

Blood gambit: how autocratizing populists fuel ethnic conflict to reverse election setbacks – evidence from Turkey and Israel

Karabekir Akkoyunlu & Yusuf Sarfati

To cite this article: Karabekir Akkoyunlu & Yusuf Sarfati (05 Aug 2024): Blood gambit: how autocratizing populists fuel ethnic conflict to reverse election setbacks – evidence from Turkey and Israel, Democratization, DOI: [10.1080/13510347.2024.2381686](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2024.2381686)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2024.2381686>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 05 Aug 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 662



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Blood gambit: how autocratizing populists fuel ethnic conflict to reverse election setbacks – evidence from Turkey and Israel

Karabekir Akkoyunlu^a and Yusuf Sarfati^b

^aDepartment of Politics and International Studies, SOAS University of London, London, UK;

^bDepartment of Politics and Government, Illinois State University, Normal, IL, USA

ABSTRACT

Through a comparative study of Turkey and Israel, this article highlights a specific strategy that autocratizing populist incumbents in ethnically divided societies utilize when they face election setbacks. A “blood gambit” entails fomenting violent conflict to keep the opposition divided along identitarian cleavages, while creating a rally-around-the-flag effect to help the incumbent win a renewed election. After failing to secure a parliamentary majority in June 2015, Erdoğan ended the Kurdish peace process and engineered repeat elections amidst heightened nationalist fervour and renewed conflict with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). These elections gave the Justice and Development Party (AKP) a majority and marked the beginning of its alliance with the ultranationalists. Following Israel’s March 2021 elections, Netanyahu increased state repression of Palestinians, which triggered interethnic violence and renewed confrontation with Hamas. The violence threw a wrench into coalition-building efforts between ideologically and ethnically diverse opposition parties. The comparison of Israel and Turkey as two countries with different majority religions, ethnic compositions and socioeconomic levels shows that “blood gambit” is not a parochial strategy. Our analysis also demonstrates that the outcomes of these strategies are shaped by differing institutional and political contexts, in particular, the extent of executive aggrandizement and the level of party fragmentation.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 11 December 2023; Accepted 14 June 2024

KEYWORDS populism; autocratization; populist toolkit; ethnic conflict; political cleavage; executive aggrandizement; party fragmentation; opposition coordination; Turkey; Israel

Introduction

There is a burgeoning literature on the relationship between populism and autocratization. When populists with autocratic leanings are elected to positions of power they undermine democracy by eroding political, civil, and legal accountability mechanisms. Autocratizing populists have a toolkit they utilize to achieve their ends.¹ They use state resources to curtail free media, create and grow their loyal businesses through

CONTACT Karabekir Akkoyunlu  ka54@soas.ac.uk

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

clientelism, weaken the rule of law by packing the courts, and punish political opposition actors.² This article aims to contribute to our understanding of populist incumbents' toolkit by illustrating a scarcely discussed strategy.

As showcased by the Trump and Bolsonaro presidencies in the US and Brazil, autocratizing populists who lose elections claim that the election was rigged, circulate conspiracy theories about voter fraud, incite their supporters and erode their constituents' trust in elections. The strategy we illustrate differs from overt attempts to overturn election outcomes. It entails fomenting violent ethnic conflict after the incumbent's party receives an electoral setback. This strategy, which we call a "blood gambit", has two goals. First it aims to widen ethnic/religious cleavages and prevent the formation of an alternative coalition. Second, by creating a rally-around-the-flag effect, it aims to galvanize nationalist feelings and boost the incumbent's popularity ahead of a repeat election. In this article, we seek to explain *when*, *why* and *how* a blood gambit might be adopted, and *what* influences its success or failure, by comparing Turkey and Israel, two countries governed by long-time autocratizing populist leaders.

The comparison of Turkey and Israel as two countries with different majority religions and ethnic compositions shows that autocratizing populist strategies manifest themselves similarly across diverse socio-cultural contexts. In Turkey, when the AKP could not win an outright majority in the June 2015 elections, President Erdoğan ended the Kurdish "peace process" and engineered repeat elections amidst heightened nationalist fervour and renewed conflict with the PKK. These elections gave the AKP a parliamentary majority and marked the beginning of its alliance with the ultranationalists. Following Israel's March 2021 elections, Netanyahu increased state repression on Palestinians, which led to interethnic violence and a renewed confrontation with Hamas. The violence threw a wrench into coalition-building efforts between ideologically and ethnically diverse opposition parties leading the right-wing Yamina to pull out of the negotiations and the Palestinian Ra'am to pause any coalition talks.

However, this strategy does not always produce the desired outcome due to differing institutional and political conditions. In Turkey, opposition parties failed to unite against the AKP, while in Israel, a diverse eight-party coalition eventually displaced Netanyahu, though briefly. We argue that levels of (a) executive aggrandizement and (b) party fragmentation help determine the outcome of a blood gambit as they shape the incumbent's ability to influence post-election dynamics and opposition actors' incentives to reach across the ethnic divide and form a coalition to oust the incumbent.

Recently, there has been growing political and academic attention not just on how autocratization works, but also how it can be resisted.³ The contrast between the failure of Turkey's opposition parties to overcome their ideological differences against Erdoğan's blood gambit and the success of the Israeli opposition to create a rainbow coalition that ended Netanyahu's 12-year premiership provides important insights for the literature on opposition coordination under autocratizing populism.

The following section situates our argument in the larger body of populism and autocratization literatures. Next, we present a theoretical framework for blood gambit, before discussing our methodology and the rationale for our case selection. The case studies that follow describe in detail when, why and how Erdoğan in 2015 and Netanyahu in 2021 fomented violent conflict to stay in power, and the different opposition responses to their blood gambit. We conclude by teasing out comparative insights and long-term considerations.

Literature review

Following Cas Mudde's ideational approach, we treat populism as a "thin-centred ideology".⁴ Populist parties and leaders divide society into "two antagonistic camps", "the pure people and the corrupt elite", and claim to represent the "general will" of the people.⁵ This Manichean, moralistic discourse tends to be anti-pluralist, often branding political opponents as illegitimate, and therefore conflicts with liberal democracy.⁶ Populists define who belongs to the "pure people", thus some are inclusionary, and others are exclusionary.⁷ Exclusionary populism, typical of Europe's far-right parties, references cultural elements and entails an ethnicized people excluding "alien" groups and values.⁸ Netanyahu's nativism has similarly excluded Palestinian citizens of Israel, among other groups, from his construction of "peoplehood". In Turkey, Erdoğan's definition of "native and national" (*yerli ve milli*) people, which fuses religion with nationalism, has vacillated between the inclusion and exclusion of the Kurds. Yet since 2014, and definitely during the twin elections in 2015, he has embraced an exclusionary rhetoric.

Populism's thorny relationship with democracy extends beyond its anti-pluralist and exclusionary discourse to the actions of elected populists. A 19-country study found that governments led by exclusionary populist parties deteriorate the quality of democracy more than inclusionary ones.⁹ Scholars agree that executive aggrandizement is the most common way through which democracies decline in the contemporary era.¹⁰ Populists in power erode liberal democracy by undermining institutional and civil accountability mechanisms, such as press freedom, freedom of expression, access to justice, judicial independence, and transparency in political financing.¹¹ The erosion of checks on governmental authority leads to autocratization; a process that renders political power increasingly monopolistic, repressive and arbitrary.¹² Since they attempt to move their respective political systems towards an autocratic direction, we define Netanyahu and Erdoğan as autocratizing populists.

Populists in power embrace a plebiscitary understanding of democracy, reducing elections to a simple choice between the will of the people versus the interests of the elites.¹³ As electoral victories are representative of the "general will" and thereby provide the ultimate popular legitimacy, they are of utmost importance. In autocratizing regimes led by populist leaders, political polarization is rampant, therefore elections are hyperpoliticized and voter turnout is high.¹⁴ When those incumbents stand to lose elections, they typically assert the process was "rigged" due to voter fraud or other conspiracies to reclaim popular legitimacy and undermine their constituents' trust in the electoral process. Trump and Bolsonaro's attempts are cases in point. Our study contributes to this discussion by exploring how such leaders may fuel violence in ethnically divided societies to overturn electoral losses.

Our delineation of this strategy also speaks to the emerging literature on the relationship between ethnic inequalities and autocratization. When ethnic divisions overlap with class differences, the propensity for autocratization increases.¹⁵ Socioeconomic inequalities between ethnic groups contribute to autocratization by accentuating conflicts over redistribution¹⁶ and by heightening polarization and political violence.¹⁷ We agree with these studies that structural inequalities between ethnic groups can lead to democratic erosion and breakdown. Indeed, significant socioeconomic disparities persist between Palestinians and Jews in Israel and between Kurds and Turks in Turkey.¹⁸ While structural conditions endanger democracy in a

country, these conditions do not mechanically translate to regime change. It is political actors (i.e. human agency) who act as triggers of these conditions. Our study adds to this literature by illustrating how populist incumbents instigate conflict between unequal ethnic groups, thereby contributing to the autocratization of their political regimes.

