

# İsmet İnönü Era: Assessing the Challenges of Democracy in Turkey

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## Abstract

The aim of study is to analyze the İsmet İnönü era in Turkey during his tenure while concentrating on the challenges and shortcomings of democracy. The study will focus on various dimensions, including political restrictions, limitations on freedom of expression, one-party rule, electoral systems, socio-cultural factors as well as economic policies in order to offer a detailed examination of the complex dynamics which shaped the democratic landscape of Turkey of the time. Studying the mentioned dimensions is expected to uncover the factors which led to the inadequacy of democracy during the İnönü era and eventually to evaluate their implications for Turkey's democratic development, which on the one hand encompasses the succession from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Republican People's Party's (CHP) dominant role and on the other hand emphasizes the consolidation of power and the challenges to political representation. Particularly, the analysis of electoral practices can provide insights into the limitations of democratic processes, such as restrictive laws, voter intimidation, and limited political pluralism. Moreover, the study will examine the impact of these challenges on democratic decision-making which would include but not limited to the centralization of power, the marginalization of opposition voices and their meanings for citizen participation. The study will also try to evaluate the restrictions on freedom of speech and the media landscape, discussing the limitations imposed on critical voices, media control, and its consequences on public discourse and democratic participation. In addition to these, the study is expected to assess the socio-cultural dynamics which would focus on İnönü's modernization policies and their impact on social transformation. The study will explore the tensions between traditional values and cultural constraints, too. This will be carried out by highlighting the challenges faced by less represented groups and the inclusiveness of the political system.

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The economic policies of the İnönü era, including the economic vision and development strategies will be scrutinized, with particular attention given to the socio-economic disparities and their effects on democratic participation as well as political power dynamics. Furthermore, the study will attempt to examine the international relations and foreign policy approach of İsmet İnönü. This examination will be through the consideration of the implications for democracy and Turkey's international standing. The influence of external factors on democracy in Turkey during the mentioned timeline will also be assessed. Finally, the study will be concluded with the evaluation of the legacy of the İnönü's era, weighing the democratic gains and losses while drawing lessons for Turkey's democratic development and considering the implications for the post-İnönü era. This comprehensive analysis is expected to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the İsmet İnönü era's impact on democracy in Turkey which could highlight the complexities and challenges faced during his tenure. The critical examination of the various dimensions, the study will provide valuable insights for scholars, policymakers as well as for any expert who is interested in Turkey's democratic history and in the ongoing democratic journey.

## **I. Introduction**

İnönü's era has some shortcomings of democracy and this deficiency can be attributed to a variety of factors. On the top of the list comes the legacy of single party regime, which had established a strong and centralized state but had also suppressed its political opposition and dissent. This legacy shaped the Turkish politics even after the establishment of multi-party system in 1946 while Republican People's Party (CHP) remained the dominant political force in the country. As second comes the challenges of nation-building in a diverse and fragmented society in which various ethnic and religious groups competed for political representation and resources. Moreover, other factors usually have been external elements such as the World War II and the Cold War which had exerted significant influence on Turkish politics. This exertion often led to İnönü government to attribute priority on security and stability rather than democracy.

The lack of democratic competence and tradition coupled with the economic and financial conditions in Turkey of the time as well as the conjuncture of international and domestic politics contributed a lot to the deterioration of image of İnönü and his administration in the minds the Turkish society, which is still not recovered today. Such perception may arise from many reasons but it can be claimed that İnönü and his administration paid little attention to the heavy burden on the masses created by the negative effects of the World War II. The problems on the Turks' shoulder had been

accumulated due to the long-standing economic, political and socio-cultural dynamics since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, İnönü administration failed to communicate its political agenda to the critical mass in the society which was more concerned about the household matters than İnönü's grand but ambivalent international political tactics that aimed to protect their beloved country from the imperialists' games during the World War II.

This era marked a crucial period in Turkish history characterized by political, social, and economic transformations. İsmet İnönü, the second President of Turkey and the leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), played a central role in shaping Turkey future of the time. Although on the one hand, İnönü is often glorified for his efforts in consolidating the young Turkish Republic and promoting modernization, but on the other hand, it is essential to critically examine the democratic shortcomings that emerged during his tenure. For such an examination, the study will seek to provide an in-depth analysis of the factors hindering the development of democracy during İnönü's tenure.

Therefore, the political landscape of the time is called attention as being one of the key elements; so, the study tries to explore the political restrictions that were in place, limiting the participation of opposition parties and curtailing political pluralism (Karpat, 1959). The dominance of the CHP and its suppression of alternative political voices significantly impacted democratic representation by diminishing chances of citizens to engage in a diverse and inclusive political process (Akşin, 2007). The study also examines the various mechanisms used to stifle dissenting voices, including restrictive laws and regulations, censorship, and the control of media outlets (Karpat, 1996 & Arabacı, 2014).

Furthermore, the study brings forth the issue of one-party rule during the İnönü era. Despite the establishment of a multi-party system after 1945, the CHP continued its domination over the political landscape, often hindering the development of a truly competitive and pluralistic democracy (Karpat, 1959 & Özdemir, 2014 & Bayır, 2011). The concentration of power and the absence of a robust opposition (Çaylak & Nişancı, 2010) had far-reaching implications for democratic decision-making and the accountability of the CHP of the time.

