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Electoral Participation, Penetration of the State, and Armed Violence in the Turkish Political Crisis of the Second Half of the 1970s: Contribution to the Analysis of Long-Range Political Crisis

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Abstract – This paper makes a contribution to the analysis of situations of long-term political crises characterized by the loss of State capacity to exercise its monopoly of legitimate physical and symbolic violence. It analyzes the Turkish political crisis of the second half of the 1970s. This crisis is characterized by the diffusion of radical antagonist mobilizations and by the routinization of the use of physical violence in a context of disintegrating State monopolies. It shows that this political crisis covers two distinct but related processes, namely changes in the rules of State and in political processes, both of which are caused by the tactical activities of one protagonist in the conflict. It then discusses how, by implementing a strategy of access to power based on a triptych of participation to elections, penetration of the State, and physical violence, the Nationalist Movement contributed to the formation and intensification of the crisis.
During the second half of the 1970s, social and political uprisings occurred in Turkey on an unprecedented scale. Organized into antagonistic radical organizations, workers and students ran local or national social campaigns almost continuously. Government employees, from teachers to police officers, also mobilized and showed their hostility toward the government in the streets. Altercations between radical activists became more and more frequent, and the number of related deaths increased steadily. As early as 1977, the Milliyet daily newspaper lamented a “street war situation.” Mili- tias were formed and exercised territorial control over sections of large cities and rural areas. Assassinations, assaults, and gunfire became daily occurrences. The State lost control over entire areas of its territory, where residents suffered under the domination of militias, the only actors capable of offering protection from the opposing side. During the summer of 1980, clashes between the extremes caused nearly twenty deaths per day. The number of deaths went from four in 1974 to 1,939 in the nine months preceding the September 12, 1980 military intervention. In the provinces, State representatives were subjected to intimidation and threats from militarized groups opposing the ruling parties and wanting to maintain control over local resources. In this context, violence and crime became routine methods of political action. On the eve of the military intervention, the political, economic, and social situation appeared to all stakeholders to be generalized chaos.

Politically, governments succeeded one another at a sustained pace beginning in 1974. Each change in the holders of power replaced a large share of public administration personnel, whose members, who were organized into competing organizations, acted in support of the party that oversaw their appointment. Seemingly overrun in its duty to maintain order, the State also suffered a loss of autonomy. As a result, it was seen by all stakeholders as an arena for competition between radical organizations seeking to access its resources and positions. In the press, the words “anarchy,” “terror,” and “chaos” were most frequently used to describe the situation, and academic publications dedicated to the period depict it as a general crisis or total chaos.

The great majority of publications dedicated to this crisis are based on three assumptions: the symmetry of resources and positions of the Far Right and the...
Nationalist Movement,⁶ the collapse of a State unable to maintain order and ensure the security of its population,⁷ and the routinization of violence,⁸ which was identifiable in the formation of anarchic or pre-revolutionary conditions.⁹ However, closer observation leads the analyst to see a completely different situation. In fact, asymmetry prevailed between the protagonists. While the Far Left united a group of generally local organizations with very little coordination and which never gained access to government, the Nationalist Movement enjoyed the participation of the MHP in several coalition governments. In addition, the party oversaw the allocation and circulation of resources within its sphere of activity. It therefore had an advantage over the Far Left and could undertake State penetration activities when the MHP was in government, which was unthinkable for the Far Left. Moreover, it seems excessive to characterize the State entirely by its absence or even collapse when most of the competition between the two circles of influence took place within State institutions. The State was thus at the heart of the action as the resources and positions over which it authorized control were the very stakes of the game between antagonistic radical organizations. Finally, violence was only marginally autonomous from political relationships since analysis clearly demonstrates that the level of violence was never as high as when Idealist activists could depend on support from the Movement’s members who were given the status of State employees when the MHP succeeded in penetrating the State.¹⁰

It is therefore appropriate to analyze the Turkish political crisis of the second half of the 1970s with fresh eyes, endeavoring to study the strategies stakeholders