Whether this strategy succeeds depends in large part on the success of the opposition coordination. Divisions among various opposition actors inform the incentive structure around opposition cooperation.¹⁹ Incumbents exploit these divisions by differentiating between systemic and anti-systemic opposition and pitting them against each other. Some argue that opposition coordination succeeds when non-systemic parties advance issues that are shared by systemic opposition parties.²⁰ Others suggest that opposition parties coalesce on an agenda if their perceived threat from the incumbent outweighs the threat they perceive from each other.²¹ Opposition coordination can also take different forms, such as filing a joint candidate, forming pre-electoral alliances, encouraging strategic voting, or forming post-election coalitions. Building on this literature, our study highlights variables that influence the likelihood of coalition formation among various opposition parties.

Theoretical framework

In this section, we discuss *when*, *why* and *how* autocratizing populist incumbents adopt a blood gambit as well as the institutional and political factors that shape the outcome of this strategy. “Blood gambit” entails fomenting ethnic conflict after the incumbent’s party suffers a setback in national elections, putting its political grip over the government in jeopardy. While violent conflict is never a preordained outcome and results from actor choices shaped by contextual contingencies, we argue that a blood gambit may be adopted when the following four conditions are present:

- A competitive electoral system under an autocratizing populist government;
- A salient ethnic cleavage with a history of politicized violence;
- An opposition that is divided along this cleavage;
- An election setback that threatens the incumbent with loss of power.

Two caveats: first, our focus is on national rather than sub-national (i.e. local or, in federal systems, state) elections. While the latter can also be of critical importance, as they do not risk unseating the incumbent altogether, they may entail a different set of strategies and calculations than in national elections, which ultimately determine who governs. Second, although both our case studies involve transnational violent conflict featuring armed sub-state actors (the PKK and Hamas) that play important roles in the politics of Turkey and Israel, and add a layer of complexity to our analysis, we do not claim that politicized ethnic violence must be transnational in nature or involve an armed insurgency in order for a blood gambit to be adopted.

Why would an incumbent facing an election setback opt for a blood gambit? In part, this goes back to the black-and-white conception of politics by populists. Autocratizing populists see politics in zero-sum terms. The imminent prospect of losing power heightens their sense of “existential insecurity”.²² As evidenced in cases such as Brazil, the US and Venezuela, they have a hard time accepting election losses, and can resort to instigating unrest to thwart the democratic process. Populist incumbents

are reluctant to share or relinquish power, because they might want to complete the sociopolitical transformation they have set in motion or avoid potential prosecution due to abuse of power. In societies with a salient ethnic division, they are likely to choose this strategy when, following a poor election showing, they face being replaced if the opposition manages to form a cross-ethnic coalition. Thus, their immediate goal would be preventing the formation of such a coalition.

There are two causal mechanisms that link the blood gambit to the political survival of the incumbent. First, fomenting ethnic tensions and conflict aims to widen the divide between opposition parties, particularly those that embrace majority and minority ethnonationalisms. We do not claim that autocratizing incumbents *create* these cleavages themselves, but rather *exploit* and *deepen* them in critical moments for political ends. An outburst of ethnic violence increases intolerance towards the “other” and makes it politically more costly for both majority and minority ethnonationalist parties to sit in a coalition with each other.²³ Second, civil wars, terrorist attacks as well as bouts of communal violence shape public opinion and produce a rally-around-the-flag effect, boosting the popularity of the incumbent leader, at least in the short term.²⁴ Thus, as shown in Figure 1, the desired outcome of a blood gambit is to prevent the formation of an opposition coalition and for the incumbent party to receive a popular mandate in a forced new election.

The second part of our theoretical argument explores the institutional and political conditions that shape the success of this strategy. Note that we define success from the incumbent’s perspective, that is, the prevention of the formation of a post-election opposition coalition. Drawing our hypotheses inductively from the detailed comparative study of Turkey and Israel, we point to two variables that shape incumbent and opposition behaviours and determine the outcome of the blood gambit: the level of executive aggrandizement and the level of party fragmentation.

Higher levels of executive aggrandizement are associated with the erosion of horizontal accountability, thus the removal of the constraints on the behaviour of the elected executives. These constraints are embodied in institutions such as the judiciary, national election councils, the presidency (in parliamentary regimes), and an independent media.²⁵ When these institutions are weak, or when the executive exerts significant influence over check-and-balance mechanisms, the ability of the incumbents to thwart attempts of coalition formation is higher, because they can bend the rules of the game in their favour.

The other variable that affects the likelihood of coalition formation among majority and minority ethnonationalist parties is party fragmentation. In ethnically divided societies, the opposition needs to bring together ideologically and ethnically diverse political parties to unseat the autocratizing incumbent. If the party system has low

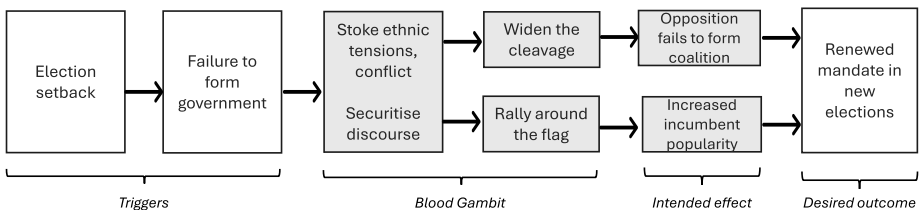


Figure 1. The mechanism of blood gambit.

fragmentation, and the nationalist vote is represented by one political party on each side of the ethnic divide, then the party leadership is less likely to negotiate with an actor it deems as “the enemy” during an ongoing violent episode. In a fragmented party system, however, competition within each ethnonationalist bloc incentivizes moderate and pragmatist actors within the bloc to compromise and seize the opportunity to join the government. Party fragmentation, in other words, is more likely to lead to ideological flexibility by providing a formal voice to moderate and pragmatist minority and majority nationalist actors in the opposition. The presence of these actors within the nationalist camp willing to compromise is imperative for the formation of a cross-cleavage coalition. Table 1 shows the likely outcomes of incumbent success across these two variables.

When executive aggrandizement is high and party fragmentation is low, the blood gambit is most likely to succeed, as we demonstrate in Turkey. When executive aggrandizement is low and party fragmentation is high, the blood gambit is most likely to fail (Israel). Although our case studies only account for two of the four possible combinations, we suggest that in-between scenarios, that is, high-high and low-low combinations, are more likely to produce success for the incumbent’s strategy. Low party fragmentation inhibits the ability of opposition actors to compromise, while high executive aggrandizement gives the incumbent the institutional tools to thwart the formation of a coalition even if the opposition actors compromise. Hence, the presence of one of these variables should be sufficient for opposition efforts to fail, and the blood gambit to succeed. Note that our analysis does not account for external factors, such as an effective civil society campaign or foreign intervention, which can shift the dynamics of party politics. Future research should test these hypotheses in cases with different combinations.

Methodology and case selection

In this article, we employ a comparative case study analysis using process tracing. Through detailed qualitative data and careful examination of unfolding events and situations over time, process tracing can help identify new phenomena, evaluate existing hypotheses, generate new ones and examine novel causal claims. It can also “strengthen causal inference in small-N designs based on the matching and contrasting of cases”.²⁶ Our study aims to contribute to theory building by delineating various causal arguments. We base our analytical narratives on the sequence of events that took place between June and November 2015 elections in Turkey, and March 2021 elections and the coalition formation in June 2021 in Israel, drawing our evidence from public statements by Erdoğan and Netanyahu, senior AKP/Likud and opposition figures, newspaper reports, eyewitness accounts, and national polling data.

Our comparison of Turkey and Israel combines elements of most different and most similar systems designs: the first in explaining the conditions for adoption of

Table 1. Explaining success and failure.

		Executive Aggrandizement	
		Low	High
Party Fragmentation	Low	(Success)	Success (Turkey)
	High	Failure (Israel)	(Success)

the same strategy in different settings, and the latter in explaining the divergent outcomes of the same strategy in similar political contexts.²⁷ The two countries differ significantly in their physical and population sizes, majority religion, state–religion relations, and level of economic development, which suggests that the post-election strategy adopted by the incumbents is not a parochial one and can travel across a diverse landscape.

At the same time, Turkey and Israel share important sociopolitical characteristics that underpin the adoption of blood gambit as a post-election strategy. The two countries have emerged in recent years as prominent cases of ethnically divided countries that have experienced democratic erosion under right-wing populist governments.²⁸ Both states were established and shaped by secular nationalist modernizing ideologies, Kemalism and Labor Zionism, and adopted policies of exclusion, discrimination and dispossession towards their respective ethnic minorities, the Kurds and the Palestinians. More recently, both countries have been governed by long-standing populist leaders, namely Erdoğan and Netanyahu, who have challenged the secular founding ideologies in each state and eroded democratic practices and institutions, albeit to different degrees. Various scholars have noted the similarities between Erdoğan and Netanyahu’s leadership style, discourse, and their exploitation of ethnic and religious fault lines for political ends.²⁹ Yet despite these similarities, the outcome of the blood gambit employed by both leaders differed in each country.

