Policing and Police Reform in Turkey since 1980: Regime Transitions and Policing Transformations

by

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Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies
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Abstract

Extant scholarship examining how political transitions affect policing have suggested that police forces in transitional states continue to be characterized by repressive and predatory practices, and have primarily investigated the causes of such continuities. Drawing on a case study of the endurance of authoritarian police practices following the transition from military to civilian rule in Turkey in 1983, I argue that the scholarly literature has largely neglected the role of mixed regimes and incomplete transitions in influencing the course of police reform in democratic transitions. The dissertation also analyzes how Turkish policing has responded to successive political transformations, including the end of tutelary democracy (accompanied by emerging competitive authoritarianism), and over the last decade the consolidating authoritarian rule of the AKP (Justice and Development Party).

This study brings to light how the police, an institution that is generally treated as subordinated to regime leaders, can pursue an independent policy agenda that can sometimes include a reformist element. Thus, in Turkey, reform-minded officials within the police pursued substantive democratic transformations in policing in exchange for their cooperation with the AKP government’s attempts to delegitimize the political role of the military, even in the face of
the AKP’s ‘authoritarian turn’ after 2006. This experience demonstrates how the police themselves can be instruments of democratic change in policing through their degree of independence from political leaders due to their control over coercion or can sometimes exhibit greater loyalty to democratic principles than the governments they serve. My findings also demonstrate how the police can shape regime transitions, a question that neither policing scholars nor political scientists have fully explored, by revealing how policing has catalyzed Turkey’s authoritarian transformation over the last 15 years.

My analysis of the AKP’s reassessment of the source of threats to its survival and its response to that changed assessment resulting in different changes to policing during the authoritarian transformation in the country also represents a contribution to the (mostly criminology) policing literature by applying insights from the political science scholarship on coercive institutions in autocracies, which theorizes how authoritarian leaders organize their coercive institutions to remain in power.
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Chapter 1

1 Turkish policing and political transitions

1.1 Introduction

My entire adult life, from my adolescence until my early 30s, was spent in service to the Turkish National Police (TNP), working mainly on international police cooperation in counter-terrorism issues. I belonged to a cohort of younger officers dedicated to raising the professional level of Turkish policing, improving police-community relations, and addressing Turkey’s serious problems of terrorism in a democratic and rights-respecting manner. I came to Canada in 2013 on a Turkish government fellowship to pursue a master’s degree in criminology, through which I hoped to become a better public servant by deepening my knowledge of criminology (which is still developing in Turkey), and by learning first-hand about Canadian policing. Although I initially planned to return to police duties in Turkey after my master’s studies, I later came to believe that through doctoral study in Canada, I could make a better contribution as a Turkish police officer and scholar. I was admitted to the PhD program in Criminology at the Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies at the University of Toronto and began my studies in fall 2015. I planned to devote my dissertation to a comparative study of Turkish and Canadian police responses to homegrown terrorism, addressing several key questions: How can police develop more trusting relations with at-risk communities? How can police persuade local residents to cooperate with them to prevent terrorist attacks? And how can police reach out to troubled young people to help them reject the deceptive allure of radicalization and hate? My goal was to develop a theory and practice of counter-terrorism policing for a democratic society that would focus on promoting dialogue and inclusion, rather than coercion and punishment.
However, under the current Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey, which was formerly a transitional democracy, has become increasingly authoritarian. Critics of Erdogan have been arrested and imprisoned, dismissed from their positions, or otherwise silenced. As part of Erdogan's clampdown on dissent, he has extensively purged the Turkish public service, including the police, dismissing and in some cases prosecuting or detaining without trial numerous officers. This purge of police began after 2013 corruption probes into the financial activities of President Erdogan and his close associates and intensified after a failed military coup attempt against Erdogan in July 2016, after which he dismissed some 33,000 police officers through emergency decrees that made no provision for investigation or appeal.

As part of Erdogan’s crackdown, both my wife, who was also a police officer, and I were dismissed from the police service by an emergency decree in August 2016. This dismissal has resulted in the loss of our employment income and the confiscation of a decade’s worth of pension contributions, just as we were expecting the birth of our second child. We also have not been able to return to our country, even to visit family and friends, because of the threat that I would be arrested and perhaps imprisoned and tortured, as many other police officers have been. I have been emotionally affected by the political events in my homeland through problems of stress and depression that I have been wrestling with in the last few years, triggered by my distress over the sad fate of many of my former police colleagues and friends and the dismantling of the democratic police force that we all sought to build.

These developments have forced me to change my dissertation topic, as my earlier plan of studying counter-terrorism policy seemed no longer feasible because of the need for travel to Turkey or to interview people still in Turkey, which could put me and my contacts in danger. My personal experiences, however, have motivated me to embark on a new dissertation project
which would examine policing following political transitions, with a specific focus on the
transformation of Turkish policing in the post-1980 military coup period. I believe Turkey is an
important case study because it has experienced repeated and very dramatic political transitions
as well as changes in policing over a relatively compressed period of approximately forty years,
from 1983 to the present. In this study, I not only ask how regime transitions affect policing, but
also how police constitute regime transitions—a question that has not been asked as much by
either policing scholars or political scientists—as I believe we cannot completely understand
Turkey’s political evolution over this period without understanding its policing transitions. As I
will discuss in more detail below, I am trying to answer these questions through interviews with
former police officers who have emigrated from Turkey, as well as data from documentary
sources and my own experience as a former Turkish police officer.

I believe this dissertation will interest not only scholars and policymakers who are interested in
Turkish policing and security sector in Turkey but also a larger scholarly audience who are
interested in Turkish national politics and Turkish studies in general since it explores the critical
yet underestimated role the Turkish police have played in the political evolution of the Republic
of Turkey. There has been intense scholarly interest in studying the military in Turkey, in part
due to its historical influence over Turkish society and political affairs. Yet, little scholarly
attention has been paid to the study of the police in comparison to other political institutions in
Turkey. One of my key contributions in this study is to place the spotlight on the police, an
institution generally understudied in political science and treated as apolitical, subordinated to
regime leaders, and relatively powerless in comparison to the military. I aim to provide an up-to-
date and sophisticated political science analysis of policing in a way that has not been done
before.
I also believe that this study will interest scholars and policymakers concerned with ‘democratic policing’ and the role of the police in politics more broadly due to its contributions to the several strands of the literature on policing. For example, this dissertation investigates policing continuity and change in the wake of regime transitions in order to contribute to a more complete understanding of the relationship between police and democracy. Another contribution that can be drawn from my study is that the police are not just impacted by political transition but themselves can be instruments of regime transitions as I will explore in more detail below. Finally, my study expands the literature on democratic policing and police reform in transitioning societies by revealing that transitional states confronting real or perceived challenges to their authority may also produce major police reform and restructuring for self-interested reasons (e.g., regime survival) that does not promote democratic development.

1.2 A brief political history of Turkey and the Turkish policing

Turkey is a country that spans across two continents, Asia and Europe, and has a rich cultural and religious diversity. It has a history as unique as its geography (Piran, 2013). Constantinople (later renamed as Istanbul by the Ottoman Turks who captured the city in 1453) remained the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire for a thousand years. Istanbul then served as the capital of the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922) for the next 450 years, which stretched from the Middle East to North Africa to Central Europe. The Ottoman Empire disintegrated following the World War I (1914-1918). The Republic of Turkey was established as an independent nation in 1923 on the remnants of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of victories against the allied armies that had occupied a significant part of the country after the end of the Great War. The country was found on secularist and nationalist principles by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder and first president of the modern Turkish Republic. Ataturk literally means “the father of the Turks”. He played a
significant role in transforming Turkey from an Islamic empire into a secular republic, which involved a series of reforms aimed at modernizing Turkish society and promoting Western-style secularism. Atatürk’s ideology, which emphasized the separation of religion and state, was enshrined in the Turkish Constitution and has been upheld by key public institutions such as the Turkish Armed Forces, the judiciary, and the education system. This secularist, modernist, nationalist, and largely Europe-facing ideology attributed to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his followers, often accompanied by public celebration of the life of Atatürk, is often referred to as ‘Kemalism’ after its founder (Goldsmith, 2009). As noted by Balboni (2023), “(b)elieving that rapid modernization and Westernization offered the best chance for the young nation’s success, in the 1920s and 30s Atatürk and his supporters unleashed a torrent of “reforms” upon a populace that—by and large—had little say in what the country’s future would be”. For example, Atatürk abolished the Sultanate (Ottoman monarchy), the Caliphate, and imposed the use of the new Turkish alphabet (Piran, 2013, p. 30-31).

Kemalist initiatives aimed at molding Turkey into a modern nation involved a comprehensive overhaul of language, dress, religion, and law, as well as an attempt to homogenize ethnic and religious differences. These attempts resulted in a deeply divided society, particularly on issues related to cultural identity, religious expression, and Turkey’s association with the West (Balboni, 2023). People who subscribed to the “Kemalist paradigm”, as defined by historian Christine Philliou (2011), thrived during the country’s initial years of economic and cultural Westernization. Conversely, those who couldn’t align themselves with or weren’t accepted by this paradigm due to factors such as their political beliefs, religious convictions, education, or ethnicity, suffered prolonged periods of exclusion from mainstream politics and cultural contempt (Balboni, 2023).
Until 1950, Turkey was ruled as a single-party state by Ataturk’s Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP). The country’s first open elections in 1950 resulted in the victory of the center-right Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti, DP) led by Adnan Menderes, which took over the government. By the 1950s, different ideologies and political alliances had emerged as an alternative to the prevailing ideology. However, a military coup in 1960 which deposed the Democrat Party government and subsequent arrest and execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes dampened the prospects for a strong political opposition in the country.

Since then, Turkey has experienced several significant periods of military-dominated authoritarian rule. Indeed, the influence of the Turkish military upon political affairs has been longstanding and profound in the history of Turkey (Jenkins, 2001). Most of the political elite in the early years of the Republic—including Ataturk himself—had a military background, as they had played key roles in the Turkish War of Independence (1918-1922) which paved the way for the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. The military was considered instrumental in shaping the new state and was seen as the ultimate guardian of the western, secular, and modern parameters of the Republic and of the unity and integrity of the nation itself (Ekşi, 2015). As Goldsmith (2009) notes, “founded by an avowedly secular military leader, Ataturk, in 1923, the country has long operated upon the principle of the indivisibility of the Turkish military and the Turkish state” (p. 32). This principle was deeply ingrained in the belief system of the population over subsequent generations through public memorials, national days, public education and the execution of a series of military coups in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997, either overthrowing or forcing from office the democratically elected governments (Cerrah, 2008; Goldsmith, 2009). Some of the justifications offered by the military bureaucratic elite for these frequent interventions in politics included “the inefficiency of civilian governments to sustain public order, the rise of domestic threats against the secular regime, and the unitary state” (Ekşi, 2015,
After the military coup which deposed Menderes in 1960, his successor, Suleyman Demirel, was removed from power in 1971 by a military intervention following increasing acts of political violence. In 1980, the Turkish military staged another coup following a period of several unstable coalition governments which proved incapable of effective rule and mounting violence between extreme right and leftist groups in the 1970s. Following the 1980 coup, the prime minister Suleyman Demirel and his deputies were banned from politics. In 1997, the military carried out another intervention known as the “postmodern coup”, during which they compelled a democratically elected coalition government to step down (Cerrah, 2008).

Therefore, despite the transition to a multiparty system in 1950 and the fact that opposition factions, including a flourishing Islamist movement, would secure multiple electoral victories throughout the remainder of the century, the Kemalist establishment largely dominated national politics and society until the early 2000s, which set significant barriers to democratic consolidation in Turkey (Balboni, 2023; Piran, 2013). Indeed, as Goldsmith (2009) notes, it is widely conceded among political observers and scholars that despite its relatively long period of experimentation with and experience of democratic institutions, Turkey’s model of democracy “remained unconsolidated” (p. 32).

As noted by Balboni (2023), “much of the country neither forgave nor forgot the elitist (especially toward more pious Turks), sometimes violent (especially toward minorities, leftists, and Islamists), and often corrupt tutelage of the Kemalist establishment—even as Atatürk himself remained a generally revered, almost mythical figure”. Furthermore, concerns over globalization, a string of government corruption scandals, a struggling economy, and a fragmented center-left coalition by the late 1990s, as well as the government’s inadequate
response to the devastating 1999 earthquake near Istanbul, only deepened skepticism towards the Kemalist establishment, leading to a significant reshuffling of national politics (Balboni, 2023).

The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), Turkey’s currently ruling moderate Islamist political party led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, rose to power in this context. The AKP won more than two-thirds of the seats in the Turkish parliament in the 2002 parliamentary elections and has been ruling Turkey since then. As argued by Tepe and Alemdaroğlu (2021). “(t)he rise of Erdoğan…hinged on antiestablishment discourse that emphasized the primacy of elected representatives over appointed state officials and the need to rein in the power of the military and state bureaucracy” (p. 88). During its early rule, the AKP and Erdogan appeared to fulfill numerous expectations that Turkish voters had pinned on them. For example, “the AKP has empowered formerly disenfranchised social groups of predominantly Islamic and Kurdish identity” (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016, p. 1584). The AKP changed the Kurdish policy of the previous Turkish governments and created opportunities for the public display of Kurdish culture and identity. Despite its flaws and eventual collapse in 2015, the AKP also commenced a peace initiative with the Kurdish insurgency aimed at resolving the longstanding conflict within the nation (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016). The AKP also curtailed the power of the tutelary institutions in Turkish politics. Specifically, it undercut the military’s political power by implementing a series of legal reforms under the sponsorship of the European Union (EU) that curbed the institutional power of the military in decision making, such as

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1 The Kurds are an ethnic group with large communities in eastern Turkey and neighboring countries, some of whom aspire to create an independent state (San, 2020a). Kurds make up around 15% of Turkey’s population and are the primary ethnic group in the eastern and southeastern regions of the country (Tepe & Alemdaroğlu, 2021). Despite this, Kurds are also present in other parts of Turkey. Interestingly, Istanbul, which has more than two-million Kurds, is considered to be the largest “Kurdish” city (Tepe & Alemdaroğlu, 2021).
increasing the number of civilian members in the National Security Council (MGK)\(^2\), reducing the frequency of its meetings and downgrading its decisions to simple recommendations for the government, taking out the seats reserved to the military in the Council of Higher Education (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu, YÖK) and the Radio and Television Supreme Council (Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu, RTÜK), and annulling the EMASYA (Emniyet Asayiş Yardımlaşma) protocol, which allowed the military to bypass civilian authorities in responding to social incidents (Castaldo, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Gürsoy, 2011, 2012). The AKP also reduced the military’s influence over politics through political delegitimation of the military’s extra-legal interventions in politics and, further, criminalization of such extra-legal attempts (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Gürsoy, 2012). As noted by Castaldo (2018), “(h)ence, initially Erdoğan’s fight against the establishment improved the quality of Turkish democracy, thanks to the EU-sponsored civilianization of politics” (p. 475). Moreover, during AKP’s early tenure, Turkey’s economy not only stabilized, but there was also a threefold increase in GDP per capita, and major Turkish cities saw the completion of significant infrastructure projects (Balboni, 2023).

Despite the positive developments in the early years of the AKP, which included increased political freedoms and human rights in Turkey, such as the removal of the military's influence on domestic politics and political and legal reforms aimed at aligning with the EU standards, the dissolution of military tutelage and the EU-promoted reforms did not result in the consolidation

\(^2\) The National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu, MGK) was established following the 1960 military coup and was a legal body consisting of civilian and military members where senior-level military officials advised the civilian governments on matters relating to foreign policy and domestic security issues (Ekşi, 2015). The 1982 Constitution enacted after the 1980 military intervention significantly enhanced the weight of the council’s decisions, which granted considerable power to military in a wide range of political decisions ranging from national security to education policy (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016).
of democracy. Instead, the politics of the AKP, headed by the then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, took an increasingly authoritarian turn after 2006-2007 when the democratic impetus provided by the EU candidacy was weakened after the accession negotiations were virtually halted (Kaygusuz, 2018). Starting from 2008, the AKP government started to increase its control over the judiciary through highly politicized trials against members of the armed forces (Ergenekon and Balyoz trials as elaborated in Chapter 4) and the members of the Kurdish political movement (KCK trials as discussed in Chapter 4) which corroded the rule of law and fundamental human rights in the country (Castaldo, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Kaygusuz, 2018). The AKP government also implemented controversial legal reforms in 2010 that increased executive control over the judiciary. While these actions left the civil-military bureaucracy without any mechanisms with which to confront Erdogan and the AKP, the overwhelming electoral victory in 2011 parliamentary elections with getting almost 50% of the popular vote left the AKP without any political opposition powerful enough to challenge him. During this period, Erdogan also managed to gradually consolidate power within his own party, sidelining several important figures in the party administration who founded the AKP with him in 2001. As Taş (2015) notes, “(t)his concentration of power in the hands of the state and party, as well as the blurring of boundaries between both, gave rise to the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of the Erdogan government”, which nurtured fissures and discontent among various groups in combination with a conservative, neoliberal agenda and polarizing discourse, culminating in anti-government Gezi Park protests in May 2013 (p. 782). Gezi Park protests which unraveled the public outcry against AKP’s increasingly authoritarian politics were suppressed heavy-handedly by the police, after which “Turkey started showing a discernible trend toward authoritarianism as the AKP leaders decided to cling to power at any cost” (Baser & Ozturk, 2022). Following the Gezi Park protests, and exacerbated by the crisis of corruption
investigations against members of Erdogan’s close circle in December 2013 which were allegedly carried out by Gulenists\(^3\) intending to remove Erdogan and the AKP from power, “through crucial legal changes concerning the higher judiciary, the media and communications as well as internal security and national intelligence, the government started effectively to disable all institutional and civil checks and balances, and established complete control over these institutions” (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 293). Moreover, the ruling party used its electoral power to control key state institutions such as the Turkish Supreme Electoral Council (Yüksek Seçim Kurulu, YSK) and the state-run Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) station to allow it to skew the electoral playing field against its opponents, and violations of civil liberties became widespread, as a result (San & Akca, 2021). In 2015, the AKP’s previous attempts to reach a peace deal in the Kurdish question through outreach to Kurdish groups, or its “Kurdish Opening” (Kurt Açılımı), which included some (short-lived) concessions to the Kurdish population such as permitting Kurdish broadcasting and Kurdish-language instruction in universities and the promise of amnesty for several militants, moreover, collapsed and turned into devastating urban battles between the Kurdish insurgents and the Turkish military (Tepe & Alemdaroğlu, 2021).

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\(^3\) Gulenists are the followers of Turkish Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen. Gulen is the leader of a transnational religious and social movement called the Gulen movement. The movement operates through various educational, media, and cultural institutions, including schools, universities, charitable organizations, and media outlets. After the AKP came to power, the supporters of Gulen managed to attain influential positions within the state administration, legal system, and academic institutions. They also had a well-established presence among entrepreneurs and journalists, displaying strong organization. The movement has faced controversy and criticism, particularly in recent years. Once considered as allies in the fight against the Kemalist establishment, the Gulenist movement and Erdogan's AKP started to experience conflicts after 2011, purportedly due to disagreements regarding the distribution of power. This division sparked a contentious struggle between the two factions beginning in late 2013, during which Erdogan utilized his political influence to purge Gulen sympathizers from the government apparatus and exert control over or dismantle key Gulenist figures in the fields of media, business, and education (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016). The Turkish government accused the movement of being involved in a failed coup attempt in 2016 and designated it as a terrorist organization. I provide further information on the Gulen movement and its conflict with AKP in Chapter 4 and 5.
A failed 2016 military coup attempt, blamed on the followers of the US-based Turkish preacher Fethullah Gulen, the former AKP ally-turned-foe, cemented AKP’s authoritarian turn. The failed putsch “gave the president reason to declare a state of emergency, hold a constitutional referendum to remake the key institutions of government, and punish dissidents” (Tepe & Alemdaroğlu, 2021). After 2016, the regime began arresting increasing numbers of political dissidents, removing bureaucrats and government workers, firing elected mayors, and shutting down or acquiring control of independent media outlets. Although the numbers are disputed, since the initial state of emergency following the coup, some 150,000 public servants have reportedly been purged through decree laws; more than 500,000 people have been investigated over terrorism-related charges; and some 95,000 have been arrested (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Tepe & Alemdaroğlu, 2021). Following the coup, the AKP government also targeted the opposition, arresting pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (Halkın Demokrasi Partisi, HDP) politicians on politically motivated terrorism charges and removing dozens of elected HDP mayors from their positions and replacing them with AKP appointees (Castaldo, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2019; Tepe & Alemdaroğlu, 2021). The coup attempt, further, provided Erdogan with the opportunity to turn the country’s political system from a parliamentary to a presidential one as a result of a narrowly won public referendum in April 2017, which several scholars argue have been responsible for the emergence of even more hegemonic tendencies in the Turkish political regime (Çalışkan, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2017). More recently, as noted by Balboni (2023), “Erdoğan and his party have seen their popularity decline amid an imploding economy, targeted political oppression and censorship, and widespread corruption at all levels, including recent revelations of deep connections between AKP leaders and organized crime”.

Throughout the history of the Republic of Turkey, but especially after 1983 democratic transition, Turkish police have played a critical role in the political evolution of the country—
which has been understudied by the scholars so far—such that we cannot completely understand political change in Turkey without examining the evolution of the police institution. How the political evolution of Turkey is related to its policing evolution will be teased out in detail in the empirical chapters (Chapters 3, 4, and 5) of this study. However, I would like to provide here a very brief outline of the historical evolution of policing in Turkey for readers unfamiliar with Turkey’s politics and policing institutions.

According to Ekşi (2015), “the history of the police in Turkey must be considered alongside the history of the military” (p. 43). The historical reason for this argument is that the roots of what we refer to as the Turkish National Police (TNP) today go back to the Ottoman Empire where policing duties were carried out by a special unit inside the Ottoman military, the Janissaries (Yeniçeriler) who were raised and funded by local strongmen (Ekşi, 2019). A separate police organization was established in 1845 as part of the massive modernizing reforms in the Ottoman state and military (Ekşi, 2015, p. 43). In a decree produced that year, the term “police” was first used, and the duties and the responsibilities of the new police force were identified, which also laid the foundation for the modern police institution in Turkey. However, despite the formal establishment of a police force separate from the military, the police organization kept recruiting its members from amongst the ranks of the military. According to Ekşi (2015), the police in the late Ottoman era and the Republican period (1923-1980s) were primarily concerned with pursuing state interests, rather than protecting the citizenry and providing public service (pp. 43-44).

This close relationship between the police and the military only expanded during the Republican era, in particular during and after military coups when the police helped military restore order by monitoring citizens through home searches and placing citizens under detention (Ekşi, 2019). As
Ekşi (2015) notes, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the cooperation of the police and the Turkish military during the labor and student protests which overwhelmed the country. The late 1960s and 1970s in Turkey were a period of “burgeoning protest and social movement activity” (Atak, 2017a, p. 697). During that period of extensive protest mobilization—along with transnational influences from the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S., and student protests and other types of political mobilization across the globe—the drafting of a new constitution in 1961 which granted extensive civil liberties to political parties and allowed labor unions and associations to flourish in the country created favorable conditions for street politics in Turkey (Atak, 2017a).

Until the 1970s, the Turkish police managed to fulfill basic tasks such as maintaining public order, addressing petty crimes, and managing the traffic, although at times, when incapable of fulfilling its duties, the Jandarma (Gendarmerie) which has been and is responsible for policing rural areas, stepped in to solve problems in urban areas which were typically the police’s jurisdiction (Piran, 2013). Although public order falls under the jurisdiction of police in urban areas, the Turkish state was not able to rely on police for restoring public order effectively during this tumultuous period of student and labor unrest and mounting violence and public disorder in the 1970s (Piran, 2013, p. 41). That is largely because ideological divides among the rank and file, provoked by the infiltration of extremist groups into the police force and the establishment of two different police unions with different ideological views, resulted in increasing tension and rivalry within the police organization (Caglar, 2003; Piran, 2013, p. 42). Pursuant to the right to organize granted to the police by the 1961 Constitution, two different police unions were established in Turkey in the 1970s. Pol-Bir (Police Unity) was the ultra-nationalist police officers’ union, while the Pol-Der (Police Union) was a union established by leftist police officers (Piran, 2013, p. 42). These two police unions were eventually banned by the ruling military regime in the aftermath of the 1980 military intervention due to the involvement of their
members in violent policing of citizens and involvement in physical altercations with each other (Piran, 2013, pp. 42-43). As the student and labor groups took to the streets during the 1970s, the police violently suppressed protesters whose ideologies differed from their own (Caglar, 2003; Collantes-Celador et al., 2008).

Although there is a lacuna in the literature on the police and policing covering the period from early Republican era to the 1980s (Piran, 2013), scholarly accounts of the Turkish policing prior to the 1980 coup d’état largely characterize it as a repressive, politicized, and illegitimate organization in the eyes of the general Turkish public (Mutlu, 2000). As noted by Piran (2013), this partiality and lack of legitimacy resulted in the lack of respect for police in contemporary Turkish society, “while the Turkish public viewed the military as their savior since it rescued the country from chaos and civil war” (pp. 41-42). In summary, the Turkish police were hardly a competent and professional law enforcement agency capable of responding to the needs of individual citizens until the 1980s (Piran, 2013). The organization and deployment of police institution during this era were oriented primarily not toward protecting citizens from crime but rather toward neutralizing and eliminating threats to the Turkish state. It would be fair to say that there was a kind of ‘steady state’ in Turkish policing until the early 1980s when Turkish policing was in the shadow of the Turkish military before it gave way to ferment and experimentation since then.

The reason this steady state in Turkish policing from the foundation of the republic to the early 1980s first gave way to experimentation was the need for increased repression and surveillance, in the face of opposition by different social groups inside Turkey to the neoliberal economic policies implemented by the newly-elected civilian government, as well as the escalating Kurdish insurgency and other types of extremist violence following the transition to democracy.
in the 1983 general elections after a three year of military rule. The result of this initial experimentation was an increased enforcement capacity of the reformed police and an attending persistence of authoritarian modes of policing—such as torture, extrajudicial killings, or politicized repression—employed by the military regime and the other civilian governments that preceded the new democratic government elected in 1983 general elections. With the military’s approval, Prime Minister Turgut Ozal\(^4\) and his government boosted police’s powers, increased the organization’s budget significantly, and allowed for the adoption of a militarized style of policing with the creation of several paramilitary police units. These institutional changes that were later supported with the enactment of a draconian anti-terrorism law in 1991 provided the necessary means for the TNP’s transformation to a militarized police force, equipped with the latest arms, equipment, and technology to carry out policing duties after the possible termination of the martial law when the military had to evacuate these areas legally (Piran, 2013).

Turkish policing played a significant (and apparently more active) role in the political development of Turkey in the new millennium. After the political leverage and legitimacy provided by the EU accession process to the AKP to fight the establishment forces, specifically the military, weakened after the negotiations were virtually halted in 2006 as a result of several European leaders objecting to Turkey’s membership, a reformist group of officers within the police organization provided unprecedented support to the AKP government in dissolving the tutelary forces which exerted a strong influence over elected governments. Specifically, they worked with AKP to sideline the military—which could realistically overthrow the AKP

\(^{\text{4}}\) Turgut Ozal was the founder of the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi, ANAP) and served as the 26th prime minister of Turkey from 1983 to 1989. He became the eighth president of Turkey in 1989. Ozal’s presidency ended with his death as a result of a heart attack in 17 April 1993.
government during its first term in office—through investigations into the members of the military allegedly plotting a coup to topple the AKP government. As I will elaborate in the subsequent chapters of this study, this alliance allowed the reformist wing within the police organization to achieve considerable autonomy in fostering their reform plans to help shift policing and coercion in Turkey toward the democratic end despite the AKP’s increasing electoral authoritarian tendencies during its second term in office (2007-2011). This alliance between the political leadership and the reformist wing within the police, which assisted in buttressing democratic policing reforms which were initiated in the early 2000s and accelerated by the EU process (discussed in Chapter 4), was hindered as the military was pacified as a tutelary veto-player. The alliance was completely broken following the launch of a corruption probe by the police on 17 and 25 December 2013, which implicated key cabinet members and even Prime Minister Erdogan’s own family (Taş, 2015). Erdogan and his AKP government responded to this crisis by implementing further authoritarian measures to strengthen their grip on the state. Following the graft probe, instead of investigating the allegations, the AKP government responded by removing or rotating thousands of police officers and prosecutors who were allegedly linked to the Gulen movement which was “Erdogan’s erstwhile ally in supporting the AKP in its conflict with the secularist state elite” (Taş, 2015). The government also introduced new legislation in early 2014 that increased the Ministry of Justice’s authority to oversee the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (Hakimler ve Savcılardan Yüksek Kurulu, HSYK) and allowed for a wider scope for the government to appoint judges and prosecutors (Kaygusuz, 2018; Taş, 2015). Furthermore, a system of ‘super judges’ was established, endowed with extensive powers, to investigate the authorities responsible for the corruption investigations (Taş, 2015). Following the adoption of these laws, all the corruption investigations were stopped and "it was legally guaranteed that such investigations against politicians would not be opened in
the future” (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 293). These critical pieces of legislation exacerbated AKP’s already emerged authoritarian tendencies by “reconfiguring the judicial system in a way that severely weakened the courts and placed them under the control of the executive authority” (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 293).

To conclude, the police institution played a critical role in constituting the regime transitions during the AKP’s tenure, first by helping affect transition from tutelary democracy by delegitimizing the political role of the military in Turkey and, second, when they launched the corruption probe in late 2013 that brought a series of allegations against Erdogan, his family and senior government officials, accusing them of corruption and other improprieties, after which the AKP government responded with a reconfiguration of the state (discussed in Chapter 5) to secure a complete control over critical state institutions (such as the judiciary and internal security apparatus) which helped accelerate Erdogan’s and AKP’s authoritarian consolidation. As noted by scholars of Turkish politics, the crisis created by the corruption probe constituted a distinctive context for the authoritarian transformation of Turkey (Kaygusuz, 2018). According to Kaygusuz (2018), in the period after the 2013 corruption investigation, “through crucial legal changes concerning the higher judiciary, the media and communications as well as internal security and national intelligence, the government started effectively to disable all institutional and civil checks and balances, and established complete control over these institutions”, which then would help Erdogan and his AKP to transform the constitutional order of the country (p. 293). I will further discuss these issues in the subsequent chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6) of this study.
1.3 Why study policing and political transition in Turkey?

My interest in studying the relationship between political change and policing was inspired by the developments taking place over the last three decades in Turkey, one of the most politically volatile countries in the Middle East, as well as by my professional lived experience as a former police officer in the Turkish National Police. In the period following the 1980 military coup, which ended the increasingly violent social and political crisis of the 1970s, Turkey underwent three major political transitions: first, a transition from a short-term military rule to a military-dominated tutelary democracy\(^5\) in the mid-1980s; second, the end of tutelary democracy by the end of 2010 (emerging competitive authoritarian tendencies after 2006-2007) and, third, the consolidation of the competitive authoritarianism\(^6\) since 2011 (Castaldo, 2018; Çalışkan, 2018; Esen & Gümüşcu, 2016; Özbudun, 2015).

In this respect, throughout the era extending from the 1980 military coup until present, Turkey saw major political transformations, including the transition from military to civilian rule followed by the implementation of neoliberal economic policies in the mid-1980s, EU accession process and the democratic reforms in the early 2000s, and the increasing authoritarianism since

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\(^5\) A tutelary regime is a hybrid regime type in which nonelected authorities (religious, military, judiciary, etc.) restrain the power of the elected government by intervening in the political process through informal and usually extra-constitutional channels (Esen & Gümüşcu, 2016, p. 1598; Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 14).

\(^6\) Levitsky and Way (2002, 2010) coined the term “competitive authoritarianism” which refers to a type of hybrid regime combining features of democracy and authoritarianism. They argue that although the end of the Cold War brought forward the breakdown of many single-party and military dictatorships, and the diffusion of the multiparty elections, these transitions did not always culminate in democracy. Many new regimes combined electoral competition with varying degrees of authoritarianism. These regimes were competitive in that the opposition forces used democratic institutions to seriously contest for power. However, they were not democratic because the political playing field was highly skewed in favor of incumbents, which caused a real but unfair competition. I elaborate on these regime definitions in Chapter 2.
at least 2007 (Ekşi, 2015; Kaygusuz, 2018). As well, throughout the post-1980 era, police in Turkey have played a critical political role by perpetuating the political order and serving interests of the political leaders and in some cases, threatening their hold on power. Within this period, there have also been several attempts aimed at reforming police organization in Turkey.

Drawing on an in-depth analysis of periods of continuity and change in Turkish policing over the last four decades Turkey underwent three major political transitions, the broader goal of this dissertation is to advance the discussion of policing continuity and change in the wake of regime transitions to contribute to a more complete understanding of the relationship between regime type and modes of policing and coercion. This study argues that political change in Turkey cannot be completely understood without examining the evolution of the police institution.

In the current study, I contribute to the existing scholarship on how political transitions affect policing, which has been largely preoccupied with dichotomies (or ideal types) of democracy and autocracy and democratic and autocratic coercion. We now know that there are all kinds of regimes that are neither purely autocratic nor purely democratic (Carothers, 2002; Diamond, 2002). Similarly, while there may be some police forces that neatly fit one of these two ideal types, the dichotomy of democratic and authoritarian coercion needs to be conceived of as a continuum, with most police forces falling somewhere between authoritarian and democratic coercion and potentially shifting between these two ideal types over time (González, 2021, p. 15). The first assumption, or the idea that regime transition leads to police reform which seems to embrace a simplistic distinction between autocracies and democracies, has resulted in the existing studies on police reform and regime change having spent a great deal of energy trying to understand why there have been so many continuities in policing in post-authoritarian or post-conflict societies (i.e., democratic transitions), sometimes failing to acknowledge the idea of
mixed regimes and incomplete transitions or the fact that countries may depart from traditional autocratic regimes, but they are not moving to democratic regimes, which may explain why the democratic police reform does not take place (Carothers, 2002). While the second assumption has resulted in the existing scholarship having largely failed to acknowledge the persistence of forms of democratic coercion/policing in autocracies or hybrid regimes. In this study, immersing myself in the mixed or hybrid regimes literature, I attempt to advance this discussion on policing and regime change by theorizing about the mechanisms and ultimate causes that may produce policing continuity or change in the wake of political transitions. In doing so, I abandon the dichotomies and assumptions in the existing literature on policing and political change and ask the ‘how’ questions rather than ‘what’ happens once the regime changes.

The democratic transition from military rule to a civilian government after 1983 parliamentary elections in Turkey was accompanied by a continuity in policing—the persistence of decidedly authoritarian features of coercion such as the deployment of police primarily for containing threats against the state, arbitrary/exceptional exercise of coercion, and weak accountability. My argument is that this was due to an unchanged need for repression/surveillance which made the new democratic political leaders reluctant to intervene to curtail these arbitrary policing practices—the new rulers of the country followed the military generals’ and their predecessors’ footsteps politically while implementing neoliberal policies coupled with adherence to IMF’s structural adjustment programs (Piran, 2013, p. 101). The relationship between policing and the political regime did not change fundamentally—what the civilian rulers elected in 1983 elections required from policing did not dramatically change from what their predecessors in the military government and the preceding Turkish governments under the military-dominated tutelary regime of Turkey required from the police institution, namely prioritizing the interests of the Kemalist state and restraining any type of opposition against the existing order—which impeded
building distinctly democratic forms of coercion. In other words, the reason for the persistence of authoritarian coercive practices of the Turkish police—from extrajudicial killings and torture to politicized repression—in the face of a ‘democratic transition’ was an incomplete transition or the absence of a significant departure from the regimes that preceded the tutelary democracy established after 1983 elections, which resulted in an unchanged purpose of deployment of coercion by the police in the country.

During Turkey’s transition from tutelary democracy in the first decade of the 2000s, the character of policing (both high and low policing) moved away from the authoritarian modes of police practices employed by the preceding regimes. During this period, low policing (protection of citizens from crime and violence) blossomed, and the police entered into a new, unprecedented relationship with the Turkish citizenry. During this period, there was also a transformation in high policing (policing concerned with safeguarding national security). The police introduced innovative strategies in the policing of terrorism which involved a radical break from Turkey’s previous highly repressive counterterrorism policing approaches and practices. This transitional period during when these substantive democratic transformations of policing occurred did not bring about the consolidation of democracy in the country. On the contrary, this period, along with the implementation of initial democratic reforms under the sponsorship of the EU and the dismantlement of Turkey’s tutelary regime, alsosignified the emergence of AKP and Erdogan’s electoral or competitive authoritarian tendencies which consolidated after 2011. The AKP government eroded, in particular, the constitutional attributes of democracy starting from 2008, with the increasing weaponization of the judiciary against oppositional political activities through the targeting of Kemalist opponents during the Ergenekon and Balyoz coup investigations where a number of military officers along with journalists, intellectuals, and secular politicians were accused of plotting to overthrow the AKP
government and the targeting of pro-Kurdish activists and politicians in mass trials between 2009 and 2011, and with the implementation of controversial legal reforms in 2010 which increased the executive’s power over the judiciary and undermined its ability to act as checks and balances over the executive (Eissenstat, 2017; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Kaygusuz, 2018). Yet, many of the democratic reforms in policing underlined above, which were started internally in the late 1990s-early 2000s and accelerated by the EU accession process, persisted until 2014-16 despite this authoritarian turn in the country after the 2006-2007 period as I will elaborate in Chapter 4. This allows us to contemplate the persistence of democratic modes of coercion in an electoral authoritarian regime or, to put it differently, that authoritarian settings can sustain democratic institutions—the reasons of which need to be unraveled.

I argue that this persistence of reformed policing was made possible because achieving the political objectives of the Erdogan regime after the crucial source of legitimacy and protection the EU had represented for Erdogan quickly weakened—political survival against the threat represented by tutelary institutions, specifically the military which could realistically overthrow his government—required the cooperation of the police which is the primary institution to which the state delegates its monopoly of the legitimate use of force (Bayley, 1985; Bittner, 1970), a condition police forces may adeptly exploit to serve their own interests. In the Turkish case, this structural power endowed a number of reformist security officials within the Turkish police with considerable autonomy in the pursuit of their political (i.e., advancing their position within the state bureaucracy vis a vis the military) as well as professional (i.e., rule of law and service to the public) goals in exchange for continued cooperation with the government’s policy priority—delegitimation of the political role of the military. Although some prerogatives of these reformist officers, such as rule of law and service to the public, were not exactly those of the Erdogan regime, they were allowed to pursue them in exchange for their cooperation in investigations into
the members of the military allegedly plotting a coup to overthrow the AKP government (explained in detail in Chapter 4). This alliance between the political elite and the reformist wing inside the police helped sustain reforms to shift coercive police practices towards the democratic end in Turkey in the face of AKP’s emerging authoritarian tendencies. Such alliance was later weakened as the military was sidelined and completely dissolved after the corruption investigations on 17-25 December 2013 targeted several key people with ties to the ruling AKP government (elaborated in Chapter 5). My findings thus suggest that the reforms to shift coercive institutions toward the democratic end may result from a police-politician accommodation, “a mutually beneficial exchange relationship wherein politicians grant police greater autonomy in exchange for the organization’s cooperation in pursuing political objectives” (González, 2021, p. 19). In the Turkish case of police reforms, the reformist elements within the Turkish police, as political actors “endowed with structural power due to their control of coercion” (González, 2021, p. 20), successfully leveraged their intelligence and enforcement capabilities (structural power) against the encroachment of the military in political life to achieve considerable autonomy in fostering their police reform initiatives which lasted until 2014-16 when majority of these reformist cadres were dismissed from their positions. These findings show that the police themselves can be instruments of democratization in policing with a stable cadre willing to recognize the value of a democratic policing approach or can end up being more loyal to democratic ideals than the regimes they serve.

My findings about the political role of the police in Turkey during the first two terms of the AKP period (2002-2013) also contribute to the research on policing following political transitions by asking how police constitute regime transitions, a question that has not been asked as much by either policing scholars or political scientists. My findings suggest that the police themselves can be instruments of regime transitions (e.g., use of Turkish police to remove military from politics
or the launch of the large corruption probe by police in December 2013, the results of which accelerated the authoritarian transformation of Turkey beginning in the first decade of the 2000s). With their extraordinary experience, policing and intelligence capabilities, and the use of secret police (or high policing) tactics, the Turkish police played a central role in disestablishing Turkey’s military-dominated tutelary regime by delegitimizing the military’s extra-legal involvement in politics. The end of the tutelary regime in Turkey was not simply a reflection of the reforms implemented by the AKP that limited the institutional power of the military in political decision-making. Instead, it involved the criminalization of military’s extra-legal interference in politics through a series of police investigations, namely Ergenekon and Balyoz (Sledgehammer) cases (discussed in detail in Chapter 4) into some members of the Turkish military for the alleged plans for coups intending to overthrow the AKP government. On the other hand, police launched the large corruption probe in December 2013 targeting President Erdogan’s close circle. The results of this probe, which Erdogan believes were organized as a political operation by Gulenists to remove AKP from power and to which his government responded by launching the most widespread overhaul of the judiciary and police force, accelerated the consolidation of already emerged authoritarian transformation of Turkey. I elaborate how the policing transitions that I describe have affected Turkey’s political evolution over the period studied in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this dissertation.