The analysis also encompasses the electoral practices employed during İnönü's era while examining the fairness and transparency of elections, assessing the extent to which democratic principles were upheld. The study will touch upon the socio-cultural dynamics which played a significant

role in understanding the democratic landscape of the İnönü era. To critically comprehend the era, the modernization policies pursued under İnönü's leadership and their impact on social transformation should also be examined. The analysis of social transformation helps us to delve into the tensions that arose between traditional values and cultural constraints by shedding light on the challenges faced by the less represented groups and the inclusiveness of the political system. Furthermore, such analysis would be less comprehensive without the investigation of the economic policies implemented during the İnönü era. Thus, the study assesses İnönü's economic vision and development strategies, analyzing their implications for socio-economic disparities and democratic participation. The assessment also includes the distribution of wealth, access to resources, and the concentration of economic power in relation to their effects on political power dynamics and on the overall democratic landscape.

At the final stage, international relations and foreign policy approach of the time are analysed by pointing out how İnönü's foreign policy stance impacted democracy in Turkey and therefore, influenced the country's international standing. This is carried out through an examination outlining the role of external factors in shaping Turkey's democratic development.

To conclude, the study will attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the İsmet İnönü era in Turkey. To reach this aim, it will critically examine the challenges and shortcomings faced by democracy of the time. This study aims to put forth a multifaceted understanding of the lack of democracy during the İnönü era thanks to the exploration of various dimensions such as political restrictions, limitations on freedom, one-party rule, electoral systems, socio-cultural dynamics, economic policies and foreign relations. A comprehensive assessment of the historical, political, social, and economic contexts, the study tries to shed light on the complex interplay of factors which influenced democratic practices at that time. Ultimately, this particular method and analysis aim to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the era's impact on democracy in Turkey and to provide insights and recommendations for future of democracy in Turkey.

### **1.1. Historical Background**

Spanning from 1938 to 1950, the İsmet İnönü era represented a critical period in the early years of the Turkish Republic. After the years under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during when the fundamental principles of secularism, nationalism, and republicanism were established, İnönü assumed the presidency after Atatürk's death in 1938. His term and tenure presented

a formidable task of upholding and furthering the nation-building project (Shaw & Shaw,2006) while maneuvering through the intricate web of domestic and international politics.

The core aim of İnönü's administration was to consolidate the gains obtained during Atatürk's time and to propel the country through significant socio-political transformations (Karpaz, 1959). This grand agenda encompassed various characteristics such as the modernization of infrastructure, the expansion of educational opportunities, the industrialization of the economy and the promotion of a secular society (Selek, 2020). İnönü's efforts intended to position Turkey as a modern country with a progressive nation on the global stage.

Despite these advancements, the era was also recalled with certain democratic deficiencies and limitations. How hard İnönü government attempted some significant efforts in order to establish and to maintain a stable political system, an overarching dominance of the Republican People's Party (CHP) observed during that time which hindered the development of a vibrant multi-party democracy (Ahmad, 2007) in Turkey. The dominance of CHP led the emergence of an environment where alternative political voices met significant obstacles hindering a gain of representation and an influence on policy decisions.

To comprehensively understand the mentioned challenges of the time, the political, social, economic, and cultural dynamics of the İnönü era should be assessed concerning their implications for democratic governance. Through an examination of both the achievements and shortcomings of İnönü's leadership in fostering a democratic society, multiple valuable insights can be gained regarding the complexities and intricacies of democratic development during this period which may pave the way for a more informed understanding of Turkey's political landscape.

## **1.2. Research Objective and Scope**

The primary aim of this academic work is to assess the challenges of Turkish democracy during the İnönü's era. Thanks to an examination of multiple dimensions, the study will attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the democratic deficiencies and limitations which characterized İnönü's tenure. The research also aims to point out the implications of these challenges for Turkey's democratic development.

The time frame of this study is primarily concentrated on the İsmet İnönü era stretching from 1938 to 1950. It tries to analyze the key events, policies, and socio-political dynamics during the mentioned time period. The study

attempts a depiction the time by drawing on historical records, academic research, and scholarly analyses so as to present a thorough examination of the challenges to democracy and their broader implications for Turkey's democratic trajectory.

## **II. Political Landscape during the İsmet İnönü Era**

### **2.1 Succession from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk**

The İsmet İnönü era commenced with the transition of power from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of modern Turkey. Atatürk's visionary leadership (Yangıl & Başpınar, 2022) had set the foundation for a democratic and secular state. He concentrated on principles like nationalism, republicanism, and secularism. Being the general commander of the Turkish War of Independence, he successfully led the country through a period of intense transformation resembling European renaissance (Akgün, 2006) and established the Republic of Turkey in 1923.

Apparently, this transition of power has marked a critical turning point in Turkey's political history. In spite of the similarities of Atatürk and İnönü concerning the leadership styles in the establishment and early years of the Turkish Republic, their approaches to governance differed in significant ways (Aydemir, 1967).

On the one hand Atatürk was known for his firm commitment to democratic ideals and a vision of a modern, Western-oriented state while emphasizing the importance of pluralism, public participation, and the rule of law. He also aimed to create a secular and progressive society (Karal, 1998) which would distance themselves from the constraints of the Ottoman Empire and would choose to align with European values. On the other hand, İnönü followed a more centralized and authoritative style of leadership. As the second president of the Turkish Republic, he faced the challenge of sustaining the nation-building project which started during Atatürk's time. İnönü found himself navigating the complexities of domestic and international politics (Aydemir, 1967). At this point, it should be accepted that İnönü's approach to governance was shaped by the political context of the time, including the challenges of maintaining stability in a volatile region and protecting the gains obtained under Atatürk's leadership. Therefore, İsmet İnönü prioritized the preservation of national unity and security against the external threats such as the World War II and the rise of fascism in Europe (Hale, 2002). Moreover, İnönü's tenure indicated a departure from Atatürk's more pluralistic and inclusive vision of democracy (Aydemir, 1967 & Karpat, 2004 & Hür, 2015). On

the issues like the pursuit of secularism and modernization, İnönü rather tended towards centralization of power within the state apparatus. Such concentration of power required for quick decision-making and effective implementation of policies. However, this method led more restricted political pluralism and the space for alternative voices and perspectives (Karpaz, 2004).