While ethnic divisions afflict many countries and populism has been on the rise globally, the combined list of cases that simultaneously feature a salient ethnic cleavage *and* autocratizing populist incumbency in a competitive electoral setting is relatively short. The most prominent example, besides Turkey and Israel, is India under Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). A number of observers, most notably Rogenhofner and Panievsky, have highlighted the parallels between Erdoğan, Netanyahu and Modi, including the way they use longstanding transnational violent conflict as an opportunity to securitize national minorities and their political allies, delegitimize them as terrorists or terrorist supporters, and exclude them from the definition of the “people”.³⁰

We build on this key observation by focusing on the tactics autocratizing populist incumbents in ethnically divided societies resort to when they face unfavourable results in national elections, and the institutional and political factors that shape the outcome of their blood gambit. We exclude India from our analysis because the BJP has yet to face a national election setback that would threaten Modi’s grip on power as Erdoğan did in 2015 and Netanyahu in 2021, although the insights from our study can be highly relevant to India going forward. Finally, there is a wider pool of “hybrid regimes” where identitarian fault lines shape the dynamics of coalitional politics, such as Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, North Macedonia and Sri Lanka, where a blood gambit may also be adopted in a potential scenario where a future autocratizing populist incumbent faces an election setback.

Case 1: Erdoğan’s “war of independence” and Turkey’s twin elections in 2015

Turkish parliamentary elections in June 2015 took place in an atmosphere of growing political uncertainty and insecurity for the ruling AKP and its leader Prime Minister-turned-President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Between 2002 and 2013, successive election victories on the back of sustained economic growth had allowed the AKP governments

to reform the judiciary, dismantle the tutelage of the powerful military, seize control of much of the mainstream media, and unveil a top-down project of sociopolitical transformation. The “New Turkey” that the AKP leadership envisioned aimed at moving Turkey away from its secular nationalist founding ethos and reshaping it as a major regional power with a distinct Islamic identity and “neo-Ottoman” aspirations under an executive presidential system. These aspirations gained momentum with the early wave of the Arab Uprisings that paved the way for the rise of Islamist politicians who looked to the AKP and Erdoğan as a model and inspiration.

Resolving the Kurdish conflict was integral to realizing the AKP’s hegemonic vision.³¹ Not only had periodic Kurdish uprisings since the early republic – especially the armed conflict since 1984 between the Turkish state and the Kurdish PKK – had been a major source of political instability and socioeconomic crises, but making up nearly a fifth of Turkey’s population, the Kurds were also an important voter bloc. Unlike the secular nationalist governments of the past,³² the AKP’s religious discourse allowed the party to reach across the ethnic cleavage and attract support from conservative Kurds, who became essential to the AKP’s electoral success and Erdoğan’s presidential ambitions. Consequently, the AKP sought to address the issue with an emphasis on Islamic brotherhood that would accommodate ethnic differences. To this end, it engaged in several initiatives, the latest of which were the ceasefire and negotiations with the PKK launched in early 2013.³³

This favourable tide shifted after mid-2013 starting with the nationwide Gezi Park protests against the increasingly authoritarian imposition of the AKP’s hegemonic vision. These coincided with a sharp economic downturn partly triggered by an interest rate hike by the US Federal Reserve, leading Prime Minister Erdoğan to blame the protests on a nefarious “interest rate lobby”; a classic populist scapegoating tactic conjuring bogus global elite groups. Erdoğan saw the Western criticism of his government’s crackdown of these protests, in contrast to the muted international response to the Egyptian coup against President Morsi, as a double standard against Muslims.³⁴ In December 2013, the simmering tension between Erdoğan and his erstwhile ally, US-based cleric Fethullah Gülen, turned into an open power struggle with the launch of a major corruption probe by Gülenist prosecutors against senior AKP officials, ministers and Erdoğan’s family. Finally, the intensification of the fighting between jihadist groups and Kurdish forces in Syria during 2014 increased tensions within Turkey and threatened the fragile “peace process”, as the AKP and the PKK appeared to support opposing sides. While the mainstream Western portrayal of Turkey under Erdoğan was shifting from “the champion of the Arab Spring” to an “enabler of jihadism”, the budding strategic alliance between the US and the PKK’s Syrian counterpart the People’s Defense Units (YPG) raised alarm in Ankara about the possibility of a US-backed Kurdish state in Syria.

Amid the sense of betrayal and insecurity fuelled by this sudden reversal of fortunes, Erdoğan and his allies espoused a zero-sum view of electoral politics, depicting it as an existential struggle – a new “war of independence” – for the authentic (Muslim Turkish) nation against its global and domestic enemies.³⁵ One major study measuring the level of populist discourse in the speeches of 140 chief executives across 40 countries found that, from 2014 onwards, Turkey under Erdoğan “experienced a larger increase in populist discourse espoused by a leader than any other country”.³⁶ In turn, this discourse was used to justify escalating violations of civil liberties and the erosion of democratic checks and balances, hastening autocratization in Turkey.³⁷

In the run up to the June 2015 parliamentary election, the AKP's stated goal was to attain a supermajority that would allow it to change the constitution without a referendum and implement the system of executive presidentialism that Erdoğan had long wanted. While Erdoğan had become Turkey's first directly elected president in August 2014, this was still a non-partisan post, whose constitutional boundaries he routinely overstepped. In his speeches, President Erdoğan implied that the continuation of the "peace process" was conditional on achieving this supermajority, a thinly veiled warning to Kurdish voters about the consequences of opposing him. Addressing a crowd in the city of Gaziantep in March 2015, he asked: "Are we ready to bring Turkey ... to its new constitution, presidential system and strengthen the peace process? My brothers and sisters, give us 400 deputies and let this matter be resolved peacefully".³⁸

During the first half of 2015, opinion polls showed consistent decline in support for the AKP with respondents citing economic concerns as a top priority.³⁹ At the same time there was a boost for the pro-Kurdish leftist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) which became poised to overcome the 10% national threshold for the first time in the history of Kurdish party politics. Led by its charismatic co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş, the HDP appealed to conservative Kurdish voters of the AKP, as well as to left-leaning Turks, and struck a defiant tone against autocratization under Erdoğan, captured by the slogan "We will not let you become president".

The election results indicated that the AKP had lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since 2002. The ruling party's vote had dropped from 49.8% in 2011 to 40.8%, giving it 258 parliamentary seats; a loss of 69 seats and far below the 400-seat threshold that Erdoğan had wanted. Among the three opposition parties that entered the parliament, the Republican People's Party (CHP), which under its chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu had been undergoing a contested transformation from a rigidly secular nationalist party to a more inclusive social-democratic one, secured 25% (a 1% drop from 2011). The far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) increased its share by 3.3% to 16.3%, while the HDP exceeded expectations by securing 13.1%. Alongside a sizeable portion of the AKP electorate that stayed home on election day, the incumbent lost support both to the MHP (nationalist voters opposed to the peace process) and to the HDP (conservative Kurds opposed to the AKP's Syria policy).⁴⁰

From the outset it became clear that Erdoğan was not interested in a power-sharing arrangement in the form of a coalition. From early on, he pointed to a repeat election as a viable path forward.⁴¹ On 7 July, Demirtaş criticized the unusual delay in the start of formal coalition talks, stating "the AKP has been governing Turkey illegally and illegitimately for a month ... The AKP administration is willing towards a coalition, whereas the President favours an early election".⁴² On the same day, columnist Mustafa Akyol observed⁴³:

President Erdoğan hates sharing power. He instead wants to concentrate it in his own hands as much as possible. But Turkey's election results ... do not fit this agenda. So, he wants to toss the dice once again, hoping that this time his party will be able to secure a parliamentary majority. ... [A coalition government] would be the end of the "revolution," and the state of emergency that he has been spearheading since mid-2013. ... This could even initiate a new era in which corruption scandals of the past two years, which somehow touch Erdoğan himself, may be reopened and legally pursued.

Erdoğan finally tasked PM Davutoğlu with forming the government on 9 July. Between 13 July and 13 August the AKP held low-intensity talks with the CHP, which were

criticized as a delaying tactic by the CHP officials and observers. According to Kılıçdaroğlu, the AKP negotiators never discussed forming a four-year coalition government, instead they proposed a temporary partnership ahead of a repeat election.⁴⁴ Following a short, symbolic meeting with the MHP, Davutoğlu declared on 17 August that the coalition talks had failed. Although there were still six days until the constitutional limit of 45 days to form a government, Erdoğan abused the authority of his presidency and ignored the custom of passing the mandate to the second largest party, in this case the CHP. On 24 August he declared a new election to be held in November. When asked why he had bypassed the CHP, the president responded: “What kind of duty would I give to those who insult this office in every way, to those who insult me personally? We have no time to lose”.⁴⁵

These developments took place against the backdrop of a dramatic outburst of ethnic violence, deadly terror attacks and a sharp return to conflict in Turkey’s majority Kurdish provinces; a turn of events foreshadowed by Deputy PM Yalçın Akdoğan’s infamous comments delivered the day after the 7 June election⁴⁶:

The process ahead will make everyone better understand that the AKP is the only guarantor of security and stability in Turkey. ... Henceforth, the HDP can at best produce a film about the peace process.

On 20 July, 33 young and mostly Kurdish socialists were killed in a suicide attack by an Islamic State (IS) militant in the town of Suruç. Two days later, the assassination of two off-duty police officers in Ceylanpınar, and the subsequent bombardment of the PKK bases in Northern Iraq by the Turkish military, led to the collapse of the peace process.⁴⁷ As the clashes intensified, the declaration of self-rule by the urban wing of the PKK, and the digging of trenches by Kurdish militants in 12 municipalities, triggered a major ground operation by Turkish special forces, leading to 24-hour curfews and urban warfare that demolished historic towns and claimed hundreds of lives.⁴⁸ On 10 October, in the deadliest terrorist attack in Turkey’s history, two IS-linked suicide bombers killed 109 people at a left-wing peace rally in Ankara.