In addition to contributing to the scholarship on policing and political change, this study also contributes to the scholarly literature on coercion and policing in autocracies which offers valuable insights on how authoritarian rulers design and organize their policing institutions and how they deploy coercion. Although the literature on coercive institutions in autocracies reflects general awareness that police in authoritarian regimes are involved in political repression to keep the leader in power (Bayley, 1982, 2006; Dobson, 2009; Fijnaut, 2004; Hagenloh, 2009;
Kalmanowiecki, 2000; Light et al., 2015; Marenin, 1996; Mawby, 2003; Policzer, 2009; Shahnazarian & Light, 2018; Shelley, 1996; Taylor, 2011), there is little research on the exact form taken by the coercive apparatus in different authoritarian regimes that could explain variations in the structures of coercive institutions or why countries might adopt different institutional designs. In this study, I explore in depth how the Erdogan regime structured the internal security apparatus to contain popular and elite challenges to its survival during the authoritarian transformation in the country. My findings involving the Erdogan government's reassessment of the source of threats to its survival and its response to that changed assessment reveal that we could see or expect to see the opposite change in threat perceptions of authoritarian rulers (from the risk of a coup to popular threats or vice versa) resulting in different changes to how policing is organized and deployed for regime survival.

After the sidelining of the military, growing discontent among different social groups against AKP’s increasingly authoritarian tendencies, which culminated in the anti-government Gezi Park protests in 2013, switched Erdogan government’s attention and threat perception from a military coup to the people as he began to perceive domestic opposition groups as a significant challenge to his increasingly authoritarian rule (Castaldo, 2018; Cubukcu, 2018; Kaygusuz, 2018). The AKP government deployed the police organization to suppress rising opposition from civil society and ordinary citizens against its authoritarianism, supported by the passing of a draconian Domestic Security Bill (İç Güvenlik Paketi) in April 2015 which allocated several controversial powers to the police, including a broader authority to use weapons at protest sites, and the authority to search homes and wiretap telephones without obtaining a search warrant. Starting from the large corruption probe in December 2013 against AKP ministers and family members of Erdogan, the threat perception of the Erdogan government shifted from a popular to a combination of elite and popular threats, inflicting a series of changes in policing and internal
security for coup proofing, such as mass purges and rotations within the police force and the empowerment of the National Intelligence Organization (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MİT) over the police and the military. The attempted military coup in 15 July 2016, however, appears to have shifted the threat perception of Erdogan regime completely towards possible intra-regime contenders within the coercive apparatus, triggering the creation of a further fragmented system of security forces to help counterweight the disloyal factions within the formal security institutions such as the military and police. This involved the fostering of a complex ecosystem of pro-government militias (private security contractors, members of gang and mafia groups, and the unofficial party youth wings) alongside the creation of new units such as neighborhood guards (Bekçi in Turkish) and Reinforcement Ready Forces Directorate (Takviye Hazır Kuvvet Müdürlüğü in Turkish) within the national police whose members are deemed loyal to President Erdogan. This finding contributes to the previous scholarship on how coercive institutions in authoritarian regimes are structured or restructured to help the incumbents effectively manage the popular or elite threats against their political survival which suggests that authoritarian rulers design their coercive apparatus based on the dominant perceived threat at the time they come to power (Greitens, 2016). What makes the Turkish case distinct, however, is that Erdogan structured his internal security apparatus between December 2013 to the July 2016 coup attempt in a way that can both coup-proof against threats within the coercive institutions themselves and quell popular unrest. One of the most important contributions of this research is that in this analysis I am applying insights from a cognate discipline, political science, to fill a gap in the interdisciplinary but mainly criminology policing literature.

My findings also align with the previous scholarship on the political role of the police which theorizes police as a political actor who may successfully exercise agency in pursuit of their own prerogatives rather than being apolitical and subordinated to regime leaders (Alpert & Dunham,
2004; Deflem, 2000; Goldstein, 1977; González, 2021; Hinton, 2006; Liang, 1992; Los & Zybertowicz; Marx, 2000; Ungar, 2002; Wilson, 1989). These accounts demonstrate that police institutions are powerful bureaucracies—with the ability to control coercion and shape public discourse around security—with whom the elected politicians need to cooperate to pursue their political objectives, which in turn endows police forces with considerable agency to defend their institutional prerogatives. In other words, police are not only a potent political instrument utilized by politicians; but they are also formidable political actors who may leverage their structural power endowed to them due to their control of coercion to “selectively provide its service in the interests of elected leaders but can also threaten leaders by withdrawing its service of providing order and security” (González, 2021, p. 23). The police, who can be formidable assets for politicians due to performing a service that is essential for the functioning of society and can be distributed in politically beneficial ways, can also present important constraints for the political leaders. As noted by González (2021), “by commission or omission, police forces can create politically uncomfortable situations for elected officials” (p. 19). Indeed, as evidenced in the Turkish case analyzed in this study, the reformist wing within the Turkish police successfully leveraged their structural power to achieve considerable autonomy in pursuing their political and professional (policing) goals in exchange for their cooperation with the Erdogan regime in curtailing the power of military over Turkish politics and, as a result, gained increasing ground in the police. They, however, also threatened the Erdogan regime’s political survival when they launched the 17-25 December 2013 investigations into government corruption which brought Erdogan and his AKP to the brink of the biggest political crisis during their 11 years of rule.

This research also contributes to the existing literature on police reform by arguing that ‘democratization’ may not always be the right way to understand the motivations or outcomes of
police reform in political transitions. This study draws from a comprehensive analysis of the police reforms aimed at reorganizing the Turkish police in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup. My findings reveal that transitional states confronting real or perceived challenges to their power may also produce major police reform and restructuring that does not promote democratic development. Such challenges to state power in developing and transitional states may influence policing and police reform by blurring the lines between the police and the armed forces through the preoccupation of both military and police with the protection of the regime. Following the transition from military junta to civilian rule in the mid-1980s, civilian policing in Turkey was increasingly militarized through the establishment of riot units and SWAT teams embedded within the larger civilian police force. The police organization was thereafter systematically used for repression of domestic opposition groups and counter-insurgency operations which severely damaged the police legitimacy and created a police culture that does not promote democratic development (Ekşi, 2015, 2019; Piran, 2011, 2013). In the case of Turkish policing reforms following the 1983 democratic transition, paradoxically, it was the need for increased repression/surveillance which led to an attempt to improve the capacity of Turkish police. In other words, while the post-1983 democratic transition set in motion a restructuring of Turkish policing, it was the neoliberal economic and national security challengers of the new rulers, which they shared with their predecessors in the military government, that determined the nature of that transformation, rather than anything directly related to the return of democratic rule.

1.4 Chapters of the dissertation

**Chapter 2** introduces the reader to the scholarship to which this study contributes. This chapter presents the theoretical framework for my study by critically engaging with the scholarly literature on political regimes and coercion, policing in political transitions, the political role of
the police, and democratic policing and police reform. This chapter provides a detailed literature review by identifying and describing theoretical concepts and common themes in the literature. In this chapter, I explain the merits of my study and its contribution to the existing scholarship. The second chapter also presents a detailed description of the research design and study participants. It details my sampling strategy and describes the data that I collect, as well as my method of analysis.

The periodization of the history of police in Turkey corresponds to the major turning points that mark the perceived political transformation of the Turkish Republic. In my study, inspired by Ekşi (2015) and Piran (2013), I investigate the transformation of policing in Turkey in the post-1980 military coup era in three episodes: policing following the transition from military rule to tutelary democracy in 1983 until early 2000s; policing during the transition from tutelary democracy (and the emergence of electoral authoritarian tendencies of the AKP) in the first decade of the 2000s; and policing during the consolidation of electoral or competitive authoritarianism in Turkey following the 2013 Gezi Park protests. Accordingly, each of the empirical chapters (chapters 3, 4 and 5) of this study focuses on the description of narrative histories in the evolution of Turkish National Police since the 1980 military coup, and the identification and analysis of puzzles and specific theoretical questions these narratives help to answer.

**Chapter 3** explores Turkish policing following the 1983 transition from military dictatorship to a tutelary democracy until the early 2000s in Turkey. This chapter explores the persistence of authoritarian patterns of policing—from torture and predation to politicized repression—from the military regime to democratic rule and theorizes about the mechanisms and reasons that may have left authoritarian police practices in Turkey largely intact despite transition to democratic
rule. It explores the increasing militarization of civilian policing in Turkey through the creation of riot units and SWAT teams embedded within the national police to fight insurgents and suppress dissident groups and how the police were preoccupied with the protection of the regime against internal enemies rather than the protection of citizens from crime and violence.

This chapter largely draws from documentary sources, including publicly accessible Turkish government documents and reports on policing and security issues, non-governmental documents on policing in Turkey, local press articles covering significant political developments and policing and security issues (e.g., incidents of police violence, mass protests, terrorist activities and counterterrorism operations), and scholarly works including books, articles and dissertations on Turkish police and policing covering the period prior to 2000.

Chapter 4 examines policing in Turkey during the transition from tutelary regime in the first decade of the 2000s, a period when Turkey witnessed substantive democratic transformations of policing that emerged within the organization as of the late 1990s-early 2000s, accelerated by the EU accession process, and then spearheaded by a group of Western-educated reformist security officials within the organization. In this chapter, I theorize about the mechanisms and ultimate causes that may have enabled these reformist security officials to foster radical changes to policing that would render it more service oriented and sensitive to individual and group rights in this new era in the face of the ruling AKP’s emerging authoritarian tendencies after 2006-2007 period when the EU accession negotiations were virtually halted. I also explore how the police played a key role in constituting regime transition in Turkey by removing military from politics.

This chapter relies on data from my qualitative semi-structured interviews, as well as non-interview sources of data which includes data from local press, unclassified government
documents and reports on policing and police reform, and English and Turkish language scholarly studies of Turkish policing during this period.

**Chapter 5** examines the Turkish policing following the 2013 Gezi Park protests, the nationwide anti-government protests after which “Turkey started showing a discernible trend toward authoritarianism as the AKP leaders decided to cling to power at any cost” (Baser & Ozturk, 2022). This period is characterized by consolidating authoritarian policies and discourse of the AKP government, rising popular discontent against these authoritarian policies, and a shift of the police toward authoritarian modes of coercion through its expanding deployment to suppress those challenging the AKP regime, arbitrary/exceptional use of force against citizens and weak accountability. In this chapter, I also explore how the police constituted regime consolidation in the country by launching the corruption investigations in late 2013 which “turned into an intra-elite crisis” (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 291) and was further utilized by Erdogan and his AKP to consolidate their authoritarian rule over the country.

In this chapter, looking at the Erdogan government’s reassessment of the source of threats to its survival and its response to that changed assessment during the authoritarian transition, I demonstrate how we could see or expect to see the opposite change in threat perceptions of authoritarian incumbents (from elite to mass threats or vice versa) resulting in different changes to how policing is organized and deployed to ensure regime survival in different authoritarian regimes.

The data for this chapter comes from documentary sources and my qualitative semi-structured interviews. In particular, given that most of my interviewees no longer worked in the TNP following the 15 July 2016 coup attempt, documentary sources served as the most important source of data used to understand changes in Turkish police and policing after 2016. These
documentary sources include English and Turkish language scholarship and opinion pieces by experts written on Turkish policing during the authoritarian consolidation following the Gezi Park protests.

**Chapter 6** brings together and recapitulates the findings of my research. I elaborate on the findings of my study and provide some discussion as to the significance of the Turkish case in the comparative context. **Chapter 7** concludes the study by summarizing the most important contributions of this research to the theory, acknowledging the limitations of the study, as well as suggesting avenues for future research.
Chapter 2

2 Theoretical framework & review of existing literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to introduce the reader to the scholarly field to which this study contributes. This chapter is composed of two major sections. The first part presents the theoretical framework for my study by critically engaging with the scholarly literature on coercion in democratic and authoritarian settings; policing following political transitions; the political role of police; and democratic policing and police reform. The second part of the chapter provides a detailed description of the research design and study participants. It describes my sampling strategy and the data that I have collected and addresses the limitations of the study and the location of the researcher.

2.2 Democracy, authoritarianism, and coercion

Scholars have long studied the problem of classification of political regimes. The heterogeneity of regime types, whether democratic or authoritarian, has been reflected in the diverse set of typologies introduced by scholars, and there is now an extensive literature on definitions, criteria and standards and tools of measurement used to classify political regime types.

Following Dahl (1971), scholars have converged around a “procedural minimum” definition of democracy that includes four key attributes: 1) free, fair, and competitive elections; 2) full adult suffrage; 3) protection of civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, press, and association; and 4) the absence of nonelected tutelary powers (e.g., militaries, monarchies, or religious bodies) that limit elected officials’ power to govern. Levitsky and Way (2010) have added a fifth attribute to
this procedural minimum definition: the existence of a reasonably level playing field between incumbents and the opposition.

However, as Diamond (2002) argues, clarifying ambiguous regimes still provides challenges despite the consensus among scholars on this procedural minimum definition of democracy and standards and tools of measurement. This challenge has been exacerbated by the adoption of multiparty elections by more regimes than ever before as a result of changes in the international environment in the post-Cold War era. As Levitsky and Way (2010) argue, this international environment did not necessarily bring democracy, and especially in countries where favorable domestic conditions were absent, transitions were more likely to result in regimes that combined multiparty elections with some form of authoritarian rule. Similarly, Diamond (2002) argues that one of the most striking features of the late period of the third wave of democratization has been the unprecedented growth in the number of what is called “hybrid regimes”. This has caused, as Svolik (2013) states, the shifting of scholarly attention from traditional authoritarian and totalitarian governments to ‘competitive’ or ‘electoral’ authoritarian regimes, or in more general terms to hybrid regimes combining features of democracy and authoritarianism.

The propensity to classify regimes as democratic simply because they have multiparty elections has been questioned by an increasing number of scholars. For instance, Levitsky and Way (2010) have analyzed the hybrid regimes that emerged in the post-Cold War era. They argue that although the end of the Cold War brought together the breakdown of many single-party and military regimes, and the diffusion of the multiparty elections, these transitions did not always result in democracy (Carothers, 2002). Many new regimes combined electoral competition with varying degrees of authoritarianism. These regimes were competitive in that the opposition forces used democratic institutions to seriously contest for power. However, they were not
democratic because the playing field was highly skewed in favor of incumbents. This caused a real but unfair competition. These regimes are called “competitive authoritarian” regimes (Levitsky & Way, 2002, 2010). According to Levitsky and Way (2010), rather than categorizing hybrid regimes as subtypes of democracy, they should be conceptualized as a distinct, nondemocratic regime type.

Diamond (2002) classifies the world’s political regimes into six categories: liberal democracy, electoral democracy, competitive authoritarian, hegemonic electoral authoritarian, politically closed authoritarian, and ambiguous regimes. He argues that the boundaries between these regime types are often blurry, particularly between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism. Diamond states that the most significant distinction between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism is the degree of freedom, fairness, inclusiveness, and meaningfulness of elections. As can be seen from this discussion, there is a political gray zone between full-fledged democracy and closed autocracy, or in Tilly’s understanding, democratization is not a linear and irreversible process but “a dynamic process that always remains incomplete and perpetually runs the risk of reversal—of de-democratization” (Tilly, 2007, p. xi).

For much of the past 40 years, Turkey has been somewhere on this spectrum, rather than clearly at one end or the other. The 1983 general elections in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup resulted in a transition from military rule to a tutelary regime with the Turkish military maintaining its significant influence over Turkish society and politics until the late 2000s. As a corollary, given Dahl’s (1971) “procedural minimum” definition of democracy, the Turkish regime between 1983 to the early 2000s can be classified as a tutelary regime due to the existence of nonelected tutelary powers (e.g., Turkish military) that limit elected officials’ power
to govern. During the 20 years of AKP rule starting from 2002, Turkey has undergone two regime transitions. First, the end of tutelary democracy and then the consolidation of a competitive authoritarian regime (Castaldo, 2018; Çalışkan, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016). Some scholars even argue that the 2016 coup attempt and the April 2017 passage of a constitutional amendment that gave President Erdogan sweeping new executive powers helped pave the way for a swing toward full authoritarianism in Turkey (Castaldo, 2018; Çalışkan, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2017).

The AKP government ended the tutelary regime in Turkey by undermining the power of major veto-players in the Turkish politics (i.e., the military and the judiciary) with the use of a variety of strategies including EU-sponsored reforms which enabled the AKP to undermine the institutional power of the military in decision-making, the adoption of plebiscitary strategies (such as anti-establishment appeal in electoral campaigns, crowded mass rallies, early elections, referenda) and the delegitimation/criminalization of the military’s extra-legal interventions in politics through a set of court cases that began during the party’s second term in office (2007-2011) which also involved the significant collaboration of the police (Castaldo, 2018). The end of tutelary regime in Turkey did not result in consolidation of democracy and instead the AKP government’s already emerged authoritarian tendencies during its fight against the establishment forces after 2007 started to consolidate after its victory in the 2011 parliamentary elections. During its third term in office (2011-2015), the AKP government used its electoral strength to dominate key state institutions which they deployed more frequently and systematically against opponents and exploited state resources in a partisan manner to block the opposition’s chances of winning an election. Esen and Gumuscu (2016) argue that, therefore, Turkey has fulfilled the criteria of competitive authoritarianism since elections continue to function as key political institutions and allow for a competition, however, the fairness of elections is increasingly
contested; civil liberties are systematically violated; and the political playing field is increasingly skewed in favor of the incumbent AKP. I will explain each of these transitions in more detail in the subsequent empirical chapters of this study.

Coercion is a defining feature of the state (Tilly, 1992; Weber, 1965). Existing scholarship offers valuable insights about what the state’s exercise of coercion ought to look like under democratic and authoritarian rule. Coercion in democratic settings is deployed primarily for the purpose of protecting citizens from crime and violence, exercised based on the rule of law which “entails limits on police authority to provide protection and exert repression, based not only on the law but also on the premise of equal treatment of all citizens”, and is subjected to meaningful formal external accountability where “civilian (i.e., non-police) state actors can monitor the use of coercion, conduct oversight in practice, and employ sanctions when such use of coercion falls outside the bounds of law” (González, 2021, pp. 11-12). Authoritarian coercion, on the other hand, is deployed primarily to serve the interests of the leader to remain in power, is exceptional or arbitrary which means it is “systematically deployed beyond what is in the law and unconstrained by rights and limits defined by law” and is subjected to weak or nonexistent external accountability mechanisms (González, 2021, pp. 13-15). According to González (2021), while some police forces do aptly fit one of these two ideal types, the dichotomy ought to be viewed as a continuum, with most police forces falling somewhere in between authoritarian and democratic coercion and possibly shifting between them over time (see Table 1).
González (2021) argues that conceptualizing coercion in this way “decouples the type of coercion from the type of regime, allowing us to contemplate the persistence of authoritarian modes of coercion in democracies and democratic modes of coercion in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian countries” (p. 16). The former is evidenced in Latin America where police forces exhibit sustained patterns of violence and corruption incompatible with democracy (and in Turkey following the transition from military rule to democracy in 1983 where the police exhibited sustained patterns of abuse and repression), and recent research has analyzed efforts to introduce forms of democratic coercion in an electoral authoritarian regime (Light 2016, as cited in González, 2021, p. 16). As I will discuss below, the persistence of democratic modes of coercion in a hybrid regime is also evidenced in Turkey where the substantive democratic transformations in policing that began in the early 2000s continued well into 2014-16 despite the AKP’s growing authoritarianism after 2007.

2.3 Research on policing following political transitions

There has been intense scholarly interest in studying policing following political transitions in Latin America (González, 2021; Hinton, 2006; Huggins, 2000; Light et al., 2015; Pereira & Ungar, 2004; Prado et al., 2012; Ungar, 2012), post-Soviet states (Beck & Robertson, 2005,
2009; Gerber & Mendelson, 2008; Light, 2014; Marat, 2018; McCarthy, 2015; Shahnazarian & Light, 2018; Shelley, 1999; Taylor, 2011; Trebilcock & Daniels, 2008), African states (Brewer, 1994; Brogden, 2005; Brogden & Shearing, 1993; Gordon, 2006; Hills, 1996, 2008; Marks & Goldsmith, 2006; Steinberg, 2011, 2014; Tankebe, 2013), and post-war Balkan countries (Aitchison & Blaustein, 2013; Hansen, 2008). Scholarship on policing and political transitions suggests that police forces in transitional states continue to perpetrate widespread human rights violations and continue to be characterized by politicized, militarized, repressive, corrupt and predatory police practices, and has expended a great deal of energy trying to understand why there have been so many unexpected continuities.

In post-Soviet countries, police remain one of the least reformed post-communist institutions (Marat, 2018). Across the region, the inherited police forces are remarkably similar with “identical structures, chains of command, and politicized relationships with the political elite” (Marat, 2018). There have been difficulties in reforming these post-communist police forces because, as Trebilcock and Daniels (2008) note, “(p)olice were alienated from citizens because of the exclusive focus of the police on securing social order and defending ruling interests” (p. 109). For instance, Beck and Robertson (2009) argue that, in post-Soviet Russia, violation of human rights, lack of impartiality and political bias, unwillingness to carry out organizational change, maintenance of the status-quo (internal passports and residence permits, bribes and abuses), quantitative measures of performance such as clearance rates, lack of accountability and oversight, and ongoing police corruption continue to dominate everyday police practices. In a comparative study of police reforms in five post-Soviet countries (Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and Tajikistan), Marat (2018) argues that the Soviet-style militarized police have resisted change despite democratic transformations in the overall political context.
Similarly, in Central and South American states where the traditional divide between the police and the military forces was blurred due to the preoccupation of both police and military with the protection of the regime, basic crime prevention and control have been neglected even after the overthrow of the military and the free election of reformist governments (Banks & Baker, 2016). In these countries, as Hinton (2006) notes, “rising crime, an acceptance of corruption in public offices, and a lack of political commitment to police reform have impeded radical changes to policing that would render it more service oriented” (p. 192). In South American states that transitioned towards democracy from dictatorships in the 1980s, such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay, police institutions and practices continue to be characterized by close military-police ties; militarized training and doctrine; high rates of police brutality; a lack of effective court oversight; and continuity of organizational forms and personnel (Arantes, personal communication, July 17, 2020; González, 2021; Huggins, 2000; Light et al., 2015; Pereira & Ungar, 2004; Ungar, 2012). As González (2021) aptly notes, in Latin America, “while soldiers returned to the barracks following transitions to democracy, police officers returned to the streets, with their legal structures, repertoires of repression, and personnel left largely intact” (p. 8).

Looking at the survival of non-democratic police practices and personnel following the end of military rule in Latin American countries, namely Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina, Pereira and Ungar (2004) argue that the democratic transitions in Latin America have had relatively little influence on patterns of policing in the region. They argue that the enactment and success of the democratic police reforms in line with human rights, democratic values and citizen safety in these countries is more dependent on the civil society’s support for the reforms and political interests rather than the mode of transition and that the level of police centralization significantly impacts how police reform takes place in these contexts.
Prado et al. (2012), in their study of the challenges confronting policing and police reform in what they call “violent Latin American democracies”, argue that a move from military or autocratic government to (at least nominally) democratic political regimes does not guarantee a shift in policing practices. Prado et al. (2012) found that in contrary to the expectation that police forces that had often been mobilized for the maintenance of autocratic governments and engaged in repression, violence and human rights abuses towards the citizens would transform into more conventional civilian police forces—charged with basic crime prevention and control and serving the citizens while protecting their basic civil and political rights—police malfeasance has in many cases actually been rising since the transition to democracy (p. 255). They state that there is still a widespread popular perception in Latin American countries, established even among police officers, that the police can more effectively achieve public security by transgressing the rule of law and violating human rights—or by the so-called mano dura approach to policing. Still, many police agencies are militarized and hierarchical, reflecting the legacies of former authoritarian regimes. Moreover, in many countries, police forces are plagued with rampant corruption which facilitates their linkage with powerful drug cartels and impedes institutional change; they engage in widespread abuse and extra-judicial killings against citizens; and suffer from a lack of essential material and human resources (Prado et al., 2012).

Prado et al. (2012) did find that many Latin American police forces have become less authoritarian without becoming more democratic. Accordingly, they propose three ideal types of police force with different types of deviation from the democratic criteria (p. 261). The first type is the ‘autocratic police force’ which is controlled by and protective of the interests of a regime. The other two types are ‘criminal police forces’ that are no longer controlled by and protective of the interests of a regime but instead accountable to drug gangs and criminal groups, and ‘autarkic police forces’ which are unaccountable and uncontrollable institutions that set their own policies
and execute them independently of the state. These three deviations from the democratic police, although distinctive, are similar to one another in that they are not accountable to the law. Prado et al.’s (2012) typology is potentially helpful for reformers to understand particularities of each country and tailor strategies to promote democratic policing in each case, by taking into account the distinct points in which different police institutions deviate from democratic criteria (be they autocratic, criminal, autarkic), and design the sequencing of reforms based on these particular problems in each country.

Scholarship on policing and political transition in Africa suggests that postcolonial police has retained established colonial policing methods and “most police in most African countries are fundamentally unchanged from what they were ten years ago” (Hills, 2008, p. 216). As a result, order and control rather than crime prevention and justice are still at the core of many African policing regimes (Hills, 1996).

Drawing on a comparative case study of policing in Russia, Brazil, and China—each of which has experienced a major political or social transition over the last few decades—Light et al. (2015) argue that a transition from authoritarianism to democracy is not sufficient for a change in patterns of policing. Rather, they argue, policing following political and social transitions is affected by both transition “outcomes” (that is, the new political or social order) and “processes” (that is, institutional choices made during the transition, as well as attendant social and political conditions) (Light et al., 2015, p. 217). They specifically explore how transition in each country affected “repression”, defined as “the politically-motivated deployment of the police against regime opponents”, and “abuse”, which they define as “other police misconduct that also victimizes citizens but is not directly ordered by the regime” (Light et al., 2015, p. 216). Their findings reveal that authoritarian regimes are more likely to perpetrate severe repression. They
also find that Brazilian police are highly abusive, but not repressive, whereas Chinese police is highly repressive, but far less abusive, and the Russian police are both significantly repressive and abusive, however, less extreme on each parameter than Chinese and Russian police. Drawing on these findings, Light et al. (2015) argue that the establishment of oversight institutions during the transition may significantly reduce police abuse, even in the most repressive authoritarian regimes such as China. The authors argue that the abusiveness of the post-transition Brazilian police is associated with a failure to create oversight mechanisms during the transition from military dictatorship to democracy, as well as that the increasing repressiveness of the Chinese police is the result of a conscious effort by the Chinese Communist Party to reinforce the police in an era of economic liberalization (Light et al., 2015).

González (2021), drawing on comparative analysis of periods of continuity and reform among police forces in Buenos Aires Province, Argentina; in São Paulo State, Brazil; and in Colombia, argues that the persistence of authoritarian policing practices following transitions to democracy is not the result of a failure of democratic processes, nor is it merely a set of structures and practices inherited from a previous period of authoritarian rule. Instead, González (2021) argues, the lack of democratic police reform results from the electoral calculus of politicians responding to societal demands for security combined with the extent of political competition. When societal preferences are divided and political opposition is feeble, politicians choose to avoid reform to prevent negative reactions from the police, a powerful bureaucracy whose cooperation politicians need. It is possible to implement reforms, but the chances of that happening in this scenario are low. Reform becomes likely when scandals resulting from egregious instances of abuse catalyze societal preferences over policing and security and incumbents face a robust political opposition, “because politicians now face an electoral counterweight to the structural power of police” (González, 2021, p. 3).
With some exceptions, scholarship on policing and political transition suggests that even as democratic rule has taken hold in many countries around the world police institutions continue to function as authoritarian enclaves. The scholarship suggests that the assumption that non-democratic policing buttressing the incumbent authoritarian regimes through repression, violence, and abuse would be transformed into democratic police forces serving and protecting the citizens as a result of a transition from authoritarianism to democracy has proven unfounded in many transitional contexts. On the contrary, as some of this research reveals, police repression, abuse and violence have in several cases actually risen since the emergence of democratic political regimes, most notably in some post-authoritarian Latin American countries.

In this research, I argue that the current body of literature on the relationship between policing and regime change has overly focused on categorizing regimes into rigid classifications of either democracy or autocracy. This narrow approach has neglected to recognize the concept of mixed regimes and incomplete transitions, as well as the reality that certain countries may depart from traditional authoritarian rule without fully transitioning to democratic systems, which may provide an explanation for the lack of progress in police reform within these contexts. As I have discussed above, we now know that there is a political gray zone between full-fledged or liberal democracy and closed autocracy and democratization is not a linear and irreversible process but “a dynamic process that always remains incomplete and perpetually runs the risk of reversal—of de-democratization” (Tilly, 2007, p. xi). In other words, there are all kinds of regimes that are neither purely autocratic nor purely democratic, or what is called the hybrid regimes. This study, by abandoning these dichotomies and assumptions in the existing literature on policing and political change, examines the patterns of police coercion that follow the political regime transitions in Turkey since 1983 in order to theorize about the mechanisms and ultimate causes that may produce policing continuity and change in the wake of regime change to contribute to a
more complete understanding of the relationship between regime type and modes of policing and coercion.

After the 1983 parliamentary elections in Turkey, when military rule was replaced by a civilian government, the policing methods continued to exhibit authoritarian traits that were present in the old regime. These traits included the use of police primarily to suppress threats against the state, arbitrary and exceptional use of coercion, and a lack of strong accountability. My argument is that the persistence of authoritarian policing practices in Turkey was because there was no significant regime change, or, in other words, this new tutelary regime did not represent a significant change from the regimes that preceded it in terms of the logic of deployment of coercion which created an ongoing need for surveillance and repression of any opposition to the Turkish state. This ongoing need made the new democratic leaders hesitant to take action to limit these arbitrary policing methods. The new political rulers of the country continued to follow the same political path as the military generals that preceded them and the previous Turkish governments that ruled under the military-dominated tutelary regime of Turkey during its multiparty period, while also implementing neoliberal policies and adhering to the IMF’s structural adjustment programs. There was no significant alteration in the relationship between policing and the political order in Turkey. The new rulers of the country expected the police to perform the same functions as their predecessors, such as giving priority to state interests and suppressing any opposition against the established system. This hindered the development of genuinely democratic forms of coercion.

In the present study, I also argue that the current body of scholarly work on political transitions and policing has predominantly focused on simplistic categorizations of either democratic or autocratic coercion. However, as González (2021) aptly notes, while there may be some police
forces that neatly fit one of these two ideal types, the dichotomy of democratic and authoritarian coercion needs to be conceived of as a continuum, with most police forces falling somewhere between authoritarian and democratic coercion and potentially shifting between these two ideal types over time (p. 15). This assumption or distinction between authoritarian and democratic coercion has resulted in the existing scholarship having largely failed to acknowledge the persistence of forms of democratic coercion/policing in autocracies or hybrid regimes.

The nature of policing, including both high and low policing activities, underwent substantive changes toward the democratic end during Turkey’s shift from tutelary democracy in the first decade of the 2000s. These changes in policing had significant impacts, particularly when contrasted with the authoritarian policing strategies employed by previous governments. Throughout this period, there was a remarkable growth in low policing, which focused on safeguarding citizens from crime and violence. During this period, there was a significant transformation in the character of high policing as well. In particular, there was a marked departure from Turkey’s earlier extremely coercive counterterrorism policing approach based on the elimination of individual terrorists either through physical force or incarceration. In a radical move, the TNP introduced so-called ‘countering violent extremism’ (CVE) programs to promote individual disengagement from terrorism and reintegration of extremists into lawful society through individually-tailored intervention programs, including personal/family interviews, counselling, and social and financial support initiatives for reintegration/rehabilitation. These new interventions yielded promising results despite Turkey’s history of deterrence-based, repressive, and militarized counter-terrorism policies (Bastug & Evlek, 2016; San, 2020a; Sevinc & Guler, 2016; Yilmaz, 2014).
However, this transitional period from tutelary regime which started with EU-supported democratization reforms was later dominated by authoritarian tendencies such as the conquest by Erdogan of stronger control over high judiciary through controversial judicial reforms, and corrosion of the rule of law as well as fundamental rights and liberties through politicized trials against political opponents of the AKP (Castaldo, 2018; Kaygusuz, 2018). Therefore, as several scholars of Turkish politics suggest, the dismantlement of Turkey’s tutelary regime did not result in democratic consolidation and marked the beginning of the transformations that have led to the institutionalization of a competitive authoritarian regime after 2013. Yet, the substantive democratic transformations of Turkish policing persisted (until 2014-16 period) despite this authoritarian turn in Turkish politics.

I argue that the reason for this persistence in policing was due to the Erdogan regime’s political goals, which involved survival against the threat posed by tutelary institutions, particularly the military, which had the capability to overthrow the government. To achieve this goal, the cooperation of the police was necessary, which granted a group of progressive security officials within the Turkish police the opportunity to pursue their political objectives, such as advancing their position within the state bureaucracy in relation to the military, as well as to uphold professional values like the rule of law and serving the public. They were granted the autonomy to pursue these objectives in exchange for their continued collaboration with the government’s policy priority, which involved ending decisively the military’s political role. While certain objectives of these reformist officers to advance democratic policing, such as upholding the rule of law and serving the public, did not fully align with those of the Erdogan regime, they were permitted to pursue them in exchange for their support in the investigations targeting military members accused of conspiring to overthrow the AKP government. In summary, this partnership between the political leaders and the reformist faction within the police was effective in
sustaining substantive changes to policing despite the AKP government’s emerging authoritarian tendencies after the weakening of the EU leverage against the threat of tutelary institutions. However, this collaboration was ultimately dissolved after the corruption investigations on December 2013 which implicated various prominent members of the ruling AKP, after which these substantive democratic transformations of policing stagnated. These developments are explained in depth in Chapter 4.

These findings reveal the persistence of democratic modes of coercion in an electoral authoritarian regime or, that authoritarian settings can sustain democratic institutions. They also show that police organizations can under certain political conditions undergo transformative changes in relatively short timeframes. Yet these changes can equally easily be reversed in conditions of continuing political instability. Moreover, the police themselves can play a pivotal role in advancing democratic policing reform rather than with the help of external actors, especially when there is a dedicated group within their ranks that recognizes the significance of adopting a democratic approach to policing. The police may even demonstrate greater allegiance to democratic principles than the regimes they serve.

Findings of this study also reveal that police themselves may constitute regime transitions, rather than only being affected by regime change. In this respect, the Turkish police whose law enforcement and intelligence abilities were expanded through several key pieces of legislation promulgated by the AKP during its first term in office, such as providing the police with practical competencies related to wiretapping and obtaining private information from communication companies which substantively increased the covert policing abilities of the Turkish police, played a pivotal part in dismantling Turkey's military-dominated tutelary regime by eliminating military influence in politics. In this respect, the end of a decisive political role for
the military in Turkey cannot solely be attributed to the reforms carried out by the AKP in its early term, which curtailed the military's institutional authority in political decision-making, but also involved the criminalization of military’s extra-legal interference in politics through a series of police investigations, namely Ergenekon and Balyoz (Sledgehammer) cases into some members of the Turkish military allegedly planning coups to overthrow the AKP government. Moreover, in December 2013, the police initiated an extensive investigation into government corruption, specifically focusing on President Erdogan's inner circle. Erdogan and his AKP government’s response to this probe, which Erdogan believes was a politically motivated scheme designed to oust the AKP from power, involved undertaking a significant restructuring of the state institutions including the judiciary and internal security apparatus, which helped AKP gain complete control over these institutions and accelerate the consolidation of already emerged authoritarian transformation of Turkey.

2.4 The political role of the police

As mentioned above, coercion is a defining feature of the state, yet it is also a defining feature of police. As the actual entity to which the state delegates its monopoly of the legitimate use of force, the authorization or the capacity to use coercion is the core of the policing role (Bayley, 1985; Bittner, 1970; Goldstein, 1977). Indeed, throughout history, incumbents across a range of regime types have consistently engaged in state-building initiatives by expanding, enhancing the expertise of, and ultimately arming the police (Wilson, 1978). For example, police played a pivotal role in early state-building in Europe (Bayley, 2011; Reiner, 1998; Tilly, 1985), as well as in Latin America during the twentieth century (González, 2021; Kalmanowiecki, 2000).

Since police forces are charged with providing a “highly coveted and contested service”—coercion—they serve as an essential instrument of political power for both authoritarian rulers
and democratic leaders (González, 2021, p. 18). Indeed, there is extensive scholarly research on the role of police as a political instrument utilized by incumbents in both democratic and authoritarian societies (Bayley, 1982, 2011; Beck & Robertson, 2005, 2009; Brodeur, 1983, 2010; Dunnage, 2006; Leishman, 2003; Light et al., 2015; Marenin, 1996; Mawby, 2003; Pereira & Ungar, 2004; Pridemore, 2005; Reiner, 2000; Shelley, 1996; Slater, 2003; Taylor, 2011; Ungar, 2012; Waddington, 2003; Wang, 2014). These accounts suggest that police forces are a potent political instrument utilized by politicians because of their control over coercion—a fundamental instrument of state making that is essential for the functioning of society through provision of order and security and can be distributed in politically beneficial ways.

Several scholars suggest that the primary function of the police and the deployment of coercion in authoritarian regimes is to keep the leader in power (Bayley, 1982, 2006; Beck & Robertson, 2009; Greitens, 2016; Kalmanowiecki, 2000; Mawby, 2003; Policzer, 2009; Shelley, 1996; Taylor, 2011). Coercive institutions under authoritarian rule are organized with the objective of neutralizing or eliminating threats to the ruler and the nature of those threats will determine institutional design and the deployment of coercion (Greitens, 2016). Research suggests that in authoritarian and totalitarian governments, the coercive power of the police is primarily deployed for sustaining the regime and repressing potential opponents both within and outside the regime rather than protecting citizens from crime and violence. Indeed, Marenin (1996) argues that whether police power (coercive capacity) is used predominantly for repression or for protection of citizens through the control of street crime is critical to determining forms of state policing. According to Gary Marx (2000), “in such societies the police, along with the military, use their monopoly on the means of violence and direct control over the means of mass communication to protect the status quo”. In order to achieve that goal, the police may be engaged in low intensity (non-violent) coercion such as intelligence gathering, surveillance, and civil liberties restrictions,
or high-intensity (violent) coercion which may include extra-judicial killings, torture, imprisonment, and forced disappearances of regime opponents (Escribà-Folch, 2013; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Way & Levitsky, 2006). In summary, existing scholarship on coercion and policing in autocracies suggests that the deployment of the police and coercion in authoritarian societies, first and foremost, is oriented toward achieving the rulers’ political survival and the authoritarian leaders’ choices about the design and organization of coercive institutions are determined by the nature of the threats to the ruler.

Coercion, and the state institution primarily entitled to exercising it are fundamental components of democracy as well. Thus, as with the authoritarian states, police are a political resource as they provide an essential condition of governance in democracies. Indeed, in present-day democracies, politicians have used police to serve their political interests and consolidate power, by selectively offering protection to preferred individuals or groups (Wilkinson, 2004), safeguarding them from unfavorable enforcement of the law (Davis, 2006; Holland, 2015), punishing political adversaries (Saín, 2006), and raising financial resources (Sances & You, 2017). Democratic regimes also deploy police against some opponents (e.g., violent revolutionaries, foreign spies) (Light et al., 2015). Indeed, Brodeur (1983, 2010) distinguishes between high and low policing in democratic regimes. By high policing Brodeur (2010) means policing that aims to protect political institutions and the constitutional structure of society. The original French conception of a high police was for an “absorbent” police who would saturate the society in the interests of protecting the regime (Brodeur, 1983). High policing aims to protect political institutions and the constitutional structure of society through the gathering and sharing of information by and among police forces (Brodeur, 2010). As Brodeur (2010) notes, in addition to public police and private security agencies, high policing is also conducted in Western liberal democracies by the so-called intelligence community, which includes the Central
Intelligence Agency (CIA), the FBI, the British MI5, and the French Directorate of Territorial Security (DST). By low policing Brodeur means “everyday policing as performed by uniformed agents and detectives” (Brodeur, 2010, p. 224).

There is another strand in the literature on the political role of police which suggests that police are not just an instrument subordinated to the interests of the regime leaders; rather they are a political actor who may successfully exercise agency in the pursuit of their own interests (Alpert & Dunham, 2004; Deflem, 2000; Goldstein, 1977; González, 2021; Hinton, 2006; Liang, 1992; Los & Zybertowicz, 2000; Marx, 2000; Ungar, 2002; Wilson, 1989). These accounts argue that the police forces are powerful bureaucracies due to their ability to provide protection and exert repression, which politicians can distribute selectively to achieve their own political objectives, as well as their ability to shape public discourse around security. Police forces may leverage their control of coercion “to selectively provide their service in the interests of elected leaders but can also threaten leaders by withdrawing their service of providing order and security” (González, 2021, p. 23). This withdrawal of service would have severe political consequences for elected leaders. In other words, in addition to being a valuable political resource that can be utilized by politicians towards their ends, police can also present important constraints for elected leaders due to their ability to create politically uncomfortable situations by withdrawing or selectively providing their services. As a result of these opportunities and risks posed by the police’s control over coercion, politicians are highly motivated to establish a cooperative relationship with police forces through accommodation, wherein they grant the police autonomy in return for the organization’s collaboration in achieving their political goals. Indeed, several scholars have noted police’s ability to achieve autonomy, as demonstrated by their reluctance to take on new responsibilities (Wilson, 1989), resistance to being held accountable by external entities (Alpert
& Dunham, 2004), and a tendency to undermine reforms even after they have been implemented (Ungar, 2002; Hinton, 2006; Goldstein, 1977).

