

Türkiye's Case of 15 July: *State of Exception* and *Authoritarian Statism* as Modes of Governance

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Abstract: This study examines authoritarianism in Türkiye in the aftermath of the coup attempt on 15 July 2016. The primary aim is to evaluate the governance practices that emerged in Türkiye following the coup attempt within the conceptual framework of "state of exception" and "authoritarian statism". Accordingly, it presents and discusses the conceptualisations of two influential scholars. It asks, "To what extent are the governance practices in Türkiye after 15 July close to Agamben's state of exception or Poulantzas's authoritarian statism?" Methodologically, this study combines a single case study with a conceptual-comparative analysis. In doing so, it contributes to the field by applying theoretical concepts to an empirical event. Thanks to this methodological framework, the study brings together two theories, based on different ontological and epistemological traditions, on a common analytical level. Authoritarianism in Türkiye is not merely a process linked to short-term political crises; it is intertwined with the historical and political context of the reshaping of state-capital relations, social opposition, security policies, and institutional structures. Thus, the main outcome is that the regime transformation in Türkiye is a hybrid form of authoritarianism situated at the intersection of these two approaches; it possesses a multi-layered structure in which the state of exception has become permanent, and the institutional structure of the state apparatus has been rebuilt in favour of the executive. Hence, it offers a conceptual proposal, "exceptional-authoritarian statism", as an analytical category to explain this transformation.

Keywords: State of exception, Authoritarian statism, Agamben, Poulantzas, 15 July coup attempt, State of emergency

Jel Codes: B50, P10, N94, Z10

Türkiye'nin 15 Temmuz Vakası: Yönetişim Biçimleri Olarak Olağanüstü Hal ve Otoriter Devletçilik

Öz: Bu çalışma, 15 Temmuz 2016 darbe girişiminin ardından Türkiye'de otoriterliği incelemektedir. Temel amaç, darbe girişiminin ardından Türkiye'de ortaya çıkan yönetim uygulamalarını "istisna hâli" ve "otoriter devletçilik" kavramsal çerçevesi içinde değerlendirmektir. Dolayısıyla, iki etkili akademisyenin kavramlaştırmalarını sunar ve tartışır. "15 Temmuz sonrası Türkiye'deki yönetim uygulamaları, Agamben'in istisna hâli kavramına veya Poulantzas'ın otoriter devletçilik kavramına ne ölçüde yakındır?" sorusunu sorar. Metodolojik olarak, bu çalışma tek bir vaka çalışmasını kavramsal-karşılaştırmalı bir analizle birleştirir. Böylelikle, teorik kavramları ampirik bir olaya uygulayarak alana katkı sağlar. Bu metodolojik çerçeve sayesinde, çalışma farklı ontolojik ve epistemolojik geleneklere dayanan iki teoriyi ortak bir analitik düzeyde bir araya getirmektedir. Türkiye'deki otoriterlik, yalnızca kısa vadeli siyasi krizlerle bağlantılı bir süreç değildir; devlet-sermaye ilişkilerinin yeniden şekillenmesi, toplumsal muhalefet, güvenlik politikaları ve kurumsal yapılar gibi tarihsel ve siyasi bağlamla iç içe geçmiştir. Dolayısıyla, ana sonuç, Türkiye'deki rejim dönüşümünün bu iki yaklaşımın kesişiminde yer alan melez bir otoriterlik biçimi olduğu; olağanüstü halin kalıcı hale geldiği ve devlet aygıtının kurumsal yapısının yürütme lehine yeniden inşa edildiği çok katmanlı bir yapıya sahip olduğu yönündedir. Bu nedenle, bu dönüşümü açıklamak için analitik bir kategori olarak "istisnaî-otoriter devletçilik" üzerinden kavramsal bir öneri getirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İstisna hali, Otoriter devletçilik, Agamben, Poulantzas, 15 Temmuz darbe girişimi, Olağanüstü hâl
Jel Kodları: B50, P10, N94, Z10

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1. Introduction

This study attempts to shed light on the authoritarianism debates over the state and regime change, together with the coup attempt of 15 July 2016 in Türkiye. Theoretically, it presents and discusses two different concepts that can be considered together from two influential scholars: Giorgio Agamben's concept of "state of exception" and Nicos Poulantzas's conception of "authoritarian statism". Therefore, this study aims to explain the debates on authoritarianism in Türkiye after 15 July by comparatively using these two concepts. Accordingly, it asks the research question of "to what extent are the governance practices in Türkiye after 15 July close to Agamben's state of exception or Poulantzas's authoritarian statism?" Methodologically, this study combines a single case study with a conceptual-comparative analysis based on a qualitative research design. In doing so, it will contribute to the field by applying theoretical concepts to an empirical event.

This article proceeds as follows: the opening section presents the methodological approach of this study with its limitations. The following section introduces the theoretical framework through descending to particulars of Agambenian and Poulantzasian perspectives on authoritarianism. The fourth subtitle gives place to a historical background to describe the authoritarian nature of the state in Türkiye. Within the framework of brief expression on the historical roots, this section focuses on the 23 years of AKP¹ rule with the so-called democratisation process, its subsequent attitude of abandoning the liberal, "conservative-democratic" ideology, and the "first" noticeable visibility of its authoritarianism through Gezi Resistance² in 2013. In the fifth place, it introduces the deepening of authoritarianism together with the failed coup on 15 July, while questioning how the case of 15 July and the subsequent state of emergency regime can be interpreted through the lens of Agamben and Poulantzas. Lastly, in the discussion and conclusion sections, the intersection of the Turkish state of emergency case with the conceptions of state of exception and authoritarian statism is provided, while a hybrid authoritarianism model is proposed, covering the article's contribution to the existing literature.

2. Method

This study combines a conceptual-comparative analysis based on qualitative research with a single case study. The primary aim is to comparatively evaluate the governance practices that emerged in Türkiye following the 15 July 2016 coup attempt within the framework of "state of exception" and "authoritarian statism". Therefore, the methodological approach required the combined use of conceptual analysis based on political theory and a case study from an interpretive perspective in order to understand the accelerating authoritarianism process in Türkiye after 2013. Within the scope of conceptual analysis, the two theoretical frameworks on the state, power and authoritarianism have been systematically analysed, and their fundamental similarities and differences have been compared by separating them into analytical categories. This approach makes it possible to reconstruct the fundamental concepts of the two theories at an abstract level and to evaluate the explanatory power of these concepts in terms of political transformation in Türkiye.

The research is based on the combined use of multiple types of sources: primary official documents covering state of emergency decrees issued between 2016 and 2018, Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) minutes, Presidential and Council of Ministers statements, Official Gazette decisions; institutional and international reports; secondary academic studies; political discourses from press statements by AKP leaders, President Erdoğan's speeches, and media content. This multi-source data structure enables the examination of an empirical event in line with the state's restructuring, the

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² The form of social outrage happened 3 years before the 15 July coup attempt.

suspension of the rule of law, the concentration of executive power, and the mechanisms of pressure on social opposition.

The analysis process was conducted in three stages. The first stage is the creation/determination of the conceptual categories. Agamben's and Poulantzas's texts were scanned using thematic content analysis; concepts such as "state of exception", "bare life", "authoritarian statism", "concentration of executive power", "legalisation of violence", and "social antagonism" were identified as analytical categories. In the second stage, these conceptual categories were applied to empirical events, namely the Turkish case within the scope of the 15 July coup attempt, and the policy practices of the state of emergency period were systematically matched with the conceptual framework. That is, an interpretive conceptual analysis was made in order to understand the explanatory logic offered by both theoretical frameworks and to reveal how this logic intersects with the Turkish case. In the final stage, a comparative theoretical assessment was carried out that an analytical comparison was made based on the question: "Which theory better explains the Turkish experience?" This assessment covers the political, legal and institutional developments that emerged during the period stretching from the Gezi Resistance to the state of emergency regime following the 15 July coup attempt. In this process, ideal-type concepts were approached using an interpretivist paradigm, and it was revealed in which ways the 15 July case study confirmed or challenged the theoretical concepts.