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6. All of the Far-Right organizations discussed here formed what can be called the “Nationalist Movement.” This refers to a network of organizations centralized by a political party, the Nationalist Action Party (Milletçi hareket partisi – MHP), which aimed to control and politicize the electorate by sectors of activity. In Turkey, the organizations and members of the Movement defined themselves as “Idealists” (ilkici). These various terms will therefore be employed here to designate the network of organizations represented by the MHP starting in the second half of the 1960s.
7. Historians and sociologists of the State in Turkey usually adopt a functionalist concept of the State and fail to offer a convincing explanatory model for the Turkish crisis of the second half of the 1970s. Faced with demonstrations by both the Far Left and the Far Right and with the introduction of physical violence into their repertoires of activity, the State no longer succeeded in assuming its role as arbiter or its function as interlocutor for social organizations. This context gives rise to the image of an outsider State. The 1975-1980 sequence of events is then considered a parenthesis, which was closed by the military intervention of September 12, 1980 and the re-establishment of the State’s monopoly of legitimate physical and symbolic restraint in most of the country. The pretext of exceptionalism thus forbids identifying the constituent mechanisms of the crisis. See notably M. Heper, “The ‘Strong State’ and Democracy: The Turkish Case in Comparative and Historical Perspective,” in Democracy and Modernity, ed. S. Eisenstadt et al., (1992); M. Heper, The State Tradition in Turkey (Northgate, UK: The Eothen Press, 1985); E. Özbudun, Social Change and Political Participation in Turkey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).
in the conflict used to embed themselves into the State as well as the effects brought about by the aggregation and composition of their tactical activities. Our findings contribute to a sociology of situations of prolonged political crisis characterized by the loss of the State’s capacity to exercise its monopoly of legitimate physical and symbolic violence. More generally, our findings will allow us to recognize situations of political crisis that are noticeably different from the critical conditions analyzed by Michel Dobry in his “Sociology of Political Crises.” Whereas the crises analyzed by Dobry last only a few weeks (for example May 1968 in France) or even a few days (February 1934), the Turkish crisis spanned five years, which leads us to assume that those involved persisted in their tactical capacities or adapted them over time. In the critical situations identified by Dobry, the rapid desectorizing of social spheres produced high volatility in the value of resources, inhibiting the tactical capacities of agents. In the case of Turkey, we clearly see a “decompartmentalization […] of sectoral reasoning,” an “opening up of confrontational spaces,” an expansion of “spaces of interdependence,” and a deobjectification of institutions, particularly State ones. However, what contributed to the escalation of these crisis mechanisms are the stakeholders’ fluctuating strategies over the long term (for example a legislature’s electoral term or a government’s term of office), which aimed at embedding themselves in the State and accumulating resources. Thus, we do not observe any regression into *habitus* or overall uncertainty in calculations but rather the strategic use of widespread organization, violence, and unrest. Here, the implementation and confrontation of tactics aiming to access public resources led to the modification of the rules for State and political practices. Our hypothesis is that the mechanisms making up the crisis, including the politicization of public institutions and the loss of State objectivity, the multisectorization of demonstrations, and the propagation of the use of irregular violence result from tactical initiatives implemented by the protagonists in the conflict, and more specifically by the Nationalist Movement. To test this hypothesis, we will analyze how the Nationalist Movement’s execution of what can be identified as a strategy for accessing power, based on the triptych

14. The notion of rule as we understand it here corresponds to that of A. Giddens, for whom rules “are linked to the formation of meaning on the one hand and to the sanction of modes of social behavior on the other.” They “cannot be conceptualized as independent of resources. These refer to modes according to which transformational relationships are effectively incorporated into the production and reproduction of social practices. Therefore, structural attributes express forms of domination and power.” A. Giddens, *La constitution de la société* (Paris: PUF, 2005): 67.
15. According to M. Dobry, the process of objectification is embodied in “the exteriority of social relations, their impersonality, and their perception of the method of what ‘goes without saying.’ Under these three aspects, complex systems or societies are laid open to sudden losses of objectification in sectoral relations when multisectoral mobilizations are deployed.” Dobry, *Sociologies des crises politiques*, 156.
of electoral participation, State penetration, and physical violence, contributed to the formation and escalation of the constituent processes of the crisis. Our intention is to understand how the Nationalist Movement succeeded in gaining influence through its activities against the Far Left but also over the process itself, by helping to modify the rules governing State involvement (including its politicization and deobjectification) as well as political involvement (including widespread demonstrations and the routine use of violence as a method of political interaction) due to the resources and positions it was able to claim.

Several types of sources have been used in this work. As the activities being studied were primarily illegal and always subject to controversy, they are generally concealed or untold in retrievable archive documents or during interviews conducted with former activists. Increasing the number of sources and comparing the information they offer thus allowed us to verify the veracity of each source and to have access to a body of concurrent information for each of the points addressed. The indictment prepared by the military prosecutor for the state of emergency command in the provinces of Ankara, Çankırı, and Kastamonu for the trials of the MHP and of Idealist organizations, which were held beginning on April 29, 1981,\(^\text{16}\) constitutes the richest and – ironically – the least utilized source to date for studying the Nationalist Movement. Of course, caution must be exercised in using data from the indictment if we are to avoid introducing arguments from military judicial institutions into academic research.\(^\text{17}\) We cannot be too cautious about a publication issued by a tribunal called by the military a few months after taking power, whose legal proceedings aimed to ban a party identified as one of the principal actors in the troubles that led to the September 12, 1980 coup. While the information contained in this document is generally accurate, the presentation and the analysis made by the prosecutor often appear biased, as the military’s objective was to eliminate the Nationalist Movement and justify their intervention. However, the proposed data remain verifiable, notably though the use of press sources or activists’ memoirs. We therefore conducted a systematic comparison and verification of information put forward in the indictment, analyzing the two most popular daily newspapers of the time, Cumhuriyet and Milliyet, published between January 1977 and December 1980, and making use of memoirs and testimonies of former activists\(^\text{18}\) or protagonists from official circles\(^\text{19}\) in office before the coup.

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\(^{19}\) N. Bölügiray, Sokaktaki Asker: Bir Sıkıyönetim Komutanının 12 Eylül Öncesi Anıları (A soldier in the streets: the pre-September 12 memoirs of a state of emergency commander) (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1989).
Our remarks follow each constituent process in the crisis in order that we may better analyze their sequence. First, we will show how the penetration of the entire State by the Nationalist Movement brought about its deobjectification by politicizing its members’ practices and the possibilities this offered to Nationalist Movement members to escalate their acts of physical violence. We will then examine how Idealist rallying within the State arena led to the spread of demonstrations and harmonized sectoral rhythms and issues. Finally, we will analyze how violence became a routine method of political interaction and activity and, through a feedback effect, contributed to an escalation in the mechanisms that had brought it about.