This research adds to the existing body of scholarly literature focused on coercion and policing within autocratic regimes which provides valuable perspectives regarding how authoritarian leaders structure and manage their policing institutions, as well as their utilization of coercion as a means to maintain their grip on power. While scholarly literature on coercive institutions in autocratic regimes recognizes the fact that the police play a role in political oppression to ensure the ruler’s grip on power (Bayley, 1982, 2006; Dobson, 2009; Fijnaut, 2004; Hagenloh, 2009; Kalmanowiecki, 2000; Light et al., 2015; Marenin, 1996; Mawby, 2003; Policzer, 2009; Shahnazarian & Light, 2018; Shelley, 1996; Taylor, 2011), there is limited exploration of how the coercive apparatus and policing takes shape in various autocratic states, which could account for differences in the structures of these institutions or why different countries adopt distinct institutional models. My research delves extensively into the way the Erdogan government organized its internal security apparatus to counter opposition from the populace and the elites during the consolidation of competitive authoritarianism in the country. Based on my research, which analyzes the Erdogan government’s reevaluation of the sources of potential threats to its survival and how it responded to this reassessment, we may witness or anticipate shifts in the threat perceptions of authoritarian leaders (e.g., from the threat of a coup to popular opposition, or vice versa) leading to different approaches to the organization and utilization of their police forces. This finding adds to the existing research on the organization or reorganization of coercive institutions in authoritarian regimes to help authoritarian rulers effectively handle challenges from the public or elites against their political survival which suggests that authoritarian incumbents design their institutions of coercion based on the dominant perceived threat at the time they come to power (Greitens, 2016).
Additionally, my research findings contribute to the line of scholarship which proposes that the police, instead of being politically neutral and subservient to regime leaders, can actively exert their own agency to pursue their own interests and priorities as a political actor (Alpert & Dunham, 2004; Deflem, 2000; Goldstein, 1977; González, 2021; Hinton, 2006; Liang, 1992; Los & Zybertowicz; Marx, 2000; Ungar, 2002; Wilson, 1989). Indeed, as demonstrated by the Turkish case analyzed in this study, the reformist faction within the Turkish police successfully leveraged their structural power to gain significant independence in pursuing their political and professional (policing) goals in exchange for their cooperation with the Erdogan government in crippling the military’s influence over Turkish politics and gained increasing ground in the police. However, when the police arrested 52 suspects with close ties to the AKP government, including cabinet ministers, bureaucrats, and prominent businessmen, on corruption allegations in December 2013, they also jeopardized the Erdogan government’s grip on power. This event brought Erdogan and his AKP to the brink of the biggest political crisis during their 11-year tenure (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).

2.5 Democratic policing and police reform

Together with the flourishing of democratic values and the emergence of democracy as the predominant goal of political development after the collapse of communism, the idea of a democratic and human rights-based policing has become prominent in scholarly and policy spheres. As Bayley (2006) points out, “rather than being seen as a necessary evil, a standing threat to freedom, police became co-producers of a desirable political order” (p. 10). Democratic institution building in general and police reform in particular have been considered key to democratization and peace-building in transitional and post-conflict environments as achieving democracy entails the provision of meaningful security to citizens and the police to which the
state delegates its monopoly of the legitimate use of force are central to this task (Ellison, 2007; González, 2021; Marenin, 2000; Pino & Wiatrowski, 2006; Wiatrowski et al., 2008).

There has been an upsurge in interventions aimed at reforming police forces in developing and transitional states drawing on Western formulated norms and standards of police conduct which also constitute elements of “democratic policing” (Banks & Baker, 2016, p. 69). Democratic policing is a concept that originated in the developed world, where it is regarded as encompassing a key set of principles and practices that ought to be deployed in law enforcement practice. For example, the protection of human and individual rights is at the core of democratic policing theory (Banks & Baker, 2016; Wiatrowski et al., 2008). Further, police accountability to law and lay persons who are empowered to regulate police activity, responsiveness to the needs of citizens, and subordination to civil authority are regarded as core elements in democratic policing (Bayley, 1985, 2006; Call, 2000; Pino & Wiatrowski, 2006).

There is now substantial scholarship on democratic policing and police reform in developing and transitional states (Aitchison & Blaustein, 2013; Bayley, 1997, 2001, 2006; Hansen, 2008; Hinton, 2006; National Institute of Justice, 1997; Pereira & Ungar, 2004; Pino & Wiatrowski, 2006; Prado et al., 2012; Stenning & Shearing, 2005; Ungar, 2012). These studies contend that the presence of a democratic society and democratic policing are related. Neild (2001) argues that “democratic policing … exists in a symbiotic relationship with democratic government” (p. 23). In this respect, police act as both an enforcement tool and a creative force, enforcing liberal order and reason, in places where this latter does not exist (Ryan, 2011 as cited in Hülagü, 2017). For example, the post-Cold War police reform processes in the Central and Eastern European countries, known as democratic police-building attempts, “have turned out to be one of the
essential ways of taking apart the undesired political regimes of these post-communist countries” (Caparini & Marenin, 2005 as cited in Hülagü, 2017, p. 107).

In their study on democratic policing in transitional and developing countries, Pino and Wiatrowski (2006) argue that the development of a democratic model of policing is critical in emerging democracies because crime and corruption may erupt in emerging democracies creating social chaos; police may embark on repressive crime control strategies which suppress crime at the expense of civil liberties and the creation of civil society; police corruption may foster organized and transnational crime groups that challenge the emerging civil society, and police strategies, organizations and activities should be dictated by civil society and democratic practices and not unilaterally by the police themselves (p. 77).

In his seminal work on democratic police assistance and policing reform abroad, Bayley (2006) identifies the minimum requirements for democratic policing reforms in the following:

- Police are accountable to the law and not to government.
- Police protect human rights, especially rights safeguarding political activity in a democracy.
- Police are accountable to lay persons who are empowered to regulate police activity.
- Police give priority to the needs of citizens and groups in conducting policing operations. (Bayley, 2006, pp. 19-20).

Police reform programs promoting democratic policing and Western policing models in developing and transitional states have also been criticized by some scholars. Democratic policing has been criticized for its assumption that the importation of Western policing models will be effective in developing states, especially post-conflict states. For example, Ellison (2007) examines police reform in Northern Ireland after the establishment of the Independent
Commission on Policing (ICP). He argues that despite the ICP’s moderate success and providing some best practices internationally, the needed change has been forestalled by difficulties in implementation and, more fundamentally, by developments in the political sphere and civil society. Ellison (2007) argues that “Police democratization will do little to enhance citizen safety without some parallel effort to enhance police capacity and political steps to ameliorate the structural conditions of crime” (p. 233). Hinton and Newburn (2009) point out that democratic policing and Western policing models are unlikely to be effective or sustained “without fairly systemic political and cultural change, ensuring that political and civil institutions are themselves democratic in their operation” (p. 23).

Scholars have also criticized international police reform projects for being directed at the interests of the donor state rather than the recipient state’s policing agencies. This view is taken by Martha Huggins in her discussion of police reform projects promoted by the United States in South American states. Huggins argues that the U.S. police training “has been used almost exclusively to promote specific U.S. national security political interests and objectives” (Huggins, 1998, p. 7). For example, as a result of the U.S. police assistance to Brazil, which dictated that the police should be subordinated under the military so that Brazil’s internal security would be more closely tied to national executive power (Huggins, 1998), “police systems became more militarized, secret, and violent through increased centralizing initiatives that reduced civil liberties” (Wiatrowski et al., 2008, p. 5).

This research adds to the existing body of knowledge on police reform by proposing that the concept of ‘democratization’ might not always adequately capture the motivations or results of police reform in political transitions. Examining the police reform that took place in Turkey following the military coup of 1980, which occurred during the shift from military to military-
dominated tutelary rule, my research demonstrates that states undergoing political transitions and facing genuine or perceived threats to their authority, such as rising levels of violence caused by criminal or insurgent groups, may also undergo significant police reform and reorganization. In the Turkish case, the need for increased repression and surveillance in the post-transition period, which demanded a competent and efficient police force to aid the military in safeguarding the regime, resulted in an effort to enhance the capacity of the Turkish police. I will elaborate on this in Chapter 3 of this study.

2.6 Methodology and data collection

2.6.1 Research questions

The broader goal of this study is to advance the discussion of policing continuity and change in the wake of regime transitions in order to contribute to a more complete understanding of the relationship between regime type and modes of policing and coercion. Turkey is an important case because it has experienced repeated and very dramatic political transitions as well as changes in policing over a relatively compressed period of approximately forty years, from 1980 to the present. This dissertation addresses the following questions:

1) What is the relationship between regime type and modes of policing and coercion?

2) What are the mechanisms and ultimate causes that may produce policing continuity and change in the wake of regime change?

3) How do challenges to state power in transitional states influence and shape police reform/restructuring?

4) How do threat perceptions play a role in the authoritarian rulers’ choices about the organization and design of their policing apparatus?
2.6.2 Research design, sources of data, and ethical considerations

I employ a qualitative case study research design in my dissertation because it permits “the detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events.” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 5). I use process tracing in order to trace the causal pathway for the evolution of the Turkish National Police from the 1980 military coup until the present. As Piran (2013, pp. 4-5) argues, process tracing “offers an alternative way for making causal inference based on a single case when it is not possible to do so through the method of controlled comparison”. Therefore, as in other single-country case studies, my dissertation allows for within-case comparison (comparison across different time periods within the same case) through engaging in process tracing.

The empirical chapters of this study draw from two major sources of data: data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants with first-hand experience of policing and police leadership and data from documentary sources. Interviews are an appropriate way of studying this topic because “in-depth interviewing is an effective method to explore people’s lived experiences, feelings and thoughts in their own context, and to uncover assumptions” (Ekşi, 2015, p. 34). Further, interview is a useful method to study sensitive topics such as my case and, as Kaarbo and Beasley (1999) argue, interviews are compatible with case study research. They can be used in combination to generate a rich and nuanced understanding of a topic. I collected interview data for the purpose of assessing the validity of my arguments or, in other words, to prove or disprove my arguments. I did not use a grounded theory approach, which involves the construction of hypotheses and theories grounded in the data gathered from participants, in the analysis of the interview data.
In my decision to conduct interviews for this study, I was influenced by Solomon’s (1987, 1992) research on informal norms of conduct that emerged in late 1940s and 1950s in response to the system of assessing the work of Soviet legal officials. This research involved “émigré interviews” with jurists who emigrated from the USSR during the mid and late 1970s and early 1980s. Similarly, I collected data through a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews with former police officers, most of whom emigrated from Turkey following the 15 July 2016 military coup attempt and the associated crackdown targeting the police officers deemed as opposing President Erdogan (discussed below). I collected data from a sample of respondents whose timespan of direct experience in the TNP fits the purposes of my inquiry (e.g., junior as well as more senior officers). These officers worked in different units of the TNP (including counterterrorism, intelligence, public order, training, and anti-narcotics squads) and in different capacities (either as supervisors or rank and file officers) for the Turkish police during the period of inquiry.

An ongoing crackdown on TNP officers by the ruling AKP government started after 2013 corruption probes into the financial activities of President Erdogan and his close associates, and heavily intensified after the failed military coup attempt of July 2016. The persecution of former TNP cadres has led to the formation of a growing ‘Turkish police diaspora’ abroad whose members have immigrated or sought asylum largely in Western European countries, United States and Canada. Having served as a former police officer in the Turkish National Police, I used to know most of these research participants, and met the others after they exited Turkey to flee the crackdown. In addition to these interlocutors, I draw from the insights of Turkish academics who study criminal justice and criminology in various U.S. universities. Most of these scholars are former police officers who completed their graduate studies in Western countries and chose to stay in academia by resigning from their posts in the TNP. Most of these police
studies scholars took seats in the U.S. universities and continue studying issues related to Turkish policing.

Interviewing serving police officers in the TNP is challenging because the former civil servants dismissed from their positions with the emergency decrees issued after the July 2016 coup attempt are considered as a national security threat and any type of association with them might be risky for the research participants. Following the failed military coup in Turkey, about 170,000 civil servants from various state institutions (including police, military, judiciary, ministry of education, etc.) were removed from their positions on charges of being a member of an armed terrorist organization or being connected to organizations threatening the national security of Turkey (Turkeypurge, 2018). As I am myself a former police officer dismissed from the service with an emergency decree issued after the coup attempt, current TNP members might be reluctant to be involved in this study or might feel intimidated into withholding information during interviews out of the same concern. Also, because serving Turkish police officers are under political pressure not to consent to such interviews, I chose to interview former officers.

As part of this study, I conducted in-depth interviews with 25 former police officers, including both commissioned and rank-and-file officers. Twenty of the participants were commissioned (ranking) police officers, while five of them were rank-and-file officers or constables. For my participants, I requested consent to cite them by their name and their former rank so that readers of my study would be able to assess their qualifications as “key informants”. Those respondents who declined to be cited by name were referred to by pseudonyms. All respondents consented to be cited by their former rank. I conducted face-to-face interviews with my participants who are currently residing in Canada. All these informants are resident in Toronto and surrounding areas, which give me the chance to conduct face-to-face interviews with them. I conducted Skype
interviews with my research participants who are residing in Western European countries and the United States.

I identified and contacted my interlocutors from the above-mentioned groups by using a nonprobability purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is “a sampling technique in which elements are selected based on the researcher’s judgment, knowledge, and substantive criteria” (Schulenberg, 2016, p. 119). Purposive sampling is advantageous when “conducting in-depth examinations of specific cases, exploratory research, or hard-to-reach populations” (Schulenberg, 2016, p. 120). I drew on my personal and professional connections in approaching my respondents for an interview. After conducting interviews with purposively-selected samples, recruitment of other possible interviewees took place through the snowball method. Participants were approached for references to other colleagues who “can provide relevant information on the concepts of interest” (Schulenberg, 2016, p. 122). This can be considered a “snowball sampling”, or “respondent-driven sampling” method of recruitment, in which “a few participants are studied and then asked to refer the researcher to others who also coincide with the research purpose” (Schulenberg, 2016, p. 122). Snowball sampling is justified in this case due to the issue of accessibility to the population under study. Another purpose of the snowballing method was to make as many interviews as possible with interlocutors from different units, positions, and years of experience. Recruitment was also facilitated by my prior workplace relationship with several interviewees, with whom I served as a police officer or studied together in the Turkish National Police Academy (TNPA).

For my informants, I reduced the research risk by approaching only former police officers who are no longer residing in Turkey. Many Turkish police officers left the TNP and fled Turkey, and those who have done so are much less subject to political risks, including arrest and prosecution.
The only remaining significant risk might be official retaliation against family members of such persons who remain in Turkey. However, I concluded that this risk could be managed both by the subjects themselves (by declining to participate if they believe their participation could jeopardize the safety of their relatives in Turkey) and by me (by deidentifying these subjects). With this combination of precautions, I believe that the risk to participants is substantially mitigated, and any remaining risk is modest. In addition, although my study touches on political issues, it is not primarily an analysis or critique of the Erdogan regime.

The other important source of data for this study is the documentary evidence, including official government documents, NGO and international organization reports, local press, and statistical data. I also deploy several scholarly literatures: on democratic and authoritarian regimes, another on policing following political transitions, on the political role of the police, on democratic policing and police reform, and on Turkish policing and political history of Turkey. Although I have some informants (i.e., more senior officers) who were able to provide valuable insight into Turkish policing prior to the 2000s, I collected most data on this period from documentary sources, including publicly accessible Turkish government documents and reports on policing and security issues, reports on crime statistics and human rights in Turkey, local press articles covering significant political developments and policing and security issues (incidents of police violence, mass protests, terrorist activities and counterterrorism operations), and academic sources including books, articles and dissertations on Turkish policing prior to the EU reforms in the early 2000s.

Documentary sources also have served as a critical source of data about policing and police reform in Turkey after the 2000s in addition to my in-depth interviews. For example, to collect data on the patterns of police misconduct and politically-motivated police repression in Turkey
after 2000, I consulted international human rights organizations’ (e.g., Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch) as well as foreign governments’ (e.g., the US Department of State) reports about human rights and civil liberties in Turkey. I also used domestic NGOs’ reports, such as the Human Rights Association (İnsan Hakları Derneği, İHD) annual human rights violations report, to collect data about the frequency of cases of ill-treatment in police custody in Turkey as well as other types of violations by the police against personal safety and freedoms. I also collected secondary data from local press articles on critical political and social incidents in Turkey from 2002 until present, including incidents of police violence, mass protests, police operations against political opponents of the AKP government, and counter-terrorism operations conducted by the police. Many of these sources are in Turkish language and thus would not be available to most international policing scholars. Bringing Turkish sources to international attention is thus another contribution of this study.

2.6.3 Limitations and location of the researcher

As with Solomon’s (1987, 1992) research, the status of my informants as dismissed émigré officers is bound to introduce some limitations to my data and bias into the sample. First, as dismissed émigré officers they might be expected to display anti-government and anti-Erdogan feelings that might in turn influence their answers. Most of my informants are members of the same cohort of young reformers, so they may have an incentive to praise the policies/initiatives of the early-Erdogan period when they were in positions of authority. Second, the fact that my informants were removed from their positions in the police force before or just in the immediate aftermath of the 15 July 2016 military coup attempt restricts my access to data about how Turkish policing has been transformed since the failed coup attempt. As a result, I have had to learn about this period of Turkish policing completely from documentary sources, including scholarly and non-scholarly analyses of policing and internal security in Turkey in the post-15
July coup period. Finally, it would be inappropriate to treat my informants’ responses as representative of the attitudes or orientations of Turkish police officers as a whole, since my respondents do not constitute an adequate sample for this population, and indeed are probably different from it in important ways, notably with respect to their political commitments.

In addition, there are also some limitations introduced to this project by my positionality as a former Turkish police officer and exile from the Erdogan regime, which in turn likely influence how I carried out this research. My personal background clearly inspired me to carry out this project on the transformation of policing in Turkey. As Jauregui (2017) argues, this positionality might have an influence on shaping my analytical frames (the ways in which I have framed my research questions and designed my study), and as well as might lead me to build a shared sense of identification and empathy with my interlocutors through what she calls an “ethnographic kinship” in ways that might configure both the conduct of my study and the analysis of data gathered from my work. She suggests that this problem can be managed by developing a sensibility of “critical empathy” or “the ability to approximately understand and explain the perceptions and practices of others while simultaneously maintaining a measure of distance that allows for critique or even active intervention or obstruction if needed” (p. 84). Building on this idea, I attempt to address issues of transparency and credibility in my research by continuously questioning and critiquing my informants’ responses as well as by being aware of how my personal and affective engagement with my interlocutors may configure the knowledge I produce from my work (Jauregui, 2017).

Moreover, although my personal background as a former Turkish police officer and exile from the Erdogan regime heightened my interest in the topic, I believe that it has not detracted from my capacity to carry out this scholarly research. Indeed, it may even have strengthened it in
giving me an experiential appreciation of the importance of openness, truth, fairness, and due process. As Gary Marx (2000) states, the quality of my scholarship and the care taken with my claims may even have been enhanced because I do not want my experience as victim to cast doubt on my academic claims.

In the following chapter, I will analyze Turkish policing following the 1983 general elections until 2000s, which corresponds to a political transition from military rule towards tutelary democracy in Turkey. I will explore the relationship between policing and the political order in Turkey in the era extending from the 1980 military coup until the early 2000s and how real or perceived challenges to state power may shape police reform in transitional states.
Chapter 3

3 Turkish policing in the post-1980 military coup period

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore Turkish policing following the 1983 democratic transition (a transition from military rule to a military-dominated tutelary democracy) until the early 2000s. This period in Turkey was marked by the persistence of authoritarian modes of policing employed by the military regime that preceded the new democratic government elected in 1983 general elections despite the transition to tutelary democracy which led to the reemergence of competitive, formally democratic institutions such as competition on a level playing field for political power that would be shared with the military, and some degree of freedom of speech and the press. Through this examination, I aim to both present a historical background on the Turkish police and to explore how the relationship between policing and political order played out between 1983 to the early 2000s.

In Turkey, before the democratic transition in 1983, challenges to state power from mounting political violence and widespread public disorder in the 1970s gave the Turkish military dominance over safety and security (which indeed culminated in the military staging a coup on September 12, 1980 to restore order) and the divide that commonly exists between military power and police power was distorted by the pre-occupation of both military and police with the protection of the regime (Piran, 2013). While the post-1983 transition set in motion a return to democracy, this political change was accompanied by a continuity of policing between the new democratic and the former military government. I argue that the reason for the continuation of arbitrary policing practices was the absence of a significant regime change or that this new tutelary regime established after the 1983 elections which resulted in a return to civilian rule.
from the military dictatorship did not represent a significant change from the autocratic regime (military rule) that preceded it as well as the previous administrations that governed under the tutelary democracy of Turkey’s multiparty period since 1950, which resulted in a persistence of the previous logic of deployment of coercion in Turkey—repression and surveillance of any kind of opposition against the Turkish state. This caused the newly elected democratic political leaders to be hesitant to take action to curtail these authoritarian modes of police practices. The perceived threats against the political order originating from the so-called ‘domestic enemies’ or the opposition groups from diverse ethnic, ideological and religious spectrums challenging the neoliberal economic policies of the new rulers—exacerbated by the armed Kurdish insurgency and the skyrocketing terrorist violence in the post-transition period—perpetuated a need for repression/surveillance, resulting in a continuity in the primary function of the deployment of coercion which then impeded a democratic police reform which would help render the post-1983 transition policing in Turkey more service-oriented. My findings reveal that, even after the stepping down of the military and the free election of a reformist government, the structure and ethos of the Turkish police was animated by the task of containing an insurgency against the state rather than protecting citizens from crime and violence. Under the new tutelary democracy of Turkey, high policing stood at the apex of the Turkish National Police and veritably hindered low policing or crime prevention and protection of citizens. In other words, the persistence of authoritarian coercive practices of the Turkish police—from extrajudicial killings and torture to politicized repression—in the face of transition resulted from an unchanged purpose of deployment of state coercion from the earlier regimes in Turkey.

In this chapter, I also argue that “democratization” may not always be the key driver of police reform interventions in transitional states. I draw on an analysis of police restructuring efforts implemented by the new civilian government after 1983 to demonstrate that transitional states
confronting real (such as armed insurgency or politically motivated violence) or perceived (political dissident groups) challenges to their power may also produce major police reform interventions. Such challenges to state power in transitional states may lead to the militarization of civilian policing through the establishment of special police units with the increased capacity to use force, such as anti-riot or SWAT teams tasked with riot control or counterinsurgency, adopting military weaponry, tactics, and organization structures (De Bruin, 2020). Thus, while the post-1983 democratic transition set in motion a transformation of Turkish policing, it was the ‘domestic enemies’ (Berksoy, 2010b; Piran, 2013), which they shared with their predecessors in the military government and the previous Turkish administrations which ruled under the tutelary regime of Turkey’s multiparty period since 1950, and neoliberal economic challengers of the new rulers, that determined the nature of that transformation, rather than anything directly related to the return of democratic rule.

3.2 Transition from military dictatorship to tutelary democracy

Following a period of intense ideological polarization and political violence between different ideological factions which devastated the country and left hundreds of people dead from the ranks of both leftist and rightist activists in the 1970s, the Turkish military seized power in Turkey on 12 September 1980 (Jenkins, 2001). This was the third time that the Turkish military intervened in Turkish politics over the course of the last two decades (Cerrah, 2008). For about three years, the country was ruled by a military junta composed of five generals. As Prime Minister Turgut Ozal and his Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi) came to power following November 1983 parliamentary elections, Turkey transitioned from military rule to a military-dominated tutelary democracy.
Wigell (2008) classifies tutelary democracy as one of the subcategories of democratic regimes called “democracies with adjectives”, which “have been invented to conceptualize ‘reduced’ forms of liberal democracy” (p. 245). Tutelary democracies fulfill most of the minimal electoral (free, fair, competitive, and inclusive elections) and constitutional (the civil freedoms that are minimally necessary not only during but also between elections in order for elections to be meaningful, such as freedom of organization, freedom of expression, right to alternative information, freedom from discrimination) dimensions of democracy but fail to satisfy another additional electoral condition which is electoral sovereignty (Wigell, 2008). These regimes show ‘tutelary’ or ‘protected’ forms of rule where the authority of elected officials is restricted by actors outside the democratic process that “attempt to exercise broad oversight of the government and its policy decisions while claiming to represent vaguely formulated fundamental and enduring interests of the nation-state” (Wigell, 2008, p. 240). As noted by Wigell (2008), tutelary regimes are “a type of democracy with effective horizontal, intra-state checks and balances, but limited opportunities for citizens to enforce responsiveness of the elected officials to their immediate demands” (pp. 246-47).

The 1983 general elections represented a transition from military dictatorship to tutelary democracy in Turkey. Actually, as Taş (2015) notes, except for the Adnan Menderes era (1950-1960), it is accurate to identify Turkey’s multiparty period as one of tutelary democracy (p. 779). Under the tutelary regime, the Turkish armed forces, whose position as a supra-parliamentary power and veto player rested on its self-assigned role as guardian of the secular regime, retained the capacity to intervene to correct undesirable states of affairs (Przeworski, 1988; Taş, 2015). As Çalışkan (2018) notes, “[t]he country’s tutelary regime was a democracy that succeeded in achieving an acceptable level of separation of powers, press freedom, and regular elections, but the civilian regime had to share its power with the military on matters of structural importance,
such as military promotions and the defense budget (p. 12). Even though the military institutionalized several privileges in order to be able to produce and deploy in politics various instruments of power, the regime maintained its democratic nature because the military refrained from involvement in day-to-day politics and respected the integrity of free and fair elections (Çalışkan, 2018). The transition in 1983 from the military dictatorship to tutelary democracy led to the reintroduction into the Turkish political arena of a degree of pluralism, competitive and formally democratic institutions such as competition on a level playing field for political power, and some degree of freedom of speech and the press. Prime Minister Turgut Ozal whose Motherland (Anavatan) Party won the 1983 general elections also worked to introduce to Turkey some crucial freedoms, such as the freedom of entrepreneurship, and the freedom of religion and conscience (Heper, 2013; Onis, 2004). He lifted the state monopoly over the broadcasting system (Piran, 2013, p. 43-44). Yet, while this transition brought considerable institutional change, modes, and practices of policing from the previous authoritarian period were largely left intact. In fact, police even substituted military as agents of repression in some areas starting from the mid-1980s which would continue through the 1990s. This is a paradox which needs to be unraveled and I try to explore in depth in the following sections how the incomplete transition in Turkey, or the fact that the new tutelary regime established after the 1983 elections represented little change from the preceding regimes in terms of the logic of deployment of state coercion, hindered substantive democratic transformations of policing in Turkey.

3.3 Turkish policing in the age of counterinsurgency

Under the leadership of the Turkish Prime Minister of the time, Turgut Ozal, the Turkish police evolved from “a non-distinct law enforcement agency originated in and administered by the military” to a more effective force responsible for helping (military) protect the Turkish state’s
internal security (Ekşi, 2015, p. 44; Piran, 2013). According to Piran (2013), the TNP’s reform in the post-1980 military coup era was “an indigenously led series of efforts” aimed at restructuring and modernizing the police force according to Turkish national security interests at a time when Turkey was faced with insurgency and terrorism, rather than a process accounted for by the logic of EU conditionality. Deteriorating EU-Turkey relations in the aftermath of the 1980 coup due to the increasing EU criticism for human rights abuses during Turkey’s counterterrorism campaign against the Kurdish insurgency rendered an EU impulse for police reforms highly unlikely (Piran, 2013). As Piran (2013) argues, Prime Minister Turgut Ozal, who was known for his ambition for economic development and free market reform, “understood that he had to restore and maintain law and order before undertaking liberal reform projects in order to make Turkey an attractive location for foreign investment where both domestic and foreign businesses can flourish” (p. 73). Scholarly accounts of Turkish policing suggest a number of key drivers of the ongoing need for repression and surveillance by the police following the democratic transition in 1983 which resulted in policing continuity under the new regime.

The first major driver for the unchanged need for repression/surveillance in the post-democratic transition era was the increased levels of political violence in the country, including the outbreak of Kurdish insurgency (PKK, Partiya Karkeren Kurdistane/Kurdistan Workers’ Party) and the emergence of left-wing extremist terrorist groups DHKP/C (Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front) and TIKKO (Turkish Liberation Army of Workers and Peasants).

The PKK is an ethno-nationalist/separatist terrorist group pursuing an independent Kurdish state in the eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey through armed insurgency against Turkish government (San, 2020a). It is listed as a terrorist organization internationally by numerous countries, including the members of the EU and others such as United States, Canada, and
Australia. EU also designated PKK as a terrorist entity in 2004 and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) also refers to PKK as a terrorist entity. Over the last four decades, a significant portion of the terrorist attacks in Turkey have been carried out by this group (Haberfeld et al., 2009). At the same time, the ultimate goal of the PKK was to expand this territory to include parts of northern Iraq, northern Syria and western Iran inhabited by Kurdish population, creating a “Greater Kurdistan” (Sozen, 2006). Since the PKK first launched its attacks against the Turkish government and civil targets in 1984, more than 35,000 people have lost their lives in PKK’s terrorist campaign (Yilmaz, 2011). Over the years, the PKK goals have changed from its initial plans to establish an independent Kurdish state to current ones of recognizing Kurdish political, social, and cultural rights within a decentralized Turkey (Gunter, 2013).

During the early to mid-1980s, left-wing extremists also increased their terrorist attacks against Turkish targets. These communist revolutionary groups pursued armed insurgency against Turkish government, seeking to destroy the current political system and overthrow the government through a revolution for the purposes of establishing a Marxist regime (San, 2015). Among these groups, DHKP/C (Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front) and TKP/ML (Turkish Communist Party/Marxist Leninist) have been the more prominent ones operating in Turkey. DHKP/C targeted Turkish government officials, law enforcement members and US and Western interests, resorting to armed attacks, assassinations, suicide bombings, illegal demonstrations and fundraising through racketeering, extortion, burglary, robbery and other thefts, donations, and drug smuggling (Ozeren & Cinoglu, 2006).

Although the police force in Turkey managed to fulfill basic duties such as "maintaining public order, addressing petty crimes, and directing traffic" until the 1970s (Piran, 2013, p. 41), it
remained ineffective in managing the massive public disorder and the mounting ideologically-motivated violence of the 1970s in Turkey, which eventually resulted in the Turkish state’s turning to the military to declare martial law to restore the broken public order (Piran, 2013). After the Turkish military’s intervention on 12 September 1980, in order to readjust itself to this new mission of containing escalating insurgency and terrorist incidents in the post-conflict environment of the early 1980s, the TNP “began to revamp its organizational structure to address its shortcomings and dispel the perception that the government was not equipped to deal with the ongoing threat against state sovereignty” (Piran, 2013, p. 73).

The outbreak of the Kurdish insurgency in southeastern Turkey in 1984 and escalating terrorist violence paved the way for the increasing cooperation of the police with the Turkish military. Typically, the Turkish military was responsible for combatting terrorism in the areas where the government had declared martial law, which initially covered over half of the whole Turkish territory. However, as the scale of the terrorist threat grew bigger and spread to other regions of the country, the military needed to redeploy significant resources in areas away from Western Turkey which required it to relinquish its authority in certain areas of Turkey to the police. This need for increased repression and surveillance, however, required a capable and effective police force which could replace military in those jurisdictions and led to an attempt to improve the enforcement capacity of Turkish police. As a result, police started to emerge as an important partner in the Turkish military’s counterterrorism/counterinsurgency campaign in the 1980s (Piran, 2013). Moreover, the military’s professionalism which kept it from deploying troops where it was not legally sanctioned after the termination of martial law and its disengagement from politics after the transition to civilian rule in 1983 provided the new civilian government led by Prime Minister Turgut Ozal with further opportunity to proceed with the institutional
reform of the TNP which would allow the Turkish police to further emerge as a repressive force (Piran, 2013).

Another significant driver for the unchanged need for repression and surveillance in the post-1983 democratic transition era was the need to effectively manage the social unrest which would eventually arise due to discontent with the neoliberal economic policies implemented by the Ozal government, coupled with adherence to IMF’s structural adjustment program which aimed for “a liberal and market oriented Western pattern of development in Turkey” (Bedirhanoglu et al., 2016; Berksoy, 2010a, 2010b; Heper, 2013). As part of his desire to liberalize the Turkish economy, Prime Minister Turgut Ozal wanted to do away with the state-controlled import-substitution economic model and replace it with an export-oriented market economy (Heper, 2013). This neoliberal economic policy focused on increasing Turkey’s exports required the productions costs, including workers’ salaries, to be kept to a minimum (Piran, 2013, pp. 101-102). Since the 1982 constitution introduced after the military coup already put restrictions on labor which limited the workers’ bargaining power, “there was an urgent need for a recently strengthened police to restrain any type of opposition” (Piran, 2013, p. 102). In Turkey, practically, those embodying this opposition involved labor unions, leftist groups, and ethnic minorities such as politically active Kurds and Alevis7, who were denigrated by the dominant discourses of the military-dominated Turkish national security state as “domestic enemies” (Berksoy, 2010a, 2010b). In addition to these groups, poor and working-class people, such as Roma and Kurdish communities who were subjected to forced migration to metropoles and

7 Alevis are a religious minority group in Turkey whose beliefs are rooted in Islam and Sufism along with some traditions from Christianity and Shamanism (Dudek, 2017). Alevis have long been discriminated against and persecuted in Turkey, where the majority of the population are members of Sunni Islam tradition.
participated in the informal economy, were excluded from the benefits of the post-coup neoliberal economic order (Berksoy, 2010b; Piran, 2013). During this period of neoliberal transformation, “while industrial capital was provided a variety of incentives within the scope of an export-industrialization model, wages were reduced, social opposition was prevented, and there was an increase in exploitation and poverty” (Berksoy, 2010b, p. 189).

In the process of reconfiguration of social relations on a neo-liberal trajectory, the police, reinforced with significant increases in its budget and being equipped with modern weapons, equipment, and technology, were officially designated as “an important mediation point for the state in fabricating this new social order” (Berksoy, 2010a, p. 153). The Turkish police, along with an initial phase of expansion and militarization following the coup, increased its capacity to control, regulate, and repress any opposition to the prevailing order, including the groups discussed above. As Berksoy (2010a) argues, the TNP typically resorted to coercion “to eliminate those who resisted this exclusionary social order” (p. 147).

Several legal and institutional amendments in policing were introduced in order to expand the capacity of the police to manage real and perceived threats against the political order during this tumultuous period in Turkey. Among these were institutional and legal changes to increase the effectiveness and surveillance powers of the police organization. In the first step, with the approval of the military, TNP’s budget was significantly increased after an evaluation of its organization, personnel, and equipment (Berksoy, 2010b). This budgetary increase allowed “the restructuring of the police organization’s cadre in parallel with the military hierarchy, the opening of new police schools and the reorganization of training, the restructuring of police centers through the division of provinces into four groups, and the provision of high technology arms and equipment” (Berksoy, 2010b, p. 189). These institutional reconfigurations were aimed
to enable the TNP to carry out effectively its high policing duties, which stood at the apex of the Turkish police, following the termination of martial law in Turkey.

The creation of new paramilitary police units was a fundamental part of these institutional changes to expand high policing capacity of the police apparatus. One specific development in this field was the creation in August 1982 of the Rapid Action Units (Çevik Kuvvet Polisi), a newly established anti-riot unit replacing the old Society Police (Toplum Polisi) unit. The Society Police unit was responsible for policing student demonstrations and labor protests during the 1960s and 1970s (Atak, 2017a; Bedirhanoglu et al., 2016; Piran, 2013). Following the 1980 military coup, the Society Police was abolished on the grounds of organizational deficiencies such as the overcrowded nature of the personnel, lack of appropriate training and financial burden to the state as well as because of the political factions and increasing polarization inside the units (Atak, 2017a, p. 698). Rapid Action Units were created in 1982 by a law passed by the military junta which was responsible for governing the country in the immediate aftermath of the 1980 military coup (Piran, 2013). These units have grown in number since their creation in 1982 and today they are organized in all cities of Turkey. The Rapid Action Units have been responsible for maintaining public order and preventing illegal movements during legally organized street protests and mass demonstrations.

Militarization of protest policing in Turkey was characterized by increasingly repressive practices through the late 1980s and 1990s (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020; Atak, 2017a, 2017b). For instance, following the establishment of Rapid Action Units in 1982, militarized subunits called Special Squad (Özel Tim) and Support Squad (Destek Timi) were integrated into the structure of RAUs in 1982 and 1997, respectively (Atak, 2017a). These units have been tasked with dispersing protestors by using militarized equipment, such as teargas, semi-automatic riot...
guns, and other types of less-lethal weapons (Atak, 2017a, p. 700). These units became involved in policing labor groups protesting the economic consequences of the Ozal government’s neoliberal policies and violently suppressed other mass protests such as May 1 (International Labor Day) and Newroz\(^8\) events where “ethnic minorities such as the Kurds and leftist groups expressed their grievances” (Piran, 2013, p. 103). In this respect, police response was notably brutal during the Gazi neighborhood riots in Istanbul in 1995, and May 1 International Labor Day celebrations in Kadıköy district of Istanbul in 1996. Gazi incidents broke out after an armed attack by unidentified individuals on a coffeehouse located in the mostly Alevi-populated Gazi neighborhood in Istanbul on 12 March 1995, leaving one person dead and 25 injured. Following the incident, local residents marched to the police station to protest the failure of the police to investigate the attack which then turned into a major riot where the police used gunfire against the protestors, leaving one person dead. As a result of police and military units’ violent intervention to the growing disturbances, 15 people were killed along with one hundred injured (Atak, 2017a). In the incidents which broke out during International Labour Day celebrations on 1 May 1996 in Kadikoy, Istanbul, 3 people were shot dead and many people were injured, after which 421 people were arrested by the police (Atak, 2017a).

These units were also widely deployed for police crackdowns on shantytowns (gecekondu in Turkish) inhabited by the impoverished and marginalized communities, largely Kurdish and Roma people who were subjected to forced migration and displacement inside Turkey.

\(^8\) Newroz festival is celebrated on March 21 by the Kurdish population of Turkey for the coming of spring. The day also symbolizes the emancipation of the Kurds from a tyrant according to a Kurdish legend (Berksoy, 2010b, p. 189). In the early 1990s, Newroz was increasingly politicized as a result of the intensifying armed struggle between the PKK and the Turkish state and turned into a political outcry for the Kurdish identity with mass demonstrations (serhildan). Police brutality towards protestors during Newroz celebrations resulted in the killing of dozens of people and hundreds wounded and arrested in 1992–1993 (Atak, 2017a).
According to Berksoy (2010b), since “these places [shantytowns] are considered the source of the alleged increase especially in drug-related crimes and crimes against property, they [the Rapid Action Units] have been charged with the oversight and the incapacitation of these marginalized groups” (p. 190). In western Turkey, “militarized policing targeted poor neighborhoods with leftist Alevi populations, while police routinely intervened in protests organized by the left, Kurdish organization, students, and Islamist groups” (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020, p. 15). Thus, throughout the 1990s, the Turkish state used this organ of high-policing to effectively contain its perceived enemies—domestic dissident groups.

Another police paramilitary unit created in this period (1983), animated by the task of containing an insurgency against the state, was the Police Special Operations Teams (Özel Harekat Timleri), which was initially organized under the TNP’s Terrorism and Operations Department (Terörle Mücadele ve Harekat Daire Başkanlığı, TEMUH) until 1993 and as a separate department thereafter (Berksoy, 2010b; Cerrah, 2008). They are the Turkish counterparts of the SWAT teams in the Western countries (Kraska, 2007). The rationale behind the creation of these paramilitary units was to fight more effectively against the Kurdish insurgency within the framework of the “[Turkish] state’s power strategy for solving the Kurdish issue through violence” (Berksoy, 2010b, p. 190). These paramilitary police teams are equipped with martial weaponry and are trained in sophisticated counterterrorism and counterinsurgency tactics (Cerrah, 2008). Their duties mainly involve breaking into terrorist safehouses in urban or rural areas, apprehending terrorist members, and rescuing hostages in the case of hijackings. While the teams played an effective role in the fight against PKK terrorism in rural areas in the 1980s and 1990s, the use of these paramilitary police units resulted in human rights abuses and numerous other problems. The teams were frequently criticized for their inappropriate use of force, violence against local populations in the Kurdish-populated areas of the eastern and southeastern
Turkey including enforced disappearances and unresolved political murders, and for their far-right tendencies (Goldsmith, 2009; Işık, 2021; Piran, 2013). Cengiz, a veteran police officer who was the deputy chief of police in a metropolitan Turkish city, describes the far-right connections of the Special Operations Teams as follows:

There were these tough guys, called Özel Harekatçılar (Police Special Operations Teams), operating in southeastern Turkey. I remember they were wearing army camouflage and driving in Land Rover jeeps unlike other police. They were equipped with M-16s (a type of assault rifle produced by the US arms manufacturer Colt) different from the army, roaming the countryside and rural areas seeking for PKK. They were distinguishable by their unique moustache styles, ülkücü biyığı (like the one Turkish far-right nationalist Grey Wolves or Bozkurt group members grow). To be a member of Police Special Operations Team, you needed to be close to the party (MHP, the Turkish far-right nationalist party). The party (MHP) was playing an active role in the recruitment of team members. Not only the terrorists, but also the local folks were afraid of them because of their brutality and ruthless behaviors during the fight. They were scared of nothing.

Indeed, Işık (2021) writes that the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) assumed a key role in recruiting members of the Special Operation Teams by compiling the names of the applicants in the party’s branches and sending them to the government institutions. According to Işık (2021), “MHP members or at least people with MHP links were employed as part of the Special Police Team, the primary paramilitary force in Kurdistan” (p. 236).

Special Operation Teams’ members were also involved in major political scandals in Turkey. For instance, a traffic accident in the Susurluk district of Turkey in 1996 brought to light the shadowy criminal connections between Turkish state officials, right-wing gangs, and the PKK: one of the victims killed in the accident that uncovered the infamous Susurluk Scandal in Turkish politics was Hüseyin Kocadağ, a former police chief who was one of the founders of the police special operations teams (Robins, 2008). Other passengers in the car were a traditional
Kurdish leader and MP, and a Turkish right-wing extremist turned criminal and drug trafficker. According to Piran (2013), “Kocadağ’s presence on the scene served as proof of the government’s links with the mafia” (p. 113). This scandal played an important role in drawing attention to complex organized crime activities that reached right up to ministers and prime ministers and generals in the Turkish army. A joint parliamentary commission was established to investigate the case, but there was no satisfactory result (Cerrah, 2008).