A series of startling intelligence and security failures, revealed by investigative journalists despite the reporting ban on the attacks, raised doubts about the government’s willingness to prevent such attacks from occurring.⁴⁹ In the ensuing climate of fear, insecurity, and nationalistic angst, Erdoğan blended a “populist necropolitics” of blood, martyrdom and death and the criminalization of the HDP into his discourse of an existential struggle, and successfully positioned the AKP as the sole protector of Turkey’s national interests against an unholy alliance of domestic and foreign enemies.⁵⁰

The AKP’s revised manifesto for the repeat election in November emphasized the themes of national unity and the fight against terrorism.⁵¹ In the months preceding the election, Erdoğan attended funerals of fallen soldiers, delivering speeches in which he praised martyrdom, while AKP-linked non-governmental organizations (NGOs) organized mass rally-around-the-flag events that functioned as campaign rallies.⁵² Addressing hundreds of thousands flag-waving participants in the “One Voice Against Terror” rally in Istanbul on 20 September, Erdoğan mixed nationalistic messages with electoral appeals:

There is no flag like this one in the world. Whoever upholds this flag is native, national and of Turkey ... On 1 November, I want you to send 550 deputies who are native, national, and with their bodies and hearts working for this country. You understand what I mean, don’t you?

Davutoğlu made a similar appeal: “You will work very hard until 1 November, and you will leave them [the HDP] below the electoral threshold. You will make the AK Party, the symbol of unity, a single-party government”.⁵³ Showing the extent of the AKP’s influence over mainstream media, the allocation of broadcast time on public and private TV channels was heavily tilted in favour of the incumbent.⁵⁴ Denied a voice on these channels and presented as an extension of the PKK, the HDP was criminalized not only on discursive but also legal grounds, with the president urging the parliament to lift the immunity of deputies with suspected links to “terrorist groups” and prosecutors launching a probe into Demirtaş for inciting violence during the previous year’s deadly protests against the IS’s siege of Kobane.⁵⁵

Erdoğan’s “aggressive turn to nationalism and the politics of fear” worked.⁵⁶ Concerns over terrorism and national security overtook the economy in at least two nationwide polls conducted shortly before the November election.⁵⁷ The AKP was the prime beneficiary of this swing in the national mood, with Davutoğlu announcing that “since the terrorist attack in Ankara, there has been an upward trend in our vote.” On 1 November, following a campaign period that took place in a “climate of violence and fear” the AKP regained its parliamentary majority by claiming 49.5% of the vote.⁵⁸ Post-election analyses showed that conservative voters, who had sat out the June election or backed the MHP and minor nationalist and Islamist parties in protest of the government, flocked to the AKP mainly out of concerns over instability and insecurity. The MHP and the HDP suffered substantial losses, with a suppressed voter turnout for the HDP in majority Kurdish provinces that bore the brunt of the conflict.⁵⁹

While the Turkish president did not single-handedly create the tensions that boiled over after the June election, he successfully exploited them for political gain. His ability as a partisan head of state to delay and constrain coalition talks, along with the AKP’s control over the legislature, the judiciary, the media and the security establishment were critical to the outcome, demonstrating the importance of the level of executive aggrandizement in the success of a blood gambit.

Two other actors besides President Erdoğan and the AKP played prominent roles in this outcome. The first was the PKK, which mistook Kurdish fighters’ recent gains in Syria and rising popularity in Western public opinion as an opportunity for a renewed push for political autonomy in southeast Turkey. The PKK’s eagerness to resume hostilities undermined the HDP leadership’s attempts to reach across the ethnic cleavage and appeal to a wider electorate, helping the AKP drive a wedge between the Turkish nationalist and the Kurdish opposition.

Another key actor was the MHP, the sole Turkish ethnonationalist party with parliamentary representation in a party system with low fragmentation. As the leader of the MHP, Devlet Bahçeli’s categorical rejection of any deal involving the HDP blocked the possibility of an opposition coalition that would have put the AKP out of power. The MHP turned down various alternatives presented by the CHP to which the HDP leadership had responded positively, including a CHP-MHP minority government that would be informally backed by the HDP.⁶⁰ For Bahçeli, his party’s hostility to the Kurds and the peace process was more fundamental than its opposition to the ongoing autocratization under the AKP. This became more evident when, following the November election, the MHP and the AKP entered into an informal alliance that was formalized in February 2018. This alliance steered Turkey towards Erdoğan’s executive presidentialism on an ultranationalist path.

Case 2: Netanyahu's nativist populism and the violent aftermath of the 2021 elections

In the summer of 2019, Benjamin Netanyahu became Israel's longest-serving prime minister. Netanyahu served as premier for 12 consecutive years between 2009 and 2021 thanks to Likud's enduring coalitions with right-wing and religious parties amid Israel's ideological drift to the right. During his reign, and particularly since the 2015 election, Netanyahu's Likud adopted a populist discourse enmeshed with nativism, primarily directed towards the Palestinians in Israel.

Palestinian citizens of Israel make up 21% of the country's population.⁶¹ Placed under military rule until 1966, Palestinians started to mobilize politically in the 1970s under the Israeli Communist Party and formed ideologically diverse ethnic political parties in the 1990s, competing for political representation.⁶² Palestinians in Israel face legal and extra-legal restrictions in access to power, resources and land ownership.⁶³ Consequently, stark disparities exist between Palestinians and Jews in income, wealth, professional status, educational attainment and life expectancy.⁶⁴

With its history of Revisionist Zionism, Likud approaches Israel's Palestinian minority with an ethnonationalist frame of exclusion and securitization. The party imagines an ethnically Jewish Israel that excludes and scapegoats Palestinians, among other vulnerable minorities. Likud also targets left-wing NGOs, centre-left parties, the judiciary, and the Supreme Court, which it frames as different parts of an out-of-touch elite supporting "foreign" elements in society, creating a textbook populist antagonism in politics. For instance, on the day of the 2015 elections, Netanyahu delivered an infamous speech to boost the turnout of his nationalist constituents: "The rule of the right is in danger. Arab voters are streaming in droves to polling stations. Leftist NGOs are bringing them in buses ... We only have you. Go vote. With your help and with God's help we'll establish a national government that will defend Israel".⁶⁵ Likud members continuously called left-wing civil society and human rights organizations "moles" and "foreign agents". For instance, Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotolevy labelled Breaking the Silence, an anti-occupation organization composed of former IDF soldiers, as "an enemy of Israel".⁶⁶

Likud and its right-wing allies did not stop at targeting these groups rhetorically, but also passed laws restricting them politically. An NGO law aiming to stigmatize human rights organizations in Israel mandates all civil society organizations receiving funding from foreign governments to name their donors in published documents in public dealings.⁶⁷ In 2018, Likud passed the Nation-State Law which stipulated that "the right of self-determination only belongs to the Jewish people", thereby formalizing the exclusion of the Palestinian minority. The same law degraded Arabic's status from an official language to a special language to undermine Palestinian claims of constituting a national minority.

Likud politicians also portrayed the Supreme Court justices as an out-of-touch, corrupt elite by describing them as "disconnected from the people", "opposed to the common people's interests" and a "nest of left-wingers".⁶⁸ The populist attacks against the Supreme Court were clearly reflected in then Tourism Minister Yariv Levin's remarks: "in a democracy it is the people who determine who is the leader – not the court ... [the judges] are not superior to the people!".⁶⁹ Unsurprisingly, when Levin became justice minister in 2023, he became the architect of the judicial overhaul proposals which would give the Knesset the power to override the

Supreme Court's rulings and enable the government to fully control the appointment of its judges.

Hence, Likud demarcates a political antagonism between Jews and Palestinians in Israel and uses this antagonism to undermine liberal institutional actors. These attacks on the judiciary coupled with Netanyahu's war on the media outlets led to considerable democratic backsliding by undermining legal and political accountability mechanisms, or the so-called "institutional guardians of Israeli democracy".⁷⁰ These attacks came to a peak when Netanyahu was indicted by Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit for bribery, fraud and breach of trust. Netanyahu was quick to target the prosecutors, calling the indictment "an attempted coup against the government through ... a biased investigation process" before adding that it was "time to investigate the investigators".⁷¹

Thus, in discourse and action, Likud shares many similarities with populist parties in power, such as the BJP in India, the Law and Justice Party in Poland or the AKP in Turkey. The Chapel Hill Expert survey that measures "the salience of anti-elite and anti-establishment appeals in a party's public discourse" gave Likud a score of 8.7 on a 0–10 scale showing that "Likud is even more populist than European far-right parties, whose scores average around 8".⁷² With the intensification of Netanyahu's populist rhetoric and targeting of state institutions, polarization in Israeli politics shifted from a right–left axis to pro- versus anti-Netanyahu camps. This realignment became particularly visible during the political stalemate in 2019–2021, when Israel held four consecutive elections in a period of two and a half years.