**Capture of State Resources and Deobjectification of the State**

**Methods of Idealist Penetration of the State**

In Turkey more so than in most European countries, the historicity of State practices shows numerous cases of social, political, and administrative spheres overlapping. Activities aiming at capturing resources practiced by the dominant social and political actors can be observed, at least since the Proclamation of the Republic in 1923. In Ankara, the State gives the impression of being a body permeable to political forces that gain access to the government, which is exposed to partisan tactics aimed at exploiting it and submitting it to their own interests. By controlling appointments and promotions within the public administration, ruling parties gain an efficient method of remunerating their supporters while securing the cooperation of a public administration supportive of their cause.20

During the 1970s, the modes of operation21 of the Far Right and Far Left enabled them to hold the positions necessary to capturing public resources. The forms of capture differed depending on the strategic opportunities these organizations possessed. However, only the Nationalist Movement succeeded in using State penetration as a method for capturing its resources. As no organization on the Far Left gained access to government, they could not interfere in appointments within central institutions. Excluded from the collusive networks that provided access to jobs, organizations on the Far Left could only establish themselves through mobilization, which occasionally allowed them to domi-

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20. The penetration of the State represents a routine activity that is illegal but institutionalized and practiced by political parties in Turkey. It is therefore not the MHP’s practice of it but the way in which the MHP integrated it into a wider strategy, based also on multisectoral mobilization and the use of physical violence, that produced the deobjectification of the State during the second half of the 1970s.

21. The radical circles used for this analysis can be understood as antagonistic “systems of action” as they represent networks of allied organizations coordinating their activities with greater or lesser levels of success, within which the participants generally have multiple involvements.
nate power relations within institutions. For its part, by becoming a governmental partner of the Justice Party (Adalet Partisi, AP, Center Right) between March 1975 and January 1978, the MHP succeeded in besieging central and decentralized State institutions by capturing what can be called their “resources of authority.” The MHP thus gained the power to interfere in the recruitment and careers of many public institutions, notably in the ministries it controlled. Once in government, it penetrated the State by short-circuiting the regulatory recruitment procedures for public administration appointments and substituting methods for promoting its own candidates. It then strove to recruit high-level managers for public institutions, it would then implement partisan recruiting policies at their own level.

The MHP and the Nationalist Movement (1969-1980)

The MHP formally made its appearance during the February 8 and 9, 1969 Adana Congress of the Republican Villagers Nation Party (Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi, CKMP), when its leaders decided to change its name. This initiative confirmed the party’s 1965 takeover by a team gathered around Alparslan Türkeş, a former army colonel. Faced with rising demonstrations by the Far Left, the party positioned itself as the champion of anticommunism in Turkey, and it decided to focus more on Islam than on Panturkism, an ideology embodied by the CKMP since the 1950s. Sister associations and labor organizations were created, with the party maintaining control over them by funding their activities and controlling the appointment of their leaders. MHP leadership thus demonstrated a remarkable organizational capacity. It succeeded in forming a highly coordinated grouping in which the division of labor was operated by the party, which had the resources to impose a high level of discipline within the Movement. In this sense, the Nationalist Movement (Milliyetçi hareket) can be identified as an integrated system of action strongly structured around the MHP.

In the legislative elections of October 14, 1973, the MHP received only 3.4% of the vote and gained three seats in Parliament. However, neither the Justice Party (AP, Center Right) nor the Republican People’s Party (CHP, Center Left) had the number of seats necessary for governing alone. In March 1975, the AP succeeded in forming a first coalition government, the Nationalist Front government (Milliyetçi Cephe). The MHP skillfully negotiated for its participation in the coalition and gained two ministries. In the legislative elections of June 5, 1977, the MHP received 6.4% of the vote and gained 16 seats in Parliament. A second Nationalist Front government (ikinci Milliyetçi Cephe) was formed, which remained in power from July 21, 1977 to January 5, 1978 and in which the MHP held five ministries. Its entry into the government allowed it to secure appointments for activists and sympathizers in the country’s public institutions and enterprises. It then turned its efforts toward law enforcement and justice-related institutions, which would allow it to provide impunity for its activists, higher education, which represented a breeding ground for potential activists, and finally State enterprises, in which it recruited electoral supporters from local branches.
On July 21, 1977, Gün Sazak was appointed Minister of Customs and Monopolies in the second Nationalist Front government. As soon as he assumed his position, he recruited activists from the party and its related associations to the Ministry. This partisan staff facilitated relationships between the party and its branches set up in Europe, served as an intermediary between party leaders and Ministry activities, and made the Ministry one of the bastions of the MHP. Thus it was enough to go to the institutions connected with the Ministry with a letter of recommendation signed by the Minister, a Ministry official, or Alparslan Türkeş, the MHP President, to be hired. Most often, it was only a matter of controlling positions at the highest echelons of the targeted institutions so that those in these positions could conduct a pro-partisan hiring policy at their level. That is what happened when Agâh Oktay Güner, MHP Minister of Commerce in the second Nationalist Front government (July 1977-January 1978), appointed Abdurrahman Sağkaya to the post of CEO of the huge Ant-birlik textile production factory in Antalya. The new CEO then carried out a policy aiming to stabilize the government through escalating violence, in particular by organizing several pogroms against populations suspected of lending their voices to the Center-Right party then in power.