These institutional reforms were supported by several legislative changes relevant to the functioning of the TNP. These legal changes included the amendments to Police Duties and Powers Act (Polis Vazife ve Selahiyetleri Kanunu, PVSK) in 1985 and the enactment of Turkish Anti-Terrorism Act (Terörle Mücadele Kanunu, TMK) in 1991. The amendments to the PVSK provided the police with broad new powers, including increasing surveillance of associations and syndicates; apprehending suspects based on the suspicion that a crime has been committed or has been attempted; taking people into custody for 24 hours for purposes of identification; using physical and material force and weapons against suspects in proportion to the level of resistance and attack; and appointing special teams consisting of headquarter personnel not registered within the police jurisdiction boundaries (Berksoy, 2010b, p. 190). According to Berksoy (2010b), these new provisions “granted the police powers broad enough to maintain the continuity of martial law even after it had ended” (p. 190).

Another piece of legislation which served to expand repressive capacity of the police in this period was the introduction of the Turkish Anti-Terrorism Act in 1991. This act placed a stronger emphasis on national security and the effectiveness of counterterrorism than on the protection of individual rights and freedoms. For instance, this act introduced a broad and vague definition of terrorism; “if and when applied, any citizen may be labelled a terrorist” (Piran, 2013, p. 104). As
the provisions of this new legislation criminalized the intention to commit a terrorist crime in addition to committing terrorist crimes, the police were granted the power to target and conduct surveillance on segments of the population perceived as domestic enemies of the state (Berksoy, 2010b; Piran, 2013).

In summary, the perceived threats against the political order originating from the so-called “domestic enemies”, exacerbated by the escalating Kurdish insurgency and the rise in terrorist incidents in the 1980s and 1990s, resulted in a need for ongoing repression and surveillance and the granting of substantial coercive powers to the police organization to counter these threats in the post-1983 transition period. In combatting these real and perceived threats against the state, the police occasionally resorted to the exercise of arbitrary coercion which resulted in frequent human rights violations against citizens, including ill treatment and torture of suspects in custody, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances of citizens suspected of terrorist affiliations (Bahcecik, 2014; Collantes-Celador et al., 2008; Ekşi, 2019). For example, under the pretext of combatting increasing acts of terrorism and escalating Kurdish insurgency, the Turkish government declared a state of emergency in several provinces in eastern and southeastern parts of the country, where emergency legislation was implemented to fight more effectively against terrorism. In the places contained within the declared state of emergency, police and military forces were used together to combat growing insurgency and terrorism. However, as noted by Ekşi (2019), this emergency legislation set the ground for widespread human rights and civil liberties violations against citizens by law enforcement. For example, as part of the emergency legislation, “the police could hold a suspect in custody longer than 72 hours without providing any justification”, severely curbing the right to liberty and security of the person and freedom from arbitrary detention (Ekşi, 2015, p. 74). As a result, decidedly authoritarian modes of high
policing—from extrajudicial killings and torture to politicized repression—persisted in the face of a transition from a military dictatorship to a tutelary democracy.

3.4 Low policing in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s

Still, such authoritarian police practices were not limited to repressive policing of insurgency and street protests or to places in eastern and southeastern Turkey where the state of emergency was in effect. Corruption, police brutality against citizens including torture and ill treatment under police custody, bribery, and various other sorts of police abuse\(^9\) were pervasive in the period prior to the 2000s (Ekşi, 2015, 2019; Goldsmith, 2009; Hülagü, 2021; Jenkins, 2001). Several scholarly studies describe the abusive character of everyday policing in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the absence of an effective external accountability or civil complaints mechanism to prevent such non-political abuse of citizens (Bahcecik, 2014; Caglar, 2003; Cerrah, 2006, 2008; Ekşi, 2015, 2019; Goldsmith, 2009; Karatay et al., 2012). In her study of the relationship between police masculinities and shifting models of policing in Turkey, Ekşi (2015) argues that the “old policing” or “macho policing” of the 1980s and 1990s in Turkey was characterized by “arbitrary use of power, impunity, bribery, torture, harsh and belittling treatment of citizens, lack of education, and use of violence instead of balanced institutional power” (p. 79). Accounts by police officers and chiefs in her research attest to this portrayal of policing prior to the 2000s. For instance, a police chief who joined the ranks of the TNP in 1998 stated the following regarding the police abuse of power during their encounters with crime suspects at police stations:

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\(^9\) I borrow this concept from Light, Prado, and Wang (2015), who define abuse as “police mistreatment of citizens that is not directly ordered by the political leadership and that primarily serves the private ends of police officers, their supervisors, or organizations” (p. 219).
I was working in the education department of the TNP in Istanbul at the time, and during a visit to a colleague at a local police station (karakol – now called “polis merkezi” in Turkish) I witnessed a torture scene, which I still remember crystal clear. Two police officers brought a suspect – a thief – to the police station. Without any interrogation or formal procedure, they made the suspect take off his clothes in the middle of the police center until he became completely naked, and tortured him by using iced water. And what surprised me most is that the torturers seemed to take pride in what they were doing, and the surrounding officers watched in approval, and I could even say, in great envy (as quoted in Ekşi (2015).

Another officer talks about his personal encounter with the police in a city in western Turkey during the second half of the 1990s:

I experienced the police violence and hostility myself for leaving my bicycle on the street when I went to pay our monthly electric bill at a bank office. When I left the bank about 20 minutes later, a police officer began to swear at me and asked me, in a retaliating manner, to show my identity card and summoned me to the police station in the afternoon as if I committed a felony. I was scared to death. After that incident, I always hesitated as if I was guilty whenever I saw a police officer. If you collect memories of such encounters with the police as a society, it is not unexpected that people would not have sympathy for the vulgar and macho police (as quoted in Ekşi (2015).

Jenkins (2001) notes that torture and maltreatment during police interrogation were widespread practices in the 1990s, arguing that one reason for this could be the pressure on police to extract confessions from the suspects because the prosecution’s case tended to be based on verbal testimony rather than gathering evidence. Yet there was no effective procedure of complaint for the victims and there were no independent investigators or commissions of inquiry responsible for investigating cases of police misconduct against suspects in police custody (Jenkins, 2001). Victims of police abuse usually relied on action by public prosecutors upon their complaint, yet the fact that the public prosecutors in Turkey were working closely with and dependent on police for gathering evidence prevented the effective addressing of such police misconduct (Jenkins, 2001).
One of my participants, Erkan, who was a senior police chief in the TNP before being dismissed in Erdogan’s purges in 2016, states the following about the lack of accountability prevalent in policing during the 1980s and 1990s:

There wasn’t any sense among police that they would be held responsible or might even lose their job if they commit or cooperate in cases of torture or mistreatment of suspects under custody. On the other hand, and I think equally importantly, doctors, prosecutors, judges, etc. were likely to defend and cooperate with the police, usually turning a blind eye to police misconduct and irregularities, in the name of state security. You know, this was the prevailing mentality in policing back in 1980s and 1990s regarding human rights issues.

Still, other studies document the existence of widespread corruption in daily policing enforcement activities in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s (Caglar, 2003; Cerrah, 2006; European Commission, 2006; Goldsmith, 2009; Jenkins, 2001; Mutlu, 2000; Piran, 2013). During this period, the most common form of individual police officer-based corruption was bribery, mostly in the form of police taking “monetary gratuities, free meals, transportation, and small amounts of gift-shopping” from people who have some business or transactions with the police (Caglar, 2003, p. 419). Moreover, “buying goods or services at discounted prices, providing information from police databases, fining a driver and failing to give the traffic offender a ticket, issuing a document to an unauthorized person, and personal use of service cars” were the other widespread forms of individual corrupt police practices in 1990s in Turkey (Caglar, 2003, p. 419). One of my informants, Halit, a retired high-ranking police chief who started working in the TNP in the 1980s, discusses this predatory nature of policing in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s as follows:

When a person comes to the local police station or the city police department, if he/she had any official business, say, applying for passport, renewing his driver’s license, or getting any other official document, the expectation was that he or she would order a free lunch or give any other type of small gift in order to expedite the official procedure. This was, like, you know, a kind of established tradition between the citizens and the police by then.
Scholars have suggested a diversity of factors which promoted corruption in policing in Turkey. They have noted that most police officers’ disadvantaged socio-economic background and low salaries earned by the police in Turkey despite long working hours pushed police officers into finding ways of supplementing income through the selective enforcement (or non-enforcement) of the law (Caglar, 2003; Goldsmith, 2009, p. 40; Jenkins, 2001). Scholarly studies also highlighted the prevalence of institutional-level problems affecting corruption among the Turkish police during the 1990s. These included problems with the police recruitment and promotion processes; an occupational sub-culture promoting military methods and coercive policing; inflexible hierarchy; absence of an independent oversight mechanism; and frequent changes in police regulations (Berksoy, 2010b; Caglar, 2003; Karatay et al., 2012). Caglar (2003) delineated the problems with the police recruitment process, which include the recruitment of applicants with insufficient mental and intellectual skills, absence of adequate psychological assessments of cadets, insufficiencies of the background investigators in the officer selection process and issues with the objectivity of the oral interview procedure employed during the officer recruitment process, which led to corrupt policing practices in Turkey. Police socialization processes and occupational culture, creating a strong solidarity amongst officers which prevents the reporting of misconduct to the superiors or to judicial authorities, also encouraged corrupt policing (Caglar, 2003, pp. 412-13). Moreover, Caglar refers to widespread political interference in the appointment and promotion processes in the police organization, lowering the morale of the officers and resulting in unprofessional police conduct (Caglar, 2003, p. 415). A 2006 report by the EU Commission documents the prevalence of corruption in the Turkish public sector, “expressing a deep concern about how corruption has contributed to the public’s negative image of law enforcement in Turkey” (Piran, 2013, p. 59).
Inadequate training was prominent in Turkish policing during the 1980s and 1990s. Institutional structure of the police education system during this period comprised of three main components (Caglar, 2004; Cerrah, 2008). The Turkish National Police Academy (Polis Akademisi) provided a four-year bachelor program, preparing students for command roles in the Turkish National Police. Turkish National Police College (Polis Koleji), a secondary-level educational institution, provided a three-year high school education for future ranking police officers, intended to lead to matriculation at the Turkish National Police Academy. Police Vocational Schools (Polis Okulu) trained non-commissioned rank and file officers. In the police schools, police cadets used to undergo a basic nine-month training course before their first posting. These institutions were all boarding schools where students used to wear a uniform and were required to obey strict rules and discipline (Cerrah, 2008). In these institutions, cadets were familiarized with the hierarchical structure of policing and were required to show a high degree of respect to their civilian and police staff teachers, as well as senior students (Cerrah, 2008).

Curriculum in the Police College was similar to the curriculum of other public secondary schools in Turkey, including such courses as math, science, geography, Turkish language and literature, and did not involve any specific police-oriented instruction. Police-related training was limited to marches and drilling training provided by staff officers (Cerrah, 2008). In the Police Academy and police schools, curriculum included an intense memorization of Turkish criminal code, criminal procedure code and other police work-related legislation as well as training aimed at improving cadets’ physical performance and firearms handling and shooting skills. There was no human rights education or police-citizen communication skills training provided to the cadets until the end of 1990s-early 2000s. Therefore, police training in Turkey during that period remained highly theoretical and oriented toward obedience, emphasizing military-like marches and drilling rather than command skills, including independent judgment, apparently paralleling
developments in the post-Soviet region (Shahnazarian & Light, 2018). Academic standards, particularly in police schools which used to train the rank-and-file officers, were poor even though officers should have completed secondary education prior to admission (Jenkins, 2001). In a 2000 survey conducted by the Training Department of the Turkish National Police, only 19% of teaching staff at police schools described the education given to recruits as adequate (Jenkins, 2001, p. 86).

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter traced the reconfigurations of public policing in a society that transitions from military rule to a tutelary democracy implementing neoliberal policies. This transition from military rule to a civilian government after 1983 parliamentary elections in Turkey was accompanied by a policing continuity between the new democratic and the former military government. In this respect, as underlined above, post-transition policing was characterized by primarily serving the interests of the state rather than prioritizing service to the citizens, arbitrary and exceptional deployment of coercion, and weak external accountability mechanisms for the deployment of police coercion (González, 2021, p. 15), the reasons of which need to be unraveled.

I argue that what resulted in this continuity in policing was an incomplete transition or the absence of a significant regime change in Turkey. The new tutelary regime established after 1983 did not represent a substantive departure from the preceding regimes, including both the military junta that ruled the country from September 1980 to November 1983 and the previous Turkish governments that ruled under the tutelary regime of Turkey’s multiparty period (Taş, 2015), in terms of the purpose of deployment of coercion—repressing any kind of opposition to the established political order. This unchanged need for repression and surveillance from the
earlier periods of the republic made the new rulers of the country unenthusiastic to intervene to reform these authoritarian modes of policing toward a more democratic form. In the post-1983 transition era, these perceived threats against the new tutelary regime arose from sections of society hitherto seen as ‘domestic enemies’ of the Kemalist state for reasons of politics, religious conviction, or ethnicity, such as minorities, leftists, ethnic/sectarian groups such as Kurds and Alevi, as well as other groups that were left out of the benefits of and challenged the newly created neoliberal economic order such as Roma people and Kurds. Additionally, the armed Kurdish insurgency and the significant increase in terrorist violence during this period exacerbated these perceived threats. Consequently, this continuity in the purpose of the deployment of coercion in Turkey between the new tutelary regime and the previous regimes hindered any significant shift towards democratic forms of coercion in Turkey’s post-transition policing. As before, the tradition of protecting the interests of the regime endured.

In this period, the domination of high policing also undermined police-citizen relations by creating a culture of policing represented by an image of the police as a “public order army”; the promotion of militaristic methods and disproportionate use of force against citizens; “a sensitivity to the sanctity and perpetuity of the state”, and the securitization of discontented groups in society as threats to the state (Berksoy, 2010b, p. 192; Ekşi, 2019, p. 506). This subculture of policing was exacerbated by the organizational and occupational problems existent in the policing, including organizational issues such as “unstandardized police regulations, low pay, poor working conditions, and frequent deployments and rotations” and occupational problems which include “danger, lack of motivation, high levels of stress, negative perceptions of the police by society, media investigations of police incidents and an inflexible hierarchy” (Karatay et al., 2012, p. 302). These factors, as a result, prevented the blossoming of low
policing, or an orientation towards the protection of citizens from crime and violence, in Turkey during this era.

Further, this unchanged need for repression and surveillance of real and perceived threats challenging the state power paved the way for a period of experimentation after a long period of ‘steady state’ in Turkish policing from the foundation of republic in 1923 until the 1980s, during when the police were largely in the shadow and service of the Turkish military. The impetus of this experimentation was, alike, an attempt to expand the repressive capacity (not democratic aspects) of the Turkish police as evidenced in the legal and institutional amendments introduced during this period in order to augment the capacity of the police organization. Thus, transformations in the structure and functioning of the police institution in Turkey following the democratic transition in 1983 were defined by the national security discourses and politics of Turkey’s Cold War-oriented, military dominated tutelary regime and the neoliberal state transformations promoted by the incumbent Ozal government. Indeed, as Bedirhanoglu et al. (2016) note, “the transformations in state and security structures in this period have been shaped by the processes of integration of the domestic capital accumulation to global capital accumulation on the one hand, and the rise of identity politics on the other” (pp. 24-25).

Neoliberal transformations resulted in a “fundamental reconfiguration of class relations through en masse proletarianization, deepening of poverty and deprivation, and socio-spatial segregation in urban centers in Turkey” (Bedirhanoglu et al., 2016, p. 25; Berksoy 2010a). In the meantime, the rise of identity politics meant that “these developments were intertwined with radicalization in politics in relation to Kurdish insurgency and the rise of political Islam throughout the 1990s” (Bedirhanoglu et al., 2016, p. 25). Policing took shape in line with the politics and discourses of security constructed and disseminated by Turkey’s militarized state and “dominated by a nationalist-conservative perspective added onto a Kemalist basis” which securitized sections of
society as “domestic enemies” or in Dhamoon and Abu Laban’s (2009) conceptualization “dangerous internal foreigners”, namely non-Muslims, radical left groups labeled as anarchists/communists, and ethnic/sectarian groups such as Kurds and Alevis who started to openly express their identities in the face of the officially accepted Sunni-Turkish identity (Berksoy, 2010a, 2010b, p. 192; Piran, 2013). Neoliberal transformations in the Turkish state during the late 1980s and early 1990s only exacerbated this marginalization, to include new groups, such as labor unions and lower classes including Roma people and Kurds who were forced to migrate to big cities and living below the poverty line, among domestic threats (Berksoy, 2010a, 2010b). It was the combination of these two factors, above all, that gave post-transition policing its character.

In response to these ‘threats’, paramilitary forms of policing were introduced, as represented by the establishment of Rapid Action Units in 1982, Special Operation Teams in 1983, the Anti-Terrorism and Operation Department in 1986, the enactment of the Anti-Terrorism Act in 1991, and the re-organization of Special Operation Teams within a separate section called Special Operation Department in the TNP in 1993 (Bedirhanoglu et al., 2016; Berksoy 2010a, 2010b; Piran, 2013).

My findings contribute to the long line of scholarship on policing and regime change which has not unpacked the idea of hybrid regimes or incomplete transitions. This literature has been too preoccupied with the distinction between democracies and autocracies, failing to acknowledge the fact that although countries may depart from traditional types of authoritarian regimes they may not be moving to democratic ones, which may explain why the police reform does not take place in some transitional states, such as in Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe where the police have faced reform challenges and remained centered on securing social order and
defending ruling interests rather than crime prevention and citizen protection even after the
transition to democracy (Aitchison & Blaustein, 2013; Beck & Robertson, 2005, 2009; Brogden,
2005; Gordon, 2006; Hinton, 2006; Hills, 1996; Light et al., 2015; Marat, 2018; Prado et al.,
2012; Tankebe, 2013; Trebilcock & Daniels, 2008; Tankebe, 2013).

This case study of policing in Turkey following the 1983 democratic transition also makes a
theoretical contribution to the existing research on police reform by arguing that police reform
interventions conducted in transitional states may not always involve the promotion of
democratic policing and Western formulated norms and standards of police conduct presented as
“best practice” in policing (Banks & Baker, 2016). My findings reveal that transitional states
facing internal challenges to their authority, whether actual or perceived, may also implement
major reform interventions aimed at increasing the capabilities of their police forces. Following
the 1983 democratic transition in Turkey, it was the need for increased repression and
surveillance which led to an attempt to expand the enforcement capacity of the Turkish police—
providing the police with increased budget and enhanced coercive powers along with the
creation of special anti-riot units and SWAT teams tasked with riot control and
counterinsurgency responsibilities. In this regard, the findings of this study call into question
police reform scholarship which has largely focused on the promotion of democratic policing in
developing and transitional states and neglected the range of other factors that might influence
how police develop in transitional contexts. Further, the findings also mirror previous empirical
work which found that in developing states, especially post-conflict states, police, in response to
perceived security threats to themselves and to the wider community, may increasingly assume
the functions and attributes of a paramilitary organization with the increased capacity to use
force (Wiatrowski et al., 2008).
4 Policing in Turkey during the transition from tutelary regime

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I continue to explore policing continuity and change in the wake of regime transitions in order to contribute to a more complete understanding of the relationship between regime type and modes of policing and coercion. This chapter draws on an in-depth case study of Turkish policing in the early millennium (from the early 2000s to 2013)—a period notable for significant political transformations such as the EU-sponsored reforms and the dismantlement of Turkey’s tutelary regime, but also the beginning of the transformations that have since institutionalized electoral authoritarianism in the country. I demonstrate that, during this period, the character of both low policing and high policing were altered with significant consequences compared to the authoritarian modes of police practices employed by the preceding regimes and, moreover, these democratic transformations of policing were sustained (until 2014-16) in the face of the authoritarian tendencies of the AKP government especially after the EU process started to lose its dynamism after 2005, the reasons of which need to be unraveled.

I argue that the persistence of democratic modes of coercion in Turkish policing, which first emerged internally in the late 1990s-early 2000s and then accelerated by the EU-guided reforms, in the face of AKP’s growing authoritarianism was made possible because a number of reformist security officials within the Turkish police were granted considerable autonomy in the pursuit of their political (i.e. advancing their position within the state bureaucracy vis a vis the military) but also professional (i.e. rule of law and service to the public) goals in exchange for continued cooperation with the government’s policy priority—weakening the threat against its political
survival represented by tutelary institutions of the secularist-Kemalist state through the removal of military from politics. The reformist elements within the Turkish police, as political actors “endowed with structural power due to their control of coercion” (González, 2021, p. 20), successfully leveraged their intelligence and enforcement capabilities (structural power) against the encroachment of the military in political life to achieve considerable autonomy in pursuing their police reform objectives which helped sustain substantive democratic transformations of policing in Turkey despite an increasingly authoritarian political regime after 2007.

My findings in this chapter also reveal that during the AKP’s second term in office (2007-2011), the Erdogan government used the police force to consolidate power, by deploying the police against opponents in the armed forces which involved monitoring and reporting on the activities of potential coup plotters within the armed forces as well as helping prepare the trials of Ergenekon and Balyoz where hundreds of military officers were prosecuted for plotting to overthrow the AKP government. With their experience, empowered policing and intelligence capabilities, and the use of secret police (or high policing) tactics, the Turkish police played a central role in disestablishing Turkey’s military-dominated tutelary regime during the AKP’s second term in office. Thus, the end of the tutelary regime in Turkey was not simply a reflection of the reforms implemented by the AKP that limited the institutional power of the military in political decision-making. Instead, it also involved the criminalization of military interference in politics through a series of police investigations (discussed below in detail) into the members of the Turkish military for the alleged plans for coups intending to topple the AKP government. This finding demonstrates how police can also constitute regime transitions, a question that has not been asked as much by either policing scholars or political scientists so far.
By drawing on the political science literature on counterbalancing, the abovementioned finding that during the transition from tutelary democracy in Turkey the police organization played an important role in monitoring and reporting on potential coup plots within the Turkish armed forces represents an original contribution to the (mostly criminology) policing literature which has not really explored the way that different regimes choose to strengthen or weaken the police and the military. Counterbalancing is a coup-proofing strategy where the incumbents divide the state’s power among multiple, overlapping security organizations to protect against potential coup attempts by the regular military (Bruce, 1992; De Bruin, 2020; Fraser, 1994; Quinlivan, 1999). The Erdogan government, during its efforts to tame the military tutelage to assure its political survival, especially after the safe haven the EU had provided to protect his government against any radical intervention by the Kemalist state weakened after 2006, attempted to balance the Turkish armed forces with the police organization to monitor and report on conspirators within the armed forces and to deter a potential coup attempt, as I will explain in more detail below.

This chapter relies on data collected from my semi-structured in-depth interviews with former Turkish police officers who were on active duty during this period, as well as data from documentary sources. These documentary resources include international human organizations and foreign governments’ reports on the situation of human rights and civil liberties in Turkey, domestic NGO reports, local press articles, and English and Turkish language scholarship on Turkish policing covering the early millennium.

4.2 The end of the tutelary regime in Turkey

Turkey witnessed significant political developments with the onset of the new millennium. The unstable coalition governments and economic crises of the 1990s helped pave the way for the
emergence of a new political actor in Turkey, the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP). The AKP government rose to power in November 2002 Turkish parliamentary elections after winning more than two-thirds of the seats in parliament in a stunning political upset to many (Balboni, 2023). After 2002, it claimed strong victories in four consecutive general elections (2007, 2011, 2015, 2018) and, as of January 2023, boasts more than eleven million registered party members (Alan, 2023). The period from 2002 when AKP first rose to power to 2013 (roughly the first two terms of AKP in office) was characterized by an initial period of democratization effort under EU-guided political and legal reforms, inclusiveness toward different segments of society, including ethnic and religious minorities, and the previously disenfranchised pious majority, and the disappearance of the tutelary character of the regime with the decreasing influence of the military in domestic politics (Ekşi, 2015, Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Taş, 2015). Yet, this decade also notably marked the emergence of the authoritarian transformations that have since institutionalized electoral or competitive authoritarianism in Turkey, such as suppression of opposition through the politicization of judiciary and the emergence of a stronger control over crucial state institutions by Erdogan, which I explore in detail below (Castaldo, 2018; Çalışkan, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016).

The AKP rose to power in an environment where the military and the judiciary held “a virtual veto power” over elected officials (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016, p. 1584). As Castaldo (2018) aptly notes, “due to the threat represented by tutelary institutions, which could realistically ban the party or its leader from politics (Judiciary) or overthrow the government (Military), Erdogan’s main goal was survival” (p. 475). AKP’s predecessor, the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) was closed in 1998 by the Constitutional Court on the premise of anti-secular activities. That is why, during his first term in office (2002-2007), Erdogan adopted a rather defensive strategy, avoiding open conflict with tutelary actors, and fostering economic development and the EU accession
process which would endow him with internal and international legitimacy, allow him to fight the establishment forces without resorting to dangerous plebiscitary strategies, and shield his government against any radical intervention by the Kemalist state (Castaldo, 2018). As Castaldo (2018) notes, “[t]he very same strategy, which resorted to EU-sponsored reforms to increase the government legitimacy and to weaken internal veto-players, was evident in other EU candidate countries like Serbia and Macedonia” (p. 475).

Under the sponsorship of the EU, Erdogan government set out to curtail the veto power of the military over Turkish politics, first, by implementing reforms which served to undercut the institutional power of the military in decision making. For example, these institutional reforms increased the number of civilian members of the National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu or MGK), which was traditionally dominated by the Turkish Military (Piran, 2013). The frequency of the Council’s meetings was reduced, and its decisions were downgraded to simple recommendations which did not require the Council’s supervision over their implementation. Moreover, the provisions of the seventh harmonization package in August 2003 (Law No. 4963) adapted in line with Turkey’s EU accession negotiations repealed the NSC’s secretary general’s executive authority and replaced it with secretarial duties and allowed the secretary general to be selected from among civilian officials (Piran, 2013). This package also enabled the Turkish Court of Accounts (Sayıştay) to monitor the financial investments and public properties controlled by the Turkish military, whereas a 2004 constitutional amendment allowed the Court of Accounts’ financial review of the military. The representative of the military was removed from the boards of the Council of Higher Education (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu, YÖK) and the Radio and Television Supreme Council (Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu, RTÜK) with this amendment. Also, the EMASYA (Emniyet Asayiş Yardımlaşma Birlikleri, Security and Public Order Assistance Squads) protocol, “which allowed the military authorities to bypass civilian
authorities in responding to social incidents”, was repealed (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016, p. 1584). According to Taş (2015), these amendments to regulate civil-military relations along with the EU acquis helped to civilianize Turkish politics.

Further, and more importantly, the influence of the Turkish military over politics was curbed with the political delegitimation and then the criminalization of the military’s extra-legal intervention in politics. The military issued a statement on its website on 27 April 2007, known as the “e-coup”, which criticized the Islamist tendencies within the AKP government and warned that the military stood ready to protect Kemalism after Erdogan selected Abdullah Gul, an Islamist from his party, as the presidential candidate. Erdogan responded to this with a counterstatement reminding the military that his government represented the will of “the people” and that, in democracies, it is unacceptable for the armed forces to intervene in politics, underlining the primacy of democratic procedures (Castaldo, 2018).

Subsequently, the AKP took steps to criminalize the military’s extra-legal interventions in politics. In a series of court cases that began during the party’s second term in office (2007–11), publicly known as “Ergenekon” and “Balyoz (Sledgehammer)” trials, hundreds of retired and active-duty military officers were brought before the courts to answer allegations of conspiring to destabilize and eventually topple the elected AKP government (Aydınlı, 2012; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Gürsoy, 2011, 2012; Rodrik, 2011). Among these officers were the former chief of general staff, Ilker Basbug, and several former commanding officers of the Turkish army. These officers and their supposed civilian accomplices were accused of membership in a secret
network, dubbed the “Ergenekon terrorist organization” after an ancient Turkish myth\(^\text{10}\), which had the aim of staging coups against the AKP government (Castaldo, 2018; Gürsoy, 2011; Rodrik, 2011). They were charged with crimes ranging from bombings to intimidation of religious minorities and coup-plotting. According to Erdogan’s rhetoric, these trials represented the proof of the elite or the ‘enemies of national sovereignty’ hindering the expression of the nation’s will (Dinçşahin, 2012). As noted by Esen and Gumuscu (2016), “these court cases signified that the military was no longer untouchable nor were they above censure by the elected civilian government” (p. 1585).

During this period, another significant political development was the AKP government’s inclusive policy and discourse towards ethnic and religious minorities sidelined under the Kemalist regime established in 1923. Within this context, while the AKP government opened up space for the expression of Kurdish and Alevi identity, it also adopted more inclusive policies towards the formerly disenfranchised Islamic constituencies under previous Turkish administrations (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016). It also initiated, although ultimately unsuccessful, a peace process with the Kurdish insurgency (Acilim Sureci) to resolve the long-running and protracted conflict in the country. The AKP government also legislated several constitutional and

\(^{10}\) The Ergenekon myth is a legendary narrative from Turkish folklore that has historical and cultural significance in the country. The myth revolves around the concept of Ergenekon, which is believed to be the ancestral homeland of the Turkic people. According to the myth, the Turkic tribes were trapped in the hidden valley of Ergenekon in the Altai Mountains. The story goes that the Turks, facing enemy invasions and persecution, sought refuge in Ergenekon, a valley surrounded by impassable mountains. They lived there for centuries, gradually growing in number and strength, until a blacksmith managed to forge a passage through the mountains, allowing them to escape and reclaim their freedom. The myth of Ergenekon symbolizes the resilience, unity, and eventual triumph of the Turkish people against adversity. It is often seen as a reflection of the national spirit and has been used to foster a sense of identity and patriotism in Turkish culture. It’s important to note that the modern-day Ergenekon trial is distinct from the original myth and represents a separate and complex political issue in Turkey.
legal reforms as part of the EU accession process during its first term in office (2002-2007), such as the abolition of death penalty in 2004, abolition of the requirement to obtain the permission of competent administrative authorities to prosecute public servants and other public employees in torture and mistreatment cases so that public prosecutors can deal with the perpetrators swiftly, shortening pre-trial detention periods for suspects, and the elimination of State Security courts that had been established in 1983 to deal with “the politically charged cases of ‘crimes against the state’ and became the main mechanism of the enduring military tutelage in Turkish politics” (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 298; Özbudun & Yazıcı, 2004).

Yet, despite these critical steps, “the AKP oscillated between liberal and majoritarian understandings of democracy” (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016, p. 1585). After the EU accession negotiations were virtually halted in 2006, with several European leaders objecting to Turkish membership, “the crucial source of legitimacy and protection the EU had represented for Erdoğan quickly weakened, leaving the government in an environment where tutelary institutions were still powerful” (Castaldo, 2018, p. 475). In this environment, several conflicts with the establishment forces (i.e., military and judiciary) demonstrated the ongoing existential threat constituted against Erdogan and AKP’s political survival by the institutions of horizontal accountability. The attempts of Turkey’s establishment forces to limit AKP’s ascendancy during this period included, for example, the 2007 presidential elections crisis, and the decisions of the Constitutional Court in 2008 which ruled out the lift on the headscarf ban in universities adopted in 2007 and the decision which almost banned AKP for serving as the hub of anti-secular activities (Castaldo, 2018). These developments led Erdogan to unveil his populist tendencies and increasingly resort to plebiscitary strategies (anti-establishment appeal in electoral campaigns, call for early elections, referendums, politicization of judiciary, etc.) in order to fight the establishment forces and colonize crucial state institutions, including those of the horizontal
accountability. These populist strategies, which provided Erdogan with a clearer electoral mandate (increasing his party’s votes from 34.28% in 2002 to an astounding 46.58% in 2007 parliamentary elections) to confront and domesticate the establishment, allowed him to gain a stronger control over crucial state institutions such as judiciary which undermined the horizontal, intra-state checks on the executive power in Turkey and to deploy these institutions against his opponents (Castaldo, 2018). As a result, democratic backsliding gained significant momentum during this period. Moreover, as clearly suggested by several scholars of Turkish politics (Castaldo, 2018; Çalışkan, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016), the more frequent and systematic deployment of these state institutions against opponents after 2011 led to the consolidation of already emerged electoral authoritarian tendencies in Turkey.

Within this tug of war between the AKP government and the secular establishment, the first step taken for the subordination of judiciary was through the Ergenekon trials which targeted alleged coup plotters within the military. Although these court cases helped drastically undermine the political role of the military in Turkey, according to several scholars (Akkoynulu & Öktem, 2016; Dinçşahin, 2012; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Kaygusuz, 2018), Erdogan utilized courts controlled by Gulenists to subdue and intimidate opponents within the armed forces using incomplete or falsified evidence and violations of due process. According to Eissenstat (2017), the effect of these trials was to sideline many traditional Kemalists in the officer corps and to increase the influence of Erdogan’s political allies, including Gulen. Opposition parties, intellectuals and journalists criticized these trials as ‘political’ in nature, which were considered more as a tool to intimidate any kind of opposition against the AKP (Castaldo, 2018). As noted by Gürsoy (2012), “[t]he arrests of the journalists have especially led to the accusation that the cases are not an attempt to clean out the pro-coup elements within the state and the military, but
a convenient tool for the AKP government and its sympathizers to repress the opposition, pressure the media and disgrace and trap the secular military” (p. 748).

Another example from this period which demonstrated Erdogan’s capacity to use the judiciary against his opponents was the so-called KCK (Koma Civaken Kurdistan, Kurdistan Democratic Communities Union) trials which targeted segments of the Kurdish political movement (Kaygusuz, 2018). In these mass trials which targeted pro-Kurdish activists and politicians between 2009 and 2011, hundreds of local party members and politicians were jailed, again pending trial. Ergenekon and KCK trials represented the prime examples of the corrosion of the rule of law and fundamental rights and liberties. According to Kaygusuz (2018), “the violations of fundamental rights and liberties displayed during these trials made clear that the principle of the rule of law would no longer function as the main guarantee against the excessive use of state power” (p. 290).

The subjugation of the judiciary under AKP’s control, which started with these trials, culminated with the AKP government’s enactment of a constitutional referendum in 2010, restructuring the Constitutional Court (Anayasa Mahkemesi) and the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors (Hakimler ve Savcılar Yüksek Kurulu, HSYK). While expanding the size of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors, the amendments also afforded the president and the parliament more power to appoint senior judges and prosecutors (Kalaycıoğlu, 2012; Taş, 2015). These amendments were feared to put judiciary under further control of the executive and allow the AKP to pack these critical institutions with their loyalists, largely members of the Gulen network who were a strong political ally of AKP during this period. These amendments were submitted to a referendum on 12 September 2010 and eventually passed winning the 58% of the popular vote. As Castaldo (2018) notes, “the fears of the opposition
materialized soon, since the majority of the new constitutional judges was conservative and the new members of the HSYK were all included in a list unofficially circulated by the Ministry of Justice before the election” (p. 478). Moreover, the new HSYK relocated all judges and prosecutors whose decisions did not align with the government wishes (Kalaycioğlu, 2012). The AKP’s successful subordination of the establishment forces in the military and judiciary through these moves, exacerbated by the consolidation of its political power with wide popular support after its repeat electoral victories in 2007 and 2011 (46.58% and 49.83% of the popular vote respectively), “left the civil-military bureaucracy without any mechanism with which to challenge Erdogan and the AKP” (Taş, 2015, p. 781), providing AKP’s authoritarianism with additional impetus throughout this period (Kaygusuz, 2018).

In summary, by the end of 2010, “the AKP had already pacified most of the veto-players in the system and ended the era of tutelary democracy in Turkey” (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016, p. 1585). However, the end of tutelary democracy in Turkey did not result in democratic consolidation in the country. Instead, as noted by Çalışkan (2018), “the beginning of the dismantlement of Turkey’s tutelary regime also marked the beginning of the transformations that have since institutionalized competitive authoritarianism in the country” (p. 11). Initially supported by the EU and employing traditional methods, and later empowered by a stronger electoral mandate and utilizing common populist tactics, Erdogan achieved increased dominance over critical state institutions, including those of the horizontal accountability (Castaldo, 2018). This significantly diminished the ability of these institutions to effectively supervise and balance the actions of the executive branch. During its third term in office (2011-2015), beginning especially after 2013 Gezi Park protests, Erdogan deployed more frequently and systematically state institutions against opponents, leading to the consolidation of already emerged competitive or electoral authoritarian tendencies. Despite the notable authoritarian turn in the country during this period,
there were significant transformations in Turkish policing (in the domains of both low and high policing) toward the democratic end, the reasons of which need to be unraveled as I explore in detail below.

4.3 The alliance with the new police elite

The first decade of the new millennium, as will be elaborated below, witnessed significant attempts to accelerate police reforms and develop a new and more democratic model of policing different from the one pervasive during the last two decades prior to the 2000s in Turkey. There were significant transformations in both low policing and high policing towards promoting a more democratic mode of coercion. The new police elite or ‘the reformist wing’, in fact, served as the locomotive for the transformations in the police institution during this decade. Before moving to discussing how these democratic transformations in the TNP persisted in the face of AKP’s increasing authoritarianism and the role of the new police elite in this transformation, it is important to explain who the reformist wing inside the police were.

As Ekşi (2019) notes, “a new generation of police chiefs who referred to themselves as “Akademililer” (police chiefs who graduated from the Police Academy in Ankara) emerged in the 2000s as the intelligentsia of the Turkish police” (p. 502). During this transitional period when Turkey gradually moved away from tutelary democracy, Turkish policing was awash with ideas brought in from abroad by a cohort of reformist police chiefs, who “emphasized the artful business of preventing crime over the blunt business of fighting it” (Steinberg, 2014, p. 173). They were unlike any leaders Turkish policing had seen in many decades. The members of this ‘new police elite’ or the ‘younger reformist wing’ had travelled to the developed world starting from the mid-1990s for graduate education and in-service training in new models of policing and organizational management as part of a state-induced higher education project (Hülagü, 2021).
These officers possessed high educational credentials, such as masters and doctoral degrees in criminology, criminal justice, policing studies, human rights, political science, and global affairs from the UK and US universities (Bahçecik, 2014; Ekşi, 2015; Hülagü, 2017, 2021; Piran, 2013). These cadres were usually appointed as professors at the Turkish National Police Academy to prepare future academy graduates for command positions at the TNP or served as police commanders in various cities and districts of Turkey upon their return from graduate education abroad (Hülagü, 2021). These cadre of young professionals were largely commissioned police officers who were vetted for their academic success during their education in the Turkish National Police Academy and their advanced English language skills. They were required to meet certain eligibility criteria, such as earning a high TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) score and having no disciplinary records in their professional background before they were required to undergo an oral examination administered by senior administrators of the TNP. The examination committee usually included the Turkish National Police Academy President, chief of the TNP Human Resources Department, and the chief of the TNP International Relations Department. The candidates who succeeded in the oral interview were then sent abroad to earn their masters and doctoral degrees with their education and living expenses fully covered by the TNP.11

As suggested by several prior studies on Turkish policing (Bahçecik, 2014; Ekşi, 2015; Hülagü, 2017, 2021; Piran, 2013), it was the new police intelligentsia who initiated the police reform that started roughly in the late 1990s and became visible during the first decade of the 2000s. As noted by Hülagü (2021), these reformist officers “were calling themselves as pioneers of

11 As I mentioned in the introduction of this study, I was a member of this cohort of younger officers dedicated to raising the professional level of Turkish policing.
democratic policing in Turkey, and as the young generation that would crack down the old and corrupt habits of the police in Turkey” (p. 64). These police intellectuals spoke of the police as problem solvers, as officers who developed ongoing relationships with civilian constituencies, and entered into an open-ended dialogue with those being policed. Besides being very active in the field, such as organizing international security conferences, introducing new policing methods such as intelligence-led policing and community-policing, and developing new performance criteria to develop the effectiveness of police, these cadres were also interested in producing a new policing philosophy. Hülagü (2021) notes that these cadres considered the job of policing as a first contact between the state and the citizen. As a corollary, in order to restore the credibility of the state apparatus, these reformist cadres saw it essential to “restructure the hard-policing legacy of the state in Turkey” and acted to relegitimize the Turkish police, whose image had been tarnished by extraordinary levels of corruption, brutality, and over-politicization of the police rank-and-file in the 1990s (Hülagü, 2021, p. 85). One of my informants, Ahmet, who has a PhD in Criminal Justice from a US university and worked in the counterterrorism units of the TNP for several years, describes this need for transformation in policing as follows:

Before the 2000s, we largely had no idea about what types of policing approaches were existent in other parts of the world, especially the US and Europe. Our graduate education in the US gave us the chance to observe different approaches to policing, theoretically and practically, and to see what was wrong with our police prior to the 2000s. This experience made us think, well, that what we needed back in Turkey was to establish a kind of policing which would serve to protect the citizens rather than focused on protecting the state from its citizens as we did for years. Only after establishing this type of policing, we believed, we could erase the deep-seated antagonism between our citizens and the police, which cost the police the legitimacy and trust in people’s eyes for years.

