

Thinking through Majoritarian Domination in Turkey and India

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15.1. Introduction

In this chapter, we argue that recent developments in India and Turkey constitute a vital reorganization of political belonging that moves into a phase of majoritarian domination, which we define as the majority's avoidable and illegitimate exercise of governmental power that compromises minorities' basic interests. Although both Turkey and India, as modern states in the twentieth century, emerged in the context of widespread violence and imperial dissolution, their founding elites adopted substantially different positions toward the challenge of extant religious difference. Differing notions of modernity, history, nationalism, and diversity motivated distinctive state-society compacts and arrangements for diversity. Turkish leaders believed they could forge a unified and unitary nation built on a Turkish Sunni identity. More than two decades later, Indian elites adopted a more intricate view of diversity that accommodated, constrained, and constitutionalized difference. However, by the time of this writing, both Turkey and India have developed into regimes that uphold majoritarian domination.¹ In this chapter, we modify the theoretical intuitions underlying "majoritarianism," a concept that has often described regimes where identitarian rather than decisional political majorities prevail. We then describe how India and Turkey became states of majoritarian domination through a comparative history of three mechanisms. Before setting out our argument, we briefly revisit the basis for comparing India and Turkey.

The Armenian Genocide and forced exchanges, and the Partition of India and Pakistan, unfolded while political elites sought to establish new states. In India, the Congress elite acknowledged the violence and struggled to find imperfect compromises to uphold peace and adherence to what would come to be called

¹ This chapter was revised in early 2020 as Covid-19 spread in India and Turkey, and we offer here a theoretical statement, that we hope, through extension or refutation, will further efforts to understand the historical sociology of political regimes.

Indian secularism (Bajpai 2011; Mehta 2016; Prakash 2018). Turkish elites, situated in the former imperial metropole, had lost an empire and many territories and refused to acknowledge the violence around them, and their legatees deny it to this day. As a result, violence did not act as a prospective restraint upon elites in Turkey. While India's constitutional settlement was a meaningful restriction on minority discrimination, in Turkey, elites ruled out accommodation toward any group, creating a burden for minorities to prove their loyalty to the state (Rodrigue 2014; Tambar 2016).

Both countries' leadership saw secularism as indispensable for national unity, justice, and development. However, they interpreted the role of religion and diversity in different ways (Madra 2015). India established a "state-nation" while Turkey established a nation-state (Stepan, Yadav, and Linz 2011; Kaviraj 2020). The Turkification project completed the transformation from empire to a linguistically and religiously homogeneous republic. The Indian republic regulated and constrained religious pluralism, and shortly thereafter institutionalized linguistic diversity.

Indian secularism, more an interpreted ethic than articulated state policy, emphasized negotiation, while Turkish secularism forbade public religiosity even as it privileged one ethnoreligious community. Kemalist laicism's original and continuing refusal to take diversity as a premise to guide the building of institutions regulating the relation between state and religion differed from that of another unitary state, France (Akan 2017a, 2017b). Thereafter, however, long-standing opposition to secularism and the globalization of economic and ideological worldviews have produced striking similarities. Turkey's and India's respective journeys into majoritarian domination are indicative of a convergence on understandings of pluralism.

The AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi), which has ruled Turkey since 2002, emerged amid an economic crisis set within the context of decades of corrupt and caustic multiparty alliance politics. The AKP has, over time, eroded an already weak apparatus of the rule of law and decisively shaped an electorate identified by conservative, religious, Sunni, and ethnic Turkish markers. In India, political competition through the 1960s consisted of contests between ideological and ethnic parties in opposition, and the Congress, the default party of power. Then, as the Congress atrophied nationally in the 1970s and 1980s, Hindu nationalist and oppressed-caste movements altered the terms of political contest. The political parties that grew from these movements staked their claim to power, in coalition nationally, and in many states. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the latest iteration of Hindu nationalism in party politics, first formed the government in 1996. This chapter discusses the second national BJP regime, which began in 2014, and has since sought to remake Indian politics and society in its image of a "Hindu Rashtra"—or Hindu nation.

The AKP and BJP found electoral success through a combination of long-running identity scripts championed by affiliated social organizations and more temporally proximate economic promises. These identity scripts disavow the founding secular compact and deny the plurality of religious and ethnic life, converting the logic of democratic majorities from uncertain, changing coalitions to permanent, ethnoreligious categories and reinscribing difference as disloyalty. Once in power, these parties undermined state institutions and constrained civil society organizations to reflect the majoritarian narrative, thereby eroding pluralism in another realm of social and political life (Kaviraj 2010). Diversity and pluralism—of religious belief and political disposition—are anathema to these regimes. They frame such diversity and the criticism that stems from it as disloyalty, punishable with violence. Therefore, despite differences in the respective histories of democracy and the management of pluralism since their modern founding, we suggest these regimes have arrived at a similar equilibrium: majoritarian domination.

15.2. Majoritarian Domination

We define majoritarian domination as the majority's avoidable and illegitimate exercise of governmental power that compromises minorities' basic interests. Majoritarianism refers to the belief that the governing majority must act in the interests of the enumerated majority—as might be produced by a census—in society.² Put another way, it refers to the privileges a member of the enumerated majority must enjoy over government *because* of her membership in that community.³ Domination, following Ian Shapiro (2015: 5), connotes “the avoidable and illegitimate exercise of power that compromises people's basic interests.” We offer this definition to specify rather than repudiate existing usages of “majoritarianism.”⁴

We explain the development of majoritarian domination through three different features: discursive, epistemic, and institutional. First, majoritarian domination arises from the conflation of decisional majorities with social groups

² The enumeration of the majority is a contested process: groups dispute how they and others are classified and enumerated by the state.