In November 1979, the MHP renewed its support for the Justice Party but refused to participate in the government it intended to form. Evidently, the MHP preferred to spare itself the electoral disappointment the new government would surely face in a period of unprecedented economic and social crisis in the country. In Parliament, it supported the new minority government formed by the Center-Right party until the military intervention on September 12, 1980. During this period, it did not participate in the government but managed to find positions within the State by threatening the AP with breaking their prior agreement and brandishing the threat of a new wave of violence similar to the one the previous government had faced.

When the military took power on September 12, 1980, the MHP was shut down. The Movement’s leaders as well as a large proportion of its activists were tried and then jailed, as was the case for all political and labor organizations in the country.

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22. In order not to break the law, the individuals involved were not formal members of the party. A decision by the Council of Ministers on March 23, 1979 states that “being a member of a political party or acting for or against a political party or participating in political activities is punishable with dismissal from the profession.” Moreover, article 7 of law no. 657 on State officials stipulates that “public officials may not be members of a political party. They will not behave in such a way as to give priority to a political party or to an individual. In the course of their duties, they will act without regard to language, religion, race, sex, political opinion, philosophical, or religious ideas.” Finally, article 125 of the law on public officials provides for disciplinary action (dismissal) for those who conceal information and documents containing information likely to prejudice the law.

large-scale hiring effort targeting Idealists in the province. The same reasoning was applied to the Ministry of Health, when Minister Gökçek appointed individuals who were close to the party to several hospital director positions, tasking them with hiring their staff from among local MHP supporters.

In November 1979, at the end of nearly two years of CHP (Center Left) presence in the government, the AP (Center Right) managed to form a minority government, supported in Parliament by the MHP, which declined to exercise power and counted on a degradation in the social situation. The conditional support it gave the AP government, which could not do without its allies in Parliament, allowed it to regain some influence. During this period, numerous cases of the MHP penetrating State institutions can be observed. The Ministry of the Interior and the Directorate General for Security that depended on it became privileged targets for the party, which succeeded in getting a large number of activists appointed by short-circuiting the institution’s hiring procedures. In the police force, the MHP encouraged local cadres to support the recruitment of certain members by sending lists of activists or sympathizers for hire to the appropriate authorities. At times, it was a matter of individual initiative. Thus on September 3, 1980, a police chief posted to the Izmir Directorate for Security wrote to the MHP chairman and shared with him his wish to see a particular individual, whom he introduced as a party member, benefit from an appointment to the Department of Information.

Other documents suggest that this practice was clearly organized by the party, as was the case for the institutions of the Ministry of National and Higher Education as Idealist members of these institutions regularly succeeded in registering party members or sympathizers as students. They sometimes also guaranteed that they would receive their degrees. After taking up their posts, these staff members established sectoral associations. In this connection, the military prosecutor for the MHP trial, which was held from April 1981, stated that the goal of these associations, by organizing themselves within institutions of the State, is to publish reports on the communist employees working there and to get them transferred, eliminate employees and executives who do not share their political views, provide financial support to Ülkü-Bir [the association of Idealist teachers] by taking up collections, and arrange for communist members of the institution to be dismissed while ensuring that Idealists are appointed in their place and trying to influence the State sphere.

24. Ö. Tanlak, İtiraf, 133.
In each institution into which the Nationalist Movement invested, a leader was appointed and sections were created, tasked with sending regular reports to national leaders appointed by the party. In addition, section leaders and influential persons from Idealist associations were invited to bi-weekly seminars held in Ankara, where they discussed Idealist doctrine and how to organize the infiltration. More generally, during training sessions offered by the party, some courses were reserved for this activity of infiltration and mobilization within institutions. Thus, one session was entitled “The importance of Education in the Idealist Movement, Education in our Infiltration Activities, Education on how to Infiltrate Crowds, and Additional Education Aiming to Conquer the State,” while another was dedicated to “infiltration (kadrolaşma), the creation of mass movements (kitleleşme), and State control (devletleşme).”

Given this, it is impossible to doubt the organized and planned nature of this process. We may also consider that the interaction and political linkages that became the two principles for appointment to State positions ran counter to an entire legal arsenal intended to protect the boundaries of the State and to impart public service values to public officials through an intense socialization to the State. Thanks to its governmental positions, the party could substitute its own method for promoting individuals over the legal provisions organizing access to public administrations.

Politization of Civil Service Practices and Deobjectification of the State

The Nationalist Movement’s actions aiming to capture resources influenced State rules by causing a politicization in public administration practices. At the affected sites, public officials came to marginalize members of the opposing camp and support those from their own operational structures in their daily professional practices. Upon taking up their posts, Nationalist Movement public officials conducted informational activities on behalf of the party. A number of documents discovered at MHP headquarters can attest to this. The following excerpt from a report issued by an unnamed department illustrates how activists who entered the civil service generated information about the relations between internal forces within the institutions:

Report on the situation in our regional managing office (bölge). [...] The situation of the fifty-one people is as follows. Nine Idealists, seven MSP [Millî Selamet Partisi, National Salvation Party, Islamist Right], ten AP, six left-wing organizations. The others are generally CHP or neutral. None of our eight Idealist friends is an executive; all are public officials. Conclusion: the staff of our