The 2021 Knesset elections were held under this environment of great political uncertainty, and constituted existential insecurity for Netanyahu, as he could not form a sustainable coalition government in the past three elections. Losing elections would mean loss of political power and loss of immunity in his ongoing criminal case. The results of the 23 March 2021 elections indicated another stalemate for government formation, hence an electoral setback for Netanyahu. Likud, the ultra-Orthodox and religious Zionist parties, who were committed to serving only in a Likud-led right-wing coalition, commanded 52 seats. Yamina, a religious Zionist party which is ideologically aligned with Netanyahu's Likud but did not commit to a Likud-only government in this election, commanded another eight seats. The anti-Netanyahu camp commanded the other 60 seats, among them two Palestinian parties, Joint List and Ra'am, controlling six and four seats respectively. Netanyahu was tasked with forming the new government on 4 April, but failed in this task, mainly because his religious Zionist partners rejected sitting in a coalition with Ra'am. Unlike Erdoğan who denied the mandate to the opposition leader Kılıçdaroğlu, President Rivlin, a former Likudnik, abided by the legal duties of his office and passed the mandate to the centrist Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid on 5 May. In the first few days of his mandate, Lapid made significant headway in convincing Naftali Bennett's far-right Yamina and Mansour Abbas's Ra'am to sit in a coalition with left-wing, centre-left and right-wing parties. However, these coalition talks came to an abrupt halt when Israel's crackdown on the worshippers in Al Aqsa Mosque prompted rocket attacks by Hamas on Jerusalem.

The background of these incidents reveals how Netanyahu, similar to Erdoğan, adopted a blood gambit to stay in power. On 13 April, the first day of Ramadan, Israeli police stormed Al Aqsa Mosque, broke the door to the minaret and cut the cables of the loudspeakers claiming that the muezzin's call to prayer interfered with President Rivlin's speech nearby at the Wailing Wall.⁷³ Disregarding protests by

Jordanian authorities that storming Al Aqsa and cutting the loudspeaker cables violated the legal status quo, Israeli police further “close[d] off a popular plaza outside the Damascus Gate, one of the main entrances to the Old City of Jerusalem”.⁷⁴ When tensions rose in Jerusalem and Al Aqsa Mosque, Public Security Minister Amir Ohana, a staunch Netanyahu loyalist, ordered the erection of roadblocks on highways forcing Palestinians to walk long distances on highways to reach Al Aqsa. Community leaders’ attempts to convince Netanyahu’s government to diffuse the tensions, “at least by reopening the square outside Damascus Gate,” went unheeded.⁷⁵ These developments came on the back of the ongoing friction between protesters, far-right settler organizations and Israeli security forces over the forceful eviction of Palestinians from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. In these clashes, police aligned with the far-right Israeli groups and used violence against the protesters. Far-right MK Itamar Ben Gvir, Netanyahu’s potential coalition partner, further provoked the situation by erecting a makeshift office across the house of a Palestinian family facing eviction.⁷⁶

On 7 May, two days after Yair Lapid was given his mandate and during the last Friday of Ramadan, the Israeli police entered the Al Aqsa Mosque and fired rubber bullets and stun grenades within the mosque, wounding 163 Palestinian worshippers.⁷⁷ The Israeli police presence in Al Aqsa and its use of violence against worshippers were seen as desecration of a holy place and a major provocation by most Palestinians.

On 9 May, Sunday, police and worshippers clashed again in Al Aqsa ahead of the planned, yet later cancelled, nationalist Flag March, which marks the occupation and the annexation of East Jerusalem by Israel. Hamas, which had its own motives to rekindle a violent clash with Israel, primarily because Mahmud Abbas had yet again postponed Palestinian elections, seized the opportunity and fired rockets at Israel after issuing several threats. The rocket fire from the Gaza Strip and retaliatory Israeli airstrikes lasted for 11 days leading to the killing of 248 Palestinians, including 66 children, and 13 Israelis.⁷⁸

The start of this inter-border violence was enough to halt the coalition talks initiated by Lapid. Ra’am’s leader Mansour Abbas froze coalition talks and stated that “Al Aqsa is a redline”, and that “the aggression toward the holy site and its worshipers is unacceptable and offensive”.⁷⁹ Yamina, feeling the pressure from pro-Netanyahu right-wingers and its own constituents, also pulled out of the coalition talks. The violent confrontation exacerbated hawkish nationalism even among the Zionist members of the prospective “Change” coalition, who condemned Hamas and supported the Israeli military operations. A nationwide poll conducted on 19 and 20 May found that 78% of Israelis approved of the Netanyahu government’s handling of the military operation, while 58% thought it had done a good job “caring for the home front”, suggesting a rally-around-the-flag effect.⁸⁰ Banking on the surge of nationalist sentiments among the Jewish populace, Likud and its allies swiftly attacked the coalition formation attempts and demanded Bennet’s Yamina and Gideon Saar’s New Hope join a right-wing nationalist government instead. For instance, Likud MK Miki Zohar suggested: “[T]he progress on forming a left-wing government *with the help of Arab parties* ... is allowing our enemies to lift their heads. I hope Bennett will understand the destruction he is leading us to”.⁸¹ Religious Zionist leader Bezalel Smotrich called on Bennet and Saar to “put everything aside and ... form an emergency government of the national camp today”.⁸²

That Netanyahu crafted this violent conflict to sabotage the coalition formation was not lost on most commentators. As Thomas Friedman from the *New York Times* suggested, Netanyahu “inflam[ed] the situation so much that his right-wing rivals have to abandon trying to topple him and declare instead that this is no time for a change in leadership”.⁸³ Similarly, Anshel Pfeffer from *Haaretz*, an astute observer of Israeli politics, said of the situation: “Netanyahu didn’t invent the tensions between Jews and Arabs... [b]ut over his long years in power, he’s stoked and exploited these tensions for political gain time and again”.⁸⁴ What made this escalation between Israel and Hamas different than the previous ones was the interethnic violence that erupted between Palestinians and Jews in various ethnically mixed cities within the Greenline, such as Lod, Acre and Ramla. Riots, ransacking, looting and lynchings led to loss of life and property, rendering coalition-building between right-wing Zionists and Palestinian parties even more difficult by hardening their constituencies’ views on cross-ethnic cooperation.⁸⁵ During a conflict like this, “[p]eople are less likely to accept solutions of compromise”, observed Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israeli Democracy Institute, a think-tank that runs public opinion surveys. “Emotions of fear, distrust, and vengeance are becoming dominant... strengthening not voices of moderation, but rather radical voices”.⁸⁶

Yet despite these obstacles, and unlike in Turkey, the opposition actors were able to take trust-building steps and come together. While the riots were ongoing, Ra’am chief Mansour Abbas declared: “[W]e can overcome [the current crisis]. Maybe political cooperation at the level of government is part of the solution”.⁸⁷ Shortly after the riots, Abbas met with the mayor of Lod in front of a ransacked synagogue and pledged to contribute to the repair of damaged synagogues, stating that places of worship should be respected by everybody.⁸⁸ These words were not lost on Yamina’s Bennet, who said that Abbas was an honest man, and that he regretted calling him a “terrorist”. Yair Lapid also played a critical role in coalition-building. He not only secured the support of the other five parties of the prospective “Change” coalition, which ranged from the right-wing New Hope to left-wing Meretz, but also crafted a complex power-sharing agreement between Yamina and Yesh Atid that had to balance delicate right-wing and left-wing demands.

This combination of compromise, trust-building and political craftsmanship paid off, and a coalition composed of eight ideologically different parties formed the government on 13 July 2021. As the coalition negotiations in the aftermath of the elections illustrate, cross-ethnic cooperation between opposition parties was crucial to oust the autocratizing incumbent. The Israeli case also shows that a high level of fragmentation within ethno-political camps, which is shaped by overall party fragmentation in the political system, contributed to the opposition’s ability to overcome ethnic polarization and unify against Netanyahu. The ultranationalists were fragmented between the Religious Zionist Party and Yamina. While the former only supported Netanyahu, the latter was at least open to cooperating with other opposition players, including the Palestinian Ra’am. Fragmentation within the Palestinian camp also presented an opportunity. While the Joint List took a nationalist position refusing cooperation with mainstream Zionist parties, Ra’am split from the Joint List before the elections, and took a more pragmatic position vis-à-vis Zionist parties by prioritizing the everyday needs of the Palestinian citizens over identitarian issues. Slicing Yamina from the ultranationalist camp and Ra’am from the Palestinian camp gave the centrist players just enough seats to create a rainbow coalition government.

Comparative insights and conclusions

This article has examined one strategy that is part of the toolkit of populist leaders who operate in competitive, multi-party settings featuring a salient ethnic cleavage. When faced with election setbacks, autocratizing populist incumbents in ethnically polarized societies can adopt a “blood gambit” to stay in power. This entails fomenting violent conflict aimed at keeping the opposition divided along ethnic lines and creating a rally-around-the-flag effect. Our study contributes to the literature on populism and autocratization by demonstrating how autocratizing populists serving as incumbents can disregard democratic processes and societal peace in pursuit of political survival. Both Erdoğan and Netanyahu were willing to thwart the outcomes of democratic elections when they faced serious political setbacks. Moreover, they were willing to stoke violent clashes and provoke hostile ethnic relations in their countries to remain in power.

The existence of armed groups locked in long-term conflict with the Turkish and the Israeli states, the PKK and Hamas, with a transnational geopolitical calculus of their own that does not necessarily align with the political goals of the Kurdish or Palestinian parties within Turkey and Israel, adds a layer of complexity to this picture. Provoking violent confrontation with these groups helps autocratizing populists frame national minorities as a national security threat and exclude them from the definition of the “people”.⁸⁹ This exclusion is then used to delegitimize other political actors willing to cooperate with these national minorities, hence splitting the opposition. The conflagration also creates a rally-around-the-flag effect intended to increase the incumbent’s popularity ahead of a repeat election.