³ Akin to what Avigail Eisenberg (2020) labels the “entitled majority.”

⁴ The prospect of an oppressive majority has long captivated political theorists. Alexis de Tocqueville's discussion of “the moral empire of the majority” contains a potent critique of the tendencies toward pluralistic ignorance and conformism in majority rule (Elster 2014). Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Fitzjames Stephens also worry about the possibility of “national majorities” (Vermeule 2014). More recently, in the context of debates about multiculturalism, scholars have examined the appropriateness of “majority rights” and the limits that should be placed upon them (Eisenberg 2020; Patten 2020).

bound by ascriptive identities, such as religion.⁵ When the majority is identified with a specific community, rather than an episodic coalition of individuals, the majority attains the capacity to interfere, illegitimately, in the basic interests and activities of minorities. Elections and social movement organizing, as we will elaborate, provide the discursive context in which majorities acquire this *permanence*. A permanent majority undermines a central tenet of modern democracy: that anyone might hope to be in the majority and have their political will enacted by a government of their choosing. It attacks, in this sense, democratic pluralism.⁶

Second, majoritarian domination relies on the suspension of criticality to secure claims of the majority's support. Uncertainty about other individuals' beliefs is a ubiquitous fact of social life. The right to free expression, a staple of democratic regimes, notionally removes all formal constraints upon expression. Indeed, democratic societies do have greater diversity in expressed opinion and include protections for this diversity, most influentially in the form of the news media. The publication of different opinions reveals the existence of diversity. The agents of majoritarian domination seek to undermine this diversity by stifling free expression in the news media. In this sense, they attack *epistemic* pluralism.

Third, majoritarian domination entails that those in power insist that the majority's will prevail in all political matters and that all state institutions must reflect the will of the permanent majority. Majoritarian domination undermines pluralism by weakening institutions designed to temper majoritarian impulses and by attacking mechanisms for accountability that supplement democratic elections. These institutions include constitutional organs of the state, such as the judiciary; statutory institutions, such as election bodies; as well as nongovernmental organizations, such as human rights watchdogs. This feature of majoritarianism is similar to authoritarianism, except that majoritarian domination uses its electoral victory as a justification for striking against other democratic institutions.⁷ We rely heavily upon excellent scholarship on institutional domination in Turkey and India. In the following sections, we examine each of the three facets—discursive, epistemic, and institutional.

⁵ See Urbinati's (2017) discussion of the threat populism poses to the principle of majority rule when it claims to consist of a more "dense majority."

⁶ An ethnic majority's exercise of political power is not inherently unjust. For instance, in post-apartheid South Africa, the Black majority had a strong, justified case to bring redress to historical domination under apartheid (Patten 2020). Chaturvedi (2019) illuminates the distinction between political and numerical minority status in her study of democratic violence in post-apartheid South Africa.

⁷ See Scheppele's (2018) account of autocratic legalism, which establishes how elected leaders undertake change to the content and structure of law to favor supporters and entrench their rule.

15.3. Majoritarianism and Discursive Pluralism

The first feature of majoritarian domination is the transformation of majority from an uncertain and episodic enumeration to a permanent declaration of popular will. Permanence undermines democratic pluralism discursively. India, Pakistan, and Turkey all negotiated the imperatives of founding modern states with fluctuating, yet still legible, communities.⁸ Elites, especially in India and Turkey, somewhat disingenuously presumed abstract decisional majorities would replace the logics of communal mobilization in competitive democracies. Majoritarian domination occurs when an abstract majority is made salient as a permanent political majority. In other words, the majoritarian identity needs to be activated for majoritarian domination to occur. This process of activation unfolds in three phases. First, social movements and political parties undertake the discursive labor of producing an identity script that describes the boundaries of belonging and invents the majority's victimhood. Second, political parties secure electoral power through strategic alliances as well as neoliberal styles and strategies (Grewal and Purdy 2014). Third, the majoritarian party and accompanying movements frame challenges to the identity script as disloyalty and punish minorities with violence. In what follows we will describe the activation of majoritarianism and its attack on discursive pluralism, through an account political Islam in Turkey, led by the Milli Görüs, the Fethullah Gülen movement, and the AKP; and Hindu nationalism in India, led by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Bharatiya Janata Party, and their affiliates.

15.3.1. Turkey

The history of majoritarian discourse in Turkey has three crucial components. First, Turkish nationalism produced an identity script that connected Sunni Islam and Turkishness during the transition from empire to nation-state. This

⁸ Ottoman and British systems of difference negotiation entrenched political contestation along communal lines and institutionalized a state that saw this as a problem for it to "manage," albeit in different sequences. James Scott (1998) and many postcolonial scholars demonstrate states' efforts to create legibility through categorical distinctions to exercise coercive rule more effectively. The census is one such tool. In recording the various social identities of individuals under a handful of categories like "Hindu," "Muslim," "Jew," "Orthodox Christian," and so on, the state produced enumerated communities. The imperial state also created incentives for the mobilization of these communities in the selection of their representatives and in the competition for state resources. In the Ottoman Empire, the state's management of diversity preceded the modern census; in British India, the census became a tool in the management of religious diversity as the colonial state positioned itself as a neutral arbiter. See Lieberman and Singh (2017) for a global study of the exacerbating effect censuses have had on ethnic conflict between groups.

identity script was embellished through the twentieth century. Then, in the early twenty-first century, the AKP transformed this latent identity script and activated it through the discursive labor of electioneering. It produced a political Islam that exploited a long-standing secular-religious divide through a moral language of imagined victimhood, resulting in continuous electoral success with “unprecedentedly comfortable majorities” (Yabancı 2016; see also Cinar 2015).