The emergence of this reformist elite is very much related to the developments that occurred in Turkey from the mid-1990s, during when the Turkish state and the Turkish police were in a deep
legitimation crisis over human rights violations during the violent conflict in the Kurdish-populated regions of the country. By the late 1990s, there was a widespread public discussion in Turkey not only on the extraordinary levels of police corruption and brutality people had to face in everyday life but also on the new political mission the police organization had adopted. Not only the police rank-and-file was over-politicized but also the violent conflict in the Kurdish-populated regions facilitated the police apparatus to enhance its hierarchical status within the whole state apparatus. As discussed in detail in the preceding chapter, this was a period when the police in Turkey were managing brutal operations in urban areas such as in Istanbul, and violently harassing leftist, poor and Alevi neighborhoods. The image of the police had been tarnished by extraordinary levels of corruption, brutality, and over-politicization of the police rank-and-file which culminated in a series of major scandals in the 1990s (Bahçecik, 2014; Hülagü, 2021, p. 85). Among these scandals were the Gazi incidents in 1995 (explained in Chapter 3) in which the police used brutal force and live ammunition to disperse the protesters and the Susurluk Scandal in 1996 (discussed in Chapter 3) (Bahçecik, 2014). According to Hülagü (2021), during the 1990s, the police rank-and-file in Turkey demonstrated against ‘human rights’, chanted slogans of hatred, distributed declarations of revenge, and even organized Imams (the people who lead prayers in mosques) to propagate their Turkish-Islamist messages. Hence, by the late 1990s, several police managers, even the ones famous for their hardline approaches to policing, started to pay lip service to human rights. As noted by Bahçecik (2014), in the late 1990s, even some early reform attempts in policing started to flourish, such as the establishment of units within the police responsible for human rights, the initiation of human rights training provided by international institutions, as well as the inclusion of police ethics in in-service training of police officers.
During the early 2000s, as Ekşi (2015) argues, this internal search for reform in the police organization that was blossoming, especially among the upper-level police chiefs, to re-legitimize the police coincided with the AKP government’s resolve to democratize and civilianize the Turkish politics under the sponsorship of EU-guided political and legal reforms (discussed above) during its first term in office (2002-2007). Indeed, as noted by Collantes-Celador et al. (2008), “the need to reform the internal security forces became even more apparent particularly with Turkey’s European Union accession process since the late 1990s” (p. 7). During this early period of democratization reforms, the EU-guided legislative changes passed by the AKP government in its first term in office, which promoted the status of human rights through anti-torture statues and laws in regard to freedom of expression, did not establish a comprehensive and clear framework for police reform although some of those changes could still be seen in the light of police reform, at least in their potential practical outcomes (Collantes-Celador et al., 2008).

Rather, the EU’s role in Turkey’s police reform should be situated within the accession/enlargement process whereby the EU contributed and assisted to institution-building in the policing sector (including police and gendarmerie agencies), through programs such as European Commission-assisted twinning and other projects (discussed in detail below), as Turkey strove to adopt, enforce, and execute the *acquis communautaire* (Collantes-Celador et al., 2008). The European Commission (EC) document describes security sector reform (SSR) for candidate countries as follows:

> The reform of the security sector in candidate or potential candidate countries is partly covered under the political Copenhagen criteria (guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect, and protection of minorities) for EU membership. The prospect of EU membership also carries with it a series of very specific obligations in the areas of border controls, migration, asylum and visa, police cooperation, or judicial co-operation in criminal or civil matters, which falls under the EU policy of freedom, security, and justice. Fulfilling membership requirements in these areas is not only about transposing in national
legislation the related EU acquis under Chapter 24 of accession negotiations. The countries must also demonstrate their capacity to successfully implement this acquis, and more generally align the rest of the related legislation and practice of their services in line with commonly accepted EU standards and best practices (Collantes-Celador et al., 2008, p. 8).

Within this context, certain projects supported by EC in the field of “Justice, Freedom and Security” have played a significant role in initiating somewhat shy yet potentially promising steps towards police reform in Turkey (Collantes-Celador et al., 2008, p. 11). These projects advanced the agenda for institutional reform aiming to enhance professionalism, accountability, and transparency of the police agencies. As noted by Collantes-Celador et al. (2008), “[a]ccording to high and mid-level police professionals and international and local experts, these projects have been particularly useful in building professional capacities and supporting human-rights sensitivities among the cadres of the police” (p. 11). Another benefit of these projects was that they achieved considerable success in cultivating a more reform-oriented mindset among younger and more educated members of the police, a finding also confirmed by most of my study participants. For example, one of my interlocutors, Suat, a former mid-level police chief who worked in several operational units of the TNP in the past, states as follows:

These (EU) twinning projects helped introduce to policing in Turkey previously unknown concepts/practices, such as forensic science, getting at the criminal suspect from the evidence instead of getting at the evidence from the suspect [which was the prevalent approach in the TNP previously], the use of technology to solve crimes, and respecting human rights in police practices. In the past, the police were not required to present concrete evidence to detain a suspect, especially for the so-called crimes against the state. Thanks to these projects, we began to apply evidence-based, information-led policing instead of arbitrary practices.

The members of the younger reformist wing, who quickly got promoted following the AKP’s rise to power in 2002, supported the EU twinning projects and took them as an opportunity to showcase their own utility to the government’s foreign policy objectives (Bahçecik, 2014). They
“fostered their reform plans, benefited from the European Union accessions process and joined forces with the technical staff sent by the EU” (Hülagü, 2021, p. 66).

In summary, the EU process accelerated police reform that had already started internally and provided a framework for more focused reform. The Turkish police reform would have proceeded forward without the EU as a driving force and anchor; however, the EU anchor pushed the police reforms already initiated by the reformist-minded practitioners within the police organization in a direction where they may not have easily gone if the two players (the AKP and reformist police officers) had to come up with a consensual solution for reforms. In other words, as Piran (2013, p. 70) emphasized, “police reforms would have occurred without the EU anchor, but the legitimacy of the EU conditions still mattered”, positioning the EU’s role as a necessary but not sufficient condition for Turkey’s police reform during the first decade of the 2000s.

Yet, what can explain the persistence of these transformations in policing after the 2006-2007 period which was marked by the halting of accession negotiations with the EU after which Erdogan and the AKP’s populism and democratic backsliding in Turkey gained significant momentum? I argue that this continuing change in policing was made possible because achieving the political objectives of the Erdogan regime—political survival against the threat represented by tutelary institutions especially after the attempted party closure case in 2008—required the cooperation of the police which, as the primary institution to which the state

12 Before 2006, the democratic impetus provided by the EU candidacy was strong in Turkey and the AKP’s ostensibly reformist policies were extensively supported by different segments of the society. After 2006–2007, however, we see an increasing determination among the AKP leaders to eliminate their Kemalist opponents, especially within the military and judiciary. This orientation reached its peak during the closure case opened against the party in 2008, after which the elimination of the Kemalist forces through the coup plot investigations gained pace (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 298).
delegates its monopoly of the legitimate use of force, “provide a highly coveted and contested service that politicians can distribute selectively to pursue their political objectives, a condition police forces skillfully leverage toward their own ends” (González, 2021, p. 23).

Indeed, several scholars of Turkish politics speak of a collaboration between the AKP and the members of the police organization in helping AKP to contest the influence of the Kemalist and secularist forces in the state apparatuses during the transition from tutelary regime (Bahçecik, 2014; Kaygusuz, 2018; Hülagü, 2021). Kaygusuz (2018) notes that this period “witnessed the construction of a new axis of power which brought together the ruling party, the police force, and the judiciary – a concatenation that would collectively designate and conduct the new politics of security in Turkey”, which she argues aimed to strengthen AKP’s position vis-à-vis the military. Hülagü (2021) argues that these police cadres (who were allegedly members of the Gulen community) “acted in close collaboration with the AKP and helped the ruling party to establish its neoliberal-neoconservative political project by redesigning the state apparatus, especially in curbing down the might of the military and judiciary in Turkey” (p. 64). Bahçecik (2014) argues that as the EU harmonization process accelerated, the reformist elements within the police attempted to showcase themselves as a significant leverage against the encroachment of the military in political life (p. 77). Indeed, historically in Turkey, especially during times of tension in civil-military relations, the intelligence and enforcement capabilities of the police become even more significant assets to hold (Bahçecik, 2014). For example, in 1997, the TNP Intelligence Department made the coalition government of the time aware of the establishment of an unofficial structure within the Turkish military, called Bati Çalışma Grubu (Western Working Group, BÇG). The alleged aim of this unofficial working group was to follow the implementation of the decisions taken in the 28 February 1997 National Security Council (MGK) meeting where the military issued a memorandum to the coalition government of the
time, which contained a list of resolutions by the Turkish military taken in response to what it deemed rising Islamist ideology and anti-secular activities. This working group, as claimed by intelligence report prepared by the police, was to spy on people and places considered threats against national security due to their alleged involvement in anti-secular activities, collecting intelligence on mosques, student dormitories, private schools, associations, religious schools, certain political party representatives, local newspapers, and the members of some trade unions (Mercan, 2009). With this report, the police intelligence aimed to notify the prime minister, deputy prime minister, and interior minister of the time about the activities by the BÇG which it assessed as preparation for a potential military takeover.

In the Turkish case, these capabilities or the structural power endowed a group of reformist security officials within the Turkish police with considerable autonomy in the pursuit of their reform goals in exchange for their cooperation with the government’s policy priority—curtailing the powers of the veto-players of the tutelary regime in Turkey, namely the Turkish military and the hardline secularists. Despite the AKP’s emerging authoritarian measures which served to undermine, in particular, the constitutional attributes of Turkish democracy after 2007, such as the weaponization of the judiciary through politicized trials (i.e., Ergenekon, Balyoz, KCK trials) targeting AKP’s political opponents and controversial reforms aimed at shaping the high judiciary, these reformist officers were allowed to pursue the policing reforms to help shift coercive low policing and high policing practices towards the democratic end in exchange for their cooperation in investigations into the members of the military allegedly plotting a coup to overthrow the AKP government. The intelligence and anti-terrorism departments of the Turkish police played a crucial role in these investigations which intended the subordination of the Turkish military by supporting the prosecution through both providing surveillance of and producing, sometimes allegedly fabricated, judicial evidence against the defendants in these
cases (Dogan & Rodrik, 2015; Rodrik, 2011). In majority of these so-called coup-plotting cases, it was the members of this reformist wing inside the Turkish police—who got promoted to senior positions in high policing organs of the Turkish police following the rise of the AKP to power in 2002—who supervised the investigations, the main result of which was a decisive ending of the political role of the military in Turkey (Castaldo, 2018).

These findings thus suggest that the reform to promote democratic policing is not the consequence of the success of democratic processes to address coercive institutions that fundamentally violate democratic principles, or in other words, democratic policing or democratic coercion may not be as closely linked to the type of regime as previously believed. Instead, the reforms to shift coercive institutions toward the democratic end may result from a police-politician accommodation, “a mutually beneficial exchange relationship wherein politicians grant police greater autonomy in exchange for the organization’s cooperation in pursuing political objectives” (González, 2021, p. 19).

These policing reforms, which I explain in detail in the following section, were maintained until 2014-16, when the alliance between the political elite and the reformist wing broke down as soon as the common enemy, the military, was sidelined and especially after the launch by the police of several corruption investigations in December 2013 that involved several key people with ties to the ruling AKP government (elaborated in Chapter 5). Majority of these reformist police cadres were dismissed from their jobs and/or jailed within the wide-scale purges targeting first the officers who were involved in the graft probe and then all police cadres throughout the TNP suspected of opposing President Erdogan. As a result, most of these police reform programs, especially the ones introduced in the counter-terrorism policing domain, have stagnated.
4.4 The ascendance of low policing

The reformist tendencies within the TNP, which started to gain strength toward the end of 1990s, “became even more apparent particularly with Turkey’s European Union accession process” (Collantes-Celador et al., 2008, p. 7). From the early 2000s until the mid-2010s, Turkish policing witnessed substantive reforms and transformations related to shifting policing policies and practices in Turkey towards a more democratic direction. In the earlier period of these transformations of policing (approximately from 2002 to 2006-2007 when the accession negotiations with the EU were virtually halted), in the context of Turkey’s EU-accession process, the EU-led drive seems to be the main push behind police reform attempts, which was replaced later, I argue, by a police-politician accommodation as the AKP and its leader Erdogan determined to dominate Turkish politics by eliminating their Kemalist opponents.

Collantes-Celador et al. (2008) argue that, in the context of EU Harmonization Packages passed by the Turkish parliament between 2002 and 2005 which involved the legislative bundles of legal reforms, “a holistic police reform (or, even more generally, internal security sector reform) was still not clearly delineated” (p. 7). Instead, most of the draconian laws and regulations, such as the Turkish Anti-Terrorism Act (Terörle Mücadele Kanunu), the Turkish Penal Code (Ceza Kanunu), and the Criminal Procedure Code (Ceza Muhakemeleri Kanunu) were liberalized and the space for individual rights and freedoms such as freedom of expression, association and assembly was expanded. Also, some initial steps towards civilian supremacy and oversight over the security forces were initiated. Collantes-Celador et al. (2008) argue that although some of those legal reforms could still be seen in the light of police reform, at least in their potential practical outcomes, such legal changes can hardly be seen as amounting to a comprehensive and holistic approach to police reform due to several reasons. One important problem in this aspect
was the apparent disconnect between the formally-adopted legal changes and institutional/administrative measures which would support the implementation of these formal legal changes (Collantes-Celador et al., 2008, p. 9). For example, the introduction of the amendment to the Turkish Code of Criminal Procedure (CMK), which resulted in a more ‘prosecutorial’ or ‘inquisitorial’ approach to criminal procedures, significantly empowered prosecutors and imposed limitations on the police. One notable change is that the police now require permission from prosecutors to issue search and arrest warrants. While this shift was intended to safeguard individual rights and freedoms by reducing police powers, in practice, it led to heightened tensions between judges/prosecutors and internal security agencies. This situation generated confusion regarding authority (Collantes-Celador et al., 2008). Again, despite the official establishment of "judiciary police" structures or specialized police units to assist in the prosecution process, the necessary institutional arrangements to effectively support these formations significantly lagged behind. Instead, as Collantes-Celador et al. (2008) note, “police and gendarmerie agencies remained in a passive/demanding situation with regard to the empowered prosecutors” (p. 10).

Yet, during this period, other projects were launched which “could be evaluated more closely within a police reform approach” (Collantes-Celador et al., 2008, p. 8) and reflect the features of democratic policing. Such reform projects broadly involved the establishment of units within the TNP responsible for human rights and increased human rights training for Turkish police officers; innovations in police education and training; the launch of community policing pilot projects in different Turkish cities to improve police-community relations, and the improvement of cooperation between the Turkish police and its foreign counterparts and international scholarly community, which were aimed at improving the public perception of the police (Bahçecik, 2014). Further, the European Commission-assisted “twinning projects” (see Table 2),
“which are the European Union instrument for institutional cooperation between Public Administrations of the EU Member States and beneficiary or partner countries”, were carried out between the EU and the Turkish police officials (Bahar, 2022, pp. 375-376). Twinning can be understood as a form of technical assistance (TA) that takes place between two public agencies and seeks to improve the institutional capacity of recipient countries to adopt, implement and enforce the full *acquis communautaire* before accession to the European Union (Bahçecik, 2014, p. 73; Collantes-Celador et al., 2008). These projects were aimed to contribute towards bolstering the technical/investigative competency of the Turkish police in the early millennium (Bahçecik, 2014; Collantes-Celador et al., 2008; Ekşi, 2015). Bahçecik (2014) argues that “the reformist wing supported the twinning projects and took them as an opportunity to showcase their own utility to the government’s foreign policy objectives” (p. 76). These officers, as suggested by my interviewees, strived to present their organization as a technically capable and science-driven entity that can effectively solve crimes through the application of crime scene investigation techniques and highlighted their international connections and collaborations as the evidence of their esteemed reputation on a global scale. These twinning projects were showcased as further evidence of the police’s evolution into a more capable and globally acknowledged institution (Bahçecik, 2014).
In line with the implementation of the Copenhagen criteria for human rights and democracy, TNP’s education and training infrastructure was subjected to major transformation in the early 2000s. Within this context, the Turkish National Police Academy (TNPA) was restructured as a university in April 2001. The new structure consisted of a Faculty of Security Sciences (Güvenlik Bilimleri Fakültesi) that offered a 4-year bachelor’s degree program to prepare the students for future command roles inside the TNP; police vocational schools (Polis Meslek Yüksekokulu) to train cadets to become police constables in a program upgraded from a 9 month-long to a 2-year program, and an Institute of Security Sciences (Güvenlik Bilimleri Enstitüsü) where the TNP members and civilians could pursue graduate programs in topics such as:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Program Year</th>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Beneficiary Institution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Improvement of Statement-Taking Methods and Statement-Taking Rooms</td>
<td>Turkish National Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Strengthening the Accountability, Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Turkish National Police</td>
<td>Turkish National Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Strengthening the Police Forensic Capacity</td>
<td>Turkish National Police</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Development of a Training System for Border Police</td>
<td>Turkish Ministry of Interior</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Enhancement of the Professionalism of the Turkish Gendarmerie in its Law Enforcement Activities</td>
<td>Turkish General Command of the Gendarmerie</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Support to the Implementation of Human Rights Reforms in Turkey</td>
<td>Human Rights Presidency</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>An Independent Police Complaints Commission &amp; Complaints System for the Turkish National Police and Gendarmerie</td>
<td>Turkish Ministry of Interior</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>Civilian Oversight of Internal Security Sector</td>
<td>Turkish Ministry of Interior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Training of Gendarmerie Officers on European Human Rights Standards</td>
<td>Turkish General Command of the Gendarmerie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Implementation Capacity of Turkish Police to Prevent Disproportionate Use of Force</td>
<td>Turkish National Police</td>
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as criminology, international security and policing, public administration, and forensic science. With these changes, the TNPA was mandated to publish its curriculum for the review and approval of the civilian Council of Higher Education (YÖK), the institution responsible for monitoring and accrediting Turkey’s civilian universities (Piran, 2013). As part of changes in the police training curriculums, all cadets in the Faculty of Security Sciences and the police vocational schools were required to take mandatory human rights courses, whereas active-duty officers were regularly provided with mandatory in-service trainings on human rights offered by the TNP Department of Education (Eğitim Dairesi Başkanlığı).

Another significant development during this period involved human rights reforms, as “the problem of torture by the police acted as an impediment to the development of relations between European institutions and Turkey, thereby giving rise to an intensive field of activity” (Bahçecik, 2014, p. 72). Indeed, experts suggest that the most impactful EU-anchored reform in policing during this period was a decline in the alleged number of cases of torture and mistreatment in police custody (Bahçecik, 2014; Piran, 2013). Torture and the use of other arbitrary punishments has long been a significant issue in Turkish policing. As noted by Goldsmith (2009), “the police and security forces have long held a reputation for widespread, even systemic, disregard for human rights including the practice of torture of criminal suspects and political dissidents, disappearances, and unlawful killings” (pp. 31-32). Moreover, the fact that “intimidation of suspects and forcing confessions was seen as a useful way of investigating crimes” and “the pressure exerted by superiors on officers to solve crimes” has led police officers to employ torture widely (Bahçecik, 2014, p. 84). This alarming situation was exacerbated by the widespread lack of accountability of police personnel for their misconduct, either through civilian or judicial oversight over their law enforcement functions.
In 2002, the AKP government announced a policy of zero tolerance against torture (Ekşi, 2019; Piran, 2013). Through the early to mid-2000s, multiple legal changes and police reform projects were introduced targeting torture and ill-treatment of those in police custody. Reforms in the legislative domain reduced pre-trial detention periods under police supervision to a maximum of four days with a view to reduce torture and mistreatment and amended Article 13 of the Civil Servants Act mandating that civil servants convicted for torture and mistreatment pay any compensation stipulated by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) (Akay, 2010, p. 82). Legal reforms also amended the Turkish Penal Code to prevent the suspension or conversion into a fine of prison sentences for torture and mistreatment cases, removed the legal requirement to obtain permission from the superiors of public employees to prosecute them for torture and mistreatment cases, and allowed for the expedited trial of these cases (Akay, 2010; Piran, 2013).

In addition to these legal reforms, a series of EU-anchored reform projects related to preventing torture and ill-treatment under police custody were launched. Most prominent of these projects were the “Improvement of Statement-Taking Methods and Statement-Taking Rooms,” “Strengthening the Accountability, Efficiency, and Effectiveness of the Turkish National Police,” and “Strengthening Police Forensic Capacity” projects (Bahçecik, 2014, p. 78). Bahçecik (2014) argues that efforts to deal with torture and mistreatment in police custody focused on these specific projects because “ill treatment by police is often associated with custody and statement-taking process; accountability is seen as a remedy for police abuse; and the improvement of forensic capacity is often hailed as a panacea for torture” (p. 78).

The “Strengthening the Accountability, Efficiency, and Effectiveness of the Turkish National Police” project aimed to “enhance the accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness of the Turkish National Police in the discharge of its responsibilities in respect of the enforcement of law in
accordance with democratic principles and having regard for the human rights of all citizens” (Bahçecik, 2014, p. 80). Within the context of this project, recommendations were made to improve the quality of police services; pre-service and in-service training of the police officers; and the promotion and appointments of the police personnel, while the other two twinning projects reportedly aimed to contribute to democratic consolidation and the rule of law in Turkey by changing and integrating scientific methods into specific police investigative practices.

In terms of outcomes of these twinning projects, the “Improvement of Statement-Taking Methods and Statement-Taking Rooms” project enabled the development of national standards for statement taking by the police, the production of a training manual which proposed a new approach to statement-taking, and the creation of thirty statement-taking rooms around Turkey with standardized equipment (Bahçecik, 2014). The new approach proposed by the project was that the statements should be evaluated in relation to all other evidence available, in line with the newly introduced Criminal Procedure Code which reiterated the importance of collection of material evidence other than confessions by the suspects (Bahçecik, 2014). The project changed the definition of suspect from a person from whom confessions would be extracted to a person who would have the opportunity to respond to suspicions against them which were produced by other material evidence. An evaluation report by Vienna’s Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, a project partner, suggested that the project led to a “reduction in the number of claims of ill treatment” (Bahçecik, 2014, p. 88).

The “Strengthening Police Forensic Capacity” project, which was carried out in partnership with Germany’s Federal Criminal Police (Bundeskriminalamt, BKA), aimed to incorporate scientific investigation techniques into Turkish policing with the goal of strengthening personal liberties and the rule of law in Turkey by curbing the use of coercive methods in gathering evidence such
as torture and forced confessions and increasing the transparency of police investigations. The integration of modern crime scene investigation techniques into policing practices in Turkey was expected to “drive a move from confession-based investigation strategies to one founded on physical and scientific evidence”, which would ultimately benefit both the Turkish population and the EU (Bahçecik, 2014, p. 84). Through the adoption of modern criminal investigation methods, the goal was to replace the long-established mentality of getting at the evidence through the criminal suspect with getting at the offender through the physical and material evidence. One of my interlocutors, Salih, who previously worked as an inspector in the anti-smuggling and organized crimes unit (Kaçakçılık ve Organize Suçlarla Mücadele, or KOM in Turkish) in the TNP stated as follows about this changing investigative approach and the increasing importance of evidence-based criminal investigation techniques in the KOM units:

I can quite confidently say that an evidence-based and technical investigation approach based on getting at the criminal suspect(s) through the evidence rather than getting at the evidence through the suspect was dominant in KOM units. No suspect would be detained or arrested before completing the investigation with clear and sufficient evidence obtained through legally justified modern policing techniques. Planned operations which used to take months to complete were adopted as the basic approach to the organized crime investigations in our units. People would be detained only if sufficient evidence were collected as a result of these months-long planned investigations. Otherwise, the old approach of getting at the evidence through the suspect no longer worked for the KOM and anti-terror units.

These words by Salih clearly illustrate how the undemocratic practices used in the past to obtain confessions (e.g., torture, mistreatment) from suspects were largely abandoned in favor of the relatively more democratic, evidence-based model of policing and criminal investigations within the TNP.
The Strengthening Police Forensic Capacity project positively contributed to the restoration of public confidence in the police in Turkey, as the police were able to solve more crimes by expanding the use of forensic methods. As Bahçecik (2014) notes, this was reflected in the positive media depictions of the police and its crime-solving capabilities, who were used to criticizing the police heavily for its corruption. Crime scene investigation techniques were professionalized and standardized, with the officers arriving at the scene first being named “first responders” who were responsible for securing the crime scene for further forensics investigation by the experts. New guidelines were published by the TNP Criminal Laboratories Department (Kriminal Polis Laboratuvarları Daire Başkanlığı, or KPL) which instructed the officers about how to respond to a crime scene and provided the basic principles of crime scene investigation. Through the project, “modern crime labs have been established and existing labs have been upgraded to European standards” (Bahçecik, 2014, p. 88).

Although it remains challenging to evaluate the impact of these reforms on torture and ill-treatment in police custody, largely due to such problems as “definition, lack of reporting, and cover-ups”, scholars argue that these reforms achieved a considerable drop in the number of allegations of torture and ill-treatment of those under police custody (Bahçecik, 2014; Goldsmith, 2009; Piran, 2013). Available data from the Human Rights Presidency (İnsan Hakları Başkanlığı, İHB), which was initially attached to the Office of the Prime Minister but later turned into the Turkish Human Rights Institution (Türkiye İnsan Hakları Kurumu, TİHK) indicate a steady decline in what the institution defines as “torture” between 2004 and 2011, while the Human Rights Association (İnsan Hakları Derneği, İHD), a non-governmental organization founded in 1986 for advancing human rights in Turkey, reports that there happened a 74 percent decrease in the number of allegations of torture and ill treatment between 2003 and 2013 (Bahcècik, 2014, p. 90).
In addition to available statistical data, anecdotal accounts of police officers suggest that the cases of torture and mistreatment of citizens under police custody diminished during the EU reforms period (Ekşi, 2015). One of my participants, Nedim, who previously worked as a shift supervisor in a local police station in Istanbul describes the impact of legal reforms to harmonize Turkey’s policies with EU norms on the attitude towards torture of one of his older fellow police officers:

In the police station where I worked, there was this old-school police inspector who was about 50-55 years old. One day he said to me, “You know, police cannot torture suspects anymore because the new laws removed the suspension of prison sentences for torture cases. There is no more zamanlaşımı (statute of limitations) for the punishment of these crimes”. He also said “We could do anything we wanted in the station in the past. Now, we cannot do. Everything is recorded and watched. You cannot touch any suspect inside the station, otherwise you are in trouble with the prosecutor. Nobody can take this risk anymore”.

These quotes illustrate how even the old-school police officers in the TNP started to abandon old, undemocratic policing practices, even though this abandonment may be due to the fear of punishment rather than a sincere adoption of the democratic policing principles.

Another participant, Fatih, a former chief inspector who earned his master’s degree in public administration in the US and served in different police units in Istanbul during his tenure, stated the following regarding the noticeable decrease of torture in police custody:

The old-style oppressive policing in Turkey had started to be replaced by a more human rights-based policing that does not see itself above the people, and I believe the changes in policing brought about by EU reforms in the early 2000s had an impact in this shift. You could no longer see officers brutally beating and torturing people in police stations. We even thought that the old police had vanished forever.
In other instances, European officials recognized in their statements Turkey’s success in curbing widespread torture. For example, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) reports that the levels of abuse of detainees including use of torture diminished significantly over the recent decades in response to visits and reports by CPT (Goldsmith, 2009, p. 38). CPT president, in 2004, praised Turkey’s success by stating that “the legislative and regulatory framework necessary to combat effectively torture and other forms of treatment … has been put in place—to be frank, it would be difficult to find a Council of Europe member state with a more advanced set of provisions in the area” (Piran, 2013, p. 86). Therefore, when the anecdotal and statistical evidence is taken together, it is possible to say that the worst forms of torture in police custody were reduced to a great extent, while it may nonetheless be misleading to declare victory over torture and ill treatment as a whole.

Another significant development in policing during this period was the implementation of community-oriented policing (COP) projects. Community policing is a policing paradigm which “encourages partnerships between the police and the community, and advocates a collaborative response to prioritize and solve problems” (Campbell et al., 2017, pp. 191-192). Community policing model differs from the traditional or professional model of policing in that the traditional approach considered only police action as necessary in fighting crimes and disorder (Campbell et al., 2017). Celebrated features of community policing philosophy, such as working locally, maintaining close ties to citizens, and responding to their unique “needs and desires”, emerged as common export items for police reform projects around the world (Akarsu, 2020).

Community policing emerged as an exception to the predominant oppressive tradition of policing in Turkey prior to the 2000s which prioritized state’s security over public service (Akarsu, 2020; Ekşi, 2015, 2019). As noted by Ekşi (2015), “one of the primary goals of community-based or
democratic policing can be identified as overcoming the “strong state tradition” in Turkey which caused a long-standing rupture between police and the citizens (p. 82). In other words, police reform was at the center of an intended democratic transformation which promoted civil society “as a panacea to counteract the effects of the coercive state” (Akarsu, 2020, p. 3). Uluturk, Guler and Karakaya (2017) argue that the implementation of community policing by the Turkish police was catalyzed by the need to fulfill the requirements of accession to the European Union and to respond to the growing demand for public safety in society.

Within this context, the TNP first began experimenting with the community policing through the aforementioned EU project “Strengthening the Accountability, Efficiency, and Effectiveness of the Turkish National Police”. The implementation of community policing programs started in 2006 in 10 major Turkish cities as pilot projects, which was expanded to all cities of Turkey by the end of 2009 (Akarsu, 2020; Uluturk et al., 2017). To develop and implement community-oriented policing services across the country, first, a unit was established under the command of TNP Headquarters in Ankara. The administrators from this unit visited some European countries and prepared the standards of COP services. Thus, “[i]nstead of implementing CP as an organization on a large scale, a special department named ‘community-oriented policing’ was dedicated to actualizing programs designed to enhance police and public relations as part of Turkey’s accession process to the European Union” (Demirkol & Nalla, 2019, p. 695). Currently, all city police departments in Turkey have a separate COP division responsible for conducting COP-related activities in their jurisdictions (Uluturk et al., 2017).

As part of the community policing experiment, the TNP incorporated innovative programs and initiatives, such as “informing citizens about police activities, conducting public surveys, holding police-citizen gatherings, and implementing community policing with the purpose of extending
citizen oversight of police” (Akarsu, 2020, p. 3). Community policing units, or TDPs (Toplum Destekli Polis), were expected to build rapport with the communities they serve to deconstruct the “men of the state” (devlet adami) image of the police (Akarsu, 2020, p. 4). Despite the negative impact of the established Turkish police culture which creates resistance against community policing, among older and more status-quo oriented officers in particular, and the highly centralized structure of the Turkish public administrative system and the Turkish police which makes reform efforts difficult to implement, community policing found support among Turkish police practitioners. Scholarly studies which explored the attitudes of officers toward community policing implementation in Turkey and the factors associated with officers’ receptivity to community policing found that majority of officers participating in the studies (whether they worked in the COP units or not) are supportive of community policing and have positive perceptions of its benefits (Aksoy, 2011; Uluturk et al., 2017).

4.5 The changing nature of high policing

While low policing was blossoming and the relationship between the Turkish police and the public was being positively transformed in the first decade of the 2000s, high policing never disappeared from the organization. Indeed, as noted by San (2020a), “[f]or more than four decades, Turkey has confronted terrorism derived from ideological, religious and ethnic sources” (p. 588). However, in the first decade of the new millennium, the nature of high policing, especially the policing of terrorism, significantly changed, involving a radical break from the longstanding repressive counterterrorism policing approach adopted by the TNP which only allowed for punitive measures in fighting terrorism such as surveillance, intelligence gathering, prosecution, or the elimination of individual terrorists either through physical force or incarceration. Instead, the TNP recognized the importance of a prevention-oriented
counterterrorism policing approach that is focused on preventing recruitment activities of terrorist organizations and the treatment of terrorist suspects within the framework of human rights in order to avoid the progression of sympathizers and passive supporters into active participation in terrorism (San, 2020a).

Several reasons may have played a role in this transformation, such as the fact that the AKP government promoted during its early term in office a more inclusive approach toward formerly disenfranchised ethnic and religious groups—such as the social groups of explicitly Islamic or Kurdish identity formerly sidelined under the military-dominated Kemalist regime (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016), or the fact that the AKP government commenced a “peace process” with the Kurdish insurgency for the ambitious resolution of the country’s decades-long ethno-separatist terrorism problem and opened up space for the expression of Kurdish identity in the public realm (Aktürk, 2012). More critical for this transformation, however, was a changing understanding regarding the purpose of the deployment of coercion among the reformist wing inside the Turkish police, from containing/responding to any kind of threat against state toward protecting citizens from crime and violence including terrorist threats. Turkish police were still policing terrorist threats against the state security originating from left-wing extremist, ethno-nationalist separatist, or radical Islamist terrorist networks. However, the new generation police chiefs gradually realized that the previous approach in the policing of terrorism, revolving around marginalizing and managing discontented social groups framed as the enemies of the Turkish state, was failing to solve the problem of terrorism and extremism in the country, and indeed was promoting the alienation of many terrorist sympathizers and passive supporters. Kemal, a former police chief who worked in a metropolitan city police department’s intelligence unit on preventing extremist left-wing terrorist activities and holds a master’s degree in international
relations and political science, summarizes the new police’s vision in the policing of terrorism as follows:

Previously, in Turkey, the police existed solely to serve the state. Its primary purpose of existence was to repress and punish people. We believe that the police should exist to serve and protect the people, to sustain their well-being. It should not serve as the heavy hand of the state as it did in the past but protect citizens against any kind of harm, including the deception of young people by malignant terrorist groups. We should not think (anti-terrorism) policing just as arresting and locking up people, but preventing their engagement in the first place, and if we fail on this, doing our best to persuade them to leave and reintegrate these people to lawful society. Preventing, especially of young people, involvement in terrorist groups and removing the ones already engaged, would be the prime contribution the police could make to society.

In an effort to address individuals at risk of becoming radicalized to violence recruited by terrorist groups, while retaining traditional punitive responses, the TNP began to experiment with countering violent extremism (CVE) programs intended to counter or reverse the adoption of radical ideologies or disengage offenders from participation in terrorist activity and eventually reduce the need for punitive measures in combatting terrorism and violent extremism (Alkan, 2010; Bastug & Evlek, 2016; San, 2020a; Sevinc & Guler, 2016). A prominent CVE initiative in this aspect was Information and Prevention Activities (Bilgilendirme ve Önleme Faaliyetleri, BÖF). This was a comprehensive CVE strategy which sought both to prevent radicalization to violence and to deradicalize/disengage suspected or convicted terrorists and armed militants from participation in terrorism (San, 2020a). The implementation of IPA was carried out by counterterrorism and intelligence personnel from city police departments, under the overall coordination of the Counter-terrorism Department of the TNP in Ankara.
A major local example of the IPA was Adana Police Department’s (APD) ‘Terörizmle Mücadelede Birey Odaklı Sürecsel Yaklaşım Modeli’ (Individual-Centered Progressive Approach Model in Counterterrorism, or ICPA), a pilot de-radicalization/disengagement program implemented by the APD between 2007 and 2015 (Adana Emniyet Müdürlüğü [Adana Police Department], 2013; Evlek, 2014). This program aimed for individual disengagement from terrorism and reintegration of extremists into lawful society through individually-tailored intervention programs, including personal/family interviews, counselling, and social and financial support initiatives for reintegration/rehabilitation (Bastug & Evlek, 2016; San, 2020a). The ICPA targeted individuals who supported extremist left-wing, ethno-nationalist/separatist, and radical Islamist terrorist groups, along with their relatives and social circles. The fundamental component of the APD CVE program was personal interviews conducted with program subjects and their families. The constituency of the program was broad unlike many other de-radicalization/disengagement programs in place in Western European and Middle Eastern contexts which only focused on new terrorist recruits or extremists in carceral settings. Within this context, APD officers engaged sympathizers/new recruits who have not yet engaged in any illegal activity or violence, militants investigated or arrested on charges of terrorism related activity, militants convicted of terrorism related offences, incarcerated militants and terrorist leaders, extremists/terrorist offenders released from prison with their extremist beliefs intact, and even militants acting in the armed wing of the terrorist groups (San, 2020a, p. 592). This progressive or policy spectrum approach was in line with the criminological understanding that crime prevention overall cannot be seen or studied as one activity; rather, there is a spectrum

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13 Adana is the fourth largest city in Turkey by economic development and population, and prominent terrorist networks such as the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), extremist left-wing groups, and radical Islamist groups are active there (Adana Emniyet Müdürlüğü [Adana Police Department], 2013).
of activities that may prevent crime at different times or places along the criminal continuum (Brattingham & Faust, 1976). Such an approach allowed the CVE practitioners to early intervene in those who have recently joined extremist groups but not yet been subject to prosecution or detention but also to continue to work with individuals who passed the early intervention stage with the efforts to disengage them having failed or individuals for whom this early intervention opportunity may have been missed. This would eventually help curb the manpower of terrorist groups by removing individuals from the radicalization process.

Interviews did not involve ideological or political debate, but rather aimed to communicate to individuals and their families the social and legal repercussions of involvement in terrorism. Individuals were also made aware of the material and nonmaterial benefits they might receive from disengagement. For arrested and imprisoned militants, for example, these included a possible amnesty, reduced sentences, or improved prison conditions. Subjects who agreed to disengage from terrorism received (if needed) social and financial support tailored to their needs in coordination with other government institutions and were closely monitored for at least six months to make sure they break their ties with terrorist circles and do not reengage in terrorism. The program involved a multi-institutional approach which required close collaboration and coordination with other government institutions to ensure the provision of social and financial benefits including job training, educational funding, employment, healthcare, and psychological counselling and guidance to reintegrate former extremists into normal life (San, 2020a).

Another important perspective of the program was to “reverse the negative perceptions of the police and increase its legitimacy with those in the program constituency through fair and humane treatment of militants” (San, 2020a, p. 589). Such civility and fair treatment by police officers of people exposed to negative terrorist propaganda and indoctrination was believed to
help change the belief structures of these individuals. This premise resonates with findings of ‘procedural justice’ research that the quality of treatment of the citizens by the police is a key mechanism for achieving police legitimacy (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler et al., 2010). The following words of one of my participants, Ugur, who previously worked as a police lieutenant at the TNP, reflect the recognition among the new police of the negative impact of malfeasance and ill-treatment of citizens on counterterrorism policing efforts and the shift in the police approach towards terrorism suspects:

In the past, we saw that police misconduct, such as torture, arbitrary arrests, or other abuse, tarnished the police’s image in the society which undermined our counterterrorism efforts. When I look back at the investigations carried out by the intelligence and counter-terrorism units then, I can say, the police, recognizing this fact, started to put more emphasis on human rights and due process in their approach towards individuals or young people who were arrested over the suspicion for engagement in terrorism, say PKK or DHKP/C related suspects. Even in the now highly criticized Ergenekon investigations, released suspects themselves were saying how the police officers showed respect for their rights and behaved well to them. Police developed projects for the disengagement of youth at risk of participation in terrorism, no more labelling bluntly someone as “terrorist”, conducting interviews with families of suspects and developing other projects for countering radicalization to violence in collaboration with other stakeholders. Our colleagues were saying that many people left terrorism behind because they saw how police treated them well under custody, without resorting to any coercive interrogation methods or mistreatment like they did in the past.

What Ugur says here is very critical in terms of showing the changing policing as he mentions that even some defendants of the Ergenekon investigations, which were labelled as “political trials” by the AKP opponents, praised the police for their treatment of the suspects during custody. Indeed, one of the Ergenekon defendants, İlhan Selçuk, a renowned secular Turkish journalist, publicly stated after his release from the police custody that he observed that much changed in the Turkish police positively and he was treated well during his interrogation by the
police officers (Bayer, 2008). The narratives of my interlocutors reveal an identity change from tough policing in counterterrorism which was characterized by excessive use of force, malfeasance, and ill-treatment of individuals under custody, and the framing of discontented masses as threats to the Turkish state.

Existing scholarship on the political role of the police makes a distinction between the police role in supporting laws of the state developed through democratic procedures and protecting democratic political institutions and the police role in acting to perpetuate the rule of those in power beyond democratic procedures (Brodeur, 2010, p. 227; Marx, 2000). As Light et al. (2015) argue, “although all regimes deploy police against some opponents (e.g., violent revolutionaries, foreign spies), in democratic policing, both the goals and methods of such repression are constrained” (p. 219). Violent repression of opposition protests and politically motivated arrests or investigations, infringe this principle (Light et al., 2015). Drawing on these theoretical debates, my findings reveal that the character of Turkish high policing, which was used to buttress the incumbent regimes in the past through repression, violence, and abuse against citizens, altered rapidly and with arguably positive consequences.

This new prevention-oriented approach in the policing of terrorism, indeed, was innovative for the Turkish police and reflected a break from the old, repressive counterterrorism policing doctrine, which solely focused on eliminating terror suspects either through arrests or killings in armed conflicts. The results of this renewed approach and the associated projects were promising in terms of driving people away from terrorist organizations in Turkey. For example, as part of the APD CVE program, 463 interviews were conducted in 2012 with 375 individuals and their family members for the disruption of separatist terrorism. The results show that, in this group, 226 out of 333 individuals disengaged from the terrorist group, 12 decreased their activities, and
95 remained active terrorist supporters (Adana Emniyet Müdürlüğü [Adana Police Department], 2013, p. 21). The successful results of these programs also suggested that CVE efforts might be effective across different terrorist motivations (San, 2020a).

