



## Modernity as a Field of Struggle: State Guardianship and Social Modernities in Türkiye (1960–2016)

*Modernite Bir Mücadele Alanı Olarak: Türkiye'de Devlet Vesayeti ve Toplumsal Moderniteler (1960–2016)*

### ABSTRACT

This article reconceptualizes political development in Turkey between 1960 and 2016 by analytically distinguishing between state modernity and plural social modernities. Challenging linear modernization theory and exceptionalist accounts of Turkish politics, it argues that modernity in Turkey has been constituted through a persistent struggle over the authority to define legitimacy, rationality, and the future. Rather than viewing authoritarian interventions as deviations from modernization, the article theorizes guardianship as a distinctly modern governing rationality through which the state sought to discipline social plurality and monopolize the meaning of modernity.

Drawing on state theory, multiple modernities, and new social movements scholarship, the article demonstrates that military tutelage (1960–1980), neoliberal governance (post-1980), and majoritarian executive power (post-2000) represent historically specific articulations of a continuous state modernity project. At the same time, social movements in Turkey—ranging from labor and student mobilization to Kurdish, Islamist, feminist, and urban movements—are analyzed as alternative modernity projects rather than reactive responses to repression. These movements articulated forward-looking claims grounded in rights, recognition, participation, and dignity, thereby exposing the exclusionary limits of state-centered modernity.

**Keywords:** State Modernity, Guardianship, Multiple Modernities, Social Movements and Identity Politics, State–Society Relations.

### ÖZET

Bu makale, 1960–2016 döneminde Türkiye'deki siyasal gelişimi devlet modernliği ile çoğul toplumsal modernlikler arasında analitik bir ayırım yaparak yeniden kavramsallaştırmaktadır. Doğrusal modernleşme kuramını ve Türkiye siyasetine ilişkin istisnacı yaklaşımları sorgulayan çalışma, Türkiye'de modernliğin meşruiyetin, rasyonalitenin ve geleceğin nasıl tanımlanacağına dair yetki üzerinde süregelen bir mücadele üzerinden kurulduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Otoriter müdahaleleri modernleşmeden sapmalar olarak görmek yerine, makale vesayeti, devletin toplumsal çoğulluğu disipline etmeyi ve modernliğin anlamı üzerindeki tekeli tesis etmeyi amaçladığı özgül olarak modern bir yönetim rasyonalitesi olarak kavramsallaştırmaktadır.

Devlet kuramı, çoklu modernlikler ve yeni toplumsal hareketler yazınından yararlanan makale, askerî vesayetin (1960–1980), neoliberal yönetişimin (1980 sonrası) ve çoğunlukçu yürütme iktidarının (2000 sonrası), süreklilik arz eden bir devlet modernliği projesinin tarihsel olarak özgül eklenme biçimleri olduğunu göstermektedir. Aynı zamanda, Türkiye'de emek ve öğrenci mobilizasyonlarından Kürt, İslamcı, feminist ve kentsel hareketlere uzanan toplumsal hareketler, baskıya verilen tepkiler olarak değil, alternatif modernlik projeleri olarak analiz edilmektedir. Bu hareketler, haklar, tanınma, katılım ve onur temelinde ileriye dönük talepler dile getirerek, devlet merkezli modernliğin dışlayıcı sınırlarını görünür kılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Devlet Modernliği, Çoklu Modernlikler, Vesayet, Toplumsal Hareketler ve Kimlik Siyaseti Devlet–Toplum İlişkileri.

### INTRODUCTION

Modernity in Turkey has been neither a linear process of institutional differentiation nor a consensual societal condition. Rather, it has been constituted through a persistent tension between state modernity - a centralized, disciplinary, and security-oriented project- and plural social modernities articulated through identity, participation, and claims to recognition. This tension has structured political conflict in Turkey since at least the mid-twentieth century, producing recurrent cycles of intervention, reconfiguration, and resistance. Approaching Turkish political development through this lens allows us to move beyond narratives of failed modernization or democratic deficit and instead analyze modernity itself as a field of structured struggle.

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Dominant accounts of Turkish politics have largely relied on linear modernization frameworks, in which authoritarian interventions are treated as deviations from an otherwise progressive trajectory toward liberal democracy (Huntington 1968; Lerner 1958). A parallel literature has emphasized Türkiye's allegedly exceptional historical path, attributing instability to the unique legacy of Kemalism, civil-military relations, or secularism (Heper 1985; Özbudun 2000). Despite their analytical differences, both approaches rest on a shared assumption that modernity is a singular, normatively progressive condition whose institutional realization may be delayed, but not fundamentally contested.