32. T. C. Ankara – Çankırı – Kastamonu, 89.
33. We glean from processes of politicization the definition offered by Jacques Lagroye, for whom “politicization is a requalification of the most diverse social activities, resulting from a practical agreement between social agents who for many reasons are inclined to infringe upon or question the differentiation between spaces of activity.” J. Lagroye, “Processes of Politicization,” in Politicization, ed. J. Lagroye, Paris: Belin, 2003: 360.
new managing office is going to double within a short time. To ensure our influence within the office, we will need to have more members appointed to the staff. We must make sure that we have at least several friends among the cadres (for example the director, or an assistant director) who will soon be appointed.34

Reports discovered at party headquarters during the investigations preceding the trial contained the first and last names and places of operation for police officers, primarily those working in the country’s large cities. These records contained subjective evaluations based on the political views of public officials and indicated whether or not they shared the views of the author. According to the prosecutor, correspondence uncovered by the justice system proved that starting in 1976 and 1977, some police officers and public officials working in the Ankara security office produced evaluations based on the political preferences of their colleagues, specifying whether they were on the Left or the Right. Suggestions were added to these evaluations.35

In a letter sent to the chairman of the MHP, the head of the legal department for the province of Hakkari informed him that “the staff members of the Hakkari legal departments have been classified according to their political views and beliefs, [and that] this evaluation is based on reliable sources.”36 Based on the data gathered about the personnel of these institutions, the party could evaluate its influence and identify the individuals it could approach. A letter sent by an activist in post in the Ministry of the Interior to the MHP chairman provides evidence of these activities:

The prefect of …, was Kurdish in his youth, but he changed over time. He joined the MSP in order to become prefect. Then he drew closer to the AP. His goal is to enter Parliament. If the MHP makes him an offer, he may accept. […] If he is approached in an intelligent manner, he could be useful.”37

Thanks to such descriptions and advice, the party possessed the information necessary to make deals with public employees in office. These informational activities helped the party compete electorally but also in its relationship with the Left.

Clearly, public officials’ practices and sociabilities stemmed from principles that were based more on their political positions than on the standards of neutrality theoretically imposed by their jobs. Within the police force, for example, the competition between Pol-Bir, the association of Nationalist Movement police officers, and Pol-Der, the left-wing association, led to the politicization

34. T. C. Ankara – Çankırı – Kastamonu, 167-68.
of professional interactions and practices. While on duty, the Nationalist and Socialist police officers insulted one another, fought, and abandoned any trace of neutrality when it came to maintaining order. Police officers dispatched to break up confrontations between Far-Left and Far-Right groups came to participate in the altercations instead, each taking position in one or the other of the opposing camps.

Finally, the politicization of professional practices can be detected in the daily support provided by Idealist personnel to Movement departments and activists. In cases where local association branches had been shut down by the justice system, party executives used their networks of provincial administrative officers to nullify the decision.

This is how in February 1978, the leader of the Izmir branch solicited and was granted the help of the provincial prefect after the first association of Idealist households in Bornova was closed. Except for the period of CHP government (which showed local arrangements with greater contrasts), when the police arrested activists following an armed operation, the local branch of the MHP would contact party executives (whether in positions of leadership or elected), who would have them released by speaking to the appropriate police chief, with intercession from an MHP or AP minister. This implantation of the party within the State allowed it to provide its activists with a degree of impunity. Occasionally, the party gained support from higher up in the public administration. Notes made by MHP Secretary General Necati Gültekin in his private diary show that an unnamed head of security (Emniyet Müdüri) was thanked in an MHP board meeting for intervening to authorize weapons permits to be issued to certain party activists.

These activities aiming to penetrate State institutions conducted by the MHP call into question “the exteriority of social relations, their impersonality, and their perception of the method of what ‘goes without saying,’” which tended to objectivize and consolidate the State according to the practices of its members and the perceptions of its audience. Moreover, while the parties in government regularly used public official positions as a method of remuneration for their activists and as a means of distributing many favors to their electoral clients, they never used them as a method for increase irregular physical violence.

38. Excerpts from conversations between police officers, reproduced in the memoirs of the commander for the state of emergency in Adana demonstrate this: “Central here, a firefight broke out in the street (…), teams 315 and 320, get there straight away. Fascist dog! You became a man, and now you give orders? Communist bastard! Sellout! Son of a…” N. Bölügiray, Sokaktaki Asker, 87.
40. A document sent to the legal office of the primary Idealist organization reported on research conducted on the personnel of the tribunals in Yozgat and Çankırı, T. C. Ankara – Çankırı – Kastamonu, 187.
42. Ö. Tanlak, İtiraf, 15.
43. T. C. Ankara – Çankırı – Kastamonu, 98.
44. M. Dobry, Sociologie des crises politiques, 154.
Thus, the MHP’s use of its positions in the State arena as mobilizable resources to implement violence was innovative in Turkey. Through the connection it exercised between official arenas and irregular violence, it also contributed to the deobjectification of the State as guarantor of order and security as citizens tended to count on the capturing organizations to ensure their protection. In this way, during the second half of the 1970s, police officers and teachers were no longer considered State officials but members of one or the other of the bodies mobilized within State institutions.

