

A FOURTH ALTERNATIVE FOR TURKEY: A DEMOCRATIC MIDDLE EAST

In this article the author argues that Turkey can be a positive catalyst for democratic change in the Middle East. In its evaluation of the potential success of the democratization process, the article analyzes eight indicators of the democratic requirements for countries in need of change in the region: their economic situation, the international climate, a past democratic experience, the existence of past democratic culture and institutions, and the role of ethnicity and civil society.

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In a recent speech¹ the famous political scientist Samuel Huntington described three alternatives for the future of the Turkish Republic. These alternatives were:

- □ The European Option: Turkey will be a full member of the European Union, and an inseparable part of the Western world. According to Huntington this scenario is highly popular among the Turkish elites and supported by the government.
- □ The Muslim Option: This option envisions Turkish leadership in the region. Turkey may lead the Middle Eastern countries as a Muslim democracy and may be a regional power through its links with the Muslim society.
- □ The Nationalist Option: Turkey lives in a very dangerous neighborhood and security must be the most important problem of the country. Therefore, Turkey has to prioritize its security and establish security based relations with the United States and Israel as well as become a more active member of the NATO.

According to Huntington, the first option is not realistic because there are unbridgeable differences between Turkey and the EU based on religion. Turkey is a secular Muslim country and the EU is dominated by a Christian vision. Consequently, despite the willingness of Turkish elites and the government, full membership in the EU does not seem possible in the near future. Huntington states that there are two important obstacles for the second option: first, “Turkey has to reconsider Kemalism” and second, there is significant paranoia in the region towards Turkey as a result of its Ottoman heritage. Turkey has to spend enormous effort to gain the support and trust of the Arab world in order to realize the second option. The final option seems the most possible according to Huntington, an isolationist and security based position in world affairs.

Huntington’s views created significant disappointment among Turkish elites, generally focused on the first option. However, Turkey’s role in the next century is not just limited to these three options. A fourth option for Turkey could be: becoming a catalyst in the transformation of the Middle Eastern autocratic states and consolidating their democratic reforms. Following the military intervention of the coalition forces in Iraq, the Middle East became an important matter among Western elites. It is now generally accepted that the Muslim world is not dominated by democracies and that their democratization will significantly contribute to world peace.²

In this paper, we will discuss opportunities for a democratic transition in the Middle Eastern region, by referring to lessons taken from previous experiences/waves of democratization. We will make a short presentation of

¹ Samuel Huntington, “Culture, Power, and War: What Roles for Turkey in the New Global Politics,” speech given on 24 May 2005, Istanbul.

² For a detailed discussion of the importance of democracy in the Muslim world, see Robert Haass, “Toward Greater Democracy in the Muslim World,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.26, No.3 (2003); Larry Diamond, “Lessons From Iraq,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.16, No.1 (2005); Francis Fukuyama, “Stateness First,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.16, No.1 (2005).

requirements of a successful democratization process, discuss Middle Eastern countries within this context and present a short elaboration of the Turkish experience which will provide significant insight into the democratization process itself.

Requirements for a Successful Democratization

Recently political scientists have begun to question what makes democracies survive. During the first half of 1990s, innumerable academic works were published about the determinants of a consolidated democracy. Although there is still no consensus among students of democratic transitions about these determinants, there are some commonly underlined factors. While trying to answer the following question, an article by Adam Przeworski, et al, gives us a short list of these factors: "If a country, any randomly selected country is to have a democratic regime next year, what conditions should be present in that country and around the world this year?"³

The Economy

Affluence, or the economic level of any given country in the most important factor affecting democratic consolidation. There is a clear relationship between the level of economic development and the fragility of a regime. Huntington states that most wealthy countries are democratic. Most democratic countries are wealthy and poverty is the principal obstacle to democratic development.⁴

According to Przeworski, countries with per capita annual income less than 1,000 USD are extremely fragile, and the probability of the regime changing to a dictatorship decreases with increasing per capita annual income. The expected duration of democracy in a country with per capita income between 4,000 and 6,000 USD is 100 years while it is only 8.5 years for those with per capita income less than 1,000 USD.⁵

The authors state that these findings falsify arguments by O'Donnell and Huntington. Both argue that there is a level of economic development beyond which further development actually decreases the probability of the survival of democracy. According to Huntington modernization threatens stability of the political regime, dictatorships or democracies. O'Donnell says that democracies tend to die when a country outgrows the easy stage of import substitution policies. However, the statistical findings of Przeworski and his friends show that there is no income level at which democracies become more fragile. According to them, above an income level of 6,000 USD, democracies are expected to live forever.

³ Adam Przeworski et al. "What Makes Democracies Endure?", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.7, No.1(January 1996).

⁴ Samuel Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.2, No.2 (Spring 1991), p.31.

⁵ Przeworski et. al. p.41.