In other words, the mentioned transition also stood for a shift from the charismatic and transformative leadership to a more pragmatic and managerial style of governance (Karpaz, 2004 & Hür, 2015). İnönü's leadership signified a focus on stability and consensus-building as well as a priority over the stability of the newly established republic in contrast to rapid and radical changes (Aydemir, 1967). By doing so, İnönü aimed to solidify the gains obtained during Atatürk's time and guide Turkey through some significant socio-political transformations (Karpaz, 2004).

Furthermore, the centralization of power and the consolidation of authority under CHP limited the checks and balances which would be required for a more vibrant and pluralistic democracy (Karpaz, 1996). Albeit the İnönü's relative success in terms of economic development, infrastructure and social reforms, the democratic deficiencies and limitations during his tenure cannot be overlooked.

In brief, İnönü's era was categorized as a more centralized and authoritative style of governance (Akşin, 2007). Therefore, it is crucial to understanding the transition and its implications when assessing the challenges of democracy during the İnönü era and shaping the trajectory of democratic governance in Turkey.

## **2.2 The Role of the Republican People's Party (CHP)**

It should be once more emphasized that CHP had a key role during the İnönü era since it exerted a significant influence over Turkish politics of the time. It had been the leading force in the struggle for independence and the establishment of the Turkish Republic during Atatürk's time. When İnönü assumed presidency, the CHP also maintained its dominance in Turkish politics, effectively becoming the ruling party. However, during İnönü's rule, he served not only the president of the country but also the leader of the CHP, which was a sort of consolidation of power within a single political entity. Interestingly, the CHP's influence extended beyond the political realm. It exerted its control over the military, the judiciary and the bureaucracy (Karpaz, 1996 & Yılmaz et al., 2013). This power concentration had significant implications for democratic governance in Turkey.

On the top of the list comes the restrictive effect of the dominance of the CHP on the political pluralism and the development of a vibrant multiparty system. CHP's firm control over the space for opposition parties to thrive and effectively challenge the status quo was much restricted (Yılmaz et al., 2013). This inhibited political competition and provided very limited choices available to voters; eventually hindered the democratic representation (VanderLippe, 2005). Second comes the influence of the CHP over state institutions. This raised concerns about accountability and transparency (VanderLippe, 2005) on the government rule in Turkey. It would be claimed that the strong ties between the ruling party and the bureaucracy, the military as well as the judiciary deteriorated the checks and balances necessary for a healthy democratic system (Karpat, 1996). This weakness also limited the ability of these institutions to act independently and undermined their role as impartial arbiters in the political process (VanderLippe, 2005).

Furthermore, the CHP's control over state resources and its patronage networks created a conducive environment so that it would maintain its grip on power (Karpat, 1959). This situation also had implications for the fair representation of diverse interests. Additionally, it hindered the development of a responsive and inclusive political system (Karpat, 1959 & Hür, 2015) until 1946. The dominance of the CHP also had repercussions for the democratic rights of opposition parties and individuals critical of the ruling party. Opposition and alternative political voices were often suppressed. This suppression cultivated only a handful of political pluralism and thus resulted in a curtailment of civil liberties (Karpat, 2004 & Arabacı, 2014).

Nevertheless, it is important to pinpoint that the CHP's influence was not entirely negative during the İnönü era. The party assumed a crucial role in preserving the secular and nationalist principles established by Atatürk (Selek, 2020). It also launched social and economic reforms aimed at modernizing the country and improving living standards of the Turks. These included many initiatives and programs in education such as Village Institutes (Köy Enstitüleri), halkevleri (community houses), etc, women's rights and infrastructure development (Aydemir, 1967 & Ahmad, 2007 & Selek, 2020). No matter how good some policies and reform programs were, the concentration of power within the CHP as well as the limited space for political competition presented significant challenges to democracy during the İnönü era (Karpat, 1959). It restricted the ability of citizens to freely express their political preferences, participate in decision-making processes, and hold the government accountable.



In other words, CHP maintained its dominance in Turkish politics and exerting significant influence over state institutions while the party's role in preserving the principles of secularism and nationalism and its efforts in social and economic development were noteworthy. Yet, its concentrated power restricted political pluralism, accountability and the fair representation of diverse interests (Karpaz, 1959 & Karpaz, 2004). Understanding the role of the CHP is crucial for assessing the challenges of democracy during the İnönü era and shaping the trajectory of democratic governance in Turkey.

### **2.3 One-Party Rule and Consolidation of Power**

One-party rule under the CHP was the characteristics of the period. Led by İsmet İnönü, the CHP had a dominant position in Turkish politics, which allowed for the consolidation of power within a single political entity (Karpaz, 1959). This consolidation had also significant implications for democratic governance during the mentioned period. The space for political pluralism and the development of a competitive multiparty system was much limited (VanderLippe, 2005). Thus, a vigorous opposition lacked which weakened the checks and balances of a healthy democratic system. More so, it gave an opportunity to the CHP to exercise its authority with minimal accountability and oversight (Karpaz, 2004 & VanderLippe, 2005). Such a conduct resulted in concerns about transparency, accountability, and the protection of civil liberties and hindered the development of a culture of political competition due to the lack of dissenting voices and alternative political perspectives which were often suppressed (Karpaz, 2004 & VanderLippe, 2005) until the establishment of Democrat Party (DP) in 1946. This situation meant the existence of deprived citizens of meaningful choices in the political process (Karpaz, 1959 & Özdemir, 2014). But it also had more implications for the functioning of state institutions where and which close alignment between the party and the bureaucracy, military, and judiciary (Karpaz, 1996 & Yılmaz et al., 2013) existed during the İnönü era.

