat in Darfur in the 1986 election.38

Once in power, the Islamists continued to appeal to Darfuris through their positive tone, and also by appointments to positions of influence. Turabi appointed a Fur governor, Tayeb Ibrahim (Flint and De Waal 2005). This deviated from the historical practice of appointing Darfur governors from the north, which alienated Darfuris. Ibrahim continued to promote the Islamist movement in Darfur through a campaign over hearts and minds, stressing the religious affiliation (Flint and De Waal 2005). The Islamist regime also granted Darfuris important posts in the central government. Darfuris, who made up 20 percent of the Sudanese population, were proportionally represented in the Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation (RCCNS), which ruled Sudan during the first few years of the Islamist period, as seen in Table 7. Although the number fell to nearly 14 percent in the following period (1993–99), the fact remains that the Islamist regime offered Darfuris more ministerial positions than all of Sudan’s previous governments, with the exception of al-Mahdi’s 1986-1989 government (El-Tom 2006; JEM 2000). During the tamkeen period, Darfuris were also allocated 10 percent of the presidential advisor positions, 15 percent of the state governor positions, 13 percent of the positions available for heads of constitutional courts, and 17 percent of the positions available for presidents of public universities (El-Tom 2006).

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38 Educational institutions in contrast to the nomadic Arabs. He stated that Arab tribes’ knowledge of Islam was considerably lower, and that they sought non-Arabs to educate their young in the faith.

38 Their success was limited within the Arab Baggara and the African Fur. According to Gallab, the first remained loyal to the Umma party and the second distrusted them (Gallab 2011).
Table 7. Western region representation in ministerial positions in Sudan’s governments

<table>
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<tr>
<td>1964-1969</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1969-1985</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>TMC 85-86</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-89</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCCNS 89-93</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 (1993)-1999</td>
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In an effort to increase their legitimacy, limit state spending, and weaken existing and potentially rival institutions, Islamists restructured Darfur’s administrative system, creating three states out of the region; these became Northern, Western, and Southern Darfur, each with new provinces and localities. For the first time since independence, they also restored the authority of the traditional leaders, while eliminating that of the secular administrative and judicial institutions established by the state (Kevane and Gray 1995). While the latter policy granted the Islamists legitimacy among the population of the region, particularly the leadership, which became tied to their regime, the former policy angered the few groups disadvantaged by the new administrative borders, which they argued weakened their claims to land (Kevane and Gray 1995; Prunier 2005).

The Islamist regime also attempted to bring peace to the previously violence-ridden region. When they came to power in 1989, they succeeded in limiting SPLM/A sponsored violence by defeating SPLM/A backed rebels in the region (Gallab 2008). However the reduction of violence was also facilitated by other external factors, specifically the end of the Chadian–
Libyan war and diminishing Libyan involvement in Darfur. Despite the occasional violent incident, in which a village would be attacked, or a market or vehicle ambushed, Prunier contends that there was “a period of apparent calm” (Prunier 2005, 74). Nonetheless, there was one group that continued to suffer from violence, namely the Masalit, a non-Arab tribe in northwest Darfur. The violence they suffered was a result of the government’s militia strategy, arming Arab tribes in south Darfur to fight the SPLM/A in the South.

The militia strategy was one of the Islamist regime’s detrimental policies in Darfur (El-Affendi 2013; Gallab 2008). Soon after the Islamist government armed these groups in the early 1990s, they turned their weapons toward their northern non-Arab Darfuri neighbours. Kuperman (2009) contends that these groups, to the condemnation of the government, were very strategic, as they circumvented direct confrontations with the SPLM/A, where their chances at victory would be low, and instead targeted their weaker northern neighbours to acquire resources.

The Masalit were the main victims of the militia strategy, having suffered numerous attacks by Arab militias. They were already frustrated with the regime’s new administrative system, which divided their territory into 13 municipalities in which they constituted the minority in six, effectively weakening their rule to the benefit of other Arab tribes (Kevane and Gray 1995; Prunier 2005). When Arab militias began to attack the Masalit’s area for resources, the Masalit responded with a low-intensity insurgency in the latter half of the 1990s. To aggravate the situation, the government used Arab militias to subdue their insurgency. While the government’s intention was to defeat the insurgency, the militias launched attacks on civilians and burned villages (Kuperman 2009).

In early 1999, the violence escalated when Arab groups attacked and killed nearly 100 unarmed non-Arab civilians, burned 100 villages, and displaced thousands (El-Tom 2006). That
same year, in response to the incident, Darfuris within the Islamist movement and government endorsed the Memorandum of March, signed by 1,300 signatories, calling for the government to respond to the attacks of the Arab groups. Al-Bashir himself condemned the attacks and promised to send officials to deal with the situation (El-Tom 2006). Subsequently, the governor of North Darfur, General Ibrahim Suliman, internally exiled and arrested Musa Hilal, the leader of the Arab militia (Power 2004). Nonetheless, the government was criticized for failing to take a decisive step to deal with the Arab militias. On one hand, it used the Arab groups to fight the SPLM/A and insurgencies within Darfur; on the other hand, it issued condemnations when those same groups attacked non-Arab tribes, and it attempted to hold the groups’ leadership accountable and contain conflicts. Throughout the 1990s, non-Arab tribes in Darfur did not believe the government intended to commit violence against them. According to Kuperman (2009), The memorandum submitted to the government, the government’s conciliatory tone, and the refusal of non-Arab tribes to support mobilization against the government pointed to the fact that they still hoped that the government could effectively deal with the Arab militias.

**Change in Approach toward the Darfuris: From Open to Closed**

In contrast to the open approach used in its dealings with Darfur in the early 1990s, the regime began to pursue closed strategies in the mid-1990s, and it shifted to a full closed approach in the early 2000s. Instead of continuing with its conciliatory tone toward non-Arab Darfuris, in 2003, the regime claimed that there were “robbers” and “bandits” in Darfur who needed to be dealt with by any and all means, including bringing in the army, police, and the PDF (Flint and De Waal 2005, 35). Nonetheless, this change of approach is most evidenced in the regime’s full endorsement of the Arab militias, which they had regularly condemned for their attacks on the non-Arab groups (Flint and De Waal 2005; Prunier 2005).
The Islamist regime began to organize and supply the Mahamid tribe of the Abbala Arabs to enable them to fight non-Arab Darfuris. The Mahamid formed the core of the racialist Arab Gathering organization and its Janjaweed militias that were active in the 1980s and 1990s. In 2003, the regime also released Musa Hilal, the Sheikh of the Mahamid and the leader of the Arab Gathering, after imprisoning him in the late 1990s for his role in the attacks on non-Arab tribes. Moreover, al-Bashir assembled a Special Task Force on Darfur that was composed of security and military hardliners who were tasked with supplying Hilal’s militias (Flint and De Waal 2005; Prunier 2005). The new governor of Darfur, El-Tayeb Mohamed Khair Sikha, ensured the regular delivery of equipment for weaponry, communication and construction material, and food supplies to Mistrisha, the gathering place for Abbala Arab nomads, who made up the majority of the Janjaweed. Misterisha, in a short period of time, moved from being “a hamlet indistinguishable from its neighbours to a sprawling town with a helicopter pad, solid building, a large mosque and plans for electricity,” with a regular delivery of food and munitions (Flint and De Waal 2005, 40). This was the “beginning of the organization of Janjaweed by the government” (Flint and De Waal 2005: 35). Not only did the Islamists arm and empower the Janjaweed, but according to Darfuri activist Hamid Ali Noor, they also collected weapons from non-Arabs, including non-Arab police forces, and transferred them to Hilal’s men (Noor 2017). Furthermore, members of Hilal’s tribe and the Arab Gathering were appointed as new leaders and members of the Popular Defence Force (PDF), the paramilitary organization the Islamists had formed in the early 1990s to aid them in the war against the South (Noor 2017).

The relationship between the Janjaweed and the NCP government was not hidden. Hilal himself declared that he was “appointed” by the government to fight against the rebels stating, “I assumed the government appeal and called my people to arms” (Flint and De Waal 2005, 35).
As well, the government made no attempt to conceal its connection to the Janjaweed. When asked in an author’s interview about regime support of the Janjaweed, former government minister Amin Hassan Omer, who was also the government’s representative and spokesperson on Darfur during this period, stated that “if there are two groups, and one is fighting against the government, it is natural that the government will side with the other group” (Omer 2017).

The attacks against the non-Arab tribes were led by the Janjaweed, followed by the PDF and the military. As Figure 6 shows, there was an unprecedented hike in organized armed conflict in Darfur in the early 2000s. The forces led by the Janjaweed carried on systematic offensives, including killing, raping, mutilating, abducting, displacing, and torching non-Arab people and villages, enjoying government’s impunity (Flint and De Waal 2005). While there is no exact number of the incidences of rape and mutilation, they are estimated to be in the tens of thousands (Miller 2009). The war on the African tribes in Darfur had claimed the lives of 300,000–400,000 and displaced another three million (Reeves 2007).

Figure 6. Number of conflict events and reported fatalities in Darfur from 1997 to 2000s
The change in the regime’s tone and level of violence followed its initial sidelining of many Darfuris in the government in the late 1990s (El-Tom 2006; Flint and De Waal 2005; Gallab 2008). In response to their political marginalization, many non-Arab Darfuris in the Islamist circle abandoned the government, NCP, and the Islamic movement and established their own ethnic political movement, named the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) (Flint and De Waal 2005; Gallab 2008). The attacks on Darfur by the Arab militias and government further galvanized the non-Arab tribes of Darfur. The Zagahwa-dominated JEM founded an armed wing. Furthermore, a new Fur dominated rebel group, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), was established. The difference between the two was that whereas the JEM’s members were Islamist defectors, the SLA members were locals who had suffered through the Janjaweed’s attacks (Flint and De Waal 2005). The result was an escalation in the number of conflict events between the government and the various rebels Darfuri groups as Figure 6 illustrates.

In sum, there was a notable change in the Islamist approach toward non-Arab Darfuris. In the early 2000s, the regime ended its conciliatory tone and politically marginalized the non-Arab Darfuris in government. The regime then embarked on a genocidal campaign against them. During this campaign, the Islamists employed Arab militias, alongside other paramilitary organizations as well as the military, to carry out systematic violence against non-Arab Darfuris. This led non-Arab Darfuris to disengage from the regime and establish their own political and armed groups.
Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Sudanese Islamists lacked a coherent approach toward the South Sudanese and Darfuri minorities during the 1990s and 2000s. Rather, their approaches changed diachronically toward each of the different groups. In Sudan, the Islamist regime shifted its approach from closed to open toward the animist and Christian South Sudanese, ratifying a momentous peace agreement with the SPLM/A ten years after leading a devastating war to subdue its rebellion. Sudan’s Islamists simultaneously changed their approach to closed toward Muslim non-Arab Darfuris, launching a campaign of systematic violence against them having previously engaged in political inclusion and peace-keeping efforts in Darfur. The simultaneous change is demonstrated in Figure 7, showing that as the number of fatalities declined in the South, it increased in northern Sudan, namely Darfur. The questions that emerge are what explains the Islamist government’s change in minority approaches toward the South Sudanese and Darfuris? And what explains the timing of the government’s changes that occurred concurrently? These questions will be examined in the next chapter.
Figure 7. Total civilian deaths in South Sudan and Northern Sudan from 1989 to 2013

Chapter 4

Explaining the Variation in Sudanese Islamists’ Approaches to Minorities:

Strategic Calculations and Regional Dynamics

The Islamist regime’s divergent approaches to the South Sudanese and Darfuris beg the question: why did ruling Islamists simultaneously change their approach from closed to open toward the South Sudanese and from open to closed toward Darfuris? The change cannot be accounted for using culturally-based theories. If Sudan’s governing Islamists were guided primarily by Islamist ideology and religious affiliation, we would expect a continuation of their open approach toward Muslim Darfuris and of their closed approach toward the animist and Christian South Sudanese. However, this did not happen, and thus this unexpected reversal requires a different explanation. This chapter illustrates that the about-face approach toward minorities in Sudan was guided by strategic calculations that integrated both domestic and regional factors.

More specifically, this chapter demonstrates that the Sudanese Islamists’ minority approaches were an outcome of strategic calculations to ensure their political survival, which depended on coalition building. A split within the ranks of Islamists over power disputes resulted in the creation of two competing factions, with each attempting to build a coalition to undermine the other. While the ruling faction succeeded in attracting the South Sudanese to its coalition, offering an open approach, the opposing faction secured the support of Islamist Darfuris, leading the government to pursue a closed approach toward non-Arab Darfuris. The change of approach was also influenced by the external environment, specifically external minority support. In the case of the South Sudanese, external support of its armed rebellion affected the minority group’s strategic leverage and its willingness to join the government coalition.
This chapter first provides background on Islamist–military relations to explain the Islamist infiltration of the military. Then, it discusses Turabi’s proposed institutional changes that spurred disagreements within the Islamist ranks. The chapter next details the discord between Turabi, younger Islamists, and the military that fractured the Islamist movement into two camps. This section uncovers how this split affected alliance seeking and building, explaining the shift in minority treatment. Finally, the chapter examines how minority external support affected the South Sudanese’s participation in the government’s coalition.

**Internal Alliances and Strategic Calculus**

**Turabi, Islamists and the Military**

In coming to power, the Islamists relied on an alliance with the military. Under the guidelines of Turabi and supervision of his deputy, Ali Osman Taha, Islamists began to build ties with the military during the late 1970s, which was facilitated by the reconciliation with Nimerie’s regime. The movement began to plant its own officers in the army, who were then charged with recruiting new members from within the military. Through indoctrination and financial assistance, the movement succeeded in drawing in new officers (Warburg 2003). For example, the movement introduced courses on “Islamic ideology and instruction” for senior officers and other training sessions at the African Islamic Center in Khartoum. It also offered financial assistance to send some of these officers to *Umra* and *Hajj* (Pilgrimages).

The Islamists recruited tactically, focusing on members of the office of the Commander in Chief of the army and the intelligence department (El-Affendi 1991; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005; Warburg 2003). They managed to secure the loyalty of the office director of the Commander in Chief of the army, Lieutenant General Fathi Ahmed Ali, along with high ranked officers like Ibrahim Shams al-Din, Abd al-Rahim Muhammad Hussein, and Zubayr Muhammad
Salih. These officers were rewarded financially and with government positions while the Islamists were in power. For example, Fathi Ahmed Ali was awarded three million US dollars for his assistance, and was appointed as minister and governor during the Islamist regime (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005).

Infiltration of the military was a central component of Turabi’s plan to increase Islamist access to state institutions. This was a pivotal strategic step considering the evident politicized nature of the military and its significance in the country. For example, military personnel in Sudan had intervened in 1958 and 1969 in response to calls for assistance from at-risk political parties. Thus, for the Islamists, building ties with the military could allow the movement the opportunity to employ its military recruits in cases of impending political exclusion or repression (Turabi 2010). Turabi (2010) stated that cultivating relations with the military was, in fact, the movement’s way of preparing for an uncertain future: “when you are planning for the future, you have to account for all eventualities even if small.”

Turabi argued that the climate of 1989 had prompted Islamists to invoke their military allies. Their exclusion from al-Mahdi’s fifth government, despite their large share in the parliament and the suspension of Shariah law at the cost of SPLM/A negotiations, had demonstrated to Turabi that “there was no way that the democratic parliamentary system would allow for Islam to assume its share in authority even if partially” (Turabi 2010). Furthermore, Turabi feared the imminence of another ideologically alternative coup that would destroy his movement, undoing his decade-long work on progress and expansion (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005; Verhoeven 2013). Thus, Turabi summoned his military allies to bring about his long-awaited vision of an Islamic state.
Turabi’s Political System

Following the 1989 Islamist–military coup, Turabi embarked on a series of institutional changes to gradually establish a new system based on what he defined as “Islamic democracy.” For Turabi, reliance on the military was a temporary measure that would aid his takeover and subsequent control of the state. Gargandi indicated in an interview that Turabi’s changes aimed “to eventually place full power in civilian hands and roll back the military to its conventional duties” (Gargandi 2017). In accordance with his vision of Islamic democracy, Turabi dissolved the military council that ruled the country until 1993, introduced elected national assembly and presidency in 1996, and founded a new constitution that allowed for political association in 1998. However, while the regime claimed that these changes were in an effort to empower civilians, they were only geared at empowering Islamist civilians, while excluding everyone else. As is discussed, Turabi’s “Islamic democracy” was flawed for theoretical and practical reasons.

Turabi presented Islamic democracy as an alternative to what he viewed as the ineffective sectarian multi-party system in place during Sudan’s past periods of democratic rule (Woodward 2013). His conception of Islamic democracy differed from the western understanding of democracy. According to Woodward (2013), he opposed the confrontational ‘opposition and government’ parliamentary system and advocated instead for a system based on Shura and Iijma, or consultation and consensus, which could bring all parties under one structure. He particularly opposed Sudan’s practice of parliamentary politics, as the mainstream parties were based on sectarianism and local family groupings. Islamic democracy, according to Turabi, also entailed the distribution of power to various segments of society. He therefore argued that federalism was an appropriate system to guard against the concentration of power (Woodward 2013).
During its first year in power, the regime issued the popular committees bill to permit the establishment of connected committees at the national, provincial, and local levels (Berridge 2017; El-Affendi 1995). The objective of the popular system, dubbed the National Congress (NC), was to increase the participation of Sudanese civilians in political decision-making as this would ensure Shura, while avoiding the shortcomings of the parliamentary system (El-Affendi 1995). According to Hamed Omer Hawi,

The NC was considered the political system not a political party, and it was announced that this system included the features of pluralism in its comprehensive conceptions, according to, first, the intellectual pluralism that enables the intellectual freedom of the individual [to have a voice] in the public issues through participating in the Congress and councils, and protects the political arena from the trends of alienation and conflict. (as quoted in Mohammed 2012, 183)

To bring all Islamic-based groups under his unified structure, Turabi rallied members of mainstream parties and other Islamist trends to join the newly established NC (Mohammed 2012).

To move to civilian rule, Turabi then dissolved the RCCNS in 1993. The regime replaced the RCCNS with the Transitional National Assembly (TNA), headed by the Islamic movement’s appointed president al-Bashir. In contrast to the RCCNS, which was composed of appointed military men, the TNA’s 300 appointments also included civilian Islamists as well as technocrats from various regions and fields (Mohammed 2012; Warburg 2003). According to Mohammed, in 1995, the regime attempted to move toward “institutional legitimacy by electing an NA to
replace the appointed TNA” (Mohamed 2012, 182). In 1996, the regime introduced elections for the presidency and parliament.

Moving forward with his institutional changes, Turabi introduced a full constitution in 1998. The new constitution recognized Sudan’s religious and ethnic diversity, which was endorsed in the constitution’s opening section: “the State of Sudan is an embracing homeland, wherein races and cultures coalesce and religions conciliate. Islam is the religion of the majority of the population. Christianity and customary creeds have considerable followers.” (The Constitution of the Republic of The Sudan 1998, 1). In addition, the constitution also stated that both Shariah and custom, in non-Muslim majority states, could serve as sources of legislation. Furthermore, it adopted federalism, creating 26 states with elected governors and parliaments. Importantly, it also allowed for freedom of association and organization, including political affiliation or al-Tawali al-Siyasi (Berridge 2017). The clause on political association stipulated that the leadership of political organizations be elected democratically. This was an effort to challenge the sectarian NUP and DUP parties, the leadership of which were not elected but inherited (Mirak-Weissbach 1998). Subsequently, Turabi founded the NCP to replace the dissolved NIF and was elected the Party’s Secretary General.39 Although the core of the NCP was Islamist, it tried to incorporate other Sufi and Salafi members as well as deserters of the traditional parties (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005).

Al-Bashir won the 1996 presidential elections for a five-year term with 75.7 percent of the votes. And with political parties banned, independents won 400 out of 400 seats in the assembly and Turabi was elected the Speaker of the Assembly. Of the 400 Islamist and Islamist sympathizers, 125 were appointed by presidential decree, and 51 were uncontested. The 1998

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39 NIF was dissolved after a decree that dissolved all parties following the 1989 coup. Although the party was officially nonexistent, some scholars still used NIF to refer to the Islamists during the 1990s.
constitutional referendum was also passed (Willis and El Battahani 2010). After the NC passed Turabi’s constitutional provisions with a majority in a national convention, in May of 1998, he put it forward for a national referendum, which was approved with 96.7 percent. The constitution was then enacted in June of the same year (Al-Abdin 2009).

Members of the opposition parties, including the NUP and DUP, boycotted these elections and refused to participate in Turabi’s regime. Turabi and his self-defined “liberalization” measures were criticized on three fronts: method, theory, and practice. First, Turabi had a record of undemocratic maneuvers. Not only did he cooperate with Nimerei’s military regime in the late 1970s and 1980s, but he also orchestrated a coup that overthrew a democratically elected government – problematic for many, no matter how he and his movement’s justified their actions. Theoretically, Turabi’s conception of Islamic democracy was also rather limited. He stated,

An Islamic form of government is essentially a form of representative democracy. But this statement requires the following qualification. First an Islamic republic is not strictly speaking a direct government of and by the people; it is a government of the shari’ah. But, in a substantial sense, it is a popular government since the shari’ah represents the conviction of the people, and therefore, their direct will. (Turabi 1983, 244)

Turabi’s conception of Islamic democracy, then, excluded those who did not believe in Shariah, including non-Muslims, leftists, and secularists. Furthermore, his conception of political pluralism, which he dubbed al-tawali al-siyasi, was also problematic. Al-tawali al-siyasi, which was intended to be his compromise on multipartyism, was only directed at Islamic based parties,
particularly the NUP and DUP as they were based on religious Sufi movements (Daoud 2017). Other non-religious based parties were not afforded the right to have their own political associations.

Finally, in practice, the regime’s measures were meaningless. They were superficial because power remained concentrated in the hands of Turabi and his aids. For example, the regime’s political pluralism and federalism were void of genuine power-sharing. In a system controlled by a dominant party, opposition parties considered the regime’s ‘political pluralism’ a facade (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005). Essentially, with Turabi as a House Speaker and his party dominating the legislature, the National Assembly was “in effect a vehicle” for implementing the movement’s policies (Warburg 2003, 214). A former DUP member stated in an interview with the author that these efforts were geared merely toward coopting the mainstream parties to move them into the regime’s system (Daoud 2017). Concerning federalism, while it claimed that the makeup of the federal system was part of an effort to grant the regions self-government, the central government maintained political hegemony over federal and state institutions as it controlled resource allocation and manipulated political appointments (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005).

Moreover, the regime’s conduct during the 1996 presidential and legislative elections as well as its 1998 constitution referendum demonstrated the hollowness of its “liberalization” measures. Observers described the elections as “extreme cases of electoral pretence” as they were neither free nor fair (Willis and El Battahani 2010, 8). Opposition and critics accused the government of tampering with the results through biased vetting of candidates, vote rigging, and voter intimidation and bullying tactics (Willis and El Battahani 2010). Essentially, the “liberalization” changes were an outcome of one man’s understanding of democracy, leading
critics to dismiss them as a response to the mounting international criticism of the regime and its human rights abuses (McKinley 1996).

The Intra-Islamist Dispute

Although the opposition characterized the “liberalization” measures as empty, the measures nonetheless spurred discord within the movement. While senior Islamists and military members did not object to Turabi’s institutional changes in the early 1990s, by the late 1990s, they began to argue that too much “liberalization” threatened their positions of power. They particularly opposed the new changes in the 1998 constitution. Specifically, they objected to the provision on al-tawali al-siyasi that allowed a return of political parties and the election of governors instead of their appointment by the president (Gargandi 2017). For Turabi, these changes were in line with his concept of Islamic democracy. He further reasoned that after ten years of tamkeen, empowerment of Islamists, they stood a good chance of defeating other parties in regular elections (Gargandi 2017).

Prunier divides those who opposed Turabi’s reforms into three camps. First, there were the hardliner Islamists, who thought that “any plurality is ‘unholy because all power belongs to God,’ and therefore any division of power is a form of Fitna (unholy quarrel)” (Prunier 1998, 2). Second, there was the group of what Prunier called “political apparatchiks,” referring to those who were invested in the NCP and feared the loss of their positions (Prunier 1998, 2). Finally, there were the military men, headed by al-Bashir, who felt that any political opening, even if partial, could empower civilian parties and end military access to power (Prunier 1998). Despite opposition from the three camps, Turabi proceeded with these measures.
Turabi’s unilateral decision making was not novel. His well-established political experience, in addition to his education – including a doctoral degree in constitutional law from the Sorbonne as well as expertise in Islamic law and sciences, and fluency in formal Arabic and other European languages – gave him great confidence in his leadership of the movement (El-Affendi 1991; Gallab 2008). Additionally, Turabi had no legitimate challengers to his leadership because he had marginalized other founding and leading members of the movement from his generation from the 1960s through the 1980s (Prunier 2005). By the 1980s, he was the uncontested head of the movement and following him was a dedicated cohort of young Islamists (Gallab 2008). Ali Gargandi, a member of the Islamist movement and a former government minister, observed that the gap in age, intellectual capacity, and political experience between Turabi and the young guard was substantial, stating in an author interview that “Turabi did not shy away from conveying this [his superiority] to them [his young followers], and they did not dispute it initially” (Gargandi 2016). They steadfastly followed the movement’s leader until the 1998 Constitution.

Ali Osman Taha was one of the loyal younger Islamists appointed by Turabi as his deputy in the 1980s, making him the second most important figure in the movement. Ali Osman first joined the movement while in secondary school. In the 1970s, while a student at the University of Khartoum law school, he assumed his first leadership roles in the Ikhwan’s university associations. Like many others in the movement, he took advantage of Nimerie’s reconciliation and held numerous positions in the judiciary during that time (Gallab 2008). After the coup, Ali Osman and other young Islamists were appointed to the executive branch as ministers and presidential advisors. For example, Ali Osman served as the Minister of Social

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40 Muslim and non-Muslim scholars consider Turabi to be a genius of his time and a foundational Islamist thinker (Esposito and Shahin 2013; El-Affendi 1991).
Affairs (1993–95), Sudan Foreign Minister (1995–98), and first and second Vice President (1998–2014). Nonetheless, whether it was before or after the coup, Turabi took it upon himself to fashion the movement’s visions and strategies, and entrusted younger generation Islamists, led by his deputy Ali Osman, to carry out their implementation without resistance.

The 1998 constitution created discord between Turabi and his younger followers, who opposed it for either religious or instrumental purposes or both (Prunier 1998). As Turabi proceeded with the passing of the constitution despite their opposition, younger Islamists criticized him for his lack of consultation and unilateral decision-making in a memorandum submitted to the NCP (Gallab 2008; Prunier 1998; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005). On December 10, 1998, ten of the movement’s prominent Islamists presented the “Memorandum of Ten” to the NCP’s Shura Council (Al-Abdin 2009). The particular title for the memo was chosen because it was an assessment of the first ten years of the regime and it also had ten signatories (El-Gizouli 2012; Gallab 2008). That being said, it was supported by many more high ranking Islamists including Ali Osman Taha (Gargandi 2016). The memo, addressed to the Islamic Movement (IM), identified a number of concerns, with the first and foremost being a deficit in Shura or consultation.

Since 1989, Turabi had been making most, if not all, major decisions for the regime and until 1993, Turabi was making decisions on behalf of the RCCNS. While he sometimes consulted with other Islamist figures and the military, according to the memo writers, he mostly proceeded independently (El-Gizouli 2012; Gallab 2008). Notably, when the RCCNS was dissolved and a presidential system was introduced, with al-Bashir appointed to the role, Turabi continued to make decisions in the president’s name (El-Affendi 2013). After the institutionalization of the National Assembly, as Speaker of the Assembly, Turabi attained his
first formal powers within the government in 1996. The speaker’s position was politically powerful. In the event of the president’s unexpected demise, the speaker would assume his role. Furthermore, the president was accountable to the National Assembly, which had the power to impeach him and request his resignation (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005). What made Turabi even more powerful was his position as Secretary-General of the NCP, a position that the adopted memorandum thought to restrain by proposing that President al-Bashir be given “effective leadership of the NCP as the party’s chairman…. And that the authority of the NCP Secretary-General, Turabi, be drastically curbed to administrative and secretarial tasks” (Sidahmed 2011, 170).