Affluence is not the only economic determinant of democratic survival: A stable economic environment with relatively higher rates of economic growth and moderate rates of inflation is also essential. Rapid growth is generally accepted as a destabilizing factor for democracies since it seriously harms income distribution. However, statistics show that democracies are more likely to survive when they grow faster than 5 percent. In the lower income levels, relatively higher economic growth increases the probability of survival of the democracy threefold. On the other hand, inflation threatens democratic stability. An annual inflation rate between 6 and 30 percent decreases the propensity for survival of a given democracy by 50 percent with an expected life of 71 years; when annual inflation is greater than 30 percent, the expected life of democracy decreases to 16 years.⁶

Theoretically an equal distribution of income among citizens is an important component of a durable democracy. Since democracies are generally regimes with a large middle class, increasing income gap between lower and middle classes threatens a democratic regime. However, statistical data provided by Przeworski does not support this argument. They fail to find a negative correlation between the survival of democracies and income inequality. However, they argue that “democracy is much more likely to survive in countries where income inequality is declining overtime.” They state that people expect democracy to reduce income inequality and democracies are more likely to survive when they do.⁷

International Climate

In addition to economic factors, international political tendencies play an important role in determining the survival of democracies. A democracy tends to survive longer as there is a global tendency towards democracies.⁸ Positive regard towards democracy as a system may help a new democracy during its earlier stages when it is still vulnerable to internal challenges. A relatively stable international environment may facilitate consolidation of democracy. As a result of increasing interdependence between polities, the external environment has some power to impose a set of conditions for internal regime consolidation. These conditions may be channeled through systemic diffusion (or penetration of system), convergence of political regimes in the same region; or some supranational or international organization using conditionality.⁹ The active and positive role of the European Union during transition of Southeastern and Eastern European countries from communist systems to democratic ones are a good example of the

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.42.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Geoffrey Pridham, “The International Context of Democratic Consolidation: Southern Europe in Comparative Perspective,” *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation: Southern Europe in Comparative Perspective*, R. Gunther et al. (eds.), (The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp.170-174.

second type. The relationship between Turkey and the Europe, which will be discussed below, is another textbook example.

Political Learning and Past Democratic Experience

Statistical data shows that if a country had a democratic experience in the past, its democracy tends to survive longer after transition from authoritarian rule. The absence of democratic traditions makes consolidation of new democratic institutions difficult (Russia) and past democratic experience makes new regime more stable (Chile). In the same way, democratic breakdown in the past also increases propensity of breakdown after the transition. Przeworski states that “the lessons learned by antidemocratic forces from the past subversion of democracy are more effective than the traditions that can be relied on by democrats.”¹⁰ Przeworski found that a strong democracy requires a past democratic experience. Although some students of political science state that dictatorships are better at generating economic development in poor countries and once countries have developed their regimes will shift to democracies; empirical findings falsify these hypotheses. Statistics show that dictatorships do not facilitate economic development and economically developed dictatorships are not transformed into democracies. Consequently, as Przeworski states, “in order to strengthen democracy, we should strengthen democracy, not support dictatorships.”¹¹

Institutions

Institutions make democracies different. Representative systems, electoral systems, division and supervision of powers as well as methods of societal dialogue make up the backbone of some of these institutions. The most important of these institutional choices is between presidentialism and parliamentarism: Juan Linz states that presidentialism seriously hurts new democracies because it systematically excludes opposition from the decision making process: the presidential race is a zero sum game and the defeated candidates are excluded from the system. Statistical analyses show that institutions also affect consolidation of democracies: Parliamentary systems last longer than presidential ones.¹² According to Arendt Lijphart, parliamentary systems are much more favorable for new democracies since they directly contribute to the quality of democracy, defined as representativeness, accountability, equality and participation¹³. He states that Parliamentary systems provide a better representation of minorities (including ethnical, regional and gender based ones), better conventional political participation, better income distribution and a better democracy.¹⁴

¹⁰ Przeworski et. al, p.43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Przeworski et. al, pp.44-46.

¹³ Arendt Lijphart, “Yeni Demokrasiler için Yeni Tercihleri” in L. Diamond and M. Plattner (eds.), *Demokrasinin Küresel Yükselişi* (Istanbul: Yetkin Yayınlar, 1995), p.188.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.191.

Culture

Samuel Huntington, states that some cultural characteristics provide a hostile environment for democracies to survive. According to him, Confucianism and Islam as cultures are not compatible with democracies. Confucian societies are characterized with domination of the state over the individual, authority over liberty, and responsibilities over rights. They lack a tradition of rights against the state, harmony and cooperation are much more emphasized than disagreement and competition; where the conflict between ideas, groups and parties are accepted illegitimate.¹⁵ Huntington indicates only two countries with democratic experience in East Asia: Japan and Philippines where democracy is a product of an American presence, catholic population (Philippines) or a weak Confucian heritage (Japan). Newly democratized countries, Taiwan and Korea owe their successes to shift from Confucianism as a result of modernization, urbanization and “impressive spread of Christianity.”¹⁶

However, according to Huntington, Islamic values are compatible with democracies: Unitarianism, rule-ethics, individualism, scripturalism, Puritanism, an egalitarian aversion to mediation and hierarchy; but since Islam rejects any distinction between the religious community and political community, it makes a democratic transition difficult. Huntington states that as a result of the Kemalist rejection of Islamic concepts of society and creation of a secular, modern, nation state, Turkey is the sole example of democratic political system with an overwhelming Muslim majority,¹⁷ In the end, however, Huntington is not too pessimistic about democratic possibilities among Islamic and Confucian societies: cultural obstacles are not permanent; they are dynamic, and societies change.