Finally, challenges to this identity script—which already existed uneasily during the republican period—were framed as disloyalty and compounded with threats of violence against political dissidents and religious and ethnic minorities. The Ottoman Empire had a Sunni majority, in that most of its subjects were Sunni. After the genocide of Armenians (1914–23) and the population transfers with Balkan countries in 1923, this majority was more pronounced in Turkey. In the early years of the republican period, the state conducted multiple “nationalization” campaigns, legislated enforcement of the Turkish language, and sanctioned discriminatory treatment of minorities. Together, these initiatives activated a boundary between the Sunni majority and Turkish minorities. Nevertheless, the state’s favor for Sunnis was not explicitly stated—it was embedded in the ostensibly secular label of “Turkishness.” Christian and Jewish minorities were the visible “other,” and, over time, Alevi and Kurdish minorities found their belonging circumscribed and loyalty questioned. For instance, the imposition of a “pure” Turkish language was supplemented by public admonitions directed at minorities (“Citizens speak Turkish”), and speaking Greek, Armenian, or Judeo-Spanish was punished by humiliation. The Turkish nation-state broke decisively with the Ottoman Empire, discarding the inclusive disposition to diversity and the traditional millet system (Barkey 2008). Ironically, state-sponsored laicity, which relegated religion to the private sphere, contained within it the enabling discourses of the Sunni majoritarian identity script. The modern Turkish state’s Directorate of Religious Affairs, responsible for managing religious affairs, sacral and financial, reflected a more complicated legacy than the ideal-typical laicity (Adar 2013).

During the 1960s, opposition to the terms of this national identity project emerged in the form of political Islam. Emboldened by the rise of pan-Arab Islamism, Necmettin Erbakan, who would go on to found many Islamist parties, organized a coalition of Islamist groups under the platform of “*Milli Görüş*,” which consistently argued for a geopolitical and cultural turn toward the world of Islam (White 2014b). The electorally dominant political party through the 1950s and 1960s, the Democrat Party, and its successor, Adalet (Justice) Party, were less sanguine about Turkish laicity. Jenny White (2014a) describes this combination of an Islamic response to laicity with electoral politics as “vernacular politics,” encapsulating its connectivity with preexisting non-elite discourses.

Support for this agenda—intellectual and financial—also came from abroad. White (2014b) recounts the influence of Islamist writers like Abul A'la Maududi and Hassan al-Banna. Behlül Özkan (2017) argues that during the 1960s and later, Saudi influence among Islamists increased, only to multiply through the influx of Saudi capital in 1983 after the election of Prime Minister Turgut Özal. The military's relaxation of its hostility to religion began during this period. Cold War politics, and a fear of the Left in Turkey, motivated the military to restructure control over public religiosity after its coup in 1980, initiating the production of a new Turkish-Islamic synthesis (Kaplan 2002; Magnarella 1993). In order to promote a counterweight to Kurdish and leftist politics, the military allowed Quranic schools and expanded religious programs, paving the way for a state-sponsored political Islam (Hemmati 2013). Islamist political parties and the Turkish-Islamic synthesis together transformed the unstated exclusions of "Turkishness" into a majoritarian identity script that excluded and vilified, above all, Kurdish and Alevi minorities. The Sivas Massacre of 37 Alevi intellectuals in 1993 was a critical expression of how the majority would punish minority disloyalty. The Turkish state subjected Kurdish minorities to more intense, systematic, violent suppression after 1980. These campaigns, did not, however, have uniform effects: many Alevis continued to support republican Cumhuriyet Halk Partis politics, and many Kurds who had moved or forcibly relocated to the west escaped violent domination.

In the new century, the AKP emerged as a new political party and associated itself with an already flourishing social movement led by Fethullah Gülen, which had built a robust network among Sunni Muslims. The AKP was able to bridge decades of Islamist discourse, bringing conflicting parties and organizations together. It provided them with a language to claim political power through electoral politics, the second feature of permanence.

The Gülen movement flourished after the 1980 coup. Fethullah Gülen carved a global, partly progressive, partly illiberal social movement with a focus on uniformity and an Islamic concept of service, *hizmet* (Turam 2007). Marshaling education and counseling in schools and dormitories through a networked and loyal set of business organizations, and media outlets that disseminated their message, the Gülen movement developed a "communitarian synthesis of faith and nationalism, of social conservatism and economic power" (Hendrick 2011: 40). The AKP, which emerged in 2001, constructed the local political apparatus that reached out to previous Islamic party and social movement networks, framing its development and anti-corruption message as a new politics of mass empowerment (Karaveli 2016; White 2014a; Sayari 2011).

This campaign resonated with voters, especially in the Anatolian heartland, tired of the endemic corruption of secular elites. Simultaneously, the AKP courted liberal elite opinion by heralding an encouraging outlook on EU

accession and the military's devolution. September 11, 2001, and the events in its wake produced an eagerness for "good," "moderate" Islamic politics in liberal circles. The AKP was able to build upon its initial success in subsequent elections, moving from 34 percent of the vote in 2001 to surpassing 50 percent of the votes in its third election in 2011.