Although both leaders adopted a blood gambit for political survival, the outcomes in Israel and Turkey varied. Two factors were influential in these outcomes (Figure 2). First, the level of executive aggrandizement and the democratic functioning of institutions made a difference. In Turkey, Erdoğan abused the powers of the presidency by delaying the start of coalition talks and denying the main opposition leader the mandate to form a government after Davutoğlu failed in his attempt, while President

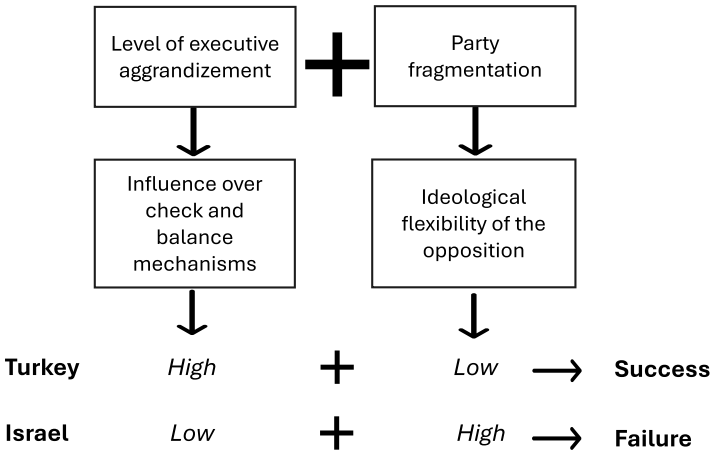


Figure 2. Explaining divergent outcomes.

Rivlin respected the institutional boundaries of his office by granting the mandate to the proper actors. These two sitting presidents acted differently because the level of autocratization was more advanced in Turkey compared to Israel. While Erdoğan had near-monopolized all the levers of political power, including the courts and the media, Netanyahu was still constrained by the rule of law and other institutional checks. This insight suggests that defeating a blood gambit through democratic means is more feasible during the early stages of democratic backsliding and much harder during the later stages, when autocratization becomes entrenched.

Second, the level of party fragmentation created different incentive structures for the opposition. That opposition parties need to reach across identitarian cleavages to challenge autocratizing incumbents is well established.⁹⁰ Contributing to this literature, we illustrate that differing levels of fragmentation within ethno-political camps affects the ability and willingness of the opposition to overcome ethnic polarization and unify. In Turkey's low-fragmented party system, the majority and minority nationalists were represented by one political party on each side (Table 2). While the Turkish nationalist MHP categorically refused to cooperate with the Kurdish HDP, in Israel's highly fragmented party system, the hardliners and the pragmatists splintered. While Religious Zionist Party and the Palestinian Joint List embraced uncompromising ethnonationalisms, ultranationalist Yamina and Palestinian Ra'am took pragmatic positions to inter-ethnic coalition-building. The cooperation between these latter actors, nurtured by significant trust-building measures, eventually gave the centrist players enough seats to oust Netanyahu. Our comparative analysis shows that high fragmentation can become an asset, and low fragmentation a liability, for the opposition to overcome ethnic cleavages in defeating autocratizing populist incumbents.

We should note that the level of political fragmentation is shaped by institutional factors, particularly by the electoral system. While both countries use proportional representation (PR) systems, in 2015, Turkey had a D'Hont system with a very high election threshold (10%), which discouraged party fragmentation. Therefore, Turkey in 2015 boasted fewer parties than Israel in 2021, which had a much lower electoral threshold (3.25%) that incentivized party splits. Turkey's subsequent trajectory is also instructive on the relationship between electoral systems, party fragmentation and opposition coordination. After its transition to presidentialism in 2017, Turkey implemented a new electoral system allowing smaller parties to bypass the national threshold by entering into formal pre-election alliances with larger parties. This arrangement incentivized fragmentation and increased the number of parties in the parliament. In this new electoral environment, a group of disenchanted MHP members broke away from their party to establish IYI Party under the leadership of Meral Akşener. This split created an opportunity for the opposition, which successfully

Table 2. Party fragmentation in Turkey and Israel.

	Turkey 2015	Israel 2021
Number of parties in parliament	4	13
Autocratizing populist incumbent	AKP	Likud
Centrist	CHP	Yesh Atid, Blue and White, Labor
Majority ethnonationalist	MHP	Religious Zionism, Yamina
Minority ethnonationalist	HDP	Joint List, Ra'am
Other	–	Shas, United Torah Judaism, Yisrael Beiteinu, New Hope, Meretz

coordinated to win the key mayoral races of Ankara and Istanbul in 2019 thanks to smartly nominated CHP candidates also supported by the IYI and the HDP, and came close to winning the 2023 presidential elections.

A final note about the long-term weaknesses of anti-populist rainbow coalitions. While forming a rainbow coalition to oust an autocratizing populist incumbent is challenging, the Israeli case also illustrates how difficult maintaining such coalitions are after they come to power. The coalition government composed of eight parties from across the political spectrum commanded a razor-thin majority of 61 seats in the Knesset. As expected, the Netanyahu camp immediately set out to open rifts between the ideologically diverse political actors of the coalition, which included, among other tactics, putting political and social pressure on Yamina lawmakers in public and wooing those with wavering support for the government in private. Although the coalition government managed to pass a budget and dodge several crises, it was reduced to a minority status less than a year after its formation with the defection of two Yamina MKs.⁹¹ The early election called for 1 November 2022 paved the way for Netanyahu's return to power and the formation of Israel's most extreme right-wing government.

This episode shows that rainbow coalitions are frail, and these weaknesses become more exposed when it comes to governing. Even when opposition actors succeed in the daunting task of overcoming a blood gambit, forming a coalition and unseating an autocratizing populist, they still face an uphill battle in keeping an ideologically diverse coalition intact. Building trust between coalition partners and expanding their common ground beyond the immediate goal of defeating the populist strongman are essential for the long-term survival of rainbow coalitions resisting autocratization.

Notes

1. Morgenbesser, "The Menu of Autocratic Innovation."
2. Esen and Gümüşçü, "Building a Competitive Authoritarian Regime."
3. Armstrong et al., "Getting the Opposition Together"; Tomini et al., "Standing Up Against Autocratization."
4. Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist."
5. Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*.
6. Müller, *What is Populism?*
7. Mudde and Kaltwasser, "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism."
8. *Ibid.*, 166.
9. Vittori, "Threat or Corrective?"
10. Diamond, "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession"; Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding."
11. Kenny, "The Enemy of the People"; IDEA, "Populist Government and Democracy"; Juon and Bochsler, "Hurricane or Fresh Breeze?"
12. Cassani and Tomini, "Reversing Regimes."
13. Selçuk, "Strong Presidents and Weak Institutions."
14. Gümüşçü, "Elections and Democratic Backsliding."
15. Panzano, "Do Mutually Reinforcing Cleavages Harm Democracy?"
16. Houle, "Ethnic Inequality and Dismantling of Democracy."
17. Leipziger, "Ethnic Inequality."
18. Sammy Smootha. "Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel After the May 2021 Unrest," *Fathom*, October 2021. <https://fathomjournal.org/arab-jewish-relations-in-israel-after-the-may-2021-unrest-a-survey-by-sammy-smootha/>; Yadirgi, *Political Economy of the Kurds of Turkey*.
19. Lust-Okar, "Divided they Rule."
20. Armstrong et al., "Getting the Opposition Together."
21. Selçuk and Hekimci, "The Rise of the Democracy–Authoritarianism Cleavage."
22. Akkoyunlu and Öktem, "Existential Insecurity."