Although this research allows for an in-depth analysis of a broad theoretical literature and an understanding of Türkiye's political transformation within a conceptual framework, it has certain limitations. As it did not involve direct fieldwork (no interview data was used), it does not include microdata on individuals' experiences, and the analysis is limited to official documents and secondary sources. Also, the possibility of creating a complete data set covering all government applications is limited. In other respects, the entire post-state-of-emergency period has been included in this study only at the level of conceptual connections. Despite these limitations, the methodological approach enables the systematic application of theoretical concepts to the Turkish case and the theoretical clarity required to address the multidimensional assessment of the process of authoritarianism. Thanks to this methodological framework, the study brings together two theories, based on different ontological and epistemological traditions, on a common analytical level. It thus enables an explanation of the regime transformation that took place in Türkiye after 2013 through both the logic of legal-political exception and the institutional-centralised form of the state.

3. Authoritarianism in Agamben and Poulantzas: Conceptual approaches and a possible analytical framework for Türkiye

Together with the rise of right-wing politics all over the world, like the government of Orban (Fidesz) in Hungary, the rise of Le Pen in France, AfD in Germany, and especially after the election of Trump, it is widely discussed that there is a political shift towards authoritarianism. One of the significant concerns regarding authoritarianism shows itself in questioning the paradoxical power and strong support of these authoritarian agents or individuals, even though they neglect individual freedoms and rights (Gürses, 2025, p. 92; Lovepump, 2017).

Herewith, this article attempts to explain the Turkish case both from an Agambenian lens over the concept of biopolitics—drawn from Foucault—and *homo sacer*³ (the sacred man) and state of exception, and from Poulantzas's discussions of authoritarian statism and his substantial expositions of the state over the frame of "strategic-relational approach" (SRA), in terms of authoritarianism under the AKP rule. More clearly, this section presents two influential theoretical approaches in a comparative manner to evaluate discussions on authoritarianism in Türkiye. As these two approaches address

³ "Agamben retrieves this figure from the margins of early Roman law, where he constitutes the exiled criminal who cannot be sacrificed, but can be killed by any member of the community without his killer being prosecuted for homicide" (Boukalas, 2014, p. 114).

both the state's relationship to law and the executive branch's capacity to reconfigure the political sphere at different theoretical levels, considering them together enables a multidimensional examination of authoritarian transformation processes.

3.1 Agamben: The State of Exception, Bare Life and Sovereignty

Agamben's theory of the state finds the essence of modern power in the suspension of law (Agamben, 2003, p. 1). According to Agamben, all modern forms of the state—regardless of regime type—are biopolitical regimes, and this means that the governments have control over the bodies of their societies, citizens (Lovepump, 2017). This control is constituted by benign things such as censuses, demographics, medical records, electronic state (e-state) applications, etc. But, when these biopolitical practices turn from benign to malignant, like suspicious practices of tapping phone calls and triangulating people's locations, which can mean to unlawfully track down individuals, then the turning point between democracy and autocracy is revealed. Namely, the fundamental capacity of power is the ability to regulate, classify, and, when necessary, devalue individuals' lives. At the centre of this framework, Agamben believes that there are two roles in the state, which are the sovereign and *homo sacer*, the bearer of bare life (Lovepump, 2017). He uses the concept of *homo sacer*, borrowed from Carl Schmitt, to complete the conceptual coupling between the sovereign (a subject) and state of exception (a situation), thereby advancing his thesis on political power (Boukalas, 2014, pp. 112, 114). In other words, Agamben expands on Schmitt's proposition that "*the sovereign is the one who decides on the exception,*" pointing to a fundamental void within the legal order. The sovereign, by making an individual *homo sacer*, can deprive that individual of political and social value. Namely, if an individual does not contribute to society, s/he is assumed as *homo sacer* who can be killed by the sovereign without punishment (Lovepump, 2017). However, as Boukalas (2014, p. 114) highlights, for Agamben, sovereign power and bare life call each other into being at the same moment; the sovereign and *homo sacer* are opposite but symbiotic concepts.

Agamben, reworking Foucault's concept of biopolitics, argues that modern states, while managing life through "normal" governance techniques, also retain the capacity to remove life from the sphere of legal protection (Dutlu, 2018, pp. 75, 82). Since biopower allows the government to have claims on people's bodies, the sovereign determines who can live and who must be killed; thus, the sovereign must kill the out-groups to maintain and protect the in-groups' safety (Lovepump, 2017). If one takes this 'killing the out-groups' mentality metaphorically and even allegorically, it would be helpful to understand and explain authoritarian tendencies of today's administrations, even if they are diverse and not emerge from the same story, i.e., coming from different socio-economic, educational, and cultural backgrounds (Lovepump, 2017). In this context, *homo sacer* is a figure who is legally killable but cannot be sacrificed: that is, her/his life has been removed from the sphere of legal protection. In contemporary states, this figure is reproduced at times as a refugee, at times as a terror suspect, and at times as a criminalised citizen. On the other side, the state of exception reveals itself as a paradoxical situation in which the law is suspended, yet this suspension is carried out within a legal framework. Hence, the law is both abolished and carried out with legal authority (Agamben, 1998, pp. 15–21, 2003, p. 1; Dutlu, 2018, pp. 75–76). According to Agamben (2003, p. 2), modern politics has evolved towards a "permanent state of emergency." Through tools such as counter-terrorism, national security, and emergency management, the state of exception becomes a dominant paradigm of government (Agamben, 2003, p. 2).

However, the Agambenian approach has been criticised for presenting an abstract, ahistorical framework that neglects social relations. More clearly, it is argued that the tripartite of bare life-sovereign power-state of exception does not refer to any of social relations or social processes and thought as a structural effect (Boukalas, 2014, p. 119). Namely, the essence of power has a hidden structure embedded in the relation between sovereign power and bare life, independent of time and space (or society) (Boukalas, 2014,

p. 120). Therefore, the character of law and politics as social phenomena is ignored by Agamben for the sake of producing analytics of pure power, leading individuals to be atomised and abstracted from social relations, bonds and meanings (Boukalas, 2014, p. 120). In this regard, politics is being emptied of its social character because the bare life removes the possibility of antagonism and/or struggle due to the absence of society (Boukalas, 2014, p. 117). In a nutshell, it is argued that Agamben renders the dynamics of political struggle invisible by treating state-society relations independently of social antagonisms. This criticism demonstrates why Poulantzas offers a complementary perspective for this research.

3.2 Poulantzas: Authoritarian Statism and the Strategic-Relational State Approach

Poulantzas's theory, unlike Agamben's, conceives of the state as a crystallisation of historical and social power relations. In this sense, the strategic-relational approach (SRA) conceptualises the state as a social relation rather than as a sovereign subjectivity with its own will and power. Thus, the state is created by social antagonism, being a creation of social dynamics, meaning that the state institutions mediate a condensation of social dynamics into the state power rather than the fact that the state has power itself. According to him, the state is an uneven terrain of social antagonism and becomes a key agency within this antagonism (Boukalas, 2014, p. 121). Put simply, the state is not an autonomous subject; it is a field of relations shaped by the struggles of social classes and social power blocs (Poulantzas, 2000, p. 140). Therefore, the transformation of the state is closely linked to conditions of political and economic crisis, class alliances, and hegemonic projects.

In a similar vein, the SRA regards law as a social relation (Boukalas, 2014, p. 121), which can be used to assess the domination of an authoritarian regime through strengthening executive power over the legislative and judicial branches. For instance, in the case of a state of exception, the state can amend, suspend, or abolish law as a particular articulation of an agency in social dynamics, but not as a thing or a subject in Agambenian sense. Therefore, the content, intensity, and duration of the exceptional moment, and its purpose and success would depend on the support, tolerance, or resistance of different social forces (Boukalas, 2014, p. 122). Accordingly, the sovereign in SRA is dissolved into the state, and the law is understood as a social relation shaped by social dynamics. At this point, the discussion on the authoritarian hardening of the state brings us to authoritarian statism because of the state's activity across all areas from legal powers, policing modalities and institutional structuring to political representations, construction of citizenship platforms and breaking social opposition (Boukalas, 2014, pp. 124, 127).

Regarding Poulantzas's discussions of authoritarian statism, the term was lexicalised by Poulantzas in the late 1970s to shed light on changes in, namely, the crisis of, the Keynesian welfare state (Boukalas, 2014, p. 124; Gürses, 2025, p. 92). Indeed, the concept refers to the process whereby classical liberal-democratic institutions formally continue to exist, but their functions are hollowed out in favour of the executive (Bruff, 2014, p. 119). With Poulantzas's own words:

“... intensified state control over every sphere of socio-economic life combined with radical decline of institutions of political democracy and with draconian and multiform curtailment of so-called ‘formal’ liberties, whose reality is being discovered now that they are going overboard” (Poulantzas, 2000, pp. 203–204, original emphasis).