The conflict between Turabi and his former disciples escalated further in the following year. Rather than heed the message of the memorandum, Turabi took action to oust and punish its architects. He used his positions as the Speaker of the National Assembly in 1996 and later as Secretary-General of the NCP in 1998 to get rid of them in both the party and the state. At the level of the party, Turabi, alongside his loyalists, embarked on a mobilization campaign to prepare for the NCP’s ‘constituent conference’ elections in October 1999. Turabi was advantaged over the memo’s writers due to his popularity in the Islamist party’s rank-and-file. His loyalists succeeded in dominating the newly elected Shura Council, while none of the ten signatories of the memo received seats in the 600-member body. Furthermore, the conference rescinded most of the Memo of Ten’s reforms, and instead restored the powers of the secretary general and demoted the president to the position of party chairman without any significant powers. At the national level, Turabi proposed a reform package of constitutional amendments that allowed parliament to remove the president with a two-thirds majority, to cut the president’s powers through the creation of a new prime minister position with executive powers, and to
immediately rescind the president’s power to appoint state governors, who were now to be popularly elected (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005; Ryle et al. 2011). In essence, Turabi was set on punishing his political opponents through isolating and marginalizing them within the party and government.

Al-Bashir was sympathetic to the demands of the young guard and opposed Turabi’s push-back against them. On December 12, 1999, before voting on the constitutional amendments took place, al-Bashir appeared on national television and declared a state of emergency for three months due to alleged external threats, allowing him to disband parliament until elections were held. He also stripped Turabi of his position as the speaker of the parliament and arrested him for allegations of conspiracy (Ronen 1999). Al-Bashir had the backing of the Memo’s Islamists as well as other senior Islamists in the executive who feared the loss of their positions, including Turabi’s deputy Ali Osman Taha. These Islamists argued that Turabi was preparing for their expulsion, as he had done in the past to political opponents within the movement. They accused him of having manipulated the entire Islamist movement since the 1960s, for his own gain and to assume all power for himself (Berridge 2017; Gallab 2008; Prunier 1998; Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005). 41 In an author interview, Ghazi al-Atabani, Minister of Information at the time and one of the signatories of the Memorandum, explained that the memo created much hostility among the Islamists, stating that subsequent to its sharing, “the atmosphere became very tense and poisonous …Turabi became divisive, vengeful and vindictive. It was obvious in his eyes at that moment, that he was planning for something. I wouldn’t take out the possibility that he was planning for a purge for the military people and those who sided with them” (Al-Atabani 2017).

41 A number of Islamists, including Mekki, Al-Tayyib Zain al-Abdin, and Ghazi al-Atabani made this argument (Gallab 2008).
Instead of addressing the Islamists’ internal problems, the memo led to a bitter inner conflict with Turabi attempting to punish his critics.

**The Military**

The military was an important party to the power dispute. As Prunier (1998) suggested, military personnel shared the younger Islamists’ reservations about the 1998 reforms because they also threatened their share of the power. Therefore, in ousting Turabi, al-Bashir enjoyed the backing of not only younger Islamists but also his military colleagues. Thus, Turabi’s attempts, including the 1998 constitutional reforms, to contain the military and to achieve a full civilian government decisively failed. In fact, the opposite transpired as the military’s political strength and ambitions only grew.

Turabi’s efforts to limit the military’s political role and ambitions was successful in the early years of the regime. Turabi and his movement took certain measures to ensure that the military would not attempt to take over power, particularly given its past long-term interventions in the country. First, civilian Islamists managed their military allies by controlling information during the coup. In the plotting and execution of the coup, military members played a secondary role (Al-Atabani 2017; Turabi 2010; Simone 1994). While Turabi plotted the coup, other civilian Islamist members, headed by Ali Osman Taha, were in charge of its implementation, including the choosing of the coup’s figurehead and other military personnel who would later assemble the ruling military council (Turabi 2010). Al-Bashir, the coup’s appointed figurehead, was informed of the impending coup only twenty-four hours prior to its execution in a meeting with Islamists. During this meeting, he briefly met Turabi for the first time, and he was also given the coup’s memorandum, prepared by the movement, to announce on radio the following morning.
Furthermore, none of the RCC members, including its chairman, al-Bashir, had prior knowledge of their role in the coup or of each other. As Turabi (2010) noted, “RCC members were merely summoned the days following the coup, with al-Bashir the day before it.” Additionally, on the ground, it was NIF militias in military uniform who carried out the coup. They were accompanied by only a few official military officers. The NIF militias had their own weapons, communication devices, and equipment. Nationwide, there were no more than 150 officers involved in the coup (Turabi 2010).

Second, the movement deliberately engaged military personnel who demonstrated a lack of political knowledge and ambition as well as loyalty and commitment to the Islamist agenda and leadership. They also carefully selected those slated for leadership roles. For example, al-Bashir was specifically chosen because of his impressionability and modest political knowledge and capability (Gargandi 2016). Al-Bashir, in contrast to Ali Osman, was not a leading executive in the movement, but merely a member recruited by the movement from the military. He had graduated from the Sudanese military college in 1967, and then progressed professionally to the rank of brigadier. He was first introduced to the Islamist movement in the final years of his secondary schooling, before joining the military college, and he later reconnected with the movement during the 1980s. In the 1980s, he attended the movement’s sponsored courses and developed relationships with other Islamists within the military. He was not involved in the plotting of the coup, and one week prior to the coup, he was stationed in the South. He was also set to retire soon. Finally, according to Turabi (2010), the movement also ensured that those military personnel directly involved with the coup took an oath to return any and all power to civilians.
The military personnel showed no objection to Turabi’s leadership because they lacked political knowledge and experience and were sympathetic to Islamism. Islamists, in contrast, had considerable political experience due to their participation in the Nimerie and al-Mahdi governments. Furthermore, Turabi and the movement had a full political programme that entailed social, economic, and political strategies. According to Al-Atabani, in the early 1990s, “military personnel were subservient to Turabi, occupying the backseat with no substantial authority in the political affairs of the state…political power was squarely in the hands of the Islamists, led and headed by Turabi and his deputy, Ali Osman Taha” (Al-Atabani 2017).

However, nearing ten years in power, al-Bashir and his military personnel developed political expertise and ambition. They gained experience and political knowledge by virtue of the political positions the movement offered them in exchange for their support. Additionally, according to al-Atabani, some of their political knowledge and inspirations, particularly al-Bashir’s, was a result of their foreign relations cultivated across East Africa and the Middle East. For example, during the time al-Bashir was expected to represent the movement’s interests in the region, he developed independent relationships with regional leaders. Al-Atabani likened al-Bashir’s transformation from a politically ignorant military professional to a power-seeking politician to a peasant who leaves the countryside and goes to town or the city for the first time and starts to take heed of the new ideas learned (Al-Atabani 2017). He explained that with time “al-Bashir vied for power and forgot about the oath he had given upon leading the coup. That is returning the government to civilians” (Al-Atabani 2017).

In sum, during the early years of the regime, al-Bashir fulfilled the first stages of Turabi’s plan to establish an Islamic democracy based on civilian rule: overthrowing al-Mahdi’s government, dissolving the RCCNS, and creating an elected executive and legislature. However,
according to Ali Gargandi, with the creation of the 1998 constitution, which constituted “the final step of Turabi’s plan…al-Bashir feared losing his post” (Gargandi 2017). Turabi’s constitution would have weakened al-Bashir’s position by preventing him from appointing governors, and also threatened it by opening up the presidency to competition from other traditional parties. Additionally, Turabi’s constitutional amendments in the following year, which entailed abolishing the leadership office and council headed by the president, creating a prime minister post with executive powers, and the ability to remove the president with a two-thirds majority of the parliament of which he was head, would have severely cut and threatened al-Bashir’s power. Turabi’s measures, if successful, would have reduced al-Bashir to a mere figurehead with no executive powers (Gallab 2008). To sustain his position as president, al-Bashir ousted Turabi in cooperation with the younger Islamists, along with the backing of his military personnel.

The subsequent conflict between al-Bashir and Turabi split the Islamic movement into two separate camps, with al-Bashir retaining leadership of the NCP and Turabi establishing the Popular Congress Party (PCP). Initially, there was some competition over the loyalty of members of the Islamist constituency, but the majority of Turabi’s former proteges left him to side with al-Bashir, including his deputy, Ali Osman Taha. While some Islamists sided with al-Bashir because of the conviction of the grievances in the Memorandum of Ten, others sided with him because the NCP had control of the state (Sidahmed 2011). Following the split, the NCP also founded the Islamic Movement (IM) as a broader political base, in order to support the Islamist orientation of the regime and rally Sufi and Salafi Islamist groups under its umbrella, while also excluding Turabi and his PCP. Ultimately, Turabi was left with no authority in the movement he headed nor in the regime he founded.
The Search for New Alliances

According to Gallab, the split “brought about an unrestricted animosity and a never-ending conflict within and among the Islamists” (Gallab 2008, 150). Chiefly, it gave rise to fierce competition between the two sides, the ruling NCP and Turabi’s PCP, over other political, regional, and paramilitary forces in the country as they tried to forge new alliances. More specifically, the search for new alliances took place in Sudan’s regions, namely the South and Darfur represented by their respective rebel groups, as well as among other northern opposition parties in exile, namely the DUP and NUP. Both groups, the Palace group (in reference to al-Bashir and the IM in the presidential palace) and the Manshiya group (in reference to Turabi’s residential area in Khartoum), as they are often referred to, approached the leaders of the mainstream parties for partnerships, namely, the NUP’s Sadiq al-Mahdi and the DUP’s Uthman al-Mirghani (Gallab 2008). However, while Turabi and al-Bashir wanted to establish alliances with numerous partners, including the NUP and DUP, they were particularly interested in regional armed groups since these groups retained a strategic advantage because of their military capacity.

Ultimately, the northern opposition political parties sided with al-Bashir, but of the two regions that retained political and military branches, Darfur turned to Turabi, while the South signed the CPA with the NCP. The northern opposition and the SPLM/A turned to the Palace group for two reasons. First, al-Bashir still maintained control over the state and the party, as well as the Islamic movement. Al-Bashir was therefore able to offer the opposition parties tangible promises that included power-sharing. Second, the mainstream party’s experience with
Turabi had resulted in much distrust, as he was held responsible for the coup that overthrew al-Mahdi’s government in 1989 and imprisoned its leaders.

Darfuris, on the other hand, left the government to side with Turabi, because, they argued, even when they were part of al-Bashir’s Islamist government in the first place, they never received their share of economic development, wealth, or power (JEM 2000). They argued that the Islamist government, despite its promises, failed to address the economic underdevelopment of the region and continued to practice discriminatory wealth-sharing policies that favoured the northern region. For instance, during the first decade of Islamist rule, not a single development project was developed in the western region. Furthermore, between 1996 and 2001, Khartoum received 75 percent of the development expenditure, while Darfur and Kordofan received less than 2 percent (Cobham 2005). Darfuri Islamists also argued that the Islamist government failed to address the disparity in social indicators such as literacy rates, school enrolments, life expectancy, and infant mortality rates, according to which the Western region continued to lag behind the northern region (Cobham 2005).

Most importantly, Islamist Darfuris criticized the Islamist government for inequitable power-sharing. They argued that their share of political positions did not reflect their population percentage. For example, while Darfuris made up 20 percent of the population, they only held about 10 percent of the ministerial and presidential advisory positions from 1989 to 2000. Furthermore, except for a few cases, the governors of Darfur were from the northern region. Also, they had no leadership representation in security and economic institutions, the two most important types of state institutions. For instance, no Darfuris had received posts as heads of national internal or external security, intelligence services, or the national police force (El -Tom

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42 For example, during the first decade of the Islamists’s tenure, the Northern region had a primary school enrolment rate of 85.7 percent, whereas Darfur’s was 33.4 percent (Ateem 2007).
Islamist Darfuris attributed the regime’s failure to achieve equitable power-sharing to racism, mismanagement, as well as the rampant corruption and nepotism in its inner circle (JEM 2000). The Islamist government’s inability to completely depart from the previous governments’ patterns of political, economic, and social discrimination toward Darfur, according to Prunier, turned the region into “a time-bomb waiting for a fuse” (Prunier 2005, 98).

While the causes for rebellion were already in place, the split between the NCP and Turabi drastically affected the government’s response. Turabi enjoyed particular popularity and support among Darfuris. Groups of Gharaba (western Sudanese) in general, but Darfuris in particular, constituted a large block of Turabi’s loyalists (Berridge 2017; Gallab 2008; Noor 2017). When the friction within the movement began, al-Bashir started to marginalize Darfuris in response to their support for Turabi, further removing them from the already limited key posts they attained (El-Tom 2006; Gallab 2008).

As a result of al-Bashir’s added marginalization, Darfuri Islamists left the NCP and government to join Turabi’s PCP. Others, led by Khalil Ibrahim, a former government minister, formed their own independent ethnic party, namely JEM, in 2001. They were also backed by Turabi (Gallab 2008; Roessler 2011). Ibrahim, along with a dozen other Darfuri Islamists, composed the JEM’s manifesto, known as the Black Book, in which the movement detailed the government’s discrimination, relying on confidential government records on wealth and power-sharing, and called for a comprehensive reform of the regime to replace injustice with justice and equality (JEM 2000). Turabi strategically supported and sponsored JEM’s rebellion to challenge the government (Flint and De Waal 2005; Prunier 2005; Roessler 2011). According to Prunier (2008), despite the JEM’s denial, there is circumstantial evidence to support its connection to the PCP. For instance, Turabi’s PCP deputy, Ali al-Haj, himself a Darfuri, promoted JEM’s
interests in meetings with leaders in the region to establish logistical support for the movement (Gargandi 2016).

The split also cost the government the ability to negotiate with Darfuris. With his propinquity to Islamist Darfuris, Turabi was an important and effective mediator. The 2000s Darfur rebellion is often contrasted with the dissident Fur Islamist Daud Bolad rebellion in the region in 1990, which was put down swiftly because support for the regime was easily mustered through Turabi (El-Din 2007; Roessler 2011). Gallab claims that “without the conflict among the ranks of the Islamists and the developments that ensued out of it, the situation in Darfur would have been very different” (Gallab 2008, 161). With his support of JEM, Turabi, in fact, further aggravated the rebellion. In an author interview, Amin Hassan Omer, a government minister during al-Bashir’s regime, expressed the government’s belief that the rebellion was fully orchestrated by Turabi and his PCP in order to pressure it (Omer 2016). Consequently, the government pursued a closed approach toward Darfur. Shortly after the publication of the Black Book and the establishment of the JEM, the government shifted its position on Darfur, endorsing the attacks of Musa Hilal and his Janjaweed forces against African Darfuris.

Roessler argues that the elite breakdown among Islamists represented an instance of “threat displacement,” in which an insecure government with a weak state led a pre-emptive strike against its rivals (Roessler 2011, 11). The threat displacement theory links the outbreak of violence to a discontinuation of elite accommodation. In this scenario, the threatened ruling faction first excludes the allies-turned-rivals because it is too risky to keep them inside, then attempts to displace and “neutralize” them (Roessler 2011, 11). Roessler explains that, “with the exit and purging of many Darfuri Islamists, especially those from the Zaghawa, and the mistrust of those remaining in the ruling party, the government forfeit[ed] its ability to effectively
counter-mobilize in Darfur except through indiscriminate violence,” resulting in a full-scale civil war in the region (Roessler 2011, 44-45).

Due to the group’s particular strategic advantage, Turabi attempted to persuade Garang’s SPLM/A to join him against al-Bashir as well. He declared in a political rally that the Southerners were right to have taken up arms against the central government because they had been wronged. To this end, he also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Garang in Geneva in February of 2002 (Gallab 2008). In this MoU, they agreed on bolstering popular opposition to pressure the government to allow for democratic governance, liberties, and human rights (Gallab 2008). The SPLM/A had also previously used Darfur to pressure the central government on its own behalf, helping to found the SLA, another Darfuri rebel group established subsequent to the government’s indiscriminate attacks in the region, by developing its manifesto and training its forces.

The government tried to prevent Turabi’s support of both rebel groups through harassment and intimidation. During the early 2000s, Turabi was put under house arrest several times for the crime of conspiring with rebels against the state. The regime also cracked down on Turabi’s party, detained some of its leading members, and shut down the party’s newspaper, Rai al Sh’ab.

At the same time, the ruling Islamists approached the SPLM/A with more tangible promises than those of Turabi. This was because the SPLM/A constituted a major threat to the government in comparison to all other opposition forces. First, the SPLM/A boasted a military wing that had remained undefeated for almost two decades. In addition to its military experience,

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43 Turabi’s move resulted in much confusion and criticism among his followers and Islamists overall; after all, Garang was a man who Turabi described as a Marxist and an enemy of Islam.
the SPLM/A enjoyed substantial diplomatic and logistical support from other states, both in and outside of the region, including the United States. While the government was able to ward off the SPLM/A in its first decade in power, the government’s ability to continue to fight the South was adversely affected by the new rebellion in Darfur and by Turabi’s relentless opposition and maneuvering. Thus, the government needed to align with the SPLM/A to ensure its survival.

To build an alliance with the SPLM/A, the Islamist government and its chief negotiator, Ali Osman Taha, offered the South’s elite the CPA, a lucrative and comprehensive package. Former government minister Amin Hassan Omer stated that the government did not have to sign the CPA, as it was not defeated in the battlefield and as it was gaining substantial revenues from oil (Omer 2016). The reason the government signed the CPA was to maintain a favourable balance of power and prevent a counter-coalition from forming. While the Islamists and their CPA representative, Ali Osman Taha, claimed that the agreement was the best chance for unity, it was in fact the regime’s “best chance of survival” (Flint and De Waal 2005, 35). Had it not signed the CPA, the fractured Islamist government would have had to battle regional forces from Darfur and the South. Flint and De Waal conclude that “the Bashir-Turabi split lost Darfur for the government but made it possible to make peace with the South” (Flint and De Waal 2005, 41).

In short, Sudan’s ruling Islamist elite attempted to hinder the formation of a counter-coalition by rewarding partners and punishing opponents. This demonstrated that strategic considerations aimed at consolidating power were more influential on minority approaches than were religious affiliation or religious cultural motivations per se. The central government thus launched a war on Muslim Darfuris, who sided with internal Islamist rivals, while it partnered with the non-Muslim South, granting it unprecedented political rights. Ultimately, the Sudanese
Islamist government’s shifts in approaches, between closed and open toward the various groups, were an outcome of strategic calculations rather than ideational commitments.

**External Dynamics and Pressure**

Islamists’ shifting minority approaches were not only driven by internal factors. International and regional dynamics also contributed to the change in the central government’s policies. Amongst other things, foreign interference and third-party involvement can influence the internal balance of power through rebel-group support, including diplomatic, financial, and military backing (Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe 2007; Saideman and Zahar 2008; Zahar 2010). In Sudan, external dynamics affected internal politics through the support provided to the SPLM/A, strengthening its position vis-à-vis the government. While Darfuri rebels did receive external support, this support followed the split and was relatively minor in comparison to the decades-long support the SPLM/A received.

The SPLM/A received significant support from regional and international actors for either ideational or geopolitical reasons, or both. During the 1980s, the group received consequential support from Ethiopia, backed by the USSR, because of its claimed leftist ideology. This support helped establish and sustain the SPLM/A in its founding years. When Yoweri Museveni came to power in Uganda in 1986, he also provided support to the SPLM/A. This was not only due to the shared ideological positions, but also because he needed the rebel group to expel Ugandan opposition operating in South Sudan at the time. These neighbours provided the South with considerable resources, including financial aid, military advisors, and equipment, as well as training ground (Rogier 2005).44

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44 In response to Ugandan and Ethiopian support of the SPLM/A, the Sudanese government backed Ugandan and Ethiopian rebel groups. Uganda accused Sudan’s government of backing Ugandan rebel groups, such as the Lord’s
While the South received support in the 1980s from a number of external actors, this support widened and increased during the 1990s as a result of an interventionist Islamist foreign policy. Among the new supporters and sponsors, the United States was the most important. The US was alarmed by the Islamist regime’s promotion of Islamism, particularly as it was a target of militant Islamist attacks during the 1990s. Turabi was committed to the spread of political Islam. For Turabi, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 created an opportunity for an Islamist order – one that would free humanity from all types of material, political, and psychological dominance (Hamdi 2008). He aspired for Sudan to be a launching point for “Pan Islamic rapprochement” (Turabi 1992). Therefore, in 1991, shortly after coming to power, he organized the Popular Arab and Islamic Conference (PAIC) in Khartoum to disseminate Islamist values, and invited 500 delegates from 45 nations in the Muslim world (Berridge 2017; De Waal 2004; Gallab 2008). This allowed him to build relations with Islamists from across the Muslim world.

In the early 1990s, Turabi built closer ties with Iran, which was a further cause of concern for the US. Although Iran was officially a Shia state, for Turabi, it served as a successful model of an Islamic Republic (Verhoeven 2014). The sectarian difference was also irrelevant to Turabi as he “sympathized with Tehran’s challenge to US regional hegemony and shared its loathing of secular Baathism, Israeli occupation of Palestine and the aging monarchs on the Arabian Peninsula” (Verhoeven 2014). In March of 1993, Turabi visited Iran and announced, “Islam is ruling Sudan; Islamic values prevail in society and Islamic injunctions are being implemented in all fields” (Lesch 1998, 130).

45 The US was targeted in 1991, when the World Trade Center was bombed in New York, and in 1998, when its embassies were attacked in Dar es-Salaam and Nairobi.
Turabi’s promotion of Islamism also entailed destabilizing Arab and Muslim countries to create opportunities for Islamists to emerge, as well as to provide citizenship, refuge, and educational and training facilities to Islamists from all parts of the world (Burr and Collins 2003; Gallab 2008; Rogier 2005). For example, the regime hosted Osama Bin Laden, who claimed he was running an underground opposition to the Saudi regime. Bin Laden, along with Ayman al-Zawahiri, former head of the militant Egyptian Islamic Jihad, began to organize a number of operations in Sudan. Leading figures in the regime were also involved in an attempted assassination of the Egyptian president in 1995 in Ethiopia, a long-time ally of the US, including Ali Osman Taha, Foreign Minister of Sudan during the period, and Nafie Ali Nafie, chief of National Intelligence and Security Services (De Waal 2004; Gallab 2008; Marchal 2010).46

The US responded to the Islamist government with the sanctioning of Sudan at the UN Security Council. Moreover, in 1993, the US placed Sudan on the State Sponsor of Terrorism list. In 1996, CIA director John Deutch visited Ethiopia for three days, noting that the US had significantly increased its funding aimed at challenging weakened terrorists and their sponsors. These funds were channeled to back Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea’s containment of Sudan, which was heavily based on the support of the SPLM/A (Haywood 2014; Rogier 2005).

All three of Sudan’s neighbours opposed its Islamist government and backed the SPLM/A. Although Uganda had continued its military and logistical support of the SPLM/A since the 1980s, Ethiopia revitalized its support of the movement in the early 1990s in response to the Islamist government’s policies. Mengistu Haile Mariam, Ethiopia’s Head of State (1977–91), had extended support to the SPLM/A, which ended when his regime was overthrown by

46 Relations between Egypt and Sudan’s Islamist regime were tainted by historic tensions. All three Egyptian military governments (those of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak) had purged and repressed Egyptian Islamists. Therefore, the purpose of the assassination attempt of the Egyptian president was to rid of a hostile regime and open up opportunity for Islamists in Egypt (Marchal 2000).
Meles Zenawi in 1991. However, the Sudanese Islamist regime’s support of Muslim minorities in Ethiopia, including the Oromo and Somali, as well as the Egyptian President’s assassination attempt in 1995 in the country, led Ethiopia to begin backing the SPLM/A again and provide training ground for the group (Rogier 2005). The Islamist regime’s interventionist policies also spoiled relations with Eritrea. Though the Islamist government’s support was pivotal to the success of Eritrean nationalists in achieving independence from Ethiopia, the relations between Sudan and Eritrea deteriorated after the latter’s secession. Eritrea broke off relations in 1994 in response to the Islamist regime’s sponsoring of the Eritrean Islamic Jihad and support of other Muslim minorities in the country (Rogier 2005). American support reached its climax in the mid-1990s as the three countries became “frontline states” of the US in the war on Sudan’s Islamists. In return, the Clinton administration provided them with 20 million US dollars of military equipment (Haywood 2014). Simultaneously, the US launched its own squad of covert ground troops in Southern Sudan (Haywood 2014). The outcome of this surge in external support was an increase in SPLM/A strength. For example, while by 1986, the SPLM/A had an estimated 12,500 troops, by 1989, the number had reached 20,000 to 30,000; by the 1990s, it had reached 50,000 to 60,000, and by the 2000s, it was over 100,000 (Bartrop 2015).

While a solidified Islamist base could ward off an internationally backed SPLM/A, the changing internal power configurations, resulting from the split, weakened the government’s ability to continue to fight off the movement. Subsequently, al-Bashir’s Islamist government attempted to coopt the SPLM/A to its coalition by severing the movement’s external support through improving its regional and international relations. The government began to pursue rapprochement with its neighbours and the international community more vigorously. First, al-

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47 In 1998, the US also led strikes on a pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum, alleging it was manufacturing chemical weapons. The allegations were falsified (Risen and Johnston 1999).
Bashir’s government used the removal of Turabi as an opportunity to rebuild relations, claiming that his removal signified a change in Islamist foreign policy. Many states welcomed his removal as they considered Turabi’s Islamism to be a threat to their stability.\textsuperscript{48} According to Gallab (2008), the Arab and Muslim state members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) which acts as the collective voice of the Muslim world, were relieved. Second, in late 1999 and early 2000, the regime restored diplomatic relations with Eritrea and Uganda, and renewed diplomatic ties with Ethiopia (Haywood 2014).

Furthermore, fearing US military action in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, al-Bashir’s government also approached the US to end its support of the SPLM/A as well as lift sanctions (Al-Atabani 2017). In 2002, in exchange for renewed relations with the US and other neighbouring states, al-Bashir’s regime agreed to a peace initiative with the SPLM/A that was focused on curbing its Islamism. The initiative was introduced by The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an eight-member East African organization, and promoted by the Friends of IGAD, a group of a few Western countries, including the US, Italy, and Norway.\textsuperscript{49} These states heavily championed the initiative primarily because of its emphasis on secularism (Gargandi 2016). Rogier stated that promoting secularism was the core of IGAD’s strategy since “secularism was seen as an antidote to political Islam” (Rogier 2005, 40). This was particularly significant to the US post 9/11, after which it sought Sudan’s isolation from extremist international Islamist groups and its cooperation in the War on Terror with respect to intelligence and information (Woodward 2006).

\textsuperscript{48} For example, Egypt’s security chief, Umar Suleiman, believed that Turabi was more of a threat to Egypt than the SPLM/A. This is despite the fact that an independent South Sudan would negatively affect Egypt’s share of water resources from the Nile (Gallab 2008).

\textsuperscript{49} The organization includes Eritrea (which withdrew in 2007), Uganda, Kenya, Djibouti, and Somalia, and is headed by Ethiopia.
The rapprochement between Sudan and its neighbours and the change in US–Sudan policy translated into a decline in military support to the SPLM/A. The SPLM/A lost a place for its bases and operations, as well as logistical and financial aid, including equipment and weapons. Haywood argues that the loss of support was “a major blow to the SPLA…. [leading to] a major decrease in the SPLA’s capacity to use violence, and the SPLA’s capturing of towns decreased dramatically” (Haywood 2014, 158). The government’s land and aerial operations as well as military campaigns became more successful in terms of recapturing land from the SPLM/A and inflicting causalities and injuries. With its lowered military capability, loss of allies, and pressure from the US, the SPLM/A ratified the CPA, despite the inclusion of provisions that conflicted with its early Africanist and secular ideological commitments.