### Spread of Demonstrations and Harmonization of Sectoral Rhythms and Issues

The conflicting demonstrations that appeared in Turkey in the 1970s took place in the majority of cases in sectors characterized by their proximity to the State. The national education system, the police force, and judicial institutions as well as the decentralized administrations but also public enterprises and cooperatives (from the Tariş agricultural cooperative in Izmir to the Turkey Radio and Television Corporation) increasingly became sites of conflict. The dynamic for the spreading conflict can be found in the Nationalist Movement’s tactic of infiltrating the State. As soon as it gained access to the government, the MHP presided over the creation of organizations intended to help it increase its presence within public institutions. Its staff was then used to marginalize those who refused to join the new Movement, including first and foremost members of associations on the Far Left who supported the Center-Left CHP party in elections.  

Wherever Idealist organizations formed, competitive relationships were built along a dividing line between supporters of parties in the Nationalist Front coalition – among them the MHP – and progressives, leftists, or socialists, all of whom were members of competing professional associations. The Nationalist Movement associations took advantage of the organizational structure of the MHP to coordinate their activities and serve the party’s strategy for accessing power, which if it succeeded, would ensure the longevity of State positions thus occupied. The Idealist strategic actions thus led to a reconfiguration of sectoral games. It allowed the Far Left to identify their common enemy, of which each sectoral representative was a direct competitor. The ideological conflict revealed itself everywhere as a conflict of interests, where defense required intersectoral

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45. The labor union confederation MİSK also established itself in most public enterprises in which a new manager had been appointed by the government in order to lend a strong hand to the management and to silence, sometimes by force, left-wing unionists. The local branch then gained the right to select personnel, whom it recruited in Idealist areas of the city.

46. The Nationalist Movement acted as though it had developed a strategy of systematically facing off with left-wing organizations, particularly in State institutions in which the Left had been in a position of strength up until that point.
coordination. The result was a “decompartementalization […] of sectoral reasoning”\(^\text{47}\) and an “opening up of spaces for confrontation, in other words, arenas or sites of confrontation specific to various sectors,”\(^\text{48}\) which tended to produce an overall bipolarization of State arenas.

In national and higher education institutions penetration activities conducted by the Movement brought about a multicategorization of left-wing demonstrations.\(^\text{49}\) Beginning in the 1975-1976 academic year, the MHP held positions necessary to reach agreements with the existing personnel. As we saw, its presence in the government imparted to the MHP a whole set of resources allowing it to negotiate access to these institutions with the person in office or to force access by intervening directly in appointments. Management and technical staff were replaced, teacher who were members of left-wing associations were transferred, and student activists or sympathizers with student revolutionary organizations were expelled or lost any chance of gaining their degree. In this way, some high schools, professional schools, and teacher training schools became,\(^\text{50}\) in party jargon, “liberated institutions” (kurtarılmış kuruluşlar), in which the public administration held the power to suspend or transfer support staff and teachers opposed to the Idealist line. Partisan staff members as well as students given places due to their closeness to the Nationalist Movement could also exert pressure (both physical and administrative) on students who were hostile to them.\(^\text{51}\) These activities tended to produce a harmonization of technical demands and demonstrations by students and teachers led by various left-wing organizations by homogenizing

\(^{47}\) M. Dobry, Sociologie des crises politiques, 141.

\(^{48}\) M. Dobry, Sociologie des crises politiques, 143.


\(^{50}\) We have access to fairly detailed information about these control-taking tactics for the period covering the last AP government (November 1979-September 1980), which the MHP supported in Parliament. On April 3, 1980, 100 teachers were dismissed from the Buca Teaching Institute (Buca eğitim enstitüsü) after a reorganization of the administrative team came out in favor of the MHP. On April 4, 1980, teacher graduates of the Atatürk Teaching Institute (Atatürk eğitim enstitüsü) held a press conference during which they condemned the fact that MHP candidates had received priority in the choice of appointments. On April 20, 600 cadres and 1,500 public officials, most of whom were members of the left-wing association Töb-Der, were dismissed from the Ministry of National Education or transferred to low-ranking posts. In June, the journal Teacher’s World (Öğretmen dünyası) announced that since the AP government had taken office, 8,000 teachers had suffered unwanted transfers after declining an invitation to join the Idealist association Ülkü-Bir. “Ayn aynası” (Monthly Mirror), Öğretmen dünyası, May 5, 1980, 32-3; June 6, 1980, 13-5; August 8, 1980, 31-2.

\(^{51}\) On May 4, 1980, student representatives of the Malatya professional high school condemned the favors enjoyed by Sunni students since the new director, known for his closeness to local Idealist associations, took office. On July 24, students from the Higher Professional School (Meslek yüksek okulu) condemned the fact that Idealist students had received exam questions before the tests and that all individuals identified as members of left-wing and Far-Left student associations had received a Fail grade for “cheating” in their exams. “Ayn aynası” (Monthly Mirror), Öğretmen Dünyası, 5, 6, 8.
the demands of these populations threatened with losing their jobs or student status and concerned about their own physical safety. In schools but also in other public institutions, the tactical activities of the Nationalist Movement consisted of what encouraged coordination and demonstrations at these sites by homogenizing the demands of Far-Left associations and the risks faced by their members.