As understood above, the defining characteristic of this form is intensified state control over social life through restrictions on democratic freedoms. Thus, it is a normal form of capitalist state combining several authoritarian features (Akça, 2014, p. 17; Boukalas, 2014, p. 124). However, authoritarianism should not be regarded as only the exercise of brute coercive force, i.e., racist political discourse or policing of demonstrations, and it can be beheld in the reshaping of state and institutional power isolating certain institutional practices and policies from social and political opposition (Bruff, 2014, p. 115).

Since the development of capitalism is not a smooth process and can be periodised into distinct phases of history according to Poulantzas, the authoritarian statism—including the crises of capitalist states—as a political response to capitalist crisis can be scrutinised in phases as well (Boukalas, 2014; Bruff, 2014, p. 119; Poulantzas, 2000, p. 204). Namely, the rise of authoritarian statism—owing to the state’s own materiality—refers to a multilinear, uneven and contradictory process, in which the state reshapes its social purpose, rather than being predetermined, eternal or universal, for Poulantzas (Bruff, 2014, p. 119).

When authoritarian statism is addressed in three phases, in the first phase in the 1970s, there is a transfer of power from the legislature to the executive that purports the monopolisation of governing functions by the executive power: the head of government (president) or the cabinet (Boukalas, 2014, p. 124). The policing control is shifted from criminal act to the crime-inducing situation meaning a pre-emptive turn in criminal law seeking to punishing crime before it occurs—presumption of innocence is ignored or is left to the mercy or discretion of the executive power; thus, the whole society is considered as potential criminals and this policing strategy turns into a legal, martial and administrative power which can be used as abusing the trust to prevent popular struggles (Boukalas, 2014, pp. 115, 116; 124, 125). In terms of the capitalist form of the state, in Bruff’s words,

“while Poulantzas’s argument is that the state is a crucial site for the exercise of power, it is not somehow separate from the society; thus, with Poulantzas’s direct emphasis (2000, p. 141), popular struggles “traverse the State from top to bottom ... these very struggles always have ‘long-range’ effects within the State” even though they extend beyond the state” (Bruff, 2014, p. 118).

This can be commented as such that the state embodies and crystallises the general domination of the owners of means of production (Bruff, 2014, p. 119).

The second phase is marked in the 1980s and 1990s when finance led a sustained capitalist counterattack, where a neoliberal ideo-political platform occurred; however, together with its adjustment to the changing balance in social forces. Workfarism, for instance, became a key strategy of the state, referring to re-conceptualising the worker as a cost of production, the deprivation of legal protection for employees, temporal and flexible working, detrimental effects of wage and pensions stagnation on social wealth, reducing social welfare, etc. (Boukalas, 2014, pp. 124–125). This strategy causes capital to become the mere interlocutor of the state, and the role of the state as a welfare provider and initiator of overall demand transforms into the coordinator of a privatised economy and enforcer of deregulation (Boukalas, 2014, p. 125).

When it comes to the last phase, namely when the above-mentioned neoliberal strategy experienced a crisis at the turn of the century⁴, the mode of accumulation departed. The new accumulation strategy relied on credit-based consumption, and the third phase of authoritarian statism included a radical intensification of political exclusion of the population and a drastic expansion of coercive state control over society. Put differently, the conditions for the emergence of more coercive neoliberalisation processes have occurred when the loss or weakening of platforms on which social compromises may be established, sustained and reinforced has happened. Hence, for the sake of economic necessity, the legal and constitutional changes have sought to recast the purpose of the state and associated institutions (Bruff, 2014, p. 115). So, the legislature has become a tool, a special committee of the executive in many countries under neoliberal governance (Boukalas, 2014, p. 125). The judiciary power has lost its inherent force over the police and ceased to oversee investigations, which means that the logic and function of the legal system have been decaying, and as in the case of the legislature, it has become an instrument in the hands of the executive that is to be used for its own political interest.

⁴ Again, Boukalas (2014, p. 125) reads this crisis over mode of accumulation; however, it is a controversial subject in terms of applicability on each case or an overall crisis of neoliberalism in the world. Maybe, it might be argued that Türkiye experienced such kind of a process throughout its neoliberal journey, because of the twin crises in Türkiye at the beginning of 2000s.

This has led policing to become intelligence-led, inspecting all interactions of any individual, and treating everyone as a suspect of uncommitted crimes (Boukalas, 2014, p. 126). Herewith, Bruff exemplifies authoritarian statism as a political response to crisis with the following lines:

“the state increasingly expands its penetration into areas of social life such as urban planning, socioeconomic regeneration of deprived areas or regions, and public health services and programs, as it seeks to stabilise the contradictions and dislocations emanating from socioeconomic restructuring without granting material concessions to subordinate social groups” (Bruff, 2014, p. 119).

Accordingly, applying the constructs of Poulantzas to today’s developments, it can also be reached a notion, authoritarian neoliberalism, particularly for the post-2007 period of global crisis—even if there has not been a total break from pre-2007 neoliberal practices—which intensified the crisis of legitimacy in various capitalist states and in turn caused the state’s restructuring to be less open and less democratic entity through the authoritarian neoliberal response towards the crisis—i.e., existence of the increasingly punitive nature of penal and criminal policy through the constitutional and legal mechanisms (Bruff, 2014, p. 116). Bruff (2014, p. 124), who views authoritarian neoliberalism as a response both to the crisis of capitalism and legitimation crises of capitalist states, stresses that authoritarian neoliberalism both strengthens and weakens the state at the same time since this type of authoritarianism moralises the global crisis through increasingly coercive legal, institutional and policy processes.

In terms of popular struggles, Poulantzas emphasises that;

“...authoritarian statism is itself partially responsible for creating new forms of popular struggle. In every country with which we are now concerned, we can see the emergence of struggles that have in view the exercise of direct, rank-and-file democracy. These struggles exhibit a characteristic anti-statism and express themselves in the mushrooming of self-management centres and networks of direct intervention by the masses in the decisions which affect them” (Poulantzas, 2000, p. 246).

In line with this understanding and Poulantzas’s argument (2000, pp. 241–247) regarding the decline of mass political parties, which denotes the state becomes a direct target of a range of popular struggles, discontent, and demands when this situation combines with a system crisis; it can be said that for the new forms of popular struggles of the twenty-first century, the authoritarian statist response becomes partially responsible for these struggles characterised by an anti-statism resisting both the greater inclusion or intervention of state power into everyday life and its increasingly coercive nature (Bruff, 2014, p. 120). As concrete examples, the rise of social movements like Occupy Wall Street (USA), Indignados (Spain), Indignant Citizens Movement (Greece), Gezi Resistance (Türkiye) have been witnessed all over the world, which have offered an emancipatory challenge to the dominant narratives of the crisis. These movements appeared to protest and struggle against the authoritarian neoliberal state and its continued delegitimation, which they have been exposed to (Bruff, 2014, pp. 116, 127).

Informed by this theoretical background, the main characteristics of authoritarian statism are summarised as: 1. concentration of power in the executive; 2. the effective subordination of the legislature and judiciary to the executive branch; 3. the narrowing of channels for social opposition; 4. the expansion of the security apparatus; and 5. the technocratic centralisation of economic management. Bruff (2014) expands on this transformation with the concept of “authoritarian neoliberalism,” emphasising that similar trends emerged in many countries, particularly after the 2008 global crisis. At this point, it is plausible not to make a clear-cut and total separation between authoritarian statism and authoritarian neoliberal state because, whatever the label is, authoritarian rule makes its presence felt in a capitalist world.