Once in power, the AKP acted on its promised neoliberal reforms and fiscal conservatism. The economy recovered from the crisis of 2001 through "politically supported capital accumulation" (Bugra and Savađskan 2014:20). This process empowered new actors separate from the privileged elite, which was also the secular elite, producing business associations that supported scripts of political Islam. As electoral successes multiplied, the AKP's discursive emphasis on its majoritarian script increased. They forwarded a new conception of the Turkish identity, inspired by a rehabilitation of the Ottoman past: glorification of the conquest of Istanbul and symbolic re-enactment of Ottoman splendor. Performing this imaginary reinscribed a vision of the nation at odds with its modern founding, and signaled the intensification of the domination of minorities.

Non-Muslim minorities—Christians and Jews—had been targets of majoritarian domination from the beginning of the republican regime, and their demographic insignificance has sustained persistent discrimination. After the Gezi Park protests in 2013 and the attempted coup in 2016, government discourse, in speeches, proclamations, and legal proceedings against all political opponents, framed dissidence in a vocabulary of treason and disloyalty. Post-coup rallies attacked non-Muslims by labeling imagined coup-plotters "crusaders" and a "flock of infidels," and state-sanctioned incitement by the media encouraged attacks against sacred sites, community organizations, and buildings (Erdemir 2019).

The domination of Alevis and Kurds intensified, with the latter subjected to a prolonged civil war. The state-led construction of the Taksim Mosque, a controversial project in Istanbul, encapsulates the regime's preoccupation with rewriting the founding scripts of the secular Turkish Republic and Ottoman toleration. By activating a latent privilege for Sunni, deploying scripts that privilege majority belonging in elections, and subjecting minorities to violent domination, the AKP has made the Sunni majority permanent and social, rather than fluctuating and uncertain.

15.3.2. India

The history of Hindu nationalism precedes the rise of the BJP, and the numerical majority of Hindus, as a proportion of India's population, has been a fact since the colonial census began in the nineteenth century. The founding script of

Hindu nationalism, drawn from V. D. Savarkar's writings, prescribes hierarchical belonging for India's many religious groups. Those whose ancestral *and* holy land lay in the subcontinent could claim the first right, while those whose holy land lay abroad could only pledge partial loyalty to India.⁹ This script formalized local antagonisms that had emerged in British India by the 1920s, around contests over physical space, such as temples and mosques, as well as religious conversion and cow slaughter.

The Congress party led India's movement for independence. It was consistently criticized by the Muslim League and Dalit groups, led by B. R. Ambedkar, as the party of caste Hindu interests.¹⁰ By 1947, the Congress elite asserted its support for secularism, even as the party disagreed internally about the concept's meaning and the extent of its application. Gandhi's assassination in 1948 by a self-professed Hindu nationalist led to a yearlong ban on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). After the ban was lifted, the RSS resumed and intensified widespread social mobilization along "cultural issues." While many members of the Congress held and retained their links with the RSS, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh emerged as the political party championing Hindu nationalism in many parts of North India. The BJS enjoyed limited electoral successes nationally, consistently falling short of securing a majority throughout its existence. However, it did succeed in forming state governments with other non-Congress parties after 1967. After Indira Gandhi revoked the Emergency in 1977, the Jana Sangh joined an array of other parties and formed the first non-Congress national coalition government that fell apart twice in three years, leading to Indira Gandhi's return in 1980.

The BJP emerged from the BJS, which unraveled that same year. Since then, the BJP has been the torchbearer of Hindutva in the party-political arena. As one of the RSS's satellite organizations, the party has maintained personnel and ideology-level relationships with the larger Sangh Parivar (the "family" of RSS affiliates). The party's national electoral fortunes reversed in the late 1980s, when Hindu nationalist mobilization upended the discursive vocabulary that dominated Indian democracy. The Shah Bano case, the Mandal Commission's report and implementation, and the Babri Masjid mobilization are well-documented episodes that accelerated and intensified the Hindu nationalist polarization program (Bajpai 2011; Blom Hansen 1996).

⁹ See Iqtidar, Chapter 5 in this volume, for a comparison of Savarkar's and Maududi's theories of democracy.

¹⁰ Gandhi's fast unto death in 1932—perhaps his most coercive—to protest the classification of depressed classes as a separate electorate that would choose its representatives to colonial legislatures was motivated by a desire to prevent a fracturing of the Hindu community. Demographic anxiety was not limited to Hindu nationalists.

Then-prime minister Rajiv Gandhi's decisions to support Muslim orthodoxy in the Shah Bano case in 1985 and leave unchallenged the opening of the Babri Masjid to Hindu devotees in 1986 catalyzed the emergence of Hindutva as the defining cultural fault-line in Indian politics. The destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and the riots that followed instantiated the potential of majoritarian domination under Hindutva. Mythic revivalism was an essential component of the RSS's project—an appeal for Brahmanical primacy and caste order projected backward to antiquity and forward into an epoch of the assertive Hindu nation. Through mass mobilizations in the 1980s the BJP and the RSS developed the capacity to contest a hitherto dominant ideological narrative of the Indian state—that of flawed but significant secularism.

The BJP's acquisition of political power at the national level in 1998 facilitated a further discursive transformation—through state policy rather than in confrontation against it. The first BJP government altered education policy through curricula and made scientific appointments to promote an alternative historical and scientific ethos that celebrated a mythic Hindu past and caricatured Muslims and Christians as foreign invaders and proselytizers respectively. The government altered the basis of citizenship to center a *jus sanguinis* conception over the *jus soli* basis that preceded it (Jayal 2013; Roy 2019). In doing so, it created the framework to enact the script Savarkar authored. Only those whose ancestral lineage and religious homeland lay within India were Indians, with the result that Christians and Muslims had split loyalties and therefore could never fully belong.