This article challenges that assumption by advancing a different analytical starting point. Drawing on state theory, multiple modernities, and new social movements scholarship, it conceptualizes modernity not as a destination but as a politically contested project, unevenly produced and enforced through state power (Eisenstadt 2000; Mitchell 2002; Wagner 2012). From this vantage point, the Turkish case is not anomalous but illustrative of a broader global pattern in which states seek to monopolize the definition of the modern, while social actors articulate alternative modernities rooted in religion, ethnicity, gender, class, and participatory claims. The central research puzzle is therefore not why Türkiye failed to complete modernization, but why modern state power repeatedly took guardianship-based forms in response to expanding social plurality, and how these forms of power generated their own modalities of resistance. Within the Turkish political sociology literature, the periods examined in this article have generally been treated as analytically discontinuous regimes. The 1960–1980 period has been predominantly framed through military tutelage and bureaucratic domination (Heper 1985; Ahmad 1993; Zürcher 2004), the post-1980 era through neoliberal restructuring and the reconfiguration of political economy (Boratav 2003; Buğra and Savaşkan 2014), and the post-2000 period through democratization, Europeanization, or more recently competitive authoritarianism (Öniş 2013; Esen and Gümüşçü 2016). While this literature provides rich institutional and historical insights, it tends to treat these periods as ruptures rather than as analytically connected configurations, and it rarely theorizes modernity itself as an object of political struggle.

This article departs from the literature by proposing a unifying analytical framework that reads the period from 1960 to 2016 through a single theoretical problematic: the enduring tension between state modernity and plural social modernities. Rather than interpreting military guardianship, neoliberal governance, and majoritarian executive power as discrete or contradictory phenomena, the article conceptualizes them as historically specific articulations of a modern state project oriented toward disciplining plurality and monopolizing the definition of legitimate modernity. The article advances two core arguments. First, guardianship is theorized as a distinctly modern governing rationality rather than as a premodern residue or transitional anomaly. Whether exercised through military tutelage, bureaucratic oversight, neoliberal technocracy, or majoritarian executive authority, guardianship reflects the state's attempt to monopolize rationality, legitimacy, and futurity in the face of social pluralization (Stepan 1988; Nordlinger 1977). Second, social movements in Türkiye are analyzed not as reactive responses to repression, but as expressions of plural social modernities - forward-looking projects grounded in rights, recognition, participation, and alternative visions of modern life (Touraine 1981; Melucci 1996).

The period between 1960 and 2016 provides an analytically coherent temporal frame for examining this dynamic. It captures the institutionalization of guardianship within a formally democratic order, its transformation under neoliberal restructuring, and its reconfiguration under competitive authoritarianism. Across these phases, the form of state modernity changed, but its underlying logic - disciplining plurality while claiming exclusive authority over modernity - remained remarkably resilient. The next section develops a theoretical framework that integrates debates on modernization theory, state power, multiple modernities, and contentious politics. The subsequent sections analyze the Turkish case across three configurations: guardianship-based state modernity (1960–1980), neoliberal transformation and identity politics (post-1980), and the proliferation of social movements as alternative modernity projects.

## RETHINKING MODERNITY, STATE POWER, AND CONTESTATION

This article situates itself at the intersection of four major strands of social and political theory—classical modernization theory, state-centric modernization approaches, multiple modernities, and new social movements theory—while arguing that none of these literatures alone adequately theorizes the power-laden relationship between modernity and state authority. Rather than reviewing these traditions sequentially or author by author, this section reorganizes them around three analytically central problems: state rationalization, cultural domination, and identity-based resistance. This thematic synthesis identifies a critical theoretical gap regarding how modernity becomes a site of political struggle under conditions of tutelary state power.

## State Rationalization and the Politics of Modernity

Classical modernization theory conceptualizes modernity as a process driven by rationalization, differentiation, and institutional specialization, producing increasingly autonomous political institutions capable of managing social complexity (Parsons 1964; Smelser 1964). Political instability within this framework is typically explained as a consequence of temporal mismatches between social mobilization and institutional capacity, most famously articulated in the notion of “political decay” (Huntington 1968). While this literature foregrounds structural transformation, it treats rationalization as a functionally necessary and normatively desirable process, largely insulated from questions of domination and exclusion.

State-centric modernization approaches extend this logic by assigning the state a proactive role in producing modernity through bureaucratic planning, legal engineering, and coercive intervention. From this perspective, modernization is not an emergent social process but a deliberate political project, often justified in developmentalist, secularist, or nationalist terms (Gerschenkron 1962; Evans 1995). Yet even as this literature emphasizes state autonomy, it tends to normalize the state’s claim to superior rationality. Authoritarian or tutelary interventions are frequently framed as contingent responses to underdeveloped social structures rather than as constitutive elements of modern statehood (Skocpol 1979). Across both traditions, the modern state is implicitly positioned as the legitimate arbiter of rationality and progress. What remains under-theorized is how rationalization itself operates as a technology of power, enabling the state to define acceptable forms of political participation, identity, and social life while delegitimizing alternative claims as irrational or regressive (Scott 1998).