As previously stated, this study embraces Poulantzas’s perspective as both comparative and complementary approach while addressing the limitations of Agamben’s framework, particularly its lack of reference to social relations and processes. However, deploying Poulantzas’s framework not merely as a theoretical counterweight

to Agamben but as a fully operational analytical tool requires specifying the composition of class forces involved in the authoritarian turn. In the Poulantzian framework, capital is not a unitary structural force but a fragmented and fractionalized entity whose different fractions occupy uneven positions within the state. Accordingly, the empirical analysis in the following sections attends to the fractions of capital—particularly construction and contracting capital, Islamic finance bourgeoisie, and export-oriented industrial capital—which were differentially positioned within the state strategies of the post-July 15 conjuncture, and against which social forces these strategies were directed. This reading, consistent with recent scholarship that situates Türkiye’s authoritarian turn within the structural contradictions of capital accumulation, emphasises how the state’s selective support of particular capital fractions produced new patterns of coercive intervention in the accumulation process (Ercan & Oğuz, 2020, pp. 103–105, 107–111). This specification is necessary to prevent capital from appearing as a monolithic beneficiary of executive centralisation and emergency rule, and to allow the Poulantzian corrective to operate not only at the conceptual but also at the empirical level.

3.3. A Comparison of Two Approaches

How Agambenian and Poulantzian perspectives can contribute to this research’s analysis of the Turkish example in different ways is traced in the following two points of comparison: the nature of the state and the mechanism of authoritarianism.

Table 1. Conceptual Framework of Authoritarianism

Nature of the state		<i>Agamben</i>	<i>Poulantzas</i>
State		The capacity to suspend the law of sovereignty	The concentrated form of social relations
Source of power		The limit/void of law	Class relations and hegemony
Legal order		Its primary function is the capacity to suspend	Shaped by capital accumulation and class balances
Mechanism of authoritarianism			
The cause of authoritarianism		The normalisation of security-based exceptions	The political response to capitalist crises
Encoding mechanism		Suspension of the rule of law	Centralisation of the executive + capital-state blocs
Result		The production of bare life	The hollowing out of democratic institutions

Considering comparatively, while for Agamben there is not a concept of contemporary power, and power is always the same with a structural relation between the sovereign and the bare life—by pointing to the eternal nature of power; the SRA of Poulantzas tries to delimitate forms of power as state types, forms and phases—by pointing to the historical conjunctures (Boukalas, 2014, p. 127). When the concepts of state of exception and authoritarian statism are taken together, and the intensification of authoritarianism is considered in a state of exception, it is still debatable that authoritarian statism is an exemplification of the state of exception in which the former does not oppose, but rather endorses the latter (Boukalas, 2014, p. 128).

Additionally, their approaches to the social struggle differ, as highlighted above in the criticisms of the Agambenian perspective. As such, Agamben does not include social struggles within his conceptual framework, whereas Poulantzas regards the state as always shaped by social antagonisms. This divergence is critically important within the scope of this research while interpreting the Turkish case study. It is because that social movements such as the Gezi Resistance, the Kurdish movement, and trade union struggles are regarded as genuine social forces transforming the state’s authoritarianism; thus, the post-2016 climate of conflict and opposition suppression policies during the state of emergency can become a central explanatory tool in Poulantzas’s approach while in Agamben’s they are mostly reduced to the “management of bare life”.

Regarding the interrogation of this eclectic comparison—meaning the reason for considering both theories together—this current article claims that the Turkish example

cannot be fully explained by a single theory, depending on three reasons. The first one is that the State of Emergency Decrees being kept outside judicial reviews, indefinite detention practices, deportations without “criminal charges”, and arbitrary revocation of citizenship, passport cancellations, which can be labelled as the suspension of law in Türkiye, necessitate Agamben’s approach to be taken into account. All these actions demonstrate strong indicators of the normalisation of the state of exception. Secondly, the centralisation of the executive branch, weakening of the control mechanism in the judiciary, expansion of the security apparatus, and centralisation of economic decision-making processes, which can be labelled as corporate restructuring, necessitate interpreting the existing case through the lens of Poulantzas, since these elements are better explained by his typology of “authoritarian statism”. Thirdly, authoritarianism in Türkiye is both a legal-political and an economic-societal process. Therefore, a single theory is insufficient to explain both the legal exception and the economic-class restructuring.

Based on these theoretical constructs, which are biopolitics, *homo sacer*, the sovereign, authoritarian statism and the strategic-relational approach, it is plausible to apply them to several authoritarian governments throughout the world. The AKP rule from the end of 2002 onwards in Türkiye, the authoritarian character of the state and the governing party can be examined in the case of this study. Türkiye’s post-2013 authoritarianism process exhibits a two-tiered structure: *a.* the normalisation of the state of emergency in the Agambenian sense, and *b.* executive centralisation together with the restructuring of state-capital blocs in the Poulantzasian sense. Thus, the Turkish case can be conceptualised as “exceptional-authoritarian statism,” consistent with the increasingly prevalent models of “hybrid authoritarianism,” “new authoritarian neoliberalism,” and “competitive authoritarianism” in the literature (Agamben, 1998; Boukalas, 2014; Bruff, 2014; Esen & Gümüüşçü, 2016, 2019, 2021; Frahm & Hoffmann, 2021; Levitsky & Way, 2002; Öktem & Akkoyunlu, 2016; Poulantzas, 2000; Tansel, 2018; Yılmaz, 2020).

4. The state and authoritarianism in Türkiye: Historical background

Understanding the processes of authoritarianism in Türkiye requires examining the state in the context of its historical formation, institutional construction, and relationship to social struggles. Therefore, Türkiye’s political regime transformation should be analysed not only as a result of contemporary political developments but also within the context of the continuities and ruptures in state-society relations that have shaped the country since the founding of the Republic. This section examines the historical nature of state authority in Türkiye through the prism of the monopoly on violence, centralisation, nation-building, neoliberal transformation, and security-oriented state practices, thereby providing a structural backdrop to the process leading to authoritarianism after 2013.

Akçay (2014) addresses the authoritarian nature of the state in Türkiye, becoming more visible during the Gezi Resistance, with three discussions: the historical roots of authoritarianism in Türkiye, the so-called democratisation process during the AKP rule, and the relationship between economic development and democracy in general. Depending on this categorisation, the authoritarian nature of the state in Türkiye is addressed as follows.

Liberals argue that the roots of the Turkish state’s authoritarianism lie in the “strong-state tradition” in Türkiye, inherited from the Ottoman state (For more detailed information on this subject, see Ahmad, 1993; Berkes, 1998; Heper, 1985, 1987; Keyder, 2011; Mardin, 1973; Zürcher, 2017). In line with this argument, appointees have always held a superior position over representatives of the people since the formation of the Republic in Türkiye. Hence, there was a bureaucratic “tutelage” over civilian politics, which continuously hindered democratic development. It is also argued that excessive state intervention is not only the main cause of the permanent instability of political and economic life in Türkiye, but also prevents the development of the Western-type progressive bourgeoisie (Akçay, 2014). This historical context, said to have fundamental

characteristics such as a strong and autonomous centralised state, nation-building and homogenisation policies, and control of social opposition, led the state to see itself as the agent and regulator of social transformation. This structure provided an institutional and mental framework for the reproduction of authoritarian tendencies in subsequent periods.

In other respects, an important dimension of Türkiye's modernisation is the institutionalisation of the state's monopoly on legitimate violence within a centralised and security-oriented framework (Weber, 1978, pp. 54–56). In Türkiye, this process has progressed alongside the restriction of the political sphere, particularly through the discourse of "national security". Democratic participation has been suspended numerous times by military interventions, underscoring the continuity of authoritarian state reflexes. After the 1980 coup d'état, the constitutional status granted to the National Security Council (MGK), the restriction of trade unions and political parties, and the perpetuation of martial law logic deepened the institutionalisation of the security state (Ahmad, 1993, pp. 13, 130, 152, 183; Heper, 1987, pp. 138, 141; Zürcher, 2017, p. 286). The post-1984 conflict environment—in which the Kurdish movement's⁵ active strategy was the use of force—led to the emergence of permanent states of emergency, particularly in the Kurdish provinces (Musluk, 2010, pp. 291–292; Özen, 2014, pp. 87, 89; Şimşek, 2004, p. 131). The state of emergency measures present a picture consistent with Agamben's concept of the "spatialisation of the state of exception" (2003, pp. 38–40). At the same time, this process demonstrates that the state has a structural position vis-à-vis certain social groups, as Poulantzas (2000, pp. 140–141) notes.