The SPLM/A also had reasons to compromise. Although in the mid-1990s, the international community and regional players supported the SPLM/A, by the early 2000s, this support declined as a result of Sudan’s efforts to end its isolation by curtailing its Islamist regional agenda, and its rapprochement with its neighbours and the US. The change in its strategic capacity led the SPLM/A to accept participation in the Islamist government’s coalition and the terms of the CPA.

**Conclusion**

There was a stark contrast in the Islamist regime’s approaches to the country’s minorities between their early period and later years. When the Islamists came to power, they followed a closed approach toward the South Sudanese marked by increased militarization to end the conflict and manipulation of intra-SPLM/A conflict. Nearly a decade later, they negotiated the CPA, which, with its exceedingly compromising language, granted the South unprecedented
cultural, economic, and political rights as well as the right to self-determination. As the situation improved for the largely animist and Christian South, it deteriorated for Muslim Darfur. In the early period of the 2000s, the regime started to back the Arab militias, it had once condemned, to support their launching of genocidal campaigns against the non-Arab tribes of the region. This followed the regime’s increased marginalization of non-Arab Darfuris in the government.

The change in the government’s approaches toward the South Sudanese and Darfuris was a result of its elites’ strategic calculations amid threatening internal and external environments. Internal frictions among the Islamists split them into two groups that vied for power and survival, al-Bashir’s NCP and Turabi’s PCP. The ousted Turabi attempted to rally the country’s regional forces and opposition parties against his old disciples. Out of the regional forces, he enjoyed popularity in Darfur, which provided him with a military wing, the JEM. The South opted for cooperation with the NCP government through the CPA, facilitated by IGAD and the US, which were keen on taming and weakening the central government’s interventionist Islamist foreign policy. The NCP had little alternative but to succumb its authority over the South, as it could not partake in a war on its western and southern fronts that would be backed by its neighbours and the US. At the same time, Garang had to abandon his “New Sudan” vision. With Sudan’s rapprochement of its neighbours and its cooperation with the US on counterterrorism, the SPLM/A lost significant military support, which reduced its capacity to pressure Sudan’s government militarily.

The Sudanese case illustrates that Islamists lack a coherent minority treatment approach. Instead, they shift their approaches between open and closed toward different groups regardless of religious affiliation. The Sudanese case also illustrates that Islamist approaches are motivated by strategic calculations to ensure survival, which depended on coalition building with
minorities. The Sudanese Islamist government rewarded coalition minority groups with open policies and punished those in counter-coalitions with closed ones. To further investigate Islamists’ minority approaches and to demonstrate that the Sudanese case is not an anomaly, this thesis also examines Turkish Islamists’ approaches to the Kurdish minority, the focus of discussion in the upcoming chapters.
Chapter 5
Turkish Politics and Islamism

Unlike Islamist parties in Sudan who developed from the Muslim Brotherhood, in Turkey they sprung from different Islamic movements. Also, in contrast to Sudan’s Islamists who aimed to found an Islamic state based on Shariah, the objective of Turkey’s Islamists was “creating an Islamic society rather than establishing an Islamic State” that would be more inclusive to Muslims irrespective of ethnic differences (Jenkins 2008, 155). This chapter uncovers how, in an effort to challenge the Kemalist system’s secular policies and gain access to the state, members of Islamic movements behaved strategically, founding political parties, building coalitions, and reinventing their ideological terms after consistent closures by Kemalist institutions. As with the case of Sudan, this analysis will show that their behaviour corroborates the literature’s findings that Islamists act strategically in the face of existing political constraints and shift their ideological priorities accordingly (Brown 2012; Clark 2006; Schwedler 2006; Tezcur 2010).

Before analyzing Islamist behaviour in Turkey, the chapter discusses the state’s political context, namely Kemalism and its state institutions, to provide a foundation.

Turkish Politics

The Turkish Republic was founded on the principles of “Kemalism” in 1923. The ideology describes the ideas and principles of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the republic’s founding father, which emphasize the nationalization and secularization of Turkey while divorcing it from its Ottoman past, which was characterized as a religious polity. Ataturk launched aggressive secularization processes to substantially minimize, if not eradicate, Islam’s political and social role in the country. In March of 1923, Ataturk abolished the Caliphate, ending six-hundred years
of Ottoman legacy over much of the Muslim world. A year later, all religious institutions, including schools and Sufi orders, were banned. In 1926, the Swiss Civil Code replaced the Islamic Civil Code. In 1928, Islam was removed as the religion of the state from the constitution. Simultaneous to these developments, new social and cultural policies were introduced to curb Islam’s presence: the alphabet was changed from Arabic to Latin; the day of rest was changed from Friday to Sunday; the use of religious attire was banned in public; the metric system replaced the old Islamic one; and the law of the surname was introduced, which enforced the adoption of Turkish surnames (Haynes 2010; Koni, Rosli, and Zin 2015; Mardin 1991). Finally, to seal the changes, in 1937 secularism was adopted in the second article of the constitution as the guiding principle of the state (Yavuz 2003).

In order to protect the Kemalist nature of the state, Ataturk ensured the establishment of Kemalist imbued political organizations and state institutions. For example, the oldest party in modern Turkey, the Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi or CHP), was founded by the Kemalist elites to perpetuate Kemalist principles in the legislature. The CHP was the only legal party during the period of the one-party system (1924–1946). The party lost influence after multipartyism was introduced and since then has not acquired sufficient votes to form a majority government and has mainly been in opposition, notwithstanding occasional exceptions. Nonetheless, other institutions maintained control over the legislature, such as the judiciary, once a strong bastion of the secular Kemalist order (Herzog 2010). The judiciary under the Kemalist

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50 Turkey became a democratic parliamentary republic in 1945 when it introduced multipartyism; however, the first democratic multiparty elections took place in 1950. Elections for the unicameral legislature were held every four years through the multiple non-transferable vote system. The 1961 constitution changed the electoral system to party-list proportional representation, where the 450 National Assembly seats were allocated through the D’Hondt method. The 1982 constitution made further changes to the electoral system. It introduced a ten percent threshold for parties to enter the 400-seat National Assembly, and the votes of the unseated parties were to be distributed to the parties that pass the electoral threshold; the number of seats increased to 450 in 1987, 550 in 1995, and 600 in 2018. In 2017, Turkey passed constitutional amendments that changed the political system into a presidential republic. The
The state was founded “as part of a state-building project and concerned with protecting the prerogatives of the state, rather than with expanding rights or protecting Turkish citizens from the powers of the state” (Koplow 2014). For instance, until 2010, the Turkish Constitution gave the Constitutional Court the power to close down political parties whose programs or activities violated Kemalist principles, including Turkey’s secularism and territorial integrity. The Constitutional Court used these articles to shut down 27 political parties since 1961. Additionally, the Court’s jurisdiction over Turkey’s Grand National Assembly, which has permitted it to rule over the constitutionality of the assembly’s legislations, has given it the authority to vet and block legislations that conflict with the Kemalist principles, which it regularly did until 2010.

Even more significant than the judiciary, the military served as the supreme guardian of the Kemalist nature of the republic. Whether it was under the one-party system or multiparty system, the military continued to oversee the political process, continuously intervening in civilian politics. The military first intervened in 1960 through a coup overthrowing the Democratic Party’s (DP) government, executing the then prime minister and ministers of foreign affairs and finance. In 1971, the military intervened through a memorandum or a silent coup, forcing the then PM to resign. Then, in 1980, the military led the bloodiest military coup, responsible for the execution of fifty, the imprisonment of five hundred thousand of whom hundreds died in prison, the torture and disappearance of thousands, and the blacklisting of over one million (Harris 2011; Pusane 2016). The last coup took place through a memorandum in executive powers shifted from the prime minister and cabinet to the president. The amendments also changed the term for parliamentary elections to five years, to be held concurrently with the presidential elections. The Turkish judicial system is composed of general law courts (that include civil, administrative and criminal courts), military courts, state security courts, and other supreme courts that include the Constitutional Court. All judges are appointed by the Supreme Council of Judges and Public Prosecutors, known by its Turkish acronym HSYK. According to the 1982 constitution, HYSK is to be composed of seven members, five appointed by the president in addition to the Minister of Justice and the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice.
1997, forcing the then PM to resign. The pretext for the multiple interventions was the protection of the country from non-Kemalists impurities, whether religious, separatist, or communist.

While it used coups as a frequent method of intervention, the military also routinely interfered in civilian politics through different institutions, most notably the National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Konseyi or MGK), founded after the 1960 coup, and the State Security Courts, founded after the 1980 coup. MGK, a military-civilian council, was established for the military to share its recommendations to civilian governments. Until 2001, it comprised of the prime minister and ministers of national defense, foreign affairs and internal affairs as well as five military members, including the chief of general staff, commanders of the army, navy, air force, and gendarmerie. However, since the civilian members were disfavoured in terms of numbers and power, the council was effectively a venue for military members to dictate their demands to governments (Petersen and Yanasmayan 2020). Along with the MGK, there were the State Security Courts (abolished in 2004), where military judges tried civilians for political crimes such as terrorism, separatism, and behaviour against the republic. There were also a plethora of other military affiliated departments, groups and centres put in place for reasons of espionage and information gathering (Aknur 2013; Pusane 2016). Aknur describes that, “Some of the most significant among these were the Western Working Group (Bati Çalışma Grubu) to fight the rise of political Islam, the Eastern Working Group (Doğu Çalışma Grubu) to cope with the rise of Kurdish nationalism, and the Prime-Ministerial Crisis Management Center (Başbakanlık Kriz Yönetim Merkezi) to observe and report on crises due to Islamic reactionaryism” (Aknur 2013, 135). Additionally, although social institutions’ decision-making bodies, such as the Council of Higher Education (YOK) and the High Audio-Visual Board (RTUK), were controlled by Kemalist elites, the military still retained seats in them.
While Kemalism was able to establish a foothold within the military, the state’s bureaucracy, and the urban bourgeois, it did not re-structure the society in its entirety. Kemalism was rejected by the religious conservative segments of much of Anatolia and the Muslim ethnic groups, particularly the Kurds who constitute about one fifth of the population, discussed in detail in the next chapter. Kemalism led to the politicization of both of these groups, with the latter group mobilizing an armed rebellion against the state in the 1980s. The next section focuses on how the former group, religious conservatives, took advantage of the political opportunities offered by the state to challenge its secularist policies.

**Turkey’s Islamists: From the Margins to the Centre**

During the first decades of the republic, in response to repressive state measures, Islamic movements largely abstained from political activities. In response to the political opening in the 1950s, due to the introduction of multipartyism alongside new political rights, their members began to mobilize in support of anti-CHP parties to influence policy-making. Their objectives were to challenge the state’s secularist policies, increase the role of Islam in the public sphere, and also increase their representation in state institutions. In 1970, members of Islamic movements founded the first Islamist party. Since then, Islamist parties have regularly participated in politics, running in elections and forming coalition governments with other right and centre parties. The closure of Islamist parties by the state – for violations of the republic’s secularism – did not hinder Islamists’ political activism as after each closure they founded a new party and gradually increased their vote share (Narli 1997). The proceeding pages will trace the development of political Islam in Turkey.
Islamist parties in Turkey developed from a number of Islamic movements, amongst the most popular of which are the Khalidiyya Naqshbandi Sufi order and the Nurcu (Yavuz 2003). These movements were critical of the Kemalist state’s forced secularization and aimed to restore the role of Islam in Turkish society through religious education. Most prominent Islamist politicians, including the longest serving heads of Islamist parties, Necmettin Erbakan and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, had direct links with one or two of these movements (Atacan 2005; Koni, Rosli, and Zin 2015; Narli 1999). For instance, both were regular participants in Naqshbandi discussion and study circles. Additionally, Erbakan sought the blessings of a leading Naqshbandi Sheikh before founding the first Islamist party in 1970, the National Order Party (Milli Nizam Parti or MNP).

The genesis of political Islam is attributed to the cultural, political and economic alienation of the religious conservatives by the Democratic Party (DP) (1946–1961) and its successor, the Justice Party (AP) (1961–1981), which they had supported since the introduction of multipartyism. The religious conservatives supported the parties because they portrayed themselves as alternatives to the state-backed CHP. In exchange for their votes, the centre-right parties introduced Islam-friendly policies. For example, the DP passed policies that allowed prayer calls to return to Arabic from Turkish; removed the ongoing ban on Hajj; reopened the Imam Hatip Schools; included courses on religion and morality in schools; and broadcasted

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52 The Khalidiyya Naqshbandi movement in Turkey dates to the nineteenth century. It stresses self-discipline and personal reform achieved through the essential orthodox Islamic practices and other spiritual practices. Despite reforms that banned Sufi practices and dissolved the order in 1925, it survived through underground networks. Nurcu, founded in the twentieth century, was also a Sufi movement. Although it was heavily influenced by the Naqshbandi order, it retained a modernist character. Its founder, Said Nursi (1876-1960), advocated for a reinterpretation of Islam that aligned with the needs of a modern society. He also argued that Turkish society can be transformed through Islam because of its emphasis on self-discipline and ethics (Yavuz 2003).
Quran recitations on the radio and TV. The parties also allowed some of the Islamic movements’ members to run on their ticket and shared administrative and political positions with them. However, by the late 1960s the religious conservatives began to withdraw their support from AP because the party halted its Islam-focused policies and began to isolate and remove them from its ranks (Geyikdagi 1984). For example, the AP refused Erbakan membership and to let him run on its ticket in the 1969 elections. Furthermore, the party passed the Law to Penalize Anti-Ataturk Criminal Conduct that led to the imprisonment of religious leaders for insulting Ataturk (Yavuz 2003). Another reason that the religious conservatives removed their support from AP was because the party advanced economic policies that sustained the dominance of the urban secular business class, while neglecting the economic interests of the small merchant, businessmen, and artisan classes of the “Muslim Periphery” (Yavuz 2003, 209). Ultimately, the DP and AP were still largely committed to the Kemalist order and made concessions to the Islamists on some policy issues only for electoral gains. Eventually, they sought to sever the influence of the religiously conservative elements in their party (Geyikdagi 1984; Koni, Rosli, and Zin 2015; Sakallioğlu 1996).

Therefore, in 1970, Erbakan founded MNP to create an organization that could embrace the religiously conservative population and promote their values. However, the party was shut down by a Constitutional Court order shortly after its creation, in 1971, for attempts to undermine the principle of secularism. Nonetheless, some military generals – who had disagreed with the closure of the party in the first place – asked Islamists to found another party. These military personnel sought to use Islam to curb the rising popularity of communism in the

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53 Imam Hatip schools were founded by the state to train Imams and preachers. Accordingly, their curriculums are heavily focussed on religious studies.
country. Erbakan took advantage of the opportunity, resumed his political activities, and founded the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Parti or MSP) in 1972.

The MSP shared the same ideological principles as its predecessor. The parties both advocated bringing the society back “to its original spiritual and moral roots” to better the ethical codes of society (Koni, Rosli, and Zin 2015, 342). Yavuz argues that the MSP was mainly concerned with social issues, including

- long hair, miniskirts, pornography, TV, movie and theatre programmes influenced by Western culture, wearing of shorts by female students during gym classes, tourist accommodations, the youth’s lack of respect for parents and older people, imitating Western culture, lack of religious belief among the youth, the disappearance of traditional family life, and the mushrooming of nightclubs. (Yavuz 2003, 210)

The party also advocated for the industrialization of the developing areas of rural Anatolia, which, its members argued, were disadvantaged by a system that favoured urban economic interests. Additionally, the party called for closer relations with the Muslim world and reduced relations with the West, including the undoing of the country’s ascension into the European Economic Community (EEC) (Koni, Rosli, and Zin 2015; Narli 1999).

By calling for cultural and economic equality for the marginalized and religiously conservative rural Anatolians, the MSP succeeded in acquiring their votes, including of Kurds, who are concentrated in southeast Anatolia (Köni, Rosli, and Zin 2015; Narli 1999). Like for the rest of the Anatolians, secularism did not affect the Sunni Kurdish population in its entirety. They voted for the MSP because of their Islamic identity. Altan Tan, a notable Kurdish
politician, argues that the Kurdish conflict with the state was more religious than it was ethnic in the early decades of the republic (Yavuz 2003, 211). For many Kurds, the Islamic movement in Turkey is considered to be of Kurdish origin, since the Khalidiyya Naqshbandi and Nurcus movements originated from the southeast and their founders were ethnically Kurdish (Jenkins 2008).

Additionally, Islamists were regarded as anti-system actors. Abdulbaki Erdoğmus, another prominent Kurdish politician, argued in 1994 that Islamist parties were strong in the southeast because they were the only political parties “outside the system, and [they] can fulfil the change we want…justice and freedom…[and the] restructuring of the system” (Yavuz 2003, 231). Because of the rural and ethnic Kurdish vote as well as votes from urban small merchants during the 1973 and 1977 elections, an Islamist party was not only able to enter the National Assembly for the first time, but was also able to govern as part of the ruling coalitions.

Throughout the 1970s, the MSP moderately performed in elections and formed coalitions with different ruling parties in exchange for political posts and influence on social policies. In the 1973 elections, the MSP gained 11.8 percent of the vote, attaining the third largest number of seats after the CHP, which gained 33.3 percent, and the AP, which received 29.8. In 1974, the MSP formed a short-lived coalition with the CHP. The CHP–MSP coalition was puzzling because of the vast ideological differences between the two. Although the CHP was ideologically closer to the AP, rivalry between the parties and personality differences between the leaders made such a coalition difficult (Ciddi 2019). Additionally, a coalition with the AP would have required more concession from the CHP because of the AP’s sizable parliamentary presence. Having limited options, the CHP formed a coalition with the MSP. For the MSP, although the coalition caused the party to lose some members and voters, who criticized it for compromising
its agenda, it gave the party legitimacy and signified its political weight. The party was also able to receive important posts as a result of this coalition. In addition to Erbakan being the deputy prime minister, the MSP attained six ministries in the twenty-five-member Council of Ministers, including agriculture, justice, commerce, industry and technology, and interior (Jenkins 2008). Another party member was appointed Minister of State, a position that carried special responsibility for religious affairs (Jenkins 2008). The CHP’s popularity, resulting from the invasion of Cyprus, gave the party the opportunity to dissolve the difficult coalition and call for an early election. Thus, only nine months later, the coalition ended. Subsequently, the MSP joined the Nationalist Front government that the AP had succeeded in forming with other political parties in the parliament to prevent early elections. Once again, Erbakan was named deputy prime minister, and the MSP kept its past six ministries in addition to the Ministry of Public Works (Jenkins 2008; Yavuz 2003).

After the 1977 elections, the MSP continued to rule in a coalition with the AP. Although the party lost nearly half its seats with only 8.6 percent of the vote – as a consequence of the supporters it lost due to its coalition with the CHP – the fractious nature of politics meant that the party continued to be an important player (Jenkins 2008; Yavuz 2003). Similar to the 1973 situation, the CHP, which gained 41.1 percent of the vote, failed to form a coalition. Instead, the AP, which came second at 36.9 percent, succeeded in forming a coalition with the MSP and other right-wing parties. Erbakan was again named deputy prime minister and the MSP was given seven key ministries: interior, agriculture, labor, industry, housing, foreign affairs and one state ministry. The party placed thousands of its supporters in the ministries under its control. Furthermore, with its control over the interior ministry, the MSP used its power to develop and
expand its own network of foundations, cultural associations, and vocation and youth organizations throughout Anatolia (Jenkins 2008; Yavuz 2003).

During its time in power, from 1974 to 1978, the MSP also managed to influence foreign and domestic policy. For example, one result of MSP participation in the ruling coalition was the country’s strengthening of ties with the Muslim world. In the late 1970s, Turkey signed a series of economic agreements with Muslim countries. Furthermore, in 1976, Istanbul hosted the seventh conference of the OIC under the chairmanship of its foreign minister – prior to this, Turkey had only sent low level delegations. During this conference, Turkey formally ratified the OIC charter, and also indicated that it would allow the Palestinian Liberation Organization to open an office in Ankara. Although these developments were related to Turkey’s isolation from the West, resulting from the invasion of Cyprus and the oil crisis, the MSP undoubtedly encouraged them. Domestically, the MSP’s largest changes were seen in education. The MSP oversaw a rapid expansion of Imam Hatip middle schools, closed in 1962 by the military backed technocrat government. Between 1972 and 1978, the schools increased fourfold, accommodating three times the student population. Although infrequently, the MSP was also able to regulate public space. For instance, in 1974, Erbakan protested against the statue of a naked woman in Istanbul, leading to its removal (Jenkins 2008).

Undeterred by the 1980 coup that shut down all political parties including the MSP, Islamists founded the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi or RP) in 1983. The RP party, similar to the MSP, articulated the concerns of the culturally and economically marginalized religious conservative population of Anatolia. It promised to introduce a “Just Order” that included a more

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54 Increased instability and political violence between the right and left in the late 1970s led the military to carry out a coup that targeted political parties from across the spectrum, claiming it needed to fight communism, fascism, religious sectarianism and separatism; the military prosecuted, incarcerated, and temporarily suspended leaders from all parties.
equitable wealth distribution (Atacan 2005). It also advocated for an active role for the state in the economy with less emphasis on privatization, criticizing the system for creating a “slave order” through its “interest based capital system” (Jenkins 2008, 155). Additionally, like its predecessor, the party called for moral development and the need to replace the “atheist-materialist” nature of the state with one of belief (Koni, Rosli, and Zin 2015, 343). The party also shared the MSP’s scepticism of close relations with the West and Israel (Atacan 2005).

The Kurdish insurgency, which began in 1984, presented the RP with a new challenge. Although the RP argued that Islamic identity was the best means for ending ethnic conflict, beginning with the 1991 elections, the “RP began to distance itself from its formerly principled and inclusive approach to the ‘Kurdish question’” (Yavuz 2003, 232). This was to avoid agitating the Kemalist elite, who portrayed “any attempt to ameliorate the harsh conditions facing the vast majority of Turkey’s Kurds as ‘concessions to terrorists’” (Yavuz 2003, 233). During the elections, the party failed to nominate a Kurdish-Muslim-oriented candidate from the southeast. Instead, the party formed a pragmatic electoral alliance with the ultranationalist Nationalist Work Party (MCP and later the MHP) and the Reformist Democratic Party to pass the ten percent threshold, which all three parties failed to attain in the 1987 elections. Although the party was able to enter parliament with 16.9 percent of the vote and 62 seats, coming in fourth place, it effectively distanced the Kurds. According to Yavuz, “Islamic political spaces-in-between Turkish and Kurdish identities were destroyed as the RP acquired more Turkish and conservative features after the 1991 elections” (Yavuz 2003, 231).

In the 1995 elections, the RP gained 21.37 percent of the votes. Due to the ten percent national electoral threshold that allocates parties that pass it more seats than correspond to their share of votes, the RP received 28 percent of the seats, translating to 158 parliamentary seats of
the 550. Although nearly 80 percent of voters did not elect RP, because of the fragmented party system the party was able to lead a government. For the first time in Turkey, an Islamist party was in power. The RP formed a coalition with the center-right True Path Party (Dogru Yol Partisi or DYP), which received 19.18 percent of the vote and 135 seats (Atacan 2005). The DYP was a successor of the AP, with which Erbakan’s MSP formed a coalition during the 1970s. 55

Several factors explain the RP’s performance in comparison to the other parties. The most important factor was the party’s increased focus on social issues. The party’s emphasis on its “populist but catchy ‘Just Order’ program” allowed it to broaden its base (Rabasa 2008, 42). For example, in addition to its historic religious conservative supporters, the party was able to gain support from the urban poor who had voted for the CHP in the past. The party’s anti-Western rhetoric also increased its popularity in the elections – particularly with the backdrop of a delayed response to the atrocities committed against Muslim Bosnians in Yugoslavia, and the deferred assessment of Turkey’s application for membership into the EU, which many Turks saw as resulting from cultural and religious biases. Yet another important reason for the RP’s performance was its effective organizational, fundraising, and campaigning strategies (Jenkins 2008). The party was able to expand its membership beyond the traditional rural conservative circles and small urban merchants to include a sizeable emerging middle class, university students, and women. It also enjoyed the financial support of the rising Anatolian Lions: Anatolian business elites who had moved to Istanbul for further business opportunities. Furthermore, the party also established social services for the poor, with its supporters, especially

55 The RP kept the following ministries: justice, finances, public works and settlement, labour and social security, energy and natural resources, culture, agriculture and village affairs, and environment, while the DYP received the ministries of national defence, interior, foreign affairs, national education, health and social security, transport, industry and commerce, tourism, and forestry.
women, volunteering to provide food, health and employment services (Jenkins 2008; Narli 1999; Rabasa 2008; Yavuz 2003).

When in power, Erbakan strategically ruled so as to avoid confrontations with the military. While Erbakan strengthened ties with some Muslim countries, including the signing of a twenty-three billion US dollars natural gas agreement with Iran, he also toned down anti-Western rhetoric. Koni and his collaborators contend that “contrary to what it has argued in its previous campaigns, the RP did not attempt to distance Turkey from the west by turning its back to the EU, UN and NATO” (Koni, Rosli, and Zin 2015, 344). Additionally, although reluctant, the Islamist prime minister signed a defense industry cooperation agreement with Israel. When it came to economic policy, just like the MSP, the party never attempted to challenge the practice of charging interest or change the banking system. In terms of social policies, Erbakan did not try to advance any substantive legislative changes. Instead, Jenkins (2008) argues that he mostly carried out religious gestures. For example, during Ramadan of 1997, he invited Sufi order leaders to a collective fast-breaking at his official office. However, when his ministers passed a decree to shift working hours in state institutions to accommodate the fasting of Ramadan, the secularist establishment was alarmed (Jenkins 2008). At that point, the highest administrative court first annulled the decree, and then the establishment worked to end the RP’s rule.

Secularists, headed by the military, launched a campaign aimed at weakening the party to force it to resign. According to Jenkins, “unlike in 1980, the military opted not to seize power directly but to catalyze opposition to the RP: coordinating initiatives by secularists in the judiciary, academia, and the media, and networking behind the scenes to try to erode the coalition’s parliamentary majority” (Jenkins 2008, 161). Subsequently, Kemalist academics, women’s groups, and leading trade unions declared their opposition to the RP-led government
through demonstrations and declarations. During the MGK meeting in February of 1997, the military presented the RP with a list of eighteen anti-religious measures that included the shutting down of middle Imam Hatip schools as well as Islamist news outlets. In May 1997, the Public Prosecutor also filed a case against the party in the Constitutional Courts and other courts pursued companies believed to be financing the party. The military also successfully pressured DYP members to resign from the government. As a result of losing its parliamentary majority because of DYP resignations, on 18 June 1997, Erbakan submitted his government’s resignation. In January 1998, the Constitutional Court closed down the RP, accusing it of activities contrary to the principle of secularism. Erbakan and five other RP deputies including the Justice Minister were all banned from politics for five years. In the following months, security institutions raided and shut down Islamist foundations and associations, and closed thousands of private religious schools and intermediate Imam Hatip schools. Moreover, the government, encouraged by the military, began to remove Islamist suspects from public institutions (Jenkins 2008).

Undeterred by the closure, once again, Islamists founded the Virtue Party in the same year (*Fazilet Partisi* or FP), adopting a different ideological position to distance itself from the RP and to project an image commensurate with the state’s secularist elite. For example, the party replaced 60 percent of its members and attempted to become more gender sensitive, recruiting women from different social classes, educational levels, and religious orientations including women who did not wear the headscarf (Narli 2003). Additionally, in contrast to the RP’s emphasis on the strong economic role of the state, the FP made some reference to the distributional role of the state but generally supported a market economy based on privatization. Furthermore, the party softened its Islamic rhetoric, switching to only making occasional religious references. Also, in contrast to the RP’s use of social and collective rights to remove
discrimination against the religious conservative segments, the FP framed freedom and practice as matters of personal liberty and human rights. For example, the party argued that the headscarf issue was a matter of violation of human rights rather than religious identity (Jenkins 2008). Regarding foreign policy, the party also broke from all its predecessors, opting for a balanced approach toward the Muslim world and the West and abstaining from anti-Western rhetoric. However, when it came to the Kurdish question, the FP’s Islamists did not assume a new position, fearing opposition from the Kemalist establishment. Yavuz argues that the FP’s policy was “to consume the center-right version of the Kemalist ideology rather than to offer new ideas and strategies for the formation of an inclusive social contract to accommodate Kurdish, Alevi, and gender-based communities” (Yavuz 1999, 129).