The multiple modernities perspective constitutes a major intervention against the universalism and teleology of earlier modernization paradigms. By emphasizing that modernity is always culturally embedded and historically contingent, this literature rejects the assumption of convergence toward a single Western model (Eisenstadt 2000; Wagner 2012). Modernity, from this viewpoint, is inherently plural, generated through diverse symbolic frameworks and institutional arrangements. However, when insufficiently integrated with theories of power, multiple modernities risk reifying cultural difference at the expense of political analysis. While acknowledging plurality, this literature often under-specifies how one version of modernity becomes dominant within a given polity. In contexts where the state claims the authority to define national identity, citizenship, and the legitimate boundaries of political life, modernity is not simply multiple but hierarchically organized (Mitchell 2002; Chatterjee 2004).

Cultural domination in such settings operates not through the preservation of tradition but through modern institutions themselves—constitutions, educational systems, legal regimes, and bureaucratic classifications—that universalize a particular vision of rationality and progress. Competing social modernities are not rejected as alternatives but disqualified as threats to order, unity, or development. Existing theories of multiple modernities identify diversity but do not fully theorize the state’s capacity to monopolize the authority to arbitrate among modernities.

## Identity, Resistance, and the Politics of Social Modernities

New social movements theory challenges state-centric and economistic accounts by conceptualizing collective action as struggles over meaning, identity, and recognition rather than as instrumental responses to material deprivation (Touraine 1981; Melucci 1996). These movements articulate claims rooted in autonomy, dignity, rights, and participation—claims that are distinctly modern in orientation. Resistance, in this framework, is not a rejection of modernity but a contestation over its content and direction. Yet much of this literature implicitly assumes a liberal-pluralist context in which identity claims confront the state within an already differentiated political field. In settings characterized by strong state traditions and limited tolerance for social plurality, identity-based mobilization does not merely seek inclusion but challenges the state’s authority to define the modern political subject (Tilly 2004; Castells 2010). Social movements in such contexts articulate alternative social modernities that directly contest state-centered visions of rationality, citizenship, and progress.

What remains insufficiently theorized is how these movements interact with tutelary forms of state power—regimes that combine electoral institutions with claims of guardianship over society’s moral and political development (Stepan 1988; Levitsky and Way 2010). While new social movements theory illuminates the symbolic and cultural dimensions of resistance, it often underestimates the structural capacity of modern states to absorb, repress, or reconfigure such challenges.

Taken together, these literatures reveal a significant theoretical gap. Classical and state-centric modernization theories overestimate the neutrality of state rationalization; multiple modernities scholarship insufficiently theorizes domination; and new social movements theory under-specifies the durability of tutelary state power. What is

missing is an integrated framework that conceptualizes modernity itself as a contested political project, structured by asymmetrical power relations between state and society.

This article addresses this gap by theorizing the relationship between state modernity and social modernities as a constitutive tension inherent to modern governance. State modernity refers to the institutionalized attempt to monopolize rationality, legitimacy, and futurity through centralized authority. Social modernities denote plural, socially embedded projects that articulate alternative visions of identity, participation, and progress. Guardianship emerges as a modern governing rationality designed to manage -and ultimately contain- this tension. By advancing this framework, the article contributes to comparative debates on modernity, authoritarianism, and state-society relations without reproducing teleological or exceptionalist assumptions. Türkiye thus analyzed not as a deviation from modernity but as a revealing case of its internal contradictions.

### **STATE MODERNITY, GUARDIANSHIP, AND SOCIAL MODERNITIES**

This article advances a conceptual framework that analytically distinguishes between state modernity and social modernities, while treating their interaction as a constitutive tension of modern governance rather than a transitional anomaly. The framework draws on critical state theory, multiple modernities, and contentious politics to conceptualize modernity not as a unified condition but as a power-structured field of competing projects (Foucault 1991; Eisenstadt 2000; Mitchell 2002).

#### **State Modernity as a Disciplinary and Security-Oriented Project**

State modernity refers to a mode of governance in which the state claims privileged authority to define rationality, progress, and collective destiny. This concept builds on analyses of modern power that emphasize discipline, surveillance, and security as core techniques through which states render society legible and governable (Foucault 1977; Scott 1998). State modernity is not reducible to bureaucratic efficiency; it is a normative and temporal project that seeks to monopolize the meaning of the future by framing certain identities, behaviors, and political claims as modern, legitimate, and necessary, while delegitimizing others as irrational or threatening.