The RSS has numerous affiliated organizations that provide a variety of services—education, martial training, health services, and militant activism in the service of Hindutva. Some—like Seva Bharati and the Vanvas Kalyan Ashram—pursue political ends by discreetly encouraging support for the BJP in elections (Thachil 2014). In contrast, others provide ideological manpower and overt assistance in mobilization efforts (Valiani 2011). The RSS's ideological labor produced a majoritarian identity script through decades of mobilization, resulting in the “thinning” of the ethical and practical core of religion into a majoritarian political identity.¹¹ Religion in politics provides an alphabet, which could be used in many different choreographies. It can be deployed to create animosity, but it has also been used to promote harmony and solidarity.¹²

¹¹ Sudipta Kaviraj (2010) convincingly argues that secularization can occur even as religion ostensibly remains the locus of contestation in politics when the ethical and practical core of religion is stripped away but its importance to identity is retained. In this context, Hindu nationalists' preoccupation with othering Muslims and Christians translates into political proposals that are mistaken as the only possible expression of Hinduism in politics.

¹² A growing literature examines the practices, networks, and ideologies of religious sharing. For instance, Anna Bigelow (2010) describes the practice of religious sharing in Malerkotla in Northern India. Also see Barkan and Barkey (2014).

Different religious traditions also offer discourses of ethical goods, such as justice and compassion. The effort to instead prioritize political proposals that dominate minorities is a political choice, not the inevitable consequence of religion in politics.

Although the BJP government under Vajpayee through 1998–2004 furthered many majoritarian projects, it did not succeed in retaining power. Vajpayee called early elections in 2004 and led the BJP's National Democratic Alliance coalition as it lost power to the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance coalition.¹³ The BJP had ruled in a coalition with parties that included lower-caste parties, Dravidian parties, and other regional parties that ostensibly rejected many of their majoritarian positions. The party itself changed its position on economic policy in the aftermath of India's "liberalization," initiated in 1991 following a foreign reserve crisis. In the 2014 general elections, the BJP's campaign deployed selective messaging about "development" and Hindutva to different audiences. Campaign speeches were replete with sharp criticisms of corruption and dynastic malaise in the Congress government. Simultaneously, through its affiliates and election candidates, the BJP orchestrated violence between Hindus and Muslims in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where it then won an astounding number of seats.

The BJP also turned a corner on the challenge initiated by the Mandal Commission's report recommending the expansion of caste-based reservations to other backward classes (OBCs) above existing reservations for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, as had been constitutionally agreed in 1949. In 1990, and thereafter, the BJP opposed the expansion of reservations on a caste basis because the deepening of caste categories underscored divisions within Hindu society, instead backing reservations along economic deprivation, which would include poor upper castes. Through the 1990s, regional parties with support among Dalit and OBC castes won state-level elections and were important coalition partners in short-lived national governments in 1996 and 1997 (Yadav 1996). The rise of the BJP in 2014 and 2019 demonstrated its success in defeating not only the Congress, which had failed to find support in these communities, but also the regional parties that represented assortments of "backward castes."¹⁴ The BJP actively courted these caste groups in its mid-level leadership, and the prime minister himself campaigned on his OBC identity (Bhan 2014). In the 2019 elections, the BJP nationalized what had hitherto been a state-level strategy by instituting reservations for the economically deprived, which was widely recognized as a quota for upper castes (Deshpande 2019).

¹³ It is sometimes argued that the BJP's role in the 2001 Gujarat riots impacted their electoral prospects in 2004 (see Dhattiwala 2019).

¹⁴ See Ahuja's (2019) account of the conditions that explain the success of caste-based party organization in different Indian states.

The BJP has consistently framed disagreement as disloyalty. The identity script imperils minorities in quotidian ways as well as through monumental legislative change. Through its first term from 2014–2019, targeted atrocities, such as lynchings, against Muslims, Adivasis, Christians, and Dalits, rose manifold. Then, early in the BJP's second term, in 2019, the Citizenship Amendment Act initiated, rather than settled, contestation around the basis for Indian citizenship. The act allows persons of all South Asian religious communities in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan except Muslims to seek asylum from persecution in India. It waives a five-year waiting period for seeking citizenship. When combined with other proposals for population control and citizenship restriction, such as the National Register of Citizens, it signals the possibility of the incarceration and expulsion for hundreds of millions of Indian Muslims. Majoritarian domination seeks to find “permanent solutions” for minorities and to ensure the majority's permanence is undisturbed.

15.4. Epistemic Pluralism

The second feature of majoritarian domination is its attack on epistemic pluralism through the production of pluralistic ignorance. Elections aggregate and enumerate support for candidates and parties. The news media represent the diversity of political opinions, albeit without enumerating and aggregating support for those opinions. However, unlike elections, which occur on a specific date, the news media represent opinion daily. They become a source of diversity that, if opposed to the majoritarian agenda, can challenge the basis of the majority's permanence and universalism. In other words, they can suggest to their audience that those among the majority may have reason to disagree with the majoritarian agenda and that political positions on a wide range of issue domains may vary even if the agents involved have a single shared identity marker. We demonstrate in what follows how AKP and BJP governments have attacked the media to stifle diversity of opinion by attacking perceived opponents, and by encouraging the amplification of long-standing scripts drawn from their repertoires by compliant media houses.