Ethnicity: Larry Diamond states “one of numerable laws of social sciences is about ethnicity: Ethnic divisions don’t disappear”¹⁸ that rulers cannot fade ethnic divisions away through assimilation or repression. However, according to Diamond, it is possible to prevent them from threatening democracies. Since the majority of newly democratized societies are multiethnic, ethnicity has to be included in the equation of consolidating democracies. Diamond puts four alternative ways of reconciling ethnicity within a political system: federalism, proportionate distribution of power and resources, minority rights and coalition formation in the center. According to him where the central state is not powerful and ethnic cleavages are sharp; a stable democracy is impossible.¹⁹ Thus, the founding fathers of new democracies have to regulate ethnicity.

Civil Society: Since the early works of Sydney Verba and Gabriel Almond (1963), the role given to society as a determinant of consolidating democracies is clear:

¹⁵ Huntington, p. 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.28.

¹⁸ Larry Diamond, “Demokrasinin Üç Paradoksu” in L. Diamond and M. Plattner (eds.), (1995), p.138.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

“political culture does shape and constrain the possibilities for democracy.”²⁰ Political culture is defined as predominant political values, beliefs and attitudes of a country and it is also determined by social and economic change, social and civic mobilization, institutional practice, historical experience and international diffusion.²¹ Interpersonal trust, participation in secondary institutions and effective political participation are characteristics of this component of a stable democracy.²²

Recent works also showed that social capital is operationalized as generalized trust, active participation to civic organizations, membership in political organizations and union membership, directly affects sustainability of democracies. For a transitional democracy, the existence of such a social capital almost guarantees consolidation of democracy.²³ Civic institutions have a cyclic function, they are outcomes of a social capital level of a given society and they also provide a suitable environment to citizens for accumulation of social capital. Putnam states that voluntary activity creates interpersonal trust through reciprocity, which in turn creates social capital, which lubricates social life and creates trust in governmental institutions.²⁴ Civil society also plays a role of restricting corruption, by checking their potential abuses and violations of the law. Civil society forms a good platform for proto-coalitions and societal groups; thus facilitating communication between different actors, before being materialized at electoral ballots.²⁵

A final role attributed to the civil society is its transnational character. As a result of increased interdependence through globalization a transnational dialogue stated among societal groups from different polities. The clearest indication of this transnational dialogue is extended cooperation between civil society organizations from different countries. This cooperation may be visible in the form of sharing experiences, resources, know-how and creating a transnational legitimacy for local civil society organizations. Consequently a transnationalized civil society stimulates transition to democracy and facilitates consolidation of new regimes.

Indicators of the Potential for Democratic Regimes in the Middle East

It is well-known that the Middle East is not a geographical region with abundant democracies. Even if we employ the minimalist definition of democracy only a few Middle Eastern countries satisfy this criterion: Israel and Turkey. Palestine,

²⁰ Larry Diamond, “Introduction: Political Culture and Democracy” in L. Diamond (ed.), *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), p.17.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p.19.

²³ Eric M. Uslaner, “Bowling Almost Alone: Political Participation in a New Democracy,” paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Emerging Repertoires of Political Action: Toward a Systematic Study of Postconventional Forms of Participation, Uppsala, Sweden, 13-18 April 2004, p.14

²⁴ Robert Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.6, No.1, (1995); p. 65.

²⁵ Larry Diamond “Toward Democratic Consolidation,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.5, No.3 (1994).

Lebanon, Egypt and Algeria are partly democratic since they hold regular elections, however, free competition in the ballots is disputable. In the Central Asian and Caucasus regions, only Armenia and Georgia provide relatively better conditions for regular free elections. Holding regular and free elections is not sufficient as an indicator of the quality of democracies. Data collected by the Freedom House about political rights and civil liberties of countries provide us a good tool of comparison of democracies.

Table 1. Rankings of the Middle Eastern Countries

	Political Rights	Civil Liberties	Freedom House Classification
Israel	1	3	Free
Turkey	3	4	Partly Free
Armenia	4	4	Partly Free
Georgia	4	4	Partly Free
Kuwait	4	5	Partly Free
Bahrain	5	5	Partly Free
Jordan	5	5	Partly Free
Morocco	5	5	Partly Free
Yemen	5	5	Partly Free
Algeria	6	5	Not Free
Azerbaijan	6	5	Not Free
Brunei Darussalam	6	5	Not Free
Kazakhstan	6	5	Not Free
Kyrgyzstan	6	5	Not Free
Lebanon	6	5	Not Free
Oman	6	5	Not Free
Pakistan	6	5	Not Free
Tajikistan	6	5	Not Free
Tunisia	6	5	Not Free
Egypt	6	6	Not Free
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	6	6	Not Free
Qatar	6	6	Not Free
United Arab Emirates	6	6	Not Free
Iraq	7	5	Not Free
Uzbekistan	7	6	Not Free
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	7	7	Not Free
Saudi Arabia	7	7	Not Free
Syrian Arab Republic	7	7	Not Free
Turkmenistan	7	7	Not Free

Source: Freedom House, www.freedomhouse.org

Results show that only 1 of 29 countries located at this region is classified as free: Israel. With a civil liberties score of only 3 (1 is the best, 7 is the worst). Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan and Morocco are countries classified as partly free. The remaining 20 countries are classified as not free; and their political rights score is not better than 6. There are differences between civil liberties scores however this variation remains limited. □