In this sense, state modernity operates through what has been described as a security rationality, in which social plurality is perceived as a risk to order and cohesion rather than as a democratic resource (Bigo 2002; Dillon 1996). Legal frameworks, educational curricula, constitutional design, and coercive institutions function as instruments through which the state produces compliant subjects and suppresses alternative visions of modern life. Importantly, this project is inherently disciplinary: it seeks not only to regulate behavior but to shape subjectivities in line with an officially sanctioned model of citizenship (Mitchell 1991). Within state modernity, guardianship denotes a specific form of political authority in which unelected or weakly accountable institutions -or executive actors claiming superior insight - assert the right to intervene in democratic processes to protect the “true” interests of the nation (Stepan 1988; Nordlinger 1977). Guardianship is justified through claims of epistemic superiority: guardians present themselves as bearers of rationality, secularism, development, or national unity, thereby legitimizing the suspension or containment of popular sovereignty.

Crucially, guardianship is not an anti-modern residue but a distinctly modern solution to the perceived problem of social plurality. It emerges where state elites interpret societal contestation as evidence of immaturity, fragmentation, or false consciousness. From this perspective, authoritarian intervention is framed not as repression but as pedagogical correction- a necessary means of aligning society with modern norms (O'Donnell 1973; Chatterjee 2004).

#### **Social Modernities, Plurality, Identity, and Bottom-Up Modernization**

In contrast, social modernities refer to the plural, contested, and bottom-up processes through which social actors articulate alternative understandings of modern life. Drawing on multiple modernities and new social movements theory, social modernities are understood as culturally embedded yet forward-looking projects that seek recognition, autonomy, and participation rather than a return to tradition (Eisenstadt 2000; Melucci 1996).

These modernities are expressed through identity politics, defined here not as narrow particularism but as struggles over the social meaning of citizenship, dignity, and belonging (Taylor 1994; Fraser 1997). Religious movements demanding public recognition, ethnic mobilizations contesting homogenizing nationalism, feminist struggles over bodily autonomy, and urban movements claiming the right to the city all articulate modern claims grounded in rights, equality, and self-determination. They do not reject modernity; they challenge the state's monopoly over its definition. The interaction between state modernity and social modernities is structured by hegemony, understood as the contingent and coercively underwritten capacity of the state to present its vision of modernity as universal

and commonsensical (Gramsci 1971; Jessop 2008). Hegemony operates not only through consent but through the normalization of certain identities and political claims as reasonable, while casting others as deviant or dangerous.

Resistance emerges when social actors refuse this normalization and articulate counter-hegemonic modernities that expose the exclusions embedded in state projects. Following contentious politics scholarship, resistance is not episodic disruption but an ongoing process of claim-making that challenges dominant frameworks of authority and legitimacy (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). In contexts of strong state traditions, resistance often takes symbolic, cultural, and spatial forms precisely because institutional channels are restricted.

In the Turkish case, the interaction between these concepts produces a durable pattern of political conflict. State modernity has historically been articulated through centralized authority, secular-nationalist identity, and security-oriented governance, generating a persistent suspicion toward social plurality. Guardianship has functioned as the institutional mechanism through which this suspicion is translated into intervention, first by military-bureaucratic elites and later by an executive claiming exclusive popular legitimacy.

Social modernities, by contrast, have proliferated since the 1960s through religious, ethnic, class-based, and gendered mobilizations that articulate alternative visions of modern citizenship. These movements have repeatedly challenged the hegemonic claims of the state, prompting cycles of repression, incorporation, and transformation. The persistence of conflict is thus not a symptom of incomplete modernization but the outcome of an unresolved struggle over who has the authority to define the modern. By conceptualizing state modernity and social modernities as analytically distinct yet mutually constitutive, this framework allows the Turkish case to be situated within comparative debates on modern governance, tutelary power, and social resistance without recourse to exceptionalism or teleology.

### **GUARDIANSHIP AND STATE MODERNITY IN TURKIYE (1960–1980)**

Between 1960 and 1980, the Turkish state's modernization project was institutionalized as a form of guardianship-based modernity, in which political authority was justified not through popular sovereignty but through claims to superior rationality, expertise, and historical mission. This configuration did not represent a deviation from modern governance but rather a particular articulation of modern state power in contexts where social pluralization was perceived as a threat to order. Military interventions, bureaucratic rationality, and the suppression of plural identities functioned as structurally interlinked components of this modernity, rather than as episodic responses to political instability.