Overall, the FP was reactive, adopting a tone that was apologetic, defensive and subdued in comparison to its predecessor’s assertive and populist one (Atacan 2005; Sen 2010; Tepe 2005; Yazici 2013). The party participated in the 1999 elections and came in third place, gaining 15.41 percent of the vote. However, when one of the party’s headscarfed parliamentary candidates won a seat, she was refused the official swearing-in ceremony and the Constitutional Court ordered that the FP be shut down for violations of secularist principles in 2001 (Jenkins 2008).

The FP’s closure generated an already simmering conflict within the Islamist ranks rooted in a power struggle and ideological differences between young generation reformists and Erbakan and his loyalists. The former group protested Erbakan’s authoritarian decision-making and advocated for new leadership from the younger generation. According to Yavuz (2003), the conflict also had ideological roots, with the reformists adopting a liberal and more inclusive understanding of Islam. For example, the reformists advocated for an interpretation that would
include the various ethnic, sectarian, and ideological groups of the society. However, Erbakan and his loyalists were committed to a conservative interpretation of Sunni Islam. The ideological and political divisions led to a splitting of the Islamist camp. In the same year of the FP’s closure, the reformists “felt free to establish their own political party” and founded the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP) and Erbakan founded the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi or SP) (Atacan 2005, 8). More specifically, the AKP was founded on 14 August 2001 with Erdogan as the party’s first chairman and Abdullah Gul as his deputy.56

In an attempt to avoid closure, the AKP liberalized its program to further distance the Islamist agenda and to project novelty. In December 2001, the AKP published a sixty-five-page Development and Democratization Program. The AKP program was much closer to that of the FP than the latter’s to the RP. Essentially, it followed the FP’s ideological direction, but did so forcefully. For example, concerning economic policy, the AKP strongly adopted liberal economic policies and called for limiting the state’s regulative and redistributive roles, indicating that social service provision should be within the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) budgetary limits. The party advocated for not only limiting the state’s economic role, but the administrative one as well, emphasizing the need for decentralization and the strengthening of local governments (Atacan 2005; Yazici 2013).

56 Prior to his headship of the party, Tayyip Erdogan was the FP mayor of Istanbul and gained a reputation for being an effective administrator. He was born in a working-class district of Istanbul in 1954, after his parents moved from the eastern Black Sea province of Rize. He attended an Imam Hatip school and later joined the MSP as a university student. On 21 April 1998, Erdogan was convicted of violating Article 312 of the Turkish Penal Code relating to the use of religious speech, for reciting a poem with religious references, and was sentenced to ten months in prison. In July 1999, he was released early for good behaviour. His conviction and imprisonment turned him into a national figure for the religious conservative base. Abdullah Gul was born in the Central Anatolian town of Kayseri in 1950. He studied economics at Istanbul University before pursuing postgraduate studies in the United Kingdom. He pursued an academic career upon returning to Turkey, and in 1991 he successfully ran as an RP candidate. During the 1996–97 RP–DYP coalition, Gul served as a government spokesman and a state minister (Jenkins 2008; Yavuz 2003).
The AKP also entirely eschewed religious references to show its commitment to secularism. While the FP had indicated its commitment to secularism and refrained from explicit references to Islam, the party had still held to the idea of the original mission: the establishment of a new civilization on the basis of moral principles and values (Atacan 2005; Yazici 2013). In contrast, Erdogan rejected defining his party with religious references, specifying “we are not an Islamic party, and we also refuse labels such as Muslim-democrat” (Taspinar 2012). In the party program, secularism was identified as the reference locus: “Our Party regards Ataturk’s principles and reforms as the most important vehicle for raising the Turkish public above the level of contemporary civilization and sees this as an element of social peace” (AKP Programme 2001, 5). The only mention of religion came as a subset of the democratization program under the title religious freedom, where the party stated that secularism should allow “people of all religions and beliefs to comfortably practice their religions, to be able to express their religious convictions and live accordingly, but [in a way that] also allows people without beliefs to organize their lives along these lines” (AKP Programme 2001, 5). Furthermore, instead of framing morality and values in Islamic terms, the party opted for including them within broader Turkish social conservatism, using the term “conservative democracy.” Under the democratization section, the party’s leaders also stressed their pledge to democratic consolidation and to strengthening human rights and civil society.

Additionally, going farther than the FP, the party adopted a strong western orientation (Atacan 2005; Tepe 2005; Yazici 2013). The party explicitly supported the country’s continued membership in NATO. It also promised a commitment to EU membership and indicated a willingness to cooperate and compromise on Cyprus, declaring it would “keep relations with European countries at the very top of Turkey’s foreign policy agenda” (AKP Programme 2001,
6). In the most notable contrast to its predecessors, the party declared in its program that it would “continue the long-standing cooperation in defense with the United States and expand it into closer cooperation in the economy, investments, science and technology” sectors (AKP Programme 2001, 6).

Despite the new ideological positions, the AKP is considered an Islamist party. The party’s commitments were interpreted by observers as an instrument to circumvent closure by the Constitutional Court or the military (Jenkins 2008; Yavuz 2003). Other factors also point to the AKP’s Islamist identity. First and foremost, most of the AKP members, including its leadership, were former FP members. Furthermore, most of the party’s supporters had voted for Islamists parties in the past and were religiously conservative. For example, nearly 70 percent of AKP supporters had voted for the FP in 1999. Moreover, as Jenkins argues, “although the AKP continued to reject suggestions that it was an Islamist party, there was little doubting its supporters’ piety” (Jenkins 2008, 169). For example, of AKP supporters, 90 percent prayed at least once a day; 99 percent fasted for Ramadan; 81 percent identified themselves as Muslim before Turk; 60 percent considered religious values to be more important than national values; 44 percent believed that Muslim women should wear the hijab; 93 percent wanted a removal of the headscarf ban; 65 percent thought there should be laws on adultery; and 60 percent wanted an interest-free financial system (Jenkins 2008, 169). In short, the AKP was operating within the institutional constraints of Turkey as a party widely perceived as Islamist, yet trying to project an image it was not so as not to meet the fate of Islamist parties that preceded it.

The AKP’s ideational changes succeeded in appealing to various factions of society including secularists, conservatives, nationalist, liberals, and pragmatists (Atacan 2005; Haynes 2010; Sen 2010; Tepe 2005). According to Tepe, the party was able to win the support “of both
resolutely secular and staunchly Islamist business associations” (Tepe 2005, 71). The party succeeded in appealing to constituencies outside the Islamist base because of its liberal political and economic agenda. The AKP won its first election in 2002 with 34.28 percent of the votes, receiving 363 out of the 500 National Assembly seats. It thus became the first party to win parliamentary majority since the 1987 elections, and the first Islamist party achieve this in the country (276 seats are needed for a majority win).

During its first tenure in power (2002–2007), as it noted in its programme, the AKP led a market-based economy within IMF regulations, which resulted in rapid economic growth. It also advanced a series of legislation reforms to meet the Copenhagen criteria for democratic governance. Additionally, it pressured Turkish Cypriots to return to negotiations over the future of the divided island. And despite an increase in anti-American attitudes amongst its parliamentarians and support base due to the 2003 Iraq invasion, the AKP government agreed to allow US troops onto Turkish soil to access northern Iraq in return for a 30 billion US dollars package of donations and loans. Significantly, the AKP refrained from attempts to openly challenge the secularist character of the state. Jenkins (2008) argues that in general the AKP was more concerned with lifting restrictions on religious practice than using the state to promote religion. During its first term, the government did not try to increase the number of mosques and opened only a few Imam Hatip schools. Jenkins argues that with the exception of a few proposals such as ending the discrimination against graduates of Imam Hatip and criminalizing adultery, “the AKP made no significant attempt to Islamicize the Turkish state” (Jenkins 2008, 179). These proposals were all vetoed by the then secularist President Ahmet Sezer and were condemned by Kemalist elites, who accused the party of establishing an Islamic state
Two developments caused concern for the Kemalist elites. First, emboldened by its historic victory, the AKP worked to sever the powers of the military. For example, during its first term alone, through EU-inspired harmonization packages, the party ensured the MGK and its General Secretariat’s roles were limited to consultation; abolished the State Security Courts that tried civilians in military courts; removed military representatives from the Council of Higher Education (YOK) and the High Audio-Visual Board (RTUK); and placed military expenditure under civilian oversight (Aknur 2013; Cizre 2005).

No less important, the AKP won the 2007, 2011, and 2015 elections, significantly increasing its voter pool, and becoming the first party in Turkish modern history to attain a parliamentary majority in multiple consecutive elections, signalling an era of hegemonic party rule. As Table 8 demonstrates, the party received 46.58 percent of the votes in 2007 and 49.90 percent in 2011; it then gained 40.7 percent of the votes in June 2015 and came back with 49.5 percent of the votes in the November 2015 elections. And, as Table 9 shows, the party dominated the Grand National Assembly with 66 percent in 2002, 62 percent in 2007, 59.3 percent in 2011, 46.9 percent in June 2015, and 57.6 percent in the November 2015 elections. The party’s success led observers to proclaim the rise of a dominant party system in Turkey, describing the Erdogan-led AKP as “one of the most formidable political forces to have developed in Turkey’s electoral history” (Ciddi and Esen 2014, 433). These developments also led critics and supporters alike to wonder whether the AKP was going to carry out Islamist policies and change the Kemalist nature of the state as a result. The next chapters will analyze the AKP’s policies toward the Muslim Kurdish minority to answer this question.
Table 8. Parliamentary election results in Turkey from 2002–2015 as percentage of votes

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>34.28</td>
<td>46.58</td>
<td>49.83</td>
<td>40.87</td>
<td>49.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>19.39</td>
<td>20.88</td>
<td>25.98</td>
<td>24.95</td>
<td>24.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHP</td>
<td>8.36</td>
<td>14.27</td>
<td>13.01</td>
<td>16.29</td>
<td>11.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pro-Kurdish Parties</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(HDP) 13.12</td>
<td>(HDP) 10.76</td>
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Table 9. Parliamentary election results in Turkey from 2002–2015 as number of seats

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHP</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26 (20 Kurdish nationalists)</td>
<td>35 (29 Kurdish nationalists)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Kurdish Parties</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDP</td>
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Conclusion

Along with providing a background on political Islamist parties in Turkey, this chapter has demonstrated their strategic behaviour. As a result of the political opening proceeding multipartyism, members of Islamic movements began to rally in support of centre-right parties to challenge the secularist policies of the state. When these parties stopped advancing Islam-focused policies and political opportunities for Islamists, Islamists founded their first political
Islamist parties strategically campaigned, using populist rhetoric to galvanize their voters. In an effort to reach their objectives of increased political representation and influence on policy-making, they formed coalitions with parties from across the political spectrum, including the Kemalist CHP. Once in power, although they attempted to promote their agenda in education, they generally abstained from openly challenging the state’s positions in other spheres including economy, foreign policy, and the Kurdish issue, fearing being shut down. Overall, in order to avoid closures by Kemalist institutions, since 1970, Islamist parties have regularly altered their ideological principles to demonstrate commitment to Kemalism. These changes have contributed to the survival of the longest living Islamist party, the AKP, which has been in power for nearly two decades.

Although this chapter has demonstrated that Turkish Islamists have been motivated by their gains instead of principles even once in power, many have attributed this to the strong Kemalist state institutions that have constrained their behaviour. Accordingly, there is scepticism around their intentions, and many think that, once in power without constraints, Islamists would reprioritize and pursue their ideological aspirations. This is particularly pertinent for the AKP in Turkey, where the Islamist party has consolidated its power through institutional changes that have weakened the Kemalist institutions that previously constrained the aspirations of the party’s predecessors. Therefore, an examination of the AKP’s policies over the span of their rule will allow for a more concrete analysis of Islamist behaviour toward minorities, the role of strategic calculations in their politics, as well as their ideology. The AKP’s policies toward its Muslim Kurdish minority will be the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter 6

Islamists’ Approaches to the Kurdish Minority in Turkey

After the AKP came to power in 2002, it followed an open approach toward the Kurdish minority. This approach was unprecedented since all of Turkey’s preceding governments had followed closed approaches. The AKP government adopted an inclusive tone, advanced accommodative Kurdish cultural, legal, and political policies and engaged with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê or PKK) in negotiations to end the decades-old conflict. By 2015, the AKP government began to change its approach to the Kurdish minority and followed in the same footsteps of its nationalist successors. Its closed approach entailed halting the advancement of policies favourable to the Kurds, ending negotiations, and increasing its military action. The next section provides a background on the Kurdish minority in Turkey. The chapter then proceeds to trace the AKP’s shifts in approaches toward the group.

Ethnic Minorities in Turkey

Turkey is an ethnically and religiously diverse state. The 1965 census was the last official record to include data on ethnicity. Accordingly, existing data on ethnic group size is often based on the projections of the nearly sixty-year-old census or other mother-language demographic and health surveys (Livny 2015; Mutlu 1996). Ethnic Turks constitute the majority of the population with an estimated population ratio of 76 percent (Akturk 2011). According to Akturk (2011), the Kurds, an estimated 16 percent of the population, make up the largest minority and are concentrated in the country’s southeast. The rest of the population is composed of other smaller ethnic groups that include Caucasians, Zaza, Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Roma and others. While most of these ethnic minorities, including the Kurds, Caucasians, Arabs and Laz, share the
majority’s religious beliefs, Sunni Islam, others like the Armenians and Assyrians are Orthodox Christians. The largest religious minority, constituting 20 percent of the population, follows Alevism, a branch of Shia Islam. Members of the Alevi group are predominantly Turkish, but a minority of Kurds follows the Alevi faith as well. This research examines the Kurdish minority in Turkey due to its population size and territorial concentration, and also because the group has engaged in political and armed forms of contention with the republic since its establishment (Yegen 1999). Furthermore, as a Muslim, mostly Sunni, group (Category A), it provides a good test case for the culturalist-centric theories that expect an Islamist government to have a coherent, consistently open approach toward fellow Sunni Muslims.

The Kurds: Background

The Kurdish minority has engaged with the Turkish state in one of the longest conflicts in the modern era (1978–present), resulting in the death of more than 50,000 and the displacement of millions. Although there were numerous Kurdish rebellions toward the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, Ensaroglu (2013) argues that these rebellions were less over identity, and more over changes to the administrative structures, resulting from the state’s centralization efforts. During much of the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922), Kurds held significant levels of autonomy over their internal affairs, and in exchange for this autonomy, they provided the Sultan with soldiers and taxes (Pusane 2015; Yavuz 2001; Yavuz and Ozcan 2006). Kurdish tribes at the beginning of the twentieth century supported the Empire and Sultan in the First World War and the subsequent War of Independence (1919–1922) (Ensaroglu 2013).

The nationalist and secular ideological position of the new republic led to the assimilation and repression of the Kurds. According to Yegen (1999), they were not only stripped of their
local autonomy, but also their language, names, and for some, homeland. During its early period, the new republic implemented a range of coercive assimilationist policies. First and foremost, it declared Turkish the official language of the state, prohibiting the use of other languages in teaching and public use. Next, the state founded a large number of boarding schools in the southeast to separate Kurdish pupils from their cultural homes (Yegen 2009). In 1928, the state banned publications in languages other than Turkish, and in 1934, the government passed the Surname Law prohibiting the use of non-Turkish names (Kuzu 2016; Yegen 2009). In the same year, the government also passed the Resettlement Law, which forcibly resettled 25,831 Kurds from their region to western Anatolia (Aslan 2015). The Kurds were granted no recognition and were instead referred to as “Mountain Turks” as the word “Kurd” was banned (Kuzu 2016; Yegen 2009).

The 1950s political opening translated into zero gains for the Kurdish minority as the state continued with its assimilationist policies. Some argue that the Kurdish population experienced more repressive policies in the second half of the century, specifically due to the three military interventions of 1960, 1971, and 1980, and with the increased militarization of the conflict in the 1990s (Moustakis and Chaudhuri 2005; Yegen 2009). For example, after the 1960 coup d’état, numerous Kurdish towns and villages in the southeast were given Turkish names. Furthermore, following the 1971 intervention, giving non-Turkish names to newborns was banned (Moustakis and Chaudhuri 2005; Yegen 2009). Succeeding the 1980 coup, the military regime announced a prohibition on publications and broadcasting in any language other than Turkish. Kurdish journals and magazines, including New Path, Origin of the Tigris, Tigris-Euphrates, Voice, and World of Peace, were all banned (Gunter 1988). The state also confiscated books, films, and newspapers about Kurdish people and culture (Yegen 2009). Yet, the 1990s
constituted the most violent and repressive period for the Kurdish population; during this period, the state carried out military operations and forced evacuations in the southeast as well as large numbers of mass arrests and extrajudicial executions (Ensaroglu 2013; Yegen 2007).

The Kurds’ responses to the state varied. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Kurdish tribes violently rebelled against the state, only to be met with coercive repression involving “mass arrests, forced mass relocation, widespread torture and executions, and even massacres” (Yavuz and Ozcan 2006). After the political opening of the late 1950s, the silenced Kurdish voices returned, not only among local leaders and religious figures, but also new leftist intellectuals and activists. By the 1970s, they had founded a diverse set of leftist Kurdish movements among which was the PKK.

Abdullah Ocalan founded the PKK in 1978 with the goal of establishing an independent statehood for the Kurdish peoples of Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. Born in Omerli, a village in the Kurdish southeast, Ocalan became politically active with leftist groups during his student years at the University of Ankara, where he studied political science. Upon returning to the southeast, he founded the PKK. The movement defined itself as socialist and national liberationist (Yarkin 2015). It aimed to found a classless society based on the Marxist-Leninist system by challenging the social influence of the traditional Kurdish society and the political power of the Turkish state over Kurdish territory (Yarkin 2015). Therefore, it claimed that its resistance was against not only the Turkish state, but also the traditional structure of Kurdish society (Yavuz and Ozcan 2006). The PKK was able to attract mainly urban and university-educated Kurds because traditional and conservative Kurds rejected the movement’s unconventional values (Yavuz and Ozcan 2006).
The PKK survived the 1980s crackdown on leftists and right wing groups by transferring its headquarters to Syria, arming itself, and adopting guerrilla tactics. In 1984, the movement started its armed campaign against the state, and it began to launch attacks on military sites in the southeastern Kurdish regions as well as the entire country. With time, the PKK improved its recruitment and professionalism. As Pusane notes, “it began to establish a significant level of control in certain provinces of southeastern Turkey with thousands of militants” who collected taxes and enforced their own laws (Pusane 2014, 83). In response to the PKK attacks and expansion in the southeast, the Turkish Armed Forces (Turk Silahlı Kuvvetleri or TSK) launched frequent operations in Turkey’s southeast and in northern Iraq. The early 1990s witnessed an unprecedented intensification of operations in the southeast that included village evacuations, mass detentions, and extrajudicial killings (Tezcur and Gurses 2017). As president (1989–1993), Turgut Ozal made brief efforts toward a political solution. For example, he removed the ban on public use of Kurdish. He also made changes to the martial law that limited the role of the military in responding to the insurgency by placing it under the control of the police and gendarmerie (Pusane 2014). However, these efforts came to an end with his death in 1993, after which the military’s position strengthened. In 1999, Turkey gave Syria an ultimatum to either stop enabling the PKK mobilization or risk a war with Turkey, after which Syria expelled the organization and its leader. The Turkish authorities then captured, tried, and sentenced Ocalan to death, later reduced to life imprisonment due to changes in the criminal law. While in prison, Ocalan declared a unilateral ceasefire and ordered the PKK to withdraw its forces from Turkey and move to its new headquarters in northern Iraq.

Military operations and Ocalan’s arrest did not completely crush the PKK. While many thought the organization was beyond restoration, it underwent a remarkable revival (Pusane
The organization’s administrative structure expanded and diversified under the newly established entity Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK). In addition to the PKK in Turkey, the KCK included sister armed groups, political parties, and new women and youth branches in Syria, Iraq and Iran, in addition to a Kurdish Parliament in Exile, responsible for international diplomatic activities in Europe (Pusane 2015). Within each regional branch, the KCK comprised “both military units and those elements responsible for recruitment activities, ideological training, propaganda efforts, fundraising…[and] its own news sources, publications and television stations” (Pusane 2015, 732). Bacik and Coskun (2011) argue that the KCK cannot be considered a mere political structure; rather, it should be viewed as a nation-building social movement operating at grassroots levels and involved in activities that range from councils, to courts, to educational committees. The military wings of the KCK, particularly the PKK, retained far more influence than all other bodies, including political parties. The organization’s revival enabled the PKK to end its unilateral ceasefire and resume attacks in 2004 (Bacik and Coskun 2011; Yegen 2016). According to Tezcur (2010), this was a result of the AKP’s success and popularity in the southeast, discussed in the following chapter, which threatened the PKK/KCK’s political hegemony over its ethnic constituency.

The PKK, nonetheless, since its founding over four decades ago, has shifted its objectives and strategies. In its early years, the PKK’s main goal, according to the PKK’s manifesto *Kürdistan Devriminin Yolu*, was the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in all Kurdish lands in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, and ending Turkish colonialism through a revolution led by workers and peasants and backed by intellectuals and youths (Bacik and Coskun 2011; Yegen 2016). However, from the mid-1990s on, the PKK stated that it would be open to solutions within a democratic Turkey and began to emphasize the notion of “cohabitation” (Yegen 2016,
Upon his capture in 1999, Ocalan did not speak of an independent Kurdish state but of Kurds and Turks living together in a democratic Turkey. Yet, in the 2000s, Yegen argues, came a new phase for the organization or what he calls the “greatest transformation” (Yegen 2016, 379). While in 1993, the PKK announced its abandoning of the goal of an independent Kurdistan, “in the 2000s it denounced this idea all together and demonized not only the notion of the nation-state, but the state itself” (Yegen 2016, 379). Ocalan advocated for a new vision based on radical democracy in Turkey and the region.

The movement has also shifted between its political and armed strategies, at times utilizing one instead of the other. Among the numerous leftist Kurdish organizations founded in the late 1970s, the PKK was the only one to use armed methods. However, its use and expression of violence has varied. In its initial years, the PKK did not attack the state, but directly targeted agents, informants, and other opponents within the Kurdish community including landlords and tribal chiefs (Pusane 2014; Yegen 2016). After the coup of 1980, the PKK switched to full guerilla warfare tactics. The PKK started to target security forces, as well as “village guards and their families, murdering many of them and other civilians. Later on, the PKK started to target village schools and teachers. Between 1987 and 1989, the PKK burned down 137 schools and murdered 18 teachers. Meanwhile, attacks on the security forces grew in frequency and intensity as well” (Yegen 2016, 373).

In the early 1990s, the PKK introduced a political party alongside its armed wing as part of its diversification and restructuring strategies, founding the People’s Work Party (HEP) in 1990. Since then, there has always been a PKK-backed legal Kurdish party in Turkish politics. The latest of these parties is the Peoples’ Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi or HDP), established in 2012. By the mid-1990s, the PKK started to use “the instrument of
negotiation became an important component of the PKK’s struggle alongside the armed struggle” (Yegen 2016, 373–374). In the following period, during the 2000s, the PKK allowed the armed struggle to take the backseat (Yegen 2016). Ocalan’s declaration terminating the armed path and inaugurating the political other was welcomed by the Kurds. Yegen explains,

> Over the past 15 years a new politics fusing negotiations, street politics and politics in parliament and local governments seems to have been more central to PKK politics than the armed struggle. In the last two local elections held in 2009 and 2014, the PKK-backed legal party won the mayorship in dozens of towns. Today, of the 15 cities with a predominantly Kurdish population, 12 are ruled by mayors from the pro-Kurdish legal party. Similarly, in the last four national elections held in 2007, 2011, June 2015, and November 2015, the same party took several dozen seats in parliament. (Yegen 2016, 380)

In 2015, the PKK made another tactical change. The movement returned to its armed strategy in place of its political one, and also returned to demands of autonomy as opposed to cohabitation; this most recent shift is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Kurds in Turkey adopt diverse political positions. The PKK does not hold political hegemony over Turkish Kurds. Although the PKK and its political wings are the most “effective” Kurdish outlet, they represent only one of three main Kurdish social and political orientations, according to some scholars (Yavuz and Ozcan 2006; Yegen 1999). The second group consists of those Kurds who are well assimilated within the Turkish society. This group belongs to the centre-right and centre-left political parties and
relies on traditional tribal ties for support and votes. This group is “active in business and the bureaucracy…[and] they have not major problems with the state; their main goal is to define and redefine their status in the national society” (Yavuz and Oczan 2006, 106). The third group is made up of conservative Kurds who identify with religion and stress Islamic values over national sentiments, but who “feel Kurdish when confronted with the choice of Turkish identity” (Yavuz and Oczan 2006, 106). This group has tended to support centre and Islamist parties. Finally, there is yet another smaller faction that belongs to the third group that is committed to the establishment of an Islamic–Kurdish state, but through means of violence; Kurdish Hezbollah (KH), a Kurdish militant Islamist organization, is the most prominent example. These groups clash and compete for control over the Kurdish population. For example, both the PKK and the KH have used violence to intimidate and weaken each other and retain dominance over the southeast (Yavuz and Oczan 2006; Yegen 1999).

In interviews with the author, Altan Tan, an HDP member of parliament, and Galip Dalay, a Kurdish intellectual, affirmed that all Kurds, whether nationalist or conservative, have the same demands of government: cultural and educational rights as well as decentralization, allowing them a form of self-government (Dalay 2017; Tan 2017). Tan further suggested that conservatives who traditionally vote for Islamist parties can be more nationalist than leftist Kurds (Tan 2017). For Dalay, the difference lies not in the demands but in the strategy; while the leftist PKK has chosen violent means, the second and third groups (except for KH) have preferred non-violent methods (Dalay 2017).

From 1923 until the 1990s, Turkish governments followed three schemes in their dealings with the Kurds: assimilation, repression, and containment (Yegen 1999, 2008). Successive Turkish governments (with the exception of Ozal’s brief period) have reasserted the
Kemalist exclusivist ideology and approach, denying and criminalizing Kurdish identity. Bulent Ecevit’s government (1999–2002) was the first to introduce some favourable Kurdish constitutional changes with limited amendments to Article 26, easing the restrictions on the use of non-Turkish languages. However, Elif Esen, a government official, stated in an interview that it was the AKP government who came forward with “a new will and position” to resolve the Kurdish issue (Esen 2017). The AKP adopted an inclusive and conciliatory tone, advanced significant Kurdish-focused cultural rights, introduced moderate legal and political rights, invested heavily in the region’s economic development, and importantly, carried out a prolonged dialogue with the PKK, resulting in a promising ceasefire in 2013. Given the republic’s history, these changes were considered to be of momentous weight (Akturk 2011).

**Islamist Governing Approaches toward the Kurds**

The AKP government described its new approach in its first party program in 2002. In the program, the party promoted a new understanding of citizenship that allowed for the recognition of cultural diversity and recognized that economic underdevelopment was not the only cause of the problems experienced by the Kurds. The government demonstrated its conciliatory tone in a historic speech delivered by Prime Minister Erdogan in 2005 in Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish city in the southeast. Erdogan acknowledged the state’s mistakes in dealing with the Kurdish minority and pledged to resolve the issue through “more democracy, more citizenship law, and more prosperity” (Yegen 2015, 5). This was a significant moment for the Kurdish peoples because it was the first time in the republic’s history that a Turkish leader acknowledges the plight of the Kurds and the role of the state in it.