Table 2. Middle Eastern Countries' Polity Scores

	Democracy Score	Autocracy Score	Polity Score (1)	The number of years since the most recent regime change	Openness of Executive Recruitment (2)	Constraint on Chief Executive (3)1	Regulation of participation (4)	Competitiveness of Political Participation (5)
Israel	10	0	10	55	4	7	5	5
Turkey	8	1	7	20	4	7	3	3
Armenia	5	0	5	5	4	5	2	3
Georgia	5	0	5	2	4	5	2	3
Iran	4	1	3	6	3	4	3	3
Jordan	2	4	-2	14	2	3	2	4
Yemen	1	3	-2	10	0	2	3	3
Algeria	1	4	-3	8	4	3	3	3
Tajikistan	1	4	-3	5	4	3	3	3
Kyrgyzstan	1	4	-3	12	4	4	3	2
Tunisia	1	5	-4	16	4	2	3	3
Pakistan	0	5	-5	4	0	2	4	2
Morocco	0	6	-6	38	2	3	3	2
Egypt	0	6	-6	51	4	3	4	2
Kazakhstan	0	6	-6	12	4	2	3	2
Azerbaijan	0	7	-7	8	4	2	4	2
Libya	0	7	-7	52	0	1	4	1
Syria	0	7	-7	40	4	3	4	1
Kuwait	0	7	-7	11	2	3	4	2
Bahrain	0	7	-7	28	1	2	3	2
UAE	0	8	-8	32	2	3	4	1
Oman	0	8	-8	46	1	2	4	2
Turkmenistan	0	9	-9	12	4	1	4	1
Uzbekistan	0	9	-9	12	4	1	4	1
Saudi Arabia	0	10	-10	77	1	1	4	1
Qatar	0	10	-10	32	1	1	4	1

(1) □ Polity score is calculated as democracy score-autocracy score

(2) □ 1- Closed; 2- Dual Executive, Designation; 3- Dual Executive, Election; 4-Open

(3) □ 1- Unlimited Authority; 3-Moderate Limitation; 5-Substantial Limitations; 7-Executive Parity and subordination;

(4) □ 1- Unregulated; 2-Multiple Identity; 3-Sectarian; 4-Restricted; 5-Regulated (no exclusion)

(5) □ 1- Repressed; 2-Suppressed; 3-Factional; 4-Transitional; 5-Competitive

Source: POLITY IV PROJECT; Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2002; Dataset Users' Manual; p.16; available at. www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/polity.

The table above shows an overall evaluation of countries based on the POLITY IV dataset. According to this data set, only Israel and Turkey have a democracy score greater than 5 (11 is the highest). 15 of 26 countries have a democracy score of 0. According to the data set, there is no country in the region in which participation is open to all societal groups, except Israel. Turkey, which is accepted as a democratic country in general, has a lower score.²⁶ Armenia, Georgia and Jordan are classified as “multiple identity” as result of their restricted electoral regulations. Israel is another exception in the region when competitiveness of political participation is considered.

Despite methodological differences, both data sources clearly show that democracy is not a common practice among countries of the Middle East, the Caucasian and the Central Asia. Israel seems the only fully democratic country in the region, and regardless of their deficiencies Turkey, Armenia and Georgia are considered to be other democracies in the region. All countries of the Gulf Region, the Turkic republics except Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; and Egypt, Libya and Syria are autocratic countries with very high autocracy scores.

Economic Indicators

It is so far argued that economic development directly affects democratic consolidation. It may do so through creating a certain level of popular support at a given level of prosperity, or establishing a middle class through equal distribution of income and facilitating legitimacy of the democratic regime by providing a stable economy with lower inflation rates and higher growth rates.

The table below presents some economic figures to draw a general picture of countries of the region. It is a remarkable fact that almost none of the richest countries is democratic. Among 7 countries which have a gross domestic product per capita more than 10,000 USD, only Israel is democratic. In the case of the Middle East, economic welfare did not bring democracy. Even though Turkey presents an important exception with its GDP per capita of 6,000 USD and democracy score of 8, two middle income countries, Tunisia and Algeria have a democracy score of 1; meaning that there is no evidence for the affluence hypothesis stating that after a certain level of income, dictatorships tend to switch to democracies in the region. On the other hand, the effect of poverty on the fragility of democracies is weak: Two relatively lower income countries, Georgia and Armenia have a medium score of democracy, while the remaining lower income countries of the region are not democratic.