## **III. Electoral System and Political Participation**

### **3.1 Analysis of Electoral Practices**

An analysis of the electoral practices during the İsmet İnönü era would provide valuable insights concerning the level and the state of democracy as well as the challenges it faced in Turkey. Although the elections were held at regular period and intervals, the nature of these elections as well as their political context created some controversy regarding their fairness, competitiveness, and representativeness (Karpaz, 1959).

The valid electoral system of the period was a sort of proportional representation system. Its aim, based on the percentage of votes received by each political party, was to ensure a fair distribution of seats in the parliament. Albeit this proportional representation system, the dominance of the CHP put barriers to the effectiveness of electoral competition and political pluralism (Sayarı & Esmer, 2002) to a certain extent.

Among the key challenges of the electoral practice analysis during this era was the limited space for opposition parties to operate and effectively challenge the ruling party (Karpaz, 1959 & VanderLippe, 2005). The CHP's stronghold on political power which coupled with restrictions on political freedoms and the suppression of dissent eventually created an uneven play field for opposition parties (VanderLippe, 2005 & Arabacı, 2014). This imbalance apparently disrupted their ability and capacity to gain significant traction and thus, it undermined the democratic principle of political competition particularly during 1946 elections (Sayarı & Esmer, 2002).

Furthermore, the political climate during the elections was not a smooth, flexible and conducive one. On the contrary, it was packed by restrictions on freedom of expression and limitations on the activities of opposition parties. Over and above the independent media circles faced censorship and repression (Arabacı, 2014 & Hür, 2015) which resulted in a lack of diverse voices and perspectives in the public sphere. Additionally, the opposition parties often encountered obstacles while they carried out their campaign efforts. The dissent voices had very limited access to state resources, met with biased media coverage as well as faced with restrictions on public gatherings and rallies (Sayarı & Esmer, 2002 & Arabacı, 2014). All these negative outlooks raised concerns about the fairness of electoral processes and the ability of opposition parties to compete on equal footing (Sayarı & Esmer, 2002 & VanderLippe, 2005).

Moreover, there emerged reports of electoral irregularities and allegations of voter intimidation during this period (Çelebi, 2015). Such situations and practices further undermined the credibility and legitimacy of the electoral outcomes and finally eroded public trust in the democratic process (VanderLippe, 2005). The lack of reliable mechanisms to investigate and to address such allegations contributed, to a certain degree, to the emergence of a sense of disillusionment and frustration among opposition parties and the community which supports them (Karpaz, 2004 & Hür, 2015). It is very important to state that despite all the challenges and limitations faced by the opposition parties, they did participate in elections during the İnönü era. Yet still, their success in the elections was often limited when the CHP

continually maintained a substantial majority in the Turkish parliament. This hegemony was further strengthened the image of the CHP as the one-party rule and it hindered the development of a more pluralistic and competitive political landscape (Sayarı & Esmer, 2002).

### 3.2 Challenges to Political Representation

One should also examine the challenges to political representation during the İsmet İnönü era which would shed light on the complexities of democratic governance in Turkey. Despite the regular elections, granting a meaningful political representation was a significant hurdle due to various factors which limited the voice and participation of diverse groups and perspectives (Sayarı & Esmer, 2002).

Among the significant challenges was the dominance of the CHP, which hindered the representation of alternative political ideologies and one way or another led the marginalization of dissent voices (VanderLippe, 2005). The CHP firmly controlled the state institutions and its resources which, in return, provided it with a significant advantage. This relative advantage of CHP made it inconvenient for opposition parties to gain significant traction; let alone to effectively represent the interests of their constituents (Sayarı & Esmer, 2002 & Arabacı, 2014). Therefore, voters met with very constrained choices as a result of the limited political pluralism and the absence of an adequate multiparty system until 1946. Furthermore, this lack of viable opposition entity in the form of a political party resulted in a reduction of the diversity of political options. This also limited the ability of citizens to express their preferences and have their voices heard (Sayarı & Esmer, 2002). Interestingly, even after 1946, opposition parties faced hurdles in their campaign efforts, had very limited access to state resources and met with biased media coverage (Arabacı, 2014 & Hür, 2015). As a result of these challenges, their ability to engage with constituents weakened, they were not able convey their policy proposals, and would not mobilize support at the levels they sought for.

The limited inclusion of less represented groups in the political process would be another challenge. Not only women and ethnic minorities but also other marginalized communities faced barriers to political participation and representation (Karpas, 1996 & Karpas, 2004). Apparently, the patriarchal norms of the society and some structural barriers prevented women from fully engaging in politics. This situation resulted in their underrepresentation in elected positions (Caporal, 1982 & Yeşilorman, 2010). Similarly, ethnic minorities both struggled to gain worthwhile representation (Bali, 1998)

and faced challenges during when sought ways in which their specific needs and interests adequately addressed (Zürcher, 2003 & Vanderlippe, 2005).

What's more, the concentration of power within the CHP also limited the influence of individual members of parliament. Besides, decision-making processes often centered around party elites (Sayarı, 2014 & VanderLippe, 2005) leaving little room for individual MPs so as to voice issues related to their constituents and thus, for the contribution to policy-making. Eventually, such practice influenced the patronage networks and clientelism, which triggered further complication on the political representation. Depending on the loyalty to the CHP, access to resources and opportunities would be granted (Sayarı, 2011) which undermined meritocracy and fair representation.