In dominant transition-oriented narratives, the 1960 and 1971 military interventions in Türkiye are commonly interpreted as interruptions of democratic development or as corrective responses to political crises rather than as constitutive elements of modern governance. Within this perspective, military intervention is framed as a response to institutional breakdown, excessive polarization, or the erosion of constitutional order, temporarily suspending democratic procedures in order to restore stability (Huntington 1968; Linz & Stepan 1996). Much of the Turkish political science literature similarly treats these interventions as efforts to “reset” the political system when civilian politics is perceived to have deviated from democratic norms or state interests (Heper 1985; Özbudun 2000). The 1960 intervention, in particular, has often been portrayed as a founding moment for a more pluralist constitutional order, while the 1971 intervention is interpreted as a technocratic correction aimed at containing social conflict without fully dismantling parliamentary rule (Ahmad 1993; Zürcher 2004). In this reading, military tutelage appears as a temporary and functional response to crisis, justified by the presumed immaturity or instability of civilian political institutions. By contrast, a guardianship-centered perspective conceptualizes these interventions as constitutive mechanisms of state modernity, embedded within a broader rationality of governance (Stepan 1988; Nordlinger 1977). In Türkiye, the military did not merely intervene to restore order but claimed epistemic authority to define the legitimate boundaries of democracy, citizenship, and political participation, conceiving of itself as the guardian of the Republic's foundational principles (Stepan 1988; Nordlinger 1977). Through constitutional mechanisms, institutionalized oversight, and public discourse, military elites framed democracy as a conditional and pedagogical project, reserving the right to intervene when elected actors were deemed incompatible with secularism, national unity, or state rationality (Heper 1985; Mardin 1973; Ahmad 1993; Özbudun 2000; Zürcher 2004).

Turkish political sociology has long emphasized that military tutelage was normalized through constitutional and institutional arrangements rather than operating solely through coercion. The 1961 Constitution, widely regarded as liberal in its rights provisions, simultaneously entrenched military oversight through bodies such as the National Security Council, thereby embedding guardianship within the formal architecture of democracy (Heper 1985; Özbudun 2000). This duality illustrates how guardianship functioned not as an exception to legality but as a legally rationalized form of intervention, consistent with Weberian notions of modern authority (Weber 1978). What

distinguishes the Turkish case is not the presence of guardianship but its durability and ideological centrality within a self-consciously modernist state tradition (Keyder 1987; Mardin 1973).

### **Bureaucratic Rationality and the State Monopoly over Modernity**

Guardianship-based modernity in Türkiye was sustained by a dense bureaucratic apparatus that framed modernization as a technical and administrative problem rather than a political one. State elites conceptualized social transformation as a matter of planning, regulation, and security management, thereby displacing democratic contestation with expert-driven governance. This reflects what Scott (1998) identifies as a high-modernist rationality, in which the state seeks to render society legible and governable through abstraction and simplification.

Turkish scholarship has emphasized that this bureaucratic rationalism was inseparable from a strong tradition of state autonomy. The bureaucracy did not merely implement political decisions but actively shaped the boundaries of legitimate politics by filtering social demands through security and developmentalist criteria (Heper 1985; Keyman 2007). Political participation was thus conditional upon alignment with state-defined notions of national interest and modernity. This mode of governance systematically marginalized social actors whose claims could not be translated into the language of bureaucratic rationality. Labor movements, student mobilizations, and leftist organizations were not repressed because they were anti-modern, but because they articulated alternative modernities grounded in egalitarianism, participatory democracy, and social justice that challenged the state's monopoly over progress (Boratav 2003; Ahmad 1993). Bureaucratic rationality thus operated as a mechanism of exclusion, distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable forms of modern political subjectivity.

A central feature of guardianship-based state modernity during this period was the suppression of plural identities in the name of national unity and secular rationalism. The state promoted a homogenized model of citizenship that equated modernity with secularism, Turkishness, and loyalty to the Kemalist project, while rendering ethnic, religious, and ideological diversity politically suspect (Mardin 1973; Yıldız 2001). This process is best understood through the concept of hegemony, wherein the state's vision of modernity was presented as universal and non-negotiable, while alternative identities were framed as particularistic and destabilizing (Gramsci 1971; Jessop 2008). Kurdish identity was denied recognition, political Islam was excluded from legitimate public expression, and class-based mobilization was securitized. Importantly, these exclusions were justified not through appeals to tradition but through claims of protecting modernity itself. International literature on cultural domination underscores that such practices are characteristic of modern states seeking to manage diversity through normalization rather than accommodation (Mitchell 2002; Foucault 1991). Turkish case studies reinforce this insight by demonstrating how identity regulation functioned as a core component of state-building rather than as a residual authoritarian impulse (İnsel 2003; Keyman and İçduygu 2005).