15.4.1. Turkey

As of this writing, there are no independent media left in Turkey, which now has more journalists in jail than any other country. In 2018 alone, the government imprisoned 159 journalists and has pressured more than 190 press institutions into closure since the 2016 coup (Tangen 2019). This intimidation is lawful: the

AKP government has made liberal use of the Anti-Terror Law and the Turkish Penal Code to charge journalists. According to a report on media freedom in Turkey, the most used charges are those of “leading . . . or being a member of or aiding a terrorist organization,” or “denigrating state institutions or religious values” (“Media Freedom in Turkey” 2019). The few independent journalists still active are often intimidated, and some experience violent assaults by AKP supporters, self-appointed purveyors of the majoritarian script (Wyatt 2019). Whether their behavior is induced or voluntary, the print and television media are complicit in manipulating and manufacturing news sources and information, ardently labeling opposition as disloyalty.

While the AKP regime entrenched its hold on a growing and supportive conservative Muslim population, groups that opposed the AKP became more vocal in their disapproval. The Gezi Park protests, which started over environmental concerns, lasted from May to August 2013 and involved more than 5,000 demonstrations across cities. Police violence wounded about 8,000 people and killed 22. Gezi Park was the first large-scale protest against AKP and Erdoğan. It crystallized conflict between a coalition of social forces and a neoliberal regime remaking Istanbul into a playground and shopping center for a rising, wealthy, conservative religious elite. Gezi Park unleashed police brutality, ordered and supported by the AKP regime. The media’s absence from the scene decimated its credibility, and only the media houses allied to the regime have survived the onslaught of acquisition and reformulation that followed (Orucoglu 2015). When the Gezi Park protests began, many television channels opted to air nature programming instead.¹⁵

Gezi Park became the moment of a new confrontation between two worldviews; an opposition view with little airtime and a strong social media presence, and a pro-regime public with an AKP-controlled media amplified the majoritarian identity script. State media portrayed pro-government groups as “the authentic representations of the nation.” The AKP organized a mass counterdemonstration labeled “A Meeting That Respects the National Will.” Erdoğan declared, “If they bring 20.000 people to Taksim, I can bring 500.000 people to Kazlıdere. We have that power, and we have that opportunity” (*Hürriyet Daily News* 2013). He evoked past republican state violence toward the followers of the AKP, and through its repetition on state media channels, he mobilized the countermovement (Aytaç and Öniş 2014; Tambar 2016).

At the same time, state media, and allied private media houses insulted minority religious traditions and goaded members of these communities to prove their loyalty. In Aykan Erdemir’s (2019) summary, the “scapegoating of, and

¹⁵ “Rosa Engels” (2019) discusses the preponderance of penguin programming in TV broadcasts at the time.

incitement against, minorities to mobilize the electorate, solidify the ranks of loyalists, and strengthen majoritarian hegemony at home” and “propagating conspiracy theories about minorities to divert the Turkish public’s attention from the government’s policy failures” occur together. The state-controlled and allied media have been zealously loyal, producing misinformation and propaganda and spreading falsehoods that have undermined opposition. The result of persecuting critics and bolstering support in the sphere of news media has been an amplification of the majoritarian will and the decimation of epistemic pluralism in Turkey.

15.4.2. India

The destruction of epistemic pluralism relies upon control over the news media and state institutions that perform essential informational and transparency functions. In India, the Congress-initiated Central Information Commission responded to “Right to Information” requests that assisted activists in exposing the government’s corruption. Many other institutions perform the task of providing public information—such as the comptroller and auditor general, and the National Statistics Office. These institutions exist to provide information to citizens as a check on the government of the day. By contrast, the news media show both a diversity of opinion and a political identity that is not totalizing—they vary across issue positions. Information-providing state institutions have been *disabled* through a lack of appointments as well as a withholding of statistics by executive decision; and the state’s restrictions on information, demands of fealty, and vicious punishment of dissent have reshaped the news media.

In 2005, after decades of ardent activism, the Congress-led government legislated a right to information and created a Central Information Commission to oversee the government’s disclosure of information to citizens that sought it. Through this very mechanism, nongovernmental organizations and lawyers were able to expose corruption in the bureaucracy’s lower and higher levels. Along with the comptroller and auditor general’s report in 2011, the government itself revealed the scandals that precipitated the Congress’s defeat in 2014. Since 2014, the executive has understaffed the Central Information Commission, denied requests that it would earlier comply with, and captured the comptroller and auditor general’s office by appointing loyalists. In 2018, a news magazine exposed the suppression of a statistical report that placed unemployment an unprecedented level, based on an unpublished National Sample Survey Organization report (Jha 2019). The experts who had authored the report resigned in protest against its suppression, and the government actively sought to discredit a report its appointees had authored (Seth et al. 2019).

The news media's diversity has also shrunk. Non-state television channels proliferated upon deregulation in 2001 (KPMG India 2017). Neoliberal reforms reoriented the communication industry's institutional apparatus from its use in the service of state-led development and poverty alleviation to commercial profit and advertising.¹⁶ The 2011–12 India Against Corruption protests, partly in response to Right to Information and comptroller and auditor general disclosures, mark a pivotal moment in the media's transformation. The protests, aimed against the Congress party's ostensibly persistent corruption scandals, received unprecedented media coverage, and mainstream English and Hindi media were instrumental in shaping support for the protests. Congress corruption and nepotism, and a choreographed confrontational newsroom, have since become the hallmarks of successful television journalism. The BJP has promoted, through various measures, a group of channels that unapologetically demanded military aggression against Pakistan, repression in Kashmir, and the suppression of student protesters. This television discourse frequently condemns dissenters, students, minorities, activists, and the political opposition as "anti-nationals," "urban naxals," and "sickulars," furthering the Hindutva agenda. It is not that the BJP exercises direct and complete control. On occasion, the media exceeds its brief: TV channels arguably escalated the government's response to terrorist attacks in 2016 and again in 2019 (Shukla 2016).