### **3.3 Impact on Democratic Decision-Making**

The İsmet İnönü era had a substantial impact on democratic decision-making processes. Although the decisions were made thanks to the formal institutions, the concentration of power, limited political pluralism as well as the hegemony of the CHP over the politics and policy-making had significant implications for the inclusiveness, transparency and accountability of the decision-making process. CHP under İnönü administration implemented a centralized decision-making structure. İsmet İnönü held two strategic positions at once, as the president of Turkey and as the leader of the CHP (Aydemir, 1967). İnönü's choice consolidated power in his hands and limited the influence of other political actors, which resulted in a top-down approach to decision-making. Within the boundaries of such an implementation, key policies and reforms were often driven by party elites in contrast to some extensive consultation and consensus-building processes (Karpat, 2004 & VanderLippe, 2005 & Arabacı, 2014). The lack of effective opposition and limited political competition further hindered democratic decision-making. Instead of a sound checks and balances system, there existed a lack of rigorous scrutiny and debate over policies and initiatives which were put forth by the ruling party. This understanding eventually limited the diversity of perspectives and alternative policy options which were closely related to the decision-making processes. This method indispensably led to suboptimal outcomes and reduced a meaningful responsiveness to citizen needs (Arabacı, 2014).

Finally, the lack of transparency in decision-making processes further eroded public trust in the government and democratic institutions. Due to the deficiency in adequate mechanisms for public participation and in access

to information, citizens were often informed very little about the rationale behind decisions (Karpat, 1996 & Hür, 2015) and the interests being served. Such unawareness contributed to a sense of disenfranchisement and undermined the legitimacy of the decision-making process (Karpat, 1959).

## **IV. Freedom of Expression and Media Landscape**

### **4.1 Limitations on Freedom of Speech:**

One of the controversial issues during the İsmet İnönü era was the limitations imposed on freedom of speech. Even though, the Turkish Constitution guaranteed freedom of expression, restrictions and practices initiated by the CHP curtailed this fundamental democratic right. The İnönü government, in an effort to maintain control and prevent dissent, enforced laws which restricted freedom of speech, particularly when it came to criticizing state policies and officials (Hür, 2015). Criticism of government actions, political ideologies, and even of the CHP often brought censorship, persecution and legal repercussions (Arabacı, 2014).

Furthermore, limitations on freedom of speech were reinforced by the government's influence over the judiciary and state institutions. Cases involving alleged insults against state officials or contentious political opinions were often prosecuted. This led to self-censorship in the society and among the media entities (Çelikiz & Kuzucanlı, 2019). Such a climate bearing fear and self-censorship had a chilling impact on the open public discourse and the free exchange of ideas.

### **4.2 Media Restrictions and State Control:**

The media during the İsmet İnönü era, particularly before the transition to multi-party period was under a significant state control and was imposed some restrictions. The CHP firmly exerted influence over media entities so as to shape the narrative and to control the dissemination of information (Arabacı, 2014). On the one hand, the İnönü government had and did not hesitate to use the power to grant or revoke broadcasting licenses. This power allowed the İnönü government to control the media landscape and limit the diversity of voices. On the other hand, state-controlled media entities, such as radio stations or newspapers served as mouthpieces for the government and propagated the CHP's ideology (Yeşilçayır, 2011). The dominance of state-controlled media inevitably diminished the availability of diverse perspectives and critical analysis. Additionally, independent media entities faced considerable challenges such as censorship, harassment, and legal obstacles. Interestingly, journalists and media organizations which

criticized the government often ended up with intimidation, arrests and even imprisonment (Yeşilçayır, 2011). Related laws and legislation, particularly during the years before 1946, when the multi-party decision was announced, were made use of in order to suppress independent journalism and to limit the ability of media entities which otherwise would operate freely (Arabacı, 2014 & Çelikiz & Kuzucanlı, 2019).

### **4.3 Implications for Public Discourse and Democratic Participation:**

The restrictions on freedom of expression as well as on media entities had profound implications for public discourse and democratic participation. The deficiency of diverse perspectives and the suppression of opposing views undermined the free ideas required in a vibrant democracy. The controlled media environment and restrictions on freedom of speech deprived the citizens of access to unbiased information and critical analysis which hindered their capacity to make informed decisions. It would be claimed at this point that the lack of open public discourse and the absence of a vigorous exchange of ideas can potentially leave citizens in the dark without proper opportunities to engage in meaningful political discussions and shape public opinion (U.S. Agency for International Development, 1999). Regrettably, the limitations on freedom of expression and media restrictions suppressed democratic participation during İnönü era. Ability to express the opinions belonging to the members of the Turkish society and their right to criticize policies were constrained to a certain degree while it was expected that society would hold their leaders accountable (Arabacı, 2014). The absence of democratic participation eroded the citizen engagement and weakened the responsiveness of the government to the needs and aspirations of the people (VanderLippe, 2005 & Tikveş, 1979).

## **V. Socio-Cultural Dynamics and Democracy**

### **5.1 Modernization Policies and Social Transformation:**

The modernization policies during the İsmet İnönü era aimed to bring about social transformation and align the country with Western norms and values. These policies encompassed various issues of the society, including education, women's rights and urban development (Zürcher, 2003).