The alliance between the political elite and the reformist wing inside the police, which helped sustain reforms to shift coercive police practices towards the democratic end despite the backsliding in Turkish democracy after 2007, began to unravel as soon as the military was pacified and lost its capacity to yield power as a tutelary institution. The alliance collapsed following the corruption investigations on 17-25 December 2013 that targeted several key people with ties to the ruling AKP and even members of Erdogan’s own family, after which the TNP suffered a massive crackdown by the AKP government. Wide-scale purges, which started after the corruption probe and reached its peak with the failed coup attempt in 2016, targeted first the officers who were involved in the graft probe and then all police cadres throughout the TNP suspected of opposing Erdogan. Turkish government’s crackdown led to the arrest or dismissal and rotation of thousands of highly skilled police officers specialized in counterterrorism. Among the purged officers were those who were pioneers in launching the CVE programs as part of the TNP’s counterterrorism toolkit (San, 2020a). Moreover, following the June 2015 elections in which the ruling AKP lost its majority in the parliament, there was a sharp turn in the Turkish government’s counterterrorism policy toward one which is entirely dependent on repression. As a result of the breakdown of the peace process between the Turkish state and the PKK and the launch of a heavy-handed and military-dominated counter-terrorism campaign as part of the re-escalating conflict, Turkish CVE measures, including the APD’s CVE program, were suspended.
4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored political change and policing in Turkey during the transition from tutelary democracy. This period in Turkey (2002-2013) was characterized by significant political (the dissolution of the country’s military tutelary regime and an emerging shift toward electoral authoritarianism instead) as well as notable policing transformations. My findings in this chapter contribute to the existing body of scholarship exploring the relationship between policing and political which has embraced an oversimplified and outdated distinction between democratic and autocratic coercion by decoupling the type of coercion from the type of regime. In doing so, I am trying to explain why police forces in autocracies (or emerging autocracies or ‘hybrid’ regimes as the Turkish case explained here) may remain closer to the democratic end of the continuum of coercion, as well as the conditions under which this may change and policing may shift toward the authoritarian end. In other words, I am trying to theorize how authoritarian or hybrid regimes may accommodate democratic practices or institutions. In Turkey, during the first decade of the 2000s, both low policing and high policing underwent swift and consequential transformations. During this period, low policing blossomed with the introduction of a set of radical reforms related to improving policing practices by introducing the features of democratic policing in Turkey and rendering the policing more service oriented. On the other hand, while high policing during the era of military tutelary regime in Turkey’s multiparty period since 1950 was dominated by a coercive approach animated by the task of protecting the regime against all forms of opposition (both violent and non-violent/lawful dissent) and based on the elimination of individual terrorists either through physical force or incarceration, the TNP began to experiment with less punitive and soft strategies in the policing of terrorism aimed to prevent people at risk of becoming radicalized to violence from being recruited by terrorist organizations or to persuade people already involved to leave behind terrorism.
While the EU process (through EC-assisted programs such as twinning and other legal changes) accelerated police reform that had already started internally by providing a framework for more focused reform, building professional capacities, and supporting human-rights sensitivities among the cadres of the police, these transformations in policing survived despite the AKP’s authoritarian shift after 2006-2007 when the EU accession negotiations were virtually halted. I argue that what made this persistence possible was the autonomy achieved by the police reformers within the TNP to maintain their reform objectives in exchange for their collaboration with Erdogan and his AKP in assuring their political survival against the ongoing threat represented by tutelary institutions—specifically the military which could realistically overthrow his government—after the EU accession process lost much of its dynamism, as well as the protection and legitimacy it had initially provided to Erdogan, after 2006 (Castaldo, 2018). Although some prerogatives of these reformist officers, such as rule of law and service to the public, weren’t exactly those of the Erdogan regime following the beginning of AKP’s authoritarian transformations after 2007, they were allowed to pursue them in exchange for their cooperation in surveilling the activities of members of the military and investigating military officers allegedly plotting a coup to overthrow the AKP government as part of the so-called Ergenekon network (as explained in detail above). The reformist security officials within the Turkish police, who acted as political actors “endowed with structural power due to their control of coercion” (González, 2021, p. 20), successfully utilized their intelligence and enforcement capacities to delegitimize the military’s extra-legal intrusion into political affairs to achieve considerable autonomy in advancing their police reform goals, which helped maintain democratic transformations in policing despite the AKP’s apparent move towards authoritarianism. My findings thus suggest that, in a theoretically unique way, while in other contexts—notably Latin American countries where eradicating authoritarian coercive structures
and practices within police forces has proven to be so challenging in the years after the transition to democracy—the leverage extended by their control over coercion enabled police organizations to resist reform attempts, this structural power allowed the reformist security officials within the Turkish police to continue the pursuit of democratic police reform in Turkey.

The findings of this chapter also suggest that police may play a role in shaping regime transitions, thus contributing to the literature on policing and political change which has largely focused on exploring how regime transitions affect policing. My findings reveal that the high policing organs of the police organization played a crucial role in the weakening of the political power of the Turkish military, thus dismantling the country’s tutelary regime. This mission primarily involved the criminalization of the military’s extra-legal interventions in politics through investigations against actors that were alleged to have infiltrated the state bureaucracy and armed forces to prepare the ground for military takeover, as seen in the Ergenekon and Balyoz police investigations targeting alleged military conspiracies to overthrow the AKP government (Hülagü, 2021, p. 61).

In relation to the discussion above, my findings in this chapter also reveal that after the crucial source of legitimacy and the political leverage the EU had provided for Erdogan against the establishment during the democratization period of the early 2000s quickly weakened following the virtual halting of the accession negotiations with the EU, the police power played a critical role by acting as a counterweight to the military. Erdogan and his AKP government skillfully made use of the improved enforcement capabilities of the reformed police and the highly skilled reformist cadres within the TNP bureaucracy to monitor and report on potential coup plots and conspiracies within the Turkish armed forces. This finding aligns with the previous political science scholarship which shows that the authoritarian incumbents resort to the division of
state’s coercive power into multiple, overlapping security organizations or countervailing the military with different types of security forces to contribute to preserving the stability of their regimes (Bozhilov, 2007; Bruce, 1992; De Bruin, 2020; Frazer, 1994; Goldsworthy, 1981; Janowitz, 1977).
Chapter 5

5 The Gezi Park Protests and After: Policing a Consolidating Authoritarian Regime

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores Turkish policing following the Gezi Park protests in 2013, the nationwide anti-government protests which “erupted as a grassroots reaction to the government’s increasing authoritarian conservatism and neoliberalism” (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020, p. 958). This period in Turkey is characterized by the consolidation of electoral or competitive authoritarianism through Erdogan’s increasing anti-pluralist discourse and his unchecked power over state institutions which were increasingly deployed against opposition, declining civil liberties, an uneven electoral playing field, rising popular and elite discontent against the ruling AKP government, and the expanding paramilitarization of the state to suppress these challenges.

Militarized police have been the primary instrument of control against the consolidating popular dissent against Erdogan and AKP’s increasingly authoritarian policies (Ekşi, 2015), supported by the legislation of a new Domestic Security Bill (İç Güvenlik Paketi) into law in March 2015, which allocated extended and unprecedented powers to the police (“Turkey: Parliament Approves”, 2015).

Other watershed events in this period were the December 2013 corruption investigations launched by the police against some key individuals close to the AKP government and the unsuccessful military coup attempt on 15 July 2016, both of which were allegedly conducted by Gulenists to remove Erdogan and his AKP from power. Both the corruption probe and the failed coup attempt were followed by major institutional changes related to policing in Turkey, including the mass purges in the National Police which resulted in the dismissals of about thirty-
three thousand police officers over their alleged links to Gulenists who were accused of masterminding the corruption probe and the unsuccessful coup attempt against Erdogan. The transformations related to the internal security apparatus in Turkey also included the establishment of new formal security forces such as the neighborhood watchmen (Bekçiler) and the Reinforcement Ready Forces Directorate (Takviye Hazır Kuvvet Müdürlüğü), as well as the instigation of an ecosystem of pro-government paramilitaries, including military contractors, criminal gangs, and party youth wings, apparently for the protection of the regime against possible future threats following the failed coup of July 2016.

In this chapter, I explore in detail how the Erdogan regime structured the internal security apparatus to contain popular and elite challenges to its survival during Turkey’s transformation to a full-fledged competitive authoritarian regime. My findings involving the Erdogan government’s reassessment of the source of threats to its survival and its response to that changed assessment reveal that we could see or expect to see the opposite change in threat perceptions of authoritarian rulers (from the risk of a coup to popular threats or vice versa) resulting in different changes to how policing is organized and deployed for regime survival. Switching threat perceptions of the Erdogan government after the Gezi uprising in 2013 and then following the December 2013 corruption probe and the attempted military coup in July 2016 deeply influenced how the policing and internal security has been organized over the last decade in Turkey. While the AKP government strengthened and militarized police institution to respond to the consolidating popular threat against its regime security after the Gezi uprising, the changing threat perception of Erdogan following the break with the police after the 2013 corruption investigations and unsuccessful July 15 military coup attempt resulted in comprehensive purges in police, and the fragmentation of the security sector, involving the creation of separate formal policing institutions and the promotion of pro-government
paramilitaries, to help counterweight and deal with potential challenges from disloyal security forces. The findings of this chapter, thus, add to the existing body of literature regarding policing in autocracies which provides valuable perspectives about the strategies employed by authoritarian leaders when organizing their policing establishments and utilizing coercion to help them effectively manage the popular or elite threats against their survival. While the existing literature acknowledges that police in authoritarian regimes engage in political repression to maintain the leader's power (Bayley, 1982, 2006; Dobson, 2009; Fijnaut, 2004; Hagenloh, 2009; Kalmanowiecki, 2000; Light et al., 2015; Marenin, 1996; Mawby, 2003; Policzer, 2009; Shahnazarian & Light, 2018; Shelley, 1996; Taylor, 2011), there is relatively little research examining the specific manifestations of the coercive apparatus across different authoritarian regimes. This lack of investigation hinders our understanding of why there are variations in the structures of these institutions or why different countries might adopt different institutional designs.

Relatedly, findings of this chapter reveal the tactics of ‘counterbalancing’ adopted by the Erdogan regime during the competitive authoritarian consolidation in the country, which refers to the division of state’s coercive power among multiple, overlapping security organizations as a strategy used by authoritarian regimes to maintain power (Brooks, 1998; De Bruin, 2020; Greitens, 2016; Quinlivan, 1999). These scholarly studies suggest that the proliferation of new security structures with overlapping functions with the existing institutions is not a universal or typical feature of all authoritarian transitions; rather it may occur in some such cases but not all. The explanation for this finding is that the authoritarian rulers are likely to design their coercive apparatus based on the dominant perceived threat at the time they come to power—threats from the population (popular unrest) or threats from intra-regime contenders, especially elites in the state coercive apparatus. These studies suggest that protecting against a coup (or coup-proofing)
calls for fragmented coercive institutions since fragmentation serves to prevent collusion between these agencies and to prevent any one agency from becoming too powerful to stage a coup against the dictator, while addressing the threat of a possible popular unrest demands more unitary security institutions and authoritarian leaders cannot simultaneously maximize their defense against both threats (Greitens, 2016, p. 4). Contemporary conceptions of counterbalancing distinguish between the coup-proofing tactics called ‘divide and rule’ or ‘balance within’, balancing different factions within the security apparatus off of one another, and tactics of ‘broadening the field’ or ‘balance outside’, creating new units within the existing security institutions and creating new armed forces outside the existing institutions (Belkin, 2005; Belkin & Schofer, 2003; Böhmelt & Pilster, 2015; De Bruin, 2018, 2020; Escrivà-Folch et al., 2020; Farcau, 1994; Horowitz, 1985; Powell, 2012). My findings regarding the Erdogan regime’s reassessment of the source of threats to its survival and its response to that changed assessment following the 2013 graft probes and the 2016 coup attempt, the two key inflection points in Turkey’s authoritarian consolidation, reveal both types of counterbalancing in action, as elaborated below. I believe this argument is an original contribution of this study to the policing literature, applying insights from the counterbalancing research from political science, a cognate discipline, to fill a gap in the interdisciplinary but mainly criminological study of the police.

Main data sources for this chapter comprise my semi-structured in-depth interviews with former police officers, Turkish government reports, legislation, Turkish press and analytical publications (op-eds, policy briefs, etc.) on issues related to policing and internal security during the authoritarian consolidation in Turkey. I also used Turkish and English language scholarly publications which I believe represent valuable sources of data for understanding and interpreting institutional changes in internal security apparatus in Turkey during the authoritarian transitions following the Gezi Park protests.
5.2 Turkish police and the consolidation of an authoritarian regime

In Turkey, the competitive authoritarian tendencies of President Erdogan and his ruling Justice and Development Party which already emerged during the second term of the party (2007-2011), started to consolidate after the onset of its third term in office in 2011. Indeed, several scholars argue that Erdogan’s strengthening electoral mandate and his growing anti-pluralism which allowed him to attack all kinds of opposition against his policies as the enemies of the national will as represented in elections resulted in an increased concentration of power in Erdogan’s hands as well as his unchecked control over crucial state institutions which were increasingly deployed against opposition. As a result, Turkey has experienced the consolidation of crucial shortcomings in each of the competitive authoritarian dimensions (elections, civil liberties, and the playing field) elaborated by Levitsky and Way (2010) since 2011 (Castaldo, 2018; Çalışkan, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016).

During this period of authoritarian consolidation, crucial violations of the playing field dimension were present. For example, the access to the law was unbalanced (Castaldo, 2018, p. 480). For instance, following the 2013 corruption investigations that were launched against AKP ministers and some members of Erdogan’s own family, the ruling AKP government introduced a set of controversial legal changes (in early 2014) which enabled Erdogan to stop the corruption investigations and purge the judiciary from his opponents (alleged Gulenists), and expanded executive control over the judiciary (Kaygusuz, 2018; Özbudun, 2015). In terms of access to the media, Erdogan enjoyed an unfair and imbalanced amount of coverage from the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) throughout all elections after 2011. In terms of access to finance, Erdogan abused public funds in all recent elections and also used private resources to gain a competitive advantage vis-à-vis the opposition. For example, during the presidential and
parliamentary elections in June 2018, misuse of state resources by the AKP such as the use of public transportation vehicles for carrying supporters to AKP rallies skewed the electoral playing field against AKP’s opponents (ODIHR, 2018).

Violations of civil liberties were increasingly frequent and intense during Turkey’s transformation to a full-fledged competitive authoritarian regime. For example, the AKP curbed independent media activity in Turkey through direct political attacks such as the closure of major media outlets and the imprisonment or exile of journalists critical of the government (San & Akca, 2021). The AKP government has also curbed the freedom of peaceful assembly and protest in Turkey. Crackdown on 2013 Gezi Park protests represents the most salient example of the repression of popular protest during Turkey’s authoritarian consolidation over the last decade. The government’s heavy-handed repression of Gezi Park protests received widespread condemnation from international human rights organizations, reporting systematic human rights abuses during protests including arbitrary detentions, torture, and the excessive use of force by the police against peaceful protestors (Amnesty International, 2013). During this period, numerous critics of President Erdogan were arrested and imprisoned, dismissed from their positions, or otherwise silenced. Since the failed coup attempt in July 2016 in particular, which provided the Turkish government with further justification for a wide-ranging crackdown on anyone perceived to be a threat, more than 500,000 people, including university professors, judges, police and military officers, human rights activists, and other political opponents, have been investigated over alleged links to terrorism and some 95,000 have been arrested (San & Akca, 2021). Following the attempted coup in July 2016, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, in the lower courts in particular, has been seriously compromised (Russell, 2018).
Following the coup attempt of July 2016, encouraged by the boosted public support for the government and the weakness of the opposition, the AKP government was able to replace Turkey’s parliamentary system with an executive presidency with compromised checks and balances in the April 2017 constitutional referendum (Castaldo, 2018; Taş, 2015). The amendment granted the president the sole power to appoint judges to the high courts, ensured judicial protections for the president and made it exceedingly difficult to prosecute them for any reason, and bestowed upon the president the authority to dissolve parliament and call for elections at their discretion (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 297). According to some analysts, the 2016 coup attempt and the April 2017 passage of the constitutional amendment that gave Erdogan sweeping new executive powers helped pave the way for the emergence of even more hegemonic tendencies in the Turkish political regime which could potentially lead to a swing toward full authoritarianism in Turkey (Castaldo, 2018; Çalışkan, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2017). Below I provide a discussion of how the relationship between the major inflection points in Turkey’s transformation to a consolidated competitive authoritarian regime over the last decade and Turkish policing has played out after 2013: Gezi Park protests, December 2013 corruption investigations, the securitization of the Kurdish conflict following the AKP’s loss of parliamentary majority in June 2015 general elections, and the July 2016 unsuccessful military coup attempt.

As discussed in the previous chapter, during the AKP’s first two terms in office (2002-2011) which was marked by the transition from tutelary democracy in Turkey, the empowered police institution was a key part of “a new axis of power which brought together the ruling party, the police force, and the judiciary—a concatenation that would collectively designate and conduct the new politics of security in Turkey” which aimed to strengthen AKP’s position vis-à-vis the military (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 289). After the military threat against Erdogan’s political survival
was sidelined with the help of the police organization and the judiciary in Ergenekon and Balyoz trials and his AKP grew stronger electorally after 2011 (getting almost 50% of the popular vote in 2011 general elections), Erdogan adopted an increasingly majoritarian, anti-pluralist posture, reconstructing the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ divide (which was framed earlier as ‘the establishment or the secular elite’ versus ‘the people’) by drawing a sharp contrast between the ‘old Turkey’, described as an era of coalition governments, tutelage, poverty, and corruption, and the ‘new Turkey’, painted as the golden era of single-party governments, advanced democracy, wealth, and accountability (Castaldo, 2018, p. 478). Within the discourse of new Turkey, all kinds of anti-government groups were framed as enemies of the nation which is now represented by the 50% who voted for Erdogan and his AKP in elections showing the reflection of the national will (milli irade). As Taş (2015) notes, “in Erdoğan’s discourse all opposition figures were dehumanized, demonized and excluded from the Turkish nation” (p. 785). For example, within this majoritarian populist discourse adopted by Erdogan after 2011, Kurds were painted as terrorists, Gulen’s followers were framed as blood-sucking vampires, and all others as the representative of old Turkey and mouthpieces of the secularist establishment (Castaldo, 2018; Taş, 2015).

The increasing societal objection and criticisms against the AKP government’s authoritarian leanings and its new Turkey project resulted in the outbreak of anti-government Gezi Park protests in May 2013. Gezi protests first started as a reaction to the police violence against peaceful demonstrators who were protesting against the government’s urban transformation projects targeting the Gezi Park in Istanbul, Turkey. What started out as an environmentalist concern, however, turned into a wave of anti-government protests, through which protestors expressed a wide range of concerns, at the core of which were issues of freedom of the press and expression, individual rights and freedoms, and the overall authoritarian policies of the AKP
government. In total, “3.6 million people participated in eighty provinces in a cycle of protest that lasted between May 28 and the first week of September” (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020, p. 968). Then Prime Minister Erdogan and the AKP perceived the Gezi resistance and the people supporting it as a threat to their political goals which involved building the ‘new Turkey’ by transforming Turkish society along decisively conservative-Islamist lines. In this respect, Erdogan in his speeches repeatedly described Gezi protests as “a violent foreign plot, carried out by “bandits” and “terrorists” in order to prevent the development of Turkey” (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020, p. 957).

An extreme level of abusive power characterized the police response to the Gezi Park protests. Looking at some of the statistics gives a glimpse of the level of police violence that was used in responding to protests. According to an Amnesty International Report released in October 2013, the Turkish Medical Association reported that more than 8,000 people were injured at protest sites, including serious injuries (Amnesty International, 2013). The Turkish Ministry of Interior also reported that 600 police officers were injured during the violent clashes between the police and the protestors. Five people died at the demonstration sites, including a police officer. One person was shot in the head by a police officer with live ammunition. A 15-year-old teenager, Berkin Elvan, lost his life after a year in a coma, hit by a canister that was shot by a policeman in Istanbul as the teenager went to buy a loaf of bread for his family during the protests (BBC, 2014). A protestor who was beaten by a small group of police officers lost his life in the city of Eskisehir.

The policing of Gezi Park protests serves as an earlier example of the shifting style of policing in Turkey during the authoritarian consolidation. Indeed, one of my interlocutors, Nedim, who served in the financial crimes unit of the TNP during the Gezi Park protests stated the following:
During a weekend when the Gezi Park protests were at its peak, I received a phone call at night from my supervisor who was called by the TNP Financial Crimes Department Head. He asked me to go to the Turkish Competition Bureau (Rekabet Kurumu) in the morning for a meeting with two officials there. You could ask “What is the relevance of the Competition Bureau with the Gezi protests?” The issue was that some AKP politicians alleged that Halk TV (a pro-opposition TV channel) incited Gezi Park protests. Me and my colleagues were asked to investigate the TV channel’s advertisements, whether the TV was involved in unfair competition in its ads, etc., and discuss with the officials from the Competition Bureau how Halk TV could be fined. Although the meeting did not produce any concrete results, I was instructed by my supervisors to discuss this issue with the Competition Bureau officials. I believe this was a very clear case of the weaponization of the police by the ruling AKP government as an instrument of repression against pro-opposition media and the individual freedoms. They expected us (the national police) to choke the finance of a legal TV channel just because it supports the opposition.

The brutal police response to the Gezi Park protests and the statements by Nedim illustrate how the model of policing in Turkey started to shift again towards a more authoritarian type of policing, one where the deployment of coercion is used primarily to serve the interests of the ruling elite to remain in power. The violent suppression of the Gezi Park protests, which revealed the hegemonic crisis that the government faced, “marked the beginning of an unprecedented intensification and acceleration of the AKP’s authoritarian and securitarian policies” (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 291). In this respect, Gezi protests “became a turning point after which the ruling elite opted for the systematic suppression of political opposition, and relied more overtly on the punitive state to manage widespread social unrest in the country” (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 292). The government’s discourse took on an extensively securitized nature, categorizing lawful forms of political activism as illegal or even equating them with acts of terrorism. As the government continued to criminalize different segments of society by labeling them as terrorists or collaborators of “external forces”, it has relied more on the police to manage the rising civil-
popular objections and opposition to the government’s authoritarian streak during this period (Çalışkan, 2018; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Kaygusuz, 2018; Yazici, 2015).

Another major inflection point in Turkey’s transformation to a consolidated competitive authoritarian regime was the 2013 corruption investigations which were allegedly organized as a political operation by a group of Gulenist police officers and prosecutors to remove Erdogan and his AKP from power. The Gulen movement was previously an ally of Erdogan, providing support to the AKP in its confrontation with the secularist establishment. However, particularly after 2010, the position of the movement started to differ from that of the AKP on various policy matters, ranging from Turkey’s rapprochement with Iran to its contentious foreign policy towards Israel. As Taş (2015) notes, “although the AKP expected a completely subservient ally in the Gulen Movement, being in possession of a vast global network of finance and education, the movement instead tended to follow an autonomous position rather than just adopting a servant’s role” (p. 782). An important turning point in the relations between the two groups in this period was when the allegedly Gulenist prosecutors attempted in December 2012 to investigate the head of the National Intelligence Organization (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilati, MİT), Hakan Fidan, who has remained one of President Erdogan’s closest associates, for his involvement in secret peace talks with PKK in Oslo. The relationship between the two groups significantly worsened after this incident. The AKP has a long history of purging Gulenists, but the latest crackdown on the movement started in November 2013 when reports emerged about the government’s intention to pass a bill that would eliminate ‘dershane’, private preparatory schools that played a crucial role in recruiting new supporters for the movement. As Taş (2015) notes, this decision was strategically made with the assumption that “it would sever the Gülen Movement’s umbilical cord” (p. 783). Consequently, this action seems to have triggered the
initiation of a corruption investigation on December 17 and 25, 2013, which implicated important members of the cabinet and even Erdogan’s own family.

During the raids on 17 and 25 December 2013, police seized $17.5 million in cash, including $4.5 million from Suleyman Arslan, the director of state-owned Halkbank, and $750,000 at the home of Baris Guler, son of the interior minister Muammer Guler (Phillips, 2017). The investigation also implicated Erdogan himself as seen in a leaked wiretapping record where Erdogan anxiously asked his son to get rid of cash at several family homes as the operation unfolded. After the operations, instead of investigating the allegations, Erdogan chose to call actions by prosecutors and police a ‘coup attempt’ perpetrated by the so-called ‘parallel state (parallel yapı)’, a reference to the Gulenists who were Erdogan’s erstwhile ally in supporting the AKP in its fight against the secularist state elite (Taş, 2015). The government filed a complaint charging the officers involved in the corruption probe with plotting to overthrow the Turkish government and with membership in a terrorist organization (Phillips, 2017). The scandal also led to the dismissals or rotations of thousands of allegedly Gulenist police officers and prosecutors deemed as opposing Erdogan across the country (Kaygusuz, 2018; San, 2020a; Taş, 2015). More importantly, however, in order to carry out effectively the struggle against the so-called ‘parallel state’, Erdogan initiated a reconfiguration of the state which would eventually enable Erdogan and his AKP to further weaken core state institutions and disable constitutional and civil checks and balances mechanisms against the construction of a new political order in Turkey: namely the abolition of the secular, republican regime, and the establishment of ‘new Turkey’ guided by conservative–Islamic principles (Kaygusuz, 2018). In this respect, during this period, by implementing significant legal changes regarding the higher judiciary, media and communications, as well as internal security and national intelligence, the AKP government
successfully undermined all institutional and civil mechanisms of oversight, establishing absolute control over these entities.

For instance, the AKP government legislated a new law on 15 February 2014 granting the Minister of Justice the power to appoint the Head of the Inspection Committee of the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), which allowed the government to monopolize the authority to decide whether a judge or a prosecutor has committed an offence and diminished the standing of judges and prosecutors to mere government employees whose future relied on the decisions of the government. Furthermore, a system of ‘super judges’ with extensive authority was established to investigate the individuals responsible for the corruption probes (Taş, 2015). According to Kaygusuz (2018), these controversial legal changes “not only disrupted the principles of the rule of law, judicial independence and separation of powers, but also provided the government with extraordinary powers without declaring emergency rule in Turkey” (p. 293).

Closely related to the reconfiguration of the judiciary, the incumbent AKP government also implemented some crucial changes in the field of internal security. During this period, as a response to the Gezi uprising and the Kobanî protests, mass demonstrations against the government’s alleged support for the Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist group in the Syrian town of Kobanî which resulted in the death of 50 civilians in the span of less than one month in October 2014 (Çalışkan, 2018), in April 2015, the AKP government passed into law a new Domestic Security Bill (İç Güvenlik Paketi) which introduced draconian security regulations and promoted the police’s autonomy from judicial control. According to Kaygusuz (2018), “this law relied on the logic of pre-emptive security and represented a crucial phase in the legalization and normalization of exceptional security practices in Turkey” (p. 294). The legislation allocated extended powers to the police, including a broader authority to use weapons at protest sites.
The law granted the police authority to use firearms “against anyone attempting to use any kind of arms, including improvised devices like Molotov cocktails”, broadening the right of the police to use firearms at the protest sites (Ekşi, 2015; Yılmaz, 2021, p. 175). Another critical change proposed by the new security legislation was the increased autonomy of the police from the judiciary. For example, the new law authorized the police to search homes and wiretap telephones without obtaining a search warrant and to “decide on pre-emptive custody without court decision–particularly during demonstrations and protests that might lead to violence or the disruption of public order” (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 294). This would allow the police to keep a person in custody for 24 hours without a warrant, or for 48 hours for collective crimes. Although peaceful protest is recognized as a fundamental civil right in democracies, these regulations considered public protests as “potential disorders” which might disrupt national security (Kaygusuz, 2018). Overall, the legislation effectively established an unofficial state of emergency in Turkey, which the government legitimized through the enactment of laws (Kaygusuz, 2018). In summary, the period between the Gezi events and the June 2015 elections saw the emergence of an unofficial state of emergency in the country characterized by the erosion of fundamental state institutions and the suppression of constitutional and civil safeguards and controls. To combat the increasing social and political opposition, the plots of the Gulen network, and the Kurdish political movement, the ruling party embarked on a path toward a regime security paradigm and expanded its repertoire of authoritarian governance methods (Kaygusuz, 2018).

In the same year the new domestic security law was introduced, came through another key turning point in Turkey’s authoritarian consolidation. In 2015, the ongoing negotiations between the Turkish state and the Kurdish insurgency (the so-called Peace Process or Çözüm Süreci) broke down after the AKP lost parliamentary majority in June 2015 general elections where the
pro-Kurdish People’s Democracy Party (Halkın Demokrasi Partisi, HDP) entered the Turkish parliament with a campaign challenging Erdogan’s push to a presidential system. Following the breakdown of the negotiations, the long-standing Kurdish question once again got militarized followed by heavy armed clashes between Turkish security forces and the PKK in the Kurdish populated regions and urban centers in southeastern Turkey, which resulted in severe human rights violations and civilian casualties (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020). Further, during this period of skyrocketing political violence, hundreds of civilians, including several members of the Kurdish and leftist political movement, were killed in ISIS terrorist attacks in Turkey. The AKP managed to regain its parliamentary majority and form a government as a result of holding snap elections in November 2015, which took place under these circumstances.

In this political environment—and in particular following the AKP’s restoration of its power in the November 2015 repeat elections with 49.5 percent of the popular vote—the ruling party and the then Prime Minister Erdogan put a more subtle and sophisticated strategy into effect to manage the challenges against its authority and regime consolidation, which was based on the criminalization of political opposition under the pretext of countering terrorism, wherein the police power played a special role. The securitizing or “coup plot” discourse previously used by Erdogan and the AKP elite to frame the domestic opposition groups (such as the Gezi protestors, the so-called ‘Parallel Organization’ (i.e., Gülenists) and the Kurdish political movement) as the internal components of an internationally organized coup attempt designed to remove the party from power, was replaced with a discourse of ‘countering terrorism’ (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 296). This discourse was supported by daily police operations against academics, intellectuals, opposition politicians and human rights activists. As argued by Yılmaz (2021), “anti-terror operations, endless political trials, and everyday repression targeting the opposition and ‘usual suspects’ of the country aim(ed) to consolidate the new presidential regime and reduce insurgent
citizens to a whispering and mumbling public that abstains from open challenge and critique” against the regime (p. 177).

In this increasingly authoritarian political environment, Turkey faced a failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016, allegedly organized and executed by a group of military officers affiliated with Gulenists (Butler, 2020). Two hundred fifty people were killed and more than 2,000 wounded before the uprising was suppressed by the loyalist security forces the following day. A few days after the attempted coup, on 20 July 2016, the AKP government declared a state of emergency and started governing the country through executive decrees that could not be audited by the Constitutional Court or by other high courts. The AKP government used these executive decrees “to make permanent changes in the structure of state institutions as well as in existing laws in violation of the Turkish Constitution” and to make a wide range of changes in public policy which are not related to the causes of the emergency rule in violation of the existing laws on executive decrees (Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 296).

Scholars argue that President Erdogan and the AKP have successfully deployed police power as part of a routinized politics of emergency to both suppress possible challenges and organize regime transformation after the July 2016 failed coup attempt. Similar to its responses to previous challenges against its authority and regime transition, such as the Gezi uprising in 2013, and the success of the Kurdish political movement in the June 2015 parliamentary elections, the AKP government once again relied on security and police operations as well as judicial repression strategies to consolidate and stabilize its authoritarian rule. According to Yılmaz (2021), such strategies were mainly anchored in “autocratic legalism”, defined as “the use, abuse and misuse of rule of law to achieve politically ‘legitimate’ aims, hence, reducing the rule of law to the existence of legal norms by strategically manipulating/abusing legal powers, processes,
and rules”, which goes hand-in-hand with the increasing police power and securitization of politics in the country. Through this strategic legalism, the AKP government aimed to silence opposition and repress challengers while creating an image of legitimacy on the government’s side and giving a clear sign to other possible challengers that they will be prosecuted like the others (Yılmaz, 2021). As happened with the previous challenges to AKP’s regime security, in the aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt AKP government resorted to everyday police operations and judicial repression, facilitated by the recent police and anti-terror law amendments and regulations, to contain civic activism, avoid insider challenges, and organize a regime transition (Yılmaz, 2021, p. 170).

In this regard, in the aftermath of the unsuccessful coup attempt, the AKP government targeted pro-Kurdish HDP politicians on politically-motivated terrorism charges. In less than nine months, a total of 2,165 HDP party members and local administrators, as well as both of its chairpersons, 83 of its mayors, and 13 of its members of parliament were arrested (Çalışkan, 2018). The AKP government also removed dozens of elected HDP mayors from their positions and replaced them with AKP appointees (Castaldo, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Additionally, since the initial state of emergency declared following the coup, some 150,000 public servants have been dismissed from their jobs through decree laws; more than 500,000 people have been investigated over terrorism-related charges; and some 95,000 have been arrested (Human Rights Watch, 2019). It became a common practice to prosecute journalists, authors, or civil society activists on the basis that they provide support to terrorist organizations, such as DHKP/C, the PKK, or the so-called Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO), without being a member of these groups. For example, 12 administrators and journalists from Cumhuriyet—a secular newspaper which was openly critical of both the AKP and the Gulenist movement—were arrested over alleged links to the Gulenists following the coup. In another
major case of targeting opposition, the judiciary jailed a member of parliament of the main opposition party, Enis Berberoğlu, for allegedly leaking confidential information to journalists after the revelations of a clandestine weapons transfer from the Turkish government to the Islamist groups operating in Syria.

Following these developments, Turkey transitioned to a presidential system as a result of the constitutional amendments which were approved by a marginal majority in a public referendum held in April 2017. In this regard, the Turkish police played an important role related to the reconfiguration of institutions that the new regime initiated in order to weaken its political opponents. First, the intra-elite conflict between the AKP and the Gulen network exacerbated by the 2013 corruption investigations allegedly carried out by a clique of Gulenist officers within the Turkish police led the AKP to embark on a significant reconfiguration of the state, weakening the autonomy of core state institutions such as the judiciary and the coercive apparatus and removing constitutional and civil checks and balances mechanisms, which would allow for the eventual transformation to a new political order in Turkey. Second, the police institution acted in perpetuating the rule of post-Gezi regime through expanded powers for wiretapping and intelligence gathering which played a significant role in the criminalization of political and social opposition which was increasingly securitized by the AKP government’s discourse. Yılmaz (2021) argues that the ground for this regime transformation in Turkey “has gradually been prepared by ‘ordinary’ but ‘spectacular’ judicial and police operations and run-of-the-mill police emergencies which have been imposed to facilitate the organization of a smooth and successful transition by preventing the emergence of any opposition to the regime change” (p. 166). In the wake of the Gezi Park protests, the then Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan declared that his cabinet was determined to strengthen the police by all means to increase their intervention capacity, which was later ensured through the acceptance of the Domestic Security
Law in April 2015 which conferred more authorities to the police and increased their discretionary power (Atak, 2017a; Yılmaz, 2021). This finding reveals the substantive role played by the police in Turkey’s authoritarian consolidation. This shows us that the policing transitions influenced the political ones, and not just the other way around. In other words, as evidenced in the Turkish case, police may also shape regime transitions. This is a significant contribution to the policing literature which has largely focused on how political regime transitions affect policing and which has been overlooked by policing scholars and political scientists so far.

As underlined above, policing in Turkey was animated by the task of monitoring and suppressing domestic opposition during the ensuing consolidation of electoral authoritarianism since the 2013 Gezi Park protests. In other words, police power has been used predominantly for repression rather than protection (Marenin, 1996). As diligently noted by Ekşi (2015, p. 94), during this authoritarian consolidation following the Gezi Park protests, a form of policing emerged “that once again prioritizes maintaining public order over public service, criminalizes popular opposition, and inscribes state power on the bodies of dissenting citizens in order to turn them into submissive state subjects”. These findings align with the previous scholarly work which highlights the involvement of police in authoritarian regimes in political repression and their preoccupation with the protection of the regime (Bayley, 1982; Dobson, 2009; Fijnaut, 2004; Hagenloh, 2009; Shelley, 1996; Taylor, 2011). There is, however, little research on the exact form taken by the coercive apparatus in different authoritarian regimes that could explain variations in the structures of coercive institutions or why countries might adopt different institutional designs. The contribution of this study towards filling this gap in the literature on policing and coercion in authoritarian settings is explained below.
5.3 The reconfiguration of policing and internal security in Turkey during the authoritarian consolidation

During Turkey’s transformation to a full-fledged competitive authoritarian regime under Justice and Development Party (AKP) governments after the anti-government Gezi Park protests in 2013, several reconfigurations happened with critical implications for the structure and functioning of policing and internal security in Turkey. Since its rise to power in 2002, Erdogan and his ruling party have confronted the question of how to deal with challenges to their rule from both the military and domestic opposition groups. During the transition from tutelary democracy in the first decade of the 2000s, especially after the weakening of the political leverage granted to it by the EU accession negotiations to protect from the military tutelage, the ruling party relied on the empowered intelligence and enforcement capabilities of the police organization to address the threat of a potential coup attempt by the Turkish military—which was the biggest threat for Erdogan and the AKP government’s political survival then—with their monitoring and cracking down on the secularists within the army for alleged attempts to overthrow the government, culminating in the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer (Balyoz) prosecutions. During this period, for example, the police were granted practical competencies related to wiretapping and obtaining private information from communication companies through changes in the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2006 and the Police Duties and Powers Act in 2007, which constituted the initial attempts to enhance the police’s room for maneuver vis-à-vis the judiciary (Kaygusuz, 2018). Ergenekon trials resulted in the end of a decisive political role for the military in Turkey.

Growing social opposition to the AKP government’s authoritarian streak, especially after the party grew stronger electorally following the 2011 general elections and Erdogan emphasized more and more the support of the 50 per cent who voted for him discrediting the other 50 per
cent of the population, resulted in the outbreak of the Gezi uprising in 2013 which switched Erdogan and his AKP’s attention and threat perception from state institutions (i.e., military) to the people as they began to perceive domestic opposition groups as a significant threat to their ‘new Turkey’ goals (Cubukcu, 2018; Taş, 2015). As a response, the AKP government this time deployed the police to suppress rising opposition from civil society and ordinary citizens against its authoritarianism, supported by the legislation of the new Domestic Security Bill in 2015 which allocated several controversial powers to the police organization as underlined above.

One critical institutional arrangement to help quell the threat of popular unrest following the Gezi Park uprisings has been the increasing militarization of the police organization. The last two decades after the 9/11 terrorist attacks have witnessed the rapid blurring of the distinction between police and military, law enforcement and war, and internal and external security. Kraska (2007) draws attention to an alarming trend of the growth and normalization of police paramilitary units (e.g., SWAT teams) modelled after elite military special operations groups and a growing tendency by the police to rely on the military/war model in formulating crime/drug/terrorism control approaches and policies. Apparently, Turkey is no exception to this trend. In fact, Turkish policing has always been militarized to a degree since its inception (Ekşi, 2015). Due to, in particular, the state of emergencies declared after each military coup attempt in the country and the protracted Kurdish insurgency where the police collaborated closely with the Turkish military to maintain public order, the militarization of the police has been “unavoidable” (Ekşi, 2015, p. 46). Ironically, as Erdogan contributed to the de-militarization of politics by the late 2000s, he then relied on the expanding reach of the militarized police in responding to the rising opposition from civil society and ordinary citizens against his authoritarianism.
In terms of the specifics of this increased militarization process, during and following the Gezi Park protests in 2013, crowd control units of the national police have been equipped with more military-style weaponry and equipment which have since been increasingly deployed for the policing of protests. The riot police have been equipped with large quantities of less-lethal weapons, including pellet guns, tear gas launchers and water cannons (Atak, 2017a). In this regard, Turkey became the world’s largest consumer of tear gas for three consecutive years from 2012 to 2014, with the Turkish police utilizing tear gas on 224 days of the year, and in response to nearly any sign of social unrest in 2014 (Çalışkan, 2018, p. 19). The police have also been equipped with heavily armored tactical vehicles, especially in metropolitan areas, to be used against dissenting citizens.

The indicators of the militarization of the Turkish police are not limited to the use of martial weaponry or technology. The Turkish police have also been highly militarized culturally, organizationally and operationally during the consolidating authoritarian rule in Turkey (Kraska, 2007). Police Special Operations Teams (Polis Özel Harekat Timleri), a paramilitary force modeled after elite military special operations units, is a visible example of how the cultural, organizational, and operational elements of the military model impacted upon the civilian police in Turkey. These units, in addition to being equipped with martial weaponry and technology, adopted a military style appearance and a war fighting mentality in crime prevention. The AKP government dramatically strengthened these paramilitary police units during authoritarian consolidation in Turkey after 2013. There has been a steep increase and mainstreaming of these units in Turkish police departments with the numbers of PPU officers significantly increased compared to the 1990s and 2000s. In 2015, for example, an additional 5,000 new Special Operations Team members joined the ranks due to the re-escalating Kurdish insurgency in
southeast Turkey, a considerably higher number compared to the recruitment patterns in the past (Ekşi, 2015).

More importantly, in terms of showing the degree to which the Turkish police is militarized, a large portion of the PPU deployments were not due to an increase in their traditional and essential function—intervening in dangerous events in progress, such as hostage, sniper, or terrorism situations—but for proactive raids against dissenting citizens. These units have been heavily deployed for the arrests targeting the enemies of the AKP regime, including Gulenists, members of the Kurdish political movement, journalists, academics, civil society activists and other dissenters. For example, these units took part broadly in police operations targeting the alleged members of the Gulen movement after the attempted coup in 2016 (“Ankara’dan Gulen Cemaatine Ağır Otomatik Silahlarla Operasyon”, 2020). These paramilitary police units were also deployed together with the military forces during the urban clashes between the Turkish security forces and the PKK in 2015-2016 as a result of the breakdown of the negotiations between the Turkish state and the Kurdish insurgents, where a large number of Kurdish-populated neighborhoods in southeast Turkey were destroyed leading to hundreds of civilian casualties and injuries (Onat & Cubukcu, 2019). These units particularly took part in the ‘weed and seed’ operations conducted by the military forces in the Kurdish-populated urban centers during the conflict, in which the security forces with heavy weaponry went into the urban neighborhoods to ‘weed out’ the terrorists and take control of the cities.