The AKP government pursued its open Kurdish approach through two paths. The first was to introduce and promote Kurdish-focused cultural, legal, economic, and political rights, as
will be discussed in the next section. The second was to pursue negotiations with the PKK to achieve long-lasting peace and PKK disarmament and reintegration. The AKP introduced accommodative Kurdish policies gradually, but a large number of these policies was announced with the initiatives of “the Kurdish opening” (2009) and the “solution process” (2012), which were periods of vigorous negotiations with the PKK. Ultimately, the AKP was successful in reforming Turkey’s anti-ethnic and assimilationist model (Akturk 2011). In an author interview, Cemalettin Hasimi, a Kurdish government official, stated that, “importantly, the AKP was successful in changing the cemented public opinion on the Kurdish issue, which was historically taboo” (Hasimi 2017).

**Cultural Rights**

The first liberalization of Kurdish broadcasting came before the AKP ascended to power. Turkey’s 57th government (1999–2002) amended Articles 9 and 26 to remove the ban on the use of non-Turkish languages in broadcasting. These constitutional changes were part of the broader EU harmonization laws Turkey was to adopt for the EU accession process. Nonetheless, serious restrictions on broadcasting remained, particularly concerning the daily and weekly time permitted for the use of non-Turkish languages in broadcasting. For example, in television, the use of non-Turkish languages was restricted to two hours weekly and 45 minutes maximum daily, while radio broadcasting in non-Turkish languages was limited to four hours weekly and 45 minutes daily. There were also restrictions on subject matter, with coverage only permitted for content pertaining to culture, music and news (Kolcak 2016). In short, when the AKP came to power, the use of Kurdish dialects in broadcasting was still quite limited (Commission of the European Communities 2008; Kolcak 2016).
The AKP eased broadcasting policies for Anatolian languages and dialects gradually but considerably. The AKP enabled private TV channels and radio stations to broadcast in Anatolian languages by enacting Article 14 (2) in July 2003. In June 2006, the restrictive nature of public channels was eased, allowing for longer broadcasting time limits and a wider scope in subject matter that included movies and concerts. With negotiations with the PKK starting in 2007, further liberalization took place. In December 2008, the AKP adopted the Law of Turkish Radio Television Corporation that allowed public TRT to broadcast in any language or dialect for 24 hours a day. TRT-6, later named TRT-Kurdi, started to broadcast 24 hours a day in Kurdish dialects with wider content that included history, literature, cuisine, news, health, religion, and other subjects. By then, both publicly funded TRT and a large number of private media outlets were airing programs in Kurdish (Kolcak 2016)

The removal of restrictions on the use of non-Turkish languages also applied to publications. Kurdish publications thrived and the number of books in Kurdish grew between 2002 and 2003 (Tezcur 2010). Additionally, legal persecution of Kurdish publishers and confiscation of publications substantially decreased. Tezcur indicates that between 1999 and 2004, “the annual number of banned or confiscated publications decreased from 283 to 9; the number of raided political entities, NGOs, publishers, and cultural centers from 266 to 35; and the number of banned political entities, NGOs, and publishers from 169 to 24” (Tezcur 2010, 779). In addition to broadcasting rights, in 2003 the AKP removed restrictions on the use of non-Turkish names, amending the provision placed by the military regime in 1972 prohibiting the use of Kurdish names.

Following the 2011 elections that granted the AKP its third consecutive ruling period, and as part of the “democratization package” in 2014, which involved constitutional
amendments, the AKP government annulled Article 222 of the Turkish Penal Code that criminalized the use of non-Turkish letters (Q, W and X), “thereby liberating all Kurdish personal names including those incorporating non-Turkish letters” (Kolcak 2016, 37). The party also annulled Article 2 (1)(d) of 1949, the Law on Provincial Administration, under which the names of non-Turkish towns and cities had been Turkified. The law had allowed the names of non-Turkish places including villages, neighbourhoods, and streets to be renamed by the Ministry of Interior Affairs. Thereafter, the AKP allowed the restoration of the original place names. The process of active restoration began in the spring of 2014 when the first Kurdish-origin name, Becirman, was restored to the village of Vergili. As part of these reforms, the AKP party further annulled Article 43(3) of 1983, which prohibited the use of non-Turkish languages in political propaganda. In the 2014 local elections and the June and November 2015 national parliamentary elections, Kolcak observes, “all Kurdish dialects and other non-Turkish languages were freely used both by the pro-Kurdish HDP and by other political parties, particularly the AKP…[and] the HDP and the AKP also used Kurdish songs and electoral banners during the campaign periods” (Kolcak 2016, 15).

The AKP also advanced a number of Kurdish-focused policies in education. Although the provision allowing private Kurdish language courses was included in the first EU harmonization law of 2002, its application was difficult due to instructor-related restrictions. In 2003, the AKP increased the availability of private language courses by easing instructor conditions. The most important provisions on education were enacted during the second and third terms of the AKP with the initiatives of the Kurdish opening and solution process. In the fall of 2009, the Higher Education Board allowed both private and publicly funded universities to provide language courses in Kurdish dialects and other Anatolian languages. At the end of the same year, the AKP
government “endorsed the opening of the first research centre providing postgraduate education in Anatolian languages other than Turkish, namely the Living Language Institute” (Kolcak 2016, 41). Following this, a large number of universities started to offer undergraduate and graduate programs in Kurdish dialects, allowing students the option of attaining bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees in Kurdish language and literature. Depending on student demand, public secondary schools also started to provide elective language courses in Kurdish and other Anatolian languages. Outside the academic setting, a number of NGOs and municipalities began offering Kurdish language courses in the early 2010s. The latest of developments in the area of education came in the 2014 “democratization package,” which allowed for education in one’s mother tongue in private schools (Daily Sabah 2014). These cultural changes made way for Kurds to promote and celebrate their culture and illustrated the AKP’s commitment to embracing the cultural diversity of the country.

Civil and Legal Rights

The AKP government also advanced several civil and legal changes favourable to the Kurds. Upon coming to power, the government immediately ended the twenty-year-long emergency rule in the southeast and abolished the State Security Courts that had imprisoned politicians for reasons of “national security.” The party continued to implement such liberalization policies through five harmonization packages between November 2002 and July 2004. In recognition of the legal standing of the European Court of Human Rights, the penal system and law were changed to protect individuals from the state and to improve imprisonment and custody regulations; this included reducing detention periods pending trials, prohibiting torture, and launching investigations on previous torture cases. Following these developments, there was a
continual and considerable decline in violations such as extrajudicial killings, torture, and deaths in custody (Karakaya and Ozhabes 2013).

Moreover, the AKP government was able to amend the Anti-Terror Law and abolish courts authorized by the law, limiting its scope and application. During this period, Erdogan spoke of removing the Anti-Terror law altogether. These changes particularly benefitted the Kurdish minority. As Karakay and Ozhabes explain, “many provisions of the Anti-Terror Law and the Turkish Penal Code, in particular, have subjected certain segments of Turkish society, particularly Kurdish citizens, to long and difficult years within the legal system” (Karakaya and Ozhabes 2013, 5). The party also passed partial exonerations for low-ranking PKK militants imprisoned since the 1990s (Karakaya and Ozhabes 2013).

In addition to benefitting from amendments to the Penal Code and Anti-Terror Law, Kurdish politicians also benefitted from the liberalization of laws concerning political parties. For example, AKP enacted amendments to Article 149 that made it difficult for the Constitutional Court to close down parties (Yazici 2017). Since Kurdish nationalist parties have been repeatedly shut down by court orders, these changes were particularly favourable to them. While the mentioned changes benefitted not only the Kurds, but other non-Kemalist elements of the society, the AKP also enacted specific Kurdish-focused laws. In 2005, it enacted the compensation law to compensate those affected by the 1990s displacement. Later, in the framework of what the AKP called the “democratization package” of 2014, the AKP passed a law enabling legal defense in one’s mother tongue in public institutions. Through these changes the AKP was able to change the state’s repressive laws that had been used to target the Kurdish minority and enact laws to compensate and recognize them as a linguistic and cultural minority with collective needs and rights. These changes demonstrated the AKP’s commitment to a
comprehensive open approach toward the Kurdish minority, changing not only the state’s assimilationist cultural policies, but also the discriminatory and repressive legal ones as well.

**Decentralization at the Local Level and Economic Investment**

The administrative structure of Turkey is tailored after the French system, where a strong central authority administers and guides localities (Tan 2015). In Turkey, the central government is responsible for nearly all decision making and resource distribution. Under the country’s parliamentary system (1923-2018), the president ceremonially appointed the governors of the 81 provinces upon the recommendations of the Ministry of Interior. The provinces are further divided into districts that are each governed by an appointed *kaymakam*, or deputy governor of a provincial district. While the local administrators in provinces for municipalities, metropolitan municipalities, special provincial administrations (SPA), and villages are elected, they, nonetheless, face restrictions in both function and resources. A few political parties had previously tried to reform the relationship between the central government and local administrative bodies, but they failed due to weak coalitions and general political instability. When the AKP came to power with a majority, it promised to reform the organizational and political structure of the country. Decentralization and administrative reforms were outlined in the party’s first program as priorities.

Between 2002 and 2014, the AKP government made efforts to grant local administration more autonomy. AKP’s initiatives for structural reform and decentralization were met with opposition. This was due to “bureaucratic resistance” as well as political and social opposition rooted in fear of threats to the territorial integrity and the unitary nature of the state (Tan 2015,

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57 After 2017, the parliamentary system was replaced by a presidential system in which the president selects and appoints cabinet ministers and governors.
When the AKP came to power, it introduced the Public Administration Reform Law. The goal of the law was to restrict central government authority and responsibilities and transfer them to local administrations. Although the bill failed to pass, the government continued with a gradual approach to decentralization. A series of reform laws was enacted in the first years of the AKP, including the Special Provincial Administration Law, Municipality Law, Metropolitan Municipality Law, and Local Administration Unions Law. The purpose of these laws was to empower province-wide local administrations by enhancing their autonomy, powers and responsibilities, capacity, and cooperation with other local bodies (Tan 2015).

The farthest-reaching law was enacted in late 2012. Act 6360, or the Metropolitan Municipality System, established province-wide metropolitan municipalities, allowing elected mayors to have authority in the entire province, while abolishing the authorities of all other bodies including SPAs, small town municipalities, and villages. The law was implemented in thirty of the most developed and urbanized provinces holding more than 75 percent of Turkey’s population. Act 6360 created a powerful mayorship, and as Kiris and Gul explain, this allowed mayors to become “strong speakers for the rights of the local ethnic groups such as Kurds and Alevi” (Kiris and Gul 2015, 49). Moreover, the new system allowed some of the new province-wide metropolitan municipalities, especially in the eastern and southeastern Anatolian regions, the status of autonomous regional administrations or even state governments (Kiris and Gul 2015). Since decentralization was a long-time demand of the Kurdish people, these AKP initiatives demonstrated the party’s sensitivity to their needs.

The AKP also pursued economic development initiatives in the Kurdish southeast. Upon coming into power, the government intensified infrastructural projects in the region. Until the end of the ceasefire in 2004, in Diyarbakir province alone, the AKP had invested 13.9 billion
Lira (5.4 billion US dollars) in infrastructural investments, agriculture, transportation, and socioeconomic programs including housing, agriculture, education and health (Butler 2015).

The AKP also favoured the Kurds in socioeconomic programs such as Green Cards, cash transfers, and health assistance (Yoruk 2012). During the first decade of the AKP government, social assistance expenditure substantially increased in the Kurdish southeast while noticeably shrinking from all other non-Kurdish regions (Yoruk 2012). During its vigorous 2012 talks with the PKK, the government promised to continue with its commitment to economic development and socio-economic programs. Early in 2015, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu revealed a 10 billion US dollars package for the Southeast Anatolian Project (GAP), a decades-old plan to improve hydroelectric power production, irrigation and agriculture (Butler 2015). By dealing with the cultural, legal, political, administrative, and economic concerns of the Kurdish minority, the AKP illustrated its willingness and commitment to a comprehensive open approach.

**Negotiations with the PKK**

Not only did the AKP government advance the mentioned Kurdish-focused provisions, but it also embarked on another strategy, negotiating with the PKK as part of its holistic open approach. The AKP government engaged in long, albeit interrupted, dialogue with the PKK to finally agree in 2013 to a ceasefire and a roadmap for disarmament and integration. These developments occurred in spite of increased opposition and pressure from the state’s traditional elite, including the military, judiciary, and nationalist and ultranationalist parties like the CHP and MHP (Aknur 2013; Pusane 2015).

Negotiations between the AKP government and the PKK were not continuous, but were marked by frequent interruptions, either due to political pressure on the AKP or violence. The negotiations underwent different phases with each phase denoting increased prospects for
success and producing clearer directions and outcomes. The first phase (2009) entailed secretive talks between the government and the PKK. The second phase (2010-2011) was characterized by an escalation in violence and irregular negotiations. The third phase (2013-2015), known as the solution process, or cozum sureci, and also the peace process, or baris sureci, saw the most notable development in the negotiations and produced the most promising outcome, a negotiated ceasefire in 2013 (Yegen 2015).

In 2007, leading up to the first phase under the direction of the AKP leadership, the National Security Council established contact with the PKK and put the National Intelligence Chief, Emre Taner, in charge of negotiations (Larrabee 2013; Yegen 2015). Several private meetings were held subsequently in September 2008, known as the “Oslo talks” or Oslo meetings” (Yegen 2015). Positive rhetoric from both sides resulted from these meetings. The chief of the general staff indicated that the military backed cultural rights at the individual level and an inclusive understanding of Turkishness that comprises of everyone who has participated in the establishment of the republic. President Gul also asserted the centrality of the “Kurdish question” in Turkish politics and promised good developments regarding the issue (Yegen 2015). On the side of the PKK, the head of the KCK and one of the senior leaders of the PKK, Murat Karayilan, indicated that the PKK “was ready to engage in a dialogue with the final aim of disarmament” (Yegen 2015, 6). In the spirit of this new step, in December 2008 the AKP extended some of its mentioned cultural and educational rights, including publicly funded 24-hour TRT-Kurdi and the founding of Kurdish language and literature departments in universities. In early 2009, the AKP declared these developments the “Kurdish Opening,” an initiative launched as part of the peace resolution that entailed engagement and feedback from the public including media, intellectuals, and NGOs (Ensaroglu 2013).
After the March 2009 local elections in which the pro-PKK Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) won the majority in the southeast, increasing its share of mayorships from 52 in 2004 to 99, the PKK declared a ceasefire and the head of the KCK repeated that the PKK was ready to engage in a dialogue with the final aim of disarmament (Yegen 2015). In August 2009, Ocalan submitted a confidential “road map” that entailed three stages. The first would be the PKK announcement of a permanent ceasefire, while the second stage would involve the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission accompanied with PKK withdrawal, and the third stage would involve the founding of a democratic constitution accompanied by PKK disarmament and integration (ICG 2014; Yegen 2015).

Leaks of Ocalan’s Oslo peace proposal along with the Habur incident, in which Kurdish militants who were allowed by the government to return paraded provocatively in guerrilla uniforms, derailed the talks in late 2009. Pressure on the AKP government from nationalists within the party and particularly the CHP increased. After the “Oslo leaks,” the CHP accused the AKP of “separatism, cowing to the goals of the terrorist PKK, violating the constitution, causing fratricide and/or ethnic polarization between Kurds and Turks, being an agent of foreign states, and even betraying the country” (Cinar 2010, 119). The AKP responded to the pressure by the slowing down of the opening process (Pusane 2014; Yegen 2015).

AKP’s deacceleration of the negotiations was followed by a resumption in violent clashes between the PKK and security forces. On December 7th, the PKK attacked Resadiye, killing seven soldiers, and on December 11th, the Constitutional Court banned the DTP. Nonetheless, Erdogan criticized the closure of the party, stating “Our position against the closure of the DTP is clear…We are against the closure of parties. We think individuals should be punished, not a (party) identity” (Caliskan 2009).
The second phase, between 2010 and 2012, witnessed irregular negotiations and an increase in violence. The AKP government continued to engage in private dialogue with Ocalan and the PKK. During this phase, state officials, along with the PKK, approved a peace roadmap provided by Ocalan and promised to act after the June 2011 elections (Yegen 2015). However, after the 2011 elections, the PKK resumed its guerrilla warfare, attacking the city of Silvan and killing 13 soldiers, because it accused the government of not following through with the Oslo meetings and of lack of seriousness (Pusane 2014). Clashes between the Turkish armed forces and the PKK intensified, with each vowing to defeat the other. Subsequently, 2012 turned to be the most violent year in fighting between the PKK and the Turkish army since the late 1990s, with hundreds of deaths and mass arrests, including of senior Kurdish politicians (Yegen 2015).

The AKP government resumed talks with the PKK in late 2012. This time, not only did the AKP pursue this round of talks with vigour, but it also did so publicly (Pusane 2014; Yegen 2015). The talks took place between, on the one side, Ocalan, PKK military leaders in the Qandil mountains, and HDP deputies and the Turkish government represented by the AKP on the other (Larrabee 2013; Pusane 2014; Yegen 2015). In late 2012, Erdogan stated on television that a new process was on the way, and on February 2013, he stated that he was ready to take all the political risks to achieve peace (Daloglu 2013; Yegen 2015).

It was against this background that, the government passed the mentioned Metropolitan Municipality System, in a show of good will in late 2012. Furthermore, in early 2013, the government enacted Article 202, entitled “Defense in Native Language,” which allowed for a defense in one’s mother tongue in legal institutions (Kurban 2014). Additionally, during the

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58 During the negotiations, HDP members visited Ocalan in Imrali prison and the PKK headquarters in Qandil regularly to facilitate communication between the two.
same period, the government advanced the fourth judicial reform package amending the Anti-Terror Law and Turkish Penal Code. This was meant to prevent some of the abusive prosecutions for “Committing a crime in the name of a terrorist organization” which have included individuals being prosecuted and convicted for legitimate expressions [of] dissenting opinions in particularly in relation to Kurdish rights and politics through speeches, participation at demonstrations and association with certain recognized political groups and organizations. (Amnesty International 2013)

With negotiations and government Kurdish-focused policies continuing, the PKK declared a ceasefire in fulfillment of the roadmap. In a message delivered to crowds on Newroz (Kurdish New Year) in 2013, Ocalan called for a ceasefire and urged PKK fighters to withdraw from Turkey and move to the organization’s headquarters in northern Iraq. The paramilitary leader of the PKK, Murat Karayilan, declared that he “very strongly” supported Ocalan’s move. With Erdogan welcoming the move, Zubeyir Aydar, one of the most influential figures in the PKK and KCK, stated that “Erdogan is a chance for peace” on March 2013 (Yetkin 2013). As Figure 8 demonstrates, violence had reached its lowest point in 2013, ushering in a post-conflict era for Turkey.
With the ceasefire established, the government continued with negotiations to achieve PKK disarmament and reintegration. Fulfilling Ocalan’s proposal, the government established the Council of Wise Persons. Composed of independent intellectuals, academics, NGO leaders, and artists, the council was tasked with setting up a commission in parliament to discuss the resolution in early April 2013. Although the commission was boycotted by the CHP and MHP, it was an important step as it signified the legality of the negotiations process. In the same month, Prime Minister Erdogan met for the first time with the Wise Persons’ Delegation and reiterated the government’s commitment to the delegation’s consultation (Hurriyet 2013). The AKP government also released 200 KCK suspects on April 2013 and almost all KCK convicts by the end of 2014. Furthermore, during the summer of 2013, the government allowed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan to transfer to a larger room in Imrali Prison as had been requested by PKK leaders (Anadolu News 2013; Yegen 2015).

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**Figure 8. Battle related deaths of Kurdish-state conflict**

In the first half of 2014, the AKP government advanced a number of amendments and laws to facilitate and legalize the peace process. Despite heavy criticism by opposition parties, the party amended the law of the National Intelligence Organization (MIT), giving it authority to negotiate with “terrorist organizations” and legitimatizing the Oslo talks (*Regional Chronicle* 2014). In response to Ocalan’s demand to provide the resolution with a legal basis, in June 2014 the General Assembly also accepted and passed into law the “Draft Law on the Termination of Terror and Strengthening of Social Integration,” also known as the Framework Law. This law extended the authority to contact “terrorists” to government and bureaucratic officials, and it allowed them to take all the necessary military, political, and legal steps to ensure disarmament, end terrorism, and achieve social integration. Kurdish nationalist parties had called for such a bill for a long time, mainly to prevent the risk of those involved in the talks being persecuted if the political atmosphere in Turkey was to turn against the peace process in the future. The law would protect anyone involved in the talks from legal action being taken against them. Ocalan described the enactment of the law in parliament as “a historic development” (Coskun 2015; *Hurriyet* 2014; Yegen 2015).

It was in this atmosphere that the “democratization package”, discussed earlier, was accepted by the General Assembly of Parliament in March 2014. The package included additional wide-ranging policies favourable to the Kurds. In addition to many of the mentioned cultural policies, including removing the ban on Kurdish names and allowing mother-tongue education in private schools, the package included laws that increased punishments for hate crimes, including those committed due to religious, linguistic, racial, gender or political discrimination. The package also granted treasury funds to parties that achieve more than three percent of the vote and legalized co-chairing political parties. These changes were particularly
important for the Kurdish political parties as they had never (until the June 2015 elections) passed the electoral threshold that would qualify them for political representation or funds. The legalization of co-chairing was also welcomed by the pro-Kurdish HDP, the only party with co-chairs. Finally, as part of the package, the Specially Authorized Courts and other courts authorized by anti-terror laws were abolished and restrictions were put into place to limit lengthy detentions to five years (Cengiz 2013; Hurriyet 2014). Cengiz (2013) argues that the package “sent a message to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the Kurdish movement by saying that new reforms will follow as long as politics are used as a means of solving issues.”

When Ahmet Davutoglu became AKP chairperson and prime minister in August 2014, he stressed his commitment to the solution process, along with a determination to take all the necessary steps to ensure its success and to make the solution process a priority in his new government (Hurriyet 2015). Erdogan, who was elected president, stated that he would be closely involved in the solution process during his term as president (Yegen 2015).

While events in neighbouring Syria in late 2014 seemed to threaten the progress of the peace process, Yegen (2015) argues that it was still on the way. In October 2014, the Kurdish city of Kobane in northeast Syria was placed under siege by the Islamic State. Kurdish protesters in Turkey against the government’s passivity clashed with security forces, leading to the death of at least 19 civilians. Nevertheless, a few weeks following the October events, the PKK and the government declared the need for a renewal of the peace process (Yegen 2015). According to Yegen (2015), official statements and cooperation between the PKK and the Turkish forces in Syria demonstrated that the solution process was continuing. In January 2015, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu visited Diyarbakir, and after greeting the crowds in Kurdish, he promised the continuation of the peace process, stating, “Our president and I promise on the behalf of our
nation that this process will achieve success whatever happens” (Hurriyet 2015). He also reaffirmed his hopes for an eternal brotherhood between the diverse groups of the nation (Hurriyet 2015).

In response to Kurdish criticism of the state’s non-response to the Kobane situation, the AKP government allowed Turkish borders to be used for the transfer of heavy weaponry and Peshmerga (the military force of the Kurdistan Regional Government) to the besieged city. Furthermore, in February 2015, the Turkish Armed Forces carried out its first operation in Syria (the Shah Euphrates Operation) via Kobane, with cooperation from the People’s Protection Units (Yekineyen Parastina Gel or YPG), the Syrian wing of the PKK (The Guardian 2015). Hasip Kaplan, MP for the HDP, noted, “Turkish forces and the YPG, which have been at war for the past 30 years, conducted a joint operation for the first time. This is a milestone” (The Guardian 2015). By Newroz in 2015, in addition to enacting the Framework Law that legalized the peace process, the government organized an AKP–HDP public hearing to discuss Ocalan’s peace map draft, and agreed to a third-party monitoring force to track the process. According to Yegen, even “more importantly, [the AKP] was content with the PKK’s decision to cease the armed struggle against Turkey only” while continuing operations elsewhere in the region (Yegen 2015, 13). This, Yegen describes, “had given the impression that the process was on its way and could be concluded after the elections in June” (Yegen 2015, 13).

Change in Approach toward the Kurds: From Open to Closed

By the summer of 2015, the conflict solution process had begun to fizzle. There was a fundamental shift in the AKP’s approach toward the Kurdish minority (Akbaba 2017). After spring of 2015, the AKP government began to adopt an exclusionary and denialist tone, halt the advancement of Kurdish-focused cultural policies, and reverse some of the laws that provided
protection for Kurdish politicians involved in the peace process. The AKP government also terminated dialogue with the PKK and returned to military strategies instead. Akyol (2016) observes that the government went from “reforms for all Kurds and negotiations with the Kurdish militants” to following a nationalist path that “almost all Turkish governments have pursued.”

In March of 2015, Erdogan voiced opposition and dismissed any connection to the peace process. In a number of comments, he went as far as to deny the existence of a Kurdish problem, the peace process, and any knowledge of the talks (Aslan 2017). The party did not mention the solution process in its Election Declaration’s first copies preceding the 2015 June parliamentary elections. Furthermore, in his 2015 speech in Diyarbakir, Erdogan did not mention the PKK or the peace process (Dalay 2017). In addition to the anti-peace process stance, the party’s rhetoric also turned increasingly nationalist, with extensive use of the slogan “one nation, one state, one flag, one language” in their election campaigns and rallies. Furthermore, Erdogan indicated that “the election results on June 8 will signify not the end of the AKP government but rather of the Kurdish initiative” (Yavuz and Ozcan 2015, 26).

In an interview for this research with Yunus Akbaba, government advisor on the Kurdish solution process during the last round of talks (2012 – 2015), he explained that the AKP’s change of approach was internalized within the government as the political figures and advisors involved in the peace negotiations were sidelined and replaced with nationalist voices from within the AKP (Akbaba 2017). As Akyol (2016) further noted, “those who call for renewed peace talks with the PKK are condemned by the same AKP crowd for being ‘traitors’— as they themselves were branded by the opposition parties during the peace process.” A number of figures involved in the peace talks have declined interviews with the researcher due to presumed
“embarrassments” surrounding the outcomes of the process, including Ahmet Davutoglu, who was the prime minister during the solution process (Aktay 2017).

In addition to the increasingly nationalist position, the government ended negotiations with the PKK definitively. Akbaba noted that in contrast to the first rounds of dialogue that were off and on, the ending of the latest round of negotiations was absolute (Akbaba 2017). Starting in April of 2015, the government prevented any meetings with Ocalan at Imrali prison, which were previously a regular occurrence during the negotiations. Subsequently, the government used military means to end the conflict and cut ties with the PKK, leading to a notable increase in violence, as Figure 8 shows. In response to PKK attacks in late July 2015, the military responded with land and air offensives in the southeast, northern Syria, and northern Iraq. In October 2017, the Turkish army launched its first land operation in northern Iraq in nine years against the Kurds (Hurriyet 2017). The renewed violence differed from previous rounds of violence in that it extended to urban areas, causing a tremendous amount of damage to infrastructure including schools and hospitals. In one report, the International Crisis Group stated, “Violence peaked between February and May 2016 when fighting erupted in some urban districts of south-east Turkey for the first time in the conflict’s 33-year history” (ICG 2016). By 2017, the conflict had caused the deaths of over 3,000 and the displacement of more than 500,000. The post-2015 violence has been described to be one of the most violent episodes of the Turkish-state conflict since it began in 1984 (ICG 2016).

59 The PKK attacks were the first instances of violence since the ceasefire. The attacks killed three Turkish policemen in the provinces of Adiyaman and Sanliurfa.
The change in position and violence levels was accompanied by a reversal in legal rights and a crackdown on Kurdish mobilization. As the war shifted between rural and urban regions, the government imposed curfews on dozens of villages in the Kurdish southeast and was accused of using a heavy-handed and disproportionate amount of force against civilians in the curfew zones (Amnesty International 2016). Furthermore, the government closed down multiple media outlets. In late 2015, IMC TV, known for its Kurdish and liberal content, was closed down for alleged spreading of “terrorist propaganda.” Fifteen more newspapers, wires, and magazines that reported from the Kurdish southeast were also closed. In late 2016, the Turkish government issued two decrees (Nos. 675 and 676) shutting down fifteen Kurdish media outlets, eleven newspapers, two news agencies, and three magazines (The Guardian 2016).