Taken together, military guardianship, bureaucratic rationality, and identity suppression constituted a coherent model of state-centered modernity in which the future was defined and managed by a narrow elite. The recurring crises of the 1960–1980 period did not stem from insufficient modernization but from the structural exclusion of social modernities that could not be assimilated into the state's hegemonic project. This analysis challenges both modernization failure narratives and Turkish exceptionalism. Instead, it situates Türkiye within a broader comparative pattern in which modern states respond to social pluralization through tutelary governance. Guardianship thus appears not as a transitional pathology but as a modern strategy for containing the political consequences of social modernity. In this sense, the Turkish experience between 1960 and 1980 reveals a fundamental contradiction of modern governance: the attempt to produce a rational, unified political order generates the very conflicts it seeks to suppress, as socially embedded modernities continue to challenge the state's claim to exclusive authority over progress and legitimacy.

### **Neoliberal Transformation and Identity: Reconfiguring State Modernity after 1980**

The post-1980 period in Türkiye marks not the retreat of state modernity but its reconfiguration under neoliberal rationalities. Contrary to assumptions that neoliberalism entails a simple weakening of the state, this period is better understood as a transformation in the modalities of state power: from direct intervention and bureaucratic command toward indirect regulation, market governance, and security-oriented management of social plurality. State modernity thus persisted, but in a more fragmented, selective, and ambivalent form.

Neoliberal restructuring redefined the relationship between state and society by displacing centralized economic control with market mechanisms and devolving certain social functions outward. However, as critical political economy literature emphasizes, neoliberalism does not diminish state power; it reorganizes it (Harvey 2005; Peck 2010). In Türkiye, the post-1980 state withdrew from direct economic management while intensifying its

regulatory and coercive capacities, particularly in areas related to labor, internal security, and identity (Boratav 2003; Buğra and Savaşkan 2014).

This transformation altered the form of guardianship rather than abolishing it. The state no longer presented itself primarily as a developmental planner but as a guarantor of market order and national security. As a result, political authority became increasingly justified through technocratic expertise and economic necessity, rather than overt ideological tutelage (Keyman 2007). Democratic participation in the post-1980 period was formally expanded through electoral and constitutional institutions, yet substantively constrained by processes of depoliticization and securitization. A central mechanism of this constraint was the 10 percent national electoral threshold introduced by the 1982 Constitution, which was explicitly designed to limit political fragmentation and insulate the political system from social and ideological pluralism perceived as threats to state order (Özbudun 2000; ). While justified in technocratic terms of governability and stability, the threshold functioned as a selective filter of political participation, systematically excluding certain social bases—most notably Kurdish political movements, radical left parties, and other identity- or class-based actors—from parliamentary representation (Keyman & İçduygu 2005; Ayata & Tütüncü 2008). As comparative scholarship on electoral engineering suggests, such institutional arrangements do not merely regulate competition but actively restructure the political field by defining which forms of social modernity can be translated into legitimate political representation (Norris 2004; Levitsky & Way 2010). In this sense, the post-1980 electoral regime exemplifies how state modernity expanded procedural participation while simultaneously constraining the substantive inclusion of plural identities under the guise of democratic stabilization.

### **The Rise of Identity-Based Claims under Neoliberal Conditions**

Paradoxically, the neoliberal erosion of class-based political organization coincided with the intensification of identity-based claims. As labor movements were weakened through deregulation and repression, social grievances increasingly found expression through religious, ethnic, gendered, and cultural identities (Melucci 1996; Castells 2010). In Türkiye, Kurdish political mobilization, Islamic movements, feminist activism, and rights-based urban struggles expanded precisely as the state retreated from universalistic welfare commitments (Keyman and İçduygu 2005; Yavuz 2009).

These identity-based claims should not be interpreted as post-political fragmentation but as alternative pathways of social modernity under neoliberal constraints. They articulated demands for recognition, participation, and dignity within a political economy that increasingly denied collective redistribution. The state's response was ambivalent: while some forms of identity expression were selectively incorporated into governance frameworks, others were securitized and criminalized, revealing the enduring logic of state modernity as a regulator of legitimate plurality (İnsel 2003; Yabancı 2019). Neoliberal governance elevated civil society as a normative solution to both democratic deficit and state overload. In Türkiye, this discourse facilitated the expansion of NGOs, associations, and advocacy networks, particularly after the 1990s. However, critical scholarship warns against equating civil society expansion with democratic deepening (Chatterjee 2004; Fraser 2003). Civil society actors often operated within tightly circumscribed policy frameworks shaped by donors, markets, and state agendas.