The media's role in destroying epistemic pluralism is undeniably sinister. With government support, the Indian media, especially television media, have conflated opposition with disloyalty and sought to eradicate the space for diverse opinions. Two mechanisms, not unique to India, have been at work. First, news channels have echoed government directives and cited each other to justify their position. Second, news channels have resorted to brazenly selective coverage, both in the time they give to different political views, and in the normative values they attach to issue positions. The consequence is that the institution most capable of reproducing diversity has become complicit in destroying it. The news media's promotion of the majoritarian narrative, often more ardently than the government itself pushes, leads viewers to believe it is a more widely shared view than it is and discredits critics by making them feel isolated. As Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of the tyranny of the majority, it operates as a "moral empire," producing conformism where criticality once existed. Timur Kuran's (1997) scholarship on the collapse of the Soviet Union suggests that pluralistic ignorance is less likely in democracies because freedoms of expression are protected. In this instance, however, the presumption of democratic legitimacy for the

¹⁶ In Rajagopal's (2016) words: "Publicly traded business conglomerates own the leading television channels that broadcast nationwide[;] state-level political parties and companies with family ties to these parties control regional television channels."

majoritarian position is what makes the multiplicity of news sources more pernicious.

15.5. Institutional Pluralism

The third feature of majoritarian domination is its institutional holism. Majoritarian domination takes a form similar to what some scholars have termed electoral authoritarianism. Democratic institutions in modern states are tasked with executing the will of the people, and with ensuring that the exercise of state power is accountable and just. At an abstract level, they consist of organs such as the executive, legislature, judiciary, military, police, and the bureaucracy. Electoral victory empowers the executive and legislature and affords the power to act through the bureaucracy and military. Judicial power, and especially judicial review, maintains a check on the power of any majority to legislate and execute untrammelled power. Some power-limiting institutions are formally empowered, as in the judiciary, whereby their authority and legitimacy are independent of the elected majority. Other institutions, such as the bureaucracy and military, are empowered (and required) to execute the majority's will. However, these institutions might also challenge the exercise of majoritarian will if it inheres against the higher authority of the constitution. Majoritarian domination attacks the legitimacy of all these challenges. It insists that electoral power is absolute, delegitimizes opposition from non-elected institutions, and seeks to replicate the expression of majority will in these institutions. In what follows, we selectively redescribe research on Turkish and Indian democratic institutions and their corrosion under majoritarian domination in this section.

15.5.1. Turkey

The AKP in Turkey first undermined the military, and then reshaped the judiciary, the Diyanet and civil society organizations into institutions of majoritarian control that act in concert with its elected regime. Its crowning achievement came in the form of Turkey's transition to a presidential system (Öniş 2015). After winning the 2002 election, the AKP upended settled civil-military relations in three phases. First, it enacted legislative reforms that circumscribed the military's policymaking power and discretionary influence. Second, through two important and scandalous judicial trials (Ergenekon and Balyoz), it discredited the earlier leadership. Between 2002 and 2013, the military was weakened and subdued, ending military tutelage with all its supporting institutions (Bardakçi 2013). Third, through purges after the unsuccessful coup of July 15, 2016, the AKP

remade the personnel to its liking. As Lars Haugom (2019: 7) argues, “Turkey’s new strong presidential system will increase civilian *political* control and oversight with the armed forces, but not civilian *democratic* control, as we usually understand this concept.” The military had always led the conflict against the Kurdish opposition. However, the recent intensification of violence against Kurds within Turkey and in Syria connotes the amalgam of the Sunni identity script and the institutional subjugation of the military.

The aftermath of the failed coup also reveals the transformation of the Turkish judiciary. More than 4,000 judges were purged from their positions and replaced by young, ideologically pliable aspirants (PPJ 2018; Gall 2019; Felter and Didem Aydin 2018). The lack of judicial independence has had varied effects, especially in the manipulation of legislation to further state patronage for loyal interests (Bugra and Savađskan 2014: 79). It helped AKP consolidate a class of loyal businessmen, as it worked through a weak judiciary to provide allies with significant public resources, in return for contributions and donations of various kinds (Esen and Gumuscu 2018). More worryingly, the state’s post-coup repression has included the severe curtailment of the civil rights of many academics, journalists, civil society leaders, and opposition politicians.

The Diyanet, the primary religious administrative institution, is not formally equal to the executive, like the military or the judiciary. Under this regime, it has flourished into an essential instrument of the state ideology, growing in size and heft (Gözaydın 2013). Ahmet Erdi Öztürk’s study of Erdoğan’s speeches and the sermons to the Diyanet between 2002 and 2016 shows the conformity of this state institution with the party, and further, the degree to which “the *Diyanet* was used to suppress dissent against the AKP and Erdoğan” (2016: 629). Crucially, as Murat Akan argues, the strategic motivation underlying the Diyanet in the AKP period is strangely similar to the Kemalist period. Both sets of elites were interested in building a homogenous society. The difference is that the AKP’s identity script is less abstract and more interested in what Akan (2017b: 275) calls “state-religion religionism.”