When it comes to education, İnönü administration concentrated on expanding access to education services and on improving the literacy rates. His government made efforts in order to establish more schools, particularly in rural areas, and to enhance the quality of education provided to the local

community. The objective of the modernization of the education system was to equip citizens with the knowledge and skills required for economic development and social progress (Karpaz, 1996).

Moreover, women's rights and gender equality also received attention during İnönü's tenure. His government eagerly initiated policies so as to improve women's access to education, healthcare as well as to the employment opportunities. Legal reforms introduced during Atatürk's presidency such as granting women the right to vote and run for public office in 1934 were deeply rooted and exercised during the İnönü's presidency. The reforms launched by both presidents represented important steps towards gender equality, although challenges remained in terms of addressing deep-rooted social norms and cultural constraints that hindered the full realization of women's rights (Caporal, 1982).

In line with women's rights and gender equality, the urban development projects were among the other significant modernization efforts of the time. The İnönü government initiated various projects to improve infrastructure, enhance living conditions and foster economic growth in cities. Urban planning aimed to create modern and organized urban environments which would cater to the needs of a rapidly changing society. However, these projects, too were not without challenges, as they sometimes resulted in the displacement of underprivileged members of the community and the erosion of cultural heritage (Yılmaz, 2022).

## **5.2 Traditional Values and Cultural Constraints:**

Despite the existence of the modernization efforts, traditional values and cultural constraints continued to be enforced during the İsmet İnönü era. Turkey's cultural construction was deeply rooted in long-standing norms, practices as well as values, which often created barriers to democratic ideals and individual freedoms (Karpaz, 1996). Likewise, conservative social attitudes and religious values had a significant role in shaping societal expectations and in limiting the scope of social change (Mardin, 2006). Traditional norms around gender roles, family structures and social hierarchies restricted the autonomy and agency of individuals and even particularly of women and the less represented groups. It was understood that these cultural constraints restricted full participation in public life and delayed the realization of democratic values (Mardin, 2006).

Moreover, the influence of religious institutions and conservative forces remained strong during İnönü's presidency. This situation further limited the recognition of diverse identities and obstructed the progress towards

a more inclusive democracy. The conservative values sometimes clashed with the ideals of individual freedoms, pluralism, and the rights of minority groups (Karpat, 2004 & VanderLippe, 2005).

### **5.3 Inclusiveness and Less Represented Groups:**

The İsmet İnönü era also witnessed varying degrees of inclusiveness for less represented groups in Turkish society. While efforts were made to promote equality and social justice, certain groups, such as ethnic and religious minorities, faced discrimination and marginalization (Bali, 1998). Ethnic groups such as Kurds and minorities like Armenians time to time encountered challenges related to cultural recognition (Uçar, 2018), language rights, and political representation. Certain degree of discrimination, limited access to opportunities and cultural policies caused their demoralization and reluctance for full participation in political and social spheres. The struggles experienced by these groups underlined the importance of eliminating structural inequalities and promoting inclusive policies which would recognize and respect their rights (Serter, 2017). Similarly, religious minority groups faced limitations in terms of religious freedom and the preservation of their cultural heritage (Bakan, Selahattin & Levent, Ramazan, 2018). Orthodox Christians, for example, confronted restrictions on the operation of their religious institutions and the preservation of their religious practices. Such applications negatively influenced their ability to freely practice their faith and fully participate in society.

## **VI. Economic Policies and their Democratic Implications**

### **6.1 İnönü's Economic Vision and Development Strategies:**

Significant economic policies and development strategies which aim to foster economic growth and modernization were observed during the İsmet İnönü era (Karpat, 1996). The Turkish government's economic vision was the result of the principles of state intervention and planned economic development (Şeker, 2011). The emphasis on import substitution industrialization (ISI), one of the key elements of economic policies was extensively implemented. This method aimed to reduce dependency on foreign goods by promoting domestic production and self-sufficiency. The government also used protective measures such as import tariffs, quotas and subsidies to support domestic industries. By doing so, İnönü administration planned to stimulate industrialization, create employment opportunities and eventually and enhance economic independence (Aydemir, 1967 & Pala, 2010)



Furthermore, İnönü's government followed some specific economic policies to strengthen the agricultural sector as it was recognized as one of the strategic sectors for the country's overall development (Pala, 2010). Additionally, land reforms, particularly under Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu (Law of Providing Land to Farmer) of 1945, were introduced to redistribute land and promote equity in landownership (Aydemir, 1967). Besides, agricultural cooperatives were established aiming to improve productivity and support rural communities.

## **6.2 Socio-economic Disparities and Democratic Participation:**

On the one hand while İnönü's economic policies planned to foster economic development, they also supported socio-economic disparities within Turkish society. The particular emphasis on industrialization and urbanization gave way to a concentration of economic opportunities in urban areas which exacerbated the rural-urban regions (Pala, 2010). Nonetheless, this disparity intensified challenges in the form of resources, infrastructure, and public services for rural populations.

Furthermore, economic power was concentrated in the hands of a few industrialists and landowners which led to perpetuation of socio-economic inequalities (Metinsoy, 2007). Besides, the elite class kept enjoying privileges and influence over the state and the economy while groups with fewer opportunities and workers ended up with limited economic prospects and struggled to have their voices heard. This situation meant that concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few would undermine the principles of political equality and would abolish the ability of ordinary citizens to participate meaningfully in political decision-making processes (Metinsoy, 2007). Economic inequalities inevitably led to unequal access to education, healthcare and some other essential services (Pala, 2010), which would put barriers to full democratic participation.