²⁶ <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/polity/Tur1.htm>

Table 3. Development Indicators of the Middle Eastern Countries

	GDP Per Capita (\$)	Total Population (millions)	GDP per capita annual growth rate (%) (1990-2002)	Average annual change in consumer price index (%) (1990- 2002)	GINI Coefficient	Democracy Score (Polity)
UAE	22420	2,9	..	..	..	0
Qatar	19844	0,6	..	2,6	..	0
Israel	19530	6,3	1,8	8,3	35,5	10
Bahrain	17170	0,7	1,5	0,7	..	0
Kuwait	16240	2,4	-1,7	1,9	..	0
Oman	13340	2,8	0,9	-0,1	..	0
Saudi Arabia	12650	23,5	-0,6	0,7	..	0
Libya	7570	5,4	..	..	..	0
Tunisia	6760	9,7	3,1	4	39,8	1
Iran	6690	68,1	2,2	23,6	43	4
Turkey	6390	70,3	1,3	75,5	40	8
Kazakhstan	5870	15,5	-0,7	45,6	31,3	0
Algeria	5760	31,3	0,3	14	35,3	1
Lebanon	4360	3,6	3,1	..	..	..
Turkmenistan	4300	4,8	-3,2	..	40,8	0
Jordan	4220	5,3	0,9	3,1	36,4	2
Morocco	3810	30,1	0,8	3,3	39,5	0
Egypt	3810	70,5	2,5	7,5	34,4	0
Syrian Arab Republic	3620	17,4	1,8	5,1	..	0
Azerbaijan	3210	8,3	0,2	109,1	36,5	0
Armenia	3120	3,1	1,7	44,7	37,9	5
Georgia	2260	5,2	-3,9	17,7	36,9	5
Pakistan	1940	149,9	1,1	8,6	33	0
Uzbekistan	1670	25,7	-0,9	..	26,8	0
Kyrgyzstan	1620	5,1	-3,2	18,7	29	1
Tajikistan	980	6,2	-8,1	..	34,7	1
Yemen	870	19,3	2,5	32,6	33,4	1

The relationship between the economy and democracy is not limited with positive effect of level of prosperity on democracy. A sustainable growth and stable economy are also two other factors affecting democratic survivability. The region does not present a homogenous picture from this perspective. The above figures clearly present that the region is far from being homogenous. When level of economic development is considered, oil exporting rich countries of the region should be expected to transform into democracies. However, they are considerably autocratic. When all of these economic indicators are considered, countries with possible transitions to democracy and the potential for democracy may be listed as follows: Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt are countries with a medium income level, a positive growth rate and relatively good income distribution. They are major candidates for democratic transition and they have good potential for democratic consolidation.

Armenia and Georgia are relatively democratic countries despite their lower income levels. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan are relatively richer; however, their economies are far from being stable. When economic stabilization occurs in these economies; their democratization propensity increases. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are too poor for being democracies. However, if they can couple economic growth with good income distribution; it will be a great step forward in their quests for democracy.

Oil exporting countries have everything required for democratization but are not democracies. Economic factors fail to explain their unwillingness for transition to democracy. Nevertheless if democratic transition occurs; we can speculate that democracy could be consolidated in those countries.

International Climate Indicators

Following the military intervention of the US to Iraq and Afghanistan, the international climate lacks stability and peace. A possible intervention in Iran, enduring rivalry between Israel and Palestine, Pakistan and India and ethnicity based disputes in the Caucasus are some leading fault lines in the region. Such an environment does not facilitate countries' transition to democracy and consolidation, especially in the Gulf region. Nevertheless, Morocco and Algeria are not subject to these circumstances and are in a much more friendly international environment. Thus, a possible transition to democracy in the South Mediterranean region is possible.

The roles given to international institutions are limited. The United Nations (UN) lost a lot of its legitimacy as a result of its exclusion from the Iraq crisis. Moreover, the UN has not been identified with the democratization effort, thus attribution of such a role to the UN is unrealistic. In contrast to the passive role of the UN, the European Union is an important actor for democratic transition. Following the Helsinki Summit, democratic governance became an important criterion for accession to the EU.

The willingness of the U.S. to bring democracy to the region is apparent in the words of President George W. Bush: “The requirements of freedom apply fully to Africa and Latin America and the entire Islamic world.”²⁷ It is not easy to make a list of countries whose transitions to democracy will be facilitated by this U.S. commitment. U.S. based civil society organizations played active roles in some countries of the region such as Georgia, Armenia and Lebanon. The military intervention of the U.S. to Iraq has been legitimized with the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime and the establishment of a new Iraqi democracy. However, the U.S. has not made any attempt to democratize Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman or UAE. Therefore, the commitment of the U.S. to democratize the region will be in question during the next few years.

Snowball effect may play an important role in democratization of the region. The best example of the snowball effect is observed during the fall of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe. These ex-members of the Warsaw pact transformed themselves to liberal democracies, strengthened with their memberships to the EU. Hints of an approaching snowball of democratization in the region are available. Azerbaijan can follow its neighbors in the near future. Of the five Turkic republics, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are potential democracies for the future. The Cedar Revolution of Lebanon presents both a threat and opportunity to its neighbor, Syria and the overthrow of Saddam’s regime may directly affect the archaic regime in Jordan.

Political Learning and Past Democratic Experience

Turkey and Israel are the only two institutionalized democracies, in the region. All of the ex-Soviet republics have considerable political experience under the rule of the Communist parties but they lack of tradition of competitive and free elections and unrestricted political participation. Libya; Syria, Iraq and Egypt are countries that were transformed to dictatorships after a short democratic experience. Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria are two countries which have been transformed to democracies after a long period of dictatorship but their experiences are also very limited. None of the Arabic states of the Gulf have democratic experience. Lebanon’s democratic experience was short lived and ended with civil war and Syrian military occupation.