In May 2016, the Turkish Grand National Assembly lifted the immunity of its members from persecution. While this impacted some of the CHP, MHP, and AKP
politicians, the clear target was the Kurdish HDP. Almost all of its MPs – 50 out of 59 – were stripped of their parliamentary immunity (Al-Jazeera 2016). In November 2016, a court decision was issued to place seven members of the HDP in pretrial detention, among them party leaders Selahettin Demirtas, Figen Yuksekdağ and Sirri Sureyya Onder. They were accused of a variety of terrorist-related crimes, ranging from spreading terrorist propaganda to being members of the PKK (HRW 2016). One month earlier, the co-mayors of the largest Kurdish city of Diyarbakir, Gultan Kisanak and Firat Anlı, were arrested for their alleged links to terrorism and the PKK and replaced by a government trustee.

According to Ali Aslan, member of the progovernment think tank SETA and Turkish academic, the AKP removed tens of municipal officials from their posts in the southeast and appointed new ones in an effort to tighten its grip on the region, reversing its policy that entailed the devolution of power to the municipal governments (Aslan 2017). The crackdown and arrests were broad enough to target not only Kurdish politicians, officials, and mayors, but also members of news outlets, schools, municipalities, think tanks and even charities (HRW 2016). Since the end of the ceasefire in July 2015, thousands of Kurdish politicians, academics, and civilians have been imprisoned on terror-related charges (Gurbuz 2017). Akyol (2016) argues that with its use of military force to deal with the conflict as well as its arrests of Kurdish politicians, the AKP government “took another step in its latter-day strategy on the ‘Kurdish question’: to kill all terrorists and arrest all their political supporters.”

**Conclusion**

In sum, the AKP government has pursued two distinct approaches to its dealings with the Kurdish minority. The first (2002–2015) was marked by a positive and conciliatory tone, the advancement of cultural, legal, economic, and political rights favourable to the Kurds, and a
commitment to resolving the Kurdish conflict through dialogue coupled with a reduction in violence. The second approach, which began in 2015, has been marked by a hostile and nationalist position, the halting of Kurdish-focused cultural policies, the reversal of legal and political rights, and a pursuit of military means to end the conflict. The question that arises, then, is what explains the diachronic variation in the government’s approaches to the Kurdish minority? Chapter 7 will address this question.
Chapter 7

Explaining the Variation in Turkish Islamists’ Approaches to Minorities:

Strategic Calculations and Regional Dynamics

*One can observe that their positions [the AKP] are not uniform, and tactical calculations seem to be a major concern* (Akdag 2015, 8).

The Islamist government’s shift in approach toward the Kurds begs the question: why did ruling Islamists change their approach toward the Kurdish minority from open to closed? Similar to that of Sudan’s government, the change in Turkey cannot be accounted for using culturally-based explanations. If Turkey’s governing Islamists were guided primarily by Islamist ideology and religious affiliation, we would expect a continuation of their open approach toward the Muslim Kurdish minority. However, this did not happen, and thus this reversal requires a different explanation. This chapter demonstrates that the AKP’s shift in approach toward the Kurdish minority was an outcome of strategic calculations to gain and consolidate power. The AKP sought to form an alliance with the Kurdish minority to weaken Kemalist state institutions, offering open policies in exchange for their support (Akdag 2015; Ozpek and Mutluer 2016). The AKP began to change its approach from open to closed once this alliance was no longer tenable, as a result of the PKK and HDP’s opposition to allying with the AKP. Leading up to the June 2015 elections, the HDP became opposed to an alliance with the AKP government because it would conflict with its own electoral gains. More importantly, the PKK withdrew its commitment to an AKP alliance due to renewed external support that increased its strategic capacity and bargaining power, leading it to demand autonomy and end the ceasefire after the June 2015 elections. The AKP then aligned with the ultranationalists to compensate for the lost Kurdish support and cemented its changed approach toward the Kurdish minority.
The first section of this chapter discusses the AKP’s strategic calculations, to which alliance building was central. This section begins with a discussion of the AKP’s need for Kurdish voters’ support in order to protect and consolidate its power through constitutional amendments geared at weakening Kemalist institutions. Next, it turns to discuss how upon the AKP’s loss of its Gulen and liberal supporters, the party accelerated its open-Kurdish agenda and negotiations with the PKK in an effort to build a formal parliamentary alliance with the organization’s political branch, the HDP. The chapter then examines the failure of this alliance. Essentially, because of the limited pool of voters, the HDP stood to electorally gain more by forgoing the alliance. Next, the chapter discusses the new alliance the AKP forged with the ultranationalist MHP to pass its constitutional amendments. The next section of the chapter examines the external dynamics that influenced the PKK’s commitment to the peace process and an alliance with the AKP, leading it to end the ceasefire and make declarations of self-government. Ultimately, its increased strategic capacity as well as the momentous territorial and political gains that its affiliate organization, the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat or PYD), was able to make in neighbouring Syria led the PKK to reassess its commitment to the much less rewarding political process in Turkey. While the AKP began to change its approach toward the Kurdish minority once the alliance with the HDP seemed untenable, it fully adopted a closed approach as a result of the PKK’s resumed attacks and its new alliance with the ultranationalists.

Internal Alliances and Strategic Calculus

When the Islamist-rooted AKP came to power, it sought the support of the Kurdish minority due to their positionality in the Kemalist secular state, as both “religious people and Kurds have always been the two others of Kemalism or the excluded groups…It was a ‘logical’ alliance”
(Aslan 2017). Nonetheless, the AKP’s pursuit of the Kurdish population’s support was not only an outcome of their shared exclusion from the republic. It was, most importantly, a result of the party’s electoral calculations (Akdag 2015). The AKP needed Kurdish votes to achieve the majority needed to change a disadvantageous institutional setting to its favour through constitutional amendments. With estimates ranging from 15 to 20 percent of the country’s population and territorial concentration in the southeast, the Kurdish minority constitutes an electorally significant group. Additionally, with an electoral law that grants the southeast 65 deputies in parliament, parties that are strong in the region are in a particularly advantageous electoral position (Akdag 2015, 137).

Through constitutional referendums, the AKP sought to protect its power by deconstructing and demilitarizing what it viewed as the deep state institutions (Pusane 2016; Yavuz and Oczan 2015). These included elements of the military and judicial establishments strongly committed to the Kemalist, nationalist, secular, and statist ideology. The AKP considered these elements to be a threat to its power because of their history of interference through coups or party closure orders, and due to their direct confrontations with the party itself since it assumed power (Yavuz and Oczan 2015).

For example, when the AKP was elected into power, the military immediately issued a warning to the party to abstain from any violations against the state’s secularism and territorial integrity. Also, in 2007, the military issued an e-memorandum cautioning against the candidacy of Abdullah Gul for president because his spouse wore a headscarf, which was seen as an affront to the country’s secularist principles. In the memorandum, the military stated that “it will display its attitude and action openly and clearly whenever it is necessary” to protect secularism, and that “their loyalty to this determination is absolute” (Reuters 2007). The judiciary also challenged the
AKP’s government with the Constitutional Court regularly obstructing AKP legislation. In an interview, AKP deputy chairman and spokesperson Yasin Aktay stated that there were many attempts to oust the party through “judicial coups” (Aktay 2017). The most notable closure case occurred in 2008 when the party was accused of plotting to make the country an Islamic state (Tekin and Guney 2015). During that year, in a rare unanimous vote, the Constitutional Court’s eleven judges accepted the indictment of the chief prosecutor against the AKP for violating the principle of separation of religion and state. The chief prosecutor cited speeches and actions by AKP members as evidence, requesting the party’s closure and banning seventy-one of its politicians, including Prime Minister Erdogan and President Gul. The party survived the closure case by one vote (The Guardian 2008).

The AKP pursued an open approach toward Kurds to acquire the parliamentary majority needed to bring about the institutional changes that would empower it vis-à-vis the Kemalist establishment. As a result of these policies, it succeeded in gaining the Kurdish votes needed. Gurbuz (2017) explains, “As Prime Minister from 2003 to 2014, Recep Tayyip Erdogan was a powerful player for Kurdish votes in southeast Turkey, receiving more Kurdish votes than the pro-Kurdish HDP in the 2007 elections.” The Kurds supported Erdogan because of his party’s promotion of accommodative Kurdish rights and its stance against the Kemalist nationalist state institutions, which were repressive toward the minority. Additionally, they supported the AKP instead of Kurdish nationalists because of the party’s likelihood to bring about change, as until that point, none of the Kurdish nationalist parties had been successful in entering parliament to challenge the state’s nationalist institutions.

Indeed, the Kurdish southeast was highly receptive to the AKP’s Kurdish policies, as Akdag (2015) shows using special modeling that helps map voter preferences and electoral
patterns in the highly populated Kurdish southeast. In the 2007 general elections, held after Erdogan’s historic speech in 2005 and the advancement of Kurdish-focused cultural rights, Kurdish votes for the AKP increased significantly in all Kurdish provinces relative to the 2002 general elections. Whereas in 2002 the AKP party received 19.9 percent of the vote from the Kurdish-majority provinces in the southeast, in 2007 it received 48.8 percent. Furthermore, in some provinces such as Hakari and Siirt, AKP support nearly tripled from the 2002 to the 2007 elections (Alvarez-Rivera 2018; Yeni Safak 2018).

The AKP’s proposed referenda were also largely supported by the Kurdish minority. In the 2007 referendum, Kurdish-majority provinces voted overwhelmingly for the yes campaign as indicated in Table 10, with a voter turnout of 71.2 percent, higher than the national average at 67.4. And although fewer Kurds participated in the 2010 referendum compared to the 2007 referendum with a 47.7 percent turnout rate in the Kurdish-majority provinces – because some Kurds argued that the changes did not challenge the mono-ethnic nature of the state sufficiently – those who did cast a ballot did so overwhelmingly in favour of the changes (Herzog 2010; Yeni Safak 2018).

Table 10. Share of “Yes” votes in percentage for the constitutional referendums in 2007 and 2010 in the Kurdish-dominated provinces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>10/2007 Referendum</th>
<th>9/2010 Referendum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hakkari 89.47</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>94.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirnak 79.03</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>89.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Siirt 78.78</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>95.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Batman 76.81</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>94.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bingol 76.63</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table continued below)
The provinces are ordered according to the size of the Kurdish population, shown in the percentage number under the province. The AKP’s successful electoral performance in the Kurdish-majority southeast in the 2002 general elections was imperative to the party’s ability to achieve the parliamentary majority needed to carry out constitutional changes. In order to modify the constitution, the party needed to secure 330 seats through a referendum or 367 seats through parliamentary procedures. In 2002, the AKP gained 45 seats from the Kurdish-dominated provinces, giving it a total of 365 seats. The AKP, with the support of the Motherland Party, achieved the 367 seats needed to pass constitutional amendments through parliament. Thus, without seats gained from the Kurdish-majority provinces, the AKP would have fallen short of the necessary 367 seats and

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60 During the 2002 elections, the AKP party gained only about 20 percent of the votes from the Kurdish-majority provinces, however, it attained the majority of seats allocated to the region. This was an outcome of the electoral PR system and the 10 percent threshold that benefits larger parties. While this demonstrates that in 2002, the party’s performance in the region was not an outcome of support from its Kurdish population, it still demonstrates why the party sought to secure this support in future elections.

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would not have been able to obtain parliamentary approval for its constitutional amendments.

When the changes were vetoed by the then president, forcing a referendum in 2007, the Kurdish southeast voted overwhelmingly for their passing, accounting for 10.5 percent of the yes votes and allowing it to pass with an overall support of 69.1 percent of the voters (Herzog 2010; Yeni Safak 2018).

The AKP proposed the 2007 constitutional amendments in response to the CHP and the Constitutional Court’s hindering of the party’s election of its presidential candidate, Abdullah Gul. The amendments were focused on electoral reform and included the election of the president by popular vote instead of parliamentary vote and the reduction of the quorum of lawmakers needed for parliamentary decisions. The CHP boycotted the 2007 parliamentary vote for presidential election and then called on the Constitutional Court to invalidate it because two thirds of the quorum were not present, which it did. The military also weighed in on the crisis through its e-memorandum backing the Kemalist position. The crisis led to snap elections, after which the AKP was able to elect Gul for president, as the other parties that had entered parliament, the MHP and DSP (Democratic Left Party), did not boycott the vote, enabling the necessary quorum (Balkir 2007; Yegen 2017). Although the AKP succeeded in getting its president elected, it still went ahead with the electoral reforms, including the election of the president by popular vote and reducing the quorum to prevent the CHP from hindering future AKP-initiated parliamentary decisions.

Kurdish support for the party during the 2007 elections and 2010 referendum proved even more critical for the AKP’s consolidation of political authority. This is because the 2010 referendum dealt with judicial reforms and limiting the military’s powers. In the 2007 elections, the AKP gained 48.8 percent of the votes from the Kurdish-majority provinces, translating to 44
seats from the region. The party secured a total of 341 seats in the elections, which allowed it to achieve the three-fifths majority needed to independently put the 2010 constitutional amendments to a referendum. Without the seats from the Kurdish-majority in the southeast, the party would have fallen short of the 330-seat majority needed. The AKP also could not count on support from the opposition, like it did when passing the 2007 amendments, because the only other parties in parliament, namely the CHP and MHP, opposed the constitutional amendments. Moreover, support from independents, who received only 25 seats, was not sufficient without the seats won in the southeast. Kurdish support for the 2010 referendums was also important. The southeast accounted for 8.3 percent of the yes votes, which were needed to hone the credibility of the referendum that passed with only 57.9 percent (Yeni Safak 2018).

As a result of the parliamentary majority it acquired in the 2007 elections, the AKP was able to advance constitutional amendments to curb the influence of the Kemalist institutions, namely that of the military and judiciary. While the party had already stripped some of the military’s powers through harmonization packages between 2002 and 2004, the changes in 2010 were critical because they were aimed at protecting the AKP government from future coups. To discourage future coup plotting, the AKP annulled Article 15, which had given coup leaders immunity from persecution. Consequently, trials of the 1980 and 1997 coup suspects began. These trials decreased the military’s credibility and public support, particularly with the publicizing of its human rights violations (Aknur 2013; Kalaycioglu 2012; Taspinar 2012). The government also started a series of separate trials against suspects of coup plots to overthrow it.

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61 Through the harmonization packages, the government ensured the MGK and its General Secretariat’s roles were limited to consultation; abolished the State Security Courts that tried civilians in military courts; removed military representatives from the Council of Higher Education (YOK) and the High Audio-Visual Board (RTUK – Radio and Television High Council); and placed military expenditure under civilian oversight (Aknur 2013; Cizre 2005).
among the most notable of which were the Ergenekon and Bayloz trials (Taspinar 2011; Yavuz and Koc 2016).62 As a result of these trials, by early 2012, “half of all Turkish admirals and one out of ten active-duty generals were in jail for plotting against the government” (Taspinar 2011).

Additionally, the AKP amendments placed crimes against state security and crimes of terror under the authority of bodies within the ministry of interior instead of the TSK (Taspinar 2011). State security and terror related crimes had been a major justification for the military’s intervention in the country’s politics. Taspinar (2011) states that “for a country that had experienced three military coups and constant military meddling for almost a century,” the AKP-led changes constituted a colossal “paradigm shift” in military–civilian relations.63 Ultimately, the AKP steered a massive change in civilian–military relations in Turkey, subordinating the military to civilian rule for the first time since the republic’s establishment and ending decades of so-called “military-democracy” (Aknur 2013; Pusane 2014).

The 2010 constitutional amendments also allowed the AKP to overhaul the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), an entity responsible for administering the judiciary. The constitutional changes allowed the president and parliament to have more input in the appointments of senior judges and prosecutors (Yazici 2017).64 Furthermore, the government’s changes to Articles 84 and 149 permitted deputies of banned

62 Ergenekon is legally known as the “case against the infringement of article 313 of the Turkish Penal Code: establishment of criminal organization.” Ergenekon is a suspected secretive secularist organization that included military officers, opposition lawmakers, academics, businessmen, civil society representatives and journalists. Its members were accused of plotting to overthrow the AKP government through the creation of chaos and terrorism (Taspinar 2011; Yavuz and Koc 2016).
63 The AKP government continued its neutralization of the military after its historic victory in 2011. In 2013, the AKP advanced the amendment of the Turkish Armed Forces Internal Service Law to Article 35, which limited the scope of the armed forces to foreign threats, leaving internal matters to civilian governments.
64 The membership of the Constitutional Court was expanded from eleven to fifteen in Article 146; previously, all eleven members were to be appointed by the president. The changes stipulated that three members be elected by parliament and twelve by the president. The HSYK, which manages the Turkish judiciary and makes decisions regarding the appointment, promotion, and expulsion of personnel within the judiciary, was also expanded from seven to thirteen, to be elected by the president and parliament.
parties to keep their seats until their terms ended and made it more difficult for the Constitutional Court to shut down parties by increasing the decisional quorum for closure rulings (Yazici 2017). This was particularly important to the party in light of the court’s history of shutting down and banning Islamist parties.

The AKP hoped for Kurdish support with the next set of constitutional amendments as well. The 2017 amendments were to create a presidential system, thereby considerably strengthening the executive branch. The changes included abolishing the prime minister’s position and empowering presidents to appoint and dismiss cabinet ministers. One possible consequence was that presidents could control the legislature if their party won a majority, since the rules allowed them to also serve as heads of a political party. The amendments also abolished the parliament’s right to interpellation. Furthermore, the changes gave presidents broader authority over the Council of Judges and Prosecutors, enabling them to appoint four out of the thirteen members (Bora 2017; Yegen 2017). Since the AKP had dominated parliamentary and presidential elections since 2002, critics argued that the amendments were sought to consolidate the party’s powers (Kirisci and Toygur 2019).

The AKP’s pursuit of support from Kurdish voters and politicians gathered momentum as a result of the party’s loss of two important constituencies after 2011, namely liberal and Gulen supporters. The loss of the liberal vote was an outcome of what critics saw as the AKP’s democratic failings. During its first decade in power, the party took notable steps consistent with the liberal worldview on Turkey’s democracy, including limiting military intervention in civilian politics and advancing significant human and minority rights provisions. However, by its second decade in power, the AKP was engaging in activities with serious democratic shortcomings that

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65 Seven would be appointed by parliament in addition to the Minister of Justice and Ministry Undersecretary.
included the repression of critics, particularly journalists and media personnel. For instance, as of 2012, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported that Turkey was imprisoning more journalists than any other country (Ognianova 2013). In 2012 alone, the government imprisoned a record high of 232 journalists, the highest since the 1990s (Murphy 2013). The government also severely restricted internet freedom, drawing criticism from the European Commission and Human Rights Watch, among others. In 2012, the government blocked 22,536 websites, including international websites such as YouTube (HRW 2012). In 2013, the AKP government further distanced liberal voters with its violent response to the Gezi protests. These began as protests against a development project and turned into general protests against the government’s infringement on the freedoms of expression, press, and assembly, as well as its alleged encroachments on secular traditions. The AKP government’s implication in corruption scandals in the same year further jeopardized its democratic creditability. By the mid-2010s, organizations monitoring the quality of democracy around the world, such as the Freedom House, Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), and the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index, all recognized that Turkey had experienced a regime change and could no longer be labeled a free democracy (EIU 2014; Puddington 2013; V-Dem 2019).

More devastating for the AKP than the loss of its liberal votes was the loss of one of its strongest allies, the Gulen movement. The Gulen movement was once one of Turkey’s strongest and most influential forces and led hundreds of thousands of members and millions of followers. Gulenists’ extensive social and economic networks as well as their penetration of state institutions, particularly the police force, judiciary, and intelligence, made them a valuable ally to the AKP (Aydintasbas 2016; Balci 2017; Yavuz 1999). The movement provided valuable support for the AKP through mobilizing its members in the government in addition to extensive
grassroots networks. In exchange, the AKP government granted Gulenists more representation in government institutions and agencies (Aydintasbas 2016; Balci 2017; Yavuz 1999).

A rift occurred between the party and the Gulen movement in 2011, as a result of insufficient power-sharing and opposition to the AKP’s Kurdish opening (Balchi 2017; Yavuz and Koc 2016). Concerning power-sharing, in addition to excluding their members from the party’s list in the 2011 parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Erdogan denied the movement its demands for appointments in the cabinet and the High Military Council (Balchi 2017; Yavuz and Koc 2016). Erdogan argued that his government had already granted Gulenists sufficient representation in the military, judiciary, and ministries of interior and education, and that they were asking for too much (Balchi 2017; Yavuz and Koc 2016). Gulenists also opposed the AKP’s open approach toward the Kurds. The movement’s opposition derived from its nationalist orientation, which had traditionally advocated for the assimilation of ethnic Kurds. According to a number of interviewees, the movement attempted to foil the peace processes several times (Aslan 2017; Balchi 2017; Dalay 2017).

The rift culminated into an open confrontation, with the government accusing Gulen of fabricating the 2013 corruption scandals. The AKP accused the movement of using its sympathizers in the police and judiciary to set up and arrest the party’s top officials to stage a “judicial coup” (Butler and Tattersall 2014). El-Kazaz observes that “the corruption probe was the final showdown that sealed a rift that had been developing between the AKP and the Gulen

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66 For instance, in 2012, Gulenists within the police force arrested Hakan Fidan, the head of National Intelligence, for directly engaging in talks with the PKK at the time (Dalay 2014). Ali Balchi also noted in an interview with the author in Turkey in May 2017 that Gulenists were also later accused of leaking the Oslo talks that stalled the peace process, and were suspected to be behind the murders of three PKK affiliates in France during the peace solution process.
for over a year, which ended one of the most consequential alliances in Turkey’s modern history (El-Kazaz 2015, 2).

Due to the loss of its liberal and Gulenist supporters, the AKP was at risk of failing to reach the two-fifths parliamentary majority needed in the forthcoming 2015 general elections to pass the constitutional amendments geared at strengthening the executive. Thus, the government needed to establish alternative alliances, leading it to pursue negotiations with the PKK and Kurdish nationalist politicians. This alliance would compensate for the loss of liberal and Gulen support and if successful at ending the decades-old conflict and disarming the PKK, it would constitute a momentous win for the AKP, increasing its popularity among Kurds, nationalists and secularists. Therefore, beginning in 2012, the government declared the solution process, or cozum sureci, advanced broader accommodative Kurdish cultural, legal, and political policies, and engaged in vigorous dialogues with the PKK. The AKP’s initiative was well-received in the southeast, with hundreds of thousands celebrating the announcement of the ceasefire during Nevroz in 2013.

An Unstable Alliance: The AKP and HDP

The AKP’s objective was to form a formal parliamentary coalition with the political branch of the PKK, the HDP, to reach the majority needed to pass the next set of constitutional changes and create a presidential system. The party also wanted to secure Kurdish votes in case the proposed changes were put to a referendum. However, the alliance between the AKP and HDP was fragile since the two parties competed over a limited pool of voters (Akdag 2016; Tan 2017). Furthermore, the HDP stood to gain more votes from the liberals and leftists across the country by distancing itself from the increasingly unpopular AKP (Coskun 2015; Grigoridis 2016). Ultimately, the AKP–HDP partnership failed due to competition over votes in the 2015
elections. In response, the AKP government began to shift away from its open approach. Seeking new partners to ensure the passage of its proposed constitutional amendments, the AKP then aligned with the ultranationalist forces in the country. These new allies, in turn, demanded the abandonment of the solution process and an overall closed approach toward the Kurds. To explain these dynamics, this section first examines the electoral considerations that led the HDP to strategically forgo its alliance with the AKP. It then discusses the AKP’s new alliance with the ultranationalist party, the MHP.

In the first place, an alliance with Kurdish nationalist parties was difficult to bring to fruition as they viewed the AKP as a competitor in the Kurdish southeast (Tezcur 2010). Since 2002, the AKP and the Kurdish nationalists, represented by independents in the 2007 and 2011 elections and the HDP in 2015, have constituted the main political players in the southeast (Tezcur 2010). As Table 11 demonstrates, their combined share of votes made up the vast majority of the region’s votes in 2007 and 2011. For instance, in the Kurdish-dominated provinces in the 2007 national elections, the AKP gained 48.8 percent of the vote while Kurdish nationalists gained 35.9, making up 84.7 of the total vote in the provinces. This suggests that the vast majority of Kurdish voters have voted either for Kurdish nationalist parties or the AKP (Akdag 2015). Thus, the parties have been one another’s main rivals in the region.

**Table 11. Share of votes in percentage for AKP and pro-PKK parties in the 2007, and 2011 national elections in Kurdish-dominated provinces**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007 Elections</th>
<th>2011 Elections</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kurdish nationalists</td>
<td>AKP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hakkari</strong></td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sirnak</strong></td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Table continued below)</em></td>
<td><em>(Table continued below)</em></td>
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The presence of a large number of swing voters has intensified the competition between the AKP and Kurdish nationalists. These swing voters are largely made up of religious Kurds who voted for Islamist parties prior to the AKP ascension to power (Atacan 2001; Yavuz 2003; Yavuz and Ozcan 2006; Yegen 1999). However, as HDP MP Altan Tan noted in an interview, these conservative swing voters, estimated to be between 1.5 and 2 million, are also sensitive to Kurdish-related policies and can be more nationalist than leftist Kurdish nationalists (Tan 2017). With about five million Kurdish electors in Turkey, the swing voters constitute a substantial 30
to 40 percent of the population (Saylan 2012). This group’s electoral power can considerably tip election results in favour of either the AKP or Kurdish nationalists. Therefore, leading up to the 2015 elections, an alliance between the AKP and the Kurdish nationalist HDP was difficult due to their competition over the same voter population.

The alliance was hindered by yet another strategy adopted by the HDP, namely using the anti-AKP momentum to draw in Erdogan’s opponents, liberals, and leftists. Prior to the 2015 national elections, the HDP began to use this strategy to diversify its voters. The 10 percent electoral threshold, legislated after the 1980 coup to prevent Kurdish parties from entering parliament, meant that the HDP needed to gain votes from outside the southeast to enter the legislature. The HDP was hoping to attract these votes by intensely opposing the AKP, which was already weakened, discredited, and tarnished by the Gezi protests and corruption scandals. HDP leader Selahattin Demirtas regularly challenged Erdogan, the AKP, and their proposed presidential system in the media, presenting his party as a viable liberal alternative (Coskun 2015; Grigoridis 2016). The party also put forward a broad liberal agenda (Kaya and Whiting 2019). Its liberal and pro-European platform focused on the rights of minorities, women, and the LGBTQ community, and on the environment. It declared its support of all ethnicities and languages in the country. Additionally, it added a “declaration on women” in its program that promised the establishment of a women’s ministry to address institutional gender discrimination. Furthermore, the party nominated the first openly gay candidate in the country’s history (Yackley 2015; Lowen 2015).

While a friendly HDP would have been a valuable partner to the AKP, a hostile HDP was a threat to the party as it could prevent it “from getting the majority needed in parliament to make constitutional changes and to realize Erdogan’s dream of a presidential system” (Yegen
If the HDP received more than 10 percent of the total vote, it would acquire at least 50 seats in the parliament, some of which would come at the expense of the AKP, thus threatening the AKP’s required majority (Yegen 2015).

In addition to the HDP’s opposition, Ocalan failed to announce a disarmament date, originally expected in March 2015, three months prior to the national elections. This situation disconcerted the AKP, as it feared jeopardizing its nationalist constituency by appearing weak prior to the June 2015 elections. As Candar noted, the government was “insisting on getting a guarantee on disarmament so that it can go into the election solidly, saying ‘we have stopped the mothers’ tears, we are close to peace’” (Butler 2015).