23. Sekulić et al., “Ethnic Intolerance.”
24. Feinstein, “One Flag, Two Rallies”; Kuijpers, “Rally Around All the Flags.”
25. Signé, “Executive Power.”
26. Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing,” 824.
27. Seawright and Gerring, “Case Selection Techniques.”
28. Gümüşçü, “Elections and Democratic Backsliding”; Osnat, “Democratic Backsliding.”
29. Bishku, “Are Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Israel’s Benjamin Netanyahu ‘Two Sides of the Same Coin?’”; Rogenhofer and Panievsky, “Antidemocratic Populism”; William Eichler, “The Sultan and King Bibi,” *New Lines Magazine*, May 20, 2021. <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/the-sultan-and-king-bibi/>.
30. Rogenhofer and Panievsky, “Antidemocratic Populism.”
31. Günay and Yörük, “Governing Ethnic Unrest.”
32. Yeğen, “Turkish Nationalism.”
33. Başer and Özerdem, “Conflict Transformation.”
34. Jonathan Burch, “Turkey’s Erdoğan Slams World’s ‘Double Standards’ on Egypt,” *Reuters*, July 19, 2013. <https://www.reuters.com/article/egypt-protests-turkey-idINDEE96I0C120130719/>.
35. Akkoyunlu and Öktem, “Existential Insecurity.”
36. Hawkins et al., “Measuring Populist Discourse.”
37. Öktem and Akkoyunlu, “Exit from Democracy”; Esen and Gümüşçü, “Building a Competitive Authoritarian Regime”; Castaldo, “Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism.”
38. T24, “Erdoğan: 400 milletvekilini verin ve bu iş huzur içinde çözülsün,” March 7, 2015. <https://t24.com.tr/haber/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-gaziantep-te-konusuyor,289627>.
39. Metropoll, “Türkiye’nin Nabzı Mayıs 2015: 7 Haziran’a Doğru, 7 Haziran’dan Sonra,” May 15, 2015. <https://www.metropoll.com.tr/upload/content/files/1784-turkiyenin-nabzi--mayis-2015-2---site.pdf>.
40. IPSOS, “2015 Genel Seçim Sandık Sonrası Araştırması,” June 8, 2015. <https://www.ipsos.com/tr-tr/secmenin-nabzini-tutan-arastirma-2015-genel-secim-sandik-sonrasi-arastirmasi>.
41. İHA, “Erdoğan: ‘Ya yeni hükümeti kurarak ya da seçimleri yenileyerek...’,” June 24, 2015. <https://www.ih.com.tr/haber-erdogan-ya-yeni-hukumeti-kurarak-ya-da-secimleri-yenileyerek-473785>.
42. T24, “Demirtaş: AKP koalisyonundan yana ama Cumhurbaşkanı erken seçim istiyor,” July 7, 2015. <https://t24.com.tr/haber/demirtas-akp-koalisyonundan-yana-ama-cumhurbaskani-erken-secim-istiyor,302134>.
43. Mustafa Akyol, “Why Erdoğan Wants Elections – Again,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, July 7, 2015. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/mustafa-akyol/why-erdogan-wants-elections--again-85106>.
44. *Hürriyet*, “Kılıçdaroğlu: Koalisyon müzakeresi söz konusu olmadı,” August 15, 2015. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/kilicdaroglu-koalisyon-muzakeresi-soz-konusu-olmadi-29807984>.
45. *Milliyet*, “Şahsıma hakaret edene ne görev verecektim,” August 26, 2015. <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/sahsima-hakaret-edene-ne-gorev-verecektim-2108060>.
46. *Hürriyet*, “Yalçın Akdoğan: HDP bundan sonra çözüm sürecinin ancak filmi yapar,” June 8, 2015. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/yalcin-akdogan-hdp-bundan-sonra-cozum-surecinin-ancak-filmini-yapar-29227700>.
47. The PKK first claimed then denied responsibility for the assassinations. In March 2018, all nine suspects, alleged PKK operatives, were acquitted due to a lack of evidence. This acquittal was upheld by a higher court in April 2019.
48. Human Rights Watch, “Turkey: Mounting Security Operation Deaths,” December 22, 2015. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/22/turkey-mounting-security-operation-deaths>.
49. Ezgi Başaran, “Devlet o failleri bulmuştu, zaafiyet de yoktu! Bi daha düşünün!” *Radikal*, October 12, 2015.
50. Yılmaz and Erturk, “Populism, Violence and Authoritarian Stability.”
51. In the June manifesto there were 14 separate uses of the word “terror” (including terrorism and terrorist) and no mention of “national unity.” In the November manifesto these went up to 28 and 6, respectively. See AKP Election Manifestos: <https://www.akparti.org.tr/parti/dosya-arsivi/>.
52. Ece Toksabay, “Turkish Magazine Raided, Copies Seized for Mock Erdogan Selfie,” *Reuters*, September 14, 2015.

53. Bianet, “Yenikapı’da ‘Milyonlarca Nefes Teröre Karşı Tek Ses’ Mitingi,” September 20, 2015. <https://bianet.org/haber/yenikapi-da-milyonlarca-nefes-terore-karsi-tek-ses-mitingi-167779>.
54. Birgün, “TRT’nin partilere ayırdığı şaşırtıcı olmayan süreler açıklandı,” October 27, 2015. <https://www.birgun.net/haber/trt-nin-partilere-ayirdigi-sasirtici-olmayan-sureler-aciklandi-93584>.
55. Şahin, “How Populists Securitize Elections.”
56. Öniş, “Turkey’s Two Elections.”
57. Metropoll, “Türkiye’nin Nabzı Ekim 2015: Seçimlere Doğru Terör, Suriye Krizi ve Medya,” October 4, 2015. <https://www.metropoll.com.tr/upload/content/files/1788-turkiyenin-nabzi-ekim-2015.pdf>; Cumhuriyet, “Gezici Araştırma’dan son seçim anketi,” October 20, 2015. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/galeri/gezici-arastirmadan-son-secim-anketi-391417>.
58. OSCE/ODIHR, “Turkey, Early Parliamentary Elections, 1 November 2015: Final Report.” OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, January 28, 2016. <https://www.osce.org/odhr/elections/turkey/219201>.
59. Günay and Yörük, “Governing Ethnic Unrest”; Konda, “1 Kasım 2015 Genel Seçim Sandık ve Seçmen Analizi,” December 2, 2015. <https://konda.com.tr/duyuru/15/1-kasim-2015-genel-secim-sandik-ve-secmen-analizi>.
60. Anadolu Ajansı, “İbre AK Parti-MHP koalisyonuna doğru kaymaya başladı,” June 17, 2015. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/ibre-ak-parti-mhp-koalisyonuna-dogru-kaymaya-basladi/35408>; Cumhuriyet, “Bahçeli’den koalisyon yanıtı: Kırmızıları karıştırmazınlar,” June 20, 2015. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/bahceliden-koalisyon-yaniti-kirmizilari-karistirmasinlar-302617>.
61. Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2023*. <https://ghdx.healthdata.org/record/israel-statistical-abstract-2023>.
62. Haklai and Rass, “The Fourth Phase.”
63. Peleg and Waxman, *Israel’s Palestinians*.
64. Smooha, “Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel.”
65. Haaretz, “Netanyahu’s ‘the Arabs are Coming’ – Not Incitement to Racism, says AG,” November 26, 2015. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2015-11-26/ty-article/.premium/pms-arabs-are-coming-legal-says-ag/0000017f-f770-d887-a7ff-fff47bbb0000>.
66. Haaretz, “Deputy Foreign Minister Labels Breaking the Silence ‘An Enemy’ of Israel,” April 26, 2017. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2017-04-26/ty-article/deputy-foreign-minister-breaking-the-silence-an-enemy-of-israel/0000017f-e855-d62c-a1ff-fc7f3e360000>.
67. Charles Enderlin, “Israel Loses its Grip on Democracy,” *Le Monde diplomatique*, 4 March 4, 2016. <https://mondediplo.com/2016/03/04israel>.
68. Porat and Filc, “Remember to be Jewish.”
69. Gidron, “Why Israeli Democracy Is in Crisis.”
70. Oren and Waxman, “King Bibi,” 320.
71. Haaretz, “Netanyahu Decries ‘Attempted Coup’ Against Him After Corruption Charges,” November 21, 2019. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2019-11-21/ty-article/netanyahu-decries-corruption-charges-an-attempted-coup-against-him/0000017f-ef2c-ddba-a37f-ef6e76aa0000>.
72. Gidron, “Why Israeli Democracy Is in Crisis,” 38.
73. Patrick Kingsley, “After Years of Quiet, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Exploded. Why Now?” *New York Times*, May 15, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/15/world/middleeast/israel-palestinian-gaza-war.html>.
74. Middle East Eye, “Israel Restricts Entry to Al-Aqsa Mosque for Palestinians on First Friday of Ramadan,” April 16, 2021. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/ramadan-israel-palestine-thousands-blocked-aqsa-first-friday>; Kingsley, “After Years of Quiet.”
75. Kingsley, “After Years of Quiet.”
76. Patrick Kingsley, “Evictions in Jerusalem Become Focus of Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *New York Times*, May 8, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/07/world/middleeast/evictions-jerusalem-israeli-palestinian-conflict-protest.html>.
77. Yolande Knell, “Al-Aqsa Mosque: Dozens Hurt in Jerusalem Clashes,” *BBC News*, May 8, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-57034237>.
78. Sam Sokol, “11 Days, 4,340 Rockets and 261 Dead: The Israel-Gaza Fighting in Numbers,” *Haaretz*, May 23, 2021. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/elections/2021-05-23/ty->