Considering these past experiences, the number of countries with sufficient political capital to sustain a democratic regime is limited. We can list Armenia, Georgia, and Lebanon as candidates for sustainable democracies. All of the Turkic republics have sufficient political experience but how to transfer it to democratic experience should be considered on a case by case basis. The South Mediterranean region’s experience will also contribute to democratic consolidation.

²⁷ Richard Haass, “Toward Greater Democracy in the Muslim World,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.26, No.3; (2003), p.137.

Institutional Indicators

Similar to democratic experience, the majority of the Middle Eastern countries lack the necessary institutions to perform democratization and democratic consolidation. Israel and Turkey are two parliamentary democracies with proportional representative electoral system. Georgia and Armenia are presidential systems with some parliamentary restrictions. All of the Turkic republics are presidential and the legislative branch is subject to the president. Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt are also presidential regimes (although Morocco is ruled by a king), and the legislative branch's power almost restricted. Similar to Morocco, Jordan is ruled by a king. Iran forms a specific institutional structure. It functions as a presidential democracy but the religious clergy materialized on the body of the Council of Guardians plays an all important role. All of the Gulf region's countries are hereditary kingdoms except Yemen ruled by a popularly elected president. It is clear that political institutions in the region don't provide a suitable environment for consolidation of democratic regimes. Presidential regimes are very fragile for new democracies and most of them are already transformed to dictatorship. The majority of kingdoms are not restricted with a popularly elected parliament making them equal to dictatorships.

When the potential of the region for democratization is considered; presidential regimes with some parliamentary restrictions are more likely to have peaceful transitions. Georgia, Armenia, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt are among them. Since consolidation of democracies is closely related with institutional structures, the above discussed polities need institutional engineering after their transition to democracies in order to sustain democratic regimes. Any transition without institutional change will create very fragile democratic regimes. □

Cultural Indicators

The most important logical implication of the clash of civilizations thesis forwarded by Huntington is that Islamic culture does not provide a suitable environment for democracies. However, there are some empirical works which contradict Huntington's hypothesis. Ronald Inglehart, a leading political scientist and founder of the World Values Survey published a series of academic works about compatibility of Islam with democracy. In his paper coauthored with Pippa Norris,²⁸ he states that support for democracy is something universal among all societies and that there are no statistically significant differences between different cultures: "development, support for democratic institutions is just as strong among those living in Islamic societies as in Western (or other) societies"²⁹ Although Islamic societies put more emphasis on religious authorities than Western societies, this difference is also valid between Western societies and societies from other civilizations.

²⁸ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, "The True Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Policy* (March-April 2003).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.70

The most important distinguishing common characteristic of Islamic societies is their lower level of tolerance for homosexuality, abortion and divorce. Their attitude towards gender equality in Islamic societies is also significantly lower than other cultures. Inglehart and Norris state that there is a correlation between support for gender equality and level of democracy of a nation, according to them economic modernization is the factor which will close the gap between Islamic and Western countries: “relatively industrialized Islamic societies such as Turkey share the same views on gender equality and sexual liberalization as other new democracies.”³⁰ Another paper published by the same authors presents much more detailed findings. According to them, Western and Islamic societies generally agreed on three of the four indicators of political values: Approval of how well democracy worked in practice; support for democratic ideals; and attitudes towards leadership by experts and by unaccountable government officials. The only difference between Islamic and Western societies is observed in attitudes towards the role of religious leaders, where Islamic nations proved far more favorable towards religious rulers.³¹ Lower levels of democracy in Muslim countries must be related with factors other than individual values and orientations. Consequently, we cannot say that Islamic culture, which dominates the region, is an obstacle for further democratization.

Ethnicity Indicators

Ethnic diversity plays an important role as a determinant of democratic stability. According to the president of the Freedom House, Adrian Karatnycky “a state with a dominant ethnic group is some three times more likely to be Free than a multiethnic state.”³² The Minority at Risks (MAR) Project directed by the University of Maryland gives a detailed picture of ethnical structure of the region.³³ According to the MAR data, 19 of 29 Middle Eastern countries have a multiethnic composition.

The number of relevant ethnical groups is 8 in Iran (43 percent of total population), 6 in Pakistan (43 percent), 2 in Israel (48 percent), 1 in Jordan (55 percent), 2 in Morocco (38 percent), 1 in Algeria (25 percent) and 1 in Saudi Arabia (15 percent), Syria (12 percent) and Egypt (9 percent). Iraq and Lebanon are totally multiethnic societies. Iraq is composed 3 and Lebanon is composed of 5 relevant ethnic groups. The ex-soviet republics of the region are also multiethnic societies: Azerbaijan includes 3 ethnic groups which form 30 percent of total population. These scores are 4 ethnic groups in Georgia (16 percent), 2 in Kyrgyzstan

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.73

³¹ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Islam & the West: Testing the "Clash of Civilizations" Thesis*; Working Paper, Harvard University Kennedy School of Government. A multivariate analysis of data controlling for macro variables such as level of human and economic development and micro variables such as education, age, gender and level of religiosity; shows that support for above stated three indicators of democracy is slightly more in Islamic societies. Lower support for democracy is found among Christian societies of Latin America, Eastern Europe while the Sinin/Confucian states showed the greater approval of strong government. Only indicator in which Islamic societies differ from Western societies is the support for strong leadership of religious leaders.