By looking at the above-mentioned arguments, it can be seen that some liberals, especially most left-liberals, who reduced the whole story of the Turkish Republic to a top-down authoritarianism and oppression by the domination of modernist and secularist elites (Gürcan & Peker, 2015, p. 19), argued that Türkiye was experiencing a "democratic revolution" under the AKP rule, which was upending the so-called tutelage over the military, bureaucracy, and the judiciary (Akçay, 2014; Yalman, 2014, pp. 40, 41). It was even argued that the rise of the AKP "created an unexpected possibility to exit from the authoritarian regime established after the military coup of 1980" (Gürcan & Peker, 2015, p. 23). This left-liberal endorsement was most explicitly tested during the Ergenekon trials (2008–2012), in which a significant section of the left—often referred as supporters of "yes but not enough"—extended conditional support to prosecutions of military officers, journalists, and academics on the grounds that they represented a dismantling of the military tutelage. However, as Şenalp et al. (2022, pp. 345–346) demonstrate, this position fundamentally misread the process: the trials marked an early moment of the authoritarian transformation rather than a straightforward democratisation because they were deeply embedded in intra-state struggles of the AKP from which it benefited to consolidate its executive power. In the context of this hegemony-building and its contradictions that the AKP's economic and political trajectory in its first decade must be assessed.

Initially, the AKP rule's economic policies were mostly rooted in the ideology of the liberal market economy (Kalaycıoğlu, 2012, p. 17). The first terms of the AKP rule mainly depended on the Transition to the Strong Economy Program, outlined by the IMF and implemented after the 2001 economic crisis (Eğilmez, 2016). The AKP government during this period accomplished significant progress regarding the EU harmonisation under Erdoğan's leadership (Yeşilada, 2016, p. 22). The inflation of Türkiye was diminished from 70% to single-digit levels, the problem of the budget deficit was considerably solved, and the banking sector reached a robust and sound structure. In line with the negotiations on full membership with the EU in 2005, high levels of annual foreign direct investment inflows were witnessed in Türkiye (Akman & Çekin, 2021, p. 298; Tsarouhas, 2021, p. 53; Varis, 2005).

⁵ PKK, established to realise the dream of Kurdish self-determination in the late 1970s.

During its first ten years in power, the AKP built a strong hegemonic centre through economic growth, neoliberal reforms, the EU accession process and a conservative democratic identity discourse (Dağı, 2005, pp. 30–31; Taşkın, 2008, p. 61; Tomuş, 2013, p. 7; Yeşilada, 2016, p. 21). Three dimensions of the AKP's hegemony-building strategy stand out during this period. These are the centralisation of the political sphere, the economic growth and new capital blocks, and cultural hegemony initiative (Akça, 2014, pp. 30–31; Bağımsız Sosyal Bilimciler, 2008, p. 19; Hoşgör, 2015, p. 207). Emerging new capital groups in the construction, finance and infrastructure sectors have broadened the AKP government's social base; these groups have been supported by state investments and public tenders (Akçay, 2014; Hoşgör, 2015, pp. 160–161). Ownership transformations in the media sector, the intertwining of conservative-cultural discourse with political discourse, and the reorganisation of civil society have created a process whereby the AKP has expanded its ideological sphere (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, p. 475; Başkan et al., 2022, p. 325; Kozanoğlu & Cabas, 2018, p. 464; Sözen, 2016, p. 201, 2019, pp. 288, 291; Yeşil, 2018). In short, the implementation of the neoliberal policies—which were implemented through installing a new technocratic core within democratically elected government and reorganising the state bureaucracy as a whole—created a “new normal” (Akçay, 2014).

In consideration of the above-mentioned developments, towards the end of the second term of the AKP rule, the EU agenda disappeared, the military was under control and reorganisation of the state institutions was accelerated (Akçay, 2014). In terms of the economy, Türkiye managed to reduce the current account deficit; however, the cost of this reduction turned out to be the decline of the growth rate below the potential rate. Additionally, the recession in the economic growth led to unemployment. All these economic developments caused problems in both domestic and foreign policies; for instance, the relations with the EU started to decay. Given these developments go hand in hand, the foreign direct investment inflows fell out of bed, and the external financing needs of the economy began to be supplied with foreign borrowing. This external borrowing shift coincided with the exhaustion of the cheap credit-based consumption growth model that had underpinned the AKP's earlier economic performance, rendering the economy increasingly dependent on volatile external financing. Accordingly, Türkiye has become one of the fragile economies of the world (Eğilmez, 2016). On the other hand, there was an excessive emphasis on stability, which constitutes also one of the biggest political capitals of the AKP. Indeed, economic and political stability have been regarded as the basic conditions for attracting foreign investments (Akçay, 2014). Within the framework of this stability understanding, it has been thought that Türkiye is an investable country (Akçay, 2014); however, the above-mentioned developments in the economy caused the discourse of stability to become an instrument of the AKP's legitimacy and its authoritarian tone of governing, or the AKP's hegemonic appeal (Hoşgör, 2015, p. 205).

Alongside these economic concerns, the conservative agenda—the Islamic social interventionism in everyday life—of the AKP rule, deeply contingent upon neoliberalism, was also striking (Gürcan & Peker, 2014, p. 83). Firstly, AKP's new population policy, depending on the encouragement of the birth rates by suggesting that women have at least three children, aims to counter the potential threat of an aging population. The AKP has also uttered antiabortion or C-section discourses and attempted to put a ban, as an extension of its new population policy. This anti-feminist terminology has become entrenched in the field of women's rights as a result of the colonisation attempt to suppress the demands of women's rights. Hence, women in general, and particularly feminist movements, have strongly reacted to these neoliberal, conservative policies of the AKP rule, whose purpose is to control women's bodies (Akça, 2014, p. 45; Akçay, 2014; Coşar, 2019). Secondly, since the AKP has aimed to accelerate the construction sector and because this sector is regarded as the engine of the economy, to contribute to the economic growth through commodification of urban space, the AKP rule has had aggressive urban gentrification—the most salient example is Gezi Park—policies, large scale

redevelopment plans, projects of nuclear power plant and hydroelectric dams (Akçay, 2014). In other words, the call of the AKP for urban transformation includes demolition of public places, green areas and historical sites by displacing poor populations and rebuilding the image of the cities (Tuğal, 2013). These policies have naturally created enormous frustration among environmentalists, eco-activists, architect unions, artists, local communities, and peasants, etc. (Akçay, 2014). It has been seen that this situation lit the fuse of the Gezi Resistance (Tuğal, 2013). Thirdly, the AKP's new regulation of drinks, a reflection of conservative measures, also encountered a secular reaction, and due to the limitations on the sale and usage of alcoholic beverages, many people feel that their lifestyle is in danger. Thus, the political environment transformed into one in which journalists, politicians, public servants, prosecutors, ordinary citizens, etc. have been arrested, their right to speech have been hindered; only conservative—religious (traditional Islamic) values, norms and lifestyles have been presented as acceptable, interventions in people's lives increased and even potentiated such as through the prohibition of alcohol consumption, almost tolerating the killings of women, uttering about women's rights and daily lives, condemning modern woman-man relationships (Akçay, 2014; Gürcan & Peker, 2014, pp. 82–83; Hoşgör, 2015, p. 213; Kalaycıoğlu, 2012, p. 19; Tuğal, 2013).

Since these actions led broad sections of society to be excluded, the opposition to be increasingly marginalised, and economic growth to become fragile, the AKP had expanded and consolidated its influence over the state apparatus, and had become what Poulantzas (1982, pp. 137, 141, 229–1, 234) theorises a “power bloc” in which political power is increasingly concentrated within the state apparatus. Moreover, the direction of the state restructuring led to the rise of authoritarianism via empowering the executive branch over the legislative and judicial branches. In addition, the prime ministry or specified economic apparatuses within the executive branch have become dominant over the rest of the state institutions, as seen in and after the 2010 referendum (Akçay, 2014).

Overall, it can be said that one of the fundamental features of the AKP rule is the exclusion of all social groups, except for the governing party and big capital groups, from economic, social and political decision-making processes. As a result of these developments, it has been observed that some liberals have broken ranks with the AKP, and, in Akçay's own words, “they criticised it not only for replacing the Kemalist tutelage system with a conservative one, but also for creating a new authoritarian regime” (Akçay, 2014; Gürcan & Peker, 2015, p. 22; Kalaycıoğlu, 2012, p. 19; Kumbaracıbaşı, 2016, p. 244; Yalman, 2014, p. 37).