Another key moment for the reconfiguration of policing and internal security during Turkey’s authoritarian consolidation was the 2013 corruption investigations, the reasons of which were discussed in detail above. The graft inquiry on 17 and 25 December 2013 unveiled the dissolution of the political alliance between AKP and the police force. As explained above, the
two groups had worked in unison to dismantle the military tutelage and to marginalize oppositional groups after the 2013 Gezi protests. As a powerful bureaucracy that has control over coercion which politicians can selectively distribute towards their own political ends, police can either provide its service in the interests of elected leaders but can also threaten leaders by withdrawing its service of providing order and security (González, 2021, p. 23). As González (2021) notes, “by commission or omission, police forces can create politically uncomfortable situations for elected officials” (p. 19). The AKP responded to this intra-elite crisis created by the corruption probe, first, by purging or rotating alleged Gulenists inside the police organization. The police officers involved in the graft probe were first dismissed from their positions and then arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the Turkish government. Others suspected of opposing the AKP, especially those who served in critical units, such as intelligence, counterterrorism, public order, special operations, and organized crimes squads, were rotated to other less critical or low-profile positions inside the police force. According to the available data, in the three months following the December 2013 corruption investigations, about 8,000 police officers were removed from their positions (Çiçek, 2014). Instead of these purged officers, the ones who were known for their hawkish, ultra-nationalist and anti-democratic tendencies and even some officers who were in the past expelled to low-profile positions due to disciplinary and other reasons were assigned to these vital units. Thus, the AKP attempted to ‘balance within’ (De Bruin, 2020; Farcau, 1994; Horowitz, 1985), or balance allegedly Gulenist factions within the police force with their own loyalists. One of my participants, Ercan, who served as a city police chief in the TNP before retiring states the following regarding the logic of the post-December 2013 police purges:

What was really aimed by the government after 17-25 December was actually not a purge but setting up AKP’s own cadres in the police. Creating a uniform
police force. It was an effort to create a party police. The formation of a structure that would serve the interests of AKP was aimed. They were trying to identify and retire anybody who would not obey them in the police force. The main purpose was to suspend democracy, to establish a kind of Mukhabarat state, and to create a kind of Revolutionary Guard, which only would fulfill the orders of the government, as in Iran.

The purges of the allegedly Gulenist cadres in the police organization continued in 2014 and 2015. In April 2015, 1,776 police chiefs, among whom were those who served in critical police investigations such as Ergenekon, Balyoz, and KCK, were retired after the legislation of the Domestic Security Bill (“1776 Emniyet Müdürü”, 2015).

Another institutional change that influenced policing after 2013 December corruption probe, after which Erdogan and his AKP started to see the police as a potential threat in addition to the growing social and political opposition to their rule, was the changes in the police education system. The Domestic Security Bill which was passed into law in 2015 allowed the AKP government to shut down the two historical police education institutions in Turkey, the Turkish National Police Academy which provided a four-year university program to prepare students for command roles in the Turkish National Police, and the Police College, a high-school level institution established to lead to matriculation at the Police Academy. Instead, a new Police Supervisor Training Center (Polis Amirleri Egitim Merkezi, PAEM) was established to train prospective commissioned police officers for the TNP. Many in the opposition alleged that the goal of these changes in police education mechanism was to ensure government’s control over the allocation of police jobs to their supporters and to claim the loyalty of newly graduating police cadres who would replace the ones purged after the 17-25 December 2013 corruption probes (“Polis Koleji Kapatılıyor”, 2015).
Moreover, as part of the AKP’s reconfiguration of the internal security as part of its struggle against the Gulenists after the December 2013 corruption probe, the government also aimed to expand the power of the National Intelligence Organization (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MİT) over the police and the military (Kaygusuz, 2018; Onuş, 2014). Indeed, MİT has been known as the institution that Erdogan gave the most importance in the state apparatus after the appointment of the undersecretary Hakan Fidan, who was and still is one of the closest figures to President Erdogan. The 'Law Amending the Law on State Intelligence Services and the National Intelligence Agency’, which was passed in parliament on 17 April 2014, granted the MİT increased power and legal protection for its head (Taş, 2015). The MİT was granted additional powers to gather various types of information, data, records, and documents from both public and private entities without needing court approval. Furthermore, MİT was given the responsibility to carry out special operations concerning terrorism and national security with the authorization of the Cabinet, effectively extending its influence over the police and military (Kaygusuz, 2018). Opposition parties, on the other hand, reacted to these changes by alleging that Turkey is turning into an ‘intelligence state’ with these controversial amendments related to the powers of the Turkish national spy agency (Demirtaş, 2014). Opposition deputies alleged that, with these changes, like the Baath regime in Syria, an administration would be created in Turkey under the control of the national intelligence agency, and therefore only under Erdogan (Yazıcıoğlu, 2014).

The failed coup attempt of July 2016 which was allegedly organized by a group of Gulenist army officers and aimed to topple President Erdogan and the AKP government shifted the threat perception of the Erdogan regime from a combination of popular and elite threats to a largely elite one. As the democratic opposition and the Kurdish political movement which were perceived by the ruling elite as the most significant threat to Erdogan and the AKP’s political
goals was contained with anti-terror operations, political trials, and everyday repression targeting the opposition, the biggest perceived threat for Erdogan remained the challenges that could originate from the political opponents (i.e., Gulenists) in the security apparatus (police and the military), as culminated in the July 2016 attempted coup to overthrow the AKP government. Not long after the coup, the ruling party took important steps in designing the internal security framework to deal with potential elite challenges to its rule: mass purges within the police organization and the military and fragmenting the security sector involving creating new units within the police force while instigating the emergence and growth of pro-state paramilitaries outside the formal security apparatus. With these transformations, the Erdogan regime has aimed to maintain monitoring of political opponents such as leftists, Gulenists, and Kurdish activists, but more importantly to manage and deter possible challenges to its rule from within the formal security forces such as the police organization and the armed forces.

Since the failed coup attempt of July 2016 which provided Erdogan with a pretext “in casting aside any limits, whether those based on rule of law at home or condemnation abroad”, the AKP government has tightened its control over formal security institutions, first, through the use of executive decrees (Kanun Hükmünde Kararname in Turkish) published after the declaration of an official state of emergency on 20 July 2016 that have enabled mass purges of the cadres considered disloyal within the police and other security services (Eissenstat, 2017, p. 4). These mass purges predominantly targeted alleged Gulenists—the former ally of AKP who have been since then criminalized as a national security threat in Turkey. Erdogan’s efforts to gain control
and loyalty among the police have had a dramatic effect, as more than 30,000 law enforcement personnel have been dismissed since the failed coup attempt (Boztepe, 2019).\textsuperscript{14}

Following the mass purges, the AKP government launched a speedy recruitment and restaffing process within the security apparatus which appears to have been informed largely by political loyalties. As Eissenstat (2017) notes, “the AKP government has tried to “coup-proof” these institutions by recruiting from its own base and that of current allies, notably the ultranationalist right, to fill the vacated positions” (p. 4). This phenomenon, Gingeras (2017) argues, appears to reflect the growing political alliance between the AKP and the far-right Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) which Erdogan established following the relatively poor electoral results in November 2015 parliamentary elections. In this regard, tens of thousands of new people were recruited into the police organization within a short timespan to replace those purged—commissioned police officers through the newly established Police Supervisor Training Center (Polis Amırları Eğitim Merkezi, or PAEM) and non-commissioned police officers through the police vocational schools.

Despite these mass purges and Erdogan’s large-scale restaffing efforts to set up his own cadres within the military and the police, prioritizing political allegiances in recruitment may not necessarily ensure “the competency or loyalty of new recruits”, which makes Erdogan worried about another coup attempt (Eissenstat, 2017; Gingeras, 2017, p. 16). Eissenstat (2017) argues that the new military and the new police are no more reliable for Erdogan now than they were in the past because the new cadres recruited into the security apparatus after the coup attempt are

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{14} The author of this study is one of these officers dismissed after the July 15 coup attempt with an executive decree.
\end{flushright}
less professional as the push to quickly replace the Gulenists and those purged “purportedly forced recruiters to forgo maintaining certain qualifying standards in order to fill needed posts” (Gingeras, 2017, p. 15). This included, for instance, the waiving of the Civil Servant Selection Examination (Kamu Personeli Seçme Sınavı, KPSS) requirement for candidates (Aksam, 2016). Further, the AKP government has had to form alliances with some former adversaries, namely the Kemalists and secularists, in replacing the expertise of those purged from the security institutions. For example, some senior military officers convicted in the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials were reinstated after the purges and promoted to generals or admirals (Gingeras, 2017). This alliance between Erdogan and his former political enemies, which is currently standing, is considered vulnerable to collapse with new developments (Cubukcu, 2018). In summary, as Akkoyunlu and Öktem (2016) aptly noted, “the continued dilemma of having to choose between loyalists of questionable competence and competent personnel of questionable loyalties to run the state agencies” was one of the formidable challenges Erdogan’s authority still faced in ensuring hegemony over politics and society (p. 520). This problem is reminiscent of Geddes’ (1994) argument that an independent bureaucracy can enhance state effectiveness and thus increase political support for a candidate, but since it is not under their control, it also becomes a risk (and a wasted source of patronage and clientelism).

As a reflection of Erdogan’s increasingly populist and majoritarian discourse especially after the 2011 elections where the AKP got almost 50 per cent of the popular vote in Turkey, “the national will (milli irade) is held above all else and in the hands of the AKP, as it records the highest share of votes in national elections” (Taş, 2015, p. 785). In other words, as the party that got the highest share of the votes in national elections, AKP is the genuine representative of the people and represents the nation, as Erdogan stated “the nation has won” after AKP’s electoral victory in 2011 parliamentary elections (“Millet Kazandı Vesayet Kaybetti”, 2011). As Erdogan now
embodies the AKP, especially after managing to sideline other prominent AKP leaders who found the party with him in 2001 and consolidating whole power in his hands within the party (Castaldo, 2018; Taş, 2015), he also embodies the nation.\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, any assault against Erdogan also represents an assault against the nation and his political survival is analogous to the survival of the nation, which clearly denotes a ‘regime security’ paradigm (Jackson, 2013, as cited in Kaygusuz, 2018, p. 285). Indeed, Erdogan responded to the corruption probe involving his inner circle by stating “Turkey has never faced such an immoral attack” and he characterized the investigation as an assault on the entire nation (Taş, 2014).

As a corollary, while restaffing the formal security services with political loyalists, Erdogan’s security concerns against possible threats from within the formal coercive institutions following the July 15 coup attempt led him to create new units within the police as well as promote informal loyalist forces outside the military and police as counterweights to the formal security services. As noted above, existing scholarship which explored how new authoritarian regimes remake security institutions suggests that autocratic rulers face two major threats against their political and physical survival: threats from the population (popular unrest) and threats from elites, especially elites in the coercive apparatus. According to this research, protecting against elite threats, or coup-proofing, demands fragmented coercive institutions because fragmentation—dividing state’s coercive power into multiple organizations with overlapping or competing functions regarding domestic security—serves to prevent collusion between these agencies and prevent any one agency from becoming too powerful to stage a coup against the

\textsuperscript{15} Taş (2015) states that with the diminishing intra-party democracy the post-2011 AKP clearly became subjected to a one-man rule, with the party cadres cleansed of alternative voices and organized according to perceived loyalty to Erdogan.
dictator, while addressing the risk of a popular unrest demands a more unitary security apparatus (De Bruin, 2019; Greitens, 2016). Therefore, because authoritarian leaders cannot simultaneously maximize their defense against both threats, authoritarian rulers who face this “coercive dilemma” are likely to design their coercive apparatus based on the dominant perceived threat at the time they come to power (Greitens, 2016, p. 4). In other words, dictators who prioritize the threat of a coup are likely to create a fragmented security apparatus, while autocrats concerned with the risk of a popular unrest are more likely to create unitary coercive organizations. As a corollary, the proliferation of new security structures with overlapping functions with the existing institutions is not a universal or typical feature of all authoritarian transitions; rather it is likely to occur in cases where the rulers prioritize the threat of a coup over the risk of popular discontent (De Bruin, 2020; Greitens, 2016).

In this respect, authoritarian rulers may ‘broaden the field’, creating new loyalist units within the existing institutions or creating new armed forces outside the existing institutions to more effectively address elite threats against their survival (De Bruin, 2020; Farcau, 1994). In a similar vein, in terms of the fragmentation of the security sector in Turkey following the July 15 military coup attempt, the AKP government deliberately fostered a complex vigilante/private security ecosystem alongside its reshaping of formal police institutions. What is theoretically unique in the Turkish case, however, is that although Greitens (2016) argues that authoritarian leaders cannot simultaneously maximize their defense against both population and elite threats or that they face a “coercive dilemma”, which makes them likely to design their coercive apparatus based on the dominant perceived threat at the time they come to power, during the period between the December 2013 corruption probe until the July 2016 coup attempt, Erdogan does not appear to have prioritized one threat over another as seen in his authoritarian measures in designing the security apparatus (the para-militarization of the police and its empowerment
through granting them extensive powers and immunity with the Domestic Security Bill, as well as coup-proofing the security apparatus by mass purges/rotations within the police and expanding the power of the MİT over the police and the military) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Threat perceptions of Erdogan and AKP and their responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>2007-2011</th>
<th>2011-2013 corruption probe</th>
<th>2013 corruption probe-2016 coup attempt</th>
<th>2016 coup attempt-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature of the threat</td>
<td>Elite threats (Kemalist military)</td>
<td>Popular threats (Opposition groups)</td>
<td>Elite and popular threats (Police (Gulenists) and opposition groups)</td>
<td>Elite threats (Disloyal cadres within the police and military)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Expanding and strengthening of the police force through changes in the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2006 and the Police Duties and Powers Act in 2007</td>
<td>Militarization of the police</td>
<td>Rotations/purges of the alleged Gulenists within the police force</td>
<td>Mass purges within the police organization and the military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Creation of the Police Supervisor Training Center (Polis Amırları Egitim Merkezi) instead of the Police Academy</td>
<td>Fragmentation of the security sector involving creating new units within the police force and instigating the emergence and growth of pro-state paramilitaries outside the formal security apparatus (military contractors, criminal gangs, and party youth wings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Expansion of the powers of the National Intelligence Organization (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MİT) over the police and the military</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Legislation of the new Domestic Security Bill in 2015 which allocated several controversial powers to the police</td>
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</table>
In this regard, since the July 2016 attempted coup, as part of its ‘broadening the field’ strategy, the AKP government has recruited thousands of neighborhood watchmen and provided them with broad new powers including the authority to stop and search citizens, and to carry firearms and use force whenever necessary (San, 2020b). Neighborhood watchmen or Bekçi have been a longstanding part of the policing structure in Turkey. Assigned to the neighborhood police station, the watchmen were basically uniformed auxiliaries responsible for assisting the police with their duties, patrolling neighborhoods during the nights to prevent disturbances and petty crimes, handing over burglars and other petty criminals to the police when arrested, as well as carrying out some administrative duties including notifying local residents of official communication and doing official paperwork. They did not carry firearms but batons and whistles instead during their shifts. The recruitment of neighborhood watchmen was halted in 2008 by the same AKP government before it was revived again following the failed military coup of 15 July 2016. With the introduction of a new legislation in 2017, the neighborhood watchmen would have almost the same powers as the police, which the opposition members of parliament believe is an initiation to organize a militia loyal to the president since allegedly most members of the guard are being recruited from among the AKP base (McKernan, 2020). Empowered neighborhood guards, while serving as a loyalist armed force which would allow Erdogan to balance against other formal security forces including the military and the police, might also help to monitor and suppress political opponents under the pretext of public security and combatting crimes. Indeed, the new duties granted to the neighborhood watchmen by the newly introduced legislation, including the task of reporting suspected individuals or places to the police in their jurisdiction, created concerns among the opposition that the watchmen might turn into a copy of the Iran’s Basij militia, a loyalist paramilitary force responsible for suppressing dissent and policing morals under the Iranian regime (San, 2020b).
In the context of the AKP government’s reshaping of formal policing institutions, President Erdogan also ordered the establishment of a new police unit called Reinforcement Ready Forces Directorate (Takviye Hazır Kuvvet Müdürlüğü). This new police unit was first established in 2018 in Ankara and then in Istanbul in 2020 with a presidential decree. Unlike other police units acting under the command of local police chiefs and civil governors, the Reinforcement Ready Forces Directorate members would report directly to the General Headquarters of the Turkish National Police in Ankara. Although the TNP officially claimed that the purpose of this new unit was to maintain order during mass demonstrations and high-risk sporting events and to help with the management of public emergencies such as natural disasters, political opponents argue that a separate police force loyal to President Erdogan was established with this extralegal decision (Uludag, 2020).

While ‘broadening the field’, in addition to creating new units within the police, Erdogan regime also created a network of informal security structures outside the official security apparatus which include military contractors, criminal gangs, and party youth wings (Cubukcu, 2018; Eisenstat, 2017; Öztürk & Reilly, 2022). There is a long history of the formation of paramilitary groups in Turkey going back to the late Ottoman period. As Işık (2021) notes, “in the Turkish state tradition, the purpose of supporting organized groups that would employ violence, from brigands and criminal gangs to state-backed paramilitary groups, was to extend central control of territory and eliminate perceived internal threats” (p. 233). In the early years of the PKK insurgency in the 1980s, the Turkish state established and/or supported many semi-formal and informal armed units with paramilitary characteristics which were mostly used as auxiliary forces, assisting official security operations and gathering intelligence in conflict zones. Işık (2021) argues that, in response to the serious lack of capacity of the regular army to contain the PKK insurgency at the beginning of the 1990s, a paramilitarization of the Turkish state occurred
between 1991 and 1996 when “the paramilitary groups were no longer just employed as auxiliary forces but became transformed into main actors of the war, on a par with the official state security forces” (p. 231). As a result of the paramilitarization of the state, “the numbers of militants in the existing paramilitary forces increased substantially, became even more autonomous, and began to function predominantly as death squads” (İşık, 2021, p. 237). Thus, in its fight against the PKK insurgency as of the early 1990s, the Turkish state used pro-state paramilitary groups such as the Village Guards (köy korucuları), and the Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Organization (Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele, JİTEM) which were directly established by the state, as well as non-state groups such as the Hizbullah (The Party of God), an illegal group which for a period in the early to mid-1990s collaborated with state security agencies and employed violence against Kurds it claimed were PKK members. Similar to this, I argue that a paramilitarization of the state takes place in Turkey again following the de-militarization of Turkish politics after 2011, with the expanding reach of the militarized policing following the 2013 Gezi uprising and the creation of an ecosystem of non-state paramilitaries and militias after the 2016 coup attempt. Cubukcu (2018) notes that Erdogan instigated this irregular and Iranian-like militia structure to help him “control streets, inflict oppression and carry out covert operations against dissident political groups” as well as to balance, at some level, formal military and police forces with diehard loyalist groups. Such groups have gained increasing visibility in Turkey as possible tools of regime protection particularly following the failed coup of July 2016.

As argued by Cubukcu (2018), the first layer of this pro-government paramilitary structure is “private security contractors”. The most well-known is SADAT (International Defense Consulting Construction Industry and Trade Inc., Uluslararası Savunma Danışmanlık İnşaat Sanayi ve Ticaret A. S.), a private military consultancy firm, founded by retired brigadier general
Adnan Tanriverdi who later became a principal advisor to President Erdogan. According to SADAT’s official mission statement, its main objective is to provide “strategic consultancy, defense and security training and supply services to armed forces and internal security forces of Islamic countries” (SADAT, 2023). According to Cubukcu (2018), “SADAT has reportedly trained about 3,000 foreign fighters and other militants operating in Syria and Libya and received a grant from the Turkish government to do so”. However, it has been the alleged domestic repression activities of SADAT which brought it to the public’s attention, rather than its clandestine activities abroad. There were allegations that SADAT was behind the Esedullah (Lion of God in Arabic) paramilitary groups which were allegedly deployed together with the official army and police forces during the city wars of 2015 which started after the failure of the peace talks between the Turkish state and the PKK insurgency (İşık, 2021). The members of the so-called Esedullah teams allegedly spoke Arabic and Azeri and were hired especially for their experience in urban conflicts (Yıldırı, 2015). It has also been claimed that SADAT played an active role in dealing with the 2016 coup attempt (Öztürk & Reilly, 2022). Multiple Turkish language and foreign media outlets reported eyewitness accounts that members of the pro-AKP armed groups, including SADAT, were involved in the killing of civilians and lynching of the coup-plotters on the night of the failed coup attempt (Jacinto, 2017; Rubin, 2017). As Öztürk and Reilly (2022) note, appointment of Tanriverdi as a principal advisor to President Erdogan immediately following the failed coup attempt strengthened the allegations that SADAT functions as a de facto private military force for President Erdogan. Further, members of the People’s Democratic Party (HDP), the pro-Kurdish opposition party, alleged that the perpetrator of the attack on HDP’s Izmir office in 2021 was trained by SADAT in Syria (“Hüda Kaya'dan”, 2021).
The second layer of this paramilitary structure is the gang and mafia groups affiliated with AKP and Erdogan’s confidants. For example, the AKP government developed strong ties with the Osmanen Germania biker gang, “which was accused of spying on and threatening Turkish exiles, and which German authorities banned in 2018” (Schenkkan & Linzer, 2021, p. 39). Further, far-right Turkish mafia boss Sedat Peker, who was a staunch supporter of Erdogan, publicly threatened to target political opponents of Erdogan and declared his support for Erdogan on several occasions. According to Cubukcu (2018), Erdogan aims to use such criminal groups as a deterrent against his opponents and perceived enemies both within Turkey and among the large number of Turkish descendants living abroad to gain leverage over the host countries.

The third layer of this pro-government paramilitary structure is the unofficial party youth wings, such as the Ottoman Hearths (Osmanlı Ocakları) and other voluntary groups, like People’s Special Forces (Halk Özel Harekat). The Ottoman Hearths was founded in 2009 to recruit AKP supporters from the youth. Members of the Ottoman Hearths have openly declared their devotion to President Erdogan and their willingness to “defend Erdogan and his regime against any kind of vigilante or insurgency” (Cubukcu, 2018). Further, members of the group have reportedly been involved in violently targeting opposition party and media offices and journalists, targeting Kurdish activists, appearing at AKP rallies to show their support for the regime, and helping suppress dissidents during anti-government protests (Sharma, 2017). For example, members of Ottoman Hearths rallied for Erdogan and monitored protests that erupted during the 2014 presidential election and 2017 constitutional referendum (Cubukcu, 2018).

In summary, the reorganization of official policing institutions following the July 15 military coup attempt was accompanied by the creation of an ecosystem of government-sponsored paramilitaries and militias. President Erdogan and his regime is likely to employ these
paramilitary groups as a “second-best” strategy in case they cannot achieve their regime security goals through the reforms/reorganizations they made in the formal coercive institutions. The apparent direct and active involvement of a coalition of pro-government militias in the violence employed to subdue the putschists during the July 15 coup attempt strengthens the argument that these tools of privatized violence may serve a role in helping the AKP regime contain the elite challenges to its power, in addition to monitoring and suppressing domestic opposition groups. Given that the new military and the new police created after the July 15 coup attempt are no more reliable for Erdogan because the new cadres recruited into the security apparatus are considered less professional and the reorganization of policing involved making alliances with some former enemies—the Kemalists and secularists—in replacing the expertise of those purged, Erdogan’s concern with regime survival encouraged him to promote the multiplicity of security forces. Therefore, the fragmentation of security forces appears to be both a response to the fact that the crackdown on the professional, well trained police force after the 2013 corruption probe may have left AKP with a very fragile/dysfunctional security apparatus and a response to the changing threat perceptions of the Erdogan regime.

5.4 Conclusion

Police played a key role in Turkey’s transformation to a full-fledged competitive authoritarian regime after 2013. This occurred in two significant ways. The response of the AKP to the ‘political crisis’ (Boukalas, 2015) created by the launch of the large corruption probe by the police in December 2013 against Erdogan’s close circle allowed the AKP government to reconfigure the state institutions and disable critical checks and balances mechanisms which would eventually allow the AKP to transform the constitutional order of the country. Police also helped organize post-Gezi regime transformation by criminalizing all kinds of dissent which
were securitized by the AKP government through its ‘coup plotting’ and ‘countering terrorism’ discourse. This finding illustrates the major role played by the police in creating and sustaining the ‘new Turkey’ and demonstrates that police can constitute political change rather than only representing a passive object of political regime transitions. Police being the agent of regime change towards authoritarianism is a unique contribution to the literature on policing following political transitions and the political role of the police. Moreover, the 2013 police corruption probe against the AKP elites illustrates how the police are not a simple puppet executing strictly the orders of the ruling elite, how they can make their own preferences and act together with a certain group—even though this group may be a political opponent—against the ruling government. This finding suggests that police are not just an instrument subordinated to serving the interests of the regime leaders to keep them in power; rather they are capable of acting as political actors who can create uncomfortable situations for the incumbent by commission or omission even in authoritarian or hybrid regimes.

In this chapter, I also analyzed the restructuring of policing in Turkey during this period of authoritarian consolidation. Based on my research on the Erdogan government’s reevaluation of the source of threats to its survival and its corresponding actions, it is evident that a shift in threat perceptions of authoritarian rulers (from perceiving the risk of a coup as the primary threat to recognizing popular threats as more significant, or vice versa) can lead to contrasting changes to how policing is organized and deployed for regime survival. Following the decline of the threat of a military coup after 2011 as a result of the Ergenekon and Balyoz coup trials and especially after the Gezi uprising in 2013, Erdogan government’s threat perception switched largely from a military coup to the people as he began to perceive growing social and political opposition as the more significant challenge to his survival. As a response, the AKP government deployed the empowered police organization to suppress rising opposition from civil society and ordinary
citizens against its authoritarianism, supported later by the passing of a draconian Domestic Security Bill which tremendously increased powers of the police force. Following the 2013 corruption probe against its ministers, Erdogan and his AKP’s threat perception became a combination of elite and popular challenges which was reflected on their measures as underlined above.

The attempted military coup in July 2016 which shifted the threat perception of the Erdogan government to a completely elite one inflicted the creation of a highly fragmented system of security which involved the fostering of a complex ecosystem of pro-government militias outside the state alongside the creation of new units within the formal police apparatus. President Erdogan and his regime promoted a more fragmented system of internal security to respond to potential challenges of loyalty and state effectiveness from within formal coercive institutions which were filled with less-skilled political loyalists but also some former enemies whose loyalties are questioned.

These findings provide valuable insights on how authoritarian rulers organize their police institutions and how, as well as to what ends, they deploy police coercion, building on the previous empirical work by Geddes (1994) on state effectiveness, the literature on how coercive institutions are designed in authoritarian regimes to eliminate threats against the ruler, and ‘counterbalancing’ research. Applying insights from political science scholarship, which has so far largely overlooked the actual entity to which the state delegates its monopoly of the legitimate use of force, to the study of policing represents one of the most important contributions of this study to the existing policing literature.
Chapter 6

6 Discussion

This study set out to advance the discussion of policing continuity and change in the wake of regime transitions in order to contribute to a more complete understanding of the relationship between regime type and modes of policing and coercion through an in-depth analysis of periods of continuity and reform in the modes of policing in Turkey over the last four decades. It has also attempted to tease out rigorously how the policing evolution of Turkey has affected its political evolution over the same period. Turkey is an important case because it has experienced repeated and very dramatic political transitions as well as changes and continuities in policing over a relatively compressed period of approximately forty years, from 1983 to the present. Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study.

To make sense of the trajectory of the last 40 years of policing in Turkey, I drew upon Brodeur’s (1983, 2010) famous distinction between high and low policing and González’s (2021) framework of the continuum of authoritarian and democratic coercion. There are a number of “lacunae, obscurities, and ambiguities” in the distinction between high and low policing, such as the fact that high policing may encompass both the protection of a constitutional order against illegal acts of subversion and the perpetuation of a political incumbent against those who intend to challenge or unseat it or the fact that “it is not certain where high policing ends and low policing begins, for the distinction between fighting crime and defending the political order is famously unclear” (Steinberg, 2014, pp. 175-76). Indeed, “shoring up a political order by fighting crime is a well-known strategy of governance” (Steinberg, 2014, p. 176). Such ambiguities also lie at the heart of Turkish policing and neither in Turkey nor elsewhere is the distinction between high and low ever clear or unproblematic (Steinberg, 2014, p. 176). Yet,
Brodeur’s conception still proves extremely helpful for understanding the relationship between political change and policing in Turkey over the last four decades.

In this study, I investigated why and how Turkish policing remained closer to the authoritarian end of the continuum despite a transition to tutelary democracy from military dictatorship in 1983, as well as the reasons and ultimate causes which allowed the reformist security officials to continue to pursue their reform goals to shift the police institution and practices toward a more democratic end despite the AKP’s emerging electoral authoritarian tendencies after 2006-2007 period.

My study findings reveal that the transition to tutelary democracy in 1983 after a three-year military rule following the 1980 military coup did not translate to democratization of policing in Turkey. Democratic transition was accompanied by a ‘harsher’ form of policing, including the increasing militarization of civilian policing through the creation of new riot units and SWAT teams tasked with repressing protests and counterinsurgency. I argue that this was due to an unchanged need for repression and surveillance from the preceding military rule as well as the previous Turkish governments of the dominating tutelary regime of Turkey’s multiparty period since 1950, which I believe made the new democratic political leaders reluctant to intervene to curtail these authoritarian modes of policing and determined the unchanged nature of policing from what it used to be before the 1983 democratic transition. In other words, there was no change in policing because there was no significant regime change from the autocratic (military dictatorship) and hybrid (tutelary) regimes that preceded the 1983 transition, especially in terms of the logic and the targets of the deployment of coercion by the state and the state institution primarily charged with exercising it. Thus, Turkish policing remained primarily oriented toward securing political and private interests rather than preventing and investigating crimes and
protecting citizens even after the stepping down of the military and the election of a reformist
civilian government. This finding mirrors previous empirical work which found that policing
practices in most transitional states, such as in Central and South American states which
transitioned from military dictatorships toward democracy, post-Soviet countries, and post-
colonial African states, have remained fundamentally unchanged from what they were before the
transitions (Brogden, 2005; Hinton, 2006; Hills, 2008; Marat, 2018; Pereira & Ungar, 2004;
Steinberg, 2011; Trebilcock & Daniels, 2008).

For instance, Banks and Baker (2016) argue that in Central and South America, challenges to
state power from armed guerillas have given state military forces dominance over safety and
security, and the divide that commonly exists between military power and police power has been
blurred by the preoccupation of both military and police with the protection of the regime. As
Ungar (2012, p. 85) notes, “the authoritarian regimes dominating Latin America in the twentieth
century, though, only solidified and militarized the professional model of the police, whose
function was more to control political opposition than to stop crime”. Accordingly, basic crime
prevention and control have been neglected even after the overthrow of the military and the free
election of reformist governments (Hinton, 2006, as cited in Banks & Baker, 2016). As before,
the practice of “policing only the lowest rungs of state and society” and protecting the interests
of the middle class and the elite endures (Hinton, 2006, p. 200, as cited in Banks & Baker, 2016).

As noted by González (2021), “making democracy real entails the provision of meaningful
security to citizens” (p. 5). As the entity which exercises the state’s coercive authority (Bayley,
1985; Bittner, 1970), police, thus, are central to this task and shape the construction of
democratic citizenship through their distribution of protection and repression. The provision of
meaningful security, however, does not only require that it address urgent societal demands for
improved security: it also requires that the exercise of coercion or police power adhere to the
premise of equal treatment of all citizens (Bayley, 2006; Caldeira & Holston, 1999; González, 2021). Otherwise, an unequal security provision results in stratified citizenship, where access to security and protection from state repression are determined by existing social hierarchies, such as race, class, and geography. In Turkey, as Piran (2013) also notes, in the post-1983 democratic transition period, certain groups such as resistant labor unions, impoverished and marginalized groups such as Roma and Kurdish people who were subjected to forced migration to metropoles and participated in the informal economy, ethnic minorities such as politically active Kurds and Alevi people who were denigrated by the dominant discourses of the military-dominated Turkish national security state as “domestic enemies” (Berksoy, 2010a, 2010b), were subjected to disproportionate levels of police violence. For example, the paramilitary Rapid Action Units (RAU) of the police created after the 1980 coup frequently conducted operations in slums inhabited by Kurdish and Roma communities, asserting that these regions were breeding grounds for drug-related offenses and gang warfare. This is very similar to the cases of extraordinarily high levels of police violence in the post-democratic transition Latin American countries where “characteristics such as race, class, or where one happens to reside are often stronger predictors of being subject to police action than is actual involvement in criminal activity” (González, 2021, p. 9).

My findings also reveal that policing in Turkey underwent a speedy transformation during the transition from tutelary democracy in the first decade of the new millennium. These transformative changes in policing (discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of this study), which started flourishing as a result of the attempts to relegitimise the state and the police in Turkey in the late 1990s after several political and human rights scandals and were accelerated by the EU accession process in the early 2000s, continued despite the virtual cessation of the EU accession negotiations and the emergence of competitive authoritarian tendencies in Turkey. This
persistence did not arise from the effectiveness of democratic mechanisms to address coercive institutions that violate democratic principles. Instead, I argue that the persistence of democratic modes of coercion despite the general evolution of Turkish politics towards a more authoritarian state resulted from a reciprocal dependence, or a kind of accommodation that emerges between politicians and police who are charged with exercising the state’s coercive authority (Bittner, 1970), wherein police forces may exchange cooperation with politicians in one dimension for pursuing autonomy in another (González, 2021, p. 20). For example, the Colombian police faced little civilian intervention despite widespread extralegal violence and corruption in exchange for continued cooperation with the government’s policy priority, the war against drug cartels (González, 2021, p. 20). More importantly for the police reform, as noted by González (2021), in the Latin American cases, the police’s ability to leverage this structural power (due to their control over the state coercion) to constrain the policy agenda and hinder reform represents an essential driver of its authoritarian persistence. For example, police commanders in Buenos Aires Province in Argentina leveraged their political relationships to prevent reformist security officials from removing them from their posts due to corruption. However, different than the Latin American cases, in the Turkish case of police reforms, the reformist elements within the Turkish police, as political actors endowed with structural power due to their control of coercion, successfully exchanged their cooperation in weakening the secularist-Kemalist state through criminalization of the political role of the military for autonomy in pursuing their police reform objectives which helped shift policing and coercion in Turkey toward the democratic end in the face of AKP’s growing authoritarian tendencies in the second half of the 2000s. This means, the structural power of the police due to their control over state’s coercive capacity which provides the police with considerable autonomy from the elected leaders to whom they are ostensibly accountable may be used to advance democratic modes of policing rather than resisting reform
efforts. This finding also suggests that the police themselves can be instruments of democratic change in policing, rather than the state or another external actor (such as a Western democratic state or international organization) which can implement reform, especially with the presence of a stable cadre of reformist security officials dedicated to radical change in policing, or that police can develop a stronger allegiance to democratic ideals than the regimes they serve, as can be seen in the persistence of democratic modes of policing even though democratic backsliding gained significant momentum in the country after 2007 as the EU leverage started to weaken and electoral authoritarian tendencies of the ruling AKP began to surface.

In the Turkish case, reformist officers within the police provided unprecedented support to the AKP in weakening the military which represented a grave threat for the AKP and Erdogan’s political survival during the party’s first two terms in office (2002-2011). One of the important reasons for the fervent support of the police for the AKP’s efforts to end the decisive political role for the military through the politicization of the judiciary in the Ergenekon trials was that the members of the reformist wing inside the TNP saw this as an opportunity to strengthen their position within the state bureaucracy to carry out their reform agenda. Indeed, throughout Turkey's history, particularly during periods of strained civil-military relations, the police's intelligence and law enforcement capabilities emerged as valuable resources to maintain control, as underlined above in the discussion of the role of the police intelligence in informing the coalition government in 1997 about the preparations for a potential military coup on the pretext of rising anti-secularism in Turkish politics and society. As a corollary, during the early years of the AKP government when the Turkish military wielded significant tutelary powers over elected officials through its influence in political decision-making and its capability of extra-legal interventions in politics, these reformist elements within the police showcased themselves as a
significant leverage against the interference of the military in politics, or as Hülşü (2017) notes, as a security valve against the resurgence of militarized and/or statist politics in Turkey.

As part of this apparently increasing autonomy provided to the reformist officers in exchange for their cooperation with the ruling AKP against the military, members of the reformist wing worked to increase TNP’s connections with its foreign counterparts and international scholarly community. They took advantage of the European Union accession process and collaborated with the EU’s technical personnel. They also assumed responsibility as the country representatives for the police reform projects hosted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (Hülşü, 2021). While serving as trailblazers in launching many innovative policing projects domestically, such as community policing projects, CVE programs, and revisions in police education curriculums, they also collaborated with policing practitioners and scholars in the U.S. and European countries to advance scholarly research related to evidence-based policing strategies in Turkey, enhance international police cooperation, and more effectively fight transnational terrorism and organized crime. In this respect, for example, the International Research Center for Terrorism and Transnational Crime (Uluslararası Terörizm ve Sınıraşan Suçlar Araştırma Merkezi, UTSAM) founded by these reformist officers served as an international hub for police researchers by publishing research reports on policing and public safety issues and organizing international conferences which brought together policing experts from around the world. These officers also published thematical books on counterterrorism, in collaboration with the NATO’s public diplomacy division (Hülşü, 2021).

These reformist police cadres remained in office until 2014–16, when the coalition between the police and the AKP unraveled as the common enemy, the military, was sidelined, transforming the police yet again in a threat for the AKP government. In December 2013, Turkish police
launched the large corruption probes which were allegedly prompted by the escalating conflict between the AKP and the Gulen movement where they arrested 52 suspects, including the sons of three then cabinet ministers, the general manager of a state bank, an AKP mayor and several businessmen with close connections to the ruling AKP government. The suspects were accused of influence-peddling, tender-fixing, bribery, embezzlement, and gold smuggling to Iran (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Hülagü, 2017). As elaborated in Chapter 5, with the introduction of a new legislation in early 2014, Erdogan was able to close those investigations and crack down on the alleged Gulenists within the police force to reaffirm his control over the police institution (Castaldo, 2018; Taş, 2015). Among these purged officers on the pretext of being followers of Fethullah Gulen were also the members of the reformist cadres who were trailblazers in launching the democratic policing projects in the TNP, such as the CVE programs which were becoming a significant part of the TNP’s counter-terrorism toolkit. The removal of these cadres from the TNP or their reassignment to low profile positions and the resulting suspension of reform programs following these developments exacerbated the reorientation of the nature of police coercion in Turkey toward the authoritarian end as characterized by an increasing focus on monitoring and suppressing domestic opposition and exceptional security practices, which revived after the 2013 Gezi Park protests. These findings demonstrate that under specific political circumstances, police organizations can experience substantial transformations within relatively brief periods. However, these changes can just as easily be undone when confronted with ongoing political instability.

The police role in undermining the military-dominated tutelary regime in Turkey with the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials after 2007 and the launch of the large corruption probe by police in December 2013, after which Erdogan and his AKP gained through crucial legal changes a decisive control of state institutions (higher judiciary as well as internal security and national
intelligence) which were then more frequently and systematically deployed against opponents, leading to the consolidation of already emerged competitive authoritarian tendencies, represent dramatic examples of how police can shape regime transitions, a question that has not been asked as much by either policing scholars or political scientists. This aspect of the relationship between police and the political change—the influence of police on political development—has rarely been acknowledged or studied by the existing policing research. For instance, Los and Zybertowicz (2000), in their study of the role of the secret police in Poland’s transition from a communist regime, point out the major role covert action and actors played not only in creating and sustaining the communist regime, but also their less well-known role in undermining it. According to Los and Zybertowicz (2000), the transformation of Polish society was not simply a reflection of social movement activity from below, or of the power vacuum created by the collapse of Soviet support. Instead, “it involved a series of covertly negotiated revolutions instituted from on high, initially with the apparent support of the KGB” (Marx, 2000, p. 109). In this regard, Los and Zybertowicz’s (2000) study questions the automatic equating of police with the established order and calls for a more nuanced view. My findings about the political role of the police in Turkey (i.e., use of Turkish police to remove military from politics and the launch of the large corruption probe by police in December 2013, the results of which helped consolidate electoral authoritarianism in Turkey which started to emerge in the first decade of the 2000s) thus suggest that the police themselves can be instruments of regime transformations.

My findings reveal that the 2013 corruption investigation, which led the AKP to start to see the police as a potential threat rather than an ally, is the culmination of the increasing autonomy granted to the police organization by the AKP government in exchange for its cooperation in dismantling the influence of the tutelary powers in the political system. These police investigations which ostensibly targeted the corruption of prominent AKP executives, but which
allegedly intended the removing of AKP from political power by the Gulen network, illustrate that police are not invariably agents of those in, or with, power and may act independently from the political authorities. Indeed, opposing the mass purges of the teaching cadres of the Turkish National Police Academy following the graft probe, some Turkish police intellectuals described the AKP attack on the Academy “as an attempt to prevent the raising of police generations who will have the capacity to act independently from any kind of political power and thus the courage to chase corrupt politicians and statist mentality which is corrupt by its essence” (Cerrah, 2015 as cited in Hülagü, 2017, p. 113).

These findings then contribute to existing research on the political role of the police, which suggests that they can act as political agents capable of effectively pursuing their own interests, rather than being apolitical and subservient to regime leaders (Alpert & Dunham, 2004; Deflem, 2000; Goldstein, 1977; González, 2021; Hinton, 2006; Liang, 1992; Los & Zybertowicz; Marx, 2000; Ungar, 2002; Wilson, 1989). Liang notes that the modern police, as a state apparatus, has in fact never been a simple tool in the hands of the executive and “it has always been a developed pro-systemic apparatus attached to the international capitalist system rather than exclusively to this or that specific national political power” (1992, as cited in Hülagü, 2017). Police have their own interests and resources which “may be used independently and in complex and contradictory ways” (Marx, 2000, p. 107). These national and international resources and the development of transnational policing practices and various other international control regimes point out the increasing ability of the police to act independently of the political authorities (Deflem, 2000, 2002; Marx, 2000). Deflem (2000, 2002), in studying the formation of international police organizations and police behavior across borders, notes their autonomy in creating alliances independently of the political centers of their respective states.
These accounts suggest that police institutions are delegated with the state’s monopoly of the legitimate use of force and serve as a key instrument of the state’s infrastructural power which can be defined as “the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm” (Mann, 1984, p. 189). They are powerful bureaucracies “whose actions, and inaction, have the potential to corrode” (González, 2021, p. 22) an administration and with whom the elected politicians need to cooperate to pursue their political goals. This, in turn endows police forces with considerable agency to defend their institutional prerogatives. In other words, police are not only a potent political instrument utilized by politicians; but they are also formidable political actors who may leverage their structural power endowed to them due to their control of coercion to “selectively provide its service in the interests of elected leaders but can also threaten leaders by withdrawing its service of providing order and security” (González, 2021, p. 23). The police, who can be formidable assets for politicians due to performing a service that is essential for the functioning of society and can be distributed in politically beneficial ways, can also present important constraints for the political leaders. As noted by González (2021), “by commission or omission, police forces can create politically uncomfortable situations for elected officials” (p. 19). For example, work slowdowns by some police agencies in major US cities such as New York and Baltimore where “police officers scaled back patrols and arrests, in some cases leading to increased violence” proved to be deeply embarrassing for the city mayors (González, 2021). In the Turkish case, this crackdown by the police on government corruption and the related individuals with ties to the ruling AKP in December 2013 had the potential to almost bring down the government. The results of the crisis were so severe that the AKP government had to initiate an unprecedented purge and rotation operation within the police force and judiciary as well as implement an overhaul of the state through sweeping legal changes concerning the high judiciary, internal
security and intelligence, and media and communications to be able to secure complete control over these institutions (Kaygusuz, 2018).