## **6.3 Impact on Political Power Dynamics:**

İnönü's economic policies also influenced political power dynamics in Turkey. The extensive use of state intervention in the economy and the establishment of state-led development institutions (Uluatam, 2023) created an environment where the power in the hands of the state and its bureaucratic apparatus (Metinsoy, 2007). This centralized power structure gave way to political decision-making processes and limited the autonomy of local governments and civil society organizations.

This situation allowed for the manipulation of economic opportunities for political purposes. Political elites received an opportunity to use economic incentives or constraints to influence political outcomes and maintain their grip on power. These dynamics created challenges related to political pluralism and democratic governance (Karpas, 1959 & Karpas, 1996), because it hindered different political actors to compete on an equal footing.

## **VII. International Relations and Foreign Policy**

### **7.1 İnönü's Foreign Policy Approach:**

The foreign policy approach during İnönü's tenure indicated a commitment to neutrality, non-alignment and maintaining peaceful relations with other countries (Aydemir, 1967). İnönü's foreign policy aimed to protect and advance Turkish interests while avoiding entanglement when conflicts of the global powers were concerned (Aydemir, 1967 & Selek, 2020).

İnönü's government kept following a policy of balance and pragmatism. They sought to navigate the complex international landscape and secure Turkey's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Karpas, 2004). In this approach establishing strong diplomatic ties with a diverse range of countries, maintaining relations with both Western powers and neighboring states were prioritized.

However, this approach also faced with many challenges and attempted to navigate through the aftermath of World War II and the emerging Cold War dynamics (Hale, 2002). Yet still the country met with pressures from both Western and Eastern blocs requesting Turkey to align its foreign policy accordingly. İnönü had an extensive experience in his past; therefore, carefully maneuvered between these competing pressures so as to safeguard Turkey's national interests while avoiding direct involvement in the Cold War confrontation (Zürcher, 2003 & Ahmad, 2007).

### **7.2 Democracy and International Standing:**

President İnönü made efforts to enhance Turkey's international standing and desired to create an image of a modern and democratic country in the eye of the western world. He was well aware of the importance of international perception and worked to strengthen Turkey's ties with other nations, particularly in Europe and in North America. For example, Turkey's accession to the Council of Europe in 1949 was one of the significant cornerstones of İnönü's foreign policy. It was believed that this membership gave a signal

to the democratic world that Turkey was committed to democratic values and would eagerly align the country with the principles of the European community. Membership to the Council of Europe provided an opportunity for Turkey to engage in intergovernmental cooperation, fostered cultural exchange and promoted democratic norms (Oran, 2009).

In parallel to the Council of Europe, Turkey's membership in international organizations, such as the United Nations, was significant as these indicated its international standing. Therefore, İnönü's government actively participated in multilateral forums and attempted to advocate for peace, stability, and the protection of human rights on the global stage (Oran, 2009).

Nonetheless, it is important at this stage to note that the perception of Turkey's democracy varied among international actors (Hale, 2002). While some countries recognized Turkey's efforts in democratization, others, such as the Soviet Russia fearing to lose Turkey to the western camp or some others regarding Turkey as non-western, raised concerns about the limitations on civil liberties and political freedoms during the İnönü era. These contradictory perceptions influenced Turkey's standing in the international community and shaped its foreign relations (Tuncer, 2023).

### **7.3 External Influences on Democracy in Turkey:**

Geopolitical situation and location of Turkey as well as its interactions with other countries had influenced the country's domestic politics and democratic development. Particularly, the geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War era had a significant effect on Turkey's democracy journey. Especially, The United States and other Western powers wished and worked to maintain Turkey as a reliable ally against the Soviet Union, which often prioritized Turkey's stability over democratic reforms (Armaoğlu, 2017). This understanding inevitably paved the way for instances where democratic shortcomings were overlooked or tolerated in the interest of preserving the strategic alliance; interestingly enough, this even continued during the Democrat Party (DP) period under Adnan Menderes' period. Furthermore, the geopolitical rivalry between the Eastern and Western blocs also affected Turkey's internal dynamics. For example, the Soviet Union and its socialist ideology influenced some segments of Turkish society which gave way to political polarization and challenges to democratic governance. Additionally, regional conflicts and tensions, such as the Cyprus issue, were not very much in favor of Turkey's democracy (Karpat, 2004 & Oran, 2009). These conflicts and Turkey's reactions had some degree of complicated results for civil liberties, human rights, and the rule of law.

## VIII. Assessing the Legacy of the İsmet İnönü Era

### 8.1 Evaluation of Democratic Gains and Losses:

The İnönü's tenure had an indication of a mixed legacy in terms of democratic gains and losses. On one hand, İnönü's government attempted and worked extensively to establish a modern and secular state, promoted economic development and positioned Turkey on the international stage. A particular emphasis on education, healthcare, and social welfare programs was observed; and these initiatives and programs contributed to improvements in the quality of life for many Turks (Karpat, 1996 & Karpat, 2004 & VanderLippe, 2005). Nevertheless, one should acknowledge the limitations on political freedoms and civil liberties during this period. Moreover, the suppression of opposition parties, restrictions on freedom of expression and limitations on democratic participation barricaded the full realization of democratic ideals. These hardships led the creation of an environment where opposing views were suppressed and political power was concentrated in the hands of the ruling party, if not in the hands of few elites.

### 8.2 Lessons Learned for Turkey's Democratic Development:

The era of this comprehensive study offers valuable lessons for Turkey's democratic development. First of all, the significance of a reliable and viable multiparty system and political pluralism for the functioning of a healthy democracy should be highlighted. On the other hand, the concentration of power in a single party bears a shortcoming. It may lead to the erosion of democratic institutions and hinder the checks and balances system which is required for accountability and transparency.