This historical examination, which highlights the pivotal and foundational role of the state, the security-oriented state paradigm, and neoliberal transformation, demonstrates that the process of authoritarianism—traceable at least to the Ergenekon trials of 2008 and accelerating through the 2013 Gezi resistance—is intertwined not only with political choices but also with structural historical dynamics⁶.

5. Case study: How can the State of Emergency Regime following 15 July be interpreted within the framework of Agamben and Poulantzas?

The coup attempt on 15 July 2016 led to radical transformations in the Turkish state structure, the governing capacity of the political authority, and the functioning of the legal-political order. The State of Emergency (SOE) declared immediately after the coup attempt remained in force for two years; however, the institutional effects and legal instruments of the SOE were perpetuated by the “permanent SOE regulations” that came into force after 2018. This section analyses this period in detail through the state of exception and authoritarian statism.

⁶ This structural account remains incomplete without attending to the transnational dimension: the intra-state struggles of the AKP period cannot be fully understood without situating them within the rivalries between competing transnational capital blocs and geopolitical configurations, a dimension that the domestic political economy literature has tended to underexplore (Şenalp et al., 2022).

An increasing authoritarian tendency in the AKP rule has been observed after 2016, which can be called as the deepening or greater visibility of authoritarianism that has already existed in Turkish politics since 1980 (Yalman, 2014, p. 45). To understand this deepening, it should first start with what happened on the way to July 15, 2016.

As is known, the societal tension, more specifically unearthed during the Gezi Resistance, escalated with the 17-25 December corruption investigations, whose main actors were cabinet ministers and MPs of the AKP. The 'allegations' (tape recordings) also implicated Erdoğan and his family. Actually, when AKP came to power in 2002 and started to challenge the secular dominance of key government positions, the Gülen movement was a natural ally, and only this group was capable of replacing Kemalists as alternative candidates for these positions (George, 2018). However, a series of public disagreements occurred because either the AKP no longer felt the need to rely on Gülen followers, or Erdoğan felt threatened by their dual allegiance. It was also thought that the presence of Gülenists in major positions, such as in the judiciary, might pose a risk to the AKP rule (George, 2018). Firstly, during the Gezi resistance, some prominent AKP figures, like Abdullah Gül, had a softer tone compared to Erdoğan's harsher attitude towards the protesters by labelling them as *looters*, and the Gülen movement's newspaper, *Zaman*, criticised the government's actions (George, 2018; Hoşgör, 2015, p. 224). In the second place, on the morning of 17 December 2013, an operation was held to raid the properties of more than fifty AKP members and businessmen who have connections with the party. Even some of the tape recordings were about the conversation between Erdoğan and his son Bilal about moving tens of millions of dollars, but only four AKP MPs and ministers resigned (George, 2018).

Ultimately, the corruption scandals caused the relationship between Erdoğan and Fetullah Gülen, the religious leader of the movement, to break down. The Gülen movement, with several thousand police officers, judges and prosecutors, was announced as having built a parallel state structure and accused of plotting to overthrow the AKP government (George, 2018; Yeşilada, 2016, p. 23). Put differently, after the corruption scandals, the movement was declared a terrorist organisation and Gülen as the head of this organisation (The Economist, 2016). This labelling of a terrorist organisation was officially declared in June 2016 (George, 2018). Here, an antagonistic cleavage has occurred within the society. While some, mainly the core supporters of the AKP, believe in the Gülen community's infiltration into the state, others commented on the situation as such: "*Mr Erdogan's furious persecution of this 'enemy within' is a way of deflecting attention from the AK party's own plans for capturing the state*" (The Economist, 2016). A further line of criticism points out that the Gülen movement's infiltration into the state bureaucracy was itself facilitated—indeed accelerated—by the AKP's own political choices. The movement could not have placed generals in the military, governors in the bureaucracy, or judges in the supreme courts without the active cooperation and political cover provided by the AKP government (Şık, 2014). Consequently, this falling out acquired a distinct dimension together with the 15 July 2016 coup attempt.

5.1. Declaration of a state of emergency and the framework of governance: Institutionalisation of the exception and the restructuring of the state

On 15 July 2016, an attempted coup took place against the AKP government and President Erdoğan, by the Gülen movement or FETÖ/PDY (Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation/Parallel State Structure) (George, 2018). Within a few days, on July 20, 2016, the government declared a state of emergency (George, 2018). A series of operations and transactions were started against the so-called coup plotters, such as detentions, arrests, dismissals from public services, confiscations of properties and bank accounts, closures of newspapers, journals, TV or radio channels, etc. Together with the coup attempt in 2016, the tone of the AKP rule became harder, and it had the chance to implement authoritarian policies and practices. The declaration of a state of emergency and its extension as governmental decrees have become the tool of this authoritarian mindset. That is why,

the state of emergency, in practice, has ceased to be merely a tool aimed at eliminating threats related to the coup attempt; it has become a broad management technique used to restructure the political, legal and administrative spheres of the state.

Within the state of emergency framework, 37 Decree Laws (KHKs) were issued to implement the above-mentioned measures. They led to the restructuring of judicial institutions and the dismissal of about 152,000 public-sector workers. They also led to the closure of about 2,000 civil society organisations and media outlets—including human rights groups, humanitarian organisations, lawyers' associations, foundations, publishing houses, newspapers, TV stations, and news agencies. The closures were followed by the confiscation of their assets without any compensation. Authorities blocked or restricted access to more than a thousand websites. Numerous passports were cancelled (50,000 passports in July 2016 alone). There was widespread implementation of trusteeship appointments, and property confiscation practices (Amnesty International, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2016, 2018; OHCHR, 2018, pp. 2–4).

Decrees entered into force upon publication and were not subject to judicial review. This situation meant that legal norms themselves were suspended, and the decision-making process was left entirely to the executive's discretion. The form and function of these decrees were almost a counterpart to Agamben's paradigm of "the suspension of law but done with the instruments of law." In this respect, the state of emergency process was a situation where "the boundary between law and the suspension of law was erased" (Agamben, 2003, pp. 4–5, 7). What caused this situation was the fact that the dismissals and the closure of institutions were carried out without concrete evidence, and they were based on vague categories such as "affiliation," which were considered grounds for criminalisation. Accordingly, individuals ceased to be legal subjects and became "addressees of the state of exception" in line with the conceptualisation of "bare life".

From another perspective, the state of emergency period was characterised by the centralisation and restructuring of the state apparatus alongside the suspension of the rule of law. It presents a structural transformation which can be explained by Poulantzas's concept of "authoritarian statism". This restructuring process can be traced in the fundamental changes made to the judicial system through decrees, i.e., the dismissal of over 4,000 judges and prosecutors, and the strengthening of the executive control by changing the structure of the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK, later HSK). Regulations during this period were to extend the Ministry of the Interior', governors', and intelligence agencies' authorities extensively, such as increasing police detention periods, which were mostly issued without evidence, and granted broad discretionary powers regarding intervention in social demonstrations. In addition, while numerous media organisations were shut down, thousands of journalists were prosecuted or imprisoned alongside the broadcasting bans becoming commonplace (Amnesty International, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Kurban, 2025, p. 331; OHCHR, 2018, pp. 3–8; Tansel, 2018, pp. 200, 209). These developments correspond to the centralisation/monopolisation of executive power in the Poulantzian sense in connection with the "integration of ideological apparatuses with the state" and the "subordination of the judiciary to the executive"; therefore, "authoritarian statism" (Poulantzas, 2000, pp. 172, 217–219, 246).

A year after the coup attempt and during the state of emergency period, the 2017 constitutional referendum, which led to the *de jure* transition to presidentialism, together with the 2018 general elections, proposed amendments to 18 articles of the constitution. With these amendments—including the abolition of the parliamentary system and the office of prime minister; revision of the number of members of parliament, of the structure of HSYK (later HSK); the transfer of power to the president to declare a state of emergency, etc.—executive power has become concentrated around a single individual, clear control mechanisms have been established over the legislature and judiciary, and the media and information regime have become almost fully integrated with the executive (Aras, 2023; Evci & Kaminski, 2021, p. 484; Sürek, 2017; The Economist, 2018). In brief, they created

serious gaps in the constitutional order, and thus, presented a contemporary version of authoritarian statism in the Poulantzian sense.