³² Adrian Karatnycky, “Muslim Countries and the Democracy Gap,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.13, No.1 (January 2002), p.108.

³³ Data available at <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/>

(31 percent), 2 in Kazakhstan (40 percent), 2 in Tajikistan (27 percent) and 2 in Uzbekistan (11 percent). According to the MAR data, Turkey includes 1 ethnic group with 20 percent of total population.

Data also includes political and economic discrimination scores of ethnic groups and these scores show that higher levels of political and economic discrimination in the region is almost a common practice. Average political discrimination score (maximum score is 4) 4 is for Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Turkey; 3.5 for Israel, 3 for Egypt, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan; 2.8 for Iran and 2.7 for Pakistan. Only Georgia, Azerbaijan and Syria have no political discrimination for ethnic groups. Political discrimination scores of Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Tajikistan and Morocco is lower 2 over 4. Economic discrimination is relatively less common among the Middle Eastern countries: The highest score of economic discrimination is observed in Israel (3.5) and Saudi Arabia (3). Other countries' economic discrimination scores is less than average.

Such an analysis of ethnic composition of the region shows that the link between democracy and ethnic homogeneity is not clear. Two most democratic countries of the region, Turkey and Israel include a significant ethnic group and have relatively higher political discrimination scores. On the other hand, the emirates of the region are composed of totally monolithic societies. Nevertheless, this fact does not hinder the necessity of including ethnic groups to the transition to and consolidation of democracies. A transition process neglecting major ethnic groups may result in civil wars and separatist movements.

Civil Society Indicators

Civil society is not an important part of the Middle Eastern political practice. There are no conceptual equivalents of the civil society of the West, despite some attempt to establish similarities between Islamic institution of *waqf* and the civil society organizations.

Limited participatory politics of the colonial period mobilized some segments of societies and numerable civil society initiatives were launched. However, after the Second World War, public discontent towards the tribal rulers of these countries were transformed to subsequent military interventions and the establishment of military dictatorships. During this long period of autocratic rule, civil society was repressed.³⁴ Across the region, authoritarian rulers excluded and repressed civil society in order to safeguard their powers. Civil society was non-existent in the oil rich kingdoms.³⁵

³⁴ *Ibid.* p.86

³⁵ Amy Hawthorne, "Middle Eastern Democracy: Is Civil Society the Answer?" *Carnegie Papers*, No.44, (March 2004) pp.8-10.

The Caucasian countries developed civil society as a result of political mobilization experienced after the collapse of the Soviet Empire. The power of civil society (perhaps with a little help from transnational partners) can be observed in the last two years in Armenia and Georgia. The forthcoming general elections of Azerbaijan, create a significant opportunity for Azerbaijani civil society. On the other hand; the Turkic republics present a different picture. According to Collins “As the Soviet system collapsed, clans — informal identity networks based on kin or fictive kin bonds —emerged as political actors” in the region.³⁶ The existence of “clan politics” contributes to regime durability; however, it seriously restricts opportunities for democratic transition by neutralizing the effect of individual elites, leadership and ideologies, pacts and formal institutions which are important components affecting democratic consolidation.³⁷ Such a political environment in which clans replace necessary institutions for democratization; coupled with the repression of authoritarian regimes create a very hostile environment for the survival of democratic regimes.

Considering these facts, we can conclude that the region lacks the necessary infrastructure for democratic transition and consolidation in terms of social capital and civic culture. Exceptions are numerous and very easy to anticipate: Israel, Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Lebanon have sufficient social capital and experience. Azerbaijan, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia are in the second tier, with relatively higher participatory experience. Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Iran have potential after possible transitions.

The Turkish Experience

Although some academics prefer to classify Turkey as a non-democratic country, more than half a century democratic experience of the country requires detailed analysis. Turkey was one of few countries which held free elections during 1950s and despite three and a half military interventions; it is still the most experienced democratic country with an overwhelming Muslim population. Therefore, we believe that Turkish experience of democratization will provide us important lessons on the eve of a democratization wave in the Middle East. □

The most significant characteristic of the Turkish democracy is the domination of the state over the society. As a result of the Ottoman heritage, the Turkish state always had a strong centralized and highly bureaucratic apparatus and highly institutionalized “output structures” of the state such as the civil service, armed forces, police and courts resulted on overdevelopment of the state machinery. Consequently, a strong state tradition dominated everyday politics, preventing development of a society centered political system.³⁸

³⁶ Kathleen Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence From the Central Asian Trajectories,” *World Politics*, Vol.56, No.1 (January 2004), p.224.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p.60

³⁸ Ergun Özbudun, “Turkey: How Far from Consolidation?,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.7, No.3 (1996) pp.124-125.

As a result of the strong state tradition, democratization of Turkey came from above, almost without any popular demands. This first attempt at democratization was not coupled with institutional rearrangements, one party continued to govern the country with previous institutional frameworks which allowed them to rule for 27 years. The lack of democratic culture and demands from below resulted in deepening political crisis and the first republic broke down with a military intervention.

After the three elections following a tentative transition towards democracy, opposition parties with legacies from the pre-1980 political system came to the power in the late 80's. Their primary propositions during the general elections were a more equal income distribution and a democratic reform. However, they did not spend too much energy to democratize the country while they were equally unsuccessful in the economic sphere: During their rule, the country experienced its first major economic crisis with an annual inflation rate of 140 percent.