Finally, the İnönü era emphasizes the importance of protecting civil liberties, freedom of expression as well as the right to dissent. It should be pinpointed that is essential for democratic discourse and the protection of individual rights to have a vibrant and inclusive public sphere in which diverse voices can be heard. The İnönü era also demonstrated the requirement for continuous efforts to strengthen democratic institutions so as to ensure the rule of law and to promote transparent and accountable governance. A democratic system needs a strong foundation which was built on respect for human rights, equality before the law as well as sound checks and balances system.

### **8.3 Implications for the Post-İnönü Era:**

The İsmet İnönü era had left a legacy for the post-İnönü era of Turkey. Apparently, the issues and achievements of this period shaped the political landscape and influenced subsequent governments' policies and approaches to democracy. The İnönü administration's limitations on political freedoms and the concentration of power within the CHP tolled the alarm bells for democratic reforms and a more inclusive political system. The struggles of democracy gained momentum in the following years which paved the way to significant political and constitutional changes.

The experiences and the lessons of the İsmet İnönü era helped us to serve as a reminder of the complexities and trade-offs inherent in democratic transitions, which also highlighted the need for a continuous commitment to democratic values, the protection of human rights as well as the inclusion of less represented groups in the political process.

Finally, the era studied in this comprehensive work left significant marks in terms of democratic gains and losses. On the one hand, it offered important lessons for Turkey's democratic development but on the other hand it also emphasized the importance of political pluralism, safeguarding civil liberties and strengthening democratic institutions. The experiences of this era will continue to shape Turkey's political landscape in the future in order to contribute to the ongoing efforts to build and sustain a vibrant and inclusive democracy.

## **IX. Conclusion**

### **9.1 Recapitulation of Key Findings:**

Stretching from 1938 to 1950, the İsmet İnönü era was a period with significant socio-political changes and challenges to democracy. Throughout this study, we have attempted to analyze various aspects of democratic governance by examining both the achievements and limitations.

Section 2 attempted to explore the succession from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and İnönü's role in shaping the political landscape. The smooth transition of power from Atatürk to İnönü demonstrated the institutional strength of the Turkish Republic and set a precedent for the peaceful transfer of leadership. This transition laid the foundation for İnönü's policies and provided him with the mandate to continue Atatürk's vision of a modern, secular and democratic Turkey.

Section 3 examined the consolidation of power and the dominance of the CHP during the İnönü's tenure. The CHP, under İnönü's leadership, aimed to establish a single-party rule, which led to limited political pluralism and hindered the development of a sound and sustainable democratic system. The suppression of opposition parties, such as the Democrat Party, through legal and political means further constrained the democratic space.

Sections 4 and 5 tried to put forth the limitations on freedom of expression, media restrictions and socio-cultural dynamics. During the mentioned period, there were notable limitations on freedom of speech. Opposing views which were critical of the government were often silenced or persecuted. This included journalists, intellectuals and political activists who faced censorship, imprisonment or exile.

The media landscape was heavily regulated and controlled by the state. There was a limitation of the plurality of voices and suppression of the critical reporting. State-controlled newspapers and radio broadcasting served as propaganda tools to promote the ruling party's narrative and suppress alternative viewpoints.

Human rights conditions during the İnönü era were mixed. While there were efforts to promote education, healthcare and social welfare programs, certain civil liberties and individual freedoms were restricted. The government's focus on modernization sometimes came at the expense of traditional values. This led to tensions between social transformation and cultural constraints.

Inclusiveness and the rights of less represented groups were also areas where the İnönü era faced challenges. While there were some advancements in education in the forms of Village Institute, community houses, women's rights and gender equality, progress remained limited. Other marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities, faced cultural restrictions on their rights to preserve their distinct identities.

Section 6 focused on economic policies and their implications for democracy. İnönü's economic vision aimed to modernize Turkey and promote development. This included industrialization, infrastructure projects as well as social welfare programs. While these policies contributed to the overall improvement in the quality of life for many Turks, socio-economic disparities persisted and democratic participation was influenced by unequal access to resources and opportunities. In Section 7, we discussed how Turkey integrated with the western block and used membership mechanisms to improve her democracy and open its regime to a multi-party system.

## **9.2 Final Thoughts on the İsmet İnönü Era and Democracy in Turkey:**

The İnönü era left some legacy with lessons to be utilized for democracy in Turkey. In spite of the notable achievements in terms of modernization, economic development and international standing, there existed significant limitations on political freedoms, civil liberties and inclusive democratic practices.

It is expected to learn from the experiences of the era and draw lessons for Turkey's democratic development. The importance of a vibrant and inclusive public sphere, where diverse voices can freely express their opinions and contribute to democratic discourse, is needed to avoid the limitations on political pluralism, to foster freedom of expression and civil liberties.

This era also reminds one the requirement to continuously strengthen democratic institutions, ensure the rule of law and promote transparent and accountable governance. It should also be pointed out that a democratic system needs a sound checks and balances mechanism, the protection of human rights and equal opportunities for all citizens.

With the passage of decades and time since Turkey moves forward, it is crucial to address the challenges that persist and work towards building a more inclusive and established and viable democracy. It should always be remembered that fostering political pluralism, safeguarding civil liberties, promoting human rights, and ensuring transparent and accountable governance are fundamental pillars for the advancement of democracy in Turkey.

To conclude, the İsmet İnönü era was a period which had both the democratic achievements and the limitations. By reflecting on the experiences of this era and striving for continuous improvement, Turkey is expected to navigate the complexities of democratic governance and work towards a more inclusive and vibrant democracy that upholds the rights and aspirations of its citizens.

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