5.2. Centralisation of the Economic and Social Spheres

In economic terms, as of 2016, the AKP rule entered a new phase, according to Eğılmez (2016). Alongside the political developments, Türkiye entered a more critical period in terms of the economy because the global system has not shown interest in emerging/prospering economies. In such an environment, countries whose economies are sound and whose internal and external politics are smooth or less troubled would be at ease economically. However, developments in Türkiye have signalled problems such as increased oil prices, a rise in the inflation rate, exchange rate fluctuations, the impact of a pressing interest rate hike, a fall in imports, a current account deficit, rising unemployment (Eğılmez, 2016). In the subsequent years, volatile economy policies of the AKP rule, continuous interventions in the high rank officials at the economy management such as appointment of President Erdoğan's son-in-law to the Ministry of Economics as a sign of nepotism, steps taken to harm the Central Bank autonomy alongside the worldwide economic developments such as the Covid-19 period have detrimentally influenced Türkiye's outlook both economically and politically (Öniş, 2019, pp. 8–9, 15; Öniş & Kutlay, 2020, p. 44; Tanca et al., 2020).

Within a broader framework, the economic sphere became politicised during the state of emergency, alongside the executive branch's restructuring of capital groups through the transfer of assets from thousands of companies. The Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) applications and confiscation practices, as well as the distribution of public tenders, showed that the property regime was rebuilt through political intervention (Oğuz, 2023, p. 111). In line with the Poulantzian lens, this situation can be understood in terms of the organic integration of the capital bloc with the state, and the technocratic and political centralisation of the economic sphere (Poulantzas, 2000, pp. 35, 50–51, 55, 171–175, 191).

In societal terms, the suppression of the opposition was carried out through the closure of civil society organisations, the obstruction of trade union activities, and the structural dismantling of academia. Targeted purges—particularly against members of trade unions affiliated with KESK and DİSK—were experienced, and strike bans as well as restrictions and/or bans of protest activities became commonplace (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020, pp. 102–103; Bozdoğan, 2019). For instance, one of President Erdoğan's statements regarding the seventh extension of emergency rule concerned workers' rights to strike: he said that the business world should welcome Türkiye's state of emergency because it guards against terrorism and prevents workers from going on strike (George, 2018). Erdoğan's statement regarding the issue is as follows:

"We are enforcing the state of emergency, so our business world can work better. I am asking, do you have any problem or disruption in your business world? When we came to power, there was a state of emergency too. However, all factories were being threatened by the strike. Remember those days. Do you have anything like that now? On the contrary, we are interfering immediately in the places which are under the threat of strike. We say no, we do not tolerate strikes here because you cannot shake our business world" (Çamur, 2017a, 2017b; Dolan, 2018; Evrensel, 2017; Oyan, 2017).

In addition, thousands of people have been dismissed from their jobs and left without wages or employment. This situation leads many to argue that the working class is bound to the interests of the national and international capital and all AKP's politics were about protecting the capital since 2002 (conveyed by Müftüoğlu, reported by Evrensel, 2017). As Müftüoğlu says;

"The government does not only prohibit strikes. At the same time, leaving thousands of people unemployed to silence the press, to make the academy allegiant. And by doing this, the government want to make people to oblige to be more exploited by threatening their job security" (Evrensel, 2017).

As these discourses demonstrate, the state of emergency was also used for economic and political purposes. In short, the seizure of companies under the state of emergency, TMSF applications, the curtailment of civil society, trustee policies, and the restriction of

trade union rights have restructured not only the political sphere but also the economic and social spheres. This transformation can be regarded as the manifestation of authoritarian neoliberal governance in Türkiye.

The suppression of labour and trade union activities should also be read not only through the juridical logic of the state of emergency, but also in terms of the concrete interests of specific capital fractions. The emergency decree-based strike bans disproportionately benefited capital groups operating in construction and textile sectors—industries where labour costs are structurally central to profitability. In the Poulantzasian sense, this is not evidence of the state acting as the instrument of capital-in-general, but rather of the state as a strategic terrain on which particular fractions secured dominance over others—in this case, over organised labour. Specifying this fractionality prevents the process from appearing as a depoliticised, functionalist outcome of accumulation, and restores the antagonistic, conjunctural character that Poulantzas’s framework demands.

5.3. Post-state of emergency or “permanent state of emergency”

Although the state of emergency officially ended in 2018, many mechanisms used during it were made permanent by Law No. 7145. For instance, detention periods were extended; governors were granted extraordinary powers; criteria for returning to public office were left vague; and the right to assembly and demonstration was effectively restricted (Bazı Kanun ve Kanun Hükümünde, 2018).

The impacts of exceptional governance were closely experienced during the 2018 general elections, which were conducted under the state of emergency. During this period, opposition parties and candidates faced a number of difficulties, including restrictions on their campaign activities and the spread of biased media coverage (Başkan et al., 2022, p. 338; Sözen, 2019, p. 296). Thus, the opposition parties conducted their electoral campaigns on an uneven playing field, as Esen and Gümüşçü (2016, pp. 1582, 1586) underline, while the incumbent AKP enjoyed an unfair competitive advantage through its control over the media and the judiciary’s instrumentalisation (Başkan et al., 2022, p. 325; Sözen, 2019, pp. 288, 291). For instance, several HDP⁷ members, including Demirtaş, the party’s presidential candidate, were imprisoned. All opposition groups that were not already incarcerated faced a significant risk of criminalisation before the elections (Sözen, 2019, p. 292).

A noteworthy proportion of the expulsions from public service were unlawful, illegal, and aimed at silencing all the dissident voices in the same pot so that legal transactions were carried out even with reference to false charges, allegations and unfounded denouncements. Thus, as George (2018) puts forward, Türkiye has become a society of informants in which no one is safe. In a similar vein, Gürses (2025, pp. 92–94) pellucidly highlights that the restriction on freedoms of the people has been presented as indispensable and benevolent, and just like “for the common good of them”; however, this process incrementally destroyed the rule of law and turned the democratic structures and institutions into an authoritarian form, and tried to be made more persuasive within the context of the “exceptional circumstances”. Herein, and by reference to Agamben, it can be claimed that the state of emergency/exception has become the rule, and corresponds to the “permanence of the exception”. The state of emergency is not merely a temporary form of governance; it has become the new normal for the regime.

Yet, reading this institutional permanence solely through Agamben’s lens risks reducing it to a formal-judicial logic of suspension. When examined through the Poulantzasian framework, the centralisation of executive power must be read alongside the fractionalist realignment within the power bloc. The liquidation of TUSKON and the rupture between MÜSİAD-aligned businesses and Gülen-affiliated enterprises concretely demonstrate that “capital” was not a unitary bloc but a set of competing fractions

⁷ Halkların Demokratik Partisi—Peoples’ Democratic Party

unevenly positioned within the state strategies (Oğuz, 2016, pp. 103–104, 2023, p. 111). The institutional restructuring of the state—re-composition of the judiciary, presidential appointment powers, asset transfers via TMSF—can thus be interpreted as a strategic intervention aimed at managing this fractional rupture and consolidating a new power bloc. This reading allows authoritarian statism to function not merely as a conceptual label but as an explanatory framework that identifies for whom, and through which alliances the transformation was organised.

6. Discussion

The analytical insights of this study demonstrate that the process of authoritarianism in Türkiye after 2013 is too complex, multi-layered, and historically specific to be fully explained by a single theoretical model. While both Agamben's approach and Poulantzas' construct offer powerful conceptual tools for understanding certain dimensions of Türkiye's transformation, both theories have certain limitations. Therefore, a framework that intersects and complements these two approaches is required to explain authoritarianism in Türkiye.

Agamben's approach incisively explains phenomena such as the suspension of the law during the state of emergency, the creation of ambiguous categories of crime, passport cancellations, indefinite detention, and suspended judicial review. The case analysis demonstrates that the state of emergency regulations functioned not only as extra-legal tools but as exception mechanisms engineered from within the law itself.

Despite the official lifting of the state of emergency in 2018, the fact that most of its measures were made permanent confirms Agamben's thesis of the normalisation of the exception in the Turkish context. Regulations granting broad powers to governors, the arbitrary restriction of the right to assembly and demonstration, legal uncertainty in the reinstatement processes of academics and public employees, the breadth of law enforcement powers, and the flexibilisation of judicial processes demonstrate that the state of exception has become an institutional management technique. However, Agamben's theory is insufficient to explain why the state produces exceptions against certain social groups, why it becomes authoritarian during certain periods, or the economic and class-based foundations of these processes. As examined in the previous sections of this study, Agamben's biopolitical framework alone cannot explain phenomena such as neoliberal economic transformation, the restructuring of state-capital relations, and the class and identity composition of social opposition. Therefore, Agamben is necessary but not sufficient for understanding the legal-political transformation in Türkiye.