This political environment was not suitable for democratizing the political system. The fear of Islamic and terrorist movements, coupled with enduring economic problems did not allow politicians to focus on democratic reforms. A necessary condition for democratization, a winning coalition of democrats, was far from being an option in Turkish politics.

Following the general elections of 1999 nobody was optimistic about democratic reforms in Turkey. Following two major earthquakes, the European Union decided to support Turkey's full membership to the EU with the conditionality of democratization and structural changes. Thus the Helsinki Summit became a turning point for the democratization of Turkey.

Following the Helsinki Summit, a series of legal and structural changes occurred. The most striking ones are the limitation on use of the death penalty to times of war, changes that made the prohibition and dissolution of political parties more difficult, expansion of the freedom of association and the strengthening of civil authority, the new Civil Code, the easing of restrictions on the right to broadcast in different languages and dialects.³⁹

During these reforms, civil society played an important role. Following the Helsinki Summit, a pro-EU coalition was formed and civil organizations were among the leaders of this coalition. Strong economic actors, a number of civil society organizations and think tanks spent enormous effort pushing for further democratization.⁴⁰ Today, civil society remains an important component of Turkish political life.⁴¹

³⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the Turkish reforms see Senem Aydın and Fuat Keyman "European Integration and Transformation of Turkish Society," EU-Turkey Working Paper, No. 2, August 2004 ; Fuat Keyman and Ziya Öniş, "Helsinki, Copenhagen and beyond," in Nergis Canefe and Mehmet Uçur (eds.) *Turkey's Accession Prospects* (London: Routledge, 2004); Ergun Özbudun and Serap Yazıcı, *Democratization Reforms in Turkey* (Istanbul: TESEV Publications, 2004).

⁴⁰ Aydın and Keyman (2004), p.13.

⁴¹ Ziya Öniş, "Turkish Modernization and Challenges for the New Europe," working paper.

There are innumerable lessons to take from the Turkish case. The above tables clearly show that economic factors did not facilitate Turkish democratization. Turkey is not among the most developed countries and per capita income is very low compared to other democratic countries. The Turkish economy has continuously fluctuated since 1970s, making democratic sustainability very difficult. Higher inflation rates with fluctuating economic growth were two impediments towards democratic consolidation. Finally, enduring economic problems coupled with rapid economic growth and social mobilization seriously hurt income distribution.

The international climate also did not provide an advantage for Turkey. Turkey is located in a geography where political tensions always occurred. The Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasian areas continuously became a center of international disputes, war and political instability. As a result of enduring rivalries between Greece and Turkey, the Aegean Sea and Cyprus were other sources of international instability for Turkey. After transition to democracy in 1983, Turkish democracy witnessed political tension with Bulgaria, Greece, Syria, Iraq and Armenia; experienced an intense military conflict in the southern region of the country and the First Gulf War. Such a negative international environment did not help Turkey to consolidate its democracy.

The most important international factor during the democratization process for Turkey was the role of the EU. As it is stated above, following the Helsinki Summit, Turkey conducted a significant political reform program. The European vision helped Turkish elites to form a winning coalition for democratization and support the government during the reforms.

Turkish democracy provides an important case falsifying the clash of civilizations thesis by Huntington who explains Turkish exceptionalism by the existence of a western oriented bureaucratic elite. However, almost every survey shows that Turkish voters are committed to democracy just as much as other societies democratic populations, meaning that there is no significant difference between Turkey and other democracies.

Similar to other Middle Eastern countries, institutional frameworks were not a positive factor contributing to consolidation of the Turkish democracy. Until 1960, the executive controlled the whole state mechanism. Moreover, during this era, any constitutional restriction upon the executive power was non-existent. The party which gained a plurality of votes controlled the legislative and the executive branches and had significant powers over the judiciary.. Every change in the electoral system until the mid-nineties resulted in the de-institutionalization and under representation of some segments of the society. Consequently, democratization under these structures is not easy and even today, making an alteration in the electoral system is accepted as an important component of further democratic consolidation.

Finally, Turkish civil society always repressed by the state played an important role during the last five years of democratic consolidation; especially in the sphere of relations with the EU. Civil society, led in this case by business associations, spent considerable effort pushing for reforms, and supported every step towards democratization. It is possible to speculate that without the support of civil society; democratization in Turkey would be much more difficult.

So we can add a fourth option to the three alternatives for Turkey, described by Huntington: Becoming a catalyst in the transformation of the Middle Eastern autocratic states and consolidating their democratic reforms. Despite significant improvements, Turkish democracy is still fragile and open to reversals. The security paranoia is the most important reason behind this fragility. If security concerns in Turkey decrease with time; Turkey will be a much more democratic country and will better sustain its democratic regime. A democratic Middle East will provide a necessary, secure, international environment for Turkey. Turkey may also play an important role in this process of democratization by sharing its experience, being a portal to the region for international actors. Most importantly, Turkish civil society may be an example with its experience, know-how and network in its own neighborhood. The success of Turkish democracy is very dependent on the democratization of the region and a democratic Turkey will be the most important facilitator of democratic change in the Middle East.