My findings involving the Erdogan government’s reassessment of the source of threats to its survival and its response to that changed assessment during the authoritarian transformation in Turkey reveal that conceptualizing authoritarian regimes as uniformly dependent on coercion ignores a critical element of variation in their governance: the different ways in which they design their coercive apparatus and use violence and repression to maintain power.

During the early period of the AKP rule, the ruling party gradually curtailed the military’s influence in politics—which was then a significant threat for Erdogan and his AKP government’s political survival—"by implementing legal reforms that reduced the institutional power of the military in decision making” (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016, p. 1584). If these reforms reduced military’s legal-institutional influence in politics, another set of developments made it more difficult for the Turkish military to stage a coup against the ruling AKP. The rulers of the governing party counterweighed the military with the police who, with their increased intelligence and enforcement capabilities, played a critical role in monitoring and reporting on potential coup plots within the armed forces. This was evident in the police’s intelligence reports on the activities of members of the military staff and their monitoring of ultra-nationalism (ulusalcılık), an ideology that, arguably, had many adherents among the army’s ranks (Bahcecik, 2014, p. 77). Subsequently, the police took steps to criminalize military’s extra-legal interventions in politics through their crackdown on the secularists within the army for alleged attempts to overthrow the AKP government during the investigations such as Ergenekon and Sledgehammer (Balyoz).
After the threat of a potential coup attempt by the Turkish military was sidelined with the help of, first EU reforms and then through the weaponization of the judiciary and the police, Erdogan government’s attention and threat perception switched from tutelary institutions towards domestic opposition, which culminated with the 2013 Gezi uprising. The AKP government responded to the popular challenges during this period, such as the country-wide Gezi Park protests and the Kurdish political movement which would later win a considerable electoral success in the June 2015 parliamentary elections threatening the AKP’s hold on power, by deploying the militarized police, later supported by the legislation of a Domestic Security Bill which granted draconian powers to the police in the policing of protests and an increased autonomy from the judiciary.

The Gulen network’s plots, in particular the large corruption probe in December 2013 which was allegedly carried out by a group of Gulenist police officers, however, led the AKP to see the police as an intra-regime contender which needs to be dealt with in addition to the threat posed by the growing social and political opposition against its policies. Therefore, we can say that Erdogan and his AKP had to deal with a combination of these threats between December 2013 until the attempted military coup in July 2016, after which the threat perception of the Erdogan regime shifted from a combination of popular and intra-regime threats to a largely elite one, such as the risk of another coup d’état by the military (Eisenstadt, 2017), which catalyzed a more fragmented system of security forces in Turkey. This fragmentation involved institutional changes in policing such as the creation of new police and auxiliary units (i.e., the Reinforcement Ready Forces Directorate whose members report directly to the General Headquarters of the Turkish National Police in Ankara unlike other police units acting under the command of local police chiefs and civil governors, and the neighborhood watchmen or Bekcis). In addition to the reshaping of formal policing institutions, as part of its strategy of dividing the state’s coercive
power into multiple, overlapping security forces following the July 15 military coup attempt, the AKP government also fostered an ecosystem of pro-government paramilitaries/militias including military contractors, criminal gangs, and party youth wings. These forces would perform several critical functions, including monitoring AKP’s political opponents, defending the government in the event of another military coup attempt, and balancing the military’s influence (Cubukcu, 2018).

My findings about how the changing threat perceptions of the Erdogan regime during Turkey’s authoritarian consolidation shaped the institutional design and deployment of policing mirror previous empirical work which found that authoritarian rulers, who are invariably concerned with their own political survival, organize their coercive apparatus and deploy coercion to achieve one of two objectives—quelling challenges from domestic opposition groups or ‘coup-proofing’ against possible threats from within the security and intelligence apparatus (Greitens, 2016; Policzer, 2009). In a careful study of Taiwan, the Philippines, and South Korea, Greitens (2016) provides a compelling theoretical framework to better understand how coercive institutions in authoritarian regimes are structured and how this design influences the patterns of state repression and violence. She notes that autocratic rulers face two major threats against their political and physical survival: threats from the population (popular unrest) and threats from elites, especially elites in the coercive apparatus. She argues that while most autocrats deal with a combination of these threats at any given point in time, in constructing their coercive apparatus, they face a “coercive dilemma,” which means having to make a choice between addressing popular threats or addressing threats from regime elites, and a fundamental organizational trade-off between addressing the risk of popular overthrow or “coup-proofing” against elite threats. In other words, they should choose between designing their internal security apparatus to manage popular threats or to protect against a coup. She continues that because coup-proofing calls for
fragmented and socially exclusive coercive institutions while managing popular unrest demands more unitary and inclusive ones, authoritarian leaders cannot simultaneously maximize their defense against both threats (p. 4). Greitens argues that authoritarian rulers facing this “coercive dilemma” design their coercive apparatus based on the dominant perceived threat at the time they come to power. Dictators who prioritize the threat of a coup are likely to create a fragmented and socially exclusive security apparatus, while autocrats concerned with the risk of a popular unrest are more likely to create socially inclusive and unitary coercive organizations. Fragmentation or the existence of multiple organizations with overlapping or competing functions regarding domestic security and a lack of coordinating authority above them, serves to prevent collusion between these agencies and to prevent any one agency from becoming too powerful to stage a coup against the ruler (Greitens, 2016).

What is unique in the Turkish case, however, is that although Greitens (2016) argues that authoritarian leaders should choose between defending against population or elite threats or that they face a ”coercive dilemma”, which makes them likely to design their coercive apparatus based on the dominant perceived threat at the time they come to power, during the period between the December 2013 corruption probe until the July 2016 coup attempt, Erdogan does not appear to have prioritized one threat over another. As discussed above, this is seen in the authoritarian measures he took designing the security apparatus against both kinds of threats, such as the increasing militarization of the police and its empowerment through granting them extensive coercive and intelligence-gathering powers and immunity with the legislation of the Domestic Security Bill, while coup-proofing the security apparatus through mass purges/rotations within the police and, more importantly, expanding through legal amendments the power of the Turkish spy agency, MİT, whose chief has been a close confidant of President Erdogan since 2010, over the police and the military. This finding shows that the authoritarian
rulers do not need to necessarily choose between either threat in designing their coercive apparatus and can organize these institutions in a way that can respond to both threats effectively at the same time, as observed in the Erdogan case.

On the other hand, I also argue that the fragmentation of the security forces in Turkey may also be a response to the fact that the crackdown on the professional, well-trained police force on the pretext of going after alleged opponents (Gulenists) left the AKP with a very fragile security apparatus, especially after the mass purges following the July 2016 coup attempt. Indeed, scholars like Akkoyunlu and Öktem (2016), and several of my respondents, argue that the crackdown had dire consequences on state effectiveness, since the purged Gülenists were replaced with far less competent loyalists. On the other hand, to be able to compensate the purged cadres, the AKP also had to recruit some of its former political enemies with questionable loyalties. This is reminiscent of Geddes’ (1994) argument about the politicians’ dilemma of creating a well-equipped, well-trained, and independent police force which can be more effective in performing its functions but is also more likely to become an independent political actor which becomes a risk for the incumbents since it is not under their control. Thus, the multiplicity of security institutions, in addition to helping more effectively manage threats against Erdogan’s political survival, also may serve to create more chance of an effective security response.

The findings of my study revealing the empowering of the national intelligence agency, MİT, with the legislation of a new law on 17 April 2014 against the threats which may originate from the Gulenists inside the police and the military and the further fragmentation of the security sector in Turkey following the July 15 coup military coup attempt also align with the political science literature on ‘counterbalancing’ which found that authoritarian rulers tend to counterweight the regular armed forces with presidential guards, militarized police, civilian
militia, or other internal security forces outside military command to deter or impede potential coup attempts (Böhmelt & Pilster, 2015; Brooks, 1998; Bruce, 1992; Byman & Lind, 2010; De Bruin, 2018, 2019, 2020; Fatton, 2002; Frazer, 1994; Janicke, 2010; Martin, 2017; Quinlivan, 1999). These studies suggest that dividing the state’s coercive power into multiple, overlapping security forces, or counterbalancing the military power with parallel security forces, has been credited with upholding the stability of long-standing regimes in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (De Bruin, 2020). Brooks (1998) argues that authoritarian Arab regimes, such as those in Jordan, Egypt, and Syria, have developed internal security forces to remain in power. These forces have been used for monitoring domestic opposition groups, defending the rulers in the event of a coup attempt, preventing a single agency from amassing sufficient power to stage a coup, balancing the military’s influence, and assuming security functions that enable the military to focus on external threats (De Bruin, 2020). Similarly, in North Korea, Byman and Lind (2010) note, the fragmentation of state coercive apparatus, including the Guard Command, Pyongyang Defense Command, and Military Security Command, has been a critical strategy in ensuring the stability of the regime.

My findings reveal that the AKP government employed the police as an institution of surveillance and intimidation against the Turkish military during the transition from tutelary democracy—this mission involved monitoring and reporting on the activities of potential coup plotters within the armed forces as well as preparing the trials of Ergenekon and Balyoz. As underlined above, this made it more difficult for the Turkish military to stage a coup against the ruling AKP. Scholars argue that the creation of new police forces as counterweights to the military power has been a key determinant of maintaining regime stability in many developing states after decolonization in Africa and Asia (Bruce, 1992; De Bruin, 2020; Dwyer, 2019; Harkness, 2016; Janowitz, 1977). In Indonesia, for example, President Sukarno employed a
mobile police brigade as a counterweight to the regular military which is argued to have temporarily deterred challenges to his rule from the potential coup plotters within the armed forces (De Bruin, 2020). Some post-Soviet Eastern European countries also retained a fragmented security sector. For example, in Bulgaria, the highly fragmented system of military and security forces included a gendarmerie force under the Ministry of Interior, the National Protection Service which responded directly to the president, and the national intelligence service which employed troops possessing law enforcement powers (Bozhilov, 2007).

Erdogan and his AKP also instigated a network of pro-government vigilantes, including private security agencies, government-affiliated criminal groups, and members of the unofficial party young wings, to help the AKP government to “control streets, inflict oppression and carry out covert operations against dissident political groups” as well as to balance, at some level, formal military and police forces with diehard loyalist groups after the July 15 unsuccessful military coup (Cubukcu, 2018). Previous research highlights the dependence of some authoritarian rulers on the use of non-state actors, such as paramilitary forces and civilian militias, in responding to challenges to their rule from both the military and domestic opposition groups (Chen, 2017; De Bruin, 2020; Fatton, 2002; Janicke, 2010; Leonard, 2015; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Martin, 2017; Pfaff, 2001; Rudbeck, Mukherjee, & Nelson, 2016; Takougang & Krieger, 1998). For example, in Haiti, President François Duvalier created a personal militia—Tonton Macoutes—to maintain public order and serve as a counterweight to the regular military (Fatton, 2002). In Panama, Manuel Noriega created paramilitary militias, the Dignity Battalions known for their fierce loyalty to his regime, to monitor internal opponents and deter potential coup attempts by the armed forces (De Bruin, 2020). Similarly, Hugo Chavez, following an unsuccessful military coup which aimed to remove him from power in 2002, established the Bolivarian National Militia, a civilian paramilitary force, to deter future coup attempts (De Bruin, 2019; Janicke,
This civilian militia force numbers about 2 million members today and responds directly to the current Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro (De Bruin, 2019).

The findings of this study also reveal that the need for increased suppression of real or perceived challenges against state power may also prompt major changes in the structure and functioning of policing in developing and transitional states. Drawing on a case study of the police reforms aimed at reorganizing the Turkish policing after the 1983 democratic transition, my findings reveal that ‘democratization’ may not always be the right way to understand the motivations or outcomes of police reform projects in political transitions. Internally generated police reform and its drivers in developing and transitional states have rarely been acknowledged, let alone studied by social scientists.

Together with the flourishing and progression of democratic ideas and the emergence of democracy as the predominant goal of political development after the collapse of communism, the idea of a democratic and human rights-based policing has been a realistic probability. As Bayley (2006) points out, “rather than being seen as a necessary evil, a standing threat to freedom, police became co-producers of a desirable political order” (p. 10). Democratic institution building in general and police reform have been key to democratization and building peace in transitional societies (Ellison, 2007; Marenin, 2000; Pino & Wiatrowski, 2006). Indeed, as David Bayley (2006) points it, “a government that cannot provide minimal safety to its citizens cannot be called a government, let alone a democratic one” (p. 22). Several scholars have suggested that a police force that fail to provide adequate protection for citizens constrained by the rule of law and accountable to formal external mechanisms would undermine the quality of democratic citizenship as well as the quality and stability of democracy (O’Donnell, 1993; Call, 2003; Davis, 2006; González, 2021). Therefore, the failure of reforming police institutions
and providing meaningful security for citizens in developing democracies creates significant threats for the durability of new democratic institutions in these countries.

Previous scholarship has predominantly addressed police reform interventions and projects promoted by an international organization, such as the EU, UN, NATO, or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), or a Western democratic state such as the United States. These studies suggest that the contemporary interventions aimed at reforming police forces in developing and transitional states have been driven by Western formulated norms and standards of police conduct, or democratic policing, which are promoted by developed states as “best practices” in policing worldwide (Banks & Baker, 2016; Bayley, 2006; National Institute of Justice, 1997). Few studies discuss cases where the police reform was domestically initiated and was not driven by the notion of democratic policing. For instance, Light (2014), in his study of police reform in post-Soviet Republic of Georgia, argues that while external agents may encourage police reform, “significant reductions in police corruption and improvements in police service require a government with exceptionally strong motivations of its own to pursue such reforms” (p. 338). Georgian police reforms were neither initiated nor directed by the West, and the reform process was driven by the Georgian government from its inception (Light, 2014). Light (2014) notes that Georgia’s post-Rose Revolution police reforms were motivated by a state building agenda rather than a democratic transition. As he notes, while the restructuring of the Georgian police resulted from a major political transition, “democratic policing does not provide an accurate label for the reforms’ origins, motivations, or outcomes” (Light, 2014, p. 335). In the Georgian case, police reforms implemented by the incumbent Saakashvili government were meant to achieve several political goals, namely “the maintenance of Georgia’s sovereignty in the face of its long-term conflict with neighboring Russia; establishing the legitimacy of the new regime with Georgian voters; and demonstrating its credibility to Georgia’s new Western

In a careful study of five post-Soviet countries (Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and Tajikistan), Marat (2018) finds that in each country police reform occurred in the aftermath of ‘transformative violence’, a watershed event that leads governments to announce police reforms to prevent challenges to their political power. Marat argues that incumbent governments in these post-Soviet states, which expand public accountability over policing and engage with civil society activists, are “primarily responding to a threat to [their] political power caused by civic mobilization in the aftermath of a state’s violent interaction with the civilian population,” rather than being necessarily or exclusively driven by the ideals of democratization (p. 2). As Marat (2018) notes, “[police] reforms aim at preventing a recurrence of such violence so as to ensure the survival of the incumbent political regime, be it recently elected or in power for some period of time” (p. 3).

In Turkey, while the post-1983 democratic transition set in motion a restructuring of Turkish policing, it was the neoliberal economic and national security (which they shared with their predecessors in the military government and previous Turkish administrations that ruled under the military-dominated tutelary regime of Turkey’s multiparty period since 1950) challengers of the new rulers, that determined the nature of that transformation, rather than anything directly related to the return of democratic rule. In other words, transformations in the structure and functioning of the police organization in Turkey during this period were dictated by the national security discourses of Turkey’s Cold War-oriented, military dominated tutelary regime and the neoliberal state transformation following the 1983 transition to the civilian rule.
Chapter 7

7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This study has examined the politics of continuity and reform among coercive institutions in political transitions. Turkey is an important case study in this respect because it has experienced repeated and very dramatic political transitions as well as periods of continuity and change in policing over a relatively compressed period of approximately forty years, from 1983 to the present. This study combines interviews with participants with first-hand experience of policing and police leadership over a significant period of change and documentary sources to help advance a more complete understanding of the relationship between policing and political change. As I discussed in detail in the previous chapter, several conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this research, drawing and building on criminology and policing studies as well as insights from the political science research on state coercion. However, the most important contributions of the current study to the theory and received knowledge about policing and politics may be described as follows.

7.2 Theoretical contributions

This study makes a significant contribution in the broad areas of policing studies concerning the relationship between police and political change, in particular by theorizing about the mechanisms and ultimate causes that may produce policing continuity and change in the wake of political transitions. The detailed process tracing within the Turkish case, covering 40 years, allows for an understanding of the relationship between political development and policing reform in one direction, and between police actions and political developments in the other. In
The findings of this study challenge a long line of scholarship on how political change affects policing which has been overly focused on static or dichotomous concepts of democracy/autocracy and democratic/autocratic coercion which, first, resulted in these studies having failed to acknowledge the role of mixed regimes and incomplete transitions in influencing the course of police reform in democratic transitions, and second, having failed to acknowledge the presence of democratic modes of coercion in autocracies or hybrid regimes or the persistence of authoritarian police practices in democracies. We now know from the political science literature on hybrid regimes that the dichotomy of democracy and autocracy should be conceived of as a continuum with many political regimes being neither purely autocratic nor purely democratic (i.e., hybrid or mixed regimes) or that countries may depart from traditional autocratic regimes, but they are not fully transitioning to democratic systems (Carothers, 2002; Diamond, 2002; Wigell, 2008). We also know that the oversimplified categorization of authoritarian and democratic coercion should instead be conceived of as a continuum, with most police forces falling somewhere in between authoritarian and democratic coercion and potentially shifting between them over time (González, 2021).

As evidenced in the case study of policing in Turkey following the 1983 democratic transition, one can argue that (qualified) political democratization was not matched with similar democracy-oriented reform in policing because there was no significant regime change or the new tutelary regime established after 1983 did not represent a significant departure from the regimes that preceded it as signified by an unchanged relationship between policing and political order and an unchanged logic (as well as targets) of deployment of state coercion. On the other hand, the
pursuit of substantive democratic transformations in policing by the reformist security officials within the police despite the AKP’s ‘authoritarian turn’ after 2006 allows us to contemplate, maybe very paradoxically, how democratic innovations in policing could persist under an authoritarian or hybrid (in the Turkish case electoral or competitive authoritarian) regime. Indeed, the latter finding demonstrates that the police themselves can be instruments of democratization in policing (especially with the presence of a stable cadre willing to recognize the value of a democratic policing approach) or the police can sometimes exhibit greater loyalty to democratic principles than the governments they serve. Relatedly, this finding also suggests that democratic policing or democratic coercion are not as closely linked to the national regime as previously believed.

My findings in this research also challenge the literature on policing which suggests that the police can leverage their control over coercion as the primary entity to which the state delegates its monopoly of the legitimate use of force (Bayley, 1985; Bittner, 1970; Tilly, 1992; Weber, 1965) to constrain the policy options available to politicians and resist/thwart reform attempts. In this respect, I add to González’s (2021) findings regarding the persistence of police forces as authoritarian enclaves in post-democratic transition Latin American countries. Whereas the police forces in Latin America leveraged their position—as the unique entity with control over repression and protection which the politicians can distribute selectively toward their own political interests—“to constrain policy agendas to maintain the status quo of authoritarian coercion” (González, 2021), this structural power allowed the reformist security officials within the Turkish police a certain degree of autonomy to pursue reform efforts to promote democratic policing in Turkey in exchange for their cooperation with the AKP government’s policy priority, sidelining the military.
Maybe related to the points mentioned above, the findings of my study also suggest that police organizations can under certain political conditions (the Erdogan’s war against tutelary institutions in Turkey for his and his party’s political survival) undergo transformative changes in relatively short timeframes. Indeed, police reform advanced a lot further and faster (the police democratized in about a decade before dedemocratizing again) in Turkey than many other transitional contexts such as post-Soviet states. Yet these changes can equally easily be reversed in conditions of continuing political instability (i.e., December 2013 corruption probes and Gulen network’s plots together with increasing social and political opposition against AKP’s authoritarian policies). Thus, democratic policing or democratic coercion may be fragile and relatively easily dismantled.

My findings also add to the existing body of research on the relationship between policing and politics by demonstrating that the police are not just impacted by political transition, but shape that transition. This was observed in the role of the Turkish police in disintegrating military tutelage in Turkey and in the case of the 2013 corruption probes by the police, which Erdogan called a ‘coup attempt’ and resulted in a comprehensive reconfiguration of the state to increase Erdogan’s control over critical state institutions, such as the judiciary, internal security apparatus, and national intelligence, which were then systematically deployed against any opponents to Erdogan’s consolidating authoritarianism and the prospective transition to the presidential system in the country. In particular, I extend on observations made by Bayley (1969) on the bi-directional relationship between police institutions and their political constitutes and the work of Aydin-Aitchison who separated out concepts of ‘policing for democracy’ and ‘democratically responsive policing’, the former emphasizing that police shape their political contexts (Aitchison & Blaustein, 2013; Aydin-Aitchison & Mermutluoğlu, 2020).
Another contribution of this study is the development of an analytical frame bringing political science literature into close conversation with the criminological scholarship focused on police, police reform and democratic policing while framing the development of Turkish policing. For example, this study applies insights from the political science scholarship on coercive institutions in autocracies, which theorizes how authoritarian leaders organize their coercive institutions to remain in power, for the analytical framing of changes in Turkish police and policing during the authoritarian transformation in Turkey, in particular after 2013. As well, another key contribution of this study is that it enhances our understanding of Turkish policing by connecting the existing knowledge base on Turkish policing to a new analytical framework, including introducing Turkish language sources to an English-speaking knowledge sphere. In other words, this study makes a contribution to general knowledge on the relationship between police and democracy, but also to our understanding of Turkish policing in its own right. For example, while the existing work on public order/protest policing or counterterrorism policing in Turkey seems to be quite developed, this work is not related to the political changes in the way that this research does.

7.3 Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

The study of the Turkish case presents some limitations. First, the case of Turkey is particularly extreme in the extent of political instability and the extent to which that instability was reflected in dramatic policing changes. In particular, the period from the start of the AKP rule in 2002 until after the 2016 coup attempt has witnessed very dramatic political transitions as well as changes in policing over a relatively compressed period of time. Indeed, Turkey experienced a roller coaster ride in policing within a decade from the early to 2000s to the early 2010s, with the police democratizing and dedemocratizing at the hands of the same political rulers. In this
respect, for example, the war against the military tutelage which provided the reformist cadres in
the police force with the opportunity to pursue their reform projects may be an exceptional
situation for most other cases of political transition. Moreover, the TNP’s extensive experience
with terrorism, which far exceeds that of most police services in other industrialized
democracies, has produced a cadre of officers dedicated to raising the professional level of
Turkish policing, improving police-community relations, and addressing Turkey’s serious
problems of terrorism in a democratic and rights-respecting manner. Therefore, employing the
Turkish model might not be feasible in contexts lacking such a cohort of progressive-minded
officers who would be able to carry out these comprehensive reform projects.

Another limitation of this research is that although it untangles in detail how the high policing
transformed during the authoritarian consolidation in Turkey after 2013, it does not spell out how
low policing or day-to-day policing has been affected by Erdogan’s restructuring. This is mainly
because most of my informants did not work in the police force after 2016 and there is limited
publicly accessible information about the workings of day-to-day policing in Turkey during this
period. In this respect, future studies can interview active-duty police officers rather than formers
especially to document day-to-day police practices and to unpack whether or not democratic
modes of coercion introduced by the previous reformist cadres have persisted despite the
authoritarian consolidation in the country.

There are some interesting questions that come out of my findings in this study which may have
implications for future research in the field. These questions are: how can my findings about the
police themselves being agents of radical change in policing inform approaches to democratic
police reform in other contexts, such as the U.S.?: why and how do autocracies sustain
‘democratic enclaves’ and democracies sustain ‘authoritarian enclaves’?: is it the case that in the
long run, police and regimes tend to become aligned with one another or does the misalignment between the police and regime tend to get ironed out in favor of the regime?; are democratic enclaves in authoritarian regimes ultimately doomed to be swallowed up?; what can the Turkish case tell us about things like the global rise of right wing and fascist governance in a vast swath of world regions, from Latin America to the US to Europe and the Middle East to South Asia?; and what can the Turkish case tell us about 'coup' by non-military actors? Future studies of policing and politics may explore through comparative case studies the questions presented here.
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Appendix A: Key to Abbreviations Cited in the Text

AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi-Justice and Development Party)—Turkey’s currently ruling moderate Islamist political party, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

ANAP (Anavatan Partisi-Motherland Party)—Turkish political party that won the November 1983 general elections in Turkey

CVE (Countering Violent Extremism)—a set of policing strategies directed toward counter-radicalization, deradicalization and disengagement of individuals from terrorist activity

DHKPC (Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi/Cephesi-Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front)—communist revolutionary group pursuing armed insurgency against Turkish government

EMASYA (Emniyet Asayiş Yardımlaşma Birlikleri-Security and Public Order Assistance Squads)

HDP (Halkın Demokrasi Partisi-People’s Democracy Party)—pro-Kurdish political party

IPA (Information and Prevention Activities)—Turkish National Police program to prevent radicalization and de-radicalize/disengage armed militants

ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant)—armed group pursuing creation of an Islamic state in Turkey and neighboring countries

MGK (Milli Guvenlik Kurulu-National Security Council)

MHP (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi-Nationalist Action Party)—far-right Turkish political party

PKK (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistane-Kurdistan Workers’ Party)—separatist terrorist group pursuing independent Kurdish state through armed insurgency against Turkish government

RTÜK (Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu-Radio and Television Supreme Council of Turkey)

SADAT (Uluslararası Savunma Danışmanlık İnşaat Sanayi ve Ticaret-International Defense Consulting)—a private military consultancy firm in Turkey
TIKKO (Türkiye İşçi ve Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu-The Liberation Army of the Workers and Peasants of Turkey)—armed wing of the TKP/ML revolutionary group

TKP/ML (Türkiye Komünist Partisi-Turkish Communist Party/Marxist Leninist) —communist revolutionary group pursuing armed insurgency against Turkish government

TNP (Turkish National Police)—Turkey’s national police force, responsible to the national government, with local field offices

YÖK (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu-Council of Higher Education of Turkey)
Appendix B: Timeline of Key Events

October 29, 1923  Foundation of the Republic of Turkey

July 21, 1946  First multi-party elections in Turkey

May 14, 1950  Democrat Party (DP) comes to power

May 27, 1960  Military coup in Turkey deposing Democrat Party government and its Prime Minister Adnan Menderes

September 12, 1980  Military coup in Turkey

August 11, 1982  Creation of Police Rapid Action Units (RAUs)

March 22, 1983  Creation of Police Special Operations Teams (SOTs)

November 6, 1983  Restoration of civilian rule in Turkey, followed by implementation of neoliberal economic policies and police restructuring

August 15, 1984  Onset of the Kurdish separatist insurgency under PKK

July 13, 1993  Reorganization of Police Special Operations Teams under a separate department

February 28, 1997  Military memorandum against the coalition government (called post-modern coup) in Turkey

December 10-11, 1999  Helsinki Summit between EU and Turkey leads to agreements on policing cooperation

November 3, 2002  AKP comes to power under Prime Minister (later President) Erdogan

July 22, 2007  Parliamentary elections in Turkey

August 28, 2007  Election of Abdullah Gul as the Turkish president by the parliamentary
October 21, 2007  Turkish referendum on direct presidential elections
2008  Launch of the anti-coup Ergenekon investigations
2010  Launch of the anti-coup Balyoz investigation
September 12, 2010  Turkish referendum on judicial reforms restructuring the constitutional court and the high council of judges and public prosecutors (Hâkimler ve Savcilar Yükse Nakil Kurulu, HSYK)
June 12, 2011  Turkish parliamentary elections; AKP gets 50% of popular vote
May 2013  Onset of the anti-government Gezi Park protests
December 17 and 25, 2013  TNP corruption probes against AKP officials; in response, Erdogan fires and imprisons many police officers
February 15, 2014  Legislative reforms granting the Minister of Justice the power to appoint the Head of the Inspection Committee of the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors
April 17, 2014  Passing of the ‘Law Amending the Law on State Intelligence Services and the National Intelligence Agency’
June 7, 2015  General elections; AKP fails to win parliamentary majority; breakdown of the peace process between the Turkish government and the Kurdish insurgency; renewed armed confrontation with PKK
November 1, 2015  Snap elections following major terrorist incidents; AKP wins parliamentary majority
July 15, 2016  Failed military coup, followed by dismissal and arrest of many TNP officers
April 16, 2017  Turkish constitutional referendum transitioning Turkey toward a presidential system
Appendix C: Recruitment Text/Information Letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

I invite your participation in an interview as part of a project to explore how political change influences the policy and practice of policing through a case study of the evolution of Turkish policing from the 1980 military coup until the present. The goal of the study is to explore specific parameters, including particular domestic institutional interests and alliances (e.g., the alliance between the Turkish political leadership and the police in 2000s, or the police/military nexus after the 1980 military coup), as well as international cooperation and/or foreign policy imperatives (e.g., Turkey-EU relations, EU-sponsored police reform projects in 2000s) which have determined the outcomes of Turkish policing and police reform in the post-1980 military coup era. This project is also aimed at understanding how new authoritarian regimes construct or reconstruct policing, and how a transition to authoritarian rule affects aspects of policing.

I am Serdar San (a doctoral student and principal investigator) of the University of Toronto, Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies. I am also a former Turkish police officer dismissed from the service with an emergency decree issued after the coup attempt in Turkey on 15 July 2016. I left Turkey in 2013 to undertake graduate studies in Canada, and have remained in Canada since then to continue my education at the doctoral level, as well as for political reasons. This email will explain to you the purpose of the project, the procedures, and the potential benefits of participation. You may contact me to ask any questions that will help you to understand the project (serdar.san@mail.utoronto.ca).

The study is called “Policing and Police Reform in Turkey: An Exploration of the Transformation of Turkish Policing in the post-1980 Military Coup Era.” This project will examine how political regime types and political transitions may influence the evolution of policing following transitions, and how regime types/transitions interact with other more contextual factors in determining policing/policy reform outcomes, drawing on a case study of Turkey which has experienced repeated and very dramatic political transitions as well as changes in policing over a relatively compressed period of approximately forty years, from 1980 to the present. Another purpose of the study is to promote a better understanding of how new authoritarian regimes construct or reconstruct policing, and how a transition to authoritarian rule affects aspects of policing, based on the findings from the Turkish case.

In the interview, I will ask you questions about your experience during your tenure in the TNP and your observations about Turkish policing in recent decades. The interview should last no more than two hours.

There are no direct benefits to you. However, by discussing these topics, I hope to add to scholarly understanding of policing/policy reform following political transitions, democratic policing, comparative policing, as well as policing in the Global South. Data gathered will be primarily used in my doctoral dissertation project that should be of interest to scholars and policymakers who are interested in Turkish policing and security sector in Turkey and a larger scholarly audience who are interested in Turkish national politics and Turkish studies in general. Data gathered may also be used in academic presentations and other publications that my dissertation might lead to (e.g., articles from each chapter of my study). I will also send you copies of any publication(s) that result from this research.
In deciding whether to participate, you may wish to consider the potential for retaliation by the Turkish government against your family members in Turkey. **You may also wish to consider the possibility that WhatsApp may be under US or Five Eyes surveillance.** If you prefer, we can conduct a telephone interview at my expense.

You are free to determine the scope of your participation in this project. I will be asking for your permission for several specific aspects of that participation. You are free to modify the terms of your participation (including by withdrawing from the project completely) up to the point of final publication of the scholarly article(s) this research might lead to. Before beginning the interview, I will ask whether you agree to be recorded on an audio or video device. If you decline, I will record your answers in writing only. I will also be asking for your consent to be cited by name in the dissertation and publications I plan to produce based on this research. **You can opt to maintain confidentiality and be referred to by a pseudonym, rather than be identified by name, if you have any particular concerns about a possible retaliation by the Turkish government against your relatives in Turkey.** If you decline to be cited by name, you will be identified only by a pseudonym as a former Turkish police officer. If you do wish to be identified by a pseudonym, we can also discuss what information should be included or omitted in my dissertation and subsequent publications in order to make your identification impossible.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time prior to publication without any negative consequence, and your data will not be used. At that time, and at any subsequent point up to final publication of planned scholarly article(s), you will be free to withdraw completely from the project, or to direct me to modify or delete particular answers you have given, or (if you initially authorize me to cite you by name), to cite you by a pseudonym.

For further questions related to the study, please feel free to contact me at 416-978-7124 or serdar.san@mail.utoronto.ca. You may also approach my supervisor, Professor Matthew Light, on 416-946-7419, or matthew.light@utoronto.ca. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Research Ethics Manager, Dr. Dean Sharpe, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto, at 416-978-5585 or dean.sharpe@utoronto.ca. The Office of Research Ethics exists to supervise research on human subjects that is conducted by professors and students at the University of Toronto, and ensure that all such research is conducted in an ethical manner. **The research study you are participating in may be reviewed for quality assurance to make sure that the required laws and guidelines are followed.** If chosen, (a) representative(s) of the Human Research Ethics Program (HREP) may access study-related data and/or consent materials as part of the review. All information accessed by the HREP will be upheld to the same level of confidentiality that has been stated by the research team.

I also respectfully ask you to forward this email to any potential participants you may know asking them to contact me if they are interested in participating in my study.

Thank you for your assistance with this project.
Yours sincerely,

Serdar San

*Principal Investigator*
Appendix D: Verbal Informed Consent Template

(This script will be read at the beginning of an interview. I will note the interview details (i.e., the interviewee’s name and the date of the interview) in my notes, along with the interviewee’s responses to the consent-related questions below.)

Name of respondent________

Date________

Thank you for your interest in participating in my doctoral dissertation research to explore how political change influences the policy and practice of policing through a case study of the evolution of Turkish policing from the 1980 military coup until the present. As you know, I am Serdar San (a doctoral student and principal investigator) of the University of Toronto, Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies. I am also a former Turkish police officer dismissed from the service with an emergency decree issued after the coup attempt in Turkey on 15 July 2016. I would now like to remind you of the purpose of the project, the procedures, and the potential benefits of participation. You may contact me, my supervisor, or the University’s Office of Research Ethics to ask any questions that will help you to understand the project or your rights as a participant; please see the invitation letter that I sent you recently for the relevant contact details. If you need another copy, I’m happy to give/email you one right now. The research study you are participating in may be reviewed for quality assurance to make sure that the required laws and guidelines are followed. If chosen, (a) representative(s) of the Human Research Ethics Program (HREP) may access study-related data and/or consent materials as part of the review. All information accessed by the HREP will be upheld to the same level of confidentiality that has been stated by the research team.

Nature and Purpose of the Project: The study is called “Policing and Police Reform in Turkey: An Exploration of the Transformation of Turkish Policing in the post-1980 Military Coup Era.” This project will examine how political regime types and political transitions may influence the evolution of policing following transitions, and how regime types/transitions interact with other more contextual factors in determining policing/police reform outcomes, drawing on a case study of Turkey which has experienced repeated and very dramatic political transitions as well as changes in policing over a relatively compressed period of approximately forty years, from 1980 to the present. Another purpose of the study is to promote a better understanding of how new authoritarian regimes construct or reconstruct policing, and how a transition to authoritarian rule affects aspects of policing, based on the findings from the Turkish case.

Explanation of Procedures: In this interview, I will ask you questions about your experience during your tenure in the TNP and your observations about Turkish policing in recent decades. The questions will cover issues such as your assessment of particular domestic institutional interests and alliances (e.g., the alliance between the Turkish political leadership and the police in 2000s, or the police/military nexus after the 1980 military coup), as well as international cooperation and/or foreign policy imperatives (e.g., Turkey-EU relations, EU-sponsored police reform projects in 2000s) which have influenced Turkish policing and police reform in the post-1980 military coup era. The interview should last no more than two hours.
Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you. However, by discussing these topics, I hope to add to scholarly understanding of policing/police reform following political transitions, democratic policing, comparative policing, as well as policing in the Global South. Data gathered will be primarily used in my doctoral dissertation project that should be of interest to scholars and policymakers who are interested in Turkish policing and security sector in Turkey and a larger scholarly audience who are interested in Turkish national politics and Turkish studies in general. Data gathered may also be used in academic presentations and other publications that my dissertation might lead to (e.g., articles from each chapter of my study). I will also send you copies of any publication(s) that result from this research. By publishing and presenting my findings, I will also be drawing attention to the plight of former Turkish police officers such as you, who left the TNP for political reasons in recent years.

Risks: In deciding whether to participate, you may wish to consider the potential for retaliation by the Turkish government against your family members in Turkey. You can opt to maintain confidentiality and be referred to by a pseudonym, rather than be identified by name, if you have any particular concerns about a possible retaliation by the Turkish government against your relatives in Turkey. If you do wish to be identified by a pseudonym, we can also discuss what information should be included or omitted in my dissertation and subsequent publications in order to make your identification impossible. You may also wish to consider whether you may find it distressing to participate in this interview, or to answer particular questions that may come up in the course of the interview. You may also wish to consider the possibility that WhatsApp may be under US or Five Eyes surveillance. If you prefer, we can conduct a telephone interview at my expense.

Recording: Before beginning the interview, I will ask whether you agree to be recorded on an audio or video device. If you decline, I will record your answers in writing only.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time prior to publication without any negative consequence, and your data will not be used. At that time, and at any subsequent point up to final publication of planned scholarly article(s), you will be free to withdraw completely from the project, or to direct me to modify or delete particular answers you have given, or (if you initially authorize me to cite you by name), to cite you by a pseudonym. You are also free to direct me to skip any questions that you may find distressing, or that for any other reason you do not wish to answer.

Scope of consent: You are free to determine the scope of your participation in this project. I would like to ask for your permission for several specific aspects of that participation. As noted above, you are free to modify the terms of your participation (including by withdrawing from the project completely, or by declining to answer particular questions) up to the point of final publication of the dissertation project.

1. Do you consent to participate in this interview? YES/NO (Indicate answer in PI’s notes.)
2. Do you consent to audio recording of our interview? If you answer no, I will take only written notes from the interview. CONSENT TO AUDIO-RECORDING: YES/NO (Indicate answer in PI’s notes.)
3. Do you consent to be cited by name in the dissertation and scholarly articles I plan to produce based on this research, or would you prefer to be identified only by a pseudonym as a former Turkish police officer? YOU MAY CITE ME BY NAME/REFER TO ME BY A PSEUDONYM (Indicate answer in PI’s notes.)
Appendix E: Interview Template

Section 1: General Questions

1) What is your age?

2) What is your highest degree of education?

3) What school(s) did you graduate from?

4) How many years of experience do you have as a former police official?

5) What police departments/units did you work at?

6) What is the last police department/unit that you worked at?

7) What do you think a democratic police looks like?

8) What qualities make a police organization more or less democratic?

9) What did police/policing look like when you first started to work as a police officer?

10) What kinds of transformations have you seen in the policing of dissent/protest?

11) What kinds of transformations have you seen in police use of force?

12) What kinds of transformations have you seen in police corruption?

13) What kinds of transformations have you seen in police technical/investigative skills and the police’s ability to control/solve non-political crimes?

14) What kinds of transformations have you seen in police education/training?

15) What kinds of transformations have you seen in police accountability/oversight?

16) What kinds of transformations have you seen in police respect for human rights and civil liberties?

17) What other kinds of institutional/administrative changes did you observe?

18) In your opinion, what kind of factors dominated the policy and practice of policing in Turkey during your tenure? (political, institutional interests/alliances, or international policy objectives?)
Section 2: Questions on EU-sponsored police reforms

19) Were the police departments/units you worked at influenced by the European Union-sponsored police reforms? If yes, can you describe the impact of these reforms on the policies/practices of policing?

20) Do you think the EU-sponsored reform projects brought about or helped bring about the democratization of Turkish policing in the 1990s or early 2000s? Why or why not?

21) Who do you think supported these reforms and why?

Section 3: Questions on Turkish policing following authoritarian transition under AKP

22) Based on your own experience, how can you describe the relationship between the police and the political regime/government under the AKP rule?

23) In your opinion, why does the current Turkish government employ the police as the main instrument of repression of dissent?

24) Have you heard about any other groups/structures engaged in the policing of dissent except the formal policing institutions, in particular since the 2016 coup attempt?

25) In your opinion, what is the reason for mass purges of police officers following the July 2016 coup attempt? How do you think these purges impacted on the operation of policing in Turkey?

26) Can you tell me what considerations or circumstances caused you to leave the TNP?

27) How do you think the transition to authoritarian rule influenced policing in Turkey?

28) How do you think policing in Turkey is viewed by police and non-police in other places?

29) Do police in Turkey treat various minority groups differently from the majority, i.e, Sunni Muslim Turks, and if so how?

30) What do you think are the most necessary police reforms in Turkey right now?