It was in response to the HDP’s anti-Erdogan stance and the failure to announce disarmament that the AKP government began to change its approach toward the Kurdish minority, halting the talks with Ocalan, the PKK, and HDP members, speaking against the peace process, and adopting a nationalist stance. In an interview with the author, Yunes Akbaba, a government advisor on the Kurdish peace process throughout its duration, stated, “The day Demirtas said to Erdogan in a parliamentary meeting ‘we will never let you become president’ was the day Erdogan changed his mind about the peace solution.” Akbaba continued on to add that “Ocalan’s failure to announce disarmament on Nerwoz in 2015, confirmed Erdogan’s mindset change about the resolution all together” (Akbaba 2017).

As a result of its change of approach toward the Kurdish minority, the AKP lost support from the Kurdish-dominated provinces in both the 2015 elections and the 2017 referendum, as Table 12 and Table 13 reveal. In June 2015, the AKP lost nearly half its voters from the Kurdish-majority provinces, receiving only 24.8 percent of the votes, down from 41.5 percent in 2011.
Likewise, support in the referendum of 2017 on the question of shifting to a presidential system was low in Kurdish dominated areas, dropping considerably from the results of earlier referenda.

Table 12. Share of votes in percentage for the AKP in the national elections in the Kurdish-dominated provinces from 2002 to 2015

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<tr>
<td>Hakkari 89.47</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>13.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sirnak 79.03</td>
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<td>26.9</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>37.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Batman 76.81</td>
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<td>46.4</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>29.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bingol 76.63</td>
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<td>71</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>64.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mardin 74.84</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>29.3</td>
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<td>Diyarbakir 72.78</td>
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<td>40.9</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>22.3</td>
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<td>Van 70.70</td>
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<td>53.2</td>
<td>40.2</td>
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<td>Agri 70.45</td>
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<td>47.8</td>
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<td>Mus 67.75</td>
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<td>38.6</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>24.9</td>
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<td>Bitlis 64.03</td>
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<td>58.8</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>31.4</td>
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<td>Sanliurfa 47.84</td>
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<td>59.8</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>64.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average of Total votes</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The provinces are ranked according to the size of the Kurdish population, shown in the percentage number under the province.

Table 13. Share of ‘Yes’ votes in percentage for the AKP proposed constitutional referendums from the Kurdish-dominated provinces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HAKKARI 89.47</td>
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<td>94.3</td>
<td>32.4</td>
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<td>89.1</td>
<td>28.3</td>
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<td>SIIRT 78.78</td>
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<td>47.8</td>
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<td>BATMAN 76.81</td>
<td>95.7</td>
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<td>36.3</td>
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<td>72.6</td>
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<td>MARDIN 74.84</td>
<td>94.8</td>
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<td>41.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIYARBAKIR 72.78</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAN 70.70</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGRI 70.45</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUS 67.75</td>
<td>93.2</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BITLIS 64.03</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANLIURFA 47.84</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average of Total votes

94.5 93.8 46.5

To be more precise, in the June 2015 elections, the AKP lost many votes specifically to the HDP, losing more than half of its Kurdish voters in some provinces. And as a result of its liberal anti-Erdogan agenda, the HDP was also able to gain the votes of leftist and liberal Turks (Grigoridis 2016; Aslan 2017). In the June 2015 elections, the HDP secured seats in parliament for the first time in history with over 13 percent of the total vote, as Table 14 demonstrates.

Table 14. Share of vote in percentage and parliamentary seats in the June and November 2015 national elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELECTIONS</th>
<th>June 2015</th>
<th>November 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vote share</td>
<td>number of seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>40.87</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>24.95</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHP</td>
<td>16.29</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDP</td>
<td>13.12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The HDP’s victory caused the AKP to experience the largest setback since its ascendance to power in 2002. The AKP lost its majority, with its share of votes declining from 49 percent in the 2011 elections to 41 percent in the June 2015 elections, causing it to need a parliamentary coalition in order to pass any constitutional amendments. Although the AKP gained some of the votes it lost in the November 2015 elections, receiving 49.5 percent of the vote, it still fell 13 seats short of the 330 seats needed to pass constitutional amendments. It was for this reason, combined with the improbability of an alliance with the HDP due to the strife experienced with the Kurdish nationalist actors, that the AKP turned to the ultranationalists and away from its open approach toward the religiously similar, but ethnically different, Kurdish minority.
AKP’s New Alliances

In addition to the HDP, the other political parties that entered parliament in the November 2015 elections were the CHP and MHP. In the November elections, the CHP gained 25 percent of the vote, coming in second place after the AKP. However, an alliance between the CHP and the AKP was not achievable because the parties assumed different ideological positions and viewed each other as a nemesis. Thus, the AKP was pushed toward pursuing an alliance with the ultranationalist MHP. The MHP gained 12 percent of the votes in the November 2015 elections, coming in third place after the AKP and the CHP, as Table 15 shows.

The MHP’s roots date back to the 1960s. Its ideology is centrally ultranationalist, emphasizing “pan-Turkist, mono-culturalist, authoritarian, anti-communist, and moralist elements” (Celep 2010, 128). The party in the 1970s incorporated religious conservatism as it sees Muslim identity to be an essential part of Turkish identity. For example, the party’s slogan is “Turkishness is our body; Islam is our soul” (Uslu 2008, 74). While this synthesis placed it at odds with the secular Kemalist understanding of Turkey, the MHP also did not squarely align itself with the Islamist parties because for the ultranationalist, the Turkish national identity trumps all other identities, including religious identity. Whereas the Islamist-rooted AKP emphasizes the Muslim identity and glorifies the multicultural past of the Ottomans, the MHP and ultranationalists stress mono-culturalism. A major point of contention between the AKP and MHP was therefore the Kurdish initiatives, during which the MHP accused the AKP of treason (Celep 2010).

The AKP sought in the MHP what it had long counted on in its potential alliance with the Kurds: a parliamentary supermajority that would aid the party in the last step of power consolidation, namely changing the constitution to create a powerful presidency. The MHP
backed the AKP’s 2017 constitutional referendum and formed an electoral alliance with the AKP prior to the 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections, known as the People’s Alliance. As Table 15 shows, the People’s Alliance won nearly 60 percent of the parliamentary vote, and as Table 16 reveals, it also won the presidential candidacy, enabling the AKP to effectively consolidate its rein over Turkey. In an interview with the author, Ali Aslan, member of the progovernment think tank SETA and Turkish academic, explained, “We have a nationalist coalition now. Prior to that the AKP had a coalition with the Kurds and liberals. Now the liberals and the Kurds are on the other side. It is a big change” (Aslan 2017).

Table 15. Share of vote in percentage in the 2018 national elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People’s Alliance</td>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MHP</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Alliance Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>53.66</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation Alliance</td>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iyi Party</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Felicity Party</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation’s Alliance Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>33.94</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 16. Share of vote in percentage in the 2018 presidential elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recep Tayyip Erdogan</td>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muharrem Ince</td>
<td>CHP</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selahattin Demitras</td>
<td>HDP</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meral Aksener</td>
<td>Iyi Party</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temel Karamollaoglu</td>
<td>Felicity Party</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In exchange for its support, the MHP has received various bureaucratic positions. As Dalay noted in an interview with the author, “with the vacuum left in the government by the Gulenists, the party has been able to establish significant presence in the government and its various bureaucratic institutions” (Dalay 2017). The party’s leadership, previously in a precarious position, has also been able to attain greater legitimacy by virtue of its increased presence and influence on the government, particularly after its alliance won the 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections (Dalay 2017).  

Most importantly, the MHP has been able to shape the government’s policies, particularly on the Kurdish issue, which was of paramount importance to the ultranationalist party. Not only has the MHP made ending the Kurdish peace process a precondition for forming the alliance, but it has also rejected any Kurdish-focused initiatives and has threatened to turn against Erdogan with a vengeance if he pursues a unilateral Kurdish policy (Friedman and Quilliam 2015). The MHP has also continued to encourage the AKP’s crackdown on HDP politicians and pro-PKK associations as well as the state of emergency declared after the 2016 coup attempt. Additionally, the MHP has made sure the highly centralized character of the state is protected. Prior to the 2017 referendum, when an AKP advisor made a reference to implementing features of a federal system, the MHP threatened to withdraw its support of the referendum and end the alliance (Hurriyet 2017; Kadercan 2018). Kadercan (2018) explains that the AKP is held hostage by the

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67 The party’s leader, Devlet Bahceli, faced criticism over the nearly 5 percent loss of votes in the November 2015 elections. In these elections, the MHP nearly lost half of its parliamentary seats and was surpassed by the HDP. Opposition to Bahceli in the party grew with Meral Aksener, who had served as interior minister in the 1990s, attempting to overthrow him through extraordinary congress. After her attempts failed, she founded the Iyi Party in 2017, which gained entry to parliament in the 2018 elections and joined the Nation’s Alliance with the CHP (Bardavid 2017).
ultranationalists, as the success of the MHP alliance “showed Erdogan two things. First, siding with ultranationalists pays off well in the short term. Second…Erdogan’s political prospects increasingly depend on ultranationalist voters.” According to Kadercan (2018), it is the AKP itself that needs to make ideological concessions as it stands to lose more than the MHP if their alliance ends.

**External Dynamics and Pressure**

*Until and unless there is some sort of a framework between Turkey and the PKK on Syria, I don’t see a return to meaningful solutions* (Dalay 2017).

*The peace resolution ended due to the PKK’s militancy, the poisoning impact of the Syrian civil war and grand ambitions in Ankara* (Akyol 2015).

Examining the strategic interactions between domestic players does not comprehensively explain the AKP’s shift in its approach toward the Kurdish minority. The AKP’s change of approach can be better understood through an analysis of the external dynamics that affected the PKK’s commitment to an alliance with the Islamist government. In fact, it was not until the PKK ended the ceasefire and declared autonomy that an alliance with the HDP was completely aborted, the AKP aligned with the ultranationalists, and fully changed its approach to the Kurdish minority. More specifically, it was after the PKK attacks in July 2015 that the government returned to containing the Kurdish conflict through military means, reversed the legal rights that protected Kurdish nationalist politicians, and cracked down and jailed Kurdish politicians and civil society members. The PKK’s decision to end the ceasefire, the peace process, and prospects of a coalition between its political branch and the AKP was a result of increased external support that augmented its strategic capacity (Balchi 2017; Dalay 2016, 2017; Marcus 2015; Yegen 2016).
Both international and regional dynamics can contribute to a central government’s minority policies. Amongst other things, foreign interference and third-party involvement can influence domestic politics through rebel-group support, including diplomatic, financial, and military backing (Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe 2007; Saideman and Zahar 2008; Zahar 2010). The PKK’s willingness to engage in negotiations with the AKP largely depended on the external support it received, which directly affected its strategic capacity. In fact, external support has contributed to both the commencement and collapse of the Kurdish conflict resolution and the changes in the AKP’s government approaches to the minority group. During the 2000s, the PKK was weakened as an outcome of the AKP’s successful efforts to isolate the organization from the international and regional support it received in the 1980s and 1990s. However, by the mid-2010s, as a result of the civil war in Syria, external support to the PKK was restored, increasing its strategic capacity.

This section will first examine the significant foreign support received by the PKK/PYD since its founding, affecting its objectives and negotiations with the state. Next, a discussion will follow on how changes in Syria revived external support to the organization and created a political opportunity for the PKK’s affiliated organization in Syria, the PYD, to develop strategic and political powers that allowed it to found an independent Kurdish administration. These developments heightened Kurdish nationalism in Turkey among PKK members, leading them to demand autonomy from the Turkish state and to adopt military strategies.

External support has historically played a role in the survival and strength of the PKK. In earlier decades, the PKK received significant support from a number of foreign countries and the Kurdish diaspora. In the 1980s and 1990s, the PKK received support from the USSR, Iran, Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Armenia, Libya, Iran, Iraq, Bulgaria, and Cuba (Bacik and Coskun
of the PKK’s insurgency (1984–1999), provided the PKK with military and financial support as well as housing its camps and leaders (including Ocalan). After the organization was expelled from Syria, the KRG allowed the PKK to set up military bases and infrastructure in the mountains of northern Iraq. Iran also approved the construction of PKK bases along its border with Turkey and provided the organization with logistical assistance in exchange for information on Turkish and US military sites in the region (Bacik and Coskun 2011; Pusane 2015).

Outside of Turkey’s neighbours in the Middle East, the Kurdish diaspora in Europe has provided substantial logistical and financial support to the PKK (Bacik and Coskun 2011; Pusane 2015). Kurdish nationalists in Europe founded a number of NGOs and associations whose entire missions were to provide financial support to and fundraise for the PKK. The PKK itself has also set up lawful businesses and activities in Europe, including publication houses and cultural associations (Pusane 2015). Bacik and Coskun explain that the transnational system the PKK established in Europe “became a complex mechanism through which the organization ran its major recruitment, training, intelligence and finance works” (Bacik and Coskun 2011, 260). The scholars argue that the room the PKK was provided in Syria and Iraq and the support it garnered from others in the region and in Europe disincentivized the organization’s disarmament, doing little to discredit its armed and violent methods or lead it to seek a political solution (Bacik and Coskun 2011). They add,

the PKK never felt obliged to seek a peaceful solution. Instead, thanks to the supportive international conjecture, the PKK enjoyed a large field of maneuver, one that stretched from Syria to Denmark. Enjoying the opportunities of a tolerant international
environment, the PKK was never forced to give up its hard line, violent strategies. (Bacik and Coskun 2011, 260).

After Turkey pressured Syria into halting its support in the late 1990s, it used its rising economic and strategic clout to pressure other states into doing the same. In 2002, following Turkey’s petitions, NATO, the EU and the US designated the PKK as a terrorist organization. Turkey also appealed to the US to change its position on the accommodation and support of PKK in northern Iraq that it had held since the 1990s. Viewing it as the only stable region in Iraq, the US was reluctant to allow Turkey cross-border operations or to take any action against the PKK in the region. However, when President George W. Bush sought Turkey’s support in the US war in Iraq, his administration’s approach to the PKK in northern Iraq changed to appease the Turks. In January 2008, the US president declared the PKK “a common enemy” and allowed Turkish incursion into northern Iraq (Park 2008). The US also pressured the KRG leadership, Jalal Talabani and Masoud Barzani, to prevent the PKK’s use of Iraqi land against Turkey. Under US pressure, but also with newly developed and important economic ties with Turkey, the leaders issued a statement against the PKK (Bacik and Coskun 2011; Larabee 2013).

In an attempt to isolate the PKK further, in 2004, Turkey signed a security cooperation agreement in which Iran agreed to recognize the PKK as a terrorist organization. At the time, the PKK’s extension in Iran, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), was escalating its activities against the Iranian state. Additionally, Iran sought to maintain friendly relations with Turkey, which served as an important mediator between Iran and the international community, particularly on the nuclear energy program. Bacik and Coskun elaborate: “In the end, the regional actors have become more open to bilateral cooperation on the Kurdish problem, having
identified the PKK as an agent of instability” (Bacik and Coskun 2011, 262). Russia had also agreed to stop any support of the PKK. With the colossal trade volume between Turkey and Russia exceeding 40 billion US dollars in the 2000s, it had no choice but to halt support of the organization (Bacik and Coskun 2011).

With decreased external support and strategic capacity, the Qandil leaders agreed to Ocalan’s roadmap to forfeit the armed path that included the organization’s disarmament, and to take on the political path with the HDP at the forefront. Since its founding, the PKK has vacillated between various goals, as mentioned in chapter five. The organization has wavered between the goals of (i) an independent state, (ii) autonomy under a federal model, or (iii) equal citizenship (Yegen 2016). It also has shifted its strategies between armed and political engagement with the state (Yegen 2016). In the 2000s and early 2010s, the military arm of the PKK was satisfied with achieving equal citizenship and elements of autonomy within Turkey (Yegen 2016; Dalay 2017).

However, by early 2015, Qandil’s leaders had grown increasingly nationalist and increased their rhetoric and actions against the terms of the peace process. In March 2015, the military chief of the PKK, Murat Karayilan, made additional demands to the ones in the draft resolution negotiated with the AKP, specifically demanding Kurdish autonomy and the release of Ocalan. He further ordered his forces to escalate fighting, stating “either they will accept autonomy or we can go our separate way” (Calislar 2015). In July 2015, the PKK formally ended the ceasefire with its claimed responsibility for the killing of two police officers in retaliation for the ISIS Suruc attack, which it blamed on the Turkish state (BBC 2015; The Economist 2015). After the attacks, the PKK declared the revolutionary people’s war against the state, and in August the PKK declared self-government in a number of cities, towns, and neighbourhoods in
the southeast. The PKK dug trenches and erected barricades to halt government forces from entering these areas (Bozarsalan 2015; Pamuk 2015).

The PKK ended the ceasefire because increased external support had revived its desire for independence. According to Dalay and Balchi, as a result of the regional changes that strengthened the position of the PKK, it shifted its preference to independence and full self-government (Balchi 2017; Dalay 2017). Gursel (2016) further notes that the restored external support inspired and emboldened the organization to try “raising the bar” of its demands of the state. It was the developments in Syria that were most responsible for reviving militant Kurdish nationalism and changing Qandil leaders’ commitment to the peace process with the AKP.

The Syrian Civil War and the PYD/PKK’s Growing Strength

Syrian Kurds, who comprise about 10 percent of Syria’s population, live along the eastern side of the Turkish border and have strong relations with Turkish Kurds. Many Syrian Kurds joined the PKK when it was based in Syria. After Syria expelled the PKK in 1999, its Syrian members founded the PYD in 2003, which is a member of the KCK (Gunes 2018; Gunes and Lowe 2015). As a result of the political vacuum created by the Syrian civil war, the PYD was able to move in and take control of large territories, some of which were acquired by defeating the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS). By 2014, the PYD had established an independent political administration in northeastern Syria, known as Rojava, as shown in Figure 10 (Gunes 2018; Gunes and Lowe 2015).
The PYD’s victory was a result of the military and financial support from a number of neighbouring and international actors. Due to Erdogan’s stance against Bashar al-Assad, Iran and Russia chose to oppose the Turkish leader to protect their Syrian ally, which required backing the PYD at times. And with the emergence of ISIS, the US decided to throw its full support behind the PYD. The US and its European allies viewed the PYD as a “reliable partner” against ISIS forces, and although they have designated the PKK as a terrorist organization, they do not designate the PYD as such (Gunes 2018; Gunes and Lowe 2015).

The PYD’s increased military support and international legitimacy, its founding of an independent Kurdish territory, as well as the participation of Turkish Kurds in battles in Rojava, led to an extraordinary shift in the PKK’s nationalist discourse and rapidly altered its goals in Turkey (Gunes and Lowe 2016; Marcus 2015). In an interview with the author, Mesut Yegen, a
Kurdish scholar, stated that these developments led to a “new momentum of Kurdish resistance in Turkey” (Yegen 2017). Dalay (2015) further explains,

as the region is dramatically changing, the PKK seems to be dynamically redefining its priorities as it identifies emerging opportunities with new potential gains and rising international prestige. And this bodes ill for the settlement of the Kurdish issue in Turkey…The PKK–inspired by the success of its sister organization the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria, is trying to replicate PYD tactics in the Kurdish southeast of Turkey.

Indeed, the PYD’s military and political success in Syria influenced the PKK’s ambitions in Turkey and weakened its commitment to the AKP’s peace resolution. It was for this reason that the PKK changed its objectives and strategies in Turkey; it declared autonomy in several areas in Turkey’s Kurdish southeast and resumed its armed strategy using PYD tactics, including shifting the war with the state to urban settings for the first time.

In sum, there was a stark contrast in the position of the PKK organization before and after the Syrian civil war, namely in its capacity and bargaining power, influenced by external opportunities and support. When the PKK engaged in the 2012 negotiations that led to the ceasefire with the AKP, it was designated as a terrorist organization by the EU, NATO and the US. It had also lost support from regional supporters – KRG post 2003, Iran post 2004, and Syria in 1998 – and additionally it was in the midst of a Syrian civil war that was happening on multiple fronts. When the ceasefire collapsed, its kin-organization the PYD was receiving political and military support from the US, Europe, Russia, and the KRG, as well as indirect
support from Iran and the Al-Assad regime (Larabee 2013). The PYD’s increased strategic capacity allowed it to acquire a large territory and establish an independent Kurdish administration. Ultimately, the Syrian civil war had undone the AKP’s government efforts to isolate the PKK and sever its international and regional support.

It was in response to the PKK’s secessionist claims and militarization coupled with its new alliance with the MHP that the Islamist AKP government adopted a full closed approach toward the Kurdish minority. In an interview with the author, Dalay stressed the role of the external environment, stating that “the AKP more often than not is responding to circumstance; it is responding to PKK’s shifting preferences that are an outcome of the PKK’s internal subtleties and its external changes and regional support” (Dalay 2017). Essentially, external dynamics affected the AKP’s domestic alliance building and its approach toward the Kurdish minority.

It is important to note that the PKK’s decision to end the ceasefire played a larger role in changing the AKP’s approach than the HDP’s anti-Erdogan stance. This is because the PKK’s military establishment is the most powerful member of the organization. As mentioned in chapter five, the organization consists of various sources of power that include Ocalan, political parties, and the military leadership in northern Iraq. While Ocalan has been considered the movement’s founding father as well as its undisputed leader, the military establishment assumed a larger role after his imprisonment. Natali (2013) argues that the “PKK leaders and cadres have been running operations and consolidating networks on the ground without Ocalan’s directives” and that they are not necessarily bound by “Ocalan’s instructions.”

During the peace process, Qandil leaders sometimes openly opposed Ocalan and undermined the HDP (Pusane 2014). In a number of instances, they issued statements contradicting Ocalan’s ceasefire declaration and supported attacks by the Kurdistan Freedom
Hawks (*Teyrebazen Azadiya Kurdistan* or TAK), a militant PKK breakaway group that opposes compromises with the state (Pusane 2014). Speaking against the HDP, Cemil Bayik, a leading figure in the PKK in Qandil also stated, “It’s not the HDP’s role to decide if it’s time for us to disarm…They can request it, as they have, but we have made clear that it won’t happen” until they decide (Marcus 2015). Duran Kalkan, one of the PKK leaders in Qandil, further stated that the future of Kurds was not going to be determined by elections but by revolution (Marcus 2015). With the July attacks, declarations of self-government, and digging of trenches in areas administered by HDP mayors, the PKK ended the political process and reasserted itself as the de facto leader of the organization. In an interview with the author, Altan Tan, an HDP MP, confirmed the HDP’s subservience to Qandil and emphasized that it never attained an autonomous position (Tan 2017).

Additionally, Coskun (2015) argues that many attributed the HDP’s anti-Erdogan pre-election stance to electoral tactics, believing that it would return to dialogue with the AKP after the election results. While the HDP largely continued with its anti-Erdogan stance after the elections, it still did not rule out a coalition with the AKP. For example, after the June elections, Figen Yukselkdag, the HDP party co-president, stated, “We are open to all proposals and negotiations about taking part in the government or forming a coalition government” (Coskun 2015, 61). It was after the PKK’s resumption of violence that the peace process was decisively ended, with Erdogan declaring that it was “deep in the freeze” (Coskun 2015, 52).

It is also important to stress that while the PKK’s resumption of violence in 2004 and 2011 did not alter the AKP’s Kurdish approach, in 2015 it did. This is due to several reasons. First, the party aligned with the ultranationalists, who stipulated an end to the AKP’s open Kurdish approach altogether. Second, the nature of violence, as mentioned above, differed since
it extended to urban localities. This negatively affected perceptions about the government’s ability to guarantee security, resulting in its strong stance against the Kurdish issue as a whole.

Third, according to Yasin Aktay, AKP deputy chairman and spokesperson, the government invested much effort in the last round of talks (2012–2015), advancing significant Kurdish-focused policies during the period. Thus, he argued that the resumption of violence by the PKK as well as its secessionist demands, caused embarrassment for the government because it made it appear weak, leading it to harden its position (Aktay 2017).

Conclusion

In its early period, the AKP undertook the longest path in Turkey’s modern history to resolve the Kurdish conflict. The AKP spoke openly about the reality of the Kurdish problem, acknowledging grievances beyond economic underdevelopment. It pursued a package of reform, granting the Kurds numerous cultural rights that included broadcasting and publishing in Kurdish as well as political campaigning and access to private education in their mother tongue. In addition to investing generous sums in the economic development of the region, the AKP led a modest effort at decentralization, expanding Kurdish mayorships’ authority and resources in Kurdish provinces. On the civil and legal fronts, the AKP ended the decades-long state of emergency in the southeast, moderated the Anti-Terror Law and Turkish Penal Code used to persecute Kurdish activists, and openly challenged the military, the judiciary, and opposition parties, “taking all political risks” in its pursuit of dialogue with the PKK. The AKP successfully reached a ceasefire with the PKK in 2013, with Ocalan announcing a new era and a roadmap for disarmament and reintegration. As a result, the AKP succeeded in garnering the Kurdish vote in consecutive elections and referendums that sought to strengthen its position in relation to deep state institutions.
Post-2015, the AKP government began to change its approach toward the Kurdish minority. The AKP moved from emphasizing a broad Muslim identity and values, which many Kurds found embracing, to adopting a Turkish nationalist identity. It then ended the promotion of Kurdish-focused policies, halted negotiations with the PKK, and adopted military means to end the conflict. In a model akin to Turkey’s preceding nationalist governments, the AKP pursued the strategies of containment and repression and became as nationalist and exclusivist as the republic’s founders (Akyol 2016).

This chapter has demonstrated that the AKP’s change of approach to the Kurdish minority was largely a result of strategic calculations for political survival and power consolidation. Due to its electoral significance, the AKP reached out to the Kurdish population for support in parliamentary elections and direct referendums. The objective of the party was to achieve the majority needed to carry out constitutional amendments to weaken the Kemalist institutional elements it considered a threat. After 2011, the AKP lost its liberal supporters due to undemocratic practices. More importantly, around the same period, it lost support from Gulenists over insufficient sharing of power. As a result, the AKP government feared the party’s inability to reach the majority needed in the 2015 elections to carry out constitutional amendments and create a powerful presidency. This resulted in the party’s search for alternative allies. The AKP then engaged in vigorous negotiations with the PKK with the objective of forming a parliamentary coalition with the organization’s political branch, the HDP, to pass its constitutional amendments.

However, the AKP–HDP alliance failed to materialize because of political competition between the parties over the same ethnic vote. Furthermore, the HDP stood to electorally gain more by distancing itself from the increasingly unpopular AKP, particularly among the liberals
and leftists, whose votes were necessary to the Kurdish party’s ability to pass the 10 percent parliamentary threshold and gain representation. The HDP’s calculations proved successful as it was able to enter the parliament for the first time after the June 2015 elections, in which they captured 13 percent of the vote. Furthermore, the PKK decided to forgo the reconciliation that was instrumental for the AKP–Kurdish alliance. The developments in Syria that increased the organization’s strategic capacity emboldened PKK’s military leadership, changing its commitment to the peace process and the entire political process. The AKP responded to the loss of an HDP and PKK alliance by forming another with the ultranationalist MHP and diametrically changing its approach to the Kurdish minority. Therefore, the AKP’s approaches to the Kurdish minority largely depended on the alliance building it sought for power consolidation. The concluding chapter analyzes Turkish and Sudanese Islamists’ minority approaches to draw the broader theoretical implications of this research study.
Existing scholarship responding to the rise of political Islam in the Middle East and North Africa has focused on Islamist behaviour relating to gender, international relations, and violence. Yet, despite its significance, research relating to how Islamists in power govern minorities has been scarce. This dissertation has attempted to fill this gap. The conclusion that follows first reiterates the motivations for this research and its questions. It then shares its findings on Islamist approaches toward minority groups, discussing their spatial and diachronic variations and explaining the causes for these variations. The chapter next draws some conclusions on the implications for Islamist behaviour and minority-state relations before turning to discuss the study’s limitations and suggestions for future research.