Demonstrations also became multisectoral. As a result of these campaigns, sectoral agendas and rhythms with shared demands were coordinated. During periods of AP or Nationalist Front governance, many of these joint campaigns aimed to support members of associations that were the victims of penetration activities conducted by the parties in government. Each time, they denounced the fascistic nature of the Nationalist Front government while expressing sectoral demands or supporting the movements led by other organizations. Thus, when the prefect of Ankara succeeded in closing Töb-Der, Tüm-Der and TÜTED, three associations of left-wing public officials on February 7, 1977, a campaign in support of these associations was organized by student organizations and the revolutionary labor confederation DISK. Clearly concerned about preserving the electoral support it received from these associations, the CHP demanded that they be reopened, whereas the Nationalist Front government welcomed the prefect’s decision. All of the organizations involved thus criticized the increasingly fascistic nature of the public administration led by the government as well as the effort to undermine progressive organizations.

It does not appear that this de-compartmentalization of sectoral logic was accompanied by an avoidance of calculation or a loss of stakeholders’ tactical capacities. On the contrary, observing tactical activities is the only way to understand that actions were harmonized and sectoral processes and issues were de-specified as a result of the tricks played by the Nationalist Movement to diversify its infiltration sites and multiply its opportunities for access to public resources. Nor can the harmonization of demonstrations led by Far-Left organizations be understood as the result of social stakeholders’ loss of tactical capacity. Participation in campaigns initiated in other sectors always corresponded with a desire to modify local power relations. Such participation was an opportunity to protest similar fates being suffered locally (such as difficulties accessing employment or marginalization) and publicize and universalize sectoral demands (related to remuneration or career paths, for example) by communicating, appropriating, and transforming demands formulated by organizations suffering the same treatment in other sectors.

52. “Töb-Der, Tüm-Der ve TÜTED süresiz kapatıldı” [Töb-Der, Tüm-Der, and TÜTED Closed for an Undefined Period of Time], Milliyet (February 8, 1977): 1, 10.
The Nationalist Movement’s desire to spread its influence in public institutions resulted in the proliferation of sites of confrontation, the bipolarization of competitive spaces, and the harmonization of protests. In this respect, it is clear that the Nationalist Movement’s activities aiming to capture resources within the State not only gave it an advantage in the game but also gave it influence over the course of the competition with the Far Left. Clearly, the Movement mastered the rhythms and methods of interaction. MHP activities thus placed its competitors in a situation of “expanded tactical interdependence,”\(^53\) in which the Idealist system of action could use its multi-positioning and high level of coordination to take the upper hand over its direct competitors.

**Spread of Violence as a Method of Routine Political Interaction**

**The Continuity of Conventional and Non-Conventional Activities in the Nationalist Movement**

The rules of the political game were also modified through the transformation of methods of political action and access to resources, which can be observed in the way illegal actions and the irregular use of violence became “levers for the accumulation of economic and political resources, social and territorial control, […] and] instruments to exercise power.”\(^54\) Although violence and illegal activities blossomed in the cracks provided by weak State means of actions, these activities did not occur in spite of the State. Rather, they endured due to the contacts the groups had within the State’s political machinery. While public institutions appeared to be unengaged as autonomous actors, the power relations within them were decisive factors. The forms, rhythms, and intensity of violent actions revolved around the power relations between Nationalist Movement coalition and Far-Left networks at varying levels of public activity (from municipal to national). However, while violent activities conducted by left-wing organizations were somewhat separate from the groups’ other activities, poorly organized, or mobilized by autonomous groups from parent organizations or activists eager to confront the Idealists, a continuity can be seen between violent activities and other, more conventional activities conducted by members of the Nationalist Movement.

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53. Expanded tactical interdependence is defined by Michel Dobry as the “transition from a routinized and above all local form of interdependence of actors within a particular sector (that is, a form of interdependence in which the effectiveness or value of resources and courses of action available to various actors is guaranteed by the relative compartmentalization of sectors in relation to one another) to an expanded form of interdependence that tends to confronting diverse and previously compartmentalized resources and courses of action directly and to determine based on this confrontation their effectiveness or value.” M. Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, 160-1.
These activities developed due to the collusive relationships maintained with protagonists from official circles, and the level of violence was at its highest when the Idealist structures were enjoying support from within the public administration in areas where it was in the political minority. When the MHP gained access to the power to make appointments within the civil service, local branches of the Movement moved into action most frequently as the support they received from decentralized State bodies allowed them to stand up to left-leaning municipalities. The asymmetrical resources between the two structures could once again be observed in the opportunities they enjoyed because the coordination of Nationalist Movement sub-units and the positions held by the MHP in the central government allowed the Idealists to impose violence at the local level as a mobilizable resource in the political, labor union, or economic competition.