Turkish studies underscore this ambivalence. While civil society enabled new forms of participation and identity articulation, it also functioned as a mechanism of depoliticization by channeling dissent into project-based, non-confrontational forms (Keyman and Öniş 2007; Duru and Keyman 2019). Thus, civil society became a terrain where social modernities were simultaneously enabled and disciplined, reflecting the adaptive capacity of neoliberal state modernity rather than its erosion.

### **RESISTANCE AND SOCIAL MODERNITIES: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AS ALTERNATIVE MODERNITY PROJECTS (1968–2013)**

Social movements in Türkiye between 1968 and 2013 should be conceptualized not as episodic reactions to state repression or economic crisis, but as expressions of plural social modernities that articulated competing visions of citizenship, justice, and political agency. Drawing on multiple modernities and new social movements theory, this section treats contention as a constitutive dimension of modernity itself, rather than as evidence of its incompleteness (Eisenstadt 2000; Touraine 1981).

New social movements theory emphasizes that collective action in late modern societies is increasingly oriented toward identity, recognition, and cultural meaning rather than material redistribution alone (Melucci 1996). In Türkiye, this orientation was evident well before the global diffusion of “post-materialist” politics. Student movements, labor mobilizations, Kurdish activism, Islamist organizing, feminist struggles, and later urban movements all articulated forward-looking projects grounded in rights, participation, and moral autonomy (Bora

2017; Çaha 2010). These movements did not reject modernity; they challenged the state's exclusive authority to define it. Kurdish movements articulated modern claims to political self-determination; Islamic actors reinterpreted modern public life through religious ethics; feminist movements reframed citizenship around bodily autonomy and gender equality; and urban movements asserted the right to the city against technocratic governance (Yavuz 2009; Tuğal 2009; Erensü and Karaman 2017). Each represented a distinct social modernity rooted in lived experience rather than state doctrine.

From a contentious politics perspective, these movements engaged in sustained struggles over legitimacy rather than short-term policy gains (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). Their interaction with the state followed a recurring pattern: initial repression, selective incorporation, and eventual re-containment. This pattern reflects the operation of hegemonic state modernity, which seeks to absorb compatible elements of social modernities while neutralizing their transformative potential (Gramsci 1971; Jessop 2008). Turkish scholarship highlights how this process produced partial recognition without structural pluralism. Identity claims were often acknowledged symbolically while their political implications were curtailed (İnsel 2003; Bora and Erdoğan 2011). The result was not democratic reconciliation but a layering of unresolved modernities, each constrained by the state's security-oriented rationality.

### 2013 as a Moment of Modernity Conflict

The Gezi protests of 2013 exemplify the cumulative effect of these dynamics. Rather than an anomalous outburst, Gezi represented the convergence of multiple social modernities—urban, secular, environmental, feminist, and youth-based—into a shared challenge against authoritarian governance and neoliberal urbanism (Özdemir 2015; Tuğal 2013). The movement articulated a vision of participatory, horizontal, and plural modernity that directly confronted both neoliberal state rationality and majoritarian claims to legitimacy.

The state's response—combining delegitimation, securitization, and moral polarization—underscored the enduring incompatibility between plural social modernities and a state modernity premised on monopolizing the future. Resistance thus emerged not as a failure of modernization but as its inevitable counterpart. Taken together, neoliberal transformation and social mobilization reveal a central contradiction of modern governance in Türkiye: as state modernity adapts and transforms, social modernities proliferate rather than recede. The persistence of contention reflects not societal backwardness but the structural limits of a modernity project that seeks unity through regulation rather than plurality through negotiation.

The analysis presented in this article challenges linear narratives of Turkish modernization by emphasizing the enduring tension between state-centered modernity and plural social modernities. Within this framework, guardianship, neoliberal restructuring, and contentious politics appear less as exceptional breaks and more as recurring sites where modern state power has been reorganized and contested.

### Rethinking Modernization: From Linear Progress to Structured Antagonism

Classical modernization theory posits that social differentiation, economic development, and institutional rationalization generate structural pressures toward liberal democracy, as expanding education, urbanization, and bureaucratic capacity are assumed to foster pluralism and political accountability (Lipset 1959; Parsons 1964). Authoritarian rule is thus treated as a transitional or residual condition, likely to arise when social mobilization outpaces institutional development but ultimately unsustainable in the long run (Deutsch 1961; Huntington 1968). Even coercive interventions are interpreted as temporary deviations within an otherwise teleological process in which modernization is expected to produce convergence toward liberal-democratic norms (Almond & Verba 1963; Dahl 1971; Moore 1966). The Turkish case fundamentally challenges this assumption. Across different political-economic configurations—developmentalism (1960–1980), neoliberalism (post-1980), and competitive authoritarianism (post-2010)—modern state power in Türkiye did not wither as society modernized. Instead, it rearticulated itself through new rationalities, institutions, and legitimating discourses.