Finally, the AKP sought to build a deep network of intermediary organizations. Following the 2013 Gezi protests, and especially in the post-July 2016 coup period, there was “increasingly selective [repression] targeting Civil Society Organizations perceived as ‘politically motivated,’ such as those working on human rights monitoring and minority rights” (Yabancı 2017). Simultaneously, the AKP fostered the emergence of docile civil society organizations that promoted the majoritarian identity script. In the case of unions, a decline of traditional unions gave way to confederations closely associated with the AKP.¹⁷

¹⁷ Two such unions, Hak-İs and Memur-Sen, use the party’s discourse and imply a distinction between themselves and the older pre-AKP unions (Duran and Yildirim 2005).

In the case of women's associations, Yabanci shows the displacement of feminist organizations by regime-supported, patriarchal counterparts.¹⁸ These organizations mobilize against "elitist feminism," emphasizing traditional gender roles. These new organizations subvert the task of civil society. Rather than increasing diversity and furthering citizens' efforts at securing redress for economic, ethnic, religious, sexual, or linguistic disadvantage, they further the identity scripts of the government, prolonging and deepening the suffering of minorities (Yabanci 2016, 2017).

15.5.2. India

The Hindu nationalist project in India has attempted to remake, replace, or remove institutions such that they collectively, and seamlessly, espouse the majoritarian will. The BJP government has also undermined India's federal structure by striking at the autonomy of state governments. The Indian judiciary, through appointment and scandal, is less able, and possibly less willing, to exercise its powers of review over the executive and legislation than it has been since the Emergency of 1975–77. The BJP has also altered the capacity and standing of a series of "fourth branch" institutions, and punished civil society activists and dissenters with prolonged incarceration.¹⁹

In August 2019, the BJP achieved what no national government had succeeded in since 1956: stripping a state of statehood. By bifurcating Jammu and Kashmir, revoking the constitutional article that granted it special status, and dissolving its legislature, the BJP altered the terms of Indian federalism and effectively signaled that self-rule in any Indian state is subject to the whim of the national government. Horizontally, as Khaitan (2020) puts it, the executive has tried to "disable" or "capture" other institutions. It has stifled legislative opposition, as though to suggest that the electoral majority renders debate nugatory. The executive also struck judicial independence through appointments to higher courts; first, it legislated a change to its appointment rules. Then, it rejected the courts' chosen nominees and left high courts widely understaffed in an already overburdened judicial system (Khaitan 2020). The courts' jurisprudence seems to track a similar trajectory of increasing "bonhomie" with the executive, with a predilection to defer to the executive in matters ranging from writ petitions for detained

¹⁸ Organizations such as KADEM (Women and Democracy Organization), AK-DER (Women's Rights Organization against Discrimination), and KASAD-D (Women's Health and Education Organization) are products of this initiative.

¹⁹ Tarunabh Khaitan's (2020) essay provides an extensive and illuminating examination of institutional attacks against three forms of democratic accountability: "vertical," "horizontal," and "diagonal."

persons to constitutional challenges to government legislation (Chelameswar 2018; Bhatia 2019).

“Fourth-branch institutions” such as the Reserve Bank of India, Central Bureau of Investigation, and the national ombudsman, Lokpal, have also been undermined to seek the replication of majoritarian will across institutions.²⁰ In downstream institutions such as the bureaucracy, the government has used its power over appointments to subvert their ostensible neutrality. Its efforts in this domain have somewhat resembled preceding regimes. On the other hand, the army has been actively co-opted by the executive to further long-standing majoritarian scripts. The executive has pushed the army to engage Pakistan along the Line of Control aggressively and to commit human rights abuses in Kashmir (ANI 2017). Discursively, the BJP has framed the army as an institution that is not accountable for its actions, and thereby, in everyday nationalist imaginations, superior to other state institutions.

The BJP also initiated an unprecedented attack on civil society organizations and activists, targeting a range of groups that defended environmental protection and human rights, in addition to students and activists, with fiscal intimidation, sedition laws, and modified antiterrorism legislation. These myriad institutional attacks may be common to many regressions from democracy. However, the motivation and justification for the attack on institutional pluralism rest on the primacy of the majoritarian identity script.

15.6. Conclusion

India and Turkey do not have a monopoly on majoritarian domination. Scholarly and journalistic work has lamented the demise of pluralism in societies around the world over the past decade. Some scholars have also long believed that democracy cannot survive in diverse societies, and especially not outside the West. We have argued here that majoritarian domination has replaced imperial pluralism, albeit following a dramatically different interlude. However, we do not romanticize the imperial past, nor do we believe majoritarian domination is the inevitable fate of democracy in societies with long-standing religious diversity.

The danger of majoritarian domination lies both in what it destroys and in what it constructs. It destroys democracy with its own instruments by constructing a majority emboldened to believe it is there for good. It ejects co-existence, tolerance, and pluralism from political discourse, and produces a vengeful, violent public. Majoritarian domination also deepens the oppression

²⁰ We would add the comptroller and auditor general and the now defunct Planning Commission to Khaitan’s (2020) extensive list of fourth-branch institutions.

of minorities whose experience of democracy and religious pluralism has always been checkered. For Kashmiris and Kurds, for instance, majoritarian domination has escalated long-standing oppression by intensifying violence and sanctifying repression by legalizing it. As of this writing, the future of democracy and religious pluralism in these societies is bleak. However, movements for democracy, and for religious pluralism, have succeeded in more adverse conditions.

Acknowledgments

We thank Murat Akan, Henri Barkey, Udit Bhatia, Sumedha Chakravarthy, Bhoomika Joshi, Sudipta Kaviraj, Melis Gulboy Laebens, and Karuna Mantena for their comments on various drafts.

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