**Escalation and Distribution of the Use of Force: The “Breeder Reactor” Effect of the Use of Violence in the Crisis Process**

At the local level, the formation of militias, or units specialized in violent action, allowed actors to succeed in driving out populations known to support the opposing camp in elections. This is what happened in the cities of Kahramanmaraş, Çorum, and Malatya, when Idealist militias attacked populations known to support the Center-Left CHP. Units placed in most large cities in the country were responsible for eliminating local leaders of opposing organizations. Attacks and random shootings were intended to intimidate and break the morale of the other side, in particular when perpetrated in gathering places such as cafés, tea shops, bookstores, party or association offices, school buildings, and university dormitories, where the adversary had a strong position. In the Nationalist Movement, violence was thus integrated into a wider strategy of access to resources. The high level of coordination of its system of action allowed the MHP to take advantage of the threat posed by militias and militarized groups as a strategy in its negotiations to engage in activities aiming to capture resources.\(^{55}\) When a minority AP government was formed in November 1979, the MHP negotiated for positions with the State machinery in exchange for its conditional support to the government in Parliament. However, the AP also seemed to grant it influence within the State in order to avoid the consequences of a fresh wave of violence, which the previous government had to face when it took office. The MHP could then use violent activities in the militarized branches of its structures to access positions within the public administration. These activities thus gave the MHP the resources of violence that allowed it to threaten the government with an escalation in the conflict if

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55. As Jean-Louis Briquet and Gilles Favarel-Garrigues note, “In many of these cases, the possession of expertise in the use of violence constitutes a resource that affects negotiations with the public authorities.” J.-L. Briquet and G. Favarel-Garrigues, “Introduction: ” Milieux criminels, 11-2.
its claim to public positions was not recognized. The escalation and distribution of the use of violence thus brought about a feedback loop because they acted as “breeder reactor” mechanisms for the activities of harnessing and de-objectifying the State.

Starting in 1979, the use of violence as a mode of political action became more widespread. Faced with the abuse perpetrated by the MHP, the Far Left became militarized and groups outside of the two camps armed themselves in order to defend themselves or to join in the capture and redistribution of State resources. Others affiliated with moderate political parties organized combat sport training and units destined to face up to the Idealist or Far-Left groups that threatened them in the local arena. This was the case, for example, for the Akıncılar association (Akıncılar Derneği), whose members were generally affiliated with the MSP (Islamist Right) and which set up 30 armed combat training camps beginning in 1979 in order to train “religious brothers for the tasks they will face in the difficult fight ahead of them.” This spread of violence must then be analyzed as the sign of an overall modification of the rules of the political game as political groups tended to integrate this mode of action in their interactions. By the end of the decade, demonstrations, the penetration of the public sphere, and violence became the three pillars of political action for the Nationalist Movement and the Far Left but also for a growing number of actors as some moderate parties and groups copied these practices in order to access resources or maintain control over what they had.

The sociopolitical configuration of Turkey during the second half of the 1970s was thus characterized by the co-occurrence of two distinct processes: the changing rules governing the political process (multisectorization of demonstrations and spread of violence) and the changing rules governing the State game (politicization and de-objectification of State institutions). These processes are linked because the activities aiming to capture State resources conducted by the MHP allowed it to escalate the use of physical violence as a method of accessing resources and led to the deobjectification of the State and the multisectorization of demonstrations. Thus this analysis has demonstrated the importance of observing the Nationalist Movement’s initiatives as it implemented these processes and succeeded in imposing modes of action, rhythms, and sites of conflict on its competitors. The Movement’s various courses of action, which we can summarize as the triptych of electoral participation, capture of public resources, and armed violence, thus served just as much as strategies to access power as it escalated the crisis.

56. S. Yalıkın, “Kayseri’de silahlı bir Akıncı Gençlik kampı hikayesi,” Hürriyet (September 2, 1980).
57. Yalıkın, “Kayseri’de silahlı.”
A strict application of the analytical model of political crises proposed by Michel Dobry would lead us to conclude that there was no political crisis in Turkey between 1975 and 1980. The crisis processes observed were not at all imposed and did not proceed from inhibited tactical activity on the part of actors but rather from their adaptation. Thus the Nationalist Movement sought to change the rules of the political game to its advantage. There was therefore no regression toward habitus and no generalized uncertainty of calculation but a strategic use of violence and unrest. However, the constituent processes of the Turkish crisis should not lead us to abandon Michel Dobry’s theses but rather to enrich them by integrating these results. Thus, the frequency of recourse to violence by some political actors, which was permitted and supported by the police, which was caught in a process of deobjectification of State institutions, as well as the politicization of many social sectors exposed to the desectorization of mobilizations entitle us to label the situation a “political crisis.” Moreover, key concepts in Michel Dobry’s work allow us to analyze the processes observed. The notion of unidimensionality of identity helps us understand moments when “operators identified by a universal vocation” are formed and make sense within the entirety of social space (leftist, fascist, etc.), while that of the “desectorization of games” helps us understand how the despecification of sectoral issues and the opening up of spaces of confrontation occur.

The Turkish case thus allows us to advance in our understanding of crisis situations characterized by the loss of State capacity to exercise its monopoly of legitimate physical and symbolic violence. We have shown that the transformation of structural attributes in State and political games results from tactical activities by some of the protagonists. Given this, the analysis must focus on short-term conditions for action as much as on the structural conditions that make possible the protagonists’ activities in societal processes. Thus, the Nationalist Movement, which through its positions, resources, and modes of action played a decisive role in the onset and escalation of the crisis, reproduced highly unremarkable activities for political parties trying to penetrate the State in Turkey. Its innovation lies in its use of the State positions it acquired to spread the conflict and radicalize it through violence. We may therefore advance our understanding of socio-historical configurations resembling those of Turkey in the 1970s thanks to the analysis of the methods by which the practices of actors contribute to the realization of formal and informal rules of societal processes without subscribing to a strategist and intentionalist vision of the tactics used by these actors but rather by paying attention to the way in which their resources, positions, and limitations shape the tactical opportunities they seize.

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