What emerges is not a story of modernization “catching up” with democracy, but a pattern in which state modernity persistently seeks to monopolize rationality, legitimacy, and futurity, even as society becomes more plural, mobile, and politically conscious. Military tutelage, technocratic governance, neoliberal depoliticization, and majoritarian executive power appear, from this perspective, as successive strategies for managing the political consequences of social modernity rather than as residues of premodern authority (Keyder 1987; Heper 1985; Yabancı 2019).

This finding resonates with critiques of linear modernization in comparative politics, which argue that modernity does not converge toward a single democratic endpoint but produces diverse regime outcomes shaped by power relations and institutional legacies (Eisenstadt 2000; Wagner 2012). Türkiye thus illustrates that modernity can stabilize authoritarian practices rather than dissolve them.

The Turkish case demonstrates a recurring dynamic: as the state intensifies its regulatory and disciplinary capacities, social actors do not retreat into tradition but mobilize modern repertoires of contention to challenge the state's epistemic and moral authority. This confirms insights from contentious politics and governmentality scholarship that resistance is an endogenous product of modern power relations rather than an external disruption (Foucault 1991; Tilly and Tarrow 2015). Importantly, resistance does not accumulate into a linear expansion of democratic inclusion. Instead, it is repeatedly contained, fragmented, or selectively incorporated, producing what might be termed layered or unresolved modernities. This helps explain why periods of apparent liberalization in Türkiye have not translated into stable pluralism, but into new configurations of domination and contestation. The Turkish case thus carries broader implications for social and political theory. First, it underscores the need to move beyond teleological models that equate modernization with democratization. Second, it demonstrates that state modernity is a productive form of power -one that generates identities, exclusions, and resistances as much as order. Third, it highlights the importance of analyzing modernity as a relational and contested process, structured by unequal capacities to define legitimacy and the future.

Theorizing modernity as a field of struggle rather than a destination, this article contributes to comparative debates on authoritarianism, state-society relations, and contentious politics. Türkiye emerges not as a deviant case, but as a revealing instance of how modern governance, under certain historical and institutional conditions, produces both domination and resistance in mutually constitutive ways.

## DISCUSSION

This article has argued that Turkish political development between 1960 and 2016 cannot be adequately understood through linear modernization theory or narratives of democratic deficiency. Instead, it should be analyzed as a sustained struggle between state modernity and plural social modernities, structured by unequal capacities to define legitimacy, rationality, and the future. Guardianship has functioned as a modern governing rationality through which the state sought to manage the political consequences of social pluralization, rather than as a temporary deviation from an otherwise democratic trajectory.

By analytically separating state modernity from social modernities, the article has demonstrated that authoritarian interventions, neoliberal governance, and majoritarian executive power are not antithetical to modernity but specific articulations of it. Across different historical configurations, state modernity in Turkey has consistently sought to stabilize order by disciplining identity, constraining participation, and securitizing plurality. These strategies did not eliminate contention; they produced it. Social movements emerged not as anti-modern reactions but as endogenous expressions of modernity itself, articulating alternative projects of citizenship, justice, and political agency.

The broader theoretical implication is that modernity should be conceptualized as a relational and contested process, not as a singular condition that societies either achieve or fail to achieve. The Turkish case reinforces critiques of classical modernization theory by showing that modern state formation can entrench authoritarian practices rather than dissolve them. At the same time, it refines multiple modernities scholarship by demonstrating that plurality alone is insufficient as an analytical category unless it is situated within relations of power, hierarchy, and domination. Modernities are not merely diverse; they are differentially authorized and institutionally enforced.

This analysis also contributes to theories of state power by underscoring its productive dimension. State modernity does not simply repress or exclude; it generates identities, oppositions, and repertoires of resistance. Resistance, in this sense, is not external to modern governance but constitutive of it. The persistence of contention in Türkiye thus suggests not societal backwardness or institutional failure, but the unresolved antagonism inherent in modern projects that seek unity through regulation rather than plurality through negotiation. Future comparative research can build on this framework by examining how guardianship-based state modernity operates across different regions and historical contexts. Systematic comparisons with Latin America, Southern Europe, and the Middle East can further clarify why some states dismantle tutelary authority while others adapt and reproduce it. More broadly, extending this approach to transnational governance, urban politics, or supranational institutions may illuminate how struggles over modernity unfold across multiple scales of power.

In sum, the Turkish case demonstrates that the central question of modern politics is not whether societies become modern, but who defines modernity, through which institutions, and with what consequences for social plurality. Treating modernity as a field of struggle rather than a linear path provides a more robust foundation for comparative political sociology.

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