Before explaining this study’s scholarly contribution, it is worth reiterating where it lies in terms of the extant literature on Islam and minorities. Generally accepted ideas around Islamist treatment of ethnic minorities stress the role of ideational factors as primary drivers. These prevalent assumptions suggest that Islamists are likely to accommodate co-Muslim ethnic minorities and exclude, and perhaps repress, non-Muslim ones. Although these ideas are held by scholars who contribute to multiple bodies of literature, all such work suffers from a lack of empirical grounding. This results in findings that rely on largely speculative assumptions, and that continue to have as a foundation ideational underpinnings about expectations around Islamists’ treatment of minorities. This dissertation has addressed the shortcomings of this ideational-based scholarship through a systematic analysis of contemporary Islamists’ approaches toward ethnic minorities. In doing so, it has addressed the following questions: how do Islamists treat minorities? Is there a coherent “Islamist approach” in dealing with minorities?
Or do Islamist governments differ in their treatment of minorities, spatially and diachronically? And, if their treatment is variable, what explains the variation?

These research questions have been examined through a comparison of Islamists’ treatment of ethnic minorities in Sudan and Turkey. In order to address the role of religious ideology and affinity, the study has focused on minorities that exhibit variations in religious affiliation with ruling Islamists. In the case of Sudan, the research investigated the treatment of the largely animist and Christian South Sudanese and the Sunni Muslim Darfuris, both differ from the ruling Islamists in ethnicity. In Turkey, the study focused on the Muslim Kurdish minority. The prolonged period of Islamist rule in each country allowed for an extensive analysis of the dependent variable, namely the treatment of ethnic minorities. Furthermore, this research investigates Islamists’ minority approaches once they have secured power, which is ideal for identifying their approaches because of the accompanying diminished constraints on their policymaking. Through an analysis of both primary materials gathered from fieldwork in Sudan and Turkey as well as secondary sources, this research has been able to apply qualitative process tracing in order to uncover the motivations for Islamists’ minority treatment approaches in the two countries.

Sudanese and Turkish Islamists’ Approaches to Minorities

This dissertation research has found that whether democratically elected, as in Turkey, or in power by way of military coup, as was the case in Sudan, Islamists lacked a coherent approach toward minorities once in power. Islamists instead exhibited spatial and diachronic variation. In some instances, they applied an open approach, defined as the extension of inclusionary cultural, economic and political policies, as well as political engagement with minority groups as opposed to military action against them. In other situations, they applied a closed approach, defined as the
implementation of exclusionary cultural, economic and political policies, in addition to increased military engagement with minorities. To identify the approach used by the Islamist groups under study, this dissertation relied on three indicators: policy, government engagement with the minority, and violence level.

This research further found that over a prolonged period of time, there was no clear correlation between the pursued approach and the religious identity of the minority. During their first decade in power, Sudanese Islamists followed a closed approach toward the South Sudanese, who are religiously animist and Christian and ethnically Nilotic. The Islamist government’s closed approach was characterized by exclusive Islamization policies and increased militarization and violence, backed by an overall hostile and inflammatory tone. About a decade later, al-Bashir’s Islamist government changed its policy. It pursued an open approach marked by an extension of social, economic and political rights, an engagement in negotiations, and a reduction in violence – all sustained by a new conciliatory position.

There was also a notable and simultaneous change in how the Islamists dealt with Darfuris, who are Sunni Muslim, just like the rulers, and ethnically a mixture of non-Arab and Arab groups. During the first decade of their rule, Sudanese Islamists pursued inclusive political policies and attempted to manage sporadic inter-ethnic conflicts in the region impartially to contain violence. Yet, in the early 2000s, al-Bashir’s Islamist government switched to a closed approach. It marginalized the once well-represented non-Arab Darfuris in both the ruling party and central government, and launched a genocidal campaign against them in cooperation with Arab militias.

Likewise, Turkey’s Islamist government shifted its approaches toward the Kurdish minority over time. In the period between 2002 and 2015, the AKP government followed an
open approach. This was marked by the advancement of accommodative cultural, legal, economic, and political rights, a commitment to resolving the Kurdish conflict through negotiations, a reduction of violence, and an overall conciliatory tone. In 2015, the Islamist government changed its approach toward the Kurdish minority. This new closed approach has been marked by a halt of inclusionary cultural policies, a reversal of legal and political rights, and a pursuit of military means to end the conflict. This reversal has been accompanied by a new Turkish nationalist position being taken by the Islamists.

It is not only the diachronic variation in Islamist governing approaches toward minorities that demonstrates that religious affiliation has limited explanatory power, but also the spatial variation. For example, Sudan’s Islamists ratified a peace agreement with the largely animist and Christian South Sudanese, while at the same time waging war on Muslim non-Arab Darfuris. Moreover, although the Islamists had succeeded in garnering support from Darfuris in Sudan and Kurds in Turkey through stressing religious brotherhood, ultimately, religious affiliation did not affect their change of approach toward these groups. Thus, this study refutes the ideational-centric analysis.

Instead, this research has found political strategic calculus to have had a considerable influence in shaping Islamists’ policies toward their respective minorities. This strategic calculus was shaped by two factors. The first was the necessity of building domestic alliances, which was largely an outcome of the strategic interactions between actors, including intra-Islamists’ interactions, and the varying formal and informal structures in place. The second factor involved the regional and international dynamics that influenced the minority groups’ participation in domestic alliances through affecting their bargaining power. While domestic actors’ strategic
interactions affected the need for alliance-building, regional and international dynamics affected the configuration of such alliances by influencing the desire of potential allies to participate.

The case of Sudan has illustrated that Islamists’ governing minority approaches were an outcome of alliance building and external dynamics. When the Sudanese Islamists came to power, they led a coalition with the military. This alliance was strong and Islamists were able to use it to consolidate their power, eliminating all political opposition. The Islamist coalition founded the first Islamist republic, institutionalizing Islamic legal, social and economic policies, and sought to export their Islamist project to the Middle East and Africa (Gallab 2008).

However, when the alliance broke off as a result of the ruling Islamists’ splintering into factions, al-Bashir’s government was pushed to configure an alternative alliance, resulting in a change of its approaches toward minorities as it attempted to coopt new minorities and exclude old ones.

The late 1990s saw Sudan’s solidified Islamist base split, ending a ten-year period of strong rule and forcing a reconfiguration of the ruling coalition. The new faction, led by Turabi, founded the PCP. Subsequently, governing Islamists, led by al-Bashir and represented by the NCP, engaged in competition with Turabi’s PCP over alliances. Non-Arab Darfuris sided with Turabi because, first and foremost, they were already dissatisfied with their share of power and wealth within the Islamist government. They also sided with Turabi because al-Bashir’s government had further marginalized them from key positions after the internal split due to their historic support of him. In response to the formation of JEM by Darfuri Islamist deserters and their aligning with Turabi, shortly after the split, the central government fully changed its approach toward non-Arab Darfuris, launching pre-emptive attacks and using Arab militias against them. The attacks resulted in a full-blown rebellion in Darfur that included the formation of multiple armed groups. Al-Bashir’s government felt that its power was under threat because it
was then facing rebellions in its western region and to the South. It also feared the development of a strong counter-coalition that would include Turabi’s PCP, Darfur’s new armed groups, and the South’s armed movement, the SPLM/A. Therefore, the central government pursued negotiations with its strongest opposition, the SPLM/A, and turned to an accommodationist approach toward the South Sudanese minority while increasingly repressing the Turabi-aligned Darfuris. Thus, the shifts in Islamist governing approaches toward the Darfuris and South Sudanese were an outcome of strategic calculations around alliance building to protect their positions of power.

External dynamics also affected the SPLM/A’s participation in the alliance with al-Bashir’s Islamist government. Al-Bashir succeeded in attracting the SPLM/A to his government’s side by curtailing its external support through improving relations with regional and international actors who had previously sponsored the movement’s rebellion. As a result of its lowered strategic capacity in the battlefield, the SPLM/A formed an alliance with the NCP in exchange for self-government, significant power, and wealth sharing, as well as the right to self-determination for the South Sudanese, all guaranteed through agreements signed between 2002 and 2005. Had al-Bashir’s Islamist regime not ensured the severing of support for the SPLM/A, it would have been logical for the Southern movement to continue its war against it, then considerably weakened by intra-Islamist fighting and splintering.

Similar to Sudan, the case of Turkey has demonstrated that the Islamists’ governing minority approaches were an outcome of strategic calculus around alliance building combined with external pressures. The Islamist AKP was the first party to win consecutive parliamentary majorities in the republic’s history. It won parliamentary majorities in the 2002, 2007, and 2011 elections. This victory gave the AKP the majority it needed to carry out a constitutional
overhaul, enabling it to consolidate its rule, and it was facilitated by the robust alliance the AKP was able to form.

Upon coming to power, the Islamist AKP led an alliance with Kurdish voters and religiously conservative movements against the Kemalist state institutions. The AKP considered these institutions, particularly the military and the judiciary, to be a threat to its survival because they had closed down every single Islamist party until 2001. Furthermore, the AKP itself experienced first-hand closure attempts by the judiciary and received several warnings from the military. With the support it received from the Kurdish voters, as well as Gulenists and liberals, the AKP government was successful in passing a set of constitutional referendums that weakened the judiciary and military.

However, after 2010, the AKP lost some of its support base, the most significant of which was the Gulen movement. To compensate for the lost support of Gulenists as well as some liberals, the AKP sought to form a coalition with the Kurdish nationalist party, the HDP. Its objective was to pass a set of constitutional changes that would enable the founding of a presidential system, aiding the AKP to concentrate extensive political authority to the extent that some observers identified democratic backsliding (Grigoriadis 2016; Yegen 2015). However, several months before the 2015 national elections, the HDP forfeited the alliance with the AKP because the Kurdish nationalist party stood to gain more electorally by distancing itself from an increasingly unpopular AKP leader and prime minister, Recep Erdogan. The PKK attacks after the elections increased the improbability of an alliance between HDP and AKP. As a result of its strife with Kurdish nationalist politicians and fearing the loss of its nationalist base, the Islamist government began to gradually change its approach toward the Kurdish minority. After 2015, the AKP government then formed the coalition it needed with the ultranationalists to pass the
constitutional changes set to strengthen the executive branch. From the time the AKP came to power to 2015, the MHP opposed Erdogan’s open Kurdish approach and accused his party of being a traitor to the Turks (Celep 2010). Consequently, the alliance between the AKP and MHP resulted in the cementing of the government’s closed approach toward the Kurdish minority. Thus, the shift in Turkish Islamists’ governing approaches toward the Kurdish minority was an outcome of strategic calculations to secure the alliances needed for power consolidation.

External dynamics influenced the PKK’s decision to resort to military strategies and its participation in an alliance with the AKP’s government. More specifically, the PKK’s commitment to the peace process with the AKP was affected by the war in Syria and the battles against ISIS, which increased the organization’s strategic leverage. Prior to the Syrian civil war, the PKK was isolated as a result of Turkey’s efforts to curtail support to the organization. However, the war in Syria revived regional and international support of the PKK as a result of its fight against ISIS. Emboldened by its augmented strategic capacity, the PKK ended the ceasefire, declared self-government in areas in the southeast, and demanded autonomy instead of the more modest decentralization measures already agreed upon with the AKP government.

It is important to stress that intra-Islamist dynamics were central in Sudan and Turkey, since they established the need for alliance building in the first place. For example, in Sudan, the split among the ranks of Islamists incentivized the regime to find new alliances and attempt to coopt the SPLM/A. The regime’s loss of Turabi and Darfuri Islamists forced the al-Bashir government’s rapprochement with international actors, in order to sever support to the SPLM/A and enable the Southern group’s cooption.

In Turkey, the situation was similar, with the loss of Gulen supporters as well as liberals increasing the AKP’s need for alternative allies. The AKP needed to align with one of the other
political forces in the country. Since a coalition with the CHP was very unlikely due to vast ideological differences, the AKP needed to form an alliance with either the ultranationalist party or the Kurdish nationalist party. The AKP attempted to form a coalition with the Kurdish nationalist party because it was feasible since its open approach toward the Kurds had already secured support from the minority’s general population. Once the HDP rebuffed its attempts to coalesce, and no longer benefitting the support of the Gulenists, the AKP needed to coalesce with the MHP so it could carry out its primary agenda, specifically constitutional amendments. Had the intra-Islamist split with the Gulenist not occurred, the AKP might have been able to pass the constitutional reforms without a need to align with either the Kurdish nationalist party or the ultranationalists. It could have done so while continuing its accommodative Kurdish policies to attract the support of Kurdish voters, which had been sufficient in the past without coalescing with Kurdish nationalist parties.

In sum, governing Islamists in Sudan and Turkey were guided by a desire to protect and expand their power. Their aspirations relied on alliance formation, sometimes with and sometimes against ethnic minorities, depending on the circumstances and available options. Ethnic minorities’ participation in such coalitions was largely contingent on their strategic capacity and bargaining power, which was directly affected by the support received from international and regional actors.

Accordingly, this research has found that even when they are in positions of power, Islamists remain subject to institutional and structural constraints that necessitate coalition building for political power. The need for coalition building for political survival is well established in the literature on democratic politics (Riker 1962; Schofield 1993; Smith 1998), and recently in the authoritarian context as well (Posner 2004; Svolik 2012). In democracies,
coalition building is an outcome of the democratic institutions in place that regulate interactions between actors, while in authoritarian settings, it is often an outcome of weak state capacity and limited resources. In the latter’s case, coalition building is thought to be less costly than the alternative, which often consists of armed rebellions. This is demonstrated in the cases of Turkey and Sudan, where, in the former, coalition building was an outcome of the political system in place, and in the latter, it was an outcome of weak state capacity and limited coercive ability.

Hence, to explain Islamist minority approaches, this research has relied on a synthesis of theories that tie political survival to coalition building and those that tie minority strategic capacity to external support. It has found the scholarship on political survival and coalition building to provide an adequate basis for explaining Islamist behaviour (Black 1958; Downs 1957; Riker 1962; Wintrobe 1998). However, to fully explain Islamist minority policies, this study found the literature on minority group strategic capacity and external support to be essential (Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe 2007; Saideman and Zahar 2008; Zahar 2010). This study’s findings, then, agree with Mandaville’s (2013) conclusion that Islamists are “subject to the same forces and factors that shape the behaviours and decision calculus of other political actors – and thereby amenable to analysis using standard concepts and methods from comparative political science.” This research has shown that this the case even in the area of minority policies, where it has been widely assumed that religious ideology plays a primary role.

**Implications for the Scholarship on Islamist Politics**

Through investigating Islamist minority policies, this study has also found that despite the particular ideological orientation of Islamists in each country, it was strategic calculations driven by the desire to remain in or consolidate power that shaped the treatment of minorities. While Islamists in Turkey were described as revisionists and reformists because of their earlier
commitment to liberal values, in Sudan, Islamists were characterized as revolutionaries and fundamentalists. Yet, Islamists in both countries have pursued open and closed approaches toward their minorities, demonstrating that religious ideology, whether liberal or fundamentalist, was less consequential in affecting Islamists’ decision-making when their power was at stake.

This calls into question the common differentiation in the literature between Islamists with labels such as “moderates” or “radicals.” The findings also agree with Brown’s (2012) rejection of the inclusion-moderation thesis (the notion that the inclusion of political groups in pluralist political processes will lead to their behavioural and ideological moderation), commonly used to explain Islamist behaviour since it is based on assumptions about Islamists’ ideological orientations.

This research has also found that, in contrast to the literature’s common portrayal of Islamists as unitary actors with common and cohesive goals, they experience intra-group fighting over power, not unlike other organizations, which could have an impact on their treatment of minorities. The Islamist split in Sudan was rooted in a power struggle between Turabi, the young Islamist guard, and the military. All parties of the conflict were driven by the desire to protect and expand their power. The young guard and the military were concerned with what they believed was Turabi’s aggrandization of his powers while limiting or perhaps even threatening their opportunities. As an interviewee noted to the author, “they [the young guard] wanted to get ahead, including Ali Osman Taha, Turabi’s deputy and most trusted follower, and believed that Turabi was an obstacle” (Gargandi 2017). Turabi (2010) stated in an interview that he never thought that power would corrupt his young disciples or change the loyalty of the military men who had given a pledge to the Islamist movement. The Islamists splintering into factions, including the NCP, PCP, and JEM, the latter of which retained its Islamist orientation, led some
to argue that the Islamist movement was the first victim of the Islamist takeover because of the power struggle and division that followed (El-Affendi 2013).

Intra-Islamist fighting has also demonstrated that Islamists are willing to go to great lengths to undermine one another, including aligning with ideologically and religiously different actors, including previously persecuted ethnic minorities, as well as persecute previously favoured religious kin. Al-Bashir’s government launched a campaign of genocide against Muslim Darfuris to defeat the JEM. It also cracked down on Turabi’s PCP and repressed the party’s followers. One of Turabi’s senior followers, Badr al-Din Taha, claimed that the government treated them with humiliation and stated that the suffering they experienced under al-Bashir “was far worse than what the communists did to them” (Gallab 2008: 155). Moreover, Sudanese Islamists were willing to align with non-Muslims to challenge one another. Both Turabi and al-Bashir sought to align with the SPLM/A. Turabi signed a memorandum of understanding with the SPLM/A leader to challenge al-Bashir’s government. In response, al-Bashir signed the CPA with Garang, relinquishing all of his government’s authority over the South, in order to foil the Southern Sudanese leader’s potential alliance with Turabi.

Likewise, in Turkey, Islamists have experienced fractioning as a result of competition over control and power. Initially the AKP broke away from Erbakan, the founder of the first Islamist party in the country. The younger guard, led by Erdogan, wanted to attain more control over Islamist parties and criticized Erbakan for excessive control. The AKP also broke away from one of its strongest allies, and arguably once one of Turkey’s best organized religious movements, the Gulen movement. Similar to Sudan’s Islamists, the split was rooted in disputes over power. Specifically, Gulenists wanted to acquire cabinet ministry positions, but Erdogan believed that his government had already excessively empowered them through generous
bureaucratic representation in the judiciary and military. Additionally, some scholars argue that with the large number of high-level administrative opportunities the AKP allowed Gulenists in the ministries of education and interior, these ministries were effectively under the movement’s control (Balchi 2017; Yavuz and Koc 2016).

Similar to Islamists in Sudan, in Turkey, Islamists coalesced with non-Islamists to undermine each other, and moreover, they used state institutions to challenge and repress one another. For example, although Erbakan’s Felicity Party, founded in 2001, was electorally marginal as it never passed the 10 percent threshold needed to enter parliament, it formed the Nation Alliance with the CHP and the Iyi Party that splintered off from the MHP in 2017. The sole objective of the alliance was to challenge the AKP’s constitutional referendum geared at strengthening the executive.

Gulen’s attempts to undermine the AKP were more serious. In December 2013, Gulen members and sympathizers in the police force and judiciary detained and indicted dozens of AKP members on corruption charges. The goal was to weaken the AKP government. As Yavuz and Koc argue, “the movement’s motive was not based on morality, fighting corruption or a desire to restore the rule of law. Rather, it was to undermine the democratically elected government of Erdogan, which refused to share power fully with the movement” (Koc 2016, 140). Furthermore, many scholars contend there is cumulative evidence indicating that it was members of the Gulen movement in the military who tried to stage a coup to overthrow Erdogan in July 2016 (Esen and Gumuscu 2017; Yavuz and Koc 2016; Yavuz and Balchi 2018). Erdogan responded to the alleged Gulen’s manoeuvres with sweeping arrests and purges of the movement’s followers. In 2016 alone, the government detained or dismissed 42,000 officials from the military and judiciary, and suspended 23,000 employees from the ministries of
education for suspected links to the Gulen movement (Yavuz and Koc 2016, 144). Erdogan described Gulen as a “cancer” in society and designated the movement as a terrorist organization (Yavuz and Koc 2016). While the Gulen movement had experienced past episodes of repression by the state, its most devastating setback came at the hands of fellow Islamists.

While an ideational explanation would expect Islamists to work harmoniously for the collective vision of an Islamic society, this has not been the case. Rather, personal rivalries and power politics took place, subordinating any religious consideration and leading to a break-up and willingness to shift alliances, including joining with religious others. This research has found both Sudan and Turkey to have demonstrated this.

Thus, scholars of MENA need to take into consideration that Islamists behave like many other political actors, maneuvering to protect their power and sometimes sacrificing their ideological tenets. Additionally, they need to take into account that a better way to understand Islamist behaviour is through examining their political environment, particularly the institutions and structures in which they work, as opposed to just their ideological positions. Given that Islamists constitute a major political force in many MENA countries, ignoring these findings risks continued misunderstanding of the region’s politics and detrimental policy outcomes.

**Implications for the Scholarship on Minority–State Relations**

This study has also found other institutional and structural variables to have less of a role in explaining Islamist *shifts* in approaches toward minorities. First, the findings of this research disagree with theories that correlate state capacity with open approaches (Cordell and Wolff 2009; Przeworski 2000; Rudolfsen 2017). Islamists in both states have shifted their approaches, despite operating with varying degrees of state capacity.
However, state capacity can explain the extent of a government’s change of approach. For instance, Bulutgil (2017) argues that the strength and ideology of state leadership institutions can influence minority policies by constraining the behaviour of the ruling elite. In Sudan, because the Islamists were able to coopt or remove other leadership institutions, they were able to carry out drastic open and closed strategies; al-Bashir’s government carried out genocide in Darfur and also negotiated the self-determination of the South. In Turkey, however, because the AKP government encountered strong nationalist leadership institutions, which were able to apply pressure, its open approach was limited to accommodative policies.

The differences in the extent of a government’s open and closed approaches are also a function of structural state capacity. Heger (2001) and Walter (1999) argue that states with limited economic resources and ineffective administrative and political institutions are more likely to resort to inexpensive strategies. The case of Sudan has illustrated the validity of this claim. For instance, the Sudanese government granted the South Sudanese the right to self-determination because it ultimately did not have the economic resources or the coercive capacity to ward off armed groups from both Darfur and the South. Furthermore, the Sudanese Islamist government’s use of Arab nationalist militias, which carried out a genocide in Darfur, was also a result of the state’s weak state capacity. In fact, the Islamist government was not the first to use the militia strategy; it was al-Mahdi’s democratic government that introduced it.

Furthermore, while some work, such as that of Gurr (1993) and Stroschein (2012), has argued that democratic governments are better able to accommodate minorities, this study has found that regime type does not necessarily play a role in Islamist governing approaches toward minorities. For example, Islamists in Turkey advanced the most comprehensive package of accommodative Kurdish policies when the country experienced the largest democratic
backsliding in the period after 2010. And although Sudan’s authoritarian Islamist regime was one of the most repressive in Sudan’s modern history, it granted the South Sudanese the right to self-determination, while none of the country’s past governments, democratic or authoritarian, agreed to such a provision. Thus, instead of regime type theories, this research has found the focus on alliance building to be able to better explain government approaches toward minorities.

Furthermore, other ideational explanations that stress the role of ethnicity also fail to account for the shifts in Islamists’ approaches. If ethnic nationalism influenced minority approaches, we would expect a closed approach toward all of the minorities examined, but that was not the case. Islamists in Turkey and Sudan have shifted their approaches toward all minorities, even though all exhibited a variation in ethnic affiliation with Islamists. However, this study has found that the adoption of ethnic-nationalist stance, as was the case in Turkey with the AKP’s nationalist position post-2015, to be an outcome of strategic calculations for alliance building.

Thus, the comparison of Turkey and Sudan has found that strategic interactions between domestic actors, regulated by existing institutions and structures, constitutes an important determinant of state approaches toward minorities. At the same time, in both cases, external dynamics played a role in shaping state minority policies. Going forward, scholars of ethnic minority studies need to continue to considering domestic politics, but also to continue to pay attention to the external context as ignoring it could risk incomplete understanding of states’ governing approaches toward minorities in some instances.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Existing research has shown that since coalition configurations are an outcome of strategic interactions between various domestic players, and could be comprised of various socio-
economic, ethnic, sectarian or tribal groups, and corporate or military circles, the inclusion of minority groups is not always necessary (Svolik 2012). Furthermore, studies have also shown that the size of minority groups and their strategic capacity – facilitated by territorial concentration and external support – can affect their inclusion in coalitions (Gherghina 2014; Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe 2007; Posner 2004). This is because a minority group’s size, territorial concentration, and external support can contribute to its political and military capacity. If the minority enjoys a sizeable population, territorial base, and external support, it can better organize politically and militarily to mobilize in support of, or in opposition to, the incumbent.

For example, al-Bashir’s government in Sudan negotiated with the SPLM/A because of the armed group’s strategic capacity, facilitated by its population size that constituted an estimated quarter of the Sudanese population, its territorial concentration in Sudan’s largest region, and its decades-long support from neighbouring and international actors. The Kurds and Darfuris also have sizable populations and a good territorial base and have enjoyed external support, making them attractive coalition partners. However, this leaves open the question about the treatment of minorities who lack these attributes. Therefore, further examination of Islamist policies toward minority groups smaller in size that are territorially dispersed and do not enjoy external support would be helpful for identifying whether these factors influence their treatment by Islamists in power.

Additionally, because ideational-centric approaches suggest that religious affiliation is the all-important factor, this study has focused on comparing the treatment of groups that differ ethnically from the ruling Islamists but share its religion (Category A) with a group that differs ethnically and religiously from the ruling Islamists (Category B). Adding comparisons with what the introductory chapter identified as Category C, namely religious minorities that share ethnicity
with the governing Islamists, could enable us to further probe the relative significance of religious affiliation versus ethnic affiliation. Candidates for comparison are the Alevi in Turkey, the Republican Brothers in Sudan, and the Bahai and Sunnis in Iran. The findings of this study suggest that neither of these ideational factors should be decisive. Rather, it is the minorities’ specific value to the strategic needs of the governing Islamists that would shape the Islamists’ policies toward them.

Finally, examining the impact of favourable institutional and structural settings on Islamist minority approaches could further our understanding about how these settings influence Islamist strategic political calculations. Sudan’s Islamist regime operated in a weak state. In contrast, Turkey’s regime is not theocratic and the state is stronger. Future research could examine a case in which Islamists govern minorities in the framework of a theocratic regime with a relatively effective state apparatus. Iran serves as an example for such a case. Would this influence the calculus of the governing apparatus and its approach toward minorities, including the inclination to adopt an open approach? In either case, this future research would be helpful in determining how various institutional settings affect Islamists’ strategic calculations and approaches toward minorities.

**Conclusion**

This study has shown that in stark contrast to what the literature expects, Islamists in power do not have a unified approach toward ethnic minorities. Islamists’ strategies in Sudan and Turkey shifted diachronically toward Muslim and non-Muslim ethnic minorities, moving between an open and accommodative approach to one that is closed and repressive. Religious affiliation, a factor stressed by ideational explanations, does not explain Islamist approaches toward ethnic minorities as it fails to account for this diachronic variation. Rather, this study has found that
Islamists’ approaches toward this population are an outcome of strategic calculations to preserve power through coalition and alliance building. Coalition building itself is contingent on strategic interactions between different internal actors and regional and international settings, as the cases of Sudan and Turkey have demonstrated.
Appendix A
Research Ethics Approval Letter

January 08, 2016

Ms. Dalal Daoud  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Department of Political Studies  
Queen’s University  
Room C321, Mackintosh-Corry Hall  
68 University Ave  
Kingston, ON, K7L 3N6

GREB Ref #: GPLST-108-15; Romeo # 6017259  
Title: "GPLST-108-15 Minorities in Islamist States: Comparative analysis of Sudan, Turkey, and Iran"

Dear Ms. Daoud:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GPLST-108-15 Minorities in Islamist States: Comparative analysis of Sudan, Turkey, and Iran" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2 (2014)) and Queen’s ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405.001), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form by signing at [http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html](http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html); click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form"). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by signing at [http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html](http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html); click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Request for Amendment of Approved Studies". Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Ms. Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

John D. Freeman  
Ph.D.  
Chair  
General Research Ethics Board

c:  Dr. Oded Haklai, Faculty Supervisor  
Dr. Andrew Lister, Chair, Unit REB  
Ms. Brenda Batson, Dept. Admin.
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