Poulantzas's approach is particularly well-suited to explaining the state's restructuring process after 2016, the centralisation of executive power, the control of the media and the information regime, the integration of the judiciary and the bureaucracy into political power, and the reorganisation of capital blocs. The presidential government system introduced by the 2017 constitutional amendment has concentrated executive power around personal leadership, largely eliminating the balance between the legislative and judicial branches. This situation is a contemporary version of what Poulantzas defined as the "monopolisation of the executive."

The transfer of companies to TMSF during the state of emergency, the redistribution of public tenders, and the increasing economic centralisation demonstrate that the structure of capital in Türkiye has been reshaped around political loyalty. This transformation forms the economic-political basis for constructing a hegemonic bloc in the Poulantzian sense. However, to allow the Poulantzian framework to operate at full analytical force the composition of this hegemonic bloc requires further specification. The authoritarian turn in Türkiye did not benefit capital as a unitary structural force; rather, it produced winners and losers among distinct capital fractions. The liquidation of Gülen-affiliated business networks and the simultaneous consolidation of MÜSİAD-aligned and construction-oriented capital groups illustrate that the state's restructuring

was not simply functional to “capital in general” but was strategically advantageous to particular fractions and actively detrimental to others. Similarly, the emergency decree-based strike bans and the curtailment of trade union rights served the immediate interests of labour-intensive sectors—most notably construction and textiles—against organised labour. Identifying these fractionalist dynamics is not a peripheral addition to the analysis; it is the condition under which the central question of Poulantzian inquiry can be answered—namely, questioning “for whom, against whom, and through which alliances” this hybrid form of authoritarianism has operated. Without this specification, capital risks appearing as a depoliticised, monolithic beneficiary of authoritarian governance, which is precisely the limitation the Poulantzian framework was introduced to overcome. At the same time, the closure of civil society organisations, the restriction of trade union activities, sweeping purges in higher education, and the appointment of trustees to local bodies are typical manifestations of the authoritarian statism defined by Poulantzas. However, like Agamben, Poulantzas also faces certain limitations. Most importantly, Poulantzas’s framework does not engage as extensively as Agamben’s with the suspension of the legal order, the legal nature of areas of exception, and micro-management techniques such as the regime of bare life and uncertainty. In other words, Poulantzas explains why the state is being restructured, but only explains to a limited extent how it uses management techniques.

One of the key insights of this article is that the Gezi Resistance and the political crises between 2013 and 2016 constituted the “tipping point” for the institutionalisation of the exceptional regime and the consolidation and advancement of authoritarian statism in Türkiye. For those who analyse this inflection point from the perspective of hegemonic crisis, the Gezi movement put three systemic and conjunctural opportunity structures as the political-cultural fix of the AKP government (supplementing David Harvey’s notion of spatial fix), political regime/state capacity dynamics in Türkiye, and international realignments affecting Turkish politics (Gürcan & Peker, 2014, p. 71, 2015, pp. 60, 84; Saraçoğlu, 2015, p. 520). Namely, Gezi revealed cracks in the AKP’s hegemonic project; these cracks created tensions between factions within the state apparatus, consistent with Poulantzas’ concept of “organic crisis”.

Here, the notion of crisis can help the discussion of exception in its different forms—as a reflection of political crisis—such as of the state, of representation, of legality, of legitimacy, etc. Any crisis arises when social antagonism turns the immanent crisis tendencies of every social, economic, and political organisation into actuality, thereby indicating a crisis in the work of social forces (Boukalas, 2014, p. 122). Although it is hard to determine the nature of the crisis, what is clear is that the AKP rule managed this crisis-like situation through unconstitutional, unlawful, or illegal practices.

The failed coup evidently created a strong basis of legitimacy for the restructuring of the state at both legal and institutional levels. The state of emergency served as both the beginning and the accelerator of this transformation. From this perspective, the intersection of the two theories provides a fundamental analytical framework for explaining Türkiye’s regime transformation. Yet, the answer to the question as to which model Türkiye is closer to—the main point of discussion that forms the contribution of this article—is that Türkiye’s post-2016 (and even post-2013) transformation aligns with certain aspects of both theories. As this research demonstrates, Türkiye’s authoritarian experience is neither entirely Agambenian nor entirely Poulantzian. Agamben’s perspective would explain Türkiye’s legal and political management techniques by noting that the suspension of the rule of law, vague definitions of crime, the disabling judicial review, and the normalisation of the state of emergency demonstrate a shift towards an exceptional regime. Poulantzas would explain the institutional and class transformation of the state by referring to the fact that centralisation of the executive, alignment of the judiciary and bureaucracy, control of the media and ideological apparatus, and political reorganisation of the economic, political, and social spheres clearly show a strong conformity to the authoritarian state model.

This study's theoretical implications indicates that Agamben better explains the legal architecture of the state of emergency; Poulantzas better explains the executive centralisation; state-capital relations is Poulantzas's area of strength; the restructuring of the judiciary and bureaucracy is the intersection of both theories; the targeting of social opposition is bare life in Agamben and narrowing of civil society in Poulantzas; permanent exceptionalism after the state of emergency corresponds to Agambenian approach and the construction of the system after 2017 corresponds to Poulantzian approach. Considering all these factors together, it is plausible to say that Türkiye has developed a hybrid form of authoritarianism. Therefore, Türkiye cannot be classified as either a purely exceptional regime or a classic example of authoritarian statism. That said, this study's own analytical position is closer to the Poulantzian pole of this hybrid: while Agamben's framework is indispensable for capturing the legal architecture of the exception, the strategic-relational approach provides the more productive explanatory ground for understanding why authoritarianism deepened when it did, against whom it was directed, and through which class alliances it was sustained—a reading that builds on and extends existing Poulantzian analyses of Türkiye's regime transformation (Oğuz, 2016).

7. Conclusion

As this research effort has demonstrated, authoritarianism in Türkiye is not merely a consequence of coups and/or coup attempts or of isolated political events. The historical state tradition, neoliberal transformation, regional conflicts, internal power struggles within the state, and administrative choices are components of this process. The combined use of two perspectives provides a comprehensive framework for explaining Türkiye's regime transformation. Therefore, authoritarianism in Türkiye can be defined both as an exceptional regime in which the state of emergency has become normalised and as a form of authoritarian statism institutionalised through the restructuring of state-capital relations.

This article seeks to make a contribution to the literature on both Turkish politics and authoritarianism in three respects. First of all, it demonstrates that the two theories can be applied together. Agamben and Poulantzas are positioned in opposing methodological camps in most of the literature. However, biopolitical exception analysis and strategic-relational state analysis complement one another by examining the same phenomenon from different perspectives. Secondly, it explains the multi-layered nature of authoritarianism in Türkiye. It describes a regime form in which not only does legal exception occur, but institutional centralisation also advances simultaneously. Lastly, it offers a conceptual proposal, using "exceptional-authoritarian statism" as an analytical category to explain the transformation Türkiye underwent in the aftermath of 2013.

In brief, this article aimed to analyse the process of authoritarianism in Türkiye, which accelerated after 2013 and reached a new level following the coup attempt of 15 July 2016, through the theoretical frameworks of Agamben and Poulantzas. The main outcome of the study is that the regime transformation in Türkiye is a hybrid form of authoritarianism situated at the intersection of these two approaches; it possesses a multi-layered structure where both the state of exception has become permanent, and the institutional structure of the state apparatus has been rebuilt in favour of the executive. The Turkish case presents a process in which the political structure has undergone significant transformation in the legal, institutional, and social spheres over the last few decades. This transformation has emerged along three main axes: the suspension of the rule of law and the normalisation of exceptions; the centralisation of executive power and authoritarian statism; and the restructuring of social and economic spheres. These axes show that authoritarianism in Türkiye is not merely a process linked to short-term political crises; it is intertwined with the historical and political context of the reshaping of state-capital relations, social opposition, security policies, and institutional structures.

Therefore, the contemporary political transformation of Türkiye coincides with diverse concepts in the literature owing to its hybrid nature.

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