- article/highlight/11-days-4-340-rockets-and-261-dead-the-israel-gaza-fighting-in-numbers/0000017f-ef54-d8a1-a5ff-ffde438f0000.
79. Gil Hoffman, “Reality Stronger than Any Coalition Deal,” *The Jerusalem Post*, May 9, 2021. <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/reality-stronger-than-any-coalition-deal-analysis-667687>.
 80. IDI, “Operation Guardian of the Walls Survey – May 2021,” May 25, 2021. <https://en.idi.org.il/media/16349/operation-guardian-of-the-walls-survey-may-2021.pdf>.
 81. Alexander Fulbright, “Ra’am Freezes Coalition Talks with ‘Change Bloc,’ Amid Violence,” *The Times of Israel*, May 10, 2021. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/raam-freezes-coalition-talks-with-change-bloc-amid-violence/>.
 82. Ibid.
 83. Thomas Friedman, “For Trump, Hamas and Bibi, It Is Always Jan. 6,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/16/opinion/israel-netanyahu-hamas.html>.
 84. Quoted in Kingsley, “After Years of Quiet.”
 85. A survey in March 2022 found that 60% of Israeli Jews supported segregation from Palestinian citizens of Israel, up from 45% just before the outbreak of interethnic violence in April 2021; Haaretz, “60 Percent of Israeli Jews Favor Segregation From Arabs, Survey Finds,” June 6, 2022. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-06-06/ty-article/60-percent-of-israeli-jews-favor-segregation-from-arabs-survey-finds/00000181-351b-dee8-aba7-3d9dfdf0000>.
 86. Hadas Gold, “Israel’s Political Stalemate is Unmoved by the Conflict with Hamas,” *CNN International*, May 26, 2021. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/26/middleeast/israel-political-stalemate-intl-cmd/index.html>.
 87. Herb Keinon, “Reshuffling Israel’s Coalition Deck Amid Jewish-Arab Violence,” *Jerusalem Post*, May 13, 2021. <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/reshuffling-israels-coalition-deck-amid-jewish-arab-violence-668142>.
 88. The Times of Israel, “Mansour Abbas: We will Repair Synagogues Torched by Arabs,” May 16, 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/mansour-abbas-we-will-repair-synagogues-torched-by-arabs/.
 89. Rogenhofer and Panievsyky, “Antidemocratic Populism.”
 90. Selçuk and Hekimci, “The Rise of the Democracy–Authoritarianism Cleavage”; Tomini et al., “Standing up against Autocratization.”
 91. Ilan Ben Zion, “Israel Government Loses Majority as Religious Lawmaker Quits,” *Associated Press*, April 6, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/benjamin-netanyahu-naftali-bennett-israel-middle-east-elections-83be724fedc54b895ce401d1553db705>; The Times of Israel, “Yamina MK Nir Orbach Quits Coalition,” June 13, 2022. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/yamina-mk-nir-orbach-quits-coalition-dropping-ruling-bloc-into-minority/>.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Karabekir Akkoyunlu is a lecturer in the Politics of the Middle East at SOAS University of London. His research focuses on the actors and institutions that drive and resist democratisation, autocratisation and militarisation in the Global South.

Yusuf Sarfati is an associate professor in comparative politics at Illinois State University, where he directs the Middle Eastern and South Asian minor program. His research interests are social movements, democratization, and religion & politics, with a regional focus on the Middle East.

References

- Akkoyunlu, Karabekir, and Kerem Öktem. “Existential Insecurity and the Making of a Weak Authoritarian Regime in Turkey.” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 505–527.

- Armstrong, David, Ora John Reuter, and Graeme B. Robertson. "Getting the Opposition Together: Protest Coordination in Authoritarian Regimes." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 36, no. 1 (2020): 1–19.
- Başer, Bahar, and Alpaslan Özerdem. "Conflict Transformation and Asymmetric Conflicts: A Critique of the Failed Turkish-Kurdish Peace Process." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 33 (2021): 1775–1796.
- Ben Porat, Guy, and Dani Filc. "Remember to Be Jewish: Religious Populism in Israel." *Politics and Religion* 15, no. 1 (2022): 61–84.
- Bermeo, Nancy. "On Democratic Backsliding." *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1 (2016): 5–19.
- Bishku, Michael B. "Are Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu 'Two Sides of the Same Coin'?" *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1 (2019): 57–87.
- Cassani, A., and L. Tomini. "Reversing Regimes and Concepts: From Democratization to Autocratization." *European Political Science* 57, no. 3 (2018): 687–716.
- Castaldo, A. "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 18, no. 4 (2018): 467–487.
- Collier, David. "Understanding Process Tracing." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 4 (2011): 823–830.
- Diamond, Larry. "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession." *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 141–155.
- Esen, Berk, and Sebnem Gümüşçü. "Building a Competitive Authoritarian Regime: State–Business Relations in the AKP's Turkey." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 20, no. 4 (2018): 349–372.
- Feinstein, Yuval. "One Flag, Two Rallies: Mechanisms of Public Opinion in Israel During the 2014 Gaza War." *Social Science Research* 69 (2018): 65–82.
- Gidron, Noam. "Why Israeli Democracy Is in Crisis." *Journal of Democracy* 34, no. 3 (2023): 33–45.
- Gümüşçü, Sebnem. "Elections and Democratic Backsliding in Turkey." In *Routledge Handbook on Elections in the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Francesco Cavatorta, and Valeria Resta, 134–146. London: Routledge, 2023.
- Günay, Onur, and Erdem Yörük. "Governing Ethnic Unrest: Political Islam and the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 61 (2019): 9–43.
- Haklai, Oded, and Rida Abu Rass. "The Fourth Phase of Palestinian Arab Politics in Israel: The Centripetal Turn." *Israel Studies* 27, no. 1 (2022): 35–60.
- Hawkins, Kirk A., Rosario Aguilar, B. Castanho Silva, E. K. Jenne, B. Kocijan, and C. Rovira Kaltwasser. "Paper Presented at the 2019 EPSA Annual Conference." Measuring Populist Discourse: The Global Populism Database, Belfast, UK, June 20–22, 2019.
- Houle, Christian. "Ethnic Inequality and Dismantling of Democracy: A Global Analysis." *World Politics* 67, no. 3 (2015): 469–505.
- IDEA. "Populist Government and Democracy: An Impact Assessment Using the Global State of Democracy Indices." *The Global State of Democracy in Focus* No. 9, February 2020.
- Juon, Andreas, and Daniel Bochsler. "Hurricane or Fresh Breeze? Disentangling the Populist Effect on the Quality of Democracy." *European Political Science Review* 12 (2020): 391–408.
- Kenny, P. D. "The Enemy of the People: Populists and Press Freedom." *Political Research Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (2020): 261–275.
- Kuijpers, Dieuwertje. "Rally Around All the Flags: The Effect of Military Casualties on Incumbent Popularity in Ten Countries 1990–2014." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 15, no. 3 (2019): 392–412.
- Leipziger, Lasse E. "Ethnic Inequality: Democratic Transitions, and Democratic Breakdowns: Investigating an Asymmetrical Relationship." *The Journal of Politics* 86, no. 1 (2024): 291–304.
- Lust-Okar, Ellen. "Divided They Rule: The Management and Manipulation of Political Opposition." *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (2004): 159–179.
- Morgenbesser, Lee. "The Menu of Autocratic Innovation." *Democratization* 27, no. 6 (2020): 1053–1072.
- Mudde, Cas. "The Populist Zeitgeist." *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541–563.
- Mudde, Cas, and C. Rovira Kaltwasser. "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America." *Government and Opposition* 48, no. 2 (2013): 147–174.
- Mudde, Cas, and C. Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Müller, Jan-Werner. *What Is Populism?* Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

- Öktem, Kerem, and Karabekir Akkoyunlu. "Exit from Democracy: Illiberal Governance in Turkey and Beyond." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 469–480.
- Öniş, Ziya. "Turkey's Two Elections: The AKP Comes Back." *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 2 (2016): 141–154.
- Oren, Neta, and Dow Waxman. "'King Bibi' and Israeli Illiberalism: Assessing Democratic Backsliding in Israel During the Second Netanyahu Era (2009–2021)." *The Middle East Journal* 76, no. 3 (2023): 303–326.
- Osnat, Akirav. "Democratic Backsliding and the Constitutional Blitz." *European Society and Politics Online*. April 18 (2024).
- Panzano, Guido. "Do Mutually Reinforcing Cleavages Harm Democracy? Inequalities Between Ethnic Groups and Autocratization." *Democratization* 31, no. 2 (2024): 265–289.
- Peleg, Ilan, and Dov Waxman. *Israel's Palestinians: The Conflict Within*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Rogenhofer, Julius Maximilian, and Ayala Panievsky. "Antidemocratic Populism in Power: Comparing Erdoğan's Turkey with Modi's India and Netanyahu's Israel." *Democratization* 27, no. 8 (2020): 1394–1412.
- Şahin, Osman. "How Populists Securitize Elections to Win Them: The 2015 Double Elections in Turkey." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 64 (2021): 7–30.
- Seawright, Jason, and John Gerring. "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research." *Political Research Quarterly* 61 (2008): 294–308.
- Sekulić, Duško, Garth Massey, and Randy Hodson. "Ethnic Intolerance and Ethnic Conflict in the Dissolution of Yugoslavia." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 5 (2006): 797–827.
- Selçuk, Orcun. "Strong Presidents and Weak Institutions: Populism in Turkey, Venezuela, and Ecuador." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 571–589.
- Selçuk, Orcun, and Dilara Hekimci. "The Rise of the Democracy–Authoritarianism Cleavage and Opposition Coordination in Turkey (2014–2019)." *Democratization* 27, no. 8 (2020): 1496–1514.
- Signé, Landry. "Executive Power and Horizontal Accountability." In *Routledge Handbook of Democratization in Africa*, edited by Gabrielle Lynch and Peter VonDoepp, 117–130. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Tomini, Luca, Suzan Gibril, and Venelin Bochev. "Standing Up Against Autocratization Across Political Regimes: A Comparative Analysis of Resistance Across Actors and Strategies." *Democratization* 30, no. 1 (2023): 119–138.
- Vittori, Davide. "Threat or Corrective? Assessing the Impact of Populist Parties in Government on the Qualities of Democracy: A 19-Country Comparison." *Government and Opposition* 57 (2022): 589–609.
- Yadirgi, Veli. *The Political Economy of the Kurds of Turkey: From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Yeğen, Mesut. "Turkish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 1 (2007): 119–151.
- Yılmaz, İhsan, and Omer F. Erturk. "Populism, Violence, and Authoritarian Stability: Necropolitics in Turkey." *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 7 (2021